



PHOTO: INTERNET

IT'S AFTER TURNING GERMANY UPSIDE-DOWN: Welshman Robert Earnshaw somersaults for joy after scoring the only goal against Germany in their World Cup warm-up game at Cardiff's Millenium Stadium on May 14.

## Argentina Reuters' pick



REUTERS, London

Argentina has topped a Reuters poll as favourite to win the soccer World Cup final on June 30, edging defending champion France.

In a Reuters survey published last December, a clear majority of sports journalists around the world backed Argentina to win the Cup with only a few supporting France.

But in the latest poll taken April 25 to May 3, 14 out of 35 sports editors and journalists said Argentina would reclaim the world title this year while 12 said France would successfully defend its crown.

Four said Italy would be winner, two said Brazil, two backed England and one opted for Portugal.

"Argentina... are still the favorites. They are full of star caliber players," said Juhani Heikkila at the Finnish NewsAgency (STT).

The 32-team finals, in Japan and South Korea, kick off on May 31.

Argentina defeated old rival Germany 1-0 in a warm-up game last month after only managing draws -- 1-1 with Wales and 2-2 with Cameroon -- in its previous two outings of the year.

Sports editors said Argentina would be tough to beat with the likes of Juan Sebastian Veron and Hernan Crespo in the squad.

Still, others said France, who enjoyed a stunning 3-0 victory against Brazil in the World Cup final

four years ago, were currently looking the better side.

Donald Walker at The Scotsman voted for Argentina in the last Reuters poll but now favors France. "I have changed my mind simply because France have looked more impressive than Argentina in warm-up games," he said.

France, grouped with Senegal, Uruguay and Denmark in group A of the tournament, had a hard-earned 2-1 victory over Romania in a warm-up friendly in February and drew 0-0 with Russia last month. However, it crushed Scotland 5-0 in March.

"(France) are in great shape... and Argentina are an extremely balanced side," said Andreas Jaros at Sportmagazin in Austria. "But right now I think France have the edge."

Argentina, world champion in 1978 and 1986, is in the toughest group with Nigeria, Sweden and arch-rival England, the 1966 world champion.

Argentina knocked England out of the 1998 World Cup after David Beckham was sent off for kicking out at Diego Simeone.

Beckham was vilified by the British press afterwards but became a national hero when he secured England's place in this year's World Cup by scoring a superb free-kick against Greece.

He suffered a broken bone in his foot at the beginning of April although he is expected to be fit for the finals.

Howard Donaldson at The Mercury in South Africa backed England to win the World Cup in

both Reuters polls. "I still think they've got a very good chance," he said.

"I just think (Sven-Goran) Eriksson... functions well under pressure which previous England managers like (Glenn) Hoddle and (Kevin) Keegan haven't done."

Others gave their vote to Italy who were World Cup winners in 1934, 1938 and 1982.

"Last December I picked Argentina. But now it looks as if Italy have found their pace under coach Giovanni Trapattoni and their win over England has shown that they are still strong contenders," said Anthony Costantino at L'orizzont in Malta.

Italy beat England 2-1 in March with Vincenzo Montella scoring both goals.

Jeremy Walker at Asahi Shimbun News Service in Tokyo said Portugal, grouped with South Korea, Poland and the United States in the opening round, would lift soccer's greatest prize.

"Portugal have, in the likes of Luis Figo and Rui Costa, the players to control the flow of the game, and with the flair and skill to find a goal when needed," he said.

But Roger Crutchley at the Bangkok Post said four times winner Portugal would be champion. "For probably the first time in recent history, Brazil are not among the hot favorites and this may take a lot of pressure off them," he said. "They should improve game by game as the tournament goes on."

## Wales baffle Germany



AFP, Cardiff

Germany's World Cup preparations were given a rude jolt here Tuesday as Wales recorded an upset 1-0 win over Rudi Voller's men.

A well-taken goal by Wales debutant Robert Earnshaw just after half-time settled a scrappy match which again cast doubts on Germany's chances at the World Cup.

Voller's side were surprisingly sluggish throughout at the Millennium Stadium and struggled to respond after Earnshaw raced past a static defence before firing home on 46 minutes.

Germany, who play the Republic

of Ireland, Cameroon and Saudi Arabia at the World Cup, were hampered by the absence of four Bayer Leverkusen players - including midfielder Michael Ballack - on European Cup duty.

Speaking after his fifth defeat in 20 matches as Germany manager, Voller blamed a lackadaisical approach from his players for the defeat.

"We started to play well too late in the game and we were too friendly and uncommitted. Some of the players were coming back from injury and we could see they were not in great form," Voller said.

"It would have been better to have put in a good performance but I don't think this is a drama."

Skipper Oliver Kahn said it was not a time to panic. "We played well in the final quarter-hour but we did not really show commitment in the

tackles.

"Now we have got to lift ourselves up for Saturday's match (against Austria in Leverkusen, Germany)."

Cardiff forward Earnshaw had a dream start to his international career. A long ball from Mark Delaney found the head of John Hartson who sent the ball into the box.

Earnshaw got the better of German defender Christoph Metzelder before firing the ball past Kahn. His skill did not end there - he celebrated with a back flip before being mobbed by teammates.

Marco Bode headed on to a post with about a quarter-hour to go and Carsten Jancker shot on to an upright in the 85th minute during an impressive final spell for the Germans but in the end the home side held on for a rousing win.

## Scolari no medical fan



INTERNET, Barcelona

Luiz Felipe Scolari is upset that his World Cup preparations have been disrupted by extensive medical tests at his team's training camp in Barcelona.

The coach is worried that his team will not get enough traditional training before the World Cup.

Team doctor Jose Luis Runco insisted that the tests were neces-

sary, especially as the players are joining up at different stages of their domestic seasons.

While the European-based players come to the end of a grueling campaign, their South American-based counterparts are in the middle of their season.

"It's a type of pre-season training. The idea is to leave the players prepared for what each position demands," Runco said.

Without a ball in sight, and with only 13 players available, Scolari opted to stay in his room and watch videos of his team's first-round opponents instead.

Four players had tests on Monday, while six more were still with their clubs.

One of Scolari's charges, Cafu, has rejected criticism that his attacking style is the main reason why the coach wants Brazil to play an unusual 3-5-2 system instead of its usual 4-4-2 formation.

"If the team plays a 3-5-2, of course the wide players will attack more," said the experienced Roma full-back.

"I have played like that for 12 years, but if the coach wants to change the system, you have to change too."



PHOTO: INTERNET

Brazil team physician Paulo Figueredo (R) checks Edilson during a medical test while Ronaldinho looks on during the squad's training session in Barcelona yesterday.

## FIFA world rankings France remain number one

REUTERS, Zurich

In the final rankings before the start of the World Cup, world champion France held its top position while Argentina, favorite to win the 2002 tournament, pulled alongside Brazil in second place.

Three of the top 10 countries in FIFA's monthly rankings will not be at the tournament in South Korea and Japan -- fourth-placed Colombia, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia.

China, in the World Cup for the first time, is the lowest ranked of the 32 teams in 50th place.

France, also European champion, has 802 points with Brazil and Argentina on 784. Colombia is fourth on 728 followed by Portugal (726), Italy (717), Mexico (716), and Spain (713).

Germany and England, both former World Cup winners, are 11th and 12th respectively, swapping positions this month. The World Cup begins May 31.

T	e	a	m	s
1	France			-802
2	Brazil			-784
2	Argentina			-784
4	Colombia			-728
5	Portugal			-726
6	Italy			-717
7	Mexico			-716
8	Spain			-713
9	Netherlands			-703
10	Yugoslavia			-702
11	Germany			-695
12	England			-694
13	United States			-690
14	Romania			-675
15	Ireland Republic			-674
15	Czech Republic			-674
17	Cameroon			-672
18	Paraguay			-671
19	Sweden			-665
20	Denmark			-657

## Algeria hold Belgium



AFP, Brussels

Belgium coach Robert Waseige was a worried man here Tuesday after his World Cup-bound squad were held to a dull 0-0 draw by Algeria.

Belgium, who play Japan, Russia and Tunisia in the first phase of the finals which kick off later this month, were made to look ordinary by a determined Algerian outfit.

Once again Belgium's perennial problem appeared in attack, where neither veteran Marc Wilimots nor young strike partner Wesley Sonck were able to make much of an impression before being replaced at half-time.

After a dreary first half, Belgium

finally got their first shot on goal in the 58th minute, when a shot from Anderlecht's Yves Vanderhaeghe smacked against the crossbar.

But that was about the highlight for Belgium, who open their World Cup campaign against host nation Japan in Saitama on June 4.

"The first half was bad," Belgium coach Waseige admitted. "We were a little bit better in the second half. But we had a lot of difficulty with our game."

"We were just too slow. We didn't have any rhythm or teamwork," he added. Belgium's only other chances came via a volley from Branko Strupar, a header from Mbo Mpenza and a shot from Mbo Vermant.

Belgium play world champions France in their next World Cup warm-up at the Stade de France in Paris on Saturday before heading to the Far East.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Brahim Zafour of Algeria (R) heads against Eric van Meir of Belgium during their friendly international at the King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels on May 14.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Norway's Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (R) heads the ball during a friendly international against Japan at Oslo's Ullevaal Stadium on May 14.

## Norway give Japan a jolt



INTERNET, Tokyo

World Cup co-hosts Japan went down to Norway on Tuesday and brought their seven-match unbeaten run to an end in the process.

"We played very badly," coach Philippe Troussier said after Norway had scored three times in the final 17 minutes in Oslo.

But, despite the defeat, Troussier said the friendly had given him some useful food for thought before he names his 23-man squad for the finals next month on Friday.

Troussier said that Norway gave a good taste of the physical style he expects from first group phase opponents Belgium and Russia.

Holding the Norwegians until the last quarter was, "in some ways, a big victory for us".

European-based players Hidetoshi Nakata and Shinji Ono returned to the Japan side and played the full 90 minutes.

But Henning Berg still broke the deadlock in the 73rd minute, heading home a free kick from Jon Arne Riise.

Four minutes later, substitute Sigurd Rushfeldt made it 2-0 from close range, his first goal for the national team in 13 appearances.

Manchester United striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer sealed victory with a third goal six minutes from time.

Japan's best chance fell to Takayuki Suzuki but his shot was parried by goalkeeper Thomas Myhre.

Norway, who failed to qualify for the finals, have now played against three of the teams in Japan's World Cup group this year, drawing 0-0 with Tunisia away and losing 1-0 to Belgium in Brussels.

Meanwhile, Japan's media got an attack of the jitters over the national side's World Cup prospects after the drubbing to Norway.

Journalists scrambled to suggest areas of improvement ahead of the World Cup.

"All three goals could have been prevented," Jiji Press said.

"The first goal was due to a failed offside trap ... The second and third

goals resulted from interceptions due to carelessness. As the team fell behind, players started to lose concentration for defensive moves.

"The priorities are to review the organisation of the defence and to stir up forwards who lack decisive strength," the news agency said.

Before the match, the Japanese public had high hopes of a victory with midfielders Shinji Ono, from Dutch club Feyenoord, and Hidetoshi Nakata, from Italian team Parma, returning to the squad.

The defeat came as a wakeup call for Japan, which is determined to avoid becoming the first home side to bow out in the first round of the World Cup.

The Asahi Shimbun called the defeat "the return of a nightmare", comparing it to the 5-0 thrashing by France last year.

"It was clear that the opposition had studied how Japan aggressively pushes up the defence line. They repeatedly staged moves that went deep behind (Japanese) defenders," the newspaper said.

"The score clearly demonstrated that a disastrous consequence is on the cards unless Japanese players maintain a tough mentality, physical strength and sense of judgement for 90 minutes," it said.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, the nation's best-selling newspaper, blamed a string of mistakes by Japanese defenders for the defeat.

The newspaper noted that the failed attempts of offside traps were especially worrying.

"The fact that (Norway) breached the lifeline of Japanese defence strategies, which coach (Philippe) Troussier hammered into his players, is worrying, especially just two weeks ahead of the World Cup," the Yomiuri said.

In a bid to offer the nation some reassurance despite the defeat, the press recalled that the Japanese players were tired from touring Europe for 10 days, during which they also lost to a makeshift Real Madrid on May 7 in Spain.

"It is safe to say that the Japanese team was tired. Their play was slow even from the first half," the Mainichi Shimbun said, adding that Nakata and other players calmly reviewed the game and said that they learned from the defeat.

## Dyer's anxious wait



AFP, London

England midfielder Kieron Dyer will know his World Cup fate by the end of the week but reports here on Wednesday suggested he may not recover from injury in time.

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has given the Newcastle player until the weekend to prove his fitness but the Swede is said to fear Dyer could break down and therefore represents a 'wasted' place in the final 23-man squad.

Dyer damaged knee ligaments in a brutal two-footed tackle by Tahar El-Khalej in the Premiership match with Southampton on Saturday.

The medical advice received by Eriksson on Sunday, after Dyer had been examined by the Newcastle and England staff, was that he would be out for four weeks.

Dyer, 23, has since been undergoing intensive treatment at St James' Park in an effort to change Eriksson's mind ahead of

the May 21 deadline for squads to be submitted to FIFA.

A Football Association spokesman confirmed: "Sven will speak to Newcastle on Friday or Saturday to evaluate the situation."

"Until that conversation takes place, he is not in a position to make a decision either way."

Eriksson, who was due to hold his first training session with the England squad at their Dubai training camp on Wednesday, is also likely to speak to Dyer himself.

With Gary Neville and Steve Gerrard already ruled out of the squad by injury, Danny Murphy and Trevor Sinclair are on standby to be officially included in the final party if Dyer is ruled unfit.

England World Cup winner Bobby Charlton has reinforced the view that there is no point taking a chance on unfit players.

"In this sort of competition you can't carry people," he told the Daily Express.

"It is no good nine of them doing OK and carrying two."

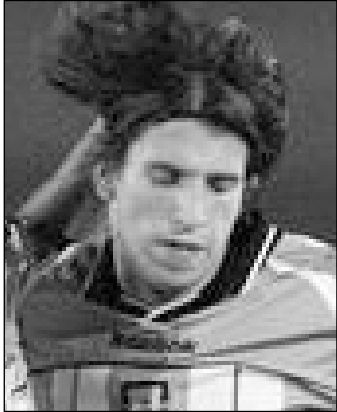
"It doesn't work like that, you have got to be all up for it."



JUAN PABLO SORIN



CLAUDIO CANIGGIA



DIEGO PLACENTE



INTERNET, Rome

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa has given a clear indication of his intended World Cup squad by calling Juan Pablo Sorin and Diego Placente in to his Rome-based training camp.

Sorin has been otherwise engaged with his club Cruzeiro in the Brazilian League while Placente is staying with Bayer Leverkusen as they build up to the Champions League final against Real Madrid.

But, when they arrive in Italy, that will bring the training party to 23, which surely represents a World Cup squad in all but name.

And it means there is no room for Barcelona's Javier Saviola or Juan Roman Riquelme, of Boca Juniors.

<b>ARGENTINA'S TRAINING SQUAD</b>
<b>Goalkeepers:</b> German Burgos (Atletico Madrid), Pablo Cavallero (Celta), Roberto Bonano (Barcelona).
<b>Defenders:</b> Roberto Ayala (Valencia), Mauricio Pochettino (Paris St Germain), Walter Samuel (AS Roma), Jose Chamot (AC Milan), Diego Placente (Bayer Leverkusen).
<b>Midfielders:</b> Javier Zanetti (Inter Milan), Diego Simeone (Lazio), Juan Sebastian Veron (Manchester United), Claudio Husain (River Plate), Matias Almeyda (Parma), Pablo Aimar (Valencia), Marcelo Gallardo (Monaco), Juan Pablo Sorin (Cruzeiro).
<b>Strikers:</b> Ariel Ortega (River Plate), Gabriel Batistuta (AS Roma), Kily Gonzalez (Valencia), Claudio Caniggia (Rangers), Hernan Crespo (Lazio), Claudio Lopez (Lazio), Gustavo Lopez (Celta Vigo).