

WORLD CUP USA '94

CUP HIGHLIGHTS

UNDATED. (AP): Wednesday's semifinals — Italy 2, Bulgaria 1; Brazil 1, Sweden 0. Stars of the day — Roberto Baggio, who had two goals for Italy; Romario, who had one goal for Brazil.

Quotes of the day — "Tactically, physically, we controlled the game in all aspects. The only difficulty was to get the ball in the net." — Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira.

"God was on our side but the referee was French." Bulgaria's Hristo Stoichkov, on the officiating of Joel Quiniou of France.

Injuries — Italy's Roberto Baggio (right hamstring) and Bulgaria's Hristo Stoichkov (right hamstring).

Suspensions — Brazil's Leonardo and Italy's Alessandro Costacurta and Mauro Tassotti are ineligible for the title game.

History — Bulgaria were the first World Cup semifinalist from Eastern Europe since 1982. In that tournament, Italy beat Poland 2-0 on two goals by Paolo Rossi before going on to win the title.

Saturday's Game — Third place: Bulgaria vs. Sweden at Pasadena, Calif. (1935 GMT).

Sunday's Game — Championship: Brazil vs. Italy at Pasadena, Calif. (1935 GMT).

WC STATS

LOS ANGELES, California, July 14 (AP): World Cup statistics after the semifinals:

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 67,182).

Quarter-finals: 273,886 (Average 68,472). Total (after 48 of 52 matches): 3,228,994 (Average 67,271).

Semi-finals: 161,663 (Average 80,832). Total (after 50 of 52 matches): 3,390,657 (Average 67,813).

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).

Semi-finals: 4 (Average 2).

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

Top-scoring team: Sweden 11, Brazil 11.

Best defense: Brazil 3 goals. Leading scorer: Oleg Salenko (Russia) 6.

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

Penalties: 15 (all converted).

Red and yellow cards after Second Round.

Sendings-off: 15. Bookings: 221.

Italian carnival in Australia

SYDNEY, July 14: Hundreds of flag-waving Italian soccer fans celebrated in the streets of Sydney and Melbourne Thursday for the World Cup final, reports AP.

Australians of Italian descent jumped in and out of fountains in the Leichhardt district in Sydney's inner suburbs. The area is known as "Little Italy" and has a high proportion of migrant Italian residents.

The celebrations followed Italy's 2-1 semifinal victory over Bulgaria at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. Italy now will play Brazil in the World Cup final.

People danced in the streets and several Italian restaurants opened early. Police said in a statement that the fans were exuberant but that no trouble had been reported.

In Melbourne, Victorian state Premier Jeff Kennett was mobbed by Italian fans when he made an appearance in North Carlton, the heart of the city's Italian quarter.

Fans draped an Italian flag over Kennett and at least two kissed him.

The suburb was alive to the sounds of trumpets blowing and car horns being sounded to celebrate Italy's win.



Italy's Roberto Baggio (C) shoots past Bulgaria's Trifon Ivanov (R) with the goalkeeper stranded in the middle, to score the first of his two goals in the match. Italy moved into the final defeating Bulgaria 2-1 at the Giants Stadium on July 13. — AFP photo

Bulgaria's dream run ends



EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey, July 14: Roberto Baggio pounced twice with deadly precision to lead Italy into the World Cup final with a 2-1 victory over outsiders Bulgaria on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Baggio struck his two killer blows in a five-minute spell midway through the first half as Italy ran rampant, finally hitting the form worthy of past champions after unconvincing displays in their shaky passage to the semifinals.

The pony-tailed European footballer-of-the-year stunned his opponents early but just when Italy looked like sweeping surprise quarter-final conquerors of title-holders Germany into oblivion, Bulgaria pulled back a goal and made a fight of it in the second half.

Roberto Donadoni set Baggio away for the first goal in the 21st minute, sending the master on a run past his marker as he worked the ball along the top of the penalty area from the left and unleashed a shot beyond the left of goalkeeper Borislav Mihailov into the far corner of the net.

Five minutes later, after midfielder Demetrio Albertini had hit the post and then lofted in a shot which the keeper did well to tip over the bar, Baggio pounced again.

The effervescent Albertini sent a thorough ball which Baggio met in the box on the right, stabbing his shot into the far corner.

Captain Paolo Maldini sent a flashing header just wide from a Donadoni corner two minutes before the interval as Italy appeared to be sweeping in style to the final with the pedigree of the champions of 1934, 1938 and 1982.

But a minute later, on a rare Bulgarian foray upfield, Nasko Sirakov was brought down in the box by defender Alessandro Costacurta and Hristo Stoichkov struck home the spot-kick unerringly, leaving a real battle to be rejoined after the interval.

Italian goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca dived to his left for the spot-kick but guessed wrong as Stoichkov stroked his left-foot shot the other side of him.

It was Stoichkov's third successful penalty and sixth goal of the tournament, carrying him level with Russia's Oleg Salenko as the leading marksman of USA '94.

But Baggio's two goals, taking his tally to five in the last three games, proved the more significant and deservedly led Italy to Sunday's final.

Bulgaria pleaded in vain for another penalty 20 minutes from the end, claiming Costacurta had fouled Emil Kostadinov, but French referee Joel Quiniou ignored their demands.

However, Costacurta will miss the final after bringing down Stoichkov in the 62nd minute and adding a second

Costacurta misses the bus

EAST RUTHERFORD, July 14: Alessandro Costacurta refused to linger for the celebrations on Wednesday after Italy reached the World Cup final, reports Reuters.

booking to the one he received in the second round against Nigeria.

Albertini was also booked for Italy in the second half along with Bulgarians Kostadinov, Yordan Letchkov and Zlatko Yankov.

Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev was in the New York Giants Stadium with his team — 50-1 outsiders when the draw was made last December — could not reproduce the magic they conjured up in the same arena on Sunday when Stoichkov and Letchkov scored the goals which eliminated Germany.

Italy, by contrast, at last showed form worthy of their high traditions after the inauspicious start they made here on June 18 when they were beaten 1-0 by Ireland.

Baggio brought them back from the brink against Nigeria with an 89th minute equaliser and scored the winning penalty in extra time. He then notched the 88th minute winner against Spain.

Baggio again displayed his brilliance when it mattered and Italy — eliminated by Argentina in the semifinals when they staged the tournament in 1990 — pulled off their third successive 2-1 victory in nine days.

They now contest the final for the fifth time.

Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi was delighted with the way his team had performed before the penalty enabled Bulgaria to get back into the game.

"We played an excellent first half, particularly the first 35 minutes, and perhaps we deserved more," he said. "Then the penalty, the heat and the ability of our opponents made things very difficult for us."

Recalling the nightmare of Italy's opening defeat by Ireland, Sacchi said: "When I remember how we started off

in this same stadium it just goes to show that there is very little in life of which you can be certain."

Seven members of the side which started that game against Ireland were in the starting line-up for the semifinal.

Asked to define Baggio's performance, Sacchi said, "I will answer with one word — exceptional."

Baggio went off with a leg muscle injury 20 minutes from the end but it was not immediately clear how bad it was.

Asked if veteran captain Franco Baresi, out since undergoing knee surgery following the 1-0 win over Norway in Italy's second game, might be fit to fill the gap in the final left by the suspended Costacurta, Sacchi said: "At this point it's very difficult imagining Baresi being able to play."

Referee: Joel Quiniou (France).

Yellow cards: Italy — Alessandro Costacurta (62), Demetrio Albertini (81).

Bulgaria — Emil Kostadinov (53), Yordan Letchkov (66), Zlatko Yankov (84).

TEAMS

ITALY: 1-Gianluca Pagliuca, 8-Roberto Mussi, 4-Alessandro Costacurta, 5-Paolo Maldini, 3-Antonio Benarrivo, 14-Nicola Bertl, 11-Demetrio Albertini, 13-Dino Baggio (15-Antonio Conte 56), 16-Roberto Donadoni, 10-Roberto Baggio (20-Giuseppe Signori 71), 18-Pierluigi Casiraghi.

BULGARIA: 1-Borislav Mihailov, 16-Ilian Kiryakov, 3-Trifon Ivanov, 5-Petar Hubchev, 4-Tzanko Tzvetanov, 6-Zlatko Yankov, 9-Yordan Letchkov, 20-Krasimir Balakov, 10-Nasko Sirakov, 7-Emil Kostadinov (13-Ivaylo Yordanov 72), 8-Hristo Stoichkov (14-Boncho Genchev 79).

Baggio may miss final

WARREN, N.J., July 14: Roberto Baggio is a questionable starter in Sunday's World Cup final against Brazil because of a hamstring injury, reports AP.

Italian team doctor Andrea Ferretti said Thursday that the 27-year-old star forward will be rested for 48 hours following a right leg strain suffered Wednesday during the semifinal match against Bulgaria.

"At the moment his chances to play (Sunday) are 50 per cent," Ferretti said.

Baggio scored both goals in Italy's 2-1 victory at Giants Stadium before limping off in the 71st minute. He tallied five of Italy's eight goals in six World Cup games.

Ferretti ruled out the use of painkillers to have Baggio in the starting lineup for the final.

"Painkillers are contra-indicated for strains. We must only hope for a positive evolution ... a final decision about his use may be taken a few hours before kickoff," Ferretti said.

Baggio, who broke into tears after leaving the field — a mixture of joy for the goals scored and despair over the injury — said he had high hopes to play Brazil.

"I am used to physical problems, I want to play," he said.

Ferretti was also cautious about a possible return to action of captain-sweeper Franco Baresi, who has been sidelined about three weeks following an arthroscopic right knee surgery to remove cartilage.

Baresi was injured during Italy's second cup match against Norway.

Baresi is improving every day, he can kick and run. But at the moment we cannot say that he could start in the final.

... It's another last-minute decision. The coach will decide about the use of Baggio and Baresi on the basis of a final medical report," Ferretti explained.

Brazilians adore Romario

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 14: Thousands of people crowded the streets in Rio, Sao Paulo, and Recife Wednesday night, cheering their latest hero and the Brazilian national team for reaching the World Cup final, reports AP.

"Romario saved the day, as usual," a soccer fanatic in the Rio suburb of Sao Cristovao told the Associated Press.

The fan's joy was over Romario's header goal in the 80th minute that eliminated Sweden 1-0 and sent Brazil to the championship match for the first time since they last won the title in 1970.

After an anxious first and second half, fans flooded the streets waving flags and honking horns.

"Twenty-four years is a long time to wait, and we've earned the chance to show the world who's best," said one man.

It was hard to find anyone who would criticize the Italian national team, and equally difficult was finding someone who didn't predict a Brazilian victory.

"Brazil is better technically," said Manuel Sampaio, a long time football reporter in Rio.

Brazilians leave it late



PASADENA, July 14: Brazil remained an enigma on Wednesday, keeping their fans on tenterhooks yet again before Romario's late goal beat Sweden and put them into their first World Cup final for 24 long years, reports Reuters.

Romario's header nine minutes from time, the only goal of a disappointing semifinal, was the third successive match that the bewildering Brazilians had thoroughly dominated yet decided only with a late strike.

Playing against only 10 men after Swedish captain Jonas Thern was sent off in the 63rd minute, Brazil seemed to be running out of ideas late in the second half. They had squandered a hateful of chances earlier.

The Swedes failed to make any headway against the resilient Brazilian defence but the South Americans showed a puzzling inability to produce a scoreline to match their supremacy.

Romario, Zinho and Mazinho all threw away gilt-edged opportunities to score in the first half and goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli made superb saves from Zinho and Romario in the second as Brazil poured forward relentlessly.

Brazil's victory lined them up to play Italy, also their opponents in their last World Cup triumph in 1970, in Sunday's final at the same Pasadena Rose Bowl, when their

after being reduced to 10 men when Leonardo was sent off.

They eventually won with a Bebeto goal little more than 15 minutes from the end.

In the quarter-final the fans' hearts were in their mouths again when the Netherlands pulled back to level at 2-2 from 2-0 down before a screaming Branco free kick nine minutes from time calmed their nerves.

It was fitting that Romario should be leading the cavalry for the third rescue. As Brazil's best player in the tournament, he always looked the man most likely to end the stalemate.

His fifth goal of the finals came when he met a Jorginho right-wing cross with a powerful downward header which gave Ravelli no chance.

Ravelli, playing in his 116th international, had no complaints about the result but he and the Swedes felt Thern had been harshly treated by Colombian referee Jose Torres Cadena.

The Swedish captain looked nonplussed when Torres Cadena brandished the red card after an innocuous looking challenge on Brazilian skipper Dunga.

But Thern accepted the decision sportingly, shook hands with Dunga, who gave him a sympathetic hug, before walking disconsolately off the pitch.

"The referee didn't see what happened," Ravelli said later. "The red card was not the right decision but referees in this tournament have made

a penalty shootout.

"Today's game was too close to that match," Svensson said. "It was tough because we had a couple of players who were not fully fit and you have to be 100 per cent to face Brazil."

Tomas Brodin flashed fitfully in midfield but Sweden could do little more than play long balls up to Martin Dahlin and Kennet Andersson, who were kept fully in check by an admirable Brazilian rearguard.

Though no soccer fan is going to bemoan the prospect of Brazil reaching the final after such a long wait, the team looks shorter on class than the sides sent to each of the last three World Cup finals — even if none of those made the final.

Pele, architect of the brilliant 4-1 triumph in the 1970 final and leading Brazilian cheering from the stands of the Rose Bowl, must have paused to reflect that the current team bears no comparison with the magicians of 24 years ago.

But if they persist in failing to convince either their own fans or the soccer purists, they are probably the best team at the finals and must start as favourites on Sunday unless Roberto Baggio has other ideas.

Referee: Jose Torres Cadena (Colombia).

Red card: Sweden — Jonas Thern (63).

Yellow cards: Brazil — Zinho (4).



RELIEF: Brazilian striker Romario exults after scoring the match winner against Sweden. Brazil dominated the entire proceedings yet took 80 minutes to claim their own and numerous supporters' nerves. Brazil play Italy in the final at the Rose Bowl on July 17. — AFP photo

fans will be praying to be spared the agony of waiting for another late conjuring trick.

Brazilian trainer Carlos Alberto Parreira was at a loss to understand it himself.

"We had 29 shots and 1-0 was not a fair reflection of our superiority," he said. "We took the game to them, controlled it throughout and created all the chance."

"Our only difficulty was getting the ball in the back of the net."

In the second round Brazil had forced their supporters to contemplate an unthinkable defeat by the United States

a lot of mistakes."

Thern thought his dismissal had cost his team dear. "In the 10 minutes before I was sent off I felt Brazil were becoming a bit nervous," he said.

"Who knows what might have happened if we had been able to play with 11 men for the full 90 minutes. Maybe we could have won it."

Swedish trainer Tommy Svensson declined to comment on the referee and laid the blame instead on the tiredness of his players who had only two days to recover after their exhausting quarter-final victory over Romania in

Sweden — Roger Ljung (29), Tomas Brodin (86).

TEAMS

BRAZIL: 1-Taffarel, 2-Jorginho, 13-Aldair, 15-Marcio Santos, 6-Branco, 8-Dunga, 5-Mauro Silva, 17-Mazinho (10-Rai, 46), 7-Bebeto, 11-Romario.

SWEDEN: 1-Thomas Ravelli, 2-Roland Nilsson, 3-Patrik Andersson, 4-Jonas Bjorklund, 5-Roger Ljung, 18-Hakan Mild, 11-Tomas Brodin, 9-Jonas Thern, 8-Klas Ingvesson, 10-Martin Dahlin, (17-Stefan Rehn 68), 19-Kennet Andersson.

Badly-needed tonic for Italians



ROME, July 14: Italy's march to the World Cup final thrilled a sports-mad nation on Thursday and gave yet another boost to the fortunes of Prime Minister and AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi, reports Reuters.

Italians, stripped of a sense of national pride after two years of political corruption scandals, found just the right tonic as striker Roberto Baggio scored twice to give Italy a 2-1 semifinal win over Bulgaria.

"His Divinity The Pony Tail," declared the newspaper Corriere Della Sera in a play on Baggio's Buddhist beliefs and tied back flowing hair.

The roar of fireworks, air horns and hooters filled the air across the country and flag-waving fans splashed in fountains and danced on piazzas as the final whistle blew around midnight. Italian time to ensure Italy's fifth appearance in the final.

Two Italians lost their lives in the orgy of celebration.

Police said a 30-year-old man in Bari, southern Italy, tumbled out of a car as it toured the city during festivities and was run over by the same vehicle.

In Velletri, near Rome, a 24-year-old Italian was knocked down and killed by a car as its driver sped through

deserted streets to get home in time for the kickoff. "I was in a hurry to watch the match," police quoted the driver as saying.

The triumph put Italy into Sunday's final against Brazil in Los Angeles, where both teams will be battling to lift the title for a record fourth time.

"Saint Baggio of New York," said La Voce newspaper.

La Repubblica even got Pope John Paul II on the act, depicting him in a front page cartoon dancing for joy and declaring "Roma-Sofia 2-1. I've never felt better ..."

The Polish-born Pope was almost killed by a Turkish gunman in 1981. Mehmet Ali Agca's trial considered claims that communist Bulgarian agents masterminded the assassination attempt but the link was never established.

Italy previously won the World Cup in 1934 and 1938 under fascist dictator Benito Mussolini and in Madrid in 1982, when late president Sandro Pertini stole the hearts of millions of Italians with a show of boyish emotion as he watched the side beat West Germany 3-1.

Berlusconi, a mega-rich media magnate who has seven players from his European champion side on the national squad, was not saying on Thursday whether he would fly to Los Angeles to watch the fi-

nal live in the Pasadena Rose Bowl.

But it appeared almost beyond belief that the over-beaming sultan billionaire, given another fortuitous boost last week when he made a triumph of hosting the Group of Seven summit in Naples, would stay away from such a high profile event.

"I told Berlusconi, before leaving Rome, that he would have to come to Los Angeles for the final. I even advised him to book a plane ticket immediately," Antonio Matarrese, president of Italy's soccer federation, said.

"What's more, I told the Prime Minister that if he didn't have the money for a ticket, I would pay for it," Matarrese told Gazzetta Dello Sport newspaper.

Berlusconi, whose interests span television and advertising and a host of other businesses, burst into politics only this year with a party named after the country's national soccer cry — "Forza Italia" (Go Italy).

He even calls his members of parliament "Gli Azzurri" (the Blues), the favoured nickname for the national team, and uses soccer smiles when talking about politics.

With soccer so high on the Italian agenda, there were warnings on Thursday that the World Cup final should not be used by any political force to score points.



Jubilant Italian fans beat on drums before the start of the World Cup semi-final between Italy and Bulgaria at the Giants Stadium on July 13. Italy won the match by the odd goal in three to set up a final against Brazil at the Rose Bowl on July 17. — AFP photo