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## Schillaci tips Immobile

REUTERS, Rome

Former Golden Boot winner Salvatore "Toto" Schillaci has tipped Italy striker Ciro Immobile to emulate his heroics and be the surprise star of the World Cup in Brazil.

Schillaci came from nowhere to score six goals for Italy in the 1990 World Cup, and the former Juventus and Inter Milan striker can see the similarities between himself and Immobile, who scored a hat-trick in the Azzurri's 5-3 win over Brazilian club side Fluminense on Sunday.

"There are the right conditions for Immobile to be (coach Cesare) Prandelli's trump card. He has played and scored a lot this season, he is in excellent shape and has great enthusiasm just as I had in 1990," Schillaci, 49, told the Corriere dello Sport.

"He is fast, sees the goal like few others and he does not have the spotlight on Italy begin their Group D

campaign against England in Manaus on Saturday, and there is a growing desire in Italy for the exciting Immobile to feature in the starting line-up even though Prandelli prefers AC Milan striker Mario Balotelli.

Immobile was in prolific form in Serie A last season, scoring 22 goals for Torino, who finished seventh in the league before obtaining a Europa League berth after sixth-placed Parma were denied a Uefa license for financial irregularities.

The 24-year-old's form led to a big money move to German giants Borussia Dortmund, who will no doubt view the reported £15.6 million transfer fee as a bargain should he shine at the World Cup like Schillaci did.

Prandelli opened the door to Immobile by comparing him with Schillaci, but then went on to insist that playing two up front was not the right fit for a team with as many quality midfielders as Italy have.

"I made a comparison with Schillaci because in 1990, he was considered by everyone as the fifth striker but he went on to become (the) top scorer," Prandelli said on Monday.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Striker Miroslav Klose appreciates the efforts of indigenous Brazilians to greet him on his 36th birthday on Monday, after Germany's practice session at Campo Bahia in Santo Andre.

# Up Klose a European

AFP, Berlin



Brasil

Veteran German international striker Miroslav Klose heads into his fourth World Cup finals not content just with having become the alltime record national goalscorer but determined to leave Brazil as the record

marksman in World Cup history. Klose, Poland-born but whose father moved to France and where he lived till he was eight before joining his footballing dad in Germany, became Germany's all-time top-scorer on Friday when he netted his 69th goal in his 132nd appearance in their 6-1 friendly thrashing of Armenia.

He bettered the previous record set by skirts, feather head dresses and bows danced Gerd Mueller, who scored the winner in the 1974 World Cup final to claim his 68th goal in 62 appearances for West Germany.

Klose, who in an interview with a Polish newspaper in 2008 said he preferred to be called European rather than German or Polish, could return from Brazil as the alltime top scorer at World Cup finals as his 14

goals leaves him one short of retired Brazilian star Ronaldo's record of 15. Klose was the top-scorer at the 2006

World Cup in Germany with five goals, having finished second with another five at the 2002 tournament, while he scored four in South Africa four years ago. "I hope to have the chance to score one or

two goals, and anyone who knows me is aware that the World Cup scoring record is a target of mine," said Klose. His longevity -- he has been a constant presence since making his debut in 2001 -- is

remarkable and saw him celebrate his 36th birthday at the German base in Brazil on Monday which was feted in unusual fashion. About 20 members of the local Indian tribe the Pataxos dressed in traditional grass

round Klose and sang to him. While that should remain a memory etched in Klose's mind forever and the photograph of it one to show his twin boys Luan and Noah he has he still believes a

future in the game post World Cup. He signed a contract extension in May with his Italian side Lazio until June 2015, with an extra year's option, but expects next season to be his last.

"At the moment, I assume that 2015 will be the end, but it depends on my fitness and any injuries," he told German daily Bild. Klose jets to Brazil with question marks

over his fitness after an injury-ravaged season restricted him to seven goals in 22 appearances for Lazio.

"When he's fit, then he is terribly important for my team," said Germany coach Joachim Loew, a self-confessed Klose fan.

"His secret is his professionalism, his strength is his will."

Klose said Germany's impressive display against Armenia, with five goals in 17 second-half minutes, was more important to him than breaking Mueller's record.

me, but it was more important for us to be in form," said Klose.

"When we play as well as we did in the second-half, then we create plenty of chances and I'll score goals.

"I want to play and I know I can help the team."

No European side has ever won a World Cup in south America in six attempts and Klose says the climate will count against Europe's teams.

"Realistically, there are five or six teams playing for the title," said Klose, the only recognised striker in Loew's squad.

"The south American teams have an advantage, in my opinion, as they know the climate better.

"I have spoken to my Lazio colleagues who played for Italy last year at the Confed Cup and they said they were struggling for air after 20 minutes.

"You need a fit team to go to Brazil and push themselves to the limits."

Aside from Ronaldo's record there is another one that the former Bayern Munich, "Of course, the goal record means a lot to Werder Bremen and Kaiserslautern star is edging closer to -- Lothar Matthaeus' record of 150 appearances for Germany.

With 19 World Cup appearances, he could also break Matthaeus' record of 25 appearances at World Cup finals -- providing Germany go all the way to the final or third-placed play-off.

#### High stakes fashion

AFP, Paris

The fashion stakes will be high in Brazil for the next four weeks and it's not just the players wives and girlfriends who will be setting the pace at the World Cup finals.

As the hosts line up against Croatia in the opening match on Thursday in Sao Paulo it will also signal the kick-off of a fierce brands war which has been gaining momentum in recent years.

The strips worn in the first World Cup in 1930 when players in Uruguay wore simple jerseys and shorts made of natural fibres seem from another world.

It's now a multi-billion dollar global industry, using the most sophisticated technology and fibres with light-weight compression jerseys aimed at helping players' muscle recovery. The 32 kit deals are worth

a combined \$375 million a year with France having the most lucrative -- a \$60.5 million a year sponsorship contract with Nike -- as England's deal with the American group is worth an annual \$42 million.

Germany have the thirdbiggest deal with Adidas, ahead of Brazil, reigning world and European champions Spain, Italy, and Russia.

The amount of the sponsorship deal relates to a nation's ability to sell shirts across the demographic spectrum, with the kit not just a uniform but something that encapsulates style, tradition and national pride.

France coach Didier Deschamps won the World Cup as captain at home in 1998 and admits "the passion" of representing your country is hard to match.

"It's an enormous pride ... it's history," said Deschamps.

It's a lucrative business

Once the action gets

underway fans will be rushing to wear their teams' jersey, and the longer they stay in the tournament the better for the brands with an estimated 10 million replica shirts set to be sold for the

## WORLD CUP BRIEFS

AFP, Santos/Rio de Janeiro/Guaruja

#### MEXICO BUS BREAKS DOWN

Mexico's World Cup squad were forced to hail taxis to take them to training after their bus broke down in Santos. The bus managed to pull up in front of

the Mexico hotel but thereafter could not move, forcing the entire squad and coaching staff to disembark and call cabs to take them to their O Rei Pele training centre 4km away.

Veteran defender and captain Rafael Marquez saw the funny side, though, taking to Twitter to post a photo of himself and team-mates squashed into the back of a taxi.

"They've shrunk our bus hahahah totraininginataxi," the 35-year-old tweeted.

The bus malfunction didn't affect coach Miguel Herrera's plans, though, as his players still managed to start their training session on time at 10.30am local time (1330 GMT).

#### GERRARD STRUGGLES IN TRAINING

England captain Steven Gerrard managed only light training on Monday ahead of the World Cup as he struggled with what was termed as a minor groin strain.

Gerrard, 34, did only a few runs down the touchline as the main squad was put through a punishing schedule at the Urca military base in Rio de Janeiro.

The Liverpool midfielder went inside before the end of the session. England staff said it was a minor ailment and they had no doubt Gerrard would be ready for England's first Group D match against Italy on Saturday.

Gerrard missed half of England's 0-0 draw with Honduras on Saturday as a precaution. England staff are gradually building up

rehabilitation for Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain as he recovers from a knee ligament injury suffered against Ecuador last week.

The 20-year-old Arsenal star took part in intense sprint workouts with a brace on his knee.

### MESSI WON'T BE MAN-MARKED

Bosnia coach Safet Susic said Monday he didn't plan to man-mark Argentine superstar Lionel Messi for his side's first ever World Cup showdown on Sunday in the Maracana.

"We never put a player on another ... We have (Muhamed) Besic but putting him only on Messi wouldn't be very good," said Susic after a 5-1 warm-up win over a youth select from Brazilian outfit Santos.

Susic told reporters he preferred a zonal system and that whose job it would be to close Messi down would depend on where the Barcelona striker happened to be at any given time.

He did not give any hints as to his lineup, saying only that "everyone is ready to face Argentina.'

Bosnia beat an under-21 Santos select on the island of Guaruja just off the coastal city of Santos in Sao Paulo state.

#### VAN PERSIE IN KITESURFING COLLISION

Robin Van Persie was never known as the sturdiest footballer, but he has never suffered a more bizarre injury than the one he managed in Rio this week.

The Manchester United forward had a freak accident with a kitesurfer while sauntering along Ipanema beach in Rio de Janeiro, escaping serious injury. Van Persie and his Netherlands team-

mate Daryl Janmaat were left with "light scratches and headaches" after colliding with the kitesurfer, according to the Dutch Football Association.

With the World Cup just days away, the incredibly injury-prone Van Persie was fortunate not to have been injured further after the crash with the 30-year-old no stranger to the marble slabs of the treatment

room. The strange incident was described by Janmaat to Dutch news service NIS as "I almost got a kite on my head. There was a man kitesurfing and he fell on the very spot

# Balotelli tying the knot!



Mario Balotelli with Fanny Neguesha

AFP, Rome

Temperamental Italian striker Mario Balotelli ensured headlines of the positive sort on Tuesday announcing on his Twitter account he is to marry his girlfriend the Belgian model Fanny Neguesha. The 23-year-old AC Milan star -- who is in Brazil

with his country's World Cup squad -- also posted a photograph on his Instagram account showing the beach in Rio de Janeiro where he proposed to his sweetheart. "She said yes... The most important yes in my

life. That was the place of my question! I Love you and happy birthday too! Je t'aime my WIFE," tweeted Balotelli both in Italian and English. Neguesha, born in Belgium of an Italian father

and a mother of Congolese-Rwandan-Egyptian extraction, posted on Instagram a photograph of the diamond engagement ring in the shape of a star that Balotelli gave her. "Tonight, I said the most important yes of my

Life. That was the best present for my birthday! I love you first and unique husband." Neither the date nor the place where they will

get married was revealed. Balotelli's next significant date is the opening group game with England in Manaus on Saturday.

#### Ayew sparks Ghana

AFP, Miami

Jordan Ayew scored three goals and Asamoah Gyan netted another Monday in his return to the starting lineup as Ghana blanked South Korea 4-0 in a World Cup warm-up match.

Ayew opened the scoring in the 11th minute, followed with another goal in the 53rd minute and completed the hat trick in the 89th minute. Gyan, the former

Sunderland striker, scored in the 44th minute. He had been among reserves earlier in Ghana's World Cup tune-ups but was among 10 players moved into the starting lineup for the Black Stars.

Ghana will open World Cup Group G play on June 16 against the United States. The Black Stars knocked the Americans out of the World Cup in the round of 16 in 2010 at South Africa and with a group-stage victory over them in 2006 at Germany.

Ghana will also face Germany in Portugal in other Group G matches at Brazil.

South Korea will try to bounce back from the drubbing in Brazil, with a Group H opener June 17 against Russia. The Koreans will also meet Algeria and Belgium in first-round matches.

## Momentary scare for Neymar

AFP, Teresopolis



Brazil briefly held its breath when Neymar went down clutching his right ankle in training on Monday, but the incident turned out to be nothing more than a momentary scare.

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The fact that the 22-year-old forward went down when none of his national team colleagues were near him suggested a potential problem, just three days ahead of Brazil's opening

However, the striker quickly got back up and finished the training game at the Selecao's Granja Comary base in Teresopolis.

World Cup game against Croatia in Sao Paulo.

Monday's training session indicated that coach Luiz Felipe Scolari will send out the same side that beat Serbia 1-0 in last Friday's final warm-up friendly in Sao Paulo when they tackle the Croatians.

It is also the same team that beat Spain 3-0 in last year's Confederations Cup final in Rio de Janeiro.



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