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Glimpse of the gala that marked the opening of the 15th World Cup football championship at the Soldier Field Stadium where holders Germany took on Bolivia on Friday to spark off a month-long carnival in the States. — AFP photo

Rose Bowl welcomes soccer

LOS ANGELES, June 18: The Rose Bowl, which will stage the World Cup final on July 17, hosts its first match of the 1994 tournament on Saturday when Romania play Colombia, reports Reuter.

The stadium is 104 years old, having staged its first New Year's Day parade, the Tournament of Roses, as well as American football games in 1890.

The stadium is technically not in Los Angeles but in Pasadena, one of the dozens of small cities which comprise the vast greater Los Angeles area.

It is a big, open bowl, with a seating capacity for USA '94 of 92,000, but its capacity is 104,594.

During the 1984 Olympic Games it staged 11 soccer matches, including the final in which France beat Brazil 2-0. The attendance of 101,799 for that game is a North American record for a soccer match.

Although mainly used for American football, including the 1977 and 1980 NFL Super Bowl finals, it has also staged chariot racing and was the cycling venue for the 1932 Olympic Games.

Radio hams' World Cup role

SAN FRANCISCO, June 18: California authorities said Friday they have enlisted the help of dozens of "radio hams" to keep an eye out of any problems during World Cup soccer games at Stanford Stadium, reports Reuter.

George Washburn, an amateur radio operator, said 24 "radio hams" would be posted at different spots in the area around Stanford Stadium during each match.

"They are basically extra eyes and ears for the Sheriff's Department and the Stanford Department of Public Safety," Washburn, who is the volunteer chief radio officer for Santa Clara county, told Reuters.

The first match at Stanford, between Brazil and Russia, is on Monday.

Washburn said the amateur radio operators, who are unpaid, would be stationed in the area from a couple of hours before each match until a couple of hours after, sitting inconspicuously in vehicles.

If they spot anything that might require an emergency response, such as a traffic accident or unruly behaviour, they will radio the information to authorities, Washburn said.

He said the radio hams had no law enforcement responsibility and would be there strictly to observe.

Although about 90 amateur radio operators will donate their time during the Stanford matches, said Washburn, who is going to take vacation time to help out with the report.

The radio operators belong to the county's radio amateur civil emergency service and are trained to assist with local emergencies such as fires and earthquakes.

Swedes, far from complacent

LOS ANGELES, June 18: Swedish coach Tommy Svensson said on Friday his team would put their World Cup survival in peril if they underestimated Cameroon in their opening Group B match at the Rose Bowl on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"I have the utmost respect for the Cameroon team, they are strong, physical and full of very good, experienced technical players.

"Even though we have been told things are not so good in their camp. That is not the case. I have had a spy watching them for two months and I know just how dangerous they will be.

"I have seen them on video, I have had them watched at training and my spy tells me just what I expected to hear. We underestimate them at our peril."

Cameroon coach Henri Michel was equally respectful about the Swedes on Friday.

"They will be very eager to erase the disappointments they experienced four years ago and we know we are in for a tough match as well. Their team may not be the most expressive in the world, but it is solid, disciplined and hard to beat. But we are ready."

Despite the obvious deference from the two coaches, the odds seem tipped slightly in Sweden's favour.

Apart from Wednesday's injury to defender Jan Eriksson which caused him to return home, Svensson has enjoyed a relatively trouble-free build-up to the opening game and is almost certain of his starting

line-up which he will announce an hour before the kick-off.

"The team is 10-11ths settled in my mind, I just have one query in midfield and I will sort that out after the next couple of training sessions," he said.

A feature of this match, the first time the two sides have met, will be how a lithe, rela-

ful moves between Thomas Brodin and Dahlin up front will be vital for Sweden's chances.

Cameroon's approach is sure to be as unorthodox as it was in 1990, but it is far from clear whether they will come out looking for a win, releasing strikers Francois Omam-Biyik and Alphonse Tchami at will, or sit back in defence and then counter-attack.

But fans hoping to see another glimpse of 42-year-old Roger Milla, the star of Cameroon's run to the quarter-finals in Italia '90 will have to be patient. He is expected to be among the substitutes and may play only in about the last 20 minutes.

Sweden face the game with an unwanted World Cup record of five successive defeats after losing their last two games in the 1978 finals and all three on their next appearance in 1990.

Sweden (from): 1-Thomas Ravelli, 2-Roland Nilsson, 4-Joachim Bjorklund, 3-Patrik Andersson, 5-Roger Ljung, 9-Jonas Thern, 8-Klas Ingesson, 6-Stefan Schwarz, 21-Jesper Blomqvist or 16-Anders Limpar, 10-Martin Dahlin, 11-Tomas Brodin.

Cameroon (probable): 1-Joseph Antoine-Bell, 2-Andre Kana-Biyik, 3-Rigobert Song Bahang, 11-Emanuel Mabouang, 8-Emile Mbouh-Mbouh, 17-Marc Vivien Foe, 5-Victor N'Dip, 19-David Embe, 14-Stephen Tataw, 16-Alphonse Tchami, 7-Francois Omam-Biyik.

Referee: Alberto Tejada Noriega (Peru). Kick-off: 2330 GMT.

Belgians bank on a Croat

DAYTONA BEACH, Florida, June 18: A spark from Croatia has ignited flames of high World Cup ambition for Belgium, reports Reuter.

With five goals on his international debut only this month Josip Weber brought punch to a Belgium team traditionally regarded as defensively solid, physically forceful but short of scoring flair up front.

Four days after leading the 9-0 rout of Zambia on June 4 he scored again in a 3-1 win over Hungary, once again finding the mark inside the first 10 minutes.

A hat-trick in a friendly against the US under 23 team on Wednesday further whetted his appetite for Belgium's World Cup fray to begin in earnest in the opening Group F game against Morocco in Orlando on Sunday.

Quick off the mark and fast to spot gaps in opposing defences, Weber has been the Belgian League's top scorer for the past three seasons and has just concluded a "good" transfer from Cercle Brugge to champions Anderlecht.

"If you have a man like that

it's easier for the whole team," coach Paul Van Himst said. "In his first two matches for Belgium he scored six goals. He's very important for the team."

Weber emigrated to Belgium six years ago from former Yugoslavia where he played for his native Slavonci Brod, Hajduk Split and Dynamo Vinckovci.

"I wanted to go to the western Europe. I had ambitions which cannot be achieved (back) there," he said at the team's base 60 miles (400km) north of Orlando.

"Two or three years ago I was thinking what to do in the future — I have a lot of friends and like this kind of life and this people.

"A was asked if I was interested in playing in the national team. After a while I decided to ask for (Belgian) nationality and see if I can play in the team."

The nationalisation process was accelerated and completed in March and now, at the age of 29, the sharpshooter is relishing a late chance of World Cup glory.

"The World Cup is the best you can do as a footballer. Any player just dreams about it. I'll

try and give the maximum of myself," said Weber, who includes English in a variety of linguistic accomplishments.

He is quick to give credit to his teammates — "I feel just comfortable in this team" — and particularly fellow strikers Marc Degryse and Luc Nilis who play just behind him.

"We've played a few games together. There were always a lot of chances, a lot of goals, a lot of combinations."

Relaxed and confident, he shrugs off the question of pressure from the interest he has generated.

"I have this question 100 times. I have no problems with that. I'm really comfortable. I try to relax and do my best. My real job is on the field, not outside it," he said.

His wife is also from Croatia and his parents, brother and relatives still live there. The virtually year-long demands of soccer limit — to his regret — his opportunities to visit but he says he goes back every year.

"I really like Croatia ... I help with money, food and material and I'll do my best. If they ask something of me, no problem," he said.

They're heroes, not crooks

CHICAGO, June 18: Colombia's ambassador to the United States on Thursday complained to a Chicago newspaper that it misrepresented the Colombian team by linking its World Cup "heroes" with drug barons, reports Reuter.

In the Chicago Tribune earlier this month, a columnist asked why US security officials did not investigate the criminal background of the Colombian team, alleging 70 per cent of the country's soccer clubs were financed by drug cartels.

Ambassador Gabriel Gilva, in a letter to the daily newspaper published on Thursday, said he strongly rejected these "careless" statements and "insulting remarks."

"The vast majority of our players come from poor backgrounds and have reached this plateau after overcoming huge odds," Silva said in the letter.

"They are heroes, not criminals or security risks, as the columnists suggest.

"As the World Cup begins in Chicago it is my sincere hope that the references about the Colombian team in your newspaper will reflect its performance in the United States and not the unsubstantiated biases found in the... column."

Colombia play their opening match against Romania on Saturday in Los Angeles. The writer of the column, Mike Conklin, was unavailable for comment.

Small in size, rich in legacy

WASHINGTON, June 18: The Robert F Kennedy Memorial Stadium in Washington may be the smallest of the nine World Cup venues, but it has a celebrated site and soccer connections with several of the world's greatest players, reports Reuter.

The Stadium is situated only two miles east of the US capital building and is best known by Americans as the home of Washington Redskins National Football League (NFL) team.

But it has been home also to the former Washington diplomats soccer team, for whom legendary Dutchman Johan Cruyff was a star player in the late 1970s. In that period, such illustrious former greats as George Best, Franz Beckenbauer, Pele and Geoff Hurst were regular visitors.

The stadium was built in 1961 and was originally called the DC Stadium. It cost 22.4 million dollars to build.

In 1969, it was re-named after the US senator and former attorney general Robert Francis Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1968 while campaigning for the democratic presidential nomination.

The capacity of the stadium is usually 56,500 but it has been reduced to 53,142 for the World Cup because of temporary measures taken to accommodate the media.

The pitch is 105 metres by 68 metres (115 yards X75) in size and is sited on a three-and-a-half acre natural grass playing surface.

A roof covers 60 per cent of the seating.

Record attendance at the stadium is 54,118 set in June 1993 when Brazil and England drew 1-1 in the US Cup.

Gel will do the trick?

DAYTONA BEACH, Florida, June 18: Belgium, who face Morocco in their opening World Cup match in Orlando on Sunday, have come up with a way to protect their heads from the fierce Florida heat — coating the players' hair with gel, reports Reuter.

"It's just a gel we found here in the supermarket with lemon. It reflects the sun," team doctor Marc Goossens said at the team's base, 60 miles (100 km) north of Orlando.

In Orlando, some of the Dutch have another method of dealing with the sun. Goalkeeper Ed De Goey and twins Frank and Ronald de Boer are wearing dark contact lenses to reduce the glare.

Mexicans pin hopes on heat

WASHINGTON, June 18: Mexico are pinning their hopes of topping a physically-superior Norway team on a combination of their own skilful passing game and the effects of the heat in Washington's opening World Cup Group E clash on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The Mexicans, more used to the high temperatures and humidity which have hit Washington this week, recognise they cannot compete with Norway's direct aerial approach and a classic clash of Latin American and North European soccer styles in an prospect.

"It should be a very interesting game from the tactical point of view," said Mexico's veteran striker Hugo Sanchez, 35, who has taken on the role of unofficial spokesman for the Central American squad from exclusive coach Miguel Mejia Barón.

"We feel we have the skill and technique to unsettle them, but we know we will have to work hard with the ball and the retain possession. I think we have an aggressive attack this time and we confident."

Sanchez, in his third World Cup, is likely to start the match at the Robert F Kennedy Memorial Stadium on the substitutes bench, while fellow-veteran Carlos Hermosillo leads the attack with Luis Roberto 'Zague' Alves, scorer of a record seven international goals against Martinique last year.

Norway, more used to the cool climate of Scandinavia than the sultry heat of Washington, prepared for the conditions by wearing plastic bags in training before travelling to their New Jersey base. They will arrive in Washington today.

"We should be good enough

their first since losing 2-1 to Italy in 1938. They will not lack confidence, having beaten such established soccer powers as the Netherlands, England and Poland during their successful qualifying campaign.

"We have no intention of changing our style of play," said inspirational captain and key defender Rune Bratseth, known as "The Elk" for his speed. "It was good enough to get us to the World Cup so now we are here, why should we change?"

Olsen has two slight injury doubts surrounding goalkeeper Erik Thorstvedt and forward Jostein Flo, but both are expected to be fit for selection today.

Mexico, with no injury problems, will be missing midfielder Alberto Garcia Aspe, a skilful left-footed playmaker, through suspension.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Mexico: 1-Jorge Campos, 21-Raul Gutierrez, 2-Claudio Suarez, 3-Juan Ramirez Perales, 5-Ramon Ramirez, 15-Misael Espinosa, 4-Ignacio Ambriz, 14-Joaquin Del Olmo, 10-Luis Garcia, 7-Carlos Hermosillo, 11-Luis Roberto Zague Alves.

Norway: 1-Erik Thorstvedt, 20-Henning Berg, 4-Rune Bratseth, 3-Erlend Johnsen, 5-Stig Inge Bjoernebye, 22-Lars Bohinen, 10-Kjetil Rekdal, 7-Erik Mykland, 11-Jahn Ivar Jakobsen, 6-Jostein Flo, 9-Janage Floertoft.

Referee: Sandor Puhl (Hungary). Kick off: 2000 GMT.



HUGO SANCHEZ

to take points from all three countries in our group," said Norway's coach Egil Olsen.

"The impression we have from warm-up games is that Mexico are good — but not that good."

Olsen said Norway will not be compromising their direct, physical style of play because of the heat. "It will be difficult for us, but it is too late for us to change our style. We cannot do anything about," he said.

Although this will be only Norway's second match in a World Cup finals series and

Classic case of contrasts

WASHINGTON, June 18: The first match-up between Norway and Mexico in 25 years is bound to be a game of contrasts when both open their World Cup effort at RFK Stadium on Sunday, reports AP.

The tall Nordics with their long, high passes and defensive style, will face the smaller, faster Mexicans out to control the ball and keep it on the ground to strip the Norwegians of their height advantage in the air.

"We have to avoid high passes," said Mexico forward

group and reach the World Cup for the first time since 1938.

Mexico, with nearly 90 million people and 11 trips to the World Cup, also finished at the top of their group, ahead of Canada, El Salvador and Honduras.

"It's going to be tough," said Norwegian team captain Rune Bratseth, who usually plays for Germany's Werder Bremen.

Although the Norwegians have little experience with Mexico, Norway coach Egil Olsen said their style "isn't that special. It is the style the vast majority of the world plays."

Miguel Mejia Barón, Mexico's coach since January 1993, has said he is likely to use the flexible 4-4-2 formation that helped the team reach the World Cup. The team, which has displayed a variety of styles under Mejia Barón, sticks to short passes, good dribbling and a fast pace.

"Mexico suits us fine," said Norwegian striker Jan Ege Fjortoft, a player for England's Swindon Town. "Their lateral passes make them vulnerable."

Norway will probably stick to their 4-5-1 formation, giving it a wall-like defence that, along with their long passes, results in a style often derided as ugly and boring. But it's also a style that has produced some good results.

Olsen, who has a 20-12-8 record since becoming coach in October 1990, urges Norwegians to drive forward with long kicks and he sticks to a total zone defence.

"I think Mexico is going to start carefully and hang back a little to get us to move forward. In any case, I think there will be relatively few (scoring) chances," said Olsen.

Olsen said the Mexican's dribbling skills are their greatest strength. They are weakest in heading play and defensive organisation, he said.

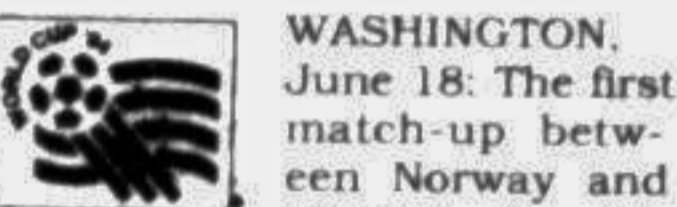
Some Mexican newspapers

urged Mejia Barón to replace starting goalkeeper Jorge Campos with taller Juan Carlos Chavez to blunt the Norwegians' height advantage.

Campos is 1.75-metres (5-foot-9-inches) tall, compared to Norway's 1.94 metre (6-foot-4) goaltender Erik Thorstvedt of England's Tottenham Hotspur.

"The only starting goalie Mexico has in Jorge Campos," Mejia Barón has said.

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Compos's daring style has made him a fan favourite. He is once said to have handed his goalkeeper's gloves to a team-

mate, assumed the position of striker and scored for his club, UNAM.

But he often ranges far from the goal, as a sort of extra sweeper. That can backfire,

such as when he lost the ball during a friendly against Columbia last year, allowing them to score because he was far from the goal, said the Norwegian news agency NTB.

Still, Mejia Barón told NTB that "Our game benefits from Campos's skills. With him as extra security in defence we can press higher and give our opponents fewer scoring chances."

He added that Korean fans tend to be "very formal" and "respect authority" but may be surprised to see women police officers patrolling the Cotton Bowl.

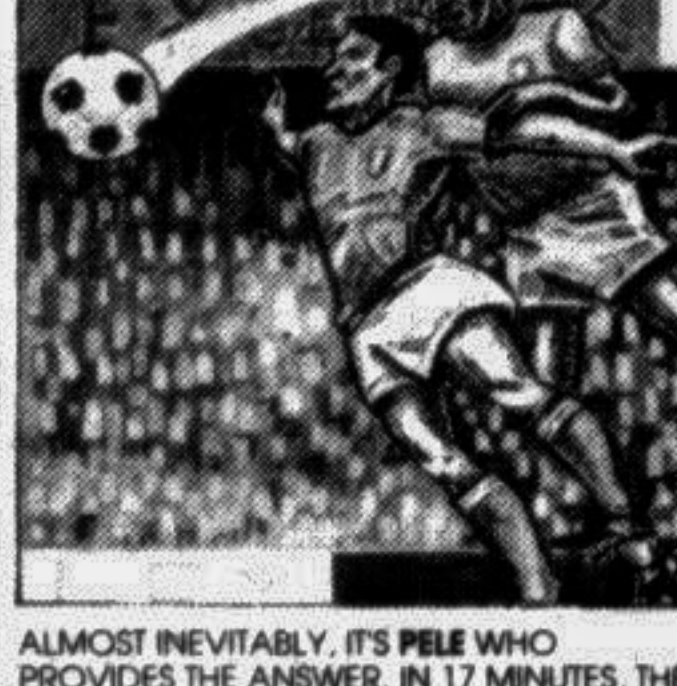


ERIK THORSTVEDT

SUNDAY, JULY 21 AND ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE AZTECA STADIUM. CAN THE ITALIANS RENOWNED DEFENCE CONTAIN BRAZIL'S SUCCUBERING FORWARDS?



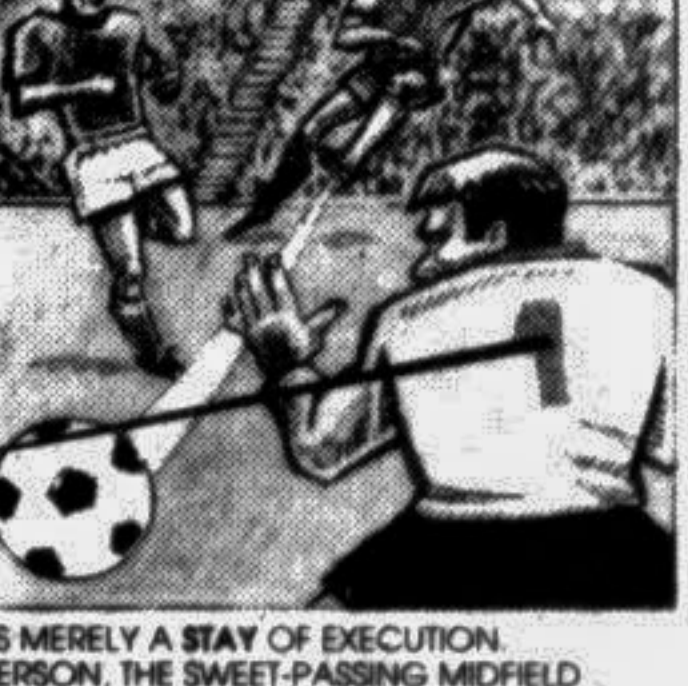
ALMOST INEVITABLY, IT'S PELE WHO PROVIDES THE ANSWER. IN 17 MINUTES, THE MASERO JUMPS SPECTACULARLY TO HEAD HOME A TEASING RIVELINO CROSS.



BRAZIL ARE CLEARLY IN CHARGE BUT, CARELESSLY, THEY GIFT ITALY AN EQUALISER JUST BEFORE HALF-TIME.



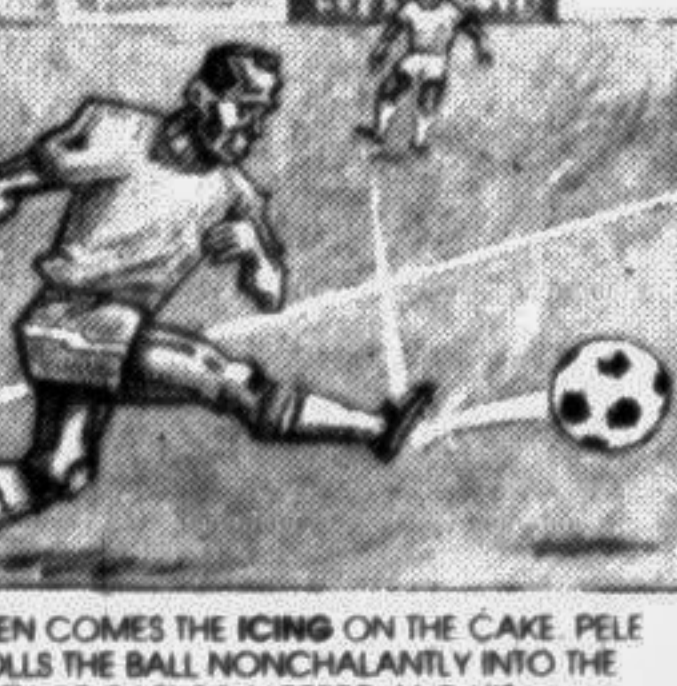
IT'S MERELY A STAY OF EXECUTION. GERSON, THE SWEET-PASSING MIDFIELD GENERAL, THUMPS BRAZIL IN FRONT AGAIN AFTER 66 MINUTES.



WHEN PELE'S ASSISTANT ALLOWS JAIRZINHO TO RUN IN A THIRD, THE SAMBAS STRIKE UP IN EARNEST. JAIRZINHO HAS NOW SCORED IN EVERY ROUND.



THEN COMES THE ICING ON THE CAKE. PELE ROLLS THE BALL NONCHALANTLY INTO THE PATH OF CARLOS ALBERTO AND HIS SEARING DRIVE FLIES INTO THE CORNER OF THE NET. 4-1.



IT'S ALL OVER. PELE IS CARRIED HIGH BY JUBILANT FANS. IT'S THE PERFECT END TO A GLORIOUS WORLD CUP CAREER.



WITH PERHAPS THE FINEST EXHIBITION OF FLAIR FOOTBALL EVER SEEN, BRAZIL HAVE WON THE COVERED RIMMET TROPHY FOR THE THIRD TIME. FITTINGLY, IT'S NOW THEM TO KEEP.

