

FINAL : Real Madrid v Bayer Leverkusen

All roads lead to Glasgow



AFP, Glasgow

Bayer Leverkusen coach Klaus Toppmoller said Tuesday his love affair with football began after watching Real Madrid's epic European Cup final victory here at Hampden Park 42 years ago.

Leverkusen take on Real in Wednesday's Champions League final at the same venue as their classic 7-3 thrashing of Eintracht Frankfurt in 1960.

Madrid overwhelmed the Germans that day for their fifth consecutive European Cup triumph and sustained their claim of being the best team on the planet.

Star of the show was Ferenc Puskas, formerly captain of Hungary, who scored four goals in front of a record Hampden Park crowd of 127,621.

"It was an amazing team," said Toppmoller at Tuesday's press

conference.

"I remember it well. Puskas was my first memory of the sport and that's when I started dreaming about football."

Toppmoller said there were similarities between the class of 1960 and the current Madrid team, but insisted his side can spring a major surprise on Wednesday night.

The team backed by chemical giant Bayer have already claimed the scalps of several European superpowers with Juventus, Barcelona, Deportivo La Coruna, Liverpool and Manchester United among the Germans' victims.

"We know that Real is a formidable opponent," he said.

"However we have always felt happy as a dark horse and have overcome all sorts of difficulties in getting to the final.

"We are certainly going to give it everything to create as many difficulties for Real as possible.

"I don't think my players will need an awful lot of motivation because

we want to show the world that we are an excellent team."

Leverkusen's task is made harder by the loss of suspended Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto and German international Jens Nowotny.

Toppmoller admitted their loss was a big blow but said their absence would galvanise the squad for Wednesday's showpiece.

"We are without Nowotny and Ze Roberto which is a massive disappointment for both players but all the others are fine and whoever comes in will do a good job.

"We will play with enthusiasm and all the qualities of a German team. We are not going to change the tactics too much - we won't hide."

Real Madrid's Portuguese winger Luis Figo said it was highly unlikely Wednesday's match would end in a similar scoreline to the one in 1960, but insisted it was important to put on a show in front of the Glasgow public.

"I hope it's a great game in the honour of football," he said.

"In a final you never know how the game is going to go, whether it will be open or very tight, but we are anxious to start and are really looking forward to the game.

"I am really happy to be here."

Although the Spaniards are red-hot favourites, Real coach Vicente del Bosque said underestimating any German team can cost you dearly.

"They don't give up, they fight to the bitter end," he said.

"When you think you have them cornered they can sting you very hard."

Figo agreed with his coach that Germans teams in Europe always pose a threat even they may not dominate the whole match.

"German teams cannot play really well for the whole 90 minutes," he said.

"But from my experience they



PHOTO: INTERNET

Klaus Toppmoller (L) the Bayer Leverkusen's coach and goalkeeper Joerg Butz during the pre-match press conference at Hampden Park stadium in Glasgow yesterday.

can hurt you in 10 minutes and that's why you have to be cautious."

Madrid, who are expected to be at full strength, are determined to end their century year with a trophy having narrowly lost out on the Spanish league title and cup.

Valencia piped them to La Liga

while Deportivo La Coruna beat Madrid in the Spanish cup.

Leverkusen have had an almost identical season, losing the Bundesliga to Borussia Dortmund on the final day of the season and losing the German cup to Schalke 04.

Waiting for Caniggia

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa admitted Tuesday that striker Claudio Caniggia was the only missing piece in the World Cup joint favourite's squad as they undergo training in Formello, outside the Italian capital.

Bielsa said that he was confident that the 35-year-old Caniggia would have recovered from a knee injury picked up during his club Rangers' 3-2 Scottish Cup final victory over arch-rivals Celtic earlier this month.

Caniggia has been working flat out to regain fitness and Bielsa believes he will be in the line up on June 2 for Argentina's opening match against Nigeria as they bid for their third world title.

If the veteran has not reached the required level of fitness the spot would be taking by Celta Vigo striker Gustavo Lopez, the Argentine coach has indicated.

Although the team have not been officially named, Bielsa has brought together 21 of the expected 23-man squad in Formello before they leave for Japan Wednesday.

Defender Juan Pablo Sorin is expected to arrive in Italy from Brazil later Tuesday, while defender Diego Placente will travel directly to Japan after Real Madrid's Champions League final against German side Bayer Leverkusen in Glasgow on Wednesday.

Before leaving Buenos Aires a week ago Bielsa had revealed a list of just 12 players and anticipated that he would be summoning the rest of the 23 after they finished club matches.

And he pointed out that he would not call up any players to the training camp who would not be going to Japan, so as not to give false expectations.

Jet-lagged England in Dubai



PHOTO: INTERNET

England captain David Beckham (L), his wife Victoria and son Brooklyn walk through Luton airport before boarding a plane to Dubai on May 13. The England World Cup squad flew to Dubai with their wives and families on Monday for a pre-World Cup break.



AFP, Dubai

England's football squad arrived in a humid Dubai Tuesday and were soon relaxing at their luxury pre-World Cup hideout as officials slapped a news blackout on the team.

"There will be no press facility during the team's four-day stay," Paul Newman, English Football Association (FA) spokesman, told AFP.

"We only got in at three this morning, so people are still sleeping the trip off," Newman said. "There'll definitely be no training today."

The Jumeirah Beach Club, chosen by the FA for its intimate exclusivity and to allow the players to acclimatise to the steamy conditions expected in Korea and Japan, was "very nice indeed ... absolutely first class," Newman added.

But the press blackout has not stopped photographers and reporters from the British tabloid press and television descending on the Gulf city-state that is one of the seven members of the United Arab Emirates federation.

"One thing's for sure, you won't be able to rent a boat in Dubai this week," one journalist said after several of his colleagues rented a raft of boats in the hope of snapping some revealing pictures whilst bobbing offshore.

But the boats have remained docked as strong waves pounded the coast and hotels raised red flags along their beaches prohibiting sea swimming.

Television crews were left to sweat it out outside the hotel's entrance, mopping brows, flapping sticky shirts and removing caps before speedily going on air and fleeing to the air-conditioned relief of

a taxi and their hotels.

Increased security was discreet, though the club was open only to card-carrying members, whose carboots were searched by staff before entry.

Dubai police have offered assistance to man the club's sole gatehouse and grounds, while all non-members will be barred from entry until the team's departure on May 18.

"We will facilitate everything for the English team to make their stay successful," said Brigadier Mohammad Hussein Ali of Dubai Police Officers' Club, which will host the team's training sessions.

No details have been given on training schedules, though Newman stressed the primary aim of the Dubai trip was rest and relaxation for the players and their families.

The resort offers a huge private stretch of glorious white sand, two swimming pools, spa and fitness facilities and seven tennis courts set amid the magnificent lush gardens which boast 250 different types of tropical plant.

It also lies along the trendiest shopping drag in Dubai, but walking trips out will be highly unlikely as temperatures at midday top 45 degrees C in the shade, with an equally oppressive (but fluctuating) relative humidity level of up to 98 percent.

Accommodation at the resort offers the players and their families luxurious secluded suites -- costing between 1,300 and 1,800 dollars a night -- overlooking private manicured lawns and the turquoise waters of the Gulf.

The guests will eat all their meals in the Mediterranean-themed Prasino's restaurant, which has been taken over for the duration of their stay and enjoys a high local reputation.

Ronaldo wants a raise?



AFP, Milan

Brazilian World Cup star Ronaldo is unhappy with his deal with Italian club side Inter Milan, Gazzetta dello Sport reported Tuesday.

Gazzetta bases its report on remarks made in Rio de Janeiro by Reinaldo Pitta - one of the player's agents - to Radio Itatiaia.

Pitta said that the player was unhappy that Inter - who recently were piped to the Italian title by Juventus - were still not a winning team and that his client was paid less than fellow strikers Christian Vieri and Alvaro Recoba.

"(Inter president Massimo)

Ramos to retire



AFP, New York

Tab Ramos, one of the top United States football internationals of the past decade, plans to announce his retirement here on Tuesday.

Ramos, 35, appeared 81 times for the US team, scoring eight goals. He made stops with clubs in Spain and Mexico before becoming the first player signed by Major League Soccer when the US-based football league was formed in 1996.

The tough Uruguayan-born midfielder, who appeared in three World Cups, had been hampered in his twilight years by persistent leg injuries.

Ramos twice tore knee ligaments and also suffered a fractured skull when Brazil's Leonardo decked him in the second round of World Cup 1994.

Ramos was born in Montevideo but grew up in the States. His best year came with Tigres in the Mexican league in 1995-96, solidifying his reputation as the best homegrown player since Hugo Perez.

Rivaldo has no problems



PHOTO: INTERNET

The Brazilian national team limber up during a training session in the Mini Barcelona's Stadium, on May 13, ahead of the friendly match against Catalonia regional soccer team on May 18.



AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona star Rivaldo said he was fit and ready for action as Brazil's squad began arriving here Monday for a pre-World Cup training camp.

The fitness of the former world footballer of the year, who has had injuries to both knees this season, has been the subject of intense speculation in recent weeks.

Team officials last week insisted the Barcelona playmaker was fit for the World Cup, and Rivaldo brushed off fears here Monday as Brazil prepare to play a Catalonia XI later this week.

"I'm fit and feel in good shape," Rivaldo told an AFP reporter on arriving at Brazil's team hotel. "I'm

ready to start training."

Brazil's players were given a two-and-a-half hour run-out on Monday after settling into a team hotel put under blanket security.

Inter Milan star Ronaldo was also among those training as coach Luiz Felipe Scolari put the four-time World Cup winners through their paces ahead of Saturday's match at the Nou Camp.

Brazil, aiming to make up for their controversial 3-0 final defeat against hosts France four years ago, will be fine-tuning their preparations for first round matches against Turkey, China and Costa Rica.

Other players to arrive at the team hotel included AS Roma players Cafu and the tough-tackling Emerson.

Defender Cafu refused to answer questions to Brazil's notori-

ously tenacious football media but midfielder Emerson said he was "very happy and excited about playing in the World Cup."

Most of Scolari's 23-strong squad will be in Barcelona with Bayer Leverkusen's Lucio and Roberto Carlos of Real Madrid joining the party following Wednesday's Champions League final in Scotland.

Parma's Junior and AC Milan's Roque Junior will also shortly be linking up with their international teammates.

Keeper Dida and midfielder Vampeta, who are playing for Corinthians in the Brazil Cup final on Wednesday, will arrive in Spain the following day with Gremio keeper Anderson Polga and striker Luizao, who are tied up in Libertadores Cup quarter-final action the same night.

Lobanovsky no more

REUTERS, Kiev

Dynamo Kiev coach Valery Lobanovsky, who died on Monday in eastern Ukraine after suffering a stroke, will be given a state funeral.

His body was flown to the capital Kiev on Tuesday to be buried on Thursday.

"A state commission has been created to stage the funeral and Ukrainian President Leonid



VALERY LOBANOVSKY

Kuchma is expected to attend," Dynamo spokesman Serhiy Polkhovsky told Reuters on Tuesday.

The 63-year-old coach, who had a history of poor health, was rushed to hospital in Zaporizhya last Tuesday at the end of the Ukrainian premier division match between Dynamo and Metalurg.

On Saturday, doctors said his condition had improved after he underwent surgery to relieve pressure on his brain. Lobanovsky will go down in history as the most successful coach in Ukraine and the former Soviet Union for the past three decades.

He guided Dynamo Kiev to two European Cup Winners' Cups in 1975 and 1986 as well as five league titles between 1974 and 1981. He also led the Soviet side to the final of the 1988 European championships when they lost 2-0 to the Netherlands.

Lobanovsky moved abroad shortly after the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy, but returned to Kiev in November 1996 to begin his third coaching spell with Dynamo.

His return paid immediate dividends for the Kiev side as they won five consecutive league titles, from 1997 to 2001.

In 1999 he was appointed Ukraine coach and also guided his Kiev side to the semifinals of the Champions League.

Lobanovsky's persistent health problems over the last two years appeared to have weakened his iron grip on the national team and the club.

Earlier this year, he underwent surgery to remove a blood clot and he was also found to have an irregular heartbeat that forced him to miss a number of matches.

While Lobanovsky's place at Dynamo appeared safe until he died, he lost his Ukraine post following the 5-2 defeat to Germany in the two-legged World Cup playoff last November.

Trap impressed with Asia



AFP, Florence

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni believes Asian football is ready make a breakthrough as the world's most populous continent prepares to stage its first World Cup.

Trapattoni, whose Italy team will be based in Japan before moving to South Korea if they reach the second phase, said that 40 years of World Cup experience had taught him that the gap between the traditional twin powers of Europe and South America and the rest of the world had narrowed.

And Trapattoni, at the helm for the first time in an important tournament for Italy but who sampled the World Cup atmosphere as a player in 1962, admitted Asian football was coming of age.

"The level will be a very high level because there are a lot of countries that have got real ability," said the 63-year-old.

"Japan are a very good side now," said Trapattoni, whose 'Azzurri' drew 1-1 with Japan last November in a friendly at the Saitama World Cup Stadium. "And we mustn't be surprised if China play well too."

Although Trapattoni never got to start a match in the 1962 World Cup



PHOTO: INTERNET

JUST IN CASE HE IS NEEDED! Giovanni Trapattoni, Coach of Italian national team stretches during the first training session of his team in Coverciano, near Florence, on May 13.

in Chile the coach admitted the game had changed radically in the four decades since.

"There are technological changes and also that applies in football."

"It was a very long time ago. Now we have countries like France who have become world-beaters and Ecuador (competing in their first World Cup)."

"You have to fear all the teams, there are no bad teams. There are different systems - 4-4-2, 3-4-1-2, 4-3-3. There are no surprises in football anymore."

"It's like comparing a contemporary poet to one 40 years ago."

Italy's most humiliating moment in a generally superb World Cup history came at Asian hands in 1966 in the unlikely surroundings of Middlesbrough's now demolished Ayresome Park in the north of

had been put aside - Inter defender Marco Materazzi and Lazio's Alessandro Nesta had had a very public argument over the 4-2 victory for Lazio that cost Inter the championship.

"I think the bickering over the Scudetto has settled down now," said Trapattoni.

Juventus and Parma players, who had competed in last Friday's Italian Cup Final, were given permission to miss Monday's first training session but were expected at Coverciano by midnight on Monday.

On Friday Italy depart for Prague where they will play Saturday's friendly with the Czech Republic while on Tuesday, May 21 they will hold a last training session in public at the Stadio Flaminio before flying to Japan that evening.