SPORT

Viva Batigol

FROM PAGE 13

England meet Sweden later on Sunday, but a disappointing Nigeria became the first African team to lose at the finals after Senegal's sensational win over France on Friday and Cameroon's draw with Ireland on Saturday.

Nigeria coach Adegboye Onigbinde was nevertheless pleased with his team's efforts.

"I was very much impressed with the performance of my boys. We were able to check the antics of the Argentine team," he said.

"I think Argentina lived up to their reputation, they had very good preparation for this competition and it showed.

Bielsa had to change his plans when defender and captain Roberto Ayala felt a twinge in his thigh during the pre-match warm-up and was replaced by Diego Placente wide on the left.

Walter Samuel moved from leftback to sweeper with Placente moving to his spot and midfielder Veron taking over as skipper in the enforced 11th hour shuffle for the twice-world champions.

But it was Nigeria who had to defend for the first hour as Argentina's famed attacking game kept them on the back foot. When Nigeria did break forward, they either squandered their chances or were denied by some superb goalkeeping from Pablo Cavallero. The second half was a big

improvement on the first, although the clearest scoring chances came before the break.

After a series of half-chances and near-misses Ariel Ortega brought out a superb save from Shorunmu after 29 minutes with the goalkeeper moving swiftly to tip the powerful shot over the bar.

Within two minutes Jav Jav Okocha forced Cavallero into an his homeland with Gremio and then even more athletic dive with a in Germany with Bayer Leverkusen blistering effort from 18 metres at before his big-money move to Roma the other end. for the 2000-2001 season.

Batistuta almost opened the scoring on 36 minutes when he headed narrowly past the post from Veron's deep corner, but that was the last clear chance of the half.

Gonzalez came on for Claudio Lopez on the left at halftime and Nigeria made their own change two a major headache. Emerson added minutes later when injured striker leadership, strength and grit and Kanu, who had struggled with a was the main man in midfield.

Start differently FROM PAGE 16

Brazilian players remained upbeat ing his knee in a friendly against and confident they can go as far as Kashima Antlers, will make up an the final. impressive back-up forward on the

bench confident of our success, but we are The pressure will be on Vieri to great," said free-kick specialist deliver the firepower and the powerfully-built striker is convinced that "The other teams are all great too so I can't say for sure which team will Italy can go all the way. Italy play Croatia and Mexico later in the take first place. But we've won the group.

World Cup several times and we will take it once more." "I think at least now, at the start, we are very strong and we have great he is still not 100 percent recovered potential. There is a great feeling from the knee problems that have between us and that is important, hampered his career, was similarly said Vieri. upbeat

"But there are no easy opponents at a World Cup, there are going to be three battles (in the group). Ecuado are a good team, we need to respect them and be at 100 percent on the field

knock for most of the first half, was replaced by fellow forward Pius Ikedia

But it was Batistuta who was making all the openings and he narrowly failed to turn in another Veron corner at the far post just after the break before Juan Pablo Sorin put a header wide.

Batistuta then fired a 20-metre free kick over the bar and Sorin's effort on the hour-mark met a similar fate after a slick passing move involving Veron and Ortega, wearing the coveted number 10 shirt

made famous by Diego Maradona. Three minutes later Argentina took the lead when Batistuta rose at the far post to head the ball home off the leg of Nigeria's Efe Sodie after another teasing Veron corner had eluded the uncertain Nigerian

defence and his team mate Pochettino. Batistuta gave way to Crespo on 80 minutes and his rival as Argentina's main striker wasted a good chance to finish off the Nigerians as Shorunmu pulled off another good save.

TEAMS

Argentina: Cavallero, Placente, Sorin, Pocchettino, Samuel Zanetti, Simeone, Veron (Aimar 78) Ortega, Claudio Lopez (Gonzalez 45), Batistuta (Crespo 81). Nigeria: Shorunmu, Yobo Babayaro, Okoronkwo, West, Sodje (Christopher 73), Ogbeche, Okocha, Lawal, Kanu (Ikedia 48)

Aghahowa. Referee: Giles Veissiere (France).

He is considered an important

influence in the Italian team, provid-

ing the platform for the likes of Francesco Totti to show off their

skills further forward, and is held in

high regard by Brazilian coach Luiz

His departure leaves Scolari with

It seems likely that Gilberto Silva

Despite the setback, the

"I don't think people here are

Star striker Ronaldo, who admits

will now come in to play alongside Juninho in the middle with Cafu and

Felipe Scolari.

Carlos on the flanks.

CROATIA VS MEXICO

Jozic has points to prove

REUTERS, Niigata

Croatia coach Mirko Jozic will be on a mission to prove two high-profile critics wrong when his side open their World Cup campaign on Monday

Javier Aguirre, coach of opponents Mexico, has offended Jozic by pouring scorn on his players' capabilities and his prowess as a coach.

But it is the harsh words of predecessor Miroslav Blazevic that are eating away at Jozic as he attempts to repeat Croatia's thrilling World Cup debut at the finals four years ago.

Blazevic, the man who led what was known as the "golden generation" of players to the semi-finals in France, has accused Jozic of "betraying" the nation's love for attracive football.

The team conceded just two goals in their qualifying campaign -the lowest number of any European nation. Jozic, who will stand down after the finals, accepts only another thrill-filled tournament will earn him a fond farewell but he warns Croatian fans that he is aiming for points first and foremost.

"For me, reaching the second round will be an achievement," he

says. "People always talk about the "golden generation."..it is true. these players are not as confident. They may have lost some of their lustre, but we have many qualities and I am proud of them."

our skills have improved a lot," said

Ronaldo.

Turkey.

After taking over from Blazevic during the qualifying campaign, Jozic has had to build a team without the likes of 1998 talisman, Zvonimir Boban.

Yet despite his love for defensive fortitude, he has also indulged Robert Prosinecki, another of the "old guard," by surrounding the ageing playmaker with hardworking team mates who think nothing of sacrificing themsleves for "Robbie."

Prosinecki will also bow out after the finals but, at 33, insists he is in prime condition. "My mind is better han four years ago and my body feels good," he said

Alongside Prosinecki, Robert Jarni, 1998 Golden Boot winner Davor Suker and Alen Boksic -- who is set for his World Cup debut at 32 --Jozic has tried to blend the inexperience of Boris Zivkovic and Niko Kovac.

Trouble is, even Jozic cannot predict how they will gel.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Croatia (Formation 4-3-1-2; Jersey numbers in the beginning): 1-Stipe Pletikosa; 6-Boris Zivkovic, 21-Robert Kovac, 3-Josip Simunic, 17-Robert Jarni: 4-Stiepan Tomas. 14-Zvonimir Soldo. 10-Niko Kovac: 8-Robert Prosinecki, 9-Davor Suker, 11-Alen Boksic

Mexico (Formation 3-5-2; Jersey numbers in the beginning): 1-Oscar Perez; 20-Melvin Brown, 5-Manuel Vidrio, 22-Alberto Rodriguez; 8-Alberto Garcia Aspe, 4-Rafael Marquez, 19-Gabriel Caballero, 6-Gerardo Torrado, 3-Rafael Garcia; 17-Francisco Palencia, 10-Cuauhtemoc Blanco Referee: Jun Lu (China)

Mexico's forward partnership -of Cuauhtemoc Blanco and Francisco Palencia -- is also one of proven class. It was their goals that helped

rescue Mexico's qualifying campaign. But with Jesus Arrellano and Johan Rodriguez suspended for the match in Niigata, and both winger Rafael Garcia and midfielder Gerardo Torrado battling against injury, Mexico are struggling to convince as a unit. A heavy reponsibility will fall on

Alberto Garcia Aspe, the midfielder

who was dropped by previous

coach Enrique Meza but who has

returned to the fold and is set to win his 109th cap. Media reports linking Aguirre with a return to club management at Spanish side Osasuna have not helped focus Mexican minds on the task in hand, either.



Davor Suker, Golden Boot winner at France '98, stretches along with his Croatian teammate Jurica Vranjes during a practice session at the Big Swan Stadium in Niigata, Japan yesterday.

Forgive and forget

REUTERS Ulsan

Brazil will put four years of misery, including humiliating defeats on the pitch and a corruption scandal off it, behind them when they take the field on Monday for their opening World Cup match against Turkey.

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari believes the players' minds will be on the future rather than the past as they begin their attempt to win a fifth world crown.

"The players are living the moment," said Scolari, who is Brazil's fourth coach since the end of the 1998 World Cup.

"These four years of difficulties will not make any difference on Monday evening."

Since finishing as runners-up to France in 1998, the four times world champions have gone through one of the worst periods in their history.

An unprecedented run of defeats left them in danger of missing out on the World Cup for the first time, and they suffered a morale-shattering elimination by nine-man Cameroon at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Last year, Brazil were dumped out of the Copa America by Honduras and finished fourth in the Confederations Cup following another embarrassing loss, this time to Australia

Ronaldo suffered a series of injuries which threatened to wreck his once glittering career. Off the field, two Congressional

inquiries into Brazilian soccer both concluded with devastating reports. They accused top officials of tax evasion, illegal appropriation of

funds and misuse of club and federation money. Among those accused was Ricardo Teixeira, the president of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) and a member

of FIFA's executive committee. One report accused him of leading the organisation down the road to financial ruin, of mixing personal and CBF business and living in luxury at the CBF's expense. He also donated some of the CBF's money to political cam-

paigns, the report claimed. The investigations also uncovered a thriving trade in teenagers, who it said were lured to Europe by unscrupulous agents on the promise that they would play for a club,

only to be abandoned. Vanderlei Luxemburgo, one of Scolari's predecessors, was at the centre of the inquiries.

After being fired amid allegations that he had taken commissions on the transfer of players when he was a club coach. Luxemburgo was later found by Congressmen to have amassed a fortune of over \$9 million

brings superior ball-handling and

seriously tested with the unfortu-

nate injury to Roma midfielder

Emerson yesterday. The back line

looks to European stars Lucio,

Edmilson and Roque Junior. Cup

veterans Cafu and Roberto Carlos

add offensive firepower up the

Brazilians expect Turkey to clog

"Turkey have skilled and physi-

of game -- especially me."

The defensive chores could be

in five years A commission of inquiry in the Brazilian Senate grilled Luxemburgo for five hours and told him that he his explanations over how he had become so rich had been unsatisfactory.

Having reached rock bottom in 2001, Brazil have slowly been on the up in one year under Scolari's leadership

Scolari has refused to comment on the off-field troubles, saying only that Teixeira has always provided his staff with everything they have asked for.

Brazil start the World Cup with a seven-match unbeaten record and with Scolari slowly gaining the confidence of a previously sceptical Brazilian media.

"The players are not talking about what happened in the World Cup qualifiers," said Scolari, who guided them through the final stage of qualifying and helped them clinch their place at the tournament in the final game.

"For them, this is the start of the Cup, they want to be champions and they are not dwelling on what happened before," he said. "The Cup starts as normal for Brazil."

on way to his 67-ball 84 as the West Indies thrashed India by seven wickets in the fourth one-day international at the Queen's Park Oval here on Saturday. The hosts squared the fivematch series 1-1 with this win.

Chris Gayle smashed 24 in an over

Gayle blitzes

as WI level

AFP, Port-of-Spain

having lost the third match by seven wickets at Bridgetown in Barbados on Wednesday. The left-handed Gayle cracked

three sixes and nine fours in his 10th half-century as the West Indies surpassed India's modest total of 123 with 17 balls to spare in a match reduced to 25-overs-a-side due to

rain. "We are in the best condition and

FROM PAGE 13 Santa Cruz, still two months short of "We have done a lot of research his 21st birthday, was the star of the

on the Turkey team. They have a very strong defence but I can assure first half and after South African you we will win the game against keeper Andre Arendse had twice denied him he made no mistake as "In fact I strongly believe that we will go on to the final." he nodded home Arce's inviting

> The man nicknamed the Golden Boy nearly repeated the feat two minutes later - only for Arendse to save superbly.

Arce produced a superb piece of skill to fire a curling freekick inside Arendse's near post and make it 2-0 on 55 minutes with South Africa's two-man wall totally ineffective.

Benni McCarthy had a low volley blocked moments later as he tried to galvanise the South Africans, who gained renewed hope when Struway deflected a low Aaron Mokoena shot past his own keeper to make it 2-1 on the hour mark.

Paraguay then threw on former Newcastle man Diego Gavilan, now playing in Mexico, for Guido Alvarenga while the tiring McCarthy made way for George Koumantarakis of Basle after failing to improve on his tally of 17 goals for his country.

Paraguay might have had a penalty of their own in the opening seconds of the match as Santa Cruz

Samba minus Emerson | A great escape act Santa Cruz brought a brilliant stop out of the overworked Arendse on the half hour, the shot-stopper

diving to make a fine save. The Paraguayans have qualified for consecutive World Cup finals for the first time, largely down to former coach Sergio Markarian.

But Markarian, having steered the side to qualifying wins over Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay and a draw against Argentina, lost a power

struggle with the Paraguayan FA and in came cautious 70-year-old Italian Cesare Maldini. The South Americans, who reached the second phase last time out,

finished level on points with Brazil in the South American qualifiers. TEAMS

Paraguay: Tavarelli, Arce. Gamarra, Ayala, Caceres, Caniza, Alvarenga (Gavilan 66), Acuna, Campos (Morinigo 72), Struway (Franco 86), Santa Cruz. South Africa: Arendse, Nzama,

officer Francois Manardo. "No-one

official said the mother and son

were refused permission to board a

special shuttle bus to the dome

The mother abandoned attend-

ing the match and instead watched it

on a giant screen installed at a

public area in Chuo-ku, said the

The baby's father went to the

The match was attended by

32,218 fans meaning 7,000 seats

were empty. A FIFA spokesman in

Seoul said earlier that "many seats

were automatically killed because of

the unsatisfactory sightlines".

because they had only one ticket.

The organising committee

has spoken to me about it."

Carnell, Aaron Mokoena, Radebe Fortune, Sibaya, Tebeho Mokoena Zuma, Issa (Mukasi 27), McCarthy (Koumantarakis 78). Ref: L Michel (Slovákia).

Meanwhile, their top striker

Sapporo woes

FROM PAGE 16

phoned up broadcasters in Germany to complain about being unable to watch the finals.

The problem arose because the struggling Kirch group, which owns the World Cup rights, would not sell the digital rights to Germany's main public channels ARD and ZDF, ARD chief Fritz Pleitgen told SID.

"Kirch did not offer to sell us the digital rights although we asked for them many times," Pleitgen said. "We understand the disappointment (of fans) but we tried everything."

FIFA is also investigating why there were around 3,500 empty seats at Friday's opening World Cup match when Senegal produced one of the biggest upsets of the tournament's history by beating France.

for Batistuta and Claudio Lopez from Veron

came from defence-splitting passes

England captain David Beckham has already warned the damage his club team-mate could do to England's chances of getting

through the group stage. "A player of his ability could destroy any team, let alone us when we come up against him, although

we've got the players to combat that," he said. All the criticism that 'Seba' has got this season has been so unfair. I feel that and many people at United feel that.

"To say it was a mistake to buy a player like him is ridiculous - he's one of the best midfielders in the world.'

Beckham accepts that Veron is likely to be itching to embarrass England.

wrap

Veron alarm for England "We have to overcome that. Of

course, you have to watch out for each team's best players and he's definitely one of their best players. None of our players will be taking it easy on him." he insisted.

Veron has suffered at United from being played out of position, with manager Alex Ferguson unable to settle on his best midfield.

"The style of football in England is different than what he was used to," added Beckham.

"Seba does make a lot more forward runs with Argentina, as he did with Lazio. There were probably times last year that he wasn't in his usual position. Maybe he was or wasn't happy.

"The important thing is that he's

upbeat about the situation. People wonder whether he will leave but I've got no doubts that he'll stay at United," he added.

went down in the box after tangling with Arendse - but referee Lubos Michel elected to wave play on. with a baby," said FIFA's local media

The South Africans, who crashed out in their only previous World Cup showing in 1998 after losing to France and drawing their other two matches, fought back with an early chance as MacBeth Sibaya smacked a shot off target.

The Paraguayans almost went ahead on eight minutes when Arce whipped in a shot that looked destined for the top corner.

But veteran keeper Arendse, surprisingly handed a start for his World Cup debut at the age of 35 by Sono, was equal to the task as he palmed the ball away.

Sono sent Arendse into the fray for his 51st cap, after regular choice Hans Vonk struggled in practice

CUP CORNER

newspaper.

match alone

He continued: "I remember a match I was responsible for in 1982 when both teams played with a ball they had never seen in their life.

"It was a standard Adidas ball but it had been painted with an emblem. It was exactly the same ball but all the players complained about it. Very often the appearance makes it look far more different than it really is.

Sports equipment maker Adidas says the 'Fevernova' ball provides the ultimate soccer experience. Splashed with gold colouring, it is 25 percent more accurate than the ball used at the 1998 finals due to meticulous testing by scientists.

It adds that the ball flies faster due to its unique design giving free-kick specialists like Beckham more power.

RESUME WC BROADCAST

REUTERS. Hamilton

Bermuda's telecommunications minister on Saturday ordered the island's cable television provider to show World Cup soccer games after it pulled the plug on coverage following a judge's ruling over exclusive rights.

Having got into legal trouble for showing the opening game of the World Cup on Friday on a channel that did not have the broadcasting rights on the island, CableVision reacted to a judge's ruling by dropping coverage entirely on Saturday and refusing to feed a signal to the legitimate broadcaster.

ZBM, the Bermuda Broadcasting Company channel awarded exclusive rights by world soccer's governing body FIFA to show games from the tournament in Japan and South Korea, won an injunction from the Supreme Court on Friday barring CableVision from showing games on ESPN2

MALAYSIA FORMS ANTI-BETTING FORCE

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian police have set up a task force to crack down on bookmakers during the World Cup, the New Straits Times reported on Sunday.

The task force will concentrate on nabbing bookmakers with links to international betting syndicates, the paper said, citing police sources.

Betting on soccer matches is illegal in Malaysia, but police expect punters to bet some 1 billion ringgit (263 million dollars) on World Cup matches.

"Based on what we have discovered so far, punters bet between 50 million to 100 million on (Friday's) opening match which was won 1-0 by Senegal," a police source was quoted as saying.

Babies not Target lost pride

passing skills.

wings.

Cup.

Gunes said.

FROM PAGE 13

Brazil is heavily favoured against Turkey, who are making their first Cup appearance in 48 years. But the four-time world champions lately have fallen on hard times, while the Turks are demanding a seat at the table of the world's soccer powers.

The Brazilians stumbled through the Cup qualifying and nearly missed the tournament altogether for the first time in history. With six losses to South American rivals and a humiliating defeat by Honduras in the Copa America, Brazil lost the No. 1 ranking for the first time since 1994 and currently is tied for second with Argentina, behind holders France.

the midfield with up to six players Meanwhile, the Turks served and try to muscle them off the ball notice on Europe's traditional socthen launching Parma's Hakan cer powers, reaching the Sukur on counterstrikes. quarterfinals of the 2000 European Championship while the Turkish cally strong players, but we know side Galatasarav won the UEFA Cup crown the same year. Now they their strong point. They come with a aspire to the Cup guarterfinals, or defensive mentality." Ronaldo said. better. "We Brazilians are used to this type

Brazil are not taking the newcomers lightly. They studied game film, consulted Brazilians playing in the Turkish league and even sent a spy to the team's practice.

"We know Brazil has superior technique, but we can be beaten by a determined, cohesive team, Brazil's coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said after practice Saturday night "We must play the first game as if it were our last. We can't make the same mistakes we made in the qualifying."

Adding to Brazil's concern is the health of star strikers Ronaldo and Rivaldo. Both are returning from injuries to their right knee ligaments and are admittedly below par.

Barcelona star Rivaldo was out for nearly two months and is still trying to get into top physical shape, although he says the knee feels fine.

Ronaldo's injury was more serious, requiring two operations and nearly two years of convalescence. Even Scolari admits he won't be the same as before, at least not during the Cup.

"Ronaldo is better physically and technically, but he still has problems with his rhythm and marking," said Scolari, who estimated it would take five or six months before "the phenomenon" was his old self again.

Still, Brazil have plenty of other The Turks may have to do withweapons. Paris Saint-Germain star out key midfielder Okan Buruk, who Ronaldinho has sparkled in warmis suffering from a muscle strain in ups and was picked by Brazilians as his right thigh. the likely star of the Cup. Joining "Last evening, Okan suffered a him in the midfield is Juninho, a strain in the thigh, and we know he surprise last-minute starter who

had pain throughout last night," Gunes told a news conference Sunday. "We will see his situation today.

For Brazilian captain Emerson, Senegal's shocking 1-0 victory over France in the Cup opener should be a warning

"The first game is always the most important," he said. "The key is to be serious and respect your adversary. We saw the opening game, and it serves as an example for us.'

Saudis in shame

FROM PAGE 13 Alam Al-Rivadah, another sports daily, said the defeat was a historical catastrophe, and blamed the team for not performing.

It said it looked as if the Germans Still, in heart and teamwork the were "plaving against themselves." Turks are a match for anyone. And Al-Jazirah daily said the Saudis the upset bug already is loose at the can play far better.

"To lose to Germany is very "I can't guarantee the result, but natural ... but to lose in this shameone thing is certain: We will give less way is totally unacceptable because we are capable of doing everything we have against the better," the daily said in an editorial Brazilians," Turkey's coach Senol on the sports pages.



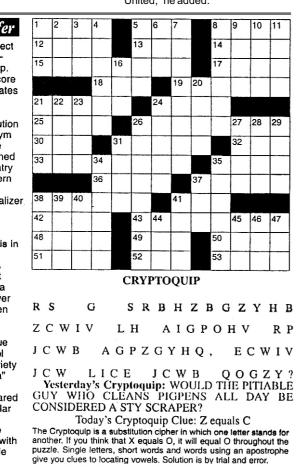
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games