

Intropective Bergomi

SENILIS, France, June 16: Giuseppe Bergomi did not play in Italy's only previous World Cup clash with Cameroon but, 16 years on, he remembers it clearly, reports Reuters.

Bergomi was a substitute when the Italians faced the Africans in Vigo, Spain, in their final first round tie of the 1982 tournament.

Italy had laboured to dismal draws against Peru and Poland in their first two matches and were in danger of elimination at Cameroon's expense.

The game ended 1-1 and Italy crept through to the knock-out stages by the narrowest of margins. Cameroon went home while Italy and Bergomi marched on past Argentina, Brazil and (West) Germany to lift the World Cup.

"I can recall (Francesco) Graziani putting us ahead in the second half against Cameroon which should have lifted some of the tension," Bergomi told reporters at Italy's World Cup base north of Paris.

"But they equalised straight away which immediately put us under pressure again. It was a great match but it was tense for the whole 90 minutes.

"The other thing I remember is that they seemed genuinely happy in the changing rooms afterwards because they'd held us to a draw — even though they'd been knocked out of the World Cup." Italy face Cameroon again on Wednesday in their second Group B match and now, as then, qualification is wide open.

In a curious echo of 1982, both sides drew their opening matches — Italy 2-2 with Chile and Cameroon 1-1 with Austria.

"I'm quite sure Cameroon have come a long way since 1982," said Bergomi, who played in the final of that tournament as an 18-year-old and is back at the 1998 World Cup as the elder statesman of the Italian squad.

"Technically I expect them to be much better and they also have the experience of a few tournaments behind them now.

"I didn't see their match against Austria but we're expecting a tough match again," he said.

A Brazilian party on the cards

FRANCE, June 16 (AFP/Internet): Rai, the former captain of Paris Saint-Germain and the Brazilian team, revealed preparations for the Coracao Brasileiro, scheduled to be held in Paris on July 1.

He was joined by Paris mayor Jean Tiberi, and Rio de Janeiro mayor Marcelo Alencar.

The Brazilian Festival will be held at the Parc des Princes on July 1 at 12 noon (BST). A premiere in Paris, this giant concert will feature all the latest Brazilian musical trends. At the presentation ceremony, yesterday at the Paris town hall, Rai announced that the event "will be an opportunity to promote not just Brazilian culture in France, but also our unique joie de vivre sense of rhythm," Jean Tiberi stressed that the event would "strengthen ties between France and Brazil".

One of the events scheduled to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of Brazil, the concert will bring together big names in Brazilian music, including Daniela Mercury, Gilberto Gil, Skank, Ivan Lins, Ivete Sangalo. More than 150 dancers, a light show of pictures and paintings telling the history of Brazil are also scheduled. For French music fans, Johnny Hallyday will also be on hand.

Rai, who was not considered for the France 98 by Mario Zagallo, is still a Brazil fan par excellence.

"Of course I wanted to participate in this World Cup, especially here in France. But I am still a Brazilian fan par excellence. It would be great if Brazil went to the finals again. The teams that have impressed me most are Nigeria and ... Brazil, even though their first game was mediocre.

"The Netherlands could also go far. The French team did not surprise me since I had expected a good performance from them. I think that with the support of their fans and the high quality of their players, they can also go far in this competition. I would also include Yugoslavia on my list of favourites."

Vogts not emotional

PARIS, June 16: Germany's coach Berti Vogts has emphasized that he will not put soccer sentiment before a hard-headed approach to the World Cup campaign, reports AFP.

He had the chance on Monday to gift former captain Lothar Matthaeus a place in World Cup history but did not make the gesture.

If Vogts had put Matthaeus on to replace Andy Moeller in the 88th minute against the United States, the veteran would have beaten the record of 21 World Cup matches held by compatriot Uwe Seeler. Poland's Wladyslaw Zmuda and Diego Maradona of Argentina.

He would also have become the second player to have competed in five finals alongside Mexican goalkeeper Antonio Carbajal who played 11 games between 1950 and 1962.

But Vogts chose to put in Markus Babel for the remaining minutes and Matthaeus was made to wait for his elevation to greatness.



ON TARGET: Germany's Andreas Moeller (C) heads in Germany's opening goal while US custodian Kasey Keller (L) and Claudio Reyna look on during their encounter at Paris on June 15. —AFP photo

Klinsmann beats age, aches and Americans

PARIS, June 16 (Reuters): They might be older and slower than they once were, but Jurgen Klinsmann and the rest of Germany's old guard were still far too strong for the United States in their opening World Cup Group F match on Monday.

Klinsmann, who will be 34 next month, set up the opening goal by out-jumping two American defenders, heading across for 30-year-old Andy Moeller to score.

Then he added a superb second himself after 65 minutes as the European champions outclassed the United States 2-0. That goal came as Klinsmann cushioned the ball on his chest, outmanoeuvring Thomas Dooley sweep it into the far corner of Kasey Keller's net.

Eight of the German side that started the match were over 30 years old, with Klinsmann one of four survivors of the West German side that lifted the World Cup in 1990. There was an even older substitute on the bench who also played in that game.

Lothar Matthaeus, 37, did not get the chance to come on and equal Mexican goalkeeper Antonio Carbajal's long-standing record of playing five World Cup finals, but could well feature in the next two matches

against Yugoslavia and Iran. Klinsmann appeared back to his best. Hindered by a loss of form and a broken jaw during his stay at Tottenham Hotspur, Klinsmann began to rediscover his goal touch towards the end of the season as he helped save Spurs from relegation from the English Premier league.

The hard work involved had clearly paid off as he became only the 17th player in World Cup history to score in three tournaments. He also took his World Cup goals tally to nine and could well finish his international career after the finals with his name included among the all-time top scorers in the competition.

"Tonight's victory is a confirmation that I'm back on form," said the German skipper after winning his 104th cap.

"We had a perfect start with the early goal and it was very good for my confidence to set up the first goal and score the second — it is the best start I could dream of.

"Over the last few months I worked very hard to get fit and all the hard work is now paying off. We made life a bit difficult for ourselves, and dropped our rhythm in the second half after taking the lead, but a 2-0 win in

our first game is a very good result, if not perfect."

Coach Berti Vogts was also full of praise for his skipper. "Jurgen is a very important player for us. He has so much experience on and off the pitch and has a great deal of influence still."

While Klinsmann created space, room and mayhem in the American defence, another 100-cap veteran, Jurgen Kohler marshalled the German defence superbly.

He made just one serious misjudgement when he allowed American substitute Frankie Hejduk the chance to power in a header at goal, but apart from that he was as stylish and imperious as ever at the back.

Even allowing for their extra age, the Germans were always quicker to read the game and quicker to the ball — especially when the Americans tried to counter.

Vogts was complimentary about the United States afterwards, praising their increased tactical awareness and their battling qualities.

"Teams like the United States do not collapse after an hour as they used to in the past, there are no poorer cousins any more at this level," he said.

Just older and wiser ones.

Yugoslavs have to pull up their socks

SAINT-GALMIER, France, June 16 (AFP): Yugoslavia coach Slobodan Santrac has just a week to weld his globe-trotting squad of soccer mercenaries into a fighting unit capable of resisting Germany.

The Yugoslavs emerged with the three points in a scrappy 1-0 win in their Group F opener against Iran on Sunday.

But as they regrouped at their base here on Monday there were signs of shell-shock after a match they did not deserve to win and could easily have lost.

Santrac was clearly still furious at yet another example of

the match in Saint-Etienne. With the Yugoslavs frequently looking like they were playing together for the first time, the Iranians dominated for long periods and, most worryingly for Santrac, were allowed acres of space in the middle of the field.

Iran ultimately proved too inexperienced to take advantage. A German squad that includes the likes of Andreas Moeller will not make the same mistake.

The Yugoslavs revel in their reputation as the Brazilians of Europe. But even Brazil have realised that success in international football these days means every player contributing defensively as well as offensively.

Sinisa Mihajlovic, the Sampdoria defender whose free-kick earned Yugoslavia the win, predicted things would be different against Germany.

"It is always hard against teams that pull everyone back behind the ball," he said.

The failure to break down Iran's limited defences however does not augur well for the Yugoslav's final group match against the United States, who have proved themselves very effective at stifling more talented teams.

After watching the Yugoslavs on Sunday, there seems little doubt that the Americans will seriously fancy their chances of progressing to the second round.

In the days of the old Yugoslavia, division between Croats, Serbs, Slovenians and Macedonians was often put forward as the reason for the national team's repeated failure to live up to its potential on the international stage.

Now the most common theory is that because the country's players are so spread out around the world it is difficult for them to fuse into an effective side.

In the last season, various members of Santrac's squad have been earning their living in England, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Japan.

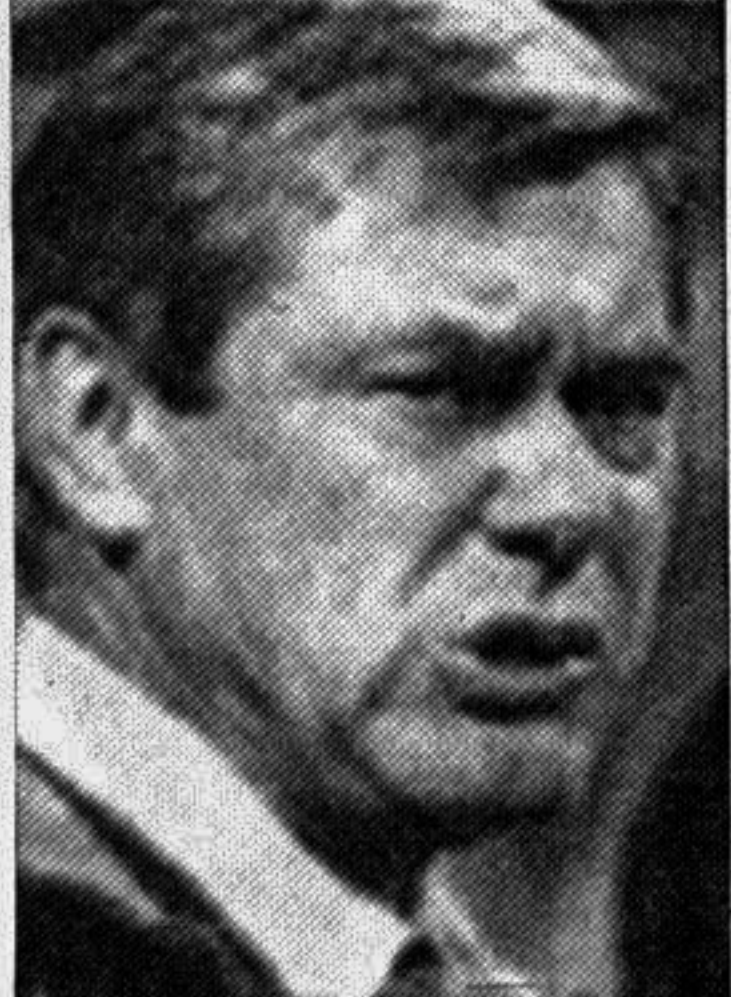
Only four of the 22 players are based in Yugoslavia and they are all set to move abroad

after this summer's tournament. Press conferences at the Yugoslav camp resemble a meeting of the United Nations as English, French, German, Italian and Spanish mingle with Serbo-Croat.

"We have some of the best players in Europe but sometimes it is difficult to put it all together as a team, admitted striker Savo Milosevic.

Milosevic however warned against reading too much into the lacklustre performance against the Iranians.

"We played Nigeria few days ago and destroyed them but they came here and beat Spain,"



SANTRAC

a star-packed Yugoslav side failing to produce a team performance worthy of their individual talents.

"We do not have a problem with coordination," he snapped. "The players just did not do what I told them to."

Santrac spent all last week telling anyone who would listen about how much work his players were doing to ensure their sum added up to more than their parts. But on the evidence of Sunday's performance, he still has some work to do to get the blend right.

But for a serious mistake by inexperienced young goalkeeper Nima Nakisa 18 minutes from the end, Iran would have taken at least a draw from



Joerg Heinrich (R) of Germany sends USA's Cobi Jones flying with a tackle during their Group F match at Parc des Princes, Paris on June 15. —AFP photo

Burglary at Saudi camp

MARCO-EN-BAROEUL, France, June 16: Thieves stole money, gifts and prayer mats from the Saudi Arabian World Cup hotel while the team were playing their opening match against Denmark, police said on Saturday, reports Reuters.

They said 10 rooms were broken into during Friday's Group C match in nearby Lens. Around 60,000 French francs (10,000 US dollars) were taken along with a number of personal items.

The robbery was reported by hotel staff who arrived to clean the rooms after the game, which Saudi Arabia lost 1-0.

Security guards left the hotel to have a coffee shortly before the break-in, media reports said.

Footix demands justice

PARIS, June 16 (Reuters): He may be a cheeky chappie intended to embody the fun of football — but official World Cup mascot Footix is not getting a look-in on the pitch, and he's not pleased.

The man-size version of the blue, red and yellow cartoon cockerel which appears on World Cup merchandise has been invited to minor sponsors' functions or media centre openings. But has not featured in a single ceremony on the pitch.

"It's sad for the spectators, and personally, I'm pissed off," said Regis Fassier, the actor who has spent much of the last two years inside the Footix costume.

"Professionally, it's very frustrating, when you work with a character like that, you start to become it, it's almost as if he'd been still-born."

Rumours abound that Footix has been kept out of the big stage by the antipathy of certain members of the World Cup publicity department.

"It's a good thing they actually like football," Fassier rasped, "otherwise there'd have been no ball for the kick-off on the opening day."

Akita had 'Bati' all worked out

AIX-LES-BAINS, France, June 16 (AP): Defender Yutaka Akita had quite an initiation at Japan's World Cup debut, going one-on-one against Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta.

His impression? No sweat, he said Monday.

"I did not feel Batistuta was someone you couldn't stop," he told reporters after returning to training camp from Toulouse, where Japan lost 1-0 on Batistuta's goal Sunday.

In fact, he added, Batistuta wasn't anywhere as quick as Cameroon's Patrick Mboma, who plays for J-League's Gamba Osaka. Akita, who plays for J-League's Kashima Antlers, has played against Mboma often.

"And he wasn't all that big," he said of Batistuta.

Obviously proud that Japan had not allowed Batistuta more than one goal, Akita said he was able to do so well because he had studied the Argentine.

"I knew what he was going to do, so he couldn't do it," he said. "My approach is to erase my opponent's strengths. If he can't carry out his best plays, he just becomes another player."

Like the rest of his team, Akita has now switched to thinking about the next game, against Croatia on Saturday.

"They have many talented players, but it's not a team we can't beat," he said.

Akita noted that Japan had beaten Croatia once, 4-3 at the Kirin Cup in Japan last year. But that Croat team was missing Davor Suker as well as Zvonimir Boban.

Japan opened their practice to reporters and fans at the training camp for the first time in days.

But most of the starters took it easy, jogging and volleying the ball. The reserves spent most of the time on shooting practice.

Pint sized Persian predator

YSSINGEAUX, France Jun 16: When Iran meet the United States next Sunday in the most politically charged match of this World Cup, one of the players the Americans will have to watch is Iran's star striker Khodada Azizi, reports AP.

This diminutive attacker, who is 5 feet 6 inches (1.68 metres) is the shortest player on the team, helped Iran clinch the last World Cup spot with a goal against Australia in the closing minutes.

Azizi doesn't want to jinx his team predicting the outcome of any game. But, he says, even a jinx couldn't stop Iran from winning against the United States.

Despite Iran's 1-0 loss to Yugoslavia at St. Etienne on Sunday, the Iranians have gained new confidence for their next two games, with the United States and Germany.

Iran were expected to crumble against the supposedly powerful Yugoslavs. Instead, they put up a fight and went into the second half tied 0-0. In the end, only one of Sinisa Mihajlovic's trademark free kicks gave Yugoslavia their narrow win.

"We will definitely play better and stronger against the United States," said Azizi, who plays for Germany's FC Cologne. Two other Iranian strikers, Ali Daei and Karim Bagheri, also play in the German Bundesliga and are not to be taken lightly by opponents.

Azizi is considered one of the best strikers in the German Bundesliga, and has scored multiple goals for his club.

"Our whole team is good. But we will make sure that the attack is the best part of the team," said Azizi, 27.

He said that back home, people just cared about a good game against Yugoslavia and Germany. But they want a win against the United States.

For Iran, the United States is the one team it has any chance of beating in Group F. Given nearly 20 years of hostility between Iran and the United States, the game in Lyon will be among the most intriguing at the World Cup.

Already, anti-American hard-liners in Iran are urging the government to order players



KHODADA AZIZI not to exchange T-shirts with the Americans after the game.

For Azizi, the world of big league soccer, where he is paid more than one million dollars for the two-year contract with Cologne is a far cry from the dirt grounds where he started to

play soccer in his impoverished neighbourhood.

Like nearly every Iranian player, Azizi first became intrigued with soccer by kicking a flimsy plastic ball as a child.

Small in stature, Azizi has made speed his asset. On the field, accelerates like a sprinter, and his fancy footwork allows him to evade defenders.

"My father was against my playing soccer. We were poor, and he did not want me to sacrifice my studies for something that would probably get me nowhere," said Azizi.

His Asian features are distinct from his teammates', and the other Iranian players tease him with kung-fu shrieks as he races across the field during practice sessions.

Azizi was born in the town of Fariman in northeastern Iran into a family of six brothers and one sister. His father was a day labourer who would work in the fields, joined by his sons during school holidays.

Azizi married four years ago and has an 8-month-old daughter, Fatemeh.

He says he likes his German club. But he loves Spanish soccer more.

"I've told my team I would never leave Cologne for another German team, even if I were offered more money. But the one condition I have had is that my club should let me go if I get an offer from Spain," said Azizi.

"I like Spanish soccer and I believe that any player who has technique can do well there," Azizi said.

He said he will think seriously about whether to leave Cologne only after the World Cup.



England's rising star Paul Scholes (hidden in the centre) is engulfed by ecstatic teammates after his superb 20-metre strike against Tunisia at Marseille on June 15. —AFP photo

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, June 16 (AP): Forty years after scoring a record 13 goals in a single World Cup tournament, Just Fontaine has sympathy for today's strikers.

Modern teams, he says, are just too defensive for there to be a threat to the goalkeeping record he set at the 1958 World Cup finals in Sweden.

"Today, coaches are too important, more important than the players," the 64-year-old Frenchman said Monday.

"Look at Argentina's Gabriel Batistuta on Sunday. He had only two chances and scored one. I always had many more chances when I was playing."

"Coaches only play with one or two forwards today. They prefer to play defensive players

because they are easier to organize," he said. "Playing that way, my record could last another 50 World Cups."

GOING BACK TO STRETCHERS

In the 1994 World Cup hosted by the United States, injured players were carried off the field on special golf carts. For the 1998 tournament, the French organisers have gone back to old-fashioned stretcher bearers.

The medical staff considered using golf buggies but decided against it in the end.

"We tested the buggies but from a medical point of view it didn't make a difference," Nicolas Gorodetzky, the French organising committee's medical general manager, said at a press conference Monday.

"To get players to the side lines it's just as quick and usually players don't go all the way to the medical station," Gorodetzky said.

He added that in the larger stadiums such as the Stade de France outside Paris and Les-Cure stadium in Bordeaux, there are golf buggies to bring the players to the medical stations, which can be as far as 600 metres from the pitch.

Under French law, the organising committee of the World Cup is responsible for the medical posts in all the stadiums. Gorodetzky said there are 150 medical staff working for the World Cup. Until now, the medical staff has treated about 500 people, mostly for minor injuries.

FUNNY

A Mexican soccer fan was taken to hospital in on after he fell off a horse.

The horse was not hurt. In fact it didn't feel a thing, it's made of bronze. The statue of the horse and its rider the Sun King, Louis XIV, have been in the Place Bellecour in Lyon for a century and a half.

The Mexican suffered injuries to his face and wrist Sunday afternoon. His name wasn't released by authorities.

The visitor apparently didn't know he was joining royalty when he mounted the statue. In 1870, Lyon was the first city in France to proclaim the republic. Municipal authorities at the end of the 19th century removed the inscription identifying the rider as Louis XIV. It was re-

placed by an inscription naming the sculptor.

To this day when people in Lyon arrange to meet at the statue, they do not identify the horseman. Instead, they talk of meeting by the bronze horse.

BRIT PICKPOCKETS

Three pickpockets from Britain were arrested over the weekend at a campsite near Bordeaux, French daily Liberation reported Monday.

The thieves had bank cards stolen from journalists and Scottish fans on them when they were arrested, the paper said. They were identified only as English and Scottish. Names weren't released.

TUNIS BEING SPORTING

The Tunisian government gave its civil servants the afternoon off Monday to watch the England-Tunisia World Cup game.

A presidential decision gives civil servants two paid afternoons off during the World Cup. That other is for the Colombia-Tunisia match next week.

England won the match 2-0, crushing Tunisian hopes of an upset.

One Tunisian newspaper headlined Monday before the match: "The English have made soccer, the Tunisians can make this event."

Japan require more bite

TOULOUSE, France, June 16: Japan's top soccer official has warned the World Cup newcomers to sharpen their attack or face an early exit from their debut tournament, reports AFP.

After a 1-0 defeat to former world champions Argentina in the Group H opening match on Sunday, Ken Nagamura, the head of the Japan Football Association, said the team had to put the accent on attack against Croatia in their next game.

Nagamura, who in his coaching days guided Japan to the bronze medal at the 1966 Mexico Olympics, said Japan's emphasis on defence would take the side nowhere.

"We were forced to repeat what we have done in our recent matches," he said.