

WORLD CUP USA '94

Jules Rimet Cup thief caught

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 13: After an 11-year search, police have arrested the ring-leader of a gang that stole Brazil's World Cup trophy, a senior official said on Wednesday — the day Brazil play Sweden in the 1994 semifinal, reports Reuters.

Brazil earned the right to keep the coveted Jules Rimet trophy after they won the World Cup for the third time in 1970. But it was stolen in 1983 and never found.

Rio de Janeiro state attorney general Antonio Carlos Biscala said in a telephone interview that Sergio Pereira Ayres, 50, was arrested on Tuesday in the beach resort of Cabo Frio where he was looking after a villa. The arrest followed a tip-off.

The gang stole the golden, winged Jules Rimet trophy from the headquarters of the Brazilian Football Federation in 1983 and are thought to have melted it down.

Ayres, a former bank employee, was sentenced in absentia to nine years for his part in the crime but was never arrested.

An Argentine citizen went to jail for receiving the trophy, another member of the gang was murdered in 1989 while on the run and a fourth man wanted in connection with the crime has never been found, according to the Jornal Do Brasil newspaper.

The trophy was also once stolen from a shop window in London shortly before the 1966 World Cup tournament in England but was found by a dog shortly afterwards.

Brazil play Sweden on Wednesday for a place in the final of USA '94 and a chance to win the World Cup for a record fourth time. The trophy now presented to the winners depicts a golden globe being held aloft by four hands.

WC STATS

LOS ANGELES, California, July 13 (AFP): World Cup statistics after the quarter-finals.

ATTENDANCES

First Round: Group A: 497,541 (average 82,924). Group B: 472,080 (78,680). Group C: 364,020 (60,670). Group D: 332,230 (55,372). Group E: 392,573 (65,429). Group F: 361,653 (60,276).

Total (after 36 of 52 matches): 2,420,097 (average 67,225).

Second Round: 535,012 (average 66,876).

Total (after 44 of 52 matches): 2,955,108 (average 67,162).

Quarter-finals: 273,886 (average 68,472).

Total (after 48 of 52 matches): 3,228,994 (average 67,271).

Previous World Cup record for whole tournament: 60,772 for the 22 games at the 1950 tournament in Brazil.

Final total in 1990: 2,517,348 (average 48,411).

Highest attendance: 93,869 (Romania v USA, Los Angeles, First Round).

Lowest: 44,132 (Bulgaria v Nigeria, Dallas, First Round).

GOALS

First Round: Group A: 17 (Average 2.83). Group B: 22 (3.66). Group C: 16 (2.66). Group D: 18 (3.00). Group E: 8 (1.33). Group F: 12 (2.00). **Total:** 93 (82 in 1990). Average per match: 2.58.

Second Round: 25 (average 3.12).

Quarter-finals: 15 (average 3.75).

Biggest win: Russia 6 Cameroon 1 (Group B).

Top-scoring team: Sweden 11 goals.

Best defence: Brazil 3 goals.

Leading scorer: Oleg Salenko (Russia) 6.

Best individual performance: Salenko 5 v Cameroon (World Cup record).

Penalties: 14 (all converted).

Red and yellow cards after second round:

Sending-off: 14. **Bookings:** 213.

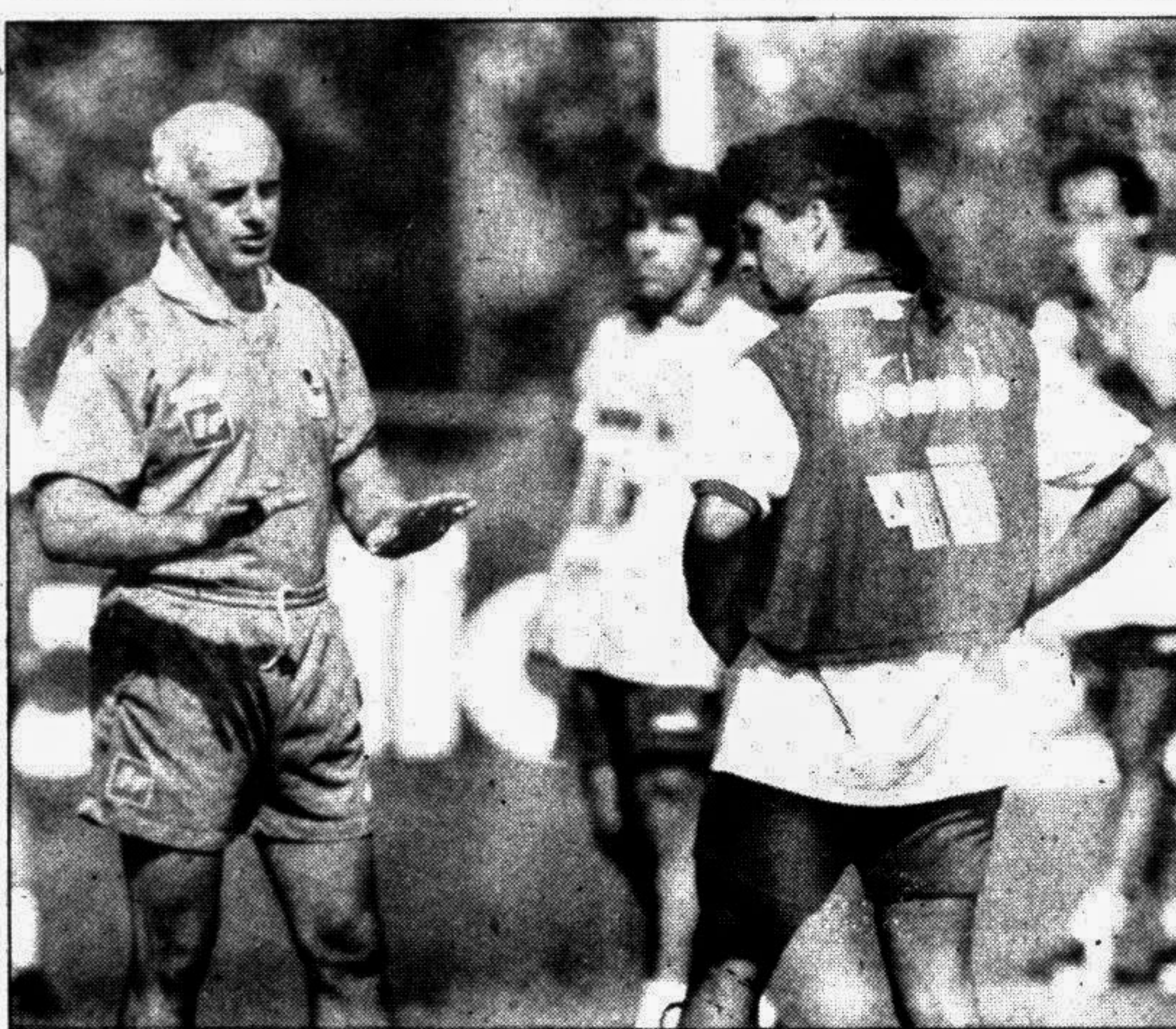
Leeds sign Skuhravy

LONDON, July 13: English Premier Division club Leeds United, hit last season by injuries, said on Wednesday they had signed Czech international striker Tomas Skuhravy, reports Reuters.

Skuhravy, 28, is to join Leeds from Italian club Genoa in a three-million-pound-sterling (£4.6 million dollars) deal.

"We have agreed personal terms with Tomas," said Leeds managing director Bill Forthby. "He has now gone back to Genoa to sort out some private matters."

He will come back within 48 hours and have his medical and, if everything goes smoothly, he will then formally sign for the club.



Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi (L) has a word with Roberto Baggio during training at the Pingry school on July 12. — AFP photo

The bigger they come, the harder they fall

LOS ANGELES, July 13: Nowhere is the merciless crush of World Cup pressure more evident than on the coaches — particularly the no-win situations confronting Carlos Alberto Parreira and Arrigo Sacchi, reports AFP.

In the football-driven national psyches of Brazil and Italy there is no glory in finishing anywhere but first.

Football is intertwined with daily life and heaven help those coaches who cannot deliver the prize to an expectant nation.

The fall-out from World Cup failure is excessively high. Already Argentina's Alfio Basile and Francisco Maturana of Colombia are the major coaching casualties.

The nature of sport is that there will only be one winner from Sunday's World Cup final.

Parreira and Sacchi will either be lionised, or ostracised.

Their semifinal counterparts, Sweden's Tommy Svensson and Bulgarian Dimitar Penev, have experienced World Cup tensions as players but are spared the national expectations boring down on Parreira and Sacchi.

Sweden, a finalist 36 years ago, and Bulgaria, who hadn't won a match at the World Cup in 16 attempts before arriving in the USA, have already exceeded their objectives.

Parreira, whose team has been labelled donkeys by a media obsessed with the Brazilian legend, has been under the griller.

"It's so huge, unbelievable," says Parreira of the pressure on him. "So large I cannot describe it."

"For Brazilians, second place is the same as last. It's totally radical, there is no middle term."

"You can't take this sort of thing seriously," says Parreira. "Thank God, I'm financially secure and I have a good family. If not, I wouldn't have been able to face everything."

Parreira never played in the World Cup, yet he has coached three national teams at the World Cup — Kuwait in Spain in 1982, United Arab Emirates in Italy, 1990 and now Brazil.

Another part of Parreira's unenviable job as coach is the managing of enormous egos, particularly accommodating the moody, but match-winning striker Romario.

On the flight to America, Romario refused to sit beside striking partner Bebeto, his fierce rival in the Spanish First Division. He even tried to have Bebeto dropped, wanting instead his best friend Edmundo playing alongside him.

That Parreira has maintained the status quo, with Bebeto and Romario seemingly in harmony on the field, is yet another masterstroke.

It is fortunate that what is left of Sacchi's hair has already gone white, such is the trauma he has undergone during the World Cup.

Sacchi is seen as the great innovator of Italian soccer, introducing bold attacking football to AC Milan which was rewarded with two championship ships, two European Champions Cups and two Intercontinental Cups.

But life has been far from smooth for the dapper Sacchi at USA '94.

Italy have scrambled into

the semifinals with superstar Roberto Baggio equalising against Nigeria in the final minute and scoring an extra time winner to advance from the second round and knocking out Spain with an 88th minute goal in the quarter-finals.

It is little wonder that an opinion poll by Italy's CAI state television found that 73 per cent of those questioned believe that Sacchi is a lucky coach.

Despite the psychological loss of injured veteran Franco Baresi, the sensational send-

ing-off of goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca against Norway and the eight-match ban of defender Mauro Tassotti on video evidence, Italy are still alive, and so is Sacchi.

Italy take World Cup defeat as a mortal wound. When the Azzurri were humiliated by North Korea in 1966 the squad was pelted with rotten fruit and vegetables on their return at Rome Airport.

It won't get to that stage this time, but now that Italy are within sight of their fourth World Cup crown, defeat won't be easy to stomach.

Methodical Swede Tommy Svensson is not given to emo-

tional excesses, save for a cartwheel on the sidelines to greet a goal in the tense quarter-final win over Romania, which went down to a penalty shoot-out.

Svensson, Sweden's player-of-the-year in 1969, has brought a steeliness to the team, a never-say-die approach that has the Scandinavians on the brink of their second World Cup final.

"I have to pinch myself to know if I am dreaming," says Svensson.

"I said before the game to our players that what we are playing for today is to play Brazil in the World Cup semifinals and that is great thing for a player from Sweden."

"We are very pleased, but we are not satisfied. We will also try to do our best to beat Brazil."

"You don't want to take any risks but the further you go in a tournament the better you get. We are certainly not going to start worrying about Brazil now," he said.

Dimitar Penev didn't win a game in three World Cups as a defender with Bulgaria, yet in his first World Cup as national coach he has taken the East Europeans to the semifinals.

Bulgaria's World Cup fame was sealed with their dramatic 2-1 defeat of world champions Germany to reach a semifinal with Italy.

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

Under Penev, the Bulgarians have an unorthodox training regimen, to say the least.

Staying up late and not overdoing it on the training field seem to be key elements of the recipe.

Smoking and drinking is fine and the Bulgarians have got better with every match, unfettered by their wives and girlfriends.

Should Bulgaria accomplish the ultimate and win the World Cup, there may be a giant overhaul of football's training manuals.

Italy player Giuseppe Signori (L) talks to teammate Dino Baggio during a practice session at the Pingry school on July 12.

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Maradona turns away from soccer

BUENOS AIRES, July 13: Diego Maradona, still angry and depressed about being thrown out of the World Cup for doping, has stopped watching the soccer altogether, reports Reuters.

"As far as I'm concerned, soccer has come to an end," the disgraced Argentine star said on Tuesday. "I can't stand watching it and I don't even want to play anymore."

His comments to a local radio station were published by the daily newspaper La Nacion on Wednesday, the day the World Cup semifinals were being played in the United States.

"I'm not watching the World Cup anymore. It depresses me," the former national captain said, maintaining his belief that Argentina were robbed of victory in the World Cup by an off-field conspiracy.

"It wouldn't have been easy but Argentina could have gone all the way," he said. "I'm sure we would have won our matches without having to go to penalties, like many are doing."

FIFA, soccer's governing body, kicked Maradona out of the finals after a doping test showed traces of performance-enhancing drugs in his urine.

"I accept the blame and I'm not going to point the finger at anyone. But this has nothing to do with my first ban," the 33-year-old Maradona said, referring to a 1991 ban for cocaine abuse while playing in Italy.

Argentina, who put in two impressive performances against Greece and Nigeria with Maradona at the helm, fell apart after the midfielder was banned, losing 2-0 to Bulgaria and crashing out of the tournament in the second round against Romania.

FIFA has said it will meet to decide on Maradona's fate in August. In the meantime the star is suspended indefinitely.

Maradona, suspended just as he was preparing to set a record of 22 World Cup appearances, said he would not flinch when he appears in the FIFA dock.

"I've never snitched on anybody, nor do I intend doing so," he said. "We're now up against FIFA and I've never been afraid of a fight nor of what people say."

The national idol, who orchestrated Argentina's 1986 World Cup triumph, said that regardless of FIFA's verdict, he had achieved enough in his career to retire without regrets.

He has already said he was quitting the game.

"I've done enough," he said. "My wife Claudia thought I looked good on the pitch. Personally I felt great and proud in the two matches played in the finals."

Panchev going to J-League

TOKYO, July 13: Japanese soccer club Jubilo Iwata, one of two newcomers this season to the country's professional J-League, is negotiating to sign former Yugoslav international striker Darko Panchev, a sports daily said today, reports Reuters.

The Sankai Sports said Panchev, 28, who is currently playing for Internazionale of Milan in Italy's First Division, was expected to make his debut at the start of the league's second stage of competition on August 10 after finalising a contract. It estimated a salary of 100 million Yen (1.02 million dollars).

A club spokeswoman declined to confirm the report but said there was a vacant slot at the club for a fifth foreign player.

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FIFA infuriates Italians

ROME, July 13: Italian newspapers attacked today FIFA's decision to suspend defender Mauro Tassotti for eight games, saying the decision smacked of anti-Italian bias, reports Reuters.

"A mad decision by the FIFA mafia," the respected daily Corriere della Sera said in its headline.

Tassotti was given the ban, which commentators say will effectively end the 34-year-old player's international career, after he struck an opponent in the face with his elbow in Italy's quarter-final clash with Spain.

The match referee did not see the incident, which broke Spaniard Luis Enrique's nose, but in a landmark case, FIFA used video evidence for the first time before giving Tassotti one of the heaviest bans in World Cup history.

Earlier in the tournament, FIFA's secretary general Sepp Blatter refused to look at video evidence to examine the harsh sending-off of Italian striker Gianfranco Zola.

"This unconstrained use of laws could ruin the World Cup, which up until now has been a great show," La Repubblica daily said.

La Voce newspaper echoed these sentiments.

"This ugly mess over Tassotti has shaken the national team, in a World Cup ruined by the mad omnipotence of (FIFA secretary general Sepp) Blatter," the paper said.

Corriere, calling the affair an "Anti-Italian intrigue," said FIFA heads were not just acting against Tassotti, but also against Italian soccer federation chief Antonio Matarrese.

Matarrese was put forward by European soccer's governing body UEFA as an alternative candidate to Joao Havelange for FIFA president earlier this year.

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UEFA switched to backing Havelange at the last minute.

SPORTING ENRIQUE

Meanwhile an AFP report from Los Angeles said: Luis Enrique branded the eight-match ban on the Italian as excessive.

"I did not think he would get such a severe suspension," Enrique said on Tuesday.

"But those who commit such fouls know what they risk," added the Real Madrid striker.

However, Enrique said he was ready to accept Tassotti's

apologies.

The suspension effectively means the 34-year-old AC Milan right-back's international career is over.

He will be out for the rest of the World Cup and miss at least six of Italy's European Championship qualifying matches.

"We decided we had to make an example of him," said Marcel Mathier of Switzerland, who chaired the disciplinary committee meeting.

It was the first time in World Cup history that FIFA used video playbacks for an off-the-ball incident to decide Tassotti's punishment for hitting the Spanish player in Saturday's quarter-final.

The disciplinary committee described the assault as "se-

rious violent conduct."

Italy's World Cup delegation announced on Tuesday they were going to appeal the ban.

"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 fifth official who was there to supervise the performance of the others."

"For Zola, we were told that the video could only be used when there was doubt such as mistaken identity. We were told the referee's decision could not be changed," Ranucci said.

The punishment is double that imposed on Brazilian defender Leonardo for elbowing American tactician Carlos Ramirez in the head in a second-round match.

Ramos was left with a fractured bone in his skull and will be out of soccer for at least three months. Leonardo was sent off for the blow and banned for the next four games.

The Tassotti case has upset the Italian squad on the eve of their semifinal with Bulgaria.

"The players feel very bad about it and rightly so," said coach Arrigo Sacchi.

"Tassotti knows he did wrong but did not expect such a heavy punishment. We are very sorry for him."

Tassotti, who has no history of disciplinary problems, became Italy's oldest debutant when he won the first of his seven Italian caps in October 1992.

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