

Kepler, King cross swords over inquiry

JOHANNESBURG, June 7 (Internet report): Former South African captain Kepler Wessels, one of the most vociferous critics of Hansie Cronje, has crossed swords with Judge Edwin King over the legitimacy of the commission of inquiry being launched into match-fixing in Cape Town tomorrow.

Speaking to Cape Talk radio, Wessels said the commission smacked of a cover-up.

"I've got severe doubts that it's going anywhere," said Wessels. "The news filtering through hopefully is not right because it smacks a little of a cover-up."

Wessels hinted that there were people with vested interests in the game who would do anything to show that the Cronje incident was an isolated affair, and also to prove Cronje innocent.

"They're going to marshal all their forces," said Wessels.

Wessels added that he felt that the mindset cultivated during the years of isolation was hampering a thorough and impartial investigation.

"They're scared, which is a characteristic of the isolation era. Somewhere else in the rest of the world the pressure (on Cronje) would be immense."

Judge Edwin King, the man charged with heading the investigation, was outraged by Wessels' comments. "These statements are impertinent, insulting and unwarranted, completely devoid of truth. There will be no cover-up of anybody, no cover-up whatsoever."

The commission starts tomorrow, and will question current and former team-mates of Cronje about various instances where match-fixing has been alleged. It is thought that Cronje will only appear after all the other statements have been taken, to put his testimony in context.

Talbot's bonding plays to unite pool rivals

CALOUNDRA, Australia, June 7: Australian will fight for Olympic swimming gold medals but head coach Don Talbot has devised bonding strategies to ensure rivalries don't disrupt his team, reports AFP.

Talbot wants to unite his 44-strong team with the idea of battling the world rather than each other at the Sydney Olympics even though Australian teammates loom as the biggest gold medal threats in several key events.

That work has already begun three months out at a training camp at Caloundra, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

"Even though each one may be rivals to each other, we're trying to beat the world if we can. We talk about that quite a bit," Talbot said here yesterday.

"We've got a psychologist on the team whose aim it is to create situations where we can deal with those things."

"Camaraderie, being a team in other words, is an important part of our preparation. We still want that competitive spirit with each other. But... I think you can manage being friends with somebody who may be your arch-rival in the water. That's what we aim to do."

"Many people use hate. I don't like that."

Just two weeks ago the swimmers were fighting it out with each other at the Olympic trials.

But Talbot hopes to be able to bond them into a tight-knit unit by the time the Games come around in September.

Talbot described the team as better than the one which won two golds, four silvers and six bronzes at the last Olympics in Atlanta and possibly capable of surpassing the 1956 Melbourne Olympic swimming team which won eight gold medals.

Tennis ball

From page 13

MA: It's not mystery. It was the role model thing as you were saying. When I was young, I watched Wasim and Waqar bowling. They were fast bowlers and I wanted to become a fast bowler. Basically, I'm a fan of West Indian fast bowlers since I was very young. My case is very similar to that of other young boys. They are watching cricket. You see that there are four, five, six fast bowlers in the Pakistan team.

Playing with the tennis ball does help the aspiring fast bowlers in Pakistan. It helps one to develop a very quick arm action. With tennis ball you have to use your full strength. When you are 15 or 16, it also helps you to learn how to swing the ball. Shoaib Akhtar and myself have learnt fast bowling on tennis ball, playing in the same town.

DSS: Against whom you wouldn't want to bowl with the new ball?

MA: I will not want to face Imranam with the new ball. He has got so much time before playing shots that even if you are a fast bowler, you will just feel that you are a medium pacer. He has got the timing and height. Same delivery we bowl to other batsman, thing would be different.

DSS: Who is going to win the Pepsi Asia Cup?

MA: Looking at our performance here so far, in Sharjah and in West Indies, we are doing really very well. And, I think, Inshallah, Pakistan will win this tournament.

DSS: How is the Dhaka wicket?

MA: You can't say it's a good bowling wicket. I like the stadium and the atmosphere. The crowd is very good here. But the wicket is very flat here like Sharjah.

Zoff counts on quality



GEEL, Belgium, June 7: Italy coach Dino Zoff rounded on his critics here Tuesday, saying that his struggling team still enjoyed popular support and were ready to make a major impact at Euro 2000, reports AFP.

Italy, who open their campaign on Sunday against Turkey at Arnhem, have lost four of their last seven games - the most recent setback coming with last weekend's 1-0 defeat to Norway.

Their ratings on national television have plummeted over the past year, sparking claims that they have also lost the affection of the Italian public.

But Zoff, a World Cup winner back in 1982, was quick to dismiss the mood of pessimism surrounding Italy and their chances at these championships.

"I'm not convinced about these figures... I don't think there's been a fall in enthusiasm," he insisted.

"We are all enthusiastic here and so are the Italian fans. Obviously they want to see results and we haven't fully provided them."

"But this is the moment that counts. Qualifying was our objective and we achieved it. Now is the moment to show what we're capable of."

He went on: "Clearly, I want us to do well and to go far in this tournament... and I think we can do that."

"This is going to be a tough European championship - but not only for us. It's very balanced and it's top quality, so that's going to make it very difficult."

The difference between making progress and being left behind could be very small. But we're certainly confident we can do well."

Asked to single out the four likely semi-finalists he said: "France are a team with great names and it's an exporting country when it comes to foot-

ballers. Holland are playing at home and we've all seen how good Spain are."

He diplomatically left the fourth spot blank and refused to discuss the possible Italian formation.

Defending his team's performance against Norway Zoff said: "We weren't dangerous enough, but as for the rest I think we were in control of the match. The ball was more in their half of the pitch than ours."



Italian forward Vincenzo Montella jumps to avoid colliding with goalkeeper Francesco Toldo during a training session of the Euro 2000 squad at Geel on June 6.

— AFP photo

Bosnich, Viduka worry for Socceroos

SYDNEY, June 7: High-profile Australian stars Mark Bosnich and Mark Viduka are in doubt for the three-game international football series against Paraguay, beginning here on Friday night, reports AFP.

Bosnich's troublesome hamstring threatens to keep him out of the entire series and had also jeopardised his career with English champions Manchester United.

"I'm rehabbing it continuously and vigorously and I'm having a fitness test tomorrow and hopefully I'll be A-OK for Friday," Bosnich said Wednesday.

"I am hopeful, I'm positive and if I play on Friday I'll continue to play - if selected - for the other two games, that's down to the boss."

"If I don't make it Friday, then I won't risk it for the other two games."

Viduka missed the last three league games of Glasgow Celtic's season because of an ankle injury which had been treated in Scotland and Melbourne.

"I'll have to see, I'll have to talk to the physio," Viduka said. "At this stage it's pretty weak. I haven't been doing anything on it."

While not doing any physical work, Viduka did plenty of sidestepping when asked about his club future, with speculation rife he will leave Celtic and join either Leeds United or Fiorentina.

Viduka, the reigning Scottish Premier League player of the year and top scorer, had yet to speak to new Celtic manager Martin O'Neill but said "the best thing is to talk to him one on one and see what he has got to say."

Viduka said he enjoyed playing alongside Leeds star Harry Kewell when teaming up for Australia, and when asked if he would like that acquaintance more regular at Leeds, he was coy but admitted the English Premiership is "the most high profile league in the world and everyone would like to play in it."

Viduka said any new club must accept he's committed to regularly flying home to represent Australia.

"They know that, it comes with me," he said.

Bosnich warned media off asking him about his future at United, where new signing Fabien Barthez, the hero of France's 1998 World Cup win, was expected to be the first choice keeper next season.

Bosnich's recurring hamstring problems and a personal clash with manager Alex Ferguson had put him on the outer at Old Trafford.

Bosnich said he would not play in the Olympic Games, as he thought a younger keeper should get the opportunity, but undoubtedly he wouldn't risk a month away from the European season when there was a chance of a move to another club.

Viduka said he was keen to play in the Games, and was likely to be one of Australia's three over-23 players.

Phillips best in the Premiership

LONDON, June 7: England striker Kevin Phillips has been named the English Premier League's player of the year by the competition's sponsors Car-

ling, reports Reuters.

Phillips the league's top scorer, netted 30 times in the league for Peter Reid's Sunderland side in their first year after winning promotion.

The award is timely boost for the 26-year-old, whose performance in England's Euro 2000 squad, not least because England coach Kevin Keegan was on the panel which selected the winner.

"You can't argue with the stats and 30 goals in one season is a phenomenal strike rate. If he can continue this form during Euro 2000 he will make himself a national hero," the panel said in a statement.

Phillips, who played in England's 2-1 win over Malta on Saturday, is expected to be on the substitutes bench for England's first Euro 2000 game against Portugal on Monday.



KEVIN PHILLIPS

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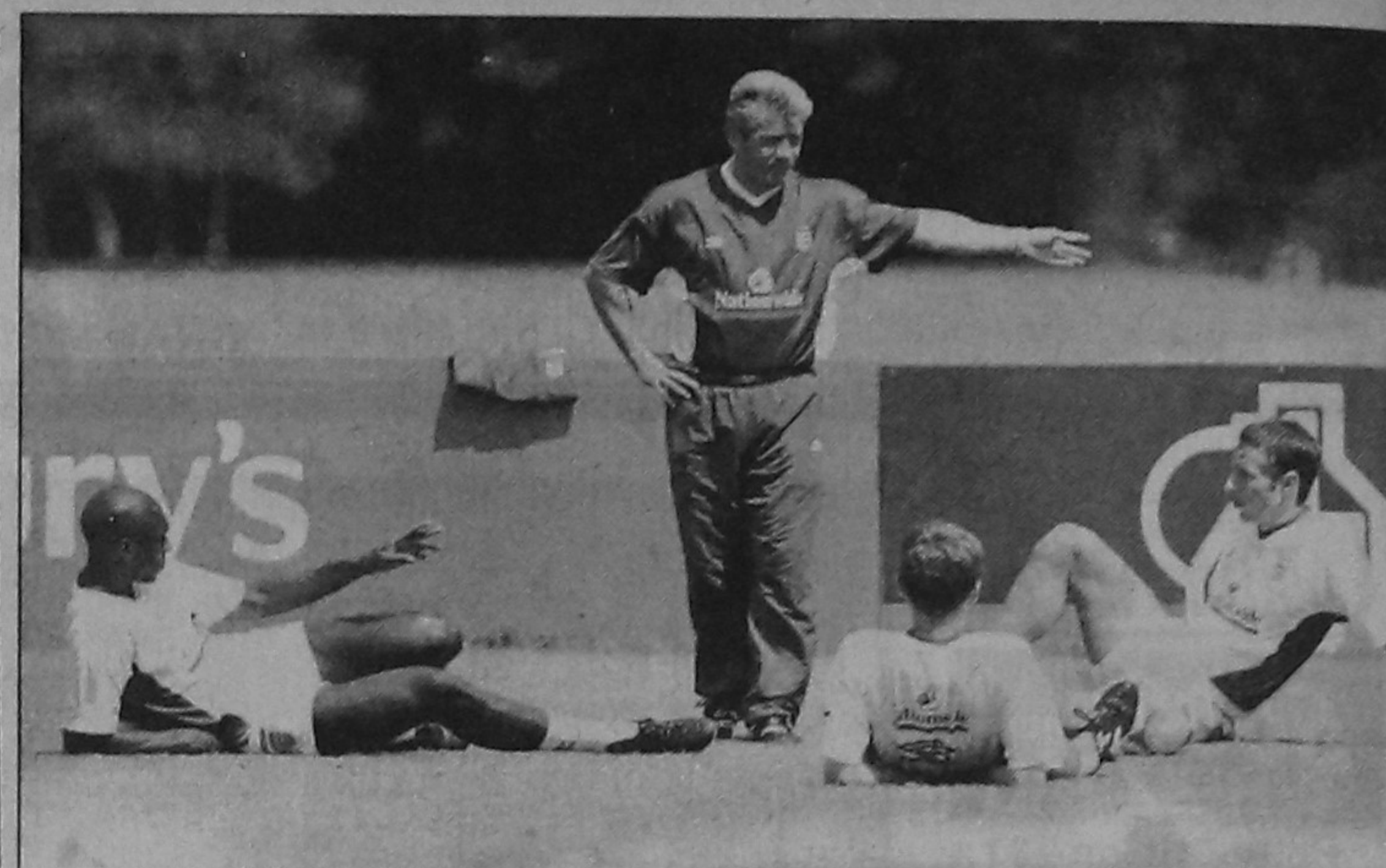
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Wright set for Swansong

LONDON, June 7: Former England and Arsenal striker Ian Wright has announced that he is to quit professional football, reports AFP.

Wright, who helped Burnley gain promotion to the First Division last season, said he wanted to spend more time with his family.



England coach Kevin Keegan (C) talking with some of his players during a practice session at the Euro 2000 squad's training base at Bisham Abbey yesterday.

—AFP photo

Biggest off-field challenge ever



LONDON, June 7: After months of fine-tuning their plans and honing their skills, the waiting is almost over as Europe's most formidable outfit heads to Holland and Belgium for one of the biggest challenges of their careers - and the football teams they follow are also starting to arrive, reports AFP.

For some, the most significant battles at Euro 2000 will not be taking place on football pitches but in the streets and squares across the Lowlands.

Police intelligence officers are in little doubt that the thugs, mainly from England, but also from Germany, Turkey and Holland and even a handful from Scandinavia, are bent on staging a series of major showdowns.

Whether the hooligans make it past heavily policed borders and whether those that get in can be prevented from sparking mass disorder are different matters.

But police have all but given up pretending that the European Championship will pass off without serious outbreaks of violence - in spite of the exhaustive efforts of governments and security forces in recent years.

A recent survey amongst 400 Dutch police officers found that 90 percent of them believed rioting was inevitable.

Police fear that the recent killings of two Leeds United fans by Turkish thugs in Istanbul, followed by the clashes between Arsenal and Galatasaray fans at the UEFA final in Copenhagen, has made retaliation and revenge attacks by English hooligans inevitable.

Geographically, the host nations stand at the very centre of European hooliganism. To the west a few dozen miles across the North Sea lies England, the spiritual home of the violent football thug.

Bordering the countries to

the east is Germany, a country which has proved to be an efficient producer of its own distinctive brand of hooliganism in recent years.

The host nations themselves, especially the Netherlands, have been blighted by their own home-grown violence problems since contracting the English disease sometime in the 1980s.

In Belgium, the spectre of hooliganism is particularly haunting following the 1985 Heysel Stadium disaster in Brussels when 39 Juventus fans were crushed to death in a stampede to escape rioting Liverpool fans.

The small size of the two countries - allowing rapid mobilisation of rival groups - as well as their easy accessibility by air, water, rail and road, has increased fears that Euro 2000 could descend into a hooligan free-for-all.

In an effort to pool resources and harmonise anti-hooligan arrangements the Dutch and Belgian governments have signed accords with their British, French and German counterparts. The agreements will help police control the movement of supporters and exchange information on troublemakers.

The accords form just one part of a range of measures taken to ensure that the finals, potentially the most combustible since Germany 1988, pass off without major trouble.

Dutch police have announced that they will have 4,000 officers on permanent duty with 20,000 on reserve who can be called up at short notice in the event of serious trouble. Belgium has said that over 30,000 officers will be available.

Black market ticket sales, seen as a major problem in the fight against hooliganism, have been the object of a zealous crackdown by the authorities.

Following the failure to stop the ticket touts at France 98 and Euro 96 - the only major deficiencies in the security arrangements at those tournaments - Euro 2000 organisers have successfully lobbied the Dutch and Belgian parliaments to criminalise black market ticket sales.

A flourishing black market,

it is argued, would encourage thousands of ticketless fans to travel to the event and ruin all hopes of maintaining the crucial segregation of rival supporters.

It could also lead to hundreds of fans wandering the streets bent on causing trouble following their failure to get into matches.

Organisers have also made sure that all 1.2 million tickets have been sold to individuals or through national football associations to ensure that blocks of tickets do not fall into the hands of travel agents with scant regard for security arrangements.

Ticket holders will be asked to provide proof of identity to the name on the ticket. Euro 2000 organisers have promised that these checks will definitely happen.

The Belgian and Dutch authorities have also activated dormant legislation to tighten up their borders to keep out hooligans. Germany has announced that it will step up surveillance of fans heading to Holland and Belgium.

The German authorities have revealed plans to stamp the passports and restrict the travel of known troublemakers - a policy which prompted a demonstration in March by 400 hooligans in Berlin protesting at what they saw as the infringement of their human rights.

The Dutch have also given the police powers to hold suspect troublemakers and impose on-the-spot fines of up to 350 dollars, for offences ranging from abusive chanting to illegal ticket sales and drunkenness in public.

The host nations have also set up systems of 'accelerated' justice with magistrates on duty 24 hours a day to impose immediate sanctions on offenders which include imprisonment and deportation.

The match between England and Germany in the southern Belgian town of Charleroi is widely regarded as the fixture with the most potential for violence.

The 30,000 capacity stadium is considered as being wildly inadequate for a match that many believe could have sold

Brazil may pull out of 2006 race

McGivan relishing the prospect



McGIVAN

LONDON, June 7: Organisers of England's bid to stage the 2006 World Cup welcomed reports

Tuesday that Brazil might pull out of the race with South Africa backing South Africa's bid, reports AP.

England campaign director Alex McGivan said the rumours of a Brazilian pullout are "nothing but good news" for the English bid.

"Not only would it simplify the whole process but I feel certain it would increase our support," said McGivan, who is bidding against Brazil, South Africa, Germany and Morocco for the right to stage the 2006 event.

FIFA's 24-man executive committee will select the 2006 host country July 6 in Zurich, Switzerland. South Africa, Germany and England appear to be the front-runners.

While McGivan believes two of the three South American votes will go to England, the Financial Times reported Tuesday that Brazil will make a deal with the South Africans to back their campaign for 2006 in return for the Africans' support of a Brazilian candidacy for 2010.

The paper said the deal was put together by Danny Jordaan, campaign director of the South Africa bid; Ricardo Teixeira, head of the Brazilians soccer federation; and former FIFA president Joao Havelange, a Brazilian who is reported to be a keen supporter of the South African bid.

The paper quoted Jordaan as saying the African soccer federation, CAF, supported the deal and officials are soon to have talks with former Brazilian star Zico, who is chairman of Brazil's bid.

"Zico said Brazil is prepared to withdraw on the basis that CAF supports them in 2010," the Financial Times quoted Jordaan as saying.

According to McGivan, that

may not necessarily guarantee the other two Concaaf votes.

"Brazil may vote for South Africa, but I do not believe that

"Brazil seem to recognize the weakness of their own position and are more interested in 2010."

"Four weeks is a long time in this campaign so I do not see how Brazil can seriously think that they can secure support now for something which is four years away."

"The idea that you can make deals four years down the road is wholly unrealistic. For one thing the FIFA Executive Committee members may change. So I don't think any kind of commitment for 2010 means a lot."

Police probe into Monaco-Marseille match

MARSEILLE, France, June 7: The police inquiry into last season's heated French First Division clash between Monaco and Marseille is continuing, a judicial source reported here Tuesday, reports AFP.

The investigation is going ahead despite the withdrawal of an official complaint lodged by Monaco's Argentine player Marcelo Gallardo against one of the Marseille players.

"The retraction of the complaint does not alter the criminal nature of the offence," a spokesman for the public prosecutor explained.

Gallardo was reportedly hit in the players' tunnel at Marseille's Stade Velodrome at half time during the April 7 fixture, resulting in the Argentine lodging an official complaint against Marseille's Peter Lucin and assistant trainer Christophe Galtier.

Fellow Monaco man Marco Simone lodged a separate complaint against Patrick Bloudeau, which has not been withdrawn.

AFP EURO 2000 BRIEFS



UNDATED, June 7: Euro 2000 briefs on Wednesday:

HIP TIP FOR GOALIES

PARIS: Goalkeepers facing penalty shootouts in the upcoming Euro 2000 should focus on the kicker's hips to get the best idea of where he will place the ball.

That's the view of British researchers who have scrutinised the tiny indicators that betray even the most poker-faced penalty taker.

In the last moment before the kick, the orientation of the taker's hips shows which direction the ball will travel, says the British weekly New Scientist in Thursday's issue.

That should give a goalie a vital half-second to move to block the shot.

"If the taker's hips are square-on to the goalkeeper in a right-footed kicker, the penalty goes to the right-hand side of the keeper," says Mark Williams, head of science and football at Liverpool John Moores University.

"If his hips are more 'open', or angled away from the goalkeeper, the kick tends to go to the left of the keeper."

Williams showed goalkeepers life-sized video footage of penalties being taken, filmed from the viewpoint of a keeper standing in the centre of the goal.

The film was stopped four times during the sequence - 120 milliseconds before the kick, 40 milliseconds before, and 40 milliseconds afterwards - and the

goalkeepers were asked to predict where the ball was being placed.

They also filled out questionnaires asking them what they looked out for.

Apart from the hips, "the angle of the runup, the orientation of the non-kicking foot, the orientation of the lower leg and the lean of the trunk were all important," Williams told New Scientist.

ROMANIAN ROSU SIGNS FOR NUMANCIA

MADRID: Romanian international Laurentiu Rosu has signed a four-year contract with Spanish First Division side Numancia, press reports said here Wednesday.

The 24-year-old Steaua Bucharest midfielder, a member of Romania's squad for the Euro 2000 finals, will cost 1.25 million dollars, the AS daily said.

Rosu joined Steaua in 1993 going on to win five Romanian league titles and three Romanian cups.

He won his first cap against Portugal in October, 1998.

LAURENTIU ROSU

NO CHANGES TO ENG-GER FIXTURE

LONDON: The flashpoint Euro 2000 finals match between England and Germany will go ahead as planned at the controversial Charleroi stadium, a top Belgian official said Wednesday.

The choice of the 30,000-capacity Le Mambour stadium for the match has been widely criticised, with concerns voiced about safety inside the small, steep-sided venue and outside in the city's narrow streets.

Sepp Blatter, president of football's world governing body FIFA, has added his voice to those suggesting that a switch of venue should be considered.

But Jan de Grave, Belgium's Euro 2000 tournament spokesman, made it plain there would be no change of venue.

"We are very determined that it is not going to be moved," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

"Preparations have been made. The fire brigade has been doing exercises in Charleroi; police have been doing exercises; we have had an international game, Belgium v Portugal, as a test case there, so we feel that every precaution that should have been taken has been taken so that the match can go through there."

"We have to rely on the green light that is being given by everybody involved - these people are professionals, the fire brigade, police, Ministry of Interior and UEFA."

"Everybody knows what they are talking about, they all feel confident that the game can go through there."

Asked if he was saying the Belgian authorities would be in complete control in the event of trouble in the stands or around the stadium, de Grave said: "Yes, that's what I'm trying to say."

The England-Germany match kicks off at 1845 GMT on June 17.

World champs flex muscles



CASABLANCA, Morocco, June 7: France fired off an ominous warning to its rivals for the Euro 2000 title with a stunning 5-1 win over Morocco here which confirmed that the World Champions are ready and raring to go, reports AFP.

It was the last French match before they open their campaign with a Group D match against Denmark in Bruges on Sunday and Roger Lemerre's men appear to have timed their run to perfection.

Goals from five different strikers - Youri Djorkaeff, Christophe Dugarry, Sylvain Wiltord, Nicolas Anelka and Thierry Henry - confirmed that that old French failing - a lack of a potent strike force - is a thing of the past.

In particular 21-year-old

Anelka and 22-year-old Henry, two supremely talented players from immigrant families in the Paris suburbs, linked superbly and their fledgling partnership could set Euro 2000 alight.

"When a country has so many players with this kind of talent at its disposal, then it is blessed indeed," said Lemerre after the win over a good Moroccan side in Casablanca late Tuesday.

Changed days indeed for Lemerre, who took over from his old friend and colleague Aimé Jacquet after the French won the World Cup in July, 1998.

A stuttering qualifying campaign for the Euro 2000 finals which saw the French come within minutes of elimination and reports that Lemerre had lost authority to his world-cup winning players left him close to resignation.

But gradually things have fallen into place and the since their qualification, the French have won six and drawn one of their preparatory friendlies.

Wins over Croatia (twice), Poland, Scotland, Slovenia and the rout of Morocco along with

the 2-2 draw against Japan in Morocco on Saturday have brought 18 goals with just five against.

The marvellous World Cup defence is still in place anchored around Laurent Blanc and Marcel Desailly with Manchester United-bound Fabien Barthez a rock in the goals behind them.

In midfield, skipper Didier Deschamps may be struggling to regain top form after a spate of strength-sapping injuries, but incomparable playmaker Zinedine Zidane is showing signs that he is close to being back to the form that destroyed Brazil in the World Cup final.

Attack remained the problem, but Anelka of Real Madrid, Henry of Arsenal and Monaco's David Trezeguet all had impressive ends to their seasons.

And with the more experienced Wiltord and Dugarry as backup, Lemerre now has an embarrassment of choices for his strike force.

France play in Group D along with the Netherlands, Denmark and the Czech Republic.