

UEFA restores Yugoslavia

GENEVA, June 30: Yugoslavian teams will be allowed to take part in UEFA club competitions next season, European soccer's governing body said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

On the eve of the qualifying round draws for the revamped Champions' League and UEFA Cup competitions, UEFA confirmed that organisational and logistical requirements to stage international matches in war-ravaged Yugoslavia had been met.

UEFA also confirmed that clubs from Bosnia-Herzegovina would not participate in next season's competitions following the cancellation of the qualifying tournament involving clubs from that country.

As a result of Bosnia-Herzegovina's absence, Belarus champions Dnepr Transmash-Mogilev will enter the Champions' League qualifying phase in the second round instead of the first.

In the UEFA Cup, Belgium club Lierse and Slovakia side Dukla Banska Bystrica will go directly into the first round and will not have to play qualifying matches.

More you travel more you win!

SAN JOSE, California, June 30 (AP): They opened in Massachusetts. Three days later, they played in Oregon. Three days after that, they headed to New York.

Now, after an improbable journey that has included two cross-country treks and has led to a surprise spot in the quarterfinals of the Women's World Cup, the Russians are coming back to the West Coast.

Russia, a newcomer to women's soccer, face China in one of two quarterfinals Wednesday in San Jose.

Russia are playing in their first World Cup and were not expected to get this far. But victories over Japan and Canada earned the Russians a spot opposite China, one of the favourites.

"I was worried about how they would hold up, with all the travel and the strain of the competition. Few of them have played at this level," Russian coach Yuriy Bystritskiy said. "But they are doing pretty well."

Very well, in fact. The Russians lost their opener 2-1 to Norway in Foxboro, Massachusetts, on June 20. They flew to Portland, Oregon, for a 5-0 victory over Japan and then flew back to East Rutherford, New Jersey, for a 4-1 victory over Canada.

"We had a very tough, emotional first game against the defending champions," forward Natalia Barbachina said. "But in the second half of the tournament the team has definitely improved. We have a lot more confidence now, and think we can continue to improve."

The Russians did not have much time to prepare for the tournament. Though eight team members play for the Samara club of Russia's professional women's league, Bystritskiy said the players had only about a week together as a national team before heading to the United States.

"That's the major problems," he said. "But the desire of the women to become the top team in the women's world of soccer makes up for the lack of time they could spend together. I try to pack the most into a short amount of time."

Russia have scored nine of their 10 goals in the second half. And they have shown they are in good condition for their game against a more polished Chinese team. Those 10 goals were scored by eight different players.

"That makes it easy for the coach," said Russian goalie Svetlana Kuko, one of the Samara club's players. "I don't have to worry about getting us into condition and can concentrate on teaching tactics and strategy for that particular opponent."

The quarterfinal winners in San Jose will face each other in a semifinal Sunday in Foxboro.

Olympics 2008

Moscow's mega bidding plan

MOSCOW, June 30: The Russian capital will undergo a costly face lift in time to greet world Olympics officials, while the country scrambles for funding to send its teams to next year's games, Russian sports officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Moscow intends to construct a mammoth sports monument, an Olympic museum and three five-star hotels before it hosts the next planning session of the International Olympic Committee in 2001, ITAR-Tass reported.

Meanwhile, Russian Olympic Committee President Vitaly Smirnov said Russian teams were having trouble finding the money to participate in next year's summer games in Sydney, Australia.

"Some programmes have to be curtailed," he said Tuesday, adding that participation in pre-Olympic games, set for September in Sydney, would set the committee back 100,000 dollars.

Smirnov said Russia intends to submit a bid to host the 2008 games during the Moscow summit. He said the south Russian city of Krasnaya-Polyana, located in the Caucasus near the Black Sea resort of Sochi, would be an "ideal" setting for sporting events.

Moscow last hosted the Olympic games in 1980, when it was still the capital of the Soviet Union. The United States and other countries boycotted the event because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the previous year.



Nelson Cuevas(R) of Paraguay and Bolivia's Rene Ribera locked in a tussle during their Group A meeting of the Copa America at Asuncion on June 29. The match ended goalless. — AFP photo

Hosts' toughest test yet

LANDOVER, Maryland, June 30 (AP): After outscoring opponents 13-1 in the first round of the Women's World Cup, the US team might have reason to feel comfortable. It shouldn't.

Now the real challenge begins.

The Americans play Germany in the quarterfinals Thursday in Landover. The Germans are, by far, the most formidable team United States have faced in the tournament. Brazil play Nigeria in the second half of the doubleheader.

On Wednesday, it's defending champions Norway playing Sweden and China taking on Russia at San Jose, California.

"This is what the World Cup is all about," US midfielder Julie Foudy said. "You win these games or you're out. This is what this team thrives on."

It had better. A loss now not only would spoil what has been a nationwide celebration of the American women, it could send ticket sales crashing for the semifinals and final. It also could eliminate the United States from the 2000 Olympics, although that is a long shot; the Americans would have to be the biggest losers among the quarterfinalists.

Of course, no one on the US side is contemplating defeat. Germany are without captain Martina Voss, who has a torn leg muscle. The US squad is 8-3-1 against Germany who finished second in the '95 World Cup.

Their most recent meeting

was a 4-2 US victory in Chicago last June, but three days before that, the teams tied 1-1 in St Louis.

"I think the Germans are a very skilled, disciplined team," US star Mia Hamm said. "They have a lot of good players. They won't be uncomfortable playing us."

Coach Tony DiCicco notes the German women play like their countrymen, which isn't bad: The German men have won three World Cups.

"When you think of Germany, the first thing that always comes to mind is their

discipline," she said. "It's the same with their men's team. They are tough, they never give up and they work relentlessly for 90 minutes. You can never count them out of a game."

Even without Voss, Germany still have midfielder Bettina Wiegmann. She creates much of the offence and is complemented by finishers Inka Grings and Brigit Prinz up front. Prinz has been especially dangerous.

"Now, they are not going to encounter the type of teams they have encountered so far in the tournament," Italy coach Carlo Facchin said of the Americans. "I think if the US can raise the level of the match and

the speed, it will win the game."

The Americans are well rested. Michael Akers and Kate Sobrero, both starters, have not played since the first half of the second game, against Nigeria. They should be fresh.

Hamm, Tiffeny Milbrett and Cindy Parlow up front and Foudy in midfield also got breathers in the opening round.

While the Germany-United States match could be tight defensively, don't look for Brazil-Nigeria to be a stinky affair. Both love to show their offensive flair, and the game could turn on Brazil having a superior defence.

Nigeria coach Ismaila Mabo thinks his team is destined to meet the United States again in the semifinals, where it will avenge the 7-1 defeat in Chicago. Brazil coach Wilson de Oliveira also said he expects his team to be in Stanford Stadium on July 4 to play the Americans.

The San Jose doubleheader features the two teams that have looked every bit as good as the United States.

The Chinese, winners against the Americans twice this year, would seem to have the only mismatch, because Russia is a newcomer to this level and advanced from the weakest group. Norway, despite injuries, has displayed offensive flair and balance. But this might be the best team Sweden has taken to a World Cup.



SOCCER SIDELINES

NEW YORK, June 30 (AP): Chart-topping actress-turned-singer Jennifer Lopez will sing during the Women's World Cup closing event at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, on July 10.

To accommodate the expanded Closing Ceremonies, the start of the third-place match has been moved back 15 minutes to 10:15 am PDT (1715 GMT). Lopez will sing between the third-place match and the final match. The final match begins at 12:50 pm (1950 GMT).

The Women's World Cup will conclude with an exciting closing ceremonies featuring one of the hottest female stars today. World Cup organizing director Marla Messing said, "Jennifer Lopez exemplifies the spirit of the Women's World Cup, and we are thrilled to have her be a part of this history-making event."

NO TV FOR NORWAY

The Norwegian players weren't happy when they turned on their television Sunday in their San Jose hotel rooms. The hotel didn't have ESPN2 and they couldn't watch the United States-North Korea match.

Norway coach Per-Mathias Hogmo was not pleased that he could not scout one of the other favourites in the tournament. "We had to find another place to watch the game," he said. "I watched around the corner at a sports bar with my (coaching staff)."

Hogmo blamed FIFA for not being more careful when choosing accommodations for the

teams. "Maybe FIFA should check to see if hotels have ESPN2 beforehand," Hogmo said. Linda Medalen, the team captain, also criticized FIFA.

"It would be good to relax and watch game, but FIFA does not want us to," he said. "It's strange that we can't watch (the games) from our rooms."

ROLE MODEL

United States goalkeeper Briana Scurry hopes she will be a role model and inspire more black children to take up soccer. Scurry is the only African-American starter on the team.

Soccer is mainly a white suburban sport in the US and Scurry said she only played soccer because her family moved from Minneapolis to a predominantly white suburb when she was young.

Now Scurry hopes she can inspire more black children to take up the sport. "I definitely see the day when we get to that, when more African-American kids will be playing," she said. "Everything begins with a single step. For example, my nieces and nephews back in Minnesota saw me play and that made them want to try it."

INJURED

Sweden's title hopes were dampened with the injury to Hanna Lundberg.

The midfielder who scored two goals in an earlier victory over Australia, left in the sixth minute of a 2-0 victory Saturday over Ghana because of a knee injury.

Lundberg hasn't officially been listed as "out" for Wednesday's match against Norway, but she isn't expected to play.

ELEPHANT WOMAN

When Norwegian captain Linda Medalen injured her nose during Saturday's match against Japan, she didn't think about skipping the quarterfinal game against Sweden on Wednesday. It was her looks she was more worried about.

"All I know, it is very painful and I look like the elephant woman," Medalen said. "As a woman, you kind of think about your looks and I am not exactly happy about that."

Norway's top defender expects to be playing in San Jose, California, on Wednesday. "I'll do anything to play, even if that means wearing a mask," she said.

Medalen did have a light practice with the team Monday and Norway's press officer, Jon Jamessen, confirmed her nose was not broken. "It's a nice black and blue around the eyes, but there's no problem," said Jamessen. He added it was almost certain she would play Wednesday.

Peru edge past Japan

ASUNCION, Paraguay, June 30 (Reuters/APF/AP): Hosts Paraguay were held to a 0-0 draw by underdogs Bolivia while surprise guest Japan gave Peru an early fright before falling 3-2 as the Copa America began Tuesday.

Peru now lead Group A with three points, followed by Paraguay and Bolivia, who each have one.

Both matches proved Group A, the tournament's easiest, may also be its most evenly matched.

PARAGUAY-BOLIVIA

Paraguay, expected to ride home-field advantage to a strong bid for their third Copa America title, were jeered off the field by a crowd of 40,000 after the goals stalemate.

The Paraguayans repeatedly threatened to breach the Bolivian wall in the first half, but ran out of ideas after coach Ever Almeida, already under pressure for forcing a fish-only diet on his squad, took off Nelson Cuevas and Hugo Ovalar, two of his most creative players, at halftime.

The coach further angered the crowd when he replaced 17-year-old striker Roque Santa Cruz, the great hope of

Frustrating start for hosts

Paraguayan soccer, midway through the second half.

Fans cried foul on Monday after news surfaced that Roberto Acuna was quitting the team because of Almeida's inflexibility over the team menu. Acuna later rejoined the squad.

"This was not the result we wanted," Almeida said of the scoreless game, adding that "the group is very even and advancing will be tough."

"We did everything well until we got to the last 20 metres of the field," said Almeida, whose team plays Japan on Friday.

PERU-JAPAN

Earlier, Peru had kicked off the competition with a far more lively game against Japan, who have been invited to take part by the South American Football Confederation.

Peru overcame a tight Japanese defence in a game which saw four goals in 11 minutes.

But it took the Peruvians 64 minutes to make up a 1-0 deficit after Japan's Brazilian-born striker Lopes Wagner headed home in the sixth minute from

a free kick after he was fouled by Peru's Juan Reynoso.

Constant pressure from Peru's Nolberto Solano, Roberto Palacios, Jose Pereda and Claudio Pizarro failed against the tight marking of Kazuaki Tasaka and Toshiya Fujita.

If they did get within shooting distance sweeper Seigo Nazaraki was on hand to clear

the danger and set up Japanese counterattacks.

But Japan's resistance was shaken by the exit of Tasaka, Lopes and Kazuyori Mochizuki as a result of injuries which lost them control of the midfield. Soto finally equalised in the 70th minute and four minutes later Roberto Holsen put Peru ahead. But the celebrations

were premature as Japan hit back and three minutes later substitute Miura made it 2-2 with a free kick.

Holsen clinched it with his second goal, a header in the 81st minute which sealed the best move of the game by Solano, named man of the match, and Flavio Maestri.

The game, in Japan's first overseas expedition since the World Cup, was their best since Frenchman Philippe Troussier became national coach 10 months ago.

The former South Africa coach had to prove he could help generate some firepower to please Japan's football chiefs who had been growing impatient with results — a 0-2 defeat by a young Brazilian side in March and scoreless draws with Belgium and Peru in friendly matches in early June.

Japan is one of two teams competing against South American sides in the Copa America tournament as guests. The other — Mexico — is part of the Central American football body CONCACAF.

Troussier said his team made too many mistakes that turned into opportunities for Peru.

"Tactically, Peru was very good," he said. "The South American players are undoubtedly superior."

"Japan surprised us," said Peruvian coach Juan Carlos Oblitas. "We came out cold and that's how they scored the first goal. Everything changed in the second half. Securing the win will give us some confidence."

Looking ahead to Peru's next game against Bolivia, Oblitas said: "They're slower than Japan yet technically superior. But everyone knows Bolivian soccer has made great improvements."

SQUADS

Japan: Seigo Narazaki, Shigesaki Mochizuki, Masahiro Hara, Yutaka Akita, Toshiya Fujita, Teruyoshi Ito, Toshihiro Hattori (Atsuhiko Miura), Kazuaki Tasaka (Takashi Fukunishi), Hiroshi Nanami, Shoji Jo and Wagner Lopes.

Peru: Oscar Ibanez, Juan Reynoso, Miguel Rebolledo, Jose Soto, Jorge Soto, Nolberto Solano, Jose Pereda (Jose Mendoza), Roberto Palacios (Roberto Holsen), Juan Jose Jayo, Flavio Maestri (Juan Velazquez), and Claudio Pizarro.

Arsenal sign Silvinho

LONDON, June 30 (Reuters/Internet): English premier league club Arsenal have signed Brazilian defender Silvinho from Corinthians for an undisclosed fee.

Silvinho, 25, played in the Corinthians team which won the Brazilian championship last year. He is the 18th foreign player signed by Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

"He is an experienced defender with great ability," Wenger said on Wednesday.

'AmRo' onslaught awaits Venezuela

ASUNCION, Paraguay, June 30: Venezuela has just one aim in Copa America — win a game for the first time in three decades. The team's first chance comes Wednesday against powerhouse Brazil and their intimidating "AmRo" attack, reports AP.

On the bottom rung of South American soccer for years, Venezuela has shown significant improvement of late.

Plus, with promising young talent, the team has posted impressive performance — a 3-0 victory over Peru, two against Ecuador, and a 1-1 tie with Denmark.

Their biggest test will undoubtedly come Wednesday night against Brazil, a team brimming with soccer household names such as Ronaldo, Rivaldo, and Roberto Carlos. Both teams are competing in Group B with Mexico and Chile.

"This is a very difficult match," Venezuelan coach Jose Pastoriza said. "Brazil plays the best soccer in South America."

Asked his chance of a surprise victory, he responded: "We can't aspire to such great things."

As the tournament's defending champions, Brazil exudes confidence.

Their front line boasts Ronaldo, arguably the world's best soccer talent, and Amoroso, who led the Italian league in scoring last season.

"We're hoping to take the Copa home, that's understood," Brazilian coach Wanderley Luxemburgo said.

For Ronaldo, the Copa offers a chance for a fresh start after a year of struggle. Following Brazil's loss in the World Cup final last year, leg injuries limited his play for Italy's Inter.

New coach Luxemburgo also

is hoping to get off on a good foot, seeking to instill discipline and humility on a team unaccustomed to either.

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US women in limelight

WASHINGTON, June 30: (Reuters): Soccer, once the Cinderella of American sports, has claimed the spotlight this season, led by superstars so famous their first names say it all: Michelle, Brandi, Mia.

Mia as in Mia Hamm, who goes one-on-one with basketball legend Michael Jordan in a Gatorade commercial and whose every move is followed by millions of school-age players.

Brandi as in Brandi Chastain, whose gently flirtatious appearance on David Letterman's talk show made the acerbic comic a fan.

Michelle as in Michelle Akers, whose writing are splashed on not one but two Web sites — ESPN.com and michelleakers.com — revealing everything from her teammates' nicknames to their snack preferences and body piercings.

With this much multimedia exposure, it might seem almost

incidental that they play great soccer. After winning Olympic gold in 1996, the US team is unbeaten in World Cup play so far and defeated North Korea 3-0 on Sunday to advance to the quarterfinals where they play Germany on Thursday.

But Team USA has plainly learned the lesson that American women athletes in tennis, golf, basketball and track and field have taught themselves over the last half-century: Winning on the field is not enough. The off-the-field publicity game counts, too.

This pragmatic sports philosophy got a boost recently from former tennis bad boy John McEnroe, who backed a drive by US women for pay parity with men at Wimbledon.

The US women's soccer team has brought fans through the turnstiles in a way American men rarely have. When they played Nigeria at Chicago's Soldier Field last week, 65,080 fans

packed the place, the largest crowd ever to watch soccer there.

More fans watched the United States beat Denmark in the World Cup opener June 19 at Giants stadium than have ever watched a Giants or Jets National Football League game there.

At Foxboro Stadium outside Boston on Sunday, a capacity crowd behaved with the same mania as hard-core men's pro football fans, screaming, crying and painting themselves red, white and blue to show their allegiance to the women's team.

"One reason is because we have such a big (US women's soccer) team and some of the players are getting to be known, like Mia Hamm," said Boston soccer fan and Arsenal player Mary Helander, a 37-year-old corporate consultant. "The men's team, while it's good, hasn't been a world contender, ever, while the women's team is."

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