

WORLD CUP USA '94

Can Brazil do it a la Didi?

SAN FRANCISCO, June 14: When ever the Brazilian soccer team doesn't look particularly sharp in practice, somebody will recall the words of the legendary Didi, reports AP.

The two-time world champion midfielder was notoriously lackadaisical in training but brilliant when it counted. Asked why, he shrugged: "Practice is practice, a game is a game."

Brazilians are quoting Didi a lot these days.

Brazil are the betting favorites to win this World Cup, which opens Friday in Chicago. But in warmup games, the team has shown the same glaring weaknesses of a year ago — with less than a week to fix them.

The players were given a day off Monday. They resume training on Tuesday for Brazil's opening match against Russia on June 20 in Stanford Stadium.

Fullback Ricardo Gomes was taken to the Samaritan Hospital in Santa Clara for an examination of an injured muscle in his left thigh. Team doctor Lidio Toledo said an announcement would be made Tuesday whether Gomes would be left off the team.

The 29-year-old Gomes, who plays for Paris-Saint Germain, was hurt during an exhibition game with El Salvador on Sunday in Fresno. He was replaced by Marcio Santos.

Toledo said magnetic resonance imaging and ultrasound tests showed Gomes had a lesion in his thigh muscle. He said a full diagnosis would be finished Monday night but that Gomes' chances of staying on the team were 50-50.

"We're waiting to see the location and depth of the lesion," he said. "It could take anywhere from 10 days to three weeks to heal. In the best of hypotheses, he will miss the game against Russia."

Unofficial reports said fullbacks Cleber and Antonio Carlos, both of national champion Palmeiras, were the top candidates if Gomes was cut.

"He has to come back," said fellow defender Branco. "If not, we're really going to lose a lot on the defense."

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira was left to mull the good and not-so-good aspects of Brazil's 4-0 win over modest El Salvador in their final tuneup Sunday.

Good was the continuing stellar play of Romario-Bebeto front line. Romario scored five minutes into the game, while Bebeto put in a penalty kick and set up two other goals.

Parreira's headache is the midfield.

It was the creative force of Brazil's World Cup champion teams in 1958, 1962 and 1970, with greats such as Pelé, Didi and Gerson. Today, it's floundering.

Parreira's concern was evident Sunday when he refused to start Rai and stripped him of the No. 10 jersey, consecrated by Pelé. Earlier, Rai had lost his position as team captain.

But Mazinho, who played the first half instead, wasn't much better.

If an opposing coach is watching this, we're in serious trouble," Gerson, nowadays a television commentator, said at halftime. "All he has to do is mark Rai or Mazinho and it kills Brazil's game."

Rai came on for the second half. Mazinho moved back to his normal position and things got better. Rai helped on the third goal by Zinho and scored the fourth on a header.

But Rai and Mazinho are unlikely to start together during the Cup. Parreira has said that leaves the defense too exposed.

If there was a problem against El Salvador, which played a slack defense and seemed honored just to be on the same field, what can Brazil expect from the hard-checking Russians?

Parreira said he wasn't worried.

"The goal of this game was to develop our rhythm," he said. "(The score) didn't matter. The team's rhythm was the important thing."



Diego Maradona shares a joke with his teammates during a practice session at Brandeis University in Wellesley on Monday. — AFP photo

For Saudis spirit is all

DALLAS, June 14: Saudi Arabia's World Cup soccer players, drawing strength from their religion, exclude a self-confidence that is acutely out of proportion to their international experience, reports Reuter.

They refuse to entertain suggestions they could be the weakest team in the World Cup finals and say they believe they can overcome tough Group F opponents Belgium and the Netherlands. Another Arab kingdom, Morocco, are their fourth opponents.

"May be our experience is shorter than the European players, but our commitment and ability compensates for that," said veteran defender Mohammed Abdul Jawad.

"Our love for our country and our team will put us ahead of the Europeans," he said in a telephone conference call from their camp in New Jersey on Monday.

"We have the ability to beat any team," he added through an interpreter.

Even their new Argentine coach Jorge Solari, who only took over from sacked Dutchman Leo Beenhakker in March, is talking up the Saudi side which is making its World Cup debut.

Asked to predict the semi-finalists, the Argentine said "Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Saudi Arabia."

The questioner responded: "I think that also answers my question about who will be the surprise team of the tournament."

Saudi Arabia qualified as the top side from Asia, and remained unbeaten in 11 qualifying games this year they have been beaten 5-1 by Greece and 1-0 by Colombia, although they also held the Colombians 1-1 in Jeddah and beat Iceland and China.

Solari included his star striker Majed Abdullah, nicknamed "the desert Pelé" by Saudi journalists, among his tips for the tournament's star players. The others were Brazilian Romario, Colombia's Faustino Asprilla and Diego Maradona.

Abdullah, a 35-year-old striker who learned to play with a ball of knotted old clothes as a child, has, according to Saudi Arabian Football Federation statistics, scored 118 goals in 166 internationals over his 17-year international career.

He attributes his ability and the team's success in qualifying to the Saudis' deeply religious spirit, and said that would determine the success of their World Cup.

"Religion comes first in our lives," said Abdullah. "Anything we do is according to God's will, and with God's help. Anything we do, we start with God."

"We have not come to the United States just to compete. We've worked hard not just to play, we want to get some results."

He said rumours of bonuses of homes, cars and even camels given to the players for qualifying were false.

"Whatever you have heard is not true. Bonuses have nothing to do with winning. We do it for our country, not for money," he said.

Solari has impressed on his players that they are capable of matching the best.

"I have high expectations of the players," said Solari. "I have not had any problems adjusting to the players and we have accomplished all I wanted to in the short time we have had together."

They open their World Cup against the Netherlands in Washington on June 20 and take heart from Egypt's result against them in Italia '90.

In the last World Cup Egypt shocked the Dutch with a 1-1 draw in their first round tie. They also held Ireland to a 0-0 draw.

Solari was brought in after Beenhakker tried to impose alien European tactics on a Saudi squad used to training under top Brazilian coaches and more comfortable with the South American style.

It's all down to economics?

LONDON, June 14: Throw away the form-book, forget the injury problems — the serious soccer fan can now pick the country which will win the 1994 World Cup by analysing not its sporting but its economic prowess, reports Reuter.

Swiss Bank Corporation (SBC) in a light-hearted publication ahead of the World Cup which kicks off next week in the United States, examined whether there was a link between success in soccer and economic fortunes.

"We tentatively conclude yes," the bank said.

Its researchers suggested that countries that had fared well in past World Cups had gone on to enjoy improved economic success as well.

SBC looked at countries in the two biggest footballing continents — Europe and Latin America — chose the best soccer nations and came up with some interesting pointers.

Argentina and Uruguay, for instance, have long been among South America's highest per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) economies and both have a history of strong soccer performances.

"Colombia is another interesting example," said Jim O'Neill, head of Global Research at SBC in London.

"Although they have a limited track record in soccer, in recent years their performance has improved markedly — coincidentally (or perhaps not) at the same time as the economy was starting to improve considerably."

SBC also noted the relative decline of Brazil. In the mid-to late 1970s Brazil had one of the better-performing economies, and were supreme on the field.

"But gradually the (economic) gap between Argentina and Brazil has widened. The same of course has happened in football," O'Neill said.

Europe to provided examples.

"What can be seen in terms of per capita GDP is that gaps have got bigger, with England in marked decline relative to Germany," said SBC.

"In this regard the remarkable contrasting fortunes of these two countries is that Germany has gone from strength to strength in football, whilst England, at least at the national level, has gone into decline."

Germany won the last Cup in 1990, while England this time have failed even to qualify.

Of course, a country does not have to be good at soccer to have economic success or vice versa. The United States and Japan, the two biggest economies in the world, have until recently shown little interest in the game.

Japan have failed to qualify for the finals, and the United States, although the host nation, are scarcely one of the favorites.

But with its economy now powering out of recession, who knows?

Wegerle sidelined

MISSION VIEJO, Calif., June 14: Roy Wegerle, the most experienced forward on the US soccer team, said Monday he won't start Saturday in the Americans' World Cup opener against Switzerland, reports AP.

Wegerle, 30, was injured Jan 8 and had three arthroscopic operations on his right knee this spring, the last on April 15. He hasn't played a full game since Jan 3, when he scored for Coventry City during a 1-1 tie with Swindon Town in England's Premier League.

US coach Bora Milutinovic wouldn't say whether he thought Wegerle was fit enough to play a full game, but Wegerle thought he was.

"I think I can, and I want to play," he said Monday. "But that's what Bora's decided to do."

The South African-born Wegerle, who became a naturalized US citizen before the 1992 US Cup exhibition tournament, scored the goal for the United States in a 1-0 win against Mexico on June 4, the last World Cup warmup for the Americans. In his only other action since the injury, he played 19 minutes against Saudi Arabia on May 25 and 13 minutes against Greece on May 28.

"There's no substitute for match fitness," he admitted.

Wegerle, who has two goals in 17 international appearances, said Milutinovic informed him of the decision three or four days ago.

"He said he wants to use me in the second 45 minutes," Wegerle said.

Wegerle's absence makes the potential US lineup for Saturday a lot clearer. After watching the way Milutinovic is using his players in practice, several players said their best guess is Ernie Stewart and Eric Wynalda will start up

Will gimmicks do the trick?

BOSTON, June 14: Taxi drivers in this sports-mad city thought it a bit ironic when Mayor Thomas Menino handed them free box lunches this week in an effort to promote the upcoming World Cup, reports AP.

The cabbies, a large percentage of whom come from lands where soccer is king, may be the only Bostonians already excited about the tournament.

"A couple of hundred cab drivers know about soccer, the rest of the people in Boston know about baseball," explained cabbie Arnold Foley, a native Ukrainian.

But Foley and 500 of his buddies were more than willing to accept the generosity of the mayor, who put World Cup bumper stickers on the cabs while doling out lunches of sliced turkey on croissant with lettuce and tomato, potato chips, a chocolate cookie, an apple and can of ginger ale.

"Soccer is soccer, and a free lunch is a free lunch," he said. "But we would appreciate it more if Mayor Menino gives us some tickets (to the World Cup games in nearby Foxboro)."

Though most of the United States is immune from the soccermania that traditionally sweeps a country about to host the quadrennial tournament, some of the cities hosting teams have caught the World Cup spirit.

The arrival of international soccer in a land where baseball, football and basketball are the preferred pastimes has led to some strange sights.

Soccer balls dot the entrance to New York's Lincoln Tunnel. Menus at Dick's Last Resort, a Dallas restaurant, are being translated into German. A 23-meter (76-foot) high Los Angeles gas tank has been painted like a soccer ball. A Pasadena, Calif. brewery is creating an ale called "Goooooooal!!!!!!!"

A couple of California cities have taken on a distinctly foreign flavor in the days leading up to the month-long tournament, which kicks off Friday.

In Los Gatos, which is hosting the Brazilian team, restaurants are translating menus into Portuguese and the town's only theater plans a five-day Brazilian film festival. Coffee sales have increased so much, it's hard to find it anymore in the community of 28,000.

"It's kind of like they've become our team, too," said Parker Stokes, manager of the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting Co., which has ordered fresh supplies of Brazilian coffee because of surging demand.

In Oxnard, signs in French greet the team from Cameroon and youngsters parade around town with miniature flags of the African nation.

While New York is mesmerized by the Rangers' quest for their first National Hockey League Stanley Cup title in 54 years and the Knicks' bid to win the NBA title, the city's ethnic communities are also getting excited about the World Cup.

PROFILES: ROMANIA

BUCHAREST, June 14: Following are brief profiles of Romania's World Cup squad:

- GOALKEEPERS:**
- Florin Prunea.** Age 25. Club Dinamo Bucharest; 21 caps; a joker off the pitch but earnest and determined in goals; he wears a tiny religious icon when playing.
- Bogdan Stelea.** 26. Rapid Bucharest; 16; has quick reactions and is calming influence on his defenders.
- Stefan Gabriel Preda.** 23 (24 on June 18). Petrolul Ploiesti; 1; a gifted but surprise member of the national squad.
- DEFENDERS:**
- Ban Petrescu.** 26. Genoa; 31; good coordination with his teammates on the fields; an offensive defender, comfortable going forward with the ball.
- Miodrag Belodedici.** 30. Valencia; 31; one of the few players to win the European Cup with two different clubs, Steaua Bucharest in 1986 and, after defecting from then-communist Romania in 1988, with Red Star Belgrade; smooth, well-organized defender; one of Europe's top sweepers.
- Gheorghe Mihail.** 28. Dinamo Bucharest; 8; strongly built and forceful defender but lacks technical finesse.
- Gheorghe Popescu.** 26. PSV Eindhoven; 50; highly respected and backbone of defense; can play as sweeper and offensive midfielder.
- Tibor Selymes.** 24. Cercle Brugge; 9; another of Romania's foreign-based players; he often pushes into attack in overlapping role to link defense with forwards.
- Daniel Claudio Prodan.** 22. Steaua Bucharest; 11; soared from second division to national team in just six months.
- Corneliu Papura.** 20. Universitatea Craiova; 4; can play anywhere in defense; potential big star.
- MIDFIELDERS:**
- Gheorghe Hagi.** 29. Brescia; 82; team star and captain; delightfully spontaneous with fine ball control; formerly with Real Madrid; nicknamed "Maradona of the Carpathians," prone to occasional outbursts on pitch.
- Angelo Ioan Lupescu.** 23. Bayer Leverkusen; 29; regarded as the linkman between defense and attack; astute and well coordinated.
- Ilie Dumitrescu.** 25. Steaua Bucharest; 37; great technician. In Romania's last seven matches he scored nine goals.
- Dorinel Munteanu.** 25 (26 on June 25). Cercle Brugge; 26; gifted and versatile player who can slot in as defender, midfielder or winger.
- Basarab Nica Panduru.** 23 (24 on July 11). Steaua Bucharest; 12; an alternative for Hagi.
- Constantin Gilca.** 22. Steaua Bucharest; 6; powerful yet smooth; considered rising star of Romanian soccer.
- Iulian Chirita.** 27. Rapid Bucharest; 2; clever midfielder but not automatic first team choice.
- Vodiu Stinga.** 21. Universitatea Craiova; 7; small player who has precise shot and good ball control.
- FORWARDS:**
- Florin Valeriu Raducic.** 24. AC Milan; 24; known as the "wonderkid" of Romanian soccer, he drifts almost automatically into goalscoring positions; scored nine goals during Romania's World Cup qualifiers but has not reproduced this form at AC Milan.
- Dinu Viorel Moldovan.** 21. Dinamo Bucharest; 3; has a powerful shot and is good header of the ball.
- Marian Ivan.** 25. FC Brasov; 1; the biggest surprise of the squad, because of his lack of international experience.
- Ioan Vladoiu.** 25. Rapid Bucharest; 5; short but aggressive and experienced player.

It'll be tough for Swiss squad

DEARBORN, Mich., June 14: Anyone who has visited Switzerland comes back with lasting memories of cool mountain air, reports AP.

So that country's soccer team comes to the United States for the World Cup and what happens? They wind up playing their first two games inside the Pontiac Silverdome, where heat and humidity are frequently taken to new and sticky heights.

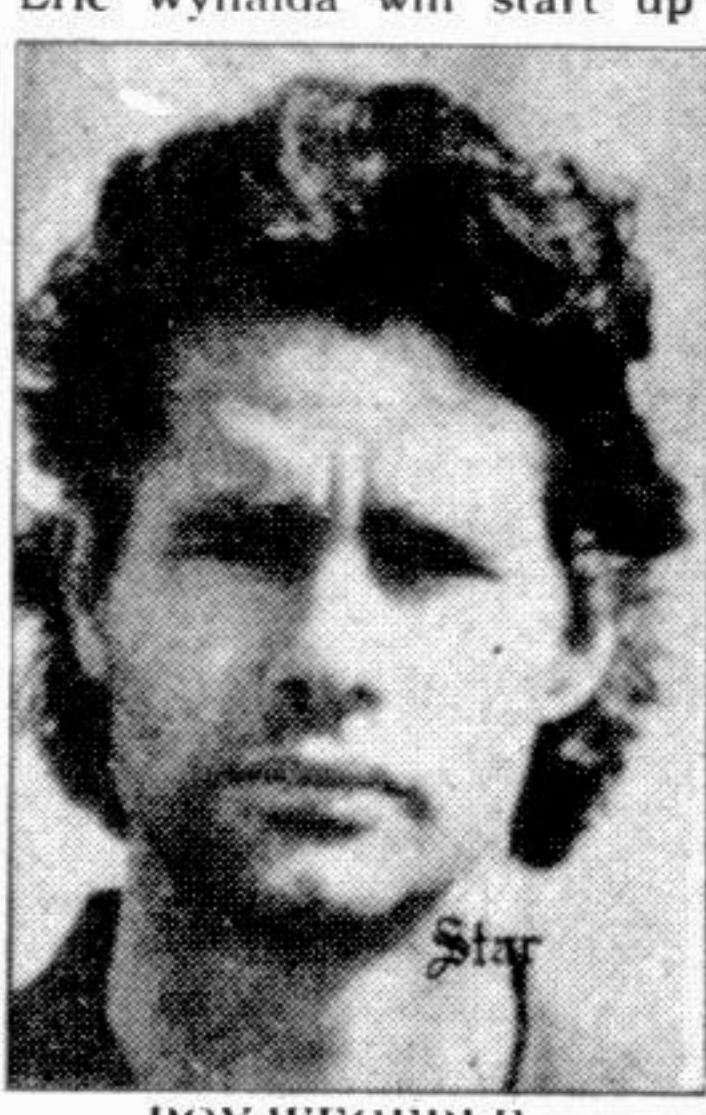
Try to figure that out. Swiss coach Roy Hodgson can't.

"All we know is what we heard from last summer, when some matches were played to test the indoor grass," Hodgson said Monday during a news conference. "I hear it's very, very difficult playing in the Silverdome. I hear some players lost (a lot of) fluids."

Switzerland, making their first World Cup appearance in 28 years, open the first round against the United States on Saturday. Switzerland also play their second game in the Silverdome, against Romania on June 22.

Rules forbid players from stopping for water during World Cup play. Several coaches, especially those whose teams will play in Florida, have urged the rule be lifted.

Hodgson, an Englishman who somehow managed to unify the French and German factions on the Swiss team, has a way of making a positive out of a negative.



ROY WEGERLE

front, with John Harkes, Thomas Dooley, Tab Ramos and Claudio Reyna in the midfield. Tony Meola will be in goal, and the consensus guess for the defense is Marcela Balboa, Paul Caligiuri, Alexi Lalas and Cle Koolman.

Milutinovic has used 18 different lineups in 18 games this season, and Saturday's will be a new one, too.

Reyna, the 1992 and 1993 college player of the year, still is a question mark. He hasn't practiced since pulling his right hamstring last Wednesday night but is set to resume workouts Tuesday, the last day of practice in California before the team travels to Pontiac, Mich. for the opener. He said he'll be ready to play on Saturday.

"I can't worry about my injury," he said.

PROFILES: SOUTH KOREA

SEOUL, June, 14: Following are brief profiles of South Korea's World Cup squad:

- GOALKEEPERS:**
- Choi In-young.** Aged 32. Club Hyundai Horang-I, 34 caps; team captain, played in 1990 finals in Italy, rated best goalkeepers in South Korea, making many spectacular and crucial saves in Asia in qualifying matches.
- Lee Woon-Jae.** 21. Kyunghee University; 2; youngest player in squad.
- Park Chul-Woo.** 29. LG Cheethas; 2; agile and aggressive goalkeeper whose recent good performance for his club earned him a late call.
- DEFENDERS:**
- Hong Myung-Bo.** 25. Posco Atoms; 52; pivotal players, noted for accurate passing and powerful long-range shots; also played in Italy; two goals in qualifying rounds.
- Shin Hong-Gi.** 26. Hyundai Horang-I; 28; short but fast left back who often links with attack to good effect.
- Chung Jong-Son.** 28. Hyundai Horang-I, 19; tough stopper with good tackling skills, won last-minute place after Kang Chul dropped out with ankle injury.
- Kim Pan-Keun.** 28. Daewoo Royals; 27; fast right back noted for ball skills.
- Gu Sang-Bum.** 29. Daewoo Royals; 61; most experienced defender who likes to go forward, one goal in qualifiers; played in Italy four years ago.
- Park Jung-Bae.** 27. LG Cheethas; 29; solid left back with stamina and powerful shots; scored twice in qualifiers.
- Lee Jong-Hwa.** 30. Lihwa Chonma; 4; tough stopper who had a key role in his club's South Korean league title win last year, international debut in March.
- An Ik-Soo.** 32. Lihwa Chonma; 5; tall defender, good in the air, earned first cap in February.
- Choi Young-Il.** 28. Hyundai Horang-I; 0; right back with good ball skills.
- MID FIELDERS:**
- Ko Jeong-Woon.** 27. Lihwa Chonma; 35; fast midfielders, often beat defenders on the outside.
- Choi Mun-Shik.** 23. Posco Atoms; 21; skillful midfielders noted for accurate passing.
- Seo Jung-Won.** 23. LG Cheethas; 37; fastest in squad and sharp around penalty area.
- Lee Young-Jin.** 30. LG Cheethas, 40; industrious with good stamina, also played in Italy.
- Ha Seok-Ju.** 26. Daewoo Royals; 35; fast midfielder noted for sharpness in shooting; scored seven goals in qualifiers.
- Choi Dae-Sik.** 29. LG Cheethas; 6; specializes in long-range shots.
- Noh Jung-Yun.** 23. Sanfrenches (Japan); 18; one of two foreign-based midfielders in the squad, lacks stamina but good reader of game who will orchestrate attacks from midfield.
- Kim Joo-Sung.** 28. VFL Bochum, 57, 198; Asian player of the year, superb dribbler, but criticised for being too individualistic; also played in Italy.
- FORWARDS:**
- Hwang Son-Hong.** 25. Posco Atoms, 50; rated one of best strikers in Asia, recently recovered from leg injury and hit good form in warm-up matches, also played in Italy, brief spell in Bundesliga before joining Posco in July 1993, scored 21 international goals.
- Cho Jin-Ho.** 21. Posco Atoms, 6; debut in February and already a star of the squad, switched from midfield to striker.



THE 1994 TOURNAMENT IN ENGLAND THROWS UP AN UNLIKELY HERO. BEFORE A BALL IS EVEN KICKED, BLACK-AND-WHITE MONITOR PICKLES FINDS THE RIGHT TROPHY AFTER IT HAD BEEN STOLEN WHILE ON DISPLAY IN LONDON. ON THE FOOTBALL FRONT, ENGLAND MANAGER ALF RAMSEY THROWS ASIDE HIS USUAL CAUTION. "WE WILL WIN THE WORLD CUP," HE CONFIDENTLY PREDICTS. BUT THE HOME TEAM'S START IS UNINSPIRING. SHORT ON IDEAS, THEY ARE UNABLE TO BREACH AN OBSTINATE URUGUAY DEFENCE. AFTER HALF-AN-HOUR OF THEIR NEXT MATCH AGAINST MEXICO, ENGLAND STILL HAVEN'T FOUND THE NET. BOBBY CHARLTON'S 30-YARD THUNDERBOLT LIFTS THE TENSION AND SETS RAMSEY'S MEN ON THEIR WAY. PELE REAPPEARS FOR BRAZIL'S CRUCIAL MATCH WITH PORTUGAL, BUT HE IS SINGLED OUT FOR SOME CRUDE TREATMENT AS HE LUMPS OFF. BRAZIL'S HOPES OF A CUP TREBLE TAKE A NOBSEIVE. A NEW STAR IS EMERGING. MOZAMBIQUE BORN ELSEBIO KILLS OFF BRAZIL WITH TWO PIECES OF CLASS FINISHING. SADLY, VIOLENT PLAY IS BECOMING ALL TOO PREVALENT. WEST GERMANY ARE ON THE RECEIVING END OF SOME CYNICAL TACKLING FROM ARGENTINA WHO ARE WARNED BY FIFA ABOUT THEIR AGGRESSIVE APPROACH.