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For Sammer time is World Cup

CHICAGO, July 7: Midfielder Matthias Sammer, one of Germany's most impressive players at the World Cup finals, faces a race against time to get fit for Sunday's quarter-final against Bulgaria, reports Reuter.

The 26-year-old former East German was originally thought to be suffering with a bruised calf in his left leg but the injury was diagnosed on Wednesday as being a strained muscle.

Sammer was only able to carry out light training with fellow injured players Thomas Strunz and Ulf Kirsten at the team's practice ground at Hinsdale High School on the outskirts of Chicago.

"If the game was today or tomorrow, Matthias would not be able to play," coach Berti Vogts said. "But we have a bit of time until Sunday so that I am optimistic."

The German's preparations for the quarter-final at Giants Stadium have also been hit by

the departure of midfielders Stefa. Effenberg and Mario Basler.

Effenberg was kicked off the squad for making an obscene gesture at the crowd during a first-round match against South Korea in Dallas. Basler returned home on Tuesday because his wife is having problems with her pregnancy.

Germany's top sports doctor, Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt, was due in Chicago later on Wednesday to treat midfielder Strunz's problematic thigh strain.

The Munich doctor, whose clients include many top European players and German tennis star Boris Becker, is also expected to treat striker Kirsten's thigh strain and Sammer's injury.

Captain and libero Lothar Matthaeus is expected to recover from his foot injury in time for the game, which Vogts said would be tough in the heat of the New York area.

"It is much warmer in New York than here. And it is a real melting pot there," said Vogts, who watched Bulgaria beat Mexico after a penalty shoot-out in Tuesday's second-round clash. "Bulgaria have some excellent individual players who can turn a game around in seconds."

"We are going to have to work our socks off for 90 or 120 minutes."

Saudis, Koreans do Asia proud

SAN FRANCISCO, July 7: Once tagged as the weakest squads among the 24 World Cup finalists, Saudi Arabia and South Korea showed the world their classic style by producing soccer talks via their courageous voyage in the United States, reports Xinhua.

The Saudis, who won the Asian qualifiers to make their World Cup debut, shadowed the 'red devils' of Belgium and the Morocco 1-0 and 2-1 in the first round and marched onto the round of 16.

Even twice World Cup runners-up the Netherlands had to come from one goal down to squeeze past the Saudis to top their group.

It was Saeed Owairan who started his run from midfield and dribbled past four Belgian defenders before scoring the lone goal.

Saudi coach Jorge Solari hailed the win over Belgium as a triumph for the Arab world from a vibrant and dynamic game while Belgian coach Paul Van Himst had to admit that his physically-strong opponents were 'extremely dangerous' especially on the counter attack.

Morocco coach Abdella Ajri was still wondering why 'Saudi Arabia had only four shots on goal but scored twice' where as his own lacked accuracy and cohesion.

Playing and losing to 1958 World Cup runners-up Sweden in the second round, the Saudis dashed off with their full attack style by fielding three defenders instead of five.

"We wanted to be more aggressive to show the world that we could do it but that was our mistake," said coach Solari, who admitted that his booters were comfortable with what they have achieved.

For South Korea, their last-ditch attacks were hailed as the most brave and fierce against reigning champions Germany and Spain who have never missed the finals since 1978. Despite their early return, the Korean eleven blasted two goals against Germany and Spain, all late in the second half to demonstrate their ferocity and prowess in a realm still dominated by the Europeans and South Americans.

Midfielders Hong Myung-Bol split the defences of both Germany and Spain with one goal against each.

Forward Hwang Sun-Hong and midfielder Seo Jung-Won each netted a goal though none has much international experience.

"I must admit that we were lucky to win the game against South Korea," because the Germans were weakened physically in the second half whereas the Koreans had their own game of offensive soccer, German coach Berti Vogts said.

The Asian squads have clearly won the hearts of the crowds, with their enthusiasm promising for a brighter prospect four years from now.

Ekoku has no regrets

MANSFIELD, Massachusetts, July 7: Striker Efan Ekoku gave up a possible chance to play for England and earn wider recognition on the international stage but says he has no regrets about throwing in his lot with Nigeria, reports Reuter.

Ekoku, who last season scored four goals in a single match for Norwich City in the English Premier League, did not play in any of Nigeria's four matches at the World Cup finals and has only won two caps for the African country since first being included in the squad in March.



Adolf Katzenmeier (L) and Hans-Juergen Montag both physiotherapists of the German World Cup squad treat midfielder Matthias Sammer at the end of a practice session in Hinsdale on July 6. Sammer is a doubt starter for the quarter-final match against Bulgaria on July 10.

— AFP photo

Honour-bound Matthaeus

CHICAGO, July 7: Lothar Matthaeus, the powerful dynamo behind Germany's success in soccer in the last decade, will make World Cup history on Sunday when he leads his country out against Bulgaria in the quarter-finals, reports Reuter.

Matthaeus, playing in his fourth finals, will equal the record number of 21 World Cup final appearances held jointly by his compatriot Uwe Seeler, Poland's Wladyslaw Zmuda and Argentine Diego Maradona.

At the same time he will become the joint highest-capped outfield player of all time with 117 appearances for his country.

Only England's Peter Shilton and Northern Ireland's Pat Jennings, both goalkeepers, have played more times for their country. Former Swiss playmaker Heinz Hermann also won 117 caps.

But although Matthaeus has a great chance to improve on both records if the Germans progress in the tournament, he is unconcerned.

"I am thinking about personal records. What is important is winning the World Cup," Matthaeus said.

Burrell after Christie

LONDON, July 7: Leroy Burrell, yet to win a major championship, has thrown down the gauntlet to Olympic and world 100 metres champion Linford Christie less than three weeks before the pair meet at the St Petersburg Goodwill Games, reports Reuter.

The powerful 27-year-old American clipped one-hundredth of a second from Carl Lewis's three-year-old world record on Wednesday when he clocked 9.85 seconds on a hot, steamy night at the Lausanne Grand Prix.

"I said from the beginning of the season that Leroy was the guy to beat this season and he's proved me right," Christie commented in London.

"I'll race him in St Petersburg. I'm looking forward to that world records are made to be broken — we are into winning the big titles."

Burrell has already held the world record once, bettering Lewis's 1988 mark of 9.92 seconds at the 1991 US Championships.

Lewis, the greatest sprinter of his era, snatched the mark back in a sensational 100 metres final at the Tokyo World Championships of the same year, clocking 9.86 to Burrell's 9.88.

Since 1991, Burrell has been pushed into the background by fellow-Americans Andre Cason and Dennis Mitchell, finishing only fifth behind Christie in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and failing to qualify for last year's World Championships after injury.

"I felt like I was dealt a couple of bad cards," Burrell said. "This is the first year I haven't had any injuries."

"I was just happy to do it today. I just came off the plane yesterday and I feel I can go a little faster."

"I'm ready to run against anybody, at the Goodwill Games I think I will be able to run even faster."

Cup," Matthaeus said at the team's training camp on the outskirts of Chicago.

Matthaeus will never have the smooth, graceful image of German soccer great Franz Beckenbauer, who made everything look so easy on and off the field in the 1960s and 1970s and earned the nickname 'The Kaiser'.

Matthaeus, Beckenbauer's protégé at Bayern Munich, is blessed with great skill but will

first round and were hit by a scandal when midfielder Stefan Effenberg was sent home for making an obscene gesture at the crowd during a first-round game.

"I have tried to be the middle man between the trainer and the players," Matthaeus said. "It is important to have contact with the team and to talk to the players."

Matthaeus made his debut for Germany as a 19-year-old at the 1980 European Championship in Italy. He played his first World Cup match when he came on as a substitute in a first-round match against Chile at the 1982 finals in Spain.

His career has never been smooth, however. He struggled at the 1984 European Championship in France. It was only after his move from Borussia Muenchengladbach to Bayern in the same year that his career took off.

Matthaeus then became one of the midfield stars of the 1986 World Cup in Mexico where the Germans lost to Argentina in the final. He reached the climax of his career when he captained the Germans to the title in Italy four years ago with some inspirational performances.

Matthaeus, who has shown versatility in moving back to play sweeper in the present, team, has hinted in the past that he might retire from the international game if the Germans defend their title.

That would deprive him of a shot at Shilton's record number of 125 caps.

"But it is not the time to think about things like retirement now," Matthaeus said. "I will take a holiday after the World Cup and talk with my family about the future. What is important now is a difficult match against Bulgaria."

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largely be remembered as a player who dominated the game with his forceful personality and never-say-die attitude.

In his wild youth Matthaeus was regarded more of a kamikaze than a Kaiser after he wrapped his Mercedes car around a post and gained a reputation as 'Lothar the loudmouth' for his outspoken personality.

But Matthaeus has matured with age. Although his fiery temper sometimes still gets him into trouble off the field, he is a player who demands respect from his teammates and leads from the front.

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President joins bandwagon

MEXICO CITY, July 7: After Mexico's World Cup soccer defeat by Bulgaria, even the Mexican President has joined in the chorus of criticism for coach Miguel Mejia Baron's choice of tactics, reports Reuter.

Mejia Baron, whose team was knocked out of the finals on Tuesday in a penalty shoot-out, was soundly condemned by his countrymen for not using his substitutes when the game went into extra time, and particularly for not bringing on national hero Hugo Sanchez after forward Luis Garcia was sent off.

The hard-fought game was a demonstration of the effort and enthusiasm of the Mexican players throughout the 120 minutes of play, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari said in a statement after the game.

But he added: "Perhaps if we had reinforced our attack when Luis Garcia was expelled we would have had more of a chance."

Mejia said he did not think it was "appropriate" to use his substitutes in the extra time.

Celebrating, a weird art

LOS ANGELES, California, July 7: There were 188 goals in the first two rounds of the World Cup, 118 explosions of joy, each unique and many downright weird, reports AFP.

The did you see that award goes to Nigeria's Finidi George.

As soon as he scored the first goal in the 2-0 victory over Greece, George ran to the corner, dropped to his hands and knees and started barking.

As his teammates surrounded him and patted him, for all the world as if he were a poodle that had just performed a trick, he lifted his right

"It was just a dance of happiness," said teammate Sunday Oliseh. "We do these dances all the time. The dance that Finidi did, in Nigeria, we do that at parties."

The Nigerians, making their World Cup debut, greeted every goal as if it were their first.

That one belonged to Rashidi Yekini, who was so delighted he followed the ball between the posts and practically wrapped himself in the net.

Cameroon's David Embe provided a flashback to 1990 when he celebrated his goal against Sweden with the same snake-hipped dance in the corner immortalised by teammate Roger Milla in Italy, capping it with a free-fall flat on his back.

Milla himself provided the encore after his lone goal against Russia. There's a cliché for everything in football, and goal celebrations are no exception.

The pumping first and the 11-player pile-up have been much in evidence.

Harold Lozano's somersault when he scored Colombia's winner against Switzerland made him one of a handful of footballers turned-gymnasts.

Diego Maradona — an old pro when it comes to milking a moment — bypassed the crowd and ran straight to the television cameras with a bug-eyed, I-told-you-so glare.

Italians brace themselves

MARTINSVILLE, New Jersey, July 7: Italy, who snatched victory from Nigeria's grasp to reach the last eight of the World Cup, on Wednesday began the race to get their battle-weary squad ready for Saturday's match with Spain, reports Reuter.

The Italians played the last 15 minutes of normal time plus the whole of extra time with 10 men on Tuesday after substitute Gianfranco Zola had been sent off.

Defender Roberto Mussi was a passenger for the final stages too as he tied up with cramp.

"To win 10 against 11 means you have done well, to play nine against 11 as we did at the end and still win means you have done very well," said coach Arrigo Sacchi.

Italy looked down and out until Roberto Baggio scored in the 89th minute to send the game into extra time and the

same Baggio later netted the winner from a penalty.

"I thought we were on our way home and it was a sad feeling because I didn't think we deserved to lose," Sacchi said.

The triple champions meet Spain at Foxboro Stadium near Boston on Saturday, the Span-

ards having earned their place by beating Switzerland four days ago.

"It doesn't matter that we have only 72 hours to prepare. We want to go further in this tournament," Sacchi said.

The news from the medical staff was good, with the doctors saying that none of the team who played against Nigeria had suffered injuries and that it just a case of seeing how they recovered from the intense strain.

Team doctor Paolo Zepilli said the effort put in by the players was the equivalent to running a marathon and added that some had lost 2.5 kg (5.5lb) in weight in the heat of Foxboro Stadium.

Despite the win, Sacchi came under attack from Italian journalists who believe he picked the wrong starting line-up by leaving out the powerful Dino Baggio. Midfielder Baggio came on at halftime and helped spark the Italian revival.

The coach would not reveal much about his next line-up but said he envisaged fielding the same defence, meaning captain Paolo Maldini would continue as a central defender rather than in his favourite left-back slot.

Sacchi must also decide whether to drop goalkeeper Luca Marchegiani now that Gianluca Pagliuca is free to return after suspension. Marchegiani has performed well since coming in.

The Italians said they were considering an appeal over the red card Mexican referee Arturo Brizio Carter showed to Zola for what appeared to be a harmless tackle.

"I can't understand why I was shown the red card because it wasn't a bad foul and it wasn't a dirty game," said the mild-mannered Sardinian.

"I'm very sorry to have put my team mates in trouble," added Zola, whose 28th birthday on Tuesday was ruined by his dismissal.

Baggio retaliates

MARTINSVILLE, New Jersey, July 7: Roberto Baggio, irritated with his treatment by the Italian media during the World Cup, hit back on Wednesday at the pundits who first wrote him off and then acclaimed him as a national hero, reports Reuter.

"I don't think I'm the saviour of anyone. I'm the same as I was yesterday morning," Baggio said.

"All I did was play my part and score," he added when asked about his two goals that rescued Italy from World Cup elimination by Nigeria on Tuesday.

"We've always had commitment and the will to win. We have proved we are not the wimps some people in the press have made us out to be," Baggio said of a 2-1 second-round win achieved when Italy had been reduced to 10 men.

Baggio, European footballer-of-the-year, has struggled for form during the World Cup but came good at virtually the last moment against Nigeria, striking in the 89th minute and then scoring the winner from a penalty in extra time.

"For 88 minutes Baggio was the worst player on the pitch," wrote the Rome daily La Repubblica on Wednesday.

Baggio fell out with coach Arrigo Sacchi earlier in the competition over Sacchi's decision to substitute his star player when goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca was sent off early in the match with Norway.

Baggio and Sacchi embraced at the final whistle on Tuesday, their differences clearly a thing of the past.

"That gesture is easy enough to explain. The team had prevented him from being considered finished as a coach and me being seen as a failed

player," Baggio said.

The double against Nigeria lifted Baggio's tally to 21 goals in 40 internationals and ended his run of more than nine months without scoring for his country.

The player said the press judged him solely on whether he scored or created goals and took no notice of other work he did for the team.

"I've always tried to give my best and the fact that Italy qualified (for the finals) is in part thanks to me," he said.

Baggio's goals lifted him past former World Cup hero Paolo Rossi into eighth place on the list of all-time Italian scorers. Rossi netted 20 times for his country, including six as Italy won the Cup in 1982.

(Luigi Riva is first with 35).

The win over Nigeria came exactly 12 years to the day after Rossi's finest hour — a hat-trick that gave Italy a 3-2 World Cup win over Brazil which sent them into the last

four.

Italian fans are now hoping that Baggio, the reluctant saviour, can continue his revival and match Rossi's heroics.

Spanish World Cup delegation chief Valentín Sainz carries the tiny talisman, the team's mascot when they won Olympic gold in Barcelona in 1992, with him wherever the Spaniards travel.

It will accompany him when Spain face Italy for a place in the semifinals on Saturday.

Five members of coach Javier Clemente's squad were Olympic gold medalists: reserve goalkeeper Santiago Canizares, defenders Albert Ferrer and Abelardo Fernandez, midfielder Josep Guardiola and striker Luis Enrique.

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Nigeria so near yet so far

BOSTON, July 7: After so much promise from Cameroon four years ago, and so much hope for Nigeria, African soccer may have realised how far it still has to go, reports AP.

Inexperience seems to be

the operative word.

Morocco went out without winning a game. Cameroon, wrought with disputes with their federation, managed a draw, but went home after an embarrassing 6-1 loss to Russia.

And Nigeria, the recently crowned African champions and big hope, made it only to the second round before internal squabbling seemed to eliminate them.

They came within two minutes of reaching the quarter-finals, and then fell apart.

"Because of our lack of experience, we're still learning," said striker Rashidi Yekini. "And we hope to be back in four years. We will go home, learn from our mistakes, regroup and be back in four years."

Victories over Bulgaria and Greece got them to the second round.

But when they took the early lead over Italy, they couldn't deliver the knockout blow against a team visibly struggling.

"I think it was all psychological after they scored," forward Finidi George said. "The game is never finished until the referee blows the last whistle. And that's what we learned today."

"We just lost our concentration for a couple of minutes toward the end."

And it's cool.

As the game narrowed to a close, he Italians pressed. Nigeria became tense and finally cracked. After the goal, it was all over.

Nigerian players complained about the referee, and accused unpopular coach Clements Westerhof, a Dutchman, of incompetence.

It was a total breakdown. Defender Emeka Ezeugo

charged at Westerhof in the lockerroom.

"You are a fool, you made us lose this match," he yelled at Westerhof.

It was the mark of inexperience, something World Cup-tested teams like Italy, Germany and Brazil know to avoid.

This was Nigeria's debut at the big show.

"In our first time here, I think we did pretty good," said forward Aniel Amokachi. "We have good young players and I think four years from now we will show the world again just how good we really are."

Despite being complimented as an attacking team, Nigeria were one of the most brutal teams, being called for an average of 24 fouls a game, 4-1-2 more than the next worst team (Spain).

Despite relying on the counterattack, their defence was often criticised as suspect. Fouling seemed to be a way to make up for that deficiency.

Regardless of comments to the contrary, Nigeria do not appear to go home as a happy unit. Several players have said they won't play for the "Super Eagles" again, or without special conditions.

Westerhof is known to be taking a vacation now that the World Cup is over, and it is generally believed he won't be back as coach.

The National Sports Commission in Nigeria is rumoured to be ready to dismiss the entire board of the Nigerian Football Association.

Throughout it all though, there is optimism.

"The level of soccer in Africa has greatly improved," said goalkeeper Peter Rufai. "And I will not be surprised if an African nation is in the finals of the next World Cup."



American sprinter Leroy Burrell (C) powers home to win the men's 100 metres in a world record time of 9.85 seconds at an international athletics meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland on July 6.

— AFP photo