

Lions hold world champs

PARIS, Oct 5: Olympic champions Cameroon showed they could hold their own among soccer's elite when they drew 1-1 against world and European champions France in Paris yesterday. Patrick Mboma's spectacular overhead kick from a long throw called out Sylvain Wiltord's opener for the French at the Stade de France, reports Reuters.

"It's a great night," said Mboma. "We came here to prove we could vie with the French and that's what we did."

The home side went ahead after 20 minutes when Arsenal's Patrick Vieira delivered a perfect lob for club mate Wiltord. He rounded goalkeeper Alioum Boukar and slotted the ball into an empty net.

But France, who were plagued by injuries, including Zinedine Zidane and goalkeeper Fabien Barthez, looked more vulnerable than usual.

Goalkeeper Lionel Letizi, a replacement for Manchester United's Barthez, was forced into a fine save by striker Samuel Eto's in the 34th minute. Gaining in confidence, the Olympic champions equalised when Mboma, so often the hero in Australia, produced his magnificent overhead effort a minute from the break.

Substitute goalkeeper Richard Druet, on for the injured Letizi, spared the hosts further embarrassment by saving from Eto's after striker ran unchallenged through the French defence in the 62nd minute.

For France, captain Marcel Desailly headed wide a free-kick from the left by substitute Laurent Robert 12 minutes from time.

"We were aware Cameroon were a very mighty side," said French coach Roger Lemerre. "For some of my guys it was hard to play here tonight as they were not at their best."

"We played euphoric opponents who were mentally and physically strong after their Olympic title."

Beckham scare for England

LONDON, Oct 5: England vice-captain David Beckham missed the squad's training session on Wednesday and is a doubtful starter for the World Cup qualifier against Germany on Saturday, the Mirror newspaper said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The Manchester United midfielder jarred his knee in Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Arsenal and is rated as only 50-50 to play in the final international at Wembley stadium.

England boss Kevin Keegan has asked Arsenal's Ray Parlour to stand by in case Beckham is ruled out altogether.

Beckham's absence would be a major blow to Keegan, who had previously said that any player who did not train on Thursday would not start the game.

Tragic

BUCHAREST, Oct 5: Dynamo Bucharest mid-fielder player Catalin Haldan collapsed and died during a friendly match in the southern city of Oltenita on Thursday, reports AFP.

Haldan, 24, had complained to a team-mate of feeling dizzy during the second half of the game against Santierul Naval and fell to the ground shortly afterwards. He was taken to hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival.

Haldan, who had been on Dynamo's books since 1996, was a member of the Romanian Euro 2000 squad.

Beijing steps up bid to host 2008 Olympics

BEIJING, Oct 5: Beijing today stepped up its bid to host the 2008 Games, after celebrating its best showing yet in the Olympics, hauling in 28 golds from Sydney, reports AFP.

"Beijing is perfectly capable of organising the Games," chirped the front page of the People's Daily, outlining all the arguments in favour of Beijing's bid.

Among these, the communist party organ cited the Chinese capital's bustling economy, its efforts to deal with transport and pollution problems, along with the success of large international shows held in Beijing in the past.

But the paper especially focused on the "patriotic" aspect of Beijing's bid.

Beijing's candidacy is the common wish of all the Chinese population, it is totally supported by the government and by the Chinese people," it said.

According to the Games organiser in Beijing, hosting the Olympics in 2008 will not only do credit to one-fifth of the world's population, but "will contribute to cultural exchanges between the East and the West, at the same time giving Chinese people an opportunity to contribute to the development and progress of humanity during the 21st century."

Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin showed his personal support to Beijing's candidacy by welcoming back the Chinese athletes on Tuesday from the Olympic Games in Sydney.

Chinese athletes brought back 28 golds, 16 silvers and 15 bronzes, the best showing for the mainland since China's return to the summer Olympic Games in 1984.

Night of the qualifiers

LONDON, Oct 5 (Reuters/Internet): With only the group winners guaranteed a place in the 2002 World Cup finals, Italy, the Netherlands and Ukraine need to record their first victories in Saturday's raft of European zone qualifiers.

Like Italy, the Netherlands dropped two points in their opening game in group two, a



2-2 draw with Ireland in Amsterdam. Coach Louis van Gaal has midfielder Edgar Davids and winger Boudewijn Zenden back fit for a must-win game in Cyprus.

The Cypriots will be no pushover, though, as they showed by beating Andorra 3-2 in their opening game.

Ruling body FIFA will be even more paramount if Portugal make it two wins out of two by beating Ireland, the group's dark horses, in Lisbon.

Ukraine are still smarting

from the disappointment of missing out on Euro 2000, despite boasting a powerful squad spearheaded by two world class attackers in AC Milan's Andriy Shevchenko and Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic.

Group five promises to be

tight with Norway, who visit Wales on Saturday and the Poles likely to push Ukraine hard for the top spot.

Spain are strong favourites in group seven and should build on their opening win in Bosnia-Herzegovina by beating Israel in Madrid.

Austria open their campaign with a trip to nearby Liechtenstein.

Group three is likely to be

a straight fight between the Czech Republic and Denmark, who both won their opening games. The Czechs host Iceland and Denmark visit Northern Ireland.

Craig Brown's Scotland side

also have a good opportunity to make it two wins out of two when they visit San Marino before next Wednesday's vital trip to group six favourites Croatia.

Belgium, who drew 0-0 with the Croats in Brussels in their first game, visit Latvia.

Owen sprang to prominence at the 1998 World Cup, scoring one of the goals of the tournament in a 2-2 draw with Argentina, who forced England out on penalties.

But at Euro 2000 England coach Kevin Keegan substituted him in all three matches.

Owen was on the bench

again for last month's friendly against France but came on and scored in a 1-1 draw.

He is set to partner Manchester United's Andy Cole in Saturday's World Cup qualifier against Germany as both look to inherit the mantle of the now retired Alan Shearer.

The outlook is positive but

there is still a lot of work to do and improvement to be made in all areas," said Tigana.

"Before arriving, my objective was to win the club promotion and to bring some experience to the club.

The atmosphere here is

fantastic and the passion of the fans in the stadiums surprised me.

"We spend less time on discipline as the players are very professional and very interested. I lead a fantastic life," he enthused.

The 44-year-old is the fourth

Frenchman to bring his football

knowledge to England following

Wenger, Houllier and Patrice

Berges, who is an assistant at

Liverpool respectively.

"I never thought there would

be so many people," he said.

"It's been 14 years that I've

been passionate about football

management and wine and

each time I have a day off I re-

turn to Cassis" in the south of

France, where Tigana owns 180

hectares of land.

The unveiling of a new white wine, Domaine La

Dona, at the world famous Harrods department store, former

international star Tigana exuded

happiness with his lot.

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