

Charlton for British

LONDON, Oct 10: Sir Bobby Charlton, perhaps the most respected figure in English soccer, says it would be a "disgrace" to appoint a foreigner as coach of the national team, reports AP.

Ever since Kevin Keegan resigned as coach following England's 1-0 defeat to Germany in a World Cup qualifier Saturday at Wembley, speculation has focused on the possibility of naming a non-Englishman as his successor.

Among the names mentioned have been France's Arsene Wenger, Italy's Marcello Lippi and Dutchman Dick Advocaat.

But Charlton, the former Manchester United star and a hero of England's 1966 World Cup winning team, says the Football Association should never consider a foreign coach.

"It would be an insult to our national pride," he said in an interview in the Daily Mail. "What a disgrace if the country which invented the game - and in which football is the greatest sporting passion - couldn't find someone good enough to manage our national team."

"If we want to consider ourselves still one of the leading football countries in the world, then we should not even consider putting a foreigner in charge."

Only the emerging countries or smaller nations to that. Playing for, or managing England involves more than just technical expertise. It is a huge honour to lead your country and it can never mean as much to someone who is not English."

FA chief executive Adam Crozier has questioned the capabilities of the current crop of English coaches.

It doesn't matter whether the new man is English, Scottish, Irish or foreign, he said. "All that matters is that they are the right person for the long term future of the England team."

A poll in the Daily Mirror suggested 81 per cent of those surveyed do not want the FA to turn to a foreigner.

"Our position has not changed - we rule nothing out and we rule nothing in," FA spokesman Adrian Bevington said Tuesday. "We begin our work for the long term on Thursday."

'The Eel' in news again

LONDON, Oct 10: Unlikely Olympic hero Eric "the Eel" Moussambani found himself at the centre of a diplomatic dispute Tuesday when the president of Equatorial Guinea refused to let the swimmer travel to a British awards ceremony, reports AP.

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo wanted Moussambani to attend a reception for the nation's Olympic athletes that conflicted with Tuesday night's National Television Awards, where he is slated to hand out an award.

Moussambani said upon his arrival in London that the president ordered his plane grounded before it left for neighbouring Cameroon.

After an hour on the tarmac, British High Commissioner George Boon convinced the president that the swimmer's appearance at the awards would raise the small west African nation's profile.

"He has delayed the reception until the end of the week," Moussambani said. "I'm very excited. I would never have dreamed of being able to come to London."

The 22-year-old student became an international celebrity at Sydney 2000 after needing almost two minutes to complete the 100 freestyle. He never put his head underwater and virtually came to a stop with 10 meters to go before finally making it to the wall.

Hamed gives up WBO belt

SHEFFIELD, England, Oct 10: Prince Naseem Hamed, widely regarded as the world's top featherweight, has relinquished his WBO title in a dispute over a mandatory defence, reports AP.

The undefeated Hamed, who has held the title since 1995, refused to fight No. 1 contender Istvan "Koko" Kovacs. The fight was due to take place in England on November 4.

HBO, the American cable television network which screens Hamed's fights, said it wasn't satisfied with Kovacs' credentials and was offering Hamed only a fraction of his usual purse.

Kovacs is now likely to be matched against Mexico's Marco Antonio Barrera for the vacant title, with Hamed to face the winner.

In his most recent fight, Hamed retained the WBO title by stopping Augie Sanchez in the fourth round in Mashantucket, Conn., on August 19. Hamed is 35-0, with 31 KOs.

Boxing fans have been clamoring for Hamed to fight either Barrera or Erik Morales, both super bantamweights.

Hamed's brother and business manager, Rith, sent a letter to WBO president Francisco Valcarcel informing him of the decision to give up the belt.

"Naseem is unable to fulfill its mandatory obligation due to HBO not approving Koko Kovacs as an opponent," he wrote. "In order to maintain the excellent relationship that we have enjoyed for the last five years, I would like to notify you of Naseem's decision to vacate the title."



Newly-appointed England captain Martin Keown talking to reporters during a media conference in Helsinki on October 9 ahead of the World Cup against Finland. To his left is England manager Howard Wilkinson.

—AFP photo

England can expect no Finnish favours



PARIS, Oct 10 (AP): Scandinavian nights are already drawing in and World Cup action in Helsinki on the cusp of winter is not a place for the faint-hearted.

But that is England's fate as the country which invented the world game must battle to save a campaign for the 2002 finals which has already descended into farce with Saturday's opening defeat at Wembley by Germany.

That bitter loss, bringing down the final curtain at the old stadium, resulted in the resignation of coach Kevin Keegan, whose frank appraisal was that the job was beyond his technical capabilities.

England is now essentially rudderless as they bid to pick up the pieces.

Keegan's assistant Howard Wilkinson has the thankless task of turning the ship around against Finland on Wednesday night and may even be in for the duration after several potential successors to Keegan ruled themselves out of the job on Monday.

Former England skipper Bryan Robson said he wanted more experience with Middlesbrough before throwing his hat into the ring while Peter Taylor of Leicester and French World Cup-winning coach Aimé Jacquet also ruled themselves out of contention, as did Sunderland's Peter Reid.

FA executive director David Davies maintains the post is coveted by the majority of modern managers.

But they are not exactly queuing up to take the hotseat, seen as an "impossible" challenge.

Even if the FA do go down the route of appointing a foreigner, even that could see a narrow choice as Arsenal said their Arsene Wenger would have to be "crazy" to do it, though they revealed he will be given permission to speak to England officials.

Robson spoke for what an increasingly less silent majority when he came out in favour of former coach Terry Venables to replace Keegan, having worked

alongside him in the run-up to Euro 96.

"I said when I worked with him that Terry Venables was the best coach I had ever worked with," said Robson.

"For me, he's the man for the job."

But England now have to take a step into the unknown in the knowledge that sections of the FA are not in favour of Venables, who stepped down four years ago when embroiled in a legal battle with former boss and Tottenham Hotspur chairman Alan Sugar.

Nonetheless, he has the vote of British bookies, who have installed Venables as their 4/1 favourite.

England's gloom deepened earlier Monday when skipper Tony Adams and defender Graeme Le Saux were both ruled out of the Finland clash.

Adams' withdrawal along with that of Beckham and Le Saux were both ruled out by Muurinen, whose side lost 1-0 in Greece at the weekend.

In Wednesday's other Group Nine match Albania host Greece in Tirana.

In Group Two, Ireland, buoyed by away draws at both Portugal and Holland, play Estonia in Dublin.

The Dutch will meanwhile face Portugal in Rotterdam.

Other midweek matches see Russia host Luxembourg in Group One while early leaders Slovenia take on Switzerland.

Group Three favourites Czech Republic travel to Malta while Northern Ireland look to follow up their weekend draw against Denmark with a win away to Iceland.

Group pacesetters Slovakia host Sweden in Bratislava while Poland can make it three wins out of three in Group Five if they beat Wales in Warsaw.

Spain visit Austria in Group Seven while the pick of Group Eight ties sees Italy host Georgia.

Finland want to prove the adage that there are no easy fixtures at international level any more and have three secret weapons in their squad who know all about the British game.

Their most potent weapon is Jonatan Johansson, who has scored five times in the Premiership for Charlton this season, while Sami Hyypia marshals the defence just as he does at Liverpool, who have made him their skipper.

The other British-based Finn is Hearts keeper Antti Niemi, who as an adopted Scot will be too pleased he can keep out the Auld Enemy.

Partnering Johansson should be Barcelona misfit Jari Litmanen, who has failed to establish himself at the Nou Camp but who conquered Europe while with Ajax.

Finnish coach Antti Muurinen says his team must be ready to face an English backlash post-Keegan.

"It won't make it any easier for us now he's gone. Maybe losing him will motivate the team," said Muurinen, whose side lost 1-0 in Greece at the weekend.

In Wednesday's other Group Nine match Albania host Greece in Tirana.

In Group Two, Ireland, buoyed by away draws at both Portugal and Holland, play Estonia in Dublin.

The Dutch will meanwhile face Portugal in Rotterdam.

Other midweek matches see Russia host Luxembourg in Group One while early leaders Slovenia take on Switzerland.

Group Three favourites Czech Republic travel to Malta while Northern Ireland look to follow up their weekend draw against Denmark with a win away to Iceland.

Group pacesetters Slovakia host Sweden in Bratislava while Poland can make it three wins out of three in Group Five if they beat Wales in Warsaw.

Spain visit Austria in Group Seven while the pick of Group Eight ties sees Italy host Georgia.

Finland want to prove the adage that there are no easy fixtures at international level any more and have three secret weapons in their squad who know all about the British game.

Their most potent weapon is Jonatan Johansson, who has scored five times in the Premiership for Charlton this season, while Sami Hyypia marshals the defence just as he does at Liverpool, who have made him their skipper.

The other British-based Finn is Hearts keeper Antti Niemi, who as an adopted Scot will be too pleased he can keep out the Auld Enemy.

Partnering Johansson should be Barcelona misfit Jari Litmanen, who has failed to establish himself at the Nou Camp but who conquered Europe while with Ajax.

Finnish coach Antti Muurinen says his team must be ready to face an English backlash post-Keegan.

"It won't make it any easier for us now he's gone. Maybe losing him will motivate the team," said Muurinen, whose side lost 1-0 in Greece at the weekend.

In Wednesday's other Group Nine match Albania host Greece in Tirana.

In Group Two, Ireland, buoyed by away draws at both Portugal and Holland, play Estonia in Dublin.

The Dutch will meanwhile face Portugal in Rotterdam.

Other midweek matches see Russia host Luxembourg in Group One while early leaders Slovenia take on Switzerland.

Group Three favourites Czech Republic travel to Malta while Northern Ireland look to follow up their weekend draw against Denmark with a win away to Iceland.

Group pacesetters Slovakia host Sweden in Bratislava while Poland can make it three wins out of three in Group Five if they beat Wales in Warsaw.

Spain visit Austria in Group Seven while the pick of Group Eight ties sees Italy host Georgia.

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—</