

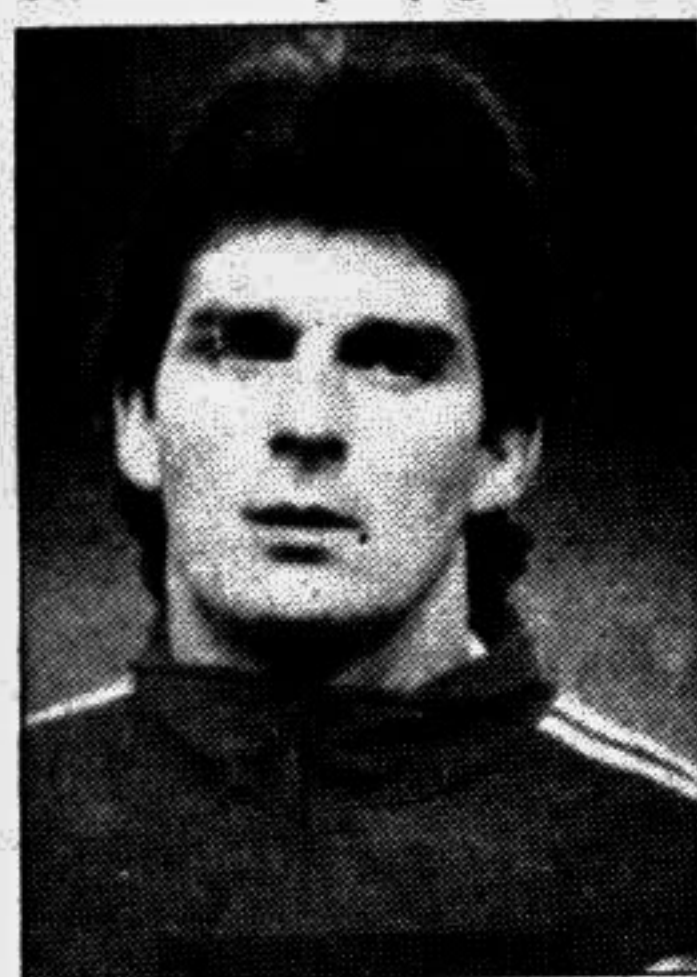
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Stoichkov hungry for goal

PRINCETON, New Jersey, July 8: Germany's plan to gorge themselves on a fourth World Cup title could come unstuck on Sunday in the face of Hristo Stoichkov's equally gluttonous



KOSTADINOV

appetite for success, reports AFP.

"When you're hungry you always want to eat more," Bulgaria's star striker, who has helped himself to four goals so far in USA '94, warned the defending champions.

Tuesday's second round win over Mexico, in which Stoichkov scored one of the goals of the tournament, prompted nationwide celebrations in Bulgaria. Whatever happens in Sunday's quarter-final, the squad will fly back to Sofia to a heroes' welcome.

But that was not stopped Stoichkov looking beyond Sunday's match to a meeting with his Barcelona teammates if Spain can come through Saturday's quarter-final against Italy in Boston.

"We have nothing to fear from Germany. They are under more pressure than us," Stoichkov said at the Bulgarians' Princeton Hotel.

"They are the world champions. Everyone expects them to beat us. We have nothing to lose and everything to win."

Boris Mikhailov, the goalkeeper whose penalty shoot-out saves took Bulgaria through against Mexico, echoed Stoichkov's optimism.

"We have no complex about Germany. We know we can beat them," said Mikhailov, who is hoping to attract the attention of a new club after leaving French side Mulhouse at the end of the season.

"We will have had a few less days to recover than them but I think the heat will count more against them. They won't be able to play their usual pressing game in midfield."

Forecasts suggest the mid-day match will be fought out in temperatures approaching 110 degrees Fahrenheit, which could make life difficult for the ageing Germans.

Significantly, Germany's most impressive performance in this tournament came in Saturday's win over Belgium, a match played in unusually cool weather.

If the Bulgarians do pull off a surprise, the chances are Stoichkov's partnership with Emil Kostadinov will have had something to do with it. The almost metaphysical understanding between the pair is the key to Bulgaria's deadly counter attacking style.

"We played together for seven years in the same team at CSKA Sofia," Kostadinov explained. "I know exactly what he is going to do and because he is so quick off the mark I'm always confident about hitting a pass into space behind a defender for him to run on to."

Stoichkov's goal against Argentina, which secured the Bulgarians a place in the second round, was a classic of its kind: Kostadinov's first-time pass, perfectly weighted, a sprint and one touch by

Stoichkov and he slots it past the goalkeeper. Like so many of the strongest double acts, the pair could not be further apart in their personalities. The day after the Mexico match, the xtrovert Stoichkov, who seems to have found his spiritual home in Barcelona,



HRISTO STOICHKOV

led a party of players on a whirlwind tour of New York.

The softly-spoken Kostadinov preferred to spend the day reading by the pool and chatting with the like-minded members of the squad.

"We're not particularly close off the field but on it we know each other like brothers," the FC Porto striker who is set to move to Atletico Madrid before the start of next season, said.

The Bulgarians freely admit they don't have the greatest team spirit in the world. "We don't all have to be the best of friends to be successful as a unit," Mikhailov said.

But nobody back home will worry about that if the team can pull off the greatest victory in the country's history.

"Already nobody is doing any work in Bulgaria because of all the celebrations," Mikhailov said. "If we beat Germany it would be like the end of the world."

Heroes' welcome for Jack's lads

DUBLIN, July 8: Any doubts Jack Charlton might have had about bringing his Irish World Cup heroes home to an official welcome quickly disappeared on Thursday, reports AFP.

The Englishman was visibly moved by the champagne welcome in Dublin and told 50,000 cheering fans: "I'm glad I didn't miss this day because this is something special."

And he got a special cheer when he confirmed: "I will almost certainly stay on and take us to the European Championship."

The Ireland manager and 19 of his 22-strong squad, flew home on a specially chartered flight from Florida for a reception in Dublin's Phoenix Park hosted by Prime Minister Albert Reynolds.

Charlton, who had declined a public celebration originally, changed his mind at the last minute.

Flanked by captain Andy Townsend and the other heroes, he told the fans: "I am sorry we didn't win the World Cup for you but we did our best. Every player here did his utmost and I can ask no more from them. It's nice to be here."

There were special cheers from the fans for Terry Phelan, whose back pass led to one of the two goals from Holland that knocked Ireland out of the World Cup, and goalkeeper Packie Bonner, who failed to save Holland's second goal.

Phelan said: "It was one of those things. It happens in football. You get over it."

"The people of Ireland have been great. The support has been great. What can you say? This is what the people wanted and we have come over to celebrate with them."

Reynolds, and other government ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Dick Spring, Finance Minister Bertie Ahern, Health Minister Brendan Howlin and Agriculture Minister Joe Walsh were at the airport to greet the players.

"The best ambassadors we have are Jack, the squad and the supporters," said Reynolds.

"The people of Ireland and the people of Dublin want the opportunity to have a party for themselves with Jack and the squad. They now have the opportunity. It was raining yesterday but Jack and the lads have brought the sunshine with them today."

On their arrival by helicopter at Irish President Mary Robinson's official residence in Phoenix Park she told the team: "You are very, very welcome home."

She added: "The team played with wonderful Irish spirit and won all our hearts."

Then the men were taken to an outdoor stage featuring a massive Irish tricolour, the official World Cup logo and "Welcome home in Gaelic and English."

Nilsson expects to be fit

SAN FRANCISCO, July 8: Swedish defender Roland Nilsson said on Thursday he fully expects to recover from a calf injury and play in his country's quarter-final against Romania on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Nilsson suffered the injury during training on Wednesday when he collided with Jesper Blomqvist when both players went for the same ball.

"He's just a young guy," joked Nilsson. "And I don't think he realised my calf was not the ball. It was a clumsy tackle, but I don't think it will be a problem to play on Sunday. It is just bruised, it was just an accident."

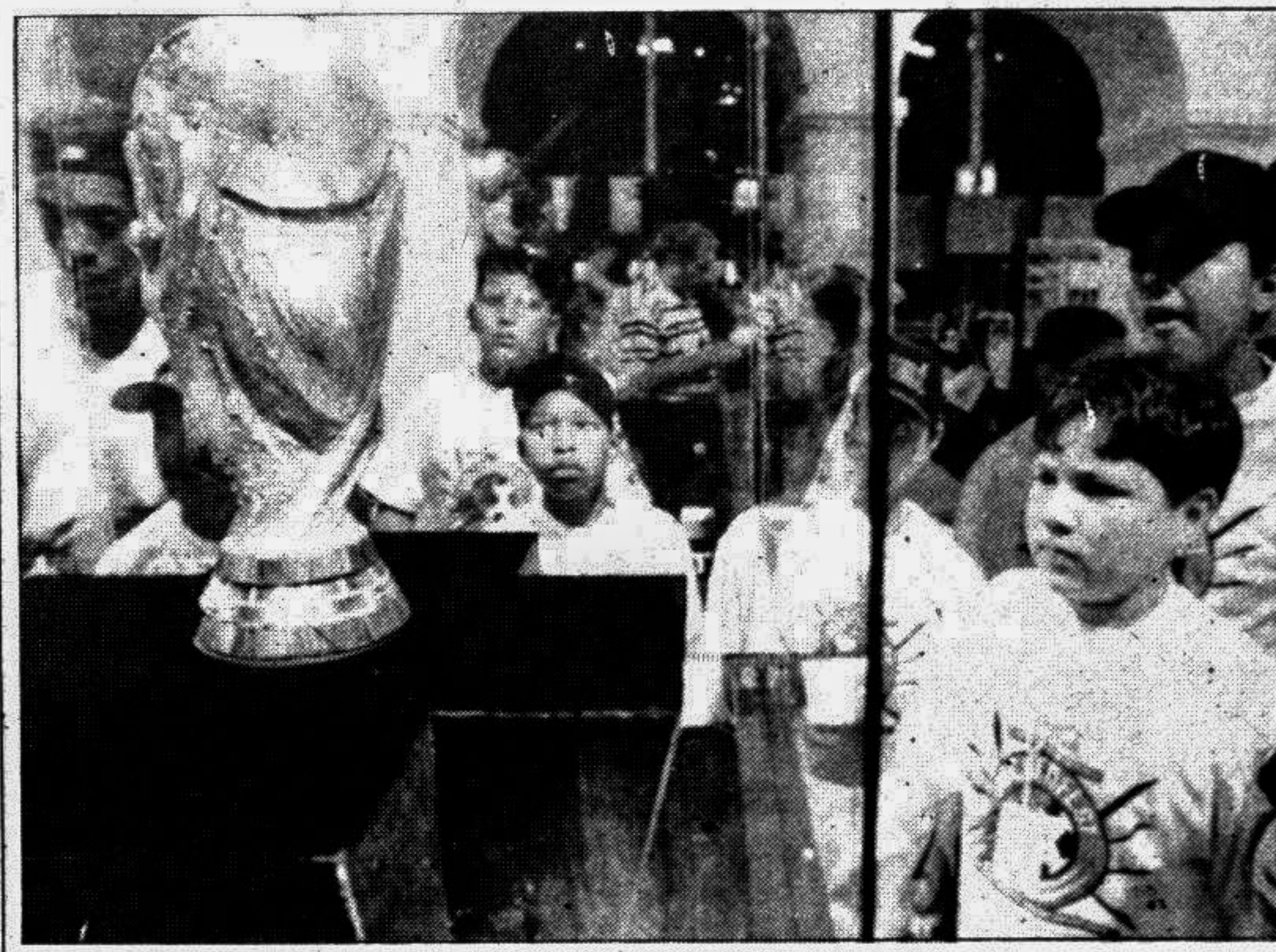
The leg was heavily bandaged on Thursday but Nilsson seems to have more chance of making the starting line-up than defender Joachim Bjorklund who suffered a recurrence of an old groin strain in Sweden's second-round match against Saudi Arabia and came off in the second half.

Swedish coach Tommy Svensson, who is also Bjorklund's uncle, said on Thursday that Nilsson's injury was no cause for concern, nor was a knee ligament injury suffered by Jonas Thern and that both would play.

But he expressed a doubt that Bjorklund would recover in time to play against Romania.

"It is a problem if you think a player can only play for 45 minutes," he said.

The mood in the Swedish camp was relaxed and buoyant on Thursday as the players conducted their usual round of morning interviews in the courtyard of their team hotel.



Visitors gaze at the World Cup which is on display at the Los Angeles Convention Centre during a preview of SoccerFest theme park which opened on July 7.

— AFP photo

Soccer alive & kicking in Eastern Europe

SAN FRANCISCO, July 8: The political upheavals which ended communist rule have created an environment in which an Eastern European country can win the World Cup for the first time, reports Reuters.

That is the view of Romanian coach Anghel Iordanescu, a claim supported by Josef Venglos, Czechoslovakia's coach at the 1982 and 1990 finals, and now manager of the new Slovakia national team, soon to start their 1996 European Championship campaign.

"Before the revolutions throughout Eastern Europe, it is fair to say that most of the nations from that part of the continent played with an inferiority complex," said Iordanescu.

"No-one doubted the individual gifts of certain players, that was never the issue. But collectively the teams failed to do themselves justice."

"Since the end of the communist regimes, many more players have gone overseas. They have a new-found self-confidence. They see they are the equals of other players around the world and this is reflected in the way they are playing their football."

Before, psychologically they may not have been tough enough to win the World Cup. That has changed. With the right luck, the World Cup is now open to Eastern Europeans.

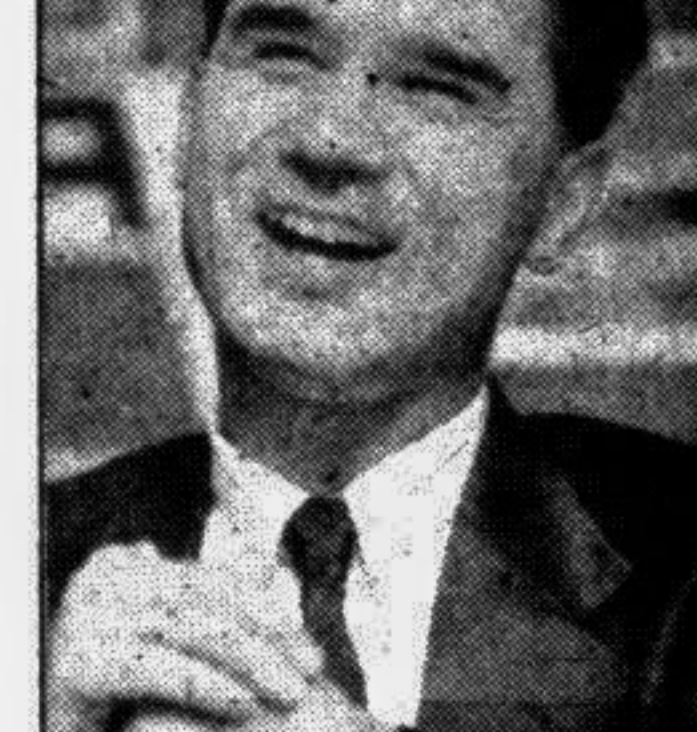
Iordanescu believes it is no coincidence that two teams from Eastern Europe, his own side and Bulgaria — have reached the last eight.

Gone is the sterile, negative style of the past — the mould has been broken. Individual talent and the ability to entertain are refreshing replacements.

Thirteen of the Bulgarian squad are with overseas clubs while eight of the Romanian team are "exiles". Some, like Gheorghe Hagi and Florin Raducioiu have played for a number of different western clubs in different countries.

Hagi, whose outstanding displays here have made him a leading contender for player-of-the-tournament, says the political changes were fundamental to the football changes.

"It was like we were released from a straight-jacket. Of course the skill was always there, but the platform to express that beauty was not there. There was a different way of thinking. We must still be disciplined, still be tough, but look at the Romanian team now. It is a beautiful side."



ANGEL IORDANESCU

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Encouraging figures

DALLAS, July 8: The number of fouls committed at the World Cup finals has shown a dramatic drop since 1990, vindicating FIFA's get tough instructions to referees, reports Reuters.

In Italy four years ago there was an average of 39.5 fouls per game but the figure has fallen by almost 30 per cent in the US finals to 28.3.

Alarmed by the generally negative and destructive play in Italy, FIFA banned the tackle from behind and ordered referees to clamp down hard on violent conduct.

The results have been staggering. While players have largely heeded the call for cleaner soccer, match officials have taken Draconian measures against offenders, handing out more than 200 yellow cards.

That represents an increase of more than 50 per cent over the cautions issued at the same stage in Italy.

Players are forced to think twice before launching into a foul as one in every six offences is being punished by a yellow card, compared with one in 12 four years ago.

FIFA have said they are happy with refereeing standards at the finals, though not everyone is so convinced.

FIFA directives have certainly been responsible for the continuing inflation of yellow cards which rose from just 60 at the 1982 finals to 121 in 1986 and 169 in 1992.

This year's final figure looks likely to top 240 — four times as high as it was only 12 years ago. Meanwhile, FIFA is busy congratulating itself on more encouraging statistics from the US finals.

The actual time the ball is in play has gone up by 10 per cent since 1990, goals have risen by 18 per cent and attendances have improved by 33 per cent.

Dahlin turns Everton down

SAN FRANCISCO, California, July 8: Swedish striker Martin Dahlin, who turned down an offer from English Premier-ship club Everton, said Thursday he did not know where he would play next season, reports AFP.

The 26-year-old striker, who has scored four goals in two rounds of the World Cup, said he was still open to offers, though his contract with German club Borussia Muenchengladbach reportedly runs through 1996.

"It's still not certain I will play for them next season," Dahlin said.

He is certain he will not play for Everton, though his precise reasons were unclear.

"Everton just did not feel right," said Dahlin. "But it was a very good offer, and I was flattered. Mike Waler is a very good manager. And I liked the brand of football Norwich played when he was with them last season."

Swedes sing a merry melody

MORAGA, Calif., July 8: Two to go. Before the World Cup, nine players said Sweden would reach the final. One optimist was Klas Inghesson, who is standing by his pre-tournament prediction, reports AP.

"We can beat all teams that are left in the tournament," Inghesson said heading into Sunday's quarterfinal match against Romania at Stanford Stadium. "Tying Brazil (in the first round) gave us so much confidence."

Even without striker Martin Dahlin, who has four goals in the World Cup but was suspended for accumulated yellow cards, Sweden took a 1-0 half-time lead against Brazil on Kenneth Andersson's goal.

Sweden became Nordic champions in early June, finishing ahead of European champions Denmark and World Cup-bound Norway. Can they become world champions?

Inghesson doesn't look that far, but "I'd be extremely disappointed if we lose on Sunday," he says.

"I've never played on a better Swedish team and I doubt Sweden will ever have a side like this one again."

Inghesson, who turns 26 next month, has 46 caps for Sweden since his 1989 debut and was a member of the team that finished third at the

European Championship two years ago.

The British odds makers also like unbeaten Sweden's chances in the World Cup. After the first round, Sweden were listed as the fourth choice (9-1) behind Brazil, Germany and Italy.

Inghesson, who also plays for PSV Eindhoven in the Dutch First Division and one of 11 foreign-based men on the roster, will face one of his club teammates on Sunday — defender-midfielder Gheorghe Popescu.

"Gheorghe is one of my best friends on PSV Eindhoven," Inghesson says. "He's very strong in the air and I think he'll mark Kenneth (Andersson)."

Andersson is the tallest Swedish player at 193 centimetres (6-foot-4). He has scored three goals in the tournament, including two in a 3-1 victory over Saudi Arabia in the second round.

Inghesson was inconsistent in midfield during the first round, but played his best game of the tournament against the Saudis. Lack of training was the main reason why Inghesson looked rusty early in the tournament.

In May, he was forced to wear a neck brace for three weeks after hitting a moose with his car on his way to a golf course in Sweden. Then, on his second workout in the United States, he bruised his

Hagi's nose smells success

SANTA CLARA, Calif., July 8: Gheorghe Hagi's nose has found the goal three times so far at the World Cup. Now it's detecting another scent.

"I can smell our victory in the air," the Romanian midfielder said about Sunday's quarterfinal match against Sweden at Stanford, Calif. "It's a sweet, adoring smell," reports AP.

Hagi's brilliant passes and three goals at the World Cup have propelled Romania to the World Cup final eight for the first time. Against Argentina in the second round, Hagi set up one goal and scored another to lead a 3-2 victory.

"The match against Argentina proved we can beat any team in the world," Hagi said. "The Swedes are paper favourites, but soccer is not played on paper."

Hagi, dubbed "the Maradona of the Carpathians," is the team strategist who sets the direction and intensity of a

game. He roams around in midfield, setting up plays using his remarkable dribbling skills and amazing accurate passes.

Swedish coach Tommy Svensson said Hagi is undoubtedly the best player so far at the World Cup.

"The only way to control Romania is to keep Hagi from distributing the ball," Svensson said. "He should not be allowed to get the ball too often."

But Hagi, 29, has other plans.

"I know my value. I know what I have to do to lead my team to the semifinals and possibly finals," Hagi said. "And imagine: Romania against Brazil at the Rose Bowl. It would be the dream come true for every Romanian."

The winner of the Sweden-Romania match will play the winner of the Netherlands-Brazil match in a semifinal on July 13 at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif.

"We waited all our lives for this opportunity," said Romanian coach Anghel Iordanescu. "Much of the out-

come depends on how Hagi plays."

Iordanescu closed Romania's practice session at Santa Clara University for the public and reporters on Thursday, secretly plotting tactics for the match against Sweden.

Iordanescu said he had "sweet problems" trying to find a place in the team for star striker Florin Raducioiu who missed Romania's victory against Argentina following a one-game suspension for accumulated yellow cards.

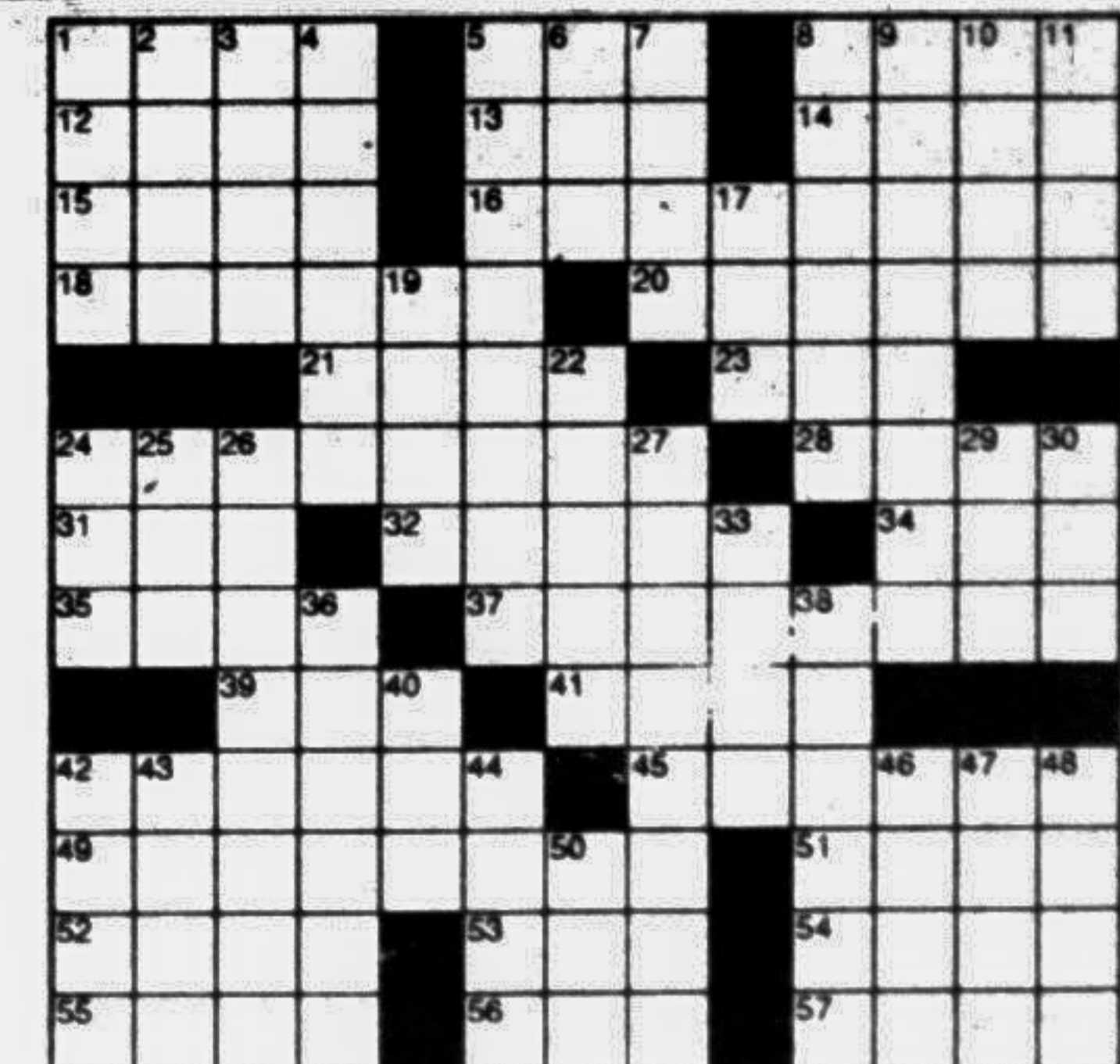
"Sweden has a powerful attack and physical defence, but we have our own strengths," Iordanescu said. "Only one mistake could decide the whole match."

"Our advantage is in the deadly line consisting of Hagi, Raducioiu and (Ilie) Dumitrescu," said defender Gheorghe Popescu.

Dumitrescu, who scored two goals and set another against Argentina, said Romania was ready for another World Cup upset.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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MGFMIVX BY SK WV
Saturday's Cryptogram: VEGETARIAN MARATHON RACER AVOIDS HOT DOG STANDS; HE DISLIKES TRACK MEATS.

Today's Cryptogram clue: M equals C

The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.