

## Defeat doesn't cross border

AFP, Abuja

Nigeria's dramatic defeat of defending champions Cameroon in football's African Nations Cup failed to sour the mood among diplomats from the two sporting rivals at talks on a border dispute Tuesday.

Delegates at the talks on the neighbours' sensitive territorial spat admitted tongue-in-cheek that there had been fears that Sunday's fixture might have clouded the upbeat mood at the United Nations-sponsored parley.

But instead, at a warm opening ceremony, officials congratulated each other's teams, and resolved jokingly to work hard to be sure to finish their agenda in time to watch Wednesday's semifinal between Nigeria and Tunisia.

Nigeria's foreign minister Olu Adeniji summed up the brotherly mood in making a bold prediction that Nigeria's Super Eagles would go on to win their next two matches and carry off African football's crown.

"The Cup of Nations will stay in the Cameroon-Nigerian family. Any time our Cameroonian colleagues want to see it they can always come across," he said.

Cameroon's chief negotiator Amadou Ali, promised to support Nigeria for the rest of the tournament, noting to applause that "what's important is that the cup comes back next door to Cameroon."

Sunday's 2-1 victory for Nigeria over the Indomitable Lions ended Cameroon's quest for a third straight Nations Cup title and renewed one of the fiercest rivalries in African sport.

## Arsene's anger

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has hit out at Real Madrid for expressing an interest in French star Thierry Henry.

Real coach Carlos Queiroz hinted that Henry and Manchester United's Ruud van Nistelrooy were his summer targets with Henry the one he would like most.

But Wenger said: "If I want a player from Real Madrid, I would call Real Madrid first. I would not come out in the newspapers first."

"It is unfair to his own players, it is unfair to Arsenal and you would expect a bit more class."

Real president Florentino Perez has already said he wants to sign another superstar, sparking speculation about who will arrive at the Bernabeu.

Van Nistelrooy has pledged his future to Manchester United by signing a new four-year deal, which will keep him at Old Trafford until 2008.

Henry also made it clear he has no desire to leave Arsenal. He signed a new deal in May keeping him at Highbury until 2007 and last December Arsenal rejected a 40 million pound (70m dollar) bid from Chelsea for their striker.

Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein said Henry was not for sale at any price.

## United trio in trouble

AFP, London

Manchester United captain Roy Keane, Cristiano Ronaldo and Gary Neville could face a police grilling over claims they made crude gestures and swore at Everton fans.

Around 50 supporters lodged complaints following the Manchester United trios celebration of their winning goal in the 4-3 victory at Goodison Park on Saturday.

Merseyside Police could seek interviews with the United stars over their future conduct, newspapers reported Wednesday.

Everton have given supporters a week to put their complaints in writing and will pass the findings on to police chiefs.

Fans claim Keane flicked a V-sign and swore in front of the Family Stand.

Ronaldo and Nevilles alleged actions came at another part of the ground.

Ian Ross, Evertons director of corporate affairs, said: "We have received a number of complaints and have written to those people. We are seeking their further observations within seven days."

The Football Association will wait to see what action the police decide to take before revealing their next steps.

Inspector Tom King, football liaison officer for Merseyside Police, said: "If Everton decided it is appropriate to refer the matter to us we would take it further but at the moment there is no investigation."



PHOTO: AFP

**THAT'S ONE HUNDRED:** Arsenal's French striker Thierry Henry (L) slots the ball past Southampton custodian Antti Niemi for his 100th Premier League goal during their FA Premier League clash at Highbury in London on February 10.

# Hundred-up Henry

Football

AFP, London

Thierry Henry's 100th and 101st Premiership goals saw Arsenal extend their unbeaten Premiership run to 25 games with a 2-0 win over Southampton at Highbury here Tuesday.

The result gave Arsenal a five-point lead over Manchester United at the top of the table ahead of the champions' match at home to Middlesbrough on Wednesday.

At the other end of the table, Leeds leapt over Wolves at the bottom with a 4-1 thrashing of their relegation rivals which should lift some of the gloom at Elland Road.

Leicester meanwhile remained in the drop zone after goalkeeper Ian Walker's own goal allowed Bolton to emerge with a 1-1 draw.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger hailed Henry after another night of clinical finishing at Highbury.

"He's top, top class. He's second in the FIFA rankings for player of the year. He's world-class," said the Frenchman.

Asked if he had had any concerns about the 100-goal mark being a burden for Henry, Wenger replied: "I was not worried at all. You know with him a goal will come."

But Wenger admitted that Henry's second, which came with virtually the last kick of the game, had settled his nerves. "The second

goal came very late but it was a relief.

"Southampton played very well and closed us down all over the pitch."

Elsewhere cash-strapped Leeds gave their long-suffering fans something to celebrate at last. England striker Alan Smith put the hosts ahead before Wolves's Romanian striker loan Violel Ganea levelled.

But Leeds skipper Dominic Matteo restored the hosts' lead shortly before half-time and in the second half James Milner and Australian striker Mark Viduka, with a 90th minute goal, completed the rout.

"I thought we played some great stuff," said Leeds boss Eddie Gray. "It was nice to see the two front guys (Smith and Viduka) on the score-sheet."

"I'm pleased for the lads. They know it's going to be tough but they

are definitely up for the challenge. "But I've told them it's only the start."

At Highbury, Southampton were left in 11th place despite pushing Arsenal hard for most of the match.

They appealed for a penalty when striker Brett Ormerod looked to have been brought down in the box by a combination of central defender Kolo Toure and goalkeeper Jens Lehmann.

However, referee Steve Bennett merely awarded a Southampton corner.

During the first half Spanish striker Jose Antonio Reyes, Arsenal's record 17 million pounds signing from Seville, was largely anonymous.

And Henry too was generally kept quiet by the Southampton defence during the early stages.

But all that changed in the 31st minute. Henry, who looked offside

when running on to fellow France international Pires's through-ball, saw the linesman keep his flag down before outpacing Darren Kenton and beating Niemi. It was Henry's 100th Premiership goal in his 160th appearance.

After the break Lehmann turned round Ormerod's shot from six yards out past the post.

Saints kept pressing for an equaliser before Henry, who moments earlier missed a glorious chance, settled the match late on when, after Gilberto missed his kick, he rifled the ball into the top corner.

Leicester goalkeeper Ian Walker was embroiled in controversy again as his own goal handed a draw to Bolton and harmed his side's dwindling chances of retaining their Premiership status.

Walker turned an innocuous toe-poke from Kevin Davies into an equaliser for Bolton as the keeper allowed the ball to slip under his body and hit his leg before crossing the line.

"The free-kick was played in and I tried to grab it but it's gone back through my legs," he said.

"It's one of those things and it will probably never happen again. I'm disappointed for the lads if that hadn't gone in we would have won the game."

Les Ferdinand had given Leicester a 16th-minute lead.

PREMIERSHIP TABLE										
English Premiership table after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)										
Arsenal	25	18	7	0	49	16	61			
Man Utd	24	18	2	4	47	20	56			
Chelsea	24	16	4	4	44	19	52			
Newcastle	24	9	10	5	34	25	37			
Charlton	24	10	7	7	32	26	37			
Liverpool	24	9	8	7	34	26	35			
Fulham	24	10	5	9	36	33	35			
Bolton	25	8	10	7	31	37	34			
Aston Villa	24	9	6	9	28	27	33			
Birmingham	23	8	8	7	20	26	32			

# Auxerre Brive-d

Football

AFP, Brive-La-Gaillarde

The amateurs of Brive knocked holders Auxerre out of the French Cup and moved into the quarterfinals with a 1-0 victory here on Tuesday.

A well-worked goal midway through the second-half from Manuel Debat proved enough for the Fourth Division team to hold off the side lying second in the First Division, who fielded a full-strength lineup including English Premiership target Djibril Cisse and Jean-Alain Boumsong, who is joining Rangers at the end of the season.

"This is huge!" said Brive coach Frederic Hantz.

"Forty two years after the club was formed Brive got through to the last 16 now 84 years later we're into our first quarter-finals."

For Auxerre's veteran coach Guy Roux the defeat was hard to take after his side were dumped out of the French League Cup last week by Nantes in a penalty shootout.

"We've been knocked out of two cups in a week because of refereeing mistakes" Roux said, alluding to an Auxerre 'goal' that was disallowed.

"I'm sad and a little bitter but congratulations to Brive, they played magnificently and were fresher than us."

At a stadium more used to staging rugby matches, Auxerre dominated the first half and Cisse had the ball in the net two minutes before the

break but his effort was ruled out for offside.

Brive's breakthrough came when they won a free kick in the 53rd minute, from which Francois Certain passed to Debat whose shot flew past the defensive wall and Auxerre keeper Fabien Cool.

Auxerre failed to threaten the Brive goal in the remaining half hour and the final whistle was greeted with joy by 13,000 home fans.

In the night's other tie, Bayonne, who eliminated Bordeaux in the last round, failed to repeat that feat when they were beaten 2-0 by last year's beaten finalists Paris St Germain.

Second-half goals from Fabrice Floresse and Pauleta saw PSG into the last eight at the Parc des Princes.



JUERGEN KLINSMANN

## Klinsmann finds Germans dull

AFP, Berlin

Juergen Klinsmann has criticised Germany's current generation of footballers for lacking the desire to succeed that he and his fellow 1990 World Cup winners possessed.

The former VfB Stuttgart, Monaco and Tottenham Hotspur striker has listened to the debate about foreigners stunting the growth of German talent but cited a change in attitude as a reason for the slump in fortunes.

"Rudi Voller and I come from a generation that knew what it wanted," the 39-year-old told the Bild daily.

"We would do anything to edge someone out of the team whether they were a foreigner or German."

"Unfortunately not many German players of today's generation have this determination."

Despite his pessimism on Germany's upcoming youngsters, the former national captain believes Voller's side still hold a psychological edge in the 2004 European championships in Portugal.

"At big tournaments all the other teams are still wary of us and this myth lives on," explained Klinsmann. "But it is important we do not lose the first match against Holland."

Germany have been paired with the Czech Republic, Holland and Latvia in the Group of Death in Euro 2004, opening the campaign against the Dutch on June 15 in Oporto.

## Hodde set for a surprise return

AFP, London

Glenn Hoddle is set to make a sensational return to management at Southampton this week less than three years after he walked out on them.

Newspapers reported Wednesday the former England, Chelsea and Tottenham boss was scheduled to talk over at the Saints by the end of the week.

Hodde, 46, infuriated Saints fans and chairman Rupert Lowe when he quit to take over at Spurs in 2001.

But current boss Gordon Strachan's self-imposed exit at the end of the season may be brought forward as Lowe is keen to bring Hoddle to St Mary's straight away.

Lowe credits Hoddle with transforming the club's fortunes before he walked out and is convinced he is the man to continue the progress Strachan has made.

Hodde managed the south coast club for 14 months in 2000/01 and, when he left them for Spurs, they were in seventh place in the Premiership and unbeaten in five games.

Only last week, when asked about a possible return for Hoddle, Lowe told SunSport: "I cannot rule anything in but I cannot rule anything out, either."

# Houllier has faith in Owen

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier insisted Tuesday that England striker Michael Owen was not being left to fend for himself up front.

Critics of the Frenchman's tactics have complained that Owen who has not scored in nine games is being played as a lone striker and is not receiving the support he deserves.

Owen's goal drought has coincided with a Liverpool slump that has seen the Anfield club collect just three points from four games and drop to sixth in the Premiership table.

But Houllier, speaking ahead of Wednesday's home match against Manchester City, said: "I have great faith in Michael. I know people are thinking he is playing on his own, that is not the case, he certainly is not on his own. He has four players to support and help him."

Houllier added: "It is not a matter of who plays up front, it is how you play as a team and who from midfield gets to support Michael. I



MICHAEL OWEN

am pleased with the system we are playing and the way that we are going.

"At some stage Michael will start scoring goals. It is only a matter of time, and when he starts scoring he usually continues to score," Houllier insisted. "I am totally relaxed and confident that the goals will start coming sooner rather than later."

"I recall last season he scored a hat-trick against Manchester City after a similar run without goals."

# Baros' comeback desire

Football

AFP, London

Milan Baros believes he can help Liverpool and the Czech Republic get their hands on some silverware after making his comeback five months after breaking his ankle in Liverpool's 3-1 win at Blackburn.

"There is still a lot to play for this season," the Czech striker said Wednesday.

"I want to do well for Liverpool in the remaining games and then look towards the European Championships in the summer."

Baros, 22, is hoping one more reserve team run-out on Thursday will ensure he at least makes the bench for Sunday's FA Cup fifth round home tie against Portsmouth.

And he was keen to return to the Czech national side who have been paired in the Group of Death in Euro 2004 along with Germany, Holland and Latvia.

"I am ready now," he said. "I probably still need to play one more reserve game and then hopefully I can be on the bench against Portsmouth on Sunday," he said.

"I played a reserve game last week and that went well."

"The conditions were not good on the night and so that made the match difficult to play in, but I did not feel any reaction from the injury and that was the most important thing."

"I have been back in full training for the last three weeks now and I am feeling a lot better. I am still a

little bit scared to tackle but that will come with time.

"I do not feel any pain. The last five months have been hard because I have not been able to play, but I feel fine now."

Baros was injured at Ewood Park last September after an innocuous

Chelsea have all but wrapped up the top three places.

## Utaka's goal Premiership

AFP, Tunis

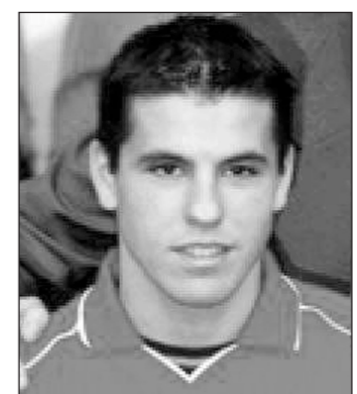
Nigeria striker John Utaka hopes his goal scoring exploits at the African Nations Cup will earn him a chance to join colleagues Jay Jay Okocha and Nwankwo Kanu in the English Premiership.

The 22-year-old, whose cool finish gave Nigeria their 2-1 quarter-final win over defending champions Cameroon, believes he is ready to step up from the French first division where he currently plays with Lens.

"If there is one league that I would want to move to, it is the English Premiership," said Utaka whose other goal at the tournament came in the group win against Benin.

"I really love the speed and the pace of the game. When I watch English football, I am really excited by it and would love to play there if I got the opportunity."

Utaka has been used as a striker by coach Christian Chukwu following the expulsion from the Nigerian squad of frontline attackers Yakubu Ayegebeni and Victor Agali for breaking a curfew.



MILAN BAROS

tackle from on-loan Liverpool defender Markus Babbel.

"This was the first major injury of my career so it was a new experience for me. I came in every day to do work in the gym or in the pool so that kept me involved," he said.

"I must admit it has been a difficult time."

Liverpool are sixth in the Premiership, two points behind fourth-placed Newcastle in the chase for a Champions League spot next season.

Arsenal, Manchester United and

## Eriksson ready to carry on

AFP, London

England coach boss Sven Goran Eriksson has agreed to talks over extending his contract to 2008 and will sit down with the English Football Association after the friendly against Portugal next week.

His existing contract runs until 2006. But, with Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich waiting in the wings with a 5 million-pound-a-year deal, the FA have offered an extension which will take him through to 2008.

Now Eriksson, 56, has agreed to meet with FA chiefs though it is still unclear if he will put pen to paper on the 4 million pound-a-year extension, newspapers reported Wednesday.

Trevor Brooking, the FA's director of football development, said: "The focus is on the next game in Portugal. Lets get it out of the way and see where we are."



PHOTO: AFP

**NOTHING IS SWEETER:** Brive players celebrate after beating Auxerre in their French Cup fixture in Brive on Tuesday.