

# Eagles sans Oliseh, George!



AFP, lagos

Nigeria coach Adegbeye Onigbinde on Sunday firmly shut the door to the World Cup on former captain Sunday Oliseh and Finidi George as they try to rebuild for the future.

Oliseh and George were left out of the country's build-up for the World Cup after they led a players' protest for air ticket refunds at the African Nations Cup in February.

Borussia Dortmund midfielder Oliseh has been most vocal since coach Shaibu Amodu was fired after Nigeria failed to reach the final of the Nations Cup in Mali.

He said it was unfair to sack Amodu after he qualified Nigeria for the soccer finals. He also accused new coach Onigbinde of having not control over the team, claiming top officials dictated to him.

However, last week Onigbinde raised Oliseh's hope he could still be on the World Cup party after the player apologised for what he termed "the Nations Cup fiasco".

Both Oliseh and Finidi have featured at the last two World Cups, where Nigeria's 'Super Eagles' were eliminated in the second round. They had hinted they will quit international football after soccer's showpiece in Asia.

Wilson Oruma, who has signed for French side Sochaux, also lost his place in the squad after a below-par performance in Thursday's warm-up match against the Republic of Ireland.

The biggest surprise inclusion on the final squad was youngster Femi Opabunmi.

Only last September, Opabunmi was in the team beaten by France in the final of the FIFA Under-17 Championship in Trinidad and Tobago.

The recent Grasshopper Zurich signing crowned his senior debut against Kenya about two weeks ago with an opportunistic goal.

## Czechs rattle Italy



AFP, Prague

A single goal from Vladimir Smicer saw the Czech Republic beat Italy 1-0 here in a friendly match, ensuring the Italians head off to the World Cup next week on a losing note.

It was only the second defeat for Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni after last year's 2-1 defeat in a friendly against Argentina in Rome.

Libor Sionko was also proving a

late inclusion to the squad were midfielders James Obiorah of Russian club Lokomotiv Moscow and Garba Lawal from Dutch outfit Roda JC.

Obiorah, former captain of the country's junior team, impressed in Saturday's 1-0 friendly victory against Jamaica, even netting the match winner.

Lawal, on the other hand, will be at his second World Cup as a result of the squad's lack of depth on the left side of the field. The player is versatile - he can play either as a defender, a defensive midfielder or as a winger.

Mutiu Adepoju of Spanish second division side Salamanca is making a big comeback to the team he last played for two years ago. The hard working midfielder is expected to fill the space created by the axing of Oliseh.

**SQUAD**  
Goalkeepers: Ike Shorunmu (Lausanne/Swi), Austin Ejide (Gabros), Vincent Enyeama (Enyimba)

Defenders: Taribo West (unattached), Joseph Yobo (Marseille/Fra), Isaac Okoronkwo (Shakhtar Donetsk/Ukr), Christopher Justice (Antwerp/Bel), Ifeanyi Udeze (PAOK Salonika/Gre), Rabiu Afolabi (Standard Liege/Bel), Eric Ejiofor (Maccabi Haifa/Isr), Efe Sodje (Crewe/Eng), Cestine Babayaro (Chelsea/Eng)

Midfielder: Agustine Okocha (Paris Saint Germain/Fra), Pius Ikeda (Ajax Amsterdam/Ned), James Obiorah (Lokomotiv Moscow/Rus), Garba Lawal (Roda/Ned), Mutiu Adepoju (Salamanca/Spa), Benedict Akwuegbu (Shenyang Fenyang/Gndi/Chn), Femi Opabunmi (Grasshopper Zurich/Swi).

Attackers: Nwankwo Kanu (Arsenal/Eng), Julius Aghahowa (Shakhtar Donetsk/Ukr), Bartholomew Ogbeche (Paris Saint Germain/Fra), John Utaka (Al-Saad/Qat).



JUST OUT OF REACH: An outstretched France goalkeeper Ulrich Rame fails to stop a shot by Belgium's Glen de Boeck (not in picture) from going inside the net during their World Cup warm-up match at the Stade de France near Paris on May 18.

PHOTO: INTERNET

## Wilmots floors France



AP, Saint-Denis

Marc Wilmots' late winner lifted injury-hit Belgium to a surprise 2-1 win over France in a World Cup warmup match on Saturday, denting the World Champions' pride less than two weeks before they begin their title defense.

The veteran Belgium skipper fired a right-foot shot home in the first minute of second-half injury time, handing 'Les Bleus' their first defeat in over eight months.

The defeat was a huge disappointment for the France fans who packed out the Stade de France for the team's last match before head-

ing to Asia on Sunday. France was missing star player Zinedine Zidane, who was with his wife for the birth of their third child. During halftime, officials announced over loudspeakers that Theo Zidane was born on Saturday. He has two brothers.

Belgium showed no sign of nerves against the World and European champions, splitting possession evenly with Roger Lemerre's men.

Arsenal forward Sylvain Wiltord had the first scoring chance, but fired just wide of Geert De Vlieger's left goalpost.

Defender Glen De Boeck headed in a free-kick by midfielder Johan Walem to leave France trailing after 20 minutes. Goalkeeper Ulrich Rame was nowhere near the ball.

Rame is the second choice goalie at the World Cup behind Manchester United's Fabien Barthez.

Marseille's Frank Leboeuf leveled in the 41st minute with a close-range shot.

De Boeck caught the French off-guard again in the 26th minute, but Mbo Mpenza failed to connect with his pass across the goalmouth.

Djibril Cisse made his international debut by replacing Juventus striker David Trezeguet at the start of the second half. He came close to scoring but De Vlieger tapped his well-aimed header over the wood-work.

Rame made up for his first-half failure by saving two powerful free kicks from Belgium skipper Marc Wilmots in the 73rd minute, but was finally caught out in the 91st minute.

It was France's first loss since its 2-1 defeat to Chile last September.

The France squad was to fly to Japan on Sunday for a five-day training camp at Ibusuki, where Zidane will join his teammates next week.

"Les Bleus" play South Korea in a warmup match on May 26 and open the World Cup against Senegal on May 31 in Seoul. They meet Denmark and Uruguay in other first-round matches.

Injury denied Belgium a string of players for the World Cup, including top forward Emile Mpenza. It plays Russia, Tunisia and co-host Japan in first-round Group H, widely considered one of the weakest groups at the World Cup.

Belgium could meet France as early as the quarterfinals.

## Ronaldinho steals the show



REUTERS, Barcelona

Two pieces of cool finishing from Ronaldinho and a fine shot from Edmílson helped Brazil to a 3-1 win over a Catalan regional selection as they continued their preparations for the World Cup at the Nou Camp on Saturday.

The lively Paris St. Germain midfielder notched his first with a sweetly-struck free kick midway through the first half and added a second just before the break when he finished off a fine run by guiding past keeper Victor Valdes into the net.

Catalunya pulled a goal back after the break when Luis Garcia's header was adjudged to have crossed the line despite the acrobatics of Brazil keeper Marcos.

But the South American side wrapped up the win when Edmílson cracked home after the Catalans failed to clear a corner in the 76th minute.

"I was very happy with the team's performance," Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari told reporters after the match.

"I was particularly pleased to see our two front men Ronaldo and Denilson working on their defensive game."

It was a good test against strong opposition and fortunately we came through without any injuries, although I fully realise we will face even tougher matches in the World Cup against Turkey, China and Costa Rica."

Scolari said that there would be only minor changes to the starting line-up for the final friendly against Malaysia next Saturday, in which he would field his first choice World Cup side.

He hinted that Barcelona forward Rivaldo would return in the Malaysia game after resting a troublesome knee injury.

On the half hour Ronaldo, playing in the stadium he graced as a Barcelona player in the 1996-97 season, broke into the action for the first time.

The Brazil striker made a powerful run to create a good

chance for Ronaldinho, although his shot was well saved by goalkeeper Victor Valdes.

Ronaldo was replaced by Luizao in the 68th minute but won huge cheers from the Nou Camp crowd as he left the field.

Saturday's game was preceded by a minute's silence in honour of the former Barcelona forward Ladislao Kubala who died after Friday.

Then an emotional 97,000 crowd were then given plenty to cheer about as their side got the better of the early exchanges with Raul Tamudo forcing Marcos into several sharp saves in the opening minutes.

But the early scares sparked



RO-RO: Ronaldo (L) greets Ronaldinho after the latter scored the first goal against Catalunya during a practice match at Nou Camp in Barcelona on May 18.

## Diesler injury dampens German party

REUTERS, Leverkusen

Germany have thrashed Austria 6-2 in their last warm-up game before the World Cup but an injury sustained by valued midfielder Sebastian Diesler marred the demolition.

Three goals from striker Miroslav Klose, two from versatile midfielder Marco Bode and one from substitute Daniel Bierofka helped the triple world champions bounce back in style four days after an embarrassing 1-0 defeat to Wales in Cardiff on Tuesday.

The price for the morale boost, however, might be high if Hertha Berlin's Diesler cannot fit in time for the finals starting on May 31.

The Bayern Munich-bound player, who had only recently returned from a long injury break, had to be carried off on a stretcher 20 minutes into the game after clashing with Austrian striker Rolf Landerl.

The gifted 22-year-old held his right knee and then covered his face with his hands.

"It doesn't look too negative but we can't say more for the moment," assistant Germany coach Michael Skibbe said shortly after Diesler, who remained sidelined for months after undergoing surgery on his right knee last October, was taken to a nearby hospital to be examined.

Klose opened the scoring with a thunderous drive from just inside the box in the 15th minute before doubling the advantage from close range 14 minutes later.

Bode had added another with a header from a Christian Ziege cross in the 36th minute when the visitors pulled one back seconds later with midfielder Rene Aufhauser collecting a pass from playmaker Andreas Herzog to catch the German defence off guard.

Austria, who have failed to qualify for the World Cup, fought back into the match immediately into the second half when midfielder Roman Wallner surprised Germany goalkeeper and captain Oliver Kahn with an angled shot.

But Klose put Germany in control again by heading home from a Jens Jeremies cross to complete his hat-trick in the 53rd minute before Bode placed the issue beyond doubt from a counter-attack in the 70th minute.

Austria had given up when Bierofka completed the rout with seven minutes remaining.

## Subdued send off for 'Les Blues'



AFP, Paris

World champions France flew out from Roissy/Charles de Gaulle airport here at 13:15 (11:15GMT) Sunday destination Osaka as they bid to defend their world title in Japan and South Korea in two weeks.

The farewell under cloudy skies was muted however after the going away party of the world and European champions was spoiled by Belgium who snatched a 2-1 victory in Stade de France on Saturday night.

Les Bleus spent the night in an hotel at Roissy airport and the only face missing from Roger Lemerre's squad of 23 who boarded Air France flight AF292 for Japan was playmaker Zinedine Zidane, whose wife Veronique gave birth to their third son Theo in Marseille on Saturday night.

The absence of Zidane was felt by the team against Belgium, but the Real Madrid star will join his team-mates on Wednesday.

"Winning the Champions League Wednesday and having a third child Saturday it couldn't be better than that," said Zidane in a recorded message to the fans before Saturday's match. "Now I'm here to see my teammates even if I have to leave my little family."

An estimated 300 fans gathered to bid farewell to the team who are among the favourites to lift the title. Despite the police escort team captain Marcel Desailly and

midfielder Alain Boghossian signed autographs.

Staff on board the Airbus A340 admitted that they had received special instructions on how to deal with the French team, but the experience wasn't new for pilot Michel Arnoux.

"Today we have passengers who are a little special on board," said Arnoux. "For me it's not the first time that I've flown the French team. It was in 1999 on their return from Yerevan in Armenia."

Air steward Philippe Blaire said they were under strict instructions to handle the team with care.

"We received telegrams from the football federation asking us to 'protect' the team and let them rest," said Blaire.

"Our main objective today will be to allow them recuperate from yesterday evening's match," said head cabin steward Stephane Brevart, adding that special measures had been taken to ensure more comfortable seats, individual video screens and a special menu for Saturday night.

Les Bleus are expected to arrive in Osaka at 08:10 local time (23:10GMT) where they will head immediately for the thermal spa of Ibusuki at the southern extremity of Japan.

Following a week-long training camp designed to getting the squad acclimated to the heat and time difference the team will leave Japan for South Korea.

A friendly will be played against South Korea next Sunday, their final run-out before their opening tie against Senegal on May 31. Their group A also includes Uruguay and Denmark.



FLORAL WELCOME: England captain David Beckham upon his arrival with his teammates at the Jeju Airport in Korea yesterday morning.

## Beck on course, Dyer doubtful



AFP, Jeju

"I know the injury happened more than one month ago but he will not have forgotten how to play football in that short time. The important thing is that he is fit."

The role that Newcastle winger Dyer will play in the World Cup remains uncertain, however. Dyer was to undergo a fitness test on Sunday having joined the squad in Dubai, where England spent four days, to join them on the flight to South Korea.

"If there was a game tomorrow I would not be ready but I am giving myself a fighting chance of being fit for June 2," Dyer told a news conference.

According to team officials, Eriksson has ordered restricted use of mobile phones from now on and alcohol is banned before and after games. But the coach has insisted it is up to the players to be serious about winning the World Cup.

The Swede, who has masterminded dramatically improved performances since taking over, said any player who needs motivating now should not be in the squad.

"I will do as I have always and if I have to motivate any of the 23 players, then I have picked the wrong squad because if you are not motivated to go to the World Cup, then you should not be there."

"If they are on the bench, then of course I may have to talk to them but I will not have discussions with the players about what I want them to do if it is not necessary."

Eriksson went on: "You should not sit next to a player 24 hours a day and tell them what to do and what not to do -- or at least I should not like to have a manager doing that to me."

England will play South Korea in the next warm-up match at the Seogwipo World Cup stadium on Tuesday before moving on to Japan where their final preparation match is against Cameroon next Sunday.