

Africa promised 2010 World Cup

AFP, Zurich

The 2010 World Cup will go to Africa, it was decided here on Thursday by FIFA's all-powerful executive committee.

It is the second time that football's governing body has agreed to award a World Cup to a continent without considering other continents.

The first time was for the 2002 competition when it was agreed to let Asia have a free run at hosting the tournament, and both Japan and South Korea put in bids.

The battle was so bitter that the executive committee, in a bid to calm tensions, agreed that the tournament would be co-hosted for the first time.

"Everyone is agreed it should be in Africa," said David Will, a member of the executive committee. "I can't see it being given to another continent."

European soccer boss Lennart Johansson said the executive committee was in full agreement with the decision.

"It must go to Africa," he said after the meeting.

South Africa lost the 2006 World Cup vote to Germany by a single vote in a bitterly-fought campaign.

But Will stressed that the decision did not mean South Africa would be given the 2010 competition.

"The decision was to give it to the African continent - not a country," he stressed.

But FIFA sources said that South Africa would be the front runner to host 2010.

"It is the best placed. There are not too many countries in Africa capable of holding such a massive tournament," said one source.

There was an international outcry last year at the decision to award Germany the 2006 World Cup after it was discovered that Oceania's representative on the FIFA executive, Charlie Dempsey, abstained from the deciding round of voting to determine who would host the tournament, and Germany edged out South Africa by a single vote.

Best in fresh health scare

AFP, London

Fears were mounting for the health of Manchester United and Northern Ireland legend George Best on Thursday when he pulled out of an Old Trafford charity dinner, held in his honour, due to illness.

Best was due to be the star guest at a Liver Research Trust event on Thursday but United officials got word shortly before the event from Best's agent Alan Platt that the former player was ill with liver problems in his native Northern Ireland.

Best had been scheduled to make a short speech at the charity event.

He has suffered a catalogue of alcohol-related problems, including a high-profile relapse last year which doctors warned would cost him his life if it happened again.

Denis Law and Bobby Charlton, with whom Best formed the 'holy trinity' that took United to trophy glory in the 1960s, were also due to attend the 880-capacity dinner for which businesses had paid a total of 45,000 pounds (66,150 dollars) for dinner. The event was going ahead as scheduled.

Ben Gardener, assistant marketing director with Manchester United Catering, said: "Obviously it is a great disappointment that George is not here and that he is obviously ill again."

Professor Roger Williams, the consultant widely credited with saving Best's life when he was at the lowest point of his battle, said he believed the Old Trafford great's latest illness was "a temporary indisposition".

Williams had set off from London early Thursday with the intention of reuniting with Best, who has recently been suffering from pneumonia.

"That has been a worry and because he has been in Northern Ireland it has been very difficult to keep a track on him," said Williams.

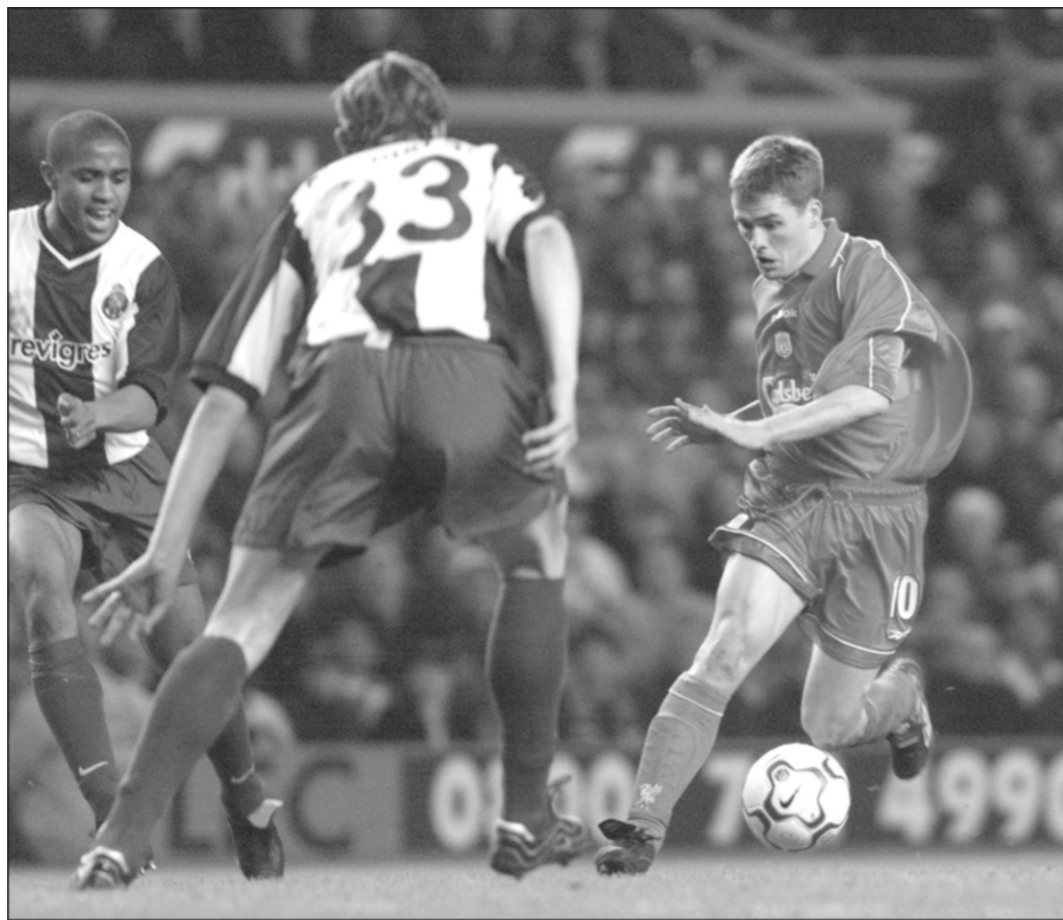
"George has a problem which he has talked about openly and liver problems are a very serious matter. I spoke to George's wife and she passed on a message from George wishing everybody every success and wishing he could have been here."

FIFA rejects Japan's World Cup name change bid

AFP, Zurich

Japan's bid to change the name of the 2002 World Cup being co-hosted by South Korea and Japan was rejected by FIFA here on Thursday.

Japanese organisers had wanted to put Japan before Korea on all brochures published inside Japan but South Korea's powerful FIFA vice-president Chung Mong-Joon had bitterly opposed the idea.



Michael Owen (R), the Liverpool superstar, trying to outfox FC Porto's Ricardo Silva on March 15.

UEFA Cup Liverpool, Barca reach semis

Football

AFP, Paris

English club Liverpool swept aside FC Porto 2-0 to reach the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup on Thursday alongside Spanish giants Barcelona who were beaten 3-2 on the night by Celta Vigo but squeezed through on away goals.

They were joined in the last four by German club Kaiserslautern - 2-0 aggregate winners over PSV Eindhoven of the Netherlands - and Alaves, who beat fellow Spanish minnows Rayo Vallecano 4-2 on aggregate.

Liverpool reached the last four of a European competition for the first time since 1996-1997 after a first-half strike from Danny Murphy and a header from Michael Owen gave them a well-controlled 2-0 aggregate victory over the Portuguese side.

Murphy appeared to control the ball with his arm before firing past Espinha in the 33rd minute, but Owen sealed the match five minutes later with a header from Steven Gerrard's cross that bounced off the turf and high into the net.

Owen said Liverpool had played well to keep alive their hopes of winning the UEFA trophy and the FA Cup to add to the English League Cup they won last month - but he said a top three finishing spot in the league was still the club's priority.

"The whole team played well. We got out of the blocks very quickly and scored two goals in the first half - and that allowed us in the second half to play at a slower pace and make sure we didn't concede any."

"We have a fighting chance in all the cups, so we're going to try to win them all."

"Our priority is still to qualify for the Champions League because we want a few more European nights like this next season," he said.

Barcelona can thank the two goals from Brazilian star Rivaldo for their place in Friday's semi-final draw.

Leading 2-1 from the first leg, Llorenç Serra Ferrer's team were given a fright as Celta's Brazilian striker Catanha equalised Rivaldo's 29th-minute opener.

Rivaldo put his side ahead just on half time before Gustavo Lopez levelled the scores with a 64th-minute penalty after Dutch international Patrick Kluivert had fouled Russian midfielder Alexander Mostovoi.

The Russian popped up in the final minute to give his side a 3-2 lead, but Barcelona were saved by the away goals rule.

Celta coach Victor Fernandez summed up the difference between the two teams, calling Rivaldo "the most important player in the world."

"If Rivaldo had been wearing a different-coloured shirt, the result

would have been different," he added.

In Eindhoven, a second-half penalty converted by the veteran Mario Basler saw Kaiserslautern progress in a poor match at the Philips Stadium, which was inter-

rupted by crowd trouble.

Dutch fans reacted angrily when the penalty was awarded after Vratislav Lokvenc was brought down in the area by PSV goalkeeper Ronald Waterreus.

After Basler had driven home the penalty, PSV's Mark Van Bommel was sent off for arguing, sparking fury among a section of the Dutch fans who began surging through a gate on the edge of the pitch.

As the fans overwhelmed the stewards attempting to hold back the crowd, the referee halted the match in the 75th minute and led the Kaiserslautern players off the pitch, while the Dutch team remained there.

Riot police restored order and the match resumed around five minutes later but PSV were a spent force.

Kaiserslautern coach Andreas Brehme said the violence had been "life-endangering" as the fans crushed against the fence.

"You can hardly blame the police, because one is powerless to stop violence like that," added the former German international star.

Kaiserslautern are now two matches away from playing the final

card for arguing with the referee after he disallowed a goal by the player.

Hagi then kicked the ball in the air, spat in the referee's face and stamped on his foot, provoking a red card.

Galatasaray coach Mircea Lucescu, a compatriot of Hagi, said the player was the victim of "shameful provocation" by the referee, who allegedly told Hagi ahead of the match: "Be careful, I'll send you off today."

Following the incident, Hagi told Turkish newspapers that he would go ahead with his decision to quit active football at the end of this season to assume a coaching position in Romania.

"There isn't even a chance in a



Barcelona's Luis Enrique (L) is under pressure from Celta Vigo's Everton Giovanella on March 15.

UEFA CUP RESULTS AT A GLANCE

AFP, Paris

Collated UEFA Cup quarter-final second leg results on Thursday:

At Liverpool Liverpool (Eng) 2 (Murphy 33, Owen 38) FC Porto (Por) 0

***Liverpool win 2-0 on aggregate**

At Madrid Rayo Vallecano (Spa) 2 (Quevedo 41, Luis Cembranos 80-pen) Alaves (Spa) 1 (Cruyff 19)

***Alaves win 4-2 on aggregate**

At Vigo Celta Vigo (Spa) 3 (Catanha 34, Gustavo Lopez 64-pen, Mostovoi 90) Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Rivaldo 29, 44)

***4-4 on aggregate. Barcelona win on away goals**

At Eindhoven PSV Eindhoven (Ned) 0 Kaiserslautern (Ger) 1 (Basler 70-pen)

***Kaiserslautern win 2-0 on aggregate**

SEMI-FINALS TO BE PLAYED APRIL 5 AND 19.

FINAL TO BE PLAYED IN DORTMUND, GERMANY ON MAY 16.

WEEKEND'S SCHEDULE IN EUROPE

AFP

SERIE A (kick-off 1400 GMT unless stated):

Sunday: Fiorentina v Bologna, Lecce v Inter Milan, AC Milan v Bari, Udinese v Parma, Verona v Vicenza, Napoli v Perugia (1600 GMT), Lazio v Juventus (1930 GMT), Reggina v AS Roma (1930 GMT)

Monday: Brescia v Atalanta

PRIMERA LIGA

Saturday: Las Palmas v Deportivo La Coruna

Sunday: Espanyol v Real Valladolid, Real Mallorca v Real Madrid, Numancia v Barcelona, Osasuna v Malaga, Real Zaragoza v Athletic Bilbao, Real Sociedad v Alaves, Rayo Vallecano v Oviedo, Villarreal v Racing Santander, Celta Vigo v Valencia

PRIMERSHIP (1500 GMT unless stated)

Saturday: Bradford v Manchester City, Charlton v Leeds, Chelsea v Sunderland, Manchester United v Leicester, Newcastle v Middlesbrough, Southampton v Everton, Tottenham v Coventry, West Ham v Ipswich

Sunday: Aston Villa v Arsenal (1600 GMT), Liverpool v Derby

BUNDESLIGA

Friday: Cologne v VfL Wolfsburg (1915 GMT)

Saturday (1430 GMT unless stated): Borussia Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen, Energie Cottbus v Hertha Berlin, Hansa Rostock v VfL Bochum, Eintracht Frankfurt v SV Hamburg, Schalke 04 v SC Freiburg, Munich 1860 v Bayern Munich (1915 GMT)

Sunday: Werder Bremen v Kaiserslautern (1630 GMT), Unterhaching v Stuttgart

Suker facing jail!

AFP, Zagreb

Croatian international Davor Suker could face prison for failing to perform his military service, Croatian press reports said on Thursday.

The military recruitment authorities in Croatia have begun an investigation into the 33-year-old former Real Madrid and Seville star, who is currently with West Ham in the English Premiership, the reports said.

He may be called before a court charged. He could face a fine or, at worst, a prison sentence of up to five years, the reports said.

Suker, one of Croatia's top sports stars, told newspapers he had not been informed of the investigation.

"I don't know anything about this," he was quoted as saying.

"If it is true, it's nothing to do with journalists nor with me, but rather a case for my lawyers and the justice system to sort out."

Valencia stars out injured

AFP, Valencia

Valencia will be without French veteran Didier Deschamps and Argentinian star Pablo Aimar for up to a month after they were injured during Tuesday's Champions League victory against Panathinaikos, the Spanish club said on Friday.

France's World Cup-winning captain Deschamps, 32, will be out of action for four weeks after tearing a muscle in his right thigh, while 21-year-old Aimar will miss at least three weeks with a torn muscle in his left thigh.

The two players could also miss Valencia's Champions League quarter-final matches in April.

Bayern, MU to revisit '99



REUTERS, Nyon, Switzerland

Manchester United have been drawn to face Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals of the European Champions League in a repeat of the dramatic 1999 final won in injury time by United.

Favourites and holders Real Madrid will play Turkey's Galatasaray as the Spaniards seek their ninth title.

Deportivo Coruna face Leeds United while last year's runners-up Valencia clash with Arsenal in two England v Spain encounters.

The quarter-final first legs will be played on April 3 and 4. The second legs take place a fortnight later.

The semifinal draw was also made with the winners of the United-Bayern game playing the winners of Real Madrid-Galatasaray and the same applying to the Deportivo-Leeds and Valencia-Arsenal games.

The final will be held in Milan's San Siro Stadium on May 23.

United have played Bayern three times in Europe, drawing twice in Champions League group action in the 1998-99 season and then the following year winning one of the most dramatic games in soccer history 2-1 with the last kick of the match to lift the trophy.

Bayern had been leading 1-0 with seconds to go when Teddy Sheringham equalised and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer applied the killer blow in injury time to leave the Germans devastated.

"Bayern will be looking for revenge but obviously we've got great memories of that night," United secretary Ken Merrett said following Friday's draw.

"But it adds to the glamour and the excitement of the game. We have a good relationship with Bayern but there is also a great rivalry."

Bayern's Brazilian striker Elber said the players will have to put the 1999 final out of their minds.

"We have to make up for it but we must not start thinking about that final we lost," he said. "It is better to

"It's good to meet them. They are a great club with great traditions -- as we believe we are."

Bayern chairman Franz Beckenbauer described the clash with United as a "highlight in European soccer".

"We see them as the toughest opponent in the draw," Germany's World Cup-winning captain and coach said.

Beckenbauer captained Bayern to their three European Cup wins in successive years -- 1974, 1975 and 1976. They have reached three finals since but have now gone 25 years without the trophy. They lost

play them now than later."

Real Madrid and Galatasaray had a look at each other in this season's Super-Cup -- between the winners of the Champions League and UEFA Cup. The Turks ran out 2-1 winners courtesy of two goals by Jardel, the second a Golden Goal decider.

Mete Rizklin, sporting director of Galatasaray, promised Real Madrid a fight. "We are honoured to be in the quarter-finals against such an opponent," he said. "We will fight to the end."

Emilio Butragueno, the former Real striker now deputy sporting director of the club said: "Galatasaray have improved a lot in the last two years, but we are confident our players will take us into the semifinals."

"The atmosphere will be very hostile there, but the game is played on the pitch and so we shouldn't worry too much. I just want our team to arrive in good form and without injuries."

"Real Madrid are always obliged to show their class, because history demands that, especially in this competition -- the most important in Europe."

Arsenal and Valencia's only previous meeting was another dramatic encounter as the Spanish club won the 1980 Cup Winners' Cup on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

"They are a good team as their league position shows but we've just got to win," said Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein.

"You have got to beat the best to get to the final so it doesn't matter who we go to." Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale said of his team's pairing with Spanish champions Deportivo: "After finishing second in our group we always knew it was going to be a difficult draw."

"But we are just grateful to be in the last eight."

Speaking about the presence of three English teams in the last eight for the first time he added: "It's putting England back on the map which I'm very pleased about."

Bookmakers William Hill slightly lengthened Real Madrid's odds from 9-4 to 5-2 favourites following the draw.

Manchester United are second favourites at 4-1 followed by Deportivo (11-2), Valencia (6-1), Bayern (13-2) and Arsenal (7/1), Leeds (12-1) and Galatasaray (25-1).

to England's Aston Villa in the 1982 final, to Porto in the 1987 final, and to United in 1999.

Coach Ottmar Hitzfeld added: "It's a great draw and great motivation to do a better job... it is going to be a real football festival for everybody."

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UEFA Cup semis draw

Top guns to face-off

Football

REUTERS, Nyon

European heavyweights Barcelona and Liverpool will meet in the semifinals of the UEFA Cup following the draw made on Friday.

Spain's Alaves, playing in Europe for the first time, were drawn against Germany's Kaiserslautern in the other semi. Despite both clubs' illustrious European histories, Liverpool and Barcelona have met only once before, when the

English side won the two-legged semifinal of the UEFA Cup in 1976 en route to winning the competition.

Liverpool are on course for a cup treble having already won the English League Cup and reached the semifinals of the FA Cup.

Barcelona, who will host the first leg on April 5, qualified for the UEFA Cup after being knocked out of the early

stages of the Champions League.

Liverpool have not appeared in a European final since the 1985 European Cup when they lost 1-0 to Juventus on a

night remembered for the disaster that left 39 dead after a wall collapsed following fighting

between rival fans.

Barcelona's last European success was the 1997 Cup Winners' Cup but they have not won its FAIR UEFA Cup since it was in its FAIR

UEFA Cup semis draw at a glance

REUTERS, Nyon

DRAW FOR THE SEMIFINALS OF THE UEFA CUP MADE ON FRIDAY:

Barcelona (Spain) v Liverpool (England)

Alaves (Spain) v Kaiserslautern (Germany)

***First legs to be played on April 5, second legs April 19.**

****Final in Dortmund, Germany on May 16.**

Cup guise in 1966.

Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry said the game would be worthy of the final.

"It would be a great final but you've got to play the best teams sooner or later and in many ways I think we would

rather have them over the two legs," he said.

"And we also have the opportunity of that visit to the Nou Camp."

Liverpool's Czech midfielder Vladimir Smicer said: "I am sure this is the tie every Liverpool fan wanted. After all,

Barcelona is a great city and I know that I am not the only person on Merseyside who wants to experience their magnificent stadium."

"It has always been my dream to play in the Nou Camp stadium and this gives me the opportunity to do that."

While Barcelona and Liverpool have won 14 European trophies between them, neither Alaves nor Kaiserslautern

have even reached a final. Alaves are in Europe for the first time while Kaiserslautern's best previous performance was reaching the UEFA Cup

semis in 1982 where they lost to eventual winners Gothenburg.

Alaves, who beat fellow Spaniards Rayo Vallecano in the quarter-finals, will host the first leg of their semi.

The final will be in Dortmund on May 16.

Bowyer fell into blood?

Football

AFP, Hull

Leeds footballer Lee Bowyer may have fallen into blood which had dripped from the injuries of a man whose brother he is alleged to have kicked and punched senseless, an English court was told on Thursday.

In the continuing trial of Bowyer and Leeds teammate Jonathan Woodgate, Hull Crown Court was told two light smears of Shahezad Najieb's blood were found on the sleeve of Bowyer's designer leather jacket after the alleged attack in Leeds city centre in January last year.

The prosecution has alleged the blood came from 21-year-old Shahezad during a fight in which his younger brother Sarfraz Najieb suffered serious injuries.

Bowyer, 24, claims he fell before reaching the Mill Hill area of the city and was not involved in any assault. Shahezad has also told the jury he injured himself in a fall before reaching Mill Hill to help his brother.

Forensic scientist Mark Webster told the trial on Thursday it was possible the blood may have got on to the footballer's jacket, from the fashionable and expensive Italian Prada range, after a fall.

He said: "It's possible blood could be transferred on to the ground from Shahezad's injuries and if Mr Bowyer fell and came into contact with the blood on the ground it could have been transferred to the jacket sleeve."

Webster said he could not decide if the

blood on Bowyer's jacket came from direct contact with Shahezad or from the ground.

"In my opinion it's entirely 50-50," he said.

Bowyer was accused of being "exhilarated" and that he "enjoyed" kicking and punching Sarfraz Najieb unconscious in the assault, claimed prosecutor Nicholas Campbell

Campbell said: "You were part of the attack on the Asian student who had left almost for dead."

"I am not saying that the others were not as exhilarated as the two of you. But you enjoyed it, Mr Bowyer."

Bowyer, in the witness box for a third day, replied: "No, I was not in Mill Hill. I have been misidentified because pictures of me have been in the paper."

The jury has seen closed circuit television footage of Bowyer hugging co-accused Neale Cavenny outside a pub after the attack on Najieb, which the prosecution has claimed was "a victory embrace."

Bowyer said: "I was not part of any attack, no assault whatsoever, no victory to celebrate."

Earlier Bowyer was accused of telling the police and the