Australia-Uruguay preview

Final piece of the jigsaw



Passions are running high and are expected to reach boiling point Sunday as Australia and Uruguay fight for the final 2002 World Cup berth in a decisive playoff at the Centenario Stadium here.

The last of the 32 spots for next year's finals in Japan and South Korea will be decided by the second leg playoff between Oceania's champion and the fifth-placed team from South American qualifying, Uruguay.

Australia took a 1-0 lead in the first leg in Melbourne, but the Uruguayans' fighting spirit brought them two World Cup titles in 1930, when they hosted the competition,

And the Australians were given a taste of the battle that awaits them when they were jostled and jeered by rowdy fans as they arrived at Carrasco airport on Wednesday.

Uruguayan football federation president Eugenio Figueredeo issued a hasty apology, claiming the perpetrators were professional thugs, and he assured the visitors that security would be beefed up with 800 police officers at the stadium.

Australia coach Frank Farina described the airport incident as "disgusting."

We were expecting another kind of welcome and I think that the security was not enough. What happened was not civilised," said Farina.

"We only came to play a soccer match," he said.

Uruguay sees this as not just a soccer match, but a chance to put itself back among the world's foot-

The first-leg defeat got an angry reception back home with 20 people injured and 74 people arrested, which is one of the reasons the Uruguayan squad were preparing their return leg onslaught away from the spotlight in the tranquillity of the seaside resort of Punta del Este, 140km from the capital.

The match kicks off at 4.00 p.m. (1900 GMT) and the home side

Ronaldo will

start against

Cup third round, first leg visit to

English Premiership strugglers

Ipswich on Thursday which the

Italians lost 1-0, but both are

expected to line up together for Inter

together," said Ronaldo on Friday. "I

will stay at Milan so I can work to get

from a long layoff with a knee injury

on November 4 against Lecce, but

had to leave the pitch after just 14

vear had initially returned on April

2000 but collapsed in agony just

seven minutes into his comeback

appearance as a substitute and

missed the whole of last season as a

The former world footballer of the

minutes because of a thigh strain.

ready for Sunday's match."

"Cuper and I decided this

Ronaldo made his comeback

Fiorentina

AFP, Appiano Gentile

on Sunday.



Socceroo Tony Vidmar (R) returns to the team's hotel after a practice session in Montevideo on November 23. Australia meet hosts Uruguay in a decisive World Cup playoff today.

must win by a goal difference of two to qualify. If the match finishes 1-0 to Uruguay after 90 minutes, extra

ne will be played. Uruguayan Coach Victor Pua as optimistic of a positive result.

"It's clear that we can win against them. Just as they beat us 1-0 in 90 minutes we can turn things around,"

The South American defence will be pitted against Leeds United pair Harry Kewell and Mark Viduka and Feyenoord midfielder Brett

But Viduka admitted that the Australians have a battle on their hands, particularly with experienced defender Craig Moore uncertain with a foot injury.

"In the second match it will be very difficult, because Uruguay are a good team," said Viduka. "But we came here to clinch qualification for the World Cup, so we will do our

best to achieve that."

And the striker added: "The main thing is to score one goal. In Australia we played pretty well, but we can do better and we hope that will happen on Sunday."

Australia may not have played in the World Cup finals since 1974, but there is a belief here that the Socceroos have assembled their finest team under home-grown national coach Farina. Farina believes his side will

come under intense early pressure. "If we can weather the storm for the first 20 or 25 minutes that will be an advantage for us because the

crowd will want something early,"

Uruguay's defence, marshalled by Paolo Montero of Italian giants Juventus, will be bidding to block the path of Kewell and Viduka, and will be counting on key striker Dario Recoba to grab goals.

If Uruguay qualify then the World Cup finals draw in the South Korean city of Busan on December 1 will include all the former World Cup champions -- the Uruguayans, Germany, Italy, Brazil, Argentina, England and defending champions

TEAMS

URUGUAY (likely): Fabian Carini, Alejandro Lembo, Paolo Montero, Gonzalo Sorondo, Gianni Guigou, Pablo Garcia, Gonzalo de los Santos y Dario Rodriguez, Alvaro Recoba, Dario Silva (Diego Alonso), Federico Magallanes (Richard

AUSTRALIA (likely): Mark Schwarzer, Kevin Muscat, Craig Moore, Shaun Murphy, Tony Vidmar, Brett Emerton, Paulo Okon, Josip Skoko, Harry Kewell, Paul Agostino (Stan Lazaridis), Mark

Players' strike off

Football

AFP, London

Inter Milan's injury-plagued The proposed strike by English Brazilian striker Ronaldo should football players scheduled to begin return to competition in Sunday's in December was called off on Serie A tie against Fiorentina at the Friday after a deal was struck San Siro, coach Hector Cuper said. hetween the Professiona Inter Milan left strikers Ronaldo Footballers Association (PFA) and and Christian Vieri out of their UEFA the Premier League.

The PFA had won the backing of 99 percent of its members for industrial action in a bid to get a greater share of the various English leagues' television revenue.

But that threat was withdrawn with Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore announcing a three-year deal which will see the PFA receive 52.5 million pounds (74 million dollars) over the next three years.

That equates to 17.5 million pounds (24.6 million dollars) per year which was significantly less than the 27 million pounds per year (38 million dollars) that the PFA had been asking for.

A clearly relieved Scudamore told a press conference in Manchester:

"We don't want to be going through this again, within three

years, six years, nine years or

however long we are blessed to be involved with this game.

The new deal was a minor increase on the earlier offer of 50 million pounds (70.5 million dollars) over three years which was not enough for the PFA to call off its strike threat

Adam Crozier the chief executive of the Football Association who also took part in the talks, said: "We have come to an agreement where common sense has prevailed."

The press conference, originally scheduled for lunchtime Friday eventually began at 1700 GMT as lawyers thrashed out the final details

But Crozier insisted the deal was worth waiting for, saying the agreement was "based on a new level of trust and on mutual respect for the role of players in the game.'

PFA chief executive Gordon Taylor, who insisted his union needed the cash injection to fund welfare and retraining programmes for injured and former players, said: "There is hopefully a new spirit of mutual respect of trust," between players and clubs.

There is a sum of money there which we appreciate very much," added Taylor, whose apparently deteriorating personal relationship with Scudamore added to the bitterness of the talks.

After winning the early stages of the propaganda war, the tide had started to turn against the PFA in recent days as the prospect of a strike loomed larger.

On Thursday, the Premier League and Football League, which controls the three divisions beneath the top tier, announced they were going to the High Court in a bid to ve the strike declared illegal. Meanwhile numerous British

newspapers Thursday said some players were having doubts about a strike with others reportedly wanting a second ballot.

Attention also began to focus on Taylor's total annual income from the PFA of 458,370 pounds (646,301 dollars), a figure more than four times that of the next most highly paid British trade union official, Ken Jackson, head of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union whose membership is over 100 times as large as that of

Questions were also being asked why, if they were so concerned about the plight of more unfortunate colleagues, Premiership footballers, some of whom earn up to 50,000 pounds (70.500 dollars) a week, paid the same annual PFA membership fee -- 75 pounds (105.75 dollars) -- as players in the lower divisions.

Wenger staying at Arsenal

AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has confirmed he will be continuing on as manager of the English Premiership side next season.

Wenger's future with the north I ondon club has been the subject of recent speculation as the Frenchman has yet to sign a new

But Wenger told the press here Saturday that there was no doubt that he would be at the helm next season, although his current deal ends in June.

"If I was not committed to Arsenal would have left already," said Wenger before Sunday's crucial Premiership game against Manchester United.

"I have had many opportunities to go for much more money. I will be here next season.

"Maybe it's because I'm from a different generation but when I give my word it's my word even if someone comes in tomorrow and gives me five times more money. I would not sign players for three or four years and then run away."

It is the strongest verbal commitment made so far on the issue by the Frenchman who joined Arsenal five

And he even revealed that he hopes to match Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson who has been at Old Trafford for 16 years.

"I just hope I last as long as Alex Ferguson has at Manchester

United. "This team have a formidable spirit and that will be seen at the end of the season. We want to show how good we are and playing Manchester United is a good occa-

sion. We are strong enough to win." Wenger added that Arsenal will make an announcement on his contract in the near future.

The news is expected to coincide with the announcement they have been granted full planning permission for their new Ashburton grove grounds which is expected early

Fukuoka relegated

Avispa Fukuoka was on Saturday relegated to the J-League's Second Division with a disappointing loss, allowing former champions Yokohama Marinos and Verdy Tokyo to remain in the top league.

Fukuoka lost to Gamba Osaka 3-2 to finish second bottom overall and fall from the first division. Fukuoka, Yokohama and Verdy had been vying to remain in the 16-team top

Yokohama drew 1-1 with Vissel

Kobe thanks to a 14th-minute goal

by Brazilian defender Dutra, while

Verdy edged past home rivals FC Tokyo 1-0 after goal by Hideki Ngai in the 13th minute. Fukuoka mayor Kotao Yamazaki

said: "It's disappointing that we couldn't stay in the first division, but I believe that the players will come back next year using their disappointment as a stepping stone."

"I think the players did their 100 percent under heavy pressure," he Kashima Antlers, the defending

J-League champions, secured the league's top place a week ago and will face Jubilo Iwata for a seasonending championship playoff on December 2 and 8. Kashima on Saturday ended the second stage with 4-1 loss to

Sanfrecce Hiroshima but had 36 points after 13 wins against two defeats to remain on top. The firs-stage winners wata brushed aside JEF United Ichihara

4-2 for the same win-loss roord as Kashima, only to miss one point for second place on 35 points.

"It was good to end the stage on a winning note, looking forward to the next match," Iwata head coach Masakazu Suzuki said.

UEFA names seeds for Euro 2004 draw

Football

AFP, Paris

World champions France are top seeds for the draw for the 2004 European Championships in Portugal, the game's European governing body UEFA announced Friday.

UEFA will hold the draw for the qualifying matches on January 25 2002 in Porto with Portugal already qualified for the championships as hosts. The remaining teams for the 16-team tournament will be decided by 10 groups of five teams with the winners of each group qualifying for the

The second-placed team from each group will play a two-legged playoff to decide the remaining five places.

Dates underlined for international qualifiers are: September 7/8, 2002; October 12/13, 2002; October 15/16, 2002; March 29/30, 2003; April 1/2, 2003; June 7/8, 2003; June 10/11, 2003; September 6/7, 2003; Se 9/10, 2003; October 11/12, 2003

Play-off fixtures are scheduled for November 15/16 and 18/19, 2003. Seeds for the draw will be decided according to national associations' coefficient list on the basis of results achieved in the qualifying competitions for the 2002 World Cup and Euro 2000.

1. France 2,100, 2. Sweden 2,667, 3. Spain 2,563, 4. Czech Republ 2,500, 5. Germany 2,250, 6. Republic of Ireland 2,222, 7. Romania 2,222, 8. Italy 2,188, 9. Belgium 2,125, 10. Turkey 2,111, 11. Russia 2,100, 12. Croatia 2,063, 13. Denmark 2,000, 14. Netherlands 2,000, 15. Yugoslavia 2,000, 16. Poland 1,889, 17. England 1,875, 18. Slovenia 1,850, 19. Ukraine 1,850, 20. Scotland 1,833



Argentine legend Diego Maradona smiles after receiving an award from the Association of Argentine Coaches and Trainers. He was also given a coaching diploma during a ceremony in Buenos Aires on November 23. Beside him is AFA president Julio Grondona.

Collina dives for videos

Football

AFP, London

Pierluigi Collina said he wants video evidence introduced into football to help those punish players spreading the "cancer" of diving In an interview to be broadcast on World Football on BBC World

Leading international referee

Service radio on Saturday, the Italian says: "Simulation is one of the worst things in football. It's a cancer in football. The balding Collina, arguably world football's most recognisable referee and widely regarded as one

of its very best, added a player who dived was not so much deceiving the officials as his fellow profession-"I prefer to think that simulation is against a colleague of the player and try to think about a match that

would decide a relegation, because playing in the Premiership or playing in the First Division is very different. "A player is not only a sportsman -- he is a worker doing his job, so his future could change because of a

At present if a referee fails to take on-field action against a player who dives then generally no further measures can be taken by football

However in some leagues, such as the English Premiership, players can use video evidence to overturn bookings and suspensions caused by refereeing decisions.

Collina now wants video evidence used across the board, even during major international tournaments where banning a diving player could have a major impact. "Before Euro 2000 we discussed

the possibility of using video evi-



PIERLUIGI COLLINA

dence in cases of diving, so the disciplinary committee could take the decision to suspend the player who did it," Collina says.

"Personally, I agree with that kind

ZZ gets into the groove

Football

AFP, Madrid

Zinedine Zidane, the world's most expensive footballer, said Friday that he has finally discovered his game again after struggling early this season with Spanish giants Real Madrid.

Zidane joined Real from Italy's Juventus in a 65-million-dollar transfer earlier this year, but the French international midfielder had a difficult time finding his niche in the

"I'm happy with my form and the way I'm playing now. I think that in the last two matches I've evolved to a good level, a level that pleases me," said the 29-year-old Zidane, voted Europe's top player for the

third time in his career Thursday. But the World and European champion admitted that the pressure had been great on his arrival in

"People were expecting a lot from me straight away. It's never nice to be criticised but you have to learn to accept it, if it's not over the top," said Zidane, who has scored four goals in the Primera Liga this

"I was happy to score all these goals but the most important for me was to find my game again. "It didn't happen all off a sudden.

think it came little by little. Everyone talks about the last two matches because they were the best but there has been a continual progression," said Zidane.

And he was philosophical about the difficulties adjusting.

"In the life of a footballer there are always highs and lows. But the bad moments have to pass by quickly and the good results stay as long as possible. "If I manage to have a season

like the two last matches, everything will be fine. But that's not saying that the battle has been won yet," he

Best falls ill

AFP, Nicosia

Former soccer star George Best was taken to a private clinic in Limassol, Cyprus, Friday suffering from an infection and high temperature, an official source told AFP.

The 55-year-old who has a history of alcoholism was said to be responding well to treatment late Friday and was expected to be able to return to his hotel by Sunday.

Andreas Stylianides, the doctor treating Best, said the former Manchester United footballer had an infection in the "gastrointestinal tract".

"He is responding well to treatment and he is to be discharged back to the hotel within the next 24 to 48 hours," said the doctor's state-

Stylianides ruled out the illness having anything to do with "alcohol abuse or any other kind of infection" The statement was issued with

the permission of Best. Cypriot Health Minister Frixos Savvides, a keen soccer fan, has taken a personal interest in Best's

condition and visited him on Friday said Stylianides. "He was taken to a private clinic in Limassol in the early hours, apparently suffering from an infection and a high fever," the source

According to the source, tests were being run on Best. "He is being treated at the clinic

but the problem doesn't seem serious, although it's too early too tell." the source added. A statement issued by the celeb-

ritv's manager, Philip Hughes, said Best was "suddenly taken ill" with a stomach bug. "In order to ensure George's best health interests he was taken to a

George picked up a stomach virus,' said the statement. Hughes said Best is "recovering steadily after a treatment of antibiot-

clinic where it was confirmed that

ics, plenty of rest and hot fluids. Even though George Best has a history of alcoholism, these past months he has enjoyed a completely clean life, entirely free of alcohol/drugs," the statement said.

The former Manchester United and Northern Ireland star was holidaying in the southern resort of Limassol with his current wife. Alex.

He arrived on the island Tuesday to visit a major golf and property development project on the west coast of Paphos, 120 kilometres (74 miles) from Limassol.

Josef vows to clear himself

Spanish international midfielder Josef Guardiola said on Friday he was certain he could prove his innocence after the Brescia player tested positive for the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone.

"I am disappointed but I'm certain I'll succeed in proving my innocence because I believe in everything I've done since I turned professional." Guardiola told a press conference. The Italian National Olympic

Committee (CONI) said on Thursday that the former Barcelona star, nicknamed 'Pep', had tested positive after his side's Serie A match with Piacenza on October 21. But Guardiola said: "The scien-

nandrolone but the man himself is telling you that it is not true." He said that for the past six or seven years he had been taking vitamin supplements developed by the University of Catalonia.

tific instruments say I took

"They are simple vitamins which have the same content as orange juice. I respect myself too much to harm myself," Guardiola said. He added he had undergone a

large number of drug tests during his Barcelona career and also while playing for Spain but had never had a positive test.

His positive test comes days

Auxerre coach has heart surgery

AFP, Auxerre

Auxerre coach Guy Roux has undergone emergency heart bypass surgery at a Paris hospital, club president Jean-Claude Hamel said Saturday. Roux, 63, had stepped down

as coach from the Burgundy first division club last year after a record-breaking 39 years at the helm, but returned as caretaker coach at the end of the season. He suffered a slight heart

attack during training Friday and

after consulting a specialist was taken immediately to Saint-Joseph de Paris hospital in the capital where he underwent the successful operation. Roux is one of the most famous managerial names in French

football, and turned Auxerre from a lower league club into a championship-winning side. The club is currently third in the French first division. Roux became coach at the club

in 1961 when the modest outfit was in the French equivalent of the sixth division.



Brazilian striker Edmundo of Tokyo Verdy is sandwiched between a couple of FC Tokyo defenders during their J-League clash yesterday. Verdy won 1-0 to stay in the Japanese top flight.