

Stardom awaits Baggio

ROME, Apr 29: More is expected of Roberto Baggio, the European footballer-of-the-year, than perhaps any other player at this summer's World Cup, reports Reuter.

His soccer-loving Italian compatriots are hoping the small, nimble attacker, will lift their team to its fourth World Cup triumph while millions of fans across the globe hope that his class will make the tournament one to remember.

With Dutchman Marco van Basten injured and Argentine Diego Maradona out of condition, soccer is desperately short of gifted individuals who can thrill the crowds.

Baggio, deadly from set pieces and a fine passer and dribbler of the ball, has the ability to prove that soccer can still be the beautiful game it was when Pele led the Brazilians to three world titles between 1958 and 1970.

"In a game which is increasingly uniform he is one of the few who can tip the balance," said former French international Michel Platini, whose number 10 shirt Baggio has inherited at Juventus.

The year 1993 was a triumphant one for Baggio with national coaches polled by FIFA naming him as the world's top player.

The 27-year-old also picked up a winner's medal for the first time in his career as he inspired Juventus to victory in the UEFA Cup.

These triumphs helped silence critics who had the strength of character to exploit his talents to the full.

A practising Buddhist, Baggio had to fight back from a serious knee injury which almost wrecked his career before it had started.

One of eight children, he

No joy for Irish, Italian fans

NEW YORK, Apr 29: World Cup organisers announced on Thursday the sale of a limited number of tickets and dashed the hopes of thousands of Italian and Irish fans desperately seeking to support their teams, reports Reuter.

World Cup chairman Alan Rothenberg told a news conference some 450,000 tickets would be sold from May 1 after being released by world body FIFA, sponsors and soccer associations but five first round matches were sold out.

They were Italy v Ireland and Norway in New York, Argentina v Greece and Nigeria in Boston and the clash between neighbours Belgium and the Netherlands in Orlando.

"No (more) tickets will be available for these matches," said Rothenberg, adding that no individual tickets were being sold for semifinals, the third place play-off and final.

"We expect again the response will be overwhelming," he said. Earlier offers, sold as packages, were snapped up and US organisers have already sold more tickets than were available at the last World Cup in Italy in 1990.

Prices ranged from 25 dollars for the cheapest first round ticket to 140 dollars for top category quarter-final seats.

Dermot Brangan, press officer at the Irish consulate in New York, said many fans, unable to buy tickets at face value for Ireland's game against Italy, would stay home.

"It will probably mean the

Beckenbauer not amused

PARIS, Apr 29: Angry Franz Beckenbauer finally spoke out on Thursday over the incomprehensible decision to make Bayern Munich play their last three Bundesliga matches in eight days, reports AFP.

Though he saw the reason for a replay of their 2-1 victory over Nuremberg last week when a wide Thomas Helmer back heel was given as a goal, he was fuming over their new schedule.

May 3 is the new date for the fixture, cancelled after video evidence, permitted in Germany, tough outlawed in international football, clearly sowed there had been no goal.

Instead of being two points ahead of Kaiserslautern with two games to go, the teams are level pegging with Munich having a game in hand.

However, Helmer was far from downcast by the decision.

Further problems for Beckenbauer came in midweek when German coach Berti Vogts refused to release key players Helmer and Lothar Matthaeus from Germany's trip to the United Arab Emirates. Both players will have played

four matches in 11 days.

Freiburg, in the relegation zone and two points and a place below Nuremberg, are angry their rivals have a chance of increasing their tally.

In Italy the last day of the season sees a host of UEFA Cup and relegation issues still to be decided.

Foggia and Napoli and Roma and Torino face each other with all four teams still in with a chance of clinching the one UEFA Cup place still up for grabs. An extra place will become available next Wednesday if Parma beat Arsenal in the European Cup Winners' Cup final.

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In Holland, Ajax need just a point from Sunday's home clash with SC Heerenveen to ensure their 24th Dutch title and their first since 1990.

Feyenoord's chance of catching the Amsterdam giants all-but disappeared on Wednesday when they dropped a point to Groningen while Ajax were winning at Roda JC Kerkrade.

Yet Barcelona, who host Sporting Gijon on Sunday, may

have to upstage the table-toppers on the last day, as they did to Real Madrid during the last two seasons, if they are to win their fourth consecutive title.

Strong-serving Matsuoka dominated the first two sets but then allowed Evernden, who was playing his 50th Davis Cup match for New Zealand back into the contest.

Evernden rallied from 1-4 to 4-5 in the fourth set, but then dropped serve to lose the match.

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