

Spain's inseparable old horse

MADRID, May 8 (Reuters): Natural survivor Andoni Zubizarreta has learnt to live with the ups and downs of a footballing career so successfully he has become the most capped player in Spanish soccer history.

While Real Madrid stars such as Michel, Gonzalez, Manolo Sanchis, Emilio Butrageno and Rafael Gordillo have come and gone from the international scene, the man known simply as "Zubi" has stayed on between the posts and has so far won 106 caps.

But Zubi and Julio Salinas, the only other survivor from the 1986 World Cup, have something else in common: they generate at least as much criticism as praise.

"Strong, consistent and reliable" says the Spanish federation's official hand-out on squad members.

"Slow and awkward, prone to make stupid mistakes" add a not-so-silent majority of Spanish fans who would like to see Zubizarreta's days between the posts at international level come to an abrupt end.

Many people feel that Zubi and Salinas are only picked because they, like coach Clemente, are from the Basque country.

Zubi's days in the Spanish team seemed to be numbered when in a moment of absent-mindedness during a vital World Cup qualifying match in November 1993 he passed the ball to Michael Laudrup and



was then sent off for bringing down the forward. Spain held on against Denmark.



ANDONI ZUBIZARRETA

mark with 10 men thanks to a series of remarkable saves by substitute keeper Santiago Canizares.

But Javier Clemente has continued to favour Zubizarreta, and Canizares' challenge for Spain's number one shirt has weakened after his relegation to the bench since signing for Real Madrid.

Zubi's experience — he played two European Cup finals with Barcelona before moving to Valencia — is unquestioned. Nor is his commanding presence or strength in the air.

What annoys Zubi's critics is his awkwardness in one-on-one situations, such as that in which he lost out to Italy's Roberto Baggio in the 1994 World Cup quarterfinal.

But is now 10 years since Zubi's inability to save a penalty became part of Spanish soccer folklore. The legend began in Mexico in the 1986 World Cup finals when he let in all five penalties against Belgium in a quarterfinal shootout.

He has always played a long way out of his area, and was the victim of surprise lobbed goals even before changes in the back-pass rule made his profession even more fraught.

Yet Zubi inspires a confidence amongst team mates that he fails to generate, amongst fans, and after winning so many caps could arguably continue all the way to the next World Cup.

Eric committed to Man United

PARIS, May 8: Eric Cantona has no desire to leave English champions Manchester United, reports Reuters.

"I've signed on and that means I'll stay to be honest and faithful to those who have surrounded me" says an interview on Monday's French sports daily L'Equipe. "I can't think of any reason that could make me change my mind."

The Frenchman said he had been hurt by criticism following his infamous king-fu attack on a supporter at Crystal Palace in January 1995.

"They were really a lot of critics, especially from France, and those who made them thought I deserved them. I thought it was too much. I'm not naive. I know that now there will be a lot of praise and that, too, will probably be too much."

He said that after he returned from his eight months suspension, he did his best to please those who had kept their trust in him, especially United manager Alex Ferguson.

Cantona, who has only a slim chance of representing his country in next month's European Championship, said he still felt French.

"I've got good friends in the French team and I do hope that France will go far in the tournament, with or without me," he said. "I stay French, in my blood and in my heart."



This picture published by ACOG on May 7 shows the long-awaited Atlanta Olympic Games torch ceremony.

Olympic torch takes a tumble!

SEATTLE, May 8: The eternal flame representing the hopes and dreams of Olympic athletes around the world blew out Tuesday on a wind-swept bridge crossing the churning waters of the Tacoma Narrows, reports Reuters.

Nearly 2,500 miles (4,000 km) into its meandering cross-country US journey, the torch carrying the flame went out when it fell out of a holder on a bicycle crossing the mile-long suspension bridge between Tacoma and Gig Harbour, Washington.

Torch relay organisers hastened to explain that the Olympic flame itself, ignited on March 30 in Olympia, Greece, from the rays of the sun, remained unharmed in a safety lantern, where it is guarded 24 hours a day.

"The particular flame of that torch went out but that does not mean the Olympic flame went out," said Alexis Davis, a spokesman for the Atlanta Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games.

A quick rekindling of the torch was possible because a caravan of vehicles and officials including the so-called mother flame accompany the torch carriers along their route.

"The mother flame is the true Olympic flame from which all torches are lit each day," Davis said.

The replacement torch was put on the back of a motorcycle for the remainder of the bridge crossing.

The torch relay began the day in Olympia, Washington, and arrived in Seattle aboard a ferry boat.

After a 16-mile (26 km) run through the city, the flame was to end the day at the Landmark Space Needle, which was to be transformed into a torch itself with a fireworks display from the top of the tower.

The US portion of the torch relay began in Los Angeles on April 27 and is scheduled to travel 15,000 miles before arriving in Atlanta for the opening ceremonies of the Summer Games on July 19.

A general and a gentleman

BUCHAREST, May 8 (Reuters): Anghel Iordanescu became a national hero after leading Romania to the 1994 World Cup quarterfinals, but could have jeopardised their chances of success at Euro 96 with an astonishing claim earlier this year.

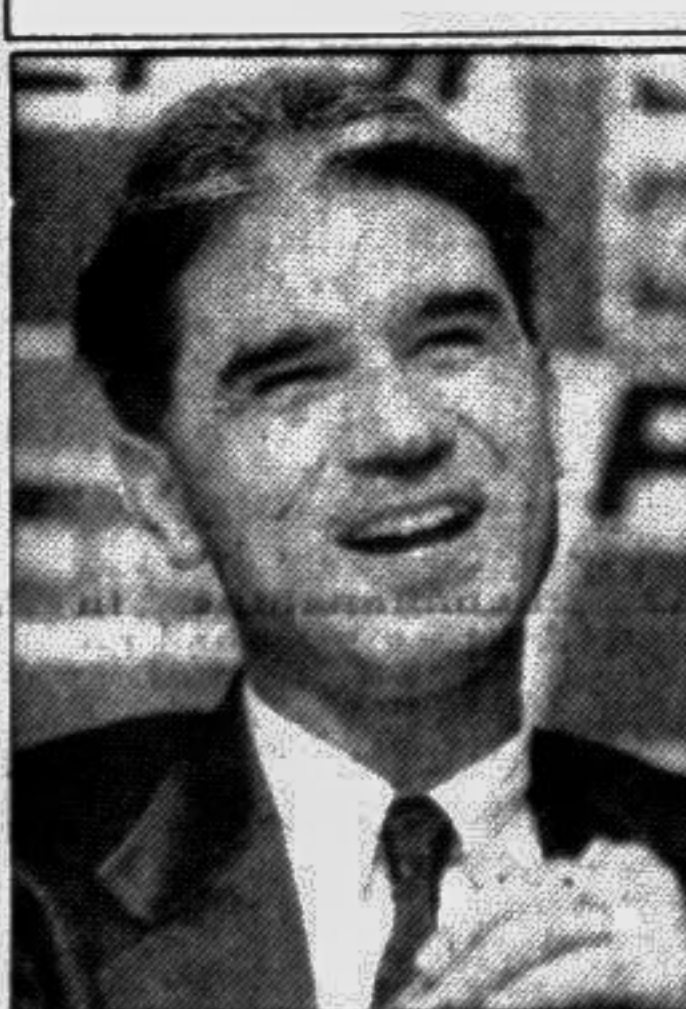
Iordanescu, promoted to army general after USA 94, surprised Romanians last month when he resigned as national team trainer after claiming that domestic league matches were rigged.

"My decision is a public protest against the growing corruption in Romanian soccer," Iordanescu said.

Three days later Iordanescu rescinded his resignation after the intervention of President Io Iliescu, players and the public. But he still stayed away from March's friendly against Yugoslavia in Belgrade, which Romania lost 1-0.

A towering figure in a country where sports is still highly politicised and most of the big clubs are state-owned and headed by members of the military or police, Iordanescu was accused by the local media of staging a comeback to help the ruling party.

A devoted family man with four children, Iordanescu has put his future at home on the line with his attempt to clean



ANGHEL IORDANESCU

up domestic soccer. If he fails he is widely expected to take up a highly paid coaching job in the Gulf, Japan or Greece.

Iordanescu insists the affair will not affect the national team's chances in the European finals.

"Of course not. If Romania qualify from the group we have a great chance of reaching the semifinals," he said.

Iordanescu played more than 400 games for Steaua Bucharest in the domestic championship between 1968 and 1982, as well as playing 64 times for Romania, scoring 26 goals.

He was assistant coach and player when Steaua won the European Cup in Seville in 1986. As Steaua's coach from 1987 to 1990, he won the European Super Cup and also coached Anorthosis Famagusta in Cyprus, between 1990 and 1992.

Iordanescu was named as Romania's national coach in the summer of 1993.

On the sidelines Iordanescu fidgets with a Rosary given to him by his village priest, touching the cross and running the beads through his fingers until victory looks certain.

Judging by the nature of Romania's build-up and the lack of form of some of his key players, the Rosary could have quite a shine on its this June.

Best becomes the best

LONDON, May 8: George Best was named as the greatest British soccer player of all time today following a public poll to mark the start of the build-up to the European Championship, reports Reuters.

Best, who played 31 times for Northern Ireland, piped England's Stanley Matthews for the honour with Bobby Charlton.

Best's former Manchester United teammate coming third.

The accolade came from a poll organised by the Royal Mail who next week issue a set of Euro 96 stamps.

Five other former stars Dizie Dean, Bobby Moore, Duncan Edwards, Billy Wright and Danny Blanchflower were also

Tickets arrive at last

ATLANTA, May 8: The wait is almost over for Olympic ticket buyers. The tickets will be shipped later this month, reports AP.

More than a year after people started ordering them — with payment up front — the tickets will be sent to customers beginning around Memorial Day, officials said Tuesday. The Memorial Day holiday is on May 27.

For some 360,000 families across America, there is only one thing that makes the Games real, said Billy Payne, president of the Atlanta Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games. "And that is the sight of an Olympic Games ticket."

It will take several weeks to distribute the tickets. Payne declined to offer more details, such as which buyers will get them first, because of security concerns.

Olympic officials have said that tickets wouldn't be sent

until shortly before the Summer Games to thwart potential counterfeiters and to reduce the chance of people losing their tickets.

Corporate sponsors, who got to buy tickets before the public sale, already are receiving theirs.

Designed to provide entry to the games as well as serve as souvenirs, the tickets feature a textured colour photograph of the Atlanta Olympics' "quilt of leaves" design against a gold background with the Centennial Games torch logo.

There are three variations to distinguish tickets for opening and closing ceremonies; tickets purchased through the mail, telephone or computer; and over-the-counter sales.

The tickets have holograms to deter counterfeiters, and other security features that ACOG would not discuss.

More information will be released before the start of shipments.

Olympic tickets went on public sale in the United States on May 1, 1995, and some customers were irked about having to pay for them long before they even knew if their orders would be filled.

Last year, ACOG came under criticism for holding on for months to money from people who unsuccessfully ordered tickets. The Olympic committee eventually made refunds to those who didn't get tickets, but not before earning about 3 million dollars in interest during an initial ticket lottery.

As of late January, when ACOG issued its last financial statement, the organising committee had sold about 328 million dollars worth of tickets.

Gullikson's funeral held

WHEATON, Illinois, May 8: Pete Sampras gives credit to his seven Grand Slam tournament titles and No 1 world ranking to his coach.

"He taught me how to compete and how to win," Sampras said of Gullikson. "Even in his sickness, he was upbeat."

On Tuesday, Sampras was

one of the pallbearers at Gullikson's funeral, attended by about 650 people at St. Michael's Catholic Church in this suburb 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of downtown Chicago, reports AP.

While speaking, Sampras broke down sobbing and couldn't finish.

Gullikson was remembered as a consummate tennis teacher, fierce competitor and ordinary guy who loved to chat with anyone who'd listen.

Besides Sampras, Andre Agassi, Jim Courier, Mary Joe Fernandez, Aaron Krickstein and other notables from the tennis community paid their last respects to Gullikson, who died Friday of brain cancer at the age of 44.

He also coached Fernandez, Krickstein and Martina Navratilova after a doubles career that carried Gullikson and his twin, Tom, to the Wimbledon final in 1983.

Tom Gullikson told the worshippers that his twin and doubles partner "was always fun to be around. In my 44 years, I never had a boring day with him."

"Tim liked to spout philosophy and was always reading books and searching to improve himself."

"On his way to the next life, I'm sure he'll be talking to St. Peter at the gates of heaven, and if he needs a tip on tennis or his golf swing, Timmy will be happy to help out."

Others at the funeral included active players Todd Martin, Brad Gilbert, Patrick McEnroe and David Pate; veteran players Jose Higueras and Stan Smith; Butch Buchholz, Lipton Championships tournament director; Paul Flory, ATP Championships tournament director; Phil Knight and Ian Hamilton of Nike, and brothers Dick and Donald Dell.

Also speaking were Gullikson's 9-year-old daughter Megan, journalist Donna Doherty and sports psychologist Jim Loehr.

Hide to return to ring in June

LONDON, May 8: Former WBO heavyweight champion Herbie Hide will begin a comeback next month after more than a year out of the ring, reports AP.

The 24-year-old British boxer will fight on the undercard of Naseem Hamed's defence of the WBO featherweight title against Daniel Alcaide in Newcastle on June 8.

Hide's opponent will be named later.

It will be Hide's first fight since losing the WBO belt to Riddick Bowe in Las Vegas in March 1995. Hide was knocked out in the sixth round, his first defeat after 26 victories.

"I've grown up mentally and physically in the last 12 months," Hide said Tuesday. "I'm a stone (14 pounds) heavier and more professional. I still regard myself as one of the top heavyweights after Mike Tyson and Bowe."

Hide said he would relish a match with Frank Bruno, who is still considering his future after losing his WBC heavy weight title to Mike Tyson in March.

"We are two former world champions who both think we are better than each other," Hide said. "I'd love to find out."

Hide's new manager, Frank Warren said, "Herbie has always been in the shadow of Bruno and Lennox Lewis but that will change. He badly wants to become world champion again and has age on his side."

Yeboah questions Eintracht's wisdom

FRANKFURT, May 8: Leeds United striker Tony Yeboah said on Monday that Eintracht Frankfurt's probable relegation from the German First Division was the price the club had paid for letting him leave last season, reports Reuters.

Eintracht have struggled to make an impact in the Bundesliga since Ghanaian Yeboah and former German international midfielder Maurizio Gaudino left Frankfurt under a cloud in the middle of last season.

With two games remaining, the club face relegation for the first time since the Bundesliga was set up in 1963.

"I was very, very sorry to see Eintracht Frankfurt go down. I think they realise they made a big mistake selling their two best players and they have got their punishment," former Eintracht captain Yeboah said in an interview.

Yeboah was the Bundesliga's joint top scorer of the season in 1993 and 1994 when Eintracht were title challengers and European campaigners.

Athletes' agents slam IOC

LONDON, May 8: Athletics agents on Tuesday criticised the International Olympic Committee's insistence that future disputes should be settled by a special court of arbitration rather than civil courts, reports Reuters.

They said the IOC wanted competitors in the Atlanta Games to sign a document agreeing to be judged by the new Court of Arbitration.

Vicente Modahl, an athletes' agent and husband of cleared 800 metres runner Diane Modahl, told BBC Radio Five: "My advice would be not to sign it, but unfortunately that means my athletes will not be able to participate in the Olympic Games."

"When you are looking for instance, at a positive drugs test you need to actually collect evidence, you need to use time to actually find out what was going on."

"It is a very, very dangerous document indeed because, if Diane had signed a document like this before the Commonwealth Games in 1994, she would have been found guilty and she would have had no chance of challenging the verdict later."

Leading athletes' agent John Bicourt added: "There is a very big principle here which is that ultimately it would appear that by signing it and entering into that agreement with the IOC, that we sign away any right to mount any challenge should we feel any athlete that we represent is unjustly accused of a doping offence."

The Court of Arbitration was set up by the IOC in 1994 and intended to work independently.

The problem of athletes taking civil action against sports bodies has been brought into sharp focus in recent years by high profile cases involving German sprinter Katrin Krabbe and world 400 metres record holder Butch Reynolds.

Olympic chiefs are especially worried about any court action arising from the Atlanta Games because of the high punitive damages awarded by American courts.

She said the decision had been taken "in the best interest of the athletes."

Asked if athletes would still be able to take their case to a civil court after that, the spokeswoman said: "It's a possibility but given the credibility of the Court of Arbitration the civil court would probably go along the same line or not accept to see the case."

Portuguese look sharp

LISBON, May 8 (Reuters): If history is any guide, coach Antonio Oliveira's Portuguese side will be going far at this summer's European Championship.

The Portuguese have fought their way through to the semifinals on two of the three occasions that they have reached the final rounds of an international soccer tournament.

They were semifinalists in France in 1984, their only other appearance in the later stages of a European Championship.

England, where the championships take place in June, holds especially fond memories. The Portuguese were third in the 1966 World Cup there, one of only two times that they have got beyond that tournament's qualifying rounds.

Led 30 years ago by the Mozambique-born Eusebio, nicknamed the "black panther" for the fear he inspired in opposing defences, the Portuguese lost to England, the eventual Cup-winners.

Eusebio finished the 1966 World Cup as the tournament's top scorer with nine goals including four in one game against North Korea. He is likely to be back in England as a special guest this summer — and his presence could yet inspire Portugal again.

For even though they may have nobody of his stature this time around, Oliveira can still call on an impressive array of talent, including Barcelona midfielder Luis Figo and Paulo Sousa of Juventus.

"We are confident in our abilities and we are going to try and make this evident in each game," Oliveira told Reuters.

"Our strength is our unity. We are going to play as a team, rather than relying on any particular part of our game," he said during training for a warm-up match against Greece.

After showing considerable flair to win their qualifying group for this summer's finals, the Portuguese seemed to run out of steam in recent games.

While they looked sharp and highly-motivated in a 1-1 away draw with England, they



were well beaten by Germany, going down 2-1 at home.

They also lost 3-2 away to France, another of this summer's finalists, in another warm-up match.

But Oliveira was confident that the tide had finally turned with the scrambled 1-0 victory over the Greeks, who will not be in England.

"We ended our first phase of preparation on a positive note," he said after the match, the last before the 22-man squad, which has still to be named, leaves for Ireland in late May to complete its pre-tournament training programme.

"Let us hope it marks the start of a new cycle of victories," added the moustachioed former international midfielder.

Portugal boast a midfield that is a match for any in the championship, with Fiorentina's Rui Costa likely to line up with Figo, Sousa and Sporting's combative captain Oceano Cruz.

Rui Costa was the hero of Portugal's 3-0 defeat of Ireland in the final game of the qualifying rounds when he opened the scoring with a delicately floated chip from the edge of box that had then Irish coach Jack Charlton later singing his praises.

Behind them, team captain Vitor Baia, who has narrowly avoided a long suspension that could have put him out of the tournament, is widely regarded as one of the best goalkeepers in Europe.

Baia was banned for two months in mid-March after being sent off for fighting in a domestic league game, the first time the normally plegmatic 26-year-old Porto "keeper" had ever been shown the red card.

The Portuguese attack, likely to include Porto's Domingos Oliveira, the league's top scorer, and Joao Vieira Pinto of Benfica, makes up in speed and skill for what it lacks in physical strength.

Portugal have been drawn together with reigning champions Denmark, Turkey and the gifted Croatians in a difficult opening group in England.

But the squad is confident that they can live up to the high hopes raised by its performances in the qualifying rounds.

"We are not going to run the danger of being overconfident. But at the same time we are afraid of nobody," said Vitor Baia.

Qu's Olympic dreams in a mess

BEIJING, May 8: An abysmal performance on Tuesday by 1,500-metre world record holder Qu Yunxia cast doubt on her making China's Olympic team and overshadowed world record holder Wang Junxia's blistering time in the women's 10,000-metres, reports Reuters.

Qu Yunxia, the ace runner of maverick coach Ma Junren, finished eighth in the 1,500-metre final with a time of four minutes 13.05 seconds, the Xinhua news agency said.

Liu Dong, a former 1,500-metre world champion, who was making his first appearance since 1994, also fared poorly with a third-place finish in four minutes and 10.20 seconds.

Wang Chunyan won the 1,500-metres in four minutes and 9.28 seconds, and Yan Wei was second in four minutes and 9.48 seconds.

Qu and Liu declined to comment after the race.

However, Liu's coach Mao Dezheng blamed Qu for the poor timings, saying her pace in the first two laps was too slow.

The humiliating defeat most likely means that she will not represent China in the 1,500 metres in the Atlanta Olympics this summer, but she still could make the team in some other event.

Wang Junxia, who set the best time this season in the 5,000 metres last week in the heats in the eastern city of Nanjing, did the same thing in the 10,000 metres on Tuesday, clocking 31 minutes 01.76 seconds.



Jan-ove Waldner, the Swedish Olympic champion plays a smash against compatriot Jorgen Persson during their European table tennis championships match in Bratislava, Slovakia on May 7. Waldner won the match and took the gold medal.

Tragic!

TRABZON, Turkey, May 8: A 12-year-old boy committed suicide Tuesday because he was despondent over his favourite club Trabzonspor's defeat in a crucial league game, police said, reports AP.

The boy, Husnu Civelek, hanged himself at a construction site in the town of Akcaabat near this Black Sea port city.

It was the second suicide of a Trabzonspor fan since the team was beaten 2-1 Sunday by Istanbul's Fenerbahce. The result toppled Trabzonspor from the top of the league standings and virtually ensured that Fenerbahce will win the title.

The first suicide occurred in neighbouring Giresun province just after Sunday's game.