

JORDAN V URUGUAY

Suarez stays focused

AFP, Amman

 Uruguay and Liverpool star Luis Suarez has warned his national side against complacency when they take on Jordan in their World Cup playoff in Amman on Wednesday.

Suarez -- who has been in tremendous form for Liverpool with eight Premier League goals already this season -- flew on a private jet to Amman for the first leg match that has captured the imagination of Jordanians hoping for an upset victory that could help their nation qualify for the World Cup finals for the first time in history.

The Jordanians are also excited about the possibility of being the only Arab side at next year's tournament, with traditional regional superpowers Saudi Arabia and Iraq failing miserably in their qualifying campaigns.

"Jordan will be very motivated to play us, just as teams are when they meet us in the World Cup and the Copa America," said Suarez.

"We have to be careful. We know Jordan have fast outfield players and if you leave space, they could show their quality."

Suarez scored twice against Fulham on Saturday but is not taking his club form for granted.

"After the game against Fulham, it will be a big change because when you play with the national team it's so different," said Suarez, who along with Paris Saint-Germain star Edinson Cavani forms a lethal forward combination for Uruguay.

The South Americans are no strangers to the World Cup, having won the tournament twice, in 1930 and 1950. At the last event in South Africa in 2010, they finished a creditable fourth after losing to the Netherlands 3-2 in the semifinals.

The Jordanians are well aware the odds are stacked heavily against them, but that has not stopped them from getting into a celebratory mood, with even King Abdullah calling a live programme on Jordan TV to offer the team a financial incentive.

"Whatever the result of this week's match, I'm proud of the players and hope their efforts will pay off," King Abdullah said on the daylong telethon that raised nearly two million Jordanian dinars (\$2.83 million, 2.11 million euros).

FIFA Vice-President Prince Ali bin al-Hussein also hoped the 'Nashama' will spare no effort in their two matches against Uruguay.

"It is a source of pride for Jordanians that our team has reached this far with the meagre resources we have," he was quoted as saying in the Jordan Times newspaper.

The Jordan team has come in for some negative press in recent times with reports dwelling on the new Egyptian coach Hossam Hassan's uneasy relationship with some players and last-minute changes to the line-up.

The hosts have been hit by suspensions with star goalkeeper Amer Shafie sitting out, while Mohamed Dmeiri and Anas Bani Yasin are on the injury list. Shafie was the hero of Jordan's match against Uzbekistan, which they edged 9-8 on penalties to make the playoff from Asia.



Uruguay striker Edinson Cavani (R) answers questions at his hotel in Amman yesterday on the eve of their 2014 World Cup intercontinental playoff against Jordan.

PHOTO: AFP

Vidic leaves hospital

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United captain Nemanja Vidic has been released from hospital after suffering concussion during Sunday's Premier League win over Arsenal, a club statement said Monday.

Vidic left the field shortly before half-time at Old Trafford following an accidental clash with United goalkeeper David de Gea.

The Serbia central defender, clearly dazed, was sent to hospital for an examination.

"Nemanja Vidic has been released from hospital after suffering concussion," a United statement issued Monday confirmed.

Vidic is not due to play again until November 24, when United visit Cardiff in the Premier League, although no timescale has been put on the 32-year-old's possible return to training.

In Vidic's absence, champions United completed a 1-0 win at home to Arsenal that saw them move to within five points of the Premier League leaders.

Pak eye top spot

Take on SA in first T20 today

AFP, Dubai

 Pakistan will look to win the two-match Twenty20 series against South Africa starting on Wednesday to go to the top of the rankings in the shortest format of the game.

Besides improvement in the rankings, both the teams will also seek to get tuned up for the fifth edition of the World Twenty20 to be held in Bangladesh in March and April next year.

Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez said his team, ranked second behind Sri Lanka, are eager to win both games.

"Of course it will be a big thing if we attain the number one ranking but for us it is more important to win Wednesday's game and then think for the second," said Hafeez at the launch of the Twenty20 Cup.

Both matches will be played in Dubai, with the second clash taking place on Friday.

"This series is also important for the fact that we have the World Twenty20 in four months so we have discussed it and want to have the same group of players so that we have a settled squad for the mega event," said Hafeez.

Pakistan will also look to put behind them the 4-1 thrashing in the five-match one-day series which finished on Monday, and Hafeez said it will be important to forget that loss.

"We are disappointed at the one-day series loss but we have to put that behind us, it's a new format and some new players have boosted our strength so we will definitely get better results," said the 33-year-old.

Pakistan are bolstered by the return of all-rounders Abdul Razzaq and Shoaib Malik, while South Africa welcome Twenty20 specialists in Henry Davids, Aaron Phangiso and David Wiese as well as pace spearhead Dale Steyn, who has not played a T20 since December last year.

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said his team will start the series with confidence.

Costa out of Spain friendlies

AFP, Madrid

Prolific Brazilian-born goalscorer Diego Costa has strained a muscle in his right thigh, ruling him out of his maiden friendlies with Spain, his club Atletico Madrid said Monday.

An MRI scan at a Madrid clinic revealed that Costa had picked up a torn right thigh muscle during Atletico's 1-1 away draw against Villareal on Sunday, the club said in an online statement.

The injury delays Costa's long-awaited and controversial start for Vicente del Bosque's Spain squad.

"This injury will prevent him from accepting Vicente del Bosque's call-up for the Spanish national team for the games against Guinea and South Africa, for which he had been named," Atletico Madrid said.

Costa, who has also acquired Spanish nationality, was called up last week for the friendly matches against Equatorial Guinea and South Africa later this month.

Bailey awaits Test debut

AFP, Sydney

 George Bailey will make his Test debut in the opening Ashes clash against England next week while Mitchell Johnson returns to Australia's pace attack, selectors said Tuesday.

Bailey got the nod in a 12-man squad on the back of his remarkable one-day international form including the recent tour to India where he amassed 478 runs at 95.60 while also serving as captain.

"We have included George Bailey in this line-up and are excited by what he can offer at Test level," national selector John Inverarity said of the 31-year-old, ahead of the first Test in Brisbane, starting on November 21.

"He is calm and composed and comes into the squad full of confidence."

Bailey said his approach to the five-day Test format would be no different from that he employs in the one-day game.

"It's just good form, so just hit the ball," he said. "It's the same approach and I feel very comfortable with where I'm at at the moment."

Selectors will be hoping he can bring much-needed middle order stability with the Tasmanian preferred to state colleague Alex Doolan.

"Alex Doolan is a very highly regarded player in our eyes. But George Bailey has been in fantastic form with the bat," said Inverarity.

There were no surprises in the squad, with a rejuvenated David Warner to open the innings with Chris Rogers after hitting

'France have fighting mentality'

AFP, Paris

France coach Didier Deschamps says he is instilling a combat mentality in his players ahead of their World Cup play-off against the Ukraine.

France play their first leg in Kiev on Friday before hosting the Ukrainians at the Stade de France on Tuesday next week.

And even four days out from the first leg, Deschamps insists his players are already primed for action.

"It's played on the pitch but it's the head that manages the legs," said the former Juventus and Monaco coach.

"We're in a state of mind of 'challenge', of 'combat'."

France reached the play-offs by finishing second to Spain in their group while Ukraine were edged out of top spot in their pool by England.

According to Deschamps it is aggression that will make the difference in such a sudden-death, knock-out stage.

Mexico seek to recover

AFP, Mexico City



Mexico will seek to put their nightmarish World Cup qualifying campaign behind them on Wednesday when they host New Zealand in the first leg of a last-chance intercontinental playoff.

The Mexicans are usually overwhelming favourites against smaller football nations like the 'All Whites' at their imposing 105,000-capacity Azteca Stadium in Mexico City.

But El Tri won just once in five home games in the final qualifying round of the North, Central America and Caribbean (CONCACAF) group, finishing fourth out of six teams.

While the United States, Costa Rica and Honduras won direct tickets to Brazil, Mexico barely secured the playoff -- a surprisingly poor showing for a powerhouse that was last absent from a World Cup in 1990.

The dismal results led the football federation to sack three managers in six weeks, finally handing the reins to Miguel Herrera last month for the two-game Cup in 1990.

The outspoken manager, who led Club America to a domestic title this year, voiced confidence that his squad can win the return leg in New Zealand on November 20 as well as Wednesday's home tie.

"The first thing we said was that we

shouldn't think about what happened in the past because that's something we can't resolve," Herrera said.

"We are going to win in Mexico and we will also seek to win over there (in New Zealand)," he told reporters over the weekend.

Fans have turned on their team, with 60 per cent saying in a poll last month that Mexico didn't deserve to qualify. Experts have warned that missing the World Cup would cost sponsors and broadcasters more than \$600 million (447 million euros).

Herrera has shaken things up since taking over, calling up only players from the domestic league while leaving out European-based stars, including Manchester United's Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez and Villarreal's Giovani dos Santos.

He said Mexico would seek to exploit New Zealand's loss of captain Winston Reid, who was ruled out of the playoff with an ankle injury suffered playing for his English Premier League club West Ham.

But New Zealand striker Rory Fallon said the All Whites' familiarity with the intercontinental playoff system could be to their advantage.

Fallon famously scored the goal against Bahrain in the second leg of their playoff that sent New Zealand to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

This time, however, the All Whites face a much stronger side that played in 14 of the last 19 World Cups. New Zealand have appeared in only two World Cups: Spain in



New Zealand player jog prior to a training session in Los Angeles on Monday. New Zealand are preparing for the first-leg of their 2014 World Cup intercontinental qualifier against Mexico.

PHOTO: AFP