



Share The Passion



MOTLEY MELANGE: Youngsters embellished with umbrellas of different colours rehearse for the opening ceremony of the 15th World Cup at the Citrus Bowl, Orlando on June 16. Belgium will take on Morocco on June 19 to trigger off World Cup action at this stadium. — AFP photo

A visit to Silverdome

PONTIAC, Michigan, June 17: The indoor Pontiac Silverdome, which will host four opening-round World Cup matches, is situated about 30 miles (50 km) northwest of Detroit in the industrial town of Pontiac. — Reuters.

The 77,500-seated stadium has hosted concerts by singer Madonna, a visit by the Pope John Paul II, country fairs and rodeos since it opened in 1974.

The Silverdome is home to the Detroit Lions of the NFL. It was once the base for the Detroit Express side of the defunct North American Soccer League and home to the Detroit Pistons of the NBA until they moved out in 1988.

The stadium was fitted out with an astro-turf surface from the start but this has been replaced by a revolutionary grass pitch for the World Cup in line with FIFA regulations.

A special turf was grown from tough grasses which could survive inside the gloomy stadium and then transferred onto 11,994 modules, each fitted with six inches (15 cm) of soil, which were installed in 31 hours last week.

The pitch is narrower than usual, with no room for traditional touchline benches, so trainers and reserve players will have to sit in the stands.

Another technological feat is the 500-tonne domed roof, which is supported purely by air pressure maintained by a system of big fans and ventilation shafts inside the stadium.

The grass and soil will be taken up after the fourth game on June 28 and sold in a bid to repay the two million dollars development costs of the new pitch.

Morocco bank on defence

ORLANDO, June 17: Abdelilah Ajri Blinda is banking on his defence to see Morocco through the first round of the World Cup, reports Reuters.

"We'll have defence for sure," The Moroccan coach told a news conference at the team's hotel in Orlando on Thursday.

The Moroccans, who reached the second round in the 1986 finals in Mexico, meet Belgium in their opening Group F match on Sunday.

Tactically, the Belgians are a great team," said Blinda. They have good players with a lot of experience."

He said he would settle for a draw.

Blinda acknowledged that his short length of time at the helm put Morocco at a competitive disadvantage in the finals.

"You can't know the players in five or six months. It's not enough," he said.

Nigeria will win World Cup?



DALLAS, June 17: Cameroon blazed the World Cup trail for black Africa four years ago but Nigeria believe they will be the ones to take the trophy home from America, reports Reuters.

While most countries are reluctant to predict anything on the eve to the finals, Nigeria's players and Dutch coach are oozing confidence.

"We are here to win the World Cup," said coach Clemens Westerhof. "Pressure? We don't know what that is."

African soccer came of age at the 1990 World Cup when Cameroon reached the quarter-finals and served notice that the continent would one day triumph.

If Westerhof is to be believed, that time has already come.

And it is his Nigerian side-crowned African champions in April — who will do it, not fellow qualifiers Cameroon.

"When I came to Nigeria five years ago I saw people playing football everywhere, on small patches of land, under bridges, and I was impressed with the way they handled the ball. I was a footballer and they could do things I couldn't," he said.

"I knew if I could mix

European tactics with what they already had, and bring in discipline, I could make a world champion team, we could reach for the sky. That's what I have been doing for five years and that's why we are here now."

The shadow of Cameroon 1990 hangs heavy over Nigeria. Everyone wants to know if Nigeria will set USA '94 alive the way their neighbours illuminated Italia '90.

"We respect Cameroon. They did very well in Italy. But we want to do better here and I know we can do better," said Westerhof, who had coached Dutch clubs Feyenoord and Vitesse Arnhem.

"You must believe in yourself, and we believe in ourselves. Nigeria are African champions and we want to make the nation proud of us here."

"We are well prepared and have the team and players to be the surprise of this World Cup. No-one should underestimate us."

Westerhof, who calls himself Dutch-Erian after five years in Lagos, says the key to Nigeria's strength lies in the number of players who play in European leagues where they have gained valuable top-level experience.

Striker Rashidi Yekini was top scorer at the African Nations' Cup as well as in the Portuguese league this season with Setubal.

He is quick to acknowledge the difference between the World Cup and African championship, but points to his record in Portugal as proof of his ability on the top stage.

"I don't think I will have any problems, but what you need to win a World Cup is luck. If you have the luck, you are the best," he said.

If Nigeria are to carry the African torch that Cameroon lit so brilliantly four years ago, the Super Eagles may have to emulate the 'Indomitable Lions' amazing feat in beating Argentina, for they are drawn in the same group.

"We respect Argentina very much," said Westerhof. "But our respect goes only until the referee blows his whistle in the first minute. Then we shall see who is the strongest."

He anticipates some physical games against first-round opponents Argentina, Bulgaria and Greece, but said, Nigeria would play fair.

"It's football, not war. We should play good, fair football. But we came here to win the World Cup, not the fair play Cup," he warned.

Paving the path for players



CHICAGO, June 17: Some are seized by the thrill of World Cup soccer. Others would just as soon watch grass grow.

And that's exactly what American sod growers have been doing quietly in fields around the country, reports AP.

The World Cup opens in Chicago Friday, and sod growers have made extraordinary efforts to see that the world's best soccer players have a prime plot on which to play.

Of the nine World Cup venues, the surfaces of eight were entirely replaced. Stanford Stadium outside San Francisco kept its original turf, but it had to be extended over the running track to meet World Cup dimensions.

Large rolls of Kentucky Bluegrass, Fescue, hybrid bermudagrass, perennial ryegrass and Tiffway II hybrid were shipped to Michigan from California, to Chicago from Colorado, to New Jersey from North Carolina and to Boston from Rhode Island.

The sod — grown on sand, soil and plastic — has been cut and planted in hexagonal, triangle or trapezoidal modules or laid out in the traditional

slab and roll form.

To re-sod Chicago's Soldier Field, the search for perfect turf took organizers 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) West to Randy Graff's Turf Farm in Fort Morgan, Colo. The sandy fields of Colorado were a perfect match for the sand-based Soldier Field.

The Colorado-grown Kentucky bluegrass was cut into strips 1.2-meters (4 feet) wide and 13.5 metres (45 feet) long. A truck then was loaded with about 20 rolls, each weighing about 2,000 kilos (4,400 pounds), to begin the 1,600-kilometers (1,000 miles) trip East. Thirty-six trucks were needed to cover the 9,270 square meters (103,000 square feet) of Soldier Field.

A crew and the only harvester in the country that can lay strips of such size flew to Chicago from Rhode Island.

Graff's Turf Farm caught the eye of organizers after George Toma, chief groundskeeper for the Kansas City Royals, visited the farm.

"He said the grass was perfect for the World Cup," said Betsy Graff, co-owner of Graff's Turf Farm. "We didn't know what he was talking about."

The Graff's only previous connection to soccer was wat-

ching their children play the game.

"This is a great honour" Graff said. "We're great sports fans and we're real interested in soccer for now."

Some of the most innovative preparation came from an experiment by Dr. John Rogers of Michigan State. The objective was to bring a natural grass field into a covered stadium.

"It's an incredible experiment that was successful," said Doug Fender, executive director of the American Sod Producers Association.

Because World Cup games require a natural surface, the artificial grass field at Giants Stadium was buried under 10 centimeters (4 inches) of sand loam. The sod, shipped from North Carolina, then was put in place.

Sod for each of the nine World Cup arena's had to be consistent. Bermudagrass, usually a southern, warm-season grass, was shipped to New Jersey so the winning team from the eastern section of competition can play on a familiar surface when it advances to the championships in Los Angeles.

"The US may not lead the world when it comes to the game of soccer," Fender said.

Bima, Boys in Fed Cup 2nd round

Sports Reporter

Sadharan Bima KS and Bangladesh Boys moved into the final round of the BEXIMCO 12th Federation Cup football tournament after winning their respective group final matches at the Dhaka Stadium yesterday.

The few spectators who turned out at the Dhaka Stadium braving incessant drizzle witnessed Sadharan Bima romp past Eskaton Sabuj Sangha 3-0 while Bangladesh Boys squeezed into the next round with a 4-3 win over Arambagh in the tie-breaker after the lackluster 90-minute encounter ended goalless.

In the Group B final Sadharan Bima, who protested against poor ground condition, led the first half by a 14th minute goal from Akram. Munna doubled the margin utilising a defence lapse in the 53rd minute while substitute Ripon sealed the fate of the match shooting into an open net at the stroke of the final whistle in an one sided affair.

In the first match of the day, Bangladesh Boys came out a 4-3 winner over Arambagh in the tie-breaker to qualify for the next round as group C champion.

Pappu, Mithu, substitute Swapn and Soroj converted the spot-kicks for the winners while Haran, Shah Alam and Alfaz made it for the losers.

Eng 94 for one

LONDON, June 17: England were 94-1 in reply to New Zealand's first innings total of 476 at close of play on the second day of the second cricket Test at Lord's today, reports Reuters.

Scores: New Zealand 476, England 94-1.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the second day of the second cricket Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND: First innings

Young lbw b Fraser	0
Pocock c Smith b Such	10
Rutherford c Stewart b DeFreitas	37
Crowe c Smith b DeFreitas	142
Fleming lbw b Fraser	41
Thomson run out	69
Parore c Rhodes b Taylor	40
Hart b Such	25
Jash b White	56
Pringle c Hick b DeFreitas	14
Owens not out	2
extras (b-3, lb-15, w-1, nb-21)	40
Total	476

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-39, 3-67, 4-138, 5-318, 6-350, 7-391, 8-397, 9-434.

Bowling	O	M	R	W
Fraser	36	9	102	2
DeFreitas	35	8	102	3
Taylor	20	4	64	1
Such	30	8	84	2
White	21	1	84	1
Gooch	5	1	13	0
Hick	2	0	9	0

(Incomplete)

Zia atop alone

Sports Reporter

International Master (IM) Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh Biman earned a crucial win over fellow IM Reefat-binsattar to secure the top spot alone with full nine points after the ninth round of the 20th national chess championship at the chess room of National Sports Council yesterday.

4 new records in nat'l swimming

Four more new records were set up on the third day of the 15th national swimming competition at the national swimming complex at Mirpur yesterday, reports BSS.

All the four marks were established by the swimmers of Bangladesh Navy, who grabbed the previous two records of the meet. The records were set up in 1500m freestyle, 200m back stroke, 100m butterfly, and 4X200 m freestyle relay.

Hodgson has no high hopes



PONTIAC, Michigan, June 17: Swiss coach Roy Hodgson is playing down his side's chances in their World Cup opener against the United States on Saturday but the players know they must win to have any chance of qualifying from a tough Group A, reports Reuters.

The Swiss, appearing in their first finals since 1966, should in theory be too strong for a US team boasting only a few international class players.

But Hodgson insisted on Thursday, "In reality the US team is a lot stronger than many people realise. We don't fear them but we have a great deal of respect."

The Swiss players will have to deal with a huge hostile crowd in the unventilated indoor Pontiac Silverdome, which is likely to be humid and baking hot. It will be the first indoor game in World Cup history.

"We're not used to the heat and the humidity. We will be playing against 70,000 people — that won't be easy," said striker Stephane Chapuisat of Borussia Dortmund in Germany.

"We have three games and we have to win one of them."

Given that the other two teams in the group are Colombia and Romania, Saturday's game offers the Swiss the best chance to record their first World Cup finals victory since they beat Italy 4-1 on June 23, 1954.

But the US side, with six survivors from the team which lost all three opening round, games in Italy four years ago,

are confident the crowd, the heat and their greater experience will be a great benefit.

"The heat works to our advantage — we have played many times in Miami and Orlando and we know how to cope with these conditions," said assistant coach Timo Liekorski.

"The key is that our players know they can do it."

Silverdome director Michael Abington told the local Oakland Press newspaper that the stadium "has great potential to be uncomfortable." Some players could lose four kilos



ROY HODGSON

during the game.

US striker Ernie Stewart said doctors had advised the side to drink liquids the whole time and to quaff two bottles of water just before going to bed.

The sides share some characteristics — both have foreign coaches, neither have a good World Cup record and both will be sporting top-calls strikers.

Liekorski said the US side's best hope would be to rely on the quick breaks, feeding the ball to forwards Eric Wynalda

of Germany's VFB Bochum and Stewart, from Dutch side Willem II.

"We are confident we have found some things we can take advantage of. Our players are very quick," he said.

Swiss hopes of opening up the hesitant US defence took a knock on Thursday when Stuttgart striker Adrian Knup, nursing an ankle injury, said he only had a 50-50 chance of playing.

The US side also has problems up front. Striker Roy Wegerle, recovering from three major knee operations this year, will not start.

The two sides drew 1-1 in a friendly in January but none of the Swiss team who started that day are likely to be in the line-up.

The omens, at least, are with the US side — the host nation has never lost the opening game of a World Cup.

The last win for the US in the World Cup finals came in 1950, with their historic 1-0 success over England in Brazil.

PROBABLE TEAMS

US: Tony Meola, 20-Paul Caligiuri, 22-Alexi Lalas, 17-Marcelo Balboa, 4-Cle Koolman, 9-Tab Ramos, 6-John Harkes, 5-Thomas Dooley, 16-Mike Sorber, 11-Eric Wynalda, 8-Ernie Stewart.

SWITZERLAND: 1-Marco Pascolo, 4-Dominique Herr, 5-Alain Geiger, 2-Marc Hottiger, 3-Yvan Quentin, 8-Christophe Ohrel, 6-Georges Bregy, 7-Alain Sutter, 10-Ciriaco Sforza, 9-Adrian Knup or 14-Nestor Subiat, 11-Stephane Chapuisat.

Brazil media on prowl



SAN JOSE, California, June 17: When a player is injured during a soccer match in Brazil, the first person to reach him is often a radio reporter who shoves a microphone in his face and broadcasts his grunts and groans live on the air, writes Reuters.

Listeners can also savour players swearing and shouting at each other when a fight breaks out and disgruntled stars cursing their coach when they are substituted during a game.

In Brazil, players are interviewed as they warm up on the

pitch before a game, as they come off at halftime and even when they are taking a shower afterwards.

Reporters stand behind the goal and at the slightest sign of trouble run on to the pitch to register the drama.

But the methods of the Brazilian media, and the radio reporters especially, have led to confusion and chaos in the United States, where around 400 Brazilian journalists are covering the fortunes of their team in the World Cup.

US authorities may be well prepared for earthquakes and other calamities. But they have so far proved incapable of

meeting the demands of the Brazilian media, who have left in their wake a trail of shattered press offices.

The spokesman at last week's Brazil-Honduras game in San Diego apologised for the behaviour of Brazilian radio reporters after plans for a post-match briefing were wrecked.

Organisers had set up a podium for interviewees and arranged neat rows of seats for reporters. It was to be the usual routine — one question at a time.

But as soon as Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira appeared, dozens of radio reporters barged to the front, thrust cellular phones and tape recorders in front of him and asked questions all at the same time. American journalists sat in their seats shaking their heads.

The Brazilians were then told after Sunday's game with El Salvador they would be allowed to interview players by the dressing room. But fighting broke out when security guards refused to allow journalists near the players.

Reporters and security staff exchanged punches and kicks, some people had shirts torn and other journalists hurled anti-American abuse at guards in the ensuing melee.

A dozen police officers then forced their way through and formed a cordon around the dressing room door.

"This is the sort of violent, brutal police you expect in Brazil," said Marcio Guedes of O'Dia, a Rio de Janeiro daily.

The next day some 30 journalists stormed the Samaritan hospital near San Jose to report the latest on an injury to defender Ricardo Gomes.

Organisers do not seem to have learned from last year's US Cup tournament.

Although touchline interviews were not allowed, several radio reporters beat the ban by obtaining photographers' credentials and then smuggling cell phones on to the pitch.

Reporters say they accept they will not be given as much freedom during the World Cup, as they get back home — touchline interviews will be strictly prohibited — but they insist on the sacred post-match grilling of players.



THE WINGER SPEEDS PAST FULL-BACK COOPER AND WHIPS OVER A HIGH LOOPING CROSS.

UNTIL KEEPER GORDON BANKS PLUNGES FULL LENGTH TO SCOOP THE BALL UP AND OVER THE BAR, IT'S A QUITE MIRACULOUS SAVE.

HAVING BEATEN ENGLAND, THERE LOOKS TO BE NO STOPPING BRAZIL. FREE KICKS ARE THEIR SPECIALITY AND PELLE PULLS ONE FROM THE TOP DRAWER IN THE 3-2 DEFEAT OF ROMANIA.

HE IS SADLY MISSED: ENGLAND ARE CLINGING ONTO A 2-1 LEAD WHEN SEELER SPECULATIVELY FLIPS A BACK-HEADER TOWARDS GOAL. RESERVE KEEPER BONETTI IS IN NO-MAN'S LAND AS THE BALL DROPS OVER HIM.