

WORLD CUP USA '94

Today's World Cup Fixtures

Italy vs Bulgaria
Brazil vs Sweden
(For details see Page 1)

Brazil still top Sprint Soccer Poll

KANSAS CITY, Mo. July 12(AP): Results of the Sprint Soccer Poll, a weekly ranking of the top 10 national soccer teams worldwide as determined by a panel of international soccer journalists, through Monday, July 11. The rankings are based on a 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 system, with first place teams receiving 10 votes, second place receiving 9, etc. First place votes are in parentheses:

1. Brazil (33), 474 points
2. Italy (10), 386
3. Bulgaria, 349
4. Sweden, 313
5. Romania, 310
6. Netherlands, 260
7. Germany, 229
8. Argentina, 146
9. Mexico, 97
10. Spain, 51

Also receiving votes: Belgium, 32; Ireland, 16; Nigeria, 16; and Switzerland, 16.

WC DIARY

LOS ANGELES, California, July 12 (AFP): Monday's World Cup diary:

BEYOND WORDS

Sweden's Kennet Andersson was overcome by his side's advance to the World Cup semifinals, where they will meet Brazil.

"It's kind of a dream," Andersson said. "I can't explain it in English. I don't think I can explain it in Swedish, either."

BULGARIANS LIVING HIGH

Bulgaria's joy at reaching the World Cup semifinals is given an extra dimension by memories of the financial hurdles they have overcome.

Last year Bulgarian football officials could not even send coach Dimitar Penev to take a look at his foreign-based players.

"This is a beautiful stadium," Penev said when he first saw Giants Stadium, which is shared by the New York Giants and New York Jets American football teams. "I wish we could take it home with us."

SEATS AVAILABLE

Bulgaria's quarter-final victory over three-times champions Germany caught a lot of people by surprise.

World Cup organisers had made up a press-box seating chart for Wednesday's semi-final at Giants Stadium that allotted a big block of seats to German reporters.

Now the seats are going begging, with the Bulgarian press contingent consisting of just 36 reporters.

SO MUCH FOR SPORTSMANSHIP

As the clock ticked on Germany's bid for a fourth World Cup, Bulgarian coach Dimitar Penev noticed a change in the German team.

He pulled Hristo Stoichkov and Emil Kostadinov from the quarter-final against Germany, even though Bulgaria led by just one goal, to keep them from getting hurt by German fouls.

"I took my men out because the German's style changed," Penev said diplomatically.

WILL BORA BE BACK?

Bora Milutinovic says he would be glad to stay at the helm of the US national football team.

It depends on who is going to be the new president," he said of the upcoming elections in the US Soccer Federation.

"I do not think there is going to be a problem, but first we must see what the president wishes. I would very much hope to continue the work that we have just begun."

Grass at Giants Stadium to be sold

EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey, July 12: The grass soccer pitch at Giants Stadium will be dug up and sold to the public after Wednesday's World Cup semi-final between Italy and Bulgaria, reports Reuter.

Venue director Charlie Sullitano said on Monday the turf, specially laid for the World Cup at a cost of one million dollars, would go on sale on Thursday for between 10 and 20 dollars per square foot (between 110 and 220 dollars per square meter), depending on how much sod was involved.



Italian striker Giuseppe Signori talks to reporters at Bernards Township's Pingry School on July 11. Italy take on Bulgaria in the World Cup semifinals on July 13. —AFP photo

Italy on Bulgaria's hitlist

EAST RUTHERFORD, July 12: Giankillers Bulgaria, who buried title-holders Germany on Sunday, aim to sally former champions Italy on Wednesday and take their exhilarating World Cup challenge all the way to the final, reports Reuter.

If Bulgaria, 50-1 outsiders after the draw for the finals last December, can reproduce the inspiration which gave them a 2-1 quarter-final win over the Germans they have every chance against Roberto Baggio's Italy.

Baggio rescued Italy with last gasp goals against Nigeria in the second round and Spain in the quarter-finals when they had appeared to be heading for World Cup eclipse but escaped instead with a pair of 2-1 victories.

Italy, who lost their opening game against Ireland, have not shown the overwhelming form to match their proud traditions — much like the Germans who saw a 1-0 lead overturned by two masterly strikes by Hristo Stoichkov and Yordan Letchkov.

Stoichkov and Letchkov, notably abetted by attacking midfielder Krasimir Balakov, proved deadly to Germany and could give the Italian defence an equally torrid time, just as Spain did in the second half on Saturday.

With the scapels of triple world champions Germany already on their belts, the lively Bulgarians are ready for further upsets in the Giants Stadium against the nation which won the trophy in 1934, 1938 and 1982.

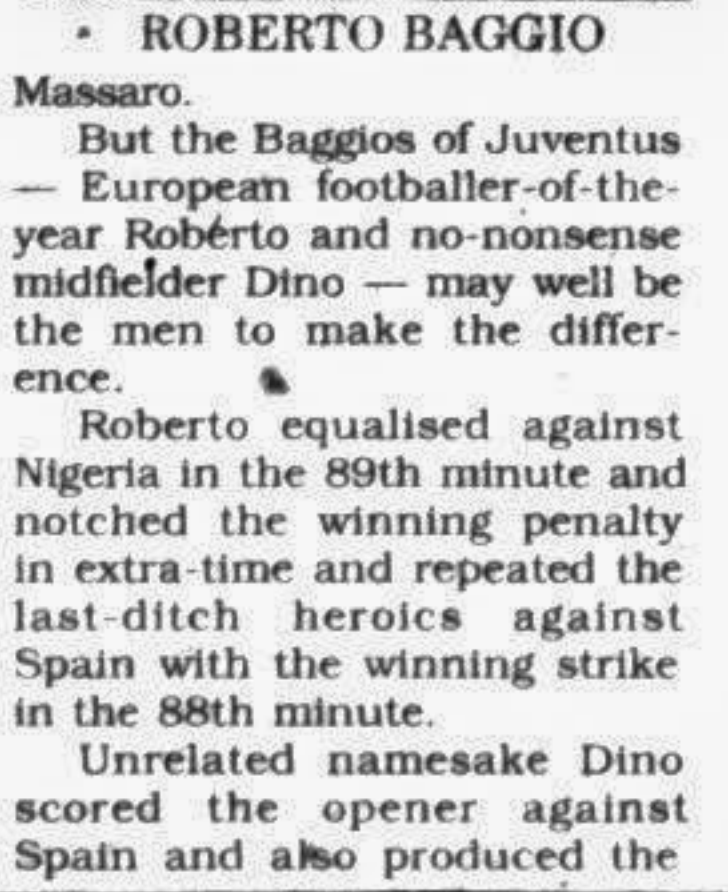
"Italy are a tricky team and



ROBERTO BAGGIO

I'm expecting a very tough match," Bulgarian goalkeeper Borislav Mihailov said, but added: "I think we have real chance against Italy. They're not as good a team as Germany."

Balakov, by contrast, expects a harder time against Italy, a team drawing heavily on the talents of European Cup winners AC Milan from tough Paolo Maldini and Alessandro Costacurta in the heart of defence to the midfield skills of Roberto Donadoni and Daniele



ROBERTO BAGGIO

goal in the 1-0 win over Norway, Italy's only victory in the first round.

Italy could recall right back Roberto Mussi, who has recovered from an ankle injury, and restore Giuseppe Signori — a substitute against Spain and provider for Roberto Baggio's decisive goal — to the starting line-up on the left of midfield.

Team chief Arrigo Sacchi has warned his players to beware of complacency. "This is a World Cup in which as soon as you think you've won the match you end up losing it," he said.

Bulgaria have excellent players with good technique and are strong physically."

Bulgaria, who started as inauspiciously as Italy with a 3-0 hiding from Nigeria, had never won a match in the World Cup finals until this tournament, but have now collected victories over Greece, former champions Argentina, Mexico and Germany.

Stoichkov scored in all those wins, including two penalties against Greece and the superb free-kick which precipitated Germany's downfall, and looks forward to more heroics against Italy.

"We've got nothing to lose and I think we're going to achieve as great a success as we did today," he said after the upset over Germany.

Letchkov, who converted the sport-kick which decided the second-round penalty shoot-out with Mexico and headed the winner against Germany, is happy Bulgaria will be the underdogs against Italy, 13-8 second favourites behind Brazil.

"We are the outsiders and we like being the outsiders," he said.

FIFA rejects Brazil's appeal

LOS ANGELES, July 12: Brazil's appeal against a four-match ban on defender Leonardo was thrown out by FIFA on Monday, reports Reuter.

Leonardo was suspended from the rest of the World Cup after elbowing American Tab Ramos in the head in a second round match. Ramos was not expected to return to soccer for at least three months.

The defender said the blow was accidental and later apologised to Ramos. Brazil had hoped the ban might be reduced so he could play in the World Cup final if they qualify.

But FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter said: "FIFA's appeals panel rejected Brazil's appeal and decided the disciplinary committee had acted absolutely correctly in accordance with the video evidence against Leonardo."

Italy want FIFA to reconsider Tassotti's case

MARTINSVILLE, New Jersey, July 12: Italy's World Cup delegation will appeal the eight-match ban slapped on Mauro Tassotti and are to take no sanctions themselves against the player who broke Luis Enrique's nose in an off-the-ball incident at the end of the quarter-final against Spain, reports AFP.

"We feel very strongly that eight matches is an excessive penalty and we will appeal that decision," delegation chief Raffaele Ranucci said on Tuesday.

The Italians are furious that video evidence was used to condemn Tassotti but not taken into account when Gianfranco Zola was given a two match ban after being mistakenly sent off against Nigeria.

"Since none of the four officials at the match saw anything, we took it for granted that nothing would be done."

"FIFA have told us they decided to look at the video evidence on the basis of the report of a 5th official who was there to supervise the performance of the others."

Ranucci said the player had apologised to the team but was maintaining the clash was accidental.

Only a gun can stop Bulgarian forwards?

MARTINSVILLE, N.J., July 12: Likening a World Cup semi-final to a wild west shootout, Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi said Monday that a gun would be the best way to stop the livewire Bulgarian forwards in Wednesday's game, reports AP.

With a broad smile Sacchi quippedly added that Italian defenders will resort to more orthodox means to control Hristo Stoichkov, Emil Kostadinov and Yordan Letchkov at Giants Stadium, where three-time World Cup champion Italy and underdog Bulgaria will battle for a berth in the July 17 championship game.

"Offense is Bulgaria's strength and we will have to watch out for Stoichkov and Kostadinov, who are among the world best forwards and can lead devastating counterattacks," Sacchi said at Italy's training camp.

"It's going to be another battle. The best way for stopping them would be a pistol. We will have to control them closely."

Dino Baggio, the Italian midfielder who has tallied two goals in five games, said he had hoped to play the Bulgarians in the semifinals. "In the assumption they would be weaker than the Germans."

"After watching their quarter-final game on television I must say I changed my mind. They have a great physical condition and are extremely dangerous in counter attacks. We can expect another tough game," Dino Baggio said.

Sacchi on stairway to heaven

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J., July 12: After coaching Italian club AC Milan to huge success, Arrigo Sacchi says he had nowhere to go but up, reports AP.

Now he's within two games of sending his national squad up into the stands to collect a record fourth World Cup trophy.

Sacchi, 48, hails from the same central Italian Emilia Romagna region that spawned Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, and he sometimes is accused of being a dictatorial coach.

Some Italian sportwriters dubbed him the "ayatollah of the bench."

But Sacchi defends his penchant for what is known as total soccer, saying it won't work without total engagement by his players.

"My schemes are demanding and players must be in their best condition to accomplish them," says Sacchi, who occasionally explodes in irate outbursts on the sidelines.

His on-the-field trademark is an obsession for midfield "pressing" and quick moves of the forwards, also without the ball, to create scoring opportunities.

In his last season with AC Milan, he faced an open rebellion by Dutch star striker Marco Van Basten, who objected to Sacchi's tough training and exhausting tactics.

Sacchi says he decided to leave a richly-paid and successful job with Milan and join the national team because he needed fresh motivation.

"In every job, you need enthusiasm for going on. Idealism

PROFILES: ITALY

NEW YORK, July 12 (AFP): Following are the profiles of the likely Italian team to meet Bulgaria in the World Cup semifinals here on Wednesday.

GIANLUCA PAGLIUCA: Age: 27, 20 caps. Height: 1.76m, weight: 72kg. Sent-off in Italy's second group match against Norway. Pagliuca ceded his place in goal to Luca Mappegiani, but returned in superb form in the 2-1 quarter-final victory over Spain, stopping certain goal from Julio Salinas.

ROBERTO MUSSI: 30, 3 caps. 1.8m, 73kg. The Torino fullback missed the quarter-final win over Spain on Saturday, but has resumed full training and should be recalled in place of AC Milan's suspended Mauro Tassotti.

ALESSANDRO COSTACURTA: 28, 25 caps. 1.78m, 74kg. AC Milan defender called into the national side by Arrigo Sacchi in 1991. In Italy's first 1994 World Cup qualifier two lapses on his part led directly to both Swiss goals in a 2-2 draw. Keystone defender in USA.

PAOLO MALDINI: 25, 56 caps. 1.85m, 77kg. AC Milan defender is considered one of the best fullbacks. Playing today. Can mark effectively but can move into attack very quickly. Still only 25, he is a veteran of the 1990 World Cup team.

ANTONIO BENARRIVO: 25, 12 caps. 1.70m, 65kg. Nicknamed Tom Thumb. Benarrivo is a workhorse in defence and attack. Made his international debut in September, 1993. He was a key figure in Parma's 1994 European Super Cup victory over AC Milan.

GIUSEPPE SIGNORI: 26, 21 caps. 1.71m, 68kg. Leading scorer in Italy for Lazio. Signori has yet to hit the mark in the World Cup, perhaps because of nagging injuries that plagued him all spring.

DEMETRIO ALBERTINI: 22, 20 caps. 1.76m, 72kg. Though he limped off at half-time against Spain, the AC Milan midfielder has reportedly made a full recovery from the knock to his left leg.

DINO BAGGIO: 22, 18 caps. 1.85m, 72kg. The 22-year-old midfielder, not related to his more famous namesake Roberto, has played a crucial role in Italy's move to the semifinals. He scored in Italy's 10-man victory over Norway in the first round and gave Italy an early lead against Spain.

ROBERTO DONADONI: 30, 55 caps. 1.73m, 68kg. A fixture at AC Milan since his arrival in 1986 and was one of the stars of their 4-0 victory over Barcelona in the 1994 European Cup final. Good at setting up chances in the last third of the field.

ROBERTO BAGGIO: 27, 41 caps. 1.74m, 72kg. After a disappointing start to the World Cup, the 27-year-old came to life in the second round, scoring both goals in the 2-1 victory over Nigeria to see Italy through to the quarter-finals. His 87th minute strike against Spain let the exhausted Italians avoid another, extra-time battle, and they will be looking to the country's most popular and highest-paid player for inspiration against Bulgaria.

DANIEL MASSARO: 33, 14 caps. 1.77m, 74kg. AC Milan forward scored two goals in the European Cup final victory against Barcelona.

Penev, no disciplinarian

MARTINSVILLE, N.J., July 12: As a player, Dimitar Penev went to three World Cup tournaments and never tasted victory.

In his first World Cup as coach, Penev has taken Bulgaria to the semifinals, reports AP.

"This is the second happiest day of my life as coach," Penev said Sunday after his team upset defending champion Germany 2-1 in the quarterfinals.

The happiest, Penev said, was Nov 17, when Bulgaria qualified for the World Cup over France with a goal 10 seconds to go from Emil Kostadinov.

Penev was a tough defender for three Bulgarian cup teams, earning the nickname "Leadfoot" for his uncompromising play.

His defensive skill was not enough to make Bulgaria an outstanding team.

In five previous cups, Bulgaria played 16 games and never won.

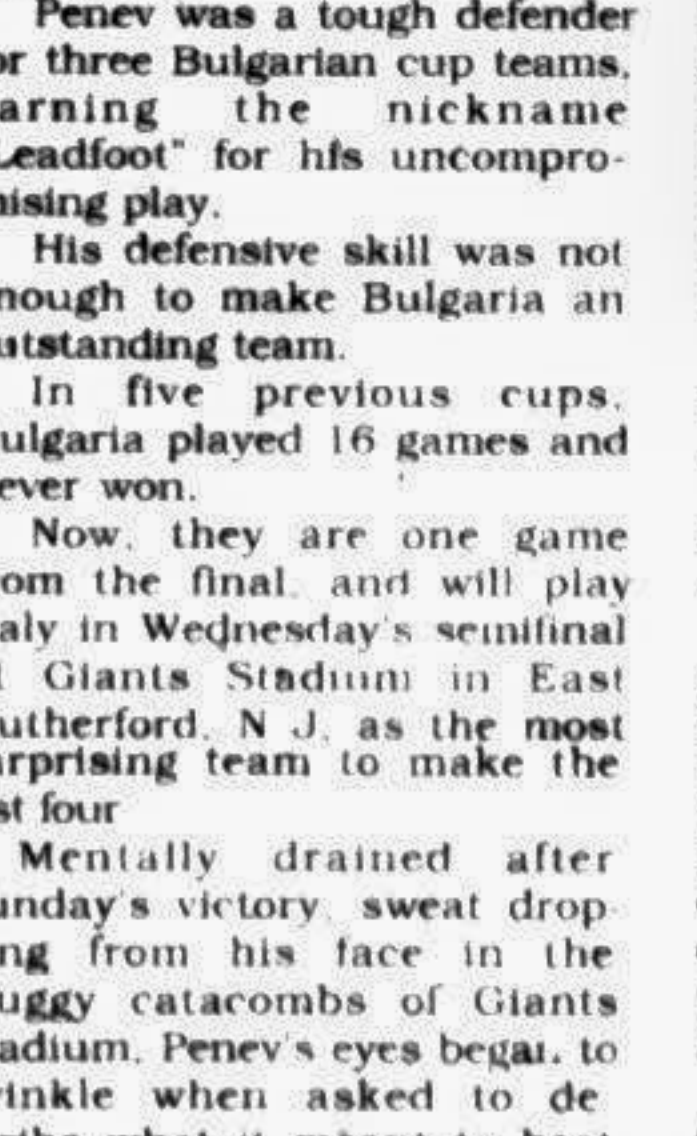
Now, they are one game from the final, and will play Italy in Wednesday's semi-final at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., as the most surprising team to make the last four.

Mentally drained after Sunday's victory, sweat dripping from his face in the muggy catacombs of Giants Stadium, Penev's eyes began to twinkle when asked to describe what it meant to beat Germany, the monster team of the last two decades.

"It's a great victory and a great day. Beating the world champion is a great thing, now the world will look at us differently," he said.

Penev, who turned 49 Tuesday, played at the 1966, 1970 and 1974 World Cup tournaments, including a 5-2 loss to Germany in 1970, and collected 90 caps, second on Bulgaria's all-time list.

He was voted Bulgaria's



DIMITAR PENEV

Lokomotiv Sofia before joining CSKA, capturing nine league and five cup titles in 13 years as player.

As coach Penev began by promoting a third-division Dimitrovgrad team to the second division, and later became an assistant coach at CSKA.

This is where Bulgaria's sudden World Cup success has its roots:

Kostadinov and Hristo Stoichkov, Bulgaria's top strikers and stars, and the midfield star Yordan Letchkov, all began their careers in CSKA and all have been coached by Penev since their early days.

All play abroad now, but the many years spent together have created a harmonious unit that doesn't need much time to gel.

The loose game plan devised by Penev is simple. The defence, made up mostly of home-based players, gets the ball to Letchkov or Krasimir Balakov in the midfield, and they try to find Kostadinov, Stoichkov or Nasko Sirakov.

It is up to them to create something in the offence and their skill, speed and clinical finishing have carried Bulgaria through.

The team has great individual class, with players able to make decisive plays in a clutch situation and that's what Penev relies on.

Penev has a friendly relationship with his players, whom he has known a long time. He is not a stickler for discipline and has found the right approach to Stoichkov, a star notoriously undisciplined and volatile.