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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

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-Boi 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 has won 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.

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 Müller-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 shootout 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."

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 shootout, 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.



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 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."

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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 Kamikaz than a Kaiser after he wrapped his Mercedes car around a post and gained a reputation as "Lothar the loudmouth" for his outspoken personality.

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."

His experience has been vital to the Germans in the United States after the team struggled to find form in the

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 match against South Korea.

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