

686km for bet!

AFP, London

A Frenchman made a 686-kilometre (426-mile) round-trip from Paris to London and then back again purely to place a 10,000-euro (6,900-pound, 12,600-dollar) bet on Brazil to win the World Cup, British bookmaker William Hill said Tuesday.

The mystery punter is said to have been 'hopping up and down' outside the chain's branch at Waterloo station, where Eurostar trains linking London and Paris start and terminate, waiting for staff to open up.

He then handed over a stash of Euros before rushing off to catch the train back to France, leaving the manager to chase him with the betting slip.

"The man was clearly in a hurry to catch the train back. He told us that he would be back on July 10 (when the World Cup final is held) to collect the winnings," said William Hill spokesman Rupert Adams.

"We didn't have the heart to tell him that he could have placed the bet on either the telephone or on the Internet."

The man staked 10,000 euros at odds of 11 to four and will collect 37,500 euros if Brazil lift the trophy.

Unlike Britain, where wagers can be placed at a number of privately-owned chains, betting in France is more tightly controlled with two franchises, one running bets on horseracing, the other lottery and scratchcard games.

Revenge the French way

AFP, Hanover

France say the way Spanish fans whistled during the playing of their national anthem the Marseillaise before Tuesday's last 16 game only served to give them added incentive to win the match.

"When they whistled at our national anthem they didn't understand that it would only make us even more motivated," said Juventus defender Lilian Thuram.

Striker Thierry Henry described the rival supporters' behaviour as shameful.

"I've never seen that before in the World Cup. It's shameful that their supporters reacted like that during the Marseillaise."

"Our fans didn't behave the same way when their anthem was played."

Mr. Motivator vs Mr. Magoo



AFP, Baden-Baden

Sven-Goran Eriksson insists he will not be motivated by revenge when he comes up against old foe Luiz Felipe Scolari yet again. And that, say the critics, is part of his problem.

Eriksson and England have been dumped out of two major tournaments by teams coached by Scolari, losing to Brazil in the 2002 World Cup before exiting to Portugal two years later at Euro 2004.

Now the burly Brazilian is blocking Eriksson's path once again as England and Portugal prepare for a match that is being billed as a clash between Mr. Motivator and Mr. Magoo.

But although Scolari has proved to be Eriksson's nemesis in two meetings so far -- and would have been his successor as England coach had he not rebuffed the FA's advances last month -- Eriksson is putting personal rivalry to one side ahead of Saturday's match in Gelsenkirchen.

"I am not a man of revenge," Eriksson said. "It's not a word in my head," he added, unconcerned that his answer highlights a mild-mannered nature that critics say has become a weakness.

A more charismatic coach, the theory goes, would be driven by a burning desire to avoid a third straight defeat in major tournaments to a bitter rival, using past failures as a powerful motivational tool.

Instead Eriksson talks of not being motivated by revenge and treating Saturday's quarterfinal as just another game.

A perceived failure to communicate passion to his players at crucial moments, most notably at half-time in the 2002 World Cup quarter-final against Brazil, is one of the most damning accusations levelled at Eriksson.

"We needed Winston Churchill and instead we got Iain Duncan-Smith," lamented one England player of Eriksson's half-time team-talk in Shizuoka, in an unflattering comparison to the hapless former leader of Britain's Conservative Party.

The passionate, arm-waving

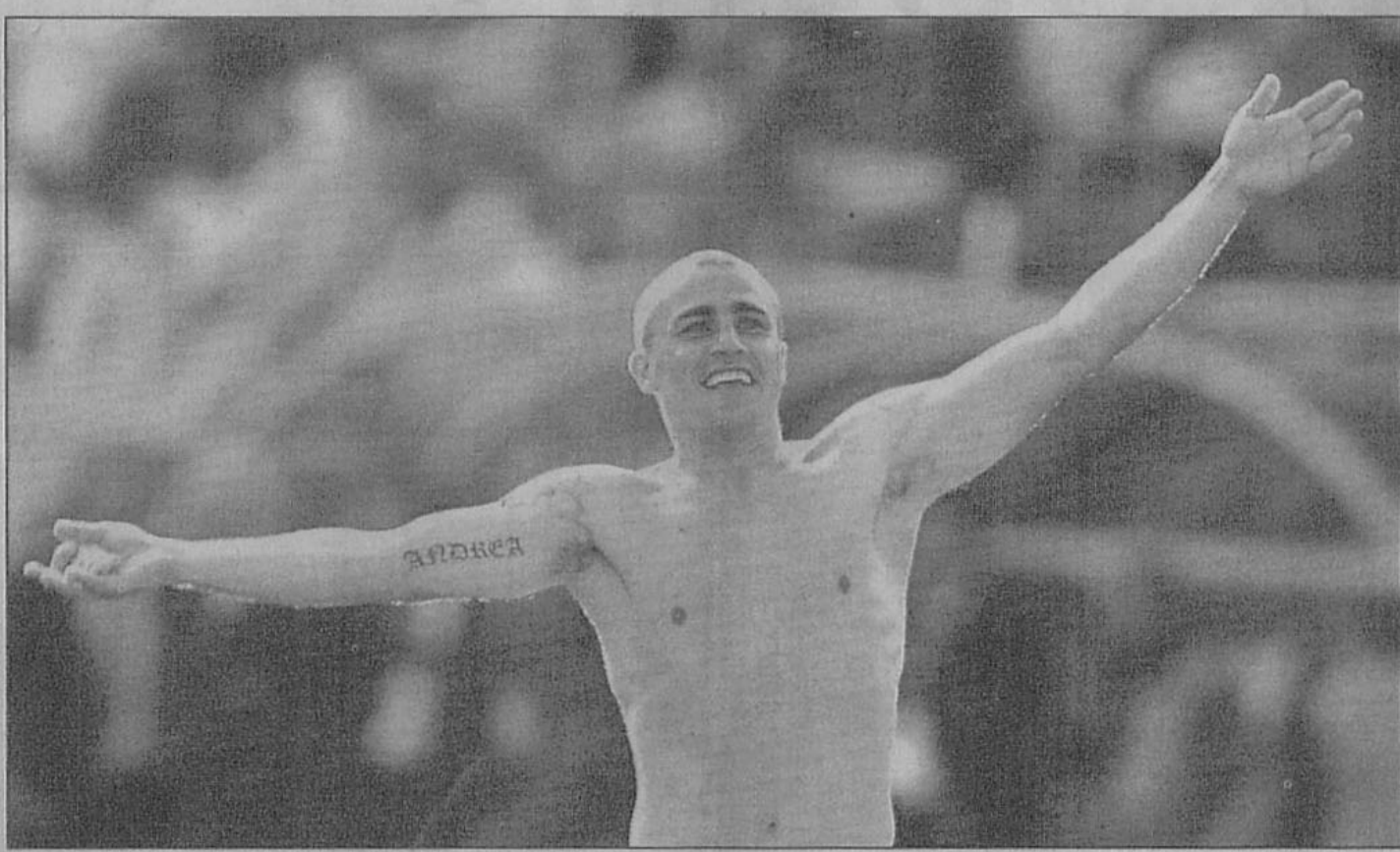


PHOTO AFP

ABOUT TO TAKE OFF: Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro seems relieved after his side's dying moment win over Australia in the round of 16 tie at the Fritz-Walter Stadion in Kaiserslautern on Monday.

Sex, sleep and diet



AFP, Duisburg

Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro has put his excellent World Cup form down to a good diet, plenty of sleep and a healthy sex life.

The 32-year-old Juventus defender was outstanding in their hard-fought 1-0 second round win over Australia on Monday, which earned them a place in the quarterfinals.

Italy had to play with 10 men for almost the entire second half after Marco Materazzi was sent off, but a clean-living Cannavaro superbly marshalled the defence as the Azzurri keep their third clean sheet in four matches.

"For an athlete it's as important how you behave off the pitch as you do on it," Cannavaro said at Tuesday's press conference.

"Eating well, getting plenty of sleep and having sex -- all of these things are important."

"Your body needs the right fuel to keep going. I don't smoke and I

don't drink alcohol, I've never liked it. I live a normal, healthy life.

"I've been disciplined for many years and that has served me well."

Asked how often he has sex, Cannavaro replied: "Whenever I want to, it helps me."

Cannavaro, who has also played for Parma and Inter Milan in Serie A, blushed after he was told that Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon had described him as the best defender at the World Cup.

"That makes me feel good," he said. "Me and Gigi have played together for many years."

"We started out together as youngsters around the same time and he's seen my development as a player."

"He's knows my strengths and my weaknesses. When a compliment like that comes from someone like him, it's worth more to me."

Cannavaro has been imperious at the World Cup, but the Naples-born centre-back insisted coach Marcello Lippi had to take a great deal of credit for getting Italy to the last eight.

"He makes everyone feel involved and is very attentive," Cannavaro said.

"When something needs to be said, he says it straight to your face. Some like it and some don't, it depends on the individual, but we all know where we stand with him."

Cannavaro was angered by suggestions that Italy, for whom Francesco Totti's 95th-minute penalty sealed victory against the Aussies, were fortunate to be in the quarterfinals.

"It annoys me when people say that we are lucky," he said.

"Against Australia we had six or seven opportunities to score, and people still say we were lucky. It was Australia who were lucky because they had 11 men against 10."

With Alessandro Nesta nursing a groin strain and Materazzi suspended, Andrea Barzagli is expected to start alongside Cannavaro at the heart of Italy's defence in Friday's quarter-final against in Hamburg against the Ukraine.

Barzagli came on as a substitute against the Aussies and Cannavaro has no doubts the 25-year-old Palermo centre-back can handle the pressure of making his first start at the World Cup.

"I know he can do it," Cannavaro said.

Messi won't betray Barca

AFP, Barcelona

Argentine World Cup midfielder Lionel Messi will never betray his club Barcelona by jumping ship to arch-rivals Real Madrid, his father said in a report on Wednesday.

Jorge Messi, who with his family fled the economic crisis enveloping Argentina six years ago, was rebutting claims by candidates in the Madrid club's presidential election that they hoped to capture the teen-aged prodigy.

Messi senior ruled out any possibility of his son moving to the capital, Barcelona's Sport daily reported.

"It's been the same ever since I've been here, the players are being used," Messi said.

"Every one knows what is going on, but you can't do this at Barca. Leo is very popular with the fans and there will not be any kind of betrayal."

Barcelona fans will be worried by the news having seen another of their heroes, Portugal's Luis Figo, make the same move in 2000.

Figo was denounced as a Judas and even had a pig's head thrown at him when he returned to the Camp Nou two years later in the colours of Madrid.

The whole sorry affair prompted an agreement between the two clubs not to try to poach each other's players but the current Real presidential candidates are resorting to win-holds-barred electioneering to win the race to the hotseat.

Depression pushed Pessotto over the edge

AFP, Rome

Work depression drove former Italy international Gianluca Pessotto to try to commit suicide, his wife said on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the 35-year-old Juventus team manager, who was appointed to the post only last month, climbed onto the window sill of his office, holding a set of rosary beads, and jumped off.

He was treated at the scene and then rushed by ambulance to the Le Molinette hospital suffering from multiple fractures.

But according to his wife Reana, the stress of his new job at the Turin club, who are due to face a sports tribunal Thursday over the match-fixing scandal that has engulfed Italian football, drove him to try to kill himself.

"He was stressed and depressed for some time," she said. "He became very fragile: he went into a dark depression due to his new role at the heart of Juventus which was not what he had hoped it would be at the beginning."

Reana Pessotto said she had argued with her husband just before he plunged from the second story window at Juventus' offices, because he called her to tell her he wanted to cancel a holiday they had arranged some time in advance.

"He found out that he had a work obligation with Juve. He rang me to tell me and we argued about it, something which happens to all couples."

"But a quarrel over holidays does not explain what then happened."

"For more than a month he had found it difficult (to motivate himself) to go to his office. He had realised that the job of team manager was not for him."

"He was suffering a lot. He kept saying: 'It's not fair, it's like all our hard work means nothing'," added Reana Pessotto.

"Fatigue, melancholy, bitterness over the club's fate, all that put together would make some people react angrily. Gianluca did worse than that."

'Roly Poly' and 'Pensioner' show their class



AFP, Berlin

Two of the most criticised players during the World Cup finals knocked another nail into the coffins of their critics on Tuesday as Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldo boosted France and Brazil into the quarterfinals.

Zidane -- accused of being too old and tired -- scored the third in France's 3-1 win over Spain while Ronaldo -- who had the usual 'he's too fat' critiques flung at him -- scored the first in a 3-0 win over Africa's last representatives, Ghana.

In doing so the 29-year-old Brazilian broke the record for overall World Cup goals easing onto 15 one ahead of Gerd Muller, though, at 60 years of age 'Der Bomber' is not likely to be able to reply with one of his own unless some wonder drug is found in the next four years.

Their victories means that France will play Brazil on Saturday with the latter bidding to avenge the two last World Cup finals defeats, on penalties in the 1986 quarter-finals and even more shattering 3-0 in the 1998 final.

Zidane was inspirational as the 34-year-old fought, harried, probed and then scored in a fashion appropriate for a fellow who could have been playing his

last ever match, as he is to retire at the end of the campaign.

For Spain it was more heart-break as after playing some of the finest football in the first phase and then taking the lead they were brought once again crashing down to earth -- their hopes of improving on their best ever showing of fourth in 1950 brought to a juddering halt.

While Ronaldo and Zidane's progress meant that the old galacticos elite of Real Madrid were still very much alive, though one will bow out on Saturday.

But it was more misery for another of their generation as Raul tasted World Cup disappointment for the third successive time.

However, for one Frenchman, Thierry Henry, it is just as well that he did not sign for Barcelona as was touted as he would not receive a warm welcome from Carles Puyol.

The Arsenal striker's theatrical collapse to the ground clutching his face having not been touched by Spanish defender Puyol led to the second French goal.

The incident left France coach Raymond Domenech slightly bemused with a forced smile on his face.

"We were admirable on all levels, courageous, reactive, solid, intelligent, lucid and patient," insisted the 54-year-old, who once again reverted to his one striker policy, ditching David Trezeguet.

"Patrick Vieira was written off,

Zizou ought not to be playing... But our little team of oldies are still in there. They may be old but they are patient," noted Domenech, saying that he couldn't wait for a match with that we are here.

For his Spanish counterpart Luis Aragones, it was a case of being the umpteenth national coach for the Iberian side to have to step forward and explain why a country bursting with talent had failed to step up to the plate.

"We made two mistakes and paid dearly for them," said the 67-year-old nicknamed the 'Wise man of Hortaleta'.

"There are very young players in this team who must learn lessons from matches such as these," he added as the Spanish challenge fell apart.

Ronaldo struck early to give the five-time champions the ideal start but again their play was far from convincing or flowing with Ronaldo especially underwhelming.

However, despite at times the Ghanaians showing good flowing football the defending champions just had enough to move into the last eight and give skipper Cafu a World Cup record 16th win in what was a national record 19th appearance at the finals. "I want more and more and more!" beamed the toothy Ronaldo, afterwards, and this time he was not asking for more food but goals.

France will be hoping that that wish is not granted on Saturday.

DP, Zambrotta visit Pessotto



AFP, Turin

Italy players Alessandro Del Piero and Gianluca Zambrotta flew back to Turin on Tuesday to visit

Gianluca Pessotto in hospital after the former international's apparent suicide attempt.

Juventus team-mates Del Piero and Zambrotta were accompanied by the national team's assistant coach Ciro Ferrara as they took a private jet back to the northern Italian city.

The three of them, who all played with Pessotto at Juventus,

were due to fly back to Germany on Tuesday evening.

Earlier Tuesday, a press conference with Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro was cut short after news about Pessotto, who is believed to have been suffering from depression, came filtering through.

Italy's assistant press officer Stefano Balducci received a call as Cannavaro talked to the media and said there had been some bad news about Pessotto.

He then got up and left hastily together with the Italy skipper.

Cannavaro later expressed his shock at the news.

"I am absolutely shattered by the news," said the 32-year-old, who also plays for Juventus.

"Pessotto is the most adorable man in the world."

Italy's hardman central defender Marco Materazzi was also in shock.

"He is our friend, we are worried for him and hope that he will be better soon," said the 32-year-old Inter Milan defender, who has had an up and down World Cup scoring in the 2-0 win over the Czech Republic and then being sent-off in the 1-0 second round victory over Australia.

The mood at the Italy camp had previously been buoyant after their 1-0 win against Australia on Monday which earned them a place in the World Cup quarterfinals.

Pessotto, who became team manager of scandal-hit Serie A club Juventus after retiring in May, was in a serious condition after jumping from his Turin office window on Tuesday.

Pessotto, who made 22 appearances for Italy, apparently climbed onto the window sill of his office holding a set of rosary beads, and jumped off, bouncing off one car and onto another.

Pessotto played for Juventus for 11 seasons and helped them win the Champions League in 1996.



PHOTO AFP

A file photo taken on April 13, 2005 shows Gianluca Pessotto leaves the field after a Champions League game.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 24 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a 10x10 letter grid and a key: LG P SHUYPLI PKPYLS XPXPW LT OHUF GKWW CG LYTHWG SCKWV FCK VHHX LY XPIFYHH OPILYF?

CRYPTOQUIP

Saturday's Cryptoquip: DID THE DRILL FEEL THAT SOMETHING WAS MISSING FROM ITS LIFE? WELL, MAYBE A LITTLE BIT.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals F. The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

The Marseille Scarface



AFP, Hanover

There was a sense of the baton passing on in France's dynamic last 16 win over Spain as Frank Ribery proved just why he was being talked about as the new Zinedine Zidane.

With his heavily scarred face and rugged looks the 23-year-old Marseille midfielder is never going to be collecting first prize in any talent contest.

But he's fast becoming Les Bleus' latest pin up boy, adored by fans and teammates alike in a manner reminiscent of the impact Zidane made back in the mid 1990s.

Ribery used to be a household name...between the four walls of his Boulogne-sur-Mer home.

Last month, when he earned his first cap as a late substitute in a warm up against Mexico at the Stade de France, he had 80,000 fans cheering him on.

Blessed with lightning speed and unencumbered by self-doubt he charges bull-like at the opposition, injecting vital pace to the France forward line.

A colourful character who converted to Islam after marrying a French woman of Algerian descent, his finishing had let him down in France's three group games but here on Tuesday Ribery came of age with a vengeance.

With France trailing after David

Scolari, meanwhile, is revered by Eriksson's critics because he is everything that the undemonstrative Swede isn't.

Admirers of Scolari believe he would have turned England's squad into a team of world-beaters instead of serial under-achievers, citing his larger-than-life personality, tactical nous and willingness to take difficult decisions.

At Euro 2004, Scolari substituted Portugal's captain Luis Figo. Eriksson, by contrast, continues to regard the position of his captain David Beckham as sacrosanct despite an undeniable waning of the midfielder's powers.

Scolari is also seen as a vastly superior tactician.

In both encounters between the two coaches, Scolari has shown an

ability to think on his feet that has left Eriksson floundering.

He reorganised Brazil superbly when reduced to 10 men against England in 2002 and made crucial substitutions that changed the course of the game in Lisbon two years ago.

Scolari will need to draw on all his improvisational powers once more on Saturday as he attempts to rebuild a midfield that has been depleted by suspension to playmaker Deco and holding player Costinha.

Eriksson's last chance to put one over on Scolari might be just his best.

"This is enormous for me," said the player who is keen on a move to French champions Lyon.

"For me, my family. I've experienced difficult times in my life but I've always believed in myself."

"I'll remember this as one of the best moments of my career -- it gave me confidence and did me a power of good, to me and the team."

In the space of little over a month since his first appearance for France he is now days away from crossing swords with the world champions in Saturday's quarterfinal in Frankfurt.

"Playing Brazil is a dream come true, to come up against players of the quality of Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Cafu and Ronaldinho. But we've got super players on our side too."



FRANK RIBERY

brated his first goal for his country by leaping into the French substitutes' bench.

He proceeded to prove a constant menace to the Spanish backline, shortly after the break leaving Peria for dead only for his dangerous cross to go abegging.

Vieira and Zidane, who retired after France's World Cup adventure reaches its conclusion, were to go on to complete a memorable night for French football but it was Ribery's intervention that proved