



# Plenty of life left in Czech old timers

## GELSENKIRCHEN

**P**re-match headlines like "Czech old timers past their sell-by date" have been left looking somewhat premature after the Euro 2004 semi-finalists turned on the style to beat United States 3-0 on Monday. Tomas Rosicky was predictably named man of the match for scoring two goals, the first a stunning 25-metre strike, after Jan Koller's early header. But more important to the team's hopes of going a long way in the tournament was the performance of Pavel Nedved, for so long their midfield inspiration and now giving it one final effort in his 34th year.

The Juventus midfielder came out of

international retirement to help his side past Norway in the playoffs but after a relatively low-key season in Serie A his first appearance in a World Cup seemed to many to have come too late. On Monday, though, in draining conditions, he was at the heart of most of his side's attacking ideas, of which there were plenty, and there was no shortage of running in his legs. Fellow 33-year-old, captain Tomas Galasek, and 34-year-old Karel Poborsky, also midfield veterans of the team that reached the final of Euro 1996, matched their younger U.S. opponents for fitness and towered above them in class in a sparkling all-round display. Two more men in their 30s, Vratislav Lokvenc and, briefly, Jiri Stajner, joined the fray from the bench to contribute

with no signs of struggling in the heat and humidity that appeared to take its toll on an American side which came into the tournament lauded as one of the fittest in Germany. Rosicky is only 25 but as someone who played in the 2000 and 2004 European championships he combines experience with a youthful talent. Plucked from Borussia Dortmund by Arsenal before the World Cup, he seems to have taken an extra step up in quality and helps make the Czech midfield a truly formidable force. Two years ago, with Nedved suffering an early injury, the Czechs lost a Euro 2004 semi-final to Greece they should have won having produced scintillating form to get there. If they can somehow find a way past

Italy to top Group E a likely second round meeting with Croatia, Australia or Japan should hold no fears. Koller, 33, was his usual goalscoring handful before suffering a bad thigh injury the Czech coaching team and fans will monitor closely, so important is the striker to the team's chances. The question over Koller's return to his team's bid yesterday became 'when' rather than 'if', relief for the side whose perfect start was soured by worries over him. Koller was initially said by coach Karel Brueckner to have sustained a "serious" injury but a team spokesman later said it was not as bad as they had thought. Although unlikely to be fit for Saturday's Group E match against Ghana, the 2.04-metre (6ft 7in) striker will not be

packing his bags just yet. "Definitely his start in further matches is not ruled out," team doctor Petr Krejci said on the Czech Republic Football Association's Web site [www.fotball.cz](http://www.fotball.cz). Koller said he might only have to miss one game. "I will have four days' rest now and I am confident I will be back for our third group game," he said on the Fifa World Cup Web site. Koller's absence in the near future, though, puts pressure on strike partner Milan Baros to recover quickly from a foot injury sustained in a friendly on June 3. Baros, top scorer in Euro 2004 when the Czech Republic reached the semi-finals, has hardly trained in the past week and coach Karel Brueckner said it was difficult to know when he would be back on the pitch. (Reuters)

## Brilliant Australia rattle the Japanese

### KAISERSLAUTERN

**M**idfielder Tim Cahill will take the plaudits but it was a towering long-haired striker more suited to a surfboard than a soccer pitch who changed the course of Australia's World Cup campaign on Monday.

Josh Kennedy, who stands 1.94 metres tall, went for the jugular. The 23-year-old frightened the life out of Japan's defenders to such an extent that the Asian champions wilted in the Kaiserslautern heat, conceding three goals in the final seven minutes to lose their opening Group F clash 3-1.

Australia are more used to running up cricket-score victories against the likes of Vanuatu and Fiji than savouring World Cup victories.

### Brilliance of keeper

A first finals win appeared remote until Kennedy threw his burly frame into a game in which the Socceroos, trailing to Shunsuke Nakamura's disputed opener, had been frustrated by the brilliance of Japan keeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi.

Captain Mark Viduka caused Japan problems but, with a clearly unfit Harry Kewell providing ineffective support, had been an isolated figure against their Asian Confederation rivals.

Kennedy, a journeyman player with the lesser lights of Germany since he was a teenager and a surprise inclusion in the squad, changed that.

### Master tactician

Coach Guus Hiddink, who took South Korea to the 2002 semi-finals, enjoys a reputation as a master tactician but Kennedy's introduction on the hour, shortly after Cahill, appeared to be a last throw of the dice.

Kennedy, uncapped when Dutchman Hiddink named his World Cup squad, was soon doing what Kewell could not, providing the perfect foil for Viduka and allowing Cahill to find much-needed space behind the front pair.

Australia's luck turned. Their furious protests at Japan's goal forgotten, they enjoyed their own good fortune when after some penalty area pinball the ball landed at Cahill's feet.

The midfielder found the net with the goal went Japan's hopes. (Reuters)

## ▼ Maasai at Hamburg match



Photos/Benjamin Ouma

## Journalist makes heads turn at game

**C**itizen TV sports presenter Torome Tirike, in full Maasai apparel together with his Kenya Broadcasting Corporation counterpart Joseph Onyango (bottom right of picture), at the AOL Arena in Hamburg, home of German Bundesliga club Hamburg SV, during the Argentina vs Cote d'Ivoire Group C match. Tens of fans scrambled to take photographs with the Kenyan journalist who was among a group of Kenyan sports writers and editors who attended the opening Group C match. The trip was organised by Emirates Airline, an official partner of world soccer governing body, Fifa, and co-sponsors of the World Cup.



## Argentina keep their pin-up star Messi waiting

### HERZOGENAURACH

**T**he teenage features of prodigy Lionel Messi stare down from giant posters in Germany but Argentina fans and the man himself are anxious to know when he will make his World Cup debut. Messi remained on the bench when coach Jose Pekerman's Argentina beat Cote d'Ivoire 2-1 in their opening Group C match in Hamburg at the weekend. Argentina media reported

that he was the only player who did not go on to the AOL Arena pitch at the final whistle to celebrate the victory with the 14 players who had taken part in the match and the rest of the squad. Messi headed straight for the dressing room where 1986 World Cup-winning captain Diego Maradona had surprised the team with an unscheduled appearance just before kickoff to give them a pep talk and promise to pay for a lunch together if they won. Messi, who will celebrate his 19th birth-

day on June 24, the day of or day after Argentina's second round match if they get through, is desperate to play, according to some media, although he recognises that decision rests with Pekerman. Media speculation has the sportswear giant adidas, who kit out the Argentina squad and put up the giant Messi posters, possibly pushing for Messi's inclusion in the team. True or not, Pekerman is waiting for what he deems the right moment, much like Sven-Goran Eriksson with Wayne Rooney. — Reuters

## WRAP-UP

### Togo anthem on hold as Korea's gets big encore

Togo's national anthem was mistaken for South Korea's ahead of their World Cup clash in Frankfurt yesterday. South Korea's anthem was repeated — to the embarrassment of Fifa and the joy of Korean fans — before organisers realised their mistake and belatedly played the Togolese anthem. Togo, making their first appearance in the World Cup finals, have already had problems in the run-up to their opening Group G match after coach Otto Pfister quit late last week. The German changed his mind on Monday and was on the bench for their opening game.

### Two England fans arrested

Two England fans who were arrested for allegedly wearing Nazi insignia to Saturday's opening World Cup Group B game with Paraguay have been arrested on returning to Britain, a police spokeswoman said yesterday. The two supporters, aged 21 and 24, were detained when they landed at Leeds airport on Monday evening, a spokeswoman for the Association of Chief Police Officers said in Germany. They will appear at Leeds Magistrates Court later yesterday and be subject to an application for a banning order.

### Crowds catch low-budget porn

Hundreds of World Cup fans saw more than just soccer when upstart pornographers filmed part of their low-budget production in the middle of Berlin's Fan Mile, a newspaper reported yesterday. The two men, identified by the B.Z. newspaper as a 20-year-old pizza deliveryman named Sebastian and a 25-year-old bartender named Moe, filmed a topless woman right in the middle of the downtown street, which has been closed off to traffic for the month-long soccer tournament and features a giant-screen TV and Ferris Wheel.