



PHOTO: AFP

HATFUL OF MEXICO! A Mexican fan wearing a traditional hat, blows a horn from the stands at Miyagi during her country's match against Ecuador yesterday.

## Mexico leave race open

AFP, Miyagi

Mexico made hard work of beating lowly Ecuador 2-1 in their World Cup Group G match here on Sunday, a result which leaves the race for the two qualifying places wide open.

Midfielder Gerardo Torrado hammered home the winner with a cracking left shot from outside the box in the 57th minute to put Mexico in the driving seat with two victories out of two.

But with their final game against Italy, the Mexicans are still not certain of going through and the most likely scenario is that three of group's four teams will finish on six points as Croatia are clear favourites to beat the Ecuadorians.

If that is the case, it will all come

down to goal difference and the Mexicans might yet live to rue the fact that they did not knock more past Ecuador here, as the Italians already won by two clear goals.

Mexican coach Javier Aguirre admitted that his side's place in the second round still hung in the balance. "I am very happy with the result but now we have no option but to go all out for victory and three points against Italy," he said.

Ecuador's Colombian-born coach Hernan Dario Gomez said: "The teams were about equal in the first few minutes, but then it fell away for us. But you must remember that this is all new to us and I am proud of the way my team played."

The World Cup newcomers

stunned the Mexicans by taking an early lead when giant striker Agustin Delgado rose high to send an unstoppable header past diminutive Mexican goalkeeper Oscar Perez from Ulises de la Cruz's right wing cross after just five minutes for the country's first World Cup goal but the two sides were level at 1-1 by half-time.

Delgado, who played in the Mexican league with Necaxa until his big money move to English Premiership side Southampton last season, has only just returned from a long lay-off due to extensive surgery on a knee injury and notched his 22nd goal in 48 games for his

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## Diego, where are you?

REUTERS, Naraha

Argentina midfielder Pablo Aimar believes Diego Maradona would give his country's World Cup chances a boost by turning up to watch their decisive group F match against Sweden on Wednesday.

"It means a lift, he's a legend, the greatest idol we have in Argentina," Aimar said.

Maradona is expected to arrive on Monday. He was granted permission to visit Japan during the tournament after first being refused entry due to his history of drug abuse.

Argentina must beat Sweden if they are to ensure their progress to the second round. They have one point less than Sweden and England with one game remaining.

## Skin appeal!

INTERNET, London

A pretty public relations girl peeled off her shirt at a World Cup charity lunch - and raised more money than Michael Owen.

The girl volunteered to strip in front of star guests Ally McCoist, Barry Fry and Gary Mabbutt at Ladbrokes' England v Argentina bash in the Park Lane Hilton.

Excited diners raced the bidding up to 1,300 pounds and off came her top.

An England shirt signed by Michael Owen raised only 1,100 pounds

## Italians drop complaint

REUTERS, Ibaraki

Italy will not be making a formal complaint to FIFA about the two goals they had disallowed during Saturday's 2-1 World Cup defeat to Croatia, an Italian Football Federation (FIGC) official said on Sunday.

Raffaiele Ranucci, head of Italy's World Cup delegation had said after the group G game that the FIGC was considering making a complaint to world soccer's governing body but later he told the FIGC's website that no such move was planned.

"The FIGC is not thinking of any kind of formal step regarding the refereeing of the game," said Ranucci. "We are not going in for victimisation or plots or such things against Italy."

"Unfortunately we paid for refereeing errors and that can happen. It was a performance like many others," added the FIGC official.

But Ranucci said he had visited

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## PORTUGAL VS POLAND

# Great deeds on great day?

AP/REUTERS, Chonju

June 10 is Portugal's national day when great deeds from the nation's history are commemorated.

Monday is also the birthday of national coach Antonio Oliveira, when he turns 50.

And it is the day when the Portuguese soccer squad must gird itself to beat Poland or make an embarrassing early exit from the World Cup.

Either way, the match will be some kind of milestone in Portugal's soccer career.

"We don't want to let our country down," midfielder Rui Costa said.

The Portuguese stumbled at the first hurdle in their opening World Cup group D game against the United States last Wednesday, losing 3-2.

But so did Poland, going down 2-0 against co-host South Korea.

Both sides are playing in their first World Cup since 1986 and both have their backs to the wall, holding out the prospect of a tense encounter in Jeonju.

"We've never been in this kind of situation. We have to show we're

strong when the chips are down," Costa said.

Defeat against the United States was an especially hard blow for the Portuguese who feel they have their best national side since 1966 when, led by soccer legend Eusebio, they made their World Cup debut and finished third.

Portugal are likely to scrap the open brand of football which took them to the semifinals of the last European Championship and play safety-first in the group D clash.

The players have told reporters that they need a tighter formation than the line-up which left space for United States to inflict one of the all-time World Cup shocks.

That implies coach Antonio Oliveira will field two rather than one in a second line of defence, while playing just three in midfield and a lone striker up front. Paulo Bento will likely join Armando Petit in front of the back four.

At the back, Nuno Frechaut will probably step in for the more defensive Beto Severo on the right, while

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PHOTO: AFP

GOT TO SHOW THE WORLD! Luis Figo, the Portuguese superstar, trains at Jeonju yesterday.

## Most wanted

AFP, Seogwipo

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo was besieged by fans at Seogwipo airport Sunday as his star shines steadily brighter in Korean eyes.

As news swept through the departure lounge that the Brazilian team would pass through to catch their flight to Ulsan after their 4-0 win over China here Saturday, a mass of mostly Korean and Chinese fans manned their cameras behind a police cordon.

The ripple of excitement mounted as the first yellow and green shirts were seen. Most of the team passed through the throng to little more than oohs and aahs, but the appearance of Ronaldo sparked a flash of camera bulbs as fans

cheered and chanted his name.

The charismatic Inter Milan sharpshooter took it in his stride, flashing his toothy grin but not stopping. Fellow glamour boy Rivaldo hardly seemed to notice, strolling purposefully through the crowd engrossed in a mobile phone conversation.

Several Brazilian players attempted to stop and sign autographs but they were hustled on by the heavy police presence.

One Korean woman who didn't want to be named said multi-millionaire Ronaldo was the undoubted star of the team and everyone knew his name.

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## Refreshing fresh legs

AP, Ibaraki

Move over golden oldies, make way for the new generation.

That was the ringing message Croatia's young guns sent out after a stunning come-from-behind 2-1 win over soccer giants Italy Saturday.

"These boys are knocking on the door and are ready to inherit the mantle of the miracle team that won third place in the World Cup in France, 1998," former coach Miroslav Blazevic said Sunday.

"The veterans still have life in them yet, but there must be a way to meld the youth and experience together," he added.

Coach Mirko Jozic took a gamble on erratic midfielders Milan Rapac and Davor Vugrinec, including the younger and fresher attacking players into the starting lineup to replace aging stars Robert Prosinecki and '98 Golden Boot holder Davor Suker.

The move rejuvenated the side and triggered a complete turnaround

from the lethargic team that went down 1-0 to Mexico in the opening match of Group G.

Besides Rapac and Vugrinec, Daniel Saric, Dario Simic and Ivica Olic -- all well under 30 -- were also slotted into the new, more dynamic outfit.

"This team had a much higher work rate and more energy in its feet," said towering defender Josip Simunic.

"We're probably not as strong as the '98 generation, but we have the potential to get better as every game progresses. What we lacked in experience I think we made up for with our hearts," the 23-year-old added.

"These are the new heroes of Croatian football," said 34-year-old Suker, who was content to sit out the match on the bench. Prosinecki, 33, who watched from the sidelines alongside Suker, was also full of praise.

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## Batigol not packing

AP, Naraha

Striker Gabriel Batistuta said Saturday that Argentina will not even contemplate losing to Sweden in a match it must win to remain in the World Cup.

"I don't want Wednesday to be my last game for Argentina. This is my last World Cup and I want it to last longer," said the AS Roma, who will end his Argentina career this summer.

A 1-0 defeat against England on Friday has left Argentina in third place in Group F. The heavily-backed South Americans are one point behind both Sweden and England. Nigeria has already been eliminated.

"Our World Cup simply cannot end after just three games," said "Batigol" who, with 56 goals in 77 games, is Argentina's all-time leading scorer. "We want to achieve something far greater."

Batistuta had a disappointing

game against England, and was shown a yellow card in the first half after late tackles on defenders Sol Campbell and Ashley Cole. He was replaced in the second half by Hernan Crespo.

"I was surprised when I was taken off. I thought maybe we could play together," he said.

Coach Marcelo Bielsa steadfastly refuses to play both strikers, saying

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PHOTO: AFP

CATCH HIM! Turkey's Emre Belozoglu breaks clear of three Costa Rican defenders on his way to score at Incheon yesterday.

### CUP CORNER

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian teenage substitute striker Dmitry Sychyov, who played for only 35 minutes as he helped his team to a 2-0 win over Tunisia in their World Cup opener, is to get a new Porsche 911.

The youngster has been voted the man-of-the-match in a poll of the country's soccer fans. An oil company has pledged a new Porsche valued at around \$85,000 to the best Russian player every time they win a game at the tournament.

Sychyov, who at 18 years and 222 days became the youngest Russian

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### TODAY'S MATCHES

Rep of Korea vs USA Venue: Daegu Time: 12:30 pm	Tunisia vs Belgium Venue: Oita Time: 3:00 pm	Portugal vs Poland Venue: Jeonju Time: 5:30 pm
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PHOTO: AFP

INSPIRATION GUARANTEED: A Costa Rican young lady shows her support for the national team during the match against Turkey at Incheon yesterday.