

Germany skipper Philipp Lahm warned Michael Ballack on Monday that he wants to remain captain of the national side after the World Cup. "The captain's role has brought me a lot of pleasure. It's a real joy. Why would I want to give it back?" the Bayern Munich full-back told Bild newspaper in an interview to be published on Tuesday. "I'd love to keep the armband, I want more responsibilities. But we will see what

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Clash of the super styles

PREVIEW

REUTERS, Erasmia
Germany's World Cup semi-final opponents Spain are far more dangerous than Argentina, with their game based on the world's best teamwork and not just individual qualities, said coach Joachim Loew.

Schweinsteiger are good as well so there will be a key situation there to carve out advantages."

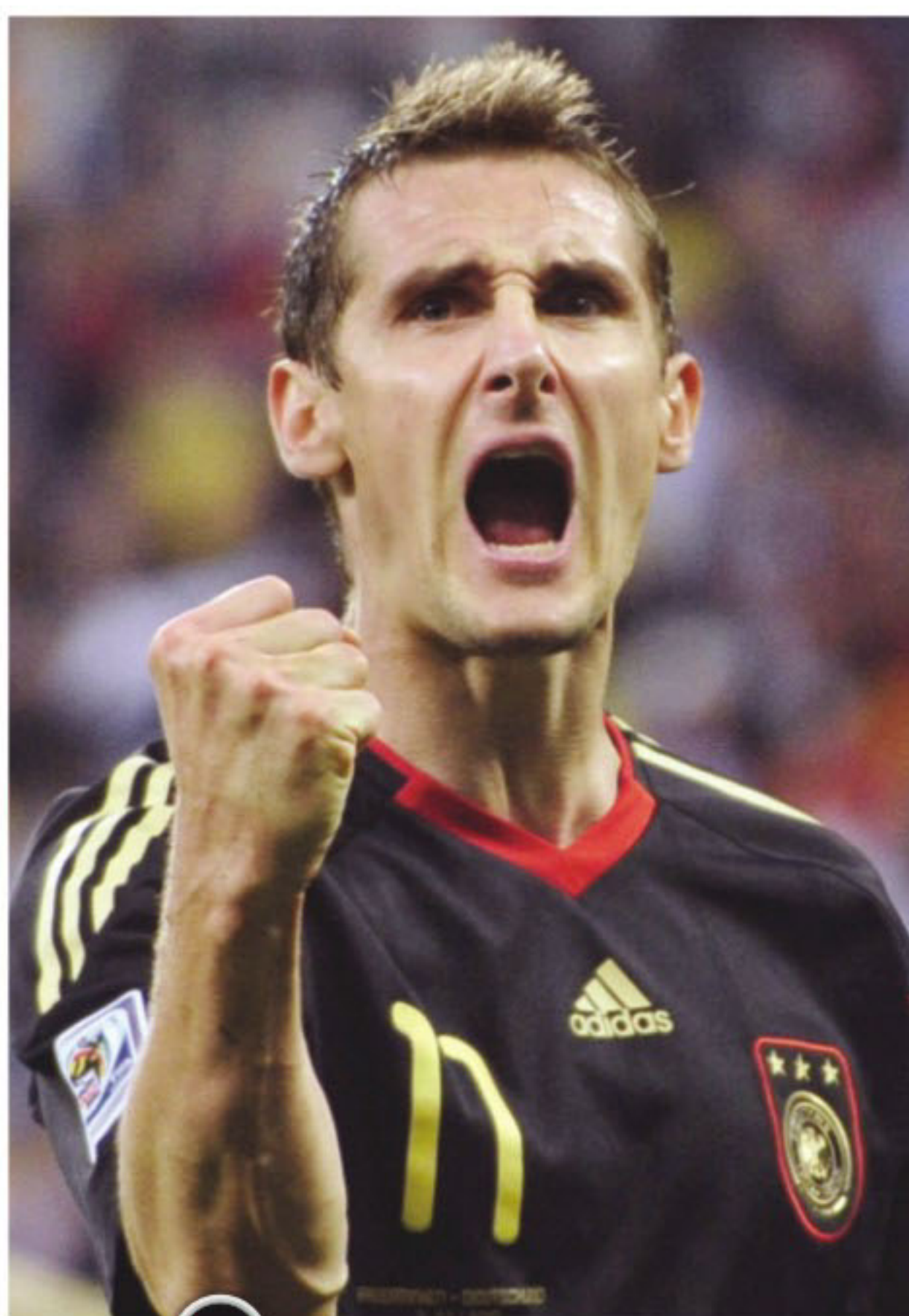
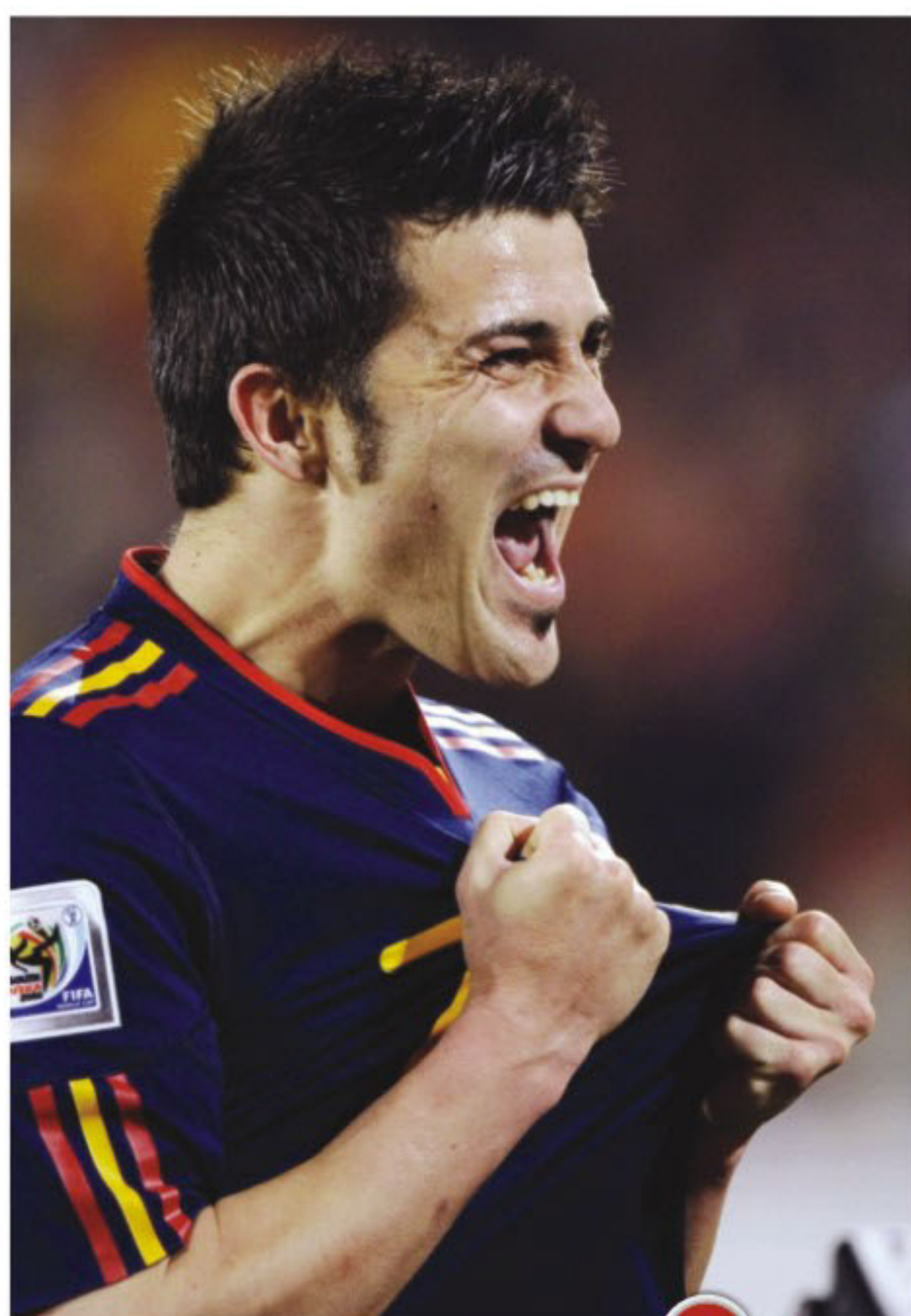
Khedira, nursing a thigh muscle injury picked up in the quarterfinal, should be fit for the match, said Loew.

The coach's only injury real concern is striker Cacau, a possible replacement for Mueller. Loew said he could also opt to play Toni Kroos or even Piotr Trochowski in his place.

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque and his players have expressed their admiration for Germany, praising Loew's success in building a side out of exciting new talent mixed with experienced campaigners.

Del Bosque has indicated the European champions, who beat Germany in the Euro 2008 final, will stick with a fast-flowing, attacking style and, with the Germans

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THE KNOWLEDGE

Germany are unbeaten against Spain at the World Cup, winning twice and drawing once.

Germany have scored the most goals at the 2010 World Cup (13).

Xavi has completed more passes than any other World Cup 2010 player (404).

David Villa is Spain's top scorer in World Cup history with eight goals.

SPAIN RESULTS

- Quarterfinals July 3
Paraguay 0 Spain 1
- Second round June 29
Spain 1 Portugal 0
- Group H June 25
Chile 1 Spain 2
- Spain 2 Honduras 0 June 16
- Spain 0 Switzerland 1



GERMANY RESULTS

- Quarterfinals July 3
Argentina 0 Germany 4
- Second round June 27
Germany 4 England 1
- Group D June 23
Ghana 0 Germany 1
- Germany 0 Serbia 1 June 13
- Germany 4 Australia 0



SPAIN TACTICS

DEFENCE
Although Spain have conceded just two goals in the tournament and both slightly freakish, their defence remains their Achilles heel. But with so much focus on keeping possession, often they are exposed to swift counter attacks--Germany's speciality.

MIDFIELD

Spain's midfield, led by the metronome Xavi is the best in the world. In the Euro 2008 final, they passed Germany off the park and who is to say that the trio of Xavi-Xabi Alonso-Sergio Busquets will not do the same this time around.

ATTACK

Although Fernando Torres has been in shocking form, David Villa has more than ably picked up the slack. Villa is a contender for player of the tournament and Andres Iniesta cannot



GERMANY TACTICS

DEFENCE
Arne Friedrich and Per Mertesacker are not the most solid center-back pairing in the world. The wing-back's of Germany are however excellent, particularly Phillip Lahm who has been inspirational as captain.

MIDFIELD

The game is likely to hinge on which team gets control of midfield. Bastian Schweinsteiger has been absolutely inspirational for Germany and he has struck up a good partnership with Sami Khedira. The absence of Thomas Mueller through suspension might prove a vital blow.

ATTACK

Miroslav Klose is just one short of equalling the record for highest goalscorer in World Cup history. Klose has been a miserable Bundesliga season behind him and looks back to somewhere approaching his best.

'Most important match' Mueller absence will be crucial

REUTERS, Potchefstroom

Spain's World Cup semifinal against Germany is the most important soccer match in the nation's history, more important even than their Euro 2008 victory, according to captain Iker Casillas.

Their triumph two years ago, when they beat Germany in the final in Vienna, was their first major trophy in 44 years but goalkeeper Casillas said that was now part of history and the Spanish people wanted more.

"People are not telling us how good we were at Euro 2008," Casillas said in an interview published on the Spanish soccer federation's website (www.rfef.es) on Monday.

"People are saying we have to win the World Cup. The people want the World Cup," he added.

"We know that the Germany match is the most important in our history, even more than the Euro 2008 final in Austria."

Spain have already made history by progressing to a World Cup knockout semifinal for the first time and play the Germans on Wednesday in Durban for a place in the final at Johannesburg's Soccer City stadium on July 11.

The Spanish finished fourth at the 1950 World Cup in Brazil when the competition had a different format, with a group phase followed by a mini league of four teams

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Mueller absence will be crucial

SOCCERNET

Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff has confirmed they will go into Wednesday's World Cup semifinal showdown with Spain with an injury-free squad after fears that Sami Khedira and Cacau could miss out - but has lamented the loss of Thomas Muller.

Bierhoff declared that all the squad are fit for the clash in Durban, despite Khedira and Cacau training separately for the past two days.

Central defender Arne Friedrich, who had a foot problem, also sat out training on Monday but will be available to coach Joachim Low.

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WORLD CUP POLL

Who has been the biggest upset so far?
Messi 40.0%, Rooney 28.3%, Ronaldo 18.3%, Kaka 10.0%, Torres 3.3%

TOTAL VOTES: 60

TODAY'S POLL

Do you think Paul the octopus will be right again?

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Nicole (L), from Germany, holds a German flag next to Javier, her Spanish husband who holds a Spanish flag, during a photo call at Palma's Beach in Palma de Mallorca yesterday. PHOTO: AFP



History beckons Spain

While no side has scored more goals in the tournament than Germany's 13, the statistics show that Spain have done more attacking than anyone. If those two pieces of information are anything to go by, this should be quite a match. The Germans have been nothing short of spectacular in South Africa. After putting four past Australia in the group phase, they clicked into top gear in the Round of 16, overwhelming England 4-1 with their rapid counter-attacking style and then put another four past Argentina in the quarters.

Though Spain have reached a semi-final for the first time ever, they have been unable to match the exacting standards they have set for themselves in recent times, reproducing their eye-catching possession football only sporadically. Victors by a single goal in their last three games, the European champions can justifiably point to some massed defences as the reason for their reduced creativity. A first time ever final appearance is also round the corner.

The Spaniards need to come up with a solid defense against the counter attacks of the Germans and need to have numbers against when Klose, Podolski, Schweinsteiger and Lahm make those dizzy runs. The Germans need to do what they did against the Argentines. If they can cut off the supply to David Villa, meaning capping Iniesta and Xavi, the Spaniards will have a tough time to score.

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