

Baggio's luck runs out



PASADENA, July 18: Even Roberto Baggio could not conjure up one last miracle to rescue Italy.

With the Italians trailing 3-2 to Brazil in the cruel World Cup final penalty shoot-out, up stepped "The divine ponytail" for the kick which would have kept his country's hopes alive, reports Reuters.

But Baggio put his shot over the bar, the man who had rescued Italy so many times on their white-knuckle ride to the final had blown their last chance.

"I missed a penalty that may not have been decisive," Baggio said, realising that Brazil only had to net their last kick to take the trophy anyway.

"Normally I side-foot them but I had so little energy left that I just tried to blast it," he said.

There was a sad irony to Baggio missing the last penalty, for this World Cup has been "the Roberto Baggio show" as far as the Italians are concerned.

The team's fortunes have ebbed and flowed with those of their star man.

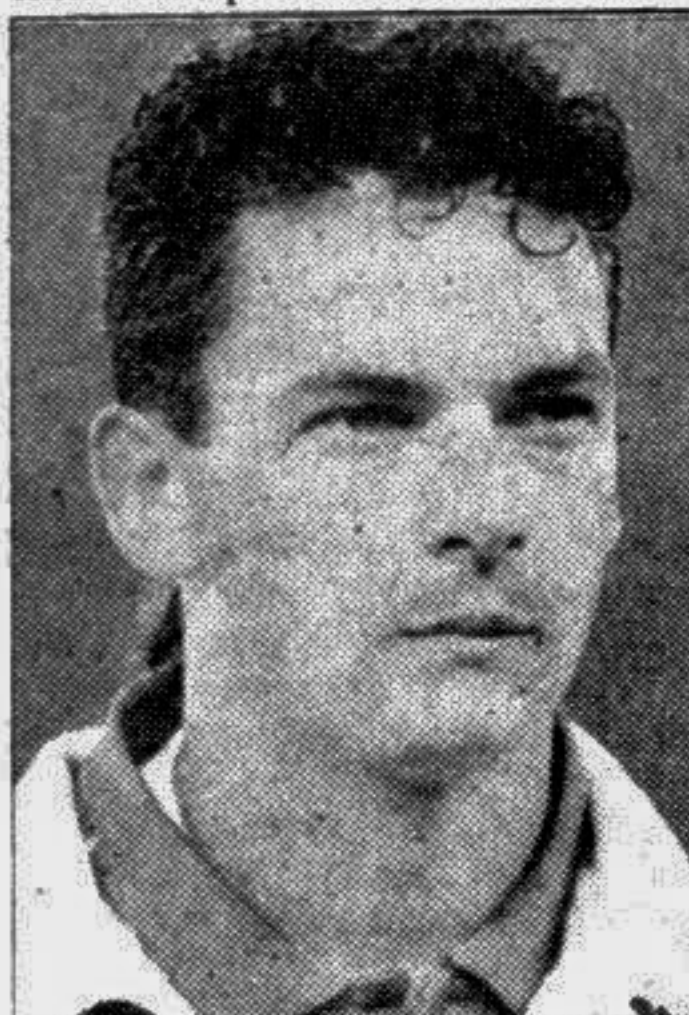
Hailed as the world's greatest player before the tournament, Baggio struggled for form and fitness during Italy's stuttering early performances.

He even suffered the indignity of being hauled off just 21 minutes into Italy's Group E game with Norway after goal-

keeper Gianluca Pagliuca had been sent off, coach Arrigo Sacchi deciding he was the most expendable player.

Had Italy's clash with Nigeria ended a couple of minutes early, Baggio would have been labelled the flop of the tournament and the Italians eliminated.

But Baggio netted an 89th minute equaliser in that sec-



ond round tie with the Nigerians and then scored the winner in extra time from the penalty spot.

"We were on our way home, I stopped the plane's engines," a relieved Baggio said after that match.

Italy's World Cup then took off, with the shy Buddhist Baggio at the controls.

The European footballer-of-the-year again looked below his best in the quarter-final with Spain but came up with a vital late winner, dancing round goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta and screwing and ball home from the tightest of angles.

Baggio finally showed all his ability with two superb goals in the semifinal against Bulgaria to take his tally to five in three games.

The first strike against the Bulgarians in which he dribbled past two defenders before curling a 20-metre shot into the bottom corner was arguably the goal of the tournament.

But Baggio strained a hamstring in that match and millions of Italians had been fretting over his fitness for the past four days.

Playing with his right leg strapped, Baggio showed touches of class in the final but did not seem able to play to his full potential.

"The doctors told me to test the injury this morning and I felt I could give it a go in the final. It was a very tactical game and I could not get involved all that much," he said.

It was a sad end of Baggio and Italy but veteran captain Franco Baresi showed the respect his teammates have for him.

"Roberto Baggio has played a great World Cup. He's the most important player in the Italian national team," said Baresi.

Technical hitch!

ROME, July 18: Technical problems darkened a huge screen Sunday in a piazza where 30,000 fans had come to watch the World Cup final, reports AP.

Many people yelled protests and some threw glass bottles at the blank screen in the historic centre's Piazza del Popolo.

Police with riot gear arrived and took some members of the crowd away in vans.

The police suggested that people go to the Olympic Stadium, a 20-minute bus ride away, where the game also to be broadcast on large screens.

Officials blamed a burned-out generator for the problem.

Baresi, from hero to culprit

LOS ANGELES, July 18: Italy's man-of-the-match Franco Baresi may be remembered as one of the culprits in their World Cup final defeat, but his heroics in Sunday's final were an inspiration, reports AP.

Central defender Baresi who had an operation for an injured right knee on June 24, was a shock last-minute call-up by coach Arrigo Sacchi for the showdown against Brazil at the Rose Bowl.

Paulo Maldini was set to skipper the side but it was Baresi who took over the leader's role.

The 34-year-old Baresi who only played the first two group matches against Ireland and Norway before damaging his knee, kept the central route into Italy's penalty area almost permanently closed.

Time after time he either made a crucial interception or a vital tackle to keep the finest strike partnership in the world of Bebeto and Romario out of harm's way.

But what is almost certain to be Baresi's final international game ended in heartbreak when he lifted Italy's first penalty over the bar. Minutes earlier he had collapsed with cramp in the goalmouth.

However, the AC Milan veteran was philosophical about losing the match on a one-off kick. Roberto Baggio also shot wildly over the bar and Daniele Massaro had his effort saved as Italy lost the penalty shoot-out 3-2.

Reflecting afterwards about his first penalty miss, Baresi commented: "Penalty kicks are a little bit like playing a lottery. You do your best and you do not know what may happen."

"I think that when you reach the final, it is always horrible to lose, whether it is on the field or in penalties. Unfortunately that is the nature of sport."

Baresi denied his call-up, in place of suspended Alessandro Costacurta, was a cunning ploy to wrongfoot Brazil.

"I did not know to the very end I would be playing," said Baresi, "and I gave everything I could."

China suffer shock defeats

SINGAPORE, July 18: China's top two women players suffered shock defeats when they were eliminated in the quarter-finals of the Singapore open badminton championships here Friday, reports AP.

Ye Zhaoying, their top player and seeded number one, and Han Jingna, their second ranked player and seeded number two, fell out in shock defeats which saw China for the first time fail to find a place in the women's finals of the championships since 1987.

Both of them represented China in the recent Jakarta Uber Cup which saw Indonesia halt their hopes of winning the title for their fourth straight victory.

The defeat of their top players here was even more shocking as they went out in straight sets to unfancied players.

Ye lost to Indonesia's Yuliani Sentosa 11-8, 11-8 while Han bowed out to South Korea's Ra Kyung Min 12-11, 11-4.

China however had a consolation win when their men's doubles pair of Chen Kang and Chen Hongyong defeated the world's top pair of Rudy Gunawan and Bambang Suprianto of Indonesia, the top seeds here.

The Chinese pair won 8-15, 15-9, 15-10.

The Indonesians as expected to dominate the men's singles event with three of the four semi final berths. The lone outsider was Denmark's Thomas Stuer Lauridsen who defeated China's Dong Jiong 15-10, 15-7.

China's other hope in the men's singles Sun Jun was eliminated by number two seed Hermawan Susanto 15-10, 15-4.

Top seed Ardy Wiranata defeated fellow Indonesian Lioe Tong Ping 9-15, 15-1, 15-2 to move a step closer to winning the title.

Another surprise in the women's section was Indonesia's new find Mia Audina who had an easy win over fancied Zarinah Abdullah of Singapore at 11-2, 11-5.



WILD CELEBRATION ... Thousands of Brazilian fans poured onto the Colorado Boulevard, waving flags and dancing, to celebrate Brazil's triumph in the World Cup USA '94. After a match that was decided in tie-breaker, no doubt they needed this. — AFP photo

It's party time at Pasadena

PASADENA, Calif., July 18: Beer flowed, couples hugged, drums sounded and conga lines marched down Colorado Boulevard as Brazil's World Cup victory over Italy on Sunday turned Old Town Pasadena into "Rio" at carnival time, reports AP.

The green, yellow and blue ruled the streets of the city's historic district of bars, restaurants and upscale shops. "Brazil!" screamed the headline of a special Sunday afternoon edition of the Pasadena Star-News.

"Ole! Ole! Ole! Ole!" the crowd in the street chanted to the beat of tambourines and drums. "Brasil! Brasil!"

The venerable Rose Bowl, which has played host to four Super Bowls and the Olympics, was transformed into an international party palace, with a guest list of 90,000-plus whooping it up in the 85-degree (29-degree Celsius) heat.

"Man, I've never seen anything like it," Marvin Adamson said just before kickoff.

The fun did get to a few. Seventy people were treated at the first aid station because of the heat. Police also made 32 arrests, for everything from public drunkenness to forgery.

But the excitement was mostly kept within legal bounds as fans rejoiced over Brazil's record fourth World Cup championship.

Not even at Wise Guys, a bar owned by Italians, could Brazil's joy be tempered. The crowds watching a large-screen TV and two smaller sets was overwhelmingly Brazilian, with only small pockets of Italian faithful.

"I love it. It was great. I bit my nails I was so nervous," Monica Valle of Rio de Janeiro said after her country defeated Italy one penalty kick.

When Roberto Baggio's penalty kick for Italy sailed over the crossbar, giving Brazil the victory, the Brazilians danced on tables and chairs and kissed anyone in sight.

Nearby, at the 35er bar, about 400 people squeezed into the two-story tavern, and the joint erupted, after 120 minutes of scoreless soccer culminated with Brazil's 3-2 victory in penalty kicks.

Beer flew farther than

Baggio's errant kick and the crowd flooded onto Colorado Boulevard, the district's main thorough fare. They waved Brazilian flags and posters of the team. Two men just rolled around on the pavement.

"Beautiful," said Tom Almeida of Bahia, Brazil.

But even in the midst of one of the country's finest hour, some of the country's notoriously hard-to-please fans couldn't help but grumble just a little.

"We won because we were lucky," said Marcello Coelho of Belo, Brazil. "Penalty kicks are not fair."

Maybe so, but the long game was nothing but glorious for Old Pasadena merchants. Bars were so crammed that managers had to physically hold doors closed to fend off customers.

"I'm sorry, you can't come in," shouted Dosworth Bar and Grill Nick Rasic to more than 30 locked-out Brazilian fans.

It didn't matter who ran the place or what it served. Tommy Tang's, a Thai restaurant, was just as busy as the La Bamba Caribbean Restaurant, the closest thing Old Pasadena has to a Brazilian hangout.

Italyans watched their team lose the heart-stopping contest. One fan was killed when he fell from the back of a flat-bed truck and was crushed under its wheel.

Brazil beat Italy 3-2 in a shoot-out of penalty kicks after an overtime game. The victory ended 24 years of World Cup frustration in a country where soccer is practically a state religion.

"The Brazilian people who suffered so many social injustices deserve this victory as a tribute to their happiness," Brazilian soccer icon Pele said.

Brazilians of all age, draped in the yellow, green and blue

colours of their flag, staged a victory party that will last at least until Tuesday, when the Brazilian team is expected to arrive home for ticker tape parades.

The victory was particularly satisfying to a country reeling under 45 per cent monthly inflation, corruption, scandals and growing urban violence.

In New York, Brazil fans danced the samba in midtown Manhattan and turned a stretch of Brazilian restaurants and businesses into a makeshift Little Brazil. Cars trailing green and yellow flags raced up Sixth Avenue, horns blaring.

Musician Kenny G renders the American national anthem during the closing ceremony at the Pasadena Rose Bowl before the start of the 15th World Cup final between Brazil and Italy on July 17.

— AFP photo

Words of solace for vanquished

ROME, July 18: The Italian media, so often the scourge of its footballing heroes, on Monday came out in full support for the national team following its World Cup defeat on penalties against Brazil, reports AP.

"Long live Italy!" proclaimed the Corriere Dello Sport, highlighting "Baresi and Baggio's fatal penalties" in the 3-2 spot-kick shootout following a 0-0 stalemate at the Pasadena Rose Bowl.

The Gazzetta Dello Sport de Milan echoed the tone: "Brazil win world poker game but hurrah for the Azurri. Damn those penalties, but Italy should be thanked."

"Italy lost in a final game of roulette," according to the Corriere Della Sera headline, asking "How can history be decided from 11 metres?"

Fed Cup resumes tomorrow

Sports Reporter

The Beximco 12th Federation Cup football tournament resumes tomorrow after an unscheduled 17-day recess for the World Cup '94.

According to the revised schedule, defending champions Brothers Union will take on Abahani Krira Chakra in the first semifinal tomorrow while Mohammedans will meet Muktiyoddha Sarisgad in the second the day after.

Both the matches kick off at 5:30 pm at the Dhaka Stadium.

Bangladesh Television will telecast the semifinals as well as final on July 23 live.

Morceli set UK track afire

LONDON, July 18: World champion Noureddine Morceli ran the fastest 1,500 metres ever recorded in Britain on Friday then said he would not be competing in next week's Bissett Games dream mile, reports Reuters.

Algerian Morceli, who holds the world records for the 1,500 and mile, clocked three minutes 30.72 seconds on a hot, steamy night at the London Grand Prix.

He then reaffirmed his ambition to break world records at 5,000, 3,000 and 2,000 metres this season as well as attempt either his own 1,500 or mile marks.

But he said he would not run in the dream mile at Oslo's Bissett Games next Friday because he had not been offered enough money.

"They (the Oslo promoters) want to have world records but they don't want to pay the price," Morceli said. "If I go to a small meeting I get the same price without the pressure."

Christie, who went home immediately after the race, has lost only once outdoors this year.

Whitney Houston, Kenny G delight Rose Bowl crowd

PASADENA, July 18: Singer-attract Whitney Houston closed the 1994 World Cup on Sunday in an American-style show including hundreds of child dancers, an air force fly-past and fireworks in the midday Californian sun, reports Reuters.

Houston, one of the world's biggest pop stars, sang a medley of her hits to an estimated television audience of two billion in more than 180 countries, in what organisers said would be the most widely-seen television event in history.

Musician Kenny G began the show an hour before the kickoff with a haunting trumpet rendition of "The star spangled banner" in front of hundreds of dancers clad all in white as three jets from the United States Air Force passed barely 200 metres (660 feet) above the Rose Bowl in a dramatic flypast.

After dancers had brought in the flags of the 24 nations who played in the tournament, Houston came on stage at the halfway line.

Houston, who won eight American music and three Grammy awards in 1994, sang "I will always love you" from her film The Bodyguard and, with a cast of children dressed in soccer kits beside her, "The greatest love."

Houston starred alongside Kevin Costner in The Bodyguard, which grossed USD 413 million worldwide and turned one of the world's most popular female vocalists into a film star as well.

The US soccer team did not get beyond the second round, but they still made it to the World Cup final, escorting the gold trophy on to an increasingly crowded stage after being accompanied across the field by dozens of dancers in football shirts.

As 90,000 spectators watched engrossed, the show exploded into a dramatic finale of fireworks as colourful as the Brazilian and Italian fans who were hoping to see something similar on the pitch once the final began.

Italians draped in gloom



ROME, July 18: A deep gloom descended over Italy on Monday after the country's dream of a fourth World Cup soccer title in the final against Brazil evaporated in the first penalty shoot-out in the history of the competition, report agencies.

Dejected who had flocked to outdoor television screens in stadiums and piazzas across Italy wrapped up their flags and discarded their hooters after Roberto Baggio fired Italy's fifth penalty shot over the bar.

Rome police said they had made two arrests when fans in the central Piazza del Popolo began throwing fireworks and coins at police after a giant television screen broke down briefly at the start of the match.

Minor trouble was also reported in Milan, where police said one officer and one Brazilian fan were slightly hurt in scuffles that erupted as Baggio, the hero of Italy's World Cup campaign, missed the do-or-die shot.

Jeers also went up from a crowd of around 30,000 who watched the match on televi-

sion at Rome's Olympic Stadium when the face of Italian team manager Arrigo Sacchi appeared on the screen.

"It's so sad, what a way to lose," said Claudio Miscella, who watched the match, goal-less after extra time, with thousands of other fans on a wide-screen television in central Rome's Pyramid district.

"I can't believe Baggio missed from the penalty spot," said student Giorgio Brancoli.

Paolo Rossi, the striker who led Italy to their last World Cup title the last time the country appeared in a final in 1982, said fans should be happy with second place after Italy's disastrous start to the competition.

"To have reached the final after such a terrible start to the tournament is an accomplishment in itself," he said.

Enzo Bearzot, coach of the 1982 squad, said in a television interview he was shocked that captain Franco Baresi has been allowed to kick from the penalty spot.

Baresi, a veteran defender who returned to play in the final after keyhole surgery on his knee 23 days ago, missed Italy's first penalty shot.

"It was a miracle that Baresi had played at all. He was so tired, I don't know why he was sent to kick from the spot," said Bearzot.

"I feel pretty good that we got to the final," said Annas Prati, a housewife in Fregene, a seaside community near the capital. "But what a terrible way to lose. It's no way to lose a championship, on penalty kicks. I wish we could replay the game."

A few brave people honked their horns in Fregene. People began trickling out into the streets 20 minutes after the game to commiserate.

On the Corso near the Trevi Fountain, a man was seen spitting on a portrait of Roberto Baggio chalked on the sidewalk.

That view wasn't unanimous.

"I don't feel anything," said Enrico Tarulli, 28, a waiter at a nearby restaurant. "But I still think Baggio is the best player in the world."

Brazilians partied in piazzas in Milan and Rome, where about 200 people sang, waved green and yellow Brazilian flags and danced to conga drums in front of the Brazilian Embassy in the capital's Piazza Navona.

Americans confound critics



DALLAS, July 18: The public turned out in droves, the hooligans stayed at home and the United States confounded the critics by staging a World Cup brimming over with excitement, reports Reuters.

The month-long soccer extravaganza proved, if nothing else, that in America public always loves a major event for the sheer spectacle regardless of whether or not he understands what is going on.

A pre-tournament poll suggested a mere 25 per cent of Americans knew the World Cup was about soccer and only one in five knew the United States were hosts.

Yet more than 3.5 million people attended the 52 matches, making it the best-attended cup yet.

Despite the sensational doping scandal surrounding Argentina's Diego Maradona, the shocking murder of a player in Colombia and the lack of a World Cup atmosphere in much of America, the tournament was a triumph.

The only real left down was that, after a month of entertaining soccer, the title was decided on a penalty shoot-out following a frustrating match. Brazil won 3-2 after Italy's Roberto Baggio missed his spot kick.

Pele, one of soccer's rare household names in the United States, had already hailed it all as a runaway success even much of the country was more concerned about the murder hearing of American football legend OJ Simpson.

Many critics had said hosting the sport's showcase in the United States, a country with no great soccer tradition, could only mean a colourless event devoid of fans and atmosphere.

For the most part, they were proved wrong.

The Brazilian media, used to interviewing players on the pitch if they have to, provided plenty of colourful language in exchanging punches and kicks with security officers determined to keep them away from the stars.

The Bulgarians won few fans early on by barring the media

from training but, recast in the role of underdogs, became popular favourites after beating champions Germany.

Cameron feuded over money, Saudi Arabia impressed on their debut, a match was played indoors for the first time and German midfielder Stefan Effenberg was kicked out of the team for making an obscene gesture to taunting fans.

Most important of all to local fans, the United States won through to the second round against all odds.

Officials said even the stifling heat in many of the nine venues, with temperatures sometimes up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (34 Celsius) during matches, failed to be as big a problem as many coaches and players feared.

If some fans thought a header was the foam on a cold mug of beer or FIFA a late-night country and western radio station from Oklahoma, they still turned out in force.

Tickets for clashes such as Ireland against Italy at Giants Stadium near New York were almost priceless.

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— AFP photo

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Pele, the soccer legend who led Brazil to their previous World Cup triumph, runs with American singer Whitney Houston round the pitch during the closing ceremony of the World Cup USA '94 just before the start of the Brazil-Italy final at Pasadena Rose Bowl on July 17.