

Spain 'not favourites'

THE GUARDIAN



Sergio Ramos has tried to ease the pressure on his Spain teammates by dismissing the idea they should be considered favourites to lift the World Cup.

The European

champions boast a formidable record in international football over the last three years and are widely favoured in South Africa. But Ramos believes there are several teams who can challenge over the course of the next few weeks.

"Well, I think in these kinds of events you always have a surprise," the Real Madrid defender said.

"Obviously the favourites are Italy, Brazil, Portugal, Holland... in this year's tournament we will see so many good players which make the World Cup so interesting and exciting. So,

we pass the status of being the favourite to the other teams.

"We do not like to be seen as favourites but of course we have a strong team and if we do the things well as we did in the European Cup, step by step and respecting every team, we will play an important role. I would be happy reaching the 11th of July, the day of the final."

Ramos' Madrid teammate Alvaro Arbeloa is likewise looking at others to carry the weight of expectation.

"Well, for me favourites are Brazil," he said. "They have a lot of experience, the team which won the most titles, they are a team which are always dangerous and to be considered. I think Spain and Brazil are the favourites."

"Italy are always very strong, although it does not look like this before the tournament. England with Capello are very good. Then teams like France, Germany and Portugal who have great individual players and, yes, Argentina, why not?"

THE KNOWLEDGE

The only side to win the World Cup after having won the European Championships are West Germany

Spain have won 96% of their matches under Vicente del Bosque's management (24/25).

Bizarre goals on menu

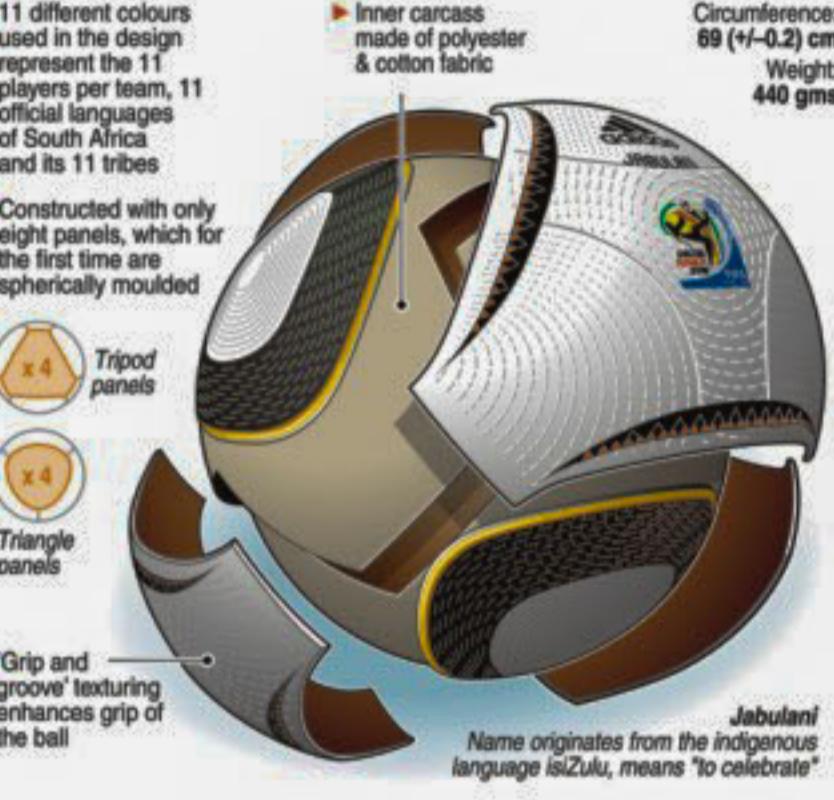
INTERNET, undated



Hugo Lloris was one of the first goalkeepers to openly criticise the balls to be used

at World Cup 2010, and the France custodian has reiterated his position during a press conference, stating that "bizarre" goals will be scored over the course of the next month and lamenting the increasing uncertainty of the shot-stopper's role.

Lloris was beaten by a wickedly swerving ball in the 1-0 friendly defeat against China, which hasn't helped him make friends with the already infamous Jabulani.



"We need to be even faster in the analysis of the trajectory," the Olympique Lyonnais keeper explained. "I would prefer it if I made a technical mistake; at least I could blame myself."

"The ball moves from high to low, from right to left. Even the attackers are embarrassed at the training centres. It is difficult to analyse the point of impact between the ball and the head or foot."

"There will be many goals, beautiful and bizarre. The ball is light. It seems that it is made of plastic. It is far from a leather ball. And as you go up in altitude, the more you will have problems."

"We all realise that these balls make our task difficult. I must be constantly alert, focused, vigilant and make the correct choices."

Ballack, Blues part ways

Cole also departs

Football

INTERNET, undated

German international Michael Ballack will be leaving Chelsea after the English club decided against renewing its contract with the injured player.

"We were unable to agree on further cooperation," Ballack's agent Michael Becker said.

Ballack was not the only major star to be sorted out at Chelsea as English international Joe Cole was also not offered a new contract after seven seasons with the London club.

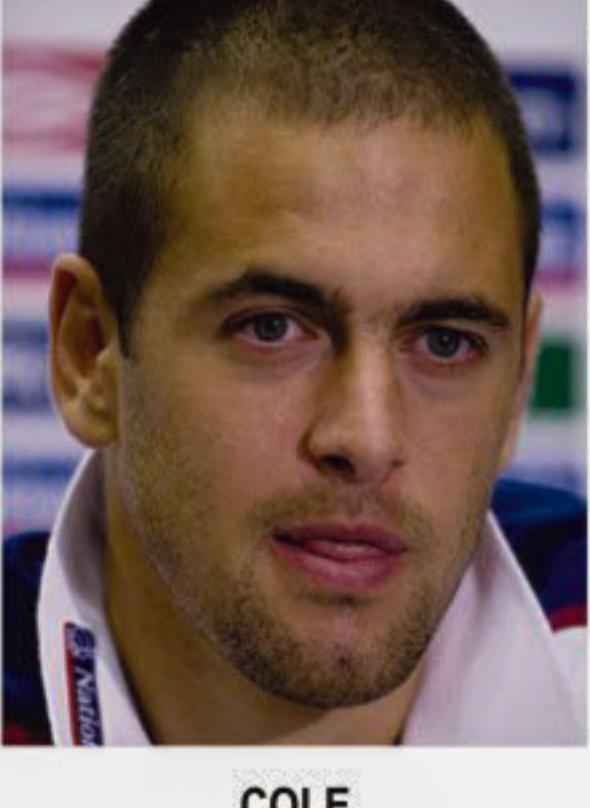
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BALLACK



COLE

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