

## Argentina not worried

AFP, Montevideo



Having succumbed to only their second home defeat in World Cup qualifying history against Brazil on Saturday, Argentina face a make-or-break trip to Paraguay on Wednesday.

The 3-1 loss to Dunga's side, who are now assured of a place at the 2010 finals in South Africa, left two-time world champions Argentina in the fourth and last automatic qualifying place in the South American standings.

Paraguay are five points above them in third and need just three points to qualify for the finals after a qualification campaign that has defied all expectations.

Argentina, meanwhile, have not won on the road in a competitive match since a 2-0 victory in Venezuela in October 2007 and have scored a meagre three goals in the intervening six away fixtures.

Should an Argentine defeat be accompanied by away wins for Ecuador, in Bolivia, and Colombia, in Uruguay, Diego Maradona's men will drop to sixth, below even a qualifying place for the play-off against the fourth-best side from the North, Central America and Caribbean zone (CONCACAF).

"I'm feeling composed. There's no cause for alarm," said Maradona, who was part of the Argentina side that came through a play-off against Australia to qualify for the 1994 tournament.

"It won't be easy to go to Paraguay, but we'll see what solutions we can find for our problems and try and take the three points."

"We had to beat Brazil and we lost. There's no time for feeling sorry for yourself, though. You have to keep looking forward."

Goalkeeper Mariano Andujar echoed his manager's upbeat outlook.

"This isn't over," he said. "We need to pick ourselves up quickly because we have another

final coming up. It's not over and it's still in our hands."

Paraguay and Chile each require just a win to guarantee qualification, but if Colombia and Ecuador both lose they will qualify regardless.

"We're there now, I can feel it," said Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino after their 1-0 win over Bolivia in Asuncion at the weekend.

"We've taken a gigantic step thanks to this really important win."

Qualification for Chile would guarantee the presence of at least one Argentine in South Africa next summer, with Marcelo Bielsa hoping for a second crack at World Cup glory after leading his native Argentina to a group-stage exit in 2002.

The philosophical 54-year-old has revolutionised the Chilean set-up since taking over in 2007 and midfielder Jorge Valdivia believes the team owe all their success to the Rosario-born tactician.

"He is humble and says all the credit should go to the players, but he changed everything: the group discipline, the condition of the training camp, the way the other teams look at us," said Valdivia.

Chile's meeting with Brazil in Salvador De Bahia is sure to have a celebratory air following the home side's historic victory over sworn enemies Argentina, but Selecao captain Lucio says they cannot afford to slacken off.

"The most important thing is that we've kept on winning, we're through to the finals and we can take the time now to work on a few things before the World Cup," said the Inter Milan centre-back.

With three matches remaining, only rock-bottom Peru stand no chance of finishing in the top five, although second-bottom Bolivia have an eight-point deficit to make up on fifth-placed Colombia in the play-off berth.

Wednesday's matches represent something of a last-chance saloon for seventh-placed Uruguay and eighth-placed Venezuela, who host Peru, but victory for either side could put them back into the qualifying mix.

## Enke out for Germany

AFP, Berlin



Germany goalkeeper Robert Enke is out of Wednesday night's World Cup qualifier against Azerbaijan with a mysterious virus while coach Joachim Loew looks set to continue his youthful experiment.

First-choice goalie Enke has been hit by an infection and Bayer Leverkusen's Rene Adler looks set to continue between the posts in Hanover after a strong performance in last Saturday's 2-0 friendly win over South Africa.

"I am really disappointed, but I do not have the feeling that I am fully fit," Enke, 32, told German tabloid Bild on Tuesday.

"With this risk hanging over me, I can't go into a World Cup qualification game. I hope we will soon know what I have."

As the experiment of playing a 4-3-3 formation worked well against South Africa, wingers Marko Marin and Mesut Ozil, who both impressed against next year's World Cup hosts, are set to be

given another chance to shine.

Germany need a win over minnows Azerbaijan to maintain their place at the top of Group Four where Loew's side lead Russia by a point with the group rivals set to clash in Moscow on October 10.

Bertie Vogts-coached Azerbaijan are not expected to present much of a challenge as they are joint bottom of the group alongside fellow minnows Liechtenstein with just a single point from their seven matches.

Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez is expected to be fit after pulling up in training on Sunday having scored the opening goal in Saturday's victory.

The 24-year-old has had a scan which revealed no serious damage, but it looks like his team-mate Miroslav Klose will be left on the bench again against Azerbaijan.

Klose's pedigree of 45 goals in 90 games speaks for itself, but Loew used Gomez as the lone striker against South Africa with possession supplied by Marin and Ozil and the experiment is likely to be repeated.

With bigger tests ahead for the national team, Loew looks to be resting the 31-year-old Klose, who was the top scorer at

the last World Cup.

"We know, what he can do and he has always performed for the national team," said Loew.

And Germany captain Michael Ballack brushed off any concerns about Klose.

"The discussions around Miro are redundant. Everyone knows what he can do."

"And the national team can always rely on him."

Having battered the Bafana Bafana on Saturday, Loew sees no reason to change the 4-3-3 system and two key members of his squad will be reaching landmarks.

Despite his early years Bayern Munich midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger will be winning his 70th cap, despite being just 25, while defender Philipp Lahm, also 25, will reach the 60th milestone.

Having struggled to a 2-0 win in Baku against Azerbaijan last month, Germany raised their performance noticeably against South Africa and a similar level is expected on Wednesday with Schweinsteiger saying the squad have big plans.

"My goal is not to catch up with someone like Lothar Matthaus (who has 150 caps), but for this team to win a big title," said the Bayern star.

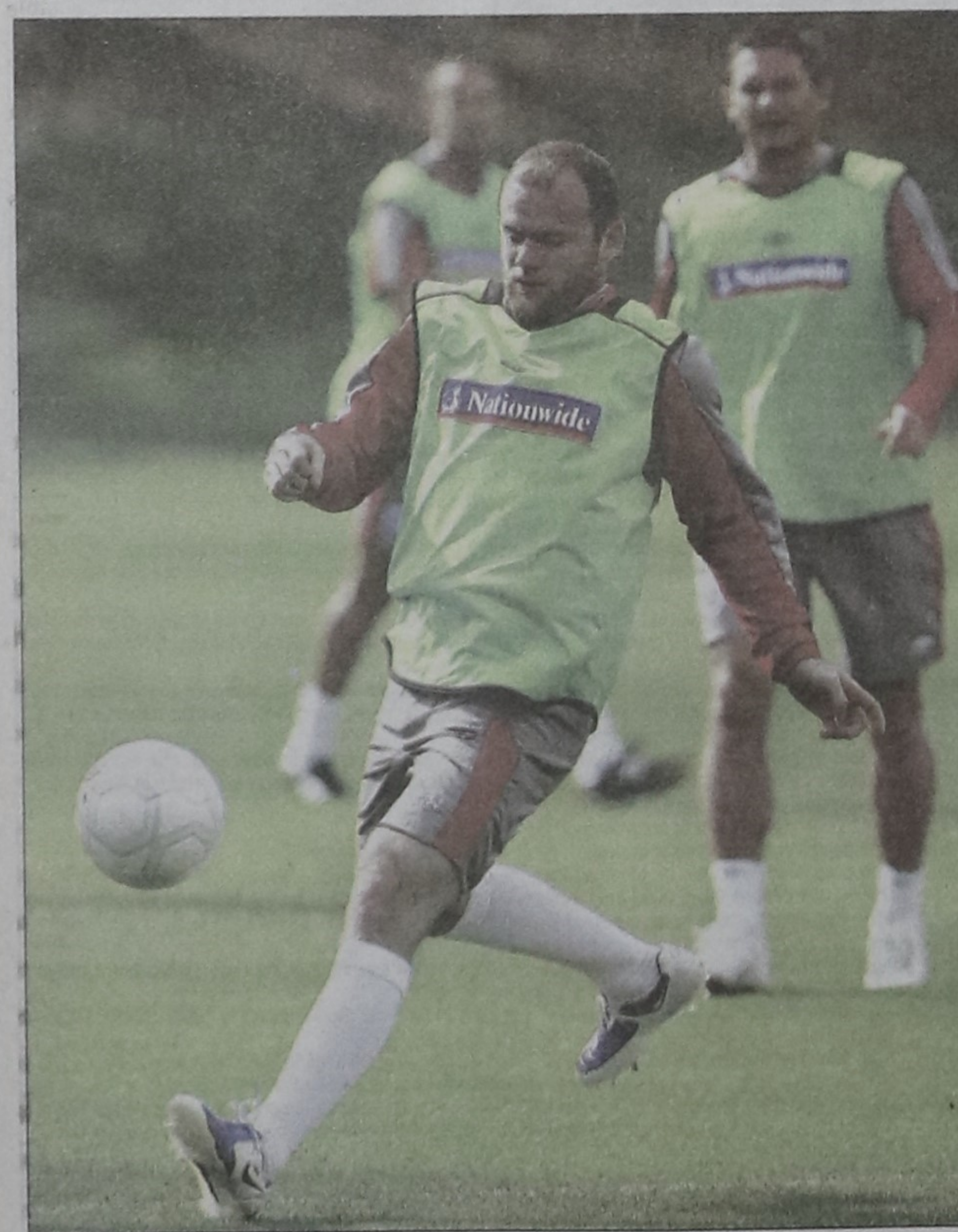


PHOTO: AFP

England striker Wayne Rooney is about to kick the ball during a training session before the forthcoming 2010 World Cup qualifier against Croatia in London on Tuesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Italy defender Gianluca Zambrotta controls the ball during a training session at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Tuesday. Italy will face Bulgaria in a 2010 World Cup qualifier tonight.

## Torres wants big guns in WC

AFP, Madrid

The 2010 World Cup will suffer if Argentina, France and Portugal fail to qualify, Liverpool's Spanish international striker Fernando Torres said on Monday.

"A World Cup without Argentina, France or Portugal would not be the same. I would like them all to take part," the 25-year-old told a news conference two days after Spain beat Belgium 5-0 in a qualifier in La Coruna.

"We also struggled to qualify for the 2008 Euro finals and then we won the tournament," he added.

"National squads change from one day to the other depending on the status of their players. They can go through a bad moment now and in the summer be one of the favourites."

Spain have a flawless seven wins at the top of Group 5, six points ahead of second-placed Bosnia-Herzegovina, who won 2-0 at Armenia.

If Spain beat Estonia in Merida on Wednesday and Bosnia fail to beat Turkey they will qualify for the World Cup finals with two games to spare.

France, who finished second during the 2006 World Cup, drew 1-1 against Romania at home on Saturday and will scramble to make the final in South Africa next year if they lose against Serbia on Wednesday.

Argentina coach Diego Maradona, meanwhile, has admitted that it will be tough for his side to ensure World Cup qualification following Saturday's 3-1 home loss to rivals Brazil, their first home qualifier loss in 16 years.

Portugal, who were semi-finalists in 2006, slumped to fourth place in Group One following their 1-1 draw against leaders Denmark on Saturday.

## Beckham considers EPL return

AFP, London

David Beckham has revealed he is considering offers from four top Premier League clubs as he bids to keep his World Cup dream alive.

Beckham knows he must finish this season playing at the highest level possible if he is to retain his place in the England squad ahead of next year's World Cup finals.

That means the LA Galaxy midfielder, who can help Fabio Capello's team seal their World Cup spot with a victory over Croatia on Wednesday, is already weighing up his options for when the MLS season finishes in November.

Beckham has been offered the chance to return to AC Milan, where he spent several months on loan last season, but he is also being courted by several top English teams, with Manchester City,

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## Quartet can book place

AFP, Paris



England, Serbia, Spain and Slovakia can all book their places at next summer's World Cup in South Africa when European qualifying continues on Wednesday.

England and Serbia have the most straightforward tasks, with both sides needing just a victory to secure top spot in their respective groups and subsequently progress to the finals.

Fabio Capello's England take on Croatia at Wembley, while Serbia welcome Raymond Domenech's underachieving France to Belgrade.

European champions Spain, meanwhile, can guarantee their passage only if they beat Estonia in Merida and second-placed Bosnia-Herzegovina fail to win at home to Turkey.

Slovakia will qualify if they win in Northern Ireland and the match between Slovenia and Poland in Maribor ends in a draw.

A place in a fourth consecutive World Cup awaits England if they beat Croatia, but revenge is also likely to be a motivating factor for the home side.

The Croats prevented England from

qualifying for Euro 2008 by beating them 3-2 on a sodden November night at Wembley in 2007 and England midfielder Gareth Barry says the players will draw inspiration from that dispiriting defeat.

"There's a lot of players in that dressing room who won't forget that night at Wembley and we're back here again," said the Manchester City man.

"There'll be a few memories but it's a different manager and a different team and although it will be in the back of our minds, we'll be confident."

England's failure two years ago set in motion a chain of events that saw Capello replace Steve McClaren at the helm and the Italian has since overseen a run of seven straight competitive wins.

Croatia, though, arrive desperate for points in their bid to finish ahead of third-placed Ukraine and coach Slaven Bilic has upped the ante by claiming that England have lost vital qualities under Capello.

"They are a very different team," said Bilic.

"They have some advantages but they are also missing something from their game. They are missing some Englishness, some of the things that have always made England teams difficult to defend against and play against," added Bilic, who spent four years in England playing for West Ham and Everton.

Croatia's Balkan neighbours Serbia go

into their crunch clash with France in a far healthier position, four points clear of Domenech's men and with South Africa in sight.

Radomir Antic's side will be just three points away from qualifying even if they only manage a draw on Wednesday, but Antic says they will not be playing it safe.

"We're not interested in any calculations, we got the result we wanted from the France v Romania match [1-1] and it's now our turn to prove our worth," said the former Atletico Madrid handler.

France are not the only major nation in danger of missing out on qualification, as Portugal currently trail Group One leaders Denmark by seven points.

The play-offs already look Portugal's most likely route to South Africa, but defeat to second-placed Hungary in Budapest on Wednesday would leave Cristiano Ronaldo and co with only a mathematical chance of finishing second.

Denmark can move to within three points of qualification if they win in Albania, while Group Two leaders Switzerland will also be within touching distance of the finals if they win in Latvia and Greece fail to beat Moldova.

Elsewhere, Scotland can secure second place in Group Nine with a draw at home to Bert van Marwijk's already-qualified Netherlands.

### IN BRIEF

#### Robinho out of Chile tie

AFP, Salvador de Bahia

Brazilian striker Robinho was ruled out on Monday of already qualified Brazil's 2010 World Cup qualifier with Chile on Wednesday.

The Manchester City star has a bruise on his right leg according to the Brazil coaching staff and will join suspended duo Kaka and Luis Fabiano on the sidelines while there is also a doubt over Elano, who has a foot problem.

Brazil coach Dunga will be left with just two fit strikers in Nilmar and Adriano, in a squad now reduced to 17 which is a huge boost for Chile who can qualify regardless of other results should they beat the Brazilians.

#### Scots sweat on Gordon

AFP, Dumbarton

Scotland boss George Burley is sweating on the fitness of influential keeper Craig Gordon ahead of Wednesday's crucial World Cup clash with the Netherlands at Hampden.

The nine-million-pound Sunderland shot-stopper damaged a thigh in Saturday's 2-0 win over Macedonia and is now a major doubt as the Scots look to cement a place in the play-offs for next year's tournament in South Africa.

Gordon, 25, has missed two games in the qualification stages and, in those matches, back-up keepers Allan McGregor and David Marshall have conceded a combined total of seven goals.

## Henry didn't slam coach

AFP, Paris



1998 World Cup winners France's increasingly fraught

qualifying campaign for next year's finals deepened on Monday when captain Thierry Henry denied he had criticised coach Raymond Domenech in front of the rest of the squad.

Squad-mate and fellow 2006 World Cup finalist Florent Malouda also revealed that he had only learnt he was not even among the substitutes for last Saturday's qualifier with Romania at the Stade de France when he entered the dressing room and he saw there was no shirt for him.

Henry's denial - Le Parisien claimed on Monday that in Friday's team meeting the Barcelona star had publicly slammed Domenech - and Malouda's clear displeasure at the manner in which he learnt of his non-selection will do nothing for morale as they head for a crucial qualifier with Group Seven leaders Serbia on Wednesday.

Henry was forced to clarify what had gone on Friday on the eve of the 1-1 draw which left the French four points adrift of the Serbs with just three matches remaining and in danger of having to go through a play-off to progress to South Africa.

"Nothing happened on Friday evening," protested Henry to French TV station TF1.

"There was a discussion between the squad and the coach as is usual."

"It was a constructive discussion... which must stay

between the players and the coach."

"I did not question the coach's qualities. There was never a clash between us," added Henry, who was quoted by Le Parisien as telling Domenech that the players had no idea where they were to play and lacked any direction.

Henry, who scored France's goal in the Romania match, insisted the camp was a happy one, something clearly not in Malouda's vocabulary.

"I saw when I entered the dressing room that there no shirt had been prepared for me," the Chelsea star - who

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PHOTO: AFP

France striker Thierry Henry participates in a training session in Clairefontaine on Tuesday on the eve of their 2010 World Cup qualifier against Serbia.