



PHOTO: AFP
THE PARTY HAS JUST BEGUN: Samba supporters liven up the stands at Seogwipo, Japan before the start of Brazil's Group C match against China yesterday.

JAPAN VS RUSSIA Counting on counter-attack

REUTERS, Iwata
Japan feel their best hope of beating group H leaders Russia is to defend in numbers and attack on the break in a game on Sunday that could decide whether the World Cup co-hosts reach the second round.

Japan coach Philippe Troussier will be anxious to discover whether playmaker Alexander Mostovoi is fit to start for Russia in Yokohama as his side look to build on their 2-2 draw with Belgium in their group opener.

But Russia will still start as favourites even if Mostovoi fails to recover from the hamstring injury that kept him out of the 2-0 win over Tunisia on Wednesday, despite evidence that they are not the force they once were.

Japan are expected to be largely unchanged from the side that earned their first World Cup point against Belgium on Tuesday.

Captain Ryuzo Morioka should be fit to lead the defence after being carried off on a stretcher midway through the second half in Saitama with a toe injury.

Hidetoshi Nakata and Shinji Ono will again be crucial to Japan's hopes of unlocking the Russian defence, although the runs of Junichi Inamoto



PHOTO: AFP
STAR IN THE MAKING: Japanese playmaker Junichi Inamoto, who really impressed in the first game, trains at Yokohama International Stadium yesterday.

Diego accepts the defeat

REUTERS, Havana
Diego Maradona has accepted England's 1-0 World Cup victory over Argentina philosophically, saying defeat had to come one day.

"The English won. They had to beat us once. I'm sorry for the people of my country," Maradona told Reuters Television.

But Maradona, who captained Argentina to World Cup triumph in 1986 when he scored the infamous "Hand of God" goal against England, said Argentina had a fine team that would fight on.

"They are always close to something great and Argentina is a team with history," he said.

Maradona is not at the World Cup because Japan initially denied him a visa due to his history of drug abuse, though Japanese media reported on Friday he would be allowed to enter the country after all.

England beat Argentina in Sapporo with a penalty from captain David Beckham, extracting sweet

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Fan dies with Eagles' death

AFP, Lagos
A fan of Nigeria's Super Eagles collapsed and died after watching his team crash out of the World Cup to Sweden on Friday, newspapers reported Saturday.

Nigeria bowed out of the tournament after losing 2-1 to the Swedes in a Group F match played in Kobe, Japan.

The middle-aged fan died at a television-viewing centre in Lafia, capital of central Nassarawa State. The Guardian reported, quoting state-run News Agency of Nigeria (NAN).

All attempts to revive the man, whose identity is not known, failed and doctors later certified him dead.

Local police in Lafia said they have not yet been officially informed of the man's death.

Refs under fire

REUTERS, undated
Italian striker Christian Vieri has accused Britain's Graham Poll of being a village referee after Croatia's 2-1 win over Italy.

"Those weren't Division One or even Division Two referees, they were village referees... Now we absolutely must win against Mexico," Vieri said.

Poll disallowed an injury time goal for Italy.

"We knew it was a competitive game. It was an intense game... these things happen and the important thing is not to get demoralised... I don't want to get into judging."

Meanwhile, Japan coach Philippe Troussier too is hoping for "better treatment" from the officials when the World Cup co-hosts take on Russia in their crucial Group H game on Sunday.

The Frenchman is still fuming over what he believes were two bad decisions that cost Japan two points in their 2-2 draw with Belgium in Saitama on Tuesday.

Costa Rican referee William Mattus disallowed an 86th minute effort from Junichi Inamoto for an alleged foul, although replays showed that there had been no infringement.

Troussier insisted on Saturday that the officials had also got it wrong when they allowed Belgium's 75th minute equaliser to stand.

"It was not just the Inamoto goal that the referee disallowed, but there was a clear offside moments before they scored to make it 2-2," said Troussier.

"I'm not talking about the run from (Peter Van Der Heyden), but before that, when the ball was headed back in there were four players in an offside position."

Troussier warned, however, that the perceived injustice would only give Japan extra incentive against group leaders Russia in Yokohama.

"There is a lot of frustration among the players about the refereeing in the first game, but we have that added motivation now to get back out there and do even better," he said.

Japan, who are trying to avoid the ignominy of becoming the first host country not to reach the second round, earned their first ever World Cup point against Belgium.

"That historic point was soured a bit by some of the decisions, so all we can do is hope for a better refereeing tomorrow," said Troussier.

Experienced official Markus Merk will be in charge at the International Stadium, venue for the World Cup final on June 30.



PHOTO: AFP
PLEASE GO TO AN EYE-SPECIALIST! Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi pleads with referee Graham Poll after a goal was disallowed against Croatia yesterday.

Cry for Argentina

AP, Buenos Aires
Argentina's sports media was forced to eat its words on Saturday. Confident going into Friday's first-round match against archrivals England, the mood was sombre and downbeat after the national side fell 1-0 on David Beckham's 44th-minute penalty.

A team that was unbeaten in almost two years and picked by many to win its third World Cup final, must now beat Sweden in its final game in Group F to make the second round of 16.

What a difference a few hours make.

On Friday, the sports daily Ole posted a picture of Beckham and Michael Owen holding up an England flag with the caption reading: "You know where you can stick that flag."

Another Ole headline Friday read: "The time has arrived to show your worth, boys." The accompanying story boasted: "Argentina is better than England. In the rival camp, panic reigns."

Come Saturday morning, Ole struck a different tune.

Under a headline saying "I love Argentina" and promising to accompany the team in its current "difficulties," Ole declared: "England won and celebrates."

The Clarin newspaper was more emphatic with a headline that said: "Now Argentina absolutely must win," with the story opening: "What was going to be huge party turned into a depression. England exposed the weaknesses of the national team and beat us well."

The country's leading soccer website www.puntogol.com also came to the point.

It called it "The revenge of the English," referring to the fact Argentina had knocked England out of the World Cup on the sides' previous two tournament meetings -- 1998 and 1986.

Another story picked up a common theme in the local media: "Pick yourself up and let's get going," it said.

As for the players, the heaviest criticism was fired at the side's usually inspirational captain Juan Sebastian Veron -- known as "La Bruja" (the Witch) -- who was shut out for 45 minutes before being substituted at halftime.

"What's going on Bruja?" said Ole, while the daily La Nacion said "it was a night to forget," describing Veron's play as "absent, imprecise and withdrawn."

There was one positive note the performance of Valencia player Pablo Aimar, who came on for Veron at halftime and caused constant headaches for the English defence.

"Argentina deserved at least a draw against England and that was mainly to do with Aimar," former Argentina goalie Amadeo Carrizo told Clarin. "He always wanted the ball and he played with great mental agility."

Down in dumps

AP, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Hundreds of people gathered around a video screen in a Slovene park Saturday, watching with disappointment as this tiny Alpine nation lost in its bid to make it to the second round in the World Cup.

South Africa defeated Slovenia 1-0, eliminating the Europeans after two games in their first-ever World Cup appearance. There was little to cheer about for the crowd back home, which couldn't even muster a few chants until the last few minutes of the match.

"Expectations were too great," said Brane Elsner, a former coach.

The defeat came after Slovenia's coach, Srecko Katanec, sent home the team's star midfielder, Zlatko Zahovic, after a public spat. And as the crowd drifted away from the video display, the grumbling grew

about the absence of Zahovic -- the team's highest scorer.

"I think our team just played bad," said 38-year-old lawyer Ales Kotnik. "They missed... Zahovic."

Zahovic, with 31 goals in 63 international games, insulted Katanec in front of the entire team, accusing him of favouring players from the region around Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, over those from other parts of the country.

For his part, Katanec said his team had shown courage under immense pressure -- and that he was proud of them. A few fans were willing to give the team a break.

"Our guys played correctly, on the edge of their possibilities," said Tomas Stefan, a 29-year-old advertising manager. "But they don't have



PHOTO: AFP
WE'LL BE BACK! A tiny Slovenian boy cheers his team during the match against South Africa yesterday.

CUP CORNER

REUTERS, Ulsan
Spanish World Cup coach Jose Antonio Camacho celebrated his 47th birthday on Saturday with cava, cake and a gentle dig at the country's media.

Two weeks ago, Camacho lost his temper with journalists at the squad's camp for what he saw as their negative portrayal of his team and tactics.

With Spain assured of a place in the second round following two straight wins the atmosphere has improved considerably. The coach sounded a suspicious note when he received gifts from the media on

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TODAY'S MATCHES

Mexico vs Ecuador Venue: Miyagi Time: 12:30 pm	Costa Rica vs Turkey Venue: Incheon Time: 3:00 pm	Japan vs Russia Venue: Yokohama Time: 5:30 pm
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