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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
Goaltending 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 Mastro 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 questioning him about Sunday's final against Italy asked "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 semi-finals 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-old 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 bandaged in every match," Popescu said. "By the end (when Romania bowed out in the semi-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 known 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 to 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 step here, a fake there, and boom. Chants of "EEE-tal-yal EEE-tal-yal" 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.

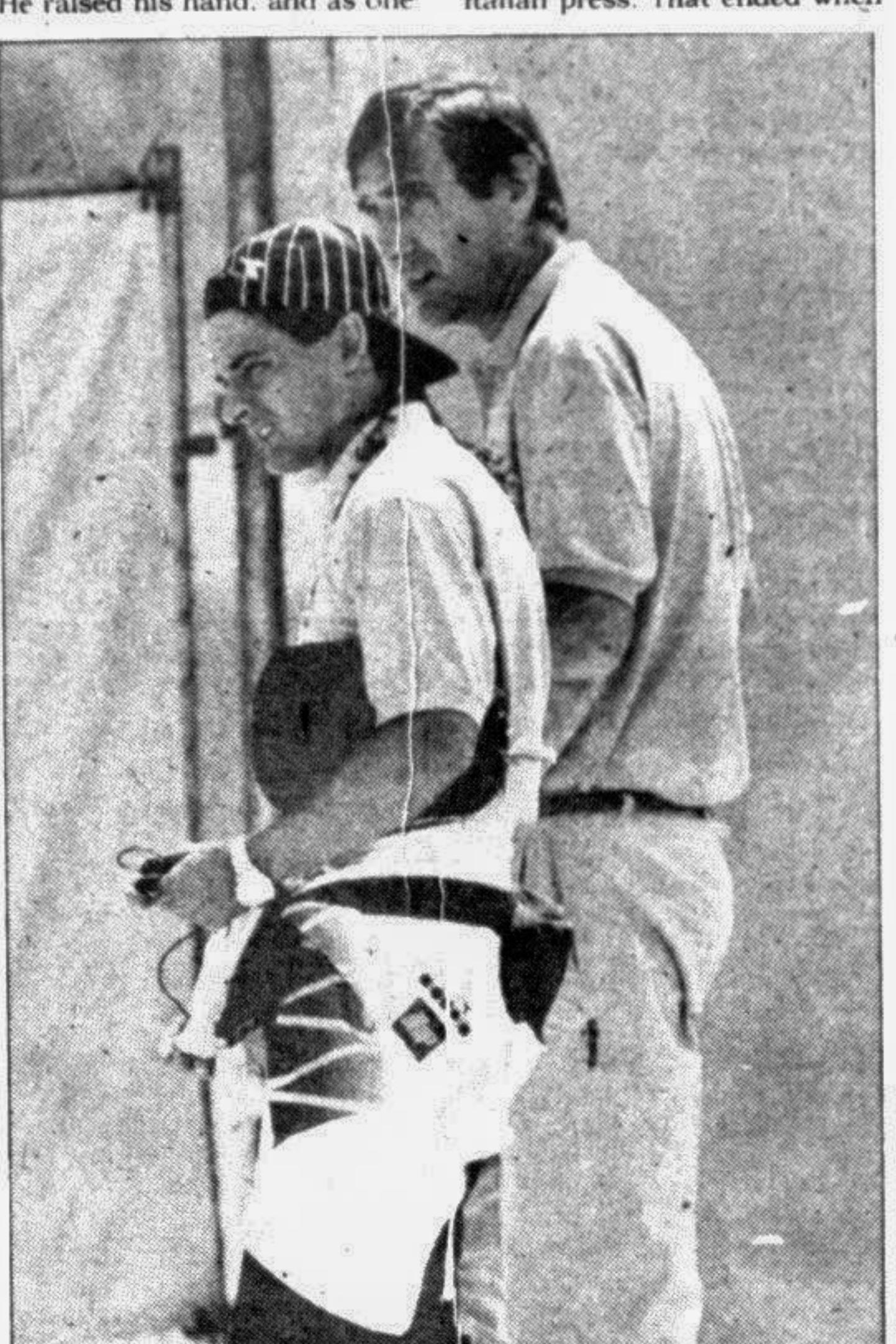
And so Americans have embraced him with blown kisses and waves, and he has responded with humility and emotion.

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

the fans rose and cheered louder.

He belonged to them, and they to him.

"This is my work, this is my life," Baggio said. "It is made of sweat and tears."

Perhaps it is the Buddhist influence picked up a few years ago that imbues Baggio, at 27, with a contemplative view of his world. It is a world that has often been chaotic and combative.

Fans in Florence rioted after Fiorentina sold him to Juventus for a record 26 million after the 1989-90 season. That was just before he joined the national team for the 1990 World Cup.

In 1990, I was very upset and nervous, and I joined the team late," he said. "This time I am tranquil.

"I don't like the life in the spotlight. But I still love soccer as much as I did when I first kicked a ball. I only want to play."

For all his creativity and control with the ball as he dribbles around defenders, Baggio has deficiencies on the field. At 1.73 meters (5-foot-8) and 72 kilograms (159 pounds), he is hardly imposing physically. He is weak on headers and tends to roam around so much he gets lost. But just as quickly he'll intrude on the action and strike with all he asked was a little understanding.

"Criticism was overly bitter, but I have always been strong inside," he said. "I never surrendered 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 sacrifice 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, Calif., 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.

Houllier said the intense pressure at home from fanatical soccer nations had helped Brazil and Italy in their toughest 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 maximum effort and take the single chance to give themselves victory."

Apart from Brazil and Italy, only three countries have reached the final in the last quarter 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 increased 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 experience 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.

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Dino, the unsung Baggio

PASADENA, Calif., 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 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 welcome relief after the trials 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.

There are no such complaints about his play here, even from Italy's fierce 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.

Baggio, who has now scored five goals in the past three games, was stung by the critics, but he also knew how hard it was to play in pain. He accepted the responsibility without considering it a burden, and all he asked was a little understanding.

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