

Confederations Cup

Leao looking for boost



Football

REUTERS, Tokyo

Brazil coach Emerson Leao says he is confident his side can give their morale a valuable boost by winning the Confederations Cup next month.

Leao made his claim after Brazil's first training session in Japan before the May 30-June 10 tournament

which, like the 2002 World Cup, is being co-hosted with South Korea. Leao, whose team have struggled unexpectedly in their qualifying campaign for next year's finals, said on Wednesday:

"Our recent games haven't been fantastic, but I'm confident the players will pick themselves up.

"Victory here would be a big confidence boost," said the coach, who targeted Cameroon as Brazil's main rivals in Group B.

Though his makeshift squad is missing a number of Brazil's top players, Leao said that whoever played would be out to settle a score

against Cameroon in their group opener.



EMERSON LEAO

"The first game is very important to the outcome of the group. We also see Cameroon as a rival because they beat us at the Olympics," said Leao, referring to Cameroon's 2-1 extra-time win over Brazil in the Olympic quarter-finals last September.

Leao, who managed J-League

clubs Shimizu S-Pulse and Verdy Kawasaki, now known as Tokyo Verdy, in the early 1990s, also predicted a tough scrap with Japan in their final group game.

"Japanese football has made real progress and Japan will have huge support from the home fans," he said. "I think it will be a great game."

Asked about Japan coach Philippe Troussier's recent pledge to play attacking football against Brazil, Leao praised the Frenchman for attempting to play the game in "the right spirit."

"I'm very happy to hear that because that's the way to play football and win matches. I don't think Brazil and Japan will be a 0-0 draw."

Brazil will play a friendly against Tokyo Verdy on Saturday before their opening Confederations Cup match in Kashima on May 31.

The four-times world champions will then face Canada at the same venue two days later, before meeting Japan, also in Kashima, on June 4.

German thug gets five-year jail



Football

AFP, Saint-Omer, France

A French court on Tuesday sent a German football hooligan to prison for five years for his role in the brutal beating of a French policeman during the 1998 soccer World Cup.

The accused, 30-year-old Markus Warnecke, smiled and hugged members of his family on hearing the verdict, which was half of the 10-year sentence the prosecutor had demanded, and less than other Germans got for the same attack in front of a German court.

Warnecke was one of several Germans who committed grievous assault on the officer, Daniel Nivel, after a match between Germany and Yugoslavia in the northern French town of Lens on June 21, 1998.

Nivel spent six weeks in a coma and was left with permanent brain damage.

"I welcome the verdict," said Nivel's wife, Lorette. "We have reached the end." But she added that "the length of the sentence for us would never be enough."

Four other Germans were sen-

tenced in 1999 in a court in Essen, Germany, for the attack, which caused widespread public outrage in



MARKUS WARNECKE

France as well as in Germany.

One of the Germans tried in Essen was given a 10-year sentence.

According to testimony, Warnecke was the ringleader of the hooligans who ripped off Nivel's helmet, kicked him and beat him about the head with a wooden board

and left him lying in a pool of blood.

Warnecke testified that at the time of the attack he had used a wooden board to force his way through a group of three policemen, including Nivel, and was not behind the blows that seriously injured the officer.

After the sentencing, both sides expressed some satisfaction with the outcome.

Antoine Vaast, a lawyer for the Nivels, said he was "quite satisfied how this affair has ended. After this decision, the accused will not appeal, and the Nival family can turn a page."

Jean-Michel Zajac, a former police colleague of Nivel who was jostled by the hooligans, said: "We cannot have the whole world. He has ruined part of a man's life and it is for him to come to terms with it... For me, justice is done."

Bertrand Wambeke, Warnecke's lawyer, also said he was "happy, even if I do not completely agree" with all the court's decisions. "There was some uncertainty, and in general when there is some uncertainty the sentence is less severe."

Fowler sings the Owen song



Football

REUTERS, Derby

Robbie Fowler has paid tribute to club-mate Michael Owen, admitting he's the international standard bearer to whom the rest of the country's marksmen have to aspire.

After emerging as the bright young thing in the mid-90s, Fowler has hardly set the international game alight but after a stunning end to the season the Toxteth-born striker is keen to establish himself and Owen as the spearheads of the national side.

Fowler, 27, grabbed a stunning goal in the UEFA Cup final victory over Alaves and scored goals 16 and 17 of an injury-hit campaign in the weekend victory over Charlton.

Despite his efforts Fowler believes Owen is the man of the moment.

"I think Michael's recent form has been exceptional," he said. "He's scored a lot of important goals and I think we are looking to work with him at the minute."

Coach Sven Goran Eriksson has already indicated that the team that starts Friday's Pride Park friendly against Mexico is likely to be the one that takes to the field for the vital

World Cup qualifier in Greece and that bodes well for Fowler who's certain to feature alongside his Anfield team-mate at Pride Park.

Fowler is itching to prove his



ROBBIE FOWLER

pedigree in the upcoming matches: "I've not done as well as what I would have liked at international level.

"I've been unfortunate in that the squads I have been in the forwards have always been very settled and it's been hard to break up partner-

ships. They have all done very, very well.

"Chances have been limited. I have started seven games and scored three goals, which isn't bad, but I would like to add to it."

Five Liverpool stars are expected to start Friday's friendly and the quintet have been joined in training by coach Sammy Lee who's replaced Steve McClaren in Eriksson's backroom team.

Although it's been suggested that Liverpool's players may be drained physically and emotionally after a dramatic conclusion to their triumphant season, Fowler reckons life couldn't get much better at present.

He added: "Personally, I wish the season could have gone on for ever. And the Manchester United players here, after winning another title, will be buzzing.

"I think it's a good time to be playing for England full stop.

"We've got a new manager, we're in the middle of the World Cup campaign and we've got a good chance of qualifying. It's pleasing to be part of that squad.

"If you keep playing well at club level your confidence is bound to be sky-high and that means when you go and play for England it is going to be right up there as well."

Ericksson going Liverpool?



Football

REUTERS, Derby

Sven Goran Eriksson looks likely to appease Liverpool's attacking triumvirate by starting Emile Heskey, Robbie Fowler and Michael Owen in Friday's friendly with Mexico.

Gerard Houllier rotated his forward line to great effect as Liverpool swept aside all before them in this season's cup competitions and secured a much-coveted place in next season's Champions League.

Both Fowler, who grabbed a brace against Charlton on Saturday, and Owen, who achieved that feat in the FA Cup final, have been linked with moves away from Anfield but both have played down any transfer talk.

With former Liverpool star Steve McManaman not linking up with the squad until next week's training camp in La Manga, Eriksson has hinted that he'll start with Heskey on England's left flank.

McManaman is staying on in Madrid with Real just one win away from wrestling the Primera Liga

crown from Deportivo La Coruna's grasp. That could hinder his chances of starting the vital World Cup qualifier in Greece with Eriksson revealing on Monday that he's set to start the same side in both matches.

The tactically brilliant Swede said in April that Owen had the potential to be a fine left winger but it's Heskey who's expected to fill that role having replaced McManaman at half-time in the Anfield win over Finland.

He also played the last few minutes of Liverpool's 4-0 thumping of Charlton at The Valley out on the left and Owen said of his team-mate:

"We finished the game with Emile out there and me and Robbie up front.

"Emile first played for Leicester as a left winger - obviously he's a great striker as well.

"It's not unusual for him to play there and to see any Liverpool players playing in that team on Friday would be great."

Owen added at the launch of Umbro's high-tech Xai boots: "A lot of people were saying I didn't have a left foot a few months ago so it's a nice compliment to hear that I could

play on that side for England."

Steve Gerrard and Jamie Carragher should also start at Pride Park, taking the Anfield contingent to five.

Three Arsenal players (David Seaman, Martin Keown and Ashley Cole), two from Manchester United (David Beckham and Paul Scholes) and Leeds' Rio Ferdinand are expected to fill the remaining six starting berths.

Meanwhile, Leeds defender Danny Mills was called up to the England squad on Tuesday as cover for injured Manchester United defender Wes Brown.

Mills, 24, has not figured on the international scene since a call to join the England squad for the match in Bulgaria in June 1999.

Brown, who has been given 24 hours to prove his fitness by coach Eriksson, has an Achilles problem and played no part in England's training session at Derby on Tuesday.

England play Mexico at Pride Park, Derby on Friday in a friendly, before tackling Greece in Athens on June 6 for a vital 2002 World Cup qualifier.



PHOTO: AFP

GUNNER'S GUN: David Seaman (R), Arsenal's veteran England custodian, receiving a silver gun from the club's chairman David Dein before the kick off of his testimonial match at Highbury on May 22.

Seaman lets in two at his party!



Football

AFP, London

Spanish giants Barcelona spoiled English international goalkeeper David Seaman's testimonial party when they beat an Arsenal side 2-0 at Highbury on Tuesday.

The 37-year-old Seaman, who told Sky Sports on Tuesday that he was about to sign a one-year contract to stay at Highbury, received a rousing reception from the 33,000 crowd in recognition of his 496 appearances over 11 years for Arsenal.

But Barcelona, who fielded former Arsenal favourites Marc Overmars and Emmanuel Petit, took the lead

through Alfonso, who netted first from Sergi's pass.

Alfonso netted again when he directed Simao's wayward shot past Seaman. However, Seaman denied Alfonso his hat-trick before leaving the field 10 minutes before the end to a thundering ovation.

Seaman was named in the England squad on Sunday for Friday's friendly against Mexico in Derby and the World Cup qualifier in Greece on June 6.

He could find fresh competition for his job if Arsenal conclude negotiations to sign Polish goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek from Feyenoord.

He joined Arsenal from QPR in 1990 and has made 863 appearances in a career that has also taken in Peterborough and Birmingham.



PHOTO: INTERNET

MR. T! England captain David Beckham sports a new haircut as he joins the England squad for training, at Pride Park, in Derby on May 22 ahead of Friday's friendly international match against Mexico.

No thanks!



Football

AFP, London

Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler on Tuesday said he was unlikely to follow in the footsteps of England colleague David Beckham by getting a Mohican style haircut.

Beckham, who has shaved off all his hair except for a two-inch wide strip down the middle of his head, unveiled his new look after Manchester United's final Premiership match at Tottenham.

Fowler, who along with Beckham is likely to feature in England's international friendly against Mexico at Derby on Friday, ruled out taking the clippers to his own head.

"It looks okay on David but I don't think it would suit me," he said.

Elber Bayern's until 2004



Football

AFP, Berlin

Brazil and Bayern Munich forward Giovane Elber will not be leaving the German champions as previously indicated and will honour his contract which runs until 2004, German daily Bild reported Wednesday.

The 28-year-old Elber, who has been an integral part of Bayern's charge to the final of the Champions League for the second time in three years, had recently said he might leave the Bavarian club.

However, according to Bayern vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Elber is going nowhere.

"We spoke to his adviser Giovanni Brancchini. He told us that Giovane (Elber) will definitely fulfil his contractual obligations to Bayern until 2004," Rummenigge told Bild.

Elber arrived in Bavaria from VfB Stuttgart, who he helped to German Cup victory in 1997.

He celebrated his third successive league triumph with Bayern last week, the club's 17th *Bundesliga* title.

In 1998 and 2000 Elber also helped Bayern to German Cup victory.

He had told German magazine Max in mid-May: "I don't know if I'll fulfil my contract."

CAF awards

Mboma Africa's best



Football

AFP, Johannesburg

The winners at the first African Football Confederation awards here Tuesday:

Footballer of the Year: Patrick Mboma (Cmr)

Woman Footballer of the Year: Mercy Akide (Ngr)

Coach of the Year: Jones Attuquayefio (Hearts of Oak, Gha)

Team of the Year: Cameroon Olympic squad

Fair play: Nigeria

Youth development: ASEC (Ivc)

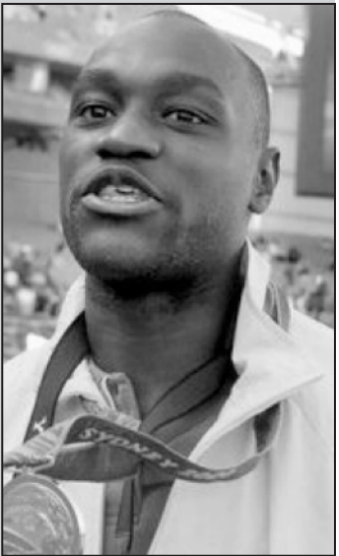
Young talent: Samuel Eto'o (Cmr)

Goal of the Year: Thabo Mngomeni (Rsa)

Save of the Year: Khalid Fouhami (Mor)

National team of the Century: Cameroon

Club of the Century: Al-Ahly (Egy)



PATRICK MBOMA

Parma, Fiorentina go for Cup glory



Football

REUTERS, Milan

Often overshadowed by European cup finals, the failure of Italian clubs in Europe will give this season's Italian Cup final added interest when Parma host Fiorentina in Thursday's first leg.

With the game coming a day after the Champions League final in Milan, the absence of Italian clubs in the latter stages of Europe's flagship tournament means a full house is expected at the compact Tardini stadium.

Interest is particularly high among Fiorentina supporters who have received extra tickets so that 4,000 of them may attend the game.

A disappointing *Serie A* campaign means the Cup offers Fiorentina a route into the UEFA Cup and a chance to claim some silverware.

The Florence club have won the cup on five occasions while Parma have two victories to their name.

The match also offers a chance for the two coaches -- Fiorentina's Roberto Mancini and Parma's Renzo Ulivieri -- to firmly establish themselves with their clubs after taking over mid-season.

Mancini finds himself on the bench in the Cup final despite not having led Fiorentina in any of the previous rounds.

Turkish coach Fatih Terim ensured Fiorentina's passage to the final and may attend the match as a spectator after an open invitation from the team captain Rui Costa.

"It would be nice if Terim could come and see the match. It is his Fiorentina that made it to this final and if we raise the cup the success should be shared between all those who took part -- those from yesterday and those from today," said the Portuguese playmaker.

After years working with relatively smaller clubs, Parma's Ulivieri

has relished the chance to work with a well-financed club and a team packed with internationals.

He took over from former Italy and AC Milan chief Arrigo Sacchi in March and has guided Parma into fourth place in *Serie A*, putting them on course for a Champions League slot.

One of his most important moves has been to give greater opportunity to Brazilian winger Junior to show his ability and the pacey wideman has responded with some excellent displays.

Junior believes Thursday's match will be a tight affair and singled out Fiorentina's in-form Italian international striker Enrico Chiesa as the main danger-man.

"Fiorentina will be difficult opponents and they are on good form at the moment. Chiesa is going through a magic moment, we will need to mark him very closely," said Junior.

Junior said Parma's late surge into the top four can be credited to the new spirit Ulivieri has installed in the team.

"With him, we have greater determination and a greater desire to win. We can win this Cup and then next season really be among the frontrunners in the league," added the Brazilian.

Parma will be at full strength for the game but Ulivieri will play reserve team goalkeeper Matteo Guardalben, who has kept goal throughout the Cup.

"We agreed Matteo would play in this competition and we should not change that now," said Parma's first-choice keeper Gianluigi Buffon.

Fiorentina will be without defenders Salio Lassisti and Andrea Tarozzi, while coach Mancini is expected to use Chiesa a lone striker, meaning no place for Brazilian Leandro or Yugoslav Predrag Mijatovic.

The second leg of the final will be played on June 13 in Florence.

Veira sponsors' choice



Football

REUTERS, London

Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira has been named player of the year by the sponsors of the premier league.

The award crowns a fine season for the 24-year-old Frenchman that started badly with two red cards in three days.

Vieira's future in the English game seemed in jeopardy after he was sent off for the second time against Liverpool on August 21.

But after serving a five-match ban he did not pick up a booking in his next 28 games and scored twice in two matches against Arsenal's bitter north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

He was named man-of-the-

match after the second game, a 2-1 win in the F.A. Cup semi-finals.

While Arsenal's challenge to premier league champions Manchester United faded, Vieira went from strength to strength.

He played magnificently in both legs as Arsenal were eliminated by Valencia of Spain in the European Champions League quarter-finals.

Vieira was an equally towering figure in the losing 2-1 F.A. Cup final against Liverpool, comprehensively outplaying his opposite number Steve Gerrard.

Manchester United's veteran striker Teddy Sheringham won England's player of the year awards from both the football writers and his fellow professionals last month.