

Irish FA back McCarthy



AFP, Dublin

Republic of Ireland manager Mick McCarthy received a resounding vote of confidence over his decision to sensationally kick skipper Roy Keane out of his World Cup squad here Thursday.

A statement by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) said McCarthy had axed Keane after receiving unanimous support from other players in the squad, coaches and officials.

Keane was sent home in disgrace from Ireland's World Cup training camp in Saipan after a clear-the-air meeting over comments made by the player in a newspaper interview degenerated into a slanging match.

McCarthy's decision left Ireland in a state of shock on Thursday, with stunned fans swamping radio station phone-ins and internet chat rooms.

But the FAI said it was standing squarely behind McCarthy following the bombshell.

"The Irish team manager, Mick McCarthy, has informed the FAI that following a team meeting today in Saipan, he has requested Roy Keane leave the squad and return home," the FAI said in a statement.

"The meeting was attended by the entire playing squad and coaching staff. We understand the consensus of the meeting was that Roy Keane's remarks were totally unacceptable.

"It is also understood that Roy's response on the matter of the manager was considered objectionable. The Association views these events with great regret.

"The decision of the manager in this matter is fully supported by the Association," the statement added.

At a press conference here Thursday, FAI honorary treasurer John Delaney said every effort had been made to accommodate Keane, who walked out of Ireland's squad on Tuesday only to back down hours later.

Delaney said Keane's stinging criticism of the Irish World Cup preparations in an interview with the

Irish Times made his position untenable.

"Two days ago Roy said he wanted to go, then he said he wanted to come back, we thought the issue was resolved but he pushed the boat out a little too strong both for the players and the manager.

"Roy is an experienced professional and deals with press every day of his life. Messages sent out by Roy have led to these circumstances," Delaney said.

"We have provided all the financial resources to give the team the best preparation and tried to ensure there was harmony in the camp.

"Unfortunately the remarks Roy made in the last 24 hours have led to these circumstances."

Asked whether it would be possible to call up a player to replace Keane in the squad, Delaney added: "We will seek a dispensation from FIFA but it's most unlikely we will be able to do that."

As for if Keane will ever play for the Republic again, Delaney added: "It's up to Roy Keane what he's going to do about his international career and I'm sure Mick has his own views."/p

The mushroom menace!



REUTERS, Tokyo

Japanese purveyors of magic mushrooms, facing an end to a loophole that has let them operate with impunity, say they expect few difficulties offloading their stocks as thousands of soccer fans arrive for the World Cup.

Due to a bizarre legal twist, the mind-altering fungi are now openly available in Japan, a country known for some of the toughest drug laws in the industrialised world.

"We get a lot of foreign customers anyway so I think we'll sell to soccer supporters," said the branch manager of Psychedelic Garden, a basement shop in Tokyo's Nishi-Shinjuku district.

"I have no idea what we'll do if hooligans come in."

Psilocybin — the chemical that gives them their "magic" properties — is banned but the mushrooms themselves are not.

That has allowed vendors to hawk them from sidewalk stands and via the Internet. Magazines can run advertisements for such exotica as Hawaiian toadstools without facing trouble.

In recent years, chains of the stores known as head shops and with names such as Herb on Air and Whoopie! have sprouted in big cities, offering substances that would be considered Class A narcotics in many parts of the world.

But fans hoping to do some World Cup scoring of their own will have only until June 6, when it will become a crime to sell or possess mushrooms containing hallucinogenic elements.

The World Cup, being co-hosted by Japan and South Korea, kicks off in Seoul on May 31 and climaxes in Yokohama, near Tokyo, on June 30.



PHOTO: INTERNET

THE PLAYERS' PRESIDENT: Russian President Vladimir Putin (Bent knee C) poses with the Russian World Cup Football squad at their base near Moscow on May 23.

Putin's best wishes



INTERNET, Moscow

Russian fans expect that their soccer players will play "beautiful football," Russian President Vladimir Putin announced after meeting with Russian soccer and hockey national teams, RIA Novosti stated. Addressing the soccer national team, the president said they expect Russia will concede as few goals as possible and score as many as possible. He wished the players successes and said he appreciates the physical and psychological burden the players must endure.

The president emphasized that

he cherishes meeting with sportsmen who are entrusted to defend the country's honour.

Addressing the hockey players, the president said that the country supports hockey players from the bottom of its heart. Putin added that in different times many high-class sportsmen have played in hockey teams but failed to play as a united collective. But in the World Championship and Olympic Games Russians have succeeded in demonstrating team spirit, patriotism, strong will and have reached positive results.

The president also mentioned that he knew the reluctance of football players to meet the president together with hockey players because the latter have demonstrated good results, thus begetting unrealistically high expectations.

In their turn, Russian sports

leaders wished the soccer national team successes in the 2002 World Cup. Russian State Sports Committee Chairman Vyacheslav Fetisov said that the entire nation will follow Russia's first 2002 World Cup game on June 5.

Olympic Committee Chairman Leonid Tyagachev mentioned that it is big honour when the president comes to see off a team for the World Cup.

Russian hockey national team head coach Boris Mikhaylov thanked Vladimir Putin for supporting the team in the World Championship.

Russian soccer national team head coach Oleg Romantsev said that they will do their best to be greeted with congratulations after returning from the Far East.

ROK eye a shock



AFP, Paju

Last year France humiliated Republic of Korea at the Confederations Cup, but Korean captain Hong Myong-Bo has warned it will not happen again when the two meet again Sunday in their final World Cup warmups.

The World Cup co-hosts are growing in confidence after beating Scotland 4-1 last week and fighting back for a 1-1 draw against England on Tuesday.

Coach Guus Hiddink says his insistence on finding tougher opposition to prepare for the World Cup is paying off.

But for the moment, Korean minds are on the match with the defending world champions who were beaten by Belgium.

"We were routed by France at the

Confederations Cup last year but it will be different this time," said Hong, a veteran of his country's teams at the last three World Cups.

"We are the same players but we are a stronger team, much different to the one that was beaten last time."

Hiddink said the heavy defeat last year had actually helped South Korea's preparations for the World Cup. "This match will be a real test no matter what the outcome. But this team has been developing over the past year and there will be no repeat this time."

South Korea's speedy winger Lee Chun-Soo is likely to miss Sunday's match in Suwon, south of Seoul, because of an injury suffered against the England team he gave so much trouble to.

He is under treatment at the Paju training centre in the north of the country where the South Korean team is preparing for the game against France and the first World Cup Group D match against Poland on June 4 in Busan.

Hiddink said playing tougher opposition in World Cup warm-up matches has given the side, now unbeaten in seven matches, a greater chance of achieving their aim of reaching the second round.

He said the Scotland and England games as well as matches last month against Finland and Turkey were "good for the guys to get experience, in a very short time, of the standard that is expected at high-level football."

Hiddink went on "in the past, the

commentators said: "We must play the weaker countries, then we will win and can have a lot of confidence in the World Cup'." But he added: "The experience was not good."

The coach said "there is no guarantee of good results in the group matches, but it does mean we are coping with the reality of international football."

South Korea's other Group D opponents are Portugal and the United States, but they have never won a World Cup match in five previous finals.

"I think the image of Korean football needed a little bit of a boost regarding the previous World Cups."

France arrive in South Korea on Saturday for the final days' preparation before starting the defence of the World Cup they won with a dramatic 3-0 win over Brazil four years ago.

Five players are carrying minor knocks but former world player of the year Zinedine Zidane is now with the squad.

Thierry Henry has injured ligaments in his right knee but France have stressed there is no doubt that he will play in the World Cup.

The other players with knocks are midfielder Alain Boghossian (ankle), David Trezeguet (knee), Philippe Christanval (knee) and Lilian Thuram (knee).

A major surgery operation is planned for the French team with 120 police to patrol their hotel base in eastern Seoul.

Senegal pip Ecuador



INTERNET, Tottori, Japan

Defender Augusto Porozo scored an own goal as Senegal beat Ecuador Thursday 1-0 in a friendly match between two World Cup rookies.

Star forward Elhadji Diouf, who turned the Ecuador defense dizzy all evening, sent a floating cross into Senegal's penalty area in the 69th minute which a disoriented Porozo knocked past his goalkeeper Jose Cevallos.

The goal came only a minute after Diouf could have scored himself, feigning an outside move before cutting back inside and curling a shot from 14 meters past Cevallos that bounced off the post.

"He can make the difference," said Senegal coach Bruno Metsu. "The team worked for him and it showed."

Senegal plays the biggest game

in the West African nation's history next week when it opens the World Cup against France, Denmark and Uruguay are also in Group A.

"This was a good test to see how far we stand," said Metsu. His defense, often wobbly over the past months, stuck together on Thursday, reducing goalie Tony Sylva to a bystander for most of the match.

Ecuador plays Italy, Croatia and Mexico in Group G. Moving past the first round would be a major success for both countries.

Both teams fielded most of their top players but lacked determination and stamina as they strolled through the match before a crowd of 8,553 in a stadium surrounded by Tottori's rice paddies.

Every time Diouf touched the ball in action though, danger was imminent. He could well have earned a spot kick as early as the second minute when he appeared to be pulled down in the penalty area.

With deft flicks of the ball and one-touch skills, the Lens forward weighed heavily on Ecuador's defense throughout the game.

In the 25th minute, Pape Bouba Diop squandered Senegal's biggest scoring opportunity of the first half when he beat an offside trap but his angled shot went past the far post.

Ecuador almost scored in the 10th minute when Ivan Kaviedes was released on the left flank. Sylva stopped his first attempt and Kaviedes' rebound bounced off the post.

Deisler undergoes surgery

AFP, Munich

Crooked German international star Sebastian Deisler, his World Cup dreams shattered by a right knee injury, has undergone surgery in the United States, according to the doctor at new club Bayern Munich.

Deisler was operated on by Richard Steadman in Colorado, Bayern doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Vohlfahrt said Thursday.

Bayern, who have signed Deisler from Hertha Berlin, are set to issue a bulletin Friday on how the 22-year-old's operation went.

Deisler suffered the injury in last week's friendly win over Austria in Leverkusen.

Refs kept waiting

AFP, Seoul

Strong competition to control top matches forced FIFA to delay an announcement Friday on who will be referee for the opening match and other first round games, officials said.

With Ali Buisaim of the United Arab Emirates, who will be at his third straight World Cup finals, a strong candidate for the France v Senegal match next Friday, FIFA referees committee chairman Farouk Bouzo said the announcement was delayed until Saturday.

"The competition is very difficult so we cannot announce it today," Bouzo said.

"All the referees chosen by FIFA are in top physical and mental form so it will be very difficult to choose for the match between France and Senegal."

Bouzo said the referee of the first match will have a particularly tough time because he must set the tone for the whole tournament and FIFA has ordered a clampdown on players who dive to get a penalty or an opponent sent off.

Some referees have called the play-actors a "cancer" in football.

"Whoever referees the France-Senegal match will have a tough task as he must officiate as FIFA wants for the whole tournament. He must set the example," said Bouzo.

Buisaim will become only the third referee to take part in three World Cups and as he is an established name there is pressure for him to get a top match.

The 42-year-old has been an international referee since 1987. He took charge of the third/fourth place match between Sweden and Bulgaria at the 1994 finals, the Brazil-Holland semi-final at the 1998 finals and the France-Japan final at the Confederations Cup last year.

Buisaim said earlier this year that his ambition is to take charge of a World Cup final before retiring.

The referees for the second round and further will be decided once the first round of the tournament in South Korea and Japan is finished.

The 72 referees and their assistants who will control the tournament have been given strict instructions to clamp down on the growing number of players who dive to secure a penalty or feign injury to get an opponent sent off.

Rivaldo in the form of his life?



INTERNET, Milan

Brazil international and Barcelona midfielder Rivaldo was recently out of action due to injury problems. According to the Spanish Marca, the player revealed he feels better now and will be in his best form for the World Cup matches.

"I feel good now and feel even better during my regular training. I believe I will be in my best form for the first World Cup match," Rivaldo stated.

The Brazilian star confirmed he is looking forward to play and achieve the World Cup.



RIVALDO

"I would like to give pleasure to all the Brazilians," he added.

Rivaldo said he is ready to play in any positions in midfield and attack to be helpful to the team.

Mates rally round Kenedy



AFP, Macau

Portuguese star Rui Costa Thursday leapt to the defence of Daniel Kenedy, a day after the midfielder was dropped from the World Cup squad for failing a drug test.

The 28-year-old Kenedy tested positive for the banned diuretic furosemide, which can be used to mask other substances, on May 14 prior to the squad's departure for their pre-finals training base in Macau.

Diuretics are also used to aid weight loss.

"Of course it was a big shock for us. His physical condition is natural and he explained himself fully," the AC Milan playmaker told reporters.

"We can't understand how an athlete can be punished for this. It's very sad because it was his dream.

"We all think he's innocent and we hope people understand that he did not try to take drugs to improve his performance but that he just wanted to take care of his body.

"It's very important that people understand this and most of all that he has not committed any crime."

Kenedy has been replaced by Portuguese football's golden boy and Sporting Lisbon star Hugo Viana, who is currently playing for the Under-21 side at the European Championships in Switzerland.

Kenedy had told the press in Macau, where the Portuguese will Saturday play their final warm-up match against China before flying to South Korea for the World Cup finals, that he had been taking a

dietary product for 10 days which may have been the cause of his failed test.

"I want to make it clear that I never willingly took a banned product," he said.

"I don't take drugs, I just took a dietary substance as I have the habit of putting on weight.

"All those people who know me realise that I would never take anything that is banned. This is a real injustice. I am really sad," the uncapped Maritimo star added.

Kenedy's case echoes that of Benfica defender Antonio Veloso, who was thrown out of Portugal's 1986 World Cup squad after testing positive for anabolic steroids.

This year, Portuguese coach Antonio Oliveira left Sporting Braga goalkeeper Joaquim Silva "Quim" out of the World Cup squad following his positive test for the endurance-boosting substance nandrolone.

On a more positive note for the Portuguese camp, the injury-plagued Costa said he was recovered from a series of injuries and raring to go. "Physically things are going OK. I'm working well and I'm happy about it... my feet are OK and my leg is also fine," he said.

Portugal's other major injury worry, influential Real Madrid star Luis Figo, also appeared to be moving freely during a light evening training session.

Figo, the FIFA World Player of the Year, has been struggling to shake off a nigging ankle injury.

However, Oliveira will be looking to his midfield dynamo's to be in the starting lineup when the Portuguese kick off their drive toward World Cup glory on June 5 against the United States.

Cup Corner

FROM PAGE 13

after Coradino visited the camp.

The two sides meet in the World Cup first phase on June 3rd at Sapporo, Japan. Croatia and Mexico are the two other nations in the group.

Coradino praised Ecuador, who came second in the ten-team South American qualifying group, after his 'spying' mission.

"Giovanni Trapattoni (Italy's coach) has great respect for Ecuador. He's quite worried by their game because of both the individual skills and their collective play," said Coradino.

"They are a very physical side and their speed seems to be their most lethal weapon," he added.

Ecuador have beaten Turkey, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Italian club side AC Milan in World Cup warm up matches.

Keane heads

FROM PAGE 13

were in one of the less difficult groups, but now without Roy it is going to be much harder," Crerand said.

Ireland face Germany, Saudi Arabia and Cameroon in Group E.

What to watch

FROM PAGE 13

Repeat at 12:30 pm
West Indies vs India
Fifth Test, Day Five
Repeat at 2:30 pm
World Cup Soccer Mix
Repeat at 8:30 pm

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Cabbage recipe

5 Waxed

9 Nasty

12 Head along the runway

13 Beatles' meter-maid

14 Raw rock

15 — the Red

16 Sore

17 Aachen article

18 Halloween cover

19 Upsilon follower

20 Cafeteria item

21 Ram's ma'am

23 Letter after 19-

25 Football refs, jocularly

28 Re-

32 States with certainty

33 Emulate

34 Spineless cactus

36 Simmered

37 Sleep inits.

38 That girl

39 Soak up some rays

42 Tiger Woods'

44 Office free-lancer

48 Illustrations

49 Hullabaloo

50 Exchange premium

51 Do the

52 Goble

53 Hyper-ventilate

54 Once around

55 Views

56 Means

57 Justification

58 Tiger Woods'

59 Goble

60 Role for Angiolina

61 Pivot line

62 Caner's creations

63 Vineyard crop

64 Affluent

65 Right Thing'

66 Affluent

67 Morals

68 Method

69 Dutch colonist

70 Oratorio piece

71 Say it isn't so

72 Rain on one's parade?

73 Product of 24-Down

74 Impetu-

75 ousness

76 Fast-

77 forward the VCR

78 Ms. Arden

79 Tarzan's son

80 Uncooked

81 Packed away

82 Started

83 Use

84 36 Figures

85 Cinderella'

86 setting

87 vicinity

88 Dance lesson

89 Stars

90 O'Connor's successor

91 Day

92 attention to

93 Cookware

94 Adversary

Solution time: 28 mins.

J A M C H A R P E O N
D E R U L E U R I E
T A R H E L L S E T R E
C I T Y A B N E R
S N A K E T E L L
P A T T E T A R B O U S H
A N O W M A R T I A R I O
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S L I C E B O N O
L O C K T A R T A R U S
A W O L E S A U T I R I E
G E I N E D I T T S O N E

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48 49 50

51 52 53

54 55 56

CRYPTOQUIP

O U Z P Y Z A A R N Q Y V R F D

P D T Q D F O S P D N A N Z S N Z P U D F .

O V Z B D P R A Z F V O R P

F U D P Y F T V Z Y F R D B D N

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHY AM I ALWAYS WEARING SHORT-SLEEVE SHIRTS? I BELIEVE IN THE RIGHT TO BARE ARMS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals F

The Cryptoquip 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.