

Team of the dreamers

PARIS, June 10 (AFP/ Internet): The greatest football team ever was named here on Tuesday -- but it will never take the field.

Selected by 250 journalists from across the world and an international panel, the Mascarade World Team of the Twentieth Century is every manager's dream.

While Pele was an obvious selection, several greats of football failed to make the final 11, including Sir Bobby Charlton, Puskas and Gento.

"When you try to pick the best team of all there is always controversy because so many great players get left out, like my friend Sir Bobby Charlton," said Pele.

It came as little surprise that Brazil won the most places, four in all.

THE TEAM

Lev Yashin (Soviet Union), Carlos Alberto (Brazil), Franz Beckenbauer (West Germany), Bobby Moore (England), Nilton Santos (Brazil), Johan Cruyff (Netherlands), Alfredo Di Stefano (Argentina), Michel Platini (France), Pele (Brazil), Garrincha (Brazil) Diego Maradona (Argentina)

Tabloids tease Collymore

LONDON, June 10: Britain's tabloid newspapers today all splashed across their front pages a lurid story of how England star Stan Collymore assaulted his girlfriend, TV presenter Ulrika Jonsson, at a Paris bar, reports AFP.

Drinking alongside Scottish fans in the Auld Alliance pub, near the Bastille area of Paris, late Tuesday on the eve of the Scotland-Brazil match, the 27-year-old footballer allegedly grabbed his blonde girlfriend's hair, pushing her to the ground as he kicked her.

Several fans are said to have jumped in and pulled Collymore, who played during England's World Cup qualifying campaign but was left out of the final squad, off the 30-year-old Swedish born presenter and escorted him from the pub.

In a statement, his agent confirmed an "altercation" had taken place in the bar. "It resulted from an argument he had during the day with Ulrika Jonsson. The argument culminated in a heated incident within the confines of the pub."

Collymore and Jonsson later returned together to England from Paris.

Tight security for Iranians

YSSINGEAUX, France, June 10: Iran's training camp was sealed off on Mondays as players prepared for their opening game with Yugoslavia on June 14, reports Reuters.

No access was allowed to within 100 metres of the entrance of the team's residence, Chateau de Montbarrier.

A team of 20 national police and five members of the crack anti-terrorist raid unit were stationed at the camp offering close security. Members of the paramilitary gendarmerie also patrolled the area.

Mayor of Yssingeaux, former government minister Jacques Barrot, told reporters his small town was the ideal location for ensuring the Iranians' preparation for their second finals passed without incident.

"This is a very practical venue because its size makes organisation and security easier," said Barrot. "Also as a former minister I am able to ensure the security."

The Chateau has been adjusted to meet the needs of the squad. As well as the installation of a gym, a room has been set aside for prayers, the bar has been closed and all alcohol has been removed, local officials said.

Barrot has gone to great lengths to ensure that the 7,000 population of the small town, near St Etienne in eastern France accept the Iranians into their community over the coming weeks.

Local authorities produced a glossy brochure explaining Iranian customs and culture and French-based Iranian artists have held talks in the town.

One shop in the town centre is offering Iranian products such as pistachio nuts and cashews.

The mayor, who greeted the team and the Iranian ambassador to France after a closed training session, said his community had grown to accept the presence of the Iranians after initial concerns.

"At first they were nervous and didn't know what expect but they have opened up and are taking an interest in the Iranian and Persian culture," said Barrot.

Security is expected to remain tight in the run-up to Iran's politically charged clash with the United States in Lyon on June 21, but Iranian players and officials are playing down the significance of the game.

Asked by reporters what the game meant to him, Iran coach Jalal Talebi replied "It's about three points, isn't it?"

Open TT Sports Reporter

The five-day long open table tennis tournament, organised by Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation, got underway at the NSC wooden floor gymnasium yesterday.

Sixteen men, six women and 30 boys are taking part in the meet. On the inaugural day, eighteen boys singles matches were decided.



LOOK FELLAS, THIS IS HOW YOU DO IT: Daniel Passarella (L), Argentina's coach and World Cup winning captain of 1978, kicks the ball during practice while his charges watch with admiration at their base in L'Etrat, France on June 9. — AFP photo

Chung cooks Korea's magic potion

PARIS, June 10 (AP): South Korea's recipe for success at the 1998 World Cup starts in the kitchen, and a chef from the homeland is overseeing the ingredients.

The cook is Chung Seungchan, flown in by their hotel to serve up the same dishes players are accustomed to eating back home.

"The players say they're happy to have Korean cooking 1,000 miles from home," said Park Sun-hu, who translates between Chung and the hotel's French chef in the kitchens.

"The French must have their baguette (bread) and fromage (cheese) every day. For Koreans it's essential to eat rice and kimchi — a spicy vegetable salad."

It is precisely those French cheeses that got the South Koreans into trouble when they came to France last April for matches against the Paris-club St Denis and France's first division club Metz.

Suffering from a variety of digestive problems, the South Koreans lost to 2-1 to Metz before scraping by St. Denis 2-1.

"They had a lot of problems with the food," recalls team vice-manager Chun Hanjin.

"Many had diarrhoea, which weakened them." "The problem was all the milk products," chef Chung explained. "They are too rich here and difficult for the players to digest. In Korea we only consume two per cent and skim milk products."

If the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, the South Koreans will need all the help they can get in their bid to win their first match in five World Cup appearances.

Doing his share, Chung prepares a selection of two or three Korean dishes each day, including the traditional staple kimchi. Chung also makes bulgogi, a marinated beef and vegetable dish, and fried chicken. And plenty of rice.

While millions of people come to France each year to sample some of the world's most famous Michelin restaurants, the country's haute cuisine has failed to impress the South Korean squad. The players do, however, appreciate Italian food.

"The hotel chef's spaghetti bolognese is very popular among the players, for some reason," said Park, who like Chung works for a hotel chain (Accor) back home.

Despite the honor and excitement of cooking for the national team, life in the French hotel's kitchens isn't exactly a piece of cake.

Communication is difficult and Chung does most of the cooking himself for the 23 players and the rest of the South Korean delegation. He does, however, receive help from the hotel's second chef, Richard Donlo.

"Many things are different in a French kitchen," said Park. "And there are many communication problems. But Monsieur Donlo is a great help even if he understands nothing about Korean cooking."

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

"I'm very excited about cooking for the World Cup team," said Chung, speaking through Park. "I get to meet famous players and it's my first time in France."

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

It's all for football in Toulouse

FRANCE, June 10 (AFP/ Internet): The Conventual Assembly of Jacobines of Toulouse is putting on an exhibition until the 17th August exclusively devoted to football and the passion it inspires.

The exhibition, entitled "Ballon passion, la Coupe du Monde et Toulouse" (Passion for football, TOULOUSE and the World Cup) presents an overview of the fifteen World Cups held to date, and the way in which political, economic and social motives have always flirited with a love of sport.

Newspapers, photos, paintings, advertisements and cartoons all show football and the World Cup in a different light.

A few rarities will be on show including the first USSR jersey, worn in the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, a set of Limoges china goal posts, and the award for the top goal-scorer of the 1958 World Cup won by the Frenchman, Just Fontaine.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Chung and Park will follow the team to Lyon and Marseille for its first-round matches against Mexico and the Netherlands.

Cloud over Abedzadeh

YSSINGEAUX, France, June 10: Ahmad Reza Abedzadeh, captain and goalkeeper of the Iranian team, will probably miss Iran's opening World Cup match with Yugoslavia because of a bad knee, the team's coach said Wednesday, reports AP.

There isn't much chance of Abedzadeh playing in the match with Yugoslavia, coach Jalal Talebi told The Associated Press. "There's only a 40 per cent chance that he'll be well enough to play," he said.

Abedzadeh, who is still recuperating from a knee operation late last year, practiced with the team under heavy rain and tight security Wednesday morning.

Iran's will adopt a defensive strategy for the game with Yugoslavia, whose star-studded team packs a formidable punch. But Iranian team sources said that back-up Nima Nakissa will likely stand guard at the goal for Sunday's game in St. Etienne.

Midfielder Sattar Hamedani, also recuperating from a leg injury last month, pulled out of practice and limped back to the team's living quarters with an ice pack on his knee. Team sources said he too may not be well enough to play Sunday.

Meanwhile, star striker Ali Daei, who recently underwent surgery for a broken cheekbone while playing with Armenia Bielefeld, said he had recovered completely.

Daei said he had signed up for three years with Bayern Munich and would be leaving his present Bundesliga team after the World Cup.

Daei and its two other Bundesliga strikers, the diminutive Khodadad Aziz and Karim Bagheri, are the pillars of the team.

"We are placed in a very tough group, but no one is going to walk over us," said Azizi. "We're going to make sure that the offense is the best part of our team."

After Yugoslavia, Iran meets the United States and Germany.

Desailly signs for Chelsea

LONDON, June 10: Chelsea completed their second international signing in 24 hours here on Tuesday when French star Marcel Desailly agreed to join the 1998 Cup Winners' Cup champions from Serie A giants AC Milan for 4.6 million pounds (7 million dollars), reports AFP.

Chelsea, who paid 2.2 million pounds for Barcelona's Spanish international defender Albert Ferrer also on Tuesday, finalised the deal in Paris where Ghana-born Desailly, who has signed a four year contract, is preparing for the World Cup.

The club managed by Gianluca Vialli, who have also signed Italian star Pierluigi Casiraghi for 5.4 million pounds from Lazio and Danish international striker Brian Laudrup on a free transfer under the Bosman rule from Glasgow Rangers, beat off interest from a number of other clubs to land Desailly, who can play in midfield or in central defence.

The 29-year-old Desailly, capped 41 times became the first player to win successive European Cup's at two different clubs with Olympique Marseille in 1993 and the following season with AC Milan, said, he was looking forward to the challenge of playing in the Premier League after five years at the San Siro.

Luca explained to me how it's going to work and about his ambitions, Chelsea have won the Cup Winners' Cup and they are growing and I'm happy to be part of Chelsea as they continue to grow.

"I'm sure Chelsea will be at the top. I hope in a few years we will win the Champions' League and this for me is my ambition."

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

"It was a big decision to leave Milan after playing for five years with them and winning many trophies like the Champions' League and the league title," he said.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Desailly, who will join fellow World Cup squad member Franck Leboeuf and compatriot Bernard Lamabourde admitted it had been a tough decision to leave the San Siro, but added the lure of playing in the Premier league with Chelsea proved irresistible.

Odyssey of an unnatural athlete

ELINCOURT SAINTE, MARGUERITE, France, June 10 (AFP): Nigerian Nwanko Kanu's path from Olympic champion to major heart surgery then back to World Cup duty has been a rollercoaster ride of triumph and tragedy.

Kanu's latest problem, a minor stomach ailment, is hardly a catastrophe compared with his terrible period when he thought he may never walk let alone play in a World Cup.

Inter Milan's Kanu, who missed training on Monday and had light training the following day, said he would be taking it easy on the run-up to their World Cup opener against Spain in Nantes on Saturday.

Kanu's rise to international fame was helped by his role in Nigeria's under-17 World Championship win in Japan. Ajax scouts spotted him and his career had its first big break.

He played a key role in Ajax's 1994-95 European Champions League winning side before the Olympic challenge beckoned. And Nigeria, with Kanu as captain, were clearly the best side of the tournament.

In the semifinal, they managed to beat Brazil which included Ronaldo, and then the other great South American nation Argentina, with Ariel Ortega, were the next victims.

Naturally he had really thrust himself into the spotlight and had created weighty bargaining power for himself.

Ajax offered him a five-year contract but Inter Milan were able to propose an even better deal.

Suddenly he was a football megastar and the then Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

Inter Milan manager Roy Hodgson had plans to build a team around him.

A successful pre-season tournament in Spain had Hodgson singing his praises, as a footballer as well as a person.

However the routine medical exam revealed he had a deformed aortic valve and he would need an operation simply to lead an average life, let alone that of a top athlete.

In late 1996, Kanu was put under the knife in a hospital in Cleveland, Ohio. "I always knew I would be back," he said. He had a four-and-a-half-hour operation to correct the defect and his football career, and life, were being put on hold.

A strong optimistic streak in this shy 21-year-old however helped him on his road back to full fitness.

Some were surprised Ajax, with all their fastidious screening of youngsters, should have missed a defect which would have shown up by a simple ego.

Amazingly, Kanu had survived years of playing high calibre football in the heat of Nigeria without any adverse effects. Footballers have been known to die in Nigeria of heart attacks while playing so perhaps his number might have come up had he not left for Europe.

Whatever the ifs, buts, or might bes, Kanu set out on his determined bid to reclaim his life in the football fast lane.

He watched Nigeria become the first qualifiers for this World Cup, a full year before the finals were due to start, with their beating of Kenya, and, in a moving tribute to him, he was applauded in the crowd and even joined his teammates lap of honour.

Kanu is only a slight build with sinewy limbs and not be normal build one would associate with an international striker. But he has competed at the highest level with consummate skill and clearly can do without any more muscle on his frame.

"I think the current team is certainly no worse than the Olympic one," he said at Nigeria's base 80-km north of Paris on Tuesday morning.

His comment looks optimistic following their recent sequence of defeats — the Super Eagles went down 3-0 to Yugoslavia and then slumped to a 5-1 loss against a rampant Holland.

Not only did the Nigerians lose both matches — they looked terrible in the process: fragile in defence and puncheon in attack.

But Kanu remained optimistic as he has always been throughout his ordeals.

"We may have lost our last three matches, but we must keep on going," he said. "We just have to get ourselves together again and I think we can do it."

Relaxing Japs style

AIX-LES-BAINS, France, June 10: A mix of Hong Kong action films, computer games and music appears to be working nerve-calming wonders for the Japanese team, reports AP.

The World Cup debutants exuded relaxed confidence, often laughing during practice Tuesday, the eve of the tournament's opener. They even appeared to be enjoying themselves.

There isn't a hint of jitters or intimidation, although their opener Sunday is against two-time World Cup winner Argentina.

So much for the longtime reputation of Japanese athletes as sure failures under pressure, prone to performing well below their abilities in international competition.

"We're not doing anything all that different," said defender Yutaka Akita, the picture of serenity. "It's just that we happen to be aiming for the World Cup."

The players say there's no point in trying to be something they can't be. The key, they say, is to stay cool and beat the mental game so they can be at their very best.

"If we've come this far, there's not much more we can do," said midfielder Motohiro Yamaguchi, who sings tunes by Japanese pop group Snap alone in his hotel room to let it all go.

"The main point is to be brave so we can carry out everything we've worked on."

The team always travels with plenty of computer games and music equipment, to keep the players happy. The team chef has been preparing rice, miso soup and other Japanese dishes.

Brazil-born striker Wagner Lopes listens to music and goes on walks around this resort town on his free time.

Defender Akira Naranahashi says he has no problems relaxing because he has brought along his own TV set and personal collection of Jackie Chan videos.

"This is about time the players may be feeling nervous, a bit frustrated," said coach Takeshi Okada, who has a reputation for being in tune with the hidden inner workings of his players.

Personally, I don't think there's a single World Cup coach who can say he's having fun," he told reporters with a wry smile.

Understandably, the players are excited. "Oh, I'm going to be so moved when they play the anthem," said defender Eisuke Nakanishi.

Even the ever confident Akita, who says he is not at all worried about Argentina, acknowledged he's thrilled Japan has finally arrived at soccer's greatest tournament.

The World Cup has been my dream ever since I was a kid. It's an honour just to be standing here," he said.



HIDETOSHI NAKATA

Nakata the material man

AIX-LES-BAINS, France, June 10: It's easy to spot Hidetoshi Nakata. He's the one with the mean long passes, cool and cocky demeanour and his hair dyed a bright copper orange, reports AP.

The 21-year-old midfielder, who has grown practically overnight into Japan's biggest cover-boy, draws screams from the stands fit for a rock star every time he touches the ball during a game.

Nakata is also the only player on the Japanese World Cup team who refuses to talk to reporters.

Every day after practice in this quaint resort, famous for its therapeutic hot springs, the players are surrounded by a throng of eager journalists. The players, with the exception of Nakata, are all surprisingly patient and cordial.

With rumours stirring about European clubs' interest in Nakata, the 1997 Asian player-of-the-year, now signed with J-League's Bellmare Hiratsuka, would top any reporter's list for interviews.

But the Japanese reporters have long given up. And Nakata — who has represented his country on several youth teams as well as the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 — is able to pass them by with a bare nod straight to the bus that takes him back to the hotel.

In the past week, Nakata made himself available to the media once, and only to a group of Argentine reporters. When this reporter tried to join the group, Nakata turned with a stern look and raised his palm, motioning, "NO."