

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

Laurels in the shadows of maple

THAT is no country for the bright things of life. Natural calamities of monstrous proportions, poverty of epic duration have been defining Bangladesh to the western press and people over many many years. In fact from time out of mind inhabitants of this part of the world have been so deeply involved in the daily, immutable battle for keeping the body and soul together that a little diversion beyond the perimeter of life's basic necessities always looked like an unnecessary liaison with luxury. So what admirable personalities like Pierre Coubertin thought sports to be: some kind of deliverer of our soul from the grey dingle of existence always turned its face from us in a well deserved reproachful gesture.

Life is a continuum they say and nothing remains unchanged no matter how heavy and impassable it might seem in the hours of distress and suffering.

We have stepped into the 24th year of our independence as a nation, as an entity on the world map and the thing that once seemed a dangerous fancy: an invitation to trouble has come a long way: yes we are taking interest in sports more than ever before and some of those who are in it have already done enough to conjure the vision of a future not too bleak.

What is more exhilarating Bangladeshis are no longer keeping their sporting pretensions confined to a particular space. Out of this delta of fifty six thousand square miles, Bangladeshis are making their presence felt abroad though in no explosive manner.

Jafar Amin is one of this small, elite group of Bangladeshi athletes who has distinguished himself not only with his skills in the field of sports and games but also with the leadership qualities at the organisational level.

The twenty two year old student of Scarborough College

of Toronto University who is a graduate in Politics and is all set to take the Canadian Civil Service examination, is the first Bangladeshi to be elected president of the Scarborough College Athletic Association (SCAA), a student body promoting athletic social and recreational activities at the college.

Besides being at the zenith of a distinguished, active and prestigious student body Jafar who had already been a widely travelled, citizen of the world — courtesy the professional obligation of his banker father — before actually flying for Canada in 1990, is a very tal-

ented sportsman. Team or individual, Jafar has a set standard for himself in any game he has loved taken up over the last four years. His high degree of ability was evident in many games notably though in soccer, indoor soccer, tennis and 'A' volleyball.

But no achievement is an achievement until it is recognised. Jafar's consistent excellence in games, got its greatest recognition until date when his indoor soccer peers chose him as the MVP (Most Valued Player) last year.

Although indoor soccer brought him the biggest laurels Jafar is a very keen, competent

tennis player and it is perhaps the game with which this sober, young man is most likely to retain his friendship. Having retired hurt in the final of the last club championship, Jafar who represented his college in the doubles championship on more than one occasion has plans to become a quality tennis coach. The job is not easy and the Bangladeshi turned Canadian has no illusions about it: "Man, it is as arduous to graduate into a top coach as it is to stake your claims as a top player."

Veering away from his personal ambition Jafar who was recently making the most of vacation to see his parents and relatives here, could spare a bit of celebration for the future of tennis in this country unlike those who think tennis as a game essentially based on power and hence an exclusive sport for the more muscular and stronger westerners, Jafar believes Bangladesh can produce quality tennis players.

Referring to Moroccan Karim Alami as a riposte to the believers in western specialisation and Pakistan as a country in the sub continent where tennis is really picking up, Jafar observes: "the main deterrent to the steady development of this game in this country is the want of good courts. I have seen the ones at the Ramna Tennis Complex. The surfaces there need to be improved — a lot which means a lot of money."

Although entertaining no plans of coming back to his motherland in near future Jafar does think of contributing something to the development of tennis in this country. Our intentions do not merit mention unless and until they are cemented in reality and years of exposure abroad has left Jafar a veteran in that lesson. To do something one needs money and position and Jafar Amin is looking forward to the day when he will have gotten both and poor Bangladesh can only be richer for that.



Jafar Amin is laden with trophies but seems quite happy as the MVP (Most Valued Player) in indoor soccer for men poses along with his female counterpart during the annual prize-giving ceremony of Scarborough College. — Star photo

World Cup trio for FIFA award

LISBON, Jan 19: Strikers Roberto Baggio of Italy, Brazilian Romario and Bulgarian Hristo Stoichkov are the finalists for the 1994 FIFA world player-of-the-year award, a FIFA spokeswoman announced on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The trio lead a list of players proposed in a vote by more than 100 national coaches from all over the world.

The name of the winner will be disclosed at a gala in Lisbon on January 30.

Previous winners were German Lothar Matthaus (1991), Dutchman Marco van Basten (1992), and Baggio (1993).

Yekini injured

MADRID, Jan 19: Nigerian striker Rashidi Yekini will be out for at least eight months after undergoing surgery here for ruptured knee ligaments, reports AFP.

The former African footballer-of-the-year suffered torn cruciate ligaments during Nigeria's friendly against England at Wembley last November.

Jose Antonio de La Fuente, the Sporting Gijon club surgeon, said Tuesday's operation was a complete success, but added that eight months rest were a minimum before he could start training again.

Yekini's transfer from Olympiakos of Greece was cancelled when the Spanish club discovered the injury at a routine medical.

Like father, like son

RIYADH, Jan 19: Sebastian Rambert, one of a new generation of Argentine footballers, has a special reason for helping his country qualify for the 1998 World Cup finals in France, reports Reuter.

The independent forward, 21 at the end of the month, is a descendant of French immigrants and his father enjoyed a fruitful spell as a footballer in the homeland.

Angel Rambert spent 11 seasons with Lyon and after gaining dual nationality played for France, with only injury stopping him from appearing in the 1966 World Cup finals in England.

Now his son, already capped six times for Argentina and an impressive performer at last week's Intercontinental Cup in Saudi Arabia, is aiming to complete the dream his father missed.

"It's going to be a very emotional time. Playing in the happen," he told Reuters.

"There will be a lot of divided loyalties if we reach the World Cup in France because we still have a lot of relatives in France."

Rambert, who holds dual Argentine and French nationality, is one of a host of players barely out of their teens who have been called to international duty by Argentina's new coach Daniel Passarella.

The team reached the final of the Intercontinental Cup last Friday, losing 2-0 to Denmark, and Rambert scored one of their five goals in an earlier win over Japan.

He made an immediate impact on his debut against Chile last November, scoring after just seven minutes in a 3-0 win in Santiago.

"That was a very emotional experience for me. I had always aspired to play in the national team. That goal was the start of a new era and people will always remember that it was me who started the era off," he said.

Still a rough girls' game

By Onapito-Ekomoloi

US soccer officials scored an unexpected success when World Cup attendances broke all previous records. Now, however, officials have scored an own goal by failing to set up the professional league they promised in return for the right to host the Cup. Gemini News Service reports on a soccer setback.



Despite the enthusiasm generated by last year's World Cup, professional soccer in the USA has failed to take off.

The proposed professional league that was to start in March has been delayed for a year — though the United States won the bid to host the

cer rarely makes the sports pages of newspapers like The Washington Post, which did extensive World Cup coverage — educating readers on minute details such as the size of the goalposts.

"People loved the World Cup because Americans love big events," says Post sportswriter Steve Goff. "There isn't much going on in this

support the idea of delaying its start until 1996 in order to devote more time to securing sponsorship."

Admits League spokesman Linke: "There wasn't enough money." He says about \$50 million has been brought in so far — a sum poor countries cannot even dream of obtaining.

Mastercard, a credit card company that was a major World Cup sponsor, is typical of many: "Sponsoring the World Cup and sponsoring soccer are two things," commented spokesperson Marianne Sulgenz. "While we were interested in sponsoring the World Cup we are interested in sponsoring soccer, okay?"

Officials say, however, that the are getting their financial act together.

The League has four-year sponsorship agreements with sports equipment giants Nike, Reebok, Apex Org, Adidas and Mitre.

ABC, one of the four major television networks, and sports channel ESPN have signed three-year broadcasting contracts with the League.

Rothenberg, a lawyer who is also president of the US Soccer Federation and was chief executive of the World Cup organising committee and who has himself invested in the professional league, says six millionaire investors have joined the list of sponsors.

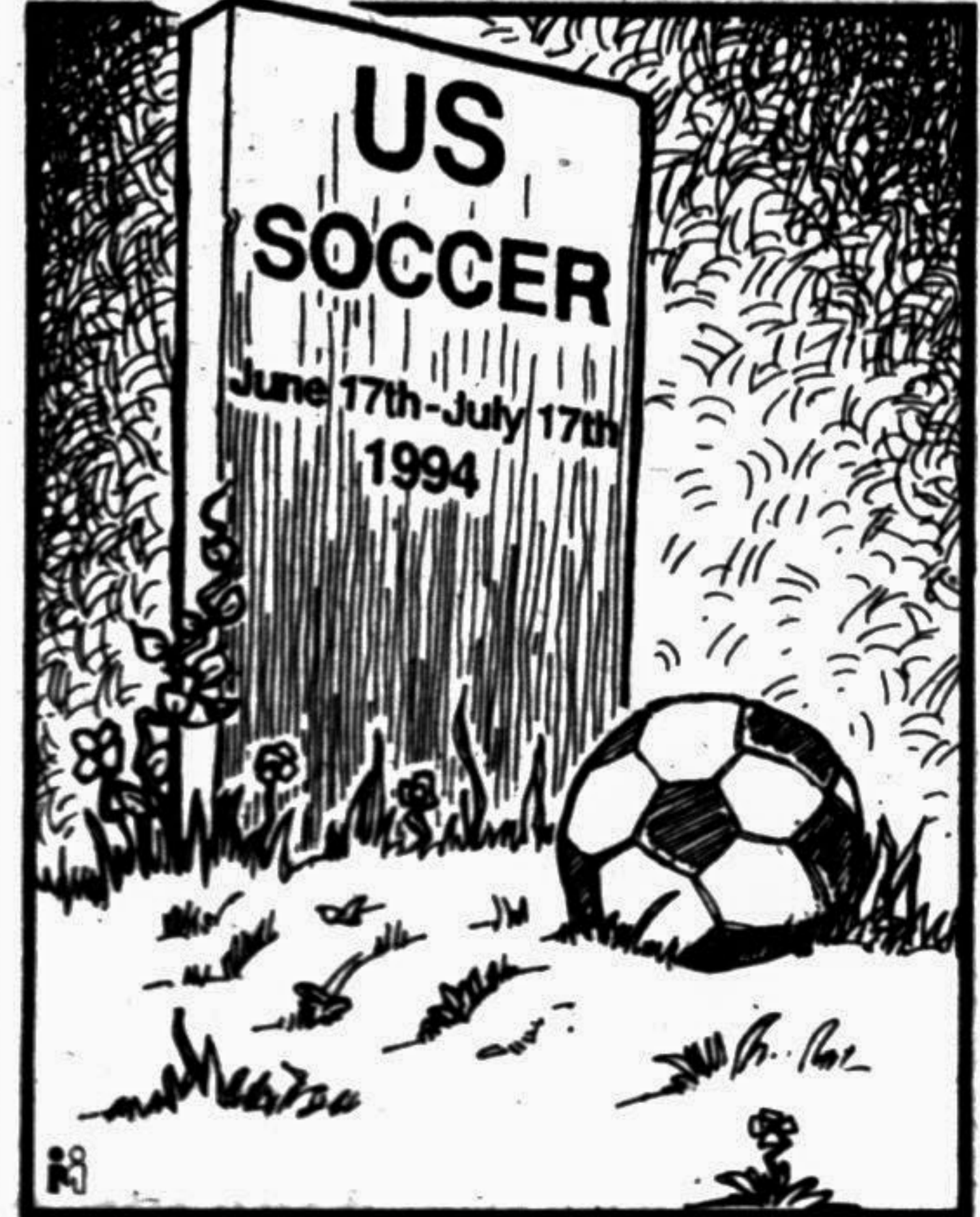
They include billionaire John W Kluge, chairman and president of Metromedia Company, one of the largest private companies in the US.

Others are Metromedia vice president Stuart Subotnick, Texas sports entrepreneur Lamar Hunt and his son Clark Hunt, API Soccer (a US division of a British-based sports and television company), and Los Angeles business group LA Soccer Partners.

League officials are so confident of success when the 10-12 teams to kick off in March 1996 that they have already started selling tickets, though serious support is unlikely until matches get underway.

Meanwhile, as men's soccer totters, women's soccer is solid. Televised college matches feature women's teams more often than men's, and the US women's team is the reigning world champion, after winning the inaugural women's world championship in China three years ago. At least Americans can be proud of their rough girls. — Gemini

about the author: Onapito-Ekomoloi is a Ugandan journalist studying in the US.



1994 World Cup for the first time ever after its soccer federation pledged to start a professional league by April 1995.

Officials now say they need more time to hire players, coaches, and promote exhibition matches. But the real problem is insufficient sponsorship, itself a reflection of lack of popular interest in a sport that Americans still think of as "a game for rough

girls."

Dean Linke, spokesman for Major League Soccer, the Los Angeles-based organisation that oversees the US professional league, plays down the delay: "The support generated by the World Cup will be there. The hunger will still be there."

World Cup attendance of 3.5 million easily shattered the earlier record of 2.5 million spectators who watched the 1990 world contest in Italy.

But many are less sanguine. Interest generated by the World Cup has died, and soc-

country now. Until a professional league starts you are not going to see much."

Goff says that "the people who are undermining soccer in this country are those running (it). They knew six years ago that they were supposed to start a professional league."

But Major League Soccer (MLS) chairman, Alan Rothenberg defends the organisers' record: "From the time we began to develop plans for division one outdoor professional soccer, we have insisted that it is more important to do it right than to do it on any particular timetable."

The Zurich-based Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA), world soccer's governing body, supports the delay.

"FIFA is less concerned with when MLS can get started than with the quality of the product itself," FIFA general-secretary JS Blatter said in a letter to Rothenberg. "We fully

Pele, Havelange vow to stage Olympics in Brazil

BRASILIA, Brazil, Jan 19: Soccer legend Pele and FIFA president Joao Havelange put aside a personal dispute Wednesday and pledged to join forces to bring the Olympic Games to Rio de Janeiro by 2008, reports AP.

Pele — now Special Secretary of Sports Edson Arantes do Nascimento — and Havelange met at the Planalto Palace to brief President Fernando Henrique Cardoso on their plans to prepare the seaside city for the Olympics.

They later told reporters Rio lacked "the facilities to make a serious bid for the 2004 Olympics, but that it wasn't too late for the city to get in shape for the summer games in 2008."

The king of Brazilian soccer said eight cities around the world were aggressively campaigning to host the 2004 games and that many of them were "fit and ready."

"Sadly, we are a little behind," said Pele. "People here must understand that hosting the games is a difficult thing, and that you have to have the right facilities. Right now, we're simply not prepared."

Havelange said he would go to Europe on Wednesday to check with the Olympic Committee on the status of the other candidates — including San Juan, Seville and several American cities.

"If I see there is no immediate receptiveness and if we are far behind, we won't stop our preparations, but focus more on 2008," he said.

Both men embraced warmly before photographers, a sign that they had reconciled a dispute that grew out of charges Pele made last year against corruption in the highest levels of the Brazilian Soccer Confederation — run by Havelange's son in law, Ricardo Texeira.

Pele said an unidentified confederation official had asked him for \$1 million for the rights for his television production company to broadcast games for the 1994 Brazilian national soccer championship. Pele said he refused and a competitor got the contract.

Texeira sued Pele for slander and the case is pending. In retaliation, Havelange barred Pele from the World Cup draw in Las Vegas in 1993 and relations between them have been cool since then.

When a reporter asked if the two men had overcome their differences, Pele responded that "there were never any discrepancies, on the contrary, we have always been united."

Arguello returns to ring

LAS VEGAS, Jan 19 (AP): Add Alexis Arguello to the list of 40 something boxers in search of big paydays and past glory.

Arguello, who first fought for a title 21 years ago begins his comeback for another at the age of 43 Saturday night when he returns to the ring for a scheduled 10 round fight.

The three-time champion hopes to follow in the foot steps of fighters like George Foreman and Larry Holmes, who have taken advantage of thin talent pools to return to the top of the heavyweight ranks.

Unlike the lumbering Foreman and Holmes, however, Arguello makes his return at 140 pounds the same weight he was 12 years ago when he lost his last title fight by knockout to Aaron Pryor.

"I'm a guy who never gained weight," Arguello said Wednesday. "That's never been one of my problems."

Arguello, who broke a hand

last August in his only fight since retiring in 1986, meets Scott Walker of Phoenix in a scheduled 10-round bout at a small neighbourhood casino far from the glittering Las Vegas Strip.

"It's the first of what Arguello says could be a string of fights leading to a possible title bid late this year."

"Me and Julio Cesar Chavez," Arguello said of the WBC 140-pound champion. "I can see the smoke coming out of the ring."

The Nicaraguan great, who spent most of the 1980s in exile in Miami after the Sandinistas took over his native country, hopes he can recapture some of the boxing skills that helped him to 24 successful title defenses.

"Ironically, though, Arguello may be better known in this country for two losing efforts against Pryor, including a memorable November 1982 fight in Miami that saw Pryor stop him in the 14th round.

"I'd like to get a little bit of notoriety back. I won't lie."

Arguello said. "I'm proud of what I've done in the ring and I'd like to show it again."

Arguello will make \$15,000 for the bout, money he admits he can use after three divorces and the confiscation of his Nicaraguan property by the Sandinistas took much of his earnings.

Arguello's old house in Nicaragua was recently returned to him by the current government after being used during the Sandinista regime as the Russian embassy.

"It is economics, but this is the way I can make my living," he said. "The world I come from, everything is economics. If I want to help my country, the first thing I have to do is make money."

Arguello, 80-7 with 63 knockouts, said he has found his comeback easier than he thought it would be, and just as comforting.

"I feel better in the middle of the ring, than anywhere in the world," he said. "I'm king of the world when I'm in the ring."

Edberg eager for one more

MELBOURNE, Jan 19: Stefan Edberg wants another Grand Slam title. Badly.

He may be in the autumn of his career after winning Wimbledon, the US Open and the Australian Open twice each, but he said Thursday his desire for another major title still burns, reports AP.

"Winning another Grand Slam is obviously the goal I have," Edberg said after advancing to the third round of the Australian Open with a 6-3, 7-6(7-3), 6-4 win over Romanian qualifier Adrian Panu.

"Competing at the top of the game is what I really want to do, and be out there winning a tournament once in a while. I believe I still can do it (win another Grand Slam). If I'm playing well and I get a little luck with the draw."

"That's very important to believe that, because if you don't believe it, you can't do it. I'm still hanging in there and my chance may come. It may come here, or the next one or the one after that."

Edberg, who celebrated his 29th birthday Thursday and is unbeaten in matches on the day, won his two Australian crowns in 1985 and 1987. His last Grand Slam title was the 1992 US Open.

He was presented with a chocolate and cream birthday cake by tournament organizers

after his match, and after blowing out the candles he quickly wolfed down a piece.

"It's still great to be out on the court when you are playing well, doing the things you want to do, and you succeed and lift the trophy that keeps me going," said Edberg, who is seeded No. 6.

The quiet Swede said he had been looking forward to this year's Australian Open.

"I'm quite motivated and I'm in pretty good shape and hitting the ball well," Edberg said.

He said Sweden's win in the Davis Cup last year — beating Russia in the final after coming from 0-2 down to oust the United States in the semi-finals — had been a big boost to his career.

"I almost forgot how great it is to win together with a team," said Edberg. "The last time I did it was back in 1988, so it really put what I consider not a good year behind me."

He failed to get past the third round of any other Grand Slam last year after making the Australian Open semifinals.

Mansell signs for McLaren

LONDON, Jan 19: Nigel Mansell has reached a 7-million-pound (\$10.5 million) deal to drive for McLaren in this year's Formula One championship, a British newspaper reported Thursday, reports AP.

He rates Voinea, 20, ranked just 176 in the world as a promising player.

"I had to work very hard because he's a young and upcoming guy," said Edberg.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY. Swede Stefan Edberg has a piece of the cake which was presented to him by the Australian Open organising committee following his match against Adrian Voinea of Romania. He turned 29 yesterday. — AFP photo

Soccer organisers try to avoid an own-goal

By Charles Akin Ogunrinde in Lagos

FOR Nigeria, next year's Under-21 world soccer championship is more than a chance to win a sporting trophy: the military government is hoping to put on a show that will help restore its battered international image.

Lagos is infamous for its corruption, its incredible traffic snarl ups, its filthy streets, its erratic water and electricity

The organisers — FIFA and Coca-Cola — are very keen that we have watertight security," he says.

Crowd control measures include restricting movement in a radius of about one kilometre from the stadiums in Lagos, Enugu, Ibadan and Kaduna. The venues were chosen to give a balanced exposure to Nigeria's three main ethnic groups — Ibadan for the

work of the media and publicity sub-committee is well advanced, according to its leader, Khalifa Baba Ahmed:

"We have packaged radio and television jingles. We have designed billboard messages. We have souvenirs and we are targeting all entry points to Nigeria as our main publicity centres."

Ahmed says that everyone making an operator-assisted phone call to Nigeria will be greeted with the message: "This is Nigeria, the host of Nigeria 95."

Radio and television stations are being encouraged to begin daily transmissions with the same message.

A Radio Nigeria jingle declares that "the most exciting event in Nigeria's soccer history is coming through: the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Youth Championship — the Under-21 World Cup. From the 11th to the 26th of March 1995 the best of the world will bring brilliant soccer to Nigerian soil. And every match will be transmitted live on radio. It's going to be super, explosive! Don't miss Nigeria 95!"

Bola Jegede, head of the socials and ceremonies sub-committee, says 8,000 people are being trained for a callisthenics display at the opening ceremony: "Imagine how great that will be."

FIFA itself looks after anti-doping tests, says Ajayi, "but we will assist. We have a very competent forensic pathologist who we have put in charge of this."

— GEMINI NEWS

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