Bielsa the taskmaster

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

REUTERS, Naraha

Argentina, aware of the great World Cup expectations in their fans back home, marked their national day on Saturday with a hard and intense training session under coach Marcelo Bielsa.

"If there is no quality of movement, there won't be quality in the match," Bielsa shouted as he exhorted his troops to maximum effort in demanding exercises of set-piece and open play situations at their J-Village bunker on the Pacific coast 200 km north of Tokyo.

Argentina, favourites to win their third world title after failing to fulfil their best expectations in the previous two finals, are preparing for their opening group F match against Nigeria in Ibaraki on June 2.

May 25 marks the day in 1810 that Argentines sparked a revolution against Spanish colonial rule.

In the World Cup starting next Friday, in which they meet Nigeria, England and Sweden in group F, Bielsa's team will be looking to overthrow title holders France.

Bielsa rarely brings the whole squad together in training, preferring to work on areas of the team separately.

He began Saturday's session with the defence, getting the players to defend attacking runs on goal at speed and then blocking shots to the near post with feet or heads.

This work appeared to be aimed at avoiding the kind of brilliant goal Argentina conceded to Michael Owen in their memorable 1998 second round clash in St Etienne against England, whom they meet again in group F in Sapporo on June 7.

"Marcelo is a coach who works differently from the majority of trainers, he works specifically on each position. He wants his team to attack and we are working towards that," left wing-back Juan Pablo Sorin said after the practice.

With the premise of winning possession at every opportunity, Bielsa also put the forwards through a strong session of pressing at goalkicks by the opposing side.

Players of the calibre of Gabriel Batistuta and Hernan Crespo, rivals for the central striker's role, were not spared the graft of dashing across the face of the penalty box chasing a goalkeeper's short kick or throw to a defender.

With speed of the essence, one of Bielsa's assistants timed the runs the forwards made between cones at the moment that one of the keepers released the ball, and cheered every improvement.

"If we all run equally (fast) in the match, we'll win the ball," Bielsa shouted.

PHOTO: AFP

Gabriel Batistuta (L) and Hernan Crespo (R) lead the pack of the Argentina players in jogging during their training session at their Naraha base in Tokyo yesterday.

Jeju welcome

FROM PAGE 16

Drawn in a tough "group of death" with two-time champions and favourites Argentina, Sweden and Nigeria, England are to be based on the islet of Awaji off Kobe during the one-month long tournament which opens on May 31.

Coach Sven-Goran Eriksson's woes were compounded, meanwhile with the news that top choice goalkeeper David Seaman had picked up a groin injury, although it was said to be only minor.

Eriksson was expected to rest Seaman for the Cameroon game and named Nigel Martyn ahead of third choice David James.

Left-back Ashley Cole was also doubtful for Sunday's match as he rests a painful knee. Southampton's Wayne Bridge is the likeliest replacement.

On the brighter side, midfielder Nicky Butt was back in training with the rest of the squad for the first time since his participation in the World Cup finals was cast into doubt because of a knee injury.

And West Ham midfielder Trevor Sinclair is firmly back in place following the injury to Danny Murphy.

The 29-year-old Sinclair left the squad on Wednesday when it was announced that Kieron Dyer would recover in time from injury.

But two days later the injury to Murphy again opened the World Cup doors to him and he returned to Japan.

"I'm very happy to be going back out," he told BBC Radio 5 Live. "Obviously it's an unfortunate circumstances for Danny but it's a great opportunity for me and I'm looking forward to taking it.

"I'm alright, because you gain time coming out, although I'm not sure what I'm going to be like at the end of this flight.

"But I'm up for it definitely and I'm confident I can put the last game behind me and show what I can really do."

Simeone relishing

FROM PAGE 16

"There are only five teams that can win the competition and they are Argentina, England, Italy, France and Brazil.

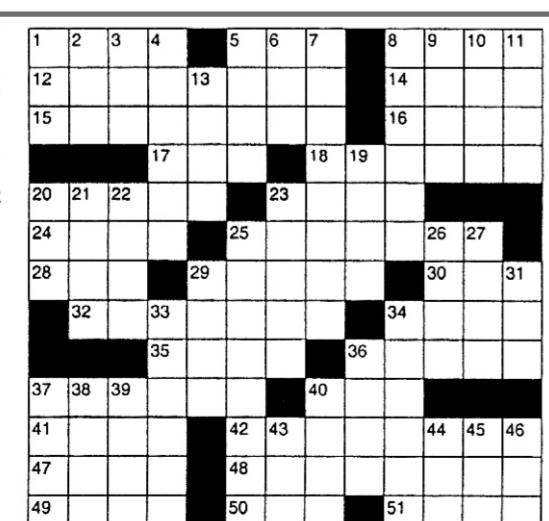"If we have both won our first games, when Argentina and England meet it will be a barbaric, murderous epic.

"So if Beckham wants to face us then I want to face him, one on one, I am not afraid.

"When I boarded the plane to come here I was filled with this incredible sense of happiness because I have the feeling that we just can't lose. We are about to reap the victory based on four years of hard, hard work

"So after this match you will see the truth - the truth about which one of us will go far and which will not."

Caniggia feels a twinge

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

REUTERS, Naraha

Claudio Caniggia pulled up with a twinge in his knee during the Rangers winger's first full practice with Argentina's World Cup squad in Japan on Saturday.

But the team's press officer Coco Ventura said it was "just a small twinge in the natural process of recovery (from his injury)".

Caniggia, in his third World Cup at the age of 35, trained with the bulk of the squad in Saturday's morning session for the first time since

injuring his right knee during the Scottish Cup final early this month.

He pulled up during a short sprint with other forwards in coach Marcelo Bielsa's squad at their J-Village headquarters.

Caniggia, recalled by Bielsa in February after six years in the international wilderness, may not see World Cup action in his final finals even if he recovers fully.

The fast winger with the flowing blond locks faces stiff competition for the position on the right of Argentina's attack.

Ariel Ortega, a veteran of the previous two tournaments, is favourite for the spot but World Cup rookie Gustavo Lopez is also gunning for recognition.

Japan hold Sweden

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AFP, Tokyo

Sweden dug their own grave as they watched their one goal advantage tumbled into a 1-1 draw with Japan through an own goal on Saturday in their last warm-up match for the World Cup finals.

The equalizer came in the 63rd minute when second-half substitute Alessandro Santos, better known as "Alex," sent the ball from the left midfield to the Swedish goal mouth.

The pass missed the target, but defender Johan Mjallby, coming back to save it, failed to hit back and the ball landed in the net.

The Swedes, who suffered their first loss in almost two years when they lost to Paraguay 1-0 a week ago, earlier took the lead in the 20th minute.

Henrik Larsson produced the last pass from the left to the Japanese goal mouth, where Heerenveen forward Marcus Allback struck home past hapless keeper Seigo Narazaki.

The visitors had another chance in the 59th minute when Arsenal midfielder Fredrik Ljungberg dribbled through to the Japanese area and unleashed a sizzling shot from the edge, only to see Narazaki dived to punch out the shot.

The Japanese threatened the Swedish goal several times to excite a sell-out crowd at the National Stadium, but they were never able to create a clear scoring chance.

Parma midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata's shot on a free kick just outside the area in the 14th minute hit a defender, while four minutes later he quickly collected a rebound to fire a long shot, which was caught by keeper Magnus Hendman.

Hiroaki Morishima's header from close range in the 42nd minute was too blunt for Hendman to miss, while Takayuki Suzuki missed another header in the 53rd minute.

Sweden, who will play a Miyazaki prefecture selection in a practice game on May 27, were drawn in the so-called "Group of Death" against England, one of the top favourites Argentina, and Nigeria in Group F.

Japan, co-hosts of the finals with South Korea, will take on Belgium at the Saitama stadium in their first match on June 4 before playing Russia and Tunisia in Group H.

It was also Japan's last warm-up game in their eight-game preparation series, winding up with three wins, two defeats and three draws.

Cup Corner

FROM PAGE13

mid-May. It had been forced to consider handing out the tickets in person at the stadium gates for early first-round matches.

The tickets were produced by British company Byrom Inc, who said printing had been delayed by the late arrival of ticketing data from around the world.

JAWOC said the question of demanding compensation from Byrom had not yet been considered.

"Our first priority is to get all the tickets delivered," the spokesman said.

Nervous about Ballack

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AP, Miyazaki

Already hit by a series of injuries, Germany is worried about the right foot of Michael Ballack, the star player of the season who is expected to carry the team through its World Cup campaign.

The 25-year-old high-scoring midfielder has been nursing the injury for weeks through a busy end of the club season. On Saturday he trained with the team, but will definitely sit out of Sunday's final warmup match against a local under-21 team.

"He practiced but we are not going to risk playing him tomorrow (Sunday)," said assistant coach Michael Skibbe at the team's southern Japanese resort.

Ballack is leaving Bayer Leverkusen for Bayern Munich next season, and Germany team chief Rudi Voeller clearly knows his value.

"We don't want to take any risks," Voeller said. "If it were a World Cup game, he would be able to play. But he should cure his injury and replenish his energy. I am optimistic about the first match."

The three-time champion opens its World Cup campaign June 1 against Saudi Arabia in a Group E match in Sapporo.

Ballack was less optimistic than his coach.

"I still feel light pain. I had problems in the final stage of the season

and I was only able to play with painkillers," Ballack said. "But it's getting better from day to day."

Earlier, Ballack had told a German newspaper that he was taking painkillers every day still and that his foot needed to rest.

Ballack scored 17 Bundesliga goals for Leverkusen, putting him second on the marksmen's list, and led the team in its quest for three titles.

In the end, Leverkusen finished second in the Bundesliga, lost the German Cup final and also lost the

MICHAEL BALLACK

Champions League final against Real Madrid, but Ballack still is sure to be voted Germany's player of the year.

There also was some good news for Germany Saturday.

Defender Marko Rehmer was back in full training after recovering from a shoulder injury. The Hertha Berlin player had been trying to regain fitness after being sidelined since March with an ankle injury.

"I feel very good. I have to use this week to get into the team system," Rehmer said.

Voeller said Rehmer would play at least one half on Sunday and that he should be ready to face Saudi Arabia.

The Germans were hit by a series of injuries just before the World Cup that forced Voeller to drop several players -- creative midfielders Mehmet Scholl and Sebastian Deisler and defenders Joerg Heinrich, Jens Nowotny and Christian Woerns.

The absence of the last two has left Voeller pondering how to set his back line -- whether to play with three or four defenders.

"We have several options and we are flexible. The players are schooled in such a way that they can play both ways," Voeller said.

The impressions from practice are that Voeller will opt for a three-man line with Christoph Metzelder, Thomas Linke and Rehmer or Carsten Ramelow.

Voeller said Sunday's match was an opportunity to try out several different things.

"Everyone should get a chance to play. First of all, it should be fun," he said.

Voeller said the long wait for the first World Cup match could stretch the team's nerves.

"It's going to be the longest week of the year, I know this from my own experience. It's almost too long and it won't be much fun," said the former star forward, who won the World Cup in 1990, Germany's last title.

About 500 police formed a corridor for players as they left customs. Milling about in red and green berets were SWAT team commandos with wraparound sunglasses, automatic

Loving every moment

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

REUTERS, Osaka

England midfielder Trevor Sinclair has arrived in Osaka following 30,000 kilometres of flying over the last 11 days and insisted he had no regrets about earlier quitting the camp in South Korea.

Sinclair, who is raring to play again, left the England party on Wednesday to return to his sick wife Natalie after it seemed his hopes of appearing in the World Cup had disappeared with fellow-midfielder Kieron Dyer's recovery from a knee injury.

But after making the 9,000-km journey from Korea to London on Wednesday, he was called on to make the 10,000-km trip back to Japan when Liverpool midfielder Danny Murphy limped out of the tournament with a broken foot.

Coach Sven-Goran Eriksson had wanted Sinclair to stay with the party but the West Ham United player insisted on returning to his pregnant wife.

When he walked through Osaka airport on Saturday, Sinclair was still happy he had gone home - but delighted to be back.

Asked whether the marathon near-36-hour journey, including

four long-haul flights in 11 days, was the best way to prepare for the finals, he said: "Probably not, but when you're in first class you can have a good sleep. It's not too bad."

Father-of-two Sinclair's other reason not to regret his long trip was that he was able to see his wife, who is five months pregnant, after she had earlier joined him for England's week-long stay in Dubai

TREVOR SINCLAIR

before Sinclair flew on to South Korea.

"She was happy to see me. It's been nice being able to get home for a few days. She wasn't well when she got back from Dubai. So my mind's at ease now as I've seen her and seen she's okay. She

wished me all the best."

The 29-year-old's main concern was for Liverpool's Murphy, himself a stand-in for another Anfield player Steven Gerrard.

Sinclair said: "I was gutted for Danny, to be honest, I know how much it meant to him and to break down in training as he did, with a freak accident, I was gutted.

"Then I thought well, maybe I'll get a call."

Sinclair was confident he would be ready for England's friendly on Sunday against African Nations champions Cameroon in Kobe.

"I'm looking forward to training, having a little looosener today and if called upon I'll be looking forward to that game against one of the great African teams."

Asked if he was ready to play in the World Cup he said: "I am -- definitely.

"It would mean a lot to me, especially after all the travelling I've done."

Once England's group F campaign gets underway at the finals, Sinclair will have one of two roles -- on the left in place of Dyer or competing with Nicky Butt or Owen Hargreaves for a place in central midfield.

England open their campaign on June 2 against Sweden. They also face Argentina and Nigeria in the group.

Arena draws his plans

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AP, Seoul

Bruce Arena proposed a new solution for his goalkeeper dilemma: Play them both during the first round.

A day after arriving in Asia for the World Cup, the U.S. coach said he had three options for his decision on whether to play Kasey Keller or Brad Friedel.

"One, is we go with the same goalkeeper in all three games. Two, is we split them in Games 1 and 2. And three, is we take it one game at a time," he said before leading the team through its first practice on a hazy Saturday morning at the Misari training complex, about 15 miles east of Seoul.

Keller was the starter for the United States in the first two games of the 1998 World Cup in France, against Germany and Iran. With the U.S. team virtually eliminated after losing its first two games, Friedel started the finale against Yugoslavia.

Both have played well of late.

Friedel started the first 36 Premier League games for Blackburn in England before joining the U.S. training camp, and helped the Rovers win the League Cup. Keller spent much of the season as the backup to Tottenham Hotspur, but emerged to become the starter in the final seven games of the Premier League season.

"The decision is going to be based on who gives us the best chance to win," said Arena, a former goalkeeper. "It's not sentimental ... If it was sentimental, I would give myself a chance to play. That would not give us the best chance to win."

Friedel and Keller have split most of the time in goal for the American team this year. Because he was not playing regularly at Tottenham for much of the season, Keller played for the United States in 11 games while Friedel played in four.

On Friday evening, the team arrived at Incheon International Airport after a 14 1/2 -hour Korean Air flight and was greeted by the largest police and military detail placed on any of the 32 teams, with agents of CIA and U.S. State Department keeping tabs, too.

"You really don't pay much attention to it," forward Clint Mathis said. "It's nice to know you're looked after and taken care of."

weapons slung from their shoulders and hands on pistols.

"We've been here before and we anticipated great security," Arena said. "Perhaps not to this degree, but we're not complaining. The Koreans do an outstanding job with regard to security for the U.S. team."

Players sat in business class during the flight, many sleeping or watching movies. When they arrived, they also were greeted by a few dozen fans.

"Welcome USA," "USA Supported Korea For Korean War," and "Korea Now Supports US Team," said signs from the Korean Veterans Association.

With two police motorcycles and a police car leading the way, the U.S. motorcade quickly cut through rush-hour highway traffic on the 30-mile ride to Seoul. An eight-member SWAT team, in an ominous-looking black van, stayed to the side of the bus throughout the trip, and three helicopters followed the motorcade.

Mixed in were two special agents from the U.S. State Department Diplomatic Security Service, which has provided protection to American soccer teams overseas for at least 13 years. Gene Williams, the team's security director and a former United Nations employee, said the CIA provided agents to the security detail.

"At least four that I know of," he said.

Williams said a 120-member security force was assigned to the team during its stay, far larger than the groups devoted to the other nations at the tournament. Eight SWAT team members will stay on the same floor as the U.S. team, and the detail at the hotel includes bomb-sniffing dogs and a bomb disposal team.

Even before the team's arrival, security officials installed metal detectors at the entrances of the team's hotel. Bellmen had ear-pieces and at least one appeared to be an undercover security man with a weapon.

Security officials checked the trunks of cars at the hotel and used mirrors to look underneath other cars nearby. At the hotel, one of the five elevators was devoted exclusively to the U.S. team, and the others were blocked from stopping on the floor of the team's rooms.

American players, who don't have their first game until June 5 against Portugal, are free to leave the hotel, but a security man might trail them. Mathis, who walked through the airport wearing a welcoming lei, wasn't overly worried.

"Whatever happens, happens," he said.

Keane home

FROM PAGE 13

see my family - it's good to be going home.

"I have no regrets. There are more important things to worry about."

Stunned Irish fans are struggling to come to terms with the loss of their star player on the eve of the World Cup with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern offering to intervene in the dispute.

Keane's former teammates meanwhile hit back to defeat J-League side Sanfrecce Hiroshima 2-1, but the problems mounted for Mick McCarthy's side with two midfield players injured.

Jason McAteer's injury appeared to be the most serious as he was carried off on a stretcher following a 35th minute sliding tackle from a Hiroshima defender as he prepared to cross from the right.

There were fears that the Sunderland player could have damaged medial ligaments in his left knee and he was sent for a scan to determine the extent of the damage.

Kevin Kilbane was also forced off sustaining an ankle injury after 62 minutes on a tackle from Yuichi Komano.

In the match itself, the Irish fell behind five minutes from half-time when Tatsuhiko Kubo was left with a clear header from six yards out.

Four minutes later though they were back on level terms when Kilbane flicked on a corner and Robbie Keane was on hand to head home at the far post.

The winning goal came after 78 minutes Niall Quinn headed down a long ball from Mark Kinsella for Keane to pick his spot.

What to watch

FROM PAGE 13

Harsha Online
Cricket Talk Show
Repeat at 6:00 pm
Cricket Programming
Super Selector
Repeat at 7:00 pm

Figo still not 100 percent

AFP, Seoul

Portugal's great World Cup hope Luis Figo admitted Saturday that his troubled ankle was still not right.

Figo, who has suffered from an ankle injury for most of the season, said he was unsure when he would be 100 percent fit.

But the Real Madrid star had an upbeat note for his fans.

"My recovery is just a matter of time," Figo told FIFAworldcup-com.

"I'm happy to be able to tell you that my ankle is a lot better," the inspirational midfielder said.

Coach Antonio Oliveira is reportedly planning to rest Figo and AC Milan's Rui Costa in the World Cup warm-up match against China being played in Macau later Saturday.

He said both players were struggling for full fitness ahead of the game in the former Portuguese colony close to Hong Kong.

Figo explained that part of his problem had been caused by having to play so many matches every season.

"There's no doubt that every year we have more matches to play and less and less time to recover. That's the way it goes. Recovery time has shrunk for everyone," he said.

Figo confessed that it would be disastrous if Portugal, playing in Group D with South Korea, Poland and the United States, failed to get into the final stages.

"It's 16 years since we reached the final phase of the World Cup. We are setting out with expectations sky-high. Falling at the first hurdle would be nothing less than a crushing failure. Our aim is to reach the final," he said.

"But we'll be taking it one step at a time. Let's get through the group stage first. After that we will see."

Portugal's small pool of players is an advantage rather than a hindrance, Figo added.