

Will Del Piero work his magic against the Austrians?

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS



ON ALERT: Security personnel keep strict watch as Iranian fans opposed to the government, demonstrate at Gerland Stadium on June 21. — AFP photo

Can Cameroon cope with red hot Chile

NANTES, France, June 22: Cameroon and Chile, both without a win after two matches, will be looking to grab a last chance at glory when they meet in their final World Cup Group B match here tomorrow, reports AFP.

Italy, who face Austria at the Stade de France at the same time, are the favourites to win the group, but any one of the three remaining teams could also advance to the last 16.

Chile opened with an impressive 2-2 draw with the Italians. But they conceded a final-minute goal after dominating Austria and had to settle for a 1-1 scoreline. All three of their goals so far have come from Marcelo 'the matador' Salas, their master marksman.

Salas, just 23, will go into the Cameroon match needing one goal to break the Chilean international goalscoring record. Salas currently has 29 goals, the same as Carlos Caszary, which he has scored in just 48 internationals.

No wonder Lazio have swooped to sign Mr 100 per cent from Argentine club River Plate.

"It is not important to me that I break this record," said Salas. "What is important to me is that Chile qualify for the second round, whether 1 score or not."

A win over Cameroon would ensure the Chileans of a place in the second round regardless of the results of the other game. Cameroon, however, know that even a victory may not be enough.

The Chileans, making their seventh World Cup final appearance but their first for 16 years, appear to have trump cards in strike duo Salas and Ivan Zamorano, but they were stunned by Austria's late equaliser in St Etienne.

"It was a real blow to the morale of the team," said goalkeeper Nelson Tapia. "But we are still motivated. We want to give something back to our supporters and don't want to go home as losers."

Zamorano said the Chileans were encouraged by the football they have played, but disappointed by the results.

"We are one of the teams that plays the best football," he said. "We are champion players and we combine well as a team, even though we lack a little experience at this level."

Chile finish second in the Group they will earn a second-round meeting with defending champions Brazil. Zamorano would relish a meeting with the Brazilians and their star striker Ronaldo — his teammate at Inter Milan.

Ronaldo told me before the World Cup that Chile wouldn't make it past the first round," Zamorano said. "My dream would be to play Brazil, win the match and then exchange jerseys with Ronaldo."

Cameroon have no injury problems but will be without defender Raymond Kalla Nkongo, who was suspended for two matches after being sent off for a wild foul on Italian midfielder Luigi Di Biagio during the 3-0 loss in Montpellier last Wednesday.

The Africans, aiming to match their performance as quarter-finalists in Italy eight years ago, have been their own worst enemies thus far, but have sought to blame others for their misfortunes.

"I think that our team played well, but it's not the first time that Cameroon has suffered at the hands of referees," said sports minister Joseph Owono after the loss to Italy.

Hatif Abedi Jam, 15, left Iran for Germany when he was 2, and also wants to go back. "I can't go now, but maybe things will change." He was painted and clothed in bright Iran colors, but a small US flew from his hat.

Americans were far fewer, but some were just as exuberant. Andy Romhanyi, 33, a warehouse manager from Phoenix, painted his face as Old Glory and wore a US flag as a scarf over a flamboyant red, white and blue outfit. His friend, Nicky Carter, wore a sequined vest and elaborate hat in the same colors.

"We don't give a stuff about politics," said Romhanyi, who wanted a win so the US team would advance to the next round. "It would be a huge, huge shame if we lost, but not because it is Iran."

Banners unfurled at the game read, "Iran Rajavi." Security police pulled them down and hauled at least one Mujahedeen out of the stands. During Iran's national anthem, new banners appeared, and police poured over the railings to seize them, often by fierce tug-of-war.

French officials confirmed they turned back hundreds of Iranians at the border.

But much of the noise was about soccer as Iran's 2-1 victory eliminated the United States from World Cup contention. At each goal, Iranians went wild all together, banging drums, blaring horns and yelling in frenzy. In unison, they chanted, "I-ran, I-ran."

Thousands of Iranians living in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia came to the game, far outnumbering those travelling from Iran. But almost all insisted that a different place of residence did not dilute their claim to a beloved identity.

Too many foreigners confuse Iran's conservative Islamic leaders with a 7,000-year-old civilisation with much wider dimensions, she added. "I'm not covered from head to toe."

Ciao Cha

SAINT-QUENTIN, France, June 22 (AP/AF): The price of failure at the World Cup is high. For South Korean coach Cha Bum-Kun, it cost him his job.

The most famous and successful striker in the history of South Korean football, the once revered "Brown Bomber" is now considered just a bomb.

With his team's string of failures at this World Cup — the failure to even muster a single goal in losses to Mexico or Netherlands — it was only a matter of time before Cha was fired.

His players' humiliating 5-0 defeat at the hands of the Dutch in Marseille on Saturday sealed Cha's fate. Korean soccer officials called a special committee meeting in Paris the following day and decided to fire the former international.

"Someone had to take the blame," said Cha, who spent 10 years in Germany with Bayer Leverkusen and Eintracht Frankfurt between 1979 and 1989, winning the UEFA Cup with both teams. "I tried my best but the result was poor."

Cha, who said he was upset but not bitter about the dismissal, added if the Korean Football Association ever offered him a second chance, he would "get better results."

He also said he would study the video of his team's matches to work out what went wrong.

To many it was obvious. The South Korean media heavily criticised Cha for mismanagement of the team and an unwise selection for his starting lineup against Mexico.

Officials in Seoul said advertisements showing sacked coach Cha cheering for his team to reach the second round at the World Cup will no longer be used.

A spokesman at Samsung Electronics Co Ltd said it will stop running two advertisements showing Cha.

"The ads showed Cha determined to take his team to the last-16. There is no use putting this ad out anymore. It is meaningless and so we will stop running them," the spokesman said.

Yonhap news agency said several other companies were expected to do the same since Cha's popularity had dropped following Saturday's thrashing by the Netherlands.

A South Korean soccer official here told the news agency there were no plans to send anyone out to the airport to meet Cha, who is scheduled to arrive later in the day.

"If I did go it would be to throw eggs at him. But, no we are not sending out anyone to the airport," he said.

South Koreans had high hopes that Cha would be able to keep his promise and take the team to its first World Cup win.

Cha also adopted a seemingly naive strategy against the Netherlands, electing for man to man marking of the great Dutch strikes. It wasn't enough to stop the likes of Dennis Bergkamp.

Cha became coach in January 1997 replacing 1995 Asian coach of the year Park Jong Hwan after Park was dismissed following the country's elimination in the quarter-finals of the Asian Cup against Iran the year before.

If Cha's World Cup campaign was a disaster, his build-up to the event was anything but.

Marching his team through qualifying with a 9-2-1 record, Cha's only blemish was a sensitive 2-0 defeat at the hands of traditional rivals Japan.

In matches leading up to the World Cup after qualifying, Cha guided the team to a respectable 14 wins, seven draws and six defeats.

But all of that has already been forgotten.

Dunga in the dock

OZOIR-LA-FERRIERE, France, June 22 (AP/Internet): The furious on-field outburst by Brazil captain Dunga against Bebeto that threatened to split the team has been settled - by a players' vote.

Last Tuesday in Nantes Dunga tongue-lashed the striker for giving the ball away in midfield. At one moment it looked as if the two were going to come to blows until Leonardo rushed in to separate them.

His public humiliation of one of the heroes of Brazil's 1994 World Cup winning team angered several of the players.

One of them accused Dunga of picking on Bebeto because he was one of the smallest members of the squad.

"He would not have gone at Junior Baiano because of his size or Edmundo because of his reputation," he claimed.

But Roberto Carlos says the bad feeling caused within the team because of Dunga's action, were settled privately during a clear-the-air meeting.

"Dunga has a big responsibility as the captain and everything he does we know is because he is doing his best for the team," said Roberto Carlos.

Coach Mario Zagallo will be relieved that the affair has been settled. He knows the importance of Dunga, who holds the team together at the back.

"That's just the way he is," Zagallo said. "He's a perfectionist and always wants to win at whatever he does and he hates mistakes. But once the match is over he forgets everything."

"On the field, it's Dunga who is in charge. It seems logical to me he reminds everybody what his job is when they mess up."

he added.

But Dunga can be his own worst enemy. He makes no effort to be diplomatic when asked what he thinks of the team.

Asked if the current team was better than the 1994 side who beat Italy on penalties in the Pasadena final of the 34-year-old Dunga is brutally frank.

"You can say the current team is more technical, more talented, but it is not better physically nor emotionally. It is not consistent and lacks humility," he says.

Far from believing all the high praise being lavished on Brazil, Dunga has no doubts that if they keep listening to those who say they are the best it will be their downfall.

He is frequently described as a workhorse with little or no skill but the crew-cropped Dunga has used the attacks to inspire himself.

"I am human and I suffered because of the criticism. But human beings are capable of being very positive and that's what I did."

"I made an enormous amount of effort to do that and I learnt a lot about me and other people," he explained.

He also knows exactly what he has to offer Brazil.

"I am strong mentally, very strong, and that is more important than anything. How many very talented players have done badly in a World Cup because they were not strong enough mentally."

"I'm not trying to build myself up out of vanity. I am also very aware of what I'm not. But I know exactly who I am and what I can give," he said.



DEVASTATING DUO: Hatrick hero Gabriel Batistuta (R) is about to be embraced by Ariel Ortega after scoring against Jamaica on June 21. — AFP photo

Will Atlas Lions roar in the highlands

SAINT-ETIENNE, France, June 22 (AFP): Scotland's bid to finally slay the jinx that has seen them fall to progress beyond the first stage at seven previous World Cups hinges on an all-or nothing clash with Morocco tomorrow.

Both sides know that, barring an unexpected victory for Norway over Brazil in the other Group A match, victory in the Stade Geofrey Guichard will secure a place in the second round for the first time in their history.

A draw could be enough for the Scots to squeeze through on goal difference but Craig Brown's men know they cannot afford to risk playing for a point against Moroccan side that, unlike their opponents, always looks capable of scoring.

The Scots won praise around the world for the way they stood up to world champions Brazil in the opening match of France '98 then dominated Norway in their 1-1 draw last week in Bordeaux.

But all the pundits will count for nothing if they fail to turn good approach work into goals against a Moroccan defence which looked shaky in the 3-0 defeat by Brazil in Nantes last week.

"There is keen anticipation among all the squad to get on with this game," Brown said. "They know this is the biggest

game of their lives with so much resting on it."

The key to the outcome is likely to be the extent to which Morocco's young squad, which has an average of 26 compared to Scotland's 29 is able to bounce back from being comprehensively outplayed by Brazil.

Moustafa Hadji, Morocco's star forward who scored in the exhilarating 2-2 opening draw with Norway, acknowledges that the Scots' greater experience could give them the edge.

"We lack experience the mistakes we make are those of young players," he said. "But if we play the way we are capable of, we will qualify."

Upwards of 15,000 Scots fans are expected to arrive in Saint-Etienne for the match, but for once the Tartan Army is not certain of being able to out chant shout and sing the rival supporters.

Saint-Etienne is home to a large Moroccan community and the north Africans sides matches have drawn bigger crowds than those of France to the giant screen, erected in the industrial city's main square.

By a curious twist of fate, Hadji was brought up in Saint-Etienne after his family moved here when he was three.

"For us the match against Scotland will be our final, he said. "We are not going to win

the World Cup but if we can beat Scotland and Norway to reach the second round we will have surprised a few people."

Morocco's French coach Henri Michel, who guided France to the 1986 World Cup semifinals had no injury worries but he will have to do without his tough tackling midfielder said Chiba because of suspension.

Defender Abdelkirim-el-Hadrioui and goalkeeper Driss Benzekrei whose errors on crosses led to both Norway goals have shaken off knocks incurred in the defeat by Brazil.

Hadji has a broken toe on his right foot but says it does not affect his game.

Scotland will be without the suspended Celtic midfielder forward Darren Jackson and the injured defender Colin Calderwood.

David Weir, the hearts defender who replaced Calderwood when he went off against Norway and created Craig Burley's equaliser, had been expected to start.

But Leicester City's Matt Elliott has impressed Brown in training and could be brought in for only his fourth cap it is a straight toss up between the two, the Scotland coach said.

The Scottish players player-of-the-year Jackie McNamara is expected to come in for Jackson who he plays alongside at Scottish champions Celtic.

Football fan fashion

PARIS, June 22 (AFC/Internet): It isn't a fashion show for sure. Elegance is the last thing on the minds of grown men with inflatable Dutch clogs the size of salad bowls on their heads.

But it's a fashion statement of sorts in the World Cup fancy dress parade.

The Dutch have the natural advantage of bright orange as their team colours. Orange clogs, orange hairdos, orange from head to foot.

They are not good singers in the German mould, but they look better. Or is it worse.

The Japanese win the team fancy dress competition. They wear shirts and shorts in the team blue, with a splash of red on the shoulder, and paint the Rising Sun on their faces.

But the fans who call themselves "Ultra Nippon" lose the best song contest.

Perhaps in deference to the French hosts, they hum an upbeat French pop song that was a big hit in Japan in the 1970s. When things get exciting they break into chants of "Nippon, Nippon."

The South Koreans are the best-dressed fans. Their men have been spotted wearing ties to games. The women sway to the beat of Korean drums in the shapely Hanbok national costume with cute Korean flags painted on their cheeks. Cheerleaders direct them in chants and song.

The Asians are organised, but the European get the prize for being weird.

The Scots have been travelling the world for generations hoping for a dream come true. Legend has it that lost remnants of the Tartan army are still turning up in Argentina after the 1978 World Cup.

They are good natured and more Scottish than English in that a good time takes precedence over a fight.

The English will be ever remembered for the George Cross

FIFA seek EU help

LENS, France, June 22 (AP/Internet): The head of world soccer today called on the European Union to do more to prevent known soccer thugs from crossing borders to foment violence in other countries.

Sepp Blatter, president of FIFA, also stressed that street violence by followers of some teams would not affect the staging of the World Cup.

So concerned was FIFA over the violence that it called an emergency meeting of the ruling Bureau this afternoon in Paris. FIFA issued a five-step plan to try to quell the violence and take long-range steps to make sure it does not recur.

At the heart of the plan was FIFA's pledge to "take the initiative of seeking greater cooperation with political authorities, including those of the European Union, in the continuing effort to protect the reputation of football and for the introduction of new legal measures to achieve this."

FIFA did not have direct contact with the EU over the hooligan issue prior to this year's World Cup. But he stressed that such contact would be made not only for future tournaments, but for soccer in general.

Blatter also said there had been some discussion about expelling teams whose fans misbehaved, including an informal proposal from a member of FIFA's board. He refused to identify the member, but said the matter was immediately dropped.

tattooed on beer bellies as they swaggered through Marseille, leaving chaos in their wake.

The English team shirt -- white -- is about as colourful as they get.

The Belgians are burdened with one of the World's most staid and boring teams. The fans compensate with the most garish get-up.

They call their team the "Red Devils" and sport red horns and carry pitchforks. The fans from hell are generally beer-soaked but good natured, though they turn sour when they play the Dutch.

The Dutch outfit everybody. With inflatable orange clogs on their heads, or orange Rasta wigs, they are absurd. But no one laughs when your team is as good as Holland.

The Germans have a sober, hardcore element who organise their hooliganism via mobile phones.

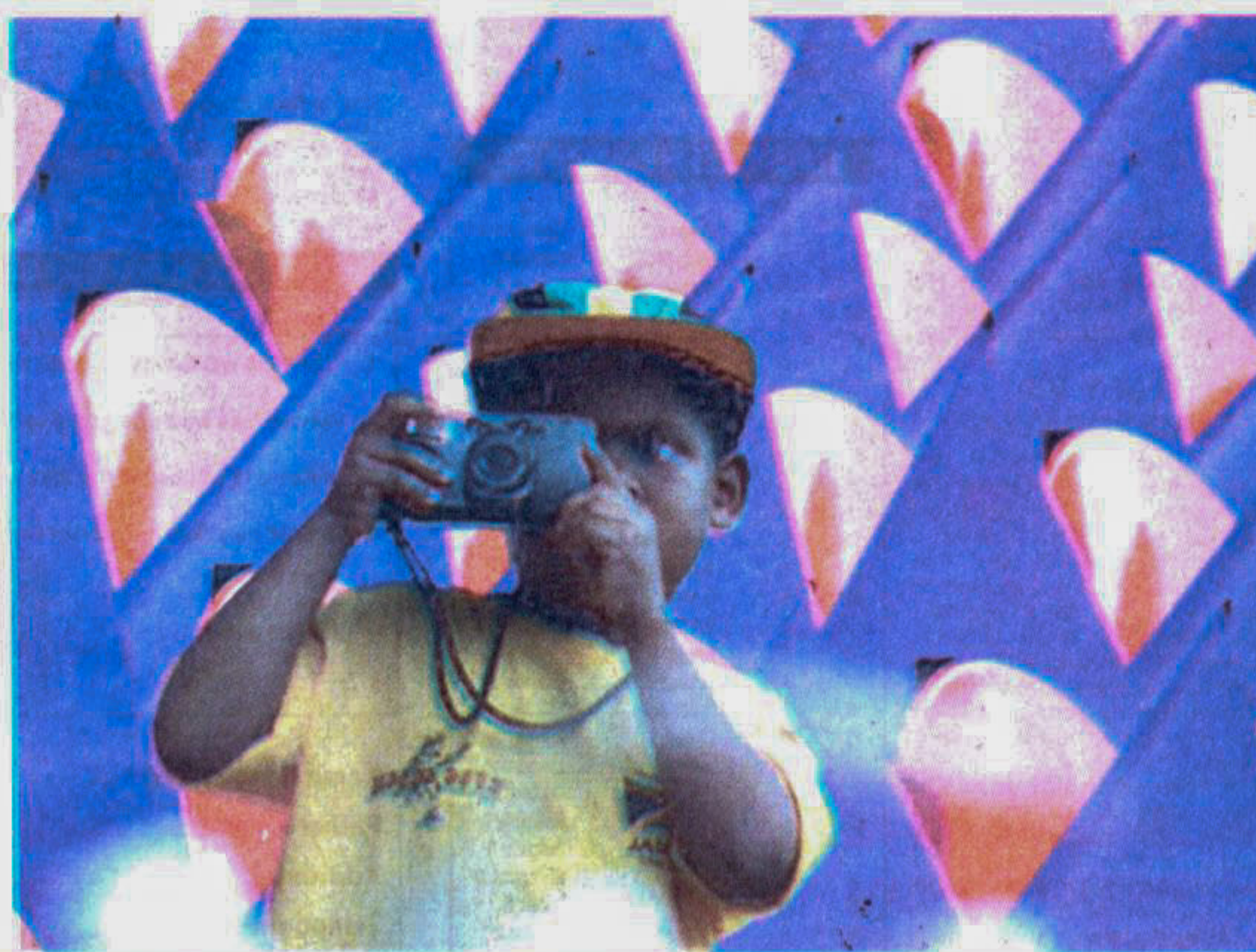
But the genuine fans are big on beer, the national anthem, and self parody. The Bavarians turn up in Lederhosen and the north Germans chant "get em off."

The Danes like red and white face paint and Viking outfits complete with horned helmets and tridents.

The Italian tifosi bring their regional flags and regional differences with them. Discreet so far, thousands are expected for the second round.

The Brazilians supply the World Cup with acres of bare flesh and bikini tops in the national colours. No boring European-style soccer chants for them, they just samba dance and cheer.

The Jamaicans in yellow, black and gold shirts have introduced the baseball cap and reggae to the World Cup while Africans have brought the leopard skin and the tribal dance. It might not be fashion, but its fun.



SAVOURING THE MOMENT : Jamaican kid takes some snaps at the Parc des Princes Stadium before the match against Argentina on June 21. — AFP photo