

WORLD CUP USA '94

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What Colombians really are?

LOS ANGELES, June 17: Whether Colombia really are potential World Cup champions or just unworthy pretenders to the throne is still a matter for considerable debate, reports Reuter.

But by the time the weekend is over, the world will have a far better idea of just how seriously to take Francisco Maturana's squad.

And while it is dangerous to read too much into any team's debut in such a gruelling tournament, a strong showing against Romania on Saturday will underline the feeling that the South Americans can mount a realistic challenge for the title.

Many observers favour them to top Group A, which also includes the United States and Switzerland.

But Romania will be no pushovers. Their coach Anghel Iordanescu may not be as flamboyant as his Colombian counterpart, but his team are capable of producing attractive, high-quality soccer when the pressure is on.

They proved that when they beat Wales 2-1 away from home in their last qualifying match in November to clinch their place in USA '94.

Performing well and winning under pressure is something Colombia have rarely done, and although their 5-0 win over Argentina in September was an astonishing victory, it was the exception rather than the rule.

So the stage is set for what should prove to be an absorbing first encounter between two countries who come from very different worlds but who

both play with a Latin temperament and style.

The game will focus on how the defences handle two highly volatile and dangerous attacking forces and whether the Colombia midfield of Carlos Valerama and Fredy Rincov can dominate the likes of Dorinel Munteanu and Ionut Lupescu in what has the mak-



FAUSTINO ASPRILLA

ings of a skilful midfield battle.

Colombia will pin their hopes up front on the tournament's possible golden boy Faustino Asprilla and Adolfo 'The Train' Valencia who will, if the heat doesn't derail him, spend most of the match trying to charge his way straight through the middle of the Romania defence.

For their part the Colombian defence will have their work cut out trying to prevent Florin Raduciu bewildering them with his magic — or the irrepressible Gheorghe Hagi peppering in shots from almost anywhere in the last third of the field.

Iordanescu closed his training sessions to the media after a Colombian television crew

tried to film his players in their hotel rooms and eating their lunch, but Romania showed just enough in a low-key friendly with Sweden in Mission Viejo on Sunday to prove just how seriously they should be taken.

Maturana joyously summed up the feeling in his camp for reporters on Thursday.

"Colombians like to dance, and we always like to dance with the prettiest girl at the ball. We are ready for the ball to start. The players are all fit, they are all ready to go and we feel confident we can do well."

"You know it would be a very good thing for soccer if we won the World Cup. We are going to bring some joy back to the game," he said.

But Iordanescu's highly motivated, well-disciplined players will bring their won version of the Carpathian two-step to the Rose Bowl dance floor, and the result could be anything but joyous for the South Americans.

PROBABLE LINE-UPS

COLOMBIA: 1-Oscar Cordoba, 4-Luis Herrera, 15-Luis Carlos Perea, 2-Andres Escobar, 20-Wilson Perez, 14-Leonel Lavarez, 6-Gabriel Gomez, 10-Carlos Valderrama, 19-Fredy Rincov, 21-Faustino Asprilla, 11-Adolfo Valencia.

ROMANIA: 12-Bogdan Stelea, 2-Dan Petrescu, 3-Daniel Claudiu Prodan, 14-Gheorghe Mihail, 4-Miodrag Belodedici, 7-Dorinel Munteanu, 6-Gheorghe Popescu, 5-Lionut Lupescu, 11-Ilie Dumitrescu, 10-Gheorghe Hagi, 9-Florin Raduciu.

Referee: Jamal Al-Sharif, Syria

Kickoff: 2330 GMT



Veteran German striker Rudi Voeller does a bit of juggling with the ball at the Hinsdale High School ground a day before the world champions' 15th World Cup opener on June 17 against Bolivia at the Soldier Field Stadium, Chicago. — AFP photo

Italians in for rough ride

NEW YORK, June 17: Triple champions Italy, dogged by uncertainties about their formation and tactics, face a daunting opening World Cup match against uncompromising Ireland on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The Group E encounter has grabbed the imaginations of the huge Irish and Italian communities in the New York area, with the 76,000-capacity Giants Stadium sold out months ago.

But Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi, whose team are among the pre-tournament favourites, seems less enthusiastic about it.

"Ireland are one of those teams you never really want to meet. They are strong, aggressive and highly competitive," he said this week. "You really know you've been in a game when you play them."

The Ireland squad mainly comprises journeymen professionals from English clubs but coach Jack Charlton, in charge since 1986, has welded them into a mighty effective unit, as recent wins over Germany and the Netherlands testify.

Man-for-man, Roberto Baggio, Franco Baresi and company are far superior to their Irish counterparts, but the Italians lack the cohesion and sense of purpose which make Charlton's team so hard to beat.

Sacchi has driven his soccer-mad fellow countrymen to distraction by constantly tinkering with his line-up.

Italy fielded a 4-3-3 formation as they won their last three games, striker Giuseppe Signori netting on each occasion.

But Sacchi is now expected to revert to a more cautious 4-4-2 with either Signori or Daniele Massaro — another striker — asked to play in midfield.



JACK CHARLTON

Charlton admits his team are in for a torrid time if Sacchi's 'Azzurri' (blues) click into gear.

"Everyone knows that the Italians can be the best team in the world on any given day, they have tremendously gifted players," said Charlton.

Ireland made their first ever appearance in the finals in 1990, reaching the last eight before Italy beat them 1-0 in Rome's Olympic Stadium.

Injuries mean Charlton cannot call on veteran stopper Kevin Moran or tall striker Tony Cascarino on Saturday.

Phil Babb of Coventry City is set to partner the solid Paul McGrath at the back while Motherwell's Tommy Coyne will forage alone up front in a 4-5-1 formation.

Strong-running midfielder Roy Keane, part of Manchester United's English double-winning team, is expected to play despite a nagging groin injury.

The pitch — 103 metres long and 66 wide — is tight and will help the Irish close down the Italians. The heat will also be a factor with temperatures expected in the 90s Fahrenheit and high humidity forecast.

There is a fear that the two teams will settle for a draw in the first match in a group which also includes Mexico and Norway. "If a draw is what we deserve then I will be happy with a draw," Sacchi has said countless times.

The fans are sure to provide a great atmosphere and the hope is that they get a match to savour.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Italy: 1-Gianluca Pagliuca, 9-Mauro Tassotti, 4-Alessandro Costacurta, 6-Franco Baresi, 5-Paolo Maldini, 11-Demetrio Albertini, 13-Dino Baggio, 16-Roberto Donadoni, 20-Giuseppe Signori, 19-Daniele Massaro, 10-Roberto Baggio.

Ireland: 1-Pat Bonner, 2-Denis Irwin, 14-Phil Babb, 5-Paul McGrath, 3-Terry Phelan, 8-Ray Houghton, 10-John Sheridan, 6-Roy Keane, 7-Andy Townsend, 11-Steve Staunton, 15-Tommy Coyne.

Kick off: 2000 GMT

FIFA in a tricky position

CHICAGO, June 17: FIFA came close to covering itself in ridicule on the eve of the World Cup finals

on Thursday when a damaging split between the old and new continental soccer powers emerged at its two-day congress, reports Reuter.

The resistance of Europe and South America to claims for better representation by Africa, Asia and North and Central America produced a deadlock which left FIFA in the bizarre position of continuing to recognise the defunct Soviet Union.

A personal intervention by FIFA president Joao Havelange, who was re-elected unopposed for his sixth four-year term, failed to resolve an impasse involving the world body's Russian vice-president Vyacheslav Koloskov.

Koloskov's place on the FIFA executive stemmed from a 1946 decision to give the Soviet Union a permanent seat as one of eight vice-presidents. Egypt proposed the Soviet

place should go to Europe but that FIFA's executive should expand at the same time from 21 to 25 members with extra representatives for Africa, Asia and North and Central America.

But the idea was rejected by traditional soccer powers Europe and South America, with a vote of 90 for and 63 against failing to reach the necessary 75 per cent majority.

The move angered the Africans, who proceeded to block an executive committee proposal simply deleting the Soviet Union from FIFA statutes and awarding an extra place on the executive to Europe.

FIFA vice-president David Will of Scotland, head of the Juridical Commission, said Europe had decided to give the place to Koloskov so the net effect would be the same which every way the Congress voted.

Even if the Soviet Union no longer existed Koloskov, as a sitting member, could not be removed from office unless the

Soviet reference in the statutes was removed, he argued.

But African delegates angrily accused Will of trying to sway the vote by expressing a personal opinion.

Havelange intervened, pointing out that FIFA's executive, made up of members from all continents had unanimously approved the idea last December but the vote was lost with only 59 members voting for and 89 against.

FIFA are thus left with a Soviet vice-president until the next congress in two years' time. Havelange called for a meeting of confederation presidents in October to work out a compromise to present in 1996.

Will said this meant players who had appeared only in friendly games for one country could go on to play for a second.

New members of FIFA's executive were presented to Congress, including Havelange's son-in-law Ricardo Teixeira of Brazil.

World Cup briefs

UNDATED, June 17: Republic of Ireland goalkeeper Packie Bonner has set himself a target of 100 appearances — and he reckons it can be achieved over the next three years, reports AP.

Bonner, one of Ireland's Italia '90 heroes, is now 34 but feels a goal can still make a decisive impact at 40. He has played 73 times for his country and again will be manager Jack Charlton's first choice in Saturday's World Cup game against Italy at the Giants Stadium, New Jersey.

"I've no doubt I can make it," he said. "Some of the world's finest goalkeepers, Dino Zoff, Peter Shilton, and Pat Jennings were approaching 40 when they quit. I can do the same."

"This World Cup is an incentive for me and the rest of the squad," added Bonner who signed Monday for Scottish premier league side Kilmarnock after being given a free transfer by Glasgow Celtic.

Brazil earned the top spot in the final pre-World Cup Sprint Soccer Poll, a weekly ranking of the top 10 national teams in the world as voted by a panel of soccer journalists and broadcasters from around the world.

Brazil, who have held the top spot for five consecutive weeks, earned 452 points. Germany are trailing behind with 359 points, ahead of Netherlands, 328, and Argentina, 317. Colombia earned the fifth spot with 257 points.

Italy are sixth, followed by Belgium and Ireland.

Sprint is the long-distance telecommunications provider

of World Cup USA '94.

Striker Niall Quinn is banging in the goals in the Republic of Ireland's build-up to Saturday's World Cup kick-off against Italy.

Sadly, the 1.95-metre (6 feet 5) Manchester City forward who started all 12 qualifying matches and spearheaded the Irish aerial attack is restricted to scoring only during practice sessions at the Seminole County Training complex in Orlando, Fla.

Quinn needed career-saving surgery after severing a knee ligament a few weeks after Jack Charlton's team booked their passage to America by scraping a point against Northern Ireland in Belfast in November.

The ex-Arsenal front-man was invited to travel with the squad, though, and is figured prominently in training matches.

"The knee is coming along fine now and it's great to be out there again with the boys," he said.

Another injury-hit striker, David Kelly, who has scored seven goals in just 16 games for Ireland, was back in training Tuesday after a back problem.

Defender Lothar Matthaus with 112 appearances for Germany behind him, says he may quit if his team wins the World Cup. In spite of his promise to coach Berti Vogts that he will stay on through 1996.

"If we win, I'll talk it over with Berti," Matthaus said. "I'd like to bow out at the top."

Said Vogts: "That would be a nice problem. We could talk over champagne."

LA rocked again

LOS ANGELES, California, June 17: An earthquake measured at 5 on the Richter Scale shook southern California Thursday, near the World Cup host city of Los Angeles, reports AFP.

The tremor was the second quake within 24 hours in the region that registered higher than 4 on the scale.

World Cup fever grips Lebanon

BEIRUT, June 17: World Cup fever is sweeping Lebanon, where tens of thousands of football fans had decked their homes and cars with the colours of their favourite teams weeks before the kickoff, reports AFP.

A scare for Argentine coach

WELLESLEY, Massachusetts, June 17: Argentina's World Cup plans to give Diego Maradona practice

in handling a man-to-man marker nearly backfired on Thursday when he took a full boot of studs on the left ankle, reports Reuter.

"I had a nasty fright. If it had been serious it would have been a catastrophe," Maradona said.

"He landed all his studs on my ankle, but it was not intentional," he told reporters after Argentina's practice at their Babson College camp in Wellesley, south of Boston.

Argentina staged the practice at midday, the time of their opening Group D match against Greece on Tuesday, with a game against Argentine youth team Renato Cesarini.

A 17-year-old Cesarini youngster was given the daunting task of keeping a tight rein on Maradona, who is working towards full fitness for his fourth World Cup tournament after little on-field action in the last year.

At one point, Maradona broke free on the left, but his marker recovered to try to

block the Argentine captain's centre, succeeding instead in upending the superstar.

"He did what we asked him. I'd like him to do that, because it helps me a lot," a relieved Maradona said magnanimously.

Coach Alfio Basile's preparations would have suffered a tremendous blow if Maradona had been hurt badly.

He has been working hard on a square attacking formation of Maradona and Abel Balbo behind two strikers.

"We were practising the square," Maradona said.

But missing from the square was Claudio Caniggia, who aggravated a sore big toe during training behind closed doors on Wednesday and is doubtful for the Greece match, according to team doctor Ernesto Ugalde.

Basile said all Caniggia needed to be able to line up alongside Gabriel Batistuta in attack on Tuesday was to rest his left foot.

Ramon Medina Bello, now with Yokohama Marinos in Japan's J-League, and 20-year-old Ariel Ortega of River Plate are vying for the spot Caniggia may have to vacate.

But defender Sergio Vazquez has recovered fully and

rather more quickly than expected from tendinitis in his right leg and should play after being fully involved in the practice.

Maradona said what Argentina needed after a week's intensive physical training was rest and "to sharpen our aim."

"We're missing a lot of goals," he said. "Although it's better to miss them here than in the World Cup."

Meanwhile, an AP report said: Sergio Goycochea, Argentina's hero in the 1990 World Cup in Italy, is caught in a tough fight for the starting spot with Luis Islas.

Coach Alfio Basile said "only 95 per cent of the team is set in my mind," suggesting that the only spot yet to be decided is the goalkeeper.

Goycochea became the undisputed starter in the World Cup four years ago, when he blocked four penalty shots and allowed Argentina to advance to the final.

But his recent performances with the national squad have been less than stellar and he even lost his starting position with River Plate of the Argentine league.



FIFA president Joao Havelange receives a bouquet from children after being reelected as president during the 49th FIFA congress in Chicago on Thursday. — AFP photo

BECAUSE OF ITS HEAT AND ALTITUDE, MEXICO IS A SURPRISING CHOICE OF VENUE IN 1970. WILL THE FOOTBALLS FLY THROUGH THE THICK AIR LIKE THE BALLOONS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY?



UNIQUELY, EL SALVADOR TAKE THEIR PLACE AFTER FIGHTING A WAR WITH A QUALIFYING GROUP OPPONENT. THEIR PLAY-OFF DEFEAT OF HONDURAS HAD SPARKED OFF A FIERCE THREE-DAY CONFLICT.



ELSEWHERE, CONCERNS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS APPEAR UNFOUNDED AS THE CONTESTANTS SERVE UP SOME GREAT FOOTBALL AND PLENTY OF GOALS. WEST GERMANY'S GERD MULLER HITS HAT-TRICKS AGAINST BULGARIA AND PERU.



CUP HOLDERS ENGLAND ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE AN EVEN BETTER TEAM THAN '86. GEOFF HURST GETS THEIR SHOW ON THE ROAD AGAINST ROMANIA.



THE SOUTH AMERICANS THEN SWAMP THE CZECHS WITH SOME ENLARGING ATTACKING FOOTBALL. THEIR FOUR GOALS INCLUDE A CRISP VOLLEY FROM PELE WHO IS APPEARING IN HIS FOURTH WORLD CUP.



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