



BRING ON MIKE TYSON: German midfielder David Odonkor (L) and striker Lukas Podolski pose for photographs on a stage at the Fan Fest (Fan Mile) in Berlin on Sunday. One million people took over central Berlin yesterday to give the German team a heroes' welcome at the end of their World Cup campaign.

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THIRD EYE

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

It is hard to understand the clamour surrounding the proposed cancellation of the third-place final in the World Cup, when it is a perfectly good spectacle, that is not only enjoyable for the fans but an experience for a lot of fringe players who find themselves on the sidelines all too often.

And as it has often happened in the past, this one too turned into an eye-catching exhibition of attacking end to end football. And it might so happen that this is the last display of attacking football that you might see in this World Cup, considering past history of final matches.

Anyhow Portugal versus Germany it was and Luis Figo and Michael Ballack both started on the bench but there was a start for German favourite Oliver Kahn, in what would turn out to be his last match for the national team. It is great testament to a career, which has seen Kahn dominate the world headlines for reasons both right and wrong. Kahn bowed out in style and showed that he has lost none of the touches that made him a revered figure in the Far East, four years earlier.

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Deutsch delight in consolation

AFP, Berlin

Tens of thousands of fans streamed into Berlin Sunday to send off the German team after its 3-1 triumph over Portugal, as Germany basked in the praise of a World Cup that 'beat all expectations'.

As the championship drew to a close, Germany looked back on a pitch-perfect tournament that saw a thrilling winning streak for the home side, few hooligans, little violence, a giddy national mood and glorious weather.

Millions of supporters partied through the night across the country after Germany clinched the third-place consolation prize in the southern city of Stuttgart.

Flag-waving Germans decked out in the side's jerseys and began gathering in the early morning hours on Berlin's wildly successful Fan Mile stretching behind the Brandenburg Gate for a heroes' parade for the 'Mannschaft' led by coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"You are our world champions," the Bild am Sonntag tabloid splashed across its front page. "Third place - but with all respect to France and Italy it is we who feel like the world champions."

It offered cut-out Klinsmann

masks for Sunday's celebration and said the German fans should give themselves a pat on the back for putting the country's guests in a month-long mood to party.

"We have the best fans in the world! No one cheered, screamed and suffered for their team like they did. LIKE ALL OF US!"

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Germany had changed its image abroad for the better thanks to a spectacularly successful World Cup.

"The old cliches have been replaced by a new, positive and more fair image of Germany," he wrote in a column for the Bild am Sonntag.

He said the 2006 championship had "beat all expectations", particularly in its smooth organization and that Britain could take a page from Germany's planning as it prepares for the 2012 Olympics in London.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave her own tribute to the supporters, saying Saturday that she did not want to detract attention from the players by appearing at the send-off.

"Tomorrow in Berlin, the team belongs to the fans," she said.

Merkel, never known as a sports enthusiast before the championship, came to symbolize the infec-

tious power of the World Cup spirit as she seemed to surprise even herself by jumping out of her seat and cheering when Germany scored a goal, as the television cameras rolled.

But she dismissed any notion that she was a fair-weather fan.

"I was always a football fan," she insisted in an interview in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung.

"No one was interested before and no one watched me when I watched a game. That's changed since I became chancellor."

Berlin's daily Tagesspiegel hoped the football magic would endure as long as the fond memories.

"In the middle of the night at the Stuttgart Rail Station: A brass band made up of old men in Germany jerseys plays. Croatian and Australian fans come out of the stadium, clapping along. Soon hundreds of them are dancing along the platforms, even the staff. A man wipes tears from his eyes. 'I have never seen my country this way.'"

"Everyone experienced similar scenes at the football World Cup...They made us happy and proud that Germany could be such a good host."

Kahn calls it a day

AFP, Stuttgart

Germany goalkeeper Oliver Kahn announced here on Saturday after his country won the World Cup third-place playoff against Portugal that he was ending his international career.

"It was my last international match today and I could not have wished for a better final game for my country," Kahn said.

"It was a great time, but you have to know when it is time to stop."

Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann had dropped Kahn in favour of Jens Lehmann for the tournament, but recalled him for the third-place playoff which Germany won 3-1.

Kahn, 37, was elected the best player of the 2002 World Cup after helping Germany to the final in which they were beaten 2-0 by Brazil.

The Bayern Munich stopper admitted during the World Cup that he would "never understand" Klinsmann's decision to drop him just before the tournament.

But he won praise for the way he encouraged Lehmann ahead of the tense penalty shootout victory against Argentina in the quarterfinal.

Kahn also faces a fight for his place at Bayern Munich with 22-year-old Michael Rensing emerging last season.

Figo quits finally

AFP, Stuttgart

Portugal said goodbye to one of its greatest heroes here on Saturday as winger Luis Figo bowed out of international football in his country's 3-1 defeat to Germany in the World Cup third place play-off.

The 33-year-old Figo won his 127th cap for Portugal - he is the country's most capped player - coming on in the 75th minute for a cameo role, providing the curling cross for Nuno Gomes to score Portugal's goal.

At the final whistle Figo was in tears after 15 years of international service came to an end.

"It is hard for me to end my international career in this way. I did everything I could and the team gave their all, but Germany

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Germans feel like champions

AFP, Stuttgart

Unable to achieve their goal of becoming world champions, host nation Germany hailed themselves as the people's champions after ending their World Cup campaign on a high with a 3-1 victory over Portugal in the third-place play-off on Saturday.

Two great individual goals from Bastian Schweinsteiger and an own goal from Armando Petit saw Germany net the consolation of third prize.

While the win could not make amends for the shattering 2-0 semifinals defeat to Italy it capped off Germany's tournament in style and the German media hailed their heroes.

"You are our world champions," headlined Bild am Sonntag. "Third place - but with all respect to France and Italy it is we who feel like the world champions."

"Germany have played the most attractive football in the tournament and scored the most goals."

"The only thing we want to hear now is the yes word from (Jurgen) Klinsmann."

Germany manager Jurgen Klinsmann, a World Cup winner with West Germany in 1990, has yet to decide whether he will stay on as national coach saying he needed some time to gather his thoughts.

"So much has happened in the last few weeks and I haven't taken it all on board yet. Give me a few days," Klinsmann pleaded.

"I am overwhelmed by emotion

at the moment and need to process things in my mind before making a decision."

After a rocky start the German press have taken to Klinsmann and his attacking brand of football has left its mark.

"The people's champions," declared the Frankfurter Allgemeine. "A perfect way to sign off. We may not have become champions but our performances are that of world champions."

Germany captain Michael Ballack, who missed the Portugal win through injury, said the players would do their all to convince Klinsmann to stay on.

"We will talk to the coach individ-

ually and try to convince him to stay - if he has not yet decided," explained Ballack.

While Klinsmann's future is uncertain that of goalkeeper Oliver Kahn's is now clear after he announced his retirement from international football after the Portugal triumph.

"The atmosphere was incredible and you wonder what it would have been like had we become world champions," Kahn said.

"It was one of the most emotional, if not the most emotional, moments I can remember."

The 37-year-old Kahn won 86 caps for his country but played

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Scolari's men hailed at home

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal's media congratulated Luiz Felipe Scolari's team on Sunday after it finished fourth in the 2006 World Cup; it's second-best performance in the history of the tournament.

"We lost yesterday but it doesn't matter, they were fantastic days," read the headline in daily tabloid

24Horas after the team's 3-1 loss to hosts Germany on Saturday.

"Portugal pleased with fourth place in its 'final' with Germany," said daily newspaper Diario de Noticias on its front page.

Portugal had only ever been to three World Cups before this year's finals and failed to get past the first round in two of them.

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PHOTO: AFP

ADIOS: German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn (R) and Portuguese forward Luis Figo share their emotion at the end of their third-place playoff at Stuttgart on Saturday. Both players announced their retirement after the game.



PHOTO: AFP

GOTCHA: Argentina legend Diego Maradona closely follows his wife Claudia as they enter Stuttgart's Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion to watch the third-place play-off between Germany and Portugal on Saturday.

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