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Vogts may resign after World Cup?

CHICAGO, July 8: Germany's soccer chief fears that coach Berti Vogts may quit after the World Cup because of media criticism, reports AP.

Vogts says he will talk to the officials at the German Football Federation (DFB) after the World Cup.

"I fear that Berti Vogts might leave after the World Cup because of attacks from parts of the media," DFB president Egidius Braun said.

Braun was speaking in an interview with the newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. The interview will appear in Friday's editions, but the newspaper released the text of the interview in advance.

Vogts, in an interview with Germany's SAT-1 television station, did not rule out leaving the post. He has an open-ended contract that can run until his retirement in 2006.

"We'll talk in peace after the World Cup," Vogts said.

"We'll talk about soccer-related matters, but also about other things."

There is always such a talk after a World Cup. We'll see what happens," Vogts said.

Vogts was harshly criticised by the German sports media for Germany's lackluster performances in early games.

Brehme may replace Matthaeus

CHICAGO, Illinois, July 8: Lothar Matthaeus says if he is not fit for Sunday's World Cup quarter-final against Bulgaria then Andreas Brehme will replace him, reports AP.

The two men share rooms when Germany travel and in the 1990 final against Argentina, when Matthaeus was bothered by an ankle injury, he asked Brehme to take



ANDREAS BREHME

what turned out to be the decisive penalty.

Coach Berti Vogts dropped the 33-year-old Brehme for the second round match with Belgium, but Matthaeus had told Vogts beforehand that if he could not finish the game then Brehme would take over as sweeper.

Matthaeus has played with a stitched right instep since being injured against South Korea in a group game the defending champions went so very close to losing.

"It's still painful but I don't think it will be a problem for me to play Sunday," he said.

Matthaeus can equal the World Cup record of 21 tournament games if another pain-killing injection allows him to turn out.

Diego Maradona had been set to play a record-breaking 22nd game against the Bulgarians in Argentina's last group game before he was suspended for drugs.

Uwe Seeler, Germany's inspirational centre-forward who kept on playing up to the 1970 finals, and Wladislaw Zmuda of Poland have also played 21 World Cup games.

But Matthaeus, nine caps short of England goalkeeper Peter Shilton's 125 international record, is not interested in records.

"I am not here to be a great start but to achieve a team goal, to be a world champion again," he said.

Matthaeus made his international debut for Germany against Holland in 1980 and came on as a substitute against Chile and Austria in the 1982 World Cup.

He was a permanent fixture in the 1986 side although he failed to mark Maradona out of the game in the final.

He was a dynamic midfield driving force in 1990 when Brehme was just as big an influence with his surging runs from the back and implacable defending.

Matthaeus converted to sweeper this year but Brehme, recalled by Vogts last November, is unlikely to replace Martin Wagner after his Kaiserlautern clubmate's powerful performance against Belgium.

His only chance appears to be as a stand-in for his captain and best friend on the team.



German striker Juergen Klinsmann (R) signs autographs for Illinois state police officers after the team's last practice at the Hinsdale, Illinois facility on July 7. The Germans are moving to New Jersey where they will meet Bulgaria in the quarter-final on July 10. — AFP photo

Sammer doubtful starter

CHICAGO, July 8: Key midfielder Matthias Sammer may miss Germany's quarter-final against Bulgaria

Sunday because of a calf injury, coach Berti Vogts said Thursday, reports AP.

"It's a problem with the calf muscle, he didn't train the last two days but I am hoping that he'll be able to play," Vogts told reporters.

"He is a very important player for us and I really hope he'll recover in the next two days. We would have to change our midfield tactics if Sammer is unable to play," Vogts said.

There was also good news for the Germans, whose squad has been reduced to 20 by the ouster from the team of Stefan Effenberg and by the absence of Mario Basler, who is home attending to a wife having problems in the eighth month of pregnancy.

Both Basler and Effenberg are midfielders and if another midfielder like Sammer is out, it could leave Germany thin in the vital sector of the team.

The good news was that captain Lothar Matthaeus resumed full training Thursday and should be fit for Sunday's game in East Rutherford, NJ.

"Lothar was kicking the ball again and running at full strength, there should be no problem for him to play," Vogts said.

Defender Thomas Strunz also resumed full training after a long hamstring injury that forced him to miss all but one of Germany's four games.

Vogts said Andreas Moeller could return to the lineup if necessary to replace Sammer, as well as Strunz and Maurizio Gaudino, who has yet to play a game.

Sammer's injury could force

Vogts to change what he calls his ideal lineup, the same 11 who started against Belgium.

The defending World Cup champions practiced for the last time in the Chicago area Thursday, before flying Friday to New Jersey. The Germans have stayed in Oak Brook, a Chicago suburb, since June 13.

The good performance against Belgium has lifted German spirits, after their lackluster displays in early games.



MATTHIAS SAMMER

"But I have to raise a warning finger. To send Bulgaria home, we have to repeat the same performance that we had against Belgium," said Vogts, who personally watched Bulgaria beat Mexico on penalties in the Round of 16.

"They have a lot of experienced players, and exceptional individuals such as Hristo Stoichkov, Emil Kostadinov and Nasko Sirakov," Vogts said.

Two Bulgarians will be well known to German players. Midfielder Yordan Lechkov and defender Petar Houbchev play for Hamburg SV in the

Bundesliga.

Vogts declined to say who will mark Stoichkov, the Barcelona star who is Bulgaria's greatest threat on the offense. "He can decide a game in seconds," the German coach said.

"We tried zone defence in practice today and we saw that we cannot play this system. We have to play strict marking," Vogts said.

Normally, Juergen Kohler or Guido Buchwald should be given the task of marking Stoichkov, but Vogts is not revealing his intentions. Veteran striker Rudi Voeller, who scored two goals against Belgium, and Juergen Klinsmann, who has notched five so far in the tournament, will start in the attack.

"The Bulgarian defence begins to unravel a bit when they come under pressure and Rudi and Juergen can trouble any defence in the world," Vogts said.

Advocaat plots his own path

DALLAS, Texas, July 8: Dick Advocaat, rarely considered Holland's first choice, is emerging in his own right from the life-long shadow of Dutch grand master Johan Cruyff, reports AP.

The balding 46-year-old knows what it's like to be consigned to second best.

As a gritty midfielder, Advocaat never played for the Dutch national team. His career path was blocked by Cruyff, Rob Rensenbrink and Wim Jansen.

Even when Advocaat took over from Rinus Michels as coach of the national team after the 1992 European Championship it was generally regarded that he was just a stop-gap for Cruyff.

Advocaat instilled his fighting qualities into the artistic Dutch team guiding them to the World Cup finals as group runners-up to Norway but significantly, ahead of England.

Yet it still wasn't good enough. Cruyff was the man the Dutch Football Federation courted to take their crafted team to USA.

But when Cruyff backed out over money the federation had to go cap in hand to Advocaat just before Christmas.

Advocaat had already to make do without injured superstar AC Milan striker Marco van Basten and on the eve of the finals two-time FIFA world player-of-the-year Ruud Gullit stormed out of the team.

So it is with great personal satisfaction that Advocaat has unified Holland's maverick-minded players into a winning combination.

The Dutch, relishing their best World Cup since twice being runners-up in the 1970s, have advanced to their first quarter-final in 16 years lining up against Brazil here on Saturday.

Apart from putting more fight into the Dutch team, Advocaat has distilled his nation's traditional attacking style.

His use of wingers Marc Overmars and Peter van Vossen, flanking star striker Dennis Bergkamp, overpowered Ireland in a 2-0 second round victory in Orlando last Monday.

"This game really proved we can play with players on the wings," said Bergkamp.

"We proved the system works. Teams don't have to be so defensive to win games."

Bebeto blessed with a son

DALLAS, July 8: Brazil striker Bebeto celebrated the birth of his third child on Thursday and promised victory over the Dutch in Saturday's World Cup quarter-final, reports Reuters.

"He's in perfect health and hopefully his first present will be a win over the Netherlands," he said after hearing that his wife had given birth to a boy in Rio De Janeiro.

Brazil go into the game — the first World Cup meeting between the two countries since the Dutch won 2-0 in 1974 — under criticism back home after they only managed a 1-0 win over the United States in the second round.

What a ref thinks

LONDON, July 8: Former World Cup referee Clive Thomas said on Thursday the refereeing in this year's final was the worst he had ever seen, reports Reuters.

"The refereeing in America has been awful. It is the worst I have ever seen it and FIFA must take the blame," said Welshman Thomas, who officiated at the 1974 and 1978 finals.

"The referees are performing like robots, doing exactly what they are told otherwise, they know they will be on the next plane home. FIFA have gone over the top."

The Mexican and Syrian referees who came under heavy criticism for their handling of Tuesday's World Cup second-round matches were not named to officiate in the quarter-finals when FIFA made its selections on Wednesday.

FIFA left out Mexican Arturo Pablo Brizio, who sent off Italy's Gianfranco Zola for a tackle in the match with Nigeria, and Jamal Al-Sarraf of Syria, who showed red cards to a Bulgarian and a Mexican in the day's other game.

"When you send people off like he (Jamal Al-Sarraf) did, you have to be sure, because it is a stigma on a player's career. At the end of that game the players were afraid to tackle each other," Thomas said.

"FIFA have no right to change the interpretation of the laws, but that's what they have done with their instructions to referees regarding things like tackling from behind. Football has always been a contact game."

When friends become foes



DALLAS, July 8: For once, Barcelona teammates Romario and Ronald Koeman will not be wishing each other the best of luck. They will be wearing opposing colours Saturday and only one of them will go to the World Cup semifinals, reports AP.

Brazil vs. the Netherlands is the highlight of the weekend quarter-finals, and a matchup between the mercurial Brazil striker and the stoic Dutch defender can only add to that.

"I know he is incredibly dangerous and incredibly sharp," Koeman said.

Romario's explosiveness on the ball and quickness of feet is Brazil's best hope to get past the well-organized Dutch defense, where Koeman's cunning and positioning have kept opponents at bay.

How the two square off in the Cotton Bowl is expected to decide the game.

Romario already has proved his full value to Brazil, scoring three vital goals and spreading around assists, the latest of which killed off US hopes when Bebeto finished off Romario's worked for a 1-0 victory.

Koeman's role has been more subdued up to now. The Dutch have yet to concede more than one goal in a game and the 1.80 metre (5-foot-11), 79-kilogram (174-pound) defender was instrumental in shutting out Ireland 2-0 in a second-round game.

Romario is expected to be shadowed by either Stan Valckx or Aron Winter Saturday, but when he beats his immediate opponent, as he is apt to do, he will stare straight into Koeman, the last hurdle in front of the goalkeeper.

The striker, who played for three seasons in the Dutch



RONALD KOEMAN

league with PSV Eindhoven, can appear dormant for much of the game only to come alive in a flash, leaving struggling defenders in his wake.

"It's tough to defend him for 90 minutes," Koeman said. "He always has his moments. Let's just hope he doesn't have

them on Saturday."

Koeman's offensive moments meanwhile have been few in the World Cup so far. The power of his long free kicks are unmatched in the world and his runs through the middle have dislodged many a defence.

Now Koeman is feeling his moment is coming.

"I have been lucky that I have been able to score in important games and at decisive moments."

"I have already dreamed about doing that on Saturday," he said.

Romario often has seen it happen over the past season. The few times his scoring touch was off with Barcelona, Koeman has come through with a dozen booming free kicks to see the side through.

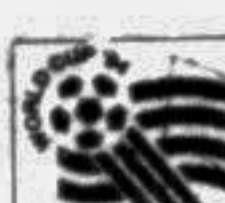
The respect is mutual, however.

Most of the time Koeman's touch is not necessary as Romario has scored with the regularity of a clock to give Barcelona their fourth straight league title and a place in the European Champions' Cup final, where the Spanish team lost to AC Milan.

While both have done a lot for Barcelona, coach Johan Cruyff also has done a lot for them. After a long stint at PSV Eindhoven in the Netherlands, Romario appeared, to be going nowhere and was not even sure of his place on Brazil's team.

Koeman's career was also boosted after he came from PSV Eindhoven.

Gerson grills World Cup '94



DALLAS, July 8: Gerson, one of the past greats of Brazilian soccer, slammed the 1994 World Cup

finals on Thursday, saying they had been wrecked by poor referees and circumspect coaches, reports Reuters.

"Before the competition, I predicted this would be one of the weakest World Cups of recent times but it's been even worse than that," he said.

One of the most prominent figures in Brazil's brilliant 1970 World Cup-winning side, Gerson has watched a steady every-match in the tournament in his role as a Brazilian television commentator. He has not liked what he has seen.

"The players are mediocre," he complained. "There have been only three outstanding players here — Romario, Maradona and Hagl."

"To have a great show you need to have great artists."

"The coaches are afraid. They plant everyone in defence, leaving just one or two players alone in attack. I can't say I've liked any of the teams. They're all about the same. Brazil have got Romario and Bebeto which puts us a bit above the rest."

Gerson, whose goal from 25 metres in the 1970 World Cup final is one of the most famous in the competition's history, added that the refereeing had been a disaster.

"I've seen referees here who aren't fit to officiate on Copacabana Beach. The only referees don't apply the rules. There have been

one who is any good is (Joel) Quirion.

"Every time there's a World Cup they (FIFA) talk and talk about how this time everything's going to work out but it's always a disaster."



GERSON

terrible tackles which haven't received even a yellow card. And what about the new rule of no tackles from behind? As far as I'm concerned it hasn't made any difference.

"They'd do better to have just one or two referees even if they had to do three matches in one day."

Gerson then laid into the officials for failing to protect the world's talented players.

"You've seen what's happened to players like Van Basten. Gullit has had injury problems, Romario and Bebeto have both been injured this year because they're always getting kicked."

"The talented players have to be preserved. If a defender comes along and kicks someone, he should be sent off straight away. But that doesn't happen."

But he was optimistic about the game's future and suggested kick-ins instead of throw-ins and offside only in the last 20 metres of the pitch as ways of improving the game.

"They have kick-ins in the Sao Paulo reserve championship and I think it's worked well. It makes the game faster and you can create goalscoring chances from the halfway line."

"Today, football and commerce are mixed in together so if there's no spectacle, everybody loses out. I'm convinced that the 1998 finals will be far better. It has to improve."

Gerson said he was not surprised to find only one non-European team in the last eight and said Nigeria and Mexico had only themselves to blame for getting eliminated.

"Nigeria spent the entire second half joking around, trying to put the ball between the Italians' legs. But this (competition) is a serious business."

"Mexico played for penalties when they're not good at taking penalties. They had (Hugo) Sanchez warming up and I don't know why they didn't bring him on."

Nigeria lost their second round match 2-1 to Italy in extra-time, having led 1-0 and conceded an 89th minute equaliser. Mexico bowed out against Bulgaria on penalties after drawing 1-1.

Injury delays Ramos' return



DANA POINT, July 8 (AP): US midfielder Tab Ramos, whose skull was slightly fractured Monday

against Brazil, said Wednesday,

"I thought I was going to die."

Ramos, 27, who plays in the Spanish league for Real Betis, who earned promotion to the First Division this season, said he thought he would be sidelined for about three months.

He will remain at the Dana Point Resort through the weekend, because doctors have advised him not to travel for several days, then will return to his home outside New York.

"Right now, my head is pretty swollen, but I'm hoping it goes down," Ramos said in an interview with team spokesman Dean Linke that was recorded and made available to reporters. "My head is like an

egg right now."

Ramos is scheduled to have another CAT scan on Thursday in Santa Monica at the office of team physician Dr. Bert Mandelbaum and will miss the start of pre-season training with his Real Betis.

"We need to define the complexity of the injuries before we make a prognostic determination on his return to the field," Mandelbaum said.

Ramos said that while he was feeling better, doctors have told him to spend much of the next 4-6 weeks in bed and out of the sun.

"The only thing I could think of when I fell down, I thought I was going to die, because I couldn't feel my legs or my arms or anything," Ramos said. "I just wanted to keep my eyes open, because I thought I had to fight it to come back. I mean that's how bad it was."

With two minutes left in the first half and the game scoreless, Ramos was holding the shirt of Leonardo when the 24-year-old defender swung his elbow in Ramos' temple, causing a small fracture of a bone above the ear.

Ramos dropped to the field and lost consciousness for several seconds. Doctors said there was a small amount of bleeding around the brain.

"I heard this noise in my head that was like a train going through, and all I thought was like, 'oh my God, I'm going to die right here,'" Ramos said.



From (L-R) US soccer player Paul Caliguri, pop-artist Peter Max, World Cup USA '94 president Alan Rothenberg, LA Mayor Richard Riordan and Cup mascot 'Striker' are gathered join in the ribbon cutting ceremony for SoccerFest and the world's largest indoor soccer theme park at the Las Angeles Convention Centre on July 7. The park opens a week before the World Cup finals in Pasadena, California. — AFP photo