



PHOTO: AFP

France striker Karim Benzema is about to score the all-important goal from a penalty during their friendly match against Turkey at the Gerland Stadium in Lyon on Friday.

France ride on Benzema

Football

AFP, Paris

France signed off before the summer recess with a much-needed 1-0 victory over Euro 2008 semi-finalists Turkey in a rain-soaked friendly here on Friday.

Jeered throughout their 1-0 defeat to Nigeria on Tuesday, Raymond Domenech's side responded with a more industrious display against a side reduced to 10 men for over 50 minutes following Uzulmez Ibrahim's dismissal.

Karim Benzema's goal from the ensuing penalty was enough to decide the match, which was held up in the closing stages when visiting fans hurled missiles onto the pitch before being placated by Turkey coach Fatih Terim.

"I scored and we won, that's good but we have to continue working," said Benzema.

He added: "There were lots of Turkish

fans, it was more than a friendly. Now we can go on holiday, rest before coming back to tackle the new season."

Driving rain made for a slippery pitch and sloppy touches, despite France's best attempts to atone for the loss against Nigeria in Saint Etienne that was marred by enthusiastic barracking from their own fans.

It took the hosts until the 32nd minute to fashion a clear sight at goal, but Nicolas Anelka shot wastefully wide of the near post after being set free by Yoann Gourcuff.

Within a minute Turkey had spurned an even more gilded chance, when Nuri Sahin sidefooted Mevlut Erding's cut-back past the left-hand post from 15 yards.

The game turned eight minutes before half-time, Ibrahim seeing red for dragging Anelka back after the Chelsea striker exploited the defender's weak back-header to surge past visiting goalkeeper Volkan Demirel and advance on an

unguarded goal.

Benzema's penalty found the bottom-left corner via Volkan's right hand, but the Fenerbahce man had better luck when Benzema's half-time replacement Andre-Pierre Gignac shot straight at him after a clever dummy from the enterprising Florent Malouda.

In-demand Bayern Munich winger Franck Ribery joined the fray in the second half, and he twice drew agile saves from Volkan before home goalkeeper Hugo Lloris reacted sharply at the other end to kick away a goalbound touch from team-mate Philippe Mexes.

France finished strongly, with Volkan saving from Gourcuff, Gignac and Bacary Sagna, while Sidney Govou curled the ball against the post and Jean-Alain Boumsong had a header cleared off the line.

France are two points behind Serbia in European World Cup qualifying group seven. Their campaign resumes on August 12 with a trip to the Faroe Islands.

Italy include WC veterans

AFP, Rome

World Cup winning trio Gianluigi Buffon, Fabio Cannavaro and Luca Toni head Italy's Confederations Cup squad released by the Italian Football Federation here on Friday.

Coach Marcello Lippi's side kick off their Confed Cup campaign against the United States in Pretoria on June 15, with Egypt and Brazil the Azzurri's other first round rivals.

The other five teams competing in the June 14-28 competition are Euro 2008 winners Spain, hosts South Africa, Iraq and New Zealand.

The 2009 Confederations Cup, the traditional dress rehearsal for next year's World Cup in South Africa, starts on Sunday week.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Marco Amelia (Palermo), Morgan de Sanctis (Galatasaray/TUR)
Defenders: Fabio Cannavaro (Real Madrid/ESP), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Andrea Dossena (Liverpool/ENG), Alessandro Gambini (Fiorentina), Fabio Grosso (Lyon/FRA), Nicolas Legrottaglie (Juventus), Davide Santon (Inter Milan), Gianluca Zambrotta (AC Milan)
Midfielders: Mauro Camoranesi (Juventus), Daniele De Rossi (AS Roma), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Angela Palombo (Sampdoria), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan)
Forwards: Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Vincenzo Iaquinta (Juventus), Simone Pepe (Udinese), Fabio Quagliarella (Napoli), Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal/ESP), Luca Toni (Bayern/GER)

FORMULA ONE

Vettel takes pole

AFP, Istanbul

German driver Sebastian Vettel took pole position in his Red Bull car here at the Turkish Grand Prix on Saturday.

Overall leader Jenson Button was second fastest while his Brawn-Mercedes teammate Rubens Barrichello will start from third on the grid. Reigning champion Lewis Hamilton was eliminated after the first qualifying session.

Juve confirm Ferrara appointment

AFP, Rome

Former Juventus defender Ciro Ferrara was on Friday confirmed as the Turin side's new manager for the next two seasons, the club announced.

The 42-year-old former Italy international was initially assigned the role on a temporary basis on May 18, following the sacking of Claudio Ranieri due to a run of disappointing results.

Federer eyes history

AFP, Paris



Roger Federer eyes a place in history on Sunday as he attempts to finally win a French Open title, wrap up a career Grand Slam and end all doubts over his status as the greatest player of all time.

However, standing in his way is pale, journeyman Swede Robin Soderling who sent shock waves through tennis by condemning four-time champion Rafael Nadal to his first ever Roland Garros defeat.

The final also has added spice because of the drastically different characters of the two men.

Federer, playing in his 19th Grand Slam final and looking to equal Pete Sampras's record of 14 major wins, is widely respected for his dazzling talent on the court and his bearing and humility off it.

Soderling, who has never got beyond the third round in any of his 21 previous majors, is treated with hostility by many of his contemporaries who accuse the 24-year-old of being aloof, rude and confrontational.

Federer, however, said he respects what Soderling, bidding to be the first Swedish champion since Mats Wilander in 1988, has achieved in the last two weeks.

"I can't underestimate Robin," said Federer, who will be appearing in a fourth successive French Open final having lost the last three to Nadal.

"It's nice to see someone else for a change in the final. I've been here before. I don't know if it's an advantage or not, because I've never been able to win."

Federer's path to the final has not been an easy one.

Ever since Nadal's fourth round demise, the Swiss star admits that legions of fans, as well as some players, have besieged him to reassure him that this is his year.

The expectations, at times, have looked too great to bear.

He had to come back from two sets down to beat Tommy Haas in the last 16 while he also

needed to stage a recovery to see off 20-year-old Argentine giant Juan Martin del Potro 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-1, 6-4 in the semi-finals.

But Federer has shrugged off fears of fatigue sabotaging his hopes on Sunday where victory will make him only the sixth man in history to complete a career Grand Slam, something that even eluded his great friend Sampras.

"When you reach the final, all questions have been answered. You know where you stand," said the second seed.

Federer will start as overwhelming favourite having defeated Soderling nine times out of nine with the Swede winning just one set in that sequence.

When they met on clay in Madrid on the eve of Roland Garros, Federer eased to a straight sets victory.

But under the guidance of compatriot Magnus Norman, who was runner-up to Gustavo Kuerten in 2000, Soderling has been a revelation from the moment he opened his campaign in front of just a handful of spectators out on Court Six.

As well as Nadal, he has put out 10th seed Nikolay Davydenko, who was twice a semi-finalist, 14th seed David Ferrer and then 12th seeded Chilean Fernando Gonzalez in the semi-final.

That 6-3, 7-5, 5-7, 4-6, 6-4 win was achieved after being 1-4 down in the deciding set.

"I have surprised myself a little bit," admitted the Swede who will reach a career high of 12 in the world by making his first Grand Slam final.

Soderling was full of praise for the help he's received from Norman.

"It's great to have a coach that used to play. He's been in the position I'm in right now," he said.

He was also keen to put the record straight on his reputation as one of the most disliked men in the locker room.

"I'm not going to change the way I am. It's just tennis. Maybe I don't say hello to the players all the time, but I'm always nervous and tense before a match," said Soderling.

"I don't like to speak much before a match. It's nothing to do with the other players. I just don't like to lose."

Crazy coaching carousel

INTERNET, undated



Not long ago German coach Jupp Heynckes was thinking about sitting back and smelling the roses. But that was before the former international, who was in the victorious Germany squad at the 1974 World Cup, had a short five-week stint in charge of Bayern Munich at the end of the season.

Although he originally said that he would be retiring after the five matches, the success he had with the former Champions League winners Bayern changed his mind.

After winning four of the five games and drawing the other, Heynckes said he realized that he was not ready to give up coaching. "During my short stint in Munich I realized that I still had the ambition to coach."

Heynckes' retirement from retirement has given Bayer Leverkusen the opportunity to land an amazing coup.

After trying to take the club forward with young coaches like Michael Skibbe and Bruno Labbadia, Leverkusen has now opted to go for experience and hired the oldest Bundesliga coach - the 64-year-old Heynckes.

Leverkusen's CEO Wolfgang Holzhaeuser is optimistic that the surprising appointment would pay off for the club. "We are sure that our young team will benefit from his experience and his natural authority."

After withdrawing from coaching for close to two-years and nearly being forgotten, Heynckes suddenly found himself a sought-after man.

Statements, like that made by former Schalke 04 manager Rudi Assauer, who said in 2004 when

Heynckes was dismissed by the club that: "Jupp is a footballer of the old school, but we are living in 2004" are suddenly forgotten.

Instead, the focus is on Heynckes' successes, like winning the Champions League with Real Madrid (1998), or Bundesliga titles with Bayern Munich in (1989 and 1990). They are an inspiration to younger coaches.

Unlike the short stint in Munich, Heynckes has not been given a short-term task in his 12th coaching position. Leverkusen wants him to contribute to the long-term strategic planning of the club.

Heynckes said in an interview with abendzeitung.de that he discussed Leverkusen's offer with his friend Uli Hoeness, the Bayern Munich manager.

"My decision to take the job came from my stomach. Of course I had a chat to Uli. He encouraged me to take the position and said that I had spent a wonderful five-week holiday in Munich," Heynckes is quoted as saying.

For Leverkusen Heynckes' decision came at the right time as Labbadia had said that he wanted to join SV Hamburg, whose coach Martin Jol in turn had early stunned the club by leaving to join Ajax Amsterdam.

"We had earlier said that we wanted a continuation of the co-operation between the coach and the club, but the coach wanted a new beginning," Holzhaeuser said.

Leverkusen is said to have received 1.3 million Euros from Hamburg for Labbadia, who still had a year's contract to run with the club.

Holzhaeuser explained that the decision to take on Heynckes was one that had long been coming. "Heynckes was our first choice, particularly as we had previously also looked into signing him."

Berlusconi vows lawsuit

Football

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said Friday pictures of topless women and a naked man sunbathing at his villa were "innocent," but his lawyer vowed to sue a Spanish newspaper that published them.

While Berlusconi's attorney threatened legal action against El Pais, former Czech prime minister Mirek Topolánek admitted that he was the man in the photo but charged that it had been doctored.

The explosive pictures were published on the eve of European Parliament elections in Italy, which could now serve as a test on the scandal's impact on Berlusconi's popularity.

But the Italian leader, already engulfed in scandal over his wife's decision to divorce him and his links to an aspiring teenage model, insisted that the photos were "innocent."

"I am not frightened. These are innocent photos, there is no scandal, but there has been an aggressive intrusion into my private life," he said on Italian public radio.

"The photos show people bathing in a jacuzzi inside a private property, something party guests were invited to do," he added.

The published pictures were among hundreds of photos that had been seized by Italian authorities after the premier filed a complaint to block their release, claiming they violated his right to privacy.

"It's just not right for someone a kilometre away to interfere and start taking photos..." The

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Andre backing Roger

AFP, Paris



ago, said on Saturday that Roger Federer will be more deserving of the rare achievement if he wins the French Open on Sunday.

Agassi's Roland Garros win here in 1999 made him only the fifth man in history to have won all four majors - Wimbledon, US Open, Australian Open and the French Open.

The American also believes that had it not been for four-time champion Rafael Nadal, whom he described affectionately as a 'freak of nature', the Swiss star would have already ended his recurring Paris nightmare.

"It could be his destiny. Roger deserves it more than I did. To win on all four surfaces in your career is one of the greatest achievements in sport," said Agassi.

"It's something that I am so proud of because every surface, and all the different conditions, demands so much of you mentally and physically and reward you so much."

"I'll be pulling for Roger on



PHOTO: AFP

Tennis legend Steffi Graf (L) poses with her husband Andre Agassi after playing an exhibition match on the sideline of the French Open at Roland Garros in Paris on Saturday.

Sunday. He is extraordinarily talented, and the grace and the way he plays is very special to see.

"If it wasn't for a freak of nature from Majorca, he could have won this many times."

Federer tackles Swedish outsider Robin Soderling, the man who sent Nadal crashing in the fourth round, in Sunday's final in what will be his fourth successive Roland Garros title match.

Nadal has defeated him in the last three, but a win over Soderling will take him level with Pete Sampras as a 14-time major winner.

It will also take him alongside Agassi, Roy Emerson, Rod Laver, Don Budge and Fred Perry as the sixth man to complete a career Grand Slam.

"That it's been 10 years since I did it shows how hard it is to do," added Agassi, who was at Roland Garros with wife Steffi Graf to promote their charity work.

"When I won the Grand Slam, it changed my career and my life. It was the most profound moment, having to overcome all the self-doubt and all the obstacles about what it takes to win here."

"We could see history on Sunday and it will be a privilege for the game to see it. It could be Roger's destiny. It's very exciting."

North Korea inch closer

AFP, Seoul



North Korea inched closer to their first World Cup finals since 1966 with a gritty 0-0 draw against Iran on Saturday.

But it was not the result newly appointed Iran coach Afshin Ghotbi was looking for, with their World Cup fate now hanging in the balance.

The draw edged North Korea level with South Korea on 11 points in Group B, but they have played two games more. The South take on United Arab Emirates in Dubai later Saturday.

Saudi Arabia, who do not play Saturday, have 10 points with Iran languishing on seven points and facing a home game against UAE next Wednesday

and then a tough trip to Seoul on June 17 - matches they must win.

Despite the draw North Korea, at the centre of international criticism after its second nuclear test, appeared disappointed after the game in front of a full house in Pyongyang, with players slumping to the ground in frustration.

But ultimately it moved them closer to ending their long wait for another crack at the World Cup.

It was a game of few chances with a scrappy first half largely forgettable.

The Iranians controlled the tempo early on, with an effort from Vahid Hashemian just before the break the highlight.

The match livened up in the second period with the Koreans coming out firing, creating two clear opportunities in the first five minutes but Hong Yong-Jo and Pak Nam-Chol were both denied by

goalkeeper Seyed Rahmati.

The Koreans were the more composed as they pressed forward against a ragged Iran, who badly missed the creative inspiration of suspended midfielder Javad Nekounam.

Iran's best chance came when Ali Karimi played a return pass to Mehdi Mahdavia, who took the ball to the right byline before squaring for Hashemian, whose volley flashed just wide of the target.

Rahmati was called into action again in the 64th minute when the North Koreans were awarded a free-kick 20 metres from goal and Hong fired in a low shot that was tipped around the upright by the Iran keeper.

They had another chance in the dying minutes when the Iranians were caught upfield following a corner as a long ball was played to Hong.



PHOTO: TIGERCRIKET.COM

State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarker (2nd from R) hands over a floral bouquet to Bangladesh vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza at the Park Plaza Hotel in Nottingham on Friday. The Sports Minister, who is in England now to watch the ICC World T20, went to the hotel to wish the team well. His entourage includes (R-L) chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russell, Dewan Shafiq Arefin, Gazi Ashraf Hossain, GS Hasan Chowdhury and Enayet Husain Siraj who all are on the visit to gain experience.