

WORLD CUP USA '94



FLYING COMPOS: Mexican goalkeeper Jorge Campos dives in vain to prevent Bulgarian Iordan Letchkov's spot-kick entering the net during the shoot-out session between Mexico and Bulgaria in a World Cup second round match at the Giants Stadium in New Jersey on Tuesday. Bulgaria prevailed 3-1 after scores were locked at 1-1 during a marathon match of 120 minutes. —AFP photo

Asian snooker final today

Sports Reporter
Record breaking Thai cueist Somporn Kantawang meets a confident Ooi Chin-Kay of Malaysia in the final of the 11th Asian snooker championship at the ball room turned snooker parlour of the Sheraton Hotel today.

Both the finalists were in devastating form yesterday warding off the challenges of their semifinal rivals, will minimum fuss.

It was all in consonance with expectations when Ooi Chan-Kay snookered Chan Watat of Hong Kong to a 6-2 defeat.

Inform Kantawang, who had earlier helped the tournament to give a ring to sportslovers, braving a spell of absorption over the World Cup, was in devastating form and his compatriot Preecha Sae Be though game, had hardly any answer.

Kantawang's flight to the final was exacted in a statistics of 6-3.

Preecha, however, had some consolation when he ensured the third position in the 12-nation, 25-player meet blanking Chan Watat 3-0 in a best-of-five frame game.

Preecha picked up 500 dollar while Chan pocketed 250 dollars as the other losing semifinalist.

In a rare revelation of media sensibility Bangladesh Television has decided to cover today's final live from 10 am onwards.

Organised by the Bangladesh Billiards and Snooker Federation and sponsored by the Beximco Group, the amateur meet throws up a total prize money of 2700 US dollars. Winner of the nine-day tournament, which concludes today, will get 1250 US dollars.

The runner-up will be richer for 700 dhs.

Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman will be the guest of honour at the presentation ceremony this afternoon.

Bilardo sees nothing new

FOXBORO, July 6: Former Argentina coach Carlos Bilardo said on Tuesday there had been tactical regression in soccer since his Diego Maradona-inspired side won the World Cup eight years ago, reports Reuter.

"Football has fallen behind 10 years," Bilardo said after watching Italy's 2-1 extra-time victory over Nigeria in a second round match at the Foxboro Stadium near Boston.

"I was telling Franz Beckenbauer the other day that there's nothing new," he said.

Beckenbauer and Bilardo were rivals for six years at top international level, with the German finally getting the better of the Argentine in their team's second successive World Cup final in Rome in 1990. Both quit later that year.

Bilardo maintained the system of a libero and two stoppers behind a five-man midfield with which Argentina won the 1986 finals in Mexico was the last tactical innovation in the game.

He said the current tournament had produced a great deal of excitement. But his successor Alfio Basile's Argentina had left themselves exposed to rivals' counter-attacks.

Bilardo said he was unimpressed by Italy. "Coach Arrigo Sacchi can't settle on a team. He's got no play in midfield."

"The players look tired," he added.

Bulgaria breach barrier

EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey, July 6: Bulgaria, who only squeezed into the World Cup thanks to a dramatic last-gasp win, reached the last eight for the first time in their history on Tuesday by beating Mexico on penalties, reports Reuter.

The Bulgarians took the penalty shoot-out 3-1 after the teams had finished 1-1 the end of 120 minutes of play.

Backed by the vast majority of the 70,000-strong crowd, the Mexicans lost their nerve in the shoot-out and their first three players failed to convert their kicks.

Bulgarian captain Borislav Mihailov emerged as his team's hero, saving penalties from Marcelino Bernal and Jorge Rodriguez after Mexican Alberto Garcia, who had netted from the spot during the game, blazed over the bar.

Mexican goalkeeper Jorge Campos saved from Bulgaria's Krasimir Balakov but had no chance with kicks from Boncho Genchev, Daniel Borimirov and the clincher from Iordan Letchkov.

"I did not have any particular strategy. I was just looking at the foot of the player taking kicks," Mihailov said of his saves.

"God was a Bulgarian today," was the explanation of striker Hristo Stoichkov.

Bulgaria specialise in nail-biting wins, having scored in the last minute of their final qualifying match last November to eliminate France.

They had never won a match at five previous World Cup finals but have now won three in a row, a run which sets them up for a quarter-final clash with champions Germany on Sunday.

This second round game was blighted by poor refereeing by Syrian Jamal Al-Sharif who sent off two men from each side, cautioned a further six and awarded the Mexicans a hotly disputed penalty.

"We thought the referee was biased by the presence of 70,000 Mexicans in the crowd," said Mihailov.

Lacking three suspended players and with a makeshift defence, Bulgaria went ahead in the seventh minute.

Ivaylo Yordanov, a striker playing as an emergency stopper, sent a fine pass through to Stoichkov who rifled a shot past Campos for his fourth goal of the tournament.

Mexico, who had never lost to Bulgaria, were level in the 19th minute when Alberto Garcia converted a penalty awarded when Bulgarian defender Emil Kremenlev tangled with Mexican striker Luis Alves "Zague" in the penalty box.

The game was held up for six minutes in the first half while the goalposts were replaced at the Mexican end after Bernal had pulled down the stanchion in making a saving header.

Garcia had been angry with referee Sharif since the penalty and could scarcely believe it when the unfortunate Kremenlev was shown the red card in the 50th minute.

Kremenlev had been booked earlier but the foul which earned him his second yellow card looked harmless enough.

That one-man advantage lasted only eight minutes as Mexican midfielder Luis Garcia was dismissed for his second caution, the punishment again appearing to far outweigh the crime.

Referee: Jamal Al-Sharif (Syria)
Red Cards: Mexico — Luis Garcia (58) Bulgaria — Emil Kremenlev (50)
Yellow cards: Mexico — Claudio Suarez (15), Luis Garcia (29), Ramon Ramirez (71), Albert Garcia (77) Bulgaria — Emil Kremenlev (13), Nasko Strakov (17), Ilian Kiryakov (35), Ivaylo Yordanov (68).

TEAMS
MEXICO: 1-Jorge Campos, 20-Jorge Rodriguez, 2-Claudio Suarez, 3-Juan Ramirez, 5-Ramon Ramirez, 4-Ignacio Ambriz, 6-Marcelino Bernal, 8-Albert Garcia, 10-Luis Garcia, 11-Luis Alves, 17-Benjamin Galindo.
BULGARIA: 1-Borislav Mihailov, 2-Emil Kremenlev, 5-Petar Hubechev, 16-Ilian Kiryakov, 11-Daniel Borimirov, 13-Ivaylo Yordanov, 9-Yordan Letchkov, 20-Krasimir Balakov, 7-Emil Kostadinov (17-Petar Mithtarski (18), 10-Nasko Strakov (14 Boncho Genchev (104), 8-Hristo Stoichkov.

At least 5,000 people gathered around the Central Palace of Culture, many of them showering one another with beer or wine as hundreds of anti-riot police clad in riot gear stood by.

During the match, the streets were deserted and thieves took full advantage of the football mania to steal cars and radios.

Hristo Stoichkov Bulgarians exult

SOFIA, July 6: The streets of Sofia were packed with jubilant fans this morning, moments after Bulgaria beat Mexico into the World Cup quarter-finals, reports Reuter.

The Bulgarian capital exploded with gunshots and the blast of car horns as thousands celebrated the 3-1 victory after a nail-biting penalty shoot-out.

The city had not seen such emotional scenes since an anti-communist coalition won parliamentary elections in 1991.

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Baron refused to enter the debate. "I have never questioned referees before and this is not the time to start doing it," he said.

Mihailov, who saved penalties from Marcelino Bernal and Jorge Rodriguez after Alberto Garcia had put his first shot over the bar, described the moment of victory as "the happiest of my life."

"This is the greatest success ever for Bulgarian soccer. tactically we played it the best possible way."

"I felt very confident throughout the match and I was almost looking forward to the penalty kicks. I didn't have any particular strategy I was just looking at the foot of the player taking the kicks."

The result was a particular disappointment for Mexico's flamboyant goalkeeper Jorge Campos who made a brilliant save from Bulgaria's first penalty by Krasimir Balakov.

He lay slumped in his goalmouth for a long time after Yordan Letchkov converted his spot kick to seal the fate of the match. He was on his feet to be consoled by Bulgarian goal scorer Hristo Stoichkov.

"He has a gift from heaven. Anybody would want a player like him in their side."

FIFA denies it

DALLAS, Texas, July 6: An International Football Federation (FIFA) official dismissed Argentine claims on Tuesday that two Romanian World Cup players had tested positive for drugs, reports AFP.

"There is no truth in these rumours," FIFA's chief press officer Guido Tongoni said.

"There have been no positive cases since Diego Maradona was excluded."

A Romanian team spokesman Julian Stanescu refused to comment on the claims.

An Argentine television station, which had hired Maradona for interviews during the tournament, made the drugs claims.

Doping rife in Argentine soccer

BUENOS AIRES, July 6: Drug-taking is rife in Argentine football, a poll published on Wednesday said, reports AFP.

The Coleccion Deportiva newspaper said 63 per cent of 209 First Division players interviewed believed drug-taking was widespread, although only three per cent said they had actually taken stimulants before a match.

Twenty-two per cent said they knew team-mates who took drugs.

Argentina's World Cup captain Diego Maradona was expelled from the World Cup finals for testing positive for five ephedrine-related drugs.

Witch-hunting of Cerrini
BUENOS AIRES, July 6: Anonymous threats have been made to kill Daniel Cerrini, who is alleged to have administered the banned products that led to Diego Maradona's expulsion from the World Cup, reports AFP.

The threats were made in calls to Cerrini's family, who have denied the dietician prescribed ephedrine for Argentina's World Cup captain.

Friends say they are worried following the murder of Colombian World Cup defender Andres Escobar, who was shot on Saturday in Medellin after scoring an own goal in the United States.

All that is known of Cerrini's present whereabouts is that he is still in the United States.

Meanwhile, Argentina coach Alfio Basile dismissed claims Maradona's film star behaviour had disrupted the team.

More trouble for Maradona

SEVILLE, Spain, July 6: Disgraced Argentine Diego Maradona faces a 1.5 million dollars court suit launched by his former club Sevilla for alleged damages, the Spanish news agency Efe said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Efe quoted Seville court sources as saying Sevilla were seeking 200 million pesetas (1.5 million) in compensation from Maradona for breaching his contract to the club for the 1992-93 season.

The former Argentine captain was withdrawn last week by his national football association from the World Cup team and suspended indefinitely from soccer by FIFA for using the stimulant ephedrine and related banned drugs.

The club fired Maradona before his contract was due to expire and withheld his final 1.15 million dollars pay cheque on the grounds that he had not honoured his obligations to the club.

Maradona, 33, was signed by Sevilla in September, 1992, for 7.5 million dollars after the player had refused to return to Napoli following a 15-month ban from the game for taking cocaine.

Sevilla lodged the claim on Monday in an arbitration court, a step before full litigation. Courts sources said this move would block any legal action that might be taken to get the 1.15 million dollars the club had not paid.

Andersson makes his mark

DALLAS, July 6: Kennet Andersson, the expensive misfit who almost never made it to the World Cup, has finally left the bad times behind, reports Reuter.

The gangling Swedish striker, who has spent his entire career with little clubs, has hit the big time with three goals in the finals, he once feared he would miss — including one against Brazil.

Andersson played only three minutes in Sweden's 10 World Cup qualifying games after spending most of last year in the international wilderness when he was snubbed by his Belgian club, Mechelen.

But after regaining his form when he moved to French club Lille a year ago, Andersson won a late call-up to the Swedish squad, and the striker who averages a goal every two games has fully repaid coach Tommy Svensson.

"When I was having trouble with Mechelen I thought I would never make it to the World Cup," said Andersson.

"And even when I was selected I did not think I would be playing because I did not play in the friendlies before the World Cup."

"To be here is great, to play and score goals is even better. I'm having a really good time. We all are."

A substitute in the opening match, he scored the Sweden's goal in the 1-1 draw with Brazil and then earned them a place in the quarter-finals for the first time in 20 years with two in the 3-1 second-round win over Saudi Arabia.

"I thought before the tournament that we could make the quarter-finals, but I never imagined I'd score so many goals," he said.

"I think the goal against Brazil was probably the most beautiful I have ever scored, and certainly the biggest thrill."



KENNET ANDERSSON of the World Cup so far," said the 26-year-old.

In Sunday's quarter-final against Romania he could draw level with teammate Martin Dahlin, whose four goals so far make him Sweden's joint World Cup record goalscorer.

"I never even knew about the record before the tournament. It will be broken, and I think Martin will break it," he said.

Andersson was left out of the starting line-up for Sweden's opening match against Cameroon, but came in against Russia when Svensson decided to play two strikers. With Dahlin suspended for the

Brazil game, Andersson kept his place and scored his first World Cup goal.

"He has improved over the last four weeks and his self-confidence has been really boosted by scoring a few goals," said teammate Roland Nilsson.

But Andersson feared for his international career when Mechelen dropped him in October 1992 after spending most of the previous season on the substitutes' bench.

The club, in severe financial difficulties, barred him from training with the first team to try to force him to leave so they could cut his 400,000 dollars salary.

A promising international career, which began in 1990 and seemed to be flourishing when he scored in the European Championship semi-final against Germany in 1992, went on hold as he tried to sort out his dispute with Mechelen.

Eventually he went back to Sweden, on loan to Norrkoping, and in July 1993 joined Lille, where he scored 10 goals last season.

"Going to Lille and playing professional football again was really important. I got my self-confidence back there," said Andersson.

He earned his international recall in February in a three-team tournament in Miami, scoring against the United States.

Last month he switched clubs again, joining another small-town French side, Caen, for five million francs (925,000 dollars). Now his World Cup goals have led to rumours of interest from Italian clubs.

But it seems the Normandy club may have got themselves the biggest World Cup bargain of all time.

A revelation of hairstyle

NEW YORK, July 6(AFP): You don't have to have a whacky haircut to be a world Cup footballer, but all the evidence is that it helps.

True, Carlos Valderrama, the Colombian with the wild strawberry blond locks, was as much of a flop in USA '94 as he was in Italy four years ago, but the fact is that, hair-wise, Valderrama was always carrying his distinctly unflamboyant teammates.

In soccer's style wars, strength in depth is always an advantage, a lesson the United States seems to have finally learned.

With hindsight, it was obvious that the short (but not too short) cropped, clean-shaven boys who crossed the Atlantic for Italia '90 never stood much of a chance.

Now, on the strength of Alexei Lalas' ginger Afro and goatee, Cobi Jones mini-dreads and Ernie Stewart's skinhead, the current American team clearly has a rosy future in the world's favourite game.

What is perhaps most remarkable is that this transformation has been brought about by a coach, Bora Milutinovic, who, as far as hair goes, is still living in the decade of total football.

In other words, he goes to the same barber as Ilie Nastase.

The American public too is getting the message that there is a lot more to soccer showing-off than dribbling.

"I don't know much about soccer, but those guys have got great hair," said Sean Miller, a New York hairdresser who is, perhaps over-optimistically anticipating a flood of Lalas Wannabes' into his Manhattan salon.

Ever since George Best grew sideburns to match his 20-inch flairs, footballers have been consistently among the most glib victims of whatever fashion happens to come along in their corner of the globe.

But it is not simply street trends that dictate the follicular make-up of the average player. Hair is also a statement, a sign of the true personality lurking behind the fringe and inevitably a pattern has emerged in how different types of players interpret the latest modes.

For the player who wants to be seen as creative imaginative and generally a bit artistic, the rule this season is: Keep it long.

Roberto Baggio's stature in Italy has risen in direct proportion to the increasing length of his ponytail over the last two years. When he had it braided into plaits weeks before the World Cup — defying clear instructions to the contrary from his mother — it served only as confirmation that this was going to be his tournament.

Thanks largely to his hair, Baggio's artist status is now so ingrained that when he plays badly it's automatically the fault of the insensitive coach who

does not know how to give the maestro the freedom he needs to express himself.

Other floppy-haired artists taking a bow at USA '94 included Norway's Erik Mykland, Switzerland's Alain Sutter and Argentina's Fernando Redondo.

For Bulgarian goalkeeper Borislav Mihailov, the World Cup has been a hair renaissance. Last seen sporting a smooth pate, he arrived in the United States with a full head of transplanted hair — and saved two penalties in a shoot-out with the Mexico that saw Bulgaria into the quarter-finals.

Just as long equals creative, short signals quick. Thus the aerodynamic look favoured by Ernie Stewart is all the rage with strikers this summer: Faustino Asprilla, Hristo Stoichkov and Daniel Massaro to name but a few.

For some reason, this development by passed both Argentina and Germany, for whom strikers Gabriel Battistuta and Rudi Voeller scooped the hair fashion *faux-pas* awards.

Voeller, who is 34, can at least point out that a tight perm and moust: che were all the rage among footballers in his youth. But 25-year-old Battistuta was nine when Mario Kempes led Argentina to glory in 1978. He has no excuse for turning up with an identical cut 16 years later.

Defenders, of course, are too tough to worry about anything as frivolous as their appearance. They've got more important things to think about, if you don't mind.

Mihailov bitter & sweet

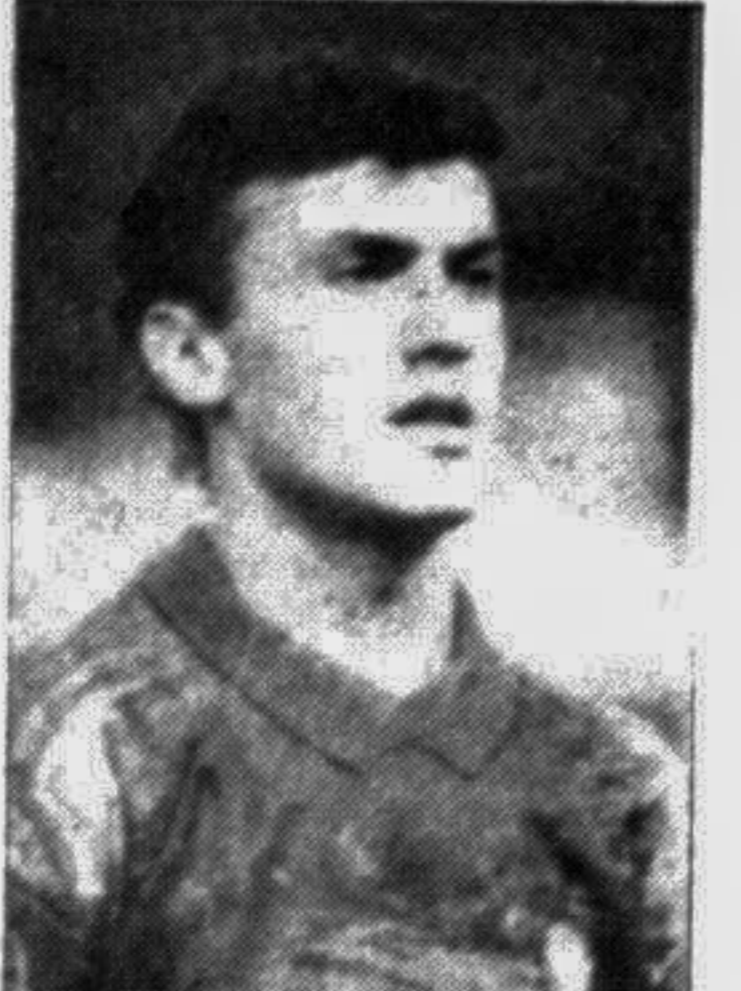
EAST RUTHERFORD, July 6: Syrian referee Jamal Al-Sharif was accused of bias by Bulgarian captain Borislav Mihailov following his side's dramatic World Cup win over Mexico on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

After his two penalty shoot-out saves had helped to earn Bulgaria a place in the last eight for the first time, Mihailov criticised Sharif who issued 10 yellow cards, sent off two players and awarded Mexico a debatable penalty.

"We thought the referee was biased by the presence of 70,000 Mexicans in the crowd," said Mihailov. "I have to assure you there was no penalty and the expulsion of our player was unjustified."

The disputed penalty was awarded in the 18th minute after Emil Kremenlev tangled with Luis Alves Zague, and the same Bulgarian defender was dismissed early in the second-half for his second bookable offence.

"I was very surprised I don't think he used good



BORISLAV MIHAILOV the official has booked a total of 19 players. Mexican coach Miguel Mejia



Bulgaria's Ivaylo Yordanov (L) gets to the ball ahead of Mexico's Benjamin Galindo during a World Cup second round match at Giants Stadium on June 5. — AFP photo