

WORLD CUP USA '94

From hero to villain

DALLAS, June 30: Like a Greek tragedian who carries with him the seeds of his own destruction, Diego Maradona was destined on Wednesday to be cast as the villain of the World Cup finals, reports Reuter.

The prospect of being thrown out of the tournament only hours before he was due to make a record 22nd appearance in the finals seemed entirely characteristic of a man who just can not stay out of trouble.

It was perhaps the final page in the saga of off-field trials and tribulations that have long accompanied one of the greatest careers in soccer.

Inevitably, there were echoes of sport's biggest doping scandal in which Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson was tossed out of the Seoul Olympics six years ago for using banned drugs.

But while Maradona admitted taking the banned stimulant ephedrine prescribed by Argentine team doctor, his offence still seemed a world away from Johnson's deliberate plan to cheat on his rivals by using anabolic steroids.

But Johnson was never branded as a cocaine user — unlike the Argentine superstar whose career hit the skids in 1991 when he was banned from the game for 15 months for taking cocaine.

Neither did Johnson quite share the line in media relations adopted by Maradona in Argentina earlier this year when he fired at reporters with an air gun.

But for all his off-field dramas Maradona arrived at his fourth World Cup apparently rehabilitated, fighting fit and still able to galvanise his teammates into exceeding all expectations in their opening matches.

However, his dream of leading Argentina to their third World Cup triumph collapsed around his ears with Wednesday's positive dope test.

Once again life had turned sour for the man who had still looked capable of dominating soccer's greatest occasion at the age of 33.

He appeared to have made his final bow on soccer's world stage and there seemed little prospect that he could make just one more grand entrance.

No love lost

BOSTON, Massachusetts, June 30: Nigerian football officials demanded harsh punishment for Diego Maradona after learning that he used the banned drug ephedrine when he led Argentina to victory against them here, reports AFP.

Former Nigerian minister of sport Emeke Omeruah, the chairman of the Nigerian Football Association, said Maradona should be sent home in disgrace.

"If any player on my team took drugs he would be banished home and would have his name expunged from football forever," said Omeruah.

He said he would not await a ruling from FIFA, who are meeting on Thursday to consider their course of action after Maradona failed a random drug test following Argentina's 2-1 win over Nigeria in Group D on Saturday.

"The team is involved with drugs all through," he said in a sharp attack on Argentina, the two-times world champions who have emerged as one of the favourites after a 4-0 win over Greece and the defeat of Nigeria. They play Bulgaria later on Thursday in Dallas.

The Nigerians will hold a meeting of their technical committee, including Omeruah and Dutch coach Clemens Westerhof, before deciding on what action to take.

"We don't want to rush into things," said Omeruah, but he did not rule out a formal protest to FIFA over Maradona. "It is shocking," he said. "Football should be drug free."

Westerhof, their Dutch-born coach, said: "I have no comment at this stage. I am very busy getting the team ready for the match (against Greece) tonight."

Nigeria's press officer, Augustine Mboi, said: "This is a tragedy. We hope young players who worship Maradona don't follow his example. Drugs should have been kept away from a great game like football... we were taken unaware."

Maradona returned to competition in 1992 after serving a 15-month ban for cocaine use while with Italian club Napoli.

Claudio Caniggia, who has only recently returned after a 13-month ban for cocaine use, scored both Argentina's goals against Nigeria.

On learning that Maradona would be expelled from the tournament, Westerhof said: "I have great respect for Maradona as a player, but no sympathy."



MARADONA ... vitiated valediction

Maradona in time

DALLAS, June 30 (Reuter): Chronology of Diego Maradona's career:

Born — Diego Armando Maradona on October 30 1960, in Buenos Aires working class slum of Villa Fiorito. Fifth of eight children of a factory worker.

Oct 1976 — Makes First Division debut for Argentinos Juniors, 10 days before 16th birthday.

1977 — Argentina debut.

1978 — Omitted from Argentine World Cup squad for finals in Argentina.

1979 — Captains Argentina to victory in World Youth Cup in Japan.

1981 — Wins first and only Argentine league title with Boca Juniors.

Aug 1982 — Moves to Barcelona for 3 million dollars after 1982 World Cup. Spends two unhappy seasons at the Spanish club marred by illness and injury.

1984 — Napoli pay 7.5 million dollars for him.

June 1986 — Scores "hand of God" goal then adds brilliant second in 2-1 World Cup quarter-final defeat of England. Leads Argentina to 3-2 triumph over West Germany in final.

June 1987 — Leads Napoli to their first Italian league title.

May 1989 — Helps Napoli win UEFA Cup, the club's first European trophy. Then is absent for two months in Argentina and refuses to return for start of Italian league season. Demands to be transferred to French Club.

June 1990 — Maradona leads Napoli to their second Italian title.

July 1990 — Captains Argentina in 1-0 defeat by Germany in World Cup final.

1990-91 season — Maradona, complaining about stress of Italian league, misses training and matches and runs up more than 50,000 dollars in fines for indiscipline; becomes involved in paternity suit.

Nov 1990 — Refuses to travel to Moscow with team for European Cup tie, turning up 24 hours later in a private jet.

March 1991 — Fails dope test for cocaine and is investigated in connection with Naples vice ring and banned from game for 15 months.

April 1991 — Shortly after return to Argentina, arrested for taking cocaine and ordered by a judge to quit the habit under medical supervision.

June 92 — Refuses to return to Napoli after drugs ban and demands transfer.

Sept 92 — Spanish side Sevilla sign Maradona for 7.5 million dollars.

Feb 93 — Maradona returns to captain Argentina against Brazil in game marking 100th anniversary of the Argentine FA.

June 93 — Sevilla refuse to pay Maradona 1 million dollars owed to him because he had "not met his obligations to the club". He quits and returns to Argentina. Sevilla sack him hours before expiry of his contract.

Sept 93 — Joins Argentina club Newell's Old Boys.

Oct 93 — Returns for Argentina in first leg of World Cup play-off against Australia; plays in second leg the following month.

Feb 94 — Sacked by Newell's for missing training. Besieged by Argentine press at his home, he fires an airgun at reporters, wounding four.

April 94 — Scores penalty in friendly against Morocco, one of five internationals he plays in build-up to US '94.

June 94 — Maradona appears in fourth World Cup. Day before he is due to make record 22nd appearance news breaks of his positive dope test.

Annals of dopers

DALLAS, June 30: (Reuter): The following is a chronology of known soccer doping cases:

— **1974**: Ernest Jean-Joseph of Haiti was banned from the World Cup in Germany but his manager refused to send him home. He was eventually extradited by security officers sent from Haiti. He never played again.

— **1978**: Willie Johnston of Scotland was sent home from the World Cup in Argentina after taking an illegal drug for medicinal purposes.

— **1991**: Diego Maradona, playing for Italian league club Napoli, failed a dope test for cocaine in March. He was banned from soccer for 15 months.

— **1991**: Maradona fled to Buenos Aires where he was imprisoned in April on charges of using cocaine. He was released on 20,000 dollar bail, went into seclusion and began a rehabilitation programme.

— **1993**: Claudio Caniggia, Maradona's Argentine teammate playing for Italian league club Roma, was banned for 13 months for using cocaine. He was reinstated last month.

— **1993**: Brazil's reserve goalkeeper Zetti was suspended after traces of cocaine were found in his urine following Brazil's World Cup qualifier against Bolivian La Paz. Four days later FIFA lifted the ban on the grounds that Zetti had unwittingly drunk a local tea made from coca leaves.

Neopolitans can't believe it

ROME, June 30: Italians were shaken today by news that Argentine World Cup captain and former Napoli star Diego Maradona had failed a dope test, reports Reuter.

"Maradona hunted," said the banner front-page headline in *Il Corriere dello Sport* newspaper above a report detailing how he had tested positive for the banned drug ephedrine at the World Cup finals.

"The news was like a stone tossed into a mill pond," *Corriere dello Sport* said.

"He had just emerged from the tunnel of drug addiction and rediscovered the pleasure of the sport and love of his fans."

A spokeswoman at Napoli, where Maradona spent nearly eight years after being bought for 7.5 million dollars in 1984, said the First Division club had no comment.

"Many people in the city are giving him the benefit of the doubt and waiting for the results of the second urine sample," she said.

The result of the second test was expected to be released in the United States later today.

Maradona, 33, tested positive for cocaine in 1991 and quit Napoli for Spain's Sevilla in June 1992 after serving a 15-month worldwide ban from soccer.

Fans in Naples retain a strong affection for the star, who led Napoli to two league titles and the UEFA Cup in 1989, the club's first European trophy.

"He earned the club a lot of bad publicity with his drugs," one taxi driver in the southern port city said. "But we'll never forget what he did for us."

When the former Napoli midfielder scored for Argentina against Greece last week, Neapolitans cheered the victory with as much gusto as if Italy had won the Cup.

A real wet blanket for Argentines



BUENOS AIRES, June 30: Argentine soccer fans had forgiven Diego Maradona his trespasses once.

But the announcement on Wednesday that he had tested positive for a banned drug at the World Cup stunned and shamed the whole country, report agencies.

"I'm going nuts. How could Diego do something so stupid when he was doing so well?" a nightwatchman, Jose Avila, said as the nation tried to absorb the news from the United States.

In a country that grinds to a halt everytime its soccer team steps on to a pitch and goes wild whenever it scores a goal, fans seemed unlikely to let Maradona off this time.

"It looked like he was going to end his career with glory and now he's thrown it all away," said a garage attendant.

The 33-year-old Maradona had been banned for cocaine abuse in 1991 but was staging a remarkable comeback in the US finals where Argentina won their first two matches.

The Argentine captain recaptured his country's admiration with a dazzling performance, restoring his image after an episode in February when he fired an air gun at reporters.

So the confirmation that traces of ephedrine, a drug used in nasal drops, had been found in a urine test taken

after Saturday's match against Nigeria felt like a bucket of icy water on Argentine fans' hopes.

"The feeling of sadness and impotence we all experience is incredible. This is so embarrassing," said a participant in a television debate on the World Cup.

"This is one of the most embarrassing episodes in the history of World Cups," said television talk show host Samuel Geblung. "This is total madness, an absolute disaster."

Maradona's future at the World Cup depended on the result of a second dope test at a laboratory in Los Angeles. FIFA, the World Soccer body, were holding a news conference in Dallas this evening to discuss the case.

FIFA banned Maradona from soccer for 15 months after the 1991 cocaine scandal. Argentine fans were stunned then by television images of police officers bundling a wild-eyed and babbling Maradona into a patrol car after a drugs swoop at his Buenos Aires flat.

Maradona, who played for Italian club Napoli before the ban, later staged two unsuccessful comeback attempts with Spanish side Sevilla and Argentine club Newell's Old Boys.

Some observers said after Wednesday's news that the Argentine Football Association (AFA) should never have summoned Maradona to play his fourth World Cup.

"I said months ago that the AFA was crazy for pinning its hopes on two players with drug problems like Maradona and Claudio Caniggia," said soccer commentator Egis Giovannelli.

Caniggia, the striker who scored Argentina's two goals against Nigeria on Saturday, spent almost a year out of soccer, also for cocaine abuse.

Before the news broke, Argentina had named Maradona in the team to play Bulgaria in their final first-round match in Dallas today.

Reporting from Dallas, local Channel 9 sportscaster Fernando Niembro said the Argentine players were deeply depressed by the news of Maradona's positive test.

"They were like a bunch of fallen dominoes. Their *esprit de corps* was smashed," he said.

Meanwhile, AFA officials here said late Wednesday that should the second test prove positive, the association would ask for leniency arguing that Maradona may have broken the "cold word" of the law but not its "spirit".

Using nose drops that contained ephedrine the night before a game, the AFA officials added, cannot be compared to testing positive for cocaine.

Angry television newsmen were divided on whom to vent their anger. "He just took some nose drops," one anchorman said, while another insisted, "A drug is a drug."

Others noted that it was not the first time Maradona had tested positive for drugs. He served a 15-month ban for cocaine use in the 1991-92 Italian soccer season, and four months later he was arrested here for cocaine use.

Experts argued both sides of Maradona's case, with some saying that he had been subjected to a rigorous diet in preparation for the World Cup that had included ephedrine.

Physicians specialising in sports medicine were not in agreement over the effects of ephedrine, a commonly used decongestant banned by FIFA because it increased blood pressure and heart beat and may improve reflexes.

Some doctors insisted that ephedrine in no way enhanced athletic performance, while other experts quoted in *La Prensa Daily* cautioned that the drug can effectively mask other banned substances, preventing their detection by standard urine tests.

But most people were concerned with today's match between Argentina and Bulgaria and over how their home team would fare under such stress and with the possible absence of their goal-creating captain.

Saudi Arabia over the moon

RIYADH, June 30: Hundreds of thousands of young Saudi men poured into the streets of Riyadh and other cities around the kingdom and celebrated until dawn Thursday Saudi Arabia's stunning World Cup advance, reports AP.

With car horns blaring, they cruised the streets waving Saudi Arabia's green flag from the sun roofs of their cars, flashing victory signs, hooting and chanting.

The all-night celebration was uncommon in the ultra-conservative desert kingdom. Similar exuberance marked the Saudis' victory in the Asia Cup in 1992, but the intensity of celebration over the World Cup win was more marked.

Saudi Arabia pulled off the biggest surprise with a spectacular goal by Saïed Owairan to beat Belgium 1-0. As a result, Saudi Arabia became the first team from the Gulf ever to advance to the second round and only the second from the Arab world since Morocco in 1986.

The news even overtook Saudi's concerns about the civil war in neighbouring Yemen, with banner headlines proclaiming "The World Clapped for Us," and "Congratulations, Oh Nation of Victories."

Traffic police seemed out of their wits and the muttawa, or religious police, were lost in the crowds.

The muttawa have faced a challenge throughout the World Cup event. Matches have coincided with key Muslim prayer times and they have been busy ensuring television sets are turned off during those periods.

The mainly volunteer arm of the state's Committee for the Prevention of Vice and the Propagation of Virtue make it their business to ensure that strict Islamic codes are enforced, including the daily five prayers.

"It was no stroke of luck that we won," wrote the capital city's *Ar-Riyadh* newspaper in its editorial.

Owairan, the man of moment



WASHINGTON, June 30: The "Desert Pele" was overshadowed by the "Maradona of Arabia" as Saudi fans saw their team make Middle East soccer history on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

No other country from the region has previously reached the last 16 at a World Cup.

The goal which clinched a 1-0 win over Belgium and a place in the second round was stunningly executed in the fifth minute by Saïed Owairan.

The way he picked the ball up in his own half, beat four Belgian defenders in an irresistible surge towards the opposing goal and drew Michel Preudhomme instantly revived memories of Maradona's finest hour against England in the 1986 Mexico finals.

This time there was no "hand of God" controversy to distract from a goal which would have graced any World Cup since the first tournament in 1930.

The 26-year-old Owairan, one of the oldest members of a youth-dominated side, was submerged by ecstatic teammates as he wheeled away towards the left corner flag having added to his impressive scoring record for the national team.

The attacking midfielder from Riyadh has now scored 24 goals in 41 appearances, including a hat-trick against Macao in a World Cup qualifier last year.

"This was the best goal of my life but I was surprised no-one tackled me," said Owairan, dedicating his moment of glory to "every Saudi person and every Arab in the World. Allah is with us."

Owairan scored the goal which earned his side a 1-1 draw against Iraq in the Asian final qualifying tournament in

Doha but was suspended from the crucial last game because of two yellow cards.

By the time he left the field injured in the 64th minute, his side were well on the way to another magnificent result in their first World Cup finals.

Majed Abdullaah, dubbed the "Desert Pele" had been substituted at halftime.

"Before the game we touched hands and promised each other we were going to do our best," revealed defender Mohammad Abdul-Jawad.

"No matter what the result,



SAÏED OWAIRAN

we had to keep showing the world that we had a really good team and that is what we did. Now we are ready to take on any team in the World Cup.

Argentine coach Jorge Solaari was quick to praise the Saudi Royal family for their role in the team's success but his results after just four months in the job betray one of the shrewdest minds at this World Cup.

He made four changes, one enforced by the suspension of Foad Amin, from the side who beat Morocco 2-1 in New Jersey but still fielded a team which counter-attacked intelligently and possessed plenty of skill.

"I told everyone at my first press conference we would take second place in our group," said 51-year-old Solari. "We've done what we

11th Asian snooker championship

Luckless day for the locals

Sports Reporter



Sixteen preliminary round matches were decided yesterday as action of the 11th Asian snooker championship began at the ballroom of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. Unfortunately for the hosts, all the three local cueists finished the day at the wrong end of the table.

The day's highlight involved a Bangladeshi player, national number two Adrian Gonsalves, who conceded the day's highest break of 93 in the third frame of his four-rail defeat at the hands of Malaysian number one Ooi Chin-Kay in the third session.

Earlier, the Malaysian opened his campaign on the right note when he brushed aside Yi Hsin-Lee of Chinese Taipei 4-1 in the morning session.

The first match of the session saw Singapore's Freddie Soh blanking Zhang Guoming of China 4-0 in the best-of-seven frames affair.

Bangladeshi national champion Narayan Chandra Ghosh could offer little resistance to Brunei's Haji Mohiddin, losing by a similar scoreline.

The match of the session, however, was played between India's M G Jayaram and Filipino Luis Saberdo, who won the gold medal in the 1993 South East Asian Games. The encounter went all the way to the deciding frame which the Indian won to seal a hard-fought victory.

In the second session, which started at 1:00 pm Preecha Saebae of Thailand outplayed Z S A Halim of Brunei 4-0 while Saleh Mohammad of Pakistan may have denied Bangladesh's Gonsalves's hopes with a similar victory.

The other two matches of the session produced 4-2 scorelines with Singapore's number two Ricky Chew beating Hong Kong's Chan-Wai-Tat and Chen Hui-an of China overcoming Chinese Taipei's Sheng Yung-Lin in the last match of the session.

up a semblance of resistance in the third session, which began at 4 in the afternoon, before succumbing to Chew in the last match of the day.

Young Farhan Mirza of Pakistan outplayed Mohiddin 4-2 while the seasoned Filipino Marlon Manalo swept aside Ye Hsian-Lee of Chinese Taipei 4-0.

Hui-an recorded his second win of the day when he thrashed Jayaram 4-0.

The third Bangladeshi player in the 25-man fray, Mofazzal Hossain, had no better luck than his compatriots, bowing down four-nil to Saebae.

S Boteju of Sri Lanka beat Guoming 4-3 in a hard-fought encounter while Thai S Kantawang handed Filipino Saberdo his second defeat of the day with a 4-2 win.

A sizable number of snooker fans crowded the venue despite the halt to watch the first day's play of the preliminary robin league which runs until July 4.

Play resumes at ten this morning.



Belgium's veteran Michel Preudhomme is all at sea while trying to tackle the rampaging Saudi forward Majed Mohammad during their last group match at the RFK stadium, Washington on June 29. Saudis posted a historic 1-0 win over Belgium.