



RONALDO SCORING, PARREIRA SMILING: Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira (L) laughs off with Ronaldo during a practice session at Betgisch Gladbach Stadium on June 20.

Bruckner offered contract extension

AFP, Westenburg

Veteran Czech Republic coach Karel Bruckner is to be offered a two-year contract extension despite his team crashing out of the World Cup at the first hurdle, the national federation's vice-president revealed on Friday.

Vlastimil Kostal added he believed they could reach an agreement with Bruckner which would take him up to the 2008 European championships.

"I think that we are going to agree a new deal with the coach," Kostal told Czech agency CTK shortly before he and the squad left for Prague.

"We will iron out the details in the next fortnight."

Bruckner failed to spark his team into the same form as they showed in reaching the Euro 2004 semi-finals.

However, he was handicapped by injuries to his two leading frontmen Milan Baros and Jan Koller.

He risked Baros in the final match with Italy, a 2-0 defeat, but the leading scorer from Euro 2004 was clearly not match fit and was replaced in the second-half.

Bruckner, a former Under-21 team coach, was also burdened by the toll age had taken on 34-year-old Karel Poborsky and even the 33-year-old former European player of the year Pavel Nedved.

He indicated earlier on Friday that he would be willing to stay on if he was offered an extension of his present deal, which runs out after the tournament finishes.

"My contract is up. But if I receive a proposal to extend it, I will accept it," he said.

Maniche positive

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good if we can add to these victories against the Dutch."

The Dutch have not lost a competitive match since their defeat to Portugal in the semi-final of Euro 2004.

But they have been through a transformation since then, bringing in new, young talent on the field and former Dutch hero Marco van Basten as coach. In contrast, the Portuguese squad has remained broadly similar.

"The Netherlands are different - different players, a new coach, but if we think that makes it difficult for them then it will also be difficult for us, because the Netherlands know us very well, the way we play," he said.

"I think it is going to be a very tough match," he added.

After beating the Netherlands in Euro 2004, hosts Portugal disappointingly and perhaps surprisingly failed to take the title, losing to Greece in the final of that tournament.

Maniche said the pressure in Germany was no less.

"The pressure is the same. We have big expectations in the World Cup and we know to get where we want to go we have to beat the Netherlands," he said.

'Brazil on title track'



INTERNET, undated

Defending champions change the players but will not change the style in knockout phase.

Carlos Alberto Parreira believes Brazil are on track to retain the World Cup after their demolition of Japan. The coach made five alterations to the line-up that defeated Australia and Croatia and the changes paid off as the Brazilians put on their best display of the tournament to beat the Zico-coached Asian champions 4-1.

Parreira said: "We have played the same way, we have just changed the players and that's important in a World Cup, in the last 16 or the last eight."

"We didn't want to change the way we play. I'm not worried about who I'm going to choose because

we don't play now until Tuesday and we have no injuries. All the players are ready to play."

Roberto Carlos and Cafu made way for Cicinho and Gilberto at full-back while Emerson, Adriano and Ze Roberto were also rested, to be replaced by Gilberto Silva, Juninho and Robinho in Brazil's final group match. Ze Roberto made a brief appearance as substitute for Kaka.

Gilberto and Juninho both scored along with Ronaldo, whose two goals put him on a total of 14 in World Cups overall, equalling Gerd Muller's record.

The holders now face Ghana in the last 16 and Parreira feels the convincing win over the Japanese -- even though Brazil had already earned a spot in the knock-out phase before the game -- was important for his team's continued progress.

"The next game and the last eight are important games," he said. "We have had 45 days outside Brazil and everything starts to get monotonous but with this result we

have sparked our game to life.

"It was important to have this game going into the last 16. I'm not worried about which team we play because Brazil is going to be well represented and Brazil will have a team that will reach our goal, which is to win the World Cup."

Parreira, Brazil's 1994 winning coach, paid tribute to the Ghanaians after their 2-1 win over the United States earned them a place in the second round at their first World Cup.

"Now we play Ghana and they are a very good team," said Parreira, who coached the west Africans' national team almost 40 years ago. They played a wonderful first game against Italy and beat the Czech Republic in a very nice way, so it's going to be a nice game. They play very fast football and they're going to be a difficult opponent. There's no one easy and they are one of the powers of African football. They should have been at the World Cup in the past but they are here now."

Defensive troubles solvable

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in the last 16 and very confident going into the game.

"I'm not sitting here to discuss my own form - that's for you guys."

"There's no added pressure. We have prepared for that, we can handle it."

"But this is a chance for us to prove we can perform at this stage, we've done well and we're happy so far."

"People have said we've not played our best football as yet - hopefully that is to come."

"If we play to our capabilities we'll do well - whatever formation we play."

England kick-off at 4pm on

Sunday and although Beckham is hoping the temperature favours his team, he will not use the heat as an excuse for a poor performance.

He explained: "We can't worry about heat - you have to perform to the highest level in any temperature."

"It's affected us in the past but we're talking about the last 16 of the World Cup. We can't have any excuses."

Beckham expects Ecuador, who finished runners-up in Group A to hosts Germany, to provide a tough test for England.

He continued: "South America is a tough place to play."

"I've watched it and spoken to players who have played there - it's a place where players are technically very gifted."

"We know they are not going to be an easy team to come up against."

"But the togetherness of our team can't be stronger - as a team we're together - and we're confident."

"There's always negativity out there but we get on with our game and believe in ourselves."

"I think the majority of the country believe in the team and the players and we are very happy we've got that."

'World Cup starts here'

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before do realise that chances as well as this don't come that often," he said.

"We're an English team, playing in Europe, playing in Germany, the weather's been great for us most of the time. Everything is right."

"That doesn't happen very often. In four years time it's going to be in South Africa, four years after that maybe Australia or South America and we're talking about different climates."

"So this is an opportunity we don't want to waste."

Beckham has seen his place in England's starting line-up called into question but is defiant in the face of the criticism of his performances so far in the tournament.

"I'm not going to sit here and talk about my form because it's not for me to sit here and talk about David Beckham."

"It's for me to sit here and talk about England going into the last 16 of the World Cup," he said.

It is clear though that Beckham is irked by the suggestion that he does not offer the

pace and width on the flank that other players such as Aaron Lennon have done when brought on as a substitute.

Beckham makes no apologies for the fact that his strength is his delivery from set pieces and open play.

"To get the best out of me you have to give me the ball," he said.

"If I get the ball and I've got a yard of space then I'll deliver it to someone to score a goal. I've done that for many years, that's my game, that's what I'm good at."

"If I'm given the ball then 99.9 percent of the time I'll put it in the right space for people to score goals. It's been hard to do that because I've had two players doubling back on me whenever we've played."

Though England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has insisted that Beckham was not an 'untouchable' member of his squad this week, there is not even the remotest chance that the Swede will drop his captain from the starting line-up.

What shape that line-up is remains open to speculation, with Eriksson mulling a 4-5-1

with Rooney as the lone striker or a 4-4-2 with Crouch partnering Rooney.

Gary Neville is still struggling from a calf injury and will most likely be replaced by Jamie Carragher while Sol Campbell will slot in at centre-half if Rio Ferdinand fails to recover from a groin strain.

Ecuador coach Luis Suarez meanwhile insists that his team will not be intimidated by the prospect of tackling England.

"What we have done is not all," Suarez said. "There is more to come. The World Cup has not ended for Ecuador."

"There is no reason for us to feel beaten before the match. If we are going to lose, let it be during the match, not before."

Ecuador looked impressive when beating Poland 2-0 and Costa Rica 3-0 in their opening matches and Suarez is confident his side can recover that form.

"The team are happy about what they've done so far," he said. "We have already earned respect. I hope we continue to make history."

Seoul awash with tears



REUTERS, Seoul

South Korean soccer fans flooded the streets of Seoul with tears early on Saturday after their team were eliminated from the World Cup.

Hundreds of thousands of red-clad fans had poured into the streets of the capital and other venues across the country to watch the 2002 semifinals play their final group match against Switzerland in Hanover, Germany.

While expectations were high that the Koreans could repeat their 2002 fairytale ride to the last four, a 2-0 loss to the Swiss, coupled with France's 2-0 win over Togo, saw

them exit the competition at the first hurdle.

Distraught fans tried to console one another through the tears.

"It's all over. We played so well. I'm crushed," said Woo Song-min, who watched the game in Seoul with his girlfriend.

Fans had started to gather at venues across the peninsula some 11 hours ahead of the 4 a.m. (1900 GMT) kick-off.

One male fan died while watching the game on the streets of Seoul though the cause of death had yet to be established, emergency officials said.

Concerts kept the masses entertained through the night and by the time the game started, the crowds had been whipped up into a frenzy.

The mood darkened early in the first half, however, when defender Philippe Senderos powered a

header past Lee Woon-jae to put Switzerland 1-0 ahead.

A controversial second goal from forward Alex Frei sparked screams of "offside" as the Seoul crowd vented their frustration at the massive screens set up to broadcast the match.

"We could have come back but the second goal broke our backs. It was not fair," said Kim Sun-wha.

There was no dancing or fireworks at the end of the match that had greeted South Korea's win over Togo and draw with France. Instead, riot police cleared the fans from the streets early to let garbage men clean up the mess.

The only people keen to hang around were vendors hoping a 50 percent mark down on World Cup T-shirts would bring in a few late sales.

Ukrainians over the moon



AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian fans danced in the streets Friday after their football team advanced to the second round of the World Cup with their 1-0 win against Tunisia.

Shouts of "Uuu-krai-na!" shook Kiev's central Independence Square where up to 10,000 people had gathered to watch the game on a giant screen in the capital's stifling heat.

When the final whistle blew, the cheers nearly drowned out the fireworks exploding over the crowd

decked out in the blue and yellow of the national standard.

Dozens of people danced in the fountains in the square, waving flags and scarves as a nearby group broke into a spontaneous rendition of Queen's "We are the Champions."

Ukraine is making its first-ever appearance in the World Cup and the whole nation has caught the football bug.

Fans watch the matches on screens set up in the nation's major cities; all bars and restaurants broadcast the games and overflow with clients; the president calls the head of the national football federation ahead of every game; and business comes to a standstill during the matches.

Several large companies have allowed employees to either leave work to watch the matches or to cheer on the home team on TV screens set up at the office.

Ukraine has had a roller-coaster of a ride in Germany.

They were demolished by Spain in their opener, 4-0, came back with a vengeance against Saudi Arabia 4-0, and squeaked by Tunisia 1-0 after captain Andriy Shevchenko scored a goal on a questionable penalty in Berlin on Friday.

Ukraine's next match will be in Cologne on Monday, where they will face the winners of Group G -- either France, South Korea or Switzerland -- that will be decided later on Friday.

Figo the figurehead again



INTERNET, undated

When Luis Figo gathered with Portugal last month to prepare for the World Cup, he sounded concerned about the effects of a draining season at Internazionale. "The reality is that I ran a lot this year," he said. "At this moment I would have liked to be more fresh." The 33-year-old ought to market whatever he has done, eaten or drunk since then because he could hardly look fresher if he tried.

A tournament that is proving unkind to certain ageing heroes who were tempted out of international retirement last year for one final crack at glory has been pleasurable for Figo. While Zinedine Zidane has failed to recapture former glories with France and Pavel Nedved has gone out with the Czech Republic Figo has been the driving force behind a Portuguese side who hope tomorrow to defeat Holland, as they did at Euro 2004, and earn a quarter-final against England or Ecuador.

His form has caused pleasant surprise even in his homeland, where he has long been revered and considered vital. This was billed as a time for Cristiano Ronaldo and Deco to grab centre stage but Ronaldo has been inconsistent and sometimes self-indulgent and injury plus a booking have restricted Deco to just one, admittedly impressive, performance. Figo has been the inspiration and it says much for his importance and sprightliness that he was used against Mexico when Portugal were already through to the second round.

Michels's psychological trick worked perfectly as a fired-up Van Basten returned to strike five goals in the remaining four matches to seal the trophy for the Dutch.

Crouch
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"Obviously I don't see that as the case. Obviously it is an option, but not the only option."

"I have proved over the years that I can receive the ball at the feet as much as anyone else and I'm sure all the players know that and feel confident that I can play that way."

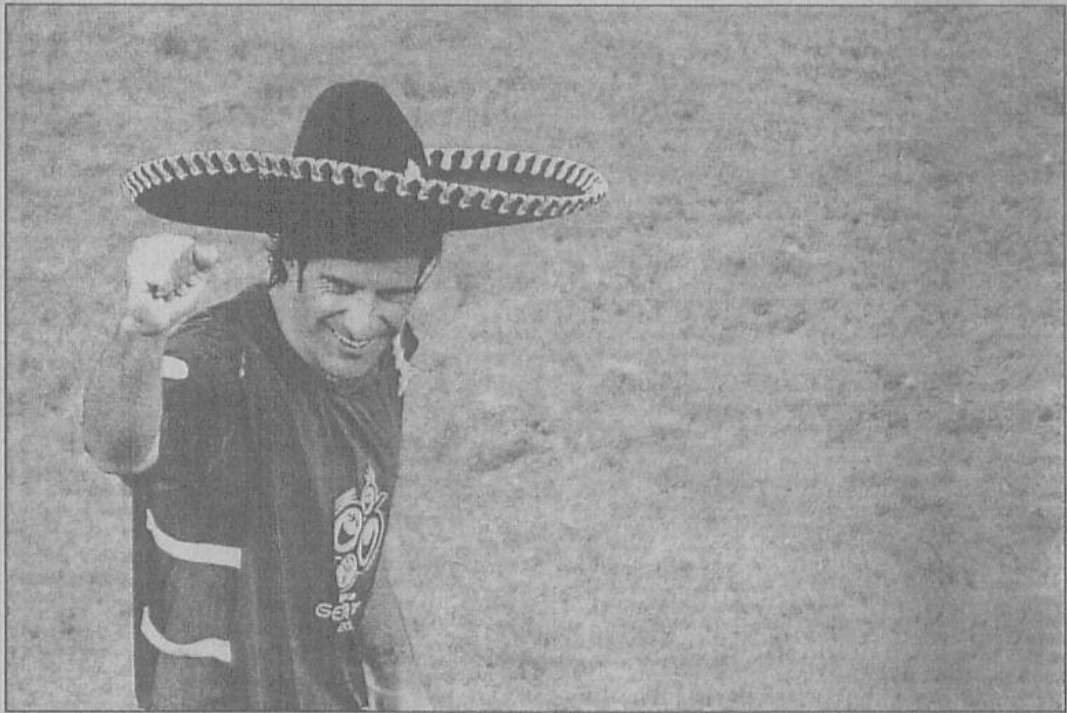
Ecuador hope

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football to Ecuador in 1899.

But they will have been perturbed by the manic enthusiasm the game has generated.

In 2001, former national team coach Hernan Dario Gomez was shot in the leg in a hotel lobby.

The incident was sparked reportedly because he didn't pick the son of Ecuador's former president for the national youth team.



Portuguese playmaker Luis Figo, attired in a sombrero, raises his fist to the crowd at the end of their tie against Mexico in Gelsenkirchen on 21 June.

PHOTO: AFP