

Comeback kings riding high

NICE, France, July 2 (AFP/Internet): Evergreen skipper Jurgen Klinsmann and coach Berti Vogts on Wednesday laughed off the critics hovering vulture-like above the German camp and said the European champions were on track to win a fourth World title.

Klinsmann, at 33 in scintillating form with three goals to his name already, said people were just jealous of Germany's ability to keep on winning matches they appeared to have lost.

"People are envious of our ability to turn around seemingly hopeless situations and give our all right to the last whistle, something many teams just can't do," said Klinsmann.

Not for the first time Germany have been dubbed the fighters after first recovering from 2-0 down against Yugoslavia to draw and then overturning Mexico's lead in the final 15 minutes to win their second-round face-off 2-1.

It's something German sides have been doing for years and they've got it down to a fine art.

"It's true we have a particular mentality -- we never give up fighting," said Klinsmann when asked what was the German secret.

"When we are behind we don't let it get to us -- on the contrary it gives us a boost." Vogts, looking to join Sepp Herberger, Helmut Schoen and Franz Beckenbauer in the German coaching pantheon of World Cup fame, said rival teams had a very high opinion of German football.

Vogts has been fighting to avoid being buried under the torrents of criticism which the German media and former stars traditionally aim at German national coaches.

But he pugnaciously told reporters to "go and sit in the shade for a minute" and think about what they were writing.

Brazilians face

From page 13

Ominously for Denmark, though, the Brazilians may be peaking at the right time. Coach Mario Zagallo believes their second-half performance against Chile was their best of the tournament.

"My players were able to develop the style of play that I like," Zagallo said. "Now I'd like to see us play a whole game like that."

Zagallo has said he believes the way to beat the Danes is to attack them down the flank.

"From what I know of the Danes, we are going to hit a traffic jam if we try to play the game through the middle, down the central corridor," he said.

"We will be trying to outflank them."

Zagallo is an unabashed admirer of the Danes' efficiency.

Their win against Nigeria was proof of their fine quality," Zagallo said.

The Brazilian coach may give wing backs Roberto Carlos and Cafu more freedom to join the attack on the overlap, while Ronaldo's central striking partner Bebeto may play in a wider role in a bid to pull apart the tight Danish defence.

"We will need to use the whole field and move well," Zagallo said.

The Brazilian team looks to have two weaknesses the Danes could exploit.

Centrebacks Junior Baiano and Aldair may be fragile against fleet-footed attackers who run at them at angles -- presenting players like Brian Laudrup with an enticing invitation -- while veteran goalkeeper Claudio can be suspect when put under pressure.

Taffarel is ironically, set to beat the World Cup appearances record for goalkeepers in Friday's match.

The 32-year-old, who has won 108 caps, will be playing in his 16th World Cup game, one more than compatriots Gilmar and Emerson Leao.

Moreover, the team is not entirely trouble-free. Ronaldo complained of knee pains and skipped practice Tuesday, although he trained Wednesday and was listed to start.

Reports conflicted on the cause of the pain and whether it hindered Ronaldo's mobility and his explosive standing start. In practice, he grimaced and put his hand to his knee during wind sprints.

"It's a slight pain," Ronaldo told Brazilian Globo Television. "It hurts when I strain, when I sprint or when I stop suddenly."

Ronaldo's fitness has been a major topic of conversation in Brazil after a team doctor this week told reporters he believed the 21-year-old was overweight.

"I can take the pain. During a game, I'm so concentrated that I forget it hurts," Ronaldo told Globo.

Ronaldo, who has so far scored three goals during the tournament, said he had not taken pain-killing drugs but would agree to injections if necessary.

"If it was needed to stay in the World Cup then I would take them," he said. "The World Cup is worth any sacrifice."

Battle of the best

From page 13

So how has Schmeichel mentally prepared himself in the build-up to facing the world's best player, leading the world's best attack in the world's best team?

"I don't dare think about it. I have been playing golf and relaxing. If I spent the whole of this week thinking about Brazil and all their great players, I would probably be terrified by Friday."

A TRUE LEADER: Jose Luis Chilaver (L), Paraguay's highly inspirational captain and goalkeeper, acknowledges the fans' applause after disembarking at Asuncion's Silvio Paterossi Airport on July 1.

—AFP photo



IT WAS THAT CLOSE: England coach Glenn Hoddle makes a point during a press conference at La Boules on July 1 after the second round loss to Argentina. —AFP photo

The Englishman's fear of the penalty

London, July 2 (The Guardian/Internet): It is the footballer's loneliest moment: the sudden death of the penalty shoot-out, when the team dynamic falls away and leaves him drawing on every fibre of his being; his national grit; his reservoir of imperial mettle which John Barnes last night said turns English players into "Trojans."

Trojans when they win, that is. So what does it say about the national character when they lose? Is there some cancerous part of the English psyche that...

Someone, somewhere must be writing a thesis on it: the role of the English character in the muffed penalty shoot-out.

"The national character definitely came out in that game," says Professor Cary Cooper, a psychologist at Manchester University's Institute of Science and Technology. We bottled it, right? "No - I mean it came out in the way we showed so much courage. It was really about bulldog England. When [David] Beckham was sent off and we were one man down, that is when the national character came out."

So where was bulldog England when David Batty's saved penalty shot us out of the World Cup? Tony Gleadell is a leading consultant in sports psychology who has worked with the national golf team and specialises in the "closed skills" of the penalty shoot-out: "It is not necessarily a cultural problem," he says. "Certain sports people are not good at closed skills and if you pick the wrong guy you are in trouble. I don't think Batty is particularly gifted at them."

"When you get to the penalty shoot-out it is all about individuals being able to cope with the pressure," says Professor Cooper. "You may as well roll a die."

Not exactly, says Dr Richard Cox, a lecturer in sports psychology at Herriot Watt University. Not only can individual nerves be short circuited with practice - but the level of those nerves might be informed by certain cultural idiosyncrasies: "It is dangerous to start dwelling on the importance of how many people are watching you. You've got to put intellectual blinkers on and the most important thing is to fix on where you want to put the ball. Alan Shearer is the best example of someone who is totally self-assured in terms of what he is going to do with the ball."

Indecision in the face of a penalty shoot-out is fatal. Might not last night's performance be seen as a classic example of a nation on the dither? Gleadell thinks so. "Under pressure the old worry sets in and a footballer has conflicting images of where to put the ball. Should it go left or right? Indecision like this creates the likelihood of a miss or save."

So what would sports psychologists suggest to scotch such indecision? Dr Cox has a DIY plan: "I'm all for encasing the whole goal mouth in a wooden shield, with one meter boards

which could be moved to reveal a hole that would concentrate the player's shot. If he's been practising like that, when it comes to a penalty shoot-out, nerves and national characteristics just won't come into it."

But Professor Cooper insists that the national character did Batty and team proud last night. "When you lose with that kind of style and class, when the players hug and support each other and don't leave the pitch with their heads hanging - that's what tells you about the national character. That was not a loss, it was a victory."

Hagi has had enough

BUCHAREST, July 2: Romanian captain Gheorghe Hagi, hailed as the country's most illustrious soccer player of all time, officially announced his retirement from the national team today, reports Reuters.

"The time has come to quit," Hagi told a news conference the day after the national side returned home after their 1-0 defeat by Croatia in the World Cup final in France.

"Any story has a beginning and an end and the end has come to my activity on the national team. I think I have accomplished my duty to my country's national team. It's time to give up my place to younger players," he said.

In eastern Europe's only Latin country, where debate and argument are a matter of course, commentators were unanimous in upholding Hagi as the best player in Romanian football history.

Hagi, 33, captained Romania in 54 matches over 15 years, accumulated a record 115 caps and scored 33 goals.

He was also critical of the referees and the way they are applying the new law over tackles from behind.

"I like the new law. It stops people being ruthlessly hacked down. But referees seem to be afraid to make a common sense decision on when to apply a yellow card or a red card. They feel they will be protected by FIFA if they show a red card."

"Spectators are being deprived of seeing some of the best players in the world. I just hope they do not ruin the World Cup," said Charlton.

But Charlton admitted that England sensation Michael Owen could never have scored his stunning goal against Argentina if the new rule had not been in place.

"In the past Owen could not have scored like that. The Argentine defence would have pulled him," he said.

He also gave reviews to the Liverpool teenager. "We are going to hear a lot more of him. He is so fast, certainly faster than most, and has such good control," enthused Charlton. "He is the revelation of the World Cup to date. Michael Owen will be a big star."

trial at Porto Alegre, who gave him a chance -- as goalkeeper.

He went on to play in Europe with Parma and Reggiana, having along the way won a little fame by taking Brazil to the 1988 Olympic final by saving three penalties in a shoot out against Germany.

That stood him in good stead for the 1994 shootout in Pasadena against the Italians.

But his Italian league adventure misfired after the World Cup when he found himself out of favour with his club and unemployed, playing in an amateur team -- as a striker.

In fact Italy never really agreed with Taffarel, who had an unhappy World Cup tournament there in 1990, even if he won the Italian Cup with Parma two years later.

And he hopes that for once his achievement will gain him the recognition he craves.

"In Brazil people are crazy about football. But they dream about wearing a number nine or number ten on their shirt. If you're a goalkeeper you just don't exist," he sighs.

How many people remember his stop from Italy's Massaro in the final four years ago or his save from Baggio's volley?

Not as many as remember the goalkeeping exploits of Romario and Bebeto, which hogged the headlines.

And Taffarel says that's just Brazilian logic.

"In Brazil only strikers count -- a goalkeeper is bad if he lets in a goal, even if his team has won by six goals."

The young Taffarel preferred basketball and volleyball, but also dreamed of scoring goals rather than stopping them.

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Charlton on cheats

PARIS, July 2 (AFP/Internet): Former England great Sir Bobby Charlton has called on FIFA to stop the cheats.

"I have never seen so many people dive," fumed Charlton on Thursday.

"They all fall the same way. The head goes back, they roll over three times. It's a work of art. The moment they get touched by a defender down they go. They practise it," he added.

Now Charlton wants FIFA to use television to catch and punish the play actors.

"The day after every match a commission should study a video of the matches and if it shows that someone took a dive they should be banned for one match."

"Obviously you can't change the result of a match, but if a player cheats he should be punished. You have to be strong about it. For example Maradona should never have been allowed to play in the 1990 final after his hand-ball goal against England," said Charlton.

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Glorious losers head home

LONDON, July 2 (AFP/Internet): Snippets of the World Cup heroes home on Wednesday.

British Airways sent a con-corde to Nantes to fly the glorious losers home. The team's followers returned more slowly, leaving some of their number behind in French custody.

Seven England fans were arrested at the stadium for possible offences, none of them serious, such as suspected theft of tickets.

During trouble in St Etienne after the defeat by Argentina, eight more England fans were held. It was not clear how many, if any, were subsequently released.

Non-travelling England fans kept the home fires burning with outbreaks of violence in unlikely places. Police made arrests in Peterborough, Poole, Weymouth, Bournemouth and elsewhere. There were fights, broken windows and, in Poole, a wrecked television set in a pub.

Dejected fans returning home laid the blame for their team's failure squarely on the shoulders of midfield star David Beckham. A few days earlier, the nation had been baying for his inclusion in the team.

The mood was summed up by Wayne Slater, 23, and his uncle David Slater, 39, from Reading, Berkshire, each had paid touts in St Etienne 280-pounds for their tickets. "It was Beckham who cost us the game. He just lost his cool," they said "he kicked out and deserved to go but he should never have done it."

But as Beckham's sister Lynne, 26, arrived to comfort his parents at their home, she was under siege by reporters, soccer ambassador Sir Bobby Charlton yesterday stood up for the shamed footballer saying: "don't throw him to the wolves."

David Beckham's Spice Girl fiancée Victoria "Posh Spice" Adams appealed to England fans not to make him a scape-goat for the team's defeat by Argentina.

Beckham's sending off early in the second half left England to struggle on to the penalty shootout with ten men and was generally condemned for his behaviour in the British media.

But Adams pleaded to fans: "Please don't hate him. He doesn't deserve to be the most hated man in Britain. He more than anyone wanted England to go all the way."

And she added: "I am as upset as everyone in Britain."

BAN FOR CRAIOVEANU

Romania's Gheorghe Craioveanu picked up a two-match suspension after his side's defeat by Croatia for verbally abusing Argentinian referee Javier Castellari at the end of the match, FIFA revealed.

Craioveanu, a second half substitute for Gheorghe Hagi, will miss his country's first two qualifiers for Euro 2000, hosted by Belgium and Holland.

His outburst also cost him 5,000 Swiss francs (3,200 dollars).

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"Bora, Queiroz and Parreira would be the three international coaches who obviously have the most knowledge of our players, our structure, the country. There's no question about that," Rothenberg said. "They're on the list automatically. After that, we start talking with people we know less about. I think the single most important thing is a record of success."

Rothenberg also said he will not impose any fines against players who spoke out against Sampson's decisions during the Americans' last-place finish in the 32-nation field. Last Friday, a day after the tournament-ending loss to Yugoslavia, Sampson and general manager Tom King had said fines against the veterans would be forthcoming.

"We have to look ahead and not behind," Rothenberg said.

Sampson, the first American-born coach to lead the United States to the World Cup, got the job in 1995 after Rothenberg fired Milutinovic and Parreira and Queiroz turned it down.

Rothenberg was unsure whether to keep Sampson on after World Cup qualifying, waiting until just before the draw to give him a contract extension through 1998.

PARIS, July 2 (AFP/Internet): Fate dealt Danish striker Peter Moller a kind hand when Colombian referee John Jairo Toro Rendon sent off first-team rival Miklos Molnar in a stormy 1-1 group phase draw against South Africa.

Had Molnar not been suspended for the second round clash against Nigeria last Sunday, Moller wouldn't have started and would be well back in the queue to face Brazil on Friday in the Danes' first quarter-final.

In the event, he arrived with a bang, scoring a fine goal after just two minutes and leading the line superbly for an hour before coach Bo Johansson brought on a fresh pair of legs in Ebbe Sand -- who promptly scored within 16 seconds.

Despite giving way to Sand, PSV Eindhoven striker Moller could be proud of his performance on his 12th appearance for the washbuckling Scandinavians, who stunned the Nigerians by running out 4-1 winners.

The 26-year-old was making his first start of the tournament but took to the World Cup stage like a duck to water, linking brilliantly with the irrepressible veteran Michael Laudrup.

Moller joined PSV for 1.7 million dollars last summer from Brondby having previously had a spell in Switzerland with FC Zurich.

He started out with Aalborg Boldklub and says he just hopes to convince Johansson to give him the chance to get at the Brazilian defence in Nantes on Friday.

Footbal-mad Hun Sen

TAKHMAU, Cambodia, July 2 (AFP/Internet): Cambodian strongman Hun Sen, a devoted football fan, said Thursday he was spending much of his time in the early stages of his country's election campaign watching the World Cup.

This is the time to watch the World Cup," the powerful second prime minister told reporters here at his country estate outside the capital after meeting Japanese diplomats.

"I am spending a lot of time watching football matches and if I can't watch the late game, I tape it and watch the next day," he said, referring to evening games in France which are aired live in Cambodia at 2:00 a.m.

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WORLD CUP NOTEBOOK

PARIS, July 2 (AFP/Internet): Snippets of the World Cup:

HAIL BABY OWEN

England may have gone home, but the world's press have hailed Michael Owen for his brilliant goal against Argentina.

Italy's La Gazzetta dello Sport dedicated almost two pages to the 18-year-old Liverpool striker, comparing him with the 17-year-old Pele, who starred in Brazil's 1958 triumph.

"The whole world is agog at baby Owen," said the Gazzetta, who compared the teenager with Ronaldo.

Owen's brilliant strike against Argentina confirmed his superstar status.

But it's his goal against Romania in the 2-1 defeat on June 22 which has put him in the history books.

That effort made him the third-youngest ever scorer at a World Cup at 18 years 190 days. Pele holds the record at 17 and 239 days for scoring against Wales in 1958.

Mexico's Manuel Rosas was the second-youngest at 18 and 93 days when he netted against Argentina in 1930.

POSH APPEAL

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