

No free pass



AFP, Pusan

France will be the last World Cup winners to get an automatic passport to the next finals, FIFA announced Friday.

The executive committee of football's international governing body decided that from next year's finals, to be held in South Korea and Japan, the winner will have to go through the qualifying tournament to reach the next finals, FIFA president Joseph Blatter said.

The move will give the champions greater competition but also open up an extra slot in the finals for regional confederations, Blatter told a press conference after the executive meeting.

Traditionally world champions go straight into the finals of the next tournament. France, winners of the 1998 finals, will be the last country to benefit from direct qualification.

Blatter said FIFA leaders decided there should be a change to bring the World Cup into line with the European Championship and other continental tournaments where automatic qualification does not apply.

"This will make them better prepared and put them on the same calendar as other nations," Blatter said.

"And with no qualification of the world champions, we have one more slot available for different confederations. This is a wise decision in line with FIFA policy," added the president.

FIFA has also decided on a change in the South American qualifying competition for the next finals which will no longer be played

in a league round-robin tournament by all entrants. For the 2002 finals this involved teams playing 18 matches each.

Blatter said FIFA might drop the Confederations Cup from 2003 and replace it with the World Club Championship.

The Confederations Cup for national teams who have won their continental championships and which is held every two years has never won widespread interest.

The World Club Championship was started in 2000 but was in

danger of being crowded out of the international soccer calendar since.

The executives also decided that referees will be allowed to wear shirts with advertising for the first time.

FIFA General Secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen said referees for club tournaments will be allowed to advertise certain products.

Adverts will only be allowed on sleeves and must not be more than 200 square centimetres in size, he said. Advertising of tobacco products, alcohol or casinos, or any

racist or "immoral" material, will not be permitted.

Zen-Ruffinen said revenues must be used for the development of refereeing. This could include increasing match payments to enable more referees to become full time professionals.

"It is part of the concept of professionalisation. It is in no way to be used to pay part of the budget of a league," Zen-Ruffinen said.

FIFA has also reached an agreement with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) but will not apply all the agency regulations, Blatter said.

FIFA and WADA, a brainchild of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), have been in negotiations for more than a year over aligning drug policy.

The IOC has been pressing football for several years to take a tougher line on drugs in line with other sports.

There have been a number of cases of high profile positive tests for the steroid Nandrolone in Italy in recent months, including Lazio's Dutch defender Jap Stam, Juventus' Dutch defender Edgar Davids and Brescia's Spanish midfielder Josep Guardiola who has been provisionally suspended after two positive tests for Nandrolone in two weeks.

Blatter said: "Our agreement has nothing to do with the last cases of positive doping with Nandrolone. The IOC has been inviting us for over a year to sign an accord."

"We are ready to sign an agreement but one which gives FIFA its independence," he insisted.

Staying out of the WADA mainstream will allow FIFA to apply its own sanctions. Football drug bans are normally shorter than for other sports.

HOW IT WORKS



AFP, Pusan

Saturday's draw for the 2002 World Cup finals will use the following procedure designed to ensure teams from the same region are kept apart as far as possible in the first round:

1. The eight seeded teams are each placed in one of the first round groups of four. Groups A-D will be played in South Korea, Groups E-H in Japan.

Holders France have already been allocated to Group A, Japan to Group H and South Korea to Group D.

The other five seeds, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Italy and Spain, are drawn from POT A into the remaining groups.

2. The 11 European teams who are not seeded are placed into POT B. The first eight draw will be allocated to Groups A-J. The three

remaining teams are then drawn into groups with non-European seeds.

The teams in POT B are: Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, England, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey.

3. The three South American non-seeds, Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay, and the two Asian qualifiers, China and Saudi Arabia, are placed in POT C and drawn into the five groups without one of the extra Europeans.

The South Americans cannot be placed in a group with a South American seed. China will be drawn into Group A, B or C in South Korea. Saudi Arabia will be assigned to Group E, F or G.

4. The fourth team in each group will be drawn from POT D, containing five African teams, Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia and three CONCACAF teams, Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States.

At least two African and one CONCACAF team will play in each host country.

Don't cry for Holland



REUTERS, Pusan

Johan Cruyff called for an overhaul of the Dutch national team today after the twice World Cup runners-up failed to qualify for the 2002 tournament in South Korea and Japan.

Speaking to reporters in Pusan, the former Dutch ace lamented the demise of the "total football" style that characterised Netherlands teams of the past three decades.

However, he refused to lay the blame squarely on the shoulders of national coach Louis Van Gaal. "It is not only the coach, it is the whole atmosphere and environment. We always used to play attractive football but now the philosophy is not the same," said Cruyff.

"We have to make the right decisions to get Dutch football back where it belongs."

Asked about his country's elimination from the World Cup, the 54-year-old former Ajax Amsterdam and Barcelona player said: "It is a shame. We have so many good players. I don't know what went wrong."

However, Cruyff again ruled himself out of the running to replace Van Gaal, who was scheduled to announce his future plans later on Friday.

"Definitely not. I don't think my qualities are best suited for the national coach," he said. Cruyff named Argentina and

France as the favourites to win the World Cup. "You have got to look at the qualifiers. Argentina did very well and the French side are still very impressive," he said.

Cruyff said that England's Michael Owen and David Beckham could also play a starring role next summer. "They are both young and will only get better. The future is very bright for them," he said. "Hopefully,



JOHAN CRUYFF

they will contribute to the tournament and everyone will have to respect what they do."

But Cruyff said England's relative lack of experience could be their Achilles heel, despite the team's improvement under Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson.

"After the change of coach, England did quite well but you can't

say they dominated for the simple reason that they qualified in the 94th minute with a free-kick," he said.

England clinched qualification thanks to a stoppage-time winner from Beckham in a 2-2 draw with Greece on October 6.

Cruyff also suggested that England's 5-1 demolition of Germany in Munich on September 1 was a one-off.

"If you look at the game against Germany, England did very well. But you can't say they overpowered anybody (else)," he said.

Fowler finally Leeds'

AFP, London

England international Robbie Fowler finally completed his move from Liverpool to Premiership opponents Leeds late Thursday after being given the thumbs-up following a medical.

The 26-year-old striker will now be officially unveiled by the club at a press conference Friday at noon.

Liverpool hero Fowler ended his 15-year association with Liverpool on Tuesday when the Merseyside club bowed to the inevitable and finally agreed to sell him.

Bundesliga preview Bayern back in wars



AFP, Berlin

Newly-crowned world kings Bayern Munich return to domestic matters, and the defence of their German title Sunday after a breathless round-the-world trip to win the Inter-Continental Cup in Tokyo.

European champions Bayern successfully shook off jet lag to beat South American champions Boca Juniors of Argentina 1-0 on Tuesday and must do so again before travelling to the capital to face Hertha Berlin.

Bayern need to knuckle down to ensure domination at home after slipping four points behind leaders

Bayer Leverkusen with the annual winter break approaching.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld returned from Japan concerned about an injury to international goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, the rock around which Bayern are built.

Kahn injured his knee in the match in Tokyo and Hitzfeld said his fitness would be assessed before Sunday's kick-off, so replacement goalkeepers Stefan Wessels and veteran Bernd Dreher are standing by.

Bayer Leverkusen meanwhile fared poorly on their travels. When the fog in Turin finally cleared on Thursday and the twice-postponed Champions League match went ahead, they were thrashed 4-0 by Juventus.

Bayer coach Klaus Toppmoller insisted his side were better than the result showed and pointed to the desperate search for a hotel on Wednesday, when the fog forced the last postponement of the match.

"When you've had the sort of preparation we've had, then something has got to give. Whether that was the whole reason I don't know, but we really weren't a presence out there," he said after the match at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

Next stop for Bayer is Werder Bremen's Weserstadion on Saturday, a risky trip after Bayern were beaten there in mid-November.

Toppmoller will hope German international striker Oliver Neuville quickly re-discovers the form which brought him a hat-trick in the 4-1 win over struggling SV Hamburg last weekend.

Third-placed Borussia Dortmund are just one point behind Bayern Munich and travel to second-bottom Cologne on Saturday.

Dortmund's fearsome strikeforce of giant Czech international Jan Koller and Brazilian Marcio Amoroso are fit and ready to face a Cologne defence which has leaked 26 goals already this season.

FIXTURES

Saturday (all matches at 1430 GMT): 1860 Munich v Energie Cottbus, VfB Stuttgart v Borussia Monchengladbach, Nuremberg v Schalke 04, Werder Bremen v Bayer Leverkusen, Cologne v Borussia Dortmund, Kaiserslautern v SC Freiburg, Hansa Rostock v VfL Wolfsburg.

Sunday (all matches at 1630 GMT): Hertha Berlin v Bayern Munich, SV Hamburg v St. Pauli.



FIFA president Sepp Blatter and US singer Anastacia, holding an official World Cup ball, pose for a photograph during a press conference at the Media Centre in Pusan on November 30.

WC DRAW BOOK

AP, Pusan

Former stars Pele, Johan Cruyff and Michel Platini are among 12 people picked by FIFA to draw teams for next year's World Cup finals.

Saturday's ceremony at the Bexco exhibition hall in this port city in South Korea will determine who plays whom in soccer's premier event to be hosted by South Korea and Japan next summer.

The 12 people picked by FIFA will pull the team's names from four different pots.

Pele helped Brazil win three World Cup titles, while Dutch star Cruyff and French ace Platini are probably two of the best soccer players never to have won a World Cup title.

Former Cameroon striker Roger Milla will be on the stage as well. FIFA also picked veteran players Hong Myung-bo of South Korea and Masami Ihara of Japan to represent the two host nations.

Two women are among the 12 - Lim Eun-joon, South Korea's first female referee, and Chinese star Sun Wen.

Chung Mong-joon, FIFA vice president and co-chairman of the South Korean organising committee, and Okano Shunichiro, the president of the Japanese soccer federation, will be there as well.

Park Young-dok and Huh Young-ho, two famous South Korean mountain climbers, complete the group of 12.

FLYING SEAGULL: The Pusan Exhibition and Convention Centre (Bexco), the oceanfront scene of Saturday's World Cup draw, is a gleaming,

state-of-the-art facility that opened in September. It is the biggest exhibition hall in South Korea, with a ground floor exhibition area as large as three soccer fields.

The exterior of the vast structure, made entirely of glass, resembles the shape of a flying seagull.

Giant soccer ball painted with the flags of the 32 nations competing in next year's World Cup finals were inflated by workers in front of the hall Friday.

GERMAN SCOUTS: Franz Beckenbauer couldn't make it, but other top German organisers of the 2006 World Cup are here to see what they can learn from the organizers of next year's event.

"You can learn something everywhere," said Fedor Radmann, the marketing chief of the German organising committee, who attended a marketing seminar in Pusan. "I learned some interesting things and noted them down. It was very professionally done."

Horst Schmidt, vice president of the German soccer federation (DFB) and a top official of the 2006 organising committee also is in Pusan, along with media director Wolfgang Niersbach. They were joined by DFB president Gerhard Mayer-vorfelder.

Beckenbauer, chairman of the 2006 organising committee, could not come because he is busy choosing the project for a new stadium in Munich.

In two years' time, Germany's financial center of Frankfurt will host the preliminary draw to decide the qualifying groups for the 2006 World Cup finals.

Ball of the World

REUTERS, Pusan

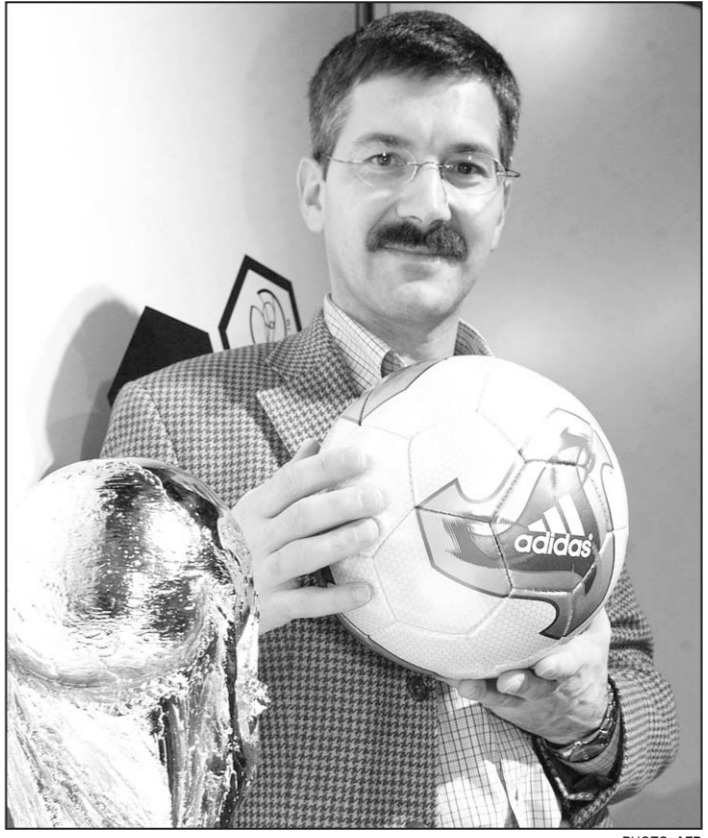
The official match ball for next year's World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea was launched today, revealing a tradition-breaking new design.

World Cup sponsors adidas, unveiling their "Fevernova" ball, said they had dropped the pattern used at every World Cup since 1978 in favour of a triangular design in red and gold symbolising the passion and energy of the two host countries.

Adidas technical expert Guenter Pfau said the ball, which features gas-filled micro-balloons under a foam layer, was designed to produce a more precise flight path, making it the most accurate football ever.

A video presentation of England captain David Beckham playing keepy-uppy with the new ball accompanied the launch in Pusan ahead of Saturday's draw for the 2002 finals.

Beckham gave the new ball the thumbs-up in the video, saying: "the power and accuracy are exceptional."



Chief executive of Adidas Herbert Hainer displays an official match ball for next year's World Cup in Pusan on Friday.

Platini's pick

REUTERS, Paris

France versus Argentina would be the ideal final for next year's World Cup in South Korea and Japan, according to Michel Platini.

Speaking ahead of Saturday's World Cup draw, the former France captain and manager also told France Football magazine that he rates the French team just above Argentina.

"France today have at their disposal a formidable generation of players, with 22 or 23 of them who can all claim to be first choice," said Platini, a close aide of FIFA chief Sepp Blatter.

"In my opinion, the Argentine squad are not quite there yet," he added.

The three times European Footballer of the Year listed Spain, England, Italy, Germany and Brazil as the other possible favourites.

He also believes that Japan and South Korea were "not yet mature enough" to reach the last four.

As vice-president of the French Soccer Federation, Platini naturally predicted that France would keep their World Cup crown.

"France are so much above the rest that I cannot see who could pose them problems," Platini added.

Serie A preview Chievo enter San Siro



AFP, Milan

The footballing divas of AC Milan do battle with ambitious Chievo Sunday with the visitors from Verona performing on the most grandiose stage in Serie A football for the first time.

The San Siro has hitherto been off limits for Chievo for the simple reason they have never before played in the top division - and clubs like Inter Milan and AC Milan do not get relegated, unless like AC in the early 1980s they got involved in a match-fixing scandal.

At that time Chievo were not even in Serie C. But with 11 matches played so far this term they are still leading the championship that still likes to call itself the 'piu bello campionato' (best domestic league) in the world.

It is another chance for Chievo's 'flying donkeys' to see just how high they can soar.

used to insist that donkeys would fly the day Chievo played in Serie A, is now worn as a badge of honour by Chievo fans.

Chievo president Luca Campedelli, a self-confessed Inter Milan fan, admits the chance to perform at the legendary Milan arena has been keeping him awake at night.

"I will finally understand how far we have come as a club when we play at the San Siro, the La Scala of football," said Campedelli, in reference to Milan's world-famous Opera House.

On Sunday the 33-year-old cake-maker will be on equal terms with AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's prime minister and reputedly Europe's richest man.

AC Milan's expensively assembled team, meanwhile, are yet to click this season with the San Siro crowd hurling abuse rather than bouquets at their pampered prima donnas in recent weeks.

season and would be the biggest beneficiaries of any slip-up by Chievo whom they trail by a single point.

However any ambitions they had in the Italian Cup dissolved on Thursday when visitors Udinese scored late in the second half of their second leg last 16 encounter to secure a 2-2 draw, and a 4-3 aggregate knocking the 'Old Lady' out of the competition.

But Inter can forget that setback by picking up all three points at Bergamo against Atalanta to regain top spot in the league. Inter coach Hector Cuper has the luxury of picking his front two from Ronaldo, Christian Vieri and Alvaro Recoba - all available for the first time.

The Argentinian may even persist with Sierra Leonian Mohamed Kallon who has scored seven Serie A goals while Ronaldo and Vieri have battled with injury and Recoba has served his passport ban and been on duty with Uruguay for their victorious World Cup play-offs.

Meanwhile, champions AS Roma, in third place three points behind Chievo, are banking on

taking the honours when they host bottom club Venezia, still winless in 11 Serie A matches this term.

Lazio, whose form has vastly improved since coach Alberto Zaccheroni dropped 41-million-dollar Spanish midfielder Gaizka Mendietta, hope to continue in the same vein at Lecce.

Juventus, with only one win in their last eight Serie A outings, hope to put the record straight at home to struggling Perugia on Saturday while Verona meet Brescia, one the most improved sides in the division.

Udinese host Parma while Torino visit Bologna in the Sunday evening match. Fiorentina entertain Piacenza whose veteran striker Dario Hubner tops the Serie A goalscoring charts with nine goals.

Fixtures (14:00 GMT unless stated) Saturday: Juventus v Perugia (19:30 GMT)

Sunday: Atalanta v Inter Milan, Fiorentina v Piacenza, Lecce v Lazio, AC Milan v Chievo, AS Roma v Venezia, Udinese v Parma, Verona v Brescia, Bologna v Torino (19:30 GMT)