

Presents

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FROM SPAIN



WE WANT TO PLAY! Two kids call out the Danish players during a training session at Loeire Park in Knysna yesterday.

SA winding preps up

APP, Johannesburg



South Africa put the finishing touches to its World Cup preparations, rolling out the continent's first high-speed rail link on Tuesday, as organisers told critics it was time to put doubts aside.

The three-billion-dollar Gautrain began whisking passengers from Johannesburg's international airport into the upmarket Sandton district, just three days before the tournament begins.

The 100-mile-an-hour link will be one of the key legacies of the tournament and is intended to show that Africa can build transport facilities to rival those of anywhere in the world.

"I have been in Johannesburg just for one hour -- the airport and here -- but I really thought this was a first world service," Costa Rican football journalist Gustavo Jimenez told AFP as he stepped off the train at Sandton.

"That's not only because of the facilities and the building, but also because of how much effort they are putting in to helping users," he added as a security guard helped him hail a taxi to take him to his hotel.

In fact, security guards outnumbered passengers, reflecting the desire by authorities here to deflect fears that a country with one of the world's highest crime rates is no place to stage the world's biggest sporting event.

Tickets from the airport to Sandton cost around 13 dollars, a small fortune for most South Africans but much cheaper than the cost of a taxi ride.

And while traffic snarl-ups mean the journey usually takes around an hour and a half, the Gautrain will cover the distance in around a quarter of an hour.

Strikes and subsidence problems have ensured that only the terminus at Sandton, a swanky suburb which is home to the Johannesburg stock exchange and a massive shopping mall, has opened in time for the World Cup.

But the train will eventually take passengers into the central business district, the suburb of Rosebank and onto Pretoria, the seat of government.

The highway between Pretoria and Johannesburg is the busiest in the country and the journey can be a two-hour commute at rush-hour, but the same trip on the Gautrain should take just 42 minutes.

Michael Bettendorf, a 27-year-old investment banker from Trier in Germany was another impressed passenger.

"It's more modern than the trains in Trier. It's comparable to the trains in the big cities in Germany, but really new," he said.

Worries over crime, transport infrastructure and accommodation have dogged the build-up to the tournament ever since South Africa was granted the right to stage the World Cup six years ago.

But Sepp Blatter, president of football's world governing body FIFA, told reporters that while the first-ever World Cup on African soil would not be without its flaws, it was time to be swept along by World Cup fever.

"Be conscious of the fact that we are in Africa, even if South Africa is the best organised country on the continent. You can be critical -- that is your right -- but admit that you really feel something here," he said on Monday.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

The sky is Azzurri

WORLD CUP 2006 PART III

The host nation was by now rapt by a belief of ultimate victory with the chant "Berlin, Berlin, wir fahren nach Berlin (we're going to Berlin)" now sung in full voice. Waiting for them in Dortmund were an Italian team hitting form after an easy 3-0 win over Ukraine in Hamburg. The semifinal that followed was a classic that seemed destined for another penalty shoot-out win for the Germans. Suddenly the Italians, who had edged the balance of play, scored in the 119th and 120th minutes through defender Fabio Grosso and sub Alessandro Del Piero, finally putting years of international disappointment behind him with a breakaway strike. The tearful Germans departed with honour preserved and belief restored, eventually picking up third place.

Portugal's Ronaldo was now established as the tournament's bad guy and was booed in Munich throughout the semi with France, though he also rose to the occasion as something approaching a one-man attack. He was outshone only by Zidane, who was set to retire from all football at the end of the tournament and was determined to go out at the highest level. A foul on Henry by Carvalho gave him a penalty chance that he took with aplomb, succeeding against Portuguese keeper Ricardo where England had failed. Thereafter, despite the efforts of Ronaldo and Luis Figo, himself on a last hurrah, France were destined for Berlin, Ronaldo eventually shedding tears that were not met with much in the way of worldwide sympathy.

The final would be a re-run of that of Euro 2000 where a Zidane in his pomp had inspired French victory. He set out for the same outcome in the final and added his blend of panache when a penalty in

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

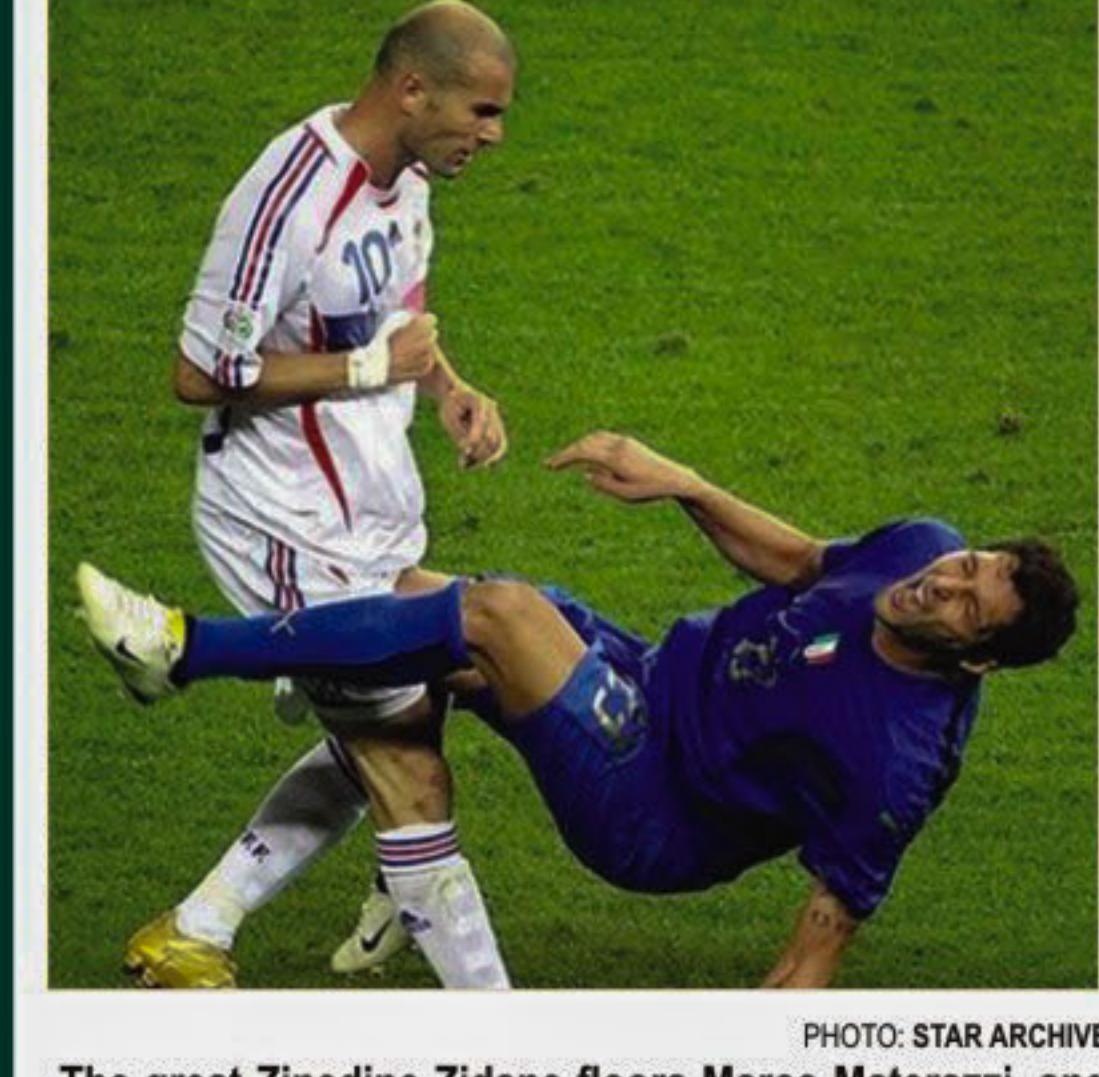


PHOTO: STAR ARCHIVE

The great Zinedine Zidane floors Marco Materazzi, and France's hopes in the penalties.

Pirlo focuses on Slovakia

INTERNET

Italy international Andrea Pirlo is confident he can be fit in time for his side's match against Slovakia on June 24.

The Milan midfielder suffered a calf tear last Friday and has been back in Brescia recovering.

La Gazzetta dello Sport understands he will fly to South Africa to meet up with the rest of the squad.

"I feel decisively better. I have cared for myself in the last few days and the pain has diminished," he said.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

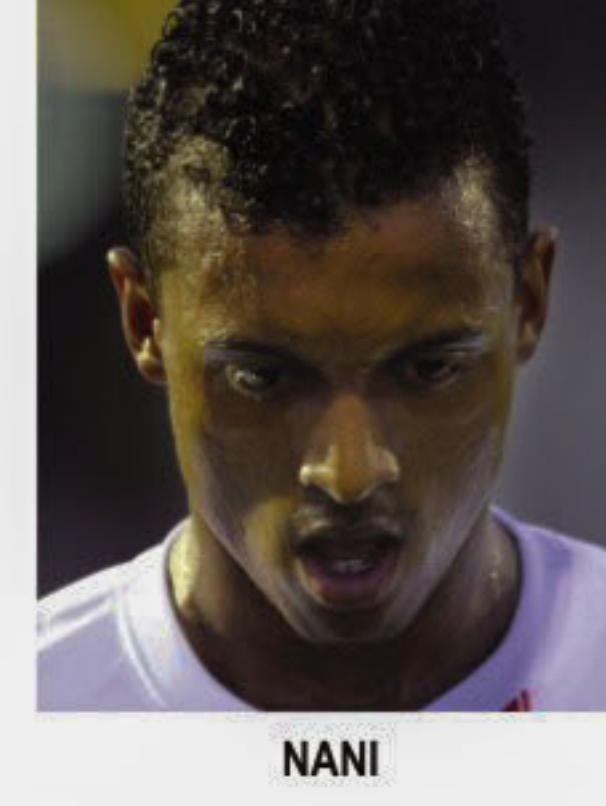
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Now goes Nani

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Portugal's Nani, who lost to runners-up France in Germany.

The winger had an excellent second half to the season with impressive performances in the Premier League and Champions League with



NANI

Manchester United.

He will be replaced by Benfica's Ruben Amorim, the Federation added.

After tests we conclude he is unfit to participate in the World Cup," it said. Nani picked up the injury in training on Friday in Lisbon before flying to South Africa.

The winger had missed the squad's final home training session in Portugal on Saturday after falling while attempting an acrobatic shot and causing a traumaticism in his shoulder.

During the flight to Johannesburg, he had been confident he would recover in time.

Nani's loss will be sorely felt by the 2006 semi-finalists

The other main injury concern in the Portuguese squad is Pepe, who has been recovering from a knee injury he sustained in December.

He has not played since but was last week cleared by doctors from the national side and

THE KNOWLEDGE
Nani was involved in 6 of Portugal's 19 goals during the 2010 WC qualifiers (three goals and three assists)

Cristiano Ronaldo failed to score or assist a single goal for Portugal in 7 appearances in qualifying

his club Real Madrid to travel to the finals.

Portugal play their first tournament match on June 15 against the Ivory Coast in Group G, which also includes Brazil and North Korea.

The Brazil playmaker says his confidence was boosted after scoring and playing well in the team's final warm-up before the tournament on Monday, and is likely to keep improving until the opener against North Korea on June 15.

Kaka played the entire match in Brazil's 5-1 win over Tanzania in Dar Es Salaam. He acknowledged he is still not at his best coming off a left thigh injury, but performed much better than in the 45 minutes he played in Brazil's first warm-up.

Kaka says he "felt fine" and just needs to "loosen up a little more." He believes he will "be ready" for Brazil's World Cup opener.

"Of course you want best players in Nigeria to participate in the squad," the Swede said.

"I would love to have Mikel in the squad, he's had a fantastic season with Chelsea and the

Kaka upbeat

AP, Johannesburg

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Messi not the only one

APP, Richards Bay

Nigeria have warned that Lionel Messi was not the only danger man for Argentina ahead of their World Cup opener against the South African giants on Saturday.

The Super Eagles will also face South Korea and Greece in Group B, but all thoughts were focused on Diego Maradona's superstars at Ellis Park Stadium in Johannesburg.

"Messi's the same player, like a man. He's a good player and we respect him. We hope he respects us too," Everton striker Yakubu Aiyegbeni said of the Barcelona playmaker.

"We're not thinking about Messi, we're thinking about playing against Argentina, a good team."

Nigeria's run-up to the World Cup has been hit by injury to Mikel Obi, their star Chelsea midfielder, but coach Lars Lagerback was adamant that his team would work through the set-back.

"Of course you want best players in Nigeria to participate in the squad," the Swede said.

"I would love to have Mikel in the squad, he's had a fantastic season with Chelsea and the

Super Eagles, but that's football, all teams have injuries.

"It's been a long season for a lot of the players and unfortunately for Mikel, after his operation it didn't work as we hoped."

Lagerback oversaw his first win as Nigeria coach on Sunday, a 3-1 win over fellow World Cup qualifiers North Korea overshadowed by a crowd stampede.

It was a third friendly warm-up, Lagerback's team having also eked out a goalless draw with Saudi Arabia and a 1-1 stalemate with Colombia.

"What the players have done in this last week is great. They've improved all the time and worked very hard," said the coach who was involved with the Swedish national team for two decades.

"In general, it was a good game (against North Korea). The players are working hard and performing and now we can focus on this week's game against Argentina, and we're looking forward to this."

Everton defender Joseph Yobo said the result against the North Koreans was timely tonic that had left the Nigeria squad in high spirits.

"It was a big morale booster for us," Yobo said. "It was our last friendly game. It was also a

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Rooney ready to roar

APP, Rustenburg

Wayne Rooney played down concerns over England's lacklustre World Cup build-up and insisted he was raring to go ahead of the opening Group C clash with the United States here on Saturday.

Fabio Capello's side have looked unconvincing in their warm-up internationals against Mexico and Japan and that impression was confirmed by another disjointed display in the 3-0 win over South African Premier League side Platinum Stars on Monday.

England did however look much sharper once Rooney came on as a second-half substitute and the Manchester United striker created his side's second goal before claiming the third for himself.

"It was a good run-out, we needed to get the game in and to play 45 minutes felt good so I was happy," Rooney said.

"I think we got out of it what we needed. I would have liked to have got a bit more of a game but I was happy with the 45 minutes."

"We are ready these are preparation games for us for the big one now coming up on Saturday. I just can't wait now. The sooner the better."

Rooney's input on Monday's match came at a price with the striker picking up a booking

for dissent and generally charging around in a manner which would have reminded many England fans of his conduct in the 2006 quarterfinal against Portugal, in which he was sent off before England lost out in a penalty shoot-out.

Teammate Jermain Defoe however believes that Rooney cannot completely shed his aggressive, competitive edge.

"When you've got that fire in your belly as a player can be good," Defoe said. "If you take that away from Wayne, then he won't be the same player."

Defoe backed Rooney's view that England are ready to challenge at this World Cup, although he acknowledged they were still adjusting to the 1500m-plus altitude of South Africa's high veldt.

"It was a really good work out. With the conditions, the altitude and the heat, it made it difficult, but it helped with the fitness for what is ahead."

"You do notice the altitude here when you're running around. It's different, and we're a lot higher here than we were in Austria but I'm sure we'll get used to it in training."

"I don't think we could be better prepared for a World Cup. I think everything we've done the training, the fitness work has been spot on."

"The hotel is brilliant. We've got everything



WHITE LIGHTNING: England's main man Wayne Rooney shoots at the goal during England's last warm-up match against club side Platinum Stars at the Moruleng Stadium near Rustenburg on Monday. Rooney picked up a yellow card after allegedly abusing the referee, drawing unwanted attention.

How to score from the spot

REUTERS, London

With the World Cup just days away, a British researcher has revealed the secret of taking penalties -- don't look at the goalie.

Greg Wood discovered in a series of tests that most penalty-takers look at the keeper rather than at the ball because the goalie is the main threat to them.

He asked members of the football team at the University of Exeter, where he works, to take penalty shots.

Then he added an element of pressure, warning them that their results would be shared with the other players, and that there was a 50-pound prize for the best result.

Special goggles recorded the movements of their eyes and allowed researchers to analyse the gaze of each player as the spot kick was taken.

They found that the player paid far more attention to the goalkeeper when under

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

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WATCH**
TEN Sports &
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