

### Goals are bad!

REUTERS, New Delhi

Two Indian soccer teams who scored a combined total of 116 goals in their final games of the season in a bid to win promotion have been suspended, along with the two teams who let them do it.

Playing separate matches on Monday, Curtorim Gym routed Sangolda Lightning 61-1 -- 60 of them in the second half -- while rivals Wilfred Leisure won 55-1 against Dona Paula Sports Club after leading 6-0 at the break.

The two teams were vying for promotion from the second division of the regional league in the soccer-mad southern state of Goa.

They started their final matches level on points but Curtorim Gym's goal difference was better than Wilfred Leisure's by five. With team officials communicating each goal netted by their rivals, a crazy second-half scoring spree ensued.

"It is really unfortunate. We have suspended all four teams for one year and have recommended that they should be expelled permanently," Goa Football Association secretary Savio Messias said, adding that officials from the clubs had also been banned from ever holding positions on the association.

## Valencia to go to court

AFP, Valencia

Valencia supporters and shareholders are set to sue the referee of their match at Real Madrid at the weekend for one euro on grounds of negligence after he awarded Real a controversial injury time penalty.

Valencia were 30 seconds away from shattering Real's 100 percent home record and ousting them from top spot in the Spanish League on Sunday but a Luis Figo penalty saved Real in a 1-1 draw.

In injury time, a posse of Valencia defenders tussled with Raul and when the striker went down referee Pedro Trustante ruled he had been fouled by Carlos Marchena to Valencia's fury.

Lawyer Andres Sanchis, representing the supporters, said: "We want this wrong to be recognised and want symbolic damages of one euro. The referee must justify his behaviour."

"There is a man on the pitch who has an obligation as a referee. He is a judge and if he is not paying attention, it can bring about negligence. We don't believe there was an error, just negligence."

The legal fight is based on the Spanish civil code which concerns people "who cause damage while performing their jobs".

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## Leeds face FIFA ban

AFP, Zurich

Leeds United face sanctions after their Australian striker Mark Viduka failed to report for international duty.

A ban could rule Viduka out of Leeds' trip to Manchester United after the Australian Soccer Association reported his absence for a friendly international against Venezuela in Caracas to FIFA, football's governing body.

Leeds claim a hamstringing injury prevented Viduka joining up with the Socceroos in Venezuela.

But a FIFA spokesman said: "We have contacted the English FA requesting they inform the club of its duty to release a player for international matches."

FIFA rules stipulate that a player who does not comply with an international call-up request will be suspended from playing for his club for a period of five days after the date of the game for which he had been selected.

This would rule Viduka out of the trip to Old Trafford.

The Socceroos are already missing Liverpool's Harry Kewell and Blackburn's Brett Emerton, Turkish-based midfielder Josip Skoko and Spanish-based striker John Aloisi for the friendly.



IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD! Oman's Yousef Shaaban (C) consoles defender Khalifa Ayil (No 25) after their match against Japan at the Saitama stadium, north of Tokyo yesterday. Japan won 1-0 thanks to an injury time goal.

PHOTO: AFP

## President to help Jay Jay

REUTERS, Abuja

Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo has promised to help national soccer captain Jay Jay Okocha recover \$1 million of his money from one of the country's banks.

"The president has discussed the issue of the trapped funds in Societe Generale Bank with the central bank governor and he said something will definitely be done," Presidency spokesman Justin Abuah said on Tuesday, quoting Obasanjo.

The Nigerian bank was suspended from the clearing house by the central bank last year.

"I want to assure you... the bank will come to life and your money will not be lost," Abuah quoted Obasanjo as telling Okocha at a meeting in the capital Abuja.

Okocha was named best player of the 2004 African Nations Cup, which finished in Tunisia at the weekend, after scoring four goals and steering Nigeria to third place. The 30-year-old midfielder, who plays for Bolton Wanderers in the English premier league, had been worried about his money before the start of the African tournament.

"I have almost all my money in a bank in Nigeria," he told Bolton's website last month. "Now the bank has a problem and I'm in real trouble. I really don't know what to do."

There had been fears that Okocha could even miss the finals because of the problem.

"This money issue is now my big problem with Nigeria, so I want to continue to play for Bolton and earn money to take care of my family," he told a Lagos radio station last month.

# Victorious starts for ROK, Japan



AFP, Undated

South Korea opened their 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign on Wednesday with a 2-0 win over Lebanon in Asian Zone Group 7. Fellow powerhouse Japan struggled to an unconvincing 1-0 victory over minnows Oman thanks to a goal in the third minute of injury time by substitute Tatsuhiko.

China's quest to qualify got off to a winning start too after 34-year old striker Hao Haidong netted to give the side a 1-0 win over Kuwait at Guangzhou's Tianhe stadium.

### GROUP 7

The South Korean side that had reached the semifinals of the 2002 World Cup overwhelmed the Lebanese rivals with a powerful display of attacking football.

Cha Du-Ri, who plays for Frankfurt in the German league, headed the first goal in the 32nd minute from a center by Lee Young-Pyo, another South Korean exile who plays for Dutch club PSV Eindhoven.

Cho Byung-Kuk added the second in the 50th minute, but the score could have been much higher.

South Korea had 24 shots at goal, and coach Humberto Coelho said he would have been happier if more had found the target.

"We could have done better especially in front of goal," said the Portuguese coach who took over from Guus Hiddink, the hero of South Korea's 2002 World Cup campaign.

The Lebanese almost took the

lead against the run of play in the 30th minute when Mahmoud Chahoud was fouled in the penalty area.

The penalty from Mohammad Kassas was easily smothered by South Korean goalkeeper Lee Woon-Jae.

South Korea, fresh from a big victory against Oman in a friendly on Saturday, opened the match at high speed and maintained their edge throughout against an out-classed Lebanon.

Chances fell frequently, with Cha Du-Ri coming close in the first half and Lee Chun-Soo hitting the woodwork with a free kick in the 72nd minute.

Coach Coelho praised his players for a fierce attacking display but said they had to learn to be more crafty.

"We launched some good attacks. What I also want is a change of pace that will make them more effective," he said.

Vietnam blanked the Maldives 4-0 in the other match of the group in Hanoi.

### GROUP 3

Asian champions Japan had promised to go for the kill against the Gulf side but instead were frustrated for long periods with Oman keeper Ali Al Habsi pulling off a series of fine saves at Saitama.

Kubo's late goal, collecting a rebound, made up for an early disappointment when Reggina midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura missed a penalty in the 29th minute after Naohiro Takahara was brought down in the area.

Al Habsi, the only professional in the Oman side, dived superbly to save the spot-kick.

Japan's first attempt on goal had come from a header by Atsushi Yanagisawa from a Nakamura's corner in the third minute, followed by another attempt from Takahara in the 17th.

In the 18th minute, Brazilian-born Alessandro Santos unleashed a shot from outside the area, only to see Al Habsi jump to punch out.

After Yasuhito Endo and

Takahara missed another two chances, the Japanese faced a scare as Oman team repeatedly threatened, but Imad Al Hosni's shot hit a defender in the 44th minute and Fouzi Bashir's effort was saved by keeper Seigo Narazaki in injury time.

The Japanese, seeking a third straight berth in the World Cup, regained control in the second half.

Kubo replaced Yanagisawa at half time and he was presented with several scoring chances only to waste them to the disappointment of a 60,207 crowd. In the 70th minute, Nakamura squandered another golden chance when his close-range shot following a Kubo header went over the bar.

Oman often looked sharp on the counter-attack but were largely restricted to long-range efforts.

It was a repeat performance for the Japanese, who defeated Oman 1-0 seven years ago in Muscat in the opening qualifiers on their way to winning their first-ever appearance in the World Cup in 1998 in France.

Japan stretched their unbeaten record against Oman to two wins and two draws. Japan will next play Singapore, while Oman will take on India, both away games on March 31 in the four-team competition.

Group rivals India also made a winning with a 1-0 win over Singapore at Margao.

Mohun Bagan mid-fielder Renedy Singh scored the winner four minutes into the second-half, before the Indians defended strongly to earn full points in their opening fixture.

India, who have never played in the World Cup before, made a similar start four years ago when they beat 1990 finalists United Arab Emirates 1-0, but failed to build on the advantage.

Singapore, ranked 107th in the India's 138 in the FIFA standings, failed to draw level despite dominating the second-half.

India play Oman next on March 31 before taking on Japan on

June 9.

### GROUP 4

In Beijing, Hao's superb play throughout paid off in the 75th minute as he headed home a deep cross from the right by midfielder Zhao Hunzhe after Kuwait keeper Shehab Aha Kankune came off his line in a failed attempt to punch the pass away.

The win marked the first for China's Dutch coach Arie Haan, who has taken up the challenge of leading China to the World Cup again following the nation's first appearance in the tournament during the 2002 finals.

Haan appeared extremely nervous on the sidelines as his side repeatedly missed chances, despite valiant efforts from Hao to set up his teammates.

In the 16th minute Zhang Yuning sent a Hao cross on to Kankune's foot just outside the goalmouth, while a charging Zheng Zhi sent a nifty Hao pass sailing over the bar nine minutes later as the first half ended scoreless.

China had 14 shots on goal, but had difficulty finishing as the Kuwaiti team repeatedly packed the penalty area and rarely made an attempt to counter-attack.

Kuwait failed to get a shot on goal in the entire match, sticking closely to the strategy of Brazilian coach Paulo Cesar Carpegiani of staying deep and defending.

Following Hao's goal, the Kuwaiti defence maintained its form and continued to repulse China's attack, but the side's emotions began to show through with Hohayr Al-Shammari and Hamid Al-Harabi being booked in the 76th and 90th minute respectively, while Fahad Al-Hamad was sent off for spitting on Chinese captain Li Weifeng.

A total of 32 countries were divided into eight groups in the Asian first round and top finishers from each group will advance to the second round, vying for at most five places in the World Cup in Germany.

# The match no one wants to miss



AFP, Dublin

The Republic of Ireland's preparations for the 2006 World Cup qualifiers will move up a gear when they welcome world champions Brazil to Lansdowne Road for what is already a 44,000 sell-out match.

It may only be friendly but the allure of seeing the likes of Ronaldo and Ronaldinho, Roberto Carlos and Juninho, has proved hard to resist for the Irish footballing public.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, whose team were due to fly in to Dublin on Monday, has paid Ireland the compliment of picking a strong squad with the fact that so many of his leading players are at European clubs a help rather than a hindrance in this case.

Meanwhile his Ireland counterpart Brian Kerr has called on home fans not to let themselves be so dazzled by the Brazilian

superstars on display that they forget to give the hosts their usual passionate backing at Lansdowne Road.

"I hope the fans give us a lot of support. Don't just come to admire them (Brazil) and respect them. That can be done after the game... It will be a special night, let's have an atmosphere for the game."

Remarkably, given their countries' respective football records, the only previous occasion that five-time world champions Brazil were in Dublin, in 1987, they lost 1-0 with Liam Brady scoring the decisive goal.

A similar scoreline on Wednesday, even in a friendly, would make the rest of the football world sit up and take notice and make it 2-2 in matches between the nations.

But whatever the final result both managers will have other targets in mind as well.

For Parreira it is a chance to assess players' form in the middle of their bid to emerge with one of the five coveted places from the

South America World Cup qualifying section - the reigning champions no longer qualify automatically.

Meanwhile Kerr will have a better idea after this match how his players cope with the ordeal of facing a top-class side.

"To play against Brazil is a boyhood dream for everybody so we're all really looking forward to it," said the Republic's forward Kevin Kilbane.

"We're expecting a good game, a good atmosphere. They've got tremendously talented players and it will hopefully be a good spectacle for everybody to watch," the Everton winger added.

If Jason McAteer takes the field on Wednesday, then the match will have added significance for the midfielder.

McAteer, of First Division Sunderland, has not played for the Republic since a 4-2 European Championship qualifying defeat against Russia in Moscow in September 2002.



PHOTO: AP

Brazil's superstar Ronaldo speaks to the media after a training session at Lansdowne Road, Dublin on February 17.

## 'Hand's off Rooney'



AFP, London

Everton manager David Moyes has again warned off Manchester United and Chelsea who are reported to be tracking Wayne Rooney.

Rooney is currently on international duty with England in Portugal and is expected to partner Liverpool's Michael Owen in Wednesday's friendly international.

Manchester United and Chelsea were both reported to be considering a summer move for the 18-year-old.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson was reported to have been so impressed with Rooney's display against his champions in United's 4-3 win at Goodison Park recently, that the teenager's name was put to the top of his summer wish list.

A 25 million pound fee was touted, and Chelsea have consistently been linked with the player since Roman Abramovich's arrival.

Moyes, who has been forced to warn off clubs before, told the club's website: "I have always stated that he is not for sale."

"And unless the board are saying something that I do not know, they are in total agreement with that as well."

"Everton do not have to sell

people. That has always been my view and that will not alter.

"Unless I am told differently by the board of directors there will be no players leaving that I want to keep at the club."

But Moyes' words will not counter the belief that Everton could not refuse a massive bid.

The problem for Everton is that several players will leave in the summer when they are out of contract, and any new contract talks have been put on hold until then - and that includes Rooney.

If his advisors present wage demands that are impossible for Everton to match, an auction could commence.

Rooney became the youngest ever England international a year ago after coming on in England's 3-1 defeat by Australia at West Ham's Upton Park at the age of 17 years and 111 days.

Life changed for Rooney on October 19 2002 when he came off the bench at Arsenal to strike a dipping, curling 25-yard shot that bamboozled England goalkeeper David Seaman and earned Everton a memorable win.

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