



DROGBA AND ESSIEN GET READY TO RUMBLE

Didier Drogba is not afraid of much and that includes Emmanuel Eboué trying to stab him with a fork. Still that doesn't deter the mischievous full-back from trying to perforate his significantly bigger team-mate. Despite a sticky start to their Africa Cup of Nations thanks to a 0-0 draw with Burkina Faso, spirits are high in the Ivory Coast camp.

They may be the favourites to win the tournament thanks to a team line-up packed with stars from La Liga and the Premier League, but Les Elephants are not letting the pressure get to them. Now that Group B has been reduced from four teams to three following the return home of Togo, however, that game between Ivory Coast and Ghana will prove absolutely crucial for both sides.

Kolo Toure was characteristically laid back about the game when PUMAFootball caught up with him inside the compound where the teams are staying in Labungo. "We know they have some good players and we have big respect for Michael Essien," he says. "Essien is one of the best midfielders in the world but let's not forget Ivory Coast have good midfielders too with Yaya and Zokora - so we'll be hard to ..." Mid-sentence, however, Kolo is forced to dive for cover as a bombardment of tiny berries rained down on him while the mohicaned Salomon Kalou jogs off giggling. As we said, the Ivory Coast camp is pretty relaxed.

Despite being bereft of big stars such as Sulley Muntari, Stephen Appiah and John Mensah, the Ghanaian camp also appeared laid back when we were invited to watch them train on Tuesday. PUMAFootball even got to see a sneak preview of striker Asamoah Gyan's new goal celebration which Black Stars fans will no doubt be hoping he gets the opportunity to unveil come Friday.

The imminent arrival of the superhuman Michael Essien is certainly helping the mood of the Ghana camp, although manager Milovan Rajevac could not guarantee that he would be fit enough to play in that crunch match following his recent return from injury. Nevertheless, his team-mates know that just having him on the bench will help give them the edge over their opposition. "Michael Essien is very important to our team," says left-back Hans Sarpei, "he is the leader of the team and he makes other teams afraid of Ghana.."

The excitement surrounding the game between Ivory Coast and Ghana is certainly building to a nice head. Les Elephants versus The Black Stars. Drogba versus Essien. This is certainly a battle of the heavyweights. PUMAFootball wouldn't dare try to pick a winner but one thing's for certain, this – Angola's rumble in the jungle – is going to be a knockout.