

Battlers come home

Football

INTERNET, Middlesbrough

Pak Do Ik and his North Korean teammates will find many things have changed in Middlesbrough on Saturday, when they visit the northeast for the first time since pulling off one of the World Cup's greatest upsets 36 years ago.

Pak will find the spot from which he drew back his right foot and unleashed the shot, which brought down Italy marked by a simple plaque in the middle of a modern housing estate.

Instead of Ayresome Park's massed banks of terracing, where once thousands of Teessiders stamped their feet in approval of their unhibited football style, Pak and the six other surviving team members will witness the gleaming Riverside Stadium - where they will be guests of honour for Boro's match against Leeds.

What they will discover remains unchanged is a remarkable and mutual love affair which has survived five decades and their country's isolationist policies which have cut them off from all of the outside

world. "They waved our flag, they clapped, I am convinced the attitude of the Middlesbrough people affected our games," said Pak.

His colleague, Rim Jung Son, said: "It still remains a riddle to me that the people of Middlesbrough supported us all the way through. I still don't know the reason why."

Pak, now 65, and Rim were speaking at this month's England match against Macedonia, at which they were special guests of the Football Association.

Their visit was masterminded and painstakingly prepared by television producer Dan Gordon, who filmed a documentary of their World Cup adventure entitled "The Game of their Lives" and secured unprecedented access to Pyongyang and the team.

Only now have North Korean relationships with the outside world thawed sufficiently to make the visit possible, and there remains plenty of intrigue.

Thirty-six years ago the North

Koreans almost had not made it to the World Cup at all. Their qualification caused a diplomatic row with the Korean War still fresh in many minds. Eventually they were allowed to participate, so long as their national anthem was not played before matches.

Their first match ended in 3-0 defeat to the USSR but Pak Sung-jin scored a late equaliser in their second match against Chile to keep them in with a chance of qualifying.

Incredibly Pak's goal was enough to beat the Italians - fancied to win the tournament - and ensure the favourites returned home to Rome to a barrage of rotten tomatoes.

The Koreans went on to their quarterfinal against Portugal in Liverpool - backed by approximately 3,000 fans from Middlesbrough who had taken the team to their hearts.

North Korea stormed into a 3-0 lead after just half an hour before the legendary Eusebio hit back with four goals as the Portuguese triumphed 5-3.

"It left quite an impression how enthusiastically they played, how fresh and how hard-working they were," remembers Leeds boss Terry Venables.



FLASHBACK: Portuguese football legend Eusebio (R) is tackled by a North Korean player during their famous 1966 World Cup quarterfinal tussle. The surviving members of that North squad are now visiting England. During their fabulous campaign they stunned giants Italy in the previous round.

PHOTO: INTERNET

"Today you wouldn't be too surprised because we know a bit about football in that part of the world. But in 1966 they were a complete surprise and they shocked

everyone with what they achieved." The Koreans returned to Pyongyang and were hidden away from the world again. Finally on Saturday they will get

to discover they have never been forgotten.

Arsenal accept Vieira ban

Football

REUTERS, London

Arsenal have decided not to appeal against captain Patrick Vieira's two-match ban and fine for insulting a referee, meaning his suspension will come into effect immediately.

Vieira will miss Saturday's premier league game against Blackburn Rovers and the match at Fulham on November 3 but will be eligible to play against local rivals Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United.

"It's disappointing...he has been harshly done by. But if he is going to miss two games he may as well miss them quickly," manager Arsene Wenger told reporters at the club's training ground on Friday.

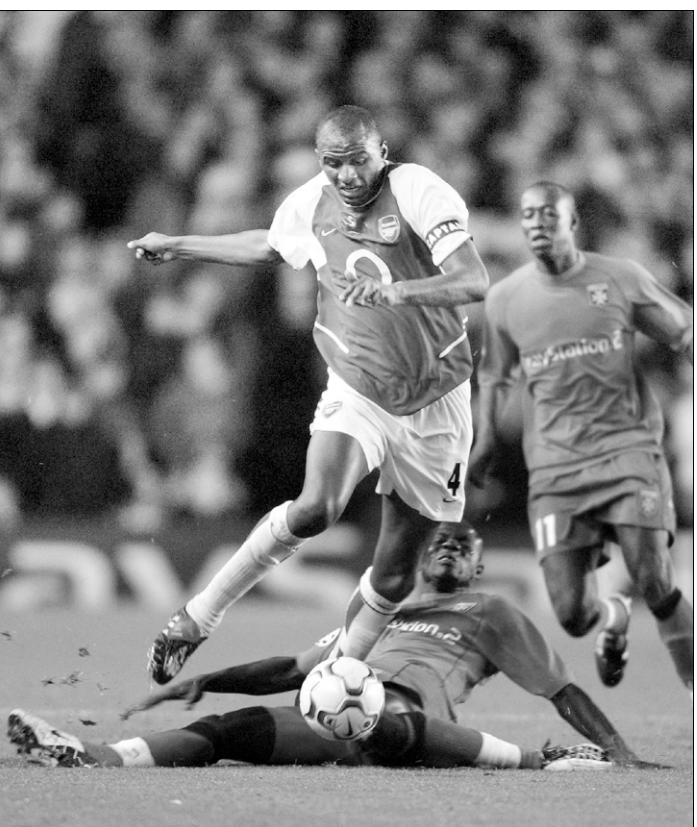
Vieira received a two-match ban and a 25,000-pound (38,830 dollars) fine on Thursday after a Football Association disciplinary committee decided he insulted referee Andy D'Urso after being sent off in a match against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on September 1.

But the disciplinary commission ruled that the 26-year-old was not guilty of using abusive language towards the official.

If the club had launched an appeal, the ban - if upheld - would have been delayed until after the appeal hearing and could have been in effect for the match against Manchester United on December 7.

Equally, if Arsenal had taken the 14 days allowed to decide whether to appeal and then decided not to, Vieira would have missed the game against Tottenham at Highbury on November 16.

Wenger explained: "Patrick will be suspended tomorrow because we decided not to appeal and to take the suspension straight away, so he will miss Blackburn and Fulham."



"I was told firstly he would miss (two games later in November), but having checked it, it appears the (FA) gave us time to appeal - and because we are not appealing he will be suspended straight away."

"We won't be appealing because we defended the case very well, we pushed as hard as we could and still got punished."

"Psychologically for Patrick it will be helpful for him to get it out of the way. If he is going to miss two games he may as well miss them quickly."

Wenger, who was present at Thursday's hearing, added: "I have

heard a lot worse (than what Vieira said to D'Urso) said on the pitch every Saturday."

"Patrick did not give abusive language, but for insulting language he got two games. Those are the guidelines."

"Patrick said he (D'Urso) has no personality...Patrick admitted that he had said that."

"But there was no abusive language. When you say in French that someone has no personality, it is not a compliment but it is also not an insult."

Grateful Cisse

AFP, Birmingham

Senegalese football captain Aliou Cisse thanked the fans of his Premiership side Birmingham City on Friday after they sent him hundreds of messages of condolence following the loss of 11 members of his family in a ferry disaster in Senegal.

Around 1,000 people perished in the tragedy last month including dozens from his village near to Ziguinchor, from where the ferry set sail.

The 26-year-old Cisse won enormous admiration from Birmingham supporters when he stayed to play in the match at West Ham before returning home to pay his respects to the dead.

Among his 11 relatives who died were his sister, uncles and cousins when the MS Joola was sunk in a storm off the Gambian coast on September 26.

Birmingham fans are set to show their support when he returns to action in Saturday's home game with Manchester City by turning one end of the ground into a huge Senegal flag by holding up green, gold and red cards before the kick-off.

"I know the fans like me and since the disaster they have really taken me to their hearts and that has greatly touched me," he told the Birmingham Evening Mail.

"They are not fans who just cheer their players on the pitch. They have shown me their warmth and compassion and I want to thank them all. They have sent me so many messages of support."

"For what the people at this club and the fans have done for me recently, I don't know how to repay them."

"What I will do is give my very best week in and week out and hopefully in the future we will be able to share in something good."

Alex stays calm

Football

INTERNET, Manchester

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson will not be rushed into buying a new striker in the January sales.

The Old Trafford club's official website had indicated Ferguson had requested the funds to reinforce his attacking options when the transfer window re-opens at the beginning of next year.

With Ruud van Nistelrooy struggling with a hamstring injury and Diego Forlan still finding his feet in the English game, United's depth up front is wafer thin.

Both Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes have been used in more advanced positions this season, with Scholes, scorer of the late winner against Olympiakos on Wednesday, again expected to carry out the role against Aston Villa on Saturday.

Speculation linking Ferguson with a move from controversial West Ham front-man Paolo di Canio has been revived, the Italian's on-going contract row with the Upton Park

outfit meaning any move by United would probably prove fruitless.

Ferguson, who was on the brink of signing Di Canio 12 months ago until now-departed Dwight Yorke turned his back on a move to Middlesbrough, refused to comment on that particular rumour but rejected any suggestion that he had asked for cash to be made available.

"I haven't requested that at all," said the United boss, who has previously indicated a reluctance to bring in new faces during the middle of a season.

"They could give you the names of six people we are supposed to be going to sign that I have never heard of."

"Before this season, we have always been able to sign players at any time. That is no longer the case but in a sense, the transfer window has always been there because of the rules governing the Champions League."

"The problem is that when you assess who you can get, the options are few."

"The kind of players we are looking for are all with teams who are playing European football themselves and that is no use to you."

French League One Bordeaux, Monaco share points

Football

REUTERS, Paris

Former Real Madrid player Bortolino Slavio has scored his first goal in the French first division, allowing Girondins Bordeaux to snatch a hard-earned 2-2 draw at home from Monaco.

Slavio scored in the 66th minute, slipping a corner from Jean-Claude Darcheville inside the right post from a narrow angle, but pre-season title favourites Bordeaux were still disappointed by the result, having drawn two and lost three of their last five games.

"They are now in ninth place with 16 points from 12 games, five points behind joint leaders Nice and AJ Auxerre who entertain RC Lens and Stade Rennes on Saturday. Monaco are on 19 points in sixth place."

On an unbeaten run of six games, they started strongly and

opened the scoring after 19 minutes when skipper Ludovic Giuly sent the ball floating under the crossbar from 25 metres.

Bordeaux reacted by levelling ten minutes later. Jean-Claude Darcheville, last season's First Division best scorer, darted into the penalty area and shot inside the left post.

In the dying seconds of the first half Shabani Nonda restored Monaco's lead, getting his left knee to a centre from Jerome Rothen.

Giuly could have scored a third seven minutes into the second half but his powerful volley went over the crossbar.

It was to be Monaco's last chance as Bordeaux, with the support of a near-capacity crowd of 32,000 people, clawed their way back into the game.

They had to wait until 14 minutes from the end to equalise but were unable to find a way through the Monaco defence again before the final whistle.



Bordeaux's Jean-Claude Darcheville (R) battles for possession with Monaco's Jerome Rothen on October 25 in their French League One encounter in Bordeaux, southwestern France. It ended in a 2-2 draw.

PHOTO: AFP

Only in Macca's dreams

Football

AFP, London

Steve McManaman admitted Saturday that he was unlikely ever to play for England again despite his brilliant performances for Champions League holders Real Madrid.

"I haven't heard from anyone since then," McManaman told the Daily Mail.

"The only contact was the message Sven (England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson) left on my answer phone when he was telling me I had not been selected for the World Cup."

"I was actually surprised he even

"But I missed the biggest tournament in the world and that's a pretty good indication of where I stand."

McManaman said he didn't believe the theory he had paid for an insipid display as a substitute in the home win over Albania in the World Cup qualifiers.

"People go on about that 15 minutes against Albania but I don't buy it."

"I came on as a sub in the next game against Greece, so it can't be that."

"He (Eriksson) wouldn't have had me back."

McManaman thanked his lucky stars that at least he was playing for the best club side in Europe in which he has won two Champions League trophies, scoring in the first one the win over Valencia.

"If you look at what Madrid have done over the last few years, it is incredible."

"For three successive years they have brought the best player in the world."

"First Figoo, then Zidane, then Ronaldo. That's just unheard of."



STEVE MCMANAMAN

made that call. I never expected to be in."

"After all I hadn't spoken to anyone involved with England for months."

While McManaman showed once again he was still at the top of his game with two goals in the 2-2 Champions League draw with AEK Athens this week it went unnoticed by the England management.

They sent scouts to Arsenal and Liverpool's Champions League encounters and even according to the Mail the First Division clash between Ipswich and Burnley.

"I'm almost resigned to the fact that I probably won't be involved again."

"I don't really understand why. That has never been explained to me."

"I'm now in my fourth season at Madrid."

"I'm 30, I've got this season and another year left on my contract and I don't know what will happen after that."

"But I've played over 100 games for the club, I'm still very much part of the set-up and I'm thoroughly enjoying myself."

However McManaman couldn't resist a parting shot at Eriksson.

"I read how people were saying the 4-3-1-2 formation worked for England against Slovakia (an unconvincing come from behind 2-1 away win in a Euro 2004 qualifier)."

"I don't actually go in for any of that. The best players have to be involved."

Larsson leaving Celtic sooner or later

AFP, Glasgow

Former Swedish international striker Henrik Larsson confirmed Saturday he wants to end his career not with Scottish champions Celtic but with another club when his contract ends in 2004.

The 31-year-old 2000-2001 European Golden Shoe winner has once again been scoring regularly for Celtic after a poor start to the campaign.

However Larsson told the Glasgow Herald it will have been seven years at Celtic when his contract finishes in 18 months time and he would reject a new contract to seek a final challenge provided his body felt up to it.

"I won't be signing another Celtic contract. I'll have been here for seven years and that will be enough," said Larsson, who retired from international football following Sweden's 2-1 defeat by Senegal in the second round of the World Cup finals.

"I'd like to play somewhere else for a couple of seasons, or depending on how my body feels, I might head straight home to Sweden."

"I want to have a life beyond football so, if my body is feeling shattered, I certainly won't play on," added Larsson, who was a member of the Swedish side that reached the 1994 World Cup semi-finals.

Larsson, though, rejected the idea he would move into football management.

"A coach? Never in a million years will I become a coach or a manager."

"For me, it is too much work without any guarantee of success. You have to scout for players, watch matches, analyse your opponents and do all the travelling."

"Also, while you have ambitions as a top player, as a coach you have to start at zero once again and that is not for me."



Supporters of Deportivo Cali football team look at the coffin containing the remains of Herman Gaviria, in Cali, Colombia on October 25. The late Colombian international who played in the 1994 World Cup finals in USA, died the previous day after being struck by lightning during a training session.

Kahn to miss Depor match

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich will be without goalkeeper and captain Oliver Kahn when they visit Deportivo Coruna in Champions League group G on Tuesday, the German club has said.

Kahn tore a right thigh muscle in Wednesday's 2-1 defeat at AC Milan which left the Bavarians, who are bottom in their group with one point from four games, at risk of making of an early exit from European club soccer's showcase competition.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said Kahn would miss not only Saturday's Bundesliga home match against Hanover 96 but also the Deportivo game and possibly the league match at Werder Bremen on November 3.

Heskey stands by Leicester

INTERNET, Leicester

Liverpool striker Emile Heskey has pledged more than 100,000 pounds to help save former club Leicester City from going broke.

Leicester, believed to be 30 million pounds in debt after relegation from the Premier League last season, was placed into administration on Tuesday.

Hired by Liverpool in an 11-million-pound transfer two seasons ago, the England striker has contributed cash to the consortium, which includes former Foxes and England striker Gary Lineker.

"This is obviously very good news for us and a great help," said acting chairman Martin George. "Like Gary, Emile Heskey has not forgotten the club that set him on the way to the top and wants to lend his support in a very positive way."

"I think it is fair to say we are very pleased and encouraged with Emile's move. He was not approached and contacted us off his own bat. That shows the depth of his willingness to help the cause."

PHOTO: AFP