

Scolari felt let down?



AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Under-pressure Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari revealed Thursday he did not select striker Romario for the World Cup squad because he felt betrayed by the striker.

Speaking for the first time of the controversial decision to leave the hero of Brazil's 1994 World Cup team at home, Scolari said he took his decision after Romario refused to play the Copa America last year.

Scolari's comments come as footballing legend Mario Zagallo claimed the absence of Romario could prove costly for the four-time World Cup winners.

Zagallo, who was involved in all four of Brazil's World Cup triumphs twice as a player then as coach and in 1994 as technical director, set aside the fact he is suing Romario for slander to say Scolari had made a mistake in not including him.

But Scolari said he had given the mercurial Romario enough chances to prove his loyalty to the team, and his decision not to go to Colombia for the Copa America where Brazil were humiliated 2-0 by tiny Honduras had made the decision for him.

"I invited him to travel with me to Colombia. I didn't know the squad, I didn't know how to work with the group and he didn't come. He (Romario) said that he was undergoing surgery. But he went with Vasco da Gama to Mexico," said Scolari.

"The team needed a point of reference, a leader," said Scolari. "People forget the details, but I have to remember everything."

"When I ask for a favour I like it to be taken care of. I extend my hand once, twice, as many times as necessary. But if the person does not respond, why should I insist either?"

"They say that I didn't give Romario a chance. Yes I did give him a chance. I called him up in my first selection on my arrival. And I honoured him with the captain's band," added Scolari.

The 36-year-old Vasco da Gama player saw his hopes of playing in Japan and South Korea after a superb season at club level dashed on Monday when the squad was announced.

Zagallo said that while every coach was entitled to pick a squad suited to his tastes he would still have selected Romario if he had been Scolari.

"Each coach has his philosophy of work. I would summon Romario," said Zagallo.

"I think that his performance with Vasco da Gama means he should be summoned.

"But coach Scolari made his choice. I respect Scolari's ideas and will be a fan cheering for success. Brazil can only grow," Zagallo told local television.

Zagallo, who led Brazil to the 1998 World Cup finals where he left Romario out of the squad because of injury, said two years ago he would have said Romario was not fit to play, but the striker had demonstrated the opposite.

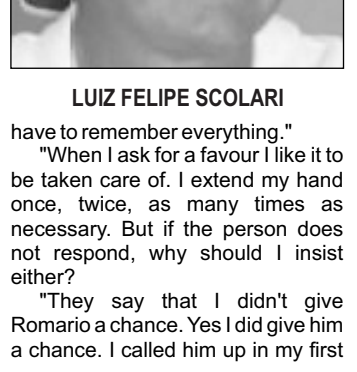
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ROMARIO

the Copa America has stopped me from going to the World Cup. Other players didn't go to the Copa and were picked again.

"It would be better if I were there, but I'm going to get on with my life.

Romario has said he cannot believe he is not going to the World Cup and has hit out at coach Luiz Felipe Scolari.

The 36-year-old striker was left out of the 23-man squad on Monday despite massive public support.

Scolari, nicknamed "Big Phil", was blasted by the press with one newspaper labelling him "public enemy number one." But the coach stuck by his decision saying Romario was not picked because he missed the Copa America in Colombia last year.

After staying silent all week, Romario spoke out to reporters following a training session at Vasco da Gama, where he has been averaging more than a goal a game this season.

"I can't believe that not going to

As he says, I am no use technically or tactically in his view. He's made his choice. I consider myself good enough to be in the squad but the coach doesn't.

"Now, I'm going to look for strength with my parents, my wife, my children and my friends. The real reason for me not being picked will appear one day."

Romario asked to be left out of the Copa America squad to have eye surgery -- but then postponed the operation and went to Mexico with Vasco da Gama, a decision which is thought to have upset Scolari.

In 11 months as coach, Scolari has picked Romario just once. That was as captain in July's 1-0 World Cup qualifier defeat to Uruguay.

Romario was the hero of the victorious 1994 World Cup team, scoring five goals in the finals, but was left out four years ago in France.

Brazil are top seeds and favourites in group C with Turkey, China and Costa Rica the opposition.

and Ronan Keating. The event aims to raise 500,000 pounds (730,000 dollars, 800,000 euros) for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, for which Victoria - Posh Spice in the Spice Girls - has campaigned in the past.

The event will be screened by the independent ITV television network on May 9.

During the programme, Beckham is expected to update viewers on his fitness for the World Cup.

This has become a national obsession after he broke a bone in his left foot during a Champions League quarter-final against Deportivo La Coruna last month.

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said Monday that Beckham, who plays in midfield for the team, would be fit to captain the national side in Japan and South Korea.



HELLO PRIME MINISTER! England captain David Beckham (L) shakes hands with Prime Minister Tony Blair (R) while Chief Executive of the Football Association (FA) Adam Crozier (C) looks on at Downing Street on May 9 shortly after the England squad for the 2002 World Cup was announced.

The big Beckham party



AFP, London

England soccer captain David Beckham and his pop star wife Victoria are to hold a lavish celebrity party Sunday, days before the national team jets out to the World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

Posh and Becks, as Britain's premier celebrity couple are known, will throw open the doors of their luxury mansion to 400 guests for the charity extravaganza, which will have a Far East theme.

The pair have invited the England team, whose World Cup squad was announced by manager Sven Goran Eriksson Thursday, Beckham's Manchester United colleagues and celebrity friends to the bash.

This will take place in a specially built Japanese garden in the grounds of their palatial home in Hertfordshire, central England, dubbed Beckingham Palace by the media.

To create an oriental feel, the couple have ordered 60,000 imported orchids to festoon the grounds and ordered tons of sushi for guests, who are expected to include pop singers Sir Elton John

not use the football team to try and divert attention from the economic crisis that has left the Latin American country reeling.

"Our objective is to do well, especially to help our people who are suffering," said Batistuta. "But I hope if we were to win the World Cup it would not be exploited by our politicians."

Batistuta has had a disappointing season with Roma and said he would stay with the deposed Italian champions but "only if Roma really wants me, otherwise there are certainly other teams that want me".

Arsenal fan Lemerre



AP, Bourg-Saint-Maurice, France

France coach Roger Lemerre on Thursday congratulated Arsenal for its "exceptional" performance this season, a day after the Gunners added the Premier League title to their FA Cup victory.

"I won't forget the pictures of happiness of Arsene Wenger and his players, especially [Sylvain] Wiltord," said Lemerre, who watched Arsenal's 1-0 away win over Manchester United on TV.

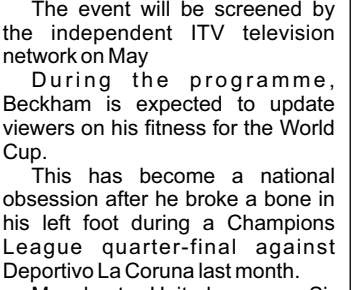
Wiltord scored the second-half winner to give Arsenal an unbeatable lead in one round of the Premiership remaining.

Wiltord and Arsenal teammates Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira are part of the France squad headed to the World Cup later this month.

Speaking at a news conference, Lemerre praised the "quite exceptional performance of Arsenal,

which hasn't lost an away match this season."

The France coach is in high-altitude training with eight members of the national team in Tignes, a ski resort in the French Alps. The players went to the nearby town of



ROGER LEMERRE

Bourg-Saint-Maurice on Thursday to practice on a soccer field, and were watched by about 300 locals.

After the training session,

Lemerre confirmed that midfielder Christian Karembeu won't be travelling to South Korea and Japan, although he is nearly recovered from a thigh injury that ruined his World Cup hopes.

"If there hadn't been any doubt [over fitness], Karembeu would be with us," Lemerre said. "The doubt has been lifted, but it's too late."

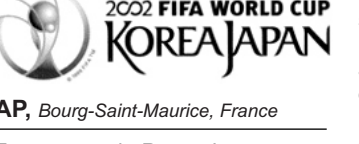
Lemerre also said he was waiting for fitness news from Real Madrid midfielder Claude Makelele, who is reported to have a slight thigh injury.

Makelele is one of 23 players Lemerre is expected to list in his official squad. The coach so far has refused to say when he will announce the roster.

Lemerre confirmed Thursday that Zinedine Zidane will miss France's World Cup warmup match against Belgium at the Stade de France on May 18.

Zidane's wife is expected to give birth to their third child that day. Lemerre said that in such cases, "family is much more important" than soccer.

Lizarazu Uruguay wary



AP, Bourg-Saint-Maurice, France

Some think France got a lucky break in its first-round draw for the World Cup, but Bixente Lizarazu says one team risks giving the World Champions an early headache.

"Uruguay is an extremely aggressive team," the Bayern Munich defender said Thursday. "You have to be very hard at tackling to make yourself respected, but you also need to keep your self-control."

France plays Uruguay in Busan, South Korea on June 6 in its second match of the World Cup. It also meets Senegal and Denmark in the first round.

Lizarazu said he got a taste of South American soccer when Bayern Munich met Argentina's Boca Juniors in the final of the Intercontinental Cup last November.

Bayern won the match 1-0 in extra time. "It was extremely violent, both in player-to-player contact and in the language used," Lizarazu said. "It was a warning: 'That's how you play in South America?' If so, we have to adapt."

But the diminutive defender, who

was in high-altitude training in the Alps this week, isn't worried about France's ability to meet the Uruguayan challenge.

"We have an extremely powerful team," Lizarazu said.

Nevertheless, Les Bleus will have to toughen up to avoid the mistakes they made against Spain and Chile in exhibition matches last year.

"Our defeats against Chile and Spain were due to lack of aggres-



BIXENTE LIZARAZU

siveness," Lizarazu said. "When you play teams that tackle hard, you also have to tackle hard."

Another concern for the French team is the weather in South Korea and Japan.

Team doctor Jean-Marcel Ferret said humidity was expected to be about 70-80 percent, with temperatures around 25-30 degrees Celsius (77-86 degrees Fahrenheit) or more.

"I don't know if we'll suffer from the heat," Lizarazu said. "We didn't suffer at the Confederations Cup. It was relatively humid, but it was OK."

The 2001 Confederations Cup, which France won, also was held in Japan and South Korea.

Ferret said he was concerned about players tiring fast in the humid conditions and becoming prone to injury through lack of alertness. But the 32-year-old Lizarazu said he's in peak condition.

"I feel very well physically," the defender said. "I do lots of stretching exercises, I watch what I eat, I practice yoga, all of which means you maintain the elasticity of your muscles for as long as possible."

The France team's high-altitude training camp in Tignes and Bourg-Saint-Maurice ends Friday. On Tuesday players meet at Clairefontaine outside Paris for the last training camp before the team heads to Asia.

open," he said. "All will depend on which team will be fresher on the day. The chances are 50-50."

Veteran striker Ulf Kirsten, who has two finals to look forward to before he ends his career, was a little more optimistic.

"We must win at least one title and I believe we will," said the 36-year-old, who was expected to start on the bench.

Schalke 04, which finished fifth in the league to claim a UEFA Cup spot, is a cup specialist with two wins out of four finals since World War Two.

Midfielder Joerg Boehme, who scored both goals in the Gelsenkirchen side's 2-0 victory over little Union Berlin in last season's final, will be eager to shine after being left out of Germany's World Cup squad.

"Three goals would be nice," he said. "Seriously, I can tell you that we will do everything we can to win it."

Schalke coach Huub Stevens has a fit squad to call upon for his last match in charge before he moves on to Hertha Berlin.

Belgium's Emile Mpenza and Denmark's Ebbe Sand, who have missed large chunks of the season through injury, should be paired up front.

Leverkusen coach Klaus Toppmoller will be without defender and captain Jens Nowotny, following the knee injury that ruled him out of the World Cup. But Kirsten has said he will not be forgotten.

The last time Leverkusen won the Cup, Kirsten took the trophy to his room for the night.

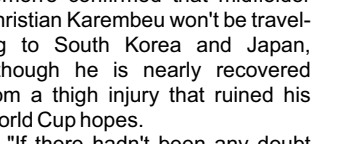
"I'd love to win it again," said the Bundesliga's most prolific scorer of the past decade.

"But this time I will not sleep with it. Our injured captain Jens Nowotny deserves to do that."

because of injuries.

"For the moment we can't tell for certain if Patrick will be in the final squad," admitted Assamba.

Mboma worry for Cameroon



AFP, London

Former African player of the year Patrick Mboma may not be fit for Cameroon's World Cup bid because of an Achilles tendon injury, national team doctor Oliver Assamba said Friday.

The 31-year-old striker, is currently on loan from Italian outfit Parma to Sunderland, but has played very little in his three months with the English Premiership club

because of injuries.

"For the moment we can't tell for certain if Patrick will be in the final squad," admitted Assamba.

"The most serious is his Achilles tendon problem which prevents him from pulling very hard on the ball and turning fast."

Cameroon play Germany, Ireland and Saudi Arabia in the World Cup and coach Winfried Schafer wants 2000 African Player of the Year Mboma in their squad.

"Patrick Mboma is very important for our team," said Schafer.

Mboma, who was a member of the Olympic winning side in 2000,

also had a spell playing in Japan. He scored three goals in the African Nations Cup in January/February, but missed his country's final success over Senegal because of a foot injury picked up in the quarter finals.

The 'Indomitable Lions' are due in Yaounde next Wednesday for a 48-hour grouping where they will attend a reception with Prime Minister Peter Mafanya Musonge and an exhibition match.

They travel on May 17 to the Netherlands for a friendly warm-up match against Denmark.

Romario at a loss



INTERNET, Rio de Janeiro

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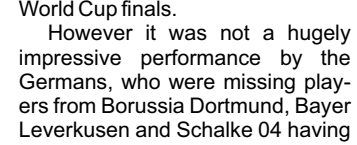
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ROMARIO

Germany striker Oliver Bierhoff (R) and Thorsten Frings celebrate one of Bierhoff's strikes during their World Cup warm-up against Kuwait in Freiburg on May 9.

Bierhoff bombs Kuwait



AFP, Freiburg

A hat-trick by former captain Oliver Bierhoff thrust an under-strength Germany to a 7-0 humbling of Kuwait here Thursday in one of their final warm-up matches ahead of the World Cup finals.

However it was not a hugely impressive performance by the Germans, who were missing players from Borussia Dortmund, Bayer Leverkusen and Schalke 04 having been left out because of UEFA Cup, German Cup and Champions League commitments.

"Everything was great tonight but one shouldn't get too carried away as it was more like a training session tonight," Bierhoff said.

While 34-year-old Bierhoff's form would have been encouraging to manager Rudi Voller he was delighted to see the great young hope of German football Sebastian Deisler mark his return to the international scene after a long injury absence with a goal.

"I was satisfied with Deisler after

being out for so long and he put up a good performance," Voller said.

"Of course though he still lacks some vitality but that will come," he added.

Voller said he was praying that the players like Bayer Leverkusen's Michael Ballack still away with their clubs would remain fit.

"It is vital they don't pick up any knocks," he said.

There was also a goal for Carsten Jancker, perhaps Voller's most contentious selection in his finals squad as he had failed to score a goal in the league this season while leading marksman Martin Max missed out, though he had missed numerous chances prior to that.

Torsten Frings and Sebastian Kehl, who had missed Borussia Dortmund's UEFA Cup final defeat because he was not eligible, were the others to get on the scoresheet against a Kuwaiti defence hopelessly out of its depth.

Frings opened the score in the 10th minute as the Kuwaitis failed to clear the ball and one of their efforts rebounded off his foot past the keeper Nawaf Al-Khaleidi.

Bierhoff tapped in from close

range 14 minutes later after Al-Khaleidi failed to hold Jancker's shot and then Deisler, who had only returned to league action last Saturday after a lay-off with a groin injury which had been preceded by a longer absence following knee surgery, knocked in the third from Bierhoff's pass.

Bierhoff sprang a feeble offside trap minutes before the break to get his second while Kehl scored from another fortuitous rebound.

While Bierhoff made it 6-0 from the spot in a contentious decision Jancker rounded off the scoring breaking the offside trap and lifting the ball over the keeper just minutes after he had tumbled unceremoniously in the box while shaping to shoot.

His Bayern Munich team-mate Oliver Kahn showed his solidarity with him by marching up the pitch to shake his hand as his scoring torment came to an end.

"Carsten must realise that scoring simple goals counts for the same as scoring spectacular ones," Voller said.

Germany's next warm-up is against Wales in Cardiff next Tuesday.



Gabriel Batistuta (R), the ace Argentina striker, and attacking partner Hernan Crespo jogging at the headquarters of Serie A giants Lazio in Formello, near Rome, on May 9 during a training session of the Argentina national team in Italy before leaving for the 2002 World Cup.

