



BRAVO PARAGUAY: Residents of the Paraguayan capital Asuncion jubilate after their team entered the second round by beating Nigeria on June 24. — AFP photo

England vs Colombia: A fight to the death

LENS, June 25 (AFP) — England and Colombia are gearing up for their high octane final group clash here on Friday with this little former coal-mining town on red alert in case of hooliganism by England's notorious supporters.

A Lens police officer is fighting for his life after German hooligans caused trouble here last week and further problems are expected with the invasion of England fans in the short trip across the Channel.

England supporters have already run amok in Marseille though Toulouse had an easier time with confrontations by police and fans ending peacefully by comparison.

Lille prefect Jacques Franquet gave no figures for the police presence but said security would be boosted at the city's two train stations and at the airport and at checkpoints on the border with Belgium.

Off licence liquor sales will be banned after 10 am (2000 GMT) as well as drinking on

streets Bars will be allowed to stay open until 2 am however.

Bordeaux and St Etienne are almost certainly hoping for the right results to avoid England's fans should England, as is unlikely, top the group, they would play in Bordeaux, but if they finished second, it would be St Etienne who would have to take special security measures.

Colombia will be out for victor to qualify and wipe away the memory of their 1994 campaign as favourites when defender Andres Escobar was murdered days after his own goal against hosts USA.

A Carlos Valderrama pass for a Preciado late goal against Tunisia has given cause for optimism in a country beleaguered 285h drug and corruption problems.

Colombia coach Henan Dario Gomez is predicting a footballing fight to the death in this winner takes all fixture.

Their two previous encounters, both played in England, in 1990 and in 1995 ended in 0-0

and 1-1 draw. Gomez was pleased with his midfield but concerned about a defence that lacked cohesion.

In the only change to the team that started the Tunisia game, suspended left back Jose Fernando Santa will be replaced by Antonio Moreno, the only other left-sided defender in the squad.

Up front, a Leider Preciado, who scored the goal against Tunisia, will again be on the substitutes bench despite being leading scorer in the Colombian league last season.

Preciado has yet to complete a full international he came on for the last 30 minutes against Tunisia and is unlikely to be used against England.

Antony de Avila and Adolfo Valencia are set to spearhead the attack and the two are already plotting England's downfall.

A victory over England would do much to extinguish the lingering controversy over the banishment of Faustino

Asprilla for criticising Gomez after the opening game against Romania.

The coach also said the had enough and was quitting after the World Cup.

Meanwhile teenager Michael Owen is poised to start for England. Owen, at 18 the youngest member of the England squad, was in fine form when he came on as a substitute in England's 2-1 loss to Romania on Monday, scoring the team's only goal, and looking a vast improvement on the pedestrian Teddy Sheringham.

England coach Glenn Hoddle is now set to partner Owen with Alan Shearer in attack.

Shearer has been frustrated by the lack of opportunities coming his way at France '98. "It's very frustrating I've only had one chance in two games — and I scored from that," he said. Shearer is believed to want, unlike Hoddle, Manchester United star David Beckham to start the match.

Lens on red alert

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finished second, it would be St Etienne who would have to take special security measures.

The newspaper Le Monde, in its Thursday edition, cited an intelligence memo as saying that German extremists plan to travel to Lens "to combat the English enemy and try to gain the title of 'best hooligans of Europe'."

The interior ministry had no immediate comment on the newspaper report, and Lens Mayor Andre Delelis said in a statement released Thursday that security "should be more efficient than it was last Sunday."

A Lens spokeswoman, Isabelle Isart, insisted "the kids got the message" when officials jailed several Germans after Sunday's rioting and quickly sentenced three of them to a year in prison.

But a ministry source privately confirmed the hundreds of police to be deployed for the match were alerted about the possibility of German-English clashes.

German police have also privately said they were taking the development seriously. They stepped up checks of France-bound motorists by boosting their border force from about 200 to more than 1,000 ahead of the matches Thursday and Friday.

Britain's biggest bet

LONDON, June 25 (AFP/Internet) — A businessman has placed what is believed to be the biggest bet in the history of British gambling on England to beat Colombia at the World Cup on Friday, the bookmakers William Hill said Thursday.

The punter ignored England's defeat against Romania on Monday to place 200,000 pounds (\$320,000 dollars), at odds of 4-5.

A spokesman for William Hill said: "We are not aware of any larger bet ever struck with a

British bookmaker on any event."

"It is certainly a huge vote of confidence for (England manager) Glenn Hoddle."

The spokesman added that the World Cup in France was on target to produce a betting turnover of 100 million pounds (165 million dollars), which would make it the biggest betting event of all time.

Rival bookmaker Ladbrokes reported a surge in business after increasing the odds of England winning the entire tournament to 33-1 following the team's defeat by Romania on Monday.

But within 15 minutes of opening, the company was forced to cut the odds to 20-1 and have now trimmed them further to 16-1.

Spokesman Sean Boyce said: "Over the last 24 hours I've felt like Michael Caine in that Zulu film. We're trying to hold our ground but all we can see is punters... thousands of them."

Brazil are still favourites to win, at odds of 11-4.

Bonev delivers parting shot

LENS, France, June 25 (AFP/Internet) — Bulgaria coach Hristo Bonev slammed his team as he quit here on Wednesday after watching his side destroyed 6-1 by a rampaging Spain.

"I can't go on in charge after the way the team has played in this World Cup. I have principles," said a shocked Bonev.

"Tonight simply showed the state of our team, and how bad they were," he added. "The future of the team and the young players who come in will be up to my successor."

Bulgaria, who reached the semi-finals four years in the United States, were given a demonstration by a sparkling Spanish side.

Striker Hristo Stoichkov, who made his name in USA 94, was pulled off at half-time.

Two days before the match Stoichkov and Luboslav Penev were punished by Bonev for staying out overnight in Paris.



ADIOS ANDONI: Spain's record-breaking goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta gets a consolatory pat from understudy Santiago Cañizares after the match with Bulgaria on June 24. Zubizarreta announced his retirement shortly after. —AFP photo

Spain sparkle in vain

LENS, June 25 (AP) — Spain finally shone, but just too late.

The Spaniards redeemed themselves Wednesday by pummeling Bulgaria 6-1, but it was all in vain because the victory couldn't prevent them from being ousted from the World Cup.

Instead, Paraguay advanced into the elimination rounds, clinching second place in Group D — or "Group of Death" — by beating Nigeria 3-1 in a simultaneous match. The Africans earlier took first place, with wins over Spain and Bulgaria.

News of Paraguay's lead had reached the players and the Spaniards did not even bother to celebrate after each of their three goals in the last 10 minutes.

"The game showed you can't always get what you hope for," said Spain coach Javier Clemente. "Today things looked as if they were working out for us but Nigeria didn't win and you have to accept that."

"I am sad, but life goes on. The pride and prestige of the team were clearly demonstrated. Spain came into their 10th World Cup as one of the favourites but a 3-2 defeat against Nigeria followed by a 0-0 draw against Paraguay left it totally dependent on the final game they were the first of the top seeds to be eliminated."

"When we went into the lead 4-1 and I heard Paraguay was winning I just couldn't believe it," said Spanish defender Carlos Aguilera. "We came here with such hopes. Today we gave everything and all for nothing."

Spain pressed on with a series of flowing attacks, with a pace Bulgaria's aging veterans could not match.

Bulgaria's star attackers Hristo Stoichkov and Emil Kostadinov were out-marked with ease by Rafael Alkorta and Miguel Angel Nadal.

Luis Enrique set up Spain's third goal on a fast break from midfield in the 53rd minute, finding Fernando Morientes who filled it low from 14 metres into the keeper's left-hand

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Paraguay pounce on Nigerian apathy

TOULOUSE, June 25 (AP) — Paraguay attacked, for a change. Nigeria did not, for a change.

Celso Ayala scored Paraguay's first goal of the World Cup after just 51 seconds and the South Americans went on to beat a listless Nigeria 3-1 Wednesday to reach the round of 16.

Nigeria, who used just four regular starters in their lineup, had already clinched first place in Group D by beating Spain and Bulgaria for six points.

The Super Eagles face Denmark, second in Group C, in the second round Sunday at Saint-Denis, while Paraguay — with five points take on hosts France at Lens the same day.

Spain finished one point behind Paraguay despite routing bottom Bulgaria 6-1 Wednesday at Lens.

"We are euphoric. We had to win and we did," Paraguay coach Paulo Cesar Carpegiani said. "But tomorrow is another day and we have to start thinking about the next round."

Nigerian goalkeeper, Peter Rufai, warned not to read too much into Nigeria's first loss.

"There is no cause for alarm," he said. "We took the game seriously but not to the

point of going out there willing to die on the pitch, like we usually do."

Paraguay immediately showed this match would be nothing like their two 0-0 draws earlier in the tournament.

Ayala's header was the fastest World Cup goal since Brayan Robson's 27-second strike for England against France in Bilbao, Spain, in 1982.

Miguel Benitez brought the ball down the right flank and was fouled along the side of the penalty area.

Defender Francisco Arce lofted the ensuing free-kick and a completely unimpeded Ayala was able to head home. He beat poorly positioned keeper Peter Rufai to the ball and no Nigerian defender made a serious effort to get there first.

"Finally the goal arrived," said Benitez, who went on to score Paraguay's second in the 59th minute. "This is the result of hard work by the entire team."

After the disastrous start, the Super Eagles did not take long to turn things around.

Ayala cleared a dangerous header from Augustine Eguavoen off the line in the

10th, and no one stopped winger Wilson Oruma's shot one minute later. Kanu released Tiji Babangida into the right side of the box and the Ajax of Amsterdam sparkplug slipped by two defenders before sliding the ball to an unmarked Oruma, who dove in from near the penalty spot.

Paraguay's flamboyant keeper, Jose Luis Chilavert, made three reflex saves over the next six minutes to keep the score 1-1. He pushed Sunday Oliseh's 25-metre blast just wide of the post, slapped away a fierce header by Taribo West and then got a leg on a 15-metre shot from Rashed Yekini.

But that was about all from Nigeria.

Paraguay came out strong after the interval, earning four corners in as many minutes and threatening to regain the lead in the 51st, when Hugo Brizuela's shot from the edge of the penalty area was pushed aside by an outstretched Rufai at the base of the post. Two minutes later, defender Ben Iroha cleared a loose ball off Rufai's line.

Nigeria were on their heels, responding only in the 57th, when Yekini's weak chance was

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A Bulgarian girl wraps herself with a national flag at Lens on June 24. — AFP photo

Will young Owen carry England through? JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS