

Sport

Charlton plots champs' doom

PARIS, June 9 (AFP/Inter- net): Former England great Sir Bobby Charlton tipped Scotland to pull off the first major upset of the World Cup by beating Brazil in the opening match on Wednesday.

Charlton, who was in England's 1966 World Cup-winning side, said that Brazil were under a lot of pressure to perform and could crumble. "Brazil are favourites -- they play together so often that they are almost like a club side," said Charlton on Tuesday. "But there is a lot of expectation that they will do well and they will be under pressure in the first game. The Scots are a disciplined team with a lot of skillful players. Brazil need to perform well and the Scots could capitalise on that. The Scots have it in them to score goals and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that they will win."

Charlton added that if Brazil were knocked out there were at least nine countries that could replace them as world champions. "England, Spain, Germany, France, Holland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Croatia and Argentina are amongst the teams who could lift the title," he said. "There may be a European team more organised than Brazil. There are many teams hoping that Brazil will go out of the competition." Charlton added that England would not miss the

influence of midfielder Paul Gascoigne, whose exclusion from the squad split the nation. "It is no problem for England that Gascoigne is not here," he said. "They have a good enough team to do well."

Helmer, Ziege still doubtful

NICE, France, June 9 (AFP/Inter- net): European champions Germany are sweating on the fitness of defenders Christian Ziege and Thomas Helmer ahead of the three-times world

against the United States next Monday.

Ziege has been struggling with a fever but the word from the German camp on Tuesday was that he could resume training on Wednesday. Helmer, who has a thigh strain, was set to have a treatment session with team doctor Hans-Wilhelm Mueller-Wohlfahrt. Bayern Munich star Helmer said he did not think the injury was as bad as last time, a reference to a muscle tear which forced him to pull out of a training camp in Finland a month ago.

But the 33-year-old said he remained optimistic that he would be fit for the showdown with the Americans at the Parc des Princes.

"On the field or off, I will do all I can to help the team," Helmer said.

Skipper Jurgen Klinsmann said the German players were anxious not to get injured in case they lost their place in the process. "Everyone is trying to make a good impression that's a healthy thing," said Klinsmann, who is 33 and has 102 caps to his name, is entering his last World Cup.

Belgians revel as underdogs

MONTHEUX, France, June 9: Belgium travelled to their fifth World Cup finals in a row Monday, bent on proving yet again that small countries need not be pushovers in soccer's global championship, reports AP.

Despite a string of good preparation results, the Red Devils started out with a long tradition -- talking themselves into the role of underdog. Belgium play their opening match Saturday against neighbours, the Netherlands, and if one takes the Belgians at their word, it should be no contest.

"I'm so impressed with the Dutch," coach Georges Leekens said Monday. "It's a machine that is far better than we are." He sidestepped Belgium's confident wins over Colombia and Paraguay over the past week.

"We have to be realistic. They are a lot stronger than we are. But we'll have to go for it," said midfielder Marc Wilmots of Germany's Schalke 04. Belgium's chances of the 1994 World Cup, when Belgium also belittled its own chances against the Dutch before upsetting them 1-0 in the first round. The Red Devils went out in the second round against Germany.

After Saturday's tradition-filled clash with the Netherlands in Saint-Denis, the Belgians play Mexico and South Korea in Group E.

The Belgians took the high-speed TGV train to their World Cup base outside Lyon on Monday. The squad is heavy on experience with both playmaker Enzo Scifo and Franky Van der Elst competing in their fourth final in a row.

"The World Cup -- it's the most beautiful thing for a soccer player to achieve. It is a way to prove that I'm still there," said Scifo, 32. He was already there when Belgium reached the World Cup semifinals in Mexico 1986 but should count himself lucky to be back in France.

A bitter three-month fight with Leekens was only solved one month ago, allowing Scifo's late entry into the team. Unlike other World Cups, Belgium's strength this time lies up front, where Fiorentina's Luis Oliveira and PSV Eindhoven's Luc Nilis have looked dangerous.

In addition, Standard's brother strikers Mbo and Lokonda Mpenza have looked good during the preparation.

Paris streets come alive

PARIS, June 9 (AP): World Cup madness infused Paris on Monday, with giants in the street, pygmies in the park, and burly young men in funny clothes punching out the odd soda machine.

In the Metro, two extra-large sized Danes muscled through the crowd in puffy white and red top hats nearly as tall as they were.

Norman Bruce, a dour Scot, had on his kilt and tam o'shanter, ready to watch his team face Brazil in the opening game Wednesday. Families cruised the Champs Elysees in a dozen national colours.

And French commuters watched at it all bemused, as if wondering what the next month would add to an always lively summer season.

The staid daily Le Monde caught the mood in a headline: "A certain indifference toward the sporting, economic and media event makes way for enthusiasm."

Not everyone was enthusiastic. Amy Sarfati, married to a Frenchman, had to hurry back with her infant daughter from a trip home to California because of an Air France strike. She found only one alternate roundabout flight.

"I laughed when I saw that Air France was the official carrier of the World Cup," she said. "It should have been USAir."

But crowds of Parisians gathered to watch preparations for the grand opening. Crews practiced maneuvering four 60-foot high giants -- Ho, Moussa, Pablo and Romeo clad in inflatable gear -- meant to symbolise the different cultures taking part in the games.

Visitors to town included 10 pygmies from the jungles of Cameroon, brought in to play drums for an extravaganza Tuesday night at the Place de la Concorde.

They brought tree fronds to build huts in the Tuileries Gardens so they would not have to sleep under a roof. They had never planned on the Paris chill.

Late Monday night, they were moved to a hotel. "It worked out okay," explained Edward Brachfeld, one of the organisers. "They had practiced sleeping in beds for 10 nights in the Cameroon."

Although games will be played in eight cities besides Paris and nearby Saint-Denis, the French capital is where the World Cup opens and closes. Many visitors expect to hang around for the duration.

A full schedule of concerts, exhibitions and outdoor parties have been planned. Huge video screens will display games for those without tickets.

An extra 1,000 police officers have been put into service just in case things get out of hand. Already, young toughs were punishing vending machines for not recognizing foreign coins.

When booze flows to celebrate victory or mourn loss, authorities know, anything could happen.

Bruce, the kilted Scot, was reserving judgment. Asked what he thought of Paris in World Cup mode, he shrugged. "It's all right," he allowed. "So far."

Ho was set on the Place du Point Neuf in the middle of the Seine. Moussa reclined on the lawns of the Champs de Mars by the Eiffel Tower and Pablo lay asleep by the Arc de Triomphe.

"We wanted a big popular party in the streets, a free celebration for all, that symbolised the sharing, the universality and the emotion of football," said former French soccer star Michel Platini, co-president of the French World Cup organising committee (CFO).

Police began closing off streets near key parade sites and the Concorde underground subway station was closed from breakfast rush-hour. The Tuileries, Champs, Champs-Elysees, Clemenceau and Pont-Neuf metro stations were to be closed later.

Each weighing in at 38 tonnes, the massive robots woke up officially in the early evening and slowly wend their way to the Concorde, where French revolutionaries more than 200 years ago massed to watch the guillotine at work on enemy aristocrats.

Organisers said some 800 million television viewers worldwide would tune in for the celebrations.

Fitted with chauffeur-driven vehicles inside each foot and an electronic system enabling head, chest and eye movement, the four giants symbolising the world's football heroes will be accompanied by weird and wonderfully-clad figures and a cacophony of world and techno music.



Two of the four plastic giants roaming on Paris streets during a ceremony yesterday. — AP/UNB photo

Ireland tour match Third win for rains Sports Reporter

Rain continued to play foul with the touring Bangladesh national cricket team in Northern Ireland as their fourth one-day match against the Ireland national team was also washed at the Elington ground in Derry yesterday. Bangladesh, who are now on a 45-day tour of Ireland, England and Scotland, will play their next match against a provincial eleven at Malahide tomorrow.

World Cup '98 on giant screen Sports Reporter

Kalabagan Krira Chakra and Kallol Photography have joined hands to offer large-screen video projection of the Brazil-Scotland match tonight at the Kalabagan ground. Infinity Engineers and Sound Storm is providing the technical support. The programme is open to all.

Friends turning enemies

SENLIS, Italy, June 9: Inter Milan teammates Gianluca Pagliuca and Ivan Zamorano will be involved in two games when Italy and Chile square off in their World Cup opener on Thursday, reports AP.

Besides their Group B clash, the Italian keeper and Chilean striker have been chiding each other on their team's respective chances at France '98 -- and offering personal challenges.

"It's not a real bet, but Ivan promised to score one goal on me. He has been pestering me for weeks," Italy's starting keeper said at the team's training camp north of Paris.

"I told him he won't. But I am ready to surrender (a goal), under the condition that Italy wins the match. I believe Italy is stronger than Chile."

Zamorano was expected to start against the Azzurri, despite nursing a knee injury, and Pagliuca has said the presence of the Chilean striker would help Italy play a more determined and focused game.

"He's a key, great player. If he's as good as in the UEFA Cup with Inter, he can be very dangerous for Italy. But I'm not hoping for his absence. I hope to play him, and beat him," Pagliuca said.

Zamorano scored the first goal and was a key figure in Inter's dominating 3-0 victory over Lazio in the all-Italian UEFA Cup final in Paris last month.

Pagliuca is also looking forward to playing another of his Inter teammates in the World Cup -- Brazilian forward Ronaldo.

The Italian keeper, who will be starting for Italy in his second World Cup, ascended to the starter's job when Angelo Peruzzi of Juventus pulled a muscle and was dropped from the roster.

"As usual the opening match will be crucial for (advancing). Chile is a tough opponent, but I feel we will have a better start than four years ago," Pagliuca said.

Italy lost 1-0 to Ireland to open their 1994 tournament before reaching the championship match, where it lost on penalty kicks to Brazil.

"I still remember that lost final, but I have no nightmares about it," said Pagliuca, who after holding Brazil to a 0-0 draw through 120 minutes, stopped one penalty kick in the 3-2 shootout loss.

"We're reasonably calm, but the tension has been naturally rising ever since we arrived in France," said Maldini. "But then I think the match against Chile is going to be fundamental for qualifying from the group."

His father and team coach Cesare is also feeling the pressure, with Maldini junior admitting: "As the days go by, the tension is increasing in him too. In 1990 and 1994, the Italian team were among the favourites and this one too is aiming for a prestigious result. That doesn't mean to say we'll manage it, but Italy, because of its tradition, has to aim for the title. We have our objective, but there are at least seven or eight other teams who have the same one. A lot will depend on form and but also on luck. The match against Chile will tell us a lot more than what we know already. But at the moment we feel good. I've finished third

U-19 kabaddi Shahid Nabi, Ansar reach final

Shahid Nabi High School and Ansar VDP High School moved to the final of the Dhaka Deputy Commissioner under-19 Kabaddi competition at the court near Dhaka stadium yesterday, reports UNB.

On way to the final, Ansar VDP defeated Keraniganj Thana KS and Shahid Nabi beat Maniknagar Model School in the semifinals.

The final will hold Friday at 5 pm at the same venue.

Rajshahi soccer From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, June 9: Mohammedan Sporting Club recorded a lone goal win over Alif Lam Meem Sangha in the First Division football league match at the local stadium today.

Abu Arif slammed home the all-important goal in the first half of the match, which was also marked by foul play.

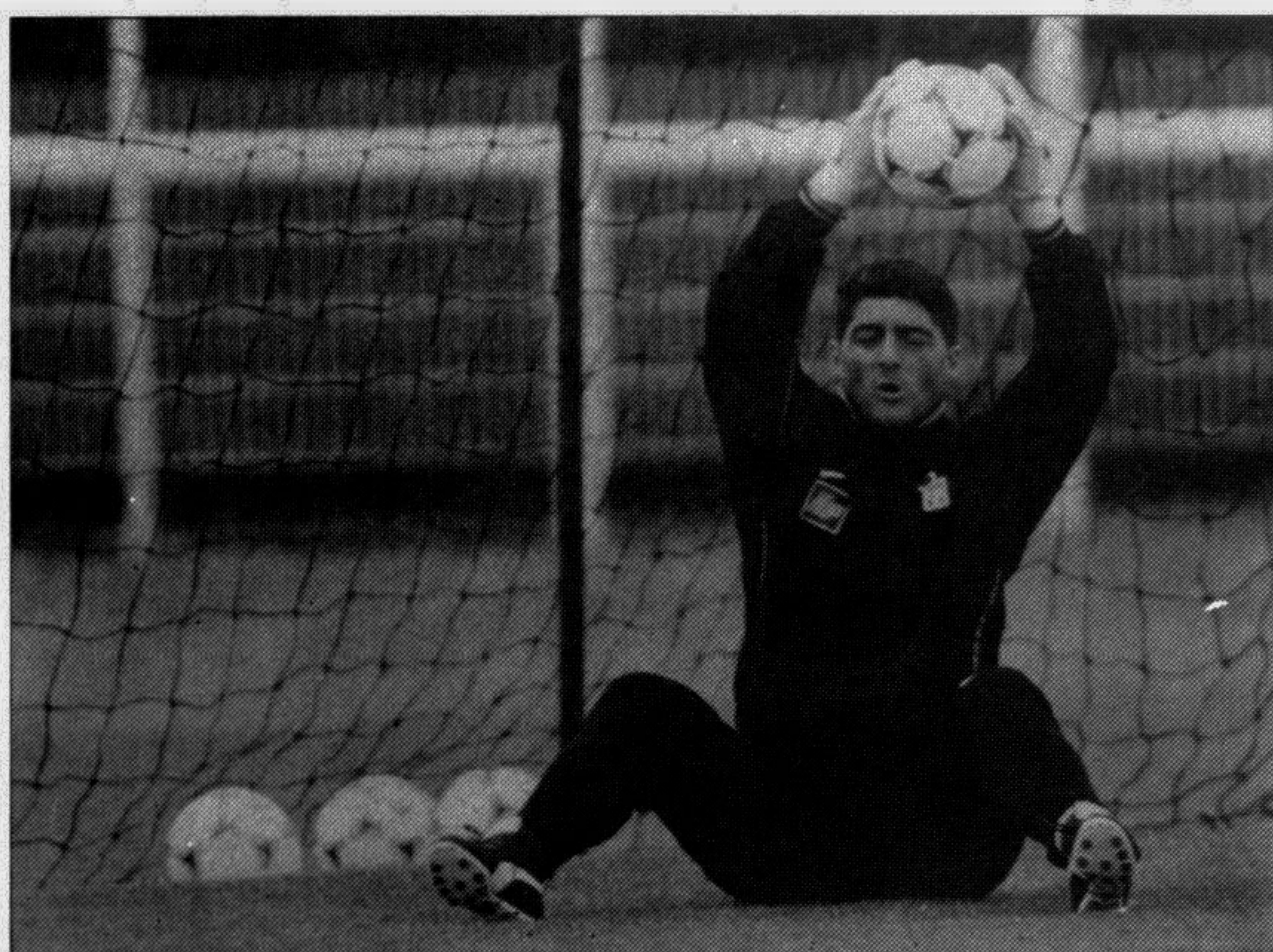
Simla Sport Club will take on Seriol SC at the same venue tomorrow.

BA trying to cash in

LONDON, June 9: British Airways said today that it would offer an extra 2,400 seats on flights from Britain to Paris this week, as a strike by Air France grounded almost all its planes on the eve of the World Cup kick-off, reports AFP.

BA said that passengers from the United States, Africa and Asia were flying into the soccer showcase via Britain.

The company has replaced standard Boeing 757 aircraft with bigger 767 and some 747 jumbos on the Paris route, in its drive to swipe passengers from Air France.



A SAFE PAIR OF HANDS: Italian goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca catches during a training session in Senlis on June 8. — AFP photo

Foes party under Eiffel Tower

PARIS, June 9 (AFP/Inter- net): A Scottish ceilidh and a Brazilian carnival were in full swing under the Eiffel Tower on Tuesday as the two most colourful sets of supporters in the world partied before the opening game of France '98.

To the skirl of the bagpipes and the rhythm of samba drums, the fans started what promised to be a 24-hour party ahead of the Brazil-Scotland match at the Stade de France. Hundreds of fans have travelled to France without tickets and are resigned to watching the match on television as touts pacing the chic Champs Elysees are asking up to 1,600 US dollars for entry to the match.

"Six of us travelled by van and are staying in a tent in the Bois de Boulogne -- it's great," said a kilted Dave Corr from Whitburn. "No, none of us have tickets and they are too expensive to buy from a tout. A thousand quid, you must be joking? We will just watch it on one of the big screens the organisers are putting up -- we are here for the crack. We drank in a Scots bar last night. There were so many people that they had to close the street -- the police

came, but they were great." Many Brazilians are also ticketless and several carried signs to advertise their desire to pay richly for the privilege of watching the world champions.

"I've flown from Sao Paulo to see the World Cup but I cannot get any tickets," said Alexandre Damaceau, who was holding a sign asking for tickets in three languages. "I'm going to stand here at the top of the Champs Elysees all day to see if I can buy a ticket for the opening game."

He was approached by a burly Englishman who was handing out leaflets which offered to buy and sell tickets.

"It will cost you 1600 US dollars for a ticket to see Scotland and Brazil," said Dave, a Londoner who would not reveal his surname. "I do this sort of thing at all the big events, like the Olympics and Wimbledon. Sure it's expensive but there are people willing to buy." The Scots supporters, popularly known as the Tartan Army, made their own fashion statement in the haute couture, capital of the world. They paraded down the Champs Elysees in kilts of various tartans complete with designer T-shirts advertising ev-

erything from beer to condoms. Several also painted their faces with the St Andrews Cross in true Braveheart style.

Ground Zero for the fans of Scotland and Brazil is the Eiffel Tower, Paris' most famous landmark, and they arrived carrying bottles of champagne, wine and spirits and cans of beer. They mingled with tourists, gave renditions of "Flower of Scotland" and current favourite "We're Here in Gay Paree" for international television crews and had impromptu kickabouts in the classy Champ de Mars.

"We had a 15-a-side match against some Brazilians and thumped them -- let's hope the boys can do the same tomorrow," said Jim Fisher, as he pulled cans of beer out of a fountain where they had chilled nicely. "This is just great -- you could not have asked for a better opening match. Scotland versus Brazil in Paris -- pure magic." Few fans took notice of the countdown clock on the Eiffel Tower which informs everyone that there are just 571 days to go before the year 2000. For the partying Scots and Brazilians the only date that matters is June 10.

Tension mounts for Maldini family

SENLIS, France, June 9 (AFP/Inter- net): Italy have a lot to live up to at the World Cup finals and team captain Paolo Maldini admitted on Tuesday that his men-and his father-are already feeling the pressure.

Italy finished third in 1990, after beating England in the play-off, and were losing finalists against Brazil in 1994. Now they are back for another World Cup adventure and hopes couldn't be higher.

"We're reasonably calm, but the tension has been naturally rising ever since we arrived in France," said Maldini. "But then I think the match against Chile is going to be fundamental for qualifying from the group."

His father and team coach Cesare is also feeling the pressure, with Maldini junior admitting: "As the days go by, the tension is increasing in him too. In 1990 and 1994, the Italian team were among the favourites and this one too is aiming for a prestigious result. That doesn't mean to say we'll manage it, but Italy, because of its tradition, has to aim for the title. We have our objective, but there are at least seven or eight other teams who have the same one. A lot will depend on form and but also on luck. The match against Chile will tell us a lot more than what we know already. But at the moment we feel good. I've finished third

and second at the World Cup finals before this, and now all I need is the first place."

As for the weight on his own shoulders, the AC Milan skipper said: "I feel the responsibility, but then so do the others, and being captain doesn't make me feel any more tense."

Apart from being favourites, Italy's other tradition is a reputation for being geared to defensive football. However, it's a reputation which Maldini clearly feels is old hat.

"Italian football can be an aggressive, attacking kind of game," he said. "Being Italian-styled doesn't necessarily mean defensive." And he similarly defended his father's decision to play a more man-marking than zonal system of play at the back, and shrugged off the idea that Italy were more at risk than others from the new rules on tackling from behind.

"I've been playing different ways for the last 10 years and never had a problem with the way I play in the national side," Maldini said. "As for marking, the defenders have always played that way with my father at Under-21 level and I don't think there will be a great difficulty from that point of view. And the new rule applies to all teams and it's not one of our main preoccupations at the moment. Naturally, in the first matches, we'll have to see how the referees interpret the tackle from behind."

ST JEAN D'ARDIERES, France, June 9: Leading goalkeeper Eric Wynalda, who is recovering from knee surgery, could be back to lead the US attack in their World Cup opener against Germany next Monday, reports Reuters.

"I was very pleased with Eric today in training. He was very sharp and I see his explosiveness coming back," coach Steve Sampson said on Monday.

"That first step that you didn't see against Kuwait (in a warm-up match last month) is now there. I could easily say today that he could start against Germany."

However, Sampson cautioned that much would depend on how Wynalda played in a friendly match on Tuesday behind closed doors against French Second Division team Gueugnon.

Wynalda, who played for a while in the German league, said he felt fit and was looking forward to a game in which the

Zidane feels fine

CLAIREFONTAINE, France, June 9: Zinedine Zidane juggled the ball like never before Tuesday, easing fears and ankle injury would keep the star playmaker out of France's opening match against South Africa, reports AP.

The Juventus ace felt little discomfort from his tender right ankle that was hurt in Finland last weekend and coach Aime Jacquet stuck to his plans to build the strategic concept for Friday's first game around Zidane.

At the end of a two-hour training session, Zidane put on a big smile, happy that three days of uncertainty were behind him.

"I'm OK. I didn't feel any pain," said Zidane. "Now we have to prepare the match. We're ready."

France are the overwhelming favourites to win the first round Group C, which also includes Denmark and Saudi Arabia.

Jacquet has no illusions whatsoever that the underdog will chose open and fluent play.

The coach knows he will need all the offensive prowess of Zidane if France are to break down the wall of 11 South Africans in front of their goal.

"It will be something like that. And it is logical," he said. "He expects little else from Saudi Arabia."

Despite criticism for lacklustre play over the last three preparation games, Zidane is confident France will show their true face in his hometown of Marseille Friday.

"That first match will liberate us. I'm convinced we can do great things. There is no alternative," he said.

And he realised it was of no use crying over the tough marking during the preparation games. It will be the same Friday. "I'll always have someone on my back. That is the way it is," he said.

France's backbone is set, build around a strong and experienced defense, a solid midfield anchored around captain Didier Deschamps and creative sparkplugs Zidane and Youri Djorkaeff.

The central striker and the second forward remain the main worry.

Based on the team that edged Finland 1-0 last Friday, Jacquet is expected to start Christophe Dugary, a tireless worker that weighs on any defence, before replacing the Marseille forward with a young challenger like David Trezeguet of Monaco.

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, Jun 9: (AP): Germany's World Cup players observed a minute's silence before a warm-up game Monday for the victims of last week's train disaster at Eschede.

Playing a professional but mostly junior selection of players from Second Division clubs, Nice and Cannes, Germany used a starting lineup that is not likely to take the field against the United States in Paris June 15 and only managed a 2-1 victory.

Olaf Marchall and Oliver Bierhoff fired the Germans into a 2-0 lead before the defence was caught embarrassingly flat footed a few times and David Andreani replied for the home team.

MORE CARDS ON THE CARDS?

Bookmakers are offering odds of only 10-1 that four or more players might be sent off in one World Cup game.

The new tough rules on the tackle from behind have made it almost certain that there will be far more red cards at this World Cup than before.

Bookmakers Corals have cut the odds on four or more expulsions in one game from 25-1 to 10-1.

The British-based bookmakers rate an England vs Scotland final 750-1 shot and are offering 250-1 that Denmark's goalkeeper, Peter Schmeichel, will score with a

DI MATTEO NOT FOR SALE

Negotiations for the transfer of Italian World Cup stars are officially suspended for the duration of France '98. But rumours about club manoeuvres for next season are a common subject for discussion at Italy's training camp.

Midfielder Roberto Di Matteo blocked suggestions that he may return to the Italian league from Chelsea, saying the English club announced he's not for sale.

"I'm going to respect the decisions of the club," he said. "Juventus striker Filippo Inzaghi denied rumours of his possible transfer."

"I'm playing for the world's best club, and I see no reason to change. I got assurances from Juventus officials that I'll stay with La Juve next season," he said.

LEIGHTON THE OLDEST

At 39, Scottish goalkeeper Jim Leighton is 22 years older than the youngest player at the World Cup, Cameroon's 17-year-old midfielder Samuel Eto'o.

Like German defender Lothar Matthaus, who is back at age 37, Leighton played in the 1982 World Cup in Spain. The keeper turns 40 July 24, 12 days after this World Cup ends.



WORLD CUP WALTZ: Anton Polster bobs between posts during a training session at Austria's Arzac Camp on June 8. — AP/UNB photo