



PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian superstars Ronaldinho (R) and Kaka (C) go through a drill during training in Stockholm on Sunday ahead of today's friendly against Ecuador.

Brazilians to share rooms

REUTERS, Stockholm

Brazil's players have gone back to the old practice of sharing rooms in a bid by coach Dunga to improve team spirit.

The players were given individual rooms during the World Cup, when a lacklustre campaign ended with a shock quarterfinal defeat against France.

After the tournament, the Brazilian media complained that the side lacked fighting spirit and teamwork.

"The players were isolated in their rooms and chatting on the internet," Dunga told the Brazilian Football Confederation's Web site.

"I think that getting on with one another is fundamental in forming a group."

"Sharing the same room, the players can exchange ideas, talk about their experiences, in short, have real conversations like friends."

Dunga replaced Carlos Alberto Parreira after the World Cup and is unbeaten in his three matches in charge. Brazil face Ecuador in Stockholm on Tuesday.

Brazil revisit '58 scene

Football

REUTERS, Stockholm

Brazil swap the heat of Kuwait for the autumnal chill of Stockholm when they face fellow South Americans Ecuador at the scene of one of their most famous triumphs on Tuesday.

The globetrotting Brazilians, who played two matches in London last month, beat a Kuwait Select team 4-0 in almost 40C in Kuwait on Saturday and now face Ecuador in another friendly in the Swedish capital where the mercury will barely touch 10C.

The game will take place at the Rasunda stadium, where Brazil famously beat Sweden 5-2 in the 1958 World Cup final to win the first of their record five world titles.

The match will always be remembered for the two goals scored by the 17-year-old Pele, including one in which he lobbed the ball over a bemused defender and smashed it into the net.

Brazil have returned to the arena three times since then in 1965, 1973 and 1988 for friendlies against Sweden.

This time, Brazil will be attempt-

ing to extend their three match unbeaten run under new coach Dunga, who replaced Carlos Alberto Parreira following their quarter-final exit at the World Cup.

They will also out to avenge a 1-0 defeat in their last meeting against the Ecuadorians in a World Cup qualifier in Quito in 2004.

Dunga's squad includes a number of young players including four who are uncapped - goalkeeper Helton, full backs Daniel Alves and Adriano Correia and midfielder Lucas.

Kaka, Ronaldinho, Lucio and Robinho are among the survivors from the World Cup.

Ronaldo, still recovering from a minor knee operation, and Adriano are both excluded, while goalkeeper

Dida has announced his international retirement.

The game is the second on a tour which began with a 4-0 win over a Kuwait Select team on Saturday.

Brazil have yet to start with both Ronaldinho and Kaka on the field under Dunga, and the coach would give little away over his starting lineup on arriving in Stockholm.

"I do not like to talk about individuals," he told reporters after a light training session.

"We have this tendency in Brazil to emphasize one player in particular. We need to have a group of 22 all motivated and well prepared. Then, during the game the individual can make a difference."

"All of them will have an opportunity and their chance to play in the right time."

Ecuador have included 14 members of their World Cup squad, when they performed creditably by reaching the last 16 for the first time in their history.

The big surprise is the inclusion of striker Edmundo Zura, who plays for Imbabura in the Ecuadorian second division.

Striker Ivan Kaviedes, originally included, has pulled out of the trip through injury.

TEAMS

BRAZIL: Gomes; Daniel Alves, Lucio, Luisao, Adriano Correia; Gilberto Silva, Dudu Cearense, Kaka, Daniel Carvalho; Fred, Robinho
ECUADOR: Cristian Mora; Ulises de la Cruz, Giovanni Espinoza, Ivan Hurtado, Paul Ambrossi; Segundo Castillo, Edwin Tenorio, Luis Antonio Valencia, Edison Mendez; Felix Borja, Felipe Caicedo.

Tight security for England match

AFP, Zagreb

Croatian police will step up security for this week's Euro 2008 "high risk" qualifier against England, police and football officials said Monday.

"Wednesday's qualifier against England is considered a high risk match," a Croatian Football Federation official, Zorislav Srebric, told journalists.

Some 4,500 English fans are expected in Zagreb for the match, he said adding that the federation and police would do everything possible to avoid incidents.

A special English police team is also to arrive in Zagreb on Tuesday to help their Croatian counterparts for the occasion, a police statement said.

Croatia and England play in Group E alongside Andorra, Estonia, Israel, Macedonia and Russia.

On Saturday, Croatia defeated Andorra 7-0 while England played a goalless draw against Macedonia.

Ljungberg out

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden skipper Fredrik Ljungberg is injured and will miss Wednesday's Euro 2008 qualifier against Iceland, the Swedish football association said Monday.

The Arsenal midfielder is sidelined after limping off early in the second half of Sweden's 2-0 victory over Spain in Saturday's Euro 2008 qualifier with a calf problem.

"Ljungberg's injury was examined with a magnetic camera... The examination confirmed the injury was such that (his) playing in Wednesday's match against Iceland is ruled out," the Swedish FA said in a statement published on its website.

"It's sad, but that's the way it is," said Ljungberg, who instead of travelling to Reykjavik will now return to London for further tests with Arsenal's medical team.

"It's obviously unfortunate for us... We were prepared for this news, we have good alternatives available," Sweden coach Lars Lagerbaeck said.

Stefan Ishizaki is set to come in as a replacement.

Coupet worry for France

AFP, Paris

Goalkeeper Gregory Coupet will miss France's Euro 2008 qualifier against the Faroe Islands on Wednesday after injuring his hand in the shock 1-0 defeat to Scotland.

Coupet will be replaced by either Fiorentina's Sebastien Frey or PSG's Mickael Landreau.

Lyon star Coupet has made the number one keeper's position his own following the World Cup where national team coach Raymond Domenech opted for veteran Fabien Barthez.

Ironically, Barthez announced his retirement from football on Thursday after failing to find a new club.

Cassano 'perfect' for Napoli

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid's transfer market consultant has this afternoon sensationally urged Antonio Cassano to join Napoli.

Ernesto Bronzetti believes that the Serie B outfit would be the perfect environment for Cassano to live up to his potential should they win promotion to the top flight this term.

"I think Napoli would be an excellent solution for him," Bronzetti, the man who looks after all of the Spanish club's overseas moves, told Radio Incontro on Monday.

"Cassano is a player who needs to feel that people believe in him and needs to be pushed on by the fans."

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Neville accepts blame

AFP, Manchester

Gary Neville, who has never scored in 83 international appearances for England, accepted the blame on Sunday for wasting a glorious opportunity to break his duck.

The Manchester United defender had the ideal chance to open his account, and win Saturday's Euro 2008 qualifier against Macedonia, when the ball fell in front of him at Old Trafford.

Macedonia goalkeeper Jane Nikoloski parried a Peter Crouch header into Neville's path, and it seemed certain the veteran full-back would slam his shot into the visitors' net.

Instead, Neville ballooned a volley into the crowd and held his

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Giants seek swift recovery

REUTERS, London



France, England and Ireland will attempt to put right damaging weekend results when they get straight back into action amid 22 Euro 2008 qualifiers on Wednesday.

France suffered their first away qualifying defeat for 14 years when they went down 1-0 to Scotland but have the chance to replace that in their immediate memory by putting a hatful of goals past the Faroe Islands in Sochaux.

Having beaten Italy 3-1 in their World Cup final rematch last month France would have thought they were in early control of a really difficult Group B but Scotland's win, and Lithuania's draw against Italy, have shown there is still much to be done.

The Faroes held out until the last minute against Lithuania on Saturday before losing 1-0 and with another mass-defence display expected, the French fans might have to be patient.

Scotland will be desperate to consolidate their famous win by getting something from their trip to Ukraine, who lost 2-0 in Italy on Saturday but who are likely to have striker Andriy Shevchenko back after illness.

The world champions were still some way from their best in that game but should continue their

gradual rebuild in Georgia.

England face a much more difficult test when they take on Croatia in Zagreb, where the home side have not lost a competitive game for 12 years since splitting from Yugoslavia, having won 20 and drawn 10 of their 30 matches.

England, toothless in their 0-0 home draw with Macedonia, would still be looking good in Group E if they could end that record while the Croats, who thumped Andorra 7-0, would really start to fancy their own chances if they could grab all three points.

Russia, already off the pace in the group after starting with two draws, will look to kick-start their campaign at home to Estonia.

Ireland were always up against it having been drawn alongside Germany and Czech Republic in Group D but made it even tougher for themselves by losing 5-2 in Cyprus.

With pressure already growing on new, but inexperienced manager Steve Staunton, they will need to respond at home to the Czechs in Dublin on Wednesday.

That will be no easy task against a team who made it three wins out of three by thrashing San Marino 7-0.

Germany, also boasting a perfect record after two games - and a goal difference of plus 14 - visit Slovakia, on a high themselves after thumping Wales 5-1 in Cardiff. Wales host Cyprus.

Sweden are the early pacesetters in Group F after inflicting a

second successive defeat on Spain on Saturday.

The visit Iceland, with Denmark, second on four points after being held at home by Northern Ireland, expecting to get back to winning ways in Liechtenstein and Spain not in action.

Group G is already developing into a tough tussle after Bulgaria showed they were serious contenders in their 1-1 draw with the Netherlands.

They should consolidate that result by beating Luxembourg away while the Dutch, without injured forward Dirk Kuyt, host Albania.

Having missed out on the World Cup, Greece have made a determined start in the defence of their European title with wins over Moldova and Norway in Group D.

They visit Bosnia, while Turkey, also on six points from two games, host Moldova.

Group A also looks like going all the way with everyone taking points off each other so far.

Serbia lead with seven points from three games going into their home game against Armenia while Finland (five from three) travel to Kazakhstan. Portugal (four from three) are in Poland.

Austria and Switzerland, automatically through as joint hosts of the tournament, meet in a friendly in Innsbruck.



PHOTO: AFP

Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann pulls off a flying save during a training session for the national team on Sunday.

Judgment day for match-fixers

Football

AFP, Rome

Four Serie A clubs found guilty of match-fixing will find out this week if their final appeals against their punishments have been successful.

Juventus were relegated to Italy's second division (Serie B) and made to start on minus 17 points for their part in rigging matches in the 2004-05 season, while AC Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio all kept their Serie A status but were deducted points.

AC Milan started on minus eight points, Fiorentina on minus 19 and Lazio on minus 11. All of the four guilty clubs qualified for European competition, but only AC Milan were allowed to participate.

The four clubs have already seen

their original sentences reduced in earlier appeals and are now seeking further cuts in the Italian Olympic Committee's Court of Arbitration - the highest authority within Italy's sporting-legal system.

Juventus, AC Milan and Lazio will hear their fates on Wednesday and Fiorentina will find out on Thursday.

According to Italian media reports all the clubs are likely to see their sentences reduced and rival teams are already up in arms.

"It would be scandalous if the sports judiciary cave in to psychological pressure and reduce the previous sentences," Aurelio De Laurentis, president of Serie B club Napoli, told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"It would be absurd to change justice after the season has begun."

President of Serie B club Genoa, Ezio Preziosi, agreed with De

Laurentis.

"The match-fixing sentences need to stay as they are so as not to delegitimise the sports justice system," said the man whose team were denied promotion to Serie A last year for match-fixing.

Juventus coach Didier Deschamps insisted his club - who were also stripped of the league titles they won in 2004-05 and 2005-06 - deserve a lighter sentence.

"I hope to see the right decision made because it's not fair as it stands," said the former France international, a World Cup winner in 1998.

"The disparity in the sentencing is scandalous."

Juventus were stung with a heavier sentence because of their bigger role in the scandal known in Italy as 'Calciopoli'.

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ASIAN CUP

Final slots up for grabs

Football

AFP, Singapore

South Korea and Iran can secure their places at the Asian Cup finals when qualifying resumes Wednesday, but underachieving China has a fight on its hands.

Seven slots are still up for grabs and while Korea and Iran should take two of them, a struggling China, the beaten finalist in 2004, still has its work cut out.

The Chinese, long tipped as a sleeping giant but which has yet to take its place among the continental elite, must beat Palestine to keep their hopes alive. If they do and Iraq beats Singapore then they will be through.

But if they don't, it will go to the

wire in the final round of qualifying on November 15.

They go into the game -- played in Jordan -- handicapped by a two-match suspension handed to playmaker Shao Jiayi who was sent off in China's 0-0 draw with Singapore last month. It means he misses their final two qualifiers.

Captain Li Weifeng will also miss the Palestine clash after picking up his second yellow card of the qualifying campaign against the Singaporeans.

Currently, China are level on seven points in Group E with Iraq. Palestine and Singapore both have four points with two matches to play.

So far, Australia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and United Arab Emirates are through to the show-piece event next year, to be jointly hosted by Thailand, Indonesia,

Vietnam and Malaysia. The co-hosts qualify automatically.

South Korea only needs a draw to seal their place when they take on Syria at home, but they go into the match on the back of 3-1 home defeat to the Michael Essien-led Ghana on Sunday, which has given coach Pim Verbeek food for thought.

Verbeek has dropped regular goalkeeper Lee Woon-jae, as well as World Cup striker Ahn Jung-hwan, who is without a club after being released by German side MSV Duisberg, and former AFC young player of the year Park Chu-young.

Iran travel to Taipei to play Taiwan, who are pointless after four matches. A victory for Amir Qalehnoei's team will see them into the finals next July.

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Football

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Teenage striker Gonzalo Higuain scored twice as River Plate beat arch-rivals and leaders Boca Juniors 3-1 on Sunday in the biggest match of the Argentine season.

River also ended Boca's run of 22 domestic games without defeat and moved into second place in the Apertura championship, one point behind their opponents, as the competition reached the halfway mark.

The match pitted two teammates from Argentina's 1978 World Cup winning team against each other on the touchline -- River coach Daniel Passarella and his Boca counterpart Ricardo La Volpe.

Passarella captained the team and La Volpe, who coached Mexico at this year's World Cup, was reserve goalkeeper.

Higuain, 18, put River ahead in the 29th minute, firing home after a series of rebounds.

Boca levelled two minutes later when Fernando Gago found Rodrigo Palacio, who outfoxed his marker and fired into the roof of the net.

River went back in front in the 53rd minute when Fernando Belluschi set up Higuain who took his chance with aplomb.

Belluschi also set up the third in the 67th minute, providing a perfect pass to Ernesto Farias who slipped the ball past the advancing Aldo Bobadilla.

Boca, whose day was complete when defender Matias Silvestre was sent off in the 74th minute for a second bookable offence, lead with 22 points from nine matches, while River have 21 from ten.

Estudiantes, coached by former Argentina captain Diego Simeone, overcame the absence of suspended

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PHOTO: AFP

River Plate star Gonzalo Higuain (R) celebrates with teammate Matias Abeleira after scoring one of his two goals against Boca Juniors at the Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires on Sunday.