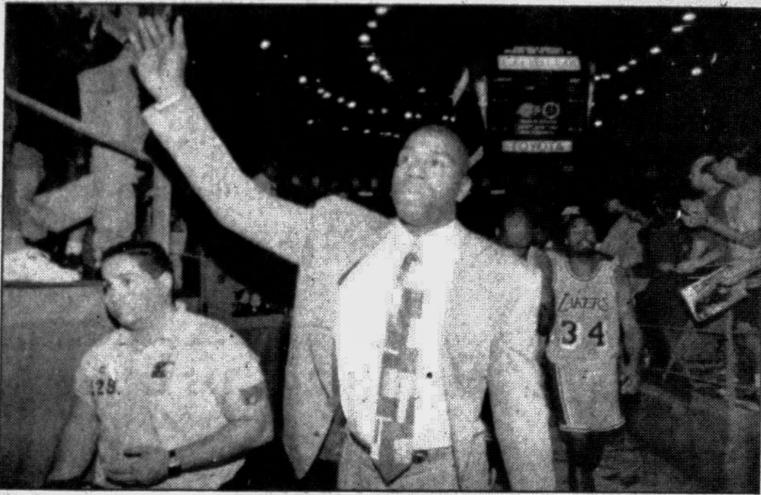


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Head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers Earvin 'Magic' Johnson waves to fans after a game with Utah Jazz which Lakers lost 103-97 in California on Sunday. The loss was the tenth in a row for Johnson, who will not coach next season. — AFP photo

FIFA wants it in black & white

ZURICH, Switzerland, Apr 26: The International Football Federation (FIFA) reserved judgement on Monday about whether the suspensions of players banned in the Valenciennes-Marseille bribery scandal could be lifted, reports Reuter.

The French Football Federation (FFF) on Friday banned three players involved in the affair until July 1, 1996 but said they would be willing to see them play outside France from July 1 this year if FIFA agreed.

A FIFA spokesman said: "Until we have the position in writing from the French Federation, we can't make any comments or statements on this affair."

The spokesman acknowledged that the French request, as reported, was unusual and probably did not have a precedent.

FIFA normally extends domestic bans for serious offences, such as corruption, to make them effective worldwide.

The three players involved in the affair are Marseille midfielder Jean-Jacques Eydelie and Valenciennes players Christophe Robert and Jorge Burruchaga.

Burruchaga, who has played for Argentina in two World Cup finals, is back in his native country and was hoping for clearance to play in this summer's World Cup in the United States which starts in June.

All three players have been suspended since the start of the current season and Robert, as well as Burruchaga, has expressed an interest in returning to the game.

China start afresh

BEIJING, Apr 26: China, stung by their poor showing in failing to qualify for this year's World Cup finals, has picked Qi Wusheng as coach of national soccer team to replace German Klaus Schlappner, the People's Daily said today, reports Reuter.

The first task for Qi, former coach of China's Olympic soccer squad, will be preparing the team for the Asian Games in Hiroshima in October.

The paper gave a mixed review of the performance of Schlappner, whose contract was due to end this year. It said he introduced advanced theories and professional management and training methods that were effective in developing football in China.

But because of the gap in soccer development between Germany and China — and Schlappner's limited understanding of Chinese sportsmen — he had made mistake that contributed to the country's unsatisfactory performance, it said.

China failed to reach the last Asian qualifying group after being eliminated by Iraq who were themselves knocked out as Saudi Arabia and South Korea won through to represent Asia in the United States next month.

South Korea can't afford to lose

SEOUL, Apr 26: South Korea will be looking for a first victory at the World Cup finals — both to improve on a dismal record and because they believe it can help them in their bid to host the 2002 tournament, reports Reuter.

The South Koreans will be playing in their third World Cup tournament in a row and fourth altogether with the aim of trying to get through from the first round for the first time.

They open their tough Group C campaign against Spain in Dallas. They also meet defending champions Germany and Bolivia, the side they fell they could beat to achieve their primary goal of a place in the last 16.

They have not won in eight matches at the World Cup finals — including the 1954 tournament in Switzerland where they conceded 16 goals and scored none in two games.

The Korean's only point came from a 1-1 draw against Bulgaria in Mexico in 1986, their best tournament by far. They scored one goal against eventual winners Argentina and two in a 3-2 loss to defending champions Italy.

They only managed one goal in three matches in Italy four years ago.

They can only improve on this dismal record which contrasts with that of their North Korean neighbours, with whom they would like to joint forces

to host the 2002 tournament.

North Korea reached the quarter-finals in their only World Cup tournament in England in 1966 after upsetting Italy 1-0 they were 3-0 up against Portugal before losing their quarter-final 5-3.

South Korea coach Kim Ho says he has a few tricks up his sleeve to boost the confidence of his unfancied side.

"The biggest problem is that the team lacks international experience. The players are pretty young and haven't



played many matches against foreign teams," said Kim after his return from a series of warm-up matches in the United States.

"We did not play our best, but they were friendly matches. We need to keep some of our secrets to ourselves," he said.

"In the big games, the players tend to lack self-confidence. They seem to 'shrink'."

South Korea notched up

two wins, two losses and two draws in the warm-up matches in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas.

"The games did help us to gain more confidence in ourselves — and that's important at this stage," Kim said.

The South Koreans have yet to decide whether to bring in Kim Joo-Sung, Asian footballer-of-the-year in 1989, who followed 1986 veteran Cha Boom-Keun into the German Bundesliga and is now with Second Division Bochum.

The midfielder, a veteran of the 1990 World Cup in Italy and last year's Asian qualifiers, has been criticised for his weak performances in the national side.

But a South Korean Football Association (KFA) official said Kim Joo-Sung's chances of being picked were good.

"He is still one of the most talented and skillful players in Asia," he said.

"Kim's performances in Germany are impressive and he is almost certain to get a chance to play again in the World Cup."

The flamboyant 28-year-old midfielder has the skill to break through apparently solid defences and create chances.

South Korea are also pinning their hopes on strikers Hwang Sun-Hong and Seo Jung-Won, who both played in Italy four years ago and are noted for their speed and

sharpness around the penalty area.

Goalkeeper Choi In-Young, another veteran of the Italian campaign, is also a star player in the squad. The agile Choi made many spectacular and crucial saves in the preliminaries.

The South Koreans earned the right to join Saudi Arabia in this year's finals as the two Asian representatives in a nail-biting climax to the regional qualifiers.

Japan looked to have a place wrapped up, but conceded a last-minute goal to Iraq in their final match, allowing the South Koreans to squeeze through and salvage their reputation as Asia's primary soccer power.

South Korea, who have been to more World Cup finals than any other Asian country, face a strong rival bid for the 2002 tournament from Japan, whose facilities are superior.

"How we perform (in the US finals) is very important to give the rest of the world game a good impression," said Park Kun-Woo, secretary general of South Korea's 2002 bid committee, in a recent interview with the London magazine World Soccer.

Cash prizes to the players for reaching the last 16 are expected to greatly exceed the 30 million won (37,000 dollars) each which they were awarded for getting through to the finals.

Eves' soccer taking off in US

NEW YORK, Apr 26: Cheered on by 60,000 spectators, the player took the pass and scored: The United States were 2-1 up and winning the World Cup, reports Reuter.

Later, as fireworks exploded over the crowded stadium, the jubilant US players lifted the trophy. An impossible dream? Maybe for the inexperienced US team who take centre stage when the World Cup kicks off in Chicago on June 17 before royalty, presidents and an expected television audience of around 1.5 billion.

But not for Michelle Akers-Stahl. She has been there, seen it and done it all before, scoring the winner when the US beat Norway in the first women's World Cup in Beijing's Tianhe Stadium in 1991.

The women's trophy, a golden ball supported on heavy pedestals, may look rather different to the graceful lines of the men's Cup but the emotion for the winner is much the same.

"A French student once asked me what it was like to hold that trophy," said Akers-Stahl in a telephone interview from her Florida home after a recent Caribbean tour during which she scored three goals in two matches.

"He said he had dreamed of holding it since he was a little boy. Ninety five per cent of the world has dreamed of doing it, but I have actually done it."

Akers-Stahl, who scored five goals in the US team's 7-0 thrashing of Taiwan in the World Cup, went on to top the tournament scorers' list with a tally of 10.

The United States had earlier beaten Brazil, Sweden, Japan and Germany in their path to the final.

Women's soccer, struggling elsewhere in the world where the traditional men's game holds sway, is booming in US schools and colleges.

And the women's success

has been important in lending local credibility to the decision to award the men's World Cup to a country without a strong soccer tradition.

"There have been a lot of sceptics concerning our hosting the World Cup," said women's coach Anson Dorrance last year.

"But as we showed in China, with continued support and development we will be competitive in the world arena at all levels."

Tom Lange, director of communications for US Soccer, said there were 15 million soccer players in the United States and approximately 38 per cent were women.

"In terms of sheer player participation, it's growing faster than the men's game. The number of women now compared to five years ago has grown eastern," he said.

Akers-Stahl, the highest international scorer in US women's soccer history with 62 goals in 67 games, said one of the reasons for soccer's popularity among women was the lack of prejudice in the United States against it.

She trains with men, eagerly watches international matches to pick up tips from the stars and intends to play in three World Cups and the Olympics before she retires.

"Here it's OK for women to be successful in sport and we can do anything we want equal to men. In Europe it's a man's sport and much harder for women to play football."

"In Sweden it's a little different — women there have a much stronger and more independent role," added Akers-Stahl, who will play in Sweden until late May when she returns to the United States to watch the World Cup finals.

For her, and many others, the US men's team have a vitally important role to play at the World Cup.

"The men are in the hot seat now. They have to do well for the game and to help the women in 1995," she said.

"It's not a case of gender. It's the most popular sport for kids in America and we have to see it as a team project.

That said, she just wanted the players to enjoy the experience: "We're all going to be supportive of them whether they get beyond the first round or not."

Akers-Stahl recognised the women had it considerably easier against the likes of Brazil and Germany at the 1991 women's World Cup finals than the men will this year.

"People involved in soccer understand why we could do it," she said. "The men's competition has been going on for so long while we (women's soccer) started in the 1970s.

"We're not so far behind here as a result. It's a matter of 15 years for US rather than 100 years for the men. So what tips can she offer the men?"

The answer, perhaps predictably, is practice.

"Practice, that's all I do. I just practise technique and different situations around the goal for one and a half hours every day, time and again. When I score it's like a frozen moment in a training session," she said.

I train with guys as there are not enough women who can stretch me. It's fine as long as I'm not challenging for headballs (headers). I can compete really well.

"But it depends, who you train with... I played for a while with some Latin guys but they got so angry if I got the ball I figured it wasn't a good idea for me to keep playing if they were going to get pissed off with me all the time."

With four of the World Cup teams training in and around her home in the Orlando area this summer, Akers-Stahl said she had already mapped out some of her priorities.

"I'm going to be down at the Dutch training camp every minute I can, watching those guys," she said. "I want to get some tips from Ron Koeman on taking free kicks."

It's 'ole' all the way for Mexico

MEXICO CITY, Apr 26: Fast, attacking football, a world record-holding striker, a colourful goalkeeper — sweeper and the vociferous support of their countrymen could make for a potent Mexican cocktail in the World Cup finals, reports Reuter.

Rapidfire ground passes and deadly finishing took Mexico to an unexpected and spectacular second place last year in the Copa America, Latin America's top international tournament, losing to Argentina in the final. Prior to that, they romped through the World Cup qualifying round against lesser opposition and won the regional CONCACAF Gold Cup with some crushing victories, chief among them a 9-0 drubbing of lowly Martinique.

In that match Luis Roberto Alves, known as "Zaguinho," equalled the world record for goals in a full international, finding the net seven times and suggesting Mexico may have found a suitably thrilling replacement for the ageing but still dangerous Hugo Sanchez.

Sanchez, whose highly successful incursion in Spanish soccer has taken him to all three Madrid teams — Atletico, Real Madrid and now the less-glamorous Rayo Vallecano — is still expected to join the Mexican squad, raising hopes that a few of his trademark somersaults may still be in evidence for Mexican fans.

Thousands of the millions of Mexicans living in the United States are expected to travel far and wide to support the team.

Mexico, quarter-finalists when they hosted the tournament in 1970 and 1986 World Cup in Italy.

The player who immediately stands out in their modern game is maverick goalkeeper Jorge Campos, whose style is diametrically opposed to that of the classical Antonio Carbajal, the only man to have played in five World Cups, appearing in every tournament from 1950 to 1966.

Campos' enthusiastic forays away from his goal have been known to lead him not only out

of the area but out of his own half as he shows off his dribbling and heading talents to the delight of his fans.

As a goalkeeper Campos makes up for his lack of eight with great agility, even though his barely-repressed ambitions to also be a centre-forward can lead to hideous errors.

In a friendly against Colombia last year, Campos lost the game for Mexico by trying to outdrizzle an attacker outside his area and losing the ball — shades of the equally unconventional Colombian Rene Higuita.

Mejia, who took over last year, called up a new genera-

tion of young players, many from UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico Club side he had previously played for and coached.

Under his guidance the Mexicans have largely eschewed aerial football to play to their strengths: Precise, elegant and complex passing patterns that regularly draw bullfighting cries of 'ole' from fans as they bamboozle the opposition.

The Mexicans nevertheless have a difficult group and will have to work hard to beat their previous best in World Cup competition.

They meet three European sides in Group E, Norway and Italy in Washington and Ireland in Orlando.

Defender Ramon Ramirez, dangerous when he joins the attack, and Ignacio Ambriz, who takes a pivotal role in midfield and has a fearsome drive from 30 metres, are key players in Mexico's adventurous new tactics.

Midfielders David Patino and Alberto Garcia Aspe, like Ramirez and Ambriz, shone in the Copa America, catching the eye on a top international stage for the first time.

Atletico Madrid's Luis Garcia, a deadly finisher and Carlos Hermosillo of Cruz Azul and Luis Miguel Salvador of Atlante, the top two scorers in the Mexican league last season, all compete for attacking roles.

This will be Mexico's 10th appearance in the finals and they join Brazil (15), Italy (13), West Germany (11) and Argentina (11) whose number of appearances run to double figures.



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Quiz 3. Entries close on 3-5-94. Read the instructions carefully. Then tick (✓) the answer which you think is correct. 1. Which country was the 1930 World Cup runners-up? Chile, USA, Argentina, Naranjito. 2. What was the name of the 1982 World Cup mascot? Pique, Ola, Detroit. 3. Where will the '94 World Cup opening ceremony be held? Chicago, New York, Basile. 4. Which Argentine coach was nicknamed 'Big Nose'? Biliardo, Menotti, Kuwait. 5. Which Asian country played in the 1978 World Cup? Iran, Israel, Meial. 6. Who was the West German manager in 1966? Derwall, Schoen, Warken. 7. Who was the referee in the 1974 World Cup Final? Taylor, Reader, 1962. 8. When was the World Cup first televised? 1954, 1958, 1962. 9. How many European teams will play in World Cup USA '94? 11, 12, 13. 10. Which country is making its debut in the WC finals this year? Sweden, Spain, Greece.