

Celtic fans sans tickets!

REUTERS, Seville

Over 20,000 ticketless Celtic fans are expected to converge on the Andalusian capital of Seville for Wednesday's UEFA Cup final against FC Porto, a Spanish government official said Monday.

Juan Ignacio Zoido told reporters it was very difficult to calculate the exact number of fans who would make the trip to the Southern Spanish city, but the British Embassy had provided them with a rough estimate to help with security arrangements.

All 52,000 tickets for the final at the city's Estadio Olimpico have been sold out.

Zoido said that the Spanish Government would be providing an extra 1,000 National Policemen and 300 members of the Civil Guard to cope with the influx of Celtic fans.

He added that supporters from as far a field as Australia and the United States were expected to make the trip to witness the Glasgow club play its first European final in 33 years, but that he was not anticipating any serious security problems.

"We want to turn the UEFA Cup final into a party," he said. "It will give us the chance to show we live in one of the best cities in the world."

The Scottish side arrived in Spain on Sunday and is preparing for the final in the nearby town of Jerez. It is scheduled to travel the 80 kilometers to Seville on Tuesday.

Real unsure about Del Bosque?

AFP, Madrid

European champions Real Madrid have approached Arsenal's Arsene Wenger and Juventus' Marcello Lippi if they fail to reach a deal with Vicente Del Bosque whose contract expires in a month.

But Del Bosque's agent Pedro de Felipe said Tuesday he was sure they would reach an agreement.

"I'm sure Real won't go abroad for another coach," he told Spanish radio.

Del Bosque has only been offered the same terms as his current deal, despite twice landing the Champions League and La Liga once since taking over from John Toshack three years ago.

When he rejected the offer, Real's sporting director Jorge Valdano warned the club might look abroad for a new coach.



PHOTO: INTERNET

READY FOR THE PARTY! Celtic fans cooling off at a fountain in Seville on May 19.

General Big Phil!

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, who led his native Brazil from the doldrums to a record fifth World Cup victory last June, on Monday defended his tough coaching methods.

"In my country, Brazil, they still say that I have a bit of a military style. That is great," he said during a speech on football strategy held in Lisbon. "In football if you are not disciplined you do not win."

The 54-year-old coach, who is known affectionately as 'Big Phil' to his compatriots, has a reputation for staying by his decisions even in the face of relentless criticism.

As coach of Brazil last year, Scolari refused to pick veteran striker Romario for the national squad despite a wave of popular pressure and lobbying on the part of then Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

In March, Scolari made it plain

that any member of Portugal's team who did not agree with his decisions was free to quit the squad following criticism of his policy of



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

selecting players for the national team like FC Porto midfielder Deco who have adopted Portuguese citizenship.

Portugal internationals like Luis Figo and Rui Costa had questioned Scolari's decision to call on Deco

but the 25-year-old footballer went on to score the winner against Brazil in a friendly held in March in Porto.

Scolari's methods include putting a huge emphasis on team spirit and obliging players to spend long periods holed up in pre-match 'concentration' training sessions.

"The success of a football team today depends 50 percent on the physical conditions of its players, 25 percent on the technique used and another 25 percent depends on confidence and psychology," Scolari said.

Portugal's underachieving national squad appears to be revitalised since Scolari took over in January.

Scolari followed up a confidence-boosting 2-1 victory over Brazil in March with a 1-0 success over Macedonia in Switzerland last month and a 1-1 draw against Holland at Eindhoven on April 30.

As hosts of the 2004 European Championship finals Portugal automatically qualify and Scolari is seeking several competitive friendlies in order to prepare for the event.

Celtic v FC Porto

Awaiting a riveting war

UEFA CUP

AFP, Seville

When Celtic last tasted European glory on that famous night in Lisbon 36 long years ago, the closest thing they had to an imported player was Bobby Lennox.

Unique among the side that beat Inter Milan to become the first British club to lift the European Champions Cup, Lennox was not actually born within jogging distance of Celtic's Parkhead stadium in the east end of Scotland's biggest city.

A native of Saltcoats, a village on the coast 30 miles southwest of the city, Lennox was the only exception in a team of a pure-bred Glaswegians whose victory was celebrated by lovers of football the world over.

As well as being an achievement unlikely to ever be repeated, Celtic's victory was a triumph of verve and imagination over 'catenaccio', the cloying and cynical defensive strategem that Inter had used to establish a stranglehold on club football's biggest prize.

It is testimony to the way football has changed since 1967 that the team Celtic will send out to defend the honour of Scottish football in the UEFA Cup final against FC Porto will almost certainly contain just two home-grown players.

Rab Douglas should have recovered sufficiently from a thigh injury to take his place between the posts while his Scotland team-mate Paul Lambert will captain a side comprising two Englishmen, two Frenchmen, two Swedes, a Belgian, a Bulgarian and a Northern Irishman.

The cosmopolitan nature of the current side has done nothing to dim the enthusiasm of the Celtic faithful. Up to 50,000 fans, including contingents from North America, Australia and other far-flung corners of the globe, are expected to descend on Seville in their sombreros to witness what they hope will be another glorious European night for the club.

On paper, Porto, Champions League winners in 1987 and runaway champions of their own domestic league this season, are marginal favourites to spoil the party.

But under Martin O'Neill, Celtic are nothing if not resilient and Blackburn, Liverpool, Celta Vigo and Stuttgart have all learned from bitter experience this season that they are not to be underestimated.

ROAD TO SEVILLE
AFP, Seville
How Celtic and FC Porto made it to the UEFA Cup final:
CELTIC (SCO) 1st round: bt FK Suduva (LTU) 10-1 on aggregate (8-1, 2-0) 2nd round: bt Blackburn (ENG) 3-0 on aggregate (1-0, 2-0) 3rd round: bt Celta Vigo (SPA) 2-2 on aggregate, Celtic win on away goal (1-0, 1-2) 4th round: bt Stuttgart (GER) 5-4 on aggregate (3-1, 2-3) Quarterfinal: bt Liverpool (ENG) 3-1 on aggregate (1-1, 2-0) Semifinal: bt Boavista (POR) 2-1 on aggregate (1-1, 1-0)
FC PORTO (POR) 1st round: bt Polonia Warsaw (POL) 6-2 on aggregate (6-0, 0-2) 2nd round: bt Austria Vienna (AUT) 3-0 on aggregate (1-0, 2-0) 3rd round: bt Lens (FRA) 3-1 on aggregate (3-0, 0-1) 4th round: bt Denizlispor (TUR) 8-3 on aggregate (6-1, 2-2) Quarterfinal: bt Panathinaikos (GRE) 2-1 on aggregate (0-1, 2-0) Semifinal: bt Lazio (ITA) 4-1 on aggregate (4-1, 0-0)

A three-man defence protected by the midfield labourers Lambert and Neil Lennon has made Celtic a very difficult side to break down while their attack-

tional cutting edge from midfield.

O'Neill, a European Cup winner with Nottingham Forest as a player, has been joking that



PHOTO: INTERNET

FC Porto's star playmaker Deco (L) obliging an autograph-hunter on arrival at Seville airport on May 19.

ing menace is eloquently expressed by Henrik Larsson's goal tally: 42 goals in 49 matches so far this season.

A slipped disc has deprived O'Neill of Larsson's striking partner, John Hartson. But O'Neill, while admitting Hartson's loss is a blow, knows he can shuffle his pack in a way that should mean the Welsh international's absence is not critical.

Chris Sutton will revert to his favoured striking role while Stilian Petrov is likely to be given the task of providing an addi-

tion to the nervous excitement of the event will force him to take refuge in the toilets at the Estadio Olimpico.

But beneath the banter, there is no doubting his determination to see his side become the first Scottish side to touch European silverware since Aberdeen claimed the Cup Winners Cup 20 years ago.

"Porto are a top-class side and we will treat them with the respect they deserve," O'Neill said. "But we have got players who can play and who are strong mentally."

Key midfielder Francisco Costinha is battling to recover from a pulled thigh muscle but all the signs were that he will be ready to play at least some part in the match.

With 20,000 Porto fans also expected to travel and the stadium capacity limited to 52,000, Seville is set to pay host to thousands of ticketless fans.

But local authorities appear relaxed in a city which harbours fond memories of the good-natured revvelling that followed Scotland's World Cup match with Brazil here back in 1982.

Houllier after Beattie, Kewell

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier was reported Tuesday to be poised to make a bid for Southampton striker James Beattie and Leeds United midfielder Harry Kewell.

Beattie is rated at 12 million pounds (18 million dollars) but Houllier hoped to get Australian star Kewell for 5 million pounds from the cash-strapped Leeds side.

Houllier is keen to find a replacement for Emile Heskey to partner England star Michael Owen.

And he believes French club Auxerre will turn down a bid for striking duo Djibril Cisse and Jean-Alain Bounsang who are also being chased by Olympique Marseille.

Houllier wants to replace Heskey who has disappointed since his 11 million pound move from Leicester three years ago.

He might fetch 5 million pounds and Houllier would use that to try to buy Kewell.

Manchester United and Arsenal have also been linked with the 24-year-old Australian.

Leeds United said they will cash in on Kewell rather than lose him for nothing. But they denied



HARRY KEWELL



JAMES BEATTIE

any approach has been made for the player, who has 12 months left on his current Elland Road contract.

Kewell is in the midst of contract talks with the club and has said publicly he doesn't want to

leave.

But chairman John McKenzie is also desperate to avoid a situation similar to that of Lee Bowyer.

Bowyer stalled on a new contract and eventually left for West Ham for 100,000 pounds in

January.

McKenzie insists the club "cannot allow" Kewell to do the same and walk away for a cut-price fee.

"I have already spoken to Harry's agent a few times and we are still very confident of putting a deal together. We hope that Harry will stay," he said.

"I will be looking to meet his agent again next week when I believe we will be in a position to put a new proposal to him.

"We all know what happened to Lee Bowyer and how he was able to walk away for almost nothing and we cannot allow that to happen again."

Beattie, 25, is also wanted by Newcastle United.

He scored 23 Premiership goals to finish third in the scoring lists behind Manchester United's Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy and Arsenal's French striker Thierry Henry.

But Southampton chairman Rupert Lowe has told manager Gordon Strachan he does not have to sell anyone this summer after an eighth place finish in the Premiership and an FA Cup final appearance.

Strachan was hoping to bolster his squad with Morocco's African Player of the Year Hicham Abouchouane. He has already offered Raja Casablanca 1.5 million pounds for the 22-year-old striker.

Players to fight drugs

AFP, London

Players' union officials in England said Tuesday they would step up efforts to stamp drugs out of the game after a BBC documentary revealed a high proportion of players used performance-enhancing substances.

"We have got nothing to hide and we will be taking things further with the FA's medical centre to make sure players continue to develop and have a proper knowledge of drugs," Professional Footballers' Association deputy chief executive Mick McGuire said.

"We do not believe that the problem is rife," he said.

"Last year 1,200 tests were carried out in football and seven were positive, but three of those were for social use."

The BBC programme revealed that a survey of 700 professional players found that 46 percent of players were aware of a colleague using recreational drugs while 5.6 percent were aware of players using performance-enhancing substances.

It also questioned whether the visits the FA's testers made to clubs and training grounds had become so predictable or expected that offending players were given plenty of time for evasion.

The FA denied during the BBC programme that major flaws existed and questioned suggestions that the British game had an increasing drug problem.

FA director of medical education and services Alan Hodson said: "We do seven days a week of testing which starts in pre-season."

"When some players say they've been informed ... that we're coming, it may mean they go over to the training ground and their names are collected and put into a hat."

"It may be the case that one hour beforehand they do know that we're coming."

Hodson said he needed more money to follow the example set by Italian authorities, who routinely test two players after every match.

Spain collapsing?

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Spiralling debts, unpaid salaries, failure to agree a new television deal and a stagnant transfer market are proof that Spanish soccer is on the brink of financial meltdown says the country's players' union (AFE).

"There are clear signs that Spanish football is in a state of collapse," AFE president Gerardo Gonzalez told the union's annual assembly on Monday.

Gonzalez said that 80 percent of clubs in the Spanish first and second divisions had failed to pay their players the full amounts stipulated in their contracts.

He said total debt to players had doubled in the space of the past season and was now estimated to have reached 45 million euros (\$52.57 million).

Under existing rules clubs that fail to pay their players up to date by July 31 face automatic relegation, but eight first and 22 second division clubs claim that they have little hope of clearing their debts to players and have called for an extension to the deadline.

Gonzalez said that the financial crisis was even more worrying than in previous years because the delay in reaching a new deal for television coverage and the slowdown in the transfer market meant that clubs had no new sources of revenue.

"There is no television deal at the moment and so clubs are

unable to get the credits they need to cover their debts," he said, adding that he would not rule out a players' strike if the problem was not resolved to the AFE's satisfaction.

"The concern amongst players could not be greater," he said.

The Spanish Football League (LFP) recently called on the government to make changes to sports regulations to help relieve the financial problems of first and second division clubs, who it says have total debts of more than 1.6 billion euros (\$1.87 billion).

The LFP wants a greater share of profits from the country's football pool, compensation from Spain's Football Federation for releasing players for internationals and more time for clubs to settle their tax affairs.