

'England need rain'

INTERNET, undated

Paraguay striker Roque Santa Cruz believes the heavens will need to open if England are to taste World Cup glory in Germany. The Bayern Munich hitman believes the heat could hinder England's chances of going far in the tournament after seeing them wilt in searing temperatures on Saturday.

"To win the World Cup, England will need rain," said Santa Cruz. "Their players are some of the best in the world as individuals, but they need to get better as a team."

"They have a chance to win, but they are also very tired from a long season in their league and that may be a reason why they can't do it."

But after seeing England flatter to deceive in their 1-0 defeat of Paraguay, Santa Cruz the best is yet to come from Sven-Goran Eriksson's side.

"England can play so much better," he added. "We thought they would come and be positive, but we didn't really see that."

"They could have a problem as they progress through the tournament but in Germany you never know if it is going to be with the weather."

No holy water for Lippi

REUTERS, Hanover

There will be no 'holy water' on Italy's bench when they fight it out for the illusive fourth title in Germany.

In South Korea and Japan four years ago, coach Giovanni Trapattoni had a small plastic bottle of water next to him in the dugout but his successor Marcello Lippi will not follow suit.

"I haven't brought holy water," Lippi told reporters on Sunday.

"A friend gave me some wine as a good-luck gift and told me to take it with me to the World Cup but I haven't brought it. I've already drunk a good part of it."

Trapattoni's ritual before the first match of the 2002 World Cup involved carrying out 'confession' sessions with players in their rooms.

Lippi said he would not be paying any such visits to his players.

"I don't even carry out confession myself and I won't be visiting their rooms," he said.

Swedes in brawl again

AFP, Stockholm

Swedish captain Olof Mellberg and teammate Fredrik Ljungberg had a bustup after a disappointing World Cup draw against Trinidad and Tobago, the Swedish press reported on Monday.

The brawl brought back memories of the 2002 World Cup in Japan, when Ljungberg angrily went for Mellberg following a hard sliding tackle during training and the players had to be separated by force.

But this time, it was no more than "a hot but short dispute", the TT news agency quoted team spokesman Thomas Saleteg as saying.

According to Swedish reports, the row began when Ljungberg expressed his unhappiness with the Swedish game after the Trinidad and Tobago match Saturday, which ended in a goalless draw.

He specifically complained about long passes coming from the Swedish defence, especially from Mellberg.

'Don't write off Costa Rica'

INTERNET, undated

Ecuador coach Luis Fernando Suarez believes Costa Rica will prove sterner opposition than Poland when the two sides meet on Thursday.

Ecuador defeated Poland 2-0, while their Central American rivals went down 4-2 to Germany, but Suarez insists his side will be taking nothing for granted.

"We know them well and they know us well," said the Ecuador coach. "It's going to be a completely different game. It is a more dangerous game for us than against Poland."

"We have a cultural problem in South America," he added. "Before the start nobody said Ecuador would win against Poland. Now after we have won, everyone is saying (beating) Costa Rica will not be difficult and we will win."

"We must change that way of thinking. We respect Costa Rica as rivals. They have a very aggressive frontline, they are quick at breaking down the flanks and have a good striker in (Paulo) Wanchope."



PHOTO: AFP

Argentine striker Hernan Crespo leaves the AOL Arena at Hamburg after a satisfying 2-1 win against Ivory Coast on Sunday. The Chelsea forward scored the opening goal.

Chelsea marksmen firing



AFP, Berlin

If anyone doubted Roman Abramovich's money was ill spent on his strikers then the opening matches of the World Cup would have blown those apart.

The Russian billionaire's millions has so far seen Blues' marksmen Didier Drogba, Hernan Crespo and Arjen Robben score goals -- with two of the three Drogba and Robben hitting the back of the net in unfamiliar orange.

And that is even before the fearsome Andriy Shevchenko, recently signed from AC Milan for a reported club record fee of

30million pounds, lets rip for Ukraine, even if he may sit out the opener against Spain for injury.

Drogba for all his awkwardness with his gangly frame and reputation for diving showed in the 2-1 defeat by Argentina that he can mix it with the best.

"His heart is what is important to me," opined Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho, though, cynics might suggest that having outlaid over 20million pounds for the Ivory Coast star he would say that any way to justify the fee.

"He is one of the last players I would sell. He gives his all even in lost causes," added Mourinho, though, there have been few of those in the past two seasons at Stamford Bridge.

"What more can I do?" pleaded a bemused Crespo prior to the World Cup.

"I have always produced it for

Chelsea when asked but the coach seems to have a blind spot when it comes to choosing between me and Didier as to the long term future.

"All I can do now is produce the goods at the World Cup and find a club willing to take me."

For the third successive World Cup Crespo has scored a goal in

Winning is what matters



AFP, Buehler

They won, 1-0, and that's what counts.

England were also sapped by the sun and struggling against Paraguay, and that's the last thing they want against their next opponents -- twin-island upstart Trinidad and Tobago, who played down to a stunning 0-0 draw.

"You can't roll over teams like Trinidad," midfielder Joe Cole said Sunday. "They showed yesterday that they can compete against Sweden. ... To get the start we did was marvellous."

And a gift.

Without even scoring a goal, England won their Group C opener when Paraguay captain Carlos Gamarra inadvertently headed in captain David Beckham's curling free-kick less than three minutes into Saturday's match.

That exhilarating start, which surely delighted Prince William, who made the trip to Frankfurt, fell apart fast when the team wilted in the 86-degree heat.

Some players sweated off nearly 10 pounds, even though team officials provided nearly three times as much water as usual during the match.

By the second half, England's normally aggressive, physical game was in the tank.

"I'm not worried we faded," Beckham said. "Our performance was totally down to the heat. You can't go into a game like that and expect to be playing 100 percent all through the game."

"The important that FIFA and the referees take into account that players are getting dehydrated, and if there's a break in play, or it's a goal-kick or a corner or a throw-in, that the referee just factors in an extra second or two so the players can get a quick intake of water," Bevington said.

FIFA said Owen, who only returned last month after breaking his foot on Dec. 31, didn't need to prove himself.

"I think he'll score lots of goals this tournament," he said.

Cole said the weather was hotter for the opener than it was for the games England played at the 2002 World Cup in Japan and the 2004 European Championship in Portugal.

that's what we have to be happy with. It's not often we are in this position after the first game."

And they might get star striker Wayne Rooney back for the T&T game. Coach Sven Goran Eriksson said Sunday night he was "optimistic" that Rooney could play Thursday.

Rooney has been sidelined for six weeks with a broken foot.

Cole was concerned that his teammates were waved away from getting water on the sideline by game officials. It wasn't clear whether the same thing happened to Paraguay players.

"There was a couple of times when you went over to ... try and get a drink, and for some reason they didn't want us to," he said. "I don't know too much about that, but I think it's important in those conditions to be drinking regularly."

"Without sounding like we're making excuses -- we won the game -- but I think the conditions played a massive part," he said.

England director of communications Adrian Bevington said the team's medical staff was also concerned. England went through 148 pints of water during the match; it normally goes through 90 for a tournament.

"It's obviously a tactical thing," said Cole, who played second striker behind Peter Crouch when Owen was taken off. "We needed someone to try to get onto the ball and try and probe a few passes. The boss knows I can do it. And it gives us another option, which is what it's all about. I was happy that I got that kind of responsibility."

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Keane hangs up his boots

AFP, Glasgow

Roy Keane, the midfielder who was instrumental in Manchester United's dominance of English football throughout the 1990's, has announced his retirement from football because of injury.

The Irish international, who finished his career by helping Celtic to the Scottish league title, made the announcement on Monday after receiving doctor's advice to quit, six months after leaving United following an acrimonious bust-up with Sir Alex Ferguson.

"Having received medical

advice from my surgeon and the

Celtic club doctor, I feel my only

option is to retire," Keane said in a statement.

The statement did not specify

the nature of the injury which has

forced Keane to call it a day but the

Irishman had been plagued by

recurring hip problems in the last

few seasons of his illustrious

career.

Celtic manager Gordon Strachan,

who had been hoping that Keane would be able to play for another season, paid tribute to

"one of the greatest ever players to

have played in the game of football."

"It was fantastic that we were

able to bring him to Celtic and it

was his privilege to work with him," Strachan said.

"Even in his short time with the

Club, Roy made a great contribution

and played an important part in bringing success to the club last season.

"We were delighted to make