



A tale of two fans

FRANCE, June 16 (AFP/Internet): Two Yugoslav supporters had the last word at the press conference given by Yugoslavia June 15 at the "La Charpinère" hotel in Saint-Galmier, close to Saint-Etienne.

Milorad Majkic (51), university sports teacher and one of his students, Zoran Blesic (29), cycled from Futog a small Yugoslav village of 3000 souls, to congratulate the team and the coach on their win against Iran on June 14.

These two cyclists trained for nearly three months and spent their savings of about 5 000 German Marks (close to 17 500 francs) in order to take on the 2058 kilometres separating Yugoslavia from France without any worries.

Only one sad moment in the 10-day trip, professor Majkic fell and hurt himself at Cannes and had to finish by train, leaving his student friend to finish the last few kilometres to Saint-Etienne alone.

They reached the capital of the Forez on Saturday June 13 and were able to watch the Yugoslavia-Iran match at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard on Sunday June 14.

Milorad and Zoran, very proud of their adventure and delighted to hand over a very long list of Yugoslavs supporting the team for the World Cup, will now go on to Paris for a few days before returning to Yugoslavia, but this time by train.

Scifo, or no Scifo

MONTHIEUX, France, Jun 16: Belgium showed their dreariest side against the Dutch and were rewarded with an opening draw. For a badly needed victory against Mexico Saturday, the Red Devils will have to show any flair they still possess, reports AP.

"We will have to prove we can do it another way too," Belgian coach Georges Leekens said Monday.

Mexico lead Group E after their opening 3-1 victory over South Korea with Belgium and the Netherlands two behind following their goalless draw.

Against their Dutch rivals, the Red Devils never showed any intention to press forward and only seemed determined to keep the Netherlands from scoring. It worked.

"That was then. Now comes the really important test," said Leekens, figuring the Mexicans will be happy with a draw.

Belgium's biggest injury worry, Goran Vidovic, was to resume training late Monday but midfielder master Marc Wilmots was sidelined with a painful thigh injury. He should be recovered by Tuesday.

To provide the offensive thrust against the Mexicans, many want to see veteran playmaker Enzo Scifo play in his fourth successive World Cup campaign in Bordeaux Saturday.

Belgium dearly lacked imagination and Scifo has proved in the past that, if any Red Devil can provide a sparkie, he can. However, he is coming off a lacklustre season and at 32, his vaunted creativity has been in decline.

So, even Scifo is not insisting he should be fielded by coach Leekens, with whom he has quarrelled long during the spring.

"If I were the coach, I would start out with the same team," he said.

Balloon threat!

ALGIERS, June 16: Algerian villagers watching World Cup balloons float down after a 48-hour flight from Paris thought they marked a new bombing tactic by Islamic militants, a newspaper said Monday, reports AFP.

Liberte said the misunderstanding took place in the small village of Sidi Djillali Benamar, near the town of Tiaret.

At first, some in the village panicked when they saw the multi-coloured balloons, thinking they marked a new kind of attack by Islamic militant bombers, Liberte said.

They relaxed when it became clear they were just some of the balloons released last Wednesday at the World Cup opening ceremony in Paris, the paper said.

"At last we got that much out of the World Cup," the paper said in an editorial.

Algeria is not taking part in the soccer tournament in France.



RETURN OF THE BLOND BOMBER: German captain Juergen Klinsmann spreads his right foot to receive the ball during the encounter against USA at Paris on June 15. —AFP photo

Germans: Typically efficient

PARIS, June 16: Captain Juergen Klinsmann made one goal and scored another as European champions Germany started their World Cup campaign with a workmanlike 2-0 victory over the United States on Monday, reports Reuters.

After a difficult season during which he has struggled with injury and indifferent form, Klinsmann looked sharp throughout the game. In the ninth minutes he neatly fed midfielder Andy Moeller who headed the ball home.

The former Tottenham Hotspur striker, whose goalscoring held together the German's disappointing campaign at the 1994 finals, then shod compo-

sure to knock in his ninth World Cup goal in the 66th minute.

Klinsmann's place in the German team was in doubt in the months before the World Cup. But the 33-year-old cast aside criticism of his form by engineering an important three points for the three-times champions ahead of a tough clash with the strong Yugoslavs in Group F.

It was a long way from being a polished performer by the Germans, but Klinsmann said afterwards that the three points were all that mattered to the team after disappointing World Cup starts in the past.

"We did not play as fluently

as we wanted to but it was a good start," he said.

"We hope to get better now, what mattered were the three points because we were uncertain of our form after four weeks of preparation."

Coach Berti Vogts added: "We started well but we did not keep our discipline. We need to find our rhythm. You saw how important set pieces are with Moeller's goal."

Moeller took his chance superbly after an Olaf Thon corner from the left was headed back across the goal by Klinsmann and the midfielder guided the ball inside the left-hand post with his head.

It was clearly a special set-

piece move which the Germans had worked on since Thomas Haessler usually takes most of the corners and Thon came across for the clear tactic.

Although for much of the match the Germans struggled to play fluid football, Klinsmann took his goal in typically clinical style.

Strike partner Oliver Bierhoff floated over a cross from the right and the former Tottenham striker controlled the ball with his chest and knocked it into the right-hand corner.

"It was a clinical finish from Klinsmann," US coach Steve Sampson said. "You don't give him that much time and room because nine times out of 10 he is going to put it away."

The US knocked out in the second round of the 1994 finals on home soil, rarely threatened apart from a brief period at the start of the second half when they played some neat football.

They had just one shot on goal before the interval when midfielder Chad Deering made a speculative effort from 30 metres out on the half hour, but German keeper Andy Koepke held the shot easily.

One of the Americans' best chances came eight minutes into the second half when a close-range diving header from substitute Frankie Hejduk forced Koepke to make a superb save low to his right.

"I think we have to pay respect to the Germans but I think we earned respect from them for the way we played in the second half," Sampson said.

Euphoric Blair

CARDIFF, Wales, June 16 (AP): British Prime Minister Tony Blair hailed England's 2-0 World Cup victory over Tunisia, saying the players had shown the world the true "face of England."

Blair, who had earlier condemned the rioting in Marseille by England fans as a "complete disgrace," said he was "absolutely delighted" with England's win in the first game of their World Cup campaign.

"This is the face of England people want to show the world," he said. "The country will be right behind them. I just wish I had been able to watch the game."

The Prime Minister was kept up-to-date with the match every 15 minutes during the European Union summit.

"We had a very good discussion at our lunch — but every so often we would get little messages in saying how the England team was doing," Blair said after the game.

"This is a fantastic result and I am absolutely delighted. The whole country will be thrilled at the result," he added.

"It is important that they went in there playing really well and they got a great result."

Bucharest goes bananas

BUCHAREST, June 16: Thousands of Romanian soccer fans celebrated their team's 1-0 World Cup victory over Colombia on Monday by halting traffic with a noisy cavalcade through the centre of Bucharest, reports Reuters.

Up to 10,000 fans converged on University Square, traditional site of mass gatherings, in the Romanian capital, with mostly young men perched on car bonnets.

Fans shouted "Hagi! Ilie" in honour of veteran captain Gheorghe Hagi and Adrian Ilie, who scored the spectacular winning goal in the dying seconds of the first half by lobbing the ball over Colombian keeper Farid Mondrago.

Some shouted: "England, your time is coming" — a reference to Romania's match next week against England, who beat Tunisia 2-0 on Monday.

Police tried for a time to keep traffic moving, but in the end allowed the good-natured celebrations to proceed.

Many fans carried national red, yellow and blue flags with a hole torn in the centre — a symbol of the 1989 anti-communist revolution which toppled dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Hiddink defends Kluivert

MONACO, June 16 (AP/Internet): Guus Hiddink has written to FIFA "explaining the circumstances" leading up to Dutch forward Patrick Kluivert's sending off Saturday against Belgium, the Netherlands coach said Monday.

Kluivert was ejected from Saturday's World Cup Group E match with lowlands rival Belgium with nine minutes remaining in the 0-0 draw after elbowing Belgian defender Lorenzo Staelens in the chest.

He was suspended for the remainder of the first round by FIFA on Sunday.

Hiddink did not say when he faxed his letter to organisers and added he was not trying to appeal the suspension.

"I just wanted to explain the circumstances," he told reporters following the Dutch team's first training session in this tiny principality on France's Cote d'Azur.

Kluivert said he has accepted his suspension and was concentrating on saying sharp for the second round.

The AC Milan striker claims Staelens taunted him with personal insults, but he refused to elaborate.

Kluivert said Hiddink knows what Staelens said in the exchange that preceded the sending off, but did not know whether he had included the comments in his letter to FIFA.

Hiddink also declined to provide details of his letter.



GETTING ON EACH OTHER'S NERVES: Netherlands' Frank Rijkaard (L) verbally abusing (West) Germany's Rudi Voeller during Italia '90. — Star file photo

Sledging soccer

PARIS, June 16 (AP): When superior play cannot beat an opponent, there is always provocation. And it continues to pay.

Over the years, even some of the calmest players have lashed out after the flood of racial slurs, abuse, taunts or spittle became simply unbearable.

Dutch striker Patrick Kluivert is serving a two-match suspension at the World Cup after he was sent off for thumping his opponent in the chest of Belgian defender Lorenzo Staelens on Saturday, unable to resist a personal insult even though a World Cup game was on the line.

"This was the worst that I have ever heard," said Kluivert. "It has driven men to worse things than a thump in the chest."

Two years ago, former world player of the year George Weah headbutted an opponent after the Liberian faced two games of racial slurs during a European Cup competition. Weah was served a six game suspension, his opponent went unpunished but for a broken nose.

Weah called it "a moment of craziness through provocation." It's a scenario that repeats itself time and again, almost always victimising the victim of foul-mouthed provocation.

"It's a scandal," said French coach Aime Jacquet, siding with victims like Kluivert. "The provocateurs are the winners," he said.

He should be so lucky to have a cool defender like Marcel Desailly on his squad. In a vital European Championship game two years ago, Ghanaian-born Desailly was racially taunted for the whole game by Bulgarian star Hristo Stoichkov.

Desailly didn't get mad, didn't get even angry. He controlled himself and France beat Bulgaria on its way to a semifinal place.

"The only point was to destabilise the player, and if Desailly would have reacted, he would have been sent off," said Jacquet. For Stoichkov, it was little more than a shoulder shrug — "it is normal," he said.

Unfortunately, he is right. It still happens in the world's most prestigious league, Italy's Serie A.

Veterans like Dutchman Aron Winter and Paul Ince have complained about it and Weah continues to face it. At a recent league game though, it wasn't him but the abusing defender who cracked, elbowing Weah and being sent off.

Insults and provocation are no stranger to the World Cup too. At an especially bad-tempered Germany-Netherlands game at the 1990 World Cup, insults galore flew between Germany's Rudy Voeller and Frank Rijkaard, culminating with the Dutchman spitting into Voeller's hair. Both were thrown out of the game.

Now Rijkaard is assistant coach of the Dutch and supervises Kluivert. "You must learn from these things," he said of Kluivert's reaction. "The most important thing is that it doesn't happen again," he said.

But for Kluivert, much of his World Cup might be over by the time he is allowed back in.

Indications from Kluivert and Staelens are that the offending comments centered on the Dutchman's private problems.

The controversial AC Milan striker has already been convicted for killing a driver in a vehicular homicide and has had to face accusations of gang raping a woman. The later case never came to court.

"It had nothing to do with racism," said Staelens, implicitly recognising his provocations.

When Kluivert walked toward him wagging his finger, Staelens waited and plunged to the ground writhing in pain after Kluivert lightly shoved his chest.

The referee consulted his linesman and sent Kluivert off. It gave Belgium a dozen minutes of breathing room to escape with a 0-0 draw.

Hearing that Kluivert earned a two-game suspension on top of the red card, Staelens said "I'm sorry that I fell so theatrically... I'm willing to apologize for it."

However, Staelens said, the insults were hardly one-way traffic Saturday night. "I'm not going to take all blame for this. It came from both sides."



CLASH OF THE TITANS: Referee Lim Kee Chong (R) attempts to defuse a tiff between Colombia's captain Carlos Valderrama (C) and his Romanian counterpart Gheorghe Hagi during their meeting at Lyon on June 15. —AFP photo

Will Chile turn on the heat tonight?

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS

