

Kuranyi slams weakened Schalke

AFP, Berlin

Schalke striker Kevin Kuranyi on Friday slammed the Bundesliga runners-up for their failure to build a strong squad to mount a serious title challenge next season.

Shalke were weakened at the end of last season when Brazilian playmaker Lincoln went to Turkish club Galatasaray while midfielder Hamit Altintop signed for rivals Bayern Munich.

"If we don't do anything, we'll be confronted with a really tough season," complained Kuranyi.

"The young players are really good, but the composition of our team is worrying," warned the German striker.

Kuranyi, whose relationship with manager Andreas Muller is reported to be strained, added: "Lincoln and Hamit have gone and we still haven't found their replacements in terms of quality."

Fresh blood has arrived at the German club this summer including under-21 Swiss international Ivan Rakitic, however Kuranyi is far from impressed.

"I want to at least win some titles but the club is taking a serious risk with these recruitments. I am fed up of settling for second place."

Schalke, last crowned German champions in 1958, had one finger on the title last season with two games remaining but were eventually pipped to the post by VfB Stuttgart.

Win or bust for Kaebi

AFP, Kuala Lumpur



New Leicester City signing Hossein Kaebi said only an unprecedented fourth Asian Cup win will satisfy Iran.

Kaebi, 21, was ever-present as a teenager in Iran's run to the 2004 semis and said the team had the talent and experience to break their 31-year title drought.

"I want to put on a good show at the Asian Cup and with the team we have now, we will be satisfied with nothing less than winning the competition," he said.

Kaebi flew in from England on Friday after joining Championship outfit Leicester this week on a two-year contract from Iran's Persepolis

FC.

The midfielder, who also featured at last year's World Cup finals, said he was excited by the move and pumped up for the tournament here.

"I'm still a little tired after my long flight from England but I'm also very excited after signing my contract with Leicester," he told the Asian Cup website.

"I'm feeling highly motivated right now and I'm determined to play well at the Asian Cup."

Kaebi joins the large contingent of foreign-based players who are hoping to end Iran's long title wait after consecutive wins in 1968, 1972 and 1976.

Coach Amir Ghalenoei will also call upon Bolton midfielder Andranik Teymourian, Frankfurt's Mehdi Mahdavia, Livorno defender

Rahmen Razaee, Hannover's Vahid Hashemian and former Bayern Munich man Ali Karimi.

Kaebi admitted he would need time to adjust to Malaysia's tropical humidity but said Iran would be ready for Wednesday's opener against Uzbekistan.

"As a whole, the team is in good shape and we have no problems right now," he said.

"I think that the main thing now is to get used to the weather and to be ready to play against Uzbekistan."

Iran are favourites in a tricky Group C also including China and co-hosts Malaysia. The Asian Cup kicks off on Saturday in Bangkok, where Thailand play Iraq.

Cesc's Wenger ultimatum

INTERNET, undated

Cesc Fabregas' agent has said that the young midfielder is happy to stay at Arsenal as long as Arsene Wenger remains at the club.

The Spanish international has been linked with a summer move to Real Madrid with those rumours only intensifying since Thierry Henry's departure to Barcelona.

However, the 20-year-old's agent Joseba Diaz told AS that his client has no plans to jump ship as long as Wenger is in charge at the Emirates Stadium.

"Cesc has not considered a move away from Arsenal and will start training with them next week," said Diaz. Had Arsene Wenger left Arsenal, however, it would have been a completely different story because he is Cesc's football mentor. Cesc is very grateful to him.

Reyes Real talks ongoing

INTERNET, undated

Jose Antonio Reyes' agent has confirmed that he is in discussions with Real Madrid to make his client's loan move from Arsenal permanent.

The versatile attacker moved to the Bernabeu on a season long loan with Julio Baptista going in the opposite direction, but Arsene Wenger has decided not to extend Baptista's stay meaning that Real will have to pay a fee if they want to keep Reyes.

His agent Jesus Rodriguez de Moya has now revealed that he is doing everything in his power to make the deal permanent.

"Reyes doesn't want to return to London", de Moya said. "If the logical steps are taken, Reyes will be a Madrid player next year.

Favourites face unpredictability

AFP, Bangkok



Australian coach Graham Arnold warned Saturday an unpredictable Oman could create serious problems for his pumped-up side as they attempt to win the Asian Cup for the first time.

The tournament favourites line up their European star-studded team in their opening Group A match at Rajamangala Stadium on Sunday with expectations high that they can land their first silverware at a major tournament.

In Hanoi, Group B kicks off on Sunday off with co-host Vietnam facing United Arab Emirates, with three points crucial for both teams who also have to contend with defending champions Japan and Asian Games winners Qatar.

The Socceroo players have been making all the right noises about not taking their rivals lightly, but Arnold raised the bar when he said anything but reaching the July 29 Jakarta final would be considered a failure.

He knows Oman is going to be a true test of their character.

"I see Oman's strengths as their athleticism and their unpredictability," he said at a press conference.

"They can do some crazy things and they can do some great things and they are probably the hardest team to play against when teams are unpredictable.

"The first game of any competition is always the hardest because everyone's starts off on zero points and there is a lot of adrenalin going through the players."

The Australians, fielding their

biggest names -- Mark Viduka, Harry Kewell, Tim Cahill, Lucas Neill, Mark Schwarzer and Vince Grella -- have been the attention-grabbers since landing in Asia to prepare for the tournament.

They come into the 14th Asian Cup full of confidence after reaching the second round of the World Cup in Germany, overwhelming Japan along the way and only bowing out to a disputed last-minute penalty to eventual champions Italy.

Oman are listed 74th on the FIFA rankings to Australia's 48 and were runners-up in this year's Gulf Cup to the United Arab Emirates.

With a population of just 2.5 million, they are making their second tilt at the Asian Cup, having lost to Japan, drawn with Iran and beaten Thailand at the last edition in China in 2004.

Former Argentine international Gabriel Calderon, only in the coaching job for a matter of months, said his team have been working hard and are ready for action.

"The players were on holidays before starting training and it's been just one month to prepare for the Asian Cup and perhaps it's a little bit short to be at the top of our game at the moment," he said.

"But the players have worked very hard over the last month and I'm hoping the team will be ready for the start of the competition.

"We are playing the best team in the group and it will be a good test for the quality of the team and its preparation."

In Hanoi, Vietnam coach Alfred Riedl said he felt no pressure, with his side the underdogs in their group.

"Everybody is fit and ready. I personally have no pressure. The team prepared well," said the

Austrian.

"We know all three (other) teams are stronger than us. But it doesn't mean we will not try to do everything to win all three matches."

The UAE's French coach Bruno Metsu said he had no injury worries and was eager to get their first match out of the way.

"It is always difficult to play the first game. Against Vietnam, we will play against the team and the fans. If you win the first game, it will help us through the tournament," he said.

Zidane's kickabout

AFP, Jakarta

French football star Zinedine Zidane had a kickabout with local children Saturday in a rural village in Indonesia during his three-day visit to the country.

Dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, Zinedane coached the children's team and played with them for about 10 minutes in a friendly game that ended with a 1-1 score.

On his way to the coaching session in Subang in West Java, the international star dropped in for a chat with a local resident. National television showed him taking off his shoes before going into the village house.

Football is one of the most popular sports in Indonesia, a co-host of the Asian Cup which kicks off Saturday in Thailand.

Zidane, in Indonesia as part of his role as an ambassador for French company Danone, met President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on Friday morning.

5x2

12x2

12x4

7x2