

PREVIEW

Japan in Eto'o's sights

AFP, Bloemfontein

Cameroon's Treble-winning striker Samuel Eto'o has Japan in his sights as the "Indomitable Lions" launch their World Cup bid on Monday against a misfiring Japan.

Paul Le Guen's Cameroon, the first African nation to reach the World Cup quarterfinals two decades ago,

THE KNOWLEDGE

The last three goals Japan have conceded in friendlies have all been own goals.

Cameroon have never scored against Japan.

Song and Tottenham central defender Sebastien Bassong.



hope Eto'o can inspire them in the same way as 38-year-old Roger Milla did in Italy in 1990.

The Inter Milan player, who rivals Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba as the best striker from Africa, has enjoyed a stellar two seasons, winning the "Treble" of European Cup, league and national cup for Barcelona in 2009 and repeating the feat for Inter in 2010.

"Eto'o is a great player," said Frenchman Le Guen. "He's used to playing great games, he's ready to cope with the situation, he's used to the pressure."

Others in the squad include Arsenal midfielder Alexandre

"We're ready. We've worked hard since the start of the training camp. We're ready to fight against Japan and win the game," said the Paris-born Bassong.

"We're used to playing against quick attackers and good players. We're all professionals and will have to deal with it. It'll be tough but we know how to cope."

No African team boasts more experience than Cameroon, whose appearance in South Africa is a record sixth at a World Cup for an African nation and who will revel in "home" support.

Cameroon have struggled

in their warm-up matches but in Bloemfontein on Monday will face a Japan side in a trough after a string of poor performances in which the Blue Samurai have netted only once in five games.

In their last warm-up match Japan fought out a disappointing goalless stalemate against Zimbabwe after a run of four successive defeats in which they managed just one goal through Marcus Tulio Tanaka in a 2-1 defeat by England.

Their poor run has given further ammunition to those who have criticised coach Takeshi Okada's claim that they have a chance to reach the semifinals.

Japan, three-time Asian champions, admit Cameroon, who can be physically intimidating, will be a tough proposition but say they will stick to their attacking style based on short passing.

"We can't change that. It's impossible to employ long balls all of sudden," Okada said.

The Brazilian-born centre-back Tanaka has urged his teammates to think for themselves as the under-fire coach struggles to find the right formula.

"Football is fun just because each player has his own idea. I'll be ready to attack if there is a chance," he said.

CSKA Moscow midfielder Keisuke Honda is expected to operate as a lone striker in the opener while former Celtic playmaker Shunsuke Nakamura, though no longer the top star, is eager to prove his worth, likely from the bench.



PHOTO: AFP

Netherlands national football team players jog during a training session at the Wits University in Johannesburg ahead of their today's opening match the World Cup against Denmark.

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Rivals show support to Green

REUTERS, Rustenburg

Robert Green took full responsibility for his mistake that gifted the United States their goal in their 1-1 draw with England on Saturday, but said he would bounce back immediately and not dwell on the error.

He was given huge moral support straight after the Group C game at the Royal Bafokeng Stadium by one of his American opponents who also happens to be one of his best friends -- his West Ham United club mate, Jonathan Spector.

"I felt for him," said Spector. "My heart went out to him."

Green told reporters: "I saw the ball coming, thought I had it covered, but missed it."

"I saw it all the way, it was my mistake, no one else's but what can I do?" he said.

"If I was younger it really might affect me very badly, but all you can do is turn round and pick the ball out of the back of the net and get on with it."

"You don't want to make another mistake like that in the next match -- if I am selected. I don't often get things as wrong as that."

"You have to keep strong and move on. It was my mistake I must live with it."

Spector told reporters: "I had mixed feelings. Obviously I felt ecstatic when the goal went in to take us back to 1-1, but devastated for him on a personal note."

PREVIEW

Dutch exude confidence

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Netherlands coach Bert van Marwijk's side face two dangers when they start their World Cup Group E campaign at Ellis Park on Monday -- opponents Denmark and the possibility of being too confident.

The Dutch, who sealed a place in the finals after winning all their qualifying matches, carried that form into their World Cup warm-up games and will kick off at 12:30 p.m. British time among the favourites to finish as world champions in a month's time.

Van Marwijk told reporters at the Dutch training base at Wits University in Johannesburg: "Yes, we did excellently in our warm-up matches, but we are taking nothing for granted against any opponents in the World Cup."

"We believe we can do well, and now we must go and do it." Expectations remains high at home that his team can go one better than the sides of 1974 and 1978 who lost in successive World Cup finals, and there is a sense within the Dutch squad that they do not just want to win but do it in style.

Striker Robin van Persie, who has netted four goals in three warm-up games, said he wanted to do more than just score goals in South Africa.

"Every striker is judged on the goals he scores, but I want to give more to the game. I'd be happy with more assists than goals," he said. "That may sound odd, but that is my ambition because it



THE KNOWLEDGE

Only Spain (656) played more passes per game during European qualification than Netherlands (600).

Denmark have won each of their three previous opening matches at FIFA World Cups.

will make the team better."

The Dutch, who have not lost to Denmark for 43 years, will be without injured winger Arjen Robben (hamstring).

The match will be significant for captain Giovanni van Bronckhorst who will become the fourth Dutchman to win 100 caps after Edwin van der Sar, Frank de Boer and Philip Cocu.

Netherlands' strength lies in their attack, with the 'Big Four' -- as the Dutch media call them -- of Van Persie, Wesley Sneijder, Rafael van der Vaart and Robben, when he returns from injury, the key to their success.

However, Denmark winger Dennis Rommedahl believes the towering Dutch expectations could give his side an

advantage.

"The players are being realistic but people in Holland and the media think that they only have to turn up and pick up the trophy," he told reporters.

"Everyone expects them to beat us quite easily and so we have nothing to lose on Monday, which can result in a surprise."

With Robben likely to be replaced by the industrious Dirk Kuyt, for the opener at least, the Danish defence is going to be severely tested but their coach Morten Olsen has faith in his side to deal with the threat.

"It's all about how you play on the day," he said. "That's the name of the game at the World Cup. You are only playing for four weeks and you have to maintain your form every day."

Olsen, who celebrates 10 years as national team coach at the finals, has one main injury worry in striker Nicklas Bendtner.

The 22-year-old, who has been bothered by a nagging groin problem, has not played since May. He showed signs of returning to match fitness this week when he began training again with the squad but has little chance of playing against Netherlands.

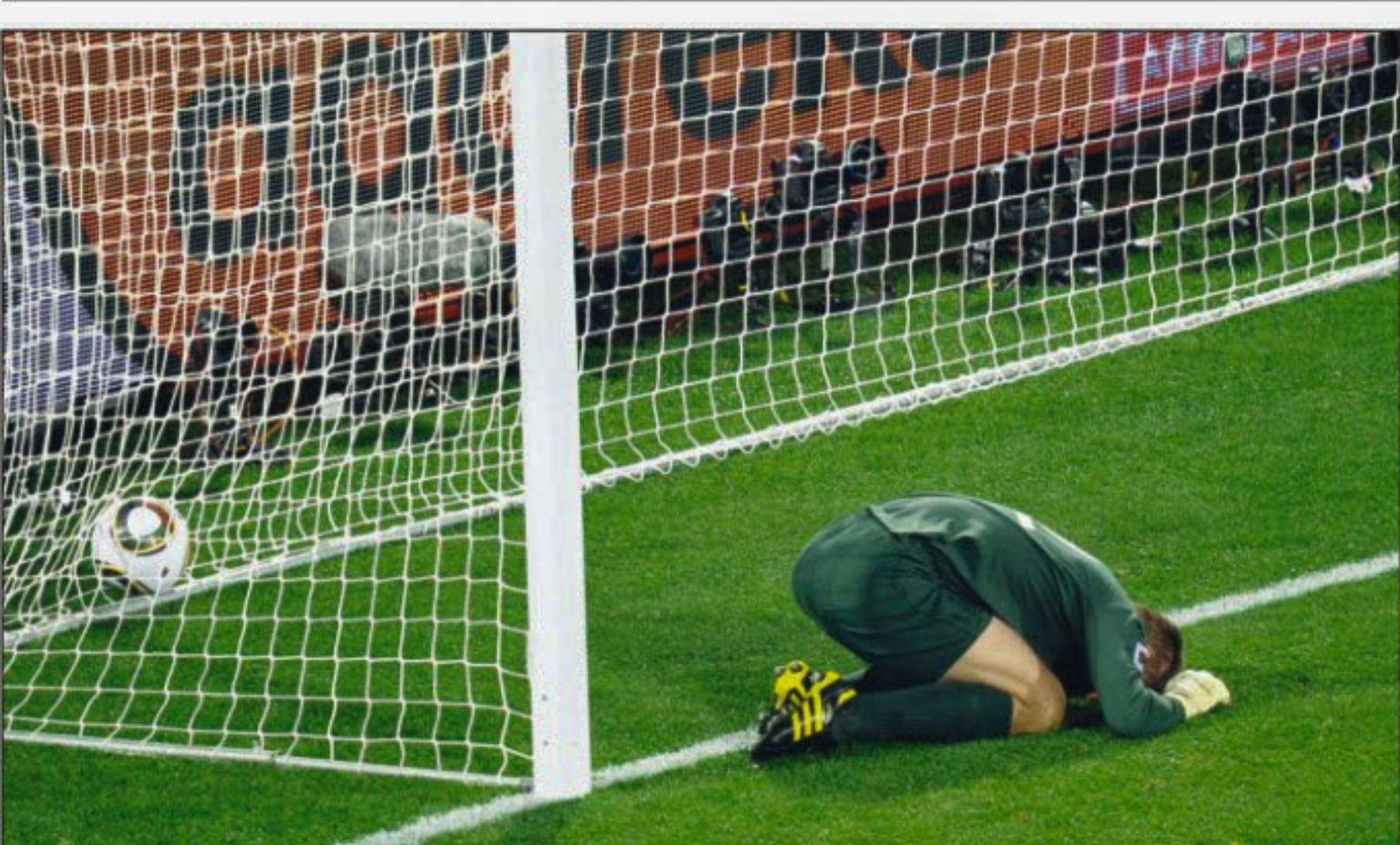


PHOTO: AFP

THE (BLUNDER) CLASS OF 2010: As Clint Dempsey's tame 25-yard shot sits pretty inside the England net during their World Cup match against USA at the Royal Bafokeng Stadium in Rustenburg, a gutted Robert Green hides his face from the world.

'Hand of clod'

AFP, London

Britain's Sunday newspapers blasted Robert Green for the goalkeeping blunder that cost England a victory in the opening World Cup game against the United States.

The weekly press printed frame-by-frame images of Green's error, with the front pages of the News of the World and the Sunday Mirror both reading "Hand of Clod", accompanied by a giant picture of Green.

Any England goalkeeper guilty of a clanger is given merciless treatment by the national newspapers, with international careers usually then brought to a shuddering halt.

David Seaman, David James, Paul Robinson and Scott Carson can all testify to that.

Green was not spared. "Cock-up keeper Green wrecks dream start," said the News of the World, adding: "Stars and tripe".

"It's back to the drawing board after this, with Capello forced to reconsider his options after Green's mistake."

"Tainted Glove", said the Sunday Mirror. "Worst Howler Ever", said another headline.

"Calamity keeper Robert Green gifted one of the all-time blunder goals last night as the jinx of the England goalies struck again. "Hapless Green somehow managed to parry the softest of soft strikes into the goal behind him. It was agonising to watch."

Robert Green will take a long, long time to live down the goal."

The Sunday Express meanwhile said of Green that "for all our sakes, he's got to go now."

The Sunday Telegraph said Green's howler had "cost England dear."

Former England defender Graeme Le Saux wrote that if

Capello wants a chat with Green

REUTERS, Rustenburg

England manager Fabio Capello will talk to Robert Green before deciding whether to keep faith with the goalkeeper whose embarrassing gaffe on Saturday handed the United States a 1-1 draw.

"We have time to decide, we have time to speak with him and after I will decide," said Capello when asked if he would stick with Green.

He also said he didn't regret his late decision to go with Green over alternatives David James and Joe Hart.

"He played the last game very well, (against Mexico at) Wembley, his performance was really good."

"He made one mistake but in the second half he made also a good save. That's the problem of the keeper," said the Italian whose English is not always clear.

England manager Fabio Capello was to axe Green, "he may as well send him straight home."

"He will certainly not play again in this tournament, and that could even be the death knell for his international career."

The Mail on Sunday said it was a "nightmare start".

"There was endeavour aplenty and flashes of quality but a fragility remains at the core of the side," it added.

"The calamitous goal which will threaten the international future of goalkeeper Robert Green was a catastrophe."

The Independent on Sunday said it was "one of those frustrating opening games the country often produces after all the build-up to a major tournament."

"An improvement will be required in the second game in Cape Town on Friday against Algeria."

The Sunday Times referenced the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, saying Green's error was "one disastrous spill the Yanks won't complain about."

It was a "howler that will haunt him for the rest of his career."

The broadsheet compared Green to a "pub cricketer misfielding on the boundary."

"A scrappy, uncomfortable draw against the second-ranked side in Group C may not stop Capello's men topping it but it is hard to see England going too far in the knockout rounds if they fail to improve."

NO SHOW FROM TICKET HOLDERS

Thousands of seats at a South Korea-Greece game in the south-western city of Port Elizabeth on Saturday were left empty after the ticketholders did not turn up, FIFA said Sunday.

The game between the little-fancied Group B sides in the far-flung city was always a tough sell.

Three thousand tickets were unsold to the clash in Nelson Mandela Bay stadium on the morning of the game.

But the empty seats in Nelson Mandela Bay stadium, one of five stadiums built new for the World Cup, far outnumbered the number of unsold tickets. Just 31,500 out of 42,486 seater stadium were on hand to see South Korea easily win the game 2-0.

OBAMA-CAMERON AGREE TO DISAGREE

U.S. President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron may agree on weighty issues like Iran and Afghanistan but their "special relationship" stops when it comes to soccer.

The two leaders "agreed to disagree" on Saturday about the desired outcome of the U.S.-England World Cup soccer match that began at 1830 GMT, the White House said in a statement.

Obama and Cameron had just finished a call that covered foreign policy issues and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The president "affirmed his deep commitment to the special and historic relationship between our two countries," the White House said.

Then beer -- and a little bit of friendly ribbing -- entered the chat.

"The president noted that the historical record of previous World Cup matches between the United States and England favours the United States and the president wagered the best lager against the best beer in America on an American win over England," the White House said.

REFEREES FAVOUR STAR PLAYERS

Ignacio Gonzalez, the Uruguayan midfielder, has accused World Cup referees of favouring the tournaments big name players.

Uruguay had Nicolas Lodeiro sent off against France and Gonzalez said: "Here it is important to know that the match officials are also trying to make a

name for themselves. Perhaps Lodeiro would not have been sent off if his name was Patrice Evra."

The Valencia midfielder claimed that Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura had favoured France's big name players throughout the two sides' goalless draw.

POINT, NOT SAVES MATTER TO ENYEAMA

Nigeria goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama, man of the match in his side's World Cup Group B loss to Argentina on Saturday, said he would readily swap his world-class saves for the three points.

The 27-year-old shot stopper for Hapoel Tel Aviv pulled off at least three superb saves from the electrifying Lionel Messi.

"This was not about me, but the team, and I would easily swap all those saves I made for the three points today," said Enyeama after the 1-0 defeat to Argentina at the Ellis Park Stadium in Johannesburg.

"It's my best-ever game against the best player (in the world) now," Enyeama said. "Maybe we showed Argentina too much respect, but that is behind us now as we look forward to our next game, against Greece."

LITTLE ITALY

World champions Italy have made their South African World Cup base a real home from home thanks to a plentiful supply of pizza, pasta, prosciutto and even Italian plug sockets.

Italians are famous for being homesick and a visit to Casa Azzurri (Home of the Blues) south of Pretoria is like taking a trip to Rome or Milan.

"We've tried to make it as much like Italy as possible so people feel at home," Vincenzo Santoro, one of a raft of Italian barmen flown over specially, told

Reuters.

A student college, up the road from the exclusive team hotel, has been turned blue for the tournament as Italy make themselves comfortable and try to promote their produce and country as a tourist destination to South African passers-by.

Team officials, corporate sponsors and journalists are plied with the best Tuscan wine and the menu offers only Italian classics.

Photographs of famous Italian landmarks and Azzurri successes on the field are plastered all over the walls while videos of Italy greats like Roberto Baggio talking about the team are on a constant loop.



BARACK OBAMA



VINCENT ENYEAMA