

Red flag for Armada

PREVIEW

AFP, Pretoria

Reigning European champions Spain will need a victory over Chile here on Friday to keep a much-fancied World Cup run on course with mighty Brazil or arch-rival Portugal likely waiting if they do advance.

The Spaniards must defeat Chile to seal a spot and to win the group must also hope Switzerland, which delivered a 1-0 shocker over Spain in their Group H opener, cannot overcome Spain's goal-difference edge after facing Honduras.

"We still need to beat Chile," Spanish star David Villa said. "There's a long way to go before we can even think about being world champions, both in terms of time and matches."

The two Group H qualifiers are set to face knockout matches against the Group G survivors, Brazil and almost-certain Portugal.

Either figures to be a tough match, with a large Portuguese population in South Africa set to support

their favourites and Brazil's playmakers alongside Spain as a choice of many to reach the World Cup final.

Argentina coach Diego Maradona summed up the consensus about Spain before the World Cup began, saying, "The way they started off, Spain was coming to pick up the World Cup and we were all playing for second place."

The Swiss loss derailed Spanish supremacy talk and not even a 2-0 victory over Honduras, new Barcelona signing Villa netting two goals, could change that. But a loss to Chile at Loftus Versfeld could send Spain home early.

"We have to prepare for a big pressure match against Chile," Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque said. "But these players are used to dealing with pressure. For them it's another match in a very busy season."

"We know Chile are a good side. They are active and quite aggressive, they get to the goal quickly and don't waste much energy."

Chile coach Marcelo Bielsa is taking nothing for granted despite six points from two matches, the first two Chilean

victories at a World Cup since 1962.

"I don't want to think about what could happen on Friday and what we can achieve against Spain," Bielsa said. "I just hope these six points can act as the basis for our qualification - that's our immediate objective."

Chilean captain and goalkeeper Claudio Bravo and Chilean attackers Humberto Bravo and Fabian Orellana play in the Spanish league and four other Chileans previously spent time on Spanish clubs.

But knowing what's coming and stopping it are much different.

"Everyone deploys his own weapons and it is not a secret to anybody that ours consist of controlling the ball while at the same time stopping the Chileans from expressing themselves," Spanish midfielder Andres Iniesta said.

Del Bosque's side could have made things a bit easier had they been able to run up the score more on winless Honduras, but they were able only to ensure that a victory over Chile would advance them.

"We lacked the finishing touch just as we did against the Swiss," del Bosque said. "This was a more open team and a vulnerable side, we should have done better. We will suffer if we continue to play like that."

A loss to Chile and the suffering will last four long years.



THE KNOWLEDGE
David Villa has made more touches (25) than any other player in the opposition penalty area in World Cup 2010.

End of an era

INTERNET

Greece on Thursday launched a search for a new national team coach after Otto Rehhagel quit after nine years at the helm following the team's exit from the World Cup.

Rehhagel's contract expires at the end of the month and his long-time assistant Giannis Topalides, who announced his resignation after the 2-0 loss to Argentina, has confirmed that the 71-year-old German has bid farewell to his players.

"We shared some very special moments. We must change the page. I have nothing against any of you. I know that I probably hurt some of you but I did so purely for competitive reasons," Rehhagel was quoted as saying to his players by Greek newspaper Ethnos. Greece's football federation was expected to formally announce Rehhagel's resignation and successor following the team's return from South Africa on Thursday.

The Greek team returned to Athens in the early hours Thursday, leaving Rehhagel behind in Durban to rest and follow the remainder of the World Cup in South Africa.

The German coach was appointed in 2001 and stunned the football world when he guided the Greek team to winning the European Championship in 2004.

No replacement has been named, although former PAOK Saloniki coach Fernando Santos is reportedly lined up for the top job according to Greek media. The 55-year-old Portuguese quit the northern Greek club in May despite earning a spot in next season's Champions

League.

Greece were eliminated from the World Cup on Tuesday after losing their final group game to Argentina. South Korea joined Argentina in the Round of 16 after holding Nigeria to a 2-2 draw.

Greece's exit from the World Cup means the end of an era not only for the 71-year-old German coach, but for many of his senior players - including Kostas Tsoanakos and Giourkas Seitaridis - who took part in the surprise win at Euro 2004 in Portugal.

Greece were considered outsiders to qualify for the knockout stages of the World Cup. But many Greeks had hoped that the team could have sprung a surprise as they did in Portugal six years ago.



OTTO REHHAGEL

Swiss confident of progress

PREVIEW

AFP, Bloemfontein

Giant killers Switzerland go into their final group clash knowing a win by two clear goals against Honduras would seal a place in the last 16 of the World Cup.

The Swiss, sunk 1-0 by Chile on Monday, could also progress with a narrow win or a draw in Bloemfontein, depending on the result of Friday's other game in Group H between Spain and Chile.

Chile have a maximum six points, with Spain and Switzerland both on three

points. Honduras, appearing in only their second World Cup finals, are yet to get off the mark.

Chile have a goal difference of plus two, with Spain on plus one and the Swiss on zero.

The Swiss began the tournament in South Africa in style, shocking the European champions 1-0 in their opener before slipping to defeat to Chile.

In that game they were reduced to 10 men with coach Ottmar Hitzfeld laying the blame for midfielder Valon Behrami's red card firmly at the door of Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal.

Hitzfeld said he would target the Honduras defence

at the Free State stadium and would set his team up to play in a more attacking style than in the Spain game.

Hitzfeld refused to say what his line-up would be although he will definitely be without Behrami after his sending off.

But despite the loss of the West Ham midfielder, Hitzfeld remained upbeat about their chances.

"We still have an excellent chance of qualifying, I'm sure if we beat Honduras we'll go through," he said.

Switzerland, who reached the knockout phase in Germany in 2006, will be looking to all-time top goalscorer Alexander Frei to lead from the front as they go in search of the goals they need.

Captain Frei was forced to sit out the Spain win after suffering an ankle injury four hours before his team boarded the plane for South Africa but started against Chile.

Honduras themselves are not out of the reckoning mathematically speaking, although qualification for the central American minnows would be a tall order, with a goal difference of minus three.

If Chile beat Spain in Pretoria and Honduras beat Switzerland, Chile will take top spot and goal difference will decide which of the other three teams takes second place.



German fans celebrate in Berlin after their team's 1-0 victory over Ghana on Wednesday night.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Either Bayer or Wolves for Ballack

INTERNET

Michael Ballack appears set to either join his former club Bayer Leverkusen or ambitious VfL Wolfsburg in a return to his native Germany from England.

Kicker sports magazine said on Thursday that Leverkusen sports director Rudi Voeller met with Ballack in Sardinia and that Wolfsburg general manager Dieter Hoeneß was also on the island.

Ballack, 33, who is missing the World Cup due to injury, did not have his contract renewed at English champions Chelsea after the past season.

There was speculation about possible interest from the likes of Manchester United and Real Madrid, but now it seems to boil down to a return to the Bundesliga at Leverkusen or Wolfsburg, although SV Hamburg are also in the frame.

Ballack said he wants to decide over the next fortnight while reports said that Leverkusen, where he played 1999-2002, want an answer from him by Monday whether he wants to earn an alleged 12 million euros (14.7 million dollars) for a two-year deal.

"Our offer is not negotiable. Ballack can accept it - or not," Bayer company spokesman and club official Michael Schade told the Express daily.

Fair & Lovely

MAX Impression Moment

Mission impossible

PREVIEW

AFP, Nelspruit

Ivory Coast face the improbable task of making up nine goals on Portugal if they are to join fellow Africans Ghana in the last 16 at the World Cup.

Sven-Goran Eriksson's Elephants must deluge North Korea with goals in their final Group G match at Nelspruit's Mbombela Stadium on Friday and hope that Brazil can aid their cause by slipping a few goals past the Portuguese in

Durban at the same time.

The task looks forlorn but Ivory Coast will be relying on their talisman skipper Didier Drogba to ignite their attack and give them an outside hope of pulling off the unexpected.

Ivory Coast's task was made doubly difficult when Portugal shipped seven goals past the shambolic North Korean defence last start in Cape Town, while the Elephants fell to Brazil 3-1.

Given that the North Koreans can be expected to be more resolute in their defending this time after their

Portuguese humiliation, Ivory Coast will be made to work for their goals.

Much of Ivory Coast's hopes rest with Drogba, who has scored 129 goals for Chelsea over the last six seasons in all competitions.

Drogba, who scored his side's goal in the loss to Brazil, is working his way back to full fitness after breaking his right arm in a warm-up match and is wearing a controversial protective cast.

Ivory Coast can be expected to manufacture scoring chances, but it's down to Drogba to finish them off.

"Our team has made progress since the last World Cup, but we could have been a bit more ambitious and tried to go for the game a bit more," he said.

North Korea, playing in their first World Cup for 44 years, began impressively when they made Brazil fight all the way for their opening 2-1 win at Ellis Park.

But disaster struck when they unravelled before the artistry of Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal conceding six goals in 37 second-half minutes to undo all their good work.



STANDINGS							
Teams	P	W	L	D	GF	GA	Pts
Chile	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Spain	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Switzerland	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Honduras	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

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PLAYERS TEEMING AT SW19 BLACKOUT

Andy Roddick mimed a goal-scoring volley, Serena Williams tweeted with fury and punters departed for nearby pubs or listened on radios after the All England Club had the temerity to enforce a blackout of England's World Cup group game against Slovenia.

So serious was the intent to keep football's dark arts from view the media centre mandarins had pulled the blinds down "to make sure the journalists' TVs aren't visible" to those passing outside.

Cue three linguistically challenged tweets from the reigning ladies' champions before signing off in disgust: "R they paying the umpires to cheat USA?? I have never seen such injustice since I played us open 2004, and 2009... Also Venus Wimbledon 2004."

That was followed by: "I can't watch this. These people are not fair. This is blatant cheating I'm watching football/soccer online this is outrageous!!! World cup? World cheat." And: "No wonder USA doesn't get onto soccer. It's all a set up!!!"

CONGRATULATIONS FROM CLINTON

Bill Clinton offered his congratulations to the USA team after seeing Landon Donovan score an injury-time goal to send them through to the last 16 of the World Cup as group winners.

The USA looked set to crash out in the group stage despite creating numerous chances to score against Algeria. However, Donovan's dramatic added-time strike gave them a win they thoroughly deserved for their persistence.

"Every contest eventually becomes a headgame," the former president said at the Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria. "I like people who don't quit though. We are not keen on quitters in my family."

The USA will play the runners-up in Group D at the Royal Bafokeng Stadium on Saturday.

MORE HURT FOR RIBERY

France playmaker Franck Ribery will undergo groin surgery on Friday, a team spokesman said on Thursday.

The player was to leave South Africa on a plane chartered by his Bayern Munich club and would be operated on in Munich, the spokesman added.

France were eliminated after the group stage with just one point and one

goal from three matches.

SLAPPER SAIFI

Algeria footballer Rafik Saifi faces a FIFA investigation after a female journalist claimed he slapped her in the aftermath of his side's defeat to USA.

Asma Halimi, who works for Algerian newspaper Competition, told the BBC: "I was waiting for the Algerian players. When Saifi came I just moved away. I felt a hit. I will make a complaint with FIFA and the police."

"Saifi slapped the face of journalist Asma Halimi," BBC World Service's Richard Connelly, who witnessed the attack, said. "She hit him back as a reflex. He then threw a bottle of sports drink which missed and had to be restrained from attacking her again."

The pair have clashed before and it is understood there was a similar incident involving them last year.

ENGLAND BURNT OUT, CLAIMS KAISER

Franz Beckenbauer, a World Cup winner as a coach and a player, believes the England players are "burnt out" following a gruelling Premier League season.

England's failure to win Group C means they will meet Group D winners Germany in the first knockout phase match in Bloemfontein on Sunday afternoon, and Beckenbauer would rather have seen the two sides go head to head later in the competition.

"A game like this should be a semifinal, not a last-16 game," said Beckenbauer in Germany's Bild newspaper. "Stupidly, the English have slipped up a little by finishing second in their group."

However, Beckenbauer believes Germany are fresher than

Fabio Capello's side and that this will work in their favour on Sunday. "The English look a little tired," he said. "There is a good reason for that: the Premier League players have got to play far more games than their Bundesliga colleagues, including two national cup competitions."

"Therefore, when it comes to a World Cup or a European Championships, they are burnt out."

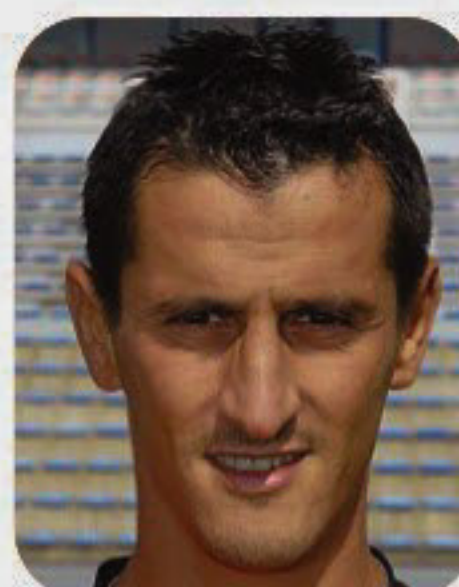
"Our players, on the other hand, seem to be in a physically better condition."

"Of course we respect them, but we certainly don't fear them."

"England's first two appearances at the World Cup were paltry, but they improved against Slovenia."



CLINTON



PARREIRA