



THE CAPTAIN IS BACK: German midfield marshal Michael Ballack puts on a bib as he gets ready to take part in a training session in Berlin on Monday.

## Philosophical Ballack

INTERNET, undated

Michael Ballack is confident he will get to play in "a few more important matches" after missing out on Germany's two biggest World Cup games in recent years.

The 29-year-old served a yellow card ban in the 2002 World Cup final before being tested for hosts Germany's much-anticipated curtain-raiser against Costa Rica last Friday.

The future Chelsea star will finally return from a nagging calf injury on Wednesday when his troops take on Poland in Dortmund, and he has set the bar high.

"I hope there will be more important games coming up for me," he said when asked about his absence from Germany's last two

World Cup matches.

"I hope we will get very far and I hope that the importance of the matches will still increase."

Ballack admitted sitting out the curtain-raiser was a tough pill to swallow.

"The opening match of a World Cup is a great event for every football player," he stated.

"You have worked very hard and all the world is watching when you are playing the first match. I would have loved to play but I have to accept (coach Jurgen) Klinsmann's decision not to risk anything."

Ballack was instrumental in his country's stunning run to the World Cup final four years ago - only to miss the 2-0 loss to Brazil due to suspension. All-important was the yellow card he had picked

up moments before scoring the game-winner in the semi-finals against South Korea.

The former Bayern Munich playmaker claims he has finally found his peace.

"It's been a long time since the 2002 final," he added.

"I have got over it and that is why I am looking ahead now."

Meanwhile, Ballack has claimed future Middlesbrough defender Robert Huth will be a key player for Germany during the finals - even though an ankle injury has seen the 21-year-old dropping out of the starting line-up.

"Right now we have a couple of guys who are disappointed because they have not played due to injuries," Ballack stated.

"I am thinking of Robert Huth

who can be a very important man for us in this tournament."

Huth twisted his ankle in Germany's first warm-up match, a 7-0 thrashing of lowly Luxembourg, which gave Per Mertesacker and Christoph Metzelder the edge in the starting race.

"Things haven't worked out for (Robert) thus far because he picked up an injury and I as the skipper will try to rebuild his confidence," said Ballack.

Huth might return to the starting line-up for the clash with Poland after the inexperienced back-line was identified as Germany's biggest weakness in the 4-2 win over Costa Rica.

But Ballack considers the defensive letdowns more of an overall

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ABSOLUTE BONKERS: Italian forward Vincenzo Iaquinta is ecstatic after scoring his side's second goal against Ghana at Hannover on Monday.

## Break the European voodoo

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany's clash with Poland on Wednesday provides a chance for the World Cup hosts to end a decade-long run of failure against European teams in the finals of major tournaments.

The Germans made a habit of brushing aside European rivals during their glory years, racking up three World Cups in 1954, 1974 and 1990 and three European championships in 1972, 1980 and 1996.

Their golden-goal win over Czech Republic at Wembley in the final of Euro 96 was the last time they beat a European side in a big competition.

Since then they have failed in nine matches, including defeats by Croatia in the 1998 World Cup, England and Portugal at Euro 2000 and the Czechs at Euro 2004.

There have also been draws with Yugoslavia at France 98, Romania at Euro 2000, Ireland at the 2002 World Cup and Netherlands and Latvia at the last European championship.

Germany's 4-2 win over Costa Rica in the opening game of this competition has raised morale in the camp but coach Jurgen Klinsmann knows streetwise Poland will be more likely to punish any errors. "Poland will play with a very different style to Costa Rica," said Klinsmann, who was in the German team for the Euro 96 final.

"Poland have a very strong team and, after they lost to Ecuador, this is a mini-final for them."

## WC BRIEFS

AFP, Berlin

Millions of German fans but also their counterparts across the globe are doing their surreptitious best to sneak a quick view of as much of the World Cup as they can during office hours.

Next Tuesday's final German group game against Ecuador is at 1400 GMT, before most offices close.

Bid newspaper asked the question on office workers' lips: "Am I allowed to watch in the office?"

The paper explained: "If your boss says so, yes. But there is no such thing as the right to watch football."

Legal expert Helmut Platow observed: "If your boss catches you you risk a warning - and even the sack for repeated transgressions."

Bild meanwhile published a huge coupon advertising new flat screen televisions with the message: "Dear boss, please buy us a plasma set for the World Cup."

**Paint it orange**  
A farmworker from the northern Dutch region of Frise has taken his love of the 'Oranje' to an extreme, painting his cow Nynke orange in the team's honour, ANP news agency reported.

The Dutch are traditionally a phlegmatic lot but Pieter Meindertsma threw that stereotype out of the window by getting the paintbrush out and coating Nynke, who now sports blue hooves, the colour of the squad's socks.

"We shampooed her first and then sprayed her," said Meindertsma, explaining the paint is the same as that used by fans to tint their hair ahead of matches.

## Soccer slangs

One swallow doesn't make a summer but it does make a diver, referees are being informed in a six-language pamphlet giving them basic linguistic instruction.

The multilingual football dictionary they have been given includes "Schwalbe," German for swallow but also soccer slang for diving.

Other nuggets include the Italian for free kick (calcio di punizione).

But there's no Guarani so if a Paraguayan player swears at the man in the middle he might just get away with it.

## God helps us

After watching as their national side went down 2-0 to Ecuador in a hellish World Cup opener, Poles are seeking divine assistance to lift them to a higher plane when they meet Germany in Dortmund on Wednesday.

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## Poland's battle for life

AFP, Warsaw

When Poland take on Group A leader and historical foe Germany in Dortmund Wednesday, the red and whites will be playing for their World Cup lives and trying to salvage national honour after a disastrous opener against Ecuador.

"This match is very, very important. If we don't get three points or even one, we can pack our bags and go home," coach Pawel Janas told a press conference in Germany.

"The match with Germany is the match of our life. It's a question of 'to be or not to be'," said the Polish coach, seeking inspiration in a time of difficulty from Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet.

Poland's and Germany's histories have often been tragically intertwined in the last 70 years.

The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 was the spark that ignited World War II, a conflict in which Poland paid a high price in human life.

In a touch of historic irony, the match in Dortmund falls on the 66th anniversary of the arrival of the first trainload of prisoners - all Polish - at the Auschwitz death camp, set up by Nazi Germany in southern Poland at the start of World War II. But allusions to old rivalries and war-time animosity stop there.

"War is not football," sports

journalist Przemyslaw Rudzki of mass circulation Polish tabloid Fakt told AFP.

Fakt devoted its entire front page on Saturday to Poland's 2-0 defeat against Ecuador the previous night, using three of the many words in Polish for "shame", plus "compromising" and "losers" to tell the squad what it thought of its performance.

The story ended with the sentence: "Don't come back home."

"There's a general feeling of despair in Poland" after the defeat by Ecuador, Rudzki said.

"I'm 99 percent sure we won't get through group A... Nobody believes in a result on Wednesday other than a massive win by Germany. I don't know if the Polish team is capable of shaking off what happened in the Ecuador match," he said.

Polish cap Ebi Smolarek, who plays for German side Borussia Dortmund, said the ambience in the team was "good" after a meeting on Monday, but made a sideways admission that self-esteem was down around the level of socks whose elastic has gone.

"We have to think about how we played in the first match and we have to make ourselves believe that we can play well," he told.

"I will give more than 100 percent and I hope all the others will, too," Smolarek said in response to a question about what message he

wanted to give to Poland's fans, who have so far confounded pundits by not behaving like the able-rousers German and Polish police had predicted they would.

"The fans created a great atmosphere during the match against Ecuador and I want to apologise to them for our behaviour," Janas said at the same press conference.

And amid the chorus of bleak criticism, there was a positive note. Andrzej Foltyn, a journalist for "We Are Fans" magazine, which has a circulation of around 10,000, said he believed deep down that Poland could win on Wednesday.

"I'm counting on a draw at least against Germany. Deep in my heart I believe in a win," he told.

And even if Poland make a premature exit from the World Cup, the squad would be welcomed back on Polish soil.

"Polish fans will not abandon their team," said Foltyn.

"If the Polish team plays like recently, then, of course, there's no chance... But you have to believe things will get better."

Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, President Lech Kaczynski and Interior Minister Ludwik Dorn have all said they will attend the match against Germany in Dortmund, which also falls almost 15 years to the day that Germany and Poland signed a friendship treaty.

The Daily Star  
RANGS TOSHIBA  
WORLD CUP QUIZ 2006

Plasma Fridge

.....THIS CAN BE YOURS

2006 Round 3, Draw in Sylhet  
(See June 8 issue of the Star Sport for competition information, prizes and rules)

The Daily Star RANGS TOSHIBA World Cup Quiz, Round 3 Ends June 15, 2006

Tick (✓) the correct answers

1. The only player to have scored a hat-trick in a World Cup final match:	Hurst <input type="checkbox"/>	Zidane <input type="checkbox"/>	Vava <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Which nation will host the 2010 FIFA World Cup?	South Africa <input type="checkbox"/>	England <input type="checkbox"/>	Colombia <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Just Fontaine played for:	France <input type="checkbox"/>	Peru <input type="checkbox"/>	Mexico <input type="checkbox"/>
4. The scoreline of the first-ever World Cup match is:	4-1 <input type="checkbox"/>	4-2 <input type="checkbox"/>	4-3 <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Who is this player?	Beckham <input type="checkbox"/>	Nistelrooy <input type="checkbox"/>	Torres <input type="checkbox"/>

Name (Mr/Mrs/Ms)..... Age.....  
Father's name..... Occupation.....  
Address.....  
Telephone (if any)..... Signature..... Date.....

Write with a ballpoint pen in clear BLOCK letters.  
Cut along the dotted lines and mail to OR drop in the Quiz Box at The Daily Star  
You may send as many entries as you like. Envelopes of entries must be clearly marked "Star World Cup Quiz 3."

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