

Drinks not on FIFA's plans



AFP, London

Football's world governing body FIFA on Wednesday rejected reports that drinks breaks are set to be introduced at this year's World Cup finals.

Reports had said that two 90-second stoppages - effectively dividing matches into quarters - were being considered to help players to cope with the conditions expected in Japan and South Korea.

But FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper has dismissed the innovative idea, saying the chances of such a fundamental change in the rules happening were "very slim."

"I think there is a big confusion here. Last week in Tokyo we had a workshop with the 32 finalist teams and it was mentioned it would be a desirable thing to do," said the FIFA spokesman.

"This would be a major change in the law of the game and we don't

change those overnight and certainly not for one competition.

"The laws of the game are sacrosanct and this would apply right across the board, from the World Cup right down to Saturday morning park matches.

"If the organising committee are in favour of taking it further it goes to the FIFA board and if anyone will allow it, it will be them, but the likelihood is very slim."

"You could not make a single exception for the World Cup unless it was under very, very special circumstances and it does not seem to us that those special circumstances are there at the moment."

Cooper said that he believed there had been a misconception about conditions in Japan and Korea.

"It is a bit puzzling where this has come from," he told BBC Radio Five Live.

"It is not that hot, temperatures are in the low to mid-20s. We played a test competition, the FIFA Confederations Cup, in those countries last year and we didn't get one single complaint," he said.

Testing times for Blatter



AFP, Zurich

Beleaguered FIFA president Sepp Blatter's future will be decided here this week when he comes face to face with his accusers who claim he is leading football's governing world body to the edge of bankruptcy.

Almost four years after he swept to power following a bitter election battle against European soccer chief Lennart Johansson, Blatter is what one of his rivals described as only 'one scandal away' from being overthrown.

Blatter will find himself under intense pressure when he heads an extraordinary executive committee meeting on Thursday evening in FIFA headquarters. Thirteen of the 24 members are pro-Johansson and the former Swiss lawyer will need all his political wiles to defuse the worst political crisis to confront FIFA.

The demand for an independent investigation was triggered by the collapse of ISL/ISMM, FIFA's marketing partner last year.

Blatter has put the cost to FIFA of the ISL/ISMM collapse at around 30 million dollars but independent marketing experts have suggested the figure could be nearer 300 million dollars.

Now Germany's Kirch Group, who bought the television rights for the 2002 and 2006 World Cups, is also facing collapse.

Senior European officials in UEFA claim that Blatter has been forced to dip into revenue due to the 2006 World Cup to keep FIFA going - further risking the future of the movement.

FIFA's six-strong finance committee - a majority firm Blatter supporters - have already examined an audit of the books earlier this week but it is the March 7 evening executive meeting when the Johansson-led majority will have their showdown with the FIFA president.

Already there have been allegations that Blatter supporters bribed African members to ensure victory in the 1998 presidential election held on the eve of the World Cup.

Last week Farah Addo, vice-president of the African Football Confederation (CAF) claimed Blatter backers had offered him 100,000 dollars to switch his support from Johansson to Blatter in the 1998 election.

Addo said he rejected the overtures but insisted he saw other members line up in the Meridien hotel in Paris being used to house FIFA members to receive money to vote for FIFA's former secretary general.

But even Johansson admits that Addo's allegations will not bring down his arch rival. He has told friends that there are already probably 100 of the 204 FIFA members who will continue to support Blatter for another four years when he stands for re-election in May as long as they continue to get the huge sums annually dished out by FIFA.

What the burly Swede and his supporters, including CAF president Issa Hayatou and the powerful South Korean FIFA vice-president Chung Mong-Joon, are banking on is to force FIFA's executive committee and Blatter to agree to an independent financial review of FIFA's books.

They are convinced that Blatter's claims that FIFA's finances are solid is wrong and if members realise the guaranteed 250,000 dollars a year to each of the 204 Associations is in jeopardy they will change sides.

German Cup Leverkusen reach final



AFP, Leverkusen

Bayer Leverkusen stayed on course for a trophy treble when a dramatic extra-time 3-1 win over struggling Cologne earned them a place in the final of the German Cup on Tuesday.

Leverkusen, who currently lead the German league and still harbour hopes of making it through to the quarter-finals of the European Champions League, booked their final place courtesy of two decisive strikes in the extra period.

The first came from Croatian defender Boris Zivkovic, who had come on as a substitute, ten minutes into extra-time when his shot slipped past Cologne goalkeeper

Markus Proll.

Then Bernd Schneider added a third that killed off any hopes of a Cologne revival pouncing on a mistake by Carsten Cullman to score past Proll after 114 minutes.

Leverkusen had looked to be cruising to victory in normal time after the unfortunate Marc Zellwegger diverted a shot from Oliver Neuville into his own goal after 59 minutes.

But in the last minute of normal time, former West Ham and Liverpool defender Rigobert Song slotted in the equaliser to send the tie into extra time.

The victory means that Leverkusen will face either holders Schalke or European champions Bayern Munich in the final - they play their semi-final on Wednesday.



PHOTO: AFP

FRENCH RULE: Arsenal's French international trio Thierry Henry (L) Sylvain Wiltord (c) and Robert Pires celebrate Pires' strike against Derby at Highbury on March 5.

Premiership Gunners go two points clear



AFP, London

Arsenal leapfrogged Manchester United to go top of the English Premiership with a 1-0 win thanks to French international Robert Pires against relegation-threatened Derby County at Highbury on Tuesday.

Elsewhere Blackburn won 3-0 against Aston Villa but they still linger in the relegation zone, one point from safety as Bolton, Ipswich and Everton keep a nervous eye on proceedings.

That was especially true of fourth-from-bottom Bolton who went down 1-0 to Sunderland at the Stadium of Light thanks to Jason McAteer's goal on the stroke of half time.

Graham Poll after December's defeat by Newcastle, forayed into the box with the ball at his feet.

County's Danny Higginbotham tripped him but referee Graham Barber denied Arsenal what seemed a clear-cut penalty.

Arsenal midfielder Ray Parlour then blasted over the top before Derby's Paul Boertien blocked a Sol Campbell header from a Henry corner.

And it needed two fine saves from Oakes to keep the game scoreless before the break.

At full stretch, he denied Henry after the forward's shot deflected off Higginbotham and then he managed to kick away a Aylvain Wiltord volley that was heading into the bottom right corner.

crossbar.

More good work from Dunn later in the half left Cole one-on-one with former Old Trafford colleague Schmeichel following a superb lofted pass.

England striker Cole beat the Denmark great only for the ball to bounce back off the post. From the rebound he set up Damien Duff but Schmeichel recovered to save his shot.

But in the second half League Cup winners Rovers had their reward with two late goals. In the 85th minute Duff beat Schmeichel with a stunning strike before Cole put the icing on the cake four minutes later.

Bolton, who started Tuesday one place above Rovers and just outside the relegation zone, went behind to a goal three minutes before the break.

Arsenal started the match a point behind United but 90 minutes later were two points clear.

However that lead may last only 24 hours as Alex Ferguson's reigning champions bid to get back in pole position with a win against Tottenham on Wednesday.

Pires' 69th minute goal wrapped up all three points for Arsenal after County battled hard to get something out of the match.

Dutch master Dennis Bergkamp superbly controlled a high ball and then released Pires who raced into the Derby penalty area before giving 'keeper Andy Oakes little chance.

Derby striker Malcolm Christie did threaten at the other end and England goalkeeper David Seaman had to rush off his line to prevent the County forward giving his side the lead.

At Ewood Park, Blackburn took the lead through David Dunn's powerful seventh-minute shot. Hakan Unsal's pass found Dunn, who cut inside Jloyd (sic) Samuel and then rifled in a shot that Villa 'keeper Peter Schmeichel could do little to stop.

Rovers might have been 3-0 up at the break, former Manchester United striker Andy Cole hitting both post and bar. He first struck the woodwork when following an early corner his close range volley hit the

Former Bolton star McAteer put Sunderland ahead when, from Kevin Kilbane's cross, England striker Kevin Phillips squared the ball to the Republic of Ireland midfielder who made no mistake.

Phillips twice came close to giving Sunderland the lead, just flicking wide a Michael Gray cross and heading a Patrick Mbomba centre into the net only to have the effort chalked off following McAteer's foul on Bolton keeper Jussi Jaaskelainen.

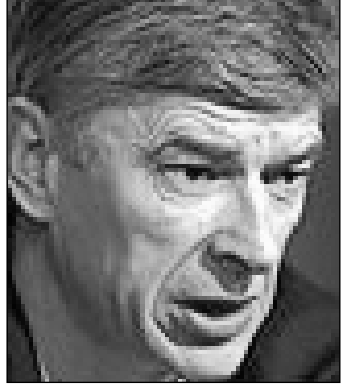
Premiership's top six									
English Premiership table after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Arsenal	29	17	9	3	58	31	60		
Man Utd	29	18	4	7	69	37	58		
Liverpool	29	16	8	5	47	25	56		
Newcastle	28	17	4	7	52	35	55		
Leeds	28	11	12	5	37	29	45		
Chelsea	27	11	11	5	47	28	44		

Wenger not affected



AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger brushed off remarks by arch-rival Alex Ferguson after the Gunners shot to the top of the English Premiership with victory against Derby.



ARSENE WENGER

Wenger, an old mental sparring partner of Ferguson's for several seasons, said he had not been bothered by the Manchester United boss's veiled criticisms of Arsenal.

Ferguson, whose Manchester United team are now two points behind Arsenal following Tuesday's game, suggested earlier today that if his club retained the title they would have 'done it the right way'.

The suggestion in Ferguson's words was that Arsenal had deliberately delayed disciplinary hearings of Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira to their advantage.

But Wenger brushed off Ferguson's words, saying he would not be losing any sleep over the comments.

"One thing that I will say is that he doesn't disturb my nights at all," Wenger quipped.

"To win the title we have to play good football, we are on a good track and what other people say is not as important.

"We don't really listen to what he says, we concentrate on our own game.

"We didn't do anything but if we are clever that's a compliment and we take it like that.

"What I can say is that we didn't do anything to the FA - we had a letter to tell us we had a hearing on that day."

Henry, who returned to action on Tuesday, faces a disciplinary hearing here Wednesday following his tirade at referee Graham Poll in the

fought win over Derby, which arrived courtesy of a Robert Pires goal means it is now 17 games without defeat for Wenger's side, who were last champions in 1998, when they claimed the double.

"The championship is now in our hands and as long as we win our games we don't have to worry about anyone else.

"The desire is there and the commitment is evident in our play," said Wenger.

"I am very pleased with the attitude of the team and their behaviour.

"It shows tonight that we have improved a lot because at the start of the season we didn't have the concentration to keep this scoreline."

Twice, in fact, Arsenal had the

chance to go top with home wins against Charlton and Newcastle pre-Christmas - but tripped up on both occasions.

Psychologically, this result could be crucial in the run-in.

"At half-time we encouraged each other to get out there and claim the victory we finally got."

Wenger also refused to rule Liverpool and Newcastle out of the title equation.

But Derby manager John Gregory, whose side have just faced both Arsenal and United in the past two days, believes United are the better equipped to come out on top in May.

"I think it will be very close but my money is on United," he said.

"Having played both in such a short space of time, United caused us more problems.

"They created so many goingscoring opportunities that they should have put us out of sight."

"I don't think Arsenal broke us down like they did," said Gregory.

Argentine president speaks out

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine president Eduardo Duhalde voiced his opposition to suspending football in the country here Tuesday in the wake of violence that has left three dead and dozens injured.

Duhalde said halting the national championship was not the answer, and called for tough punishments for those caught involved in the trouble.

"It's not a solution," Duhalde said, talking about the crowd trouble that has dogged Argentine football since the 2002 season kicked off last month.

Elber dreams finals

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's Brazilian striker Giovane Elber still hopes to make it into his country's squad for the World Cup finals.

"I don't know if I will be there, but if I do go then I will be very happy," said the 29-year-old striker.

However, Elber knows his chances of making it into Luis Felipe Scolari's squad for the finals in Japan and South Korea have been hampered by his club's refusal to allow him to play for Brazil in recent matches.

If he is not selected for the squad, then Elber is determined to make the best of the situation.

"If I am not there, it means I can spend seven weeks holiday with my family. I have already been to Japan - it is not the best place to take a holiday."

Elber, who has won 15 caps for Brazil, is on the verge of becoming the most successful foreign striker in the history of the Bundesliga - he has 106 goals to his name from his spells with Stuttgart and Bayern.

That has put him level with Swiss striker Stephane Chapuisat.

Hapoel-AC Milan tie on neutral ground

AFP, Milan

Israel's Hapoel Tel Aviv and AC Milan of Italy will play next week's UEFA Cup quarter-final first leg tie on neutral territory instead of in Tel Aviv, the Italian First Division club told AFP on Wednesday.

European governing body UEFA have sanctioned the move because of the worsening security conditions in the Middle East.

No exposure please!

AFP, Singapore

Scantily-clad cheerleaders have been shown the red card at Singapore football matches but sideline jugglers are welcome, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

The Woodlands Wellington club has been told by the Football Association of Singapore that a gyrating duet hired to perform at their S-League matches were not appropriate entertainment.

The young women, dressed in bikini tops, transparent mini-skirts and thigh-high boots, appeared to mesmerise the crowd but FA competition director Quah Kim Song told the Straits Times Wednesday there were complaints.

"We had some complaints from parents who felt it was not good for children to be exposed to such entertainment.

"And frankly, I felt it was quite distasteful. Instead of dancers, wouldn't it have been better to bring in some jugglers?"

Quah said Woodlands had not been told to stop using dancers, but to review the situation and use performers who were "attired properly instead of revealing so much flesh."

When asked what was wrong with featuring such dancers at football matches, Quah replied: "But this is football. It's the entertainment on the field that will bring the fans to the stadium."

Get ready for Mrs. Ronaldo

INTERNET, Milan

Inter Milan superstar Ronaldo's wife Milene Dominguez will make her league football debut on the 19th of March at the Monza Stadium.

Ronaldo's better half will wear the jersey of the local club Fiamma Monza.

But what does her husband think about it and what will he do to support her? Almost certainly he will be present on the stands as a supporter.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Treasure seeker's aid

4 After-hrs. bank

7 Unbelievable tale

8 "— moi, le deluge"

10 Taming of the Shrew" city

11 Intones

13 Soap opera

16 Firmament

17 Singer Payne

18 Cologne-label word

19 Union jack?

20 Word of action

21 Erect

23 Unruly tykes

25 Percussion instrument ...

26... and its sound, maybe

27 "— Town"

28 Brackets (Abbr.)

30 Seance noise

33 Soap opera

36 Intimidedates

37 Boldness

38 Amsterdam struc-tures

39 Deadlocked

40 Neighbor of Leb.

41 Shaft of light

1 With a passion

2 Grad

3 Frolic-some

4 Garden pest

5 Refrain phrase

6 Fix

7 Chatter

8 Liniment

9 Thoroughfare

10— de deux

12 Big name in retail

14 Debit's opp.

15 Gist

19 Groove on

20 Actor Kilmer

21 Leap

22 Illiterate

23 Borscht base

24 Re-hearsed

25 Sticky stuff

26 Iron

28 Ring locale, often

29 Subsequently

30 The Hoosier Poet

31 River near Stone-henge

32 Apiece

34 Director Bunuel

35 Fuji flow

Solution time: 26 mins.

ASOF	BITP	LAMB
LOVE	EGO	OBIE
ALAN	BOLD	FACE
SOLD	OUT	OTTER
EAT	ALE	
STARK	TOLD	OF
AWL	YAK	RIO
GOLD	BUG	EMOTIE
AOL	WEE	
SPAWN	COLD	WAR
HOLD	OVER	DONE
OPAL	AND	LOTS
WEAR	STY	EDIT

Rivaldo only thinking football



REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona's Brazilian forward Rivaldo said on Tuesday he had given no thought about whether to sign a new contract at the Catalan club.

The 29-year-old's current deal is up at the end of next season and speculation is once again starting to mount about a possible move to Italy.



RIVALDO

Rivaldo said he just wanted to concentrate on his football for the remainder of the season, although he did drop a possible hint about his likely decision when he complained about feeling undervalued by the Nou Camp crowd.

"It's good that the coach and president have said they want to talk about it," Rivaldo said at a news conference.

"All I want to do at the moment is think about the next few games, though. We'll talk afterwards.

"In any case, I haven't spoken to the president or any of the club directors on this matter."

Rivaldo is still booed by some fans when he is not playing at his absolute best and he is clearly upset by that treatment.

"Sometimes I don't feel valued,"

he said. "I don't know what more I can do to make people appreciate me."

Rivaldo was diplomatic when asked if he thought Romario should be given a place in Brazil's World Cup squad.

"Romario is a great player," he said. "He's been left out of the side for recent games but they've just been friendlies. Romario doesn't need any test.

"The final decision has to be down to the coach, though."

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari omitted Romario from the home-based squad to face Iceland in a friendly in Cuiaba on Thursday despite popular pressure to recall the striker.

No stopping Romario



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

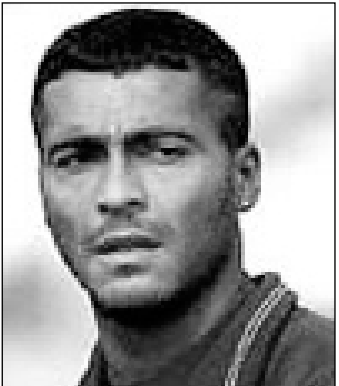
Brazilian striker Romario, who has been repeatedly ignored by the national team since last July, scored twice in Vasco da Gama's 4-1 win over Portuguesa to increase the pressure for a recall.

Romario, top scorer in last year's Brazilian championship with 21 goals, took his tally to nine in eight games in the Rio-Sao Paulo tournament as he fuelled the controversy over whether Brazil should take him to the World Cup.

He is second top scorer after Ponte Preta striker Washington, who has 10 goals.

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari defied a wave of pressure last week -- which even included President Fernando Henrique Cardoso speaking out in Romario's favor -- as he again left the 36-year-old veteran out of his squad, this time for Thursday's friendly with Iceland.

The man known as Big Phil, or



ROMARIO

Felipao, refused to say whether or not he would take Romario to the World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan in May and June.

Romario, who missed France '98 through injury, desperately wants to play in what would be his third World Cup.

"I take the field with the duty to score goals and I'm 100 percent switched on so that I don't waste chances," said Romario in comments which appeared directed at those who feel he is past his best.



PHOTO: INTERNET

LADY PHENOMENON! Milene Dominguez, wife of Brazil superstar Ronaldo, trains in Milan in preparation for her debut in women's football club Fiamma Monza

CRYPTOQUIP

EC ZIU DIEUM YC AKQQKWQ

KW ZSI MYKF ZSI QEUAIWIU

CKWEFFD ZSUIG KW ZSI

ZUYGIF

Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A PERSON IMBIBED A GALLON OF BRINE, I THINK IT COULD CAUSE HIM TO GET PICKLED.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: Q equals G

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

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