

WORLD CUP USA '94

Swedes against playoffs

LOS ANGELES, July 15: Dejected Sweden captain Jonas Thern and coach Tommy Svensson both called for FIFA to scrap World Cup third-place playoffs and let the losing semifinalists lick their wounds in private, reports Reuter.

"At the moment it's not a game that is really very important to us," said Thern on Thursday, less than 24 hours after Sweden lost to Brazil in the semifinals.

"I don't think any of the players want it. It's too short a time after the disappointment of losing the semifinals."

"It's all about money and how much FIFA can make from it," said Thern who will miss the game anyway because of a controversial sending-off against Brazil.

Svensson, who has the job of picking up his players and trying to motivate them for Saturday's third-place playoff against Bulgaria, said he would prefer to share third spot.

"It should not be too difficult to motivate the players because they are playing for a medal in the World Cup. But perhaps it would be better to give both teams third place and share it like they do in the European Championship," he said.

Thern said there was no question of the players not giving their best but they would have preferred to leave the tournament after arguably the biggest disappointment of

their careers. "We were so close to reaching the World Cup final and were feeling disappointed but now we have to get over it in two or three days and try to play well against another team



Star TOMMY SVENSSON

who lost. "It's always hard to pick yourself up after you have lost a game and even more so when it's a World Cup semifinal."

"I really don't think there should be a consolation game and that they should do the same as the European Championship," Thern said.

However, some of the players were putting on a brave face at Thursday's press conference at the team's hotel in Marina del Rey and talking of how determined they were to finish third.

"I am a little bit disappointed we did not make the final but we want to be the

third-best team in the world," said striker Martin Dahlin, who also wants a fifth goal to become Sweden's top scorer in a World Cup final.

"We want to finish with a win," said midfielder Stefan Schwarz, who comes back for the Bulgaria game after missing the semifinal through suspension.

Sweden and Bulgaria met twice in the World Cup qualifiers and Thern believes the Swedes hold the upper hand after winning one game and drawing the other.

"Bulgaria have been a very big surprise in this tournament and it will be a tough game for us; but we have a good record against them," he said.

Svensson, who will be without Thern and defender Roger Ljung, both suspended, intends to field his strongest side.

"Bulgaria are a very strong team and have proved they belong at the top in the world, and especially in Europe," he said.

"It's a matter of how much we can work. We had to be at our best from the first game here and it's taken a lot out of us."

Sweden should start among the favourites for the 1996 European championship in England, with the nucleus of the side staying together for the qualifying series which begins in September.

"Soon I will have to prepare myself for it and that is something to look forward to," said Svensson.

Bravo better

LONDON, July 15: A far-sighted backer is sitting pretty ahead of Sunday's World Cup final, knowing he will collect at least 106,000 pound (165,000 dollars) whoever wins, reports Reuter.

Just under a year ago, before the start of the British soccer season, a London man put a 400 pounds accumulator bet on Manchester United to win the England Premier league, Glasgow Rangers to take the Scottish equivalent, Crystal Palace to capture the English first division and Brazil to win the World Cup.

He staked another 400 pounds linking the three British club, who, obligingly, all won their respective leagues, and Italy.

If Brazil win on Sunday he picks up 106,000 pounds (165,000 dollars). If Italy are successful he will receive 124,000 pounds (193,000 dollars).

Graham Sharpe, spokesman for bookmakers William Hill, said on Thursday: "This punter has achieved every gambler's dream. He can sit and watch a soccer match knowing that he will make a six-figure profit regardless of the result."

Remarkably, a backer in Birmingham is also causing the bookmakers some major headache.

He has already won 55,000 pounds (86,000 dollars) by staking 5,000 pounds (7,000 dollars) at 11-1 on a Brazil v Italy final.

In a separate 8,000 pounds (12,500 dollars) wager he linked Manchester United, Crystal Palace and Brazil. If Brazil win on Sunday he will receive a further 335,000 pounds (522,000 dollars).

In other big-roller action, a Malaysian who lost 110,000 pound (172,000 dollars) when Mexico failed against Bulgaria, has staked the same amount at even money on Brazil to win Sunday's final in 90 minutes.

Zagalo can't help being a winner

LOS ANGELES, July 15: Brazil assistant coach Mario Zagalo, of the verge of his fourth World Cup triumph, told his critics on Thursday they would simply have to live with the fact that he was a winner, reports Reuter.

"They'll just have to swallow it," he said. "They can swallow it with water, or with lemonade, or with Coca-Cola."

"People may not like it but I'm successful. I won the World Cup as a player in 1958, as a player in 1962 and as a coach in 1970 and now I could win it again. Nobody else can say they are four times world champion."

"I'm a winner. I'm three times champion and nobody's going to take that away from me."

Despite his success, Zagalo has many detractors in Brazil who feel that as a coach he is too defence-minded. They point to Brazil's 1974 World Cup performance, when they failed to reach the final from their second round group, as evidence.

His critic also claim that he simply inherited the 1970 World Cup team when the late Joao Saldanha resigned weeks before the start of the competition.

Zagalo has always denied it vehemently, saying he made numerous changes to Saldanha's side.

Brazil's first team players were given the day off on Thursday, following their hard-fought and unconvincing 1-0 semifinal win over Sweden on Wednesday.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira was adamant that the score was not a fair reflection of his team's superiority, saying his players had 29 shots on goal.

He said he would announce his team for Sunday's final on Saturday but, with no suspension or injury problems, he is not likely to make changes from the side which beat Sweden.

The only doubt is whether Mazinho or Rai will accompany Mauro Silva, Dunga and Zinho in midfield. Mazinho is favourite after Rai's lacklustre second-half display against the Scandinavians.

Parreira said there would be no special marking for Italy's Roberto Baggio.

"We don't mark man-to-man, we mark by zones. But we will watch him closely because he's a player who can decide matches as he's already shown in this World Cup," he said.

"We can't give them any space. We have to play tight. They don't open up either. They know how to close up and come out on the counter attack. Tight marking has always been one of the characteristics of Italian football."



IN A MERRY PIN... (from left to right) Cafu, Mazinho, Rai, Leonardo and Ronaldo, the 17-year-old prodigy kept out of action by the Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, having a joke during the morning training session at Fullerton yesterday. Brazil take on Italy in the final, on July 17. — AFP photo

Bastion, Brazil's booster

FULLERTON, Calif., July 15: Great defence is probably the last thing that comes to mind when the subject is Brazilian soccer.

Brazil evokes images of sinuous attacks, "samba soccer" and goals, lots of goals. The great Pele scored 1,284 goals, a record. And today's heroes, Bebeto and Romario, also are high scoring forwards.

But it's an unsung defence that has carried Brazil to the brink of a fourth World Cup championship. The team play Italy for the title on Sunday at the Rose Bowl, reports AP.

Brazil have allowed just three goals in six games, the fewest in the tournament. Four of those games were shutouts, including two 1-0 squeakers.

Even more surprising, Brazil have done it with a patched-together backfield that is missing four of their original members.

"We're lucky that Brazil right now have an exceptional group of defenders," said assistant coach Mario Zagalo. "We lose one, and we have another of equal caliber to replace him."

Barely six weeks ago, the team's luck seemed to be running all bad.

The first casualty was Mozer, of Portugal's Benfica.

Doctors at training camp found he had hepatitis. Mozer was sent home, and Roma's Aldair summoned.

On the eve of the cup, starter Ricardo Gomes stretched to block a shot during an exhibition game and distended a leg muscle. He was out of the tournament, and Ronaldo was urgently recalled from Japan.

Next was Ricardo Rocha. In the 68th minute of Brazil's opening game against Russia, Rocha pulled up lame with a groin pull. He was replaced by Aldair, but it was too late to add a player to the roster. Brazil was down to three backs.

Then it was Leonardo who left suddenly, in a second-round game with the United States, he viciously elbowed Tab Ramos and fractured the midfielder's skull. Leonardo was slapped with a four-game suspension, and veteran Branco, recuperating from a back injury, was pressed into service.

They all stepped up. Facing the high-scoring Dutch team in the quarterfinals, Branco shut down wing attacker Marc Overmars and even scored the game-winner.

In the semifinals, Brazil smothered Sweden's vaunted air game before they could get airborne. The Swedes managed just three shots all afternoon.

and not a single header. Meanwhile, the defence keyed a deadly counter attack. It was a perfect cross from defender Jorginho that set up Romario's header for the lone score.

"Brazil is the only team in the Cup that has never once been seriously in danger," coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said. "We can put the gas pedal down when we want to, but it hasn't been necessary."

Credit team defence. That's something of a novel concept in a country that has long considered defenders the piano movers for the maestros in the midfield and virtuosos up front.

"The defence is the whole team, not just the back line or the midfield," said Ricardo Rocha. "Brazil now plays collective soccer. Nobody thinks individually."

For Parreira, the team's success is a personal vindication. His concern with defence has drawn the wrath of fans who prefer the "show soccer" of bygone days.

"If we had three of our superstars who could carry the team, it might be different. But we don't," he said.

"Efficiency and balance," he went on. "I've said all along those are they keys. Now we're ready for anything."

When will they swap roles?

PASADENA, Calif., July 15: You watch and wonder when Carlos Alberto Parreira will get up. You watch and wonder when Arrigo Sacchi will shut up.

Their bench demeanor couldn't be more different. Brazil's Parreira rarely leaves his seat to shout directions or exhort his players. Italy's Sacchi almost never sits down, reports AP.

Yet, they have much in common:

— Both World Cup coaches have been maligned by the media back home for nearly three years.

— Both have altered their team's style just enough to bring more criticism than praise.

— Both have had disagreements with players, yet have not lost any of their power.

— Both have won.

That last similarity is the most important. Say what you will about Parreira and Sacchi — and much has been said — since they took charge of their national teams — but they have guided their squads to the edge of an historic achievement.

On Sunday, either Brazil or Italy will become the first four-time World Cup champions.

"We have come here to win a world championship," Parreira said. "Now, we are ready to play the one game to do that."

And if Brazil don't win that game and take their first World Cup crown since 1970, how much will that take away from his accomplishments?

"Being a football coach is my life, a pleasure," he said. "But being the coach of the Brazilian team in the World Cup is something else. It's a commitment. You cannot have fun in this. You can have fun only if you succeed in winning the World Cup."

Sacchi faces the same pressures, and might have to go after title No. 4 without star striker Roberto Baggio. A hamstring injury makes Baggio "50-50" for Sunday's game at the Rose Bowl.

Just getting this far should provide utmost satisfaction for Sacchi, his players, fans of the Azzurri and all Italians. But it won't. Just as with Brazil, nothing less than a championship will be enough.

"Sacchi's team wins and entertains," Italian Soccer Federation president Antonio Matarrese said. "But we also suffer a lot in each match. It has been like this from the beginning."

From the beginning, Sacchi said a spot in the semifinals would be impressive for Italy, who struggled in pre-tournament games. As the Italians survived numerous crises and lived on the edge for nearly a month, Sacchi's skills became evident.

He is a master strategist. He uses his bench well. He has confidence in substitutes. And he knows how to fire up his players and keep them confident in the face of adversity.

Take Parreira — and imagine Brazil without Romario. That was the situation for much of the World Cup qualifying rounds. Known for his independent nature, Romario feuded with the Brazilian federation, primarily over his inactivity in previous years with the national team. So he refused to play in qualifying.

Parreira, realizing how devastating not even qualifying for the tournament would be — Brazil have been to every World Cup — convinced Romario to return. And Romario led Brazil into the final 24.

Parreira at cross-roads

LOS ANGELES, July 15: Carlos Alberto Parreira is on the threshold of a sudden switch from a symbol of hate to Brazilian icon.

Brazilian coach Parreira predicts there will be six months of celebrations should his team beat Italy on Sunday to win their first World Cup in 24 years.

But he believes a loss will only continue the unrelenting lashing of contempt directed at him from his football-besotted nation's public and press.

"If Brazil win the World Cup, all will be forgiven. And we will do it," Parreira said Thursday.

He believes a nation of 160 million will be paying homage to this team for years to come should they earn a record fourth World Cup.

But he admits it is difficult dealing with the extremes of emotion from supporters of Brazil.

Mention of Parreira's name before World Cup matches here is greeted with boos and derision by the Brazilian fans.

He said financial security and a good family life gave him solid support against the vitriol of a Brazilian press constantly at his throat.

However the criticism does not hurt him any more. "I do not suffer with the press treatment because I prepare

myself for that. And there's only a few days to go. I have to follow my own way. I cannot be bothered about the things you



ALBERTO PARREIRA

hear." The Brazilian nation is mired in a downwards spiral, socially, politically, and economically in the last year, and Parreira knows his countrymen require a Brazilian win for the "feel good" factor.

Despite the avalanche of criticism — from Brazilian president Itamar Franco to Parreira's own mother — he has persisted with his defensively disciplined, yet creatively attacking side.

Although Parreira insists:

PROFILES: BRAZIL

LOS ANGELES, July 15. (AFP): Following are the profiles of Brazilian players likely to be selected for Sunday's World Cup final against Italy:

Taffarel: Age: 28, 85 caps. Height: 1.80m, weight: 80kg. Has potential to become ever greater than the legendary Gilmar. Barely tested by Sweden in the semifinals, he will be looking for his fifth clean-sheet of the tournament against Italy.

Jorginho: 29, 76 caps, 1.75m, 69kg. Not really played up to his potential in the World Cup finals but coach Carlos Alberto Parreira remains convinced he is the best right back in the world. Extremely dangerous when he breaks up field.

Aldair: 30, 29 caps, 1.80m, 74kg. A true match winner, as Holland discovered in the quarterfinals. His 35 metre-plus pass out of the midfield to Bebeto set up Romario's opening goal against the Dutch. Only brought into the side after Mozer was struck with a liver complaint. Can play either as a sweeper or stopper.

Marcio Santos: 24, 44 caps, 1.85m, 77kg. Considered by many a surprise choice he has been a cornerstone of the Brazilian defence. Especially effective in the air, cutting out high corners. Has been helped by planning for Bordeaux in the French First Division.

Branco: 30, 78 caps, 1.80m, 76kg. Parreira was widely attacked for including him, critics insisting he was not good enough. Branco proved them wrong when he scored the winner against Holland. A "put up and shut up goal" to his critics he said.

Dunga: 30, 58 caps, 1.78 m, 77 kg. Brazil's midfield general. Loves to tackle and take the ball away from anyone who dares to try and get past him. Has justly earned his nickname of "Dunga the destroyer". Despite his rugged play has amazing ball skills. His name means "Dopey" in Portuguese but he is anything. But, brought back after Brazil, were humbled by Bolivia in a qualifying match in '93.

Mazinho: 27, 56 caps, 1.88m, 82kg. Defensive midfielder brought in as a replacement for Rai in a bid to give Brazil more steel. A teammate of Zinho at Fluminense, he was one of only three players in the semifinal starting line up who plays club football in Brazil.

Rai: 31, 58 caps, 1.88m, 87kg. Brother of the legendary Sorocates, has had trouble holding his place in the side. Found himself replaced by Mazinho in the crucial match against Holland but came on for him in last 10 minutes, replaced Mazinho at half-time in the semifinal against Sweden.

Maurio Silva: 26, 47 caps, 1.78m, 80kg. Strong and solid in midfield. Lacks the ball skills of Dunga but a solid tackler who adds muscle to the midfield and allows Rai to exploit his phenomenal skill and ability.

Zinho: 24, 43 caps, 1.70m, 72 kg. After a slow start in the tournament is coming more and more into his own. Was all over the place against the Dutch, taking on the defence and creating more openings for Bebeto and Romario. Living up to his description of the most improved Brazilian player in 1993.

Bebeto: 30, 88 caps, 1.78m, 69kg. A proud new father and a living nightmare for defences. Equally happy on the right side of the left and not afraid to work flat out for 90 minutes. The smallest feet in football but a devastating goal scorer — three so far.

Romario: 28, 59 caps, 1.68m, 70kg. The most feared striker left in the tournament. Despite early battles with his teammates before the tournament, especially with the mild-mannered Bebeto, has kept his word to Parreira to behave himself. Said after the win with Russia that this was to be Romario's World Cup. His winner against Sweden was his fifth goal of the tournament.

For Rai it's as good as over

PASADENA, July 15: Brazil midfielder Rai was once again disappointing in his team's 1-0 World Cup semifinal win over Sweden on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Rai, dropped for the previous two World Cup games, was brought on at half-time in an attempt to add some more firepower to the Brazilian attack but the move backfired.

Instead of creating more chances than in the first half, Brazil seemed to run out of attacking ideas, altogether after Rai had come on for midfielder Mazinho.

They missed a hatful of first half opportunities but the late goal scored by Romario was one of only a handful created in the second period.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira admitted afterwards that the change had not worked out as he had hoped.

"I expected more," he said. "Mazinho was doing well but he's not the type who shoots at goal. We needed someone like Rai who charge into the penalty area and finish off moves."

At first, it seemed like a good idea. After just one minute and 20 seconds on the field, Rai got into a good scoring position but failed to control Romario's pass properly, allowing Sweden goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli to grab the ball at his feet.

After that, however, Rai displayed the form which led him to be dropped by Parreira in the first place, looking lethargic and giving the ball away needlessly too often for comfort.

Rai's form has been consistently disappointing throughout the last year both for Brazil and his club side, Paris St Germain of France.

But Parreira had persisted with him in the face of criticism because of a lack of other genuinely creative midfield players in Brazil.

The problem was amply illustrated against the Swedes with strikers Romario and Bebeto frequently coming back to the halfway line to pick up the ball and create their own chances.

Parreira took another gamble on Wednesday which proved more successful.

For the first time in his career, midfielder Mauro Silva played almost as a sweeper, positioning himself just in front of the two central defenders to help them cope with the expected Swedish bombardment.

He rose to the challenge and the Swedish attack rarely got a look-in.

"I didn't play him as a sweeper, it was more the sort of role that Ronald Koeman has for Holland," Parreira explained afterwards.

The general verdict on Brazil by their own critics is that they have reached the final with three excellent performances — against Russia, Cameroon and the Netherlands — and mediocre displays in the two matches with Sweden and the 1-0 second-round win over the host nation.

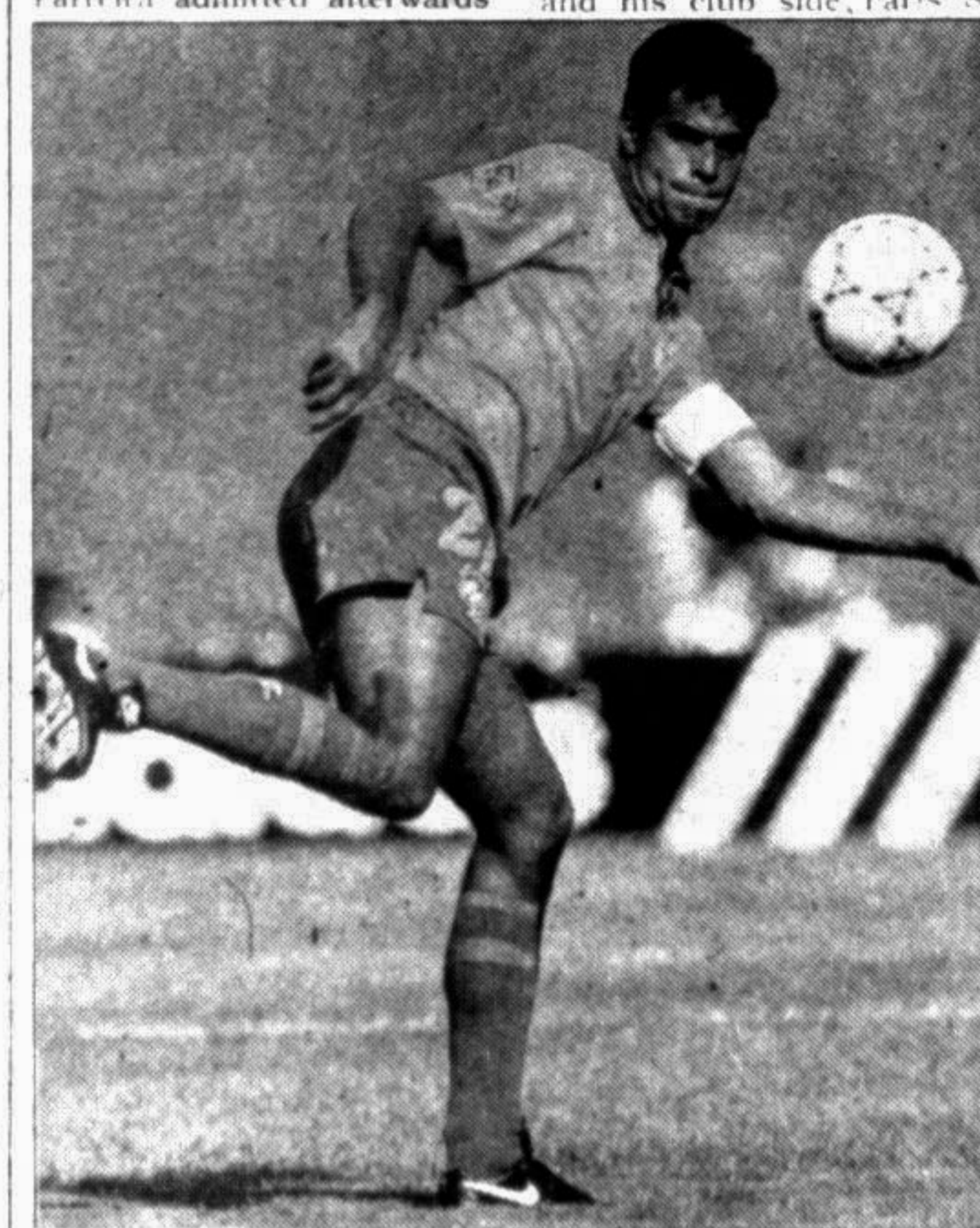
Strikers Bebeto and Romario have been unanimously acclaimed, scoring seven of the team's 11 goals between them.

The defence has looked solid, goalkeeper Taffarel has rarely been tested and has conceded only three goals in six games.

The team has reached the final for the first time in 24 years despite lacking some of the flair of past Brazilian sides.

They have made up for it with determination and spirit normally associated more with north European teams than Latin sides.

Determination and will to win is something that has come from the European game," said striker Romario. "But we will never forget our Brazilian technique."



RAI — again disappointing