



CAN ANY OF THEM STRIKE? French midfielders Patrick Vieira (back to the camera), Zinedine Zidane (L) and Florent Malouda (C) and striker Thierry Henry (R) share a light moment during a training session at the Weserbergland Stadium in Hameln on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

FRANCE V SOUTH KOREA

Victory is a must

AFP, Leipzig

Anything less than victory against table toppers South Korea on Sunday will leave France perilously close to crashing out of the first round for the second successive World Cup.

A drab goalless draw in their opener against Switzerland has left Raymond Domenech's 1998 champions tied for second in Group G, two points behind the 2002 semi-finalists.

Central to France's plight is her impotent attack which has not hit the mark at the World Cup now since the 3-0 triumph over Brazil in the final in Paris eight years ago.

Thierry Henry was deployed as a lone striker against the Swiss on Tuesday and Domenech must decide whether to stick with that or team up Arsenal's record goalscorer with either David Trezeguet or Louis Saha.

Another conundrum facing him is whether to persist with Frank Ribery, the young midfielder from Marseille who failed to replicate his dazzling performances in France's three warm-up wins.

Trezeguet broke ranks last week and called for Domenech, who has Lyon's fit again midfielder Florent Malouda back at his disposal, to adopt a more aggressive style.

"It's my opinion that we have to push forward, we've got all the attributes to do that."

"Brazil don't ask themselves any questions, they just do it," the Juventus star said.

Domenech himself wants to see his predominantly thirtysomething side, the only one of the eight seeds not to kick off with a win, raise their game from the solid yet unspectacular offering served up in Stuttgart.

"I want us to be more adventurous - I want to set the dogs free against Korea," he said.

"The Swiss match confirmed the solidity of our basic play, but the team were holding themselves back, a little hesitant."

"I want them to build on this sound foundation and show a more imaginative face on Sunday, to be more audacious. It's more a mental thing."

He added: "The Korean match has now turned into a very important one where we have to score."

"We know they have the possibility to look for a draw and go for it in their last game. It's obvious we

have to win it to be comfortable but even if we draw again it doesn't rule everything out."

"It will not be easy but we have to win," said France striker Thierry Henry. "They (Korea) were in the semi-finals last time but they're not as defensive as Switzerland and they should allow us more space."

One positive from the Swiss draw was the showing of Zinedine Zidane who looked a lot sharper than in the run up to Germany.

But a bizarre booking for taking a free-kick too hastily means the midfield maestro who is making his final curtain call before retirement here will have to watch out if he is not to miss what could be his last appearance for his country against Togo next week.

Domenech rejected a suggestion that the Koreans, who have come off second best on their last two meetings, represented a less taxing task than Switzerland.

"Not at all. It won't be easier. On the contrary it will perhaps be more difficult."

"They go fast, from defence to attack. It's another style, another danger."

Henry agreed. "Korea are talented, they have a lot of technique, they run a lot, they're a team that play without asking themselves questions."

"They attack altogether, and defend altogether."

Despite France's predicament South Korea coach Dick Advocaat is not blind to the potential havoc

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Thuram reaching 'unwanted' record

REUTERS, Hameln

Lilian Thuram was never particularly interested in Marcel Desailly's national record of 116 caps, which he should reach on Sunday when France play South Korea in their second World Cup Group G game.

A prominent member of the team that lifted the World Cup on home soil in 1998 and won the European Championship two years later, the 34-year-old Thuram announced his retirement from international football after a quarter-final exit at Euro 2004.

In August last year, alongside playmaker Zinedine Zidane and holding midfielder Claude Makelele, the defender changed his mind and returned to help France reach the finals in Germany.

"If I had wanted to beat Marcel's record, I wouldn't have stopped (in 2004) but now that I'm so close, it

would be stupid not to," Thuram said just before the World Cup.

A reassuring presence in defence for over a decade, Thuram has been hampered by injuries over the past year and has struggled to the extent that he was no longer an automatic starter at Juventus towards the end of the season.

The Guadeloupe-born Thuram looked sluggish in France's dull 0-0 opening draw with Switzerland last Tuesday and media commentators are suggesting it might be wiser to drop him for the game against South Korea in Leipzig.

Coach Raymond Domenech is likely nevertheless to select one of the most respected figures in his squad. "He's an extraordinary player and everybody can learn something from him," William Gallas said of his partner in France's central defence.

Whatever happens in Germany,

Thuram will always be remembered by French fans for his amazing feat against Croatia at the 1998 World Cup.

The defender, famous for his clumsiness in front of goal, struck twice to present France with a 2-1 win that sent the team through to their first World Cup final, in which crushed Brazil 3-0.

Those goals remain the only two Thuram has ever scored for France in 115 appearances.

"When I die, they will show those goals on television," he recently told French sports daily L'Equipe.

Eight years after the 1998 triumph, Thuram, who won his first cap on the same day as Zidane in a 2-2 draw with Czech Republic in 1994, provides a symbol for an ageing team looking for a final encore.

The thoughtful Thuram surely realises, however, that he must now show on the pitch that he still deserves to be picked.

Ahn eyes stardom

AFP, Bensberg

Goalscoring hero Ahn Jung-Hwan believes South Korea can frustrate France in their vital Group G encounter on Sunday and then hit them on the break.

Ahn scored the winner against Togo on Tuesday with a dipping shot over the goalkeeper and hopes he gets the chance to show his shooting skills when South Korea take on the 1998 world champions in Leipzig.

"I will try and do my best and score if I get the chance," said Ahn, who was famously sacked by Perugia after he scored the golden goal winner that sent Italy packing from the 2002 World Cup.

"Every player is ready to score if they get an opportunity. France desperately needs a win and will be attacking. That might give us the chance to hit (on the break) especially in the second half. We will attack aggressively in the second half."

South Korea coach Dick Advocaat has not commented on his line-up but it is widely expected he will play a defensive formation against France with Ahn in Manchester United's Park Ji-Sung leading the counter-attacks.

Park, the best known player in the South Korea squad, acknowledged that France could call on a legion of world class players and that he might be forced to help out the defence.

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CHARGED UP: South Korean players, who won their first match against Togo on June 13, warm up for a training session at the Bay-Arena in Leverkusen on Thursday. The Koreans face off with France in a Group G match in Leipzig tonight.

PHOTO: AFP

'We need flair'

REUTERS, Hameln

France need to add a touch of Gallic finesse to their trademark defensive displays if they are to go a long way at the World Cup, coach Raymond Domenech said on Thursday.

The 1998 champions, who started with a dull 0-0 draw with Switzerland on Tuesday, at least pleased their coach by controlling the game and neutralising their opponents.

"We need to add some imagination to make life difficult for our opponents. We need to play more freely, with more boldness," Domenech said.

"We were solid, compact and that's how we wanted to be," Domenech told a news conference. "The Swiss were dangerous only on two set pieces and maybe on one other occasion."

The problem, the coach admitted, was that France, who have not scored on the World Cup scene since lifting the trophy eight years ago, hardly created a chance.

"We have to keep relying on that organisation we have, that's a basis, but at the same time we need to add some imagination to make life difficult for our opponents," Domenech said.

"We need to play more freely, with more boldness." The France coach, whose ageing team looked rusty and sluggish against the Swiss, said rejigging his line-up was not the solution.

"Changing everything is not the

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Lee promises heroics

AFP, Leverkusen

Masterful shot-stopper Lee Woon-Jae has pledged to put his body on the line to prevent the Thierry Henry led French attack from scoring against South Korea in their vital Group G encounter on Sunday in Leipzig.

Veteran Lee, the South Korean captain who will gain his 99th cap against France, said that he would use every part of his 1.82 metre frame to protect his goal.

"If I cannot save the ball with my hands, then I will use my feet, I will use my body - all different parts of my body," said Lee, who was a hero for South Korea in the penalty shoot-out victory over Spain in 2002, which took the co-hosts to the World Cup semi-final.

"I will give 100 per cent effort in the match against France."

Lee said that the squad had been motivated from their first training session in South Korea and confidence was coursing through the players with the 2-1 win over Togo under their belt.

The Koreans top Group G ahead of France and Switzerland, who drew their opener 0-0, making Sunday's game a virtual must-win fixture for the 1998 World Cup winners.

"France is a world class team which plays at a high level," added the 33-year-old Lee, who has conceded 87 goals in his 98 games for South Korea. "We have not talked too much about tactics yet, we have been focusing on recovery from the Togo match."

"I am sure the head coach (Dick Advocaat) has something prepared tactically. Once he gives us the instruction, we will try and carry it out."

Advocaat has played down South Korea's chances against France without ruling out a 'surprise result' and the Dutch mentor said that the pitch conditions could play a big part in the outcome.

"It is better for France if the grass is watered or it is raining," said Advocaat, who steered Holland to the quarter-finals of

the 1994 World Cup.

"We have to slow down the game because they have too much skill and too much pace, it is better for us when the pitch is dry."

Advocaat, who is expected to play a defence-minded 4-3-3 formation and rely on hitting France on the break, has emphasised to his players that winning the one-on-one challenges and pressuring France was the only route to victory.

"We have to be realistic - for all positions France have two world class players. In that way we do know what to expect," said Advocaat, nicknamed the 'Little General' during his time with the Dutch squad.

"You can expect a France side that will be very up for this game. We have to react to that. If we can pressurise them a bit and make life a little bit hard like Switzerland did, so we can surprise them maybe in that way."

Switzerland plays Togo in the other Group G match in Dortmund on Monday.

Malouda fit for debut

REUTERS, Hameln

France midfielder Florent Malouda, whose World Cup adventure started in pain, said on Friday he was fully fit and ready to play.

Malouda, who missed the opening 0-0 draw with Switzerland in Group G on Tuesday, revealed he had suffered from haemorrhoids.

"I'd never had that before and it was not the best time to have it but it's over now and I'm absolutely fine," he said.

"I underwent surgery in Germany last week."

The nature of Malouda's problem was unknown until the player spoke to reporters, France coach Raymond Domenech refusing to reveal make medical information about the players to the media.

The 26-year-old Malouda, playing for his country in a major tournament for the first time, is expected start when the 1998 world champions play South Korea on Sunday in Leipzig.

"I've got pins and needles in my legs," Malouda said. "I just can't wait to play."

The Olympique Lyon player was confident France would recover from a sluggish start to survive a group also featuring Togo.

"I'm not worried at all," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

HER WISH FULFILLED: An Argentine fan shows a placard appealing to coach Jose Pekerman to include new sensation Lionel Messi during the South Americans' match against Serbia and Montenegro in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.