

Brazil unveil WC slogan

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

"All in one rhythm," is the official slogan of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, FIFA announced Tuesday, saying it would unite fans who head to the Samba nation for the football extravaganza.

The official slogan was a joint effort between Brazil and the footballing world, said FIFA Secretary General Jerome Valcke at a ceremony in Rio, noting it "represents the unique flavor" Brazil will bring to the tournament.

"Based around the central idea of 'rhythm', it will unite fans in Brazil and abroad, around what will be a colourful and vibrant celebration set to a uniquely Brazilian rhythm," said Valcke.

Brazil's Sports Minister, Aldo Rebelo, said the slogan was an invitation to citizens and visitors "to join together and celebrate the immense sense of pride" in the country's role as hosts.

It was Valcke's first trip to Brazil since he caused an uproar in March with his criticism of the country's 2014 preparations, saying organizers needed "a kick up the backside."

Valcke and FIFA President Sepp Blatter had to apologize for the remarks, which triggered fury from the host country. Rebelo then said Valcke would no longer be welcome as a FIFA spokesman.

FIFA has expressed varying degrees of concern about whether preparations -- renovation or construction of stadiums as well as infrastructure projects -- are on track for the first World Cup in Brazil since 1950.

A little over two years before the championship kicks off in Sao Paulo on June 12, 2014, nearly 40 per cent of projects are yet to start, the Brazilian government said last week, insisting there was no cause for alarm.

Brazil plans to spend \$13 billion on 101 projects to build or modernize stadiums, airports, roads and public transport ahead of the World Cup, but work has begun on only 60 of them, the government said.



Germany striker Mario Gomez chases the ball during a training session in Tourretes yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UEFA suspends Besiktas

REUTERS, Istanbul

UEFA has suspended Besiktas from European competitions for one year and fined them 200,000 euros (\$250,700) due to financial problems at the Istanbul club, Turkish media reported on Wednesday.

The move came after UEFA scrutinised Besiktas' accounts in the second and third quarters of 2011 and ruled that they breached articles of the ruling body's financial fair play regulations.

Shares in Besiktas tumbled more than 9 per cent on the news to 4.29 lira.

Besiktas Chairman Fikret Orman and the club's lawyers attended a meeting with UEFA's disciplinary committee for a second time on Wednesday after the club was earlier warned about its financial status and high debt.

Orman said Besiktas would appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) regarding the ban, but added he was not very optimistic about a ruling in favour of the 13-times Turkish champions.

Desperate for money

AFP, Seoul

A former South Korean national football player who was desperate for money after being banned for life for match-fixing has been arrested for robbery and kidnapping, police said Wednesday.

Kim Dong-Hyun, 28, and former professional baseball player Yoon Chan-Soo, 26, are accused of kidnapping a woman and commandeering her Mercedes in Seoul's wealthy Gangnam district.

The pair stole a van late Friday and toured the neighbourhood for hours looking for a victim, a senior detective at Gangnam police station told AFP on condition of anonymity.

They followed the woman to her apartment car park where Kim allegedly threatened her with a knife and forced her into the passenger seat of her vehicle. He drove off as Yoon followed in the van.

Things went wrong when the woman, 45, jumped out of the Mercedes as traffic slowed. She hailed a taxi and told the driver to follow Kim and Yoon while calling the police.

According to the Korea JoongAng Daily, the pair told police they planned to steal the victim's jewellery and force her to withdraw money from her bank account.

EURO2012
P R E V I E W

More cautious approach

AFP, Lisbon

With the "golden generation" led by Luis Figo long since retired, Portugal head to Euro 2012 secure in the knowledge that at least expectations will be lower than at the tournament they hosted eight years ago.

Fans of the Seleccion are still reeling at the near miss by the team of 2004, when unfancied Greece spoiled the party in Lisbon in the nearest the Portuguese have come to international glory.

Figo and friends, tipped for top honours after under-20 World Cup successes in both 1989 and 1991, had been expected to turn on the style and show their rivals, including then under-achieving neighbours Spain, the way to glory.

But the final defeat crushed home expectations and sent the Portuguese, who had banked on flair winning the day, back to the drawing board.

Eight years on and the talismanic presence of Cristiano Ronaldo notwithstanding, most observers expect a more cautious approach from coach Paulo Bento, a tough defensive midfielder in his day who won domestic honours with Sporting Lisbon.

Portugal could hardly have asked for a tougher group: their Group B rivals -- Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark -- are all former competition winners.

For a side which only crawled through the back door of the playoffs to qualify at Bosnia's expense, even getting through the group stage looks a daunting prospect.

Bento took over as national team coach from the sacked Carlos Queiroz early in the qualifying campaign, steering them to runner-up spot before seeing off Bosnia in the playoffs.

A subsequent thrashing of world champions Spain -- albeit in a friendly -- added credit to Bento's ledger, particularly given that the Spanish had dumped the Portuguese out of the last World Cup.

But their most recent outing was an unimpressive goalless stalemate last against tournament co-hosts Poland.

Portugal will clearly have to step up a gear if they are to get the better of tournament favourites Germany in Lviv on June 9, where they also take on Denmark four days later before a final match against the Netherlands at Kharkiv on June 17.

"Getting through to the knockout stage is a tough call," admitted Bento, who was suspended with Xavier and Nuno Gomes in the 2000 tournament for jostling the Austrian referee in a controversial 2-1 semifinal defeat to eventual winners France.

With the attacking flair of Ronaldo and Manchester United's occasionally mercurial Nani to call on, the Portuguese should carry a threat. Yet a defence which leaked four goals to Cyprus in a home qualifier must rank as suspect.

Against the Dutch, most fans will hope flair can outflank brawn while also producing a similar result the last time the two faced off, at the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

On that occasion a record 16 yellow and four red cards were shown as the Portuguese advanced.

08 DAYS TO GO

Balotelli's warning

AFP, Paris

Mario Balotelli, named in Italy's 23-man squad for the European Football Championships, has threatened to walk off the pitch if he is racially abused by fans.

The 21-year-old Manchester City star said in an interview with France Football magazine that he reacted differently when Juventus fans targeted him with racist chants during a match for his former club Inter Milan in 2009.

"I pretended not to see anything," he was quoted as saying. "I wanted to play. I was young. It was for me to tell (the referee). Racism is unacceptable. I can't abide it."

But he added: "If it happens again, I'd leave the pitch straight away and I'd go home. This is 2012. It can't happen."

Fears over racism and violence in co-hosts Poland and Ukraine have mounted this week after the BBC aired a documentary

showing fans in both countries making Nazi salutes and monkey chants at black players.

The programme also highlighted anti-Semitism and a serious assault on a group of Asian students.

The British government has also issued warning to black and ethnic minority fans about the risk of racist attacks, prompting the families of two black England players to say that they would not be going to support the team.

Balotelli, born in Italy to Ghanaian parents but adopted at the age of two, left no doubt as to his reaction if he was subject to racist taunts.

He said he was once in a bar in Rome and had bananas thrown at him, explaining that he would have "knocked out" the perpetrators if police had not arrived on the scene quickly.

"I hope that doesn't happen again. If anyone throws bananas at me, I'd go to prison because I'd kill them," he said in the interview, published on Tuesday.

Back from the brink

AFP, London

England midfielder Scott Parker admits he is determined to make up for lost time at Euro 2012 after his international career appeared to be on the rocks.

Parker has recovered from an Achilles injury to be named in Roy Hodgson's 23-man Euro squad and the Tottenham star is widely expected to feature alongside Steven Gerrard in England's midfield in their opening group match against France on June 11.

It is a remarkable renaissance for Parker, who just two years ago feared his England career was over when he took a call from then coach Fabio Capello to inform him he would not be going to the World Cup in South Africa.

Parker had been named in Capello's preliminary squad but did not play a minute of two pre-tournament friendlies against Mexico and Japan and was axed by Capello when he trimmed his group for the tournament.

At that point, Parker felt he may never play for England again but injuries gave him one last chance and he seized it in a friendly against Denmark in Copenhagen in February 2011.

"I had reached a point where I had nothing to lose," Parker said of the Denmark match. "I could either not play well and it would be a massive struggle to get back in or I could go out with no fear and do the best I could."

Now Parker is well established in the international set-up and fulfilled a childhood ambition when he captained England for their friendly defeat against Holland at Wembley earlier this season.

Monaco appoint Ranieri

AFP, Monte Carlo

Italian Claudio Ranieri was on Wednesday unveiled as coach of fallen giants Monaco, who finished eighth in the French second division last season.

The 60-year-old former Chelsea coach signed a two-year deal, with an option on a third year, and takes over from Marco Simone, who left Monaco earlier this month.

Ranieri was sacked as Inter Milan coach in March after a year in charge there and previously also coached Napoli, Fiorentina, Juventus, Roma, Parma, Atletico Madrid and Valencia.

The Italian "is today considered one of the best coaches in European football and brings to Monaco all the richness of his experience and all he has achieved in football", Monaco said in a statement.

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Portugal forward Helder Postiga (L) jokes with defender Bruno Alves during a Euro 2012 training camp in Praia del Rey yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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