



Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari (C) imparts tips to his charges as a cameraman takes pictures prior to a training session on Tuesday in Marienfeld.

PHOTO: AFP

Dhorasoo in Rangers link

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers manager Paul Le Guen has been told he must act immediately if he would like to bring France's World Cup star Vikash Dhorasoo to the Scottish giants.

Reports in the French press claim Rangers have already opened talks with the Paris St Germain midfielder.

His agent, Alain Migliaccio, says there has been no contact with Le Guen for two months but insists the 32-year-old would jump at the chance of a move to Ibrox.

Migliaccio told the Scottish Sun: "I spoke with Paul two months ago and he said he was interested in signing Vikash. He hasn't called me since and I don't know if he is going to call. But I know that Vikash wants to sign for Rangers."

"But if Rangers want to sign him then they will have to do it quickly as the season in France starts in three weeks and if PSG let Vikash go then they will have to find a replacement. As soon as Paul Le Guen phones me then I will be straight in the phone to PSG to see if they will let him go."

Get off our backs Domenech tells Le Pen

AFP, Hamelin

France coach Raymond Domenech has defended his players against comments from far-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen who claimed that they lacked support from the fans backhome.

The anti-immigration National Front leader made his comments ahead of France's last 16 round game against Spain which the French went on to win 3-1 to reach the quarterfinals.

Presidential candidate Le Pen said that there was no great national movement of support behind what he called an ageing team.

"I get the feeling that the French public do not feel truly represented by them which, without doubt, explains why there is not the same depth of support as there was eight years ago" when France won the World Cup at home.

Le Pen also indulged in an old charge that the French players did not properly sing the national anthem when it was played just prior to kickoff, citing the case of Zinedine Zidane "who mumbled a bit."

Replying to the comments at the French training base here, Domenech said that it was wrong to single out the French players for such criticism.

"He should take a look at the other teams. We are probably one of the teams which have the most players that sing the national anthem."

"He should stop saying things like this, the Spanish don't sing, the Argentinians don't sing."

"The players are proud to wear the French colours."

Le Pen has regularly been at loggerheads with the French national side which draws its players from a mixed background of European and African descent.

Scolari stokes siege mentality



INTERNET, undated

The lengths to which Luiz Felipe Scolari is willing to go to motivate his players for Saturday's quarterfinal were highlighted Wednesday when he began stoking up a siege mentality in his squad. In a move perceived by Scolari-watchers to have been prompted by the Brazilian his team's head of media, Afonso Melo, accused English newspapers of disrespecting Portugal and its squad.

Flanked by Pauleta and Nuno Valente, both of whom are set to start against England, Melo used the squad's media conference here to berate English newspapers for their treatment of Portugal. He took one paper to task for publishing what he described as fabricated Pauleta quotes criticising Paul Robinson, and said English papers had caused great offence by accusing the squad of being "violent and insubordinate".

That referred to reaction to Portugal's game against Holland which featured four red cards, including one for Deco and one for Costinha, and 16 cautions.

Scolari, a renowned critic of the media and particularly of reporting that is hurtful to him or inaccurate, appears to be seizing a chance to use the furore to his advantage. An expert at forging team spirit, and aware such qualities will be required by his weakened team against England, he is tapping into the pride Portuguese players have for their country.

Melo extravagantly called newspaper portrayals of Portugal as "unbearable for us", adding: "This is unfair and preposterous. The Portugal team (had) spent the last four years without seeing a red card and our supporters are well known for their fair play, so if this is the respect that some of the English press is going to show for Portugal and the Portugal team, we are going to show the English press the same respect."

The upshot was English papers were restricted to three questions after a lengthy portion of the conference in Portuguese. That in itself is insignificant but it appeared indicative of Scolari using every avenue to try to get his players in the frame of mind to repeat their Euro 2004 quarterfinal win over Sven-Goran Eriksson's side. He is known to exploit any detail to achieve victory, and was famous

at club level in Brazil for gamesmanship such as ordering ballboys to delay returning the ball.

"If you know a little bit of Portuguese history you can see that Portugal aren't afraid of anybody," Pauleta said. "The only thing we want is to be respected because we respect anybody and we don't accept the fake and false news about Portugal and the Portuguese team." Pauleta had earlier talked of wanting to reach the semifinals, which would equal Portugal's best World Cup performance of 1966, "to dignify our country".

The issue created a frosty and tense atmosphere before a training session in which Cristiano Ronaldo worked separately in his attempt to overcome a thigh injury before Saturday. Scolari, who was never scheduled to attend the conference, made no secret two months ago of his disdain for the English media as he turned down the chance to succeed Eriksson.

Pinpointing the media storm as his reason for rejecting the job may have been a convenient excuse rather than the whole truth but it seems he was horrified by the reaction to his candidacy. "There are 20 reporters camped outside my house and if that is part of another culture it is

not part of mine," he said as he withdrew from the running. He has since said he is not willing to commit to another post until his contract expires next month. It remains possible he will sign an extension.

England is his sole focus for now, and Pauleta insisted there was no danger of Portugal suffering a physical hangover from their game against Holland. The striker rejected the idea that England's form means Portugal have the upper hand. "I don't agree that England is playing badly," he said. "I think people said Spain were probably the team playing the best tournament and now they are out so I don't believe any team is playing badly or not."

Nuno Valente is looking forward to locking horns with David Beckham. "Beckham is a very good player and very dangerous because he is such an expert at free-kicks and set pieces," the left-back said. "But I believe I can stop him."

Valente added: "We are all going to be fit. We have had six days to rest. And we have a coach who is strong and who in three and a half years has shown his qualities with the Portugal team. We are very happy to have him as our coach."

Germans shed anthem shame



AFP, Berlin

German fans and players have finally dusted off their long-taboo national anthem for the football World Cup, no longer ashamed to belt it out, loud and proud, to cheer on the home team.

As the country revels in a new patriotism fueled by the German side's run to the quarter-finals, Haydn's lilting melody for the "Deutschlandlied" has become the soundtrack and now almost everyone is singing along for the first time since World War II.

Because anything to do with national identity is extremely delicate in Germany due to enduring shame over its Nazi past, an act as natural as singing the national anthem at a sporting event has made waves here.

Most German players in the post-war years, like most Germans, bowed their heads when the band struck up the anthem.

But Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann, who spends most of the year in California and describes US-style patriotism as inspiring, has encouraged his players to sing along. Surprisingly, most seem to know the lyrics.

In the televised coverage of the matches, the camera has moved from the team to Chancellor Angela Merkel, who smiles each time her mouth forms the opening verse, and then to fans chanting unisono amid a sea of black-red-gold flags.

"I like the fact the national team sings the anthem," Merkel told

Wednesday's issue of Sport Bild magazine.

"And I find it particularly nice that so many people have sung along. I think we should enjoy the World Cup and be happy. What really impresses our guests is the enthusiasm in the stadiums, even when Germany is not playing."

Historian Christoph Stöckl, a longtime director of the German Historical Museum in Berlin, notes that the Deutschlandlied "has a great democratic tradition".

Compared to other countries' militaristic anthems, the German one "is very moderate in tone, there is no bloodshed".

Then why has this song, whose lyrics were written by liberal poet August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben in 1841 and hail "unity, justice and freedom for the German fatherland", remained problematic for so long?

Like other national symbols, it was transformed with each upheaval in German history.

The Deutschlandlied first became the official national anthem in 1922 under the democratic, but chaotic Weimar Republic. During the 12 dark years of the Nazi period, the notorious first verse was highlighted.

Beginning with the lines "Deutschland, Deutschland ueber alles, Ueber alles in der Welt" ("Germany, Germany above all, Above everything in the world"), the words remain forever linked to the Nazis' dreams of empire and domination, even if they originally expressed a longing for national unity in 19th century Germany, which was still a patchwork of kingdoms and city-states.

In 1991, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the song, which

served as the West German anthem, was formally named the reunited country's national anthem. But only the uncontroversial third verse is sung.

As a sign of the changing times, it was the GEW teachers' union that provoked outcry when it decided "the nationalistic atmosphere conveyed by the singing of the anthem" during the World Cup.

It was even forced to apologize for its declaration that the anthem was "a terrible song of praise to the German nation" after a storm of protest among Germans basking in football fever.

At the same time, observers have noted that the omnipresent German flags on cars, apartment balconies and children's strollers have more to do with football than any nationalist sentiment.

"What is happening in Germany is not 'Deutschland, Deutschland ueber alles' but Germany is leading, another goal," said European Parliament deputy Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who was born in France to German-Jewish refugees.

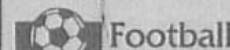
"People who don't know each other from Adam link arms and sing the national anthem together. You haven't seen that since August 1914," trendy east German author Thomas Brussig, referring to the start of World War I, noted.

"You ask yourself -- do they have the right to do that? Are we becoming dangerous again?"

He drew his conclusion long before the World Cup final, which will be played on July 9.

"We will remember that we supported Germany like the French supported France, the Italians Italy, and the Brazilians Brazil. And that finally it was not so bad."

Serie A tribunal opens



REUTERS, Rome

Italy's biggest-ever sports trial opened on Thursday before a panel of judges trying four leading soccer clubs on match-fixing charges which could force them out of the nation's top league and European competition.

Tribunal president Cesare Rupert opened the trial with a roll call of the accused who stood up as their names were read inside a spartan, low-ceilinged room in Rome's Olympic Stadium.

The trial, which was beamed by closed circuit television to media gathered in a nearby room, quickly moved to procedural issues that dominated the morning.

Three defence lawyers, passing a microphone as they raised points of order, asked that the trial be postponed to give the defence more time to prepare their cases. The judges then called a recess to consider the request.

The panel of five retired judges and one representative from Italy's referees association is considering charges against Serie A champions Juventus, AC Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio, as well as 26 senior officials, referees and linesmen.

In a reminder that it is a sports tribunal, the judges wore suits instead of the robes that are worn in criminal trials.

Among the accused in the "Clean Feet" scandal, AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani sat in the front row near Franco Carraro, former president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

Referee Massimo De Santis, who was pulled from the World Cup after the scandal erupted in May, was in the third row.

Former Juventus general manager Luciano Luciano Moggi, at the centre of the scandal, was not present. He has said he does not need to answer to the tribunal because he has quit Juventus.

The accused are charged with sporting fraud and unfair conduct, which could lead to the teams being relegated and the individuals being either suspended or banned from football.

Juventus runs the greatest risk of being dropped from Italy's top league, and the club appeared resigned to playing a year outside Serie A before competing again for the championship which it has won the past two years.

"We have worked to get things back to normal and prepare a team that in two years will return to being a winning squad," Juventus CEO Carlo Sant'Albano said in an interview published in La Repubblica newspaper.

Lawyers representing five Serie B teams that hope to be promoted if the accused squads are relegated turned up. But defence lawyers for the Serie A squads asked the court to bar their counterparts representing Bologna, Lecce, Treviso, Brescia

and Messina.

The trial will run for the duration of the World Cup in Germany and vie for Italians' attention with the progress of the national team, who have 13 players from the four accused clubs. Italy face Ukraine on Friday in the quarterfinals.

Soccer-mad Italy has been gripped by the scandal since it erupted last month with the publication of intercepted telephone conversations showing Moggi discussing refereeing appointments with senior FIGC officials during the 2004-05 season.

FIGC, which appointed the tribunal, has said it will rule by July 9, the date of the World Cup final, and that appeals would be heard by July 20.

That would give FIGC time before a deadline of July 27 to submit the names of teams to compete in next season's Champions League and UEFA Cup competitions.

If they were relegated, Juventus, Milan and Fiorentina would miss the Champions League and Lazio the UEFA Cup. If they were only docked points, they would still be able to compete.

The football trial is not a criminal proceeding but prosecutors in four cities have launched investigations which could lead to criminal charges.

Football frenzy in Ukraine



AFP, Kiev

No longer do kids playing football in the backyards of Ukraine argue over who is going to be Ronaldo and Beckham. Today they fight over who is going to be 'Sheva', Voronin and Kalinichenko.

The children have caught the football fever sweeping the country ahead of Ukraine's historic quarterfinal against Italy on Friday in the nation's first-ever World Cup appearance.

"People who've never been interested in football, today the games are all they talk about," says Valya Romanenko, a 28-year-old English teacher in Kiev and longtime football fanatic. "Everyone is buying flags to hang from windows."

Ukrainian flags and the yellow jerseys of the team are selling like hotcakes from stands throughout the country. Many people are wearing team jerseys to work and around town, and lawmakers are

donning them for parliament sessions.

Taking the lead from head coach Oleg Blokhin, many fans are vowing to shave their heads in the event that the team wins football's top prize -- a distant dream only a few weeks ago that's today gaining more and more converts.

Bars and restaurants overflow with people during matches and most businesses come to a standstill.

"All of our tables get reserved several days before matches," says Serhiy, a barman at Planeta-Sport in Kiev, one of the capital's most popular sport-watching venues.

The former Soviet state is making its first appearance at the world's premier football contest since gaining its independence in 1991 and few thought the boys in yellow would get as far as the quarterfinals.

Star striker Andriy Shevchenko, alias 'Sheva', has said repeatedly that he would consider it a success if the team made it to the last 16.

So the unexpected arrival in the last eight has fanned patriotic

flames, especially vis-a-vis Russia, which has traditionally wielded influence over its smaller neighbour.

Russia never made it past the group phase in the two World Cups at which it has played and failed to qualify for this year's contest.

"We're the only eastern European team that has gone this far," says Grigoriy Medvid, a 30-year-old railroad worker from western Lviv.

"Now more people in the world will know that Ukraine is not Russia. Russia is not even competing. So which one of us is the little brother?"

The team's victories also come as a welcome break from headlines about the nation's bickering politicians, the stagnating economy and rising energy prices.

"If we beat the Italians and they triple gas prices, I don't even think anyone would notice," says Vassyl Androsenko, a 52-year-old engineer in Kiev.

And some think the football victories can accelerate the pro-Western integration advocated by the new, post "orange revolution" authorities.

"You know, I don't exclude that if the team is successful, it can speed up Ukraine's integration into Europe," says Yaroslav Vegera, a 28-year-old history teacher in Lviv.

"If the country is in the quarterfinals, that means its crisis has finished and a renaissance has started."

The Ukrainian matches are also doing their bit to improve international relations.

During one match, "we had a table with two Argentinians, two Englishmen, two Chinese and a couple of Ukrainians and you should have seen how they were jumping up and down together," says Roman, an administrator at the Shato restaurant in central Kiev.

There are a few people, however, who have resisted the football mania.

"During the past month work discipline at my business has collapsed," complains Igor Kum, a 32-year-old owner of a food distribution firm in western Lviv. "People are late to work because they're watching football late into the night, at work they turn on the TV."

"I can't wait until this Cup is over," he says.



A cameraman takes pictures as policemen guard outside the Olympic Stadium in Rome, where the trial on Serie A's match-fixing scandal is taking place, on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP