



New Zealand striker Rory Fallon (R) is ecstatic after scoring the all-important goal against Bahrain during their 2010 World Cup qualifier in Wellington on Saturday.

IN BRIEF

Conceicao calls it quits

AFP, Lisbon

Former Portuguese international Sergio Conceicao announced Saturday that he is retiring as a player.

"I want to announce today the end of my footballing career. When I look back I'm proud of what I achieved," Conceicao told the Portuguese press.

The midfielder, who turns 35 on Sunday, will become sporting director of Greek club PAOK Salonica where he has played for the past two seasons.

During his career he played for major European clubs including FC Porto, Lazio, Parma, Inter Milan and Standard Liege.

He also notched up 56 caps and scored 13 goals for Portugal between 1996 and 2004. The highlight of his career was the clash against Germany in Euro 2000 when he scored a hat-trick during their 3-0 victory.

Qatar's Brazilian stun Paraguay

AFP, Rouen

Qatar's Brazilian-born striker Fabio Cesar Montesin scored both goals as the 2011 Asian Cup hosts defeated World Cup qualifiers Paraguay 2-0 in a friendly on Friday.

Montesin struck in the 57th and 81st minutes to secure victory for the Gulfside.

Klose released from swine flu quarantine

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Miroslav Klose was on Saturday released from a four-day quarantine for swine flu after showing no signs of the virus and is available to play against the Ivory Coast next week.

Both the Bayern Munich star and his wife Sylwia were put under observation last Wednesday after their four-year-old twin sons Noah and Luan were discovered to both be suffering from the H1N1 virus.

Klose, the top scorer at the 2006 World Cup, nor his wife showed signs of the virus and have been allowed to leave quarantine.

Klose, 31, is now free to join the Germany squad to prepare for Wednesday's friendly against the Ivory Coast while Saturday's planned Germany-Chile match has been called off after last week's suicide of national goalkeeper Robert Enke.

Klose is expected to join the Germany squad in Hanover on Sunday for Enke's memorial service which is expected to be attended by 45,000 fans and colleagues from across German football.

Stars request Enke memorial game

Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany's top players including Michael Ballack and Bastian Schweinsteiger have requested the German Football Federation (DFB) hold a memorial game for tragic goalkeeper Robert Enke.

The 32-year-old shot-stopper committed suicide last Tuesday by flinging himself under a commuter train passing through his home town of Neustadt am Rübenberge, near Hanover, having suffered from depression since 2003.

The ex-national team goalkeeper, who won the last of his eight caps in August and helped Germany qualify for the 2010 World Cup, will be buried on Sunday after a memorial service at his home club.

Up to 100,000 people are expected at Hanover 96's stadium for a memorial service which will be attended by the entire Germany squad before Enke's coffin is carried out of the stadium by six Hanover team-mates.

With Germany playing a friendly against the Ivory Coast on Wednesday, the national team led by Ballack will attend a service for Enke on Sunday morning and then train in Duesseldorf in the afternoon to prepare for the game.

After consultation with the players, Germany coach Joachim Löw opted to bring the squad

together to prepare in the aftermath of Enke's tragic death.

Saturday's planned friendly international between Germany and Chile, which had been due to be held in Cologne, was called off as a mark of respect, but the national team's stars on Friday asked the DFB to consider holding a memorial match.

"The players have asked if there can be some sort of game next year to allow them to say goodbye to Robert," the DFB's secretary general Wolfgang Niersbach told German tabloid Bild.

Enke was set to travel with the Germany squad to South Africa for next June's World Cup, but his tragic death and one possibility is the full national side could play Enke's club Hanover 96 in a warm-up match.

Meanwhile, DFB president Theo Zwanziger says more must be done in the sport to break the taboos around depression.

"After this tragedy, we must think about the issues in football and look at ways of breaking some of the existing taboos," Zwanziger told German tabloid Bild.

Enke leaves behind his wife Teresa, 33, and eight-month-old daughter Leila, whom the couple adopted in May -- three years after their two-year-old daughter Lara died from a heart infection.

The Germany goalkeeper will be buried on Sunday next to the grave of his daughter.

England impresses Kaka

AFP, Doha

Kaka believes Fabio Capello has transformed England into a team capable of wrecking Brazil's hopes of claiming a sixth World Cup in South Africa next year.

The Real Madrid playmaker is a keen student of the English game and he has been impressed by the way Capello has resurrected the national squad from the ashes of their failure to reach Euro 2008, guiding Wayne Rooney and co. to the finals with nine wins in ten qualifiers.

"I think the character of Capello is the key to understanding this England team," Kaka said ahead of Saturday's friendly clash between the two countries.

"We always knew that they had good individual players capable of deciding games but they look more of a team now. They are much sharper collectively, which is what you would expect from a Capello team."

"Otherwise they must let him go and not harm his development."

Argentina coach Diego Maradona says his son-in-law, striker Sergio "Kun" Aguero, should leave Atletico Madrid if the club does not invest.

"It is not just England, we have some injuries too," Kaka stressed. "It makes the game

less rich but England are always a tough team to play against and it will be good to see how we do against one of the favourites for the next World Cup."

"After this match we play Oman, then we have a friendly in March and after that it is the World Cup, so this test for us is very important."

As ever with Brazil, a debate rages over the extent to which the current squad has sacrificed flair in the pursuit of results but Kaka has no problem with head coach Dunga's

"For us, the best thing, the number one option, is to win and after that we have to make a good show for everyone," he said.

"We are not thinking about trying to beat England two or three-nil, we are just thinking about playing good and trying to win."

Brazil's fortunes have been transformed under Dunga, who took over after the country's demoralising qualifying exit from the last World Cup.

"After the World Cup we were highly criticised and we learned from that, especially the things that went wrong," reflected Gilberto Silva, the former Arsenal midfielder who is one of the survivors from Brazil 2002 World Cup winning squad.

"We have to start again from zero and now the team looks strong but we are always looking to learn, to get better day by day."

"The World Cup is massive for everyone, everyone wants to be there, but especially for Brazilians."

"We have made a big sacrifice to qualify. It is not so easy for us, most of whom play in Europe, to go to South America for the qualifying matches."

"But all of us enjoy representing our country and we know our responsibility from now on. After the qualification, the pressure gets bigger."

Dunga meanwhile insisted he has no problem with people criticising his approach, as long as Brazil continue to get results.

"I want to be remembered as a winner," he said. "You should not forget that if Brazil has won a lot of competitions it is because we have had the best defenders as well as the best strikers."

Diego wants Aguero to leave Atletico

AFP, Madrid

Argentina coach Diego Maradona says his son-in-law, striker Sergio "Kun" Aguero, should leave Atletico Madrid if the club does not invest.

"Otherwise they must let him go and not harm his development."

Argentina international Aguero, 21, is a star turn with Atletico, for whom he signed in 2006 from Argentine side Independiente. His contract runs to 2012.

Atletico came fourth in La Liga last season to reach the Champions League but this season their form has been dismal and they are out of the Champions League already and also in the relegation zone.

"It is not just England, we have some injuries too," Kaka stressed. "It makes the game

"You're a great among greats, the history of football cannot be told without you," Argentine ambassador Carlos Bettini told the 83-year-old, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time.

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Jose sees his future in England

AFP, London

Inter Milan's Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho revealed Saturday that he sees his future in English football.

The former Chelsea coach is doing well with Inter Milan, leading them to the Serie A title last season and they currently have a five-point lead in the championship.

However, after five titles in seven seasons in three countries the Portuguese admitted: "I want to build something."

"Clearly it is unrealistic to expect to stay at a club as long as Sir Alex Ferguson - but I am ready for the next phase of my career. I want to work with a different perspective."

"At Porto my objective was to win to earn the right to go abroad. At Chelsea my ambition was to create a bit of history."

"But I always knew Chelsea lacked the normal English culture of stability."

"I was never under any illusions. I understood the personality of (owner) Roman Abramovich and the culture of the people around him. I knew it was not job for 10 years."

The 46-year-old, who left Chelsea in September 2007, added in The Times: "I love Inter and would love to build for the future here."

"In fact, I am doing it now, because I am not a selfish coach and I'm thinking about the future in terms of youth development and the age structure of my first team."

"But Italy is not the country for this. England is the country and my football is English football."

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"I want to be remembered as a winner," he said. "You should not forget that if Brazil has won a lot of competitions it is because we have had the best defenders as well as the best strikers."

"I have always been a team player," Di Stefano, Real's honorary president, told the ceremony at the Argentine embassy.

NZ book SA ticket

Fallon strike sinks Bahrain

AFP, Wellington



A goal by Rory Fallon just before half-time and some heroic goalkeeping by Mark Paston secured New Zealand's ticket to next year's World Cup as they squeezed past Bahrain 1-0 here on Saturday.

In a match billed as the biggest sporting event ever staged in New Zealand, the single goal broke the deadlock after the first leg of the Asia-Oceania final at Manama last month ended in a scoreless draw.

Bahrain's best chance to equalise, a penalty in the second half, went begging as Paston blocked Sayed Adnan's shot.

Before a crowd of 35,100 at Westpac Stadium, a record for a football match in a country obsessed with rugby union, New Zealand reached the World Cup finals for only the second time, after qualifying for Spain 28 years ago.

New Zealand coach Ricki Herbert, a member of the 1972 World Cup side, was ecstatic.

"We're back. We're there. South Africa, here we are," he said after giving Paston a congratulatory kiss, adding the team had done their preparation in the event of a penalty.

"We had done a little bit of homework and Paston's pulled one out of the top drawer," he said.

"He's done a big one for us. We thought we could get through without conceding a goal. We thought one would do it and we're there."

Paston, who said it would probably take a few days for New Zealand's success to fully sink in, described his penalty save as "a bit surreal, really."

"I basically guessed which way and it ended up in my hands and I got up and went on with the game really."

After dominating the goalless first encoun-

ter, where they missed two golden chances, Bahrain started the return match with the luxury of knowing a score draw would be enough to progress, and they attacked from the outset.

One particular snap shot from striker Jayce John was forced away by a diving Paston, who was quickly on his feet to block the rebound.

But after weathering the opening onslaught, the Ryan Nelsen-led New Zealanders fought their way into the game.

Leo Bertos and Celtic's Chris Killen both hit the woodwork before Fallon headed home a Bertos corner in the 44th minute.

In the 51st minute Abdulla Omar was brought down by Tony Lochhead in the penalty box and Uruguay referee Jorge Larrionda had no hesitation in pointing to the spot, only for Paston to deny Adnan's penalty.

The Gulf nation, with a population of a little over a million, also went agonisingly close to playing in the last World Cup -- losing at the same stage to Trinidad and Tobago.

WC QUALIFIED TEAMS

Countries assured of qualification for next year's World Cup in South Africa after Saturday's Asia-Oceania play-off match (32 nations will take part in the tournament):

Europe Zone

Netherlands, England, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Serbia, Italy, Switzerland, Slovakia

Asia Zone

Japan, Australia, South Korea, North Korea

Africa Zone

South Africa (as hosts), Ghana, Ivory Coast

South America Zone

Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina

North America Zone

Mexico, United States, Honduras

Oceania Zone

New Zealand

Galaxy in MLS final