

Philips Lighting — Official Sponsor of WorldCupUSA94

PHILIPS

Baggio delays Italy's flight

FOXBORO, Massachusetts. July 6: Roberto Baggio aborted Italy's flight home moments before take-off on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

"Italy were already on the plane and I stopped it," said Baggio, suddenly regaining his scoring form when all seemed lost.

"After the goal he was extraordinary, playing as he knows and can," coach Arrigo Sacchi said after Baggio struck twice in the side's dramatic 2-1 World Cup victory over Nigeria.

"We have recovered the Baggio we all wanted, the man who can take us forward," said Italian Football Federation president Antonio Matarrese.

Italy were a goal down and one man short when Baggio slipped his marker Sunday Oliseh and took a square ball from right-back Roberto Mussi to equalise from the edge of the penalty box in the 89th minute.

His winner from the penalty spot 12 minutes into extra time took his tally to 21 39 internationals.

The goals helped the pony-tailed Juventus player to put behind him a disappointing first round in which his usefulness to the team was marked less by his ball skills than an unexpected first-half substitution against Norway.

Italy, already upset 1-0 by Ireland in their opening match, had goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca sent off early in the crucial second match against Norway.

Sacchi chose Baggio as the man to make way for reserve goalkeeper Luca Marchegiani and a fighting performance saw Italy through 1-0.

"I hope we've made the breakthrough. This squad has so much character," said European footballer-of-the-year Baggio.

Italian press hails Baggio

ROME, July 6: After three poor performances, star striker Roberto Baggio finally triumphed at the World Cup and Italian dailies Wednesday quickly reversed their earlier criticism, reports AP.

La Gazzetta dello Sport ran a banner heading saying Italia: Baggioooooo! and Il Manifesto wrote, "Forza Buddha" (Let's Go Buddha), referring to Baggio's religious preference.

Italians had nearly given up hope of defeating Nigeria at Foxboro, Mass, when with two minutes left, Baggio scored the goal that tied the game 1-1 and gave Italy a chance for victory.

Baggio came alive after the goal, and when Italy were awarded a penalty kick in overtime the striker tallied again sealing off the outcome.

"Italy saved by the pony tail," wrote Il Giornale, referring to Baggio's hairstyle.

Italians celebrate

ROME, July 6: Italians danced in the streets and jumped into fountains on Tuesday to celebrate their soccer team's thrilling comeback victory over Nigeria which kept their World Cup hopes alive, reports Reuter.

Fireworks went off from the Alps to Sicily as soccer-mad Italians poured onto the streets and motorcades of flag-draped cars honked horns and brought traffic to a halt in many cities.

"The whole country held its breath for 120 minutes," said the television presenter who read the late evening news with the 2-1 victory in the United States.

During the match, the streets were silent as the spectre of a depressing defeat at the hands of the Africans hung over the country until almost the last minute.

But after the final whistle supporters cracked open bottles of wine at fan clubs throughout the country as Italy were given another chance of repeating their triumph in the 1982 World Cup in Spain.

Basler returns home

CHICAGO, July 6: German midfielder Mario Basler rushed home from the World Cup finals on Tuesday to be with his wife who is having problems with her pregnancy, reports Reuter.

German press chief Wolfgang Niersbach said the Werder Bremen player had flown to Germany in the afternoon to see his wife Anke, who had been taken to hospital in pain. She is eight months pregnant.

Basler, 25, who had yet to start a game at the World Cup finals, only took an overnight bag with him and was expected to return to the United States if no major problems occurred.



HERO OF THE MOMENT: Roberto Baggio (2nd L) is congratulated by teammates Roberto Donadoni (L), Daniele Massaro (19) and Dino Baggio after grabbing a last-minute equaliser against Nigeria in their World Cup second round match at the Foxboro Stadium on Tuesday. Italy won 2-1 in extra-time to advance to quarter finals. — AFP photo

Hagi keeping a low profile



ARCADIA, Calif. July 6: "Which slogan do you prefer," a Romanian-American journalist asked midfielder Gheorghe Hagi at a press conference: "Hagi for President" or "King Hagi?"

Hagi wasn't biting. "Neither one," he said. "Just Hagi the player."

As Romania prepare for their knockout quarterfinals game with Sweden Sunday at Stanford Stadium, team officials and players are trying to keep from getting carried away with star power and past success, reports AP.

"I forgot everything that has happened, starting with yesterday," said coach Anghel Iordanescu.

"As we begin our preparations for Sweden," Iordanescu said, "first we must get all the players with their feet on the ground."

As Hagi doodled on a notepad at the end of the dais, Iordanescu revealed that he had chastised Romania's number 10 after the first-round 4-1 loss to Switzerland.

"I was not happy with the way he performed in the game with Switzerland," Iordanescu said.

Iordanescu admitted that Hagi is to Romania what Maradona was to Argentina and what Cruyff was to the Dutch.

Hagi shrugged off a question about his famous mood changes. The 29-year-old said that he has been playing professionally for 12 years and suggested that everybody has bad days.

"In life you have up and downs," he said. "In the morning you don't wake up in the same way."

"Now I am together with my team," he said. "I have the chance to be in this new generation of Romanian soccer players."

Iordanescu said his team's expectations do not stop with

the quarterfinals. "Some say we are dreaming too much," he said. "But through equilibrium and balance on the field, anybody can dream as much as they want."

Iordanescu said that the team felt the absence of striker Florin Raducioiu in their 1-0 victory over Argentina in the round of 16.

Burdened with two yellow cards in first-round play, Raducioiu had to sit out the Argentina game.

Iordanescu said the team

Romanian soccer players to develop. "Our country has always possessed talented players," he said. "In the past political system, players could not cultivate their own image and personality."

"Now they are showing what they can give. They are allowed to sign contracts and to show their true value."

Spurs, Barcelona want Hagi

ARCADIA, California, July 6: Romania captain Gheorghe Hagi said on Tuesday he was flattered by reports linking him with Barcelona and Tottenham, but said he would not make any decisions about his future until after the World Cup, reports Reuter.

"If Mr Cruyff at Barcelona is interested in me, I am delighted, and if Tottenham are interested in me that is a very high compliment from an English club."

"But I cannot think about those things now. I am here in the United States, with Romania in the World Cup and nothing else matters to me."

"Once it's over that's a different story. I would be happy to play in England one day and I would be happy to go back to Spain, but I am still a Brescia player and that's fine with me too."

Reports in both the Romanian and Italian press have linked Hagi with a move from Italy.

Gazzetta Dello Sport said Tottenham had offered Hagi personal terms of 1 million dollar a year for three years and that Tottenham's owner Alan Sugar was due in Italy on Thursday for talks with Brescia's president Gino Corioni. Barcelona are understood to have offered a slightly better deal.

Hagi had a spell on trial with Nottingham Forest in England but never played for the first team.

He has played in Spain, spending two seasons with Real Madrid after Italia '90 and he might relish a move to Real's arch rivals Barcelona after never really proving himself in the capital.

He move to Brescia at the start of the 1992-93 season and although Brescia were relegated to Serie B at the end of that campaign, they have just been promoted.

Bandura Holy Cross school b'ball champs

Sports Reporter

Bandura Holy Cross School clinched the National King Fan school basketball title winning the final against St Gregory School 74-54 at the NSC wooden floor gymnasium yesterday.

Holy Cross School who never appeared to be threatened by the fancied St Gregory School led the first half 41-28.

Salfu who spearheaded his side's easy victory emerged as the runaway top scorer with a haul of 45 points. The winners caged 33 against St Gregory's 26 in an evenly contested second session.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Sadeque Hossain distributed prizes among the winners. Managing director of the sponsor National King Electrical Industries Habibullah was also present on the occasion as the special guest.

Westerhof quits

FOXBORO, Massachusetts, July 6: Nigeria coach Clemens Westerhof confirmed his resignation after their World Cup exit on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

"That's it," said Westerhof, in charge for five tempestuous years, following the 2-1 defeat by Italy.

The Dutch-born coach, who led Nigeria to the African Championship in April, has long said he would quit at the end of Nigeria's World Cup campaign.

"That was my last game. I am proud to have been in charge of Nigeria for five years and thank all those people who have supported me and helped me bring this team this far."

Asked about his future, he said: "Now I'm going to the hotel to help my wife celebrate her birthday, then I'm going to Disney World with my 12-year-old son."

Westerhof praised his players for their performance against the Italians. "I said before that we wanted to be the surprise team of this tournament and I think now we are."

"It was a very good match, but victory was two minutes too far away. He did our best but luck was not on our side."

Westerhof has had a love-hate relationship with both Nigeria and its players since taking over the post in 1979.

He often "resigned" in a bluff tactic to force the hand of Nigerian sports officials.

Keshi calls it a day

MANSFIELD, Massachusetts, July 6: Nigerian captain Stephen Keshi, dropped for his team's World Cup defeat by Italy on Tuesday, said he was retiring from international soccer, reports Reuter.

At the same time, the 33-year-old defender launched a bitter attack on coach Clemens



Westerhof after the 2-1 loss to the Italians in the second round at Foxboro Stadium.

Keshi accused the Dutch-born coach, who resigned earlier on Tuesday from his position, of leaving out key players because of personal grudges.

"I was not picked for the team because I stood up to him. Samson Siasia was also left out because he criticised the coach," he said.

Westerhof had a row with the Nigerians last week over the right of player's wives to stay in the team hotel.

Keshi said Westerhof deserved little credit for the Africans' showing at the World Cup, where they finished top of their opening-round group and came within two minutes of eliminating three-time champions Italy on Tuesday.

"He was not a coach. He only did a lot of talking. I protected him for five years only because he stood up for the rights of the players on money we were owed by the federation," he said.

Yekini blames Westerhof



FOXBORO, July 6: Nigeria's star striker Rashidi Yekini launched a bitter attack on coach Clemens Westerhof and his team-mates after his country's 2-1 defeat by Italy in the World Cup second round on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Yekini blamed Westerhof for tactical folly and said his team-mates refused to pass him the ball as the Africans were dramatically eliminated from the tournament.

"I have always been against this coach," he said of Dutch-born Westerhof. "It is no secret that I don't like him and he doesn't like me. I tried to go against him long ago but my teammates did not support me."

"As a result, I was played out of the game. I never saw the ball."

Yekini also criticised the replacement of field attackers, Daniel Amokachi and Emmanuel Amunike, with

midfield players. Amokachi, who was injured in the first half, was substituted by Mutiu Adepoju, while Thompson Oliha was a second-half change for Amunike.

Westerhof should have brought in another attacker to help me," said Yekini, who at 30 added he was unsure about his future international career.

He was the only dissenting voice among a disappointed group of players at the Foxboro Stadium.

"I have mixed feelings," said teenage midfielder Sunday Oliseh, who will join Italian club Reggiana next month.

"I'm disappointed that we put up a good show today," he said. "We just have to accept the defeat like men," added winger Finidi George. "I hope we can do better in 1998."

Defender Augustine Eguavoen, who conceded the extra time penalty that led to the defeat, said no one player was to blame.

"When you touch any player in your own 18-yard box there is always a chance that you are going to give away a penalty. I think we now have to put this behind us and look forward."

Added Oliseh: "We were leading with just two minutes to go and we were enjoying ourselves. We made a mistake, but that's football."

Dutch emerge from shadow



ORLANDO, July 6: The Dutch World Cup squad took a well earned day off today as they contemplated the prospect that life without Marco van Basten and Ruud Gullit may not be so bleak as they thought, reports Reuter.

Monday's 2-0 win over Ireland carried the Netherlands to the quarter-finals for the first time since the golden days in 1974 and 1978 when they finished as losing finalists.

More importantly a compelling, all-round performance in which Dennis Bergkamp led by example showed at last that the Dutch are not just title contenders on paper but on the field as well.

Van Basten's career threatening ankle injury and Gullit's highly publicised walkout just before the finals looked likely to leave the Dutch team without the leaders capable of making the men from the lowlands scale the heights of success.

An unimpressive and tricky passage through Group F seemed to confirm the view that the Dutch were a little short of true class but the Irish match changed all that.

Trainer Dick Advocaat, who would naturally have liked both of the missing stars on his squad, was highly delighted with his new-found team.

"We are very satisfied that we have also played most of the last two years without both Gullit and Van Basten," he said.

Gullit played in just three World Cup qualifying matches before he quit the side in an earlier disagreement with Advocaat over tactics and Van Basten appeared in only two before his injury.

In their absence, the clockwork orange machine has certainly not run down and Bergkamp is the man who is winding it up.

The blond forward struck for his second goal in as many matches on Monday, taking his tally to 21 in 35 games for his

country. The 25-year-old Inter Milan player used to prefer to get his goals on darting runs from midfield but these days he is leading the attack from a centre-forward position and doing it with style and relish.

But the blossoming Dutch team who take on World Cup favourites Brazil in a daunting test in Dallas on Saturday are much more than just a vehicle

for Bergkamp's skills. Despite criticism of his lack of pace, Ronald Koeman continues to be a tower of strength in central defence even though he has rarely got forward as yet to unleash his fearsome free kicks and long-range shots.

In midfield, Bergkamp's Inter teammate Wim Jonk pulled the strings perfectly against the Irish in the absence of the suspended veteran Jan Wouters but it was the attack which was most impressive.

Unlike other teams at the World Cup, the Dutch are playing not with one but two overmars and young Marc Overmars and Peter van Vossen proved the fatal thorns in Ireland's side.

Overmars, a 21-year-old Ajax Amsterdam flanker, was simply brilliant as he jinked past opponents at will and caused confusion and panic by constantly switching wings.

Advocaat's belief in wing approach play has led him to field no less than four wingers in the tournament so far with Bryan Roy and Gaston Taument also appearing in most matches.

The trainer's faith in attacking soccer leaves the Dutch vulnerable at the back with only three out-and-out defenders in Koeman, Frank de Boer and Stan Valckx.

But the defence held up superbly against Ireland with midfielders Jonk, Robert Witschge, Aron Winter and Frank Rijkaard all providing extra cover and support in midfield.

"I think the defence played really well," Advocaat said. "They didn't give away too many chances."

How they will cope with Romario and Bebeto on Saturday may be another matter but the Dutch go into the game without any complexes, knowing victory would make them favourites for the title.

Charlton decides to oblige



DUBLIN, July 6: Jack Charlton, English manager of the Irish football team, bowed to a Transatlantic clamour on Wednesday and agreed to attend an on-off Dublin party for Ireland's homecoming World Cup heroes, reports Reuter.

"I've spoken to him (Charlton) in the last five minutes and he's going to attend," the chief executive of the Irish Football Association (IFA) told Irish Radio from his base in America.

Charlton said earlier that he would not be coming because of television commentary commitments but was persuaded to take part in the event after the government intervened to overturn its cancellation and host what is billed as the party of the year.

The event, in Dublin's Phoenix Park, was called off when it appeared that few of the leading players or Charlton would be coming but Prime Minister Albert Reynolds' government urged the organisers to think again.

Charlton and about 19 of the 22-man squad are due to fly into Dublin Airport on Thursday to be met by Reynolds and thousands of fans — much to the disappointment of employers weary of stay-away or hungover World Cup fans.

The employers' association (IBEC) said it was sorry that the event had been arranged for midday because hundreds of thousands of people would abandon their places of work early — as they have done for

the past three weeks of Irish World Cup action.

But the Irish Congress of Trade Unions urged employers to allow their staff to attend the gala and promised that lost hours could be made up at a later date.

Between 100,000 and half a million people are expected to pack Phoenix Park.

Ireland's progress through the early rounds of the World Cup before its 2-0 knockout defeat by the Netherlands on Monday night has turned normal life on its head, created a

several key players including captain Andy Townsend had said they would not be coming to Dublin — it is home to few of the players because most are members of English or Scottish clubs and live in Britain.

But most will now attend, organisers said, and Charlton denied that they had been paid to do so.

"I am hurt by suggestions that I am opting out of the homecoming — even more by snide suggestion that, if players were getting paid for it, they would go to Dublin," he told the Irish Times.

The team's World Cup progress, which included an historic 1-0 win over Italy in the opening game on June 18, united Ireland in a show of national pride.

Beer consumption was reported to have risen by 20 per cent, the festivities even survived a short-lived bar staff strike and the mood of euphoria overshadowed a mounting list of labour and political disputes facing the government.



UNPRECEDENTED: Official replacing the goal post during the Mexico versus Bulgaria World Cup second round match at the Giants Stadium, after one of the Mexican players pulled the supporting rod down leading to the collapse of the structure. It caused several minutes' hold up in the proceedings. — AFP photo