

Maradona upbeat

BOSTON, Massachusetts, June 28: Diego Maradona, who will have played more World Cup matches than anyone when Argentina face Bulgaria, on Thursday, believes he can win another World Cup, reports AFP.

"We've got the stuff that makes world champions," the 33-year-old said here Monday after wins over Greece and Nigeria qualified the 1986 champions for the second round.

Thursday's match at Dallas will be his 22nd game in four World Cups. At present he shares the record with Germany's Uwe Seeler and Poland's Wladyslaw Zmuda.

Maradona has played in the 1982, 1986, 1990 finals, lifting the trophy in Mexico eight years ago. Seeler played in four finals tournaments from 1985 to 1970. Zmuda's four tournaments were from 1974 to 1978.

Mexico goalkeeper Antonio Carbajal is the only man to have played in five finals although he only played in 11 matches.

Before the tournament everyone was talking about Brazil, Germany and Colombia. Now they know they have to worry about us," Maradona said.

He said Colombia, who have failed to survive the first round, had never really impressed him.

"They shouldn't have spent so much time bragging after beating us 5-0," he said.

Colombia's 5-0 win in Buenos Aires, when Maradona's drugs and injury problems meant he was unavailable, forced Argentina to play off against Australia to qualify for USA '94.

Basile won't let his men slow down

BOSTON, Massachusetts, June 28: Argentina coach Alfio Basile will resist the temptation to rest his star players for the final World Cup Group D game against Bulgaria, reports AFP.

Although Argentina are already qualified for the next round Basile has no intention of relaxing the pressure on his players.

"In order to keep up the momentum we have built up, we have to keep on winning," he said.

He dismissed suggestions that Diego Maradona, the 33-year-old captain, and his star strikers Gabriel Battistuta and Claudio Caniggia deserved a rest after powering Argentina to convincing wins over Greece and the mighty Nigerians.

"All the top players will play," he said.

Basile wants to beat Bulgaria and end to of the group ahead of Nigeria so as to stay in Boston, their home for more than three weeks now, for the next round and the quarter-final on July 9.

Bulgaria's 4-0 win over Greece on Monday convinced Argentina they are no pushovers.

"But they will have to be better than that to beat us," Basile said.

Five players reported injured after the Nigerian game, which Argentina won 2-1 here on Saturday.

But only defender Roberto Sensini is in doubt for the Bulgaria game in Dallas on Thursday, Nigeria, second in the group and three points behind Argentina, play Greece in Boston at the same time.

Sensini, the 27-year-old right-back who plays in the Italian league for Parma, took a blow to the chin and badly bruised his right thigh.

"I will have to take it easy for the next couple of days," he said.

Waiting in the wings is Hernan Diaz, the 29-year-old River Plate defender who scored a goal in his debut for Argentina in a friendly against Germany in December.

Diaz was brought on for a limping Sensini for the last three minutes of the Nigeria game.

Star striker Caniggia, who needed two pain-killing injections during the match after injuring a foot in the 57th minute, is a certain starter.

"Without a doubt Caniggia is going to play," said Basile.



Bolivia defender Juan Pena (L) struggles to keep Spanish forward Julio Salinas at bay during their Group C encounter at the Soldier Field Stadium in Chicago on June 27. Spain moved into the next round with a 3-1 win over Bolivia. — AFP photo

Spain on way to Washington

CHICAGO, June 28: Spain, who have often promised so much at World Cup finals but very rarely delivered, made sure of their survival in the 1994 tournament by a convincing 3-1 victory over Bolivia in Group C on Monday, reports Reuter.

The Spanish, who went so close to beating world champions Germany in the group last week but only came away with 1-1 draw, reached the second round thanks to a 19th minute penalty from midfielder Josep Guardiola and two brilliantly taken goals from Jose Luis Caminero in the 66th and 71st minutes.

The Bolivians scored their first goal in their World Cup history in the 67th minute when Erwin Sanchez's long-range shot took a deflection into the net.

But the Spaniards, who could only manage a 2-2 draw with South Korea in their opening match after conceding two late goals, held off late Bolivian pressure to clinch the second qualifying place in the group.

Javier Clemente's side, who finished second in the group behind Germany, will now travel to Washington to play Switzerland in the second round on July 2. The Swiss finished second in Group A behind Romania.

The Spanish deserved their victory. Their defence, orchestrated by Abelardo Fernandez, looked particularly solid. Some of their attacking moves in the second half were inspired.

Caminero's two goals were the best that Chicago's Soldier Field has seen in the first round. It was a major blow to the Spanish that he was given his second yellow card of the first round in the dying seconds and will miss the Swiss clash.

His first goal was deftly worked. Caminero fed Sergi Barjuan on the left flank. Sergi danced round his marker and slipped the ball

back to Caminero who blasted the ball home, giving Bolivian goalkeeper Carlos Trucco no chance.

The Bolivians scored on their next attack. But four minutes later Caminero chipped down a long pass from the back from Albert Ferrer in the penalty area and coolly fired the ball into the back of the net.

Bolivia, who have yet to win a match in their World Cup history, could walk away from the finals with their heads high after another good performance, however.

The Bolivians, who made Germany work hard for a 1-0 victory in the opening match, gave the Spanish a huge scare in the third minute when striker William Ramallo hit the bar with a blistering shot from long range with Spanish keeper Andoni Zubizarreta well beaten.

But the Spanish took a grip on the match when Bolivian veteran winger Carlos Borja pushed Spanish striker Felipe Minambres in the area for the penalty. Guardiola blasted the penalty into the middle of the goal with Trucco diving to his right.

It was a stupid push from Borja with Felipe unlikely to threaten the Bolivian goal. But it effectively ended Bolivia's bid for a victory at the World Cup, with the Bolivians storming forward in the second half, the Spanish always looked like

Thai students get a break

BANGKOK, June 28: Soccer-mad Thai students and teachers can stay up to watch the World Cup final next month without having to struggle to school afterwards, the education department has ruled, reports Reuter.

Director-general Banchoh Pongsastra told reporters schools need not open on July 19, when the World Cup final is due to be broadcast live in Thailand between 2:30 and 5:30 am local time.

catching them out on the counter-attack.

Clemente said the Spanish would miss Caminero against the Swiss but he seemed far from worried.

"We will miss him but we have other good players and I am sure he will be replaced effectively," he said. "It was not easy against the Bolivians today but we qualified and that was the main goal."

Bolivian coach Xabier Azkargorta said Ramallo's early chance could have changed the game.

"I felt the game was close throughout," he said. "You have to remember that the ball hit the bar and it could have changed the whole of the game. But the Spanish then scored and we had to change our tactics."

"We played the best we could and gave our all until the end of the match," Azkargorta added.

Referee: Rodrigo Badilla (Costa Rica)

Yellow cards: Spain — Albert Ferrer (46) Jose Caminero (90)

TEAMS

SPAIN — 1-Andoni Zubizarreta, 2-Albert Ferrer, 5-Abelardo, 15-Jose Caminero, 17-Voro, 12-Sergi, 7-Juan Gokikoetxea, 8-Julen Guerrero, 9-Josep Guardiola (10-Jose Maria Bakero 87), 16-Felipe (6-Fernando Hierro 46), 19-Julio Salinas.

BOLIVIA — 1-Carlos Trucco, 4-Miguel Rimba, 3-Marco Sandy, 2-Juan Pena, 6-Carlos Borja, 13-Modesto Soruco, 8-Milton Melgar, 15-Valdimir Soria (20-Ramiro Castillo 61), 21-Erwin Sanchez, 14-Mauricio Ramos (11-Jaime Moreno 46), 18-William Ramallo.

MATCH STATS

Table with 3 columns: Stat, Bolivia, Spain. Rows include Goals, Shots on goal, Fouls, Corners, Offsides, Yellow cards, Red Cards.

Immune to soccer bug!

LOS ANGELES, California June 28: Millions of Americans have jumped on the World Cup bandwagon, but even as the Alexi Lalas wigs proliferate plenty of US sports fans are proving immune to the football bug, reports AFP.

"My feeling is that if they flew me in on a helicopter that landed on the 50-yard line and had me sit in an air-conditioned box, I still wouldn't go," said southern California insurance broker Gene Whitlock.

"Suppose I'm interested in the United States, but Cameroon? That sounds like a cookie."

Cup organisers and FIFA officials never miss an opportunity to spout figures showing that the World Cup has revolutionised the perception of soccer in America.

And they may be right. Attendances are on course for a World Cup record, with the United States' final Group A match against Romania drawing 93,000 spectators to the Bowl in Pasadena, site of the July 17 final.

Even in Dallas, where ticket sales lagged behind the other eight venues, two matches have sold out.

Television viewing figures have exceeded organisers' wildest expectations.

Early ratings showed that in 29 major metropolitan areas Sunday's USA-Romania match drew a television audience three times that of Wimbledon or the PGA Tour golf tournament at Hartford.

But still, pockets of resistance remain. Television comedian David Letterman regularly pillories the cup on his late-night show.

History beckons Saudis

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 28: They came close to making history once. Now a draw can put Saudi Arabia in the history books.

The Saudis, who for 31 minutes against the Netherlands had visions of joining the names of the greatest upsets in World Cup history, can still make history by becoming the first Arab nation to reach the second round, reports AP.

They will need at least a draw against Belgium on Wednesday at Washington's Robert F Kennedy Stadium. A victory would assure it but a tie would give them four points and good chance of advancing.

"Every player realises that the Saudi team can go on to the second round," said defender Mohammad Al Jawad, underlining the challenge for the emerging soccer nation.

Belgium are already beyond that.

"A lot remains at stake. We still need a draw if we want to stay in Orlando," where Belgium already won their first two games, said Belgian coach Paul Van Himst.

"And we would love to stay," said playmaker Enzo Scifo.

Saudi Arabia's chance for an upset improved when Belgium decided to sideline several players for the game to give them additional rest or avoid suspension with additional yellow cards.

Belgium currently lead Group F with a perfect six points out of two games and remain an obvious favourite.

Both Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands have three points but the Saudis are ahead because they scored more goals, and Morocco has no points. The first two teams automatically go through, with four of the best third-place teams joining them.

The Netherlands, a star-studded team fighting for qualification, play Morocco simultaneously in Orlando Wednesday.

The Saudis are not without problems though. Fuad Amin, who scored against both the Dutch and the game winner against Morocco will be lost after earning his second yellow card against the Africans.

Still, there is a certain amount of national and Arab pride riding on the Saudis.

"We want to win because we represent not just Saudi Arabia, but the whole Arab world in the World Cup," Amin said after beating Morocco.

But don't expect the Saudis to go all-out on attack.

"They always keep many people behind the ball on defence, but when they break out they can really hurt an opponent," Van Himst said.

Even if they won't be playing at full strength, Belgium would be looking for a victory to keep their momentum going and pride intact.

"It's still a World Cup qualifier, we won't just let ourselves go like that," Van Himst said.

Captain Georges Grun and striker Josip Weber will likely sit on the bench Wednesday.

because any additional yellow cards would force them to miss the second-round game.

Van Himst might also decide to rest other players who have been drained by two games played in the steaming 40 degree-plus Celsius (100 degree-plus Fahrenheit) heat. The substitutes would be fully fit and full of adrenaline to prove themselves.

"The subs will be ready, both physically and mentally," said Van Himst.

Even though the Saudis would play a five-man defence, Van Himst does not want to throw more forwards at them.

"That would not serve any purpose," he said.

Instead, he wants to lure them off their back line with a strong midfield, and hoping Belgium's two strikers would be able to profit from the space it creates.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Belgium: 1-Michel Preud'homme, 15-Marc Emmers, 13-Georges Grun, 14-Michel De Wolf, 4-Philippe Albert, 3-Vital Borkelmans, 10-Enzo Scifo, 7-Franky Van Der Elst, 6-Lorenzo Staelens, 9-Marc Degryse, 17-Josip Weber.

Saudi Arabia: 1-Mohammad Al-Deayea, 2-Abdullah Al-Dossari, 3-Mohammad Al-Kulawi, 5-Ahmed Jamil Madani, 13-Mohammad Abdul-Jawad, 19-Hamza Saleh, 8-Fahad Al-Bishi, 14-Khalid Al-Mualid, 16-Talal Jabrin, 9-Majed Abdullah, 10-Saeed Owairan.

Referee: Hellmut Krug (Germany). Kick-off: 1630 GMT.

FIFA won't reverse ban on Harkes

DANA POINT, California, June 28: FIFA on Monday rejected a protest lodged by the US World Cup team in hopes of reversing a one-match ban on midfielder John Harkes for the yellow card he was shown in Sunday's game with Romania, reports Reuter.

Harkes received his second caution and an automatic suspension that will keep him out of the second round if, as expected, the Americans qualify. He was shown the yellow card for encroaching at a Romanian free kick.

US general manager Bill Nuttall insisted that Harkes had committed no offence, but said the team would abide by FIFA's ruling. In a terse statement later, he announced that FIFA had rejected the protest. He gave no further details.

"After looking at the film we filed a protest last night to FIFA, asking them to review it," he told reporters before soccer's governing body had ruled on the protest.

Harkes said earlier Romanian midfielder Gheorgie Hagi got him booked by pointing at him before the free kick was taken to suggest he was too close.

The film shows Harkes never moved," Nuttall said. "We

Success, Saudis & Solari

WASHINGTON, June 28: Saudi Arabia's hopes of joining soccer's traditional powers in the last

16 of the World Cup rest with a man who speaks less than 30 words of Arabic and wants to leave his job in a matter of days, reports Reuter.

Coach Jorge Solari will be stepping down even if the Saudis take a point off Belgium on Wednesday and manage to reach the second round at their first World Cup tournament.

By recent Saudi standards his four-month stint makes him a faithful old retainer. Dutchman Leo Beenhakker lasted only from November to February as successor to Brazilian Jose Candido, who was sacked in the middle of the final Asian qualifying tournament.

Amid the chaos, Beenhakker suggested that meddling officials had thwarted his every move.

The shrewd Solari, a midfielder in the Argentine team labelled "animals" by England manager Alf Ramsey after their World Cup quarter-finals in 1966, quietly adopted Saudi policy by appointing his brother and son to key coaching roles and is now suddenly on the brink of a unique family achievement.

His son-in-law Fernando Redondo has already helped Argentina qualify for the second round and may yet face the Saudis in USA '94 if certain

results unfold this week.

So far Solari's team have beaten Morocco 2-1 and were unfortunate to concede a late goal to the Netherlands, whom they are now battling for second place in Group F.

"He has done a wonderful job preparing our team," said Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador in Washington where the Belgian match is being played.

"The mix of Argentine coach and Saudi players has worked well. It shows how small our world has become."

Solari, known as "El Indio" in Argentina for his dark features, diplomatically suggested otherwise.

"The Latin and Arabic cultures are very different... I've had to adapt many parts of my life. I came to Saudi Arabia just to help them with the World Cup but then I will leave."

"I speak 20 or 30 Arabic words, but most of the time two interpreters are there to assist me."

From a purely soccer standpoint, the 51-year-old coach believes his successor will inherit a team with plenty of potential.

Several of the Saudi squad who won the World Youth Cup in 1989 have emerged at senior level, and a country which until 1976 had no national soccer team is now bursting with ambition.

"This is a very well-prepared team," admitted Solari. "We played with courage and

determination against Morocco and we are looking forward to advancing to the next round."

Goalkeeper Mohammad Al-Deayea, still only 21, attributed the Saudi victory to the fact that "My whole country backed us up with their prayers and God's will."

Moroccan fans were more inclined to blame their defeat on the swerving long-range shot by midfielder Fuad Anwar Amin, who later predicted his side would beat Belgium. Unfortunately for Amin, he will be forced to miss the match after receiving two yellow cards.

So far "the desert Pele," Majed Abdullaah, has played just 44 minutes and had scant chance to add to his reported tally of 118 international goals, but much interest still centres on the Saudi players' financial rewards.

No one has effectively quashed the rumour that each team member received a 100,000 dollars bonus and a Mercedes for reaching the finals, while the squad have used a private jet belonging to the New York Yankees baseball team to fly between cities.

Some hotel and training facilities have also failed to meet Saudi requirements, doing little to alter perceptions of a wealthy team at play.

"The team is not interested in the financial aspects, at least not me," said Solari revealingly. "What is important is scoring goals and victory, not material rewards."

Some solace for Bolivians

CHICAGO, June 28: Bolivia's biggest soccer adventure ended in defeat and elimination from USA '94 on Monday but not before they recorded their first World Cup finals goal in more than 510 minutes, reports Reuter.

Fittingly the goal, joyously acclaimed by the green and yellow-painted supporters in Soldier Field Stadium, was scored by Bolivia's finest player, Erwin Sanchez, midway through the second half of their 3-1 defeat by Spain.

The Bolivian playmaker's drive from about 25 metres took a deflection from a Spanish defender to loop over goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta and end one of the game's longest goal droughts.

USA '94 was the first tournament where Bolivia earned their place on merit — in 1930

and 1950 they received invitations to soccer's top table but provided easy pickings, conceding 16 goals in just three games.

However, the appointment of Spaniard Francisco Azkargorta to coach the team galvanised Bolivia, both on and off the field.

Bolivia finished second behind Brazil in their South American qualifying group, notching five wins including a 2-0 defeat of the great Brazilian side. Azkargorta was named Bolivian man of the year and the team became the country's heroes.

Azkargorta said on arrival here he just wanted the team to produce their best, but the tournament started badly with a 1-0 defeat by Germany in the opening game.

Bolivia earned their first World Cup point by drawing 0-0 with South Korea. But the goals just would not come and

the pressure seemed to get to the Bolivian players against Spain.

Time again they would get to the penalty area and then apparently lose their nerve — until Sanchez stepped up in the 66th minute.

Ultimately outplayed by Spain, Bolivia were disappointed to be heading home but felt they had done themselves justice.

Apart from Sanchez, Bolivia were hampered by their lack of inventive players.

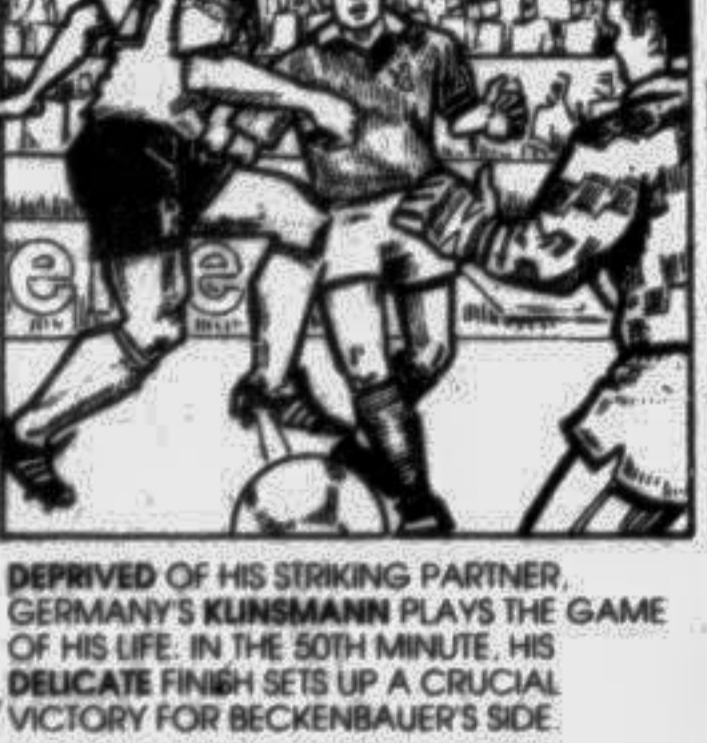
Two yellow cards also deprived Bolivia of another gifted player, Julio Baldivieso, against Spain. Azkargorta felt that the smaller sides were picked on by referees told to crack down on rough play and time-wasting.

Sanchez said: "We played the best we could. We wanted to put Bolivia on the map of the soccer world and I think we succeeded."

IN THE TOP SECOND ROUND MATCH, WEST GERMANY FACE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS HOLLAND. AN IL-TEMPURED FIRST-HALF TANGLE BETWEEN VOLLER AND RUKAARD SEES BOTH MEN ORDERED OFF.



DEPRIVED OF HIS STRIKING PARTNER, GERMANY'S KUNSMANN PLAYS THE GAME OF HIS LIFE. IN THE 50TH MINUTE, HIS DELICATE FINISH SETS UP A CRUCIAL VICTORY FOR BECKENAUER'S SIDE.



IN A CLASH OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN HEAVYWEIGHTS, BRAZIL DO EVERYTHING BUT SCORE AGAINST ARGENTINA. IN THE END, THEY ARE BEATEN BY SOME MARADONIA MAGIC. THE LITTLE MAN RELEASES CANIGGIA WHO LANDS THE KILLER BLOW.



ELSEWHERE, 38-YEAR-OLD ROGER MILLA CONFIRMS HIS PLACE IN WORLD CUP FOURSOME. THE CAMEROON'S SUPER SUB ROIS COLLOMBIA'S SWEEPER-KEEPER HIGUITA TO NET THE SECOND OF TWO SENSATIONAL MATCH-WINNING GOALS.



JOINING THE AFRICANS AS FIRST-TIME QUARTER-FINALISTS ARE THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. BONNER'S SHOOT-OUT SAVE IS THE KEY MOMENT AGAINST ROMANIA.



THE IRISH ADVENTURE ENDS IN THE STIRLING HEAT OF ROME'S OLIMPIC STADIUM. A PREDATORY STRIKE FROM ITALY'S SCHILLACI IS ALL THAT SEPARATES THE SIDES IN AN ABSORBING MATCH.



THE PICK OF THE QUARTER-FINALS IS UNQUESTIONABLY THE CAMEROON. ENGLAND THE AFTER GOING BEHIND, THE AFRICAN LIONS STORM INTO THE LEAD IN THE 65TH MINUTE.



ENGLAND ARE BOCKING ON THEIR HEELS AND NEED GARY LINEKER, THEIR GOALSCORER-SUPREME, TO RESCUE THEM WITH TWO PENALTY GOALS.

