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Italy, Bulgaria in record

UNDATED (AP) : The results of the 11 previous meetings between Italy and Bulgaria with date, winner, score, type of competition and venue. Italy has won five, Bulgaria two and there have been four draws.

June 14, 1966: Italy 6-1, exhibition, Bologna, Italy.

April 6, 1968: Bulgaria 3-2, Euro Championship qualifying, Sofia, Bulgaria.

April 20, 1968: Italy 2-0, Euro Championship qualifying, Naples, Italy.

May 24, 1969: 0-0, exhibition, Turin, Italy.

June 21, 1972: 1-1, exhibition, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Dec 29, 1974: 0-0, exhibition, Genoa, Italy.

Sept 20, 1978: Italy 1-0, exhibition Turin, Italy.

Sept 23, 1981: Italy 3-2, exhibition Bologna, Italy.

May 31, 1986: 1-1, World Cup, 1st Round, Mexico City.

Sept 20, 1989: Italy 4-0, exhibition, Cesena, Italy.

Sept 25, 1991: Bulgaria 2-1, exhibition, Sofia, Bulgaria.

The semifinalists:

Vital statistics

LOS ANGELES, July 13: Following are some of the playing statistics for the four World Cup semi-final teams:

Goals scored:

11 Sweden; 10 Brazil;

9 Bulgaria; 6 Italy.

Goals allowed:

3 Brazil; 4 Bulgaria; 4 Italy;

7 Sweden.

Shots at goal:

34 Bulgaria; 33 Brazil;

32 Sweden; 24 Italy.

Missed shots:

25 Bulgaria; 29 Brazil;

30 Italy; 34 Sweden.

Blocked shots:

13 Bulgaria; 14 Brazil;

17 Sweden; 20 Italy.

Hit posts:

3 Sweden; 2 Brazil;

2 Bulgaria; 0 Italy.

Saves:

8 Brazil; 35 Italy;

38 Bulgaria; 39 Sweden.

Cross passes:

66 Sweden; 55 Brazil;

21 Italy; 13 Bulgaria.

Free kicks:

12 Bulgaria; 11 Brazil;

10 Sweden; 8 Italy.

Corner kicks:

31 Italy; 23 Brazil;

16 Sweden.

Offsides:

12 Bulgaria; 13 Italy;

20 Brazil; 20 Sweden.

Yellow cards:

5 Brazil; 7 Italy; 10 Sweden;

19 Bulgaria.

Red cards:

1 Brazil; 1 Sweden;

2 Bulgaria; 2 Italy.

US start favourites

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands, July 13: After the sights of India, there won't be a lot to see other than the tennis court for the United States when they face the Dutch in the Davis Cup second here this weekend, reports AFP.

The charms of Europe's huge container port will pale in comparison to what the sub-continent had to offer during a first-round tie against India in March, when team members chartered a plane to visit the sights.

"We saw the Taj Mahal," said Jim Courier. "That was unbelievable."

But the Americans, with one eye on this weekend's World Cup final in their native land, will be trying to concentrate on tennis and a place in the semifinals when the action starts on Friday.

Aussies upset

DUBLIN, July 13: Australia, the 1990 finalists and holders of the Champions Trophy, were upset 2-1 by unfeared Russia today in the opening match of the women's World Cup, reports Reuter.

The Australians dominated the Group A match territorially but, as in the 1990 World Cup, could not convert their corners.

They finished the match with a 1-1-4 corner advantage but, while the Russians converted two of their four, Australia managed just one.

The Russians took the lead from their first corner after eight minutes, the Australian goalkeeper being committed by a feint shot which allowed Ludmilla Shutova to score.

Michele Andrews equalised five minutes later after an exchange in which Russian goalkeeper Alexander Setykhova saved twice.

Setykhova proved Australia's biggest obstacle. She repeatedly came to the rescue as the Russians struggled to combat the speed of the Australian attacks.

The Russians relied on occasional fast breaks in reply, but made little impact, then, with just seven minutes remaining captain Natalia Dobrokhota hit a direct shot from a corner past substitute Australian goalkeeper Justine Sowry.



Swedish forward Martin Dahlin lazing at the pool side of his team's hotel in Marina del Ray, near Los Angeles on July 12. — AFP photo

Criticism only revs up Dunga

LOS ANGELES, July 13: Brazil skipper Dunga says the criticism which has been heaped on him at this World Cup will make him play better, reports AFP.

The tough, 30-year-old, determined-minded midfielder said Tuesday "People can criticise me as much as they want, it will not affect my performance. It could improve my game."

Dunga, the fall guy for Brazil's poor World Cup performance four years ago, said determination to prove the doubters wrong was strong motivation.

"At one time, criticism used to hurt me," said Dunga, who was picked out as a prime example of the hated Europeanisation of Brazil in Italia '90.

"Now I'm above all that. I concentrate on my own game, which may not be aesthetic, but it's effective."

The team is really united. If we have problems amongst ourselves, we sort them out behind closed doors. The morale of the team is so high, we are not afraid of what people say."

Lack of skill is Dunga's main fault according to the Brazilian press. But Gerson, whose midfield talents helped Brazil win the 1970 World Cup, also says he is too slow, which is a bit rich coming from the stroller of Pele's side.

But coach Carlos Alberto Parreira is firmly behind his man.

"Dunga plays his role well in the system I wish the players to follow. He's strong, competitive, and has more skill than people give him credit for."

Certainly if one compares him with European players, his ball skills are better than average. But Brazil's 160 million population demand a team of Peles and get bored with defensive-minded players, said assistant coach Mario Jorge Zagalo.

Dunga, whose gritty style is far from "Dopey" — the translation of his nickname in Portuguese — said "ends would justify the means."

"If the team loses, we will be harshly criticised. If we win, no one will care how we did it," he said.

Germans weary of Spaniards

LONDON, July 13: Davis Cup champions Germany hope to avoid the fate of their footballing compatriots when they face Spain in the Davis Cup quarter-finals on Friday, reports Reuter.

"We don't want to suffer the same fate as our footballers," team captain Niki Pilic said.

The shock of Germany's defeat by Bulgaria in the World Cup quarter-finals on Sunday has given the tennis squad a clear warning.

"We cannot allow ourselves to think that we will definitely win. We will have to fight bitterly, for every point," Pilic said.

The Spaniards are resigned to losing the grasscourt tie against the German giants, led by world number three Michael Stich.

French Open champion Sergi Bruguera I can this year's Wimbleton tournament by saying grass play was boring, but battled through to the fourth round before losing to American Michael Chang.

But Pilic warned against underestimating the Spanish strength.

"When someone like Bruguera twice wins Paris, then wins at Gstaad and here, one day after arriving, hardly misses a ball in training, then you can't be too cautious," he said.

Going into Wednesday's semifinals and with his team long eliminated, that total still led the scorers list.

Dahlin, new star on horizon

shootout.

Letchkov's countryman, goalkeeper Borislav Mihailov, saved two penalties in that shootout and rescued his team with spectacular saves from Thomas Haessler and Juergen Klinsmann.

Mihailov, who also played in the 1986 World Cup, has been around a while. But Bulgaria's first-ever run to the semifinals has put the 32-year-old keeper, who plays for Mulhouse in France, in the spotlight.

Italy have two Baggios to thank for their semifinal berth. Roberto's goals appeared more dramatic because of the times when they were scored. But Dino's two goals in his World Cup debut, combined with his long-range shooting and tireless work in midfield, have stolen some of the glory.

Spain reached the quarter-finals with the help of three goals from impressive Jose Luis Caminero. The bearded Atletico Madrid midfielder, who also missed one game because of suspension, regularly caused panic in opposition defences with his well-timed runs and accurate shots.

The German line-up had a familiar look with nine players from the 1990 tournament and again relied on the goalscoring prowess of Juergen Klinsmann (five goals) and Rudi Voeller (two).

The same could be said for Hristo Stoichkov's goals and assists for Bulgaria. Roberto Baggio's dramatic late strikes for Italy, and the explosive combinations of Brazilian strikers Romario and Bebeto, who have seven goals between them.

Stoichkov, Baggio, Romario and Bebeto were big-name stars throughout the world before this competition. Now Dahlin, already well-known in Europe, is about to join them.

But the Swede is not the only player to make an impact in his tournament debut.

Bulgarian midfielder Yordan Letchkov was little-known outside his homeland or Germany, where he plays for Hamburg SV. His diving header that upset defending champions Germany in the quarterfinals has put his name on the lips of soccer fans throughout the world.

Even before that game, the balding midfielder had impressed with his foraging runs down the right and his tackling. His penalty kick that beat Mexico in a second-round

M United drop out of race

LONDON, July 13: Manchester United on Monday ruled out trying to snatch Norwich's five-million-pound rated striker Chris Sutton, reports AFP.

Club chairman Martin Edwards refused to get involved in a race for the 21-year-old player's signature after Norwich said he was available at a British transfer record price — but only if offers were made before Friday.

Edwards said: "I spoke to Chase last week and he is aware of our interest and our valuation of the player.

"I am not prepared to say how much that is, but it is short of five million pounds."

Edwards added: "Another thing which makes it difficult is the fact that Norwich want other clubs to agree to pay that much, before speaking to the player and that is not helpful. Often it is the attitude of the player, whether he is keen and enthusiastic, which determines what price you are prepared to go to."

United's reluctance to make a bid comes as Tottenham's interest in Sutton also appears to have cooled, leaving Arsenal and Blackburn as the favourites to sign the player.

The White Hart Lane club are believed to have balked at Sutton's rumoured 12,000 pound per week wage demand.

Spurs are now expected to target a top European star, whose international pedigree has already been proved and whose salary expectations would fit in with their pay scale.

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Rivalry of an epic stature

LOS ANGELES, July 13: None of the 61 countries who have battled against each other in 15 World Cup finals over the last 64 years boast a greater rivalry than Sweden and Brazil, reports Reuter.

It is one of the great coincidences of World Cup history that the "Samba" Latin football of Brazil, should have been pitted against the disciplined, controlled football of the northern Europeans a record six times.

And just to prove that there is no rhyme or reason to this particular sequence, Brazil and Germany, who have played more matches than any others in World Cup history and appeared in 10 finals between them, have never met in World Cup action.

Today's meeting will be the seventh between Brazil and Sweden in the finals and comes just two weeks after they met in a Group B first

round game and drew 1-1.

No others have met so many times, the nearest being five meetings between Brazil and Czechoslovakia, Brazil and Spain, West Germany and Yugoslavia and Argentina and Italy.

The match will also be the seventh time the Swedes have gone looking for a victory against the South Americans.

From the first in France in 1938 to the most recent in Detroit on June 28, all have ended in four Brazilian victories and two draws.

Their most famous meeting remains the 1958 World Cup final when Brazil, including the 17-year-old Pele who scored twice, beat Sweden 5-2, in Stockholm and then carried a huge Swedish flag around with them on their lap of honour.

In the crowd that day was Swedish coach Tommy Svensson, then a 13-year-old schoolboy.

"My father took me to the game and it remains one of the greatest days of my life," he

said on Tuesday. "Even though we lost, it didn't matter, it was a marvellous occasion."

The players in Svensson's squad, none of whom were born when that match was played 36 years ago, are all agreed that history will count for nothing when the semifinal starts.

"What happened two weeks ago in Detroit won't matter and neither will anything else from the past," said skipper Jonas Thern.

"But I do think the fact that Brazil have won so many games works in our favour. The longer you go without a victory, the nearer you first victory comes — at least I hope so."

As far as the statistics go, Brazil beat Sweden 4-2 in 1938, 7-1 in 1950 and 5-2 in the 1958 final before the teams drew 1-1 in Argentina in 1978.

Four years ago in Italy, '90 Brazil won 2-1 before the teams drew again in this tournament.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

The results of the previous meetings between Brazil and Sweden with date, winner, score, and round game and drew 1-1.