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Awaiting a fabulous carnival



MISSION VIEJO, Calif., June 12: The final banners are being hung. The final nails are being driven in.

Nearly six years after it was awarded to the United States, the World Cup arrives in America on Friday: reports AP.

Fifty-two games will be played in nine cities over 31 days by 24 teams to decide the world's soccer champions. Stadiums will be filled and about 3.65 million tickets will be sold for the quadrennial tournament, breaking almost all World Cup attendance records.

But it still remains to be seen if this event will achieve its purpose — to finally establish the world's most popular sport in the United States.

"I think by the end of the tournament the United States will know about the World Cup," Alan Rothenberg, head of the US organizing committee, said this week.

Opinion polls thus far paint a far different picture. Most show just one-quarter to one-third of Americans surveyed realize the tournament is being played in the United States this summer.

"I think we're making incredible progress," Rothenberg said. "The last poll said 20 per cent. Now it's 31 per cent. That's a 50 per cent increase."

Teams have been in the United States since May 17, when Saudi Arabia became that first to arrive. The last due in

is Germany, who arrive Monday.

The Germans, the defending champions, open the tournament Friday afternoon at Soldier Field, with pregame entertainment scheduled to include American pop singers Diana Ross, Daryl Hall, Jon Secada and Sounds of Blackness, and the crowd scheduled to include US President Bill Clinton and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The United States, who haven't advanced past the first round since 1930, open against Switzerland the next morning at the Pontiac Silverdome in the first indoor game in World Cup history. No hosts have failed to advance to the second round in 14 previous World Cups.

"We play at the top of our level, and we have a little bit of luck. I think we can accomplish it," midfielder Tab Ramos said. "We don't have the type of pressure all the teams have from their countries."

By the time the tournament concludes on July 17 in the Rose Bowl, an estimated total of 32 billion viewers will have watched the games.

TV ratings in the US are expected to be minimal. Rothenberg prefers to concentrate on the ticket sales. Thirty-nine of the games have sold out individual tickets, with the rest available only through premium packages.

Rothenberg is concerned that too much attention is being paid to things that could go

wrong and cites the positive experiences of recent exhibition games.

"I don't think we're going to have terrorist acts," he said. "I don't think we're going to have hooligans. Last weekend was a good sign of that. We had 91-thousand plus at the Rose Bowl, 73,000-plus at the Meadowlands. They were happy, excited, demonstrative, with noisemakers, with flags and we had virtually no problems."

Rothenberg also is looking ahead to Major League Soccer, which he heads. He'll announce the 12 cities for his league this week, and he says it will start play next April 9. He's spent the last two weeks checking out the stadiums.

"In the next week, what has to be done is straighten out the ticketing issue, finish construction of the stadiums, finish the look, sell the unsold tickets," he said.

Even before the tournament begins, the World Cup has caused three international flaps.

Nigeria was angered that the United States wouldn't allow Nigeria Airways to land in this country, a ban modified Friday when the US government said the plane could come if it first was checked in Senegal.

Muslims were angered that The Coca-Cola Co and McDonald's Corp used the Saudi Arabian flag, which contains words from the Koran, on promotional items.

Greeks were angered when Rothenberg claimed an

alleged robbery during last Sunday's exhibition game either didn't happen or was an inside job.

Soccer is used to such things. It's part of its culture.

Rothenberg believes US fans will like the international flavour of the tournament, and international fans will enjoy soccer-related vacations in the United States. He estimates the tournament will generate \$4 billion for the US economy, and World Cup officials say about \$1 billion in licensed merchandise will be sold.

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For tourists, organizers have arranged for European newspapers such as The Times of London and La Gazzetta dello Sport to be available in major hotels.

For dignitaries, US soccer officials promise to flatter them as such as their European counterparts.

In the end, FIFA wants the US World Cup to look like any other.

"Everybody is fixated on the security issue, but we have made clear to our security that we're not going to take away from the beauty of this event," Rothenberg said.

"Yes flagpoles were taken (at the exhibition games), but flags weren't. Flags were everywhere. People had horns. If the Brazilians bring their drums, we'll shake them, and if there's a weapon inside we'll take it, but they'll have their drums. This will be a fabulous carnival for everybody."

Striker Towhid scored two goals banging twice at the stroke of the breather while Milon netted the other in the 29th minute of the play.

The outstation Khulna Abahani KC who drew the first blood when

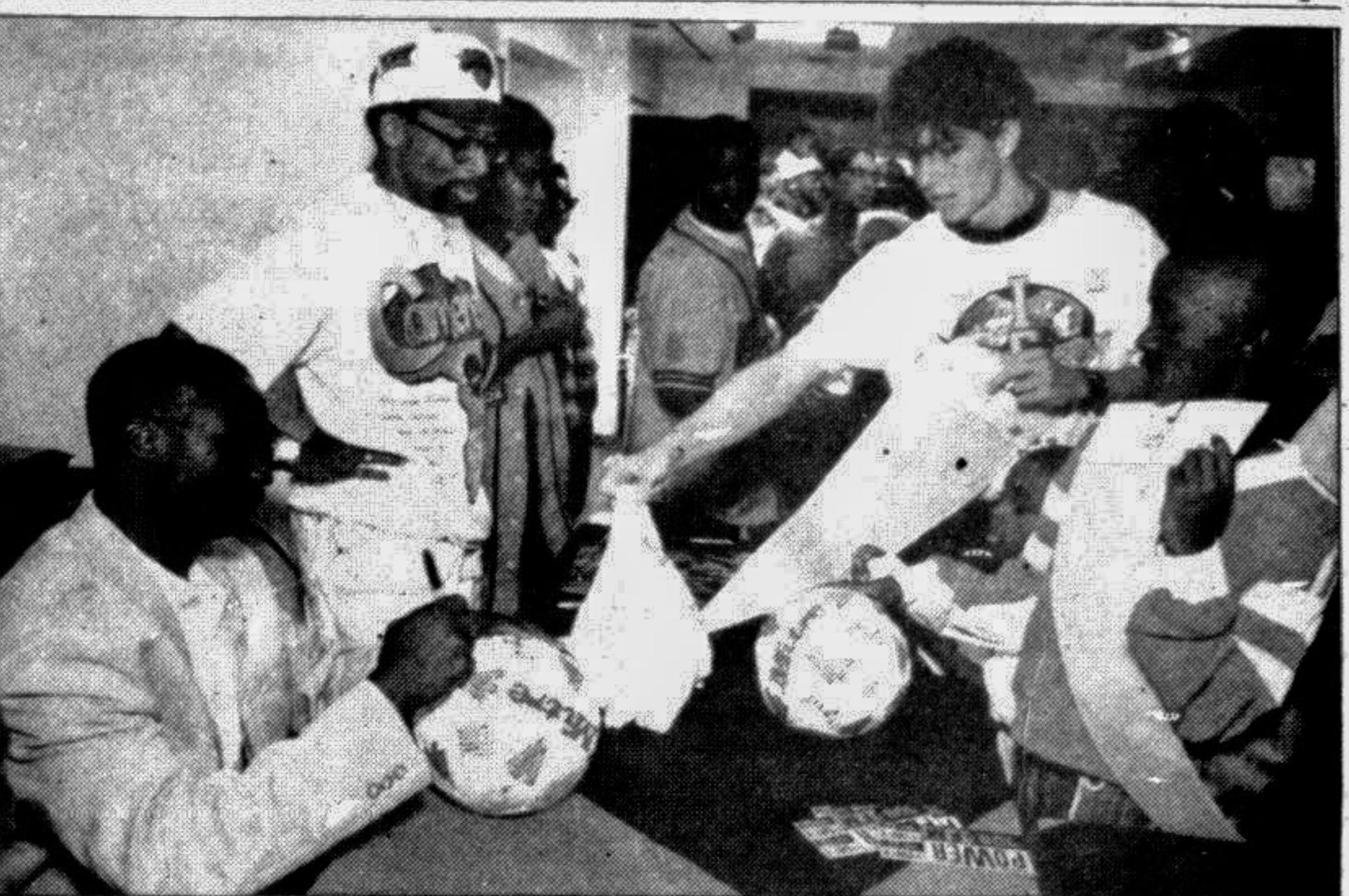
Goals galore in Fed Cup

Sports Reporter

If football is a game of goals then the match between Rahmatganj MFS and Abahani KC of Khulna deserves fulsome accolade as ten goals were scored with Rahmatganj finally prevailing by 6-4 in the first of BEXIMCO's two matches of the 12th Federation Cup football tournament.

Rahmatganj, a First Division outfit of Dhaka football who conceded a tenth minute goal bounced back hitting four goals in the first half.

Winger Akhter, who re-



Veteran Cameroon striker Roger Milla autographs a football while American film director Spike Lee (2nd from L) looks on as the players take a break to meet their fans in Los Angeles — AFP photo

Heart of Asia's malady



DALLAS, June 12:

Asia's 3.2 billion people are 59 per cent of the world's population.

You might think that's enough to field a World Cup champion team, reports AP.

But as it is, the region's two entrants would just like to reach the second round of the 24-country soccer championship. Asia's 44 countries include the world's two most populous, China and India, stable economies like Japan and oil-rich Arab nations. In contrast, Europe has only 9.4 per cent of the world population but many soccer world champions.

Sadharan Bima will meet Farashganj in their next Group B match on Tuesday.

Zia, Konica U-18 badminton champs

Sports Reporter

Zia and Konica clinched the boy's and girl's singles titles of the under-18 badminton championship winning their respective finals in straight sets on the concluding day at the NSC wooden floor gymnasium yesterday.

Zia, a 16-year-old high school student of Chittagong, earned a facile 15-9, 15-5 win over Momin of Dhaka.

In the girl's singles final Konica humbled Momo 11-1, 11-1 in an one-sided affair.

Finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman later distributed trophies among the winners as chief guest.

Fifty-five players including six girls took part in the week-long meet organised by the Bangladesh Badminton Federation.

All of which is fine with Cle Kooiman, a rugged defender for the US World Cup soccer team, reports AP.

England retain winning side

LONDON, June 12: England selectors have largely kept faith with a winning side by making left-arm seamer Paul Taylor the only change for Thursday's second Test against New Zealand, reports AFP.

Taylor, who had a terrible time in India a year ago, takes the place of the injured Mark Illott in a 13-man squad for the Lord's Test.

Though Devon Malcolm's head had been on the chopping block after a poor showing in the victorious first Test, selectors gave the experienced paceman a last-minute reprieve.

And chairman of selectors Ray Illingworth confirmed that most of last night's deliberations had centred on the fast bowling department.

After all, to bowl out New Zealand twice on a good pitch was a good performance you cannot ask for much more than that.

Like Illott at Trent Bridge, Taylor may fail to make the final XI with Illingworth suggesting there is more chance of England playing both front-line spinners at Lord's. New boy Richard Steno was ultimately omitted from the first Test team but will hope to win his first cap when battle resumes on Thursday.

MISSION VIEJO, Calif., June 12: By his own description, he's not blessed with abundant talent.

is certainly not the nimblest guy around, and is not too good-looking.

As a defender, you have to love what you do, and I do love it," he said. "I'm very competitive, and I hate to lose a tackle, hate for somebody to beat me with the ball.

"For me, letting the other

cer team of international standards nowadays involves big money."

Ahmed Nejm, a board member of the Jordan Soccer Federation attributed the Asian failures to lack of organisation.

"African soccer players were bad once, but they are now even better than the European teams because they have stronger bodies and have developed technical skills and intelligence and they are very team-cooperative in play," Nejm said in Amman, Jordan.

"Asian players lack these features and hence their poor performance."

A brighter future is seen by Peter Velappan, secretary general of the 44-member nation Asian Football Confederation, who says Asian soccer will improve over the coming decade.

He is pushing for FIFA, world soccer's governing body, to give Asia at least four berths by the 2002 tournament, which is likely to be held in Asia.

The logic: five of the former Soviet republics are now part of Asia. And the World Cup, final will expand from 24 to 32 teams for the 1998 tournament.

"We are developing, though slowly, but surely," Velappan said.

Kooiman—the 'wild' American



Defensive players rarely get much recognition, although soccer followers know that the matchup of forwards against defenders usually tells the story of a game.

"As a defender, you have to love what you do, and I do love it," he said. "I'm very competitive, and I hate to lose a tackle, hate for somebody to beat me with the ball."

"It's 11 vs. 11, and you take my position against my

backs that do the same thing, three out of the four midfielders do the same thing, and one of the forwards does the same thing, then we've dominated the game. That's what you're trying to do, win your individual battles and you've won your team battle."

Kooiman knows it's important that he beats his man consistently, either getting to the ball first, making the forward turn back upfield, or taking him down with a tackle.

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Kooiman and his American teammates open World Cup play against Switzerland on June 18 at the Silverdome in Pontiac, Mich.

Kabaddi league begins tomorrow

The Metropolis Premier Kabaddi league, organised by the Bangladesh Amateur Kabaddi Federation, will begin tomorrow at the kabaddi court of the Outer Stadium, reports UNB.

Eight services teams, divided into two groups, will compete in the league to be played initially on a league basis.

Teams: Group A — Bangladesh Rifles (Senior), Bangladesh Police A and Fire Service.

Group B — Bangladesh Rifles (Junior), Village Defence Party (VDP), Bangladesh Police B and Civil Defence.

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"I think defenders definitely are the unsung guys."

Playing defense looks simple, but it's really quite difficult, Kooiman said.

"It's a very physical position, you definitely get a lot of body contact," he said. "But you have to do a lot of reading, knowing when to come up, when to stay back, when to go in on a tackle, when to hang back. That only comes with experience."

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