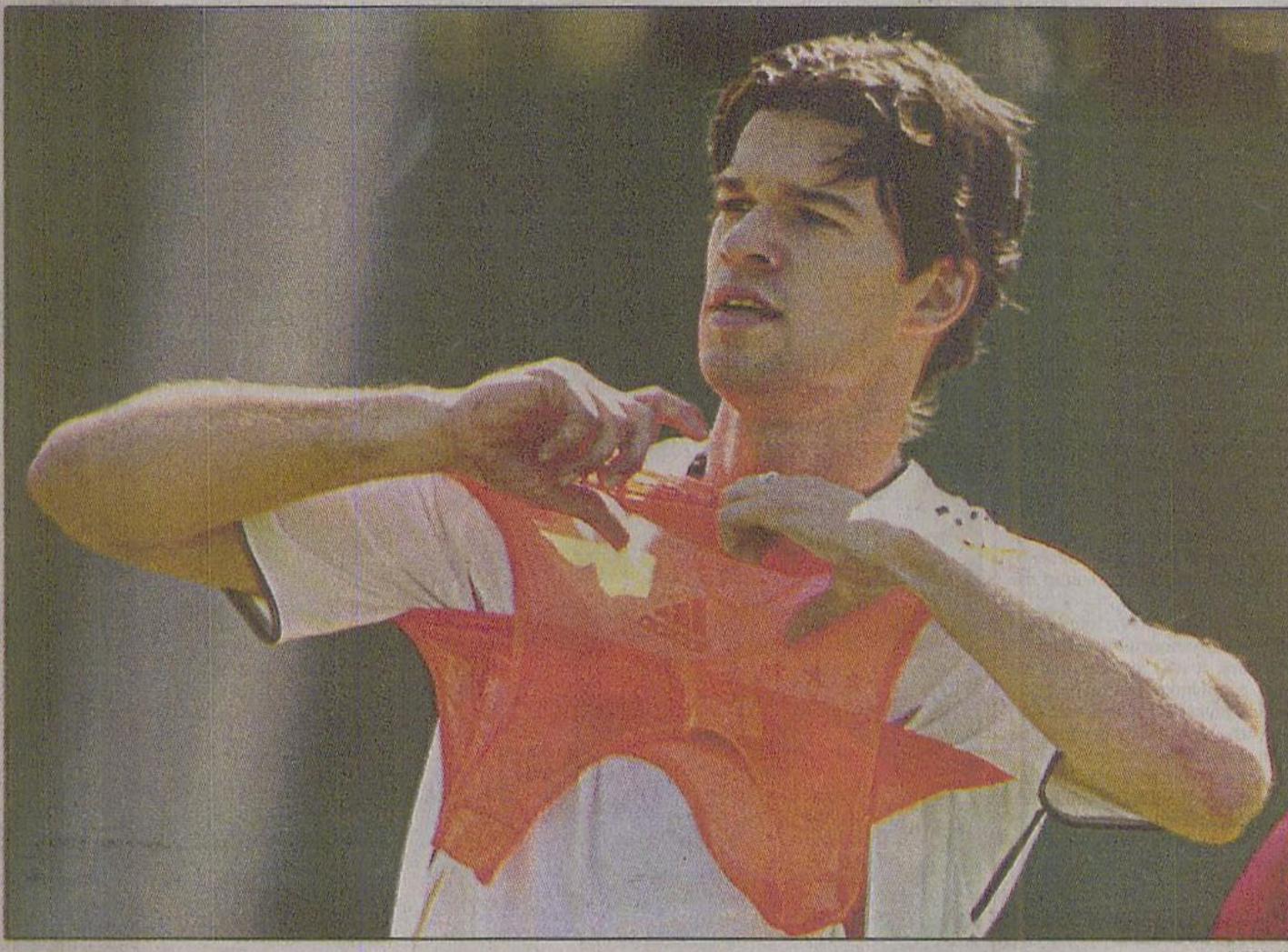


DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 14, 2006



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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 rested for hosts Germany's much-anticipated curtain-raiser against Costa Rica.

The future Chelsea star will finally return from a nagging calf injury on Wednesday when his trots up 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 in the 4-2 win over Costa Rica.

But Ballack considers the defensive letdowns more of an overall

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