

The finals' countdown



TOKYO, June 3: A countdown board was unveiled on Thursday by the Japanese organizers of the 2002 World Cup finals, showing the remaining days before the opening match of the tournament, to be co-hosted by Japan and South Korea, reports AFP.

The message "730 days to go" appeared on the board unveiled at a ceremony at Tokyo Station, Japan's central station, alongside the official emblem and tournament mascots.

A crowd of around 100 journalists, photographers and TV crews gathered at the ceremony, along with officials, sponsors and passers-by.

The countdown board also included the names of the 10 host venues in Japan and the official partners.

Japan Organising Committee vice president Shunichi Okano, who has been re-elected as the head of the Japanese Football Association for two further years, pledged the country would help host a successful tournament.

"When we were chosen as the host country of the World Cup just four years ago, I thought we still had six years to go, but I feel four years have passed in an instant."

"I expect the following two years to pass in a twinkling as well, so I would like to take it seriously every day. I promise that we will do our best to make the World Cup a success," added Okano.

Okano also said one of the important things for him, as the president of the football association, was for the national team to improve.

"We have no time to waste, and I have to give an answer that everyone can agree with. I hope that we, the players, the national team and the association, will be able to show you very impressive matches in two years time," he said.

Okano was to leave for Morocco later in the day to watch the Hassan II Cup in which Japan were to challenge World Cup holders France this weekend.

Earlier, Okano said that when he was re-elected as association president he would carry full responsibility for deciding the future of French national team coach Philippe Troussier.

Okano will announce his decision after the Hassan II Cup and the Kirin Cup, in Japan from June 11-18.

Troussier's contract runs out at the end of June, but it included an option to extend it to October if Japan qualified for the Olympics and the Asian Cup finals. Japan did both under the wing of the Frenchman.

Monsoon golf concludes

Monsoon Golf tournament concluded at the Savar Golf Club yesterday, says a press release.

A large number of golfers from both home and abroad including some female took part in the meet.

Cho became champion in the ladies' group while Ezzan Zulkifly in the men's group.

Besides, Air Commodore Fakrul Azam, Major General Mustafa Kamaluddin and K U Chowdhury became the 1st, 2nd and 3rd runners-up respectively. Jung and Shawkat-uz-Zaman became Best Gross and 2nd Best Gross respectively while Brigadier Mashud Ali Khan became the senior winner.

Ashfaque A Chowdhury was awarded the Nearest to Pin and Brigadier Abdul Mannan Miah got the award in the Longest Drive.

Chief of Army Staff Lt General Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman took part in the tournament and later distributed prizes as the chief guest.

Scottish court upholds Tyson bout

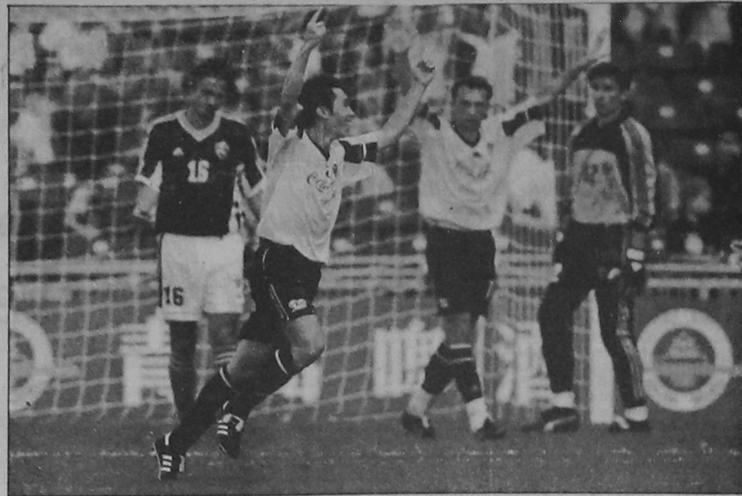
LONDON, June 3: An anti-race group lost a legal bid on Friday to prevent American heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson from fighting in Scotland this month, reports Reuters.

The Rape Crisis Centre in Glasgow had asked for a judicial review of the government's decision to allow Tyson, a convicted rapist, into Britain for the second time in five months.

But Edinburgh's Court of Session turned down the request, allowing the bout against fellow American Lou Savarese to go ahead on June 24 in Glasgow.

The crisis centre argued that admitting Tyson might make rape more acceptable in the eyes of the Scottish public.

Tyson remains a firm crowd favourite despite his many brushes with the law. The fight against Savarese has already sold 40,000 of the 60,000 tickets on offer.



Lee Wai-Tik (C) of South China is ecstatic after scoring a goal during their 4-2 demolition of mighty Yugoslavia in a friendly yesterday. — AFP photo

Euro 2000 warm-up

Yugoslavs suffer Hong Kong blues



HONG KONG, June 3: Euro 2000 hopefuls Yugoslav ended their Asian tour on a disastrous warm-up game 4-2 to local Hong Kong side South China on Saturday, reports AFP.

With little more than a week before Yugoslavia begin their challenge on the European title against Slovenia, the talented national side received a jolt to their confidence as they succumbed to the local league champions and the heat at Hong Kong Stadium.

To rub salt in the wound it was a Yugoslav who proved the hero for the local team, as

South China striker Zeljko Gavrilovic scored twice, one a fortuitous opener in only the sixth minute.

He added another in the 25th minute after beating the offside trap to hammer home from six yards before team-mate Ricky Cheng Siu-chung gave South China a stunning 3-0 half-time lead after sidefooting Lee Kinwo's right-wing cross.

Yugoslav coach Vujadin Boskov made seven changes at the start of the second half as he tried to stem the flow in a largely lethargic and performance from the Yugoslavs, but despite finding star players Savo Milosevic and freekick specialist Sinisa Mihajlovic, it was not enough.

Defender Mateja Kezman made it 3-1 in the 66th minute with a close range header, but South China regained their three-goal advantage through a superb 20-metre (yard) strike from Lee Wai-Tik.

Mihajlovic, who was carrying a toe injury sustained in

training on Friday, scored a last-minute goal from a free kick, but the damage had already been done to the Yugoslavs.

It was the national side's fourth and final match of their Asian tour. They had previously beaten the Chinese national team 2-0 and held the South Korean Olympic and national squads to 0-0 draws last week.

Boskov refused to answer questions as the team boarded their bus to catch a flight back home.

"Maybe the humidity killed them," said Gavrilovic, who has said previously he had always dreamed of playing for the Yugoslav squad.

"I knew they were really struggling with the heat and the humidity and a lot of the team members were losing a lot of fluid," he added.

"But it was generally a poor performance by Yugoslavia and one that will not augur well with the Euro competition coming up."

Euro 2000 warm-up

Portugal too hot for Wales



CHAVES, Portugal, June 3: Portugal showed England's watching spy that they have the class, skill and sheer quality to break a few hearts in Euro 2000 in beating Wales 3-0 in a friendly here Friday night, reports AFP.

They outplayed a spirited but outclassed Wales, in the Portuguese side's last warm-up match before facing England in Eindhoven on Monday week in a game that is full of danger for Kevin Keegan's side.

Portugal scored twice in the first half through Luis Figo and Joao Pinto, with substitute Nuno Capucho adding a spectacular third after 67 minutes.

Wales fought and battled but a deflected free-kick from Figo and then a pass into the box for Sa Pinto to score, had this little stadium rocking.

The Portuguese produced some wonderful skills.

Figo jinked past four men to reach the box and then the Barcelona genius showed he was capable of error. A fine crossfield pass found Carlos Secretario but from the return pass Figo blazed over from 12 yards.

Gary Speed saw a 20-yard free-kick spilled by goal keeper Baia, who was equalling the Portuguese record with his 70th cap, and then the stopper managed to rush out and completely miss the ball as Craig Bellamy chased through. The youngster's angled shot was blocked, and

Craig Bellamy missed a glorious close-range chance, hook-

ing with the Porto keeper way out of his goal, Gareth Roberts hooked the ball onto the roof of the net.

A minute later Joao Pinto launched a savage late tackle into John Robinson, who angrily pushed the Benfica man away.

Referee Frank De Bleckere booked both players. The incident enraged the Wales bench.



LUIS FIGO

who were incensed at the dangerous lunge from Joao Pinto.

Before the restart Speed limped off to be replaced by Andy Johnson, seemingly the victim of an off the ball kick.

The second goal came a minute from the break. Joao Pinto found Figo with a fine pass into space and when a low cross arrived in the box, Sa Pinto drove the ball home.

Portugal decided for more width after the break and to attack young Roberts at full-back, putting on Sergio Conceicao for Jose Vidigal.

Craig Bellamy missed a glorious close-range chance, hook-

ing over after Roberts had nodded down a deep Mark Delaney cross from the right after 49 minutes.

Figo, Secretario and Sa Pinto soon left the fray before the substitutes, Nuno Capucho, scored a stunning third by chipping Ward delightfully from the edge of the box after 67 minutes.

Portugal had gone up a gear, and with Wales tiring in the heat, it was now a question of keeping the score down.

1860 about to rope in Amunike

MUNICH, Germany, June 3: 1860 Munich have reached agreement with Barcelona striker Emmanuel Amunike and will formally sign him for two years once he passes a fitness test next week, it was reported Friday, reports AFP.

The 29-year-old Nigerian international suffered a string of injuries, the primary problem being his right knee, which kept him off the field last season and will move to Germany in a free transfer.

"He wasn't getting a chance any more at Barcelona. He just wants to play again and decided on us even though he had to take a pay cut," 1860 president Karl-Heinz Wildmoser said.

It will be Amunike's debut in the Bundesliga although he was meant to play for Duisburg in 1994.

He signed for the Zebras before the 1994 World Cup in the United States but reneged on the contract when he discovered Duisburg were not a high profile glamour team.

Iran lift King Hussein title

AMMAN, June 3: Iran ran out the inaugural winners of the King Hussein Tournament after seeing off Syria 1-0 here in Friday's final, reports AFP.

Before the match in the Jordanian capital Syria's Yugoslav manager Bozidar Vukotic had warned that his weakened side's only chance was to score first. They didn't, and as Vukotic predicted Iran had few problems holding on to the lead given to them by Sohrab Bakhtiarizadeh in the 36th minute.

Winning coach Jalal Talebi said, "I feel great. It was a game that we deserved to win. You can't expect a good game in a final, but if any team was going to win it was ours."

"I'm very proud of the players. We achieved what we were looking for and we won the first King Hussein Cup."

Sohrab's low free kick, which seemed to catch the Syrian keeper, Mohammad Bairouty by surprise, was Iran's only reward for a first half in which they created all the clear-cut chances.

In the 21st minute Ali Karimi had shown exactly why he is likely to be the next Iranian to move to a European club as he jinked past three defenders before firing a right-footed shot which Bairouty gratefully pushed over the bar.

In the second half Iran, whose side was made up largely of Olympic team players, were happy to take control and let the pace of the game drop.

Iraq comfortably claimed third place in the King Hussein Cup thanks to a three goal first half against hosts Jordan, the team eventually running out the 4-1 winners.

All is not lost for Ireland



BRUSSELS, June 3: The Republic of Ireland have a slim chance of competing in Euro 2000 beginning next week in Holland and Belgium - but only if a court in Liege rules in favour of an application to have Yugoslavia thrown out of the tournament, reports AFP.

A Belgian court will announce its verdict before June 9 on a request by residents of Kosovo origin in Belgium to bar the Yugoslav football team from competing in Euro 2000, which begins on June 10.

The tribunal on Friday heard submissions from lawyers for the plaintiffs and for the Belgian State.

The Kosovars are seeking to have visas refused to the Yugoslav team and its entourage.

Their case is based on existing European Union sanctions against the Yugoslav regime - imposed during the Kosovo conflict - and which the Kosovars maintain should be applied to the football team.

One sanction forbids any financial transaction with Yugoslavia but the country's football federation will pocket 3 million euros (2.9 million dollars) just for taking part in Euro 2000, to be co-hosted by Belgium and Holland.

But lawyers for the Belgian State argue that the European Union has not decided on a sporting embargo against the Yugoslavs which qualified for the Championships with a 2-2 draw in a Balkan grudge match with Croatia.

Yugoslavia is due to play all its Group C first round matches in Belgium.

These are on June 13 at Charleroi against Slovenia, which used to be part of Yugoslavia, on June 18 in Liege against Norway and on June 21 at Bruges against Spain.

Should Yugoslavia be expelled then the obvious candidates to replace them would be the Republic of Ireland who finished runners-up in their group and lost a two-legged play-off with Turkey.

In 1992 Yugoslav were thrown out of the European Championships in Sweden after a similar case although in this case United Nations sporting sanctions applied.

Denmark replaced them at short notice and astonished the sporting world by winning the tournament - perhaps the ultimate case of "lucky losers" in the history of world sport.

Bayern scrape past Thailand

BANGKOK, June 3: Looking slightly tired in the Bangkok heat, Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich played cautiously but well enough to edge Thailand's national team 2-1 Saturday in a friendly match, reports AFP.

Bayern's Michael Wiesinger hardly looked tired, however, netting both his team's tallies on the evening.

After cautious play by both sides punctuated by several long shots, Wiesinger opened the scoring in the 23rd minute by slotting home from 10 yards after furious play in the box and several deflected headers.

Thailand battled hard for an equalizer and quickly responded, as team captain Kitatsuk Senamuang, of English First Division side Huddersfield Town, beat the offside trap and slipped a slow roller past Bayern keeper Bernd Dreher at the 27th minute.

Football draw held

Rufinen cautions Euro clubs



Zen-Rufinen said players who failed to turn up when fit would be suspended.

"It does not turn up he will be suspended immediately and should he play for his club during the suspension, then the match in which he played would be declared null and void," he said.



MICHAEL ZEN-RUFFINEN

SYDNEY, June 3: FIFA secretary-general Michel Zen-Ruffinen warned European clubs to release their players in time for the Olympic football tournament when he made the draw here Saturday for the Sydney Games, reports AFP.

European clubs have lobbied to have the release period cut to just 10 days as the tournament clashes with their domestic and European Cup seasons.

OLYMPIC FOOTBALL DRAW

SYDNEY, June 3: The draw for the Sydney Olympic football tournament made here Saturday:

- MEN**
- Pool A: Australia, Italy, Nigeria (holders), Honduras
 - Pool B: South Korea, Spain, Morocco, Chile
 - Pool C: United States, Czech Republic, Cameroon, Kuwait
 - Pool D: Brazil, Slovakia, South Africa, Japan
- WOMEN**
- Pool A: Australia, Germany, Sweden, Brazil
 - Pool B: United States, Norway, China, Nigeria

MEN'S FIXTURES

- Sept 13
18:30 Nigeria v Honduras at Hindmarsh Stadium Adelaide
19:00 Cameroon v Kuwait at Brisbane Cricket Ground
20:00 Australia v Italy at Melbourne Cricket Ground
20:00 USA v Czech Republic at Bruce Stadium Canberra

WOMEN'S FIXTURES

- Sept 13
17:30 Sweden v Brazil at Melbourne Cricket Ground
17:30 Australia v Germany at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 14

- 17:30 USA v Norway at Melbourne Cricket Ground
17:30 China v Nigeria at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 15

- 17:30 Australia v Sweden at Sydney Football Stadium
17:30 Germany v Brazil at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 16

- 17:30 USA v China at Melbourne Cricket Ground
17:30 Norway v Nigeria at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 17

- 17:30 Australia v Brazil at Sydney Football Stadium
17:30 Germany v Sweden at Melbourne Cricket Ground

Sept 18

- 17:30 USA v Nigeria at Melbourne Cricket Ground
17:30 Norway v China at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 19

- 17:30 1st Pool A v 2nd Pool B at Sydney Football Stadium
17:30 1st Pool B v 2nd Pool A at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 20

- 17:00: Bronze Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00: Gold Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium

Sept 21

- 17:00: Bronze Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00: Gold Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium

Sept 22

- 17:00: Bronze Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00: Gold Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium

Sept 23

- 17:00: Bronze Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00: Gold Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium

Sept 24

- 17:00: Bronze Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00: Gold Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium

Melbourne Cricket Ground
20:00 Slovakia v 5th Africa at Bruce Stadium Canberra

Sept 25

- 18:30 1st Pool C v 2nd Pool D (1) at Hindmarsh Stadium Adelaide
19:00 1st Pool D v 2nd Pool C (2) at Brisbane Cricket Ground
20:00 1st Pool A v 2nd Pool B (3) at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00 1st Pool B v 2nd Pool A (4) at Melbourne Cricket Ground

Sept 26

- 20:00 Winner (1) v Winner (3) at Sydney Football Stadium
20:00 Winner (2) v Winner (4) at Melbourne Cricket Ground

Sept 29

- 20:00: Bronze Medal Match at Sydney Football Stadium

Sept 30

- 12:00 Gold Medal Match at Olympic Stadium

Defending champions Nigeria drew Italy, Australia and Honduras, who surprisingly eliminated Mexico on their way to Sydney, in their preliminary pool.

Australia coach Raoul Blanco said Honduras should not be underestimated.

"They eliminated Mexico to qualify. I think they could be a pleasant surprise to many people," he said.

South Korea, Spain, Morocco and Chile were drawn in Pool B, with Pool C containing the United States, the Czech Republic, Cameroon and Kuwait.

Brazil, Slovakia, South Africa and Japan make up Pool D.

The first two in each pool qualify for the quarter-finals.

Women's world champions the United States drew China, whom they beat in last year's World Cup final, world No 3 Norway and Nigeria in a tough preliminary pool.

Australia, Germany, Sweden and Brazil make up the other pool.

The first two in each pool qualify for the semi-finals.

FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper said an inspection of the facilities in Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide had shown them to be up to scratch.

"The Olympic stadium is just breathtaking, it's one of the finest stadiums you would find anywhere in the world, if not the finest right now," he said.

But he was worried about the pitches.

"The grass is not that great everywhere," he said.

"But with a bit of tender loving care these playing surfaces, I'm absolutely convinced, will be up to the standard that we need."

Djorkaeff wants to move

BERLIN, June 3: French World Cup winning midfielder Youri Djorkaeff confirmed on Friday that he wants to leave Bundesliga side Kaiserslautern and hinted again that champions Bayern Munich would be his next port of call, reports AFP.

The 32-year-old, who is under contract with the Red Devils till 2002, explained that he wanted to leave because he didn't believe that coach Otto Rehhagel would still be at the club next season.

"I am still contracted to Kaiserslautern, but I think we can sit down and work something out," the former Monaco, Paris Saint Germain and Inter Milan midfielder told German football magazine Kicker.

"I want to get out because I don't think Rehhagel will still be the coach come next season," he added.

However, Djorkaeff's urge to compete in the Champions League also played a part in his decision.

"We (Kaiserslautern) would have qualified for next season's competition had I not been injured since April 8," he innocently declared.

Djorkaeff, currently the leading scorer in the French national side with 23 goals in 60 appearances, rejected Bayern Munich's denials that there had been contact between them.

"I have been in touch with Bayern Munich," he said.

WC 2006

Moroccans upset with Qatar



RABAT, June 3: Qatar's member of the FIFA Executive Committee Mohammed Ben Hammam told

AFP Friday he had not yet decided which country to back when he casts his vote in July in the ballot to select the host nation for the 2006 World Cup.

His remarks come after a furious reaction in Morocco - one of the five countries bidding to stage the event - to claims that Qatar would back Germany rather than Morocco, which had believed that it could count on the support of the Gulf state in a spirit of pan-Arab solidarity.

Ben Hammam, president of the Qatar Football Federation (QFF), Friday played down the claims, saying no decision had yet been taken but judging by the reaction in Morocco the damage has already been done.

"I have not yet decided who I will vote for," Ben Hammam told AFP's Nicosia bureau.

Wenger targets Panucci

LONDON, June 3: Arsenal's inspirational French coach Arsene Wenger looks set to clinch the signing of Italian international right-back Christian Panucci from Inter Milan it was reported on Saturday - provided he can come up with the 60,000 pounds (90,700 dollars) a week wage demands, reports AFP.

Wenger, who guided Arsenal to the 1998 Double and this year's UEFA Cup final, is desperate to bring in some new younger blood to his remarkable defence whom have all gone the wrong side of 30 and are starting to show their age and he believes that 27-year-old Panucci fits the bill.

"What is certain is that I will act only in accordance with my conscience, to be faithful to international football and the Asian Football Federation."

"I have never said I would support Germany," said Ben Hammam. "Besides I wish good luck to Morocco with or without my support."

Ben Hammam's remarks come after furious reaction in the Moroccan media to the claims that he would back the German bid.

Daily paper Liberation was particularly scathing Friday, saying: "This Arab brother (Qatar) has just plunged an evil dagger in the back of the project of one nation' (pan-Arab solidarity)."

It then said that Ben Hammam should appear on Qatari TV channel Al Jazeera, which backs the cause of Arab unity, "so he could listen to one of the channels' demagogic speeches and be interrogated about Arab unity, the Arab nation and Arab solidarity."