

WORLD CUP USA '94

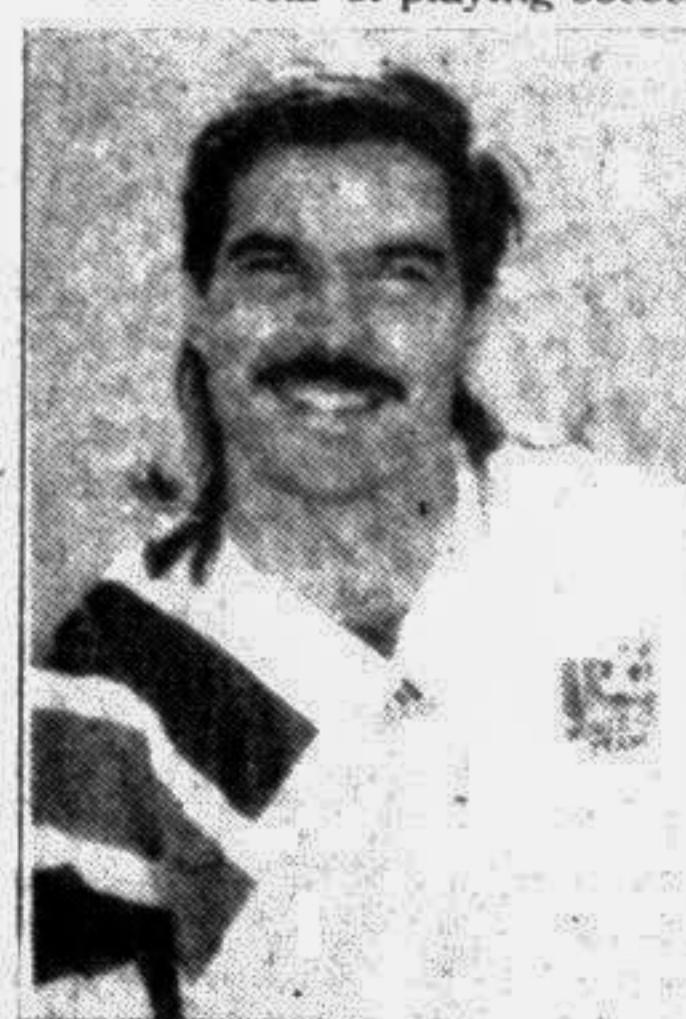


Toenails, feet, blisters, Balboa

PASADENA, Calif. June 7. Feet. Shoes. Toenails. Blisters. Not necessarily in that order.

For US sweeper Marcelo Balboa, such are the topics these days for serious discussion since he's healed and recuperated from a ligament stress tear and partial tear of the cartilage in his right knee, reports AP.

Then there's the normal wear and tear of playing soccer



MARCELO BALBOA

all the time.

"Your big toe nail dies and breaks off," the 6-foot-1, 170-pounder said. "Then you get big ugly blisters on your heels. That's the price to pay by some of the guys; not all of the guys, just some of them."

On April 17, 1993, he paid a bigger price.

It was a game between the US and Iceland. Balboa's right foot found an indentation on the field where a football yard marker used to lie. He heard a pop and plopped to the ground.

For the highest scoring (nine goals) US defender ever, the son of a former professional soccer player in Argentina, the pop burst his dream of a soccer legacy.

There was surgery and the predicted recovery period of nine months to a year. But Balboa, who grew up watching and playing soccer, used the down time to speed up his physical recovery.

He was always pushing himself to act as if he was no mechanical device that bent and straightened his leg, as if a plastic sleeve didn't surge cold water to keep the swelling down, as if two tubes didn't drain non-circulating blood from the knee. He was advised not to climb the stairs to his second-floor bedroom in his Laguna Nigel apartment, but he did, even though some nights he'd slip on a step, fall and lay in the dark for hours.

He returned to the team a short eight months later, playing briefly in a game against El Salvador. The 26-year-old has been with the US national team since 1988 and played in all three 1990 World Cup games. The year before he hurt his knee, he was named the US male soccer athlete of the year.

The day it was announced that he would be part of the 1994 US team, Balboa said he hoped the fans would be as excited as he would be.

"This place is just gonna be rockin," he said.

The United States is set to open World Cup play June 18 against Switzerland in Detroit, and Balboa's blistered feet and hurting toenails will be there.

Rothenberg
retorts

NEW YORK, June 7: Eleven days before the kick-off of World Cup 1994, the event's chairman accused the Greek team's delegation of containing thieves and liars, reports AFP.

Alan Rothenberg said Monday at least some members of the Greek delegation must know details about items stolen from the Greek Locker room during a tune-up match Sunday at nearby Giants Stadium.



BARCELONA, MAY 1994. AT A MEETING OF FIFA - WORLD SOCCER'S GOVERNING BODY - THEIR PRESIDENT JULES RIMET FINALLY GETS THE SEAL OF APPROVAL FOR HIS LONG-STANDING DREAM - A GLOBAL SOCCER TOURNAMENT.



URUGUAY, HOME OF THE REIGNING OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS IS SELECTED FOR THE FIRST-EVER WORLD CUP. THE HOSTS BUILD A BRAND NEW STADIUM IN THE CENTRE OF MONTEVIDEO.



DESPITE URUGUAY'S OFFER TO PAY THEIR EXPENSES, ONLY FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES UNDERTAKE THE THREE-WEEK STEAMER JOURNEY TO SOUTH AMERICA. ONE OF THESE IS ROMANIA, WHOSE TEAM IS PICKED BY THEIR FOOTBALL-LOVING MONARCH, KING CAROL.



ON 13 JULY 1930, THE WORLD CUP BEGINS. LUCIEN LAURENT OF FRANCE SCORES THE TOURNAMENT'S FIRST-EVER GOAL AS HIS TEAM BEAT MEXICO 4-1.



IN THE ARGENTINA-CHILE MATCH, A FIGHT BREAKS OUT AFTER A BAD FOUL BY ARGENTINIAN CENTRE-HALF MONTI. POLICE HAVE TO SEPARATE THE COMBATANTS.



IT'S NOT LONG BEFORE CONTROVERSY REARS ITS HEAD. IN FRANCE'S NEXT GAME, AGAINST ARGENTINA, THE REFEREE BLOWS FOR FULL TIME SIX MINUTES EARLY - JUST AS LANGILLER LOOKS SET TO EQUALISE. THE FRENCH LOSE 1-0.



SURPRISE PACKERS OF THE COMPETITION ARE THE CHINA WHO ADVANCE BY BEATING BOTH BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY 3-0. THEY ARE TAGGED THE SHOT-PUTTERS ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR BULKY BUILD.

Whither eternal favourites?



RIO DE JANEIRO, June 7: It is the land of samba soccer, the nation that produced Pele. It may have more world-class players than any other nation on the planet, reports AP.

Yet they haven't won the World Cup since 1970.

Once again, Brazil are favourites to win the title for the fourth time. Once again, 22 players have the eyes of the nation on them and the pressure that goes along with them.

"Things are going very favourably, and I have a strong feeling that we'll bring back the title," said defender Jorginho, who plays for Bayern Munich.

"We have a great team, with players that play on some of the best clubs in the world," added Bebeto. "Soccer, desire, courage and unity I guarantee we have."

True enough. But it wouldn't be the first time Brazil came into a World Cup as favourites only to drop out early, not so much outplayed as self-destructed by overconfidence, money squabbles or personal vanities.

Cracks showed on Sunday when they were held to a 1-1 draw with lightly regarded Canada.

The only team to qualify for every World Cup, Brazil's laurels are gathering dust. Their three World Cup championships - in 1958, 1962 and 1970 - have been marched by Germany and Italy.

Now, with the most talent

in a decade, Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira is determined not to repeat past mistakes.

Since he took command of the team in 1991, Parreira has sought to balance youth and experience, creativity and tactics, daring and caution. Half of the 22 players are from top European clubs, including eight of the starting 11.

Training is based on computerised physical evaluation, using software specially developed by two-time world club champions Sao Paulo. Players undergo "positive mentalisation" sessions to create a "winner's mentality." Even superstition is respected.

"We might lose the Cup, but it won't be off the field," said fullback Ricardo Gomes, of Paris-St Germain.

On the field, Brazil's big asset is - where else? - on offence. The starting duo of Bebeto and Romario is widely considered among the world's best.

Romario, a stocky striker with a sprinter's speed and wizardly ball control, led Spain's Barcelona to their fourth straight Spanish league title, finishing as the league's top scorer with 30 goals.

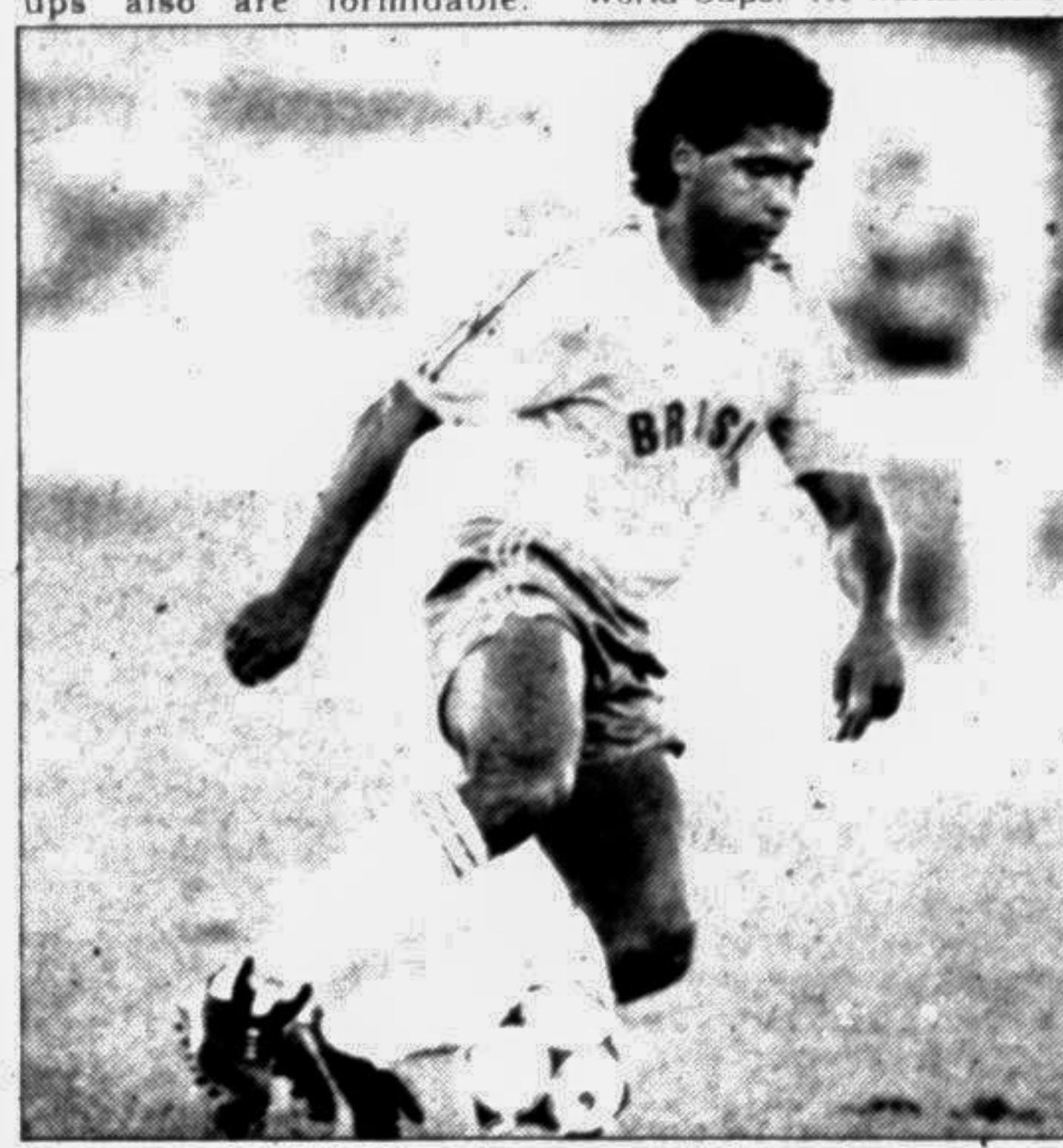
"I know they'll throw the responsibility on me if Brazil are eliminated, but I'm ready for it," said Romario, whose ego matches his talent. "I'll give my life to bring the fourth

championship."

Bebeto, the other half of the duo, is a little acrobat who uses quickness to bat defenders. A clairvoyant passer and deadly shooter, he is an ideal complement for Romario.

"Aren't we the perfect duo?" he asked, rhetorically.

Maybe so, but their backups also are formidable:



ROMARIO... the mercurial forward

Muller, a veteran of two World Cups, and Ronaldo, a 17-year-old sensation who has drawn raves from people who know among them Pele, Tostao and Zico.

Ronaldo is the best attacker in Brazilian soccer," said Zico, a veteran of three World Cups. "He works the ball

equally with his left and right foot, is intelligent, quick and cold like the great scorers."

Ronaldo also is seen as something of a good-luck charm. Assistant coach Mario Zagalo, who played on two World Cup champion teams and coached the third, recalls that in 1958 there also was a 17-year-old phenomenon who went on to considerable success - Pele.

The solid defence is a reunion of veterans from the 1990 Cup: Taffarel, Jorginho, Ricardo Rocha, Ricardo Gomes and Branco. Young stars Cafu and Leonardo, both of Sao Paulo, also could get a chance.

The midfield is the only question mark. But it's a big

one. Mauro Silva and Dunga are destroyers. Zinho is a worker ant, scurrying back and forth but also essentially a defender. That leaves Rai as playmaker and field general, the vital link between the midfield and the offense that makes everything work.

But Rai, the brother of former all-star Socrates, hasn't been up to the task. Since a brilliant 1992 season, when he led Sao Paulo its first world championship, his skills have just seemed to vanish.

Parreira knows he has a problem but says there's not one else to fill Rai's role. All he can do, he says, is hopes that

Rai recovers his old form.

"It's true, we lack creativity. I look but I don't find it," Parreira shrugged. "The fact is Brazil today doesn't have a great No 10 jersey any more. Like Rivelino, an Ademir da Gama or a Zico. Zico was the last. Give me one and I'll put him on the team right now."

Rai insists his slump is behind him. His optimism at training camp was contagious.

"You can bet on me," he said. "I had problems, but they're over. I've never been so confident, physically and mentally."

But fans here worry that Parreira's book-heavy tactics and concern with defense have hamstrung the attack. Public opinion polls show Brazilians want a third attacker - and maybe a fourth and a fifth.

The memory of the 1990 World Cup debacle is still strong. Brazil tried to adopt a European-style defence with a sweeper, but they players didn't understand it. The result: Brazil were ousted in the second round 1-0 by archrivals Argentina.

Fullback Gomes said it couldn't happen again.

The group is similar but the characteristics are different, starting with tactics. We have a more offensive team and two exceptional attackers in Bebeto and Romario," he said.

"In 1990, there was not unity, the fight for positions was terrible and not always clean. The difference is in our conduct, in our experience and ability to learn from our mistakes."

Frustrated Fijian fans

SUVA, Fiji. June 7: Fijian soccer officials plan an official complaint to the sport's international governing body after the United States denied visas to dozens of fans seeking to attend the World Cup finals, reports AP.

Fiji Football Association secretary Jitendra Maharaj told the Australian Associated Press that of more than 70 fans who bought tickets for this month's tournament, 56 had been refused visas to visit the United States.

He said the refusal to grant visas to so many fans was strange because Fiji had supported the United States in its bid to stage the tournament, which starts next week.

"We may have to think twice about supporting them in future," said Maharaj. "If a country wants to stage the World Cup it should make some kind of allowances for fans to attend," he said.

Dennis Rounds, a spokesman for the US Embassy in Suva, said many of the applicants were refused visas because they did not provide enough evidence of financial assets and commitments in Fiji to ensure their return. He said the United States had made no special allowances for fans wanting to attend the World Cup.

"Normal procedures were followed," he said.

Too many empty rooms

NEW YORK, June 7: Hotel and tourism officials are complaining that World Cup soccer officials greatly overestimated the number of hotel rooms needed for the tournament this month, reports AP.

Soccer officials held 25,000 room nights in Washington but have dropped the total to 30,000, according to Cheryl Carey of the Washington Convention and Visitors Association.

Hotel room nights in Dallas have dropped from 304,000 to 65,000, Less Tanaka, executive vice president of the Hotel Association of Greater Dallas, said Monday.

"I don't think Dallas is any different from the other eight venues as how we'll do," Tanaka said.

Tanaka figures on dhs 23.9 million in lost revenue, based on an average of dhs 100 per night.

"We just wish that the World Cup would have been more realistic in their estimates of the number of room nights to be utilized," Tanaka said. "Obviously, they were overly optimistic."

John Marks, president of the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the World Cup accommodations bureau reserved 188,000 room-nights in the San Francisco Bay area more than a year ago, but 25,000 are still open.

"The drop is alarming, to say the least," Marks said. "They just absolutely overestimated their ability to sell rooms and - or their demand on those rooms. Frankly, I don't think there will be as many international visitors as we had hoped for."

Before the December draw that determined where teams will play in the first round, planners expected to sell 220,000 room-nights in the Boston area. But just 40,000 room-nights have been booked, according to Art Canter, director of the Massachusetts Lodging Association.

Laudrup to join Real

MADRID, June 7: Danish international midfielder Michael Laudrup has reached agreement to play for Real Madrid for the next two seasons, club president Ramon Mendoza announced on Monday, reports Reuter.

PROFILES : BRAZIL

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 7: Following are brief profiles of the 22 members of Brazil's World Cup squad:

GOALKEEPERS:

Taffarel (Claudio Andre Taffarel). Age 28. Club: Reggiana; 61 caps. Became first Brazilian goalkeeper to play in Europe when he joined Italy's Parma following 1990 World Cup; joined Reggiana after excess of foreigners forced him out of Parma team.

Zetti (Armelinio Quagliatolo). 29. Sao Paulo; 5; Second choice goalkeeper with excellent reflexes but weaker on high crosses.

Gilmar (Gilmar Luis Rinaldi). 35. Flamengo; 7; Third-choice goalkeeper with similar qualities and defects to Zetti.

DEFENDERS:

Jorginho (Jorge Amorim Campos). 29. Bay. munich; 45; Fast, attacking full-back regarded by Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira as the best in his position in the world.

Brancos (Claudio Ibraim Vaz Leal). 30. Fluminense; 70; Aggressive full back with a thunderbolt left foot shot; quick temper and huge desire to do well for his country. Sharply criticised in Brazil as being past his prime and first team place threatened. Previous clubs include Porto; Genoa and Brazil's Gremio.

Leonardo (Leonardo Nasamento De Araujo). 24. Sao Paulo; 10; Left back this season deployed by his club in a creative midfield role with enormous effect. Could play in either position if picked.

Ricardo Rocha (Ricardo Roberto Barreto da Rocha). 32. Vasco da Gama; 38; Very little gets past Ricardo Rocha, a central defender with perfectly timed tackle and good ball distribution; returned to Brazil last year after two years with Real Madrid.

Ronaldo (Ronaldo Luiz Nazario de Lima). 17. Cruzeiro; 2; Despite his age, he has already scored more than 50 goals for his club which has led to inevitable comparisons with the legendary Pele, who starred in the 1958 World Cup at the age of 17, however, he has little experience against top-class opposition and is not initially expected to be in the starting line-up.

Marcio Santos (Marcio Santos). 24. Bordeaux; 22; Solid central defender handicapped by lack of top international experience which makes him likely to lose out to the two Ricardos in the fight for a first team place.

MIDFIELDERS:

Mauro Silva (Mauro da Silva). 26. Deportivo la Coruna; 32; Solid, Bulky, ball-winning midfielder and one of the key players behind the rise of the previously unfashionable Spanish club; he joined two years ago from Brazil's Bragantino.