



Australia's top striker Mark Viduka (R) leads his teammates at a training session in Hanoi on Friday. Australia take on defending champions Japan in quarterfinal of the Asian Cup in Hanoi today.

PHOTO: AFP

All eyes on Aussie-Japan clash

AFP, Hanoi



Japan coach Ivica Osim rates the Asian Cup quarterfinal clash of the titans with Australia here Saturday as the toughest challenge in his time with the Blue Samurais. But the Bosnian insists revenge for their humiliating World Cup defeat to the Socceroos is not an issue, a sentiment echoed by Australian counterpart Graham Arnold who contends much has changed since last year in Kaiserslautern. "I consider it the toughest match I have faced as Japan coach and consider Australia, from the objective viewpoint I have about this Asian Cup, the toughest opponents we could possibly meet," said Osim. "As Brazil won the Copa America title after losing their opening game, Australia may possibly do the same. "They are on course to get better as a whole and formidable as

the opponents. On the other hand, we have not yet experienced a poorly played game." Australia beat Japan 3-1 in their World Cup opener in Germany with all their goals coming in the last eight minutes. The Asian champions never recovered and crashed out at the group stage. But Osim insists no-one is dwelling on the past. "It is shocking if you still feel the shock after one year," he said. "The better team won that match. Japan lacked the right information on Australia. If they are favourites here this year, it means they were not an easy side to beat last year." Arnold, facing the boot after the tournament regardless of what happens on Saturday, concurred. "It's a totally different competition with different players and different coaches," he said. "It will obviously be a very difficult game as Japan have shown form." Arnold is facing a dilemma over whether to leave Tim Cahill, Harry Kewell and returning defender Lucas Neill on the bench for the

crunch match, and was keeping his cards close to his chest Friday. All three players were outstanding in the World Cup game against Japan but Kewell and Cahill have been more effective here as substitutes, while Neill is available after serving a one-match ban for his red card against Iraq. Arnold would only say that everyone is fit and the mood in the camp is buoyant after their 4-0 thrashing of Thailand in Bangkok last Monday. "In training, we've played enormously well in the last few days. The players are in an extremely good mood," he said. "Everyone is fit (except for the suspension of Luke Wilshire). We have a special team spirit. We're looking forward to being very successful tomorrow." Australian captain Mark Viduka sees Japan as the clear favourites, but warned the Socceroos would rise to the occasion. "Traditionally, the Japanese are good as a team, collectively," he said. "There are quick players and

technical players. Their last game was a tough game. "I think definitely they are favourites, but we also are quietly confident. Osim knows that stopping striker Viduka will be key to success, with his side much smaller and less physical than the Australians. "The thing is how to solve the problems of physical size and techniques. These are the two questions for Saturday's match," he said. "For example, I think about how to stop Viduka. "In reality, the same players may be assigned to block Viduka as they did last year. But there are other players in the Australian team too. "They are formidable when they play collectively. They are better in terms of individual capability." Once again he will be relying heavily on Celtic star Shunsuke Nakamura and Frankfurt striker Naohiro Takahara to steer his side to a semifinal against either Saudi Arabia or Uzbekistan.

B'ham agree Mido fee

AFP, Birmingham

Birmingham have agreed a six-million-pound (12.3m dollar) fee with Tottenham for Egyptian striker Mido. The 24-year-old, who would be the Blues' seventh permanent signing of the summer since winning promotion back to the Premier League, has yet to agree personal terms with the club. The club said in a statement: "Mido had been rumoured in the media to be joining the club on a season-long loan but Blues can confirm that they are looking to sign the former Ajax, Marseille and Roma hot shot on a permanent deal." Mido initially joined Spurs on an 18-month loan from Roma before signing for 4.5 million pounds in August 2006. He started only seven league games for the north Londoners, making five further appearances as a substitute and scoring one goal.

Scores injured in Bosnia clash

AFP, Sarajevo

Twenty-seven policemen and nine fans were injured in clashes of Bosnian and Serbian fans after the UEFA Cup qualifier between Zrinjski and Partizan Belgrade in the southern town of Mostar late Thursday. After the match, that ended with Zrinjski's 6-1 defeat to Serbian Partizan, fans of the two teams started to fight each other outside the stadium, radio reported Friday. Five Serbian and one Bosnian fan had been detained overnight while a policeman and one fan sustained serious injuries, the BH Radio said. Matches between Bosnian Croat and Muslim teams and those from neighbouring Serbia are treated as high risk events, following Bosnia's 1992-95 war that pitted the country's three ethnic groups against each other.

Capello behind the microphone

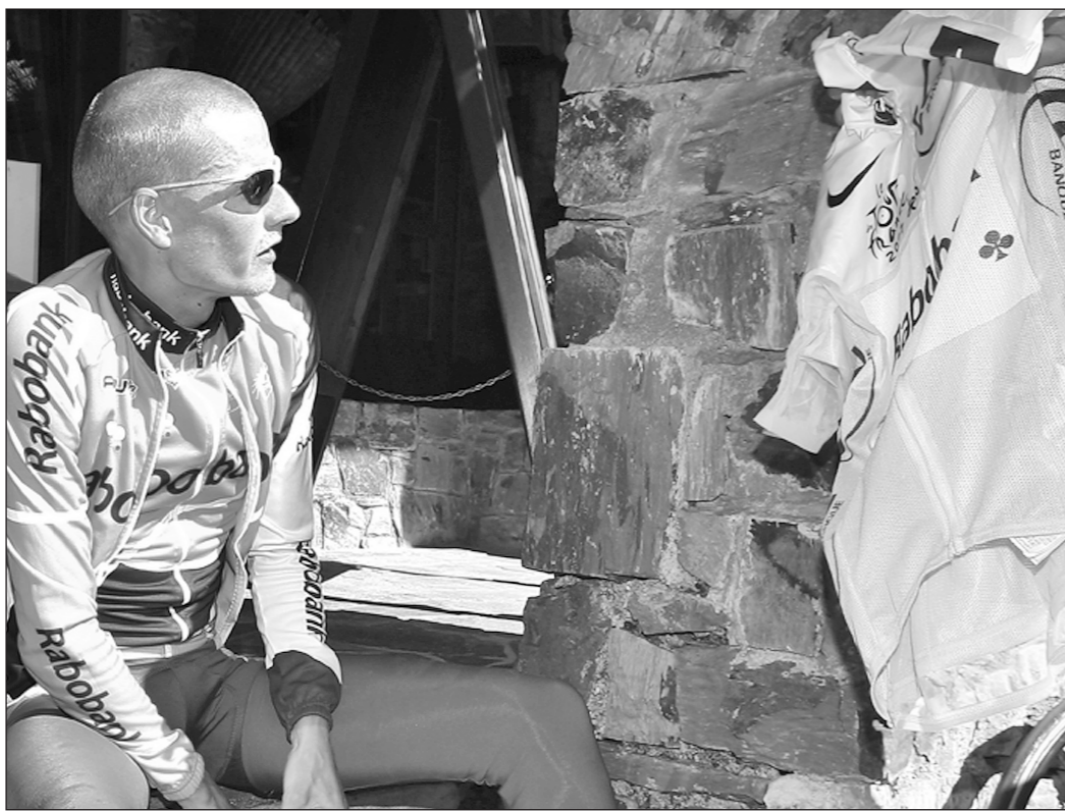


INTERNET, undated

Fabio Capello will spend this season in the stands as a television pundit, but Arrigo Sacchi hints at a return to the bench. Following the first dismissal of his career, former Real Madrid coach Capello was left looking for a new post. He confirmed this week that he rejected offers from CSKA Moscow and the United States, so he will take a year out to commentate for Italian State televi-

sion RAI. This is not the first time Fabio has taken such a step, as after his last spell in Madrid -- which also ended with a Liga title victory -- he also spent a season as a media pundit. Capello is not just a commentator on football, as during the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin he was in the booth for some ice hockey games. While one coach takes a break to work in television, another may be making the opposite journey. Former Milan, Parma and Italy tactician Sacchi told "Radio Kiss Napoli" that he is considering

a return to the bench. "If there is a team with humble players and healthy plans, then why not? If not as a coach, then perhaps in a directorial role." Sacchi gave up management mid-season at Parma in 2001 under doctor's orders, as he was suffering from anxiety attacks and heart problems. This month magazine 'World Soccer' named his Milan side of 1989-90 as the best club of all time. In that season they won the Champions League, Intercontinental Cup and European Super Cup.



Danish biker Michael Rasmussen looks at his yellow jersey before a training session at the Tour de France cycling race. Rasmussen has been axed from the Danish national team following a drugs test row.

PHOTO: AFP

Dudek signs for Real

AFP, Madrid

Polish goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek, out of contract with English Premiership side Liverpool, on Friday signed a two-year deal with Real Madrid, the Spanish champions announced. Dudek, who will be the stand-in for Spanish international goalkeeper Iker Casillas, was officially presented after passing his medical. The 34-year-old will earn 1.5 million euros (2 million dollars) a year, according to press reports. Dudek becomes Real's fourth signing this summer after German defender Christoph Metzelder (Borussia Dortmund), Brazilian defender Pepe (FC Porto) and Argentine striker Javier Saviola, who is out of contract with Barcelona. Dudek arrived in Liverpool in 2001 and was the hero of their Champions League final victory in 2005, when they beat AC Milan on penalties. But last season his relationship with coach Rafael Benitez has been strained as he has found himself second in the pecking order behind Spaniard Pepe Reina. Dudek is just the third Polish-born footballer to play at Real after W. Rozitsky from 1913-1915 and Raymond Kopa (Kopaszewski) in the 1950s.

Diarra leaves Lyon for Bordeaux

AFP, Lyon

Lyon midfielder Alou Diarra moved to rivals Bordeaux in a 7.75 million euro deal on Thursday, the French champions announced. The player, currently in South Korea with Lyon taking part in the Peace Cup, will sign a four-year contract. Diarra said he decided to leave Lyon to improve his chances of breaking into the French national side in time for the Euro 2008 finals. "It's difficult not playing when one of your ambitions is to play for the national side," he said. Diarra was signed by Lyon from Lens in August 2006 for 6.25m euros after the departure of Mahamadou Diarra to Spanish champions Real Madrid.

Cash incentive for Czech youngsters

AFP, Prague

The Czech Republic's Under-20 footballers will earn a share of 142,000 euros (196,000 dollars) in bonus money should they win the world title in Canada, the country's football federation said on Thursday. The Czechs, who beat Austria 2-0 in Wednesday's semifinals, will face either Argentina or Chile in Sunday's final. "It's with great joy that we will reward our players because they have boosted our prestige," said Czech football federation spokesman Václav Tichý. If the Czechs finish as runners-up, they will share a pool of 71,000 euros.

Rasmussen axed

AFP, Copenhagen

Tour de France leader Michael Rasmussen has been axed from the Danish national team and told he will not take part in either the world championships or the Olympics following a row over drug testing, it was announced on Thursday. The director of the Danish Cycling Union (DCU) Jesper Worre told DR1 television station that Rasmussen had received a number of warnings over failing to inform doping authorities over his training whereabouts. "We consider this case with great seriousness and the executive of the DCU decided that Michael will no longer be part of the national team and he was informed of this on June 26," said Worre. Rasmussen, who rides for the Rabobank team, has said he had received just one warning but Worre insists there have been several notices issued. Rasmussen currently leads the Tour de France after 11 stages and enjoys a 2min 35sec lead over Spain's Alejandro Valverde. "It is confidential information but people have the right to know that the DCU fights for a clean sport," said Worre. However, he added: "The DCU is not saying that Michael tested positive. But there are question marks over his behaviour and attitude" that place doubts over his place in the national team.

United thrive on Ronaldo magic



AFP, Seoul

Cristiano Ronaldo enhanced his standing as arguably the most popular player in the Far East by producing a magical 45-minute display as Manchester United defeated FC Seoul 4-0 here on Friday. The Portuguese forward, whose every touch was greeted by cheers and piercing screams, scored one and made two other goals in a comprehensive victory for the English champions. And although the double Footballer of the Year was replaced at half-time, United still showed enough to suggest that they will once again take some stopping in the Premiership this season. United were without South Korean midfielder Ji-Sung Park due to the knee injury that is expected to keep him sidelined until January at the earliest. But the 65,000 sell-out crowd inside the Seoul WorldCup Stadium were not short of superstars to entertain them and both

Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney turned on the style in front the hugely passionate supporters. Seoul, languishing in mid-table in the K-League, were never a match for the Premiership giants and the English team cruised into a three-goal inside the opening half hour. The game was only five minutes when Ronaldo, who appears to be building up a David Beckham-like status in the Far East, scored his second goal of the Asia Tour following neat interplay with Rooney. England striker Rooney received the ball from a throw-in halfway inside the Seoul half before turning and laying the ball off to the on-rushing Ronaldo. With the defenders backing off, Ronaldo powered forward before beating keeper Kim Byung-Ji with a low shot from 20 yards. Ki Sung Yeung gave United a fright seven minutes later when he shot narrowly wide from the edge of the penalty area, but on 18 minutes, Sir Alex Ferguson's team had doubled their lead through youngster Chris Eagles.

Ronaldo was again a key figure as he played tricks with the ball before teeing up the young midfielder and Eagles beat Kim with a curling effort into the bottom corner of the net. The home side simply could not compete with United's superior quality and Rooney put United 3-0 ahead on 20 minutes with well-taken goal, again after being teed up by Ronaldo. Ronaldo almost made it 4-0 on 29 minutes with a vicious left-foot strike from 30 yards that flew a matter of inches over the crossbar. Rooney and Ronaldo were replaced at half-time by Ryan Giggs and Alan Smith and Seoul were able to settle quicker after the break, creating chances to reduce the deficit. But Kim Dong Suk's low effort was saved by goalkeeper Tomasz Kuszczak and United unsurprisingly regained the upper hand shortly afterwards, with Senegal-born France defender Patrice Evra rounding off a two-man move involving Giggs and Paul Scholes to score from close range on 59 minutes.



PHOTO: AFP

Argentina's teenage striker Sergio Aguero (R) rounds Chile 'keeper to score during their FIFA U-19 World Cup semifinal match in Toronto on Thursday. Argentina won the game 3-0 to advance to the final.

MU hopeful over Tevez



AFP, Seoul

Manchester United chief executive David Gill said Friday he remains hopeful that their 30 million pound move for Carlos Tevez will be wrapped up before the transfer window closes on August 31. Tevez and his current club West Ham United face a two-week delay in a resolution to the dispute over his registration and ownership due to their decision enlist the help of FIFA in settling their differences. With the possibility of further action at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, the prospect of Argentina striker Tevez failing to sign for United before the window closes has now grown as a possibility. But Gill believes that FIFA will

not allow a situation to develop that sees the player unable to play until the next window opens in January. "What you find in these situations is that FIFA and the necessary bodies try to make sure that the player can play, whether it's for Manchester United or for West Ham," he said here where United are on an Asian tour. "I would have thought that they will do everything they can to make sure the decision is made within the appropriate period. "Theoretically, you can go from the Dispute Resolution Chamber to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Whether both parties choose to do that, we'll have to see, but that would be the final arbiter. "The issue is effectively who owns the economic rights to the player, who owns the registration of that player, and therefore what

happens to any monies that we might pay. "Can he unilaterally terminate his registration? Can he move on? That's the fundamental issue." Meanwhile, United defender Gabriel Heinze, an international teammate of Tevez, will not be allowed to join Liverpool despite the Champions League finalists lodging a 6.8 million pounds bid for his services. With a traditional rivalry between England's two most successful clubs stretching back over half a century, United boss Sir Alex Ferguson insists there is no chance that Heinze will be allowed to move to Anfield. "I can assure you that Liverpool will not be getting Gabriel Heinze. We can put that to bed right now and we have done so," said the Scot.

Fowler turns down Sydney



AFP, Sydney

Former Liverpool ace Robbie Fowler has rejected an offer from Australian A-League side Sydney FC, the club said Friday. The striker, modestly known as "God" on the red half of Merseyside, visited Australia this month but he decided against becoming the club's marquee signing for the upcoming season, Sydney FC chief executive George Perry said. "Naturally, we're bitterly disappointed but we're satisfied we did everything we could to persuade Robbie to come to Sydney FC, Australia and the A-League competition," Perry said. "Robbie was tremendously impressed by what he saw in Sydney but he's chosen to go elsewhere. We respect his decision and wish him and his family well." Fowler, who scored 183 goals in 369 games during his two

Papin tipped for China job

AFP, Beijing

Former French striker Jean-Pierre Papin has emerged as a top candidate to coach China's national side after the team's disastrous first-round exit from the Asian Cup, press reports said Friday. Papin will arrive in Beijing this month for talks with the China Football Association, which is expected to fire coach Zhu Guanghu after the team's appalling result in Kuala Lumpur, the leading Titan Sports Weekly said. "I'm very interested in this position but I don't think I'm the only one on the list," the newspaper quoted Papin as saying. "I don't know a lot about the Chinese team... but I do know that this nation has huge potential." Papin quit as coach of French club Strasbourg earlier this year after helping the side win promotion to the league's first division. Meanwhile Zhu has refused to resign following China's 3-0 loss to Uzbekistan on Wednesday -- its first failure to reach the second round of an Asian Cup in 27 years. "I will not leave football," said Zhu, much to the anger of the local media, which called for a complete overhaul of the country's football system, starting with his sacking.