



Kiwi success hijacked

AFP, Sydney
First there was Pavlova, then Phar Lap. Then Crowded House and even Russell Crowe joined the list of New Zealand creations claimed by Australia.
But Australian media may have overstepped the mark on Wednesday by dubbing New Zealand "Australasia" after their historic World Cup draw against Slovakia, prompting paroxysms of rage across the Tasman Sea.
"Australasia 1 -- Slovakia 1: Kiwis get the point," trumpeted the Sydney Morning Herald's front page headline, over a picture of New Zealand's Winston Reid celebrating his late equaliser.
The tongue-in-cheek description was taken up by Australian breakfast TV, prompting New Zealanders to pause from celebrating one of the country's finest sporting moments to lash out at their near-neighbours.
"Aussies struggle with All Whites' result," read a headline on stuff.co.nz, while the National Business Review's website ran with, "Dirty Aussies lay claim to NZ's World Cup glory."
"New Zealanders are today celebrating our nation's first-ever World Cup point following

the All Whites' 1-1 draw with Slovakia. So are Australians," the Review's report said, slamming the Herald's "stunning gall".
"Bloody Australians, unbelievable, they will claim anything as their victory," tweeted one disgruntled Kiwi.
New Zealand's last-gasp draw -- in their first World Cup appearance in 28 years -- sparked jubilant scenes across the country, which is usually more closely associated with rugby.
It follows Australia's 4-0 drubbing by three-time winners Germany, which left the Socceroos' World Cup hanging in the balance and Aussie fans in the doldrums.
"Australasia" especially hits a nerve after a surprising survey showed one in four New Zealanders wanted their country to become part of their bigger, wealthier neighbour, stoking fierce debate.
Australia and New Zealand have enjoyed generations of friendly rivalry, mainly played out on the sports field but also spilling over to accents, economics and even the weather.
However, a Lowy Institute survey released last month showed despite the banter, Australians have warmer feelings towards New Zealand than any other country.



The French team jog during a training session at the Fields of Dreams stadium in Knysna on Monday. The Les Bleus fans will be expecting them to fire against Mexico at Polokwane today after a disappointing goalless draw in their opening match against Uruguay. PHOTO: AFP

English wilt under pressure: Ballack

AFP, London
German footballers can cope with the successes of their predecessors better than their English counterparts claimed former German captain Michael Ballack in his column in The Times newspaper on Wednesday.
The 33-year-old -- who had to miss the World Cup finals because of an ankle injury sustained in the FA Cup final with Chelsea -- said that both countries came into every final of a tournament with huge expectations from their supporters.
However, while the Germans -- three-time winners of the World Cup -- appeared to be buoyed by them, the English appeared to take fright as yet again they set out to emulate the England side who won the country's one and only World Cup in 1966.
This was borne out by their respective opening matches where a young vibrant German side thrashed Australia 4-0 and a disappointing England fought out a 1-1 draw with the United States.
"German teams approach every competition expecting to do well," wrote Ballack, whose fortunes nosedived from the FA Cup injury after which he was released on a free transfer by Chelsea.

"Expectation can create pressure, but we're inspired by our history, whereas I've sensed that England are intimidated by their past."
Ballack believes that Germany do not match England individually but as a team they are a better unit.
"I'm not 100 percent sure, but from speaking to teammates at Chelsea and watching their games, I've come to the conclusion that it's different with England," wrote Ballack, who has attracted interest from several German clubs.
"Their history weighs them down. Individually, England have better players, but I'd rather be in the German team."
"We're one of the fittest sides in the tournament, play good football and have an outstanding mentality, so have an opportunity to achieve something great."
"We're a big country, with a big history, and have to go for it."
Ballack said that he had been especially impressed by Germany's 21-year-old playmaker Mesut Ozil, who he said looked to have filled a gap that the Germans had been missing in successive sides.
"In Mesut Ozil we have the No10 we have been missing for many years and he is showing the world how talented he is," he wrote.

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PREVIEW Mexicans wary of the wounded

REUTERS, Polokwane
After ruining South Africa's opening party plans, Mexico take on an unsteady France side on Thursday eager to highlight their growing reputation as World Cup gatecrashers.
France's household names

hold no fears for a side who upset champions Italy 2-1 in a warm-up game before holding the hosts to a 1-1 draw in their first Group A match.
"At the end of the day, we're not playing against their stars, we're playing 11 against 11," Mexico midfielder Gerardo

Torraldo told reporters before facing the likes of Franck Ribery and Thierry Henry. "We have to be warriors."
The intriguing fixture in northern Polokwane looks a lot tighter than the sides' contrasting pedigrees suggest and France, who looked harmless in their 0-0 draw with Uruguay, can expect a fierce challenge from coach Javier Aguirre's men.

Domenech might decide to bring back Henry, their most prolific scorer with 51 goals from 122 appearances, in place of Nicolas Anelka at centre-forward.
Domenech, who boldly introduced an attacking 4-3-3 system during his side's preparations, is expected to revert to his preferred, more cautious 4-2-3-1 system against Mexico with Jeremy Toulalan and Abou Diaby in front of the defence.

Mexico, who dream of equaling their best World Cup performances, quarterfinal appearances in both 1970 and 1986 on home soil.
France, whose first duty is to avoid another early exit following their Euro 2008 flop, are more ambitious and targeting a repeat of their run to



"They're an excellent side who can give any team a hard time," France coach Raymond Domenech said of Mexico. "I watched them against Italy and I was impressed. You must make sure they don't get too much possession, otherwise you're in trouble."
Another key to the match will be whether France's high-profile forwards, who have not scored an international goal since last November, will hit the back of the net at last.
Such are the 1998 champions' worries up front that

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Aguirre could also make a few changes and may opt for Guillermo Ochoa in goal after Oscar Perez's shaky showing against South Africa.
The experienced Cuauhtemoc Blanco, now 37, and young Javier Hernandez, 22, could also start in attack, at the expense of Carlos Vela and Guillermo Franco respectively.
Surviving a group from which any side could advance would be satisfying for

THE KNOWLEDGE
France have only converted 2 of their 99 shots in 2010 (1 v Costa Rica & 1 v Tunisia).

the last World Cup final.
"We must show more accuracy in front of goal but physically, we're better prepared than in 2006 and I honestly believe we are capable of doing just as well this time, if not better," said midfielder Florent Malouda, who should start on Thursday.

PREVIEW Battle for survival

REUTERS, Bloemfontein
Nigeria are keeping everyone guessing about their plans for the World Cup Group B match with Greece on Thursday, training in seclusion on the Indian Ocean coast since their defeat by Argentina.
Both sides desperately need points from the clash in Bloemfontein's Free State Stadium to keep alive their hopes of reaching the second round. The omens do not favour the Greeks.
Nigeria have largely kept their own counsel at their camp at Richards Bay north of Durban, founded as a British army base for their campaign against the Zulus in the 19th

Century.
The Super Eagles could take some encouragement from Saturday's 1-0 defeat against an adventurous Argentina side in Johannesburg, a game lit up by Lionel Messi.
Nigeria goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama made a series of excellent saves, a stubborn defence helped keep the score down, and the attack caught the South Americans sporadic problems.
Fortunately, fullback Taye Taiwo recovered quickly after being taken off injured and resumed training on Sunday.
Nigeria's Swedish coach Lars Lagerback will have to decide whether to stick with Chinedu Obasi on the right

BRAZILIAN VOODOO GIVES ARGENTINES NEEDLE
Never mind the vuvuzelas, Brazilian World Cup fans are giving rivals Argentina the needle with some voodoo 'fun'.
Brazilian sports daily Lance and Mexican equivalent Record reported that voodoo-style dolls of Argentina in particular have proved a hit.
A Brazilian website, voodooocopa.com.br, has been selling the 15cm-tall dolls for 10 reais (5.6 dollars) with five needles included.
"Stab your pin with the best of intentions," said the advertising blurb which accompanies the site.
There's even a doll of Argentina coach Diego Maradona -- though there's also one of Brazil's own -- much maligned -- Dunga.
The men behind the site, Rodrigo Fachel and Daniel Kamagusuku, told Lance that dolls dressed in the colours of France, Italy and Germany were also quite popular.
"It's just a bit of fun," they told Lance.
Record noted that last year their office also had a doll ready for when Mexico met regional rivals the United States.
"It didn't help much -- and it caused a furore," the paper noted.

A LESSER MAN
Chile's Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa said he was a worse character nowadays than when he coached his homeland at the 2002 World Cup finals.
"I don't think there is such a difference -- save for the fact I feel older and my health and character are worse," opined the laconic Bielsa at Nelspruit on Tuesday as his team prepared for Wednesday's Group H match against Honduras.
A reporter had wanted to know if 54-year-old Bielsa -- who did guide Argentina to the 2004 Olympic gold medal -- had changed from the man who suffered a first-round knockout eight years ago.
"Eight years have passed and you can't compare then and now," said Bielsa, who took the opportunity to praise Diego Maradona's current Argentina side for "playing very attacking football" in their 1-0 win over Nigeria.

squad -- a first in World Cup history.
All three hail from the town of La Ceiba, and Jerry, the eldest at 29, joins Johnny, 24, and Wilson, the 26-year-old who plays for English Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur.
For the Palacios family, the call-up of Jerry is a boost to morale three years after younger brother Edwin was kidnapped in the politically troubled Central American country.
Although a 150,000-dollar ransom was paid, his body was discovered in a remote rural area.
"Everything I do in football is for Edwin. He is watching over me," Palacios told Honduran reporters on arrival in South Africa, where Honduras are preparing for only their second appearance in a World Cup.

OF TEARS AND WEDDING RING
The best goal of the Brazil v North Korea game was undoubtedly Maicon's 55th-minute effort which looked like a cross, but dipped around the near post at the last second on the tightest of angles to earn him the man-of-the-match award.
Maicon dedicated the goal to his wife and admitted it was an emotional moment as he choked back tears.
"I was just thinking about everything I had to go through to get here," he said.
"It was my first match in a World Cup and I had scored a goal. I was pretty emotional, I didn't cry, but I kissed my wedding ring to thank my wife for everything she has done to help me get here."

AMBUSH MARKETERS AMBUSHED
South-African police have arrested two Dutch women on Wednesday over a suspected ambush marketing campaign by Dutch brewer Bavaria.
"The two were arrested in their hotel this morning and we are now trying to find out what they are charged with," a Dutch Foreign Ministry spokesman said.
The arrests come after FIFA questioned a group of 36 Dutch women who were watching the Netherlands play Denmark in Soccer City stadium on Monday in skimpy orange dresses.
The dresses produced by family-owned brewer Bavaria caught the eye of experts on the lookout for ambush marketing campaigns.
Anheuser Busch's Budweiser is the official beer for the tournament and world soccer's governing body fiercely protects its sponsors from brands which are not FIFA partners.



THE KNOWLEDGE
The four wins managed by Nigeria in the World Cup have been against European sides.
Greece have still failed to score a goal in the World Cup, conceding a total of 12 goals in their four finals games so far.

THE PALACIOS IN HISTORY BOOKS
Wilson, Johnny and Jerry Palacios have set a World Cup record thanks to Jerry's call-up into the Honduran squad in place of injured Torino star Julio Cesar de Leon.
Jerry Palacios, a striker with Chinese club Hangzhou Greentown, was an emergency call-up after Leon had to pull out with a leg injury on the eve of the tournament, and now the Central Americans have three brothers in their

ambush marketing campaigning by Dutch brewer Bavaria.
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