

PREVIEW

Cat & mouse battle

AFP, Rustenburg

Ghana captain John Mensah is not expecting Australia to throw caution to the wind as they seek to revive their World Cup campaign by beating the Black Stars here on Saturday.

Australia were punished for playing an open game against Germany in their group D opener and the 4-0 defeat has left the Socceroos facing virtually certain elimination if they lose to Ghana at the Royal Bafokeng stadium.

Ghana, in contrast, are on a

don't think that's the way Australia are going to be against us. I think it's going to be different."

Mensah, who is hoping a loan move to Sunderland from French club Lyon will be made permanent after the World Cup, also revealed that he is finally feeling fully fit after a season blighted by recurring injuries.

"There was a problem in my back that caused problems in my calves and the backs of my legs, but they have a good physio, and I have my own physio out here with me now at

THE KNOWLEDGE

Asamoah Gyan was the first striker to score at this World Cup.

Australia have won only one of their eight matches at World Cup finals.



high after a 1-0 win over Serbia that has given them a great chance of reaching the last 16, as they did in Germany four years ago.

"The tournament couldn't have started much better for us, winning our opening game against a tough Serbian team," said Mensah.

"But now we're looking to go on and we're totally focused on Australia.

"I didn't watch all of the Australia v Germany game but I watched little bits. Germany created a lot of chances but I

the World Cup," he said. "But I'm fine now, feeling good."

"We got to the second round in Germany four years ago, but things change in football and I cannot prophesy that we will do that again, but we are all determined and focused on our mission."

Mensah is one of only a handful of veterans of the 2006 campaign in what is the youngest squad at the tournament.

But what Ghana lack in terms of experience is compensated for by the quality of the emerging stars, according

to the captain.

"The young players have surprised us," he said. "There were many of us older players weren't at the Cup of Nations (where Ghana finished runners-up) but the young players went there and they demonstrated their quality and did well and we're all proud of what they did."

Mensah also credits Ghana's coach, Milovan Rajovic, with instilling a greater tactical awareness in a squad that has come to trust the Serbian.

"The coach is good," he said. "He does his tactical thing and we do what he says and we all believe if we do that we will be successful."

"This compact play, that's what he wants and it's what we do and we all believe this compact play will help us move forward."

Australia will be without their most potent goal threat, Tim Cahill, who is suspended as a result of the red card he received against Germany but will return for the final group match, against Serbia in Nelspruit on June 23.

Midfield anchor Vinnie Grella will also miss Saturday's match, as a result of a knee injury, with Carl Valeri expected to start in a line-up featuring several other changes from the side that was overrun by Germany.



PHOTO: AFP

WHEN WILL HE PLAY? Australia midfielder Harry Kewell (R), takes part in a drill during their training session at the Ruimsig Stadium in Roodepoort on Wednesday. The Socceroos take on Ghana in today's second game from 8.00pm.

Out, out, out, shout France

INTERNET

France's 2-0 loss to Mexico at the 2010 World Cup has unleashed a storm of outrage in France as media, former France internationals and politicians on both sides of the ideological divide heaped criticism on the team and coach Raymond Domenech.

"Sack them all!" railed conservative lawmaker Nicolas Dupont-Aignan on Canal Plus television. "Changes must be made when something doesn't work ... They must be sacked. Maybe not all of them, but something must be done."

The head of the left-wing Europe Ecology party, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, was almost as stinging in his criticism, telling Europe 1 radio, "What's strange is that the players know how to play football, but when they play together, they play badly, they don't play. They don't like each other."

Cohn-Bendit reserved special criticism for Domenech and cited one of France's living football legends, Zinedine Zidane. "(Zidane) is right when he says that Domenech is not a coach, he's someone who just puts the players on the pitch."

As a result of the loss, France has only a very slim chance to advance from the group stage, a withering setback for a side with players who start for some of Europe's biggest clubs.

The French, beaten finalists in the 2006 World Cup, must defeat host South Africa convincingly on June 22 and hope for a favourable result in the other group encounter between Mexico and Uruguay.

Former France international defender Bixente Lizarazu has never been sparing of his criticism of Domenech, and Thursday's mediocre performance against Mexico provided him with ample ammunition against the lame-duck manager.

"Raymond Domenech bears a large part of the responsibility for this elimination because he is the coach," he told RTL radio. "He was always like a weather vane, changing his ideas, the players and his concept. It's high time that we talk about it."

Another former France international, Robert Pires, put it more succinctly.

"The France side is the image of its coach. He is not good, they are not good," he told TF1 television.

French media were equally unsparing in their reproaches.

"The incompetence of the French side refutes all the discourses held by Raymond Domenech and his players about their strength of character and their capacity to react," the sports daily L'Equipe wrote. "This morning France is contemplating a field of ruins: its national team."

Football blogger Bruno Roger-Petit, writing for the online publication Sport24.com, said, "Everyone is guilty, everyone is responsible."

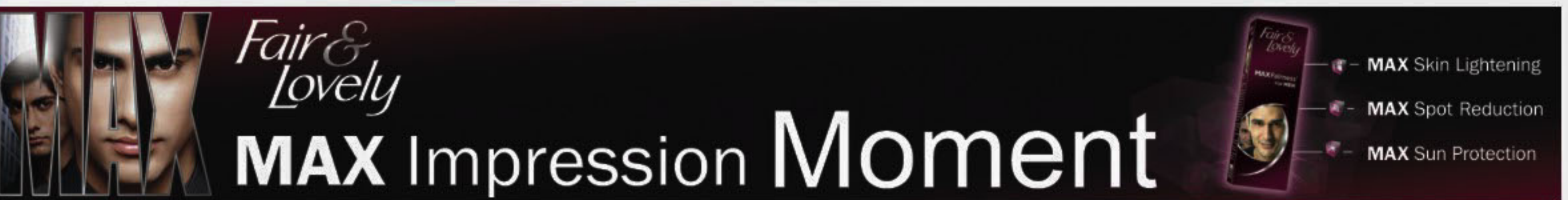
The entire French football hierarchy, from (French Football Federation president) Jean-Pierre Escalettes to Domenech, to several unbearable, incurable players, these detestable (and today detested) monsters of egotism."

The daily Le Parisien called the team's performance "pathetic," and asked: "How can a side that never enjoys itself transform itself into a dream machine overnight? Through the magic of players who don't get along with each other? With the know-how of a coach who still proceeds by trial and error?"



PHOTO: AFP

Denmark's Christian Poulsen (front) controls the ball during a training session at Loerie Park in Knysna on Thursday. The Danes take on Cameroon in Pretoria today.



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PREVIEW

It's a do or die clash

AFP, Pretoria

Both Cameroon and Denmark will have their backs to the wall when they meet in a World Cup Group E clash at the Loftus Versfeld stadium here on Saturday.

Having lost their opening matches, both sides know that defeat in their second game of the group stages could spell the end of their interest in this year's tournament.

If the Netherlands and Japan were to draw in the other group game, then a defeat would see either Cameroon or Denmark eliminated.

But with two rivals already on three points, anything other than a victory will leave either side still with a mountain to climb in order to reach the knock-out phase.

And that's something that has not been lost on Indomitable Lions midfielder Enoh Eyong Takang who believes the Africans must improve up front following their opening 1-0 defeat to Japan.

"It really is a do-or-die game. We must win it if we want a chance to progress," he said.

THE KNOWLEDGE

Cameroon have won just one of their last 11 matches at World Cup finals.

Denmark are unbeaten against African sides in the World Cup.

Guen's decision even harder to comprehend as Eto'o was anonymous almost throughout the match.

And speaking to French TV channel Canal Plus, Eto'o left no mystery as to his feelings that his coach had made a

"I played where the coach wanted. I gave it everything and I tried to put my teammates in good positions to do their job."

"(But) I am the best scorer in the history of the Cameroon national team because I play

team need to tighten up at the back as well.

"We lost a battle but not the war. Everyone's behind us. It's important to react on the pitch," Nkoulou said.

"We're not very happy with the number of goals we've conceded (eight in the last three games). We'll do all we can to perform better come Saturday."

Denmark are in an equally precarious position having lost their opener against the Netherlands 2-0.

They weren't helped by an own goal from Daniel Agger but coach Morten Olsen said they have to forget that game and quickly focus on challenges ahead.

"We still have two important games," he said.

And he will be hoping that he can use Arsenal target-man Nicklas Bendtner for more than an hour, as he did against the Netherlands.

"He couldn't play any more, what we saw was fine and he will play again," said Olsen.



mistake.

"At the end of the World Cup, Paul must answer to the officials. And me, as a player and captain, I must do the same," he said.

in a certain position (central striker)."

It's not just up front that the Indomitable Lions have problems, according to Monaco defender Nicolas Nkoulou, his

ANTHEM ROCKING CHARTS

Denmark's World Cup footballers have yet to find the net in this year's tournament, but the team has scored success on the Danish charts with their unofficial football anthem.

"The Danish Way to Rock" has clawed its way to the top of single charts in the Scandinavian country, the daily Jyllands-Posten reported Friday.

The Danish-language song by the band Nephew shot to the top of the charts on April 23, a week after it went on sale. Last week it was in fifth place.

The song has been criticized by some fans who complained it lacked a catchy beat.

BLAME IT ON JABULANI

The much-criticised Jabulani ball is a factor in the series of goalkeeping blunders that have characterised the World Cup so far, England captain Steven Gerrard said Thursday.

"I think this ball, when it comes off the floor, is very unpredictable, and you do get an advantage when you are shooting," Gerrard told journalists in Cape Town's Green Point stadium. "Certainly our keepers have been having some problems."

England's Robert Green is one of a growing number of goalkeepers who have fallen foul of the Jabulani curse. He allowed a speculative shot from the US's Clint Dempsey to squirm through his gloves in the 1-1 draw in the opening Group C match.

The latest victim was Nigeria's Vincent Enyeama, who undid a magnificent performance against Greece on Thursday by spilling a shot into the path of Vasileios Todoridis to tap-in the decisive goal in a 2-1 victory.

The keeper for Algeria, England's opponents in Friday's Group C match, was also left with a red face after letting a weak effort slip past him during his team's 1-0 loss to Slovenia.

Capello concurred with his captain that the ball was at least partly to

blame for the unprecedented number of errors.

"I saw that keepers make mistakes," he said. "The bounce of the ball is sometimes higher than normal."

Lionel Messi blamed the noise of vuvuzelas for Argentina conceding a goal in their 4-1 defeat of South Korea at Soccer City stadium on Thursday.

...AND BLAME IT ON VUVUEZLAS

"You could not hear anything, just like the other day," the striker said after the match in Johannesburg.

"That's why that happened to 'Micho.' Everyone was shouting at him, and he could not hear it, he could not see," Messi said with reference to defender Martin Demichelis.

Lee Chung Yong made the most of a mistake by Demichelis to score the lone South Korean goal of the match.

"I also had a couple of situations in which I lost the ball that way. You cannot hear anything," Messi complained over the vuvuzelas.

Argentina keeper Sergio Romero also slammed the South African stadium horns.

"You can't hear anything no matter how loud you speak. I think two defenders and I shouted at (Demichelis), and he did not hear us," Romero said of the run-up to the South Korean goal.

"It sometimes happens to me too, that they sometimes talk to me for me to go out to get the ball, and then I look at them and I apologize because you can't really hear anything," the keeper said.

Romero, however, shrugged his shoulders, noting that that is just "the way the game goes."

Argentina captain Javier Mascherano was not convinced and demanded action.

"The noise makes it impossible to hear your team-mate, but as long as FIFA do nothing about things are not going to change," the midfielder said.



GERRARD



MESSI