

Klinsmann impressed with USA

NICE, June 13: Germany captain Juergen Klinsmann said today the United States had improved since 1994 and commanded a good deal of respect this World Cup, reports Reuters. "They are strong physically and you can see from their recent friendlies that they have been developing well," the former Tottenham striker said. "They have taken steps forward since the last tournament and we have no reason to underestimate them. We have a lot of respect for them, some of their players have been playing in Europe and they will be confident." The United States who meet Germany on Monday, are outsiders in the first-round Group F which also includes Iran and Yugoslavia, the Germans and the Yugoslavs are tipped to go through to the second round. But the European champions, who have been training in the south of France for the past week, have a reputation for being poor starters in World Cups. "It is important how you start in a tournament and we want to get three points," Klinsmann said. "We know it will be hard work but we are optimistic and the spirit in the team is good."

Despite fierce competition from the other forwards in the squad, Klinsmann is expected to start the match up front alongside Oliver Bierhoff. Coach Berti Vogts, who will not announce his line-up until the day of the match, said he had seen the United States play live only once before. "They will be a physical team," he said.

Day Three's firsts

PARIS, June 13 (AP): The first red card, the first scoreless tie, the first team to score three times. Almost the first World Cup strike by a goalkeeper. Oh, and another own goal. While furious Japanese fans continued their search for tickets they had been promised and had paid for, day three of the World Cup produced a curious mixture of the field. Veteran striker Hristo Stochkov fired against the post and Paraguay's attack-minded goalkeeper, Jose Luis Chilavert produced the best free kick so far. It was curling just under the crossbar from 30 meters but Bulgarian "keeper" Zdravko Zdravkov produced an acrobatic save to make sure the game ended 0-0. "I already saw the ball in the net," said Chilavert, who has 65 goals in his professional career. "Too bad, I could have made history."

Bulgaria's Anatoli Nankov became the first player of the championship to be expelled. But at least it was for two yellow cards. We're still awaiting the first red card for a tackle from behind.

Bulgaria-Paraguay was game five and the first to be scoreless. It was followed by Denmark's 1-0 victory over Saudi Arabia in which defender Marc Rieper headed the winner and Michael Laudrup made his 100th appearance with a win.

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In Saturday's games, Olympic champion Nigeria faced Spain in Nantes, neighbours Belgium and the Netherlands confronted each other in Paris and South Korea met Mexico at Lyon.

Meanwhile, the ticket problems that have plagued the organising committee for more than a year, were biting hard as the tournament went into a fourth day.

Fans from as far afield as Japan have arrived in France to find the tickets aren't here to meet them and FIFA, soccer's governing body, is investigating two national federations and a subsidiary of its own marketing arm regarding game ticket fraud at the World Cup.



WILL THERE BE SUNSHINE AFTER THE RAIN? Colombian captain Carlos Valderrama in pensive mood during practice ahead of his team's opening game against Romania on June 15. —AFP photo

Giovanni to get the axe?

OZOIR-LA-FERRIERE, France (AP/Internet): A new game -- a different Brazilian team? Training camp was abuzz Friday with reports that coach Mario Zagallo was dissatisfied with the performance of some of his players in Brazil's 2-1 victory over Scotland and planned changes in the starting lineup for the game with Morocco on Tuesday.

The modification everyone was talking about was the return of AC Milan midfielder Leonardo to the starting 11 in place of Giovanni, who had a poor showing against the Scots.

As expected, Zagallo declined to confirm the switch. "Everybody's saying Leonardo is the starter," he said after practice Friday. "I don't want to talk right now. I want to take a few days and think about it."

But Zagallo made no secret that he felt the team played better with Leonardo, who replaced Giovanni at the start of the second half. The defence stiffened, the offense picked up, and Brazil gradually dominated the stalwart but limited Scots.

Giovanni, a versatile and creative midfielder, looked lost in 45 minutes against the Scots. Slow and diffident, missing simple passes, he showed none of the expected rapport with his FC Barcelona teammate Rivaldo.

On Friday, Giovanni ignored requests for interviews and raced into the dressing room after practice. "I thought he was very apathetic. He didn't show up on the field," Zagallo said. "I don't know what the matter is. I'm a soccer coach, not a psychologist."

Zagallo's substitution of Giovanni was a clear sign of his displeasure. Normally, Zagallo became the first player of the championship to be expelled. But at least it was for two yellow cards. We're still awaiting the first red card for a tackle from behind.

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FIFA, which said it had complaints from fans missing tickets in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, England and Brazil, as well as Japan, said it was warned fans not to deal with anyone but licensed ticket operators.

discusses what he feels were a player's errors during halftime, and gives him a second chance in the final 45 minutes. But with Giovanni, he ran out of patience.

"A player with Giovanni's talent and strength can't be so out of tune," team coordinator Zico said. "He was very dispersed."

Zagallo is an admitted fan of Leonardo. He lost his spot mainly because he was a lefty

zanni. "Leonardo trains as if it were a real game, and when he plays, he shows motivation and joy," Zico said.

Leonardo's defensive ability -- he started his career in the back before switching to midfield -- also could give him an edge, because Morocco has a talented offensive team that is expected to press the Brazilians more than Scotland.

"I've been prepared for a long time," Leonardo said. "The coach has to be illuminated to decide and choose the best."

Many also speculated that Denilson could earn a starting spot alongside Ronaldo, with Bebeto going to the bench. Denilson came in at the 70th minute against the Scots and troubled the defense with his runs up the left side.

"The changes made the team stronger, including tactically," Zagallo admitted. "Still, Bebeto is likely to get another chance against Morocco, with Denilson as the 12th man. If fans thought the 34-year-old striker didn't produce much against Scotland, the coaching staff didn't agree."

He moved well, creating the spaces needed for the players advancing from the midfield and moving the ball with intelligence," Zico said. "He's doing everything we asked."

Denilson also was a starter, albeit in the midfield, until the Rivaldo-Giovanni experiment. And his good showing against Scotland cemented his standing as Zagallo's first option for the attack -- while talented but temperamental Edmundo moved further down the bench.

"Even if someone else is up set, I'm here to show Zagallo what I can do," said Denilson. "I'm at a great moment and should take advantage of it."

Do not come to France. It is said to try to buy tickets now," said Jacques Lambert, managing director of the French organising committee.

FIFA has another ticket problem on its hands -- national soccer leaders who turn their access to legal tickets into illicit profits.

FIFA said Friday it was investigating Cameroon, where soccer federation president Vincent Onana was detained as he tried to leave his country with the national team. He was placed under investigation this week for embezzlement of public funds, accused of supplying an English agency with 3,000

tickets worth 660,000 dollars. FIFA also said it was investigating a ticket case in an unidentified South American country, but on Saturday it said early evidence indicated that country might be cleared.

"Our investigation tends to indicate this federation is innocent," FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper said. He gave no indication that the investigation was closed.

French reports have identified the country as Colombia. The Colombian soccer federation has denied that and said FIFA told officials that it was not involved.

Earlier in the day, after talks with Chirac, Mbeki discussed the match with reporters outside the Elysee Palace, but declined to forecast a score.

"President Chirac and I agreed to agree that the best team would win," he said diplomatically.

French captain Didier Deschamps makes South Africa's David Nyathi feel his presence when the two teams clashed in Marseille on June 12. —AFP photo

French captain Didier Deschamps makes South Africa's David Nyathi feel his presence when the two teams clashed in Marseille on June 12. —AFP photo

Broken hearts hard to heal

MEDELLIN, Colombia, Jun 13 (AP): For Dario Escobar, the World Cup is synonymous with sorrow.

The proud father watched in horror four years ago when his son, a star defender on the Colombian national team, deflected a crossing pass into his own net, contributing to a 2-1 loss to the United States which eliminated a much-touted Colombia from the 1994 World Cup.

Five days later, as the tournament continued, drunks insulted 27-year-old Andres Escobar outside a Medellin bar. A gunman pumped six bullets into the athlete's chest. The country and the world condemned a senseless killing.

And little changed. Today, Dario Escobar keeps his son's memory alive in scrapbooks and through social works.

He has tried to convert a heinous crime into a parable for soccer fanatics and impressionable youth, speaking against violence and founding two soccer schools for the teach poor kids that winning isn't everything.

Colombians in New York and London have also founded soccer schools bearing the name of his slain son, he says. But a bitter Escobar says the moral is lost on too many of his countrymen, including whomever is behind recent death threats to a coach and a team member now in France.

"Nothing has been assimilated," he said at his Medellin apartment Thursday. "We can't sing victory yet."

Meanwhile, the sport will never be the same for the soccer-loving Escobars.

After the shooting, Andres' older brother Santiago quit the game, ending a 14-year professional career. He now coaches a youth team.

Dario Escobar visits son's grave now and then, and it has become a local landmark. But he hasn't been to a soccer stadium since he lost Andres. He says watching television this month is too much to handle.

"I watch these World Cup games for a minute or two, but it doesn't interest me like before," said Escobar. "It brings back bad memories."

Batty against tackling from behind

LA BAULE, France, June 13: England tough guy David Batty is firmly in favour of referees coming down hard on defenders tackling from behind, reports AFP.

The Newcastle player, with a reputation of mixing it with his opponents insists FIFA's get tough stance is correct.

"The opening games of the World Cup have been quite event free terms of bad tackles so there's been a little chance to see how the referees will react."

But I'm sure and quite rightly so, that bad tackles will be clamped down on. Bad tackles from behind should always be worth at least a yellow card.

Those are the sort of tackles the players themselves want to see eradicated," said the midfielder with the worst disciplinary record in the premiership last season.

As for England's hopes of reacting their 1966 success Batty believes coach Glenn Hoddle's ability to create a club atmosphere can propel them towards World Cup glory.

Batty is confident the closeness and togetherness of the current squad will be a key factor in France.

Batty, who has vowed to continue playing his tough-tackling game, insisted: "The difference to previous England squads is when we score a goal now we feel it's one of our mates who has put the ball in the net."

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, Jun 13 (AP): Desperate fans trying to buy tickets for England's first World Cup game faced prices of up to 820 dollars on the streets of Paris.

Scalpers with wads of match tickets for sale lined the pavements of the Champs Elysees doing brisk business. But for any England fan hoping to watch their team in action the prices were sky-high.

The police patrolling Paris' choicest boulevard turned a blind eye to the activities of the black marketeers.

One Parisian, who identified himself only as Marc, struck a quick deal with an English fan. He said afterwards he had successfully applied for tickets for several games through the French distribution system.

"I'm keeping the tickets for the games I want to see but selling the others," he said.

One England fan, Tim Jones from Birmingham, said he had come to Paris early in the hope of picking up tickets for at least one of England's games.

He said: "I just can't afford the prices they are asking. It's ridiculous. I'll go to Marseilles but I expect they will be even harder to come by there."

AMERICANS, AT LAST American players finally got out of their hotel Friday. But it wasn't on a trip to Lyon, as they had planned.

In France, it sometime seems everyone is on strike. This time, small businessmen and artisans held protests in Lyon, blocking traffic around the city. They say the government has spent too much money on organising the World Cup, and not enough on local needs.

Instead, several American players went to Macon and walked around the town of 37,000, a little north of the US hotel. Compared to Saint-Jean D'Ardeires, the tiny village the team is based in, it was the big city.

Even goalkeeper Kasey Keller, who grew up on an egg farm finds it boring.

US coach Steve Sampson wasn't bothered by the criticism. "There is some seclusion," he said, "which is what we wanted -- the coaching staff wanted."

WE LOSE SPECTATORS IN USA The number of US households watching the World Cup opener plunged 57 per cent from four years ago, a cable TV network said Friday.

Brazil's 2-1 victory over Scotland at Saint-Denis, France, on Wednesday got a 0.8 cable rating, which translates to 592,000 homes among the 74.0 million that receive the ESPN sports channel.

In 1994, Germany's 1-0 victory over Bolivia in Chicago got a 2.2 rating, equivalent to 1.39 million homes.

Wednesday's second game, Morocco's 2-2 tie against Norway, also got a 0.8 rating.

Part of the reason for the decline was that the 1994 World Cup was played in the United States. Another reason was that this year's opener was at mid-morning local time, while the 1994 opener was played in late afternoon.

MICHAEL MAKES A CENTURY Michael Laudrup got a huge bunch of roses and a crucial vic-

tory Friday as he made his 100th international appearance for Denmark.

The 33-year-old forward was presented with a bouquet to mark his century of caps before Denmark kicked off their World Cup finals campaign against Saudi Arabia at the Stade Felix-Bollaert stadium.

But after the game, which Denmark won 1-0 on a 68th minute Marc Rieper header, Laudrup was thinking of the team rather than his personal milestone.

"This was a great team effort," said Laudrup, who will end his playing career at the end of the World Cup. "We created a lot of opportunities but still had trouble capitalising on our chances."

The man who did capitalise paid tribute to Laudrup's glittering career.

"I think it is very important for a player to reach 100 internationals," Rieper said. "He has been without doubt the best player Denmark has ever had. He is a wonderful player and hopefully the team and him together can do something at this World Cup."

Laudrup ended his club career at Ajax Amsterdam where he helped the Dutch powerhouse to this season's league and cup double.

He also had spells with some of the greatest names in European soccer -- playing for Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus among others.

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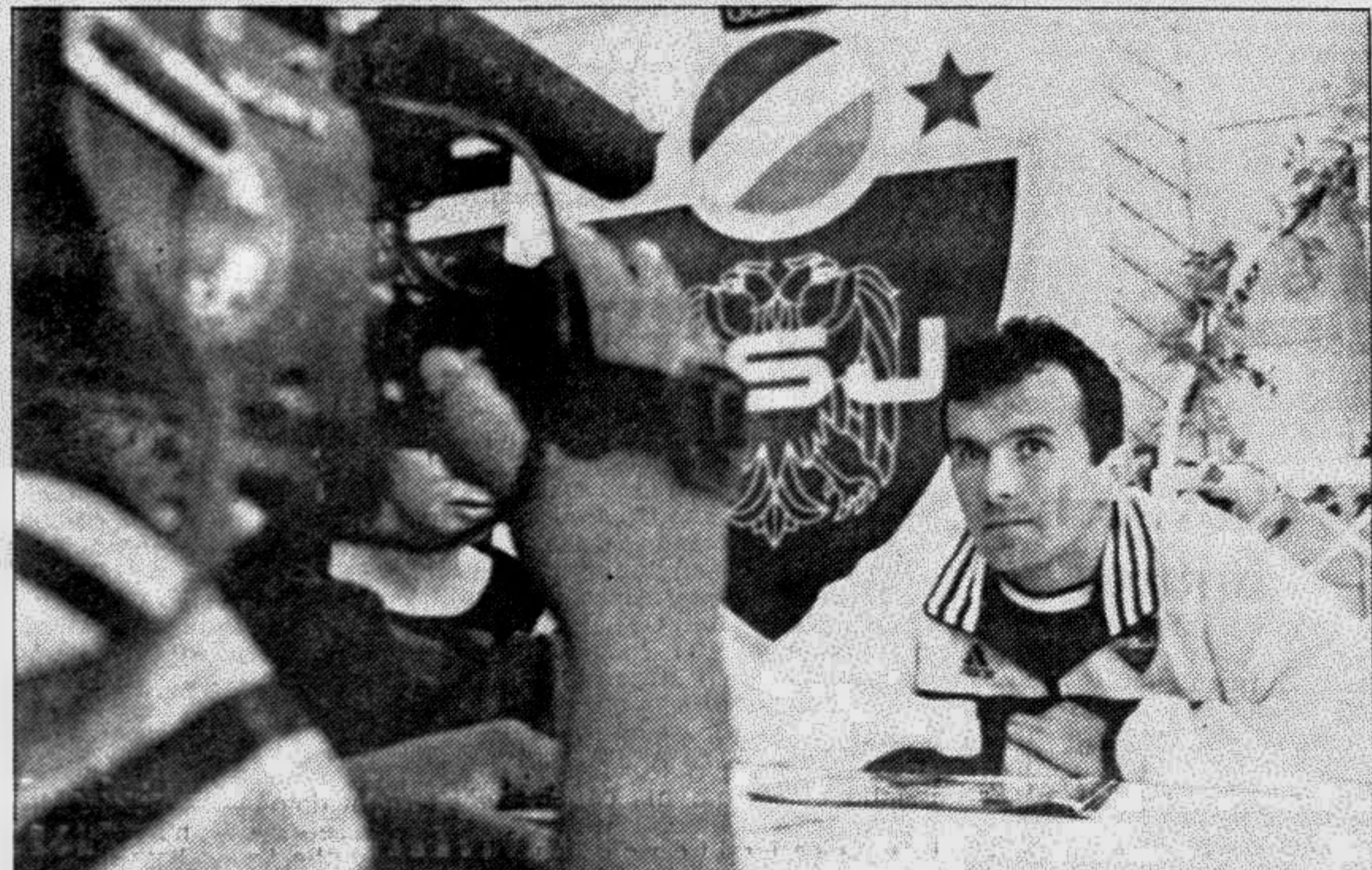
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Injured Yugoslav star Dejan Savisevic at a media conference at Charpiniere hotel in Lyon on June 11. Savisevic is likely to miss his team's opening World Cup match with Iran on June 14. —AFP photo

NOTES FROM FRANCE

PARIS, Jun 13 (AFP): World Cup notebook on Friday: In a South Africa squad containing colourful characters with names to match, like John 'shoes' Moshoeu, 'naughty' Mokoena and Doctor Khumalo, goalkeeper Hans Vonk's is just a wee bit dull.

The giant Dutchman's main rival for the number one jersey, Brian Baloyi, sports custard-coloured dreadlocks in contrast to Vonk's regulation short backhand sides.

The Johannesburg-born Heerenveen goalkeeper, who once played an under-23 friendly for Holland against Denmark, said: "I know I'm a bit serious, but I've got a job to do."

JAMAICA FLY THE FLAG For their World Cup debut, Jamaica's Reggae Boyz put up a giant 60,000-dollar inflated football at Paris' Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport yesterday.

A full 16 metres in diameter and anchored to the ground by ropes, the football is being watched day and night by six Belgian technicians for fear it could float off and disrupt traffic or come under attack from rabbits roaming the airfields.

The football, to be officially toasted by Prime Minister Perceval Patterson and Government ministers on June 17, was designed by Belgian Sred Brick.

The Reggae Boyz hit the World Cup scene against Croatia tomorrow.

VIDEO REPLAY DEBATE REOPENS Italy's controversial late penalty against Chile has reopened the debate on whether video replays have a role in football. US coach Steve Sampson said that 95 per cent of top refs would not have given a penalty for what was clearly an accidental handball. But he said he was opposed to using video evidence to make sure every decision was correct. "I'm in favour of rules changes to improve the game but replays would disrupt the rhythm of the game too dramatically," he said. The penalty in question earned Italy a 2-2 draw in their opening match.

LENS FIELDS CARNOVAL GIANTS Tuesday's World Cup party in Paris featured four six-storey high giants. Not to be outdone, lens will show off its own giants during today carnival.

The enormous figures named Mr and Mrs Gayant and Cesar will be on show at various squares in the town but they are too big to join the colourful parade of carnival floats with different themes, music group and

people in fancy dress. Throughout the tournament Lens, 200km (160 miles) north of Paris, will stage street events focusing on countries that will be playing there in the first round.

EIFFEL OVERTIME The Eiffel Tower, which usually lights up the Paris night-time sky only until 1 am is to remain lit all night long for the duration of the World Cup.

The company which maintains the famous monument said it would leave the lights on to enable foreign television stations to have the tower as a permanent live studio backdrop.

DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION The British embassy said it will close on Monday to allow its British and Tunisian staff to watch the Group G match between England and Tunisia.

In a statement headed "England v Tunisia -- football crazy," the embassy said that ambassador Richard Edis, who will be in Marseille for the game, wished both teams the best of luck.

CHAOS AT SPANISH CONFERENCE Spain's press conference ahead of their opening Group D World Cup match against Nigeria was a chaotic affair.

The mixed zone at the La Beaujoire Stadium was overrun by hundreds of excited Spanish journalists who barged officials and other press personnel out of the way and talked loudly over the official translations.

The press conference did produce one moment of mirth, however, when a French translator introduced striker Juan Antonio Pizzi as "Mr Pizza."

BRAVE BERG Norwegian defender Henning Berg has to win the award for the bravest statement of France '98 so far.

Berg said that he doesn't believe defending champions Brazil are as good as they were when they won the title four years ago in the United States.

"I didn't think Brazil are as strong as they used to be," he said.

"In 1994 they were very organised, they had all the people in all the right places. We have to see if they can produce that again, but I don't know if they are as organised as they were."

Berg's words are particularly outspoken because Norway will face Brazil in their final Group A match in Marseille on June 23.

It may be a match the Norwegians need to win to advance.

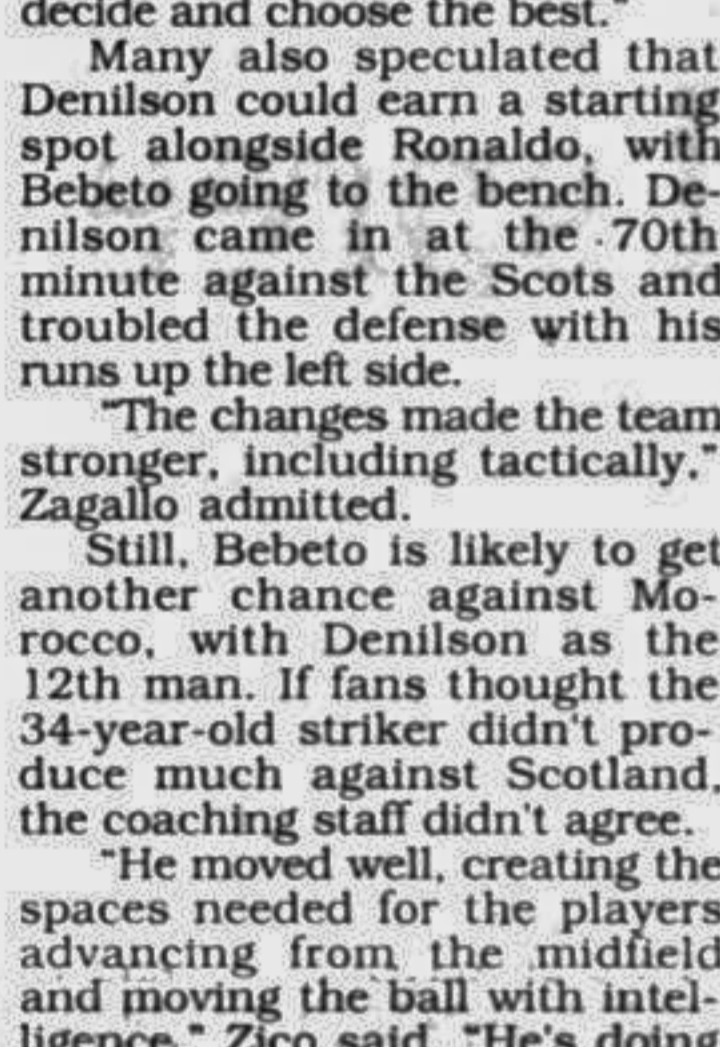


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brokers and tour operators, especially in Japan, where some 12,000 fans were left ticketless.

Similar, although smaller, cases have been reported in Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Brazil.

Although just two of the first seven games had capacity crowds, all tickets have been sold, and officials have told fans not to expect last-minute buys.

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