

Lehmann wants Kahn's gloves

AFP, Berlin
Arsenal's German international goalkeeper Jens Lehmann has reopened his war of words with Bayern Munich's Oliver Kahn claiming he should be Germany's first choice for the European championships in Portugal.

Lehmann, 34, has been forced to play second fiddle to Kahn, 35, since his debut back in February 1998 and admits he is perplexed at how the Munich goalkeeper - whom he claims is error-prone - continues to force him onto the substitutes' bench.

"My performances are more consistent," Lehmann told Kicker magazine. "I have only made two mistakes in the past year - one against Leeds United and the other against (Dinamo) Kiev.

"So I can not accept that someone is better than me."

The comments come at an apt time with a Kahn howler allowing Croatia to equalise in Germany's 2-1 friendly win on Wednesday.

Lehmann admits Kahn performed heroically in the 2002 World Cup but then let himself down in the final when Brazil striker Ronaldo pounced on his fumble to open the scoring.

"I told Kahn in Japan 'You played great - except in the final,'" added Lehmann.

The former Borussia Dortmund shot-stopper hopes to be selected ahead of Kahn in Germany's next warm-up match with Belgium on March 31 in Cologne.

Until then the pair will continue their frosty relationship with most of the words said off the pitch.

"I do not know what we have to talk about," revealed Lehmann. "I do not have a 24-year-old girlfriend. I have a different life."

Nice proposal

AFP, Bremen

Werder Bremen's prolific Brazilian marksman Ailton has vowed to get married at the Weserstadion if his team can lift their first German championship since 1993.

Ailton has bagged 19 goals to help Bremen establish a nine-point gap at the top of the Bundesliga and vowed to marry his long-term girlfriend Rosalie on the stadium's pitch if he wins the German crown for the first time.

"If I win the German championship with Werder, Rosalie and I will get married on the pitch," Ailton is reported to have told German magazine Bunte.

Ailton, 30, has already agreed to join Schalke 04 on a free transfer at the end of the season.

Only on a Real off day

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich need a minor miracle to defeat Real Madrid in the last sixteen of the Champions League, according to their vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

Recent defeats to Alemannia Aachen (2-1) and VfL Bochum (1-0) have seen Bayern's confidence evaporate ahead of the first leg clash with Real on February 24 at the Olympic Stadium.

"For Bayern to reach the quarter-finals Real Madrid must have two poor days at the office and we have to play really well," admitted Rummenigge.

"Even if we play to our maximum I am not sure we can knock them out."

"We are not playing well and our position in the Bundesliga emphasises that."

Real Madrid's general manager Jorge Valdano claims 2001 Champions League victors Bayern can no longer count themselves amongst the top five teams in Europe.

"Real, Juventus, AC Milan, Arsenal and Manchester United are now the top five," Valdano told German television station SAT 1. "Bayern are not in the form to be included in that company."

English thugs in court

AFP, Faro, Portugal

Two England fans will appear in court here Thursday accused of attacking Portuguese police officers before Wednesday's friendly international between the two countries which ended in a 1-1 draw, the Lusa news agency reported.

The two men, a 28-year-old from Poole and a 30-year-old from Sheffield, were part of a group which allegedly attacked undercover officers who were providing security in the centre of the southern city of Faro.

The police were not seriously hurt in the incident and no other arrests for violence were reported, Lusa said, adding that the duo spent the night in jail and will appear in court later Thursday.

The men were part of an estimated 2,000 England fans who headed to the southern Algarve province without tickets.



Portugal's Pauleta (C) celebrates scoring the equaliser while Deco (L) and Nuno Valente (R) run to join him against England during the international friendly match at the Estadio Algarve in Faro 18 February 2004. The game ended 1-1.

Mixed day for heavyweights

Football

AFP, Paris

European champions France were comfortable winners over Belgium on Wednesday but two of their main challengers for Euro 2004, Italy and the Czech Republic, drew on a night of friendly matches.

Germany need a late goal from substitute Carsten Ramelow to secure a 2-1 win over Croatia after Oliver Kahn had handed the Croats an equaliser.

England defender Ledley King scored on his debut against the European championships' host nation Portugal before Pauleta equalised with a superb free kick to force a 1-1 draw in Faro.

Holland made a modest start to their road to Portugal as they overcame a defensive United States team 1-0, while Spain

began their preparations with a 2-1 defeat of Peru.

World champions Brazil meanwhile were held to a goalless draw by the Republic of Ireland in Dublin.

France stretched their unbeaten run to 14 games by beating Belgium 2-0 in Brussels as Sidney Govou and debutant Louis Saha compensated for the absence of injured first-choice striking duo Thierry Henry and David Trezeguet with goals in each half.

Govou slotted home a loose ball in first-half injury time after Saha appeared to have been fouled.

Zinedine Zidane drew the Belgian defence before slipping the ball to Saha, for the Manchester United striker to cap his debut with a 76th minute goal.

In Faro, a stunning strike from Pauleta denied England the chance to ruin Luis Figo's 100th

minutes to go thanks to Antonio Di Natale's angled header.

Italy were pegged back two minutes later by Tomas Rosicky's superb right-footed curling shot. Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni said his side lost their shape when he substituted Vieri, Francesco Totti and Alessandro Del Piero for the start of the second-half.

"We deserved our lead and what pleased me most was the way Vieri, Totti and Del Piero linked up. When the three play together there is no limit to what they can do," said Trap, who warned of the threat from the Czechs at Euro 2004.

"They exploited the space and gave us many problems. They are a very talented team."

In Split, Bayer Leverkusen's Ramelow volleyed home the winner in the 90th minute to save the blushes of goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, who had gifted Croatia's Mato Neretljak an equaliser four minutes earlier.

Croatia were unlucky not to get a draw but their shaky defence will interest Euro 2004 group opponents England, France and Switzerland.

German coach Rudi Voller was furious with his side's lacklustre opening.

"I am relieved that we got the win especially after the defeat by France - when we were poor."

"We can build on this now." Holland, tipped for success in Portugal, dominated a defensive-minded United States team in Amsterdam in a match decided by a single individual goal scored by Arjen Robben.

Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy netted twice for the Dutch in the first half but both efforts were disallowed.

Two Euro 2004 qualifiers were given a jolt. Sweden went down 2-1 to Albania in Tirana, while Switzerland lost 2-1 to beaten African Nations Cup finalists Morocco in Rabat.

In other matches, Robert Earnshaw claimed a hat-trick as Wales humiliated Scotland 4-0 in Cardiff.



Czech goalie Jaromir Blazek (R) stretches to block a header by Italy's Christian Vieri during a friendly between the two countries in Palermo, 18 February 2004.

Scolari's WC play for Portugal

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Eighteen months after guiding Brazil to their fifth World Cup crown, Luiz Felipe Scolari believes the application of his winning formula is starting to pay dividends for Portugal.

The starting line-up Scolari used in Wednesday's 1-1 draw with England was widely seen as an indicator of the kind of team Portugal will field when they host Euro 2004 this summer.

As such it bore a distinct Scolari stamp, in particular with the deployment of two holding midfielders -- FC Porto's Costinha and Real Madrid's Figo -- to bolster the side's defensive foundations in the way that Kleberston and Gilberto Silva did for Brazil in Japan and South Korea.

"Having those two in there makes us more consistent, harder to beat. I was pleased with the way it worked," Scolari said.

"In England, we were up against a very strong team and if the system works that means something. We can learn a lot from playing matches like this."

The 55-year-old famously provoked an outcry in his homeland by pronouncing that the "beautiful game is dead," in the run-up to 2002.

As things turned out, the extent of Scolari's alleged cynicism had been wildly overstated.

Brazil triumphed in the Far East

playing exhilarating football worthy of the country's proudest traditions and any Portuguese team that contains both Luis Figo and Rui Costa is hardly going to be short on entertainment value.

Scolari's mission however is to ensure that the reserves of talent contained in Portugal's "golden generation" are fully exploited, that players like Figo and Costa do not end their careers without a major title to their name.

That, in the Brazilian's view, means injecting a bit of steel alongside the style -- and that is what he believes he can see emerging in his squad.

"There were many good things in the way we played for a technical point of view. We were better than England for a lot of the match although we did not translate that superiority into goals, which is ultimately what counts."

"But I was not just happy with the way we played. The players attitude was also very important. I really liked the way they responded when we went 1-0 down. Right to the end they were fighting to score two goals. Okay, we only got one but we kept trying to the end of the match. That is the attitude I wanted to see."



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

FIFA World Rankings World Champs stay firm

AFP, Paris

World champions Brazil remain top of the FIFA World Rankings while newly-crowned African champions Tunisia improve 14 places to 31st. Losing African finalists Morocco climb 5 places to 33rd.

TOP 30 RANKINGS

1. Brazil	846 pts
2. France	828
3. Spain	795
4. Holland	749
5. Mexico	742
6. Argentina	741
7. England	740
8. Czech Rep	739
9. Turkey	737
10. Italy	731
11. USA	729
12. Germany	727
13. Cameroon	720
14. Denmark	712
15. Ireland	709
16. Belgium	693
17. Portugal	681
18. Costa Rica	679
19. Croatia	676
20. Sweden	674
21. Nigeria	672
22. Uruguay	669
23. South Korea	665
24. Paraguay	661
25. Russia	657
26. Poland	654
27. Senegal	651
28. Japan	650
29. Romania	650
30. Saudi Arabia	648

Irish hold Brazil

Football

AFP, Dublin

World champions Brazil were held to a goalless draw by the Republic of Ireland in an entertaining friendly international in front of a capacity 44,000 crowd at Lansdowne Road here Wednesday.

Both Ronaldo and Ronaldinho missed chances as did the Republic's Tottenham duo of striker Robbie Keane and defender Stephen Carr.

However, it needed some fine saves from Brazil keeper Dida and Ireland counterpart Shay Given to ensure the game stayed scoreless.

"Although it was 0-0 it was an exciting game," said Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira afterwards.

"Both teams denied each other space. But I thought we played better in the second half, we kept the ball a little bit more."

And he played down Graham Kavanagh's challenge on Gilberto Silva which ultimately led to the Arsenal midfielder going off in the 14th minute and raising fears he will miss Arsenal's Premiership crunch match with Chelsea on Saturday.

"Gilberto has twisted an ankle. I think he will be all right. (Playing on) Saturday may be too close but we will see in the next 24 hours how he is."

"Ireland are not a dirty team. They played very strong, very tough," Parreira added.

And the coach said that was why, with Brazil set to resume their so far unbeaten World Cup qualifying campaign, he had only made two

substitutions. Meanwhile Republic coach Brian Kerr said: "It was a good battling performance but we used the ball well at times."

Reflecting on Cardiff midfielder Kavanagh's challenge on Gilberto he added: "Carlos Alberto Parreira said they don't do friendlies. Graham was just agreeing. It wasn't going to be a pallysy-wallysy match."

"We had four or five good chances but they had a few ones as well."

Brazil began the match with eight of the side that beat Germany in the final to win a record fifth World Cup in 2002, Dida and midfielders Ze Roberto and Kaka the only exceptions.

And they should have taken the lead in the ninth minute when Ronaldinho, played in by Ronaldo, after a strong-run by Kaka, shot wide.

But the Republic were far from overawed by their illustrious opponents, playing some neat football of their own and three minutes later they missed a glorious chance.

Kavanagh's corner from the right fell to John O'Shea and from his shot Robbie Keane, inside the six-yard box, trying to turn the ball in weakly kicked it straight at Kaka.

Soon afterwards Brazil lost Gilberto, still seemingly feeling the effects of Kavanagh's strong sixth-minute challenge.

But the game really came alive late in the first half after Clinton Morrison wasted a tremendous opportunity.

Played in by an awful defensive header from Edmilson, brought on as a substitute for Gilberto, the Birmingham forward was clean

through on goal as he set off from 10 yards inside the Brazil half.

However, with just Dida to beat, Birmingham forward Morrison dragged his 43rd minute shot from outside the box hopelessly wide.

Dida then kept the game scoreless at half-time when he blocked full-back Carr's shot from point-blank range with his legs.

Ireland continued to press forward and in the 54th minute Morrison burst down the right only to see his accurate cross headed over the bar by Keane from six yards out.

But four minutes later Ronaldinho's looping ball left the Irish defence flat-footed only for Ronaldo to shoot over the top of Given's goal.

Industrious Cardiff midfielder Kavanagh then conceded a 61st minute free-kick 25 yards out after he was late with a tackle on Ze Roberto.

That was well within Carlos's range but the renowned dead-ball specialist shot straight at the wall.

Half-time substitute Julio Baptista then played in Ronaldo, who one-on-one with Given saw his shot blocked by the keeper's legs as the Newcastle shot-stopper made his first meaningful save of the match.

Ronaldinho's follow-up shot from outside the box then clipped the crossbar. Moments later Ronaldo was through again but this time Given saved at his near-post.

Late on Keane hit the side-netting when played in by substitute Jason McAteer while at the other end Andy O'Brien's fine block tackle denied Ronaldinho.



Brazil's wall Ze Roberto, 11, Kaka, 10, Julio Baptista, 18 and Edmilson, 15 stand during a free kick from Ireland during their international friendly in Dublin 18th February 2004. The game finished in a 0-0 tie.

Leeds to fight Viduka ban

Football

AFP, Leeds

Relegation-threatened Leeds United plan to challenge a FIFA ban on Mark Viduka playing against Manchester United on Saturday following an Australian soccer protest.

"Leeds United Football Club is taking legal advice and will explore every available avenue in seeking to redress this potential injustice," Leeds said in a statement on their website.

Leeds said they were "outraged" by the Australian Soccer Association (ASA) who called for a FIFA ban after the striker pulled out of Wednesday's friendly international against Venezuela in Caracas.

"This decision has shown a complete lack of understanding and compassion towards Mark whose father Joe is still critically ill over in Australia," Leeds added.

Leeds, sinking under 100 million

pounds (189m dollars) of debts, pointed out they had no hesitation in allowing Viduka to return to Melbourne for three weeks to be with his sick father's bedside.

And they said that when he returned to England he complained of pain in his lower back and tightness in his hamstrings.

"Leeds United Football Club and Mark Viduka have following his selection for this game been open and honest with ASA and given his loyalty to both club and country it is difficult to understand why such a hard stance has been taken which does not appear consistent with that for those other players who, for whatever reasons, did not travel to Caracas," Leeds said.

"Leeds United Football Club fighting a battle for survival both on and off the pitch, have just 13 games to secure their place in the Premiership."

The ASA said earlier Thursday it would invoke FIFA regulations to ban Viduka and Scott Chipperfield, who plays for Swiss side Basel, from playing in their next European club

matches over their failure to play for Australia.

Viduka and Chipperfield, along with Harry Kewell, Brett Emerton, John Aloisi and Josip Skoko missed Australia's 1-1 draw with the South Americans in Caracas on Thursday.

The ASA said it was satisfied that Kewell, Skoko, Aloisi and Emerton were unable to travel because of injuries which were substantiated by medical reports.

Viduka has been quoted as saying he will walk away from the Socceros if the ASA enforced a FIFA ban on him for missing the Venezuela international.

ASA said in a statement on Thursday that it was not satisfied Viduka had sustained an injury which would have prevented him from playing in Caracas.

Chipperfield did not connect with a flight from Madrid to Caracas on Monday and instead of taking one of two alternative flights suggested to him he returned to Switzerland.

Draw of honour

Football

AFP, Dublin

Republic of Ireland manager Brian Kerr kept his emotions in check but there was no disguising his pride after a friendly goalless draw with world champions Brazil here at Lansdowne Road.

Kerr's new-look team more than held their own against a Brazil side boasting eight players who started the 2002 World Cup Final against Germany.

"We had five friendlies last year. We played Scotland, Norway, Turkey, Australia and Canada and now Brazil."

"So make your mind up on what was the best result of that lot," Kerr replied when asked to put Wednesday

night's performance in front of a capacity 44,000 crowd into context.

"Given the fact that there were a lot of changes in the team and that we did some experimenting with a few players, it was good night for us," said the softly-spoken Kerr.

"We had a few young players and a few who don't play regularly for us out there, such as John O'Shea, Andy Reid, Andy O'Brien, Graham Kavanagh and Clinton Morrison."

"It was a very good, disciplined performance and we passed the ball quite well at times."

"They didn't get beat and I'm happy with that but I am happier when we get points in competitive games," insisted Kerr whose team begin their qualifying campaign for the 2006 World Cup in September.

"But there's nobody else who can play that's better than them if you are

playing a friendly match," added Kerr ahead of next month's warm-up fixture with the Czech Republic.

Even Kerr's reserve might have disappeared had Robbie Keane not twice missed great chances to realise every fan's dream of scoring against Brazil.

Firstly, he shot straight at keeper Dida from inside the six-yard box following John O'Shea's header from a corner.

Then, in the second half, he headed over the crossbar from close range following Clinton Morrison's pinpoint cross.

Keane's Tottenham team-mate Stephen Carr also went close when, on the stroke of half-time, he ghosted into the box only to see Dida save with his legs.