

## Cameroonians in running for Africa's best

CAIRO, Dec 1: The African Footballer of the Year will be named here Saturday with a star from all-conquering Cameroon the likeliest successor to Nigerian Nwankwo Kanu, reports AFP.

A list of 27 candidates released by the African Football Confederation (CAF), whose media and technical committees select the star, includes five Indomitable Lions.

Striker Patrick Mboma from Italian Serie A club Parma and utility player Gremi Njatap from European Champions League holders Real Madrid of Spain appear the strongest contenders.

Midfielders Lauren Meyer from perennial English Premiership championship title challengers Arsenal, Samuel Eto'o from Spanish outfit Real Mallorca and Salomon Olembe from French side Nantes are the other Cameroon contenders.

The Indomitable Lions won the 2000 African Nations Cup in dramatic fashion, beating co-hosts Nigeria in a penalty shootout, and the national under-23 squad struck gold at the Sydney Olympics.

Mboma was one of three over-age players permitted to play at the Olympics and success for him would crown a career that has improved steadily rather than spectacularly since arriving in Europe.

Cameroon have won the award six times since its introduction 30 years ago with goalkeeper Thomas 'Black Spider' Nkono and legendary striker Roger Milla being honoured twice.

Nigeria dominated the poll since CAF replaced a Paris-based magazine as organisers in 1994 with Kanu twice and strikers Rashidi Yekini and Victor Ikpeba collecting the most votes.

While the identity of the winner may be shrouded in secrecy, he will almost certainly be a midfielder or striker playing professionally with a European club.

The last goalkeeper to win was Moroccan Badou Zaki in 1986, the last player based in Africa was compatriot Mohamed Timouni a year earlier, and the last defender was Tshimene Bwanga of the Democratic Republic of Congo 27 years ago.

## Ghana will pip Nigeria to the WC 2002!

LAGOS, Dec 1: Ghana's Black Stars will beat major group rivals Nigeria to qualify for the 2002 World Cup, the top official of the Ghana Football Association (GFA) said here on Thursday, reports AFP.

"Ghana will qualify for the World Cup ahead of Nigeria because the Nigerians are now past it," GFA secretary general Wollanya Agere told reporters.

"Nigeria have seen their good days. Most of the players now have very little to offer the team."

"Only teams with young, selfless and determined players can lead their country to the World Cup and that's why we are very confident we will be the ones playing at the next World Cup," he added.

Ghana, four time African champions, are yet to play in the World Cup finals while Nigeria qualified for the second round in each of the last two tournaments in the United States and France.

The Black Stars lead the group for the 2002 World Cup to be jointly staged by South Korea and Japan.

Ghana beat Sierra Leone 5-0 in their opening game of the qualifying series while Nigeria could only manage a 2-0 victory at home against the same opponents.

The Nigerians also lost to unheralded Liberia in their second qualifying game.

Sudan are the other country in the five-team group.

## Blatter's green signal for DPRK

HAVANA, Dec 1: Sepp Blatter, President of football's governing body FIFA, said here on Thursday that he was willing to see North Korea host a couple of matches at the 2002 World Cup finals, reports AFP.

Blatter, who succeeded Joao Havelange in 1998, added a final decision would have to be reached by the time the draw for the finals was made in December 2001.

"When I was in Korea three weeks ago I said we had an open policy on the matter," he said.

"If the two countries can reach a political agreement then South Korea can give North Korea one or two matches," he added.

However, Blatter emphasised that FIFA could not make the first moves towards making it happen.

"We cannot make the first move it is up to the politicians, we can come in afterwards but not before," he said.

Should North Korea land a couple of matches it would add to their growing re-entry into the sporting world after they marched with South Korea at the Olympics opening ceremony in September and this week were granted a hosting world title fight by the WBC.



Lorenzo Amoruso (L) of Glasgow Rangers locked in an aerial tussle with Kaiserslautern's Miroslav Klose during their UEFA Cup third round first leg encounter at the Ibrox Stadium in Glasgow on November 30.

## UEFA Cup

### Albertz makes the difference

GLASGOW, Dec 1: A goal two minutes from time from former German international Jorg Albertz gave Scottish giants Rangers a 1-0 victory over German club Kaiserslautern here at Ibrox on Thursday in the UEFA Cup third round, first leg, reports AFP.

Kaiserslautern, who were going down to their fifth successive defeat, were reduced to 10-men only minutes before Albertz' goal when Jorgen Petersen was sent-off for a second bookable offence.

Rangers, the reigning Premier League champions, should have won the match earlier but wasted a succession of strikes before Albertz, nicknamed 'The Hunter' struck to consign the Red Devils' to playing catch-up football in the second leg.

Kaiserslautern coach Andreas Bremer, who scored the penalty that brought Germany the 1990 World Cup with a 1-0 win over Argentina, said his side had stuck at it well but in the end couldn't last the whole 90 minutes.

"It was strange really as we had the better of the second-half," Bremer said.

"We went forward more and created more chances," he added.

Rangers were fortunate to finish with a full complement of players as striker Michael Mols, who was inches away from the opening goal in only the third minute, slapped Kaiserslautern keeper George Koch in the face in the first half after his opponent had stood on his foot.

Fortunately for Mols French referee Gilles Veissiere had not spotted it and took no action.

### Rai's swansong January 14

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 1: Former Brazil captain Rai said on Thursday he would end his playing career on January 14 in the colours of Sao Paulo for a friendly match against Flamengo, reports AFP.

The 35-year-old midfielder was part of Brazil's 1994 World Cup-winning side and had a successful spell as captain of leading French club Paris Saint Germain - with whom he won the 1996 Cup Winners Cup - but ended his competitive playing career in July because of injury.

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Faith Terim's Fiorentina make the trip to Lecce while Bologna, riding high in fourth place, will be hopeful of consolidating their good start with a home clash with Vicenza.

Udinese, who are beginning to slip after their table-topping exploits of the early season, will hope to halt the slump at home to AC Milan whose coach Alberto Zaccheroni and German striker Oliver Bierhoff will be returning to the club where they first became established names in Italian football.

That would inevitably lead to pressure on their Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson to accelerate his departure to coach England in the summer.

Reggina, meanwhile, have had seven consecutive defeats since the opening day victory over Inter Milan that ended the

reign of Inter coach Marcello Lippi and ushered in Tardelli.

They are also in the doghouse following the crowd scenes that led to the premature abandonment of last week's home match with Brescia, who were leading 3-0 when the game was halted.

But Atalanta remain the only unbeaten side in the division although they face a tough battle to preserve that record when they visit Parma on Saturday evening.

Parma's 6-1 victory over Inter, which followed a 2-0 triumph over Lazio in the league, confirmed their recovery from a bad start and Bergamo-based Atalanta will need to be at their best to maintain their proud record.

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