



SL-Pak opener today

AFP, Dambulla

Asia's Test players begin their preparations for next year's World Cup when they contest the region's top one-day prize from Tuesday.

Away from the global spotlight on the football World Cup in South Africa, the four-nation Asia Cup will be played in Sri Lanka over the next 10 days.

India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, who co-host the cricket World Cup in February-April, will be joined by Pakistan in a round-robin preliminary league with the

top two teams contesting the final on June 24.

"This is a good chance to test our strengths and weaknesses and also see how the others are faring on the way to the World Cup," Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said.

India go into the tournament in the central town of Dambulla hoping to make amends for their failure to reach the semifinals of the

FIXTURES

June 15	Sri Lanka v Pakistan
June 16	India v Bangladesh
June 18	Sri Lanka v Bangladesh
June 19	Pakistan v India
June 21	Pakistan v Bangladesh
June 22	India v Sri Lanka
June 24	Final
June 25	Reserve day



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan speaks at a press conference in Dambulla yesterday, ahead of the Asia Cup that kicks off in Sri Lanka today. Bangladesh will play their first match of the regional championship against India on Wednesday.

Socceroos savaged back home

AFF, Sydney

Australian pundits and former Socceroos lined up Monday to sink the boot into the national team, following their 4-0 humiliation by Germany in Durban.

Former Blackburn Rovers and Australia midfielder Robbie Slater, now a television pundit with Fox Sports, slammed the tactics of coach Pim Verbeek and said the Socceroos never showed any desire to win Sunday's game.

"We played with six midfielders and no recognised striker. You at least have to go out and try and win the game and we never did that," Slater said.

"You don't mind losing if you give it a shot, but we never did."

"Verbeek has done a great job getting us here and the Asia Cup, but he has to take much of the blame for this result."

Former Socceroos goal-keeper Mark Bosnich attacked captain Lucas Neill for being too negative before the match.

"This game was lost before a ball was kicked," he told Fox Sports.

"To go out before the game and make out your opposition is superior at a pretty big press conference is a self-fulfilling prophecy."

"Tonight was an embarrassing defeat."

What to WATCH

ESPN & SuperSport3
2010 FIFA World Cup
New Zealand v Slovakia
Live from 5.30pm
Ivory Coast v Portugal
Live from 8.00pm
Brazil v North Korea
Live from 12.30am (Wednesday)

Serbs blame everything

REUTERS, Pretoria

Serbia players could not hear their fans over the incessant din of vuvuzelas, had trouble controlling the World Cup ball and lost their concentration to give away a 'stupid' penalty and lose 1-0 to Ghana.

That was the verdict of the dejected-looking players as they tramped past reporters, having to keep answering questions about why Sunday's Group D opener had gone wrong for them.

Their coach Radomir Antic had a different gripe, saying Aleksandar Lukovic's dismissal for a second yellow in the 74th minute had been too harsh and had turned the game.

Nine minutes after that setback, substitute Zdravko Kuzmanovic's raised arm struck a ball hit across the area to give away the penalty that put Ghana ahead and triggered wild celebrations from the already noisy African crowd.

"I think that it is not easy to control the ball in the air," defender Nemanja Vidic told reporters when asked if the ball had contributed to the penalty because it looked as if Lukovic had thought it would fly over him.

Many players have criticised the ball, branding it a "beachball," "inadequate" and like one purchased in a supermarket, among other complaints.

"It's very quick, more in the air than at the feet. I think if the ball hits the ground you get good control. But all the teams have problems with the ball so it is not an excuse," added Vidic.

Apart from the ball, players are also having to get used to the noisy vuvuzelas, which do not stop during a match and create a constant racket unlike anything heard at matches on other continents.

"Because of the vuvuzelas we couldn't hear the Serbian fans," forward Marko Pantelic told reporters.

"Our fans were cheering but the only noise was the vuvuzelas."

Defender Branimir Ivanovic said they had lost concentration to give away the penalty, which Danko Lazovic said was "stupid," while Serbia were knocked off their stride by Lukovic's sending off before that.

"The sending off of Lukovic was too harsh and it turned the match their way," Antic told a news conference.

Rusty Dutch still

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without really impressing and the Dutch always had the upper hand.

They took the lead when Poulsen, one of three Dutch-based players in the starting line-up, misdirected a header from Van Persie's cross on to the back of fellow Dane Daniel Agger and the ball went in for the first own goal of the tournament.

Sneijder saw a shot loop off Agger onto the bar in the 82nd and three minutes later Kuyt put the game beyond Denmark when he followed up to tap home after substitute Eljero Elia, who had a big impact, hit the post after a through ball by Sneijder.

Denmark, who have not beaten the Dutch, apart from a penalty shootout victory in Euro 92, for 43 years, rarely looked like scoring in a match that never really lived up to expectations.

The Danes seemed content to sit back and soak up what was thrown at them -- which was actually very little.

The nearest they came to a goal was when Bendtner sent a header wide after 27 minutes, his last notable contribution before going off after an hour.

The Dutch dominated most of the possession throughout and almost made it 3-0 at the death but Ibrahim Afellay's effort was acrobatically cleared off the line by Poulsen.

National Sports Awards given

SPORTS REPORTER

The government yesterday named ten sportsmen and organisers as winners of the National Sports Awards 2009 for their outstanding contributions to the development of sports both at national and international levels.

India, who face Bangladesh in their first match on Wednesday, are without veteran Sachin Tendulkar, the world's most prolific Test and one-day batsman, who opted to rest ahead of a busy season.

Also missing is one-day regular Yuvraj Singh, who was dropped due to poor form after scoring just 74 runs in five World Twenty20 matches.

In five one-day internationals this year, the left-hander has managed only 96 runs.

Pakistan, preparing to clash with holders Sri Lanka in Tuesday's opener, have recalled mercurial fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar for the first time since May last year when he was sidelined with a knee injury.

Flamboyant all-rounder Shahid Afridi leads a talented Pakistani squad which includes three promising batsmen in Umar Amin, 21, Shahzaib Hasan, 20, and Asad Shafiq, 24.

Sri Lanka, who won the last Asia Cup in Pakistan two years ago, have left out ageing batsman Sanath Jayasuriya and an unorthodox spinner Ajantha Mendis for the tournament.

Jayasuriya, who turns 41 later this month, is the most experienced one-day batsman in the world with 444 appearances and second in the leading scorers' list with 13,428 runs behind Tendulkar's 17,598.

But a woeful average of 3.75 in six matches at the World Twenty20 forced his exclusion for the Asia Cup and raised doubts over the left-hander's future ahead of the World Cup.

Bangladesh hope to regroup on the slow Dambulla wickets after being beaten by England in both Tests on seam-friendly tracks at Lord's and Old Trafford.

Abahani trounce Police

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani recorded a massive 9-2 win over newcomers Police AC in the Green Delta Premier Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

Abahani, who got off to a flying start with a 3-0 win over Sadharan Bima in their league opener, dominated throughout the game and went into the breather with a comfortable 4-0 lead. They then added five more to the scoreboard.

Striker Pushkar Khisa, defender Asaduzzaman Chandan and midfielders Ajit Kumar and Rubel Hossain scored two goals each while Hasan Jubair netted the other for Abahani. Rana Das Yaul Haque scored one goal apiece for the losers.

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A new Germany

FROM PAGE 17

as both Miroslav Klose and Lukas Podolski bagged goals; the latter with a shot clocked at 87mph. Thomas Mueller, the Bayern Munich youth product produced a sterling show on the right wing (and took his goal superbly) and Bastian Schweinsteiger and Sami Khedira picked, harried and passed with consummate ease.

The measure of Germany's domination can be illustrated by the fact that they completed more passes in the first half alone, than South Africa, Uruguay, USA and Nigeria completed in their entire matches.

But what shone through was that this is a new Germany. Multi-cultural, brash, brave, daring, pretty and sometimes even spectacular. None are adjectives usually associated with the national stereotype but adjectives that held steady after a performance that will have made the world sit up and take notice.

Elsewhere, Africa had much to celebrate about as Ghana picked up the first victory for the continent. Ghana, contrary to popular opinion, are a strong, defensive and tactically aware side.

Serbia are similar and both sides threatened to cancel each other out, until Zdravko Kuzmanovic committed an almost suicidal handball inside the area. Presented with the chance from the spot, Asamoah Gyan made little mistake blasting past Vladimir Stojkovic. John Mensah's post-match celebration with the Ghana flag held aloft, showed just how much the win meant to Africa.

"Everyone is happy, not only in Ghana but the whole of Africa," Gyan said. "I'm so happy, not for Ghana winning but for an African team winning in the World Cup. It's not so easy."

"We knew all Africa would support us. I really drove off that."

Ghana coach Milovan Rajevac, a Serbian, was excited if his team could pull off the historic triumph after the hosts, Nigeria and Algeria had failed to bring Africa a World Cup triumph in South Africa.

"This was the first time the World Cup was held on African soil and so I'm happy an African team beat a great European team and I'm happy that the whole of Africa is pleased about this win," Rajevac said.

Ghana was the only African team to reach the round of 16 at the 2006 World Cup, losing to Brazil in the knockout stage, and the victory over Serbia boosted the Black Stars'



GERMAN INSPIRATION: A German fan cheers her team in a World Cup match against Australia at the Moses Mabhida stadium in Durban on Sunday.

It's the time to Diski

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Forget famous goal celebrations such as "The Robot" by Peter Crouch and "The Dive" by Juergen Klinsmann, here comes the South African "Diski dance."

The Diski dance, which is performed through heading and kicking an imaginary ball, may be goal celebration to watch in this World Cup.

South Africa's Siphiwe Tshabalala and his teammates displayed this distinctive dance when they celebrated his goal against Mexico in the opening World Cup game on Friday.

The dance is already popular on YouTube and many soccer fans may want to learn the moves.

Even South Africa's President Jacob Zuma has learnt the Diski dance which could surpass Cameroon Roger Milla's iconic corner flag dance celebration in the 1990 FIFA World Cup.

U.S. actor John Travolta performed the dance shortly after landing his Boeing 707 at Lanseria airport, north of Johannesburg, on Wednesday morning.

Goal celebrations are now part of the biggest sporting event and players plan them in advance just in case they find the back of the net.

The Robot goal celebration was so popular that England fans were dismayed when Crouch declared he "wouldn't be doing it any more unless England won the World Cup."

Another popular celebration is "The Snort" by Robbie Fowler reacting to claims that he was a cocaine addict by sniffing imaginary cocaine off the lines on the pitch.

The word Diski is a township slang for soccer and may also describe the local style of football which focuses on dribbling and other tricks.

Steyn guns WI down

AFP, Port of Spain

Fast bowler Dale Steyn starred again as South Africa secured a 163-run victory over the West Indies in the opening Test on Sunday.

Steyn collected three wickets for 65 runs from 15.3 overs, as West Indies, chasing 457 for victory, were bowled out for 293, just before the rescheduled close on the fourth day at Queen's Park Oval.

The South African quickly ended the match with figures of eight for 94 to earn the man-of-the-match award.

Steyn bowled Nelson Pascal off an inside edge for 10, when the West Indies tail-end tried a flamboyant one-legged pull.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 352 (Boucher 69; Benn 1-120)

WEST INDIES: First innings 102 (Steyn 5-29)

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 206 (Smith 90; Petersen 22, Kallis 40; Benn 3-74)

WEST INDIES: Second innings 293 (Gale 73, Deonarine 23, Bravo 49, Shillingford 27, Benn 42; Steyn 3-65, Morkel 2-49)

Result: South Africa won by 163 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Dale Steyn.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

32 Lustrous black

33 Vast expanse

34 Tittle

36 Fool

37 Charon's water

38 Put forth

40 "I see"

41 Temptress

43 Obliterates

47 Praise in verse

48 Most gentle

51 "—Miserables"

52 "Holy mackerel!"

53 Stage presentation

54 Chow down

55 Actress

56 Turn on a pivot

57 Chatroom chortling

58 Talks and talks