

Government boost for Uruguay



AFP, Melbourne

The Uruguayan government has come to the aid of its national football team by sending a plane to bring the players home quickly for their make-or-break World Cup match against Australia.

A Kevin Muscat penalty 12 minutes from time gave Australia a vital 1-0 win over Uruguay in the first leg here on Tuesday night, and both teams were due to fly out early Wednesday.

There had been reports that the Australian team would arrive in Montevideo 18 hours ahead of the Uruguayans because they had booked a direct flight.

The Uruguayan team was initially going to have to take an indirect flight home.

But Uruguayan officials said after Tuesday's match they would now get home earlier than the

Socceroos.

"We will now arrive three or four hours before the Australians because our government is sending a plane to pick us up when we arrive in Buenos Aires (Argentina)," coach Victor Pua said.

The Uruguay team has been particularly hard done by in governing body FIFA's scheduling of the two legs, which are separated by the Pacific Ocean.

The Uruguayans qualified for the showdown with Australia by finishing fifth in the South American series, but as soon as they played their last match against Argentina on November 15 they had to fly out to Australia.

The party arrived in Melbourne on Friday, three days before the game, and both teams will only arrive in Montevideo on Thursday night, two days before the final match.

The winner of the playoff will take the 32nd and last place at next year's World Cup finals in Japan and Korea.



Kevin Muscat sends Uruguay custodian Fabian Carini the wrong way to convert the penalty at Melbourne yesterday.

Socceroos owe Muscat one



AFP, Melbourne

A Kevin Muscat penalty 12 minutes from time gave Australia a crucial 1-0 win over Uruguay in the first leg of their World Cup football qualifier at the Melbourne Cricket Ground here Tuesday night.

Australia will now travel to Montevideo for the return leg on Sunday with the cushion of a goal lead against the meanest defence in South America.

The eventual winners will claim the 32nd and final place at next year's World Cup finals in Japan and Korea.

The pugacious Muscat went from villain to hero in a week after his ugly tackle injured Christophe Dugary in the 1-1 draw with France here.

The Australians found it hard going before their 84,646 home fans to break down the well-manned Uruguayan defence, which only conceded 13 goals in 18 games during the South American group qualifying series.

The penalty came when substitute striker Paul Agostino was

brought down by Dario Rodriguez as he ran on to a pass from Harry Kewell with only goalkeeper Fabian Carini to beat.

Italian referee Graziano Cesari immediately pointed to the spot and Muscat, the Wolverhampton Wanderers defender, drilled it into the net.

The Uruguayans came within 12 minutes of blotting out the Australian attack, led by Leeds United ace Kewell and, with Alvaro Recoba orchestrating the midfield, they looked unlikely not to come away with a scoreless draw.

It was Australia's first victory in a home World Cup qualifier since 1969 following a series of draws against the likes of Argentina, Scotland, Israel and Iran.

The Soccerroos are bidding to break their 28-year World Cup drought and qualify for next year's finals while Uruguay, two time winners of the Cup in 1930 and 1950, have failed to qualify for the last two World Cups.

"It's only half time, so I'm not getting too excited about it," Australian coach Frank Farina said.

"There's ninety minutes to go and we are going into an atmosphere that's hostile if not worse, but you could say I'm extremely pleased.

"We'll go into the next game in a similar fashion confident that we have the firepower up front to snatch an away goal to take us to the finals."

Farina's counterpart, Victor Pua, was disappointed but still hopeful after the loss.

"Australia got one chance and they made it but there is 90 minutes left in Uruguay and we hope we can turn it around," Pua said.

"Australia have a very good team and put us under pressure in the last 15 minutes."

He said Uruguay would adopt different tactics at home and adapt quickly from defence to attack.

Recoba was Uruguay's best player almost rocked Australia with an audacious 40-metre lob in the third minute of the match, which Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer had to leap for just under his crossbar.

But minutes later Australia almost went ahead when defender Craig Moore's bullet header from a corner was just touched over the top by Carini.

Dead-ball specialist Recoba got his first free kick 35 metres from the Australian goal in the 25th minute when Brett Emerton brought down striker Javier Chevanton, but the Inter Milan ace's low volley went

well wide.

While Recoba was Uruguay's beacon, Kewell was involved in most of the Soccerroos' attack in the early stages as he roamed from his favoured left side of the field to the right.

Kewell consistently caused the Uruguayan defence problems with his deft close skills in the first half.

Uruguay's promise to pay close attention to Kewell was evident when River Plate's Rodriguez received the first yellow card of the match when he brought down the Aussie to the right of the penalty area.

German-based striker Agostino came on at halftime for Lazaridis to give Australia more firepower up front and he made his presence felt in the heavy physical exchanges.

But it was Uruguay who went on the attack early in the second half with Gonzalo de los Santos almost giving the South Americans the lead in the 50th minute when he flicked a header off a Recoba free kick just wide.

Schwarzer was then forced to save two Recoba shots at goal in the 53rd and 63rd minutes.

Australia then went on the attack and Paolo Montero gave away a free kick when he brought Agostino to the ground in a heavy tackle. There was a mad scramble from the free kick but Uruguay managed to force it clear from their goal.

In the 69th minute Agostino hit the upright with Carini beaten off a Kewell cross as Australia continued to attack.

But Australia kept pressing and got their reward in the 78th minute when Agostino was pushed to the ground by Rodriguez in the penalty area.

Muscat, the Soccerroos' regular penalty-taker, nervelessly converted to set the stadium into a frenzy.



AUSSIE ALL THE WAY: Fans show the colours of Australia before the match against Uruguay at Melbourne yesterday.

Spanish trial for Gunners



AFP, Paris

Dutch striker Dennis Bergkamp's well-documented fear of flying may or may not have sparked a chain reaction but Champions League travel sickness has become a worrying affliction for Arsenal.

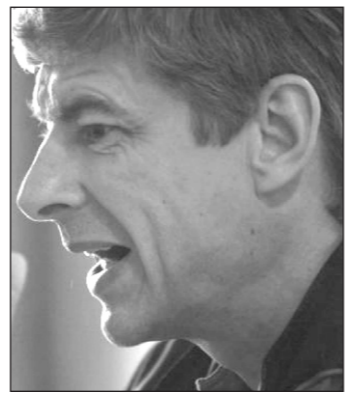
The Gunners fly the flag for the English Premiership on Wednesday but having landed in one of the toughest groups of the second phase Arsene Wenger's men face a mammoth task if they are to reach the last eight.

First-phase defeats at Mallorca, Panathinaikos and Schalke do not augur well for Group D visits to Deportivo La Coruna, Wednesday's rivals who have already done the double over Manchester United, as well as Juventus and German league leaders Bayer Leverkusen.

Arsenal will be happy to have put Saturday's North London draw against Tottenham behind them, none more so than England defender Sol Campbell, who was roundly abused by Spurs fans for his summer move across the city to Highbury from White Hart Lane.

Campbell said the 1-1 draw was something to build on.

"The performance on Saturday



ARSENE WENGER

shows that we are ready for the challenge," the England man said looking forward to the trip to Spain.

Wenger says the Gunners are readying themselves for a huge challenge against a Deportivo side they beat 6-3 on aggregate in the UEFA Cup two seasons ago.

"La Coruna are a very good side, very technical with a Brazilian touch. We respect all three teams in our group, however," added Wenger, who says there is a "slight chance" that Thierry Henry will return following an ankle injury.

But defender Oleg Luzhny is out having been handed a four-match suspension for a red card received against Schalke 04.

WEDNESDAY FIXTURES	
Group C	
Panathinaikos (Gre) v FC Porto	Sparta Prague (Cze) v Real Madrid (Spa)
Group D	
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) v Arsenal (Eng)	Juventus (Ita) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)

Arsenal might be forgiven for casting an envious eye towards Group C, which appears far more manageable - at least for favourites Real Madrid, who visit Sparta Prague for their opening tussle before further ties against Panathinaikos and old rivals FC Porto.

Juventus, following Sunday's 3-1 win over Parma which moved them third in Serie A, will be wary of Leverkusen, whose come from behind win at Cologne moved them ahead of Bayern Munich at the top of the German Bundesliga.

Both Juve and Leverkusen had their awkward moments in the first phase as the Italians lost their final match at Celtic while the Germans

Verona, a city divided



AFP, Milan

Just as in the Shakespeare play of the same name the "Romeo and Juliet" derby between Hellas Verona and Chievo has ended in tears with Chievo president Luca Campedelli admitting relations between the two city rivals have broken down, Gazzetta dello Sport reported Tuesday.

Verona overturned a 2-0 deficit Sunday night at the Stadio Marc'Antonio Bentegodi shared by both teams to defeat Chievo 3-2, only the second league reverse of the season for the tiny Serie A newcomers who remain top of the division.

But Campedelli, who has become something of a celebrity in Italy with his team's rise from obscurity and his self-deprecating humour, said Tuesday that relations between the clubs had deteriorated because of comments made by Verona coach Alberto Malesani - formerly Chievo coach - before and after the derby and also remarks by

the district's women did not go to the stadium but stayed at home making sausage.

"We remember what Malesani did for Chievo but also what Chievo did for Malesani."

Campedelli, a 33-year-old cake-maker, also criticised Pastorello who had highlighted the anti-Malesani chants by some Chievo fans.

"We all had our fair share of insults," said Campedelli. "What about the racist abuse at (Chievo players) Christian Manfredini, Eriberto and Jason Maye? And the obscenities at Chievo and (coach Luigi) del Neri? We did not complain because we want to rise above it and because we do not want to play the victims."

"Verona's president should put his own house in order before trying to correct others."

Pastorello last season caused a storm when he said he would not dare buy a black player because of his team's notoriously racist fans although this summer he bit the bullet and purchased Colombian Johnnier Montano from Parma.

Campedelli had kinder words for



Verona's coach Alberto Malesani (top) rides on the shoulders of a supporter as he celebrates at the end of the Serie A match against Chievo on November 18.

Verona president Giambattista Pastorello.

Malesani's exuberant celebration - he milked the applause of Verona fans who made up the vast majority of the 41,000 crowd and stripped down to his vest and track-suit bottoms - was not appreciated by Campedelli.

Asked about Malesani's offer of a meal Campedelli said: "It will be very difficult for me to eat with him."

Campedelli admitted he had been needed by remarks before the match, saying: "We did not need the sausage comment when Malesani said that when he coached Chievo

his defender Salvatore Lanna whose farcical own goal - he hacked an attempted clearance into his own net - allowed Verona to equalise 2-2.

"Lanna is great," said Campedelli. "We are not going to persecute him for one incident."

On a lighter note Campedelli finished: "At least we will have less journalists harrassing us at Veronello (the training camp)."

Before the match the city had tried to put on a united front but Malesani's pre-match diatribe and post-match striptease lit the fuse on what is developing into a genuine feud.

No progress in strike talks



AFP, London

A fresh round of talks aimed at preventing a threatened players strike broke up in stalemate on Monday.

Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) chief executive Gordon Taylor met with Premier League counterpart Richard Scudamore at the PFA's headquarters in Manchester, along with Manchester United director and solicitor Maurice Watkins.

The PFA are still demanding a five percent cut of the 1.5 billion pounds (2.16 million dollars) television deal

the Premier League recently negotiated with broadcasters here, with the latest offer of 50 million pounds (72 million dollars) over three years having been rejected last week.

But a resolution appears no closer and with the PFA having a mandate for a strike after 99 percent of their members voted in favour of industrial action, then some form of stoppage could take place on the weekend of December 1-2 if a settlement is not reached this week.

Taylor, following Monday's negotiations, said: "Another meeting was held today, but no real progress was made."

"We expect to have a further meeting later this week."

Lobanovsky set to resign



AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's national head coach Valery Lobanovsky, who is also the manager of the country's flagship side Dynamo Kiev, is set to resign from his post in the near future, local media reported Monday.

Sources in the Ukrainian football federation said Lobanovsky announced his decision to concentrate on his Dynamo job immediately

after his team's World Cup play-off defeat by Germany last week.

After the match, which Germany won 4-1 to book their passage to the World Cup finals in Korea and Japan, Lobanovsky thanked his players and wished them luck in the next qualifying campaign under a successor.

Reports also said that Leonid Buryak, who assisted Lobanovsky in the 2002 qualifying campaign, will likely be named Ukraine's new head coach at the Ukrainian Football Federation congress on December 15.