

Comparative study of the finalists

LOS ANGELES, July 16: Following are the playing statistics registered by Brazil and Italy up till the semi-finals at the 15th World Cup:

	Brazil	Italy
Matches played	6	6
Won	5	4
Drawn	1	1
Lost	0	1
Total minutes played	540	570
Goals scored	11	8
Goals conceded	3	5
Total shots	104	85
Shots on goal	42	27
Missed shots	42	35
Blocked shots	18	22
Hit against posts	2	1
Free-kicks	13	9
Corner kicks	27	33
Goalkeeping saves	12	42
Fouls committed	65	79
Fouls suffered	76	119
Yellow cards	6	9
Red cards	1	2

WC DIARY

LOS ANGELES, July 16 (AFP): Today's World Cup diary:

OVERDEVELOPED

Six months ago the Bulgarian Football Federation asked German Football Federation president Egidius Braun to help organise its World Cup team.

Braun responded with coaches and other advice, but he never expected the Bulgarians, who had never before won a World Cup match, to knock Germany out in the quarter-finals.

"We did a lot of development," Braun said. "But it's good for soccer."

BAD TIMING

After breaking Spanish star Luis Enrique's nose late in Saturday's quarter-finals, Italian defender Mauro Tassotti tried to go to Spain's changing room to apologise.

The Spaniards told him to go away.

"They said it was not a good time," Italy coach Arrigo Sacchi said.

DUMB QUESTION

Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira has heard plenty of stupid questions during this World Cup. But he couldn't believe his ears Thursday when one reporter questioned him about Sunday's final against Italy asking "Do you want to win the game?"

"What kind of question is that?" Parreira shot back in English.

CHARLTON'S ASSESSMENT

Former England international Bobby Charlton believes Brazil have yet to prove they are a great side.

"They have a strong defence and midfield and against Sweden in the semifinals they made a lot of chances. But they have yet to score the goals that great sides do," the hero of England's 1966 side said today.

He thought Italy's Roberto Baggio was the outstanding player so far. "He's started scoring the really important goals but Romario makes the Brazil attack tick and you have to wait for the final to say who the best player is. It might turn out to be another player."

Hagi to undergo surgery

BUCHAREST, Romania, July 16: Star Romanian midfielder Gheorghe Hagi will undergo surgery on his left knee, reports AP.

Team doctor Pompiliu Popescu told the daily Evenimentul Zilei that the 29-year Hagi, known as the "Maradona of the Carpathians" will be operated on in Brescia, Italy, where he plays, after a short vacation in his home city Constanta and the capital Bucharest.

"Hagi's knee was banded in every match," Popescu said. "By the end (when Romania bowed out in the quarter-finals to Sweden) it was torture and we had to put ice on his knee after each match."

In January, Hagi had an operation for a cyst on the same knee, but it flared during the World Cup.

Following his performance in the World Cup, Hagi is being courted by Barcelona and Tottenham Hotspur. He has been quoted in the Romanian press as saying he prefers to play in Spain where he made his debut on foreign soil with Real Madrid in 1990.

Romania's players were given a heroes' welcome when they returned to the capital this week.

Early Saturday, Hagi was seen at an upscale Bucharest disco with Valentin Ceausescu, an avid soccer fan and elder son of executed dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Valentin was apparently responsible for Hagi's rise to the Premier Division in the late 1980's.

Baggio — burdened with a nation's hopes



PASADENA, Calif., July 16: An apocryphal story about Italy's Roberto Baggio at the World Cup has it that his mother asked Pope John Paul II for help in converting her son back from Buddhism to the Roman Catholic Church, reports AP.

The pope, so the tale goes, agreed but stipulated two conditions.

"First, Roberto must help Italy win the World Cup," the pontiff said.

"I will pray that he does, holy father," Mama Baggio replied.

"Second," the pope added, "I want two tickets to the final."

"I'm sorry, holy father," Mama answered with a sad shrug, her palms raised in a sign of helplessness. "It is impossible. I suppose my Roberto will have to stay a Buddhist."

Roberto Baggio isn't any ordinary Italian Buddhist soccer player. His braided locks are renowned as "il divino codino" — the divine pigtail — and his swift feet are believed to be magical.

His mother, Matilde, and millions of countrymen are praying for him — his own religious convictions notwithstanding — hoping for divine intervention to heal his sore leg in time for Sunday's championship game against Brazil.

Everywhere in soccer-crazed Italy, babies are being named after him, a generation of Robertos. It is not an exaggeration that Italians compare his genius on the field with the artistry of Renaissance masters.

"Roberto Baggio," forward Gianfranco Zola said, "is a treasure for our nation."

More neutral observers of the soccer scene merely consider him the greatest player alive.

Baggio doesn't just score, he makes it look easy. It's a gift that Michael Jordan had as a basketball player, that Joe Montana showed in Super Bowl drives.

When Baggio scored both of Italy's goals in the semifinal victory over Bulgaria, it was as if everyone around him froze while he calmly drove the ball untouched into the net. A feat here, a fake there, and boom. Chants of "EEE-tal-ya! EEE-tal-ya!" cascaded down from more than 77,000 fans at Giants Stadium in New Jersey, along with sprays of confetti and rolls of toilet paper.

Baggio plays by instinct and has that rare knack of being in the right place at the right time. No matter that his inflamed Achilles tendon throbs or that his strained hamstring aches, he has a way of showing up and scoring at the most dramatic moments. He is a money player.

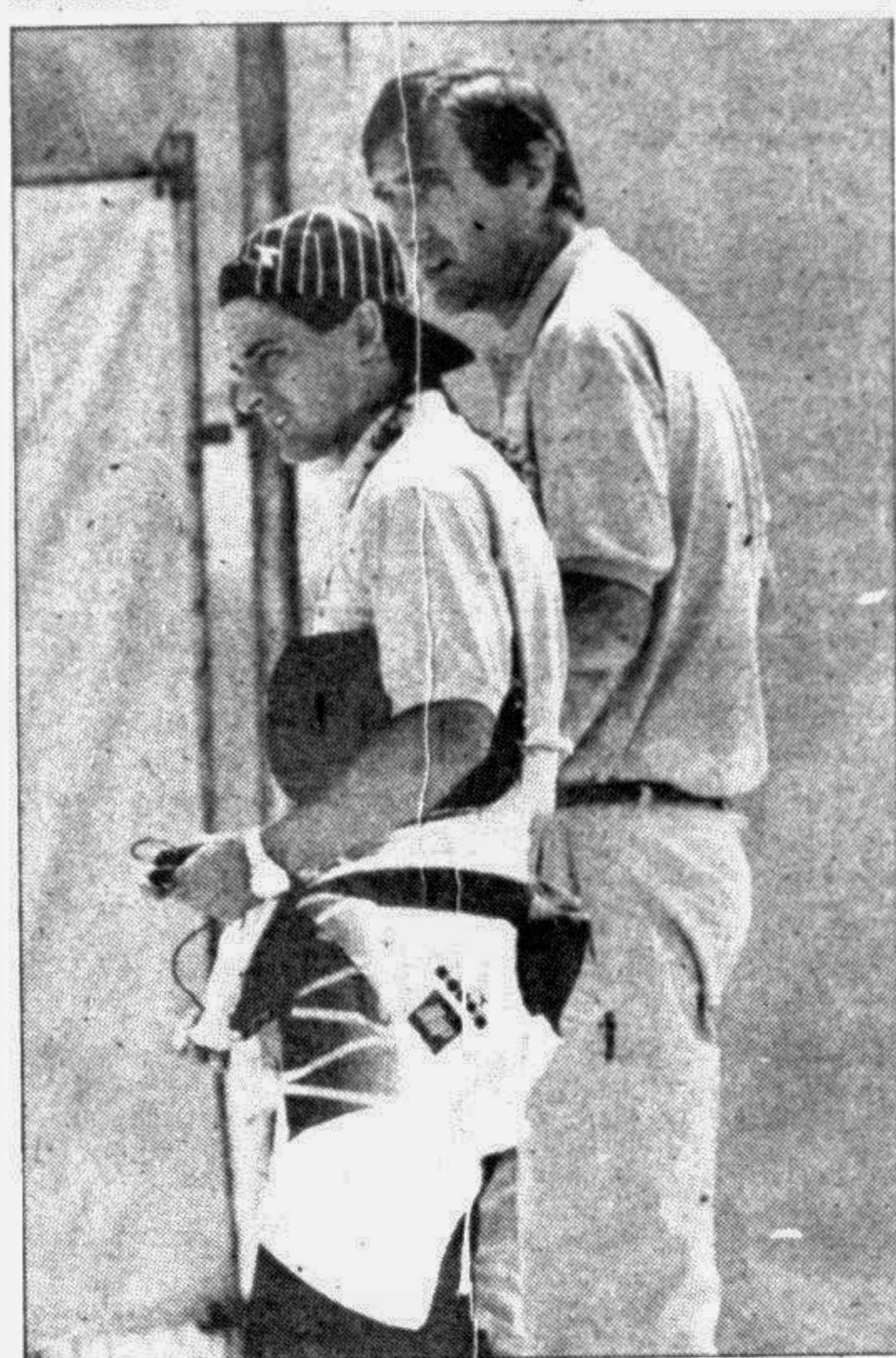
And so Americans have embraced him with blown kisses and waves, and he has responded with humility and emotion.

Standing on the sideline near the end of the game against Bulgaria, hands folded and touching his lips as if he were meditating, he suddenly wept upon hearing the final whistle.

His golden-toed cleats dangled from the tied shoestrings looped around his neck, and he buried his face in the chests and arms of teammates. He hugged Italian soccer le-

gend Luigi Riva, kept crying as he limped off the field, then stopped and took in the scene and the sounds of the crowd. He raised his hand, and as one

by an inflamed tendon, he went through an eight-game scoring drought that brought merciless criticism from the Italian press. That ended when



Roberto Baggio, the Italian superstar who has been advised to rest to heal the injury sustained during the semifinal against Bulgaria, walks off the field with an unidentified man before the start of his team's training session at the Loyola-Marymount College on July 15.

— AFP photo

he scored in the 89th minute

against Nigeria, only a minute

left in the game, sparking a 2-1

victory in overtime for Italy.

and averting a humiliating second-

round elimination.

Baggio showed no emotion

when he scored, that critical

goal, but moments later rushed

toward the Italian bench to

embrace his teammates and

reassure them.

"We already were at the air-

port," Baggio said. "We were

mentally prepared to return

home. I took them all down

from the plane ... I feel re-

born."

Baggio, who has now scored

five goals in the past three

games, was stung by the crit-

ics, but he also knew how hard

it was to play in pain. He ac-

cepted the responsibility with-

out considering it a burden,

and all he asked was a little

understanding.

"Criticism was overly bitter,

but I have always been strong

inside," he said. "I never sur-

render to difficulties. I have

been fighting with my knee

every week since I was 18.

"I never give up, but people

only expect goals from me.

They do not consider how

much I sacrifice myself for the

team."

He is being asked to sacri-

fice himself some more on

Sunday, to put aside the pain

and pop up out of nowhere

again and win one more time.

A dozen years ago, Paolo Rossi

led Italy to its first World Cup

title since 1938. Now it's

Baggio carrying the hopes of

the nation.

Little space for outsiders



PASADENA, July 16: Outsiders can keep dreaming but the World Cup final belongs to a handful of nations-forming a soccer elite and will continue to do so, former French national trainer Gerard Houllier said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Brazil and Italy, who each came through for the fifth time, have underlined a tradition which has seen only 10 countries reach the final in the 64-year history of the competition.

"It can be no surprise," said Houllier, in the United States as a member of FIFA's technical study group. "If you think of the strength of South America, you think of Brazil and in Europe it has to be Italy."

"These are the strongest countries and they have the best players in the world, the ones who make the difference like Roberto Baggio."

Houllier said the current World Cup had shown there were no easy teams any more with nations such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, South Korea and Bolivia playing above expectations and proving difficult to beat.

"But the way the tourna-

ment is structured gives little

chance to outsiders to reach

the final.

"There is no substitute for

experience. The countries

which have that know how to

get that vital goal when it

matters and we have seen that

so often in this World Cup."

Houllier said the intense

pressure at home from fanat-

ical soccer nations had helped

Brazil and Italy in their tough-

est moments.

"They know they are in a

fight for their lives," Houllier

said. "That Italy did so well in

the later stages after starting

badly was a reaction to all the

criticism they came under."

"They knew their futures

were in the balance and it

forced them to produce maxi-

mum effort and take the single

chance to give themselves vic-

tory."

Apart from Brazil and Italy,

only three countries have

reached the final in the last

quarters of a century —

Argentina and West Germany,

who met in each of the last

two finals, and the

Netherlands, runners-up in

1974 and 1978.

Houllier said the format of

future World Cup, when the

number of teams will be in-

creased from 24 to 32, would

make it even harder for out-

siders to come through.

"Outside teams are capable

of springing surprises in early

matches but as the tournament

goes on, their lack of experi-

ence starts to count against

them."

"In a 32-team tournament,

it will be much harder to get

past the first round as only two

will go through from each

group and there will no longer

be any third-placed teams," he

added.

Of the four semifinalists in

the United States, only Bulga-

ria, who upset defending cham-

ions Germany, had never

Dino, the unsung Baggio

LOS ANGELES, July 16: While Roberto Baggio may be the better known it was the other Baggio — Dino — who scored the goal that booked Italy's place in the '94 World Cup finals, reports AFP.

Needless to say the pass in the clinching match against Portugal in Milan last November came from Roberto.

In the run up to the World Cup finals the two combined to score eight goals — Roberto five and Dino three.

Their success prompted Roberto to say: "We have set up a good venture which I hope can keep scoring goals in the coming games."

The Baggio boys, good friends but not related although they were born in the same northeast region, have developed into the cornerstone of an Italian side trying to become the first team in history to win a fourth World Cup.

Unlike his namesake, Dino is strongly built and powerful and nowhere near as well known.

But the 22-year-old midfielder, who had problems early on trying to secure a place in the Juventus line-up and has now moved to Parma, is a firm favourite of coach Arrigo Sacchi.

Sacchi named Dino his player-of-the-match in Italy's quarter-final against Spain. He scored a stunning goal only two minutes to go.

Dino, like Roberto, has also had to overcome a serious knee injury that threatened to halt his career before it had really started. It has given him a determination to make the most of chances.

Much of their understanding on the pitch has been strengthened by their close off the field friendship. The pair go hunting and skiing together.

For Dino, Italy's World Cup success has come as a well-earned relief after the trial and tribulations he suffered last season at Juventus which led to his transfer.

Much of the blame for Juventus failing to win a trophy fell unfairly on Dino.

Their are no such complaints about his play here, even from Italy's die-hard fans.

FIFA feels it's a bit too late

PASADENA, Calif., July 16: Italian soccer officials on Friday appealed the eight-game suspension of Mauro Tassotti, but soccer's governing body said it was too late to allow the defender to play in Sunday's World Cup final, reports AP.

The appeal came six days after Tassotti broke the nose of Spain's Luis Enrique with an elbow during a 2-1 quarterfinal victory, and four days after FIFA's disciplinary committee suspended Tassotti for "serious violent conduct" in the case.

FIFA said it would consider the Italian appeal but not until it returned to its headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland. "The FIFA appeal committee will not deal any more with this issue during the remaining days of the World Cup," FIFA statement said.

Italian officials were upset over the length of the suspension — twice as long as the previous record for a suspension imposed during recent World Cups — and the fact that Tassotti did not receive even a foul when the play occurred.

FIFA imposed the stiff sanction after viewing videotapes of the play.

Donadoni doubtful starter



PASADENA, July 16: World Cup finalists Italy, swatting over the fitness of star striker Roberto Baggio, were dealt another blow on Friday when they learned experienced midfielder Roberto Donadoni had an injury problem, reports Reuter.

"Roberto (Donadoni) felt a pain in his left hamstring a few hours after the match (on Wednesday) and it got worse during the flight yesterday," said team doctor Andrea Ferretti.

"It should be the kind of injury that clears up within 24 hours but we are obviously keeping a very close eye on him."

Ferretti said there was little change in the condition of Baggio, who also has a hamstring problem, and is rated only 50-50 to play in Sunday's final. Both Donadoni and Baggio were ordered to sit out training on Friday.

Baggio has steered triple champions Italy to the final with five goals in the past three games and is determined to play.

"I just haven't allowed myself to think about missing the game," an Italian team spokesman quoted Baggio, who did not appear at a breakfast time press conference, as saying.

"I don't feel any pain when I walk but there is a sharp sensation when I make quick movements."

Coach Arrigo Sacchi, who hopes to name his team today refused to discuss who could replace Baggio.

Parma attacker Gianfranco Zola is available again after suspension while Giuseppe Signori, could be promoted

after starting the last two game on the bench.

Sacchi also has problems in defence where both Mauro Tassotti and Alessandro Costacurta are suspended.

Roberto Mussi has taken over the right back spot from Tassotti in this World Cup but the loss of Costacurta, one of the Italian stars of the tourna-



ROBERTO DONADONI

ment, is a serious one.

Sacchi has virtually ruled out recalling veteran captain Franco Baresi who has just resumed training after keyhole surgery to repair damaged knee cartilage.

"As things stand today I would say that Baresi's chances are very remote," Sacchi said. Parma's Luigi Apolloni, who

has won just three caps, is the likely deputy for Costacurta.

Italy have triumphed over adversity throughout the tournament, scoring vital wins over Norway and Nigeria when down to 10 men and Sacchi hopes this spirit can compensate for any absentees.

"I am very happy to coach a group of excellent professionals who have shown such character," he said.

"Baggio is a very great player and if he were unavailable then we would lose something. It would be up to the rest of the team to produce a little bit extra to make good the loss."

"With this squad anything is possible and we have our sights fixed on the Cup."

Sacchi was associated with thrilling attacking soccer when he coached Milan to the European Cup in 1989 and 1990 but his Italian team have failed to scale such heights with their play.

"I thought we played very good soccer in the first half of the semifinal with Bulgaria," Sacchi said when questioned on his team's performances.

"It would have been very difficult for my Milan team to play as it did in these conditions, in this heat... it's very hard to put pressure on opponents and have good movement off the ball here."

Sacchi did not agree that most neutrals in Pasadena's Rose Bowl Stadium on Sunday would be rooting for Brazil, a team which has not matched the skills of its illustrious predecessors but has been better to watch than Italy.

"I think that the fans will support the team which produces the best soccer on the day," he said.

Maldini back to his best

