



PHOTO: AFP

WILY OLD FOXES: Argentina veterans Diego Simeone (R) and Gabriel Batistuta train at Sapporo Stadium yesterday.

ARGENTINA VS ENGLAND

Mother of all grudge games

REUTERS, Sapporo

World Cup favourites Argentina renew their bitter soccer rivalry with England under the Sapporo Dome on Friday in the highlight match of the tournament's first round.

Victory would guarantee Argentina a place in the next round after their 1-0 defeat of Nigeria on Sunday. Defeat for England, who drew 1-1 with Sweden, would consign them to a desperate fight for survival against the Nigerians in their last group F match. But the match is about far more than points, far more than soccer 20 years after the two countries went to war over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands.

England are determined to avenge two successive World Cup defeats by the Argentines, featuring hugely controversial contributions by two of the biggest names in soccer, Diego Maradona and David Beckham.

In St Etienne four years ago, Beckham - now the England captain - was sent off for kicking Diego Simeone and England were beaten in a penalty shoot-out.

In the 1986 quarter-final Maradona's "Hand of God" goal put his team ahead before his astonishing second goal, voted recently the

best in Cup history, put the game beyond England's reach.

Five players on each side will be renewing their acquaintance from the second round match in France that remained locked at 2-2 after extra time.

Simeone and Beckham will once more line up in midfield while Michael Owen - scorer of a sensational goal in St Etienne at the age of 18 - and Gabriel Batistuta will again lead the two attacks.

Argentina will play with the team that started the second half of their opening match against Nigeria.

Kily Gonzalez starts on the left of the attack, having given Argentina more variety as a second half substitute for Claudio Lopez in the 1-0 win over Nigeria in Ibaraki on Sunday.

The team announced by coach Marcelo Bielsa is otherwise the same after Juan Pablo Sorin and Ariel Ortega were passed fit following minor knocks against the Nigerians.

"After the (Nigeria) match I was left with the feeling that Kily should play," Bielsa told a news conference.

"Neither Ortega nor Sorin trained normally these last days (since Monday), but in principle

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PHOTO: AFP

ENGLAND'S GREAT HOPES: David Beckham (L) and Michael Owen fly an England flag at Awaji yesterday.

Plotting pair

AP, Sapporo

Argentina better watch out. David Beckham and Michael Owen are devising a cunning plan for a victory at the World Cup.

Owen makes one of his fast runs at the defenders, the sort that led to a memorable goal against them in 1998. Either they can't catch him or they can only stop him with a foul, and Beckham fires home the free kick.

Simple. The two England stars say they don't plan to resort to foolery. Although Owen has gained a reputation among some defenders for a tendency to dive, it's his sheer speed that makes it seem that way,

he contends.

Owen scored three times in a qualifying game against Germany in Munich in a 5-1 victory for England. The Germans couldn't handle his ability to time his runs, and Argentina will be well aware of that.

"They do play a different style of football to us," Owen said, referring to the Argentina players who edged Nigeria 1-0 in their opener. "There's a lot more shirt-pulling and grabbing, especially on set pieces."

Owen might want to begin his forays from a little deeper, running at defenders instead of from them. And, if Argentina wants to concede free kicks 25 yards from the goal, Beckham will be waiting.

The England captain, whose team started with a disappointing 1-1 tie against Sweden, can't wait to take one of his trademark, long-

range free kicks after he was shut out by the Swedes.

"I will be dreaming about it the night before," he said. "I didn't get one the other night. I think we will have to use a bit more cunning. As Diego Maradona said about his team, they are cunning players. If they use things to get an advantage, then they will do that."

"England are not so cunning as that, but we will see. I wouldn't expect our players to play certain tricks, but you never know."

Beckham and Owen go into Friday's game with mixed memories of their last World Cup meeting with Argentina at Saint-Etienne, France.

Owen's wondrous goal, in which he took a pass from Beckham in

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Zahovic sent home

REUTERS, Yokohama

The World Cup can provide the best memories of a player's career but performing on the biggest stage of all turns training camps into pressure cookers of tension and backbiting.

Zlatko Zahovic's expulsion from Slovenia's squad demonstrates how easy it is for the whole thing to blow up, often destroying the team's chances at the month-long tournament.

Zahovic is the second player to fall out with his coach after Ireland's Roy Keane was put on the plane home from a pre-Cup camp after abusing coach Mick McCarthy.

Major soccer tournaments demand a lot of young players used to playing a match for their club and then heading home.

The two squads that reach the final on June 30 will have been together for five or six weeks. Some coaches allow their charges to see their wives and partners but for the others it's the same faces at breakfast, dinner and strategy sessions. Loving families often explode

during a two-week holiday and they aren't competing for places at what could be a once-in-a-lifetime chance to play World Cup soccer.

If he doesn't like a player or the coach at his club, a player need see him only at training. The rest of the day is his to do whatever he likes.

This mass of free time, added to the huge salaries earned by top players, can cause problems but national squad camps create their own pressures, most of them related to boredom and inter-personal tensions getting out of hand.

At the 1998 World Cup South Africa sent home Brendan Augustine and Naughty Mokoena for sneaking out to dance at a nightclub until dawn.

Cliques often form around key players. With several days between each match, players have a long time to chew over defeats and the coach is often the target of their unhappiness, particularly among those who are forced to watch from the bench.

The German and Dutch squads

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Red alert

AP, Tokyo

Police will mobilise more than 7,000 officers for the World Cup match between Argentina and England in northern Japan as a precaution against possible hooligan violence, a spokesman said Thursday.

They also are considering a ban on the sale of alcohol.

Although the first World Cup soccer finals in Asia is off to a smooth start, with no incidents of violence reported so far in co-host countries Japan and South Korea, English and Argentine fans have a history of being among the most violence-prone in the world.

Police are taking no chances for the game Friday at Sapporo Dome on Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido.

The 7,000 riot and plainclothes police will be on hand around the Dome, including about 1,400 officers from Tokyo, Osaka and other cities who will be flown in for the game, said Hokkaido police spokesman Shinichi Konishi.

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Diego doing his part

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine legend and one-time England nemesis Diego Maradona says England are running scared as they prepare to face his country in Friday's crucial World Cup Group F encounter which will have both nations glued to their television screens.

Maradona destroyed England with his infamous "Hand of God" goal and then a brilliant second in the 1986 quarter-final and the 41-year-old insists that Juan Sebastian Veron and company will destroy Sven-Goran Eriksson's side.

"They will show that the English are absolutely terrified, they are quaking in their boots," Maradona said.

The eagerly-awaited showdown in the Sapporo Dome will bring England and Argentina to a standstill as Argentine fans huddle over their breakfast table while England fans work out how to skip a day's work - or take an extended lunch break.

CUP CORNER

REUTERS, Ibaraki

Thieves dressed in Irish team kits made off with 225,000 yen in cash from a pizza shop in a stadium north of Tokyo before the Germany-Ireland match in the soccer World Cup finals, local police said.

About 20 men "who looked like foreigners" and were dressed in green Ireland kits arrived at Shinji Taguchi's small pizza outlet on the first floor of the Ibaraki stadium at about 7:30 p.m. (1030 GMT), an hour before the kick-off, police said.

After they had been served and left, the 65-year-old Taguchi found that a plastic bag full of cash that had been taped to the inner side of the counter was missing.

"We are looking for these people, but it will be difficult because we don't know their names or anything. They just came into the shop as

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PHOTO: AFP

WE BELONG HERE: A colourful contingent of Senegal supporters enjoying themselves on the stands at Daegu during the match against Denmark yesterday.

Diao delight & despair

AFP, Daegu

Liverpool-bound Senegal midfielder Salif Diao was hero and villain as the World Cup giant-killers battled to a 1-1 draw against Denmark in Group A here Thursday.

Diao, who is expected to complete a move to Anfield after the World Cup along with team-mate El-Hadji Diouf, gave away a penalty, scored a brilliant equaliser and then got sent off for a shocking tackle late in the game.

The Senegalese, who defeated world champions France 1-0 in the opening game last Friday, fought

back from a goal down to snatch a deserved share of the points.

Diao's 52nd-minute equaliser came after sharp-shooting Jon Dahl Tomasson had put Denmark 1-0 up from the penalty spot after 15 minutes.

"I did everything in this match," said Diao. "My team-mates joked with me at the end that I was definitely man of the match."

"It was very important for me to score the goal. People are saying it was a beautiful goal but it was more than that for me. The coach was unhappy at me giving away the penalty."

"I thought the red card was very severe as I was going for the ball. There were more dangerous tackles from the Danish players during the game. It was a straight red but maybe the referee made a mistake and forgot to produce a yellow first (as I had been booked already)."

"I hope FIFA (disciplinary committee) look at the television replay and do not suspend me for two games. That would be harsh as we would have to reach the quarter finals for me to play again."

Tomasson said that it was great to score his third goal of the tournament but was unhappy that the match was

played in the afternoon heat.

"I am pleased with my three goals but it is more important for Denmark to have four points. Hopefully we can get a great result in the last match (against France) and go through - I think we deserve it," said Tomasson who recently signed with Italian cracks AC Milan.

"The heat was terrible, it definitely affected us in the second half. They moved the kick off time after the official draw - a small country like Denmark has two afternoon kicks off while Germany have three

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TODAY'S MATCHES

Sweden vs Nigeria Venue: Kobe Time: 12:30 pm	Spain vs Paraguay Venue: Jeonju Time: 3:00 pm	Argentina vs England Venue: Sapporo Time: 5:30 pm
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PHOTO: AFP
NO USE CRYING NOW: A tearful Slovenia star Zlatko Zahovic (L) listens as captain Ales Ceh announces Zahovic's expulsion at Seogwipo yesterday.