



Serbia and Montenegro's midfielders Predrag Djordjevic (L) and Zvonimir Vukic run during a training session in Billerbeck on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Swansong of Hey Slavs!

AP, Billerbeck

Serbia-Montenegro's game against Ivory Coast on Wednesday will mark the last time the "Hey Slavs!" Yugoslav anthem is played at a soccer stadium. And it will be the final occasion the country's blue, white and red flag will fly above a sporting venue.

Maybe, in terms of soccer, that's a good thing.

"After the match on Wednesday, we are putting a full stop," midfielder Dejan Stankovic said Monday. "We are starting with a new country, a new team, a new flag, a new anthem and hopefully better results."

The game in Munich has no meaning because both Serbia-Montenegro and Ivory Coast have been eliminated from the World Cup, with Argentina and the Netherlands already advancing from Group C.

But it will go down in history as the last match for Serbia-Montenegro, the final vestige of old Yugoslavia. The country formally split last month when Montenegro voted for independence.

The Yugoslav anthem, despised by Serb fans because it reminded them of the old communist federation, regularly draws boos and jeers, leaving players shifting with unease.

As the successor state, Serbia will keep the FIFA membership. Montenegro, already applying for a seat with soccer's governing body, hopes to take part in qualifying for

the next World Cup.

This team is certainly not making its final appearance a memorable one. It lost to Argentina 6-0 on Friday -- one of the worst defeats in the team's World Cup history. The previous worst was a 6-1 loss as Yugoslavia in the 1930 semifinals against Uruguay. Serbia-Montenegro's appearance in Germany is the national team's 10th trip to the World Cup, but the first -- and last -- under that name.

Serbia-Montenegro's team spokesman Aleksandar Boskovic said that Serbia will play their first match as a single country in a friendly against the Czech Republic in Prague on Aug. 16.

"From the golden city of Prague, we hope to start our golden future," Boskovic said.

The World Cup has been anything but golden for Serbia-Montenegro.

Nothing has gone right for the team, beginning with an opening 1-0 loss to the Netherlands. Since then, the team -- which includes only one Montenegrin, goalkeeper Dragoslav Jevric -- has had to deal with problems ranging from injuries to squabbles over tactics and confrontations between players at training sessions.

Captain Savo Milosevic, who announced he will retire from the national team after the World Cup, said it could be hard for the team to improve against Ivory Coast.

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IRAN V ANGOLA Africans can dream

AFP, Leipzig

World Cup debutants Angola are aiming to create the biggest surprise of this World Cup when they take on Iran here on Wednesday with an outside chance of reaching the second round.

Written off as no-hopers when they arrived in Germany, a gritty performance to force a goalless draw with Mexico has given the southern African nation a shot at finishing in the top two of Group D.

They need to beat an Iranian team smarting from their elimination after two defeats and desperate to return home with a face-saving victory.

The odds are stacked against Angola.

Just a draw for Mexico against the already-qualified Portugal in Gelsenkirchen would put the Central Americans through regardless of the Angola result.

The Mexicans have a superior goal difference - the next criteria after points in deciding the group positions - so the Angolans need to score the first goals in their World Cup finals history if they are to stand any chance of progressing.

Coach Luis Oliveira Goncalves said there was no pressure on his team because they had already exceeded all expectations.

"We had two objectives when we came here: to do our country and our continent proud and I think we achieved that to perfec-

tion in this game," he said after the Mexico match.

A remarkable performance from goalkeeper Joao Ricardo in that game kept Angola's hopes alive.

The 36-year-old, who is currently without a club, said that win or lose against Iran, the team have already lifted the spirits of a country, which only emerged from civil war in 2002.

"Our country has been through a difficult period," said Joao Ricardo. "This success will give millions of people great joy."

"What is my future? My future is winning against Iran." Akwa, the team's longest-serving player, who is also without a club since leaving Qatar's Al Wakra last year, admitted that the

TEAMS

Angola (4-5-1)

1-Joao Ricardo, 20-Loco, 3-Jamba, 5-Kali, 21-Delgado, 17-Ze Kalanga, 15-Rui Marques, 7-Figueiredo, 11-Mateus, 14-Mendonca, 10-Akwa.

Iran (4-4-1-1)

1-Ebrahim Mirzapour, 13-Hosein Kaebi, 5-Rahman Rezaei, 3-Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh, 20-Mohammad Nosrati, 2-Mehdi Mahdavi, 6-Ali Karimi, 7-Ferydoon Zandi, 21-Mehrzad Madanchi, 14-Andranik Taymorian, 9-Vahid Hashemian.

team was "nervous" before their last game and said inexperience, could count against them.

Angola will be forced to shuffle their pack because midfielder Andre is suspended after being sent off against Mexico.

Iran entered the tournament with high hopes of reaching the second round for the first time but they crashed to Mexico and then Portugal, scoring a solitary goal on the way.

Their Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic was heavily criticised by the Iranian press.

"He has to be held accountable for all this extravagance and wasting of money," fumed leading sports daily Iran Varzeshi.

Brankovic could be about to hand 37-year-old Ali Daei - the scorer of a world record 109 international goals in 148 matches - his farewell World Cup appearance after he was dropped for the Portugal defeat.

Michel will leave

REUTERS, Niederkassel

Ivory Coast coach Henri Michel said on Sunday he considered their final World Cup Group C game against Serbia & Montenegro on Wednesday to be his last in charge, in line with his contract.

"The Ivorian Soccer Federation did not ask to extend my contract, so for me it finishes with the match against the Serbians," the 58-year-old Frenchman told a news conference.

Asked whether he would consider coaching another African team, Michel said: "I have given quite a lot to Africa already."

Hopes were high for debutants Ivory Coast but despite stirring performances Michel, who took the helm in 2004, watched his African side lose 2-1 in their games against World Cup heavyweights Argentina and Netherlands.

"We could have done something great here but it turned out otherwise... But there is hope for the future," he said.

Argentina's scintillating 6-0 demolition of Serbia & Montenegro helped seal the Ivorians' fate, and the Elephants now have only pride to play for against the Serbians in Munich.

Michel, who is at his fourth World Cup finals, said he would do all he could to win his last match with the Ivorians but he went on to criticise much of the refereeing against the Dutch.

"This is a World Cup of regrets, especially with regard to the refereeing. I watched the game against the Netherlands again last night and saw some very obvious mistakes."

"I am under the impression there is a favouritism for larger countries over smaller ones when it comes to refereeing."

Michel first went to the World Cup finals 20 years ago in charge of a France team that reached the semi-finals in Mexico.

PHOTO: AFP

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SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO V IVORY COAST

Exit with pride

AFP, Munich

African Nations Cup finalists Ivory Coast have their last and potentially best chance to secure a consolation victory in the World Cup's "Group of Death" Wednesday against Serbia and Montenegro.

Both teams have lost hope of qualifying from Group C after succumbing to favourites Argentina and the Netherlands, and are likely to be rudderless when their managers leave after their final games in Germany.

Despite the shared fate, their form on the field and spirit differ sharply.

On their first World Cup appearance, the "Elephants" conceded narrow 1-2 scorelines to two of the most experienced nations in the tournament and closely rivalled Group C's favourites in each match.

"The draw was in the end fatal to us. We played against two great teams without having lost merit," said Chelsea's Didier Drogba, who spearheaded Ivory Coast.

If they draw, they will come a creditable third after Serbia-Montenegro's goal difference suffered with the 0-6 humiliation by Argentina.

But the west Africans will have a heart to win in Munich, if only to sweeten coach Henri Michel's bitterness and seek Africa's second

success after Ghana's 2-0 victory over the Czech republic.

"Everyone tells me this team plays great football. What's more important is the result. And the result was not good. We're out and that's the bottom line," said Michel, one of the most experienced managers in Germany.

"It means that Ivory Coast are still not at the level of the big teams at the World Cup," added Michel, signalling that it was likely to be his last game with Ivory Coast.

His players share a sense of unfinished business in Germany.

"In the next game against Serbia and Montenegro we want to try to get a win," said Arouna Kone after the second defeat at the hands of the Netherlands.

By contrast, the dissent and injury plagued Serb and Montenegrin players appeared demoralised after their drubbing by Argentina.

They failed to repeat the form that kept a virtually clean sheet in World Cup qualifying and had made them one of Europe's most incisive contenders.

The squad also suffered a severe blow with the training injury to full back Nemanja Vidic.

Disputed coach Ilija Petkovic footed the blame for the Argentina's six goal frenzy and announced over the weekend he would not seek to renew his con-

tract as coach once the team returns home.

Meanwhile, the press in Serbia ripped into the team after the match against two times World Cup winners Argentina, speaking of a "disgrace".

"It turned out that the difference between the wishes and the capabilities of our team at this World Cup was too big," said the Vecernji Novosti daily.

Midfielder Ivan Ergic said: "To lose 6-0 is horrible, but we were not completely fit and we had a lot of pressure put on us by the press and the media back home."

On the field, the Serbs will be blunted without their highly fancied striker, Mateja Kezman, who was sent off against Argentina.

TEAMS

Ivory Coast (4-4-2)

1-Jean-Jacques Tizi, 21-Emmanuel Eboue, 4-Kolo Toure, 3-Arthur Boka, 12-Abdoulaye Meite, 5-Dider Zokora, 19-Gnery Yaya Toure, 2-Kanga Akale, 22-Romario, 9-Arouna Kone, 14-Bakary Kone.

Serbia & Montenegro (4-4-2)

1-Dragoslav Jevric, 13-Dusan Basta, 6-Goran Gavranic, 20-Mladen Krstajic, 3-Ivica Dragutinovic, 2-Ivan Ergic, 4-Igor Duljaj, 10-Dejan Stankovic, 18-Zvonimir Vukic, 19-Nikola Zigic, 21-Danijel Ljubaja.



PHOTO: AFP

SOLACE IN MUSIC: Iran midfielder Ali Karimi listens to music while leaving their hotel to fly to Leipzig on Monday.

Iran want to end on a high

REUTERS, Frankfurt

After their early elimination from the World Cup, Iran now want to depart by showing the world their true worth in their final match against Angola on Wednesday.

Iran missed their last chance to qualify for the second stage of the tournament when they lost 2-0 to Portugal in Group D on Saturday, helping that side seal their place in the next round.

"We haven't shown what we can do at all," midfielder Ferydoon Zandi told reporters after the match. "But now, we can play without pressure, maybe that has been a factor. We want to leave with a victory now."

Iran, whose presence in Germany has repeatedly been overshadowed by diplomacy and politics, have not been able to rely fully on key players because of injuries, and their younger players simply lacked the experience to keep up for two halves.

Coach Branko Ivankovic left out

Africans seek late reward

REUTERS, Niederkassel

A subdued Ivory Coast team pledged on Sunday to fight for a win against Serbia & Montenegro to ensure they have something to show for their first World Cup finals.

A victory would also be a fitting farewell for coach Henri Michel who said on Sunday that the match would be his last in charge of the team as his contract about to expire.

After two defeats apiece, Ivory Coast and Serbia & Montenegro are going home regardless of the outcome of their clash in Munich on Wednesday.

"Neither of us will want to leave the World Cup empty-handed and we are both anxious to return with our heads held high," midfielder Gilles Yapi Yapo told a news conference.

The West Africans have won plenty of plaudits for the way they played in 2-1 defeats against both Argentina and the Netherlands in Group C. "To return with no points despite all the talent that we have would be very disappointing," said forward Bakary Kone.

Asked whether he and his team

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VIVALA UKRAINE: A Ukraine fan cheers with her national flag during their match against Saudi Arabia in Hamburg on Monday.