

## Egypt start in style

AFP, Luanda

Champions Egypt kicked off their Africa Cup of Nations' title defence in scintillating style on Tuesday to restore some measure of sanity to proceedings in Angola after a spate of shocks on the opening two days.

Husted out of a World Cup berth by bitter rivals Algeria in November's play-off the Pharaohs arrived here with motivation aplenty.

And they hit the ground running with a 3-1 defeat of Nigeria to top Group C ahead of Mozambique and Benin, who shared the spoils 2-2 in the day's other game.

After Angola's sensational collapse to Mali, Malawi's whipping of Algeria, and favourites Ivory Coast being held by Burkina Faso, Egypt took to the pitch at their peril.

But the six-time champions didn't falter as they brought an end to a 33-year-old winless run they have endured against the west Africans with the goals coming from Emad Motaeb, skipper Ahmed Hassan, and Substitute Mohamed Nagi. Nigeria had taken an early lead through Chinedu Obasi.

Striker Mohamed Zidan said: "We didn't give up. I think we deserved the victory."

Egypt's assistant coach, Shawki Garib, added: "The victory over Nigeria is just the beginning, we still have a long way to go and so we still need our fans' genuine support and prayers."

Nigeria coach, Shuaibu Amodu, said his team paid the price for some schoolboy errors.

"We played well and controlled the game especially in the first half but somehow we made some silly mistakes and we were punished," said a miserable Amodu.

Later, Benin were on course for their first ever Africa Cup of Nations win when they shot out of the starting stalls to go two goals up in the first 20 minutes against Mozambique.

Their goals came via a penalty by Razak Omotoyossi and an own goal by Mozambique defender Dario Khan.

Mozambique's Almiro Lobo reduced the deficit before the half hour Mark with Goncalves Fumo netting the equaliser in the 54th minute. Benin coach, Michel Dessuyer, said: "I have to accept this result even though we lost a 2-0 lead. We failed to defend our advantage and now we have to focus on the next match against Nigeria."

His Mozambican counterpart, Mart Nooij, reflected: "The first 20 minutes was disastrous for us. After a good preparation, the players went into the game like a bull chasing after a red flag, but we came back in the second half and played a very wonderful game."

The latest developments from Friday's deadly attack on the Togo team bus centred on the arrest by Angolan police of two suspects wanted in connection with the machine gun assault which has cast a long shadow over the competition.

Burkina Faso, one of the three teams left in Cabinda where the attack took place, are desperate to leave the troubled province which has been the subject of a massive clampdown by security forces.

"We want to get to Luanda as quickly as possible due to the security question," Burkina Faso's assistant coach Gualbert Kabore declared.

"We have to stay in Cabinda until Saturday morning. Organisers have taken draconian measures and to get out we have to be accompanied by security personnel. It complicates life."

## Fergie escapes FA action

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson will not face disciplinary action over his latest criticisms of a referee, the Football Association (FA) announced Tuesday.

Ferguson was furious with Mark Clattenburg for sending-off Darren Fletcher during English champions United's 1-1 draw away to Birmingham City on Sunday.

Afterwards the Scot suggested Clattenburg had been inconsistent this season but the FA, England's governing body, have decided his remarks did not mean he was alleging bias or questioning the official's integrity.

"No action will be taken in relation to Sir Alex Ferguson," an FA spokesman said Tuesday.

As a result, the FA have not activated the two-match suspended sentence hanging over Ferguson for criticising referee Alan Wiley's fitness earlier this season, for which he was initially punished with a two-match touchline ban.

Scotland midfielder Fletcher was dismissed for two yellow card offences and after the match at St Andrews an irate Ferguson said: "As far as I'm concerned, I've not seen a softer sending-off for a long time. It is ridiculous."

## Roma bounce back

AFP, Rome

AS Roma bounced back from conceding a shock early goal against Serie B strugglers Triestina to win 3-1 on Tuesday and qualify for the quarterfinals of the Coppa Italia.

Roma, who will play Genoa or Catania next, joined Serie A leaders Inter Milan in the last eight after Jose Mourinho's team beat Livorno 1-0 in December.

Triestina were ahead after just five minutes as Luigi Della Rocca converted a penalty after he himself had been fouled by Marco Cassetti.

A shock was on the cards against a weakened Roma, for whom coach Claudio Ranieri rested the likes of centre-back Juan, striker Luca Toni and midfield dynamo Daniele De Rossi.

But Roma drew level on the stroke of halftime as Matteo Brighi shot home following a rebound.

Montenegro forward Mirko Vucini gave the hosts the lead on the hour after he was set up by French winger Jeremy Menez.

And 10 minutes from time Brazilian flop Julio Baptista sealed the victory direct from a free-kick.



PHOTO: AFP  
Russian star Maria Sharapova models earrings from Tiffany's that she will wear while playing at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Wednesday.

## Leonardo wants focus

AFP, Rome



AC Milan coach Leonardo urged his team on Tuesday to concentrate on their performances and not the league table.

Milan are second in Serie A, eight points behind bitter city rivals Inter Milan following Sunday's 3-0 humbling of Juventus in Turin.

They have a game in hand away to Fiorentina, though, which they will play at the end of the month.

They also have the Milan derby to look forward to on January 24 meaning that Milan could even be top of the pile come February if Inter drop points somewhere else.

But Leonardo is not counting on that.

Inter looked headed for a rare defeat on Saturday when they trailed 3-2 at home to rock bottom Siena with two minutes left but goals from Wesley Sneijder and Walter Samuel got the champions out of jail and earned them an unlikely 4-3 victory.

"We're very happy about what we're doing but the gap is still there because Inter's consistency is incredible," said Leonardo.

"But even so, there are still 19 matches to play plus the game in Florence so this is not the time to start doing your sums. Now is the time to maintain the level of play we've attained."

First up, though, Milan tackle third division Novara, who are unbeaten this season and have already claimed two Serie A scalps in Parma and Siena.

And although Leonardo will ring the changes, he insisted he is not taking lightly their opponents.

"We've prepared well for this match and whoever plays they have been waiting for this moment to show what they can do."

"Football is a continuous examination for everyone. This match is part of our calendar and of course it's important because players will walk out onto the San Siro pitch wearing a Milan shirt."

## Mokoena lifts Pompey

AFP, London



South Africa's Aaron Mokoena scored right at the end of extra-time as crisis club Portsmouth came from behind to beat Coventry City 2-1 in an FA Cup third round replay on Tuesday.

Victory gave Portsmouth, bottom of the Premier League and beset by financial problems, a fourth round tie at home to top-flight rivals Sunderland.

Both of Pompey's goals were heartbreaking for second-tier Coventry, coming in the last minute of normal time and in time added on at the end of the second half of extra-time.

The win gave Portsmouth fans a rare moment of celebration in an otherwise chaotic season, on and off the field, and Mokoena said it had come at a vital time for the south coast club.

"It was very important to win this game so we can build on it," Mokoena told ITV4. "We needed it so badly. It's a big win for us."

He added: "It's always difficult to come to these

places and credit to Coventry, they made it difficult for us. At the end of the day we managed to wrap it up."

Portsmouth, the 2008 FA Cup winners, were behind for most of the match after Coventry striker Leon Best fired the home side into a 22nd minute lead.

And it seemed cash-strapped Portsmouth, whose officials met earlier Tuesday with Premier League chiefs in a bid to lift the club's transfer embargo, were about to exit the FA Cup until Coventry's Stephen Wright headed into his own net shortly before the end of normal time at the Ricoh Arena.

The tie was heading for a penalty shoot-out until defender Mokoena headed in the winner with virtually the last act of the game.

Earlier, Barry Ferguson's first goal for Birmingham City saw them beat Nottingham Forest 1-0 in a third round replay at St Andrews to set-up a fourth round tie away to Premier League rivals Everton.

Scotland midfielder Ferguson struck from 15 yards shortly after the hour mark as Birmingham saw off in-form Championship high-flyers Forest and extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 14 matches.

Elsewhere, second division Derby beat third tier Millwall

5-3 on penalties after the match at Pride Park finished extra-time at 1-1.

The deadlock was eventually broken when Steve Morison gave Millwall a 108th minute lead before Derby equalised soon afterwards through Steve Davies's lob.

Derby goalkeeper Stephen Bywater saved from Danny Schofield in the shoot-out before Dean Moxey sealed the hosts' place in the fourth round.

Sheffield United almost blew a 3-0 lead away to Championship rivals QPR but held on for a 3-2 win at Loftus Road.

Lee Williamson opened the scoring in the 19th minute and then two goals in three second-half minutes from Jamie Ward and Richard Cresswell left the Blades 3-0 up with 20 minutes left.

But Akos Buzsaky's penalty gave Rangers hope before Damion Stewart's goal two minutes from time set up a frantic finish.

In Tuesday's only third round match Bristol City's late equaliser secured a 1-1 draw against Championship rivals Cardiff after substitute Gavin Williams scored in the second minute of stoppage-time at a blizzard-hit Ashton Gate to cancel out Michael Chopra's 76th minute opener for the visitors.



PHOTO: AFP  
Birmingham City midfielder Barry Ferguson (2nd from R) scores the all-important goal against Nottingham Forest during their FA Cup third round replay at St Andrew's on Tuesday

## WC idea on discussion

AFP, Melbourne

A revolutionary plan for a World Cup of tennis will be discussed among the players during this month's Australian Open, Novak Djokovic said here on Wednesday. Djokovic, a member of the ATP Player Council headed by Roger Federer, said the idea floating around for a World Cup -- 32 nations playing once every two years to replace the annual Davis Cup -- was an idea from the council.

Reports said it was envisaged to have a biennial 10-day tournament involving 32 teams, which would feature shorter matches in which players have to watch the clock between points and compulsory mid-match substitutions.

Djokovic, who is playing in the Kooyong

Classic here, said players would hold talks during the Australian Open starting on Monday which would be "crucial for upcoming years".

The Serbian star said nothing had been settled yet but various options were on the table.

"It's all fresh and it's all ideas, we didn't decide to put anything on an official term because we have to consider other sides as well," Djokovic told reporters.

"This is the bottom line. Without sponsors there wouldn't be a tournament; without tournaments, you know, players wouldn't exist."

"But still, players are the ones who are making the show and their opinions have to be greatly considered."

"This time I think that slowly things will get better. But these are things that cannot happen overnight."

The Times of London said the idea had

already been presented to the All England Club, the United States Tennis Association and Tennis Australia, as well Federer.

Top television executives were also in the loop, it added, saying that they believed that a men-only competition would attract a larger audience.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley was quoted by the paper as saying the idea was "innovative, refreshing and thoughtfully put together."

"Any initiative that will further expose our sport and will grow its participation, particularly in Australia but also worldwide, has to be great for tennis," he said.

Croatian Ivan Ljubicic, who is also playing in the Kooyong Classic, said the Davis Cup format was now outdated.

"The top guys are not able to play all the matches that they would love to play for their nation," Ljubicic told reporters.

## Flachi tests positive for cocaine again

AFP, Rome

Brescia's Francesco Flachi's playing career looks to be over after he tested positive for cocaine for the second time.

The 34-year-old only returned from a two-year doping ban last year after testing positive for the same substance in 2007 when playing for Sampdoria.

But now the striker, who began his career at hometown club Fiorentina, has tested positive again for a cocaine derivative following a match against Modena on December 19.

## Sol's surprise return

AFP, London



Sol Campbell is set to complete a surprise return to Arsenal by the end of the week after impressing the club's backroom staff in a 45-minute run out for the Gunners second string.

Campbell, 35, played the first half of the Arsenal reserves match at West Ham on Tuesday evening and afterwards revealed that he was on the verge of signing until the end of the season for the club he played for between 2001 and 2006, winning two Premier League and three FA Cup trophies.

"I cannot tell you how much I've missed playing after being out for so long," the former England centreback told reporters.

"There are still a few technicalities to iron out but I'm signing for Arsenal until the end of the season and it is fantastic, marvellous."

Campbell, who has been training at Arsenal for nearly two months, has barely played since the end of last season following his departure from Portsmouth and a subsequent, ill-fated brief stint with fourth tier outfit Notts County.

But he appeared sharp as he made a series of important interventions and his performance earned him an enthusiastic review from Arsenal reserve-team manager Neil Banfield.

"Sol is a fantastic professional," Banfield said. "He came in and said it was great to be out there playing."

"He's played with these youngsters before and I've got to say he is a first-class professional."

Banfield said he had never expected Campbell to last longer than 45 minutes. "That was planned to give him a run-out as he hasn't played in five months," he said. "We may try and get another fixture for him in the coming weeks so he can get another game." With William Gallas and Thomas Vermaelen performing well this season, Campbell is being brought back essentially as cover for



SOL CAMPBELL

Arsene Wenger's first-choice centrebacks.

But his former team-mate, Martin Keown, believes the veteran could play a much more central role in Arsenal's push to land their first trophy since 2004.

"Without a doubt if he had not shown the right signs, that he was fit and sharp enough, there is no way that Arsenal would have considered it," Keown said.

"What would have been a concern for them is whether Sol still has the hunger to get

## IN BRIEF

### Martins leaves Angola

AFP, Benguela

Wolfsburg striker Obafemi Martins has left the Nigerian squad to see his specialist in Europe after he complained of persistent pain on his recently operated shin.

Eagles media officer, Peterside Idah, confirmed the departure of the striker Wednesday morning.

"Martins has gone back to Europe to see his specialist as regards the problem with his shin," he said.

"He has complained of pains on his right shin, which the experts said should not be the case after he underwent surgery recently."

Martins did not take part in Wednesday morning's shake-up in at the training ground in Benguela, which is a walking distance from the Eagles Hotel Praia Morena.

The official insisted that Martins would be back in time for Saturday's crucial Group C match against Benin in Benguela.

In other team news, Fulham midfielder Dickson Etuhu did not take part in the training as he had an ice pack around his left knee.

Idah confirmed that Locomotiv Moscow striker Osaze Odenwingie has also resumed full training with the team after an infection.

The Nigerians were stunned by Egypt in their cup opener on Tuesday losing 1-3 after opening the scoring.

### Podolski out for several weeks

AFP, Berlin

Bundesliga strugglers Cologne are set to be without German international striker Lukas Podolski for several weeks as he overcomes a back problem, the club said on Tuesday.

Podolski missed training and underwent a scan but is set to be out at a crucial time as the season resumes after the winter break this weekend with Cologne just two points clear of the drop zone.

The club fear that Podolski, who is in his second spell with the side after an unhappy time at Bayern Munich, could be suffering from an intervertebral disc problem, having already a slight discal hernia two years ago.

"We therefore have to be very careful," coach Zvonimir Soldo told local newspaper Express, which forecast that the player could be out of action for some three weeks.

back into top level football and he has obviously proved that."

Keown admitted he was surprised that Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger had decided to resign a player who left the club under something of a cloud in the wake of his half-time substitution and subsequent walkout in a match against West Ham in February 2006.

The Gunners boss has passed on opportunities to re-sign the likes of Nicolas Anelka and Patrick Vieira in the past but Keown believes Campbell can have a significant influence on an Arsenal squad that is short on the experience of winning things.

"I think it is as much to do with what he wants in the dressing room," Keown added.

"As a young player you need those senior players to help drag you over the line. When you have not won something for a number of years, as is the case for most of that group, you just need to be nurtured. Sol is very good at that."

"And he is very strong and powerful in the air which is maybe something that is missing from the two current central defenders."

"Gallas and Vermaelen are playing very well but without a doubt if you are going to win a championship you need three or four good, top central defenders."

"Sol is a bit like a train: once you start him up and fire him in the right direction he takes a hell of a lot of stopping. They will have a job to get him out of the team if he gets into it."