

Baggio, Bergomi in, Zola & Casiraghi out

Cesare puts speculations to rest

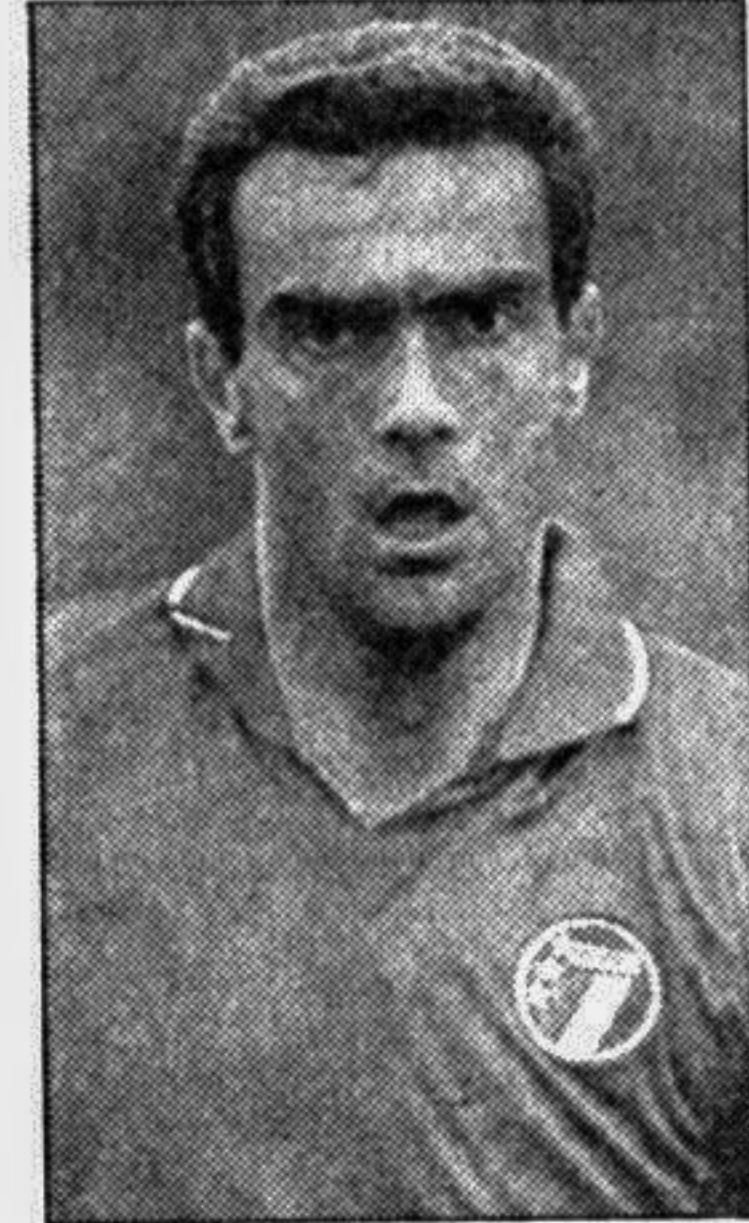
ROME, May 22 (AP) Reuters. AFP: Bowing to a nationwide clamour, coach Cesare Maldini on Thursday included veteran star-forward Roberto Baggio on Italy's World Cup team for France '98.

during the second half of the Champions' final but still completed the match. A final decision about Del Piero will be taken by Italian officials by the June 2 deadline set by the international soccer federation FIFA for presenting the final 22-men lists.

gesting his brilliant international career might be over. Baggio insisted it was not and continued to play superbly for Bologna, who he joined after a frustrating 1996-97 season at AC Milan during which he was frequently left on the bench. He scored twice on the final



ROBERTO BAGGIO



GIUSEPPE BERGOMI

Iranians falling apart?

TEHRAN, May 22: Iranian MPs called for a 'serious probe' Thursday into a spate of poor performances by the national team just three weeks ahead of the start of the World Cup in France, reports AFP.

"Iran's worst defeat in its recent football history 'wounded the sentiments of our people, notably the youth,'" said an MP from the border province of West Azerbaijan.

Mostafa Ahmadi, from Karaj just west of the capital, went further calling Iran's crushing 7-1 defeat in Rome on Tuesday to an AS Roma reserve side a 'painful catastrophe'.

"Give the amount of money spent on the team, such a defeat was unimaginable for our football," he said.

Iran's Football Federation sacked the team's coach Tomislav Ivic a day after the defeat and replaced him with Jalel Talebi, a former member of the Iranian national team.

Ivic took over the job in mid-January, just five months before the start of the finals but faced mounting criticism after losing at home to Hungary in a friendly tournament last month.

Brittany tame the lions

RENNES, May 22: Cameroon were held at a 1-1 draw by a Brittany selection here Thursday in their opening friendly World Cup workout friendly, reports AFP.

Omam Biyik, who used to play for the local French First Division club Rennes, opened the scoring for Cameroon in the 14th minute but Lionel Rouxel equalised seconds before half-time.

ENGLAND-S AFRICA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard table showing cricket match statistics between England and South Africa, including runs, wickets, and overs.

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, May 22 (AP): Bookmaker William Hill is quoting odds of 5-1 on England captain Alan Shearer getting a red card at the World Cup.

William Hill began taking bets after referee Paul Durkin, who will be an official at the World Cup although not taking part in any of England's games, warned that Shearer would have been sent off for his FA Cup final foul on Arsenal's Tony Adams if that had been a World Cup game.

All he got at Wembley was a yellow card.

Meanwhile, Ladbrokes are predicting that the most likely World Cup final will be between defending titlists Brazil and host nation France.

That matchup is being offered at odds of only 9-1. Brazil vs. Germany or Italy or England are quoted at 10-1, yet a Germany-Italy or Germany-England final is 25-1.

BAFANA BAFANA'S BON VOYAGE

Fans gave South Africa's soccer team a noisy farewell Thursday as it began the journey to its first World Cup.

The 'bafana bafana', coming off a 1-1 draw Wednesday night with Zambia, departed for Argentina for an exhibition match Monday against the former world champions.

Then the team goes to Germany to complete its training for the World Cup in France.

This is the greatest moment for South Africa as it will be first time this country will be participating in the World Cup, coach Philippe Troussier told the crowd at the airport.

"It is also significant that it will be the last World Cup tournament this century. I promise we will do our best in France as we carry with us the pride of this nation."

SCOTS TURN TO GOUGH

Having just returned to the San Jose Clash of Major League Soccer, Richard Gough is being asked to help Scotland's World Cup preparations.

The Scottish squad has flown out to the US to play warmup games against Colombia and the United States and coach Craig Brown has called on the 36-year-old centre back Gough, who played 61 times for his country before falling out with the previous coach, Andy Roxburgh.

"I'm not sure yet about San Jose's schedule but Craig has asked me to join the squad at their training camp," Gough said.

UMBRO TO DRESS UP ENGLAND

England has signed a new five-year, 50 million pound (83 million dollars) deal with British-based Umbro to provide shirts, shorts and socks from next year, turning down offers from the United States' Nike and Germany's Puma.

As part of the deal, fan organisations also will have a say in the design of the new clothing.

CROATIAN OBSESSION

If first-time World Cup participants Croatia make the quarterfinals in France, there's one team they really want to face.

Yugoslavia. "I hope we meet them in the World Cup," Croatia's top striker Davor Suker said. "I still think that we're a better side, as their main stars (Dragan Stojkovic and Dejan Savicevic) are warning."

Yugoslavia were kicked out of the last World Cup because of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after separation in 1991.

Now neighbours, they are sure to meet in qualification for the 2002 European Championship because they are in the same group.

NORWAY'S 'BRITISH' SQUAD

It's surprising that Norwegian soccer coach Egil Olsen hasn't set up his training camp in Britain.

Theoretically, he could field his entire World Cup squad from players who perform in the English and Scottish leagues.

Olsen will select players from home clubs as well as some from other European nations. But his 'British' squad could look something like this: Thomas Myhre (Everton), Espen Baardsen (Tottenham), Frode Grodas (Tottenham), Sting Inge Bjornebye (Liverpool), Henning Berg (Manchester United), Gunnar Halle (Leeds), Bjorn Kvarme (Liverpool), Staale Stensaas (Glasgow Rangers), Claus Lundekvam (Southampton), Roger Nilsen (Sheffield United), Ronny Johnsen (Manchester United), Trond-Egil Solvold (Coventry), Lars Bohinen (Derby), Harald Brattbakk (Celtic), Egil Ostensjo (Southampton), Oyvind Leonhardsen (Liverpool), Jan Aage Fjortoft (Barnsley), Tore Andre Flo (Chelsea), Steffen Iversen (Tottenham), Alf-Inge Haaland (Leeds), Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (Manchester United), Tore Pedersen (Blackburn).

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Less refined 6 Comprehensive 9 Bankroll 12 Stupely 13 Upon: prefix 14 Commotion 15 Heavy cotton fabric 16 Teased 18 Rug 20 Couturier 21 Hot tub 23 UAR member 24 Cognizant 25 Amneris' slave-girl 27 Quebec peninsula 29 Through-out the text 31 Penn's pal 35 Elsa Kensch's subject 37 Judicious 38 Craze 41 Eggs 43 'Friends' cast member

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and solution for 'CRYPTOQUIP'.

Hick's hefty hundred

LONDON, May 22: Graeme Hick hammered an emphatic answer to the England selectors who dropped him from the squad for the one-day series against South Africa with the 98th first-class century of his career on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The Zimbabwean-born batsman plundered 166 off 221 balls for Worcestershire on the opening day of their county championship game against Middlesex at Uxbridge.

Hick, who hit one six and 19 fours, shared a second wicket stand of 133 with Vikram Solanki (78) and added 222 for the fourth wicket with skipper Tom Moody (132 not out) as Worcestershire piled up 435-4.

West Indies captain Brian Lara was dismissed for only two as his much weakened Warwickshire were shot out for 130 by Nottinghamshire at Edgbaston. Stand-in opener Mike Powell carried his bat for a career best 70 before Notts replied with 71-2.

Lancashire's Glen Chappell (5-49) did the damage as Essex were all out for 242 at Chelmsford with Stuart Law making the top score of 55. Lancashire were 36 without loss at the close.

Asian youth soccer

Bangladesh-Lanka opener today

Bangladesh will take on hosts Sri Lanka in the opening match of the group 5 qualifying round of the 31st Asian youth (under-19) football championship which begins in the central town of Kandy today.

In their second match of the four-team qualifiers, Bangladesh will face Tajikistan on May 26 while their last encounter will be against Kazakhstan on May 29.

Top finishers from this round will book a berth in the 10-team final round, scheduled to be held in Thailand from October 17 to 30.

A 25-member Bangladesh team led by national custodian Biplob Bhattacharya has already reached the island nation last week.

SQUAD

Biplab Bhattacharya, Gobinda Chandra Sarker, Aminul Haq, Mohammad Shaimul, Shahequl Islam, Zillur Rahman, Latuk Jahangir Alam Mintu, Riad Mahmood, Amit Khan Souvra, Reazul Karim, Ameer Khan, Motiur Rahman Munna, Rezaul Karim Liton, Masud Haidar, Mustafa Anwar Parvez, SM Papal Mahmood, Saifur Rahman Moni, Majibur Rahman Ritu, Aild Khan and Saiful Islam Saif.

Wilmots breathes energy

BRUSSELS, May 22 (AP): He may not be the world's prettiest player to watch, but when the Red Devils need efficiency and drive, Marc Wilmots has the credentials.

After Enzo Scifo set standards for Belgian elegance if not efficiency at the last three World Cups, national coach Georges Leekens is expected to turn to Wilmots as the midfield dynamo in France.

The in-your-face midfielder with the crunching tackle and ceaseless energy has come to full bloom at Germany's Schalke 04, where his cut and thrust style blended perfectly with the working class heroes of the Ruhr's industrial belt.

He scored the decider in the 1997 UEFA Cup final, highlighting his rise to international prominence.

Leekens called him back into the Red Devils' fold after an ugly dispute with the preceding coach had seemed to put an end to his career for Belgium.

"Everything has been cleared up," the 29-year-old Wilmots said. "But, in short, everything I have achieved now is because of Schalke."

Wilmots left Standard Liege two years ago as a striker seemingly at the end of his wits. In Germany though, he returned to the midfield, where his raw aggression thrived again.

Kingston, Indore told to wake up

LONDON, May 22: Cricket pitches at Kingston in Jamaica and Indore in India will have to receive official approval from the International Cricket Council before they are allowed to stage their next Test match or one-day international, reports AFP.

The first Test of England's winter tour to the West Indies was abandoned after just 61 balls when the Sabina Park pitch in Kingston was ruled too dangerous to continue playing.

It was the first time in 121 years of Test cricket that a match had been aborted because of the state of the playing surface.

This was just a month after the second one-day international between India and Sri Lanka at Indore on Christmas Day suffered a similar fate with only 18 deliveries having been bowled.

The two abandonments were a major topic for discussion at a two-day meeting of the ICC committee, which was chaired by former West Indies star Sir Clyde Walcott.

"The decision of the committee is that before another one-day international or Test takes place at Indore and Kingston, an ICC approved person will be sent to inspect how the pitches are playing at both venues."

Devils never say never

BRUSSELS, May 22 (AP): The Red Devils just keep coming back. Few know how, but all know when — each time a World Cup rolls around.

Despite a disastrous start to their qualifying campaign, Belgium are one of only a half-dozen nations to reach their fifth consecutive World Cup finals.

As always, Belgium have had to build a winning strategy around the few international quality players they have, and, for the first time in years, the forward line is their forte.

"Our strength is up front," coach Georges Leekens says. Luc Nilis of PSV Eindhoven and Fiorentina's Luis Oliveira could form a dangerous partnership.

Don't have too great expectations though. "We're just a little team. An underdog in France," Leekens said.

But who better to turn the odds around than Leekens, who was widely credited for squeezing Belgium in among the 32 qualifiers.

Eric couldn't care less!

KUALA LUMPUR, May 22: French soccer legend Eric Cantona is refusing to share his thoughts on who will win the World Cup this month, reports AFP.

Cantona, who earned 45 caps and scored 20 goals for France, has joined a professional beach soccer tour which starts here today, and organisers warned journalists not to ask him about the World Cup.

When the question was inevitably put about France's chances of winning the World Cup, Cantona, true to his mystical persona, replied: "What World Cup?"

The retired ex-Manchester United star is less reticent about beach soccer.

In Group E, Belgium face their old nemesis the Netherlands, Mexico and South Korea. Since the 1982 World Cup in Spain, Belgium have built their reputation on classy defenders like Eric Gerets, Georges Grun and Philippe Albert. Now, credible heirs are nowhere in sight and during recent preparation games against Norway and Romania, the defence looked shaky.

In midfield Marc Wilmots is steadily developing into the playmaking hero of sweet-footed Enzo Scifo, even though their styles could hardly differ more.

Wilmots of Germany's Schalke 04, always looks ready to run through a wall to defend the fiery red colours, and that's just the way Leekens likes it.

Scifo, seeking his fourth successive World Cup campaign, was long criticised for intricate moves that effectively slowed down the game instead of providing swift service.

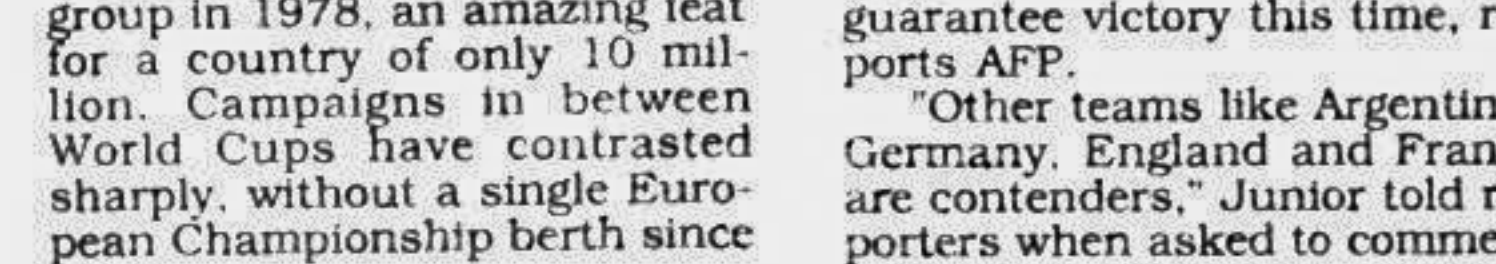
So when Scifo vowed in February he would never play for Leekens again after he was cut for an exhibition game, it was not the coach who was going to blink first. In a media standoff that took three months, Scifo took back his words and was looking for a couple of weeks in France.

Junior being unpatriotic

KUALA LUMPUR, May 22: Junior, who played for Brazil in two World Cup finals, said Thursday the South American champions may have the best players now but that would not guarantee victory this time, reports AFP.

"Other teams like Argentina, Germany, England and France are contenders," Junior told reporters when asked to comment on Brazil's chances at the next months' World Cup finals in France.

The 44-year-old played for Brazil at the 1982 and 1986 finals.



ENZO SCIFO

Ireland, Belgium still turned it into a mighty scramble before prevailing.

Belgium have played in every finals since missing out to the Dutch in their qualifying group in 1978, an amazing feat for a country of only 10 million. Campaigns in between World Cups have contrasted sharply, without a single European Championship berth since 1984.

In the runup to France '98, big questions remain as to who will feed the two strikers and even bigger questions who will fend off the opposition.

The Daily Star World Cup Quiz '98 advertisement featuring prizes like a Sanyo Refrigerator, Philips TV, and Philips Personal Electronic Scale.

Competition Information, Prizes and Rules section for the World Cup Quiz '98.

World Cup Quiz '98, Round Four ends May 27, 1998. Includes a list of questions and a form for participants to provide their name, address, and telephone number.