



PHOTO: AFP

TRYING OUT A DIFFERENT BALL: Nicolas Anelka tries a drop kick during France's training session at the Fields of Dreams Stadium in Knysna on Thursday. The 1998 champions take on Uruguay tonight and much will depend on the Chelsea forward.

Reputation at stake

AFP, Cape Town



Former champions France go into their opening World Cup game against Uruguay in Cape Town on Friday battling a salvo of criticism, with nothing but victory enough to satisfy the sceptics.

Raymond Domenech's team have been in underwhelming form, losing 1-0 to China in a warm-up match last week, which followed a 2-1 win over Costa Rica and a 1-1 draw with Tunisia.

Since arriving in South Africa, they have adopted a siege-like mentality at their luxury five-star resort to focus on the job in hand, training mostly behind closed doors.

This has not gone down well with an irate French media, while Sports Minister Rama Yade caused a stir when she said the team should have shown some "decency" during hard economic times by not choosing such swanky accommodation.

Domenech, who is widely disliked in France and will be replaced by former skipper Laurent Blanc after the tournament, has played down his squad's troubled build-up.

"To lose against China in our final build-up game hardly pleases me but at the end of the day it remains a preparation match," he said. "Now we get down to the real thing."

The fact that France are here at all still irks some after Thierry Henry's outrageous handball played such a pivotal role in their play-off victory over Ireland.

If that wasn't enough, the French team was then rocked by a sex scandal linking members of the team, including star player Franck Ribery, to an under-age call girl.

The 1998 champion's consolation is that they are in

a relatively easy group that also includes hosts South Africa and Mexico.

With Patrick Vieira failing to make the squad, France's lone 1998 survivor is Henry, although the veteran Barcelona striker is likely to be used as a super-sub.

William Gallas and Patrick Evra will lead at the back with Jeremy Toulalan and Abou Diaby shoring up midfield.

The emergence of Yoann Gourcuff, the talent of Ribery and the rejuvenation of Nicolas Anelka have given the coach a variety of options in attack, where Andre-Pierre Gignac and Florent Malouda will hope to feature.

For the Uruguayans, it is another chance to relive their glory days.

They collected the 1930 World Cup and repeated the

feat in 1950, but since then have rarely made an impact at the global showpiece.

This time round expectations at home are not high and coach Oscar Tabarez is keen to ignore their past.

Instead, he wants to focus on getting the best out of a talented and maturing squad, who trounced Switzerland and Israel 3-1 and 4-1 respectively in recent friendlies.

Tabarez has already named his team for Friday's clash at Green Point Stadium with defender Mauricio Victorino and midfielder Egidio Arevalo Rios surprise choices.

Victorino, who plays in Chile with Universidad de Chile, replaces Andres Scotti of Colo Colo, also in the Chilean top flight.

Penarol's Arevalo Rios

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Viera backs Les Blues

AFP, Johannesburg

French World Cup winner Patrick Vieira on Thursday predicted troubled France could spring a surprise in South Africa, saying the pressure on the squad would bring them together.

"France have always been criticised before big tournaments like the World Cup. It was like that in 98, it was like that in 2002, it was like that in 2006 and it's nothing new, I'm not surprised," said the Manchester City player.

"I really strongly believe that France are good enough to win the World Cup even if they haven't played well in the first few games, the friendlies they've had."

Speaking about under-pressure Domenech, Vieira said: "The manager has been criticised for a long time and there's nothing new about that but I think what's important is for them to get focused on the game."

Vieira said France's strength was that they had so many players who could make a difference and turn games, adding: "That's why they have to believe they can go and win it because they've got the quality there."

The former Arsenal and

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Biggest star of 'em all

AFP, Johannesburg



South Africa's legendary trumpeter Hugh Masekela will jazz up the World Cup opening ceremony with American R-and-B star R Kelly, but all eyes will be on the stands for a glimpse of Nelson Mandela.

Mandela's family confirmed that the 91-year-old icon of the anti-apartheid struggle would attend the opening match, if only for a while, but no details have emerged about how or when he will arrive.

Organiser Derek Carstens promises a "big surprise" during the first seven minutes of the ceremony, but said the secret would not involve South Africa's first black president, who is increasingly frail but still beloved.

On the ground, more than 1,500 performers will showcase music and dance from the "six-pack" of African countries participating in the continent's first World Cup, Culture Minister Lulu

Xingwana said. "We're very happy that we have the best from South Africa and the best from the African continent," she said.

R Kelly will perform with the Soweto Spiritual Singers. Nigerian Afro-funk star Femi Kuti will also perform, while South Africa will pay tribute to the late opera tenor Siphiwo Ntshibe.

The 34-year-old rising star had been asked by Mandela to sing at the opening ceremony, but he died suddenly last month of bacterial meningitis.

Details about the ceremony, which is being masterminded by South African producer Lebo M, famous for his work on "The Lion King" on Broadway, had been closely guarded in the months before the event.

Carstens promised there would be one more "big surprise" during the ceremony's first seven minutes.

He said it would not involve Nobel Peace Prize-winner Mandela, whose family said Tuesday that he would make a brief appearance at the ceremony, ending weeks of uncertainty over whether the increasingly frail former presi-

dent would attend. Mandela's involvement proved critical at key moments in the campaign to bring the tournament to Africa for the first time, and FIFA president Sepp Blatter has called him "the person who got the World Cup for South Africa".

The 40-minute opening ceremony starts at 2:00pm (1200 GMT) Friday ahead of the kick-off match between South Africa and Mexico.

Organisers expect hundreds of millions of viewers to watch on television, making it one of the world's most-watched events.

Jerseys made of recycled bottles

AFP, Taipei

Nine teams competing in the World Cup will be wearing environmentally friendly jerseys made from recycled plastic bottles when the tournament kicks off in South Africa today.

Front-runners Brazil, the Netherlands and Portugal are among the teams who will be sporting the shirts made in Taiwan, the island's cabinet said Thursday.

Each jersey is made from eight plastic bottles that are melted and processed into polyester and is 13 percent lighter and can absorb and disperse sweat more quickly than traditional fabric, the cabinet said in a statement.

Environmentally conscious Taiwan is keen to promote green technology and architecture as it seeks to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

A Taiwanese company has turned 1.5 million recycled plastic bottles into a nine-storey pavilion for an international floral show on the island later this year.

Nepalese want rain

AFP, Kathmandu

Football fans in Nepal are praying for a good monsoon to ease a crippling national power shortage that threatens to prevent them watching World Cup matches.

Nepal depends almost entirely on hydropower, and the country's 28 million people face up to 18 hours of power cuts a day until the onset of the monsoon in June brings enough water to meet the demand for electricity.

Fans have appealed to the authorities to leave the power on during key matches, but their pleas appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

"It will simply not be possible to reduce the power cuts during the World Cup because we cannot meet demand," said Sher Singh Bhat, an official with the Nepal Electricity Authority.

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WORLD CUP POLL
Do you think Argentina are relying too much on Lionel Messi?

Yes 86.4%
No 13.4%

TOTAL VOTES: 145

TODAY'S POLL
What will be the result in the France-Uruguay match?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast your vote

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ESPN & SuperSport3
2010 FIFA World Cup Opening Ceremony
Live from 6:10pm
2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa v Mexico
Opening Match
Live from 8:00pm
Uruguay v France
Live from 12:30am (Saturday)

TEN Sports
West Indies v South Africa
First Test, Day Two
Live from 8:00pm

SOUTH AFRICA v MEXICO
Time: 8:00pm
Johannesburg (Soccer City)

URUGUAY v FRANCE
Time: 12:30am (Saturday)
Cape Town

Fair & Lovely
MAX Fairness for MAX Impression

TODAY'S MATCHES

MAX Skin Lightening
MAX Spot Reduction
MAX Sun Protection



PHOTO: AFP

FROM FINGERS-CROSSED TO THUMBS-UP: Didier Drogba, with his injured right-arm in a sling, arrives at the OR Tambo Airport in Johannesburg with his Ivory Coast teammates on Thursday.

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