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Portuguese defender Abel Ravier (R) slides in to tackle Spaniard Thomas Christiansen during the semifinal of the European under-21 football championship in Nimes, southern France on Friday. Portugal won 2-0.

Greece, hopeful debutants

ATHENS, Apr 16: The United States is a long way from Athens but Greek players will feel at home in the World Cup finals, reports Reuter. There are more than three million Greeks living in America and they will give the World Cup debutants a hero's welcome both in and out of the stadiums. Our fans will be our greatest asset, said national coach Alketes Panagoulas, a Greek-American himself who coached the US team from 1982 to 1985 and is now in his second spell as Greek team manager. Greek-Americans are the happiest people on earth because it is the first time we've qualified and the finals will take place where they live. All tickets have been sold and my team will feel like they are playing at home, he said. Greece's participation this summer marks the end of a 60-year wait to reach the finals. The nearest they came before was in 1969 when they needed to beat Romania at home in their last qualifying match to clinch a place in the 1970 finals in Mexico. A 1-1 draw saw Romania through instead. This time Greece made sure of their place early, apart from Germany, who qualified automatically as champions. Greece were the first European team to reach USA '94, securing their place on May 23 last year. They reached the finals, with an impressive record of six wins and two draws from their eight qualifiers, topping their group ahead of Russia and Hungary. Now they are preparing for three tough opening round matches in Group D against Argentina and Bulgaria in Boston and the unpredictable Nigerians in Chicago. Both cities boast large Greek communities but thousands more plan to travel for the three matches, especially from New York. Another incentive for the Greeks is money. The squad will share a one-million-dollar bonus offered by the Greek Football Federation for reaching the finals with private sponsors promising to add to the coffers. The squad will earn even more if they qualify for the second round Sports Minister George Lianis says the amount has not yet been decided — but will be arranged in good time. Greek teams have been doing exceptionally well in many sports internationally and next month we will table a bill in Parliament concerning bonuses. Our athletes know that if they do well they will be rewarded, he said. But can Greece realistically compete with superpowers like Argentina? I believe there are no longer soccer superpowers and this may prove to be the World Cup of the underdogs. We did very well in the qualifiers and if we repeat our performance then look out for Greece, Panagoulas said. I am actually more concerned about Nigeria with their tall and fast players. They have excellent physical condition and we are not used to their kind of play, he added. Panagoulas hopes the Greeks will get at least a draw against Argentina and t worst beat either Bulgaria or Nigeria. That would give Greece four points and a chance of reaching the second round as one of the best third-placed teams. Although the squad contains just the right mix of youth and experience, all the players have limited experience of soccer at the highest international level. Few Greeks have played abroad but players like veteran Tasos Mitropoulos, who is 37, a young striker Nikos Mahlas, who at 20 is the youngest member of the squad, will be as fired up as anyone not to let the side down. None of the current squad are with foreign clubs and none are widely known overseas — but they are all big stars in their own backyard. Goalkeeper Antonis Minou, 35, led Aek Athens to the championship last year, while Dimitris Saravakos, 32, will become Greece's most-capped player when he takes his total of 72 caps past the all-time record of 74 held by Nikos Anastopoulos. He should catch the eye with his lethal, long range free-kicks. Panagoulas admits to at least one obvious drawback. Greece drew 0-0 with Poland in a warm-up match last month and will play Saudi Arabia in Athens on April 27 and England at Wembley on May 17. They also intend to play another two friendlies in the United States, yet to be arranged. Fan violence has marred Greek sport in the past three years but both Panagoulas and Lianis assure it will not follow the Greeks to the US. In the United States the Greek fans will remind everybody that sport was born in Greece with the ancient Olympics. Greek-Americans always bring out the best of that which is Greek and not the worst, Lianis said. Greece's previous best performance in the international stage came in 1980 when they reached the finals of the European Championship. They did not win that competition, but they certainly were not discredited either. The man in charge then was Panagoulas, which is as good an omen as any for a nation keen to impress and come home with its reputation enhanced.

Barrios has a point to prove

BOSTON, Apr 16: Arturo Barrios will be on a mission in Monday's Boston Marathon, reports AP. "You can call it a mission," the 32-year-old Mexican said. "I want to prove to myself that I can run a marathon like I can run a 10K race." "Know it's a big challenge, but I think I can do it." Barrios, the former world record-holder for 10,000 metres on the track, has run two marathons, neither to his full satisfaction. In his debut at Boston in 1986, he finished fifth in 2 hours, 14 minutes, 9 seconds despite very little marathon training. In his second marathon, he finished third at New York last year in 2:12:21, running the final two-thirds of the race with severe blisters on his feet. "I was happy, not with my performance, but with the fact that I proved I could run with pain," he said. "After the race, I was in severe pain and I lost six toenails." Barrios said he began feeling the pain about halfway through the 26-mile (42 kilometre), 385-yard (346-metre) event through New York City's five boroughs and thought it would disappear. It didn't. He ran "comfortably" for the next four miles, even with the pain, before it became excruciating. The rest was torturous. Speculation is that the blisters were caused by new shoes, new socks or rubbing Vaseline on his feet — or a combination of those factors. "I don't want to use anything as an excuse," Barrios said. For Monday's race, Barrios is taking no chances. He will wear an old pair of socks and no Vaseline. In addition to setting the 10,000-metre record of 27:08.23 at Berlin in 1989, Barrios is the world record-holder for 20 kilometres (56:55.60) and the one-hour run (21:10.1 meters), setting both marks during the same race at La Fleche, France in 1991. He also has represented Mexico in two Olympics (1988 and 1992) and the 1987 World Championships at 10,000 metres, and set course records in such events as the 1986 Continental Holmes 10K, the 1986 Boulder 10K and the 1990 Bay to Breakers 12K. But his shorter distance running days are over, except as tuneups for a marathon. "I will run marathons from now on," he said. That's why Monday's race is so important to Barrios. "Winning Boston would mean that I have done the right thing in moving from the 10K to the marathon," Barrios said. "Boston is a very difficult course because of all the hills. If I'm not there (among the leaders) at 20 miles (32 kms), I don't have a chance." "At New York, I wasn't able to run to my full potential. I want to do that in Boston." When Barrios ran at Boston eight years ago, he ran an even pace for the first 23 miles (37 kms). "With 5K (3.1 miles) left, I died," he said. Since then, he has become a more intelligent runner, having learned the nuances of pace and what his body is capable of doing. "I'm not afraid of taking the lead," he said. "That doesn't mean I will make a break early. It means that if we're on 4:55 (mile) pace, I won't be afraid to step it up to 4:52." "I'm not afraid to see if I can sustain it and see if my can catch me. I like the way Juma Ikangaa runs," he said of the Tanzanian who holds the New York City marathon course record of 2:08:01. "He likes to run in front and see if anyone can pass him." "The first 21K (13.1 miles), anyone can be in front. Then, we will see who will be the contenders. I want to be a contender. I know I can do it." At New York, Barrios was eighth with 10K (6.2 miles) remaining and passed five runners the rest of the way. "I chased people," he said. "I don't want to chase. I want people to chase me." Even though Barrios ran courageously to finish third at New York, he was not satisfied. Before that race, he had come off a long track and road racing campaign, and was tired. This time, he has spent four months preparing specifically for the marathon. "I've been training like a marathon man," he said. Monday, he intends to run like a marathon man.

Appelmans, Fendick advance

BANGKOK, Apr 16: Top-seeded Sabine Appelmans of Belgium and second seed Patty Fendick of the United States advanced to the final round after both women triumphed in their semifinal matches Saturday in the dms 100,000 Volvo Women's Tennis Open, played in the resort town of Pailaya, reports AP.

Italy in Euro U-21 final

PARIS, Apr 16: Holders Italy had to negotiate a penalty shoot-out before edging past France and into the final of the European under-21 soccer championships on Friday, reports Reuter. The Italians will now play Portugal who defeated Spain 2-0 in the other semifinal in Nimes. Italy were reduced to 10 men defender Daniele Delli Carli was sent off in the 75th minute for a nasty tackle on striker Christophe Dugarry. France, who won the trophy in 1988 with a team which included English footballer-of-the-year Eric Cantona, dominated most of the match but failed to breach a tight Italian defence in a goalless draw. Italian goalkeeper Francesco Toldo then stopped Claude Makeleke penalty to give his side a 5-3 victory in the shoot-out. In the other semifinal Portugal opened the scoring with a superb goal by Rui Costa in the 47th minute and went two-up through Joao Pinto with eight minutes to go. Portuguese Alvaro Gregorio received his marching orders in the 63rd minute and was followed 12 minutes later by Spaniard Jesus Velasco.

A warning for Valderrama

BOGOTA, Apr 16: Colombia captain Carlos Valderrama has been ordered by his club's largest shareholder not to play again without permission from a doctor treating him for a knee injury, reports Reuter. Valderrama played for Colombian champions Junior Barranquilla on Tuesday despite a warning from his doctor, Carlos Uribe, that he needed more time to recovery from the injury he suffered in February. The wiry-haired midfielder came through the South American Libertadores Cup match against Paraguayan champions Olimpia unscathed but that was not enough to placate shareholder Fuad Char. Colombia president Cesar Gaviria had also appealed to him not to play. "Valderrama must not play again without the authorisation of Carlos Uribe," said Char, senator and owner of a supermarket chain. Valderrama, who returned to Barranquilla on Thursday, said he would obey the order. The player tore a knee ligament during a friendly international against Sweden in February and Uribe said another injury to the same knee could put him out of action for eight months.

Basile makes it official

BUENOS AIRES, Apr 16: Diego Maradona has been included in Argentina's squad for their World Cup friendly against Morocco next Wednesday, reports AFP. Coach Alfio Basile has included the former skipper in a 19-man squad for the game in the northern city of Salta — but will make him take a fitness test. Maradona, who has not played since ending his contract with Argentine league club Newell's Old Boys last December, said he felt he has made excellent progress on his way back to match fitness.

Eagles honoured

BAMAKO, Apr 16: Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare on Thursday rewarded the country's national soccer squad, The Eagles, for gaining fourth place in the African Nations Cup, reports Reuter. State television said Konare gave each of the 22-man squad a lease on a building plot and made the team's trainer an officer of the national order of merit. The Eagles were beaten 3-1 in the match between the losing finalists by Ivory Coasts Elephants last Sunday in Tunisia. Ivory Coast gave each member of its squad a one million franc (1,700 dollars) handshake. The Nigerian team, who beat Zambia 2-1 in the final, each received a three-bedroom flat and the equivalent in dollars and local currency of 17,400 dollars from military ruler Sani Abacha.

Yakushiji retains WBC crown

NAGOYA, Japan, Apr 16: Japan's Yasuei Yakushiji retained his World Boxing Council (WBC) bantamweight title Saturday, by knocking out Josefino Suarez of Mexico in the 10th round of their bout here, reports AFP. The win stretched his record to 21 wins with 15 KOs, against two defeats and one draw.

Holland keen to break jinx

AMSTERDAM, Apr 16: There is a quiet, but growing optimism in the Dutch camp that 1994 could be the year they finally shed the tag of the "best team never to have won the World Cup," reports Reuter. Runners-up in 1974, in the Cruyff-Neeskens era of total football, and again in 1978, the Dutch national side, full of world class performers, have won only one major title — the 1988 European Championship. Often their own worst enemies, the Dutch have gone into major championships riddled with self-doubt and torn apart by internal bickering over team selection and tactics. Before the World Cup in Italy four years ago, coach Thijs Libregts resigned after several star players disputed tactics and clamoured for Johan Cruyff to take over. Cruyff's club side Barcelona refused to release him and Leo Beenhakker presided over a disappointing series culminating in a quarter-final defeat by Germany. But the mood this spring is cautiously optimistic, built on a settled squad, a hard-won qualification ahead of old rivals England and a feeling that this is the last attempt at glory for the squad's band of veterans like Ronald Koeman, Ruud Gullit, Jan Wouters and Frank Rijkaard. The Dutch have suffered their moments of anguish and soap-opera en route to the United States. Striker Marco van Basten has virtually ruled himself out of the finals through injury after playing fewer than a handful of matches since a first operation on a damaged ankle in December 1992. He now faces a third major operation. Gullit has shown petulance and indifference in equal measure: and the "will-he-won't-he" saga over Johan Cruyff being appointed coach threatened briefly to scupper the current squad's unity. To cap it all, the football association is embroiled in a copyright row over its World Cup mascot, a cheery Lion called Dutchy. Coach Dick Advocaat, his position possibly strengthened by the fall in public support for Cruyff who wrangled with the Dutch authorities over money and advertising, will assemble a experienced squad built around a solid core. The backbone will be Feyenoord keeper Ed de Goey, defender Ronald Koeman of Barcelona, midfielders Frank Rijkaard of Ajax and Jan Wouters of PSV Eindhoven and Inter Milan striker Dennis Bergkamp. The inclusion of Gullit, in inspirational form since his move to Sampdoria from AC Milan, would, however, be a huge boost. Much depends on his relationship with Advocaat between now and June. Gullit has not worn the national orange jersey since he was substituted against England a year ago. He then opted to quit, disillusioned by his won poor form and the coach's insistence he play as a traditional winger. Now he has told Advocaat he wants to return to the squad, but has suggested he is too busy in Italy to turn out in the Netherlands' warm-up games. If he does return, he is likely to be given a freer role up front, supported by Bergkamp. Advocaat is unlikely to tamper with a successful and flexible 3-3-4 system, designed to accommodate players who are quick-witted, technically gifted and comfortable on the ball. The squad's first warm-up match in Tunisia in January gave them a taste of what to expect in the heat of Orlando against opponents from the so-called lower divisions of world soccer. The match ended 2-2. More recently they spoiled Scotland's first outing at a renovated Hampden Park, cruising to a 1-0 win and extending their unbeaten run to 11 matches. They last lost in September 1992, beaten by Norway en route to the World Cup finals. The game against Scotland showed that the Dutch have a more disciplined approach these days and they also have more than adequate replacements for their stars. This team has few weak links. I have seen signs of the players really wanting to roll up their sleeves," Advocaat said after the match. Ajax defender Danny Blind won Dutch media plaudits as stand-in for Ronald Koeman at the heart of the defence and Wim Jonk's display suggested Wouters will have his work cut out to be certain of starting in midfield alongside Rijkaard. Rob Witschge and Arthur Numan will contest the other midfield place. Foggia's Bryan Roy, scorer of a spectacular winner in Glasgow, has finally proved himself at international level, and Marc Overmars and Feyenoord's Gaston Taument will vie for the other flank position. Hang Gillhaus, Aron Winter and Peter Van Vossen are on stand-by for Bergkamp and Anderlecht's John Bosman. One of few problem areas for Advocaat is at right back where 30-year-old Stan Valckx, currently in form for Sporting Lisbon, may be preferred to Feyenoord's Ulrich Van Gobel.

WC officials working a way out

NEW YORK, Apr 16: World Cup organisers are reviewing a controversial move to try and probe the backgrounds of reporters seeking accreditation, reports Reuter. "The whole thing is under review," said World Cup senior press officer John Griffin on Friday. "It will be reviewed by our people in Los Angeles, to what extent I don't know." The media has been asked to sign waivers authorising the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and all state and local US law enforcement agencies to release criminal histories and records to World Cup officials. The move has been widely attacked. Major US newspapers have slammed World Cup officials. The New York Times declared it was "aghast". "It strikes us as the grossest invasion of the personal privacy of the journalists," the Times said in a letter sent to World Cup USA 1994 chairman Alan Rothenberg. "To carry on their livelihood, members of the media should not be required to yield their civil rights." Britains Daily Mail reported on Friday that the Irish team had asked their government to sort out "the security shambles" prompted by similar forms for players. It quoted veteran defender David O'Leary as saying, "I think this form is totally unnecessary. Why should they want to know about peoples backgrounds like this?" A spokesman for the Irish federation was quoted as saying: "We've had a copy of the security form faxed to us and I think it's fair to say we're not too impressed."

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Quiz 2. Read the instructions carefully. Then tick (✓) the answer which you think is correct. Includes 10 multiple choice questions about the World Cup and a table for marking answers. Includes 'COMPETITION RULES' and 'ENTRIES CLOSE ON 23-04-94'.