

U.S. OPPONENTS

Busy spring for Group D teams

The three U.S. opponents in Group D are in the process of finalizing their preparations.

Here's what Portugal, South Korea and Poland have in store through June:

PORTUGAL. The Group D favorites have scheduled only three pre-World Cup friendlies.

The Portuguese travel to Barcelona to face neighboring Spain Feb. 13. They have a tentative match with Colombia at home on March 27 and face Brazil April 17 in Lisbon.

On May 18, they are scheduled to fly to Shanghai, China, where they will hold their pre-tournament training camp.

SOUTH KOREA. The co-hosts have the most ambitious schedule of any team in the tournament.

South Korea will have spent almost five weeks in California for training and the Gold Cup before heading off to Uruguay for a friendly Feb. 14.

The start of the K-League has been postponed until after the World Cup, so Guus Hiddink has domestic-based players full-time.

South Korea will travel to Africa (Tunisia on March 13) and Europe (Finland on March 20 and Turkey on March 27) before returning home for the final push.

Six home matches are scheduled in April and May. The marquee event is a contest against defending champion France May 26, five days before the opening game.

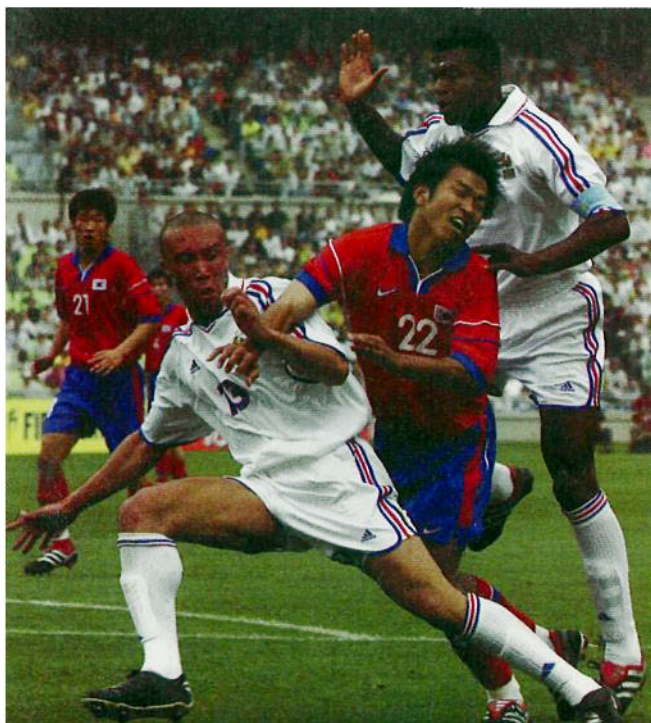
POLAND. Like Portugal, Poland will have a difficult time assembling its players until early May because most play abroad.

The Poles will travel to Cyprus for matches with the Faeroe Islands Feb. 10 and Northern Ireland Feb. 13.

A match with World Cup co-host Japan is slated for March 27 in Lodz.

Home matches with Romania and Estonia are scheduled for April 17 and May 18, respectively.

South Korea gets a chance for revenge when it hosts France five days before the World Cup opener. Ko Jong Su had no luck getting through defenders Mikael Silvestre (left) and Marcel Desailly in France's 5-0 win at the 2001 Confederations Cup.



LEE JAE WON/REUTERS