

NIGERIA VS DENMARK THIS AIN'T NO FRIENDLY!

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সংবিধানিক সতর্কীকরণঃ যুগ্মপত্র বাছুরের জন্য স্বতন্ত্র



A BECKHAM BEAUTY ABOUT TO UNFOLD: David Beckham about to unleash the lovely curler that found the back of the Colombian net at Lens on June 26. — AFP photo

Nigeria vs Denmark: Eying uncharted territory

SAINT-DENIS, France, June 27 (AP) — Nigeria, carrying the World Cup hopes of a continent, and Denmark both aim to erase painful memories from past trips to the second round when they square off at France '98.

Neither have ever reached the quarterfinal stage, but that will change after their meeting Sunday at the Stade de France.

Just 60 seconds and Roberto Baggio stood between Nigeria and the quarterfinals four years ago, but the Super Eagles' suspect defence let a 1-0 lead slip away. Denmark's only other trip to the round of 16 — in 1986 — ended in humiliation with a 5-1 loss to Spain.

"They are playing for themselves, for Nigeria and also for Africa," Nigeria coach Bora Milutinovic said of this talented squad, which topped Group D. "These types of games bring out their best."

The African contingent here of five teams was the highest ever, but only Nigeria is left in the draw. They could become just the second team from the continent, after Cameroon in 1990, to reach the quarters.

The confident players are thinking even bigger.

"We are now one of the favourites," defender Taribo West said. "Denmark play an English style, which is an advantage for us. We know that tactic."

Denmark scraped through Group C, managing only a 1-1-1 record and a total goals tally of 3-3.

But built around the get-to-everything goalkeeping of Manchester United's Peter Schmeichel and the solid play

of the Laudrup brothers, Denmark are precisely the type of squad that could give Nigeria fits. If the Scandinavians play a down-tempo, ball-control style, it might disrupt the Super Eagles, who prefer free-flowing soccer.

"They have good tactical discipline and that could be a problem," Nigeria winger Mutiu Adegboju said. "We'll have to try to push the pace."

His teammates do that as well as anyone in the tournament, turning up the volume on a bop-'til-you-drop brand of

attacking play. Milutinovic, the only man to coach four teams into the second round, has a wealth of weapons and Nigeria's five goals so far have been scored by five different players.

"We're going to try to play our football," said captain Uche Ukechukwu, a central defender who missed Nigeria's final group game — a half-hearted 3-1 loss to Paraguay — through suspension. "We always do, no matter who we play. Schmeichel is very good but you have to win as a team, not as individuals."

Nigeria should take that to heart.

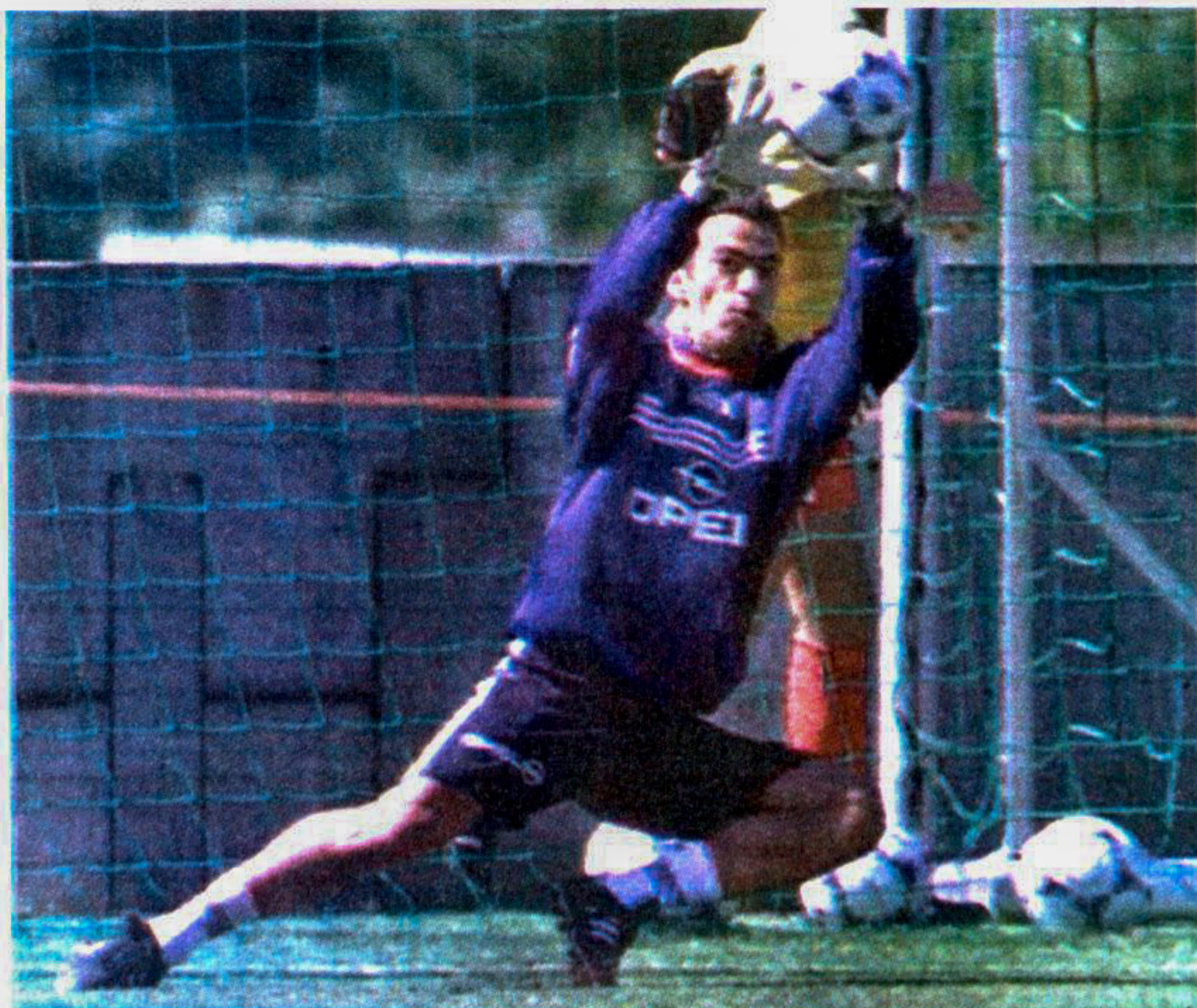
Latest odds

LONDON, June 27 (Reuters) — England, impressive 2-0 winners over Colombia, have had their World Cup odds trimmed from 14-1 to 10-1 as a record soccer bet was landed by a lucky backer on Friday.

The punter gambled 200,000 pounds (325,000 dollars) on England beating Colombia at 4-5 and will now collect 360,000 pounds (600,000 dollars).

England were heavily supported by patriotic backers to beat Colombia on Friday and William Hill spokesman Graham Sharpe said: "This result must have made a five million pounds (8.3 million dollars) dent in bookies' pockets."

Latest World Cup odds:
11-4 Brazil, 4-1 France, 5-1 the Netherlands, 13-2 Germany, 8-1 Argentina, Italy, 10-1 England, 33-1 Croatia, Nigeria, Romania, 40-1 Yugoslavia, 50-1 Norway, 66-1 Chile, 80-1 Mexico, Paraguay, 125-1 Denmark.



TRYING SOMETHING DIFFERENT: French midfielder Youri Djorkaeff becomes custodian for a change during practice at Clairefontaine on June 26. — AFP photo

Beckham answers back

LENS, France, June 27 (AFP/Internet) — David Beckham's very un-English outburst against coach Glenn Hoddle after their 2-0 win over Colombia bodes ill for England in the run-up to Tuesday's second round match against Argentina.

It is rare in England camps to have open defiance but Beckham's public refusal to accept he was not concentrating on the World Cup as Hoddle had claimed is a major blow to the mood in the camp.

Beckham was left out of the starting line-ups for England's first two games of the World Cup.

But he played a full part in the Colombia win, hitting a marvellous curling free-kick on the half-hour for the second goal.

Beckham's omissions had incurred the wrath of Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson who criticised Hoddle for not starting the 23-year-old talent in the first two matches.

Ferguson said Hoddle had misled Beckham on his status within the England set-up after he was the only player to appear in all eight qualifiers.

But whatever the whys and wherefores, the very un-English open disagreement, unlike in German, Dutch and many South American squads, is a significant setback.

Hoddle said Beckham had his mind more on his private life and his Spice Girl fiancée than helping England's World

Cup bid.

Beckham said that was not true. "I've always been focused on my football."

"That's always come first, before everything else. Nothing gets in the way."

"I just needed the chance to get in there and show what I can do. I was given that chance, in the role I want, and I gave my best performance for England."

FIFA stay out of it

PARIS, June 27 (AFP/Internet) — FIFA will not get directly involved in plans for South and North Korea to share matches in the 2002 World Cup, said president Sepp Blatter here on Saturday.

"North Korea is a political problem and it is not for FIFA to become involved. There are two associations, one in the north and one in the south, but if the two countries are reunited there will be no problems having matches in both countries," he said.

Former president Joao Havelange was actively involved in trying to involve North Korea in 2002 and according to FIFA sources he will continue to work behind the scenes as honorary FIFA president to find a solution.

"He has the stature and the know-how. I suspect he will work to get North Korea involved," said one source.

However, Hoddle insisted even after Friday's win that his earlier decision not to include Beckham had been the right one.

"He really didn't have his mind concentrated on the World Cup, but now he has and that's why I chose him."

Beckham, who has good looks, a glamorous fiancée and superb footballing talent, is often the target of criticism from possibly envious people who know he has a short fuse and are trying to get a reaction.

Hoddle has continually made it clear that pin-up boy Beckham has to keep both on-pitch and off-pitch composure to succeed in international football.

Beckham was yellow carded for dissent in their 1-0 England win over France in Montpellier in last year's Tournoi de France but it was enough to keep him out of the final Brazil match.

"He has to learn to calm down. The quicker he learns, the better player he will be," Hoddle said after that match.

Though Beckham's current comments have no bearing on his on-pitch composure, they shed light on his off-pitch ability to calm down for the good of the side regardless of whether his complaints are justified.

Now England have the chance to gain revenge for the "Hand of God" goal in Mexico in 1986 when Diego Maradona admitted he knocked their first goal in with his hand.



A Romanian fan carrying a Tunisian teddy bear puppet, enjoys herself at Saint-Denis. — AFP photo

Ronaldo in row

LONDON, June 27 (The Guardian/Internet) — The world champions Brazil go into today's second-round match against Chile in Paris with doubts surrounding both the spirit in their camp and the availability of key players, writes Chris Griggs.

Ronaldo, their 21-year-old star, is reported in the Brazilian press to have fallen out with Rivaldo, the midfielder who supplies the killer passes he feeds off. And his forward partner Bebeto has complained of muscle pain in his right leg.

Talking after the defeat by Norway in Marseille on Tuesday, the two-times FIFA world player-of-the-year insisted that the service from midfield had not been up to standard. "It was certainly not like playing for Inter Milan, where I always get wonderful service," he said.

Rivaldo has reportedly taken this as a personal criticism and the newspapers report "a coolness" between the pair.

Bebeto missed training yesterday, adding to the problems facing Mario Zagallo. The

coach is able to recall the defenders Aldair and Cesar Sampaio but doubt remains whether he will give a second consecutive start to Denilson, the world's most expensive player. The £21 million midfielder, who before the Norway defeat had appeared for a total of 23 minutes as a substitute against Scotland and Morocco, is on stand-by along with the equally under-played Edmundo.

Chile, beaten 4-0 in their most recent meeting with Brazil a year ago, when Ronaldo scored two of his 26 international goals in 39 appearances, face more tangible troubles.

Three regular starters are suspended, the defenders Francisco Rojas and Moises Villarroel and the midfielder Nelson Paragary having collected their second yellow cards against Cameroon in their final game in Group B.

The coach Nelson Acosta will depend on the free-scoring Marcelo Salas and Ivan Zamorano - Ronaldo's strike partner at Inter.

TV record

LONDON, June 27 (AFP/Internet) — A record 24.2 million TV viewers watched England's 2-0 World Cup victory over Colombia in Lens on Friday evening.

Figures released by the BBC reveal that at an average 22.5 million watched the game, the figure peaking at 24.2 million for the final stages.

The previous record TV audience for a football match was 23.5 million for the Euro 96 semi-final between England and Germany at Wembley.

"It seemed as though the entire country stopped to watch England's superb victory," said a BBC spokesman.

Even more viewers are expected to tune into the second round match with Argentina on Tuesday.

Matador fit to face Germans

FONTENAILLES, France, June 27 (AFP/Internet) — Mexico received a boost here on Saturday when star striker Luis "Matador" Hernandez was declared fit for Monday's second round match with three-time World champions Germany.

The 29-year-old, who scored three goals in the first round, has fully recovered from the injury he picked up in last Saturday's match with Belgium, though it didn't stop him from scoring the equaliser in Thursday's pulsating 2-3 draw with Holland.

"Hernandez is 100 per cent fit and aside from the suspended Ramon Ramirez (who was sent off against Holland) everyone else is up for selection," Mexico coach Manuel Lapatiente said.

A glitch in the German machine

NICE, June 27 (AP) — Oliver Bierhoff and Juergen Klinsmann are scoring their goals and Germany are marching on. It may not be pretty, but the Germans are where they want to be.

But, there are signs of tension within the team, with some players unhappy with being demoted to the bench.

"We wanted to be first in the group and we achieved our objective," said coach Berti Vogts after his team's 2-0 victory over Iran in Montpellier on Thursday.

The win put Germany atop Group F, to face Mexico in the second round Monday, also in Montpellier.

The Germans have played Mexico twice in the World Cup, winning 6-0 in 1978 in Argentina and 4-1 on penalties after a goalless quarterfinal clash on Mexican soil in 1986.

Bierhoff, who like Klinsmann has scored two goals so far for Germany, conceded Friday that the European champions have not provided much entertainment.

"Yes, it's correct to a certain extent to say that we've been playing for results so far," Bierhoff said. "But we don't go into a match like that, we go in trying to score as many as we can. But what good is a 6-1 if you go home?"

Spain beat Bulgaria 6-1 but still failed to advance to the

second round.

"We try to score as many goals as we can to please the fans, but I must say we haven't done that in the first three games. We were not convincing."

"There have been many surprises here. We finished the group with seven points, more than Brazil or the Netherlands," Bierhoff said, whose goal against Iran brought his international tally to 19 in 29 games.

Germany also beat the United States 2-0 and had a 2-2 draw with Yugoslavia, finishing first on goal difference.

"We are a typical tournament team. We can improve a lot and I am sure we will," said Bierhoff, who topped the Italian league with 27 goals this season.

Speaking about Mexico, Bierhoff said, "On paper, they look like easier rivals for us."

"I thought they were finished after going down 2-0, but they came back and they played with a lot of heart," Bierhoff said.

"We have to be on alert for 90 or 95 minutes and we have to keep them under pressure."

Mexico trailed the Netherlands 2-0 before coming back and clinching a draw with a last-second goal, after achieving a similar comeback against Belgium.

Two Germans who played



BLOND MESS? Romanian players, sporting a new hair-do, are relieved after Moldovan's equalizer against Tunisia at Saint Denis. — AFP photo

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