

PLAYOFFS

Socceroos on way to hostile land

AGENCIES, Buenos Aires



Australia coach Guus Hiddink has played down the hostility which has continued to fester between his team and Uruguay since their last meeting in a World Cup qualifier four years ago.

The two sides face each other in a two-leg playoff for a berth at next year's finals in Germany, with the first match in Montevideo on Saturday.

Australian directors have been keen to revive memories of their last visit to the Uruguayan capital in 2001 when they said they were insulted and spat at by an angry mob when the team arrived at the airport.

This time, Australia have chosen to stay across the River Plate in Buenos Aires. They will arrive in Montevideo on the eve of the match and leave immediately afterwards.

"There's always a lot of talk before the game but the federations of Australia and Uruguay have done a good job so far," Hiddink told reporters on Tuesday.

"It's normal for the environment to be hostile when the whole stadium is against you but if it's within the rules and regulations of the sport, there's no problem," the Dutchman added.

"Uruguay have good players, with a lot of experience at the top level in Europe."

Australia were beaten 3-0 in Montevideo last time, losing 3-1 on aggregate as they added to an unhappy record of falling at the final hurdle in World Cup qualifiers.

They also lost to Scotland in a playoff for the 1986 World Cup, Argentina (1994) and Iran (1998).

This time, however, Australia's players believe they are better prepared than before. They also play the second leg at home in Sydney on Wednesday.

"It's not going to be easy, but playing at this level is not easy. So the players are used to it, and we've just got to stick together," midfielder Vince Grella told reporters.

"I think that's an important thing, of us sticking together and being a strong unit. And we should be okay."

Fellow midfielder Marco Bresciano said: "As soon as we landed the first time in Uruguay, it was probably threatening as well. I mean we had all the supporters there, always, not leaving us at peace. Even at the hotel, making noise, making it difficult for us."

Days after Uruguay qualified to meet Australia, Football Federation Australia (FFA) chief executive John O'Neill said the Australian players would not hesitate to walk off if there was any crowd trouble.

"We need to make sure that FIFA, under whose auspices this game is being run, have taken all the measures to ensure there is no repetition of what happened four years ago," he said.

O'Neill's remarks were followed by a row over the date of the game, which Uruguay suggested bringing forward to Friday, and confusion of the kickoff time, which changed twice before being settled on Tuesday for 5 p.m. (1900 GMT).

Uruguay have often retorted that Australia exaggerated the events at the airport last time and that their previous stay was otherwise trouble-free.

Australia have qualified for the World Cup finals on one previous occasion, losing in the opening round of the 1974 tournament in West Germany.

Uruguay have won the tournament twice and have made 10 appearances at the finals.

SLOVAKS STILL IN THE DARK
Slovakians may be unable to watch the biggest soccer match in the country's history because of a row over television broadcasting rights.

Slovakian officials on Tuesday accused Spain of demanding "extortionary" conditions for rights for the World Cup playoff, first leg in Madrid on Saturday.

The second leg takes place in Bratislava on November 16.

With only four days to go before the clash in the Spanish capital, no deal is in place to allow the game to be broadcast on Slovakian television.

"The Spanish side is asking for terms that aren't just, I'd say, unjustified, but even extortionary," said Vojtech Miklos, head of a company that handles marketing for the national team.

Miklos reacted to reports in Spanish media of a 240,000 euro (\$281,700) asking price by saying: "When something costs 20,000 or 30,000 why should we pay 200,000?"

"The Spaniards have received serious offers (from the Slovak side)," he added. "We can't let ourselves be extorted." Slovakia have never qualified for the World Cup, or made the playoffs, in the nation's 12-year history.

TURKEY HIT BY INJURY

Hertha Berlin midfielder Yildiray Basturk and Besiktas midfielder Ibrahim Akin have been forced out of Turkey's World Cup play-off against Switzerland due to injuries. Both players have knee injuries, doctor

Cengiz Dinc told Anatolia news agency in Switzerland, where the Turkish team is preparing for Saturday's match.

Basturk will probably re-join the squad for the second leg on November 16, he said Tuesday.

CZECHS UNHAPPY

The Czech Football Association (CMFS) on Tuesday lodged an official protest with its Norwegian counterpart over a condition of the pitch which will host the first of two World Cup 2006 playoff matches on Saturday.

Association general secretary, Petr Fousek, said the Czechs had also contacted football's world ruling body FIFA about the state of the Ullevaal stadium pitch.

"Further steps will be decided in the next 48 hours," he said in a statement on the association's website.

"The pitch is in a very bad state after heavy rain and matches played at the weekend."

Fousek added that representatives of the Norwegian association had ignored this fact, which had made them the target of criticism from within their own ranks.

SATURDAY'S PLAYOFFS	
MADRID	Spain - Slovakia
MONTEVIDEO	Uruguay - Australia
BERNE	Switzerland - Turkey
OSLO	Norway - Czech Republic
PORT OF SPAIN	Trinidad and Tobago - Bahrain

Liverpool a la MU!

AFP, London

Rick Parry, the chief executive of Liverpool, has held talks with American billionaire Robert Kraft as the English Premiership club pursues new investment to fund its planned new stadium.

Parry met Kraft, the owner of the New England Patriots gridiron team, in Boston earlier this week but did not confirm the nature of his discussions.

"It certainly wasn't a secret visit, having attended two games with a combined attendance of over 100,000 people while I was there," Parry told Liverpool's website.

"I've actually known the Kraft family since meeting them in Boston back in 2001 and have had a long-standing invitation to visit the Gillette stadium, which is one of the very few privately-funded stadia in the USA."

"They were keen for me to see at close hand how the match day operation ran and I watched both the New England Revolution v Chicago Fire MLS game on Sunday and the New England Patriots v Indianapolis Colts NFL fixture a day later."

"It also gave us the opportunity to discuss at length the way in which they had funded the construction of the ground."

British media reports on Wednesday claimed Liverpool were discussing a deal with Kraft which could result in Liverpool selling naming rights to the new stadium the club plans to build in Stanley Park, close to the current ground at Anfield.

Ronaldo up against Zidane

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazil striker Ronaldo and France midfielder Zinedine Zidane have invited some of the world's best players to take part in the third 'Game against Poverty', next month.

The Real Madrid players, who are goodwill ambassadors for the United Nations Development Programme, will each captain a team, the club's website reported.

Italian referee Pierluigi Collina will come out of retirement to officiate the match in the German city of Duesseldorf on December 22.

Proceeds from the game, which was held in Madrid last year, will go to fund anti-poverty projects around the world.

FIFA lifts ban on Yemen

REUTERS, London

FIFA has provisionally lifted the suspension imposed on Yemen's football association (YFF) in August.

"As a result of this decision, the YFF is once again entitled to participate in FIFA competitions and all forms of cooperation can be reassumed," FIFA said on Wednesday.

World soccer's ruling body said its emergency committee made the decision this week following a report by Mohamed bin Hammam, president of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), on his visit to Yemen in mid-September.

FIFA had imposed the suspension for what it called serious interference by political authorities in the internal affairs of the YFF. "In reaching their decision, the emergency committee took account of the fact that the Yemeni political authorities, led by the Minister for Youth and Sport, have pledged their support and given their written consent to all necessary steps," a FIFA statement said.

Yemen are ranked 131 in the world.

Biman almost

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ISPAHANI-BANGLA CAT
An unbeaten 77 by Kamrul Islam powered Ishpani to an easy victory against Bangla Cat.

Kamrul added 89 runs with Mazharuddin (44) for the third wicket as Ishpani scored 167-4 in 42.2 overs in reply to newcomers' 166 all out in 42 overs.

Earlier Debabrata Paul and Yasin Arafat picked up three wickets each to restrict their opponents to a modest total.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BIMAN: 241-6 in 50 overs (Sanwar 23, Hasanuzzaman 39, Sajjad 79 not out, Mosharrarf 52 not out; Saiful 3-21).

ORION: 54 all out in 19.3 overs (Sajjad Ahmed 13; Mushfiqur 3-12, Sharif 3-3, Mosharrarf 3-3).

Result: Biman won by 187 runs.
JAMUNA: 119 all out in 25.1 overs (Rasel 35, Kawsiq 12, Ziaur Rahman 18 not out; Farhad 3-22, Alamgir 3-23, Dollar 2-35).

ACME: 120/5 in 27.5 overs (Farhad 65 not out, Bashar 21; Sujon 2-12, Ziaur 1-33).

Result: Acme won by six wickets.
BANGLA CAT: 166 all out in 42 overs (Rafiqul 24, Mahubub 42, Rezaawanul 28 not out; Debrabata 3-30, Yasin 3-34).

ISPAHANI: 167-4 in 42.2 overs (Nafees 27, Kamrul 77 not out, Mazhar 44; Enamul 2-35).

Result: Ishpani won by six wickets.



Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson smiles at a press conference while announcing the launching of a Manchester United Soccer School at Dubai's Sports City on Wednesday.

French booters blame govt

REUTERS, Martinique

Top French soccer players, reacting to riots in major cities, have urged authorities to address the problems of disaffected youths growing up in the suburbs.

"I grew up in the suburbs and I feel very close to these youths," said defender Lilian Thuram, the most capped player in France's squad, which is in Martinique to play a friendly match against Costa Rica.

"The situation makes me sick. Nobody is asking the right questions. Nobody is trying to look at the real problems," the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship winner added.

"The main issue is (the youths') insecurity but no one is talking about the best way to give people a job. People are talking about insecurity rather than unemployment."

The protests, blamed on racism and unemployment in rundown suburbs, have spread from Paris's poor suburbs to French towns across the country.

The French government approved emergency measures on Tuesday

allowing curfews to be imposed in riot-hit areas after 12 nights of unrest.

Youths threw Molotov cocktails at police and torched cars in several French cities and towns in a 13th night of violence, ignoring the government's imposition of rarely used emergency laws.

Police said on Wednesday that 573 vehicles were set ablaze across the country overnight, down from 860 the night before. One official said the incidents were sporadic. The number of people detained rose to 204 from 151 the night before.

Several French internationals grew up in Paris suburbs, among them Arsenal striker Thierry Henry, who is with the team in Martinique and told reporters he did not wish to speak about the riots.

Zinedine Zidane, the son of Algerian immigrants who grew up in a tough Marseille district, missed the trip to Martinique because of a groin injury.

"They are trying to convince the public that these people are nothing but rioters... which is not the truth," Thuram said, criticising the government of

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, which faces a presidential election in 2007.

"Three years ago, there was an election here and insecurity decided the vote. Now another election is looming and insecurity is the number one issue again," he said.

"Actually, they are trying to find a scapegoat as they are unable to find a solution to the job problems," he said.

Olympique Lyon midfielder Florent Malouda said the current situation had been inevitable.

"People in the suburbs are desperate and it was always going to come to this," he said.

"We have reached breaking point, said Malouda's teammate Eric Abidal. "This situation is anything but new and a solution is still to be found."

Abidal, who grew up in Lyon's suburb of La Duchere said: "When I was there, there was a supermarket but the guys there refused to hire people from our neighbourhood. I can understand that people are fed up to see things like that."

NFL draw today

FROM PAGE 12
and NFL tournament committee secretary Manzoor Hossain Malu yesterday.

"It is now uncertain whether the matches from outside Dhaka would be telecast or not. It would be a big problem for us because our deal with the sponsors is that the federation must ensure live telecast of at least 20 matches. There would be 12 matches in Dhaka but broadcasting of those matches will not suffice," he added.

The BTV has only agreed to telecast the matches in Dhaka but refused to take their crew and equipment to the other venues due to 'lack of security'.

It was learned that the sports minister had a talk with the DG of BTV, Mohammed Hanif, yesterday but there was no positive response from the boss of the state-run television.

Sources said that Information Minister M Shamsul Islam had earlier ensured the BFF in a letter that the BTV would telecast all the matches like it did in the past. The BFF officials are still banking on that promise that things would go in their favour once the information minister is freed from his Saarc Summit commitments.

Vaughan's absence

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have a number of good pacemen," he said.

Pakistan lost their last Test at the Multan stadium -- against arch rivals India last year -- in a defeat which triggered a controversy over the pitch.

Pakistan team management criticised English curator Andy Atkinson for not preparing the type of pitch they demanded, even though the home team batted and fielded poorly to hand India their first-ever Test win in Pakistan.

"What happened in the past is past. My young team has gained good experience in the last two series in India and the West Indies earlier this year, so I expect a very good fight from them," said Inzamam.

Both the Pakistani and England teams reached Multan early Wednesday and were scheduled to hold net sessions in the afternoon.

Tendulkar won't

FROM PAGE 12
a positive approach by the players.

"It's a wheel, once you push it, it rolls on its own and gathers momentum, which was what was missing, he said, adding that Chappell's presence was making a difference.

"He is among the top players to have played this game. Obviously his thinking is different, it has influenced the way the team approaches the game.

"It is not only about technique, not only about practical things, but the theories, which, sitting back in the room you can visualise so many things and start thinking differently."

Tendulkar hopes the team can maintain the momentum until the 2007 World Cup, but said it would be one step at a time for himself.

"I think it is important to focus more on the near future. It's like a camera lens. The moment you start focusing on things which are far off, you lose focus of things close to you."

India have a busy season ahead. They play five home one-dayers against South Africa later this month before Sri Lanka return to play three Tests. They tour Pakistan in January and host England in March-April.

More than a friendly



AFP, London

England skipper David Beckham can't wait to have another crack at Argentina when two of the biggest rivals in world football clash in Geneva on Saturday.

Beckham suffered one of the lowest points of his career when he was sent off against the Argentinians in the 1998 World Cup, and one of the highest when he scored a heart-stopping winning penalty against them four years later in Japan.

Naturally, it is the latter event that Beckham prefers to look back on rather than the moment when he over-reacted to Diego Simeone's provocation in Saint Etienne, France seven years ago.

"People go on about my foul on Simeone and the red card but I'd obviously rather people talk about me scoring the penalty four years later," Beckham said on Wednesday.

"Every time we play Argentina there is a hysteria around the game and what has happened, not just with me over the last few years but with other people as well."

"It seems Argentina are destined to play a big part in my career. It's a special moment. Not only because it's my 50th as captain but because it's against a team rated as one of the best in the world."

Beckham will not be taking any penalties on Saturday, having passed on that responsibility to Frank Lampard after three misses.

"I think it is better for the team to

have a regular penalty-taker rather than me who hardly ever takes them for Real," Beckham said.

"The defining factor was Frank does it for Chelsea and to have a regular penalty-taker is important for us."

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said Saturday's match would be the perfect test of where England are after a qualifying campaign that started well enough but nearly went off the rails in the closing stages after a defeat by Northern Ireland.

England were eliminated from the World Cup by Argentina in 1986 and 1998 and by Brazil in 2002 and will inevitably have to overcome South American opposition if they are to do better in Germany next summer.

"We all know that when Brazil play well, they are difficult to beat and if it goes their way attacking-wise, they have as many options as they want," Eriksson said.

"But I don't think it is impossible to beat Brazil. Let's start by trying to defeat Argentina this week."

Eriksson added that history and geography would be on his squad's side in Germany.

"It's more difficult for the South American teams to play a World Cup in Europe than in other places in the world. South American teams have only won once in Europe - Brazil (in Sweden) in 1958."

England held their first training session for Saturday's match at Manchester United's Carrington complex on Wednesday.

Eriksson will be looking for Wayne Bridge to prove his sharpness in

training when the squad meet up today, having played just 60 minutes of first-team football for Chelsea since his return from an eight-month injury absence.

With Ashley Cole and Jamie Carragher both missing through injury, Eriksson has limited options at left-back. West Ham's Paul Konchesky has just one cap behind him and Phil Neville is playing in central midfield for Everton.

A key dilemma for the Swede will be to decide between Rio Ferdinand and Sol Campbell as a central defensive partner for John Terry.

Ferdinand was dropped for last month's qualifier against Austria but got back in the team when Campbell was injured for the final match against Poland. But a solid performance for Manchester United against Chelsea on Sunday may have been enough to convince Eriksson that Ferdinand's blip in form is behind him.

The 27-year-old himself admitted he had been surprised to lose his place in the England side after five years as an automatic choice.

"I didn't expect to be dropped by England," Ferdinand told the Sun.

"But you have to roll your sleeves up and get on with it and prove you are worthy of winning your place back. It's something that hurt and it is hard when the manager is naming the team and you are not in it."

"You don't want that feeling and I don't want to feel it again. It's up to me isn't it? I want to start against Argentina, of course I do."

No rift with Flemo, says NZ coach

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand cricket coach John Bracewell has denied any rift with captain Stephen Fleming over the decision not to select all-rounder Chris Cairns for the just completed one-day series against South Africa.

The New Zealand team returned home Wednesday from South Africa after losing the one day series 0-4.

A report in the Dominion Post newspaper on Tuesday said a rift had developed between Bracewell and Fleming over the non-selection of Cairns, with the two barely speaking at the start of the tour.

But Bracewell denied the report on arriving back at Christchurch. He said Fleming had been "involved in the (selection) process all the way".

Cairns, who in his prime was one of the world's leading all-rounders, had been left out after indifferent form and a lack of regular play in recent months. The 35-year-old retired from Test cricket last year but said he hoped to keep playing one-day internationals until after the 2007 World Cup.

He was told to go back to club and first class domestic cricket and improve his fitness so he could be considered for selection later in the southern summer season.

SL to exempt ICC from tax

AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan government announced Tuesday that all International Cricket Council (ICC) events held in this cricket-mad island will be given total tax exemptions.

Finance Minister Sarath Amunugama said the concession would start with the under-19 World Cup in February next year.

Sri Lanka will be hosting the youth world cup for the second time. India emerged victorious in the 2000 event held here, beating the hosts in the final.

Rajani in, Zahed

FROM PAGE 12

Rajani's answers," Kanan added.

Rajani, one of the best central defenders in the country, was irregular in the preliminary camp due to the berth of his child in Kolkata and an injury.

Argentine coach Cruciani was also considered taking an additional striker and went to see Saiful Islam Moni training with Muktiyoddha Sangsad on Tuesday.

However, Muktiyoddha and ex-Bangladesh coach George Kottan claimed that the injured forward has regained 75 per cent fitness so far.

Considering the whole squad's fitness level, Cruciani opted to keep Shahajuddin Tipu in his side ahead of the injured national striker.

The footballers have been requested to report to Kanan tomorrow at 5pm at the BFF Bhaban.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Not barefoot
5 A handful
9 Deposit
12 Horseback activity
13 Ball in a gym
14 Lemieux milieux
15 First victim
16 Grub
17 Moray, e.g.
18 Implement
19 The whole enchilada
20 Point
21 Send out invitations
23 Comedian on Philips
25 Frightens
28 Cowardly
32 Disney classic
33 Hawaiian greeting
34 Stimulate
36 Jackie Paper's pal was one

37 Super-man foe
38 Scull need
39 Ring out
42 Standard activity
44 Bygone VHS alternative
48 Put on a show
49 Catego-rizes
50 Egg
51 Abbott's first
52 Farmer fraction
53 Shift start
54 Absorb

55 Command to Flover
56 Joie de vivre
57 Lovers' quarrel
58 Vagrant in a tub
59 Buck
60 Gives an address
61 Evangelist
62 Robert's
63 Multi-colored
64 North Sea feeder
65 Stead

10 Good news in Texas
11 Squeal
20 Clavicle
22 Hit
24 Still's partner
25 Rushmore face
26 Negligent
27 Rambler maker
29 Journal
30 Discoverer's cry
31 Hardly ruddy
35 Anticipate
36 Big name of the swing era
39 Dogs' dogs
40 1999 Tom Petty album
41 Riding
43 Taj Mahal site
45 Satan's forte
46 Albacore
47 Congregational shout
49 Father figures

Solution time: 27 mins.

DOWN

1 Lovers' quarrel
2 Vagrant in a tub
3 Sub
4 Buck
5 Gives an address
6 Evangelist
7 Multi-colored
8 North Sea feeder
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