

World champs, Germany impress



World champions France began their countdown to the World Cup finals with an emphatic 5-0 win over Scotland in Paris, a day featuring 50 international teams in friendly action.

Berti Vogts was taking charge of Scotland for the first time but saw France race into a 3-0 lead inside the first 23 minutes.

There was more Gallic celebration as Philippe Troussier, the French coach of World Cup co-hosts Japan, saw his side chalk up one of their most impressive victories as they beat fellow finalists Poland 2-0 in Lodz.

It was Japan's first away win since beating Saudi Arabia 1-0 in October 2000 and came courtesy of first-half goals by Hidetoshi Nakata and Naohiro Takahara.

There were also wins for perennial World Cup powerhouse Germany, but they had to come from behind.

Clint Mathis gave the U.S. a shock lead against Germany after 17 minutes in Rostock but skipper Christian Ziege pulled Germany level after 44 minutes with an unstoppable free-kick past his Tottenham Hotspur team mate Kasey Keller.

Germany then hit three in nine minutes from Oliver Neuville (61), Oliver Bierhoff (65) and Torsten Frings (68) before Mathis grabbed a consolation 19 minutes from time.

German coach Rudi Voller proclaimed himself satisfied - just about - with two months to go to his men's World Cup opener against Saudi Arabia.

"I am satisfied with our effort. The players gave everything throughout even if the team was thrown together rather at random," Voller explained, referring to an injury crisis which claimed a dozen regulars - including Leverkusen star Michael Ballack. "The lads who have been around the past couple of years are a great bunch," said Voller. "But the Americans managed to breach our three-man line of defence and we had a few positional problems," Voller admitted.

Argentina, rated as co-favourites to win the World Cup along with France, looked set for a victory as they twice led against fellow finalists and African champions Cameroon in Geneva but in the end had to settle for a 2-2 draw.

A Juan Sebastian Veron penalty



Veteran Argentina forward Claudio Caniggia (No 9) under pressure from Cameroon's Pierre Wome (R) during their Friendly international at Geneva on March 27.

put Argentina ahead after 17 minutes but Cameroon were level three minutes later when Samuel Eto'o was left unmarked to head in at the far post.

Pablo Aimar (63) put Argentina back in front with an excellent break-away strike, but substitute Patrick Suffo equalised with another header from a corner with four minutes to play.

Argentina stretched their unbeaten run to 16 matches, while Cameroon are still unbeaten under coach Winfried Schafer.

Schafer was happy with his side's showing as he puts the finishing touches to Cameroon's preparations for World Cup opening phase matches against Germany, Saudi Arabia and Ireland.

"The pace was very quick from kick off to the end and that helped us. We're happy as it was our first match against one of the big guns.

"We had a few coordination problems in the first half - but we talked about how to correct that and we played better after the interval," said German Schafer.

"We could have won - but it could equally have been 4-4. All our preparation is focused on our first World Cup match (against Ireland).

"It was difficult for me to motivate the players after (February's) African Nations Cup win and I hope we arrive in Asia in a better frame of mind - but I know many African hopes go with us and we hope to emulate our 1990 showing of reaching the quarter-finals."

There were unwelcome defeats for a surprisingly large number of finalists, including highly-rated Portugal who crashed to a 4-1 home reversal to Finland in Oporto.

Portugal, who have been dreaming of the World Cup with the likes of Luis Figo, Rui Costa and Nuno Gomes in their team, were never in the game against the visitors who raced ahead with goals from Joonas Kolka (9) and Mikael Forssell (27).

Sergio Conceicao pulled one back five minutes before the break but the Finns continued their rampage with Jari Litmanen scoring either side of the break.

There was little joy for Spain either, as they went down 1-0 to the Netherlands in Rotterdam where a powerfully headed Frank de Boer goal after 32 minutes was enough to give the Dutch victory.

There were two other shock results with finalists South Africa crashing 4-1 to Georgia in Tbilisi

after having two men sent off. Estonia also scored a memorable upset with a 2-1 win over finalists Russia in Tallinn.

South Africa suffered a painful defeat in Georgia where they finished with nine men after striker Lesley Manyathela and defender Thabang Molefe were sent off.

Manyathela went in the 27th minute for a bad challenge while Molefe was red carded after 58 minutes for a nasty tackle from behind on Vitali Daraselia.

Levan Kobiasvili (14pen), Georgi Demetradze (33, 86) and Rati Alexidze (84) scored for Georgia while Delron Buckley was on target after 67 minutes for South Africa.

Estonia were on the back foot for long periods against Russia but won with goals from Andres Oper after 10 and 85 minutes. Vladimir Beschastnykh scored for Russia after 18 minutes.

Belgium, also heading for Asia in a few weeks time, will have to concentrate better there than they did in Patras where Greece came from 2-0 down to win 3-2 with two goals from Visis Vryzas in the last 10 minutes.

Belgium established their lead early in the second half with goals from Bart Goor (32) and Wesley Sonck (53), but Greece struck back to win it with Vassilis Tsartas turning the match in their favour with a 59th minute penalty.

Senegal, competing in the World Cup for the first time and playing world champions France in the opening match, began their build-up with a 2-1 win over Bolivia in Dakar, while Saudi Arabia scored a notable 3-2 home win over fellow finalists Uruguay.

In other action involving World Cup finalists, Tunisia drew 0-0 with Norway, Sweden were held 1-1 by Switzerland, Croatia drew 0-0 with Slovenia.

Ireland, back in the World Cup finals after an eight year gap, also looked impressive crushing fellow finalists Denmark 3-0 in Dublin with Ian Harte (19), Robbie Keane (55) and Clinton Morrison (90) scoring.

**Away from the matches involving World Cup finalists and in an otherwise unremarkable 0-0 draw between Liechtenstein and Northern Ireland, the 21-year-old Irish striker Warren Feeney made a little bit of soccer history.**

**By making his international debut he became the third generation of his family to play for his country, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, who won two cups in 1947 and 1950, and his father, who made his sole appearance in 1976.**

Ivan Kaviedes grabbed two goals to lead Ecuador to a 3-0 win over Bulgaria in New York while Bouabid Boudina was on target in Morocco's 1-0 victory over Costa Rica in San Jose.

England silenced by Montella



An injury-time penalty from Vincenzo Montella gave Italy a last-gasp 2-1 win over England in a fiercely-contested World Cup warm-up match at Elland Road on Wednesday.

After a dull first 45 minutes, the game sprang into life when Robbie Fowler came off the bench to slot England in front, finishing off West Ham youngster Joe Cole's forceful run.

But England were pegged back when a spectacular long range effort from Italy substitute Vincenzo Montella restored parity.

And Montella had the final word after Massimo Maccarone was brought down by England's substitute goalkeeper David James and the Roma striker stroked home the penalty.

England coach Sven Goran Eriksson defended questions with his usual diplomacy and refused to criticise his players for extending their winless run to four games.

"It disturbs me that we lost today, that's for sure, but I'm not that worried about it because the spirit is very good," said the 53-year-old Swede.

"We played good football, we played as good as Italy did. But they had a more experienced side and won the game thanks to that."

Eriksson jumped to the defence of Cole who gave the ball away in the build-up to the incident which led to Italy's penalty.

"I'm not angry about it," Eriksson said. "If you are young and playing Italy you can make mistakes but hopefully in one year, or hopefully two months, he will learn something."

One player Eriksson was particularly pleased with was Southampton's Wayne Bridge who played for 80 minutes.

"He had a very good game, a very modern left-back who knows how to defend and can attack very well," Eriksson added. "He's not afraid to show his attacking abilities."

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni was economical with his praise for match-winner Montella with whom



SORRY ENGLAND! Italy striker Vincenzo Montella (R), sends England keeper David James the wrong way to score the match winner from the penalty spot at Elland Road, Leeds on March 27.

support. England chose to play with two strikers, Liverpool duo Michael Owen and Emile Heskey.

England had the first opportunity in the eighth minute but David Beckham's free-kick, awarded after Alessandro Nesta had fouled Heskey, sailed high over the cross-bar.

Bridge caught the eye with a couple of rampaging runs down the wing and may have answered Eriksson's prayers by making the troublesome left-sided position his own.

After Nesta had been yellow-carded for bringing down Heskey in the 25th minute, Campbell was denied the opening goal when his close range shot was tipped over the bar by Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

Italy's best chance of the first-half came in the 41st minute when Gianluca Zambrotta cut in from the right and forced a good save out of England's Nigel Martyn from 20 yards.

England made nine changes at the interval with only Bridge and Trevor Sinclair staying on for the second-half while Italy made just one adjustment, bringing on Montella for Totti.

Only a well-timed interception from Nesta prevented Fowler from making contact with Bridge's delightful left-wing cross nine minutes into the second period as the home side pushed forward with more purpose.

And moments later England's Ledley King, who missed out on making his debut against Holland last month because of illness, tested Buffon with a fierce right-foot strike.

The writing was on the wall for Italy but they failed to heed the warnings and it was no surprise when England took the lead in the 63rd minute.

Skilful youngster Cole refused to give up what looked like a lost cause and after driving through several Italian tackles he slipped the ball to Fowler who slid the ball past Buffon from 10 yards.

But England's lead lasted just four minutes when Cole lost possession in midfield out of nothing Montella pulled the trigger from 25 yards after the England defence had failed to close him down, and the Roma marksman's 25-yarder flew into the top corner.

And Montella hit England with a sucker punch in stoppage-time, netting from 12 yards after Maccarone was hauled to the floor by the on-rushing James.

Pires gives up

INTERNET, Paris

Arsenal FC midfielder Robert Pires decided to clarify the controversy around the injury that has ruled him out of the forthcoming World Cup 2002 since rumours have been spreading concerning the gravity of his injury as well as the possibility that he still might travel to the World Cup. "The World Cup is over for me," stated the midfielder in an interview with the French daily L'Equipe.

"I'd like to be left in peace. I've taken a decision to wait three weeks and then decide whether I should undergo the surgery or not. I believe I am entitled to the right of medical secret," he added.

Meanwhile doctor Guy Bellier, a knee surgeon, believes that: "This kind of polemic concerning the way the treatment should be carried out is inevitable: surgeons have different opinions and there is no such a thing as the absolute truth."

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Collated international football friendly results of matches involving World Cup finalists on Wednesday:

**In Paris**  
France 5 (Zidane 12, Trezeguet 23, 42, Henry 33, Marlet 88) Scotland 0

**In Leeds, England**  
England 1 (Fowler 63) Italy 2 (Montella 67, 90)

**In Rostock, Germany**  
Germany 4 (Ziege 44, Neuville 61, Bierhoff 65, Frings 68) United States 2 (Mathis 17, 71)

**In Geneva**  
Argentina 2 (Veron 17-pen, Aimar 63) Cameroon 2 (Eto'o 20, Suffo 86)

**In Porto, Portugal**  
Portugal 1 (S. Conceicao 40) Finland 4 (Kolkka 9, Forsell 27, Litmanen 42, 50)

**In Rotterdam, The Netherlands**  
Holland 1 (F. De Boer 32) Spain 0

**In Dublin**  
Republic of Ireland 3 (Harte 19, Keane 54, Morrison 90) Denmark 0

**In Zagreb**  
Croatia 0 Slovenia 0

**In Dammam, Saudi Arabia**  
Saudi Arabia 3 (Al-Dossari 9, 19, Al-Waked 17) Uruguay 2 (Forlan 4, O'Neil 59)

**In Dakar**  
Senegal 2 (Bouba Diop 44, Niang 64) Bolivia 1 (Diego 47)

**In Malmö, Sweden**  
Sweden 1 (Allback 28) Switzerland 1 (Cabanas 53)

**In Patras, Greece**  
Greece 3 (Tsartas 61-pen, Vryzas 80, 87) Belgium 2 (Goor 29, Sonck 55)

**In Lodz, Poland**  
Poland 0 Japan 2 (Nakata 10, Takahara 42)

**In Tunis**  
Tunisia 0 Norway 0

**In Tallinn**  
Estonia 2 (Oper 9, 85) Russia 1 (Beschastnykh 18)

**In Tbilisi**  
Georgia 4 (Kobiashvili 12-pen, Demetradze 35, 84, Alexidze 82) South Africa 1 (Buckley 66)

**In San Jose**  
Costa Rica 0 Morocco 1 (Madihi 76)

**In Fortaleza, Brazil**  
Brazil 1 (Luizao 71) Yugoslavia 0

**In East Rutherford, New Jersey**  
Ecuador 3 (Kaviedes 23, 81, Tenorio 50) Bulgaria 0

France no dream team!

REUTERS, Paris

World champions France may have thrashed Scotland 5-0 in a majestic World Cup warm-up but coach Roger Lemerre warned that the champions were still some way short of being a "dream team".

The French scored four goals within the first 45 minutes on Wednesday and had sealed the game before the break against Scots who were overwhelmed technically and physically from the start.

But Lemerre said: "France are not a dream team. We are a team well-organised and disciplined. We played in a very simple way. But as far as the dream is concerned we'll see about it later," he said.

However, he was delighted with the performance against Scotland. "We had four shots in the first half and we managed to score as many goals. It's something exceptional."

"We played in a very simple manner and we were able to implement exactly what we wanted."

"We were really strong on the pitch. And what we did during the first half was sometimes outstanding," captain Marcel Desailly said. "The first goal by Zinedine Zidane) broke the deadlock and it was much easier to play after that."

Inspirational Zidane, at his very best, opened the scoring thanks to a superb 20-metre volley which left goalkeeper Neil Sullivan no chance in the 12th minute.

The game was from there was totally dominated by the world and European champions who gave the feeling they could score whenever they wanted.

"We had a fantastic first half. We scored great goals and we produced a game like we never had before. It was a real delight," Zidane said.

Thierry Henry scored a goal and David Trezeguet hit a double to lift his personal tally to 18 goals for France.

"At first I was a little bit confused to be on the left but after a while everything went smoothly," Henry said. "It's still difficult to say something when you win by such a margin."

"We beat Japan 5-0 and we tamed Portugal 4-0. Every time people had said the opponents were too weak. I don't know."

Ronaldo bolsters Brazil



AP, Fortaleza

In just 45 minutes, Ronaldo rekindled Brazil's faith in a fifth World Cup title.

Visibly out of shape and off his old explosive form, the "phenomenon" still provided the spark that fired up a struggling Brazilian team in a 1-0 win over Yugoslavia in a Cup warmup Wednesday night.

Luizao got the game-winner in the 70th minute, but the story of the game was Ronaldo's return after a two-year absence. And his no-look passes, a seeing-eye through ball and a near-miss on a breakaway drew roars of approval from the

Cup." Ronaldo said his ultimate ambition was to regain his reputation as the most feared striker in the game. "I want to start slowly but I remain very ambitious," he said.

"In my career I have always conquered everything I wanted. My objective is to be the best again, I know it might take time but I will do it."

The first step, he said, was to win back his place in the team at his Italian club Inter Milan.

"I thank Felipe (Scolari) for the chance he gave me, now I have to go back to Inter, fight for a place in the team and get some match practice," he said.

It was a late start for Brazil, who stumbled though its worst Cup qualifying ever with a revolving door

three times on counterstrikes led by Fiorentina's Predrag Mijatovic that tested goalie Marcos.

In the second period, Luizao replaced Ronaldo and striker Denilson came in for defender Anderson Polga, as Scolari tested a more offensive formation.

And it was all Brazil, with Roberto Carlos threatening from long distance and Ronaldinho, the standout of the team, on skittered through the defense and forced Jevric to make a tough save in the lower right corner.

As the crowd grew impatient, chanting for Romero and shouting "Ole" as the visitors traded passes, Brazil finally got on the board. Cafu lofted a cross from the right side that Lazio defender Sinisa Mihajlovic failed to clear, and Luizao headed the ball in from point-blank range to make it 1-0.



BACK WHERE HE BELONGS: Brazilian superstar Ronaldo (R), trying to get past veteran Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic during their international friendly at Fortaleza on March 27.

crowd at Castelao stadium in this northeastern city.

Most of all, his rebuilt knee and a recent spate of muscle problems didn't seem to bother or intimidate him. Is Ronaldo back?

"I'm really happy," the panting, perspiring Inter striker said as he headed for the locker room at halftime. "My participation could only have been better with a goal. But I didn't deserve so much."

"The goal is the World Cup," he added. "It was a good start."

"Today was a very happy day for me," said Ronaldo. "I was confident beforehand, everything went well as I expected."

"I've trained a lot for this, I'm happy with my display, my movement and the chances I created."

"The group has been marvellous, they have welcomed me with open arms, everybody helped me on the pitch, knowing that my physical condition is not the best."

"I know I missed some goals but I will save them up for the World

of coaches and players. And while Brazil were less than overwhelming against Yugoslavia, the team at last appears to be taking shape.

"We have 77 days left. That's a big number. We can get ready," said Roma defender Cafu.

Ronaldo and Paris Saint-Germain's Ronaldinho showed an instant understanding and signs that they could be the tandem coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has been searching for. In the 14th minute, Ronaldo threaded a ball through the defense for a shot by Ronaldinho that Yugoslav goalie Dragoslav Jevric raced out to stifle.

Then it was all Ronaldo, with a heel pass to Edilson, a long bomb and a feed to Roberto Carlos for a booming shot that sailed high.

In the 32nd minute, Ronaldo streaked up the middle on a breakaway, but Jevric dived to smother his shot.

The Brazilian onslaught kept Yugoslavia penned up in their own end, but the visitors slipped through

Both teams substituted freely in the final minutes.

Brazil's next Cup warmup is against Portugal on April 17 in Lisbon.

LINEUPS

**Brazil:** Marcos, Lucio, Roque Junior, Anderson Polga (Denilson, 46), Cafu, Emerson (Kleberson, 66), Gilberto Silva, Ronaldinho (Juninho Paulista, 79), Roberto Carlos (Junior, 75), Ronaldo (Luizao, 46) and Edilson (Djalminha, 69).

**Yugoslavia:** Dragoslav Jevric, Zoran Mirkovic, Sinisa Mihajlovic, Mladen Krstajic; Slavisa Jokanovic (Igor Djulaj, 64), Nikola Lazetic (Radovan Krivokapic, 80) Predrag Djordjevic (Branko Boskovic, 75) Boban Dmitrovic; Predrag Mijatovic (Ognjen Koroman, 54), Savo Mirosevic (Nenad Dzodic, 75) and Mateja Kezman (Sasa Ilic, 80).

**Referee:** Epifanio Gonzalez, Paraguay

ITV Digital face doom



AFP, London

The administrators of bankrupt British pay-TV broadcaster ITV Digital were striving Thursday to stave off a collapse of the business, which could threaten the survival of dozens of English football clubs.

British media groups Granada and Carlton, who set up the digital terrestrial broadcaster in 1997,

pulled the plug on the company on Wednesday, saying it could not afford a multi-million-pound contract signed with English football.

Accountants Deloitte and Touche have been appointed as administrators to try to haul the loss-making broadcasting out of bankruptcy.

ITV Digital owes The Football League of 72 second-tier clubs 178 million pounds (290 million euros, 255 million dollars) over the next two years but is trying to re-negotiate the payment down to just 50 million.

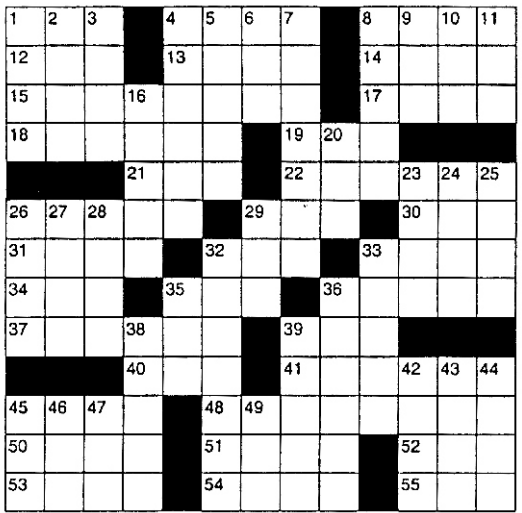
The Football League has refused to accept a re-negotiation of the rights, which it believes could put 30 to 50 clubs out of business, and has warned of legal action if the original deal is not honoured.

Like all broadcasters, ITV Digital has been walloped by the slump in advertising revenues caused by the global economic slowdown. It has also struggled to compete with arch-rival BSkyB, Rupert Murdoch's satellite broadcaster.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 39 Priestly vestment 40 "Certainly" 41 Frost or Burns 42 Vagrant 21 One-kind link 13 General Bradley 14 Showed unoriginality 15 Ersatz stovetop 17 Second-hand 18 Praises to the skies 19 Sermonizer's subject 21 Existed 22 Dragster 26 Greens-keeper's item 30 Coop occupant 31 Winged actress 32 Wrestling surface 33 Complaint 34 Up to 35 Moonshine vessel 36 Overly particular 37 Frank

2 Crazy like 30 Up against 31 Swimmer 26 Avin. 27 Hedge-podge 28 Mickey's creator 29 Crone 32 Wanted poster photo 33 Nickname for a "good ol' boy" 35 Montana, for one 36 Moved in a stream 38 Lay Lady Lay singer 39 Band-leader Shaw 42 Harrow rival 43 Erstwhile Cabinet member 44 Weight allowance 45 That guy 46 Fuss 47 Writer Buscaglia 49 Sapporo sash



CRYPTOKUIP

Q Z R Y L Z X W R H Q Y F Q I A T R T L T E W X W Z E Z R H O R L Z W Z E F Q F C R I C S L T R " L S O R K

L Z K K L Z E R S Q A T."

Yesterday's Cryptokuip: I HAVE TO ASSUME A CAVE MAN'S FIRST CHOICE FOR A MEAL WOULD BE A CLUB SANDWICH.

Today's Cryptokuip Clue: S equals R The Cryptokuip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.