

Afro ebullience v Euro maturity

FOOTBALL

SYDNEY, Sept 29 (Reuters/Internet). The only certainty about Saturday's Olympic soccer final between Spain and Cameroon is that it will pit European pragmatism against African power and exuberance. Cameroon are bidding for their first Olympic gold in any sport having reached the final with last-gasp 2-1 knockout victories over Brazil and Chile. They want to emulate Nigeria who became the first African side to take a major global competition by winning gold in Atlanta in 1996. They also want to complete a great double by adding the Olympic title to their victory in the African Nations Cup earlier this year. They are a hard-running, powerful side who never give up and are capable of playing some outstanding soccer — although sometimes with a little too much force than is necessary. Spain, attempting to win gold for the second time in eight years, have played far more cautious and disciplined soccer knocking out Italy (1-0) and the United States (3-1). After two weeks of travelling around the outposts of the Games in Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide, the sides come face to face in front of an expected 110,000 crowd under the Olympic torch in Stadium Australia. Both teams have the ideal mixture of youth and experience and the confidence that reaching the final brings. But for one player the Olympic final will represent the fulfillment of

a once-impossible dream. Cameroon's goalkeeper will be 16-year-old arlos Idriss Kameni, third choice keeper at French Second Division side Le Havre, who started this tournament as reserve to Daniel Bekono, six years his senior and keeper at one of Cameroon's top sides, Canon Yaounde. But coach Jean-Paul Akono called up Kameni in place of Bekono for the quarter-final match and the teenager was outstanding as Cameroon, reduced to nine men after two sendings-off, stunned Brazil 2-1 with a golden goal winner. He had another brilliant game with a series of breath-taking saves when Cameroon scored two late goals to beat Chile 2-1 in the semifinal in Melbourne — and now is just 90 minutes away from a gold medal. "I really cannot believe that this is happening to me," he said on Friday. "It is like a dream. The whole country is behind us, there is a huge festival in the streets every time we play and the gold medal would just be too fantastic for words. I did not expect to be playing here, but now I am, I feel confident and the whole team believes we can keep the Olympic title in Africa. That would be a fantastic achievement." FIFA confirmed on Friday that neither team would have any players suspended, which means that Cameroon skipper Geremi and defender Aaron Nguimbat, who were red-carded against Brazil, would be eligible to play. The match will have a special poignancy for Geremi, who

plays for Real Madrid, and his Spanish club mate Samuel Eto'o and for Arsenal midfielder Lauren, who used to play for Real Mallorca in Spain. They all know the Spanish players well, and will be especially keen to do well against them. Spain come to the final with a fine pedigree at this level, which belies their reputation down the years as under-achievers in the European Championship and World Cup. As well as winning the Olympic gold in Barcelona eight years ago, they finished third in the World Under-17 championship in Egypt in 1997 and won the World Under-20 championship in Nigeria 18 months ago. They also won the European Under-18 title in 1995 and the Under-21 championship in 1998 and most of the players in this team have been playing together in those various age group sides since they were 16 years old. The star of their 3-1 win over the United States in the semifinals was AC Milan striker Jose Mari, but the Barcelona trio of Puyol, Xavi and Gabi have all been outstanding and there is not a weak link in the team. The Spanish players collectively have more experience of the big occasion — forward Angulo was in the Valencia side beaten by Real Madrid in the European Cup final in May — and in the end that experience could tell. But Cameroon have overcome the odds throughout the competition and could well do so again on Saturday to give Africa the Olympic gold medal again.



90 DEGREES! France's Eva Serrano performing in the women's individual all-round qualification round of rhythmic gymnastics on September 28. —AFP photo

R-ynchronisation

SWIMMING

SYDNEY, Sept 29: Russia won their second synchronised swimming gold of the Olympics Friday when they added the team title to the duet crown won by Olga Brusnikina and Maria Kisseleva, reports AFP. The Russians scored 99.146, with Japan taking silver with 98.860 and Canada winning the bronze on 97.357. Defending champions the United States finished in fifth position on 96.104 points behind fourth-place France (96.467). Both Brusnikina and Kisseleva were on the Russian team, who were leading coming into Friday's free routine after achieving the highest marks in Thursday's technical programme, which counted for 35 per cent of the total scores. The world and European champions, who until Tuesday had never won an Olympic synchronised swimming medal, gave an outstanding creative performance with contrasting speeds and crisp leg movements in a witch-themed routine. "I believe it was a masterpiece. If it wasn't we wouldn't have won gold," said Kisseleva. They achieved two perfect 10s for technical marks, and two 10s for artistic impression for a combined total of 99.146 points — 34.580 for the technical routine and 64.566 for the free. "Psychologically this routine was very difficult than physically. We were leading in the competition and everyone was expecting us to perform. The Japanese were breathing down our necks," said Kisseleva.

Japan were faultless on their spins in their routine to "The Bird of Wonder" and achieved one 10 mark for technical merit from the Japanese judge and four 10s for artistic impression. "Even though we swam before we had never seen a 10," said team member Rei Jimbo. "It was a first time experience and looked really beautiful." Miya Tachibana, who won duet silver Tuesday with Miho Takeda, said: "We worked very hard but we were still a step behind the Russians and there is still room for improvement for us." Canada performed an energetic programme on the theme of athletes competing in the Olympics to the music of "Charlots of Fire". It included seven Olympic sports including an original bicycle lift which thrilled the crowd in Sydney's International Aquatic Centre. "We worked with a couple of athletes to show us how to do the moves. There were so many layers to this routine. It had risky high lifts and took a lot of choreography," said Claire Carver-Dias. "This wasn't just the synchronised team it was a Canadian team effort with people from different events helping us to win this for Canada." The United States, the most successful synchronised swimmers since the sport's inclusion in the 1984 Olympics, go home empty handed after coming fifth in the team and fourth in the duet. The United States and Canada had shared every synchro gold and silver since the sport was introduced at the 1984 Atlanta Games, and Japan had taken every bronze.

Lanka on cloud nine

ATHLETICS

COLOMBO, Sept 29: Sri Lanka heaped praise on sprinter Susanthika Jayasinghe here Friday after the athlete bagged the country's first Olympic medal for 52 years, reports AFP. Jayasinghe bagged bronze in the women's 200 metres Olympic on Wednesday, delighting press and politicians in her homeland. The Daily Mirror devoted its entire front-page to Jayasinghe's feat and published dozens of congratulatory messages. Gifts were also pouring in for Jayasinghe with newspapers reminding that the Sports Ministry had earlier promised 10 million rupees (130,000 dollars) for any Sri Lankan athlete making it to the finals of an Olympic medal. President Chandrika Kumaratunga said Jayasinghe's bronze had brought Olympic pride to Asia. "As a woman I am indeed proud of another woman's moment of glory," President Kumaratunga said. Sri Lanka's main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe drew attention to the obstacles Jayasinghe has had to overcome in her sporting career, which was nearly scuppered in 1998 during a bitter row with the sports ministry. She shot to fame at the 1997 World Championship where she bagged a silver medal. But her rise in celebrity following that result led to turmoil, with allegations of sexual harassment against a sports ministry official. She was hit with a drug ban by the International Amateur Athletic Federation in 1998. The IAAF later abandoned the case. But it's unlikely to catch Barabados. It will take another 19 medals to do that, Butterfield said — "If Barabados don't get any more medals." Population isn't the only measure you can apply to put medals into context. "There's a number of factors that would obviously be important," Butterfield said. Among them, things like health statistics and gross domestic product (GDP), a good measure generally of the overall prosperity of a country.

"You have fulfilled the aspirations of Sri Lankans who are proud of you," Wickremesinghe said. Earlier in the Olympics Jayasinghe wore a yellow ribbon during the 100m event to call for free and fair elections at the October 10 parliamentary polls. The action provoked criticism in Sri Lanka, but on Thursday she defended the move. "What difference does it make if I wear a yellow ribbon or not," Jayasinghe was quoted as saying in the local press. "How will you know what colour underwear I am wearing." The yellow ribbon was a red rag to the officials who objected to her making a political statement while representing the country at the Sydney games. "She showed a lot of guts," said Waruna Larnatilleke, a campaigner for free and fair elections here. "We are very happy she wore it and won a medal despite a lot of pressure from officials." Sri Lankans took to the streets to burst crackers as Jayasinghe narrowly missed silver by becoming third by one hundredth of a second behind Pauline Davis-Thompson of the Bahamas in an event won by Marion Jones. "The motherland is proud of you," Jiang said. "The athletes' excellent performance reflects the vigorous spirit of the Chinese people in the course of reform and opening, which has contributed to the Olympic spirit." While Jiang urged the athletes to maintain a high morale, continue their scientific training and strive to continue to bring

move. "The difference does it make if I wear a yellow ribbon or not," Jayasinghe was quoted as saying in the local press. "How will you know what colour underwear I am wearing." The yellow ribbon was a red rag to the officials who objected to her making a political statement while representing the country at the Sydney games. "She showed a lot of guts," said Waruna Larnatilleke, a campaigner for free and fair elections here. "We are very happy she wore it and won a medal despite a lot of pressure from officials." Sri Lankans took to the streets to burst crackers as Jayasinghe narrowly missed silver by becoming third by one hundredth of a second behind Pauline Davis-Thompson of the Bahamas in an event won by Marion Jones. "The motherland is proud of you," Jiang said. "The athletes' excellent performance reflects the vigorous spirit of the Chinese people in the course of reform and opening, which has contributed to the Olympic spirit." While Jiang urged the athletes to maintain a high morale, continue their scientific training and strive to continue to bring

Battle of unbeatens

BASKETBALL

SYDNEY, Sept 29: Reigning champion United States, seeking a fourth title in the past five Games, joined Australia in advancing to the Olympic women's basketball final here Friday, setting up a showdown of unbeaten teams, reports AFP. Sheryl Swoopes scored 19 points while Lisa Leslie added 15 points and 12 rebounds to lead the US team past South Korea 78-65 while Lauren Jackson and Sandy Brondello each scored 16 points in a 64-52 Aussie victory over Brazil. The championship game Saturday will be a rematch of a pre-Olympic tune-up won 83-62 by the US team. But Jackson had a warning for her American rivals. "The US are absolutely a great team, but we have been playing outstanding," Jackson

said. "Our game has improved 100 per cent since we played them. We know we can go out and beat the US." And the US team knows better than to take the Olympic hosts for granted. "It will be a tremendous game, women's basketball at the highest level on the greatest stage in the world," US coach Neil Fortner said. "It will be fast-paced, physical, have every element you can imagine." "It will be an intense battle," American Delisha Milton said. "We're very confident." Australia, which took bronze at the 1996 Games, clinched no worse than a silver medal, assuring their best showing in Olympic competition. "It's a first for Australian basketball, but we're going to go one step further," Aussie captain Michele Timms said. "America better watch out. We know what we can do."



SYNCHRONISED SINO SMILES: The Chinese team performs in the free routine final of the synchronised swimming competition yesterday. —AFP photo

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 29 (AFP): Worms have been providing sterling service in Sydney's bid to claim the tag of the "Environmental Olympics". A mix of tiger worms and red worms are being used at four Olympic venues to help reduce, reuse and recycle the food waste. **IT WAS LIKE 500 MILES** They played The Proclaimers' hit "I Would Walk 500 Miles" over the public address system at Stadium Australia Friday when Chris Maddocks of Britain finally entered the arena. It could hardly have been more appropriate. Competing at his fifth Olympics, Maddocks was the last official finisher in the 50km race walk, almost half an hour behind second-last placed Irishman Jamie Costin. Heat and wind made it hard for all the walkers — especially the 43-year-old Maddocks, who was out on the course for almost five hours and had a hamstring injury to boot. He said he nearly quit several times, but was encouraged to go on by race officials and volunteers, and was rewarded by a rousing reception from the fans in the stadium. **STICKY FINGERS** Fans of famous Olympic athletes such as Shane Gould, Nicole Stevenson and four-time gold medalist speed skater and Olympic Aid chairman Johann Koss will be able to bid for chocolate versions of the sporting stars' hands, feet and handprints at an auction on Saturday. The chocolate moulds will be auctioned off to the public at the Cadbury Chocolate Dream Factory at Sydney Olympic Park to benefit Olympic Aid. Olympic Aid is an athlete-driven initiative aimed at raising funds for and promoting awareness of refugee children around the world. **COLONIAL RIVALRY** Australian sprinter Darryl Wohlen added insult to injury for Great Britain's 4x100m relay runners, who were disqualified in the first round Friday. "It's a good to see the Brits get

run out," he said. Australia's 4x100m relay team, of which Wohlen is a member, progressed to the next round. But Wohlen will be less pleased to see the Australian women share the same fate when they dropped the baton. **BORN TO BE WILD** Australia's Olympic long jump silver medalist Jai Taurima lived up to his tag of being the wild man of Australian athletics with a four-hour drinking spree after Thursday's final. Taurima was leading until the final jump when Cuba's Ivan Pedroso denied him with a winning leap of 8.55m. Taurima, a tattooed giant with a ring in his navel, advocates pizza, burgers and copious beer as the winning diet. And he claims he has a secret to keeping his weight down — smoking a packet of cigarettes a day.



HIGH SPEED CHANGES: American Brian Lewis (R) hands the baton to teammate Maurice Greene during the first round of the men's Olympic 4x100m relay qualifiers yesterday. —AFP photo

Barbados table-toppers!

SYDNEY, Sept 29 (AFP): Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States leading the medal tally has become the stock story of the Summer Olympics. But this week a new winner has emerged in the medal stakes: tiny Barbados. Sprinter Obadele Thompson's bronze medal in the 100 metres has thrown the tiny Caribbean nation into the lead on the medal table, if you're taking population into consideration. With a population of just 270,000, Barbados' lone medal has pushed it to the top of a table maintained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which measures the number of medals won on a per capita basis. Too often, according to some critics, the Olympics generate attention about who has won the most medals rather than for whom winning those medals represents the greatest accomplishment. "There are other forms of analysis that can be done to look at what lies behind all those medals," Martin Butterfield, the statistician behind the Australian Bureau's medal count, told AFP on Friday. "The more people you've got the greater number of people you're going to get with some kind of athletic ability."

That means that with its population of almost 280 million people, the United States actually only qualifies as 43rd in the competition if you put its 76 medals by the end of competition Thursday into context. China, which now ranks second on the normal medal table with its 56 medals, only manages 65th place in Butterfield's table of the 75 countries to have won medals in Sydney thanks to its population of 1.26 billion. (India, with its 1.01 billion people and only one medal, ranks a disappointing last.) Of the top five countries on the traditional medal table, Australia does best on a per capita basis by Butterfield's measure, managing fourth at a rate of one medal for every 370,000 people. But it's unlikely to catch Barbados. It will take another 19 medals to do that, Butterfield said — "If Barbados don't get any more medals." Population isn't the only measure you can apply to put medals into context. "There's a number of factors that would obviously be important," Butterfield said. Among them, things like health statistics and gross domestic product (GDP), a good measure generally of the overall prosperity of a country.



A WIN AWAY FROM GOLD: Australia's Lauren Jackson (No 11) is ecstatic after beating Brazil in the women's basketball semifinals at the SuperDome yesterday. —AFP photo

Nothing can be sweeter

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 29 (AFP): There was no finer way for Kenyan Noah Ngeny to end his losing streak against Hicham El Guerrouj than by beating him in the final that matters to every athlete who competes at the top level — the Olympic one. El Guerrouj, who was going down to only his second defeat since he fell in the 1996 Olympic final, had effectively been undone by the Vitas Gerulaitis syndrome. The late flamboyant American tennis player also put an end to a long losing record when he dispatched Jimmy Connors in the Masters to stop the rot at 16 successive matches. When asked how he had turned the formbook around Gerulaitis said: "Nobody but nobody beats Vitas Gerulaitis 17 times in a row!"

Thus it was with Ngeny, who only two years ago was the pacemaker for El Guerrouj when he broke the 1500 metres world record in Rome, as he finally put the Moroccan master to the sword. It left El Guerrouj's Olympic dreams in tatters for the second successive Games and making sure that the picture of his fall in Atlanta he keeps with him as motivation would return with him to Morocco for another four years. All this season it had looked a remote chance that Ngeny, who comes from Eldoret an eight hour ride from Nairobi and the birthplace of the legendary Kip Keino, would be able to get within striking distance of El Guerrouj. But as his coach Kim McDonald, who guided Englishman Peter Elliott to a minor medal in 1988, says they never lost faith. "We thought that following last year's race in Rome when

Noah competed for real that we could eventually down Hicham because he realised that he could keep up and give Hicham a real run for his money," he said. What gave them even more belief was the marvellous race that El Guerrouj and Ngeny, who is described by McDonald as being a quiet thinker, put up in the world championship final in Seville. That was dubbed the "race of the century" by middle distance icon Seb Coe — when the Moroccan bested the Kenyan but was pushed to the limit for the first time in a major final. However, not many took Ngeny seriously when after that final he declared that El Guerrouj would never beat him again particularly after he failed to beat him once coming into the Games. "We were prepared for this race and how we would run it," McDonald said.