

**Scifo excluded**

LYON, France, June 11: Belgium have dropped Enzo Scifo for their crunch World Cup game with Holland at the Stade de France on Saturday, reports AFP.

The 32-year-old midfielder had been talked back into his fourth World Cup, finals by coach Georges Leekens and played in the 0-0 draw with England in Morocco last week.

But Leekens, keen to challenge Holland in midfield, decided today to do without him.

"There's no point in letting them dictate play, if we leave them the freedom of the park right up to our penalty box we'll get into trouble. We have to go to take the fight to them," Leekens said of the talented Dutch side.

Stopper Goran Vidovic, recovering from a groin strain, is the only doubt for Belgium's World Cup opener.

Leekens said he named his side as early as possible to relieve the players of any unnecessary pressure.

"Gordan is a key player and I



ENZO SCIFO

prefer to wait as long as possible to see how he responds to treatment," Leekens said.

Germinal Ekeren defender Mike Verstraeten was on standby to replace Vidovic.

Nico van Kerckhoven, injured in the friendly with France last week in Morocco, is replaced by Dany Boonin who plays for French club Metz. He plays alongside 37-year-old Franky van der Elst given the captain's armband, in midfield.

**PROBABLE TEAM**

Filip de Wilde, Bertrand Crasson, Lorenzo Staels, Goran Vidovic or another, Vital Borkelmans, Franky van der Elst (capt), Philippe Clement, Danny Boffin, Marc Wilmost, Luc Nilis, Luis Oliveira.

**Predrag's promise**

SAINT GLAMIER, France, June 11 (AP): Predrag Mijatovic the Yugoslav Ronaldo — has an extra motive to do well at the World Cup.

"I want to prove how much the world soccer has lost by banning the Yugoslav team from the last World Cup and other international competitions," Mijatovic said in an interview with the Associated Press Thursday.

Economic and diplomatic sanctions imposed by the United Nations against Yugoslavia in 1992 because of the wars in Bosnia and Croatia also compassed its athletes and teams. That led to the country's national team being banned from qualifications for the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

Mijatovic, the 29-year-old high-scoring forward of Real Madrid, says the ban hurt him the most as "I have missed a chance to test my skills on the top international level."

"Now I and my teammates have an extra motive to do well and show how unfair the sanctions were," said Mijatovic, who is often compared to Brazilian star Ronaldo.

Last season, Mijatovic was widely regarded as the second-best player in Europe after Ronaldo. Many coaches predict that the two will compete for the title of best player or scorer at the championships in France.

"I'm not thinking about Ronaldo. I'll concentrate more on Taffarell if we ever get to play Brazil," Mijatovic said, referring to the Brazilian goalkeeper.

Quick and cunning, Mijatovic was the best scorer in all World Cup qualification groups with 14 goals. He netted seven in two play-off matches against Hungary that ended 12-1 on aggregate in Yugoslavia's favour.

Last month, Mijatovic snatched the only goal as Real Madrid beat Juventus of Italy in the finals of European Championships Cup.

At training sessions in this French village close to Saint Etienne, Mijatovic seems to be the most motivated among his teammates, running fast, changing direction and scoring at ease.

"I feel fantastic," he said wiping sweat from his forehead. "We are all ready for success because this is a great chance for this generation of Yugoslav players."

Yugoslavia and Germany are favoured to qualify to the next round of the World Cup from Group F that also includes the United States and Iran.

"I heard that the Americans are quite strong and they should be taken seriously," Mijatovic said. "Iranians play with fanatical motivation, but we shouldn't have trouble beating them as the quality is on our side."

"I'm not impressed by the Germans. I think they have an aging team which is on the decline. May be this is our chance to beat them," Mijatovic said.



REACHING FOR THE UNREACHABLE? Saudi Arabia's reserve goalkeeper Hussein Jawad Al-Sadiq dives full stretch to make a save during a training session at Villeneuve D'Ascq, France on June 10.

**Sami armed & dangerous**

PARIS, Jun 11 (AFP): When he was 10 years old, Saudi Arabia's striker Sami al-Jaber was banned from football by an angry father who said soccer was no way to make a decent living.

But he defied his disciplinarian dad with the same passion for the sport that he will bring to bear against France, favourites to win Group C which also includes the Denmark and South Africa.

"France really had better watch out," warned Al-Jaber, young, gifted, and deadly, and teamed up in the Saudi attack with a living legend — Saeed al-Owairan, who scored a goal for the history books in the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

Saudi's play Denmark in their opening game in Lens tomorrow and meet the French in St Denis on June 18.

"France are the favourites to win the group. But all the other teams will gunning for them," he said.

He argues that Saudi Arabia, even though they have pulled off some memorable successes in the past, are still underrated by Europe as a marginal footballing nation.

"People do not realise how professional we are," he said. "For a local derby in the capital Riyadh between Al-Hilal and Al-Shabab we get a crowd of 80,000."

"Football in huge in Saudi Arabia."

Al-Jaber, diminutive and slight of build, is huge too.

When his father relented and let him play his favourite sport, he was signed on by the love of his life, Al-Hilal — but only af-



SAMI-AL-JABER

ter another row with his dad who wanted him to sign for rival club Al-Nasser.

At 17, he was playing in the first team, and a year later was selected by Saudi Arabia's Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira to play his first inter-

national.

A provider as well as a finisher, Al-Jaber plays role in most goals scored by Saudi Arabia and his club side.

Al-Jaber is small physically but devilishly difficult to knock off the ball. He loves to run at defenders and many of his goals come after evading tackle after tackle in the box.

But he is just as effective when poaching inside the penalty area, his quick reactions leaving defenders lunging at shadows.

Al-Jaber had a quiet qualifying campaign by his striking standards but has hit a rich vein of form this year.

He scored four of Al-Hilal's six goals in the quarter-final stages of the Asian Club Championship in Lebanon and hit the target twice as his club side beat Al Shabab 3-2 to win the Saudi championship.

He also has a happy habit of scoring on the big occasion — he nabbed both goals which won Al-Hilal the Asian Super Cup with a 2-1 aggregate win over South Korea's Pohang Steelers last year — and will relish the opportunity to shine on the World Cup stage.

After the World Cup his ambition is to become the first Saudi player to join a top European club, a privilege denied Al-Owairan when he was banned for breaking Islamic law by drinking after the 1994 World Cup campaign. "If I was offered a pot of gold to play for another Saudi club in the United Arab Emirates I would turn it down. But to play in Europe is another thing altogether," he said.



GIVE ME A BREAK! Danish custodian Peter Schmeichel stretches on the ground while his teammates jog during practice at Toulon on June 10.

**FRANCE '98 SIDELINES**

UNDATED, June 11 (AP): Office employees carried televisions to work and bank customers stood transfixed before sets in bank lobbies as Jamaica turned its attention to the World Cup on Wednesday.

And Jamaica's team doesn't even play until Sunday.

Few telephones rang and traffic on Kingston's streets dropped off as the opening matches between Brazil and Scotland began Wednesday morning local time.

Interest in the World Cup on the Caribbean island has been intense since Jamaica won their first-ever berth in the tournament.

It is the first appearance for a Caribbean country at the World Cup since Haiti played in 1974. Jamaica play Croatia on Sunday, followed by a match against Argentina on June 21.

Both of those games will be on Sundays, but business owners said they are bracing for massive absences on Jamaica's third match, June 26 against Japan. That one falls on a weekday.

**TROUSSIER MAY JOIN WEDNESDAY**

Controversial South Africa coach Philippe Troussier appears almost certain to become the next manager of English

**MAKING NEW FRIENDS**

With nothing to do other than soccer at their isolated training camp in southern France, the US players are making friends with the animals. And there's a lot of them.

"Peacocks, ducks, rosters, geese, deer, billy goats," forward Brian McBride said, to name a few.

While they feed the animals, players haven't given them names.

"That will probably be after we get back from Paris," he said, laughing.

The team is also amusing itself by playing darts.

"We've broken almost every single dart," McBride said. "I don't know if it's because people throw hard or we're no good at darts."

**NO NEPOTISM**

Coach Cesare Maldini said he could not see any family conflict in coaching his son Paolo on Italy's national team.

"He's a player. I'm the coach. We respect the roles. I'm proud to be the coach of all Italian players, not only of Paolo," Maldini said on the eve of Italy's match on Thursday against Chile.

**CESARE A BRAZIL FAN?**

Italian coach Cesare Maldini nearly jumped to his feet when he saw Brazil's winning goal against Scotland on a distant television screen during his news conference in Bordeaux on Wednesday.

"Brazil has scored!" he shouted before answering the next question.

**Yugoslavs don't scare Talebi**

YSSINGEAUX, France, Jun 11: The Iranian coach says that on a good day the Yugoslavs are no match for anyone. So he is hoping to catch them on one of their bad days when the two teams meet Sunday at the World Cup, reports AP.

"Yugoslavia is a very good team. They have a lot of very skillful and experienced players who have technique and play attack football," said Jalal Talebi, who took over the team less than a month ago in Iran's second coaching chance since the fall.

"On a good day, Yugoslavia can beat any team anywhere in the world. But on a bad day they can lose to anyone anywhere in the world. We are hoping to catch them on one of their bad days," Talebi told reporters in this pastoral town where a famous pastry school is Iran's World Cup home.

Defence is Talebi's preoccupation. Iran has three star strikers who play in the German Bundesliga, but its defence has always been weak.

It may suffer even more, with little chance that captain and goalkeeper Ahmad Reza Abedzadeh, who is recovering from a knee operation late last year, will play Sunday.

There's only a 40 per cent chance that he'll be well enough to play," said Talebi.

Nima Nakissa, seven years younger than the 32-year-old Abedzadeh and not as experienced, will likely make the Iranian goal against Yugoslavia.

Midfielder Sattar Hamedani, also recuperating from a leg injury last month, pulled out of a practice match Sunday and limped back to the team's living quarters with an ice pack on his knee.

After Yugoslavia, Iran face the United States and Germany, another soccer powerhouse.

Iranian soccer fans were so happy when their team clinched the last World Cup spot that millions danced in the streets, and Talebi admitted that his team was under tremendous pressure to beat the Americans, Iran's political adversary for nearly two decades.

**Klinsmann not going to MLS**

NICE, France, June 11: Germany captain Juergen Klinsmann denied Wednesday that he had agreed to join Major League Soccer team Los Angeles Galaxy after the World Cup finals, reports AFP.

Klinsmann was reported in the French newspaper L'Equipe to have reached a deal with the Galaxy a few weeks ago.

But Klinsmann insisted at the German training headquarters there: "There is no deal."

However, the 33-year-old, who has an American wife, confirmed that MLS officials had contacted him in March.

"I made it clear that I would decide only after the World Cup," said Klinsmann, who is retiring from international soccer after the finals.

The veteran striker has also been linked with San Jose Club, another Californian club.

"He's an ideal player for our league," said an MLS spokesman. "He's a great player, a big personality and is appreciated in our country."

Germany play the United States in their opening World Cup game on June 15 in Paris.

Klinsmann has played more than 100 internationals and scored at a rate of close to a goal every second game.

He has played club football in Germany, Italy, France and England and was twice German footballer-of-the-year and English player-of-the-year in 1995.

**Tale of a cook**

YSSINGEAUX, France, Jun 11 (AP): As a Frenchman proud of his country reputation for good food, chef Alain Sagnol was a bit perturbed when he learned that Iran's World Cup team was bringing its own cook to France.

So when the Iranians arrived, Sagnol found the freshest salmon in the market, cooked it in his own secret recipe, and served it for dinner. The Iranians were hooked.

"We go with French food these days," said coach Jalal Talebi, adding that Sagnol's salmon delight was superb. "Everyone liked it. We eat Iranian food only every three or four days now," he said.

But the Iranians, housed under tight security at a famous pastry school in this pleasant town of 7,000 in the heart of France, won't be tasting the region's most famous delicacy: *Le petit sauc aux lentilles*, or small sausages with lentils cooked in a delicate wine sauce.

That's because their Muslim religion forbids the consumption of pork or alcohol, so they will also miss out on the excellent cured meats from the mountains and the famed liquor of Velay.

Except for fish, all other meat for the Iranians is slaughtered in the special Muslim fashion and sent over by the Iranian Embassy in Paris.

Before the Iranians arrived, the women staff at the pastry school with the grand name of *Ecole Nationale Supérieure de la Pâtisserie*, were sent away on leave at the embassy's request.

"The Iranians like French food a lot, and I am very pleased," said Sagnol, head chef at the school.

He said he has been tempting them with lots of salads, and chicken and lamb dishes, even though their restrictions had somewhat cramped his style.

"Our cooking is a lot more complicated, while the Iranians have a lot of simple grills," he said.

**Just to remain beyond Ronaldo's reach?**

PARIS, June 11 (Reuters/Internet): If Ronaldo believed he could beat Just Fontaine's World Cup goalscoring record, then he would have been disappointed with his performance against Scotland.

Few fans in the Stade de France, however, were unhappy with their first sight of the world's greatest player at the 1998 finals as the Brazilian displayed his talent to the full, especially in the first half.

To overtake Fontaine's total of 13 in 1958, Ronaldo needs an average of two goals a game, and that depends on Brazil getting to the semifinals and beyond.

His failure to score in the 2-1 opening win against Scotland has raised the target to 2.33, an almost impossible task even for "The Phenomenon."

But Ronaldo was relaxed after drawing a blank for the third international in a row as both he and the rest of the watching world appreciated his other contributions to the game.

The Inter Milan player produced some glorious touches and was continually on the move to create space for his

colleagues, belying a reputation for just waiting for the ball to arrive.

"I liked the game, we played well and I'm not worried about



JUST FONTAINE

not scoring because I moved around a lot," he said. "I came back to look for the ball and I

created chances for my colleagues, which is what the boss asked me to do."

Ronaldo was included in Brazil's 1994 World Cup squad at 17 but did not get a game. In the last two years, he has been unanimously acclaimed as the world's best player.

He did not get a touch for the first 10 minutes and his first significant contribution was when he pressured Colin Hendry into heading the ball narrowly wide of the Scottish net.

Shortly afterward, he uncharacteristically passed the ball straight to a Scottish player just inside his own half, hinting at an attack of World Cup nerves.

But such fears were immediately dispelled with a superb dribble in the best Ronaldo tradition. He turned inside Hendry, twisted past two more defenders and shot, only to see his effort brilliantly saved by goalkeeper Jim Leighton.

In the second half, a mesmerising dummy reminiscent of Pele at his best and a sweet backheel helped set up chances for colleagues.



Romania's captain Gheorghe Hagi staves off the challenge of a US Albi defender during a practice match at Albi, France on June 10.

**'El phenom's' appetiser**

PARIS, June 11 (AFP): Ronaldo's jinks and shimmies, backheels and dummies are the essence of the best of Brazil and his supreme talent was on show in their opening 2-1 victory over Scotland.

Brazil's overall performance might have left coach Mario Zagallo scratching his head about how to get the best out of his players.

Following a fabulous first half hour, his team went off the boil in the second half and only a fortunate own goal by Scotland gave them the win.

But, on this performance, Zagallo must be delighted that 'el phenom' Ronaldo has lived up to his World Cup media hype.

Ronaldo twisted and turned to beat defender Colin Hendry in almost embarrassing fashion in the first half.

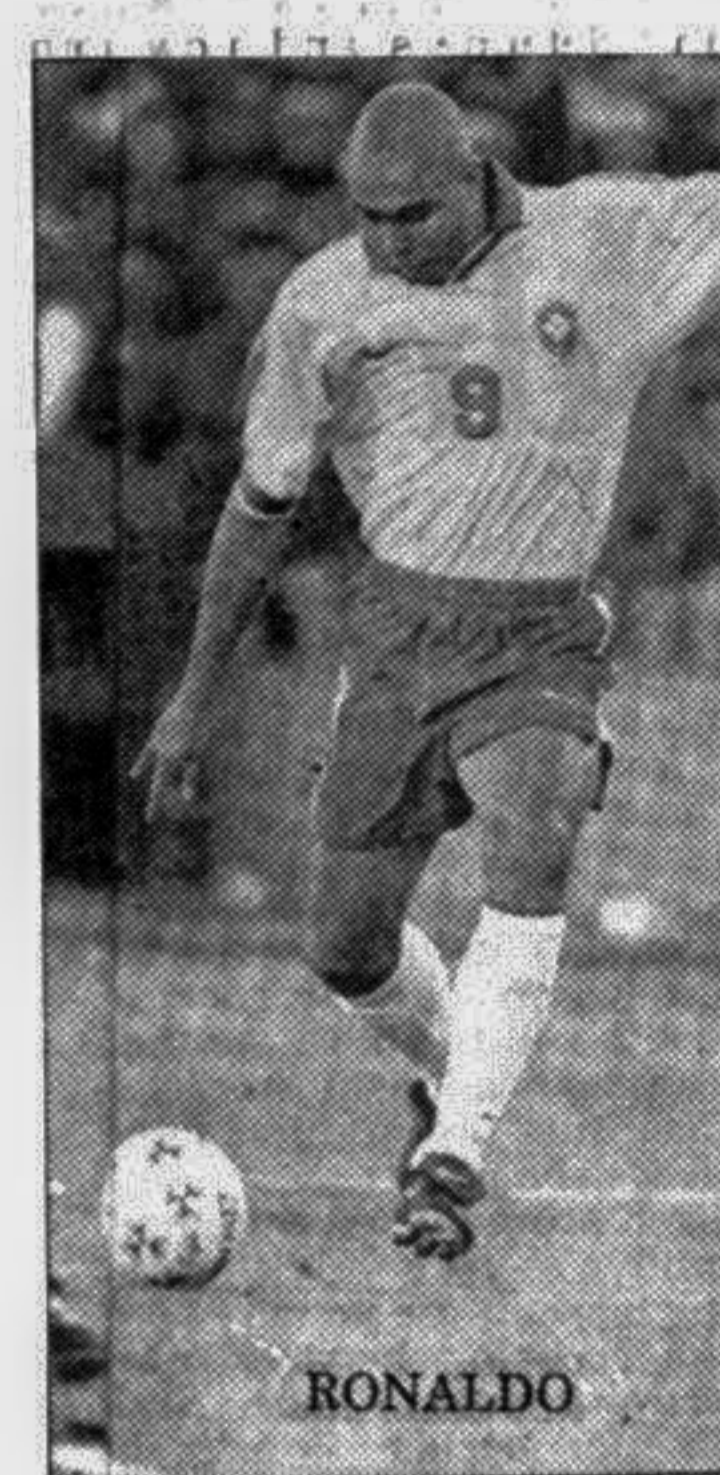
Then, after the break, came a couple of sublime skills from Ronaldo, setting up Rivaldo with a dummy and then creating a chance for Leonardo with a backheel.

His blistering pace was also on show and, but for diving keeper Jim Leighton, he would have opened his World Cup goal account — he was in the squad for USA '94 but never got on the pitch let alone score.

Brazil showed a soft underbelly despite their victory and Ronaldo's exploits.

The record books will show Cesar Sampaio scoring for Brazil, John Collins equalizing from the spot, and Tomy Boyd hitting an own goal for the Scots.

In truth the match had a 1-1



RONALDO

draw written all over it until Scotland were hit by the cruellest of blows.

A ball came in from midfield and Cafu, who went up with Gordon Durie, tried to hook the ball past Jim Leighton.

But the ball rebounded off Leighton's face and cannoned off Boyd's shoulder. Colin Hendry, racing in, couldn't prevent the ball crossing the line.

However Ronaldo, who has only quite recently risen to fame, has no doubts Brazil can do better and go on to take the

title.

"I want to win the World Cup and I believe in this team," he said.

He went from Sao Cristovao to Belo Horizonte for a mere 7,500 dollars before signing for PSV Eindhoven and then Barcelona.

Inter Milan were so impressed by his skills that they were willing to splash out 30-million-dollars to break the world transfer record.

But the 21-year-old knows he will never be mentioned in the same breath as Pele or Maradona until he has conquered the globe and put a World Cup winner's medal in his pocket.

But now he bears the hopes of a nation on his young shoulders and well knows that, in Brazil, second place counts for nothing.

"In Brazil it is victory or exile — there is nothing in between. We are all united in our aim to win here and the atmosphere in the group is excellent," Ronaldo said.

"We can achieve our ambition of becoming the second South American side to win in Europe (following Brazil in Sweden in 1958)."

"We shall respect all teams here. It's true we shall miss Romario but the tandem of Ronaldo and Bebeto will be strong and we will score goals — I feel it in my bones," said Ronaldo, already a double FIFA world-player-of-the-year and winner of France football's coveted Golden Ball last January.



DO YOU MIND IF I PLAY ... Youssou N'Dour (L) and Axel Red sing the official World Cup song during the opening ceremony at Stade de France, Saint Denis on June 10.