

Sports

Storm clouds gather over France team ahead of World Cup defense

French Football Federation locked in a row over image rights

SAINT-DENIS: Just two months before France begin their defense of the World Cup, the mood around the team is in stark contrast to the celebrations that followed their win over Croatia in the 2018 final. The clouds have been gathering over coach Didier Deschamps and his squad as key players struggle with injuries and personal problems.

Meanwhile the French Football Federation (FFF) is locked in a row over image rights with its biggest star and its president faces accusations of inappropriate behavior. It all threatens to derail France's campaign in Qatar. More immediately, they go into their final matches before the World Cup this week against Austria and Denmark in the UEFA Nations League with a depleted squad. Paul Pogba, a goalscorer in the 4-2 win over Croatia in 2018, is among the players sidelined.

As the Juventus star battles to recover from knee surgery he has filed a complaint with Italian prosecutors saying he was the target of a 13 million-euro (\$13m) blackmail plot. Pogba's brother Mathias is one of five people charged and detained in the case. Paul Pogba reportedly told investigators he was effectively kidnapped by childhood acquaintances and threatened by two men in balaclavas carrying assault rifles, who accused him of not having helped them financially.

The ex-Manchester United midfielder also said the blackmailers wanted to discredit him by claiming he asked a witch doctor to cast a spell on Kylian Mbappe, another 2018 World Cup hero. "It is his word against his brother's. I am going to trust my teammate," Mbappe said recently of Pogba and those claims. "I think it's in the interests of the national team as well with a big tournament coming up."

Mbeumo eyes WCup place with Cameroon

JOHANNESBURG: France-born English Premier League forward Bryan Mbeumo hopes switching national team loyalty to Cameroon can win him a place at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Brentford star Mbeumo is one of many wanting to impress from Thursday as the five African qualifiers - Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia - play two warm-up matches each. Brighton defender Tariq Lamptey and Athletic Bilbao forward Inaki Williams, both born in Europe to Ghanaian parents, are among others taking advantage of a FIFA rule that permits changing allegiance.

An increasing number of footballers from Europe are choosing to represent the African country where their parents or grandparents were born. Opponents for the African quintet between Thursday and Tuesday range from record five-time World Cup winners Brazil to Nicaragua, ranked 139th in the world. Here, AFP Sport reveals how the qualifiers are shaping up for the last international window until club football halts just seven days before the World Cup kicks off on November 20.

Cameroon

Apart from selecting Mbeumo for the first time, coach Rigobert Song has recalled Nicolas Nkoulou and George Mandjeck for matches in South Korea against the host nation and Uzbekistan. Defender Nkoulou last lined up for the Indomitable Lions five

'Super-hot' title race heads to first Japan MotoGP since COVID

MOTEGI: A thrilling MotoGP season moves to Japan this weekend after world champion Fabio Quartararo crashed in Aragon to blow the title race wide open with five grands prix to go. The Frenchman still heads the standings but his lead has been slashed to 10 points by hard-charging Italian Francesco Bagnaia and Spain's Aleix Espargaro is also firmly in the title hunt. Ducati rider Bagnaia had ramped up the pressure on Yamaha's Quartararo by winning four races in a row going into last weekend at Aragon, Spain, where Quartararo made a spectacular and painful first-lap exit after clipping the Honda of six-time world champion Marc Marquez.

Bagnaia was denied a fifth straight win by Enea Bastianini on the last lap after a nerve-jangling duel, but second place was good enough to tighten the squeeze on the shaken Quartararo and the Italian now has all the momentum. "I gave my best and I would like to have another fight in Japan,"

Mbappe dispute

Mbappe himself is involved in a row with the FFF that risks damaging squad morale. On Monday, their get-together at the chateau of Clairefontaine, an hour's drive from Paris, was overshadowed by Mbappe's refusal to participate in a photo shoot because of the FFF's unwillingness to modify an agreement regarding players' image rights.

The Paris Saint-Germain superstar has boycotted a shoot before, and on Monday the federation responded quickly, promising to "revise as soon as possible the agreement". Mbappe's representatives insisted the matter "obviously does not call into question his total commitment and determination to contribute to the collective success of the national team".

Meanwhile, the FFF's veteran 80-year-old president is in the firing line. Noel Le Graet was last week summoned to a meeting with the country's Sports Minister, Amelie Oudea-Castera. The government then announced it was launching an audit of the federation. That came after So Foot magazine published accusations that the FFF suffered from organizational problems and that some former employees had alleged they had not been treated properly.

One accusation is that Le Graet sent text messages of a salacious nature to female employees. The federation has launched legal action against the magazine. Le Graet told Le Monde newspaper this month that "there aren't any text messages". He has not yet replied to AFP's request for a comment on the allegations. "It's not the calmest atmosphere that I have known," admitted Deschamps. "But it is not unsettling for me. My staff and I are focused on

what is happening on the pitch." years ago and midfielder Mandjeck has not featured for the five-time African champions since 2019. "We need experienced players like Nicolas and George, who will help our new generation of players grow. They are passionate and patriotic," said Song.

Ghana

Ghana have included Lamptey, Williams and former Germany youth international Stephan Ambrosius and Ransford-Yeboah Koningsdorffer for matches against Brazil and Nicaragua in France and Spain. There is also a place in the squad for Southampton defender Mohammed Salisu, who was born in Ghana but declined previous call-ups, saying he wanted to concentrate on his club career. Coach Otto Addo, mastermind of a shock qualification at the expense of Nigeria, has picked five Premier League players, including Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey and Crystal Palace forward Jordan Ayew.

Morocco

Most attention will be on Chelsea winger Hakim Ziyech when six-time World Cup qualifiers Morocco tackle Chile and Paraguay at Spanish venues. He has been recalled by new coach Walid Regragui after being shunned by Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic, who accused the Premier League player of being "untruthful" and "a trouble maker". "We look forward to the Hakim that all Moroccans love, the one who fights on the pitch and gives everything for his country," said former international Regragui. —AFP

Senegal

African champions Senegal have been hit by a

said the 25-year-old Bagnaia, who is chasing a first MotoGP world title.

The Italian said he was happy to settle for the 20 points that came with finishing second rather than risk going for broke in the pursuit of 25 points for the win. Just 17 points divide the top three in the title race heading to Motegi for the first MotoGP in Japan since the pandemic. Bastianini is not out of the championship fight in fourth, 48 points behind Quartararo. Bagnaia, though, is uneasy about any title talk.

"For sure now we are more close and now we can speak more about the championship, but I don't want to," he said. "I want to do more weekends in Japan like we are doing this second part of the championship and see what happens. "I know that our potential is so high but it's three years since we went there so it will be tough at the start." While Bagnaia was being circumspect, Aprilia Racing's Espargaro is relishing being in the mix for his first MotoGP world title. "The championship is getting super hot," the 33-year-old said after coming third in Aragon behind Ducati duo Bastianini and Bagnaia.

He believes that Bagnaia is the man to beat and "now riding better than us". "He has the best bike



YVELINES: (From left) France's head coach Guy Stephan, France's head coach Didier Deschamps and France's physical trainer Cyril Moine arrive for a training session in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines on September 20, 2022 as part of the team's preparation for the upcoming UEFA Nations League. — AFP

what is happening on the pitch."

Chance for emerging stars?

Nevertheless, his squad will be without key players Hugo Lloris, N'Golo Kante and Karim Benzema, as well as Pogba, for the upcoming games. Just five players from the 2018 final are involved, including recalled veteran Olivier Giroud. Among the other members of the 2018 squad, Manchester City

defender Benjamin Mendy is on trial in England charged with a number of sexual offences.

Mendy last played for France in November 2019. Les Bleus went out of Euro 2020 to Switzerland in the last 16 but bounced back to win the Nations League last year. That latter victory showcased the benefits of recalling Benzema - himself recently given a suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail a teammate. — AFP



LONDON: Brentford's French midfielder Bryan Mbeumo (left) heads the ball towards goal, but fails to score during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Arsenal at the Gtech Community Stadium in London on September 18, 2022. — AFP

string of blows before facing Bolivia and fellow qualifiers Iran in France and Slovakia. Bayern Munich full-back Bouna Sarr will miss Qatar due to knee surgery and forward Keita Balde can only play at the World Cup after the second round due to an anti-doping violation. A further concern for coach Aliou Cisse is defender Noah Fadiga - the son of 2002 Senegal World Cup midfielder Khalidou - who suffered concussion playing in France last weekend. —AFP



ARAGON: Yamaha French rider Fabio Quartararo rides his bike during the MotoGP fourth free practice session ahead of the Moto Grand Prix of Aragon at the Motorland circuit in Alcaniz. — AFP

and is riding at a really, really high level so it's not going to be easy for Fabio and me," said Espargaro. "But this is MotoGP you never know what can happen. "Now we are going to very strange circuits, far from Europe with different temperatures, with different (tyre) grip so anything can happen." —AFP

Australian Rules club hit by 'heartbreaking' mistreatment claims

SYDNEY: Australian Rules' chief executive said Wednesday it was "hard to find more serious allegations" after a top club was accused of separating Indigenous players from their families and pressuring one couple to have an abortion. In the latest racially tinged scandal to hit Australia's most popular spectator sport, Hawthorn Football Club said an internal investigation into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players were treated had raised "disturbing" historical claims. The club did not go into detail, saying the matters were "confidential".

But public broadcaster ABC reported harrowing accounts of young Indigenous players pressured to end contact with their families and focus on their sporting careers. The ABC said in a period about a decade ago, players were relocated away from family and pressed to change their mobile phone numbers. One allegation related to a prospective father who told the club he and his partner were expecting a child and was advised to terminate the pregnancy. "At face value it's hard to find more serious allegations," Australian Football League (AFL) chief Gillon McLachlan said.

"There are so many people hurting today and have been hurting for a long time. As a game we will do everything to ensure the hurt you experienced is not a hurt experienced by others," McLachlan said an external panel of four independent, appropriately qualified people would conduct a separate investigation for the AFL. "We need to run a proper investigation to get to the bottom of it and this is important out of respect for those making the allegations and out of respect for those being accused," he said.

Hawthorn, the 13-time premierships-winning side with the Latin motto translated as "let us be judged by our acts" - are based in Melbourne. Allegations of separating Indigenous players from their families and forced estrangement are particularly sensitive in Australia. Until the 1970s, white-dominated Australian governments forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their parents in an attempt to eradicate Indigenous cultures.

Indigenous AFL legend and former "Australian of the Year" Adam Goodes retired in 2015 after being subjected to months of racially motivated booing by spectators. In 2021, the president of top Australian Rules side Collingwood resigned after evidence of systemic racism at the club. Hawthorn chief Justin Reeve backed the AFL's independent investigation, calling the findings of their internal review "heart-breaking". Asked whether Hawthorn had a culture problem, Reeve replied: "I think Australia has a culture problem, historically, and I think like all of us, we focus on every day being better and building a great environment for our club. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics	
Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Michelle Henry Fernandes, holder of passport No. T5337449, do hereby change my name to Michelle Antonet D'Costa for all purposes. I will henceforth be known by the name of Michelle Antonet D'Costa and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents. (C# 2405) — 20-09-2022
Yalla Venkatamma holder of Passport No. L1432096 do hereby change my name to Konka Parvathi given name Yalla Venkatamma surname all purposes I will henceforth be. (C# 2406) — 21-09-2022

For Rent directly from the Owner
Villa in Jabriya
For rent in Surra One floor Flat for rent in Jabriya, Salwa and Salmiya
One floor in Surra
99666522
Please contact
24911260
24911325