

ARGENTINA VS NIGERIA

# Banking on Batigol

AP/REUTERS, KASHIMA

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa on Saturday announced that veteran AS Roma striker Gabriel Batistuta will start in the team's World Cup Group F opener against Nigeria.

Batistuta's call up for Sunday's match in Ibaraki means no place in the starting line up for Hernan Crespo of Lazio.

Batigol, as he is known, is Argentina's most prolific scorer with 55 goals in 75 games. However, the 33-year-old has had a poor season at Roma, suffering from several injuries and a dip in form that saw him convert just six goals for his club side.

Cespo, 26, helped propel Argentina to the World Cup finals, grabbed nine goals in 12 games in the South American qualifiers.

In another much awaited decision, Bielsa said he would start Lazio's Claudio Lopez, who edged out Valencia Kily Gonzalez for the left flank position.

Ariel Ortega of Turkey's Fenerbahce squeezes in front of veteran Claudio Caniggia of Glasgow Rangers on the right flank.

A winning start is essential to any

side aspiring to reach the latter stages and the more so in a group where matches against England and Sweden are next on the agenda.

World champions France found out in the tournament's opening game on Friday that playing against African sides can be a tough assignment, losing 1-0 to newcomers Senegal.

Argentina well remember their defeat to Cameroon as they began the defence of their world crown in 1990 -- a 1-0 loss regarded as one of the greatest shocks in soccer history.

The Argentines are indeed wary of the unpredictable Nigerians and fear they may catch them at their

best. The African side have tended to start tournaments well before losing momentum.

"They're complicated," said playmaker Juan Sebastian Veron. "They've matured a lot, the majority of their players play abroad. Perhaps they lack tactical discipline but they're very skilful."

Nigeria are capable of repeating their shock start to the 1998 finals in France when they came from behind to upset Spain 3-2. Argentina also need to exorcise the ghost of a shock defeat by Nigeria in the 1996 Olympic final.

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### PROBABLE TEAMS

Argentina (Jersey numbers in the beginning): 12-Pablo Cavallero; 4-Mauricio Pochettino, 2-Roberto Ayala, 6-Walter Samuel; 8-Javier Zanetti, 14-Diego Simeone, 11-Juan Sebastian Veron, 3-Juan Pablo Sorin; 23-Ariel Ortega, 7-Claudio Lopez, 9-Gabriel Batistuta..

Nigeria (Jersey numbers in the beginning): 1-Ike Shorunmu; 3-Celestine Babayaro, 6-Taribo West, 5-Isaac Okoronkwo, 16-Efe Sodje, 2-Joseph Yobo, 4-Nwankwo Kanu, 10-Jay Jay Okocha, 9-Bartholomew Ogbeche, 17-Julius Aghahowa, 7-Plus Ikedia  
**Referee:** Gilles Veissiere (France)

PHOTO: AFP

LISTEN, THESE AFRICANS ARE DANGEROUS! Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa(R) instructs forward Claudio Lopez (C ), while Gabriel Batistuta stands close at J-Village Naraha yesterday.

## Yes, no on Zidane

AP, Seoul

Zinedine Zidane, the world's best player and a key to France's World Cup defence, may play on Thursday against Uruguay, the French team doctor said Saturday.

France was upset in Friday's World Cup opener 1-0 by Senegal, and the absence of Zidane at the match was blamed in part for the French loss in the Group A match.

Team doctor Jean-Marcel Ferret, in explaining Zidane's state of health said: "It isn't impossible that he will play against Uruguay, but we won't take any risks. The injury is coming along and the next two or three days will be key."

Ferret said Zidane had already begun jogging, indicating the left thigh injury he picked up a week ago in a practice match against South Korea had improved.

French coach Roger Lemerre was less optimistic.

"I would be surprised if Zidane came back for the match against Uruguay," the French coach said. "The squad is waiting for his return. There is no dependence on Zidane. We depend on ourselves and not on him."

Ferret described the recovery process that might see Zidane return to the pitch.

"There will be a return to the training field and he will have to start showing he can turn and accelerate. Kicking the ball will be the last

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## Ask Uncle Vieira

AFP, Dakar

Blood runs thicker than water - or so the adage runs and the ties which bind France and Senegal, which "La Grande Nation" colonized in 1890 prior to independence in 1960, run deep.

They took a bit of a jolt with Friday's shock Senegalese win over the reigning world champions - but one man more closely involved with both cultures than most was able to sit back afterwards and say laconically: I told you so.

The great uncle of Arsenal and France midfielder star Patrick Vieira, born in the Senegalese capital Dakar, had predicted a win for the African upstarts.

And he had even predicted the score.

Michel Preira, 62 years old and the brother of Vieira's maternal grandmother, went to watch the "historic" match with his neighbours in the city's Gibraltar district.

Almost as soon as his relative touched the ball a worried cry went up.

"Patrick, you wouldn't dare do that to us," said the assembled company of armchair fans many of them wide-eyed youngsters gathered around "Pepe" Preira, their shots breaking bouts of silence as the lacklustre French struggled to

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THE COLOUR IS DISTINCTIVELY IRISH: Republic of Ireland fans light up the stands at Niigata's Big Swan Stadium yesterday during their country's match against Cameroon.

PHOTO: AFP

# Two-hot Tomasson

AFP, Ulsan

Jon Dahl Tomasson bagged a double as Denmark got off to a flier with a vital 2-1 win over Uruguay here on Saturday in their opening World Cup Group A match.

With group favourites France having been stunned 0-1 by Senegal in Friday's tournament-opener both sides were looking to take full advantage.

And it was the Danes who took provisional pole position in the group ahead of the Senegalese on goals scored after Newcastle reject Tomasson produced neat finishes on the stroke of half-time and seven minutes from the end.

Tomasson side-footed home a Jesper Gronkjaer cross to break the deadlock and give the Danes a lead they barely deserved in terms of possession.

Dario Rodriguez smashed home a brilliant left-foot volley from some 25 metres for the equaliser barely two minutes after the restart, netting only his third goal in the light blue of the 'Charruas'.

But Tomasson, who had a nightmare season with Newcastle five years ago but rebounded his form at Dutch side Feyenoord, winning the UEFA Cup this season to earn a big-money move to AC Milan, struck the winner when it seemed the game was headed for a draw.

The 25-year-old outjumped two static defenders to power home a header after a cross from Martin Jorgensen.

Should the Danes now beat Senegal in Daegu on Thursday they will claim a berth in the second phase while the Uruguayans face having to hand France a second defeat in Busan the same day if they are to pull their campaign out of its early nose-dive.

Danish coach Morten Olsen was delighted to get three early points.

"We were nervous at the start but

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PHOTO: AFP

TERRIFIC TOMASSON: Denmark striker Jon Dahl Tomasson is jubilant after scoring one of his two goals against Uruguay yesterday.



## CUP CORNER

AFP, Dakar

Senegal president Abdoulaye Wade on Saturday declared his country as the new world champions after Friday's momentous victory over France.

The 1-0 win over the reigning title holders courtesy of a Papa Bouba Diop strike was met with adulation by the Senegalese press with one paper declaring that the west African country "had finally been placed on the world map."

However, Wade, took it a stage further. "To beat the champion of the world is to become the champion of the world," he told Le Matin.

The daily added: "Once more Senegal has put her name alongside the greatest nations in the world."

Reports elsewhere were just as upbeat as Senegal went football-crazy for the day.

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MBOMA BOMBS! Ireland defender Gary Breen fails to prevent Cameroon striker Patrick Mboma's (lying C) shot from entering the goal at Niigata yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Indomitable Irish

INTERNET, Niigata

The Republic of Ireland showed there is life after Roy Keane as they earned a deserved draw with Cameroon in their opening group game.

Cameroon, tipped to make a big impression on the competition, backed up their credentials with a strong display filled with power and technique.

Samuel Eto'o provided the inspiration and Patrick Mboma applied the

finish, scoring for the Indomitable Lions just before half-time.

But Mick McCarthy's men were not to be denied and equalised courtesy of a Matt Holland strike in the 52nd minute.

And the Irish, inspired by the excellent Damien Duff in the second half, should have made their superiority count.

Only the woodwork and some desperate defending prevented Ireland from scoring the winner,

which their unrelenting pressure merited.

In perfect conditions at Niigata's Big Swan Stadium, a large contingent of Irish fans sent chants of 'Are you watching Roy Keane?' around the ground throughout the match.

Chances were scarce, with Ireland's other notable Keane, Robbie, heading wide from Kevin Kilbane's cross.

Shay Given made a superb save to deny Eto'o, who had been put

clean through after exquisite interplay with Mboma.

But as the first half wore on, Cameroon started to exert greater control, and with their greater possession came the opener.

A well-worked three-man move saw Geremi release the dangerous Eto'o.

The Cameroon striker danced

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