

World Cup seeding Spain pip England



AFP, Pusan

Spain beat off competition from England and Mexico to be named as one of eight seeds for next year's World Cup finals, football's world governing body FIFA announced on Wednesday.

As expected, established heavyweights Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Italy were also named as seeds by the tournament's organising committee.

The other three seeds in Saturday's draw for the 32-nation tournament will be reigning champions France and joint hosts Japan and South Korea, all of whom had already been assured of being seeded.

Since they hammered Germany 5-1 in a qualifying match in Munich in September, England have been regarded as one of the teams most likely to challenge the tournament favourites France and Argentina next June.

But they lost out on a seeds' spot under criteria which combined teams' places in the FIFA rankings over the last three years and their record in the last three World Cups.

For the teams not already seeded, the system placed Brazil first, Argentina and Italy tied second, followed by Germany, Spain, Mexico and England in that order.

The outcome means Saturday's draw will be a nerve-wracking affair

for England with a serious risk they will have to play one of the other top teams in their first round group. France had already been aware that they would play their first round matches in South Korea, including the tournament opener on May 31 in Seoul.

Japan and South Korea will play their first round group matches in

meetings of teams from the same continent, and that countries from different regions were split evenly between the two hosts.

China, who have qualified for the first time in their history, will play their matches in South Korea, with which it shares a land border, to make it easier for their fans to get to games.

under FIFA regulations which allow for a country to be placed in a "special region for economic and geographic reasons." As a result, the other Asian qualifier, Saudi Arabia, will play in Japan. All four Asian teams will be kept apart in the first round.

The structure of the draw will also ensure that none of the eight first round groups contain three European teams and that all five South American qualifiers will be in different groups.

One of 11 non-seeded European countries will be drawn in each of the groups with the three teams left over put into groups without European seeds.

Three non-seeds from South America will be kept apart from Argentina and Brazil.

The five African qualifiers and three from North and Central America will be drawn last with one of them in each group.

In other decisions reached by the organising committee on Wednesday:

-- Yellow cards picked up by players in one or more qualifying matches will be cancelled when the finals start but suspensions given to players for receiving red cards will still apply.

-- All 32 teams in the World Cup will get one million Swiss francs from FIFA towards the expense of their preparations, up from 750,000 in France 98. This money is separate from the payment teams get per match for playing in the finals, which qualifying, the level of which has not yet been decided.



CLASH OF HEADS! FIFA President Joseph Blatter lends his ear to UEFA chief Lennart Johansson at Pusan, South Korea, on November 28 prior to the announcement of the seeded countries for the 2002 World Cup finals.

their respective countries. The other five seeds will not know where they play until the first part of the draw on Saturday.

The organisers also outlined a series of procedures designed to minimise the number of first round

Michel Zen-Ruffinen, FIFA general secretary, told a press conference that the FIFA executive committee had unanimously agreed to let China and its fans avoid an expensive stay in Japan. He said the decision was taken

South's gesture for North



AFP, Pusan

South Korea will try to tempt North Korean players to join its squad for next year's World Cup finals, but FIFA said Wednesday the communist state has now lost its chance to host matches.

North Korea has snubbed an offer to stage some matches for the tournament, which South Korea and Japan will co-host next June, but Korean organising committee co-chairman Chung Mong-Joon said he would go to the North to make a new attempt to get the North involved.

Chung said he would go to Pyongyang early in 2002 and invite the North to send its best players.

"If the North has good players I will discuss the possibility of allowing them to play for South Korea at

next year's World Cup finals," Chung told reporters.

"FIFA president Joseph Blatter will go with me to North Korea next year," he added.

Chung, with FIFA's backing, had offered North Korea the chance to stage one or two of the 32 matches that South Korea will host at the tournament.

Officially it has until Saturday's draw for the finals, which is to be made in Pusan, to give a reply.

But Lennart Johansson, president of UEFA and head of FIFA's World Cup committee, told a press conference: "To me it was a good idea from the beginning but I think it is too late."

Blatter added: "The last moment to enter will be the draw and the draw will be in three days but it is unlikely that it will happen."

Senior FIFA officials had already said it would not be possible for matches to be held in the North.

A senior FIFA official who went to Pyongyang earlier this year told

AFP the stadiums in Pyongyang did not meet international safety standards.

He said the national squad did not have enough money to buy enough football boots and he had seen players training "in what looked like slippers."

North Korea has shunned international competition for more than a year though it has been holding training camps abroad.

It was one of only a handful of nations that did not even enter the World Cup qualifying competition. Neither did it enter the Asian Cup.

North Korea was also invited to send a delegation to the World Cup draw, which will be attended by soccer leaders from around the globe, but Chung said no reply had been sent back.

The two Koreas started a rapprochement in 2000 which collapsed earlier this year. Exchanges have been frozen and there was shooting on the inter-Korean frontier on Tuesday.

FIFA accommodates China



AFP, Pusan

FIFA has used special regulations for the first time to allow China to start next year's World Cup finals in South Korea.

The move will allow an expected army of Chinese fans to avoid an expensive trip to Japan, the other hosts of the finals. It will also be a major boost for South Korea's hopes of selling the 300,000 tickets for the finals it still has.

Michel Zen-Ruffinen, general secretary of the international governing body, told a press conference that FIFA's World Cup organising committee had unanimously agreed to let China be based in South Korea for the first round.

This will mean that Saudi Arabia, Asia's other representative from the qualifying tournament, will play in Japan.

The formal draw for the finals is to be held in Pusan on Saturday. But Zen-Ruffinen said it was decided in advance for China, which has qualified for the finals for the first time, to be in one of the four first round groups in South Korea.

He said the decision was taken under FIFA regulations which allow for a country to be placed in a "special region for economic and geographic reasons."

The general secretary and other officials said it was the first time such a decision had been applied at the World Cup finals. "But the regulations exist and it was a unanimous decision," he added.

Chinese officials and fans had expressed hopes that their team would be based in South Korea because it is closer and cheaper. China's President Jiang Zemin has announced that he will attend the opening ceremony in Seoul on May 31.

FIFA vice president Chung Mong-Joon, co-chairman of the

Korean World Cup Organising Committee (KOWOC), admitted that he had suggested to FIFA members that China should be placed in South Korea.

But he said there had been no opposition and Shunichiro Okano, president of the Japan Football Association, said he had also approved the idea.

According to KOWOC officials, there are about 300,000 tickets left for matches in Korea so China's presence will be a major financial boost.

Chung said: "There are enough tickets for Chinese fans to see not only China's matches but also the matches of other good teams."

Zen-Ruffinen said China would not be allowed to be in a group with South Korea when the draw is made. Saudi Arabia will similarly not be allowed in the same group as Japan. This will keep all the Asian teams apart at the start of the contest.

Kyushu, African choice



AFP, Tokyo

Olympic and African champions Cameroon have chosen a remote Japanese mountain village of 1,400 people as their base camp for the 2002 World Cup finals, a village official said Wednesday.

"We are scheduled to sign an agreement Thursday on Cameroon's use of our village for camp training," said an official at the administrative office of Nakatsue on Japan's southern main island of Kyushu, roughly 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) southwest of Tokyo.

The Tunisian squad has also decided to base itself on Kyushu, lying close to the Korean peninsula,

Van Gaal leaves 'Oranje' job

AFP, The Hague

Louis Van Gaal has resigned as manager of the Dutch national team in disgust at the attitude of the players, the Volkskrant newspaper reported on Wednesday.

Van Gaal, who failed to lead the Netherlands to qualification for next year's World Cup finals, was reported on Tuesday to have resigned although there was no confirmation early Wednesday from either the manager or the Dutch football federation (KNVB).

Volkskrant said the final straw for Van Gaal came when the Dutch national side performed disappointingly in the 1-1 draw in a friendly against Denmark in Copenhagen on November 10.

"Van Gaal did not appreciate the fact that the players did not take the match against Denmark seriously," said the paper.

"Van Gaal saw that the players weren't quite as good as they thought they were and that some of them really wanted to have a new coach," Volkskrant added.

Dutch federation president Hans Kesler made no immediate response to the reports of Van Gaal's resignation, telling Dutch media: "We have agreed not to comment and will stick by that agreement."

Van Gaal, a former coach of Ajax and Barcelona, succeeded Frank Rijkaard in July 2000 when he resigned following the penalty shootout defeat by Italy in the Euro 2000 semi-finals.

Van Gaal had signed a six-year contract with the KNVB but failed to pass the first hurdle by taking the Dutch, who were semi-finalists at the 1998 World Cup, to Japan and South Korea next year.

Red card bans will carry to finals

AFP, Pusan

FIFA on Wednesday announced a World Cup amnesty for players booked during qualifying matches but said bans imposed for red cards would be carried over into the opening games of the finals.

Players who received a single yellow card or two in different matches will have their slate wiped clean before the tournament in Japan and South Korea kicks off on May 31. FIFA general secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen told a press conference here.

But players who were sent off during the qualifiers who have not yet served the resulting suspensions will have to finish them, he said.

Oliseh doesn't want to face France

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian captain Sunday Oliseh said on Wednesday he hoped his country would avoid world champions France and Argentina when the draw for the 2002 World Cup is made this weekend.

"We pray that we are not drawn against countries like France, Argentina, Brazil and Germany in the first round of the World Cup," German-based Oliseh told Cool FM Radio here.

Argentina, for one, are a very solid side and without doubt the most competitive team coming to the championship.

"It will therefore be good to avoid such teams very early in the competition so that we could at least qualify for the second round," he said.

The 27-year-old defensive midfielder, who plays for Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund, has featured in Nigeria's two World Cup finals outings in 1994 and 1998.

The 'Super Eagles', as the country's soccer team are known, were eliminated in the second round on both occasions.

Oliseh, however, warned that no team should be underrated at the World Cup.

"There are no longer weak teams in the game. We struggled to qualify, so too Brazil. And Holland simply did not make it," said Oliseh, who was named team captain in January 2000.

Kyushu, African choice

French actress and animal welfare activist Brigitte Bardot urged South Koreans on Wednesday to stop eating dog meat, saying it hurts the image of the country as a co-host of the World Cup finals.

"Even if eating dog meat is part of a country's dining culture, that habit must be stopped as we don't live in a Middle Ages society," Bardot said in a telephone interview with South Korea's MBC radio network.

"Eating dog meat seriously hurts the image of your country," she said, adding that dogs are "friends not animals."

She said it was "horrible" that Koreans continued to eat dog meat in the 21st century. "And I know dogs are cruelly butchered," she said in French, translated into Korean.

Bardot said she was sending pictures and other evidence of the practice to members of the French World Cup football squad and other

English League Cup Japanese to the fore



AFP, London

Japanese international midfielder Junichi Inamoto saw Arsenal mark his full club debut with a 2-0 English League Cup fourth round win over First Division strugglers Grimsby on Tuesday.

Elsewhere Inamoto's international team-mate Akinori Nishizawa helped Bolton to a 6-5 penalty shoot out win against fellow Premiership side Southampton after the sides had finished extra time level at 2-2.

First Division Watford also needed extra-time before beating Premiership Charlton 3-2.

But in the evening's other fourth round tie there was no need for any added time as Newcastle beat bottom of the Premiership Ipswich Town 4-1 with former England striker Alan Shearer scoring twice and netting his 100th goal for the north-east giants.

Inamoto, 22, was one of 10 changes Arsene Wenger made to the team that beat English Premier League champions Manchester United 3-1 on Sunday.

And it was two other members of Arsenal's foreign legion who scored the goals that saw off Grimsby, third-from-bottom in the First Division.

Brazilian Edu headed home in the fourth minute but Arsenal had to wait over an hour for the decisive second before French striker Sylvain Wiltord's 74th minute header put Arsenal into the last eight.

Inamoto, a 4million pounds (5.78million dollars) signing from J-League club Gamba Osaka this summer, looked understandably nervous and short of match-fitness.

His error forced England defender Martin Keown to make a last-ditch clearance on the edge of the box to prevent Bradley Allen going clear in search of a 28th-minute equaliser.

But another header, this time from Wiltord, wrapped up victory for Arsenal.

Nishizawa, won the 54th minute penalty, that allowed Bolton to go 1-0 up when he was pulled back by Paul Williams, Dean Holdsworth scoring from the spot.



Arsenal's Japanese international Junichi Inamoto(L), staves off the challenge of a Grimsby defender during their English League Cup encounter at Highbury on November 27.

Southampton equalised nine minutes from normal time through Kevin Davies before two goals in two extra-time minutes from Bolton's Michael Ricketts and Southampton's Tahar El Khalej levelled the match again.

In the end it was former Southampton striker Rod Wallace who scored the vital spot-kick to make it 6-5 in what had become a sudden-death shoot out after the mandatory opening 10 penalties had all gone in.

At St James Park Newcastle's manager Bobby Robson saw his team beat former club Ipswich Town.

All of the home side's goals came in the first half with Frenchman Laurent Robert opening the scoring in

the 18th minute. Striker Shola Ameobi made it 2-0 eight minutes later.

Then a pair of typical Shearer tap-ins showed the striker had lost none of his old poachers instinct as he made the most of two crosses from Peru's Nolberto Solano in the 37th and 40th minutes.

Ipswich substitute Darren Bent pulled one back 13 minutes from time.

At Vicarage Road, Watford produced the upset result of the night with substitute Heidar Helguson's s extra-time winner giving manager Gianluca Vialli, a League Cup winner with Chelsea three years ago, a night to remember.

Fowler Leeds bound?



AFP, London

Liverpool's English international striker Robbie Fowler looks set to join Leeds United after both clubs revealed Tuesday they had agreed a fee believed to be around 11million pounds (15.4million dollars).

The 26-year-old has yet to agree personal terms and the announcement of the deal comes just hours after Liverpool's caretaker manager Phil Thompson had said he would be holding talks with the player over a new contract.

Should he agree terms it will take Leeds manager David O'Leary's spending at the club since he took over to 97 million pounds.

Leeds had rejected Liverpool's original asking price of 15million pounds for Fowler, who the Premiership leaders were apparently desperate to sell now rather than see his value diminish as the

remaining 18 months on his contract wound down.

Leeds, who initially bid 6million pounds, are two points behind Liverpool in second place and have reportedly been interested in the

failure in recent times to command a place in the Anfield starting line-up with the UEFA Cup holders preferring a partnership between Fowler's fellow England internationals Michael Owen and Emile Heskey.

He has also been involved in several off the field incidents and the writing appeared to be on the wall when he had a row with Thompson at training earlier this term.

Fowler was forced by boss Gerard Houllier to apologise to Thompson, a stand-off followed that lasted several days and meant Fowler was left out of two matches before he complied.

Fowler's imminent arrival is now likely to cast a cloud over the future of Leeds' temperamental striker Alan Smith, who was dismissed for the fifth time in just over two years during Sunday's 1-1 home draw with Aston Villa.

O'Leary described Smith's disciplinary record as "a disgrace" adding that the player could become "a liability for both club and country"



ROBBIE FOWLER striker, nicknamed 'God' in the dressingroom for his goalscoring ability, for some time.

Bardot's campaign against dog meat



AFP, Seoul

World Cup finalists "...so that they know what's going on in Korea and the Korean government may feel pressure and put an end to consuming dogs."

But Bardot stressed she was not leading a boycott of the World Cup.

Koreans' fondness for dog meat has been put under the spotlight again following a call from football's world governing body FIFA for the authorities to crack down on cruel slaughtering practices.

Although the Seoul government

has already banned the production and sale of dog meat for human consumption, the practice remains widespread and government efforts have instead been concentrated on encouraging more humane slaughtering.

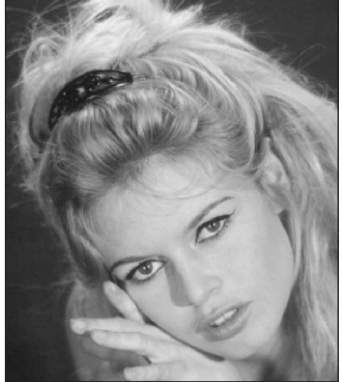
FIFA President Blatter has sent a letter to South Korea's soccer supreme Chung Mong-Joon calling for "immediate and decisive measures" against cruelty in slaughtering dogs in South Korea ahead of next year's World Cup finals.

But Chung said it should not be FIFA's concern.

"I don't understand why FIFA has raised the issue itself," Chung, FIFA's vice president and co-president of the Korean World Cup Organizing Committee, told South Korean journalists.

He stressed the issue was taken up when Seoul hosted the 1988 Olympic Games, but the International Olympic Committee did not take any action.

Ahead of the 1988 Games, South Korea forced many dog meat eateries to shut down or shift to other dishes.



BRIGITTE BARDOT