

Sport

Moller eying rejuvenation

COLOGNE, Germany, May 29: Former German international Andreas Moller faces a wall of protest from Schalke 04 fans who don't want him in their club but it is precisely this atmosphere of aggression and rejection that he wants to use to rekindle his tarnished public image, reports AFP.

Moller has been dismissed by ex-teammates as "weak" and a "whiner" and despite his 85 caps for Germany but despite his talent he never quite managed to break through as a great player.

Instead he has become known as a choker in big games, as someone who always falls at the final hurdle.

Asked for Schalke last week, the 32-year-old Moller admitted to journalists it would be "damn hard" to overcome the prejudices against him.

As manager Rudi Assauer presented Moller to the media last week supporters gathered outside and were shocked to hear the news.

So far more than 80 percent of Schalke fans contributing to an internet questionnaire have said they don't want Moller in their club's blue shirt with some hard cases saying they will actually boycott going to games.

"The challenge at Schalke fascinates me which is why I will fight to the bitter end," Moller said.

"The most important thing is that I play good football again. I want to prove it to myself. As far as I am concerned the new season could start up tomorrow," he added.

Moller, because of his image as a temperamental and spoilt star, would be a controversial character at Schalke regardless of his origins.

That his former club was hated rivals Borussia Dortmund just stirs up the Schalke hornets nest even more.

"I just had to get out of Dortmund. I wanted a fresh start, fresh faces, a fresh sporting challenge," he added.

"Compared to my contract with Dortmund I even took a cut in money," Moller said in response to reports that his decision was purely financial.

"If it had only been about money I would have gone abroad, signed a retirement contract and laid in the sun."

At the time Moller was deep in negotiations with Dortmund to extend his contract and only needed to work out a few final details before he had a sudden change of heart and switched allegiances.

Moller then signed a two-year contract at Schalke with an option for one more year. He was out of contract at Dortmund and moved free of charge.

Baumann to fight against ban if ...

BERLIN, May 29: Former Olympic champion Dieter Baumann, who has tested positive for nandrolone, has said he would take legal action if he were given a two-year ban by German athletics officials, reports Reuters.

Baumann has been suspended since last November after random tests showed he had levels of nandrolone 10 times over the accepted limit. He faces a two-year suspension but the legal committee of the German Athletics Federation (DLV) has yet to reach a final verdict.

"I would have the possibility (in case of a two-year ban) to go either before the court of arbitration of the German Sports Federation or a normal court," Baumann told Sunday newspaper Welt am Sonntag.

The 5,000 metres gold medalist from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics said he would opt for a traditional court because it could order the ongoing proceedings to be delayed, which would allow him to resume competing.

"Only a normal court can deliver a temporary injunction and I need one to be able to compete," he said.

Baumann has already appealed after a court ordered down his initial request to resume competing while waiting for athletics officials to make a final decision on his case. His appeal was turned down earlier this month.

The German athlete wants to compete to reach the Olympic qualifying standard, hoping he would then be cleared by the DLV and could go to this year's Sydney Games.

Haile meeting called off

HENGLO, Netherlands, May 29: An athletics meeting which was to have seen Haile Gebrselassie return to action after missing the indoor season due to an ankle injury was called off on Sunday because of gale-force winds, reports Reuters.

The meet had almost been cancelled last week after the fireworks warehouse explosion which devastated the town of Enschede.

But organisers decided to hold the meeting minus the usual festivities, only to be foiled on Sunday by the weather.

Gebrselassie would have been having his first race since the Seville World Championships last August when he collected his fourth consecutive 10,000 metres title.

Other athletes scheduled to appear on Sunday included women's world 10,000 metres champion Gete Wami and world steeplechase record holder Bernard Barmasai of Kenya.

International friendlies

World champs turn on the style



UNDATED, May 29 (AFP): France recorded a confident booster ahead of the Euro 2000 World Cup.

2002 co-hosts South Korea held European Championship finalists Yugoslavia to a surprise draw, while South Africa won against Malta in international friendlies across the globe on Sunday.

FRANCE-2, CROATIA-0

ZAGREB: France's Robert Pires and David Trezeguet both scored in a 2-0 victory over Croatia here for their seventh consecutive win following this Euro2000 warm-up match.

World champions France, who also earned their 10th match without defeat, gave a footballing lesson to the aging formation of coach Miroslav Blazevic at the Maksimir stadium.

French coach Roger Lemerre said afterwards: "A team takes sustenance from victories. Taking into account our qualification for Euro 2000, we needed to prepare well for these matches which was perhaps a handicap for the Croatian team."

France dominated the midfield, with Zinedine Zidane in top form, and had a lively and inspired striker in Thierry Henry.

This third win in three meetings for France against Croatia was a repeat of the 1998 World Cup semi-final when defender Lilian Thuram scored twice in a 2-1 victory.

Croatia's recent draws against Spain and Germany make this an even more impressive result for France.

Pires scored in the 23rd minute, after panic in the Croatian defence, for a deserved lead. Henry, preferred to Real Madrid's Nicolas Anelka, upstaged his Arsenal teammate Davor Suker and had a lot of chances.

In the second half, the assured world champions went on the attack and even played a quarter hour with three strikers and two other offensive players.

The 70th minute goal of Trezeguet, set up by Sylvain Wiltord, reflected France's authority on the match and their good form just two weeks before Euro 2000.

SOUTH AFRICA-1, MALTA-0

VALLETTA: Thabo Mngoni scored with one minute of normal time left to give South Africa a 1-0 friendly victory over Malta, their first success in Europe.

The slim, dreadlocked captain of Bafana Bafana (The Boys) won possession near the touchline, moved inside and unleashed a 35-metre drive that gave goalkeeper Ernest Barry no chance.

It was a wonderful end to a largely disappointing display by a makeshift South African side, who wasted several good chances before a small crowd at Ta'Qali Stadium.

Delron Buckley spurned the best opening six minutes into the second half when he sprang the offside trap only to be foiled by a superb Luke Dimench tackle inside the penalty area.

Barry displayed his agility midway through the second half by turning a sizzling Dumisa Ngobe drive round the post as South Africa tried to turn overwhelming territorial superiority into goals.

Bafana Bafana also had the better of a tame first half in warm, cloudless conditions on the tiny Mediterranean island with a Patrick Mayo header rebounding off the crossbar.

Mngoni, leading his country for the third time in the absence of injured defender Lucas Radebe from English Premiership club Leeds United, was unlucky on the stroke of half-time with a chip that went millimetres wide.

Malta defended well but never tested goalkeeper Andre Arendse, returning to the South African team for his first match since it finished third at the African Nations Cup last February.

Bafana Bafana had lost to world champions France (twice), Germany and England and drawn with Denmark

Barca about to rope in Dutruel

PARIS, May 28: Celta Vigo's French goalkeeper Richard Dutruel passed a medical on Friday and is set to sign a contract with Primera Liga rivals Barcelona, reports AFP.

The length of the contract has not been revealed but Dutruel says he has been promised a place in the starting line-up with Dutch keeper Ruud Hesp set to leave the Nou Camp and despite the return from a loan spell with FC Porto of Barcelona's Portuguese keeper Vito Baia.

Dutruel, 28, was a long-time understudy of Bernard Lama at Paris St Germain. He never started a first-team game in France's top flight but played for Second Division outfit Caen.

But he has impressed in Spain although because of a contractual dispute he has recently been overlooked in favour of Vigo's promising young Jose Manuel Pinto.

(twice) and Iceland in previous visits to Europe since being readmitted to international football eight years ago.

Domestic and European club commitments and injuries left South Africa with only 14 players and substitute defender Pierre Issa arrived from France 10 minutes before the squad left for the stadium.

SOUTH KOREA-0, YUGOSLAVIA-0

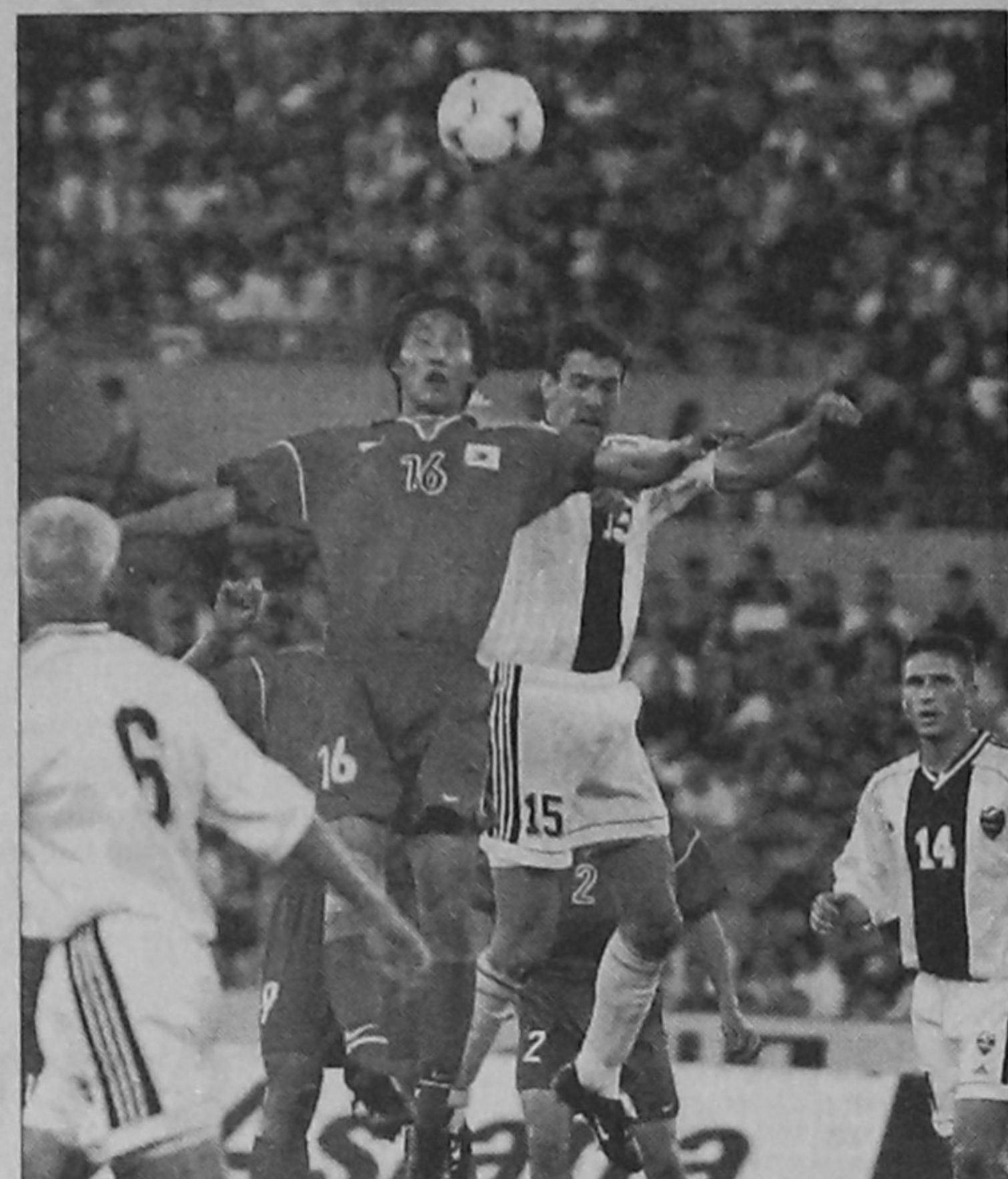
SEOUL: Midfielder Lee Young-Pyo made two decisive saves to help South Korea score

high spirits three minutes into the second half when Yugoslav goalkeeper narrowly beat a powerful grounder by Lee Chun-Soo in the middle of the penalty box.

But the challenge from South Koreans faded quickly after they missed follow-up chances.

Real Zaragoza's Savo Milosevic, who replaced injury-stricken striker Predrag Mijatovic at half-time, pounced on South Korea's defense up front and his colleagues regained control of the midfield.

Yugoslavia continued their



An aerial tussle between Yugoslavia's Mladen Krestajic (R) and South Korean Kim Sang-Sik during their international friendly at Seoul on May 28. — AFP photo

a well-deserved 0-0 draw against Yugoslavia in at Seoul's Chaamsil Olympic Stadium.

Lee was instrumental in South Korea's defense, cutting out Yugoslavia's offensive before a crowd of 35,500.

He blocked a decisive shot from defender Nisa Saveljic that went out of the hands of goalkeeper Kim Yong-Dae straight into the left corner in the 56th minute, and another from midfielder Slavava Jokanovic in the 71st minute.

The Yugoslavs exposed some sloppy defending in early exchanges, as South Korea, led by midfielder Ko Jong-Su and forward Seoul Ki-Hyeon, started aggressively and outpaced the visitors.

The South Koreans got in

dominance afterwards, forcing a series of corners, but failed to find the net.

"I'm satisfied with my kids who played well in the midfield, making several good chances," South Korea coach Huh Jung-Moos said.

"Yugoslavia underestimated the strength of my team," Huh said, conceding South Korea needs more training to refine their play in the penalty box.

Yugoslav coach Muzjadin Boskov said: "Lead and some other Korean players were outstanding. Today I tested the system of my team. We will come back with new strategies in the next game," he said.

The two sides are scheduled to play again on Tuesday.



French midfielder Johan Micoud (L) is under pressure from Croatian Krunoslav Jurcic during their friendly international in Zagreb on May 28. — AFP photo



Espanyol players celebrate after clinching the Spanish Cup title on May 28. — AFP photo

Giggs out of action

LONDON, May 29: Ryan Giggs has been ruled out of Wales' trip to Portugal next week following a scan on a thigh injury, reports AFP.

The Manchester United winger damaged his leg during shooting practice in training last Sunday as Wales prepared for their clash with Brazil in Cardiff.

Giggs watched the 3-0 defeat on Tuesday from the dug-out before returning to Old Trafford for treatment.

He travelled to watch the Champions League Cup final in Paris on Wednesday and then moved on to Monte Carlo, along with Sir Alex Ferguson and team-mate Ronny Johnsen, where the trio picked up the world team of the year prize at the inaugural Laureus Sports Awards ceremony.

Giggs had a scan on the injury on Friday before Wales boss Mark Hughes was given the news he had no doubt been expecting.

Hughes said: "I talked to Manchester United's doctor and he has confirmed that the scan shows Ryan has a torn thigh muscle that will take three to four weeks to heal properly."

"I had hoped that the injury would turn out to be no more than muscle spasms."

"He did the damage right at the end of shooting practice last Sunday. We pulled him out of training immediately and tried to cheer him up by saying that it would be okay, but deep down I think he knew it was going to be a problem."

"You have to realise that injuries are one of those things. You hold your hands up and accept them and then get on with the job."

Wales, who are expected to call up Tottenham midfielder Simon Davies from the under-21 squad, have already lost Robbie Savage, Chris Coleman, Mark Pembroke and John Hartson from their original party.

Hughes will be hoping Barnsley's Darren Bernard comes through tomorrow's First Division play-off final against Ipswich unscathed and is able to join up with the squad that flies to Oporto on Wednesday.

The under-21s travel to Northern Ireland this week for a triangular tournament that also includes Scotland. They play the Scots at Newry on Wednesday and the Irish at Dungannon on Friday.

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Owen aims for the top



LONDON, May 29 (AFP): Michael Owen has set his sights on becoming the best striker in the world - and he has rubbish claims that he and England skipper Alan Shearer are too similar to become an effective partnership.

Owen's knack of scoring against the cream of the footballing talent surfaced again when he was on target in Saturday's confidence-boosting draw with Brazil at Wembley.

It was just the tonic needed after an injury-hit season by Owen who shot to prominence two years ago with his wonder goal against Argentina in the 1998 World Cup finals.

And in terms of Euro 2000 there were encouraging signs that Owen and Shearer, who has expressed his liking for playing alongside Emile Heskey, can operate as a pairing.

Owen said: "Some people say I only score against Luxembourg which is a bit off-putting considering that I have scored against some of the best teams in the world."

"It's great to score against such opposition. I scored that goal against Argentina but I know I need to reproduce it at this level and scoring against Brazil is great for the confidence."

"I have never doubted my own ability. I've done the business at the top level before and to do well against the best team in the world is very pleasing."

"I don't want to be just a normal professional. I want to reach the top and you've got to

with English and Spanish clubs said to be after his signature.

"The transfer market is very busy right now and we have asked Doctor Campora (Monaco president) to take full responsibility for the player," said Simonet without revealing Barthez's next destination.

The French team are coming off an impressive 2-0 win over Croatia Sunday and played a Croatian second division side Monday without Barthez as the World Champions prepare for Euro 2000 which kicks off June 10 in Brussels.

Barthez recently denied reports linking him with English Premiership champions Manchester United and said he intends to stay with Monaco and see out his contract.

FRANCE COUNT ON LUCKY NUMBERS

PARIS: World champions France have proved the old adage that footballers are a superstitious breed by keeping their France 98 squad numbers for Euro 2000, to be co-staged by Holland and Belgium between June 10 and July 2. L'Equipe reported Sunday.

The 18 surviving members of Aime Jacquet's World Cup winning squad will all wear the same numbers they were allocated for that successful campaign.

The four newcomers will all take the jerseys vacated by the France 98 quartet not selected by Jacquet's successor Roger

Lemerre, who was number two to Jacquet during the World Cup.

These are Nicolas Anelka, who takes the number nine jersey from Stephane Guivarc'h, Ulrich Rame (no 22 from Lionel Charbonnier), Johan Micoud (no 14 from injured Alain Boghossian) and Sylvain Wiltord (no 13 from Bernard Dimede).

Lemerre will officially confirm his squad on June 1.

SQUAD (Jersey numbers in bracket)

Goalkeepers: Fabien Barthez (Monaco - 16), Bernard Lama (Paris SG - 1), Ulrich Rame (Bordeaux - 22)

Defenders: Laurent Blanc (Inter Milan/Ita - 5), Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich/Ger - 3), Marcel Desailly (Chelsea/Eng - 8), Frank Leboeuf (Chelsea/Eng - 18), Vincent Candela (Roma/Ita - 2), Lilian Thuram (Parma/Ita - 15)

Midfielders: Zinedine Zidane (Juventus/Ita - 10), Youri Djorkaeff (Kaiserslautern/Ger - 6), Didier Deschamps (Chelsea/Eng - 7), Patrick Vieira (Arsenal/Eng - 4), Emmanuel Petit (Arsenal/Eng - 17), Robert Pires (Marseille - 11), Johan Micoud (Bordeaux - 14), Christian Karembeu (Real Madrid/Spa - 19)

Forwards: Thierry Henry (Arsenal/Eng - 12), David Trezeguet (Monaco - 20), Sylvain Wiltord (Bordeaux - 13), Christophe Dugary (Bordeaux - 21), Nicolas Anelka (Real Madrid/Spa - 9)

Diego wants to replace Van Gaal!

MADRID, May 29: Diego Maradona says his big dream now is to coach FC Barcelona, reports AP.

"My great dream is to manage Barcelona, and more so now given that (chairman Josep Lluís) Nunez is gone," the Argentine soccer legend told Spain's Marca sports paper in an interview in Munich, Germany.

"I know that I have just one chance and 99 against. But if I get the opportunity I'll grab it and won't let go," the 39-year-old Maradona said.

Maradona played for Barcelona from 1982-84 after leaving Argentina's Boca Juniors and before joining Italy's Naples.

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AFP EURO 2000 BRIEFS



ZAGREB, May 29: France's World Cup winning goalkeeper Fabien Barthez left the national squad here early Monday to "sort out his future," French Football Federation president

Barthez recently denied reports linking him with English Premiership champions Manchester United and said he intends to stay with Monaco and see out his contract.