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FIFA secretary general Joseph Blatter (C) shows reporters at a crowded press conference in Dallas on Thursday the list of medications disgraced Argentine soccer idol Diego Maradona, told the sport's governing body, was taking before the World Cup tournament began.

Saga of a modern Icarus

NEW YORK, July 1: Diego Maradona wanted to make this World Cup a final blaze of glory. But in the end it spelled his renewed downfall, reports AP.

Maradona, known for flamboyance bordering on the outrageous both on and off the field, rose to soccer's peak when he captained Argentina to the 1986 World Cup. He also led a much-maligned Argentine squad into the 1990 final.

He was sidelined by drugs, however, long before testing positive for ephedrine, a banned stimulant found in common decongestants, at this year's tournament.

In March 1991, playing for Napoli in the Italian first division and his career sagging, Maradona failed a cocaine test. He was suspended from international soccer for 15 months.

Next month he was arrested at an apartment in the Argentine capital Buenos Aires and charged with possession and consumption of drugs.

He refused to return to Napoli after the drug ban. World soccer bosses — knowing the man's drawing power — brokered a transfer to Spanish club Sevilla to get him playing again.

His return was unspectacular and it seemed Maradona's days at the top were over.

But backed by loyal admirers and piqued in his pride by scornful critics — a former Argentine player called him lumbering and "fat as a pig" — Maradona fought back after his country qualified for the 1994 championship and was named

to the team.

"My condition is not what it used to be," he said. "Age is a factor, but still, I want to retire in glory," he said.

The 33-year-old midfielder began training only seven weeks before the tournament but lost 12 kilograms (26 pounds) and pumped up his ego for his fourth World Cup.

"I'm going to shut the mouths of those who say I'm finished," Maradona proclaimed to reporters while juggling a practice ball between his feet, head and shoulders.

Baggio no quitter

MARTINSVILLE, New Jersey, July 1: European football-of-the-year Roberto Baggio, without a goal in the World Cup finals, said he had no intention of surrendering his place in the Italian attack to the gifted Gianfranco Zola, reports Reuter.

Billed as one of the potential stars of USA '94 Baggio has been well below par as Italy laboured to third spot in Group E.

"I've the highest regard for Gianfranco (Zola), having got to know him well over the past month or so," Baggio said on Thursday.

"But I don't intend to surrender my place to him."

Baggio took a knock on the left leg in Tuesday's 1-1 draw with Mexico but resumed training on Thursday.

"Physically I'm fine," he said. "Hopefully, I can get a goal and the team produce a better performance to turn things around."

"I'm tired of those who say I'm fat, that I've lost my reflexes and that I'm out of shape," he said. "They'll see the great Diego at the World Cup."

In fact, Maradona was on the way to making good on at least part of that promise.

In Argentina's first two games at this World Cup, he proved that even without the speed and strength of old, he could make or break a game with a few brilliant moves or passes.

He showed his touch of old by slamming in a goal in a 4-0 thrashing of Greece. Against Nigeria, he set up both goals by Claudio Caniggia in Argentina's 2-1 win.

Maradona was due to reach a new milestone in Thursday's final first-round game against Bulgaria — his 22nd World Cup game, one more than Germany's Uwe Seeler and Poland's Wladyslaw Zmuda.

Maradona did not become known for doing things half-way.

In the 1986 quarterfinal with England, he knocked in the notorious "Hand of God" goal with his arm. Later in the game, he laid down a brilliant run past four defenders — one of the most spectacular goals in history — to seal the 2-1 victory.

Last February, several reporters sustained slight injuries after air rifle shots were fired from Maradona's home in Buenos Aires.

The reporters, who had come to ask about Maradona's leaving club team Newell's Old Boys, said the player was carrying a gun.

All about ephedrine

LOS ANGELES, California, July 1: Ephedrine, the drug that forced Diego Maradona out of the 1994 World Cup, is used in a host of over-the-counter remedies, but its very availability makes it dangerous for sportsmen, reports AFP.

The drug is classified as a stimulant, and its side-effects sometimes mimic the effect of amphetamines.

Medicinally, it is used as a decongestant to treat colds, allergies and asthma.

It is one of a long list of stimulants banned by FIFA and the International Olympic Committee.

US swimmer Rick Demont had to give back his 400m freestyle gold medal at the 1972 Olympics when he tested positive for ephedrine, which was an ingredient in his asthma-medication.

Lately athletics officials have tried to discover a mechanism to separate inadvertent use of small amounts of ephedrine from deliberate use of the drug to enhance performance.

So far they have failed, and many have begun to question whether ephedrine, even in its pure form, can actually enhance reflexes and improve the oxygen carrying capacity of blood.

"Over-use can cause anxiety, agitation, restlessness, dizziness, headaches and confusion."

In May, a diet supplement containing ephedrine was banned in Texas when users experienced a "speed-like high" while taking it.

One California pharmacist said teenagers were taking ephedrine products in an effort to get a speed-type rush.

Cornell University medical college professors Gary Wadler and Brian Hainline, authors of the book "Drugs and the Athlete," cite studies that show ephedrine offers no competitive edge.

They say banning ephedrine "regardless of the dose taken or the concentration of the drug in the urine makes little sense."

Other types of drugs, such as anabolic steroids, have a more clear-cut performance enhancing effect.

FIFA's drug test procedures are similar to those of the IOC. At the World Cup, two players from the 22-man squads are randomly selected for testing, and each provides two samples.

But FIFA's procedures differ from those of the IOC in that instead of automatic sanctions based on the type of drug used, the FIFA World Cup Organising Committee decides penalties on a case-by-case basis.

Maradona blames FIFA for his fall

DALLAS, July 1: Disgraced soccer star Diego Maradona, banned from the World Cup Thursday after testing positive for drugs, said the latest controversy had forced him out of the game, reports AP.

"They have retired me from soccer," the 33-year old told Channel 13 of Buenos Aires. "I don't think I want another revenge, my soul is broken," Maradona said in the interview aired shortly before the Argentina-Bulgaria game Thursday.

"I don't understand, I would like to fly, I don't know it hurts," he said. "They cut my legs off when I had a chance to recover."

Maradona, who was banned for 15 months in 1991 for using cocaine, tested positive for five drugs, according to FIFA. He said he had no idea how he took them.

"I don't know, maybe we were careless," he told Channel 13. "But I swear I did not drug myself to play. With my abilities, I don't need to drug myself."

Asked whether he felt frustrated about anybody, he replied, "FIFA."

"I thought the rancour against Maradona had ceased," he said. "But I now see it has not and it makes my soul ache."

A cocktail of five drugs, from stimulants to diet pills, knocked Maradona out of the World Cup.

The Argentina Football Association kicked the talented forward off the team just hours before its final first-round game against Bulgaria for using banned drugs. The Argentine team record was left unchanged.

The first drug suspension at a World Cup in 16 years, it cost the tournament one of its biggest personalities, a veteran coming back from a previous drug suspension with a style that boosted his team and beguiled fans.

But superstars have yet to find a foolproof fake "or doping tests, and soccer officials said that, when res... delivered at 2 am local time (0700 GMT) confirmed the presence of drugs, they had no choice."

"It's with great sadness that we have to say that Maradona is suspended and will not play," said Joao Havelange, the Brazilian president of FIFA, soccer's governing body. "I was always praying that the result would be different."

"This was a very difficult decision for us. But the medical facts don't lie. We had to accept them as the truth."

Citing past cocaine use and the "moral and human issues" involved, FIFA said it would wait until after the World Cup ends July 17 before conducting a full investigation into further penalties against Maradona. It could take a range of actions, including a lifetime ban.

In street interviews, ordinary Argentines recounted how their young children cried after Maradona, 33, was pulled from the World Cup and suspended from all soccer for taking a mix of five performance-boosting drugs.

"This is day of mourning for the nation," said Federico Storani, a member of parliament and a likely presidential candidate for the opposition Radical Party.

"I absolutely believe in Maradona's good faith... what happened isn't his fault, because he doesn't have any technical understanding of medicines."

Interior Minister Carlos Ruckauf and the governors of several provinces rushed to Maradona's defence, blaming his associates and urging Argentines to remain grateful for the moments of joy he brought them throughout his career.

The size of the loss for Argentina was underscored by

Until that decision is made, FIFA said, Maradona is banned from all soccer activities worldwide.

"We have to acknowledge the difficulties the player had getting to this World Cup, the personality involved," FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter said. "It is a human, moral problem, not a medical problem."

Maradona was caught by a random drug test, one of four given after each World Cup game. His urine sample collected after Argentina's victory over Nigeria June 25 contained traces of five banned drugs — ephedrine, norephedrine, pseudoephedrine, norepseudoephedrine and methamphetamine.

All are stimulants and somewhat related, with the last three derivatives of the first two. Their intended use ranges from cold and asthma medication to weight-loss treatment, Maradona arrived at this World Cup svelte and sleek, having lost 26 pounds in his rehab from a cocaine suspension in 1991-92.

But officials said this was no accidental doping case.

"We did not find any product on the market that contained all five substances," said Dr Michel D'Hooghe of Belgium, a member of FIFA's medical team. "It must be a cocktail."

The source of the drugs was unknown but D'Hooghe confirmed that some of the substances — especially norephedrine — are used in diet pills.

Players using prescription drugs for legitimate purposes can escape a doping trap by having the team doctor declare the use prior to each game. But documents provided by Blatter and D'Hooghe showed that — while the Argentine

physician listed Maradona under medical treatment before the Nigeria game — none of the drugs found in his system were on that list.

D'Hooghe scoffed at suggestions that ephedrine was a fairly harmless drug.

"All these products gain access to the central nervous system," D'Hooghe said. "They cause a stimulation, increasing circulation and physical capacity."

Argentine Football Association president Julio Gronzona said Maradona was informed of the test results and expulsion early Thursday. He said he was unaware of the ousted star's reaction or his reasons for taking the banned drugs.

Agricol De Bianchetti, a lawyer for the AFA, said Maradona's use of ephedrine was a strictly personal decision.

Fernando Signorini, Maradona's personal physical trainer, accused another member of the player's personal entourage, Daniel Cerrini, of having given Maradona the drug that got him suspended.

"He was amateurish and negligent," Signorini said.

Pablo Abbatangelo, secretary of the AFA, told a Buenos Aires radio station that the decision was reached "to avoid further sanctions that could compromise the team."

Had Maradona played for Argentina against Bulgaria at the Cotton Bowl, he would have played in a record 22nd World Cup game. Argentina already has advanced to the second round of the tournament.

While the announcement was made by FIFA, Maradona stayed in his hotel bedroom in Dallas talking to his agent and personal trainer. Outside, some 50 Argentine fans stood chanting support for the star.

Sources close to the Argentine team said Maradona was depressed and had declined to go to lunch with the other players. It was not known whether he would go to the game.

When he led Argentina to the World Cup title in 1986, Maradona was unquestionably the best soccer player in the world. His winning goal in the quarterfinals against England — a lonely run through most of the opposing team — is an every soccer highlight film.

Eight years and a 15-month cocaine suspension later, Maradona is no longer that overwhelming force. But he came to America lean and mean, wanting one more Cup title and one more chance for redemption. He had one goal and one assist in two games and provided an offensive spark that lifted the whole team.

Now the spark is gone. Perhaps forever.

Rivals, peers rue Maradona's exit

LOS ANGELES, California, July 1: Diego Maradona's exclusion from the World Cup for using five banned substances saddened his rivals and admirers in the tournament on Thursday, reports AFP.

Italy's players, who could face a Maradona-less Argentina in the second round, were disappointed by the news that the Argentinian captain was kicked out for using ephedrine and ephedrine-related drugs, which are banned as stimulants.

"It makes me very sad," said Gianfranco Zola, who played with Maradona at Napoli and took over his number 10 shirt when he was suspended for using cocaine.

"This World Cup meant everything to him. His reputation was on the line."

However, Maradona's Italian biographer Franco Esposito said: "He is always fighting a lonely battle. Perhaps recently he hasn't had the help he should have had from people surrounding him."

Goalkeeper Luca Marchegiani had hoped that FIFA would be lenient.

"I hope this can be sorted out without them taking disciplinary measures. We don't want to play Argentina without its best player."

But the Argentine Football Association withdrew Maradona to avoid further sanctions to the entire team.

"I feel sorry for Diego," said Roberto Baggio, the player who has come nearest to emulating Maradona's genius on the field. "I know he will be attacked endlessly by the press."

"But all that is secondary compared to his problems with drugs."

Paolo Maldini said the decision was only fair.

"Those are the rules. Everybody knows them and they have to be applied."

Full-back Antonio Benarrivo said: "It's a shame. He seemed to have pulled himself back up to near his best. Now he has fallen again. It's a great loss for football."

German captain Lothar Matthaeus agreed. "It's a terrible blow for football and for Diego," he said.

"I have great respect for Maradona as a player, but no sympathy," said Nigeria's Dutch coach Clemens Westerhof. "Why should? When you come to a tournament you abide by the rules, or you get into trouble."

"I was a big fan of his. I am personally saddened. But I am not involved in any way. I just look after my team. This is not good publicity for football."

Jürgen Klinsmann, Germany's top scorer here with four goals, said he had been pleased to see Maradona playing so well again.

"It's really upsetting," he added.

A capsule preview of Round Two

UNDATED, (AP): Following is a capsule look at the second round of the World Cup:

July 2:
At Chicago (1705 GMT, 2305 BST)
Germany vs Belgium:
The Germans had a tough time holding onto their unbeaten record when South Korea rallied from a 3-0 deficit to lose 3-2, but nearly tying it. Berti Vogts' team wilted in the heat of Dallas after edging Bolivia 1-0 and tying Spain 1-1 in earlier games. Captain Lothar Matthaeus is struggling with six stitches in a foot injury. Juergen Klinsmann remains in form, having scored four of Germany's five goals.

Unpredictable Belgium were upset 1-0 by Saudi Arabia in their final Group F game in Washington, yet downed their neighbours, the Netherlands, by the same score. Enzo Scifo, the captain and most influential player, points out that Belgians are at their most dangerous when they are the underdogs.

At Washington (2035 GMT, 0235 BST)
Spain vs Switzerland
The Spaniards are in the World Cup for the ninth time, but have reached the last eight only twice. To get there this time, Spain need to reproduce the performances they had against Germany, a 1-1 tie, and Bolivia (3-1) and forget the fact they threw away a 2-0 lead to South Korea in a 2-2 draw. Jose Luis Camarero, who scored twice against Bolivia, is missing because of a one-game suspension.

Swiss teamwork may get them past Spain for the first time in 17 games and avenge a loss in 1966 that sent Switzerland home from the tournament. But the Swiss were beaten by Colombia 2-0 in their last game and the Colombians went home eliminated.

July 3:
At Dallas (1705 GMT, 2305 BST)
Saudi Arabia vs Sweden:
The Saudis edged Belgium 1-0 in their final game, one of the biggest World Cup upsets on record, and are confident now of beating anyone. They wound up second in their group, scoring six goals in three games, and showed they have the attacking skills to open strong defenses. Midfielder Fuaid Amin is most dangerous with two goals.

The Swedes surprised tournament favourites Brazil by gaining a 1-1 tie in Detroit, even without suspended top scorer Martin Dahlin, who scored three times against Cameroon (2-2) and Russia (3-1). Sweden have a tough defence and talented offence, with Tomas Brodin teaming up with Dahlin.

At Pasadena, Calif (2035 GMT, 0235 BST)
Romania vs Argentina:
Florin Raducioiu and Gheorghe Hagi dominate Romania's offence, but the defence was crunched 4-1 by Switzerland. Raducioiu hasn't scored since the opening game against the Colombians (3-1). But he will sit out the game thanks to two yellow cards he got during previous games. The defence stiffened for a 1-0 victory over the United States.

Diego Maradona is no longer around to inspire Argentina, banished by FIFA after testing positive for drugs. Without their leader, the Argentines tumbled 2-0 to Bulgaria after victories over Greece (4-0) and Nigeria (2-1) with him on the team. Gabriel Batistuta scored three and Claudio Caniggia had two in the first round.

July 4:
At Orlando, Fla (1605 GMT, 2205 BST)
Netherlands vs Ireland
The Dutch offence is falling over itself to score goals, and

that's the problem. Coach Dick Advocaat has cut the forward line from four to three to create room for Dennis Bergkamp and Bryan Roy, and the results for a team that seems to lack inspiration slowly are improving. The negative was a loss to neighbor Belgium, but the Dutch scrambled past Saudi Arabia 2-1 and Morocco 2-1.

Ireland have scored only two goals on the way to the final 16 and plays with one striker in front of a five-man midfield. But Ireland are capable of scoring goals from any position and have a rock solid defence built around veteran (but injury prone) Paul McGrath.

At Stanford, Calif (1935 GMT, 0135 BST)
Brazil vs United States
Romario, who has scored three goals, looks in top form. Bebeto, Rai and Zinho are giving good support and the defence, for once, looks pretty stable. But after comfortable victories over Russia (2-0) and Cameroon (3-0), the Brazilians looked lacklustre against the Swedes (1-1).

The Americans were buoyed by a 2-0 victory over listless Colombia, but then slumped to a 1-0 loss to Romania. John Harkes, one of their most impressive players so far, misses the game because of suspension. But Ernie Stewart can shake up the Brazilian defence with his runs and Marcelo Balboa and Alexi Lalas will be a danger in the back.

July 5:
At Foxboro, Mass (1705 GMT, 2305 BST)
Nigeria vs Italy
Daniel Amokachi (two goals) and Rashidi Yekini (one) will be tightly marked by the Italians, but can expose a defence missing veteran Franco Baresi. Nigeria are well-organized on

defence and attack and their only defeat was to a Maradona-inspired Argentina.

Italy are slowly — very slowly — improving after losing 1-0 to Ireland in their opening game. Dino Baggio, who connected in the 1-0 victory over Norway, and Daniele Massaro, who scored in the 1-1 tie with Mexico, are there to assist player of the year Roberto Baggio. Leftback Paolo Maldini is becoming a major figure in Italy's bid to reach the quarters.

At East Rutherford, N J (2035 GMT, 0235 BST)
Mexico vs Bulgaria
The Mexicans topped the toughest group, thanks to goals from Luis Garcia (two in a 2-1 victory over Norway) and Marcelino Bernal (in a 1-1 tie with Italy). They arrive at Giants Stadium with a tough-to-beat approach and have reached the quarterfinals twice before.

Bulgaria were overpowered 3-0 by Nigeria in their first game and looked like they would be one of the first teams going home early. But striker Hristo Stoichkov (three goals) and partner Emil Kostadinov have engineered a 4-0 victory over Greece and a 2-0 triumph over two-time titlist Argentina.

Oliseh can relax now

FOXBORO, July 1: Nigerian midfielder Sunday Oliseh heard that his caution had been cancelled on Thursday in a case of mistaken identity at the World Cup final, reports Reuter.

Oliseh's yellow card, awarded in the 2-1 defeat by Argentina on Saturday, was withdrawn by FIFA on appeal, team officials confirmed.

The reason was not specified, but Nigerian officials said it was a case of mistaken identity.

"It was a big burden off my shoulders," said Oliseh. "I was worried about getting a second booking against Greece and missing out on the second round."

Oliseh did receive a caution on Thursday's 2-0 win over Greece but it will not be carried forward to the knockout phase under FIFA's amnesty for yellow card offences in the first round.

Another WC immolation

KUALA LUMPUR, July 1: A Malaysian was stabbed with a pair of scissors by his cousin following a quarrel over which World Cup match to watch on television, a newspaper reported Friday, reports AFP.

The two argued over whether to watch Morocco v Holland or Belgium v Saudi Arabia which were being played at the same time in the United States and being shown on rival television channels, the Malay Daily Utusan Malaysia said.

Yap Ngo High, 36, was stabbed while watching the Morocco v Holland match on one side after quarrelling with his cousin who wanted to see the other match, a police officer in the northern town of Rawang was quoted as saying.

Yap was treated at a Kuala Lumpur hospital but his condition was not known.



ANGRY ARGENTINES: Agitated fans in downtown Buenos Aires on Thursday react to the announcement of the suspension of Diego Maradona as they watch a televised press conference.