



'No need to panic'

AFP, Port of Spain



South Africa coach Mickey Arthur said there is no need to panic despite watching his world number one side's batting line-up fail to click for the second successive match.

South Africa lost by seven wickets to Pakistan here on Friday in their final World Cup warm-up match on an awful pitch which caused so many concerns that players protested over its match worthiness.

"There is absolutely no panic. This was just a practice match and it didn't go our way," said Arthur after seeing another below-par outing from his batsmen who mustered just 192 against Ireland on Monday.

"I think if the coin had fallen the other way and had we bowled first, it would have been different. Our bowlers had a decent workout, but the only concern is that the top order still needs some runs."

The game was help up for nearly 10 minutes in the morning session after the players had complained of the track. South Africa were 56-3 at the stage.

"I don't think we gave up. It took us 10 overs to regain the intensity after the break," said Arthur.

"The last thing we wanted was to lose a player like Jacques Kallis

(on an unpredictable pitch) as he is obviously crucial to our preparations. We were five down early and wanted 220, but ended up shorter than that."

The South African coach believed that his team would not encounter such surfaces when the main competition starts.



MICKEY ARTHUR

"I don't think we are going to play on such pitches in the main competition, if my information about the pitches is right," said Arthur.

"I think it's certainly going to be a bowl-first competition, but the toss is not going to be as crucial as it was today (Friday)."

South Africa's hopes of gaining valuable batting practice were dashed when they were put in to bat on a wet pitch as they could manage just 199, a total which

was much below their expectations.

Pakistan batted as if it was the easiest job in the world, surpassing their opponents' total with more than five overs to spare. This was just the boost they needed ahead of their World Cup opener against the West Indies next week.

"It was a tale of two pitches," added Arthur.

"When we batted it was wet and difficult. It dried up later and batting became easier. It was of variable bounce when we started, but awesome to bat on later in the match."

South Africa were restricted to a modest total with only Loots Bosman defying the Pakistani attack with 53. Ashwell Prince (35), Jacques Kallis (29) and Mark Boucher (22) were the other notable scorers.

Pakistani bowlers struck it rich, with seamers Mohammad Sami and Umar Gul, and off-spinners Mohammad Hafeez and Shoaib Malik grabbing two wickets apiece.

In contrast, Pakistan's batting flourished as Younis Khan (79), opener Hafeez (49) and Mohammad Yousuf (48 not out) all made merry in better batting conditions.

South Africa are in Group A of the World Cup with defending champions Australia, Scotland and the Netherlands.

The top two sides will advance to the next Super Eight stage.

Los Angeles Galaxy president and general manager Alexi Lalas speaks during a press conference announcing the details of the World Series of Football at the Home Depot Centre on Friday.

Inter Ultras to 'deafen' Ronaldo



INTERNET, undated

Inter supporters have planned 30,000 whistles to heckle Ronaldo throughout the derby, but Gennaro Gattuso assures his teammate is ready for anything.

This will be the first time Il Fenomeno has faced his former club since joining Milan and the fans have prepared a welcome that is not so much warm as incandescent.

The 'Boys' Ultras club have prepared 30,000 whistles to hand out at San Siro so that fans can deafen Ronaldo with the noise every time he touches the ball.

Nonetheless, teammate Gattuso is certain that the unusual situation will not trouble Roni too much.

"Ronaldo is in good shape, wants to do well and I think he's been dreaming about this match for a very long time," smiled the midfielder.

"It's only normal he'll have an incredible desire to prove he is not finished as a player, regardless of what some might say."

Ringhio has never scored in the Milan derby and is none too confident of his chances on Sunday afternoon either.

"I get the feeling if I hit the back of the net against Inter there would be a lot of heart attacks on the

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Chelsea to face Galaxy



AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham is set to face a handful of his former English international teammates as part of a four-team tournament unveiled Friday that will include Chelsea and Galaxy financiers Anschutz Entertainment Group.

Doubleheaders at the Galaxy's home stadium will send Chelsea against the Bluewings and Galaxy against Tigres on July 17 and Chelsea against the Galaxy with the Tigres against Suwon on July 21.

Chelsea also have planned a July 14 tune-up match at another California venue against an unannounced opponent.

Beckham will have a chance to show his skills to current England and Chelsea skipper John Terry as

well as England internationals Ashley Cole, Joe Cole, Frank Lampard, Wayne Bridge and Shaun Wright-Phillips.

Chelsea coach and manager Jose Mourinho sent a video message wishing Beckham the best of luck in his American adventure.

"The fact that David Beckham is there brings something extra to the tournament and to the game," he said.

"This gives me the chance to wish him big success in the US. He will be very important for US soccer and for the relationship between US soccer and European soccer."

Chelsea also plan to take part in future World Series tournaments in 2009 and 2011.

Chelsea and the Galaxy have also established a relationship

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Lille opt against CAS appeal

AFP, Lille

Lille have finally decided to drop their protracted protest against the Champions League last 16 first leg goal scored by Manchester United last month.

Lille on Friday announced that following UEFA's rejection of their latest appeal, they will take it no further, ruling out a challenge at the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Manchester United's Ryan Giggs scored with a quickly taken free-kick at the end of the first leg in northern France, a goal which prompted a furious reaction from Lille.

Straight after the goal, the Lille players stormed off the pitch and ever since the club has been dragging the issue through one appeal after another, despite European football's governing body UEFA confirming there was nothing wrong with the goal.

Lille had been hoping to get UEFA to nullify the original result - a 1-0 victory for Man Utd -- and order a replay of the match.

However despite a series of appeals, Lille found no favour from UEFA who confirmed that the referee was right to allow the goal to stand.

Rijkaard soft on Motta

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona's Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta has been given a few days holiday to sort out personal problems, coach Frank Rijkaard said on Friday.

The 24-year-old missed training without permission on Thursday, and had a meeting with the club's management later in the day. He was left out of the squad to face Real Madrid in the Nou Camp on Saturday.

"It isn't a punishment. I have given him time to rest and recuperate so that he can return in a few days full of energy again," Rijkaard told a news conference.

"He isn't injured or ill. He's going through a difficult moment and is not at ease with himself. This is a move to help one of our players."

Rijkaard gave no explanation as to what Motta's problems were. Motta has been left out of the club's previous three squads.

"It is the type of thing that can happen in any company, and isn't the only time I have done this," Rijkaard added.

"It isn't easy to be a Barcelona player and this decision is for the good of him and the team. He is a good person who I get on well with, and he has always been one of my favourite players. But after a long time here things have become difficult for him."

Charlton eulogises Ronaldo



AFP, Manchester

Manchester United legend Bobby Charlton has paid arguably the greatest tribute yet to the team's brilliant Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo.

Charlton, an Old Trafford director, is uniquely qualified to discuss the quality of footballers to have played for United after over half a century associated with the club.

Having spent the most productive years of his club career alongside players of the calibre of Denis Law and George Best, Charlton is no stranger to prodigious football talent, yet the England World Cup winner confesses that even he has been stunned by Ronaldo's superlative form this season.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has confirmed the club are progressing with talks designed to hand Ronaldo an improved contract, even though he is already tied to the team until 2010, and Charlton is certain they have a unique talent on their hands.

"Ronaldo has just been fantas-

tic," said Charlton. "It takes great players to grab the ball by the horns and lift people and he has been doing that recently."

"He does things I have never seen anybody else do. And the one thing he does do is he is as tough as hell. If you clatter him, it doesn't bother him too much, he'll carry on. His goal at Fulham was just marvellous and I think he has been a better player than even people here realise."

Charlton also leapt to the defence of Ronaldo, who is still accused of diving in search of penalties. The latest such incident saw the United star harshly booked for a supposed dive as he bore down on goal during United's Champions League victory over Lille on Wednesday.

"He doesn't do that normally," said Charlton. "Why would he? If he is getting near goal and he's given the chance, what would he rather have, the penalty or the goal? He will always go for goal, he is such a strong character."

Charlton was talking before United's Champions League draw pitted them against Roma in the quarter-finals and, as the club

prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary in European football by playing a European XI in a charity fund-raiser on Tuesday, Charlton believes success in the competition for the first time since 1999 is overdue.

A lot of people have said that Alex has not won as many European Cups as maybe he should have, considering the number of times he has won the title," said Charlton. "For him, it would be marvellous, for the whole club, really."

"It is the biggest prize and yes, absolutely, the club should have had more European Cups and Alex desperately wants another European Cup. But he desperately wants another Championship, another FA Cup. He is what he is, he does what he does every day and never changes."

"The first thing Alex Ferguson ever said when he came here was that winning the championship was the only thing to do. That has never changed."

Charlton, a member of the first United team to win the European title in 1968, also believes the signs

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Wembley reconstructed



AFP, London

The delayed 800-million-pound (1.2-billion-euro, 1.5-billion-dollar) reconstruction of Wembley Stadium in London has been officially completed, the Football Association said Saturday.

The keys to the new 90,000-seat stadium have been handed over by Australian construction firm Multiplex, the FA said in a statement

on its website.

But the English game's governing body said it could not confirm that the showcase FA Cup final would take place there on May 19 - the stadium must first host two "ramp up" events to test the facility.

These will be a community day for local residents to see the stadium on March 17 and the England under 21 team's game against Italy on March 24.

Wembley's re-opening has been beset by repeated delays and

financial wrangling which has forced the FA to reschedule England international matches.

Rock band Bon Jovi had been due to open the new stadium last June but they, like veteran rockers the Rolling Stones, Robbie Williams and the reformed Take That, were forced to move venues after building work overran.

Now singer George Michael is due to play the first concert at the stadium, in northwest London, on June 9.

Wembley's re-opening has been beset by repeated delays and

Henry out for the season



AFP, London

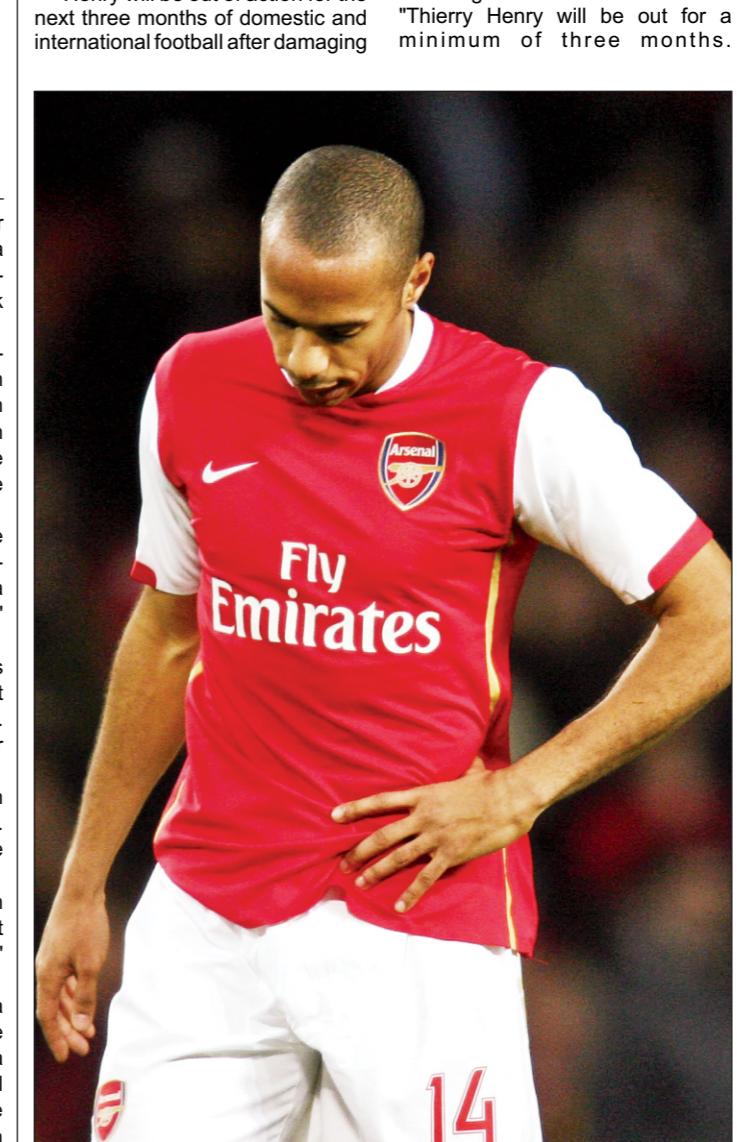
Arsenal captain Thierry Henry will miss the rest of the season after suffering groin and stomach injuries during his side's Champions League exit against PSV Eindhoven.

Henry will be out of action for the next three months of domestic and international football after damaging

muscles in his groin and stomach soon after coming on as a second half substitute at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday.

The France striker was already struggling with foot and hamstring problems, but Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger hopes Henry's time on the sidelines will enable him to make a full recovery in time for the start of the 2007-08 campaign.

Wenger told Arsenal's website: "Thierry Henry will be out for a minimum of three months.



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THIERRY HENRY

Unfortunately this means he will now miss the rest of this season both domestically and internationally, but we are confident that he will be ready for the start of next season.

It also means the forward will miss France's next Euro 2008 qualifier at Lithuania later this month and possibly the home games against Ukraine and Georgia in June.

Henry has started just 16 league games this season and his absence has been crucial to Arsenal's miserable recent run that saw them lose the League Cup final and suffer exits from the FA Cup and Champions League, all within the space of 11 days.

But the news that Henry has to rest will please his surgeon Professor Nicola Maffulli, who had earlier insisted the forward needed at least six weeks rest to cure the injuries that have dogged him this season.

Henry had admitted before the PSV match that he had been fully fit for just a handful of games this season as a result of the sciatic nerve problem he has had since the World Cup.

And Maffulli, who has created a fitness programmes for Henry, believes his hectic schedule in the last year has taken its toll.

He told the London Evening Standard: "The body is like a chain. If one part of the chain doesn't work properly, other parts can be affected."

If the sciatic nerve is causing a problem to the hamstring, his style of running will be affected and other parts of the body will be stressed which were not stressed before.

There is always a connection between the back and other parts of the body. The best way to manage it is to make sure the first injury is sorted out.

"It can take at least six weeks for a problem such as this to be sorted out. Otherwise it will come back again."