



PHOTO: AFP

THE ENGLISH KNIGHTS! Captain David Beckham (R) and ace striker Michael Owen (2nd from L) jog with England teammates Nicky Butt (L) and Paul Scholes at Niigata yesterday.

DENMARK VS ENGLAND

Another Viking invasion?

REUTERS, Niigata

Having already disposed of the world and European champions, Denmark are now preparing to dump the country who invented the game out of the World Cup finals in Saturday's second round clash with England.

The Danes' stunning 2-0 victory over France on Tuesday made headlines around the world and propelled Morten Olsen's team to the top of group A against all the odds.

Though confidence is at an all-time high, Olsen is sweating on a groin injury to key striker Jon Dahl Tomasson, the scorer of four of Denmark's five goals in the group phase.

Should Tomasson fail to recover,

Ebbe Sand would probably get the nod to join Dennis Rommedahl -- whose opening goal knocked the stuffing out of France -- and Martin Jorgensen in Denmark's usual 4-3-3 formation.

Adding to Olsen's worries, though, is a foot injury suffered by combative midfielder Stig Tofte, whose presence would be sorely missed in the role of cutting off the supply line to England striker Michael Owen.

England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson will be counting on the likes of Owen, skipper David Beckham and central midfielders Nicky Butt and Paul Scholes to turn a difficult match their way.

Where Denmark were solid in all three group games, England have been erratic -- plumb the depths

in a woeful second half in their 1-1 draw with Sweden, soaring to a 1-0 win over pre-tournament favourites Argentina, and then huffing and puffing their way to a 0-0 draw with Nigeria.

Owen Hargreaves is England's only injury casualty, with his place on the left likely to be taken again by Trevor Sinclair, ahead of Kieron Dyer and Joe Cole.

Evergreen substitute Teddy Sheringham, and the pacy Darius Vassell would be ready to add further firepower if England lose their way.

Although they have only lost one of their previous 14 games against the 1992 European champions,

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Nippon dreamland

REUTERS, Osaka/Tokyo

Japan exploded with joy and pride on Friday after its soccer team made the nation's World Cup dream come true.

Blue-shirted fans adorned with the "Hinomaru" national flag and chanting "Nippon, Nippon, Nippon" rocked the stadium in the western metropolis of Osaka where Japan, co-hosts of the tournament, beat Tunisia 2-0 to reach the second round.

"It's a historic victory. I am proud to be Japanese," said Hideki Iwamoto, a 27-year-old employee of a maker of outdoor goods as he left the stadium.

"This gives me the energy to forge on in my own job." Japan had never reached the knock-out stages before and avoided becoming the first hosts to be eliminated in the first

round.

"It's amazing, amazing, amazing," said Miyugi Kume, an office worker in Tokyo. "I want them to keep on fighting."

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who said he watched the match in his office with his secretary, said: "It was great. Didn't tears come to your eyes when the goals went in?"

"It would be good if Korea also won and went through to the next round." Co-hosts South Korea face their own date with destiny later on Friday when they play talent-packed Portugal.

Many Japanese were officially working and studying on Friday afternoon during the match, but even the Sports Ministry -- which had urged its staff to stick to their jobs -- said people could watch if they didn't bother other people.

"Players and fans were united as one," said Akemi Hattori, who said

her co-workers at a Tokyo-based job placement company brought a television to work to watch.

"We sneaked in and out of the room to watch the match," Hattori said. "Everyone here is crying after the game."

Japanese fans were thirsty for a reason to cheer after a decade of economic stagnation and political stalemate.

Like co-hosts South Korea, Japan's team have thrilled their fans in the first World Cup to be held in Asia.

They battled to a 2-2 draw against Belgium for their first ever World Cup point, then nabbed their first win, against Russia, laying to rest the memory of a dismal World Cup debut four years ago when they

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PHOTO: AFP

THANK'S NAKATA, I NEEDED THAT JERSEY! A jubilant Japanese female fan waves a replica jersey of national hero Hidetoshi Nakata from the stands at Osaka yesterday.

Rare record

REUTERS, Yokohama

Ronaldo appears to have made soccer history after being given a goal by officials who studied a video clearly showing he did not touch the ball.

The tournament has been dotted with decisions about what constitutes an own goal which appear to contradict FIFA's official guidelines, but Ronaldo's is by far the most bizarre.

The Brazil striker claimed the 10th minute goal against Costa Rica on Thursday and it was initially given to him.

After video replays showed Ronaldo did not touch the ball, FIFA gave it as an own goal to defender Luis Marin. Both players had converged on a cross from the left at the same moment just in front of the Costa Rican goal.

On Friday FIFA announced that after its Technical Committee studied video replays, they decided to

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Surging Sea of Red

AFP, Seoul

More than one million football fans in red took over the streets of Seoul on Friday to roar on the South Korean national team to success in their mission to reach the second round of the World Cup.

Police gave up what they considered an unequal but peaceful struggle to keep traffic moving as hordes of teenagers let off fireworks and danced in the streets after South Korea's 1-0 win over Portugal in Incheon.

Hundreds of thousands more jammed city centres across the country in one of the biggest outpourings of nationalist fervour South Korea has ever seen.

"They are nearly all teenagers and they just keep arriving, there is no end in sight to the waves of fans," said one police commander as he pushed his protective line of police back to make more space around the Gwanghwamun district of central Seoul.

Streets in the main embassy and bank district were closed off as more than 300,000 supporters took the

best places to look up at three giant screens that have become a point of pilgrimage for fans unable to beg, borrow or steal tickets for South Korea's matches.

Another 300,000 gathered in the City Hall plaza 500 metres (yards) away where another screen was set up for the giant overspill of supporters.

Fifty thousand people watched a screen in the Jamsil baseball stadium in the south of the city and even more in a park on Yeouido in the Han river which runs through Seoul.

Fanaticism grew as news spread before the match that arch rivals Japan, the World Cup co-hosts, had qualified for the second round by beating Tunisia 2-0 in their final group match.

"Everyone is jealous and now Korea has to do it or die," said one fan in the Incheon Munhak stadium where President Kim Dae-Jung joined the capacity 50,000 crowd to watch South Korea advance in a tense match.

Police helicopters flew continu

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Devils scrape through

REUTERS, Shizuoka

Belgium scored twice in the last 12 minutes to seal a thrilling 3-2 victory over Russia on Friday and a place in the World Cup's second round.

Vladimir Beschastnykh's second-half equaliser looked to have earned Russia a place in the last 16 but strikes by substitute Wesley Sonck and captain Marc Wilmots put the Red Devils 3-1 up and on course for a last 16 clash with Brazil.

Russia refused to lie down, however, and substitute Dmitry

Sychev's 88th minute goal gave them hope of snatching the draw they needed to progress before the final whistle brought an end to Belgium's five-match streak of World Cup finals draws.

Belgium finished runners-up in group H on five points, two behind Japan and two ahead of the Russians who failed to qualify for the second round for their third straight World Cup.

Belgium's under-fire coach Robert Waseige was delighted with his team's resilience and hit back at his recent critics.

"I am very happy of course," Waseige said. "We have had a lot of critics, particularly at home, so we are really happy to have won this match and to reach the next round."

"It's a great honour to meet the eternal Brazil. I feel a great pride ahead of this match, for any team playing Brazil is a great reward in itself. We will have to be at the top of our form."

Belgium started brightly knowing they needed a victory to keep alive their hopes of progressing and fully merited their lead when Johan Walem superbly curled a free kick

into the top corner from 25 metres.

Mbo Mpenza and Gert Verheyen, twice, had excellent chances to increase their lead in the opening period against a misfiring Russian team.

Russia, with unfit playmaker Alexander Mostovoi again on the substitutes' bench, looked devoid of attacking menace in a terrible first-half display.

Coach Oleg Romantsev, his job

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Bubble burst

AFP, Lisbon

A subdued Portugal sadly accepted the end of its World Cup ambitions on Friday after South Korea beat its heavily favoured national team 1-0.

"Portugal's dream is over," wrote sports daily Record on its website beside an image of a crying "Tuga", the squad's mascot.

Football fans quietly left outdoor cafes and restaurants where they had gathered to watch the match.

"We paid a heavy price for our poor performance during the first 45 minutes of our match against the U.S.," a man told private television SIC Noticias at a cafe in the central city of Aveiro.

Portugal suffered a surprise defeat to the United States during its first World Cup match on June 5.

The U.S. squad beat Portugal 3-2 after surging into a 3-0 lead after only 36 minutes in the first half, dampening hopes for Portuguese World Cup glory.

But hopes for the Portuguese squad were revived on Monday after the team crushed Poland 4-0 on the country's national day.

The team needed a draw to go through to the next round.

"I am devastated," said Fernando Peres, who has gathered at a riverside restaurant in Lisbon to watch the game.

Expectations had been running high that Portugal, which made it to

the semi-finals at Euro 2000 before going out to the reigning European champions France, would achieve its best performance yet at a World Cup this year.

Portugal last played in a World Cup in 1986.

"A country without comparison returns to its usual obscurity," wrote columnist Paulo de Almeida Sande in a column published in daily Diario de Noticias on Friday that anticipated Portugal's World Cup elimination.

"The sceptics, who doubted the abilities of this team from the beginning, were right all along," he added.

Tragic

REUTERS, Seoul

A South Korea man in his mid-twenties died on Friday after setting himself on fire and leaving a chilling suicide note saying he wanted to be "a ghost and the 12th player" for his team in the World Cup, police said.

"I'm choosing death because South Korea has to go far to compete with the Latin American and European teams. I will be a ghost and the 12th player on the pitch and do my best for our team," police in the southeastern city of Pusan quoted the note as saying.

The man was found badly burned at a beach resort in Pusan on

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PHOTO: AFP

SONCK SOMERSAULT: Wesley Sonck (C), the Belgian forward, suspended in mid-air as he does a somersault-celebration after scoring against Russia at Shizuoka yesterday.

TODAY'S MATCHES

<p>Germany vs Paraguay Venue: Seogwipo Time: 12:30 pm</p>	<p>England vs Denmark Venue: Niigata Time: 5:30 pm</p>
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PHOTO: AFP

DESTINY'S CHILD: A South Korean tiny tot echoes the sentiment of millions before the start of the match against Portugal at Incheon yesterday.