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Sao Paulo daily predicts Fourth of July upset

SAN FRANCISCO, July 2: While Brazil fans gleefully predict the Fourth of July demolition of the United States, the influential sports paper Gazeta Esportiva of Sao Paulo is preparing for a World Cup upset, reports AFP.

The headlines have already been pencilled in: The day of American soccer independence.

Though Brazil are overwhelming favourites to win Monday's second round match at Stanford Stadium, Gazeta Esportiva is sceptical.

Brazil easily qualified after winning two and drawing one of their group matches, but the Brazilian press has heaped criticism on their supposed lack of style.

Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira tried to explain that the Swedes made it difficult by playing defensively, saying a more aggressive attack would have been suicidal.

But the 12 reporters of Gazeta Esportiva, who publish 28 pages a day on the World Cup, just won't buy it.

They believe the US Independence Day holiday could mark America's coming of age in international football.

Gazeta Esportiva believe it will be a big game, with a great atmosphere, and could create an incredible shock.

American goalkeeper Tony Meola said a penalty shoot-out after a draw could be America's greatest hope.

Ronaldo eagerly awaits his turn

SAN FRANCISCO, July 2: Admiration from the coach's mother is all very well, but Brazilian phenomenon Ronaldo would rather get the nod from Carl Alberto Parreira himself, reports AFP.

The 17-year-old striker is itching to become the youngest Brazilian since Pele in 1958 to play in a World Cup, but so far he is playing second fiddle to the more experienced Romario and Bebeto.

After training at Santa Clara on Thursday, Ronaldo admitted he was thinking of asking Parreira why he had not played.

"Carlos is the sort of guy you can ask these sort of things," he said.

"It's nice to have the support of his mother, but it's what he wants that counts.

"I really felt I might be able to put a bit of life into the match against Sweden, but Carlos is the boss."

Likeable and modest, Ronaldo was seen off at the airport by his mother, who asked if he had his toothpaste and ordered him to eat properly.

"Well, she is my mother. She can do that," he said.

Despite his youth, there has been nothing childish about his first professional season, during which he has scored 55 goals in 57 matches for his club Cruzeiro.

In six international appearances he has scored one goal, a left-footed shot against Iceland last May 4.

He can shoot with either foot, has fine dribbling skills and is also good in the air, though it remains to be seen if the comparisons to Pele and Argentina's Diego Maradona will prove justified.

While Parreira has so far been reluctant to use his young star, he expects him to be a major player in years to come.

"With some players, you just know they are going to be great, and Ronaldo is one of them," he says.

Cruzeiro president Cesar Masci said he had been offered six million dollars for the teenager by Ajax Amsterdam.

Masci said other European clubs, including PSV Eindhoven and Barcelona had also expressed interest.

"He's just got it," Parreira said. "You can't put your finger on it, but he's got it."

ACOG expects similar success

WASHINGTON, July 2: Increased US exposure to football through the World Cup will help create sell-outs at the 1996 Olympic tournament, Atlanta Games Organising Committee chairman Billy Payne predicted here Friday, reports AFP.

End of a decade's project



CLEMENS WESTERHOF

BOSTON, July 2: They seem to have come alive in the last six months. Actually, they've been building for a decade.

Ever since Nigeria won the inaugural FIFA World Under-17 Championship in August 1985, and then took the bronze medal in the World Youth (U-20) a month later, some in the soccer world have been anticipating their arrival on the World Cup stage, reports AP.

"We want to get as far as the semifinals and make a record for Africa," said Nigeria's Dutch coach Clemens Westerhof. "If we get to the last four, the Cup is in our face and we can do something."

Nigeria won the 1980 Africa Cup title and were runners-up to Cameroon in 1984. But since their 1985 U-17 title (they were actually an Under-16 championship then), the soccer world has seen the Nigerians coming.

Besides their 1985 success, they finished runners-up at the Africa Cup in 1988 (to Cameroon again) and 1990 (to Algeria).

But they also finished second in the 1987 U-17 championship to the Soviet Union and were silver medalists at the 1989 U-20s behind Portugal.

Getting to the 1994 World Cup finals didn't come easy. They breezed through the first round of African qualifying with a 3-0-1 record against South Africa and the Congo, scoring seven goals and allowing none.

But the second round was different. They were drawn into the same group with Ivory Coast and Algeria, the past two Africa Cup champions.

They opened with a 2-1 loss to the Ivory Coast. They rallied

with a 4-1 victory over Algeria on two goals by Rashidi Yekini in their next game. But they needed a 4-1 victory over the Ivorians in their home leg and then a 1-1 draw in Algeria to



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edge the Ivory Coast on goal differential.

The Nigerians' good fortune continued in March and April, weaving their way through 11 other nations in Tunisia to capture the African Nations Cup.

A 3-0 victory over Gabon and a 0-0 draw with Egypt got them to the quarterfinals, where they ran over Zaire 2-0 on two second-half goals by Yekini.

Another Yekini goal enabled them to draw 2-2 with their old nemesis the Ivory Coast in the semifinals after 120 minutes, and then won on penalties.

Then in the final Emanuel Amaniye came off the bench for the first time in the tournament to score a pair of goals and give Nigeria the title over sentimental favourites Zambia 2-1.

It sent the reigning African champion to the World Cup for the first time since Zaire in

1974. In the run-up to the World Cup, Nigeria have relied on Yekini. Named the African Footballer of the Year this past season, the 29-year-old striker scored eight of Nigeria's 17 goals in qualifying using his speed, powerful shot and burly physique.

But at the African Cup finals, a 20-year-old Austin Okocha and 19-year-old Sunday Oliseh also came to the front.

Okocha who plays for Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga, is known for his ball handling skills, which has even drawn the attention of Pele.

Oliseh, conversely, has gained attention for his marking and passing while also playing for FC Liege in the Belgian first division. He has transferred to Reggiana and will play in Italy next season.

The Nigerians built out of players from leagues all across Europe and Northern Africa (Belgium, England, Egypt, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal and Turkey, as well as Nigeria), have an attack so fast that it sometimes leaves its defence in trouble.

Sometimes the attack gets so far ahead of the play that it leaves itself vulnerable to counter-attack.

Cameroon were the darling of the 1990 World Cup, earning Africa a third berth for 1994. Nigeria doesn't have the burden of proving African soccer to get another berth — that was taken care of in politicking by FIFA President Joao Havelange.

But there is still the matter of proving African soccer equal with Europe and South America. Beating Italy on Tuesday would be a healthy start.

Sacchi relying on F — factor

MARTINSVILLE, N.J. July 2: Arrigo Sacchi is counting on the fear factor to take Italy through Tuesday's second round World Cup clash with Nigeria, reports AFP.

"If I'd had a choice I would not have chosen to play Nigeria," the Italian coach admitted on Friday.

"We will have all the pressure. The reality may be that Nigeria has been the revelation of this tournament but the fact that they are not one of the traditional football powers means Italy has nothing to win and everything to lose.

"If we lose it will be presented as a disgrace, like another Korea," Sacchi said in a reference to Italy's first round elimination by North Korea in 1966 — a defeat which resulted in the Italian squad being

pelting with rotten tomatoes on their return to Rome.

"If we win nobody will think anything of it."

Despite his admiration for the explosive power of Nigeria,



ARRIGO SACCHI

Sacchi is confident his side can advance to the quarterfinals.

Historically, Italy has always done better against tough opponents.

"That was the case in 1982 when we won after playing terribly the first round and it was the case in the group where our best match was against Norway when we had everything to lose.

"Fear is a very strong motivator and I think the players are well aware of the stakes involved in this match."

"If we see a Nigeria like the one that played against Bulgaria we will have a very tough task but if they play like against Argentina things will be very different."

"If we play like we did against Ireland we don't deserve to beat anyone," Sacchi said.

Relief too brief for hosts

Mofazzal Hossain, who registered the first win for hosts Bangladesh when he scored a hard-fought 4-3

win over Brunei's ZSA Halim late Friday night, could not keep the momentum against Sri Lanka S Botju and was simply outclassed on the third day of the 11th Asian snooker championship at he ballroom of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Friday's win came as a pleasant surprise for the local fans, who must have given up hopes of a Bangladeshi victory after the top two national cueists fared rather miserably in their respective engagements. However, their ephemeral euphoria was replaced by an all too familiar and longish tale of local losses as all three local participants found themselves at the wrong end of the table.

For the record, all of them — Mofazzal, Adrian Gonsalves and NC Ghosh — were trounced by the similar margin

of 4-0. Apart from the loss in the first session, Mofazzal also lost his match in the last session against Chan Kwok-Min of Hong Kong. This session also saw a thriller of a match between Indika Dodangoda of Sri Lanka and Luis Sabero of the Philippines, which was settled in the last of the best-of-seven frames when the Lankan clinched the frame with a brilliant break of 128.

The two other matches of this session produced similar 4-0 scorelines as Alok Kumar of India beat Yi Hsien-Lee of Chinese Taipei and Malaysian Yung King-Foot got rid of ARH Mollahidin of Brunei.

Alok Kumar also won his other preliminary robin league match of the day when he compounded the miseries of Bangladesh Adrian Gonsalves, the national number two, winning by a 4-0 margin. Kien-Foot also had little trouble in taking care to Ricky Chew of Singapore 4-1.

Preecha Saebe of Thailand was stretched a bit in over-

coming Kwok-Ming 4-1 but once again Dodangoda, the promising Lankan, was in the middle of a thriller against Ghen Hui-an of China before scraping home 4-3.

The third session saw yet another defeat for national number one Narayan C Ghosh as the Narayanjan player went down to Chan Wai-Tat of Hong Kong. Singapore's Freddie Soh was all over ZSA Halim of Brunei in a 4-0 result while the tournament favourite Ooi Chin-Kay of Malaysia had a 4-1 win over Pakistani Saleh Mohammed.

In the first session, Saleh, however, got a win when he outplayed Hsien-Lee 4-1 and so did Sabero against Sheng Yung-Lin of Chinese Taipei by a similar margin.

Meanwhile, Bengal Airlift Ltd announced a special prize for the highest break in the tournament. S Kantawang of Thailand appeared headed for the prize after breaking the Asian record with a fantastic break of 139 on Friday.

High-tech solution!

SAN FRANCISCO, July 2: The United States have gone high-tech in their quest to beat Brazil in their fourth of July World Cup second-round clash at Stanford Stadium, reports AFP.

Assistant coaches have fed data from Brazil's first three matches into a computer. Every play is logged, and lines criss-cross the screen showing the paths of the ball. An opponent can then work out the most frequent moves — and hopefully counter them.

The United States have never beaten Brazil in five attempts, and in their four games since 1976 have not even scored a goal. Should they do the unlikely and make the quarter-finals, they could thank partners Zvi Friedman and Jon Kotas who designed the software.

The majority of players seem to like the device, but coach Bora Milutinovic is sceptical.

Parreira defends his approach

SAN FRANCISCO, July 2: Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira hit back at press criticism of his team from major Brazilian newspapers, reports AFP.

Burros or, in English, donkeys was the cry from Brazilian fans in Detroit on Tuesday as they failed to shrift in a 1-1 draw with Sweden.

The cries were picked up by at least one newspaper as Brazil were slammed for their lack of finesse and artistry.

But Parreira countered: "Sweden had an organised defence and a strong aerial game. As far as tactics were concerned, it was a most organised team, it could not be a pretty game."

"Can we be blamed for the defensive attitude of Sweden," he asked.

"Brazil was the only one which tried to win the game. We didn't want to do out and attack recklessly because there was no need to do that."

Parreira said he critics had failed to understand the context the game was played in.

"This game was a completely different type of game. Brazil had already qualified. We were bound to come first or second. We were playing in a stadium which did not help as it was smaller than the other grounds," he said.

"It has never been easy to cope with the criticism and it's not any different now."

He said the fear factor from other teams often made it difficult for Brazilians to play with their expected relaxed flair.

"Everybody plays defensively against Brazil. It makes it difficult for our own game to flourish," he said.

But he added: "I have not seen any team better than Brazil."

Twice yellowed group of eight

DALLAS, July 2: US midfielder John Harkes is one of eight players suspended for the second round of the World Cup, reports AP.

Harkes received two yellow cards in the first round and will not be available for the United States game Monday against Brazil at Stanford, Calif.

Others who will be out because of two yellow cards received in the first round are Jan Wouters of the Netherlands, Joaquin Del Olmo of Mexico, Florin Raducliu of Romania and Jose Luis Camarero of Spain.

Gone with red cards are Italy goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca and Romania's Ion Vladou, who was sent home by his team for poor conduct on and off the field.

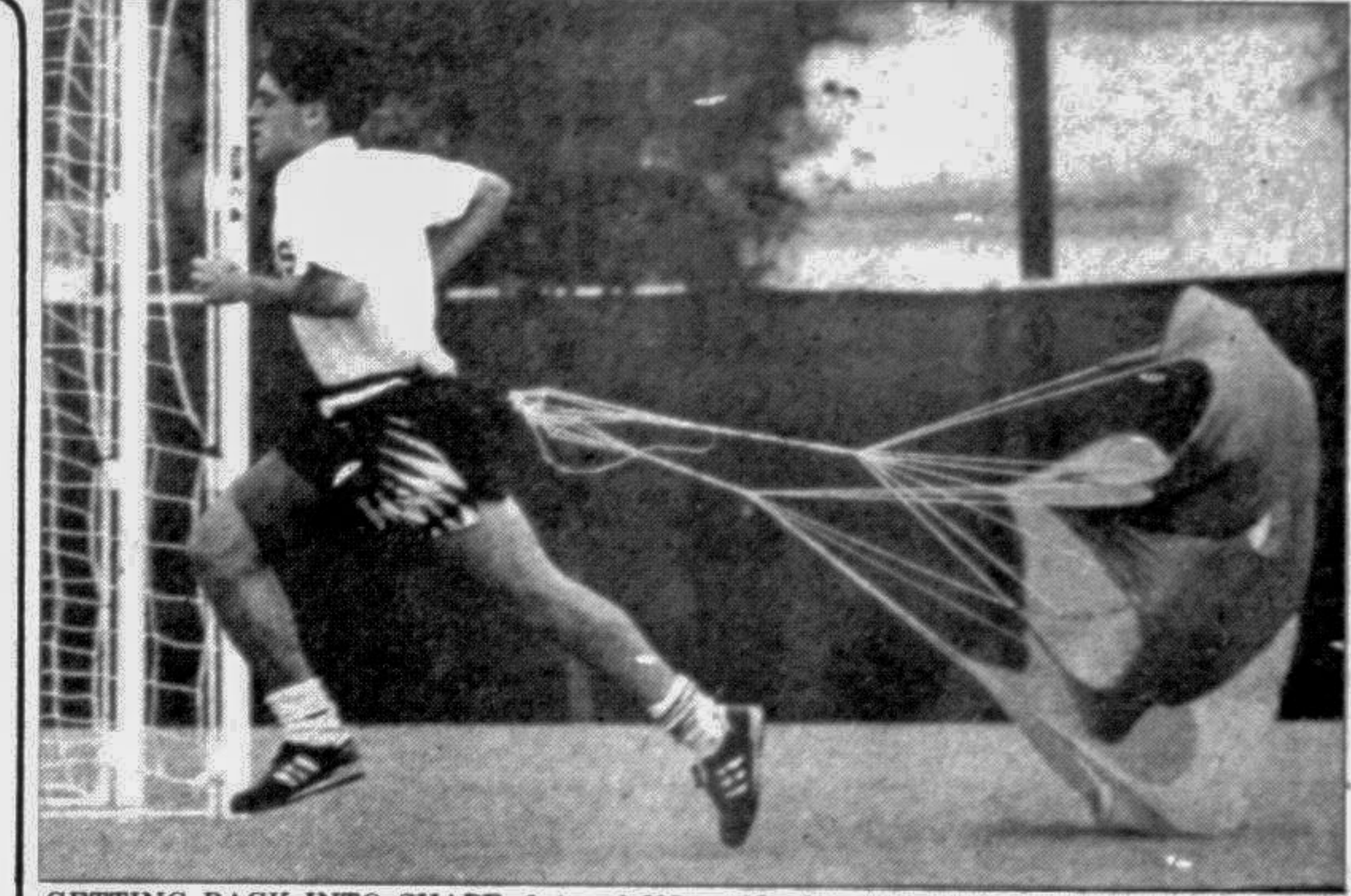
Also dismissed from his team was Germany's Stefan Effenberg for an insulting gesture directed at fans in the Cotton Bowl last Monday. He, too, had accumulated two yellow cards in the first round.

Carter to referee Italy, Nigeria game

LOS ANGELES, July 2: Mexico's tough disciplinarian Arturo Brizio Carter, who handed out two red cards and nine bookings in two World Cup first-round matches, will referee the Nigeria versus Italy second-round match on June 5, reports AFP.

France's Joel Quiniou will referee the Fourth of July World Cup clash between the United States and pre-tournament favourites Brazil, FIFA announced Friday.

Denmark's Peter Mikkelsen will referee his third match of the tournament, Holland v Ireland in Orlando on July 4, and Syria's Jamal Al-Sharif will be in charge of his third game when he referees Mexico v Bulgaria in New York on July 5.



GETTING BACK INTO SHAPE: Injured US midfielder Claudio Reyna runs with a small parachute as part of an exercise routine for his damaged right hamstring during a training session at Mission Viejo in Los Angeles. — AFP photo

Perspective changes with the point of view

SANTA CLARA, Calif. July 2: The US national team views a draw as a glass half-full. For Brazil, it's mostly empty, the water is bad and the glass is dirty.

While the Americans spent their day preparing for a draw, practising penalty kicks in anticipation of a need for them against the Brazilians in their second-round matchup at Stanford, on Monday, the World Cup favourites defended themselves for achieving "only" a draw against Sweden, reports AP.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira tried to explain that a draw wasn't a bad result. In fact, it was good.

"We attained our objective," coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said. "Brazil was first in its group. We passed our qualifying round easier than any other team. We were never even threatened."

There were special problems against Sweden, he said. The field was small and lumpy. The Swedes played defensively. There was no pressure

to win because both teams were already qualified. Hardly satisfactory for the demanding Brazilian fans.

Back home, the press excoriated Parreira's team for what it considered a sub-par performance.

One Rio de Janeiro newspaper ran the headline "Show of Incompetence." Another screamed: "Wake Up, Parreira!"

"Our objective is always to play well," Parreira said patiently. "Brazil can produce more (and) it will grow during the tournament. But we must have patience. We can't commit suicide."

The Americans know the pressure is on Brazil and will try to use it to their advantage, he warned. Brazilians shouldn't fall into that trap.

"There's a great impatience for Brazil to expose itself — and go home early. But that won't happen. A team must have technique and efficiency. The days of magic and dreams are over. They don't exist in soccer anymore. Now it's elimination. Make a mistake and you're out."

But don't tell Brazilians about caution. For the country that gave the world Pele, they want showtime, every time.

On Thursday, the players walked from the field into the press zone like cows into a school of piranhas. Forward Zinho had to explain over and over why he had played poorly against Sweden and if he thought he deserved to be benched.

"Yes, I know I played badly. I have self-criticism. And not only against Sweden. I didn't make a pretty showing in the first two games, either. But I have more to offer," he offered lamely.

"I don't understand why you attack us," said defender Jorginho. "You want to win. So do we. We're all in the same boat. We just don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past."

Only once did Parreira betray his exasperation. A reporter asked if he agreed with a published story that called Brazilian journalists the most fanatic and disagreeable at the Cup.

"Without a doubt whatsoever," Parreira replied.

Jones to replace Harkes

MISSION VIEJO, Calif. July 2: Bora Milutinovic probably will pull a fast one against Brazil: Cobi Jones is the likely midfield replacement for the suspended John Harkes, reports AP.

"I think I add a lot more speed in the offensive attack," Jones said Friday as the United States prepared for Monday's second-round game at Stanford Stadium. "Hopefully I am put to good use against the Brazilians. Hopefully I'm put to good use with Ernie."

Jones combines with Ernie Stewart and Eric Wynalda to give the United States one of the speediest front lines in the tournament.

"He's the kind of player who puts you on your heels as a defender," Wynalda said. "He's extremely explosive."

Jones, 24, creates excitement among fans with his dreadlocks and ready smile. He has five goals in 53 international appearances but played just 59 minutes in the first round, substituting for Stewart twice up front and for Tab Ramos in the right midfield against Romania.

In the third game I came in with more time (64th minute) and in a position I'm used to playing," Jones said. "I think I did pretty well."

Harkes is more of a defensive player, creating a different dynamic on the left side. Jones looks to attack.

"When we broke out with Ernie and myself, we've sometimes broken out too quick,"

practiced at their training camp in Mission Viejo on Saturday morning before flying on a charter from El Toro Marine Base to San Jose. They'll practice at Stanford on Sunday.

"It is a very difficult thing that is ahead of us, but not impossible," Milutinovic said Friday. "We have everything to gain and nothing to lose. That's a situation we should take full advantage of."

Up north, Brazil practiced Friday at Santa Clara University. Brazilian media was hysterical after Tuesday's 1-1 tie against Sweden.

"There is absolutely nothing to worry about," Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said.

US assistant coaches say the Americans will try to play a compact defence, clog the middle and force Brazil to attack on the flanks.

"The US team has improved technically," Parreira said. "It has gained a lot of experience, defends very well and attacks dangerously. The Americans will try to pass the ball around and Brazil will have to take the initiative and move onto the attack."

Brazil is 5-0 against the Americans, outscoring the United States 20-3. US players say the history isn't important.

"The toughest thing in sports is to win when you're expected to win," US assistant coach Sigi Schmid said.

Rufai, a retiring introvert

MASSACHUSETTS, July 2: Peter Rufai saw the light after he scored two goals for his schoolboy team in Nigeria, reports AFP.

Rufai, a gangling 13-year-old, played centre forward for the last time that day.

"The other team got one goal back and I was very upset," he said.

So Rufai bundled the goalkeeper out of the way, donned the gloves himself, and has never looked back.

"I made a few saves. My mates told me to stay there and I have ever since — no regrets," says the 30-year-old who is looking for a new club in Germany or England after finishing his contract with Dutch club Deventer Go-Ahead Eagles.

"They have asked me to sign on again, but I am looking for something else. I admire

the German league and fancy a big club there, or maybe in England," said Rufai, whose idol is the great German keeper Sepp Mayer.

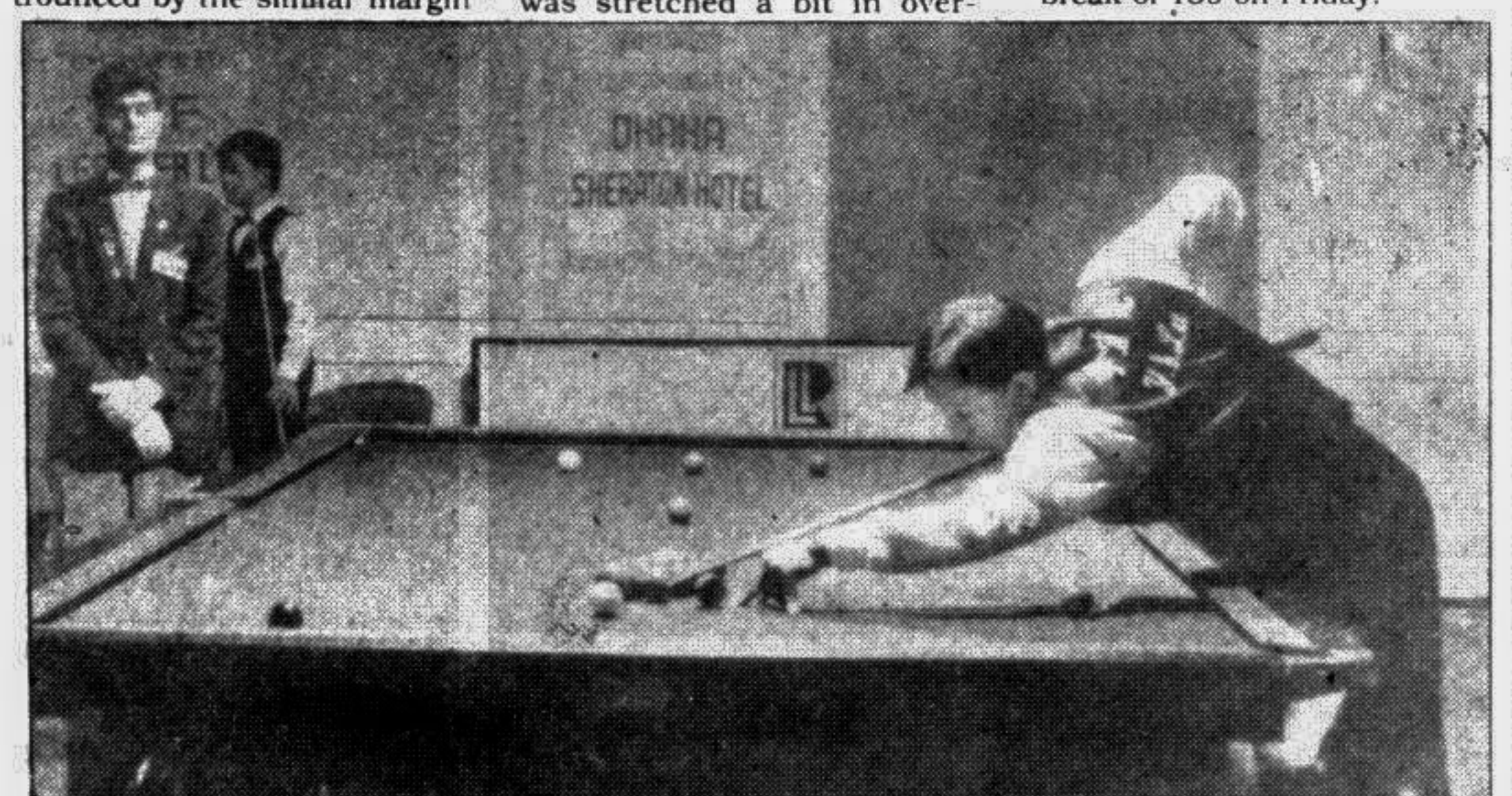
A 12-year veteran of the side, capped 79 times for Nigeria, Rufai came to the World Cup with a glowing reputation after helping the side win the 1993 African Championship.

Once he even put his striker's talent to use, scoring a goal from the penalty spot for Nigeria against Tunisia.

A favourite of extrovert Dutch coach Clemens Westerhof, Rufai, like most goalkeepers is a born eccentric.

With the strength and the height of a night club bouncer, Rufai is a retiring introvert who lists playing tennis and reading as his interests.

But Rufai doesn't read who-done-it. He packs his travel bag with heavyweight tomes on microeconomics in the modern world accountability for international management, and global economic prospects.



Chinese cueist Yih sien Lee, in action on the third day of the 11th Asian snooker championship at the ball room of the Sheraton Hotel yesterday. — Star photo