## Ronaldo's rage

UNDATED, June 23 (AFP): A furious Ronaldo has hit out at gossip-mongers he claims are trying to derail his World Cup dreams.

The world's best player insists that the growing number of rumours about him are all part of a plot to destabilise him and wreck Brazil's bid to win a record fifth World Cup.

In the past week there have been claims that the superstar needs to take pain-killing in-jections before each match and that he had broken up with his girlfriend Susanna Werner.

"The story that I had a knee injection before, the last match is nothing but a joke in really bad taste," said the 21-year-old multi-millionaire.

The Inter Milan star was equally annoyed by reports that he and Werner had split-up and that he had thrown away the ring she had given him.

"The news about me and my girlfriend is another bad joke which is meant to break my concentration. I'm still wearing my ring and I intend to keep on wearing the same ring."

#### France fired up From page 16

Djorkaeff or Marseille bound Robert Pires acting as the creative force, and the latter is bursting to get into the action. "If I play I want to be judged

on my qualities," said Pires, who has scored twice in his 15 appearances for France to date. In attack, Jacquet said he wanted to rest David Trezeguet, on target against the Saudis, and might bring back Stephane

Guivarc'h after his recovery from a knee injury sustained in the opening win over South Africa. But Arsenal target Theirry

Henry, on a high with three goals already, now appears a fixture in the side. The Danes, who dryly com-

mented that they were gong to hold a party for Jan Heintze as he was the only substitute not to be sent off in their match against South Africa, look likely to bring in Derby County central defender Jacob Laursen in place of Soren Colding. Heintze is set to keep his

place on the left side of midfield with Michael Schjonberg moving into the centre of midfield, but it is to the Laudrup brothers that Denmark will be looking to turn on the necessary flair to ensure they get the three points. The Laudrups — Brian and

his older brother Michael, looked superb in the first-half of the South African encounter but once the 'bafana bafana 'clamped down on Michael, the last survivor from the exciting team that got to the second round in 1986, the Danes looked an ordinary side.

France without Zidane still look a good side and their class should see them top the group. The Danes will want to ensure they get the point that will see them play Nigeria in the second

#### Spain vs Bulgaria

From page-13

wrath of coach Hristo Bonev for staying out overnight in Paris on Sunday without permission - maybe not the best way to prepare for Wednesday's make or break battle. Bonev had expected the team

to appear for a morning discussion on the match only to discover the two strikers had disappeared.

They appeared in the early afternoon saying they had overslept.

Both now face a heavy fine. Whatever his indiscretions — and there have been a few the surprise 1994 semifinalists still rely heavily on the 32year-old Stoichkov for inspira-

He was a width of the post away from scoring a precious goal against Paraguay, but looked sluggish in the 1-0 defeat by Nigeria.

Yet his 36 goals in 73 international appearances still qualify the 1994 Europeanplayer-of-the-year for a place in the line-up four years after he was joint top-scorer with six goals alongside Russia's Oleg Salenko.

Stoichkov slammed the Spanish for over-confidence. repeating a weekend allegation that 'They think they are the

He added for good measure that "the Spanish have no chance of winning the World

But if Spain reign on Wednesday, the controversial Bulgarian will walk off the world stage for the last time.

Can Chilavert

laughed at the consideration of From page-13 Spain as a favourite in Group D. all the way to the final," said Now, as the two sides prepare the Super Eagles's centre-back Taribo West. for a survival battle Wednesday. he has further antagonised the

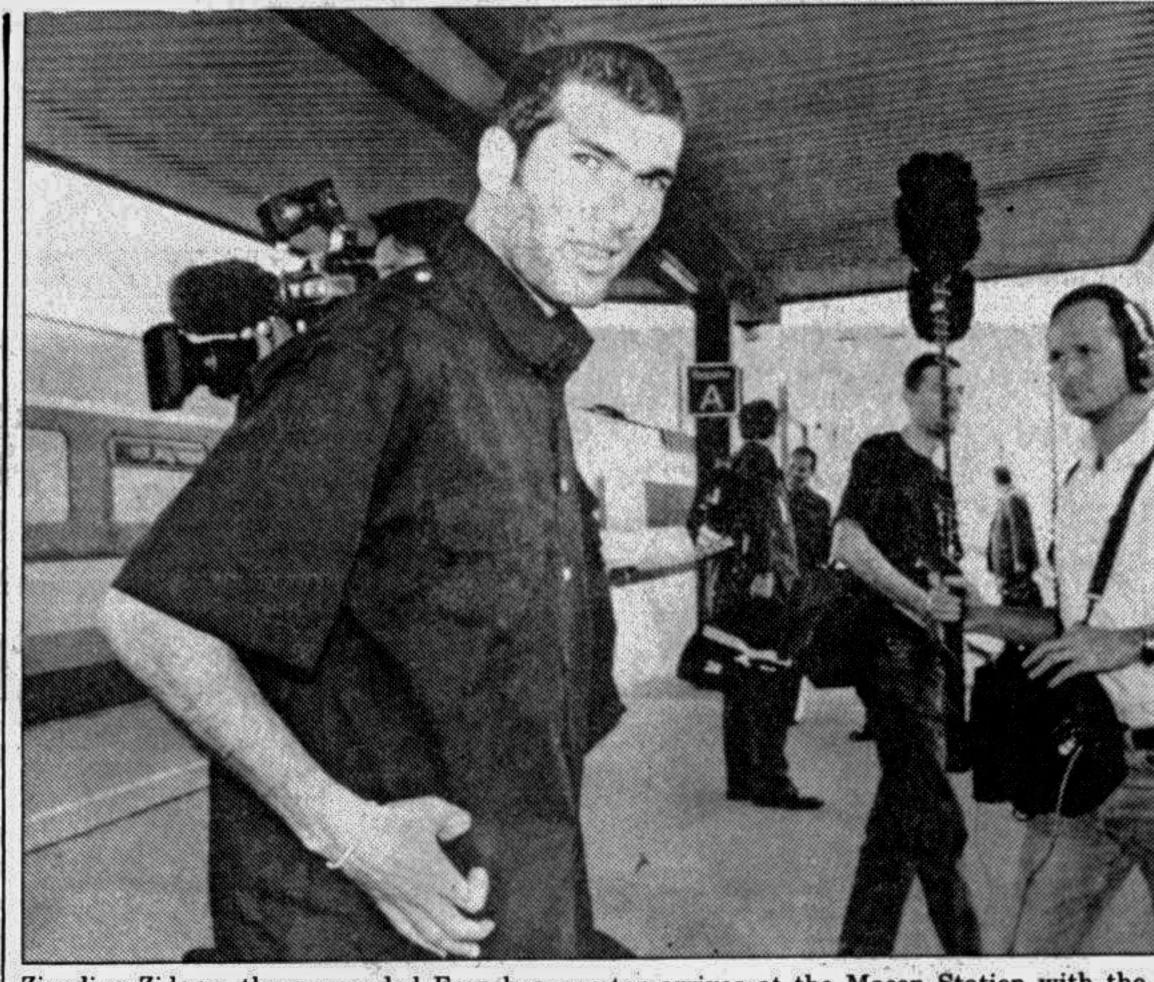
"It's true our preparation was Spaniards by saying the team is not good but that's normal after paying the price for totally a long, tiring season overestimating itself and un-Undoubtedly if Nigeria are derestimating others. focused on the task in hand in

At the beginning, Clemente Toulouse, Paraguay will face and his players dismissed Stothe stiffest test of their defenichkov, rhetorically asking sive resolve yet. what else could be expected. But as the difficulty to re-

The 1996 Olympic champions combine physical power with Brazilian-style ball skills and searing pace from all areas of the pitch.

Monaco striker and Africanplayer-of-the-year Victor Ikpeba's deft finish that won the match against Bulgaria was typical of the confidence currently cursing through the veins of Milutinovic's players and on their day the likes of Sunday Oliseh, scorer of the 25yard screamer which sealed the victory over Spain, Finidi George and Jay Jay Okocha are a match for anybody in the

tournament. The Africans, however, will have to make do without defender and captain Uche Okechukwu, who is suspended after picking up two yellow cards.



Zinedine Zidane, the suspended French superstar arrives at the Macon Station with the national squad on June 22. — AFP photo

# Gabriel gunning for Golden Boot

PARIS, June 23 (AFP): Goal machine Gabriel Batistuta's second hattrick in successive finals in Argentina's 5-0 thrashing of Jamaica has propelled him into an elite club of World Cup legends.

The 29-year-old Fiorentina striker, who ruled out a goal feast in comments leading up to the match, scored the 32nd hattrick in the history of the fi-

Batistuta, who has said he will take a month off after France '98 to consider his many transfer possibilities, also scored three goals in Argentina's 5-0 threashing of Greece in USA '94. In fact, statisticians would

lap up the figures thrown up by this phenomenal striker whom coach Daniel Passarella left out for nearly a year saying he didn't fit into their system. Passarella has denied there

was a rift and said his omission was for tactical reasons. Batistuta has now scored 47 goals in 61 matches for his

country. He was also topscorer in Italy in 1995 with 26 goals with Fiorentina, where he is said to be unsettled because the club never win as many big prizes like more illustrious rivals such as Inter Milan and Juven-

In the 1995/96 season, Fiorentina did lift the Italian Cup however, with Batistuta scoring eight goals in as many matches, including two of his side's three goals in a final over

two-legs with Atalanta. And his life in Florence is comfortable from a financial standpoint.

He earns about 3.3 million dollars a year and his wages are only second to Brazilians star Ronaldo who earns in the region of 4.7 million dollars at Inter Milan.

Batistuta is in an elite club of hattrick heroes, including

CHANTILLY, France, June

His latest taunts that Javier

23 (AP/ Internet): Bulgaria's

Hristo Stoichkov has a name

for provoking his opponents.

Clemente's crew is not up to the

task at this World Cup could

prove to be the red rag the Span-

ish bull needs if it is to awaken

For weeks, the former FC

Barcelona winger, who shared

the top goalscoring honours in

the 1994 World Cup, has ap-

peared intent on aggravating

the Spanish squad -- many of

them former teammates -- with

main in the World Cup in-

creases and criticism rains

down on Spain, his jibes might be used to unleash the so-called

"Red Fury" that Spain suppos-

has not shown respect," said

Spanish defender Rafael Alko-

rta, who has had to contend

with Stoichkov in domestic

league play and may very well

be assigned to mark him on

Wednesday. "He's made a mis-

Spain's top-selling sports paper, Marca, probably better

reflected the growing rage Mon- -

"He's out of control," the pa-

day when it ran a banner head-

line that read: "Stoichkov, Your

per wrote. "If there's one player

who specialises in heating

take with these statements."

Provocations Bore Us."

"Stoichkov is the one who

edly has but yet to show.

Prior to France '98, he

his remarks.

and the Spaniards know it.

and stay in this World Cup.

England's Geoff Hurst, who hit three in the 1996 final, Germany's Gerd Muller, who has the World Cup record of 14 goals in total, and Just Fontaine, who fired home 13 goals in Sweden in 1958.

Batistuta also proved his thirst for goals with a hattrick against Bosnia in Argentina on



GABRIEL BATISTUTA

May 15 on the build-up to this

Batistuta's exploits meant he has gone some way to making up for his disappointment in the last finals in the United Batistuta desperately wanted

to be top scorer but their second round loss to Romania in one of the most exciting match of those finals scuppered his plans and Bulgaria's Hristo Stoichkov and Russia's Oleg Salenko shared that honour with six a piece.

Batistuta's performance against Jamaica was all the more remarkable because he only scored his first goal with 17 minutes to go and there was

with "Red Fury"

things up it's Hristo Stoichkov.'

proven correct in dismissing

Cup with an almost impeccable

8-2-0 qualifying record, Spain

has done little but disappoint.

They lost their opener 3-2 to

Nigeria after twice holding a

one-goal lead. Then, after

promises of revenge, they man-

aged only a dismal 0-0 draw

against lowly Paraguay in pos-

the best and have underesti-

mated their opponents," Sto-

ichkov said this past weekend

on the field, and now they're

under pressure because they

one point each, and another

loss Wednesday for either

means elimination. A draw for

Bulgaria also spells farewell. A

victory would leave the winner

dependent on group-winner

Nigeria beating or drawing with

Paraguay, which has two

fect us," said Spanish defender

Carlos Aguilera, who also ad-

mitted that the team was grow-

ing weary of being criticised.

"We are not going to give him

any special treatment. ... We're

rose to fame as a member of FC

Barcelona's "Dream Team" in

the early '90s under the leg-

endary Johan Cruyff. With

Cruyff, he won several league

titles and the club's first and

only European Champions Cup

in 1992. He left the club earlier

this year and is expected to play

image, Stoichkov is notorious

for his arguments -- and at

times fisticuffs -- on and off the

Known for his tough cowboy

in Japan after the World Cup.

The 32-year-old Stoichkov

not obsessed with him."

"Stoichkov's words won't af-

sibly the dullest match of the

"The Spanish think they're

"Superiority has to be shown

Spain and Bulgaria have just

the Spaniards.

tournament.

have to win.

points.

in his latest taunt.

So far, Stoichkov has been

After coming into the World

still seven minutes left following his penalty for his third and Argentina's fifth.

"The goals will help me in my ambition to be the tournament's leading scorer and that is the reason I came here," said Batistuta, whose goals earned the SOS Children's Village Charity 25,000 dollars. Batistuta and Ariel Ortega.

who scored twice before the break, helped silence Argentina critics who slammed them after only beating Japan 1-0. "It wasn't easy but after the first goal they lost concentra-

tion totally and we found it very easy to run through their defence," said Batistuta, the leading tournament scorer with Batistuta, who finished the Japan game with his right ankle strapped, knew they needed

a convincing performance against Jamaica if they were to live up to their billing as the tournament favourites. Batigol, as he is known because of his goalscoring feats, is thinking of following in the

footsteps of Ossie Ardiles and Mario Kempes, the stars of Argentina's 1978 World Cup side, by moving to English football. Manchester United's Alex Ferguson is interested, but so

are a host of other clubs outside England, including, amongst other Parman, AS Roma and Real Madrid. But his price tag must have gone up after this performance in the shop window of football with surely even more phone calls pouring it to his agent.

Batistuta, who started out with Newell's Old Boys, then joined River Plate and Boca Juniors before moving to Florence in 1991, is now at possible the peak of his career.

"I want to make a name for myself at this tournament. I'm determined to do that," he said. In many people's minds, he already has.

"He's a great player that

But the Bilbao defender

symbolised an era in Spain,

wrapped up his praise with a

subtle warning: "I hope he's a

sensible fellow, and anyway

when we meet face to face on the

field it will be a different mat-

Alkorta said.

nian players will receive 7,000 dollars apiece from their government for the important 2-1 victory over the United States, the team's spokesman said Tuesday, reports AP.

That's in addition to the 1,500 dollars they got for losing only 1-0 to highly-rated Yugoslavia in their first World Cup game in 20 years, Khosrow Valizadeh told The Associated

With 20 years of tension be-tween Iran and the United States, Sunday's game in Lyon was the one all Iranians wanted to win. Millions celebrated and danced in the streets of Tehran after the game.

The combined dirs 8,500 reward isn't in the same league as the 100,000 dollars and Mercedes car that each Saudi player got from their oil-rich government four years ago when they qualified for the World Cup in the United States.

#### It's nonsense

NICE, June 23 (AFP/ Internet): Berti Vogts has hit out at suggestions Germany should have pulled out of the World Cup after German fans left a French

policeman fighting for his life.
"I was furious when this was raised," said the Germany coach. "I was rung up at two o'clock in the morning and phoned the federation president Egidius Braun to thrash out the question."

FIFA president Sepp Blatter immediately dismissed the idea when it was brought up informally as one possibility on Monday.

The policeman attacked in Lens before Germany's match with Yugoslavia on Sunday has irreversible brain damage.

### Belgian concern

CAILLOUX-SUR-FONTAIN-ES, France, June 23 (AFP) Internet): Belgium coach Georges Leekens is poised to bring in the inexperienced Philippe Van de Walle to replace injured keeper Filip De Wilde for his side's crucial Group E clash with South Korea.

The 37-year-old Van de Walle has only been capped twice for his country, the last time coming at the end of the 1996 season.

De Wilde is suffering from a groin strain and despite undergoing intense physiotherapy still remains doubtful. Also struggling to be fit in

time is defensive midfielder Franky Van der Elst. The 37year-old ball winner is still feeling twinges from a thigh injury picked up last week in training.

His place will go to 24-yearold Philippe Clement, like Van de Walle a novice in international football.

## Stoichkov slapped

BONDOUFLE, France, June 23 (Reuters): Bulgaria's football federation decided to slap a fine on wayward striker Hristo Stoichkov on Monday after he was found absent from the team hotel without permission two days before a crunch World Cup

But the federation appeared to have opted for discretion rather than discipline in dealing with its soccer diva and his striking partner Lyuboslav Spaniards to answer taunts Penev, saying they had not been out all night, as a senior official had told journalists.

"There's going to be a severe fine. We can't say how much yet," Exerov, a spokesman, said at the team's evening training session, where both players were present. Asked where they had gone during their absence. he added: "No one knows and no one is asking.

Earlier the general secretary of the Bulgarian Football Union, Ivan Vutsov, had said the pair had headed for Paris and not returned by morning. The players themselves then told journalists they had overslept in their rooms and had not been woken.



IT'S ALL OVER: Alan Shearer (R), the England captain and Paul Scholes looks shell shocked after Romania have scored their late winner at Toulouse on June 22.

- AFP photo

# Big bonus for Iranians YSSINGEAUX, June 23: Iranian players will receive 7,000 dollars apiece from their government for the important 2-1 victory over the United States,

TOULOUSE, France, June 23 (AFP/Reuters): England coach Glenn Hoddle played down England's last-gasp defeat by Romania insisting his side will still march into the second round.

Ironically the killer blow to England came from Dan Petrescu, the player signed by Hoddle when manager of Chelsea nearly three years ago.

His goal virtually ended England's hopes of topping the Group and if Romania avoid defeat against bottom placed Tunisia in their final match. Second place is all England can manage and on almost certain confrontation with Argentina in the second round.

But Hoddle insists England still have reason to be optimistic for the remainder of France '98.

In the final analysis England paid the penalty for two pieces of sloppy defending with Viorel Moldovan losing his marker Tony Adams for the opener and then Petrescu getting the better of Graeme Le Saux to tuck away the 90th minute decider.

Hoddle said. "What we can't do is defend like that again. The

TOULOUSE, June 23:

Michael Owen became Eng-

land's youngest World Cup

scorer on Monday when he

came on as substitute against

Romania and put the ball away

within 10 minutes, reports

Teddy Sheringham and carved

up the Romanian defence to

slide in and ram home a close-

Then, well into injury time.

after sloppy defending had al-

lowed the Romanians to grab a

last gasp 2-1 lead, Owen let rip a

shot from 25 metres out which

hit Bogdan Stelea's post and

was disappointing to and up

losing. I would definitely like to

start the next game (against

Colombia)," said Owen, who be-

came they youngest ever Eng-

land international this century

when he appeared against Chile

tive striker became England's

youngest scorer this century.

when he steered his side to a 1-0

victory over Morogoo withnhis

mance against Romania belied

his lack of international expe-

rience — just two starts and five

flicked home a goal in his first

senior game for Liverpool and

last season ended up as top

have gone to the young man's

head. "I enjoyed the game from

a personal point of view but the

team comes first as always," he

but I would like to start a game.

Everyone wants to play in the

game but it's the manager who

decides. When he gives you the

chance you have to try to take

must know the future is rosy,

especially given the pedestrian

performances on Monday of

strikers Alan Shearer and

Despite his difference Owen

it," said Owen.

Sheringham.

"You can't expect miracles

Owen's confident perfor-

The season before last he

But none of this appears to

first international goal.

appearances as substitute.

Late last month the diminu-

"It was great to score but it

bounced agonisingly to safety.

The 18-year-old replaced

Reuters.

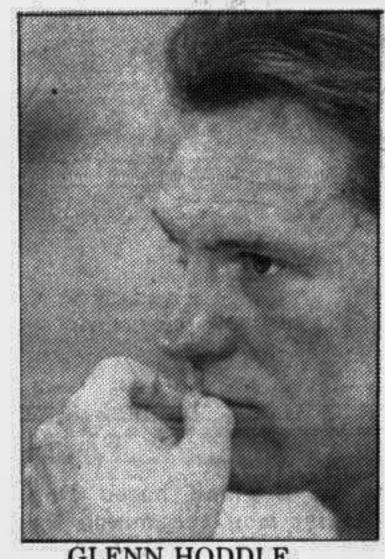
range equaliser.

in February.

Super sub Owen

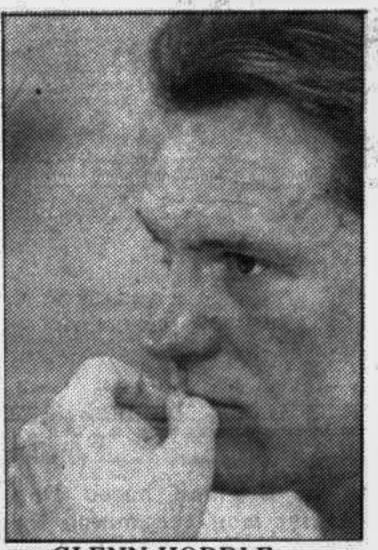
shots into history

there for the entire 90 minutes.



whether Hoddle decides to in-

concentration level has to be "We have to take the overall picture and we still think we can qualify, and if we continue to play like that over 90 minutes we'll win more matches than we lose.



It remains to be seen

### was more than vindicated. After a week of controversy. with Alex Ferguson and Bobby Charlton both criticising Hoddle for not starting Beckham, a below par performance by the Tottenham player would have further fuelled their beliefs. But Anderton, also with

David Batty, was England's best performer and that prompted Hoddle to say, "Maybe that has answered a few critics. I thought he was outstanding." Meanwhile English Bookmakers William Hill quoted odds on a likely successor to Hoddle after his team's 2-1 defeat by Romania. **GLENN HODDLE** 

"Glenn Hoddle may have just four days left in this current job." said William Hill

clude goalscorer Michael Owen

from the start, but he did his

prospects no harm with the ini-

tial equaliser and then almost

salvaging a point with his in-jury time shot against the post. Hoddle said, "It is too early

to say If I will start with

Michael on Friday. That's

something I can't digest."

Hoddle felt that his decision

to again stick with Darren An-

derton instead of David Beck-

ham in the right wingback role

spokesman Graham Sharpe. "And punters are already speculating about who should replace him."

Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson is a 2-1 favourite to succeed Hoddle with Blackburn's Roy Hodgson a 4-1 sec-

ond favourite. Press criticism today focused on England's two defensive blunders, which led to the Romanian goals, and Hoddle's decision to leave teenage striker Michael Owen out of his starting lineup. Owen scored England's only goal after coming on

as a late substitute. "Going to stop thinking you know best now, Glenn?" asked Steven Howadrd in the Sun. "After steadfastly and stubbornly refusing to play Michael

Owen from the start, England boss Glenn Hoddle paid the full price here last night. The England manager blamed the defeat on two sloppy goals. Whether he will be big

enough to admit to sloppy and one-eyed team selection will be interesting to see.' Nigel Clarke voiced similar opinions in the Daily Mail. "It is not only Hoddle's reluctance to start with Owen that asks

questions about his management at the highest level, it is his insistence to operate with a back three and a system England cannot play," Clarke said. David Miller, writing in the Daily Telegraph, said the myth that England were "in some way

a formidable side was embarrassingly exposed last night." "Also discomfortingly revealed was the doubtful judgement of Glenn Hoddle as coach,

"It has been evident for some while that England's brightest and probably best hope in the finals lay with young Michael Owen, whose pace is such as to frighten anyone.

he said.

The Independent's Ken Jones condemned England's approach as showing a marked absence of cohesion and wit.

"I told him to go out there Inferior both in individual technique and in team work, England's witless policy, based on aerial attack from the flanks, never promised to give them the initiative," Jones said.

> Signs that the tabloid axes are being sharpened if England do make an ignominious exit from France came in a frontpage headline in the Daily Star. Although the text praised Owen's equaliser the headline read: "Two bad Hod."

# FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

keeper," he said.



UNDATED, June 23 (AP): Sports-mad Prince Albert of Monaco took a trip into the mountains above Monte-Carlo on Monday to watch the Dutch World Cup squad in training.

Albert, an International Olympic Committee member and Winter Olympics bobsledder, stood for a half-hour chatting with Dutch coach Guus Hiddink and former international Frank Rijkaard - who lives most of the year in this playground of the rich on the Cote d'Azur. Albert was introduced to all

the players before looking on admiringly as they juggled the ball in games of soccer-volleyball. "He didn't say much to us, just 'hello.' There were a lot of

people for him to meet," striker Dennis Bergkamp said. Albert did not speak to the press before leaving the ground. but told a local television crew. "It is great to have the Dutch

#### SHORT CUT The Saudis cleaned house when they fired coach Carlos

SAUDI DELEGATION

Eight members of the World Cup delegation were sent home when Parreira was dismissed following Saudi Arabia's losses to Denmark and France. The defeats guaranteed the Saudis won't repeat their second-round performance of 1994.

Alberto Parreira.

The Saudi federation, headed by Prince Faisal bin Fahd — son of King Fahd — was upset about the poor showing and replaced not only Parreira but also delegation head Fahad Nasser al-Dahmash, technical manager Ahmed Eid al-Harbi, two assistant coaches, a manager, a guide, a physiotherapist and an official charged with logistics.

#### One of Parreira's assistants, Mohammed al-Khaurashi, will take charge of the Saudis' final first-round match Wednesday against South Africa.

MICHAEL OWEN

Manager Glenn Hoddle ad-

"We've always known that

mitted indirectly that Owen was

likely to feature more promi-

Michael can come on and give

us a different dimension. It's

something that we've always

been thinking about and it's

worked well for us tonight," he

and just enjoy himself and see

if he could get a goal. And that's

show some human feelings.

beating the ground in frustra-

floor and didn't see anything.

Eventually I heard a big roar so

I knew it must have hit the post

or been a good save from the

tion after hitting the post.

For all his cool, Owen did

"I hit the ball and fell on the

the way it turned out."

nently in his plans.

BANGLES & BEADS Are bangles and beads becoming the ultimate soccer accessory?

With more and more soccer players wearing flashy jewelry on the pitch, FIFA has ruled that the practice is fine as long as it doesn't hurt anybody. FIFA spokesman Keith

Cooper pointed out that players can wear whatever jewelry they want, within reason. Under the world soccer body's rules, players cannot

wear anything that referees might consider dangerous to themselves and others. "Although they might come on the field with bangles and beads, most of it is already

Things referees mostly look out for are elaborate rings that could hurt an opponent in a collision.

stripped off them in the referee's

preliminary check," Cooper

#### JONK MOURNS PAL'S DEATH

Dutch midfielder Wim Jonk was in mourning Tuesday after learning that his best friend had been killed in a car crash in the Netherlands. Coach Guus Hiddink broke

the news to the 31-year-old player, who then left the players' training camp to join his wife at a nearby hotel. It was not immediately clear

whether Jonk planned to fly home. He was to meet Hiddink again Tuesday to discuss the situation.

Jonk's friend, whose name was not released, was killed in a collision near Amsterdam early Monday. PSV Endhoven's Jonk is one

of the Dutch team's most experienced internationals and played an influential role in Saturday's 5-0 victory over South Korea. The Netherlands' final

Group E fixture is Thursday against Mexico in Saint-Etienne.

#### ARGENTINES CLOSE THE GAP

Gabriel Batistuta and his Argentina teammates have firmed in the betting to win the World Cup after a 5-0 win over Jamaica on Sunday.

British bookmakers Ladbrokes had offered pre-tournament odds of 12-1 for Argentina to win the World Cup and 8-1 for Batistuta to win the Golden Boot for scoring the most goals.

But Batistuta's three goals against Jamaica, adding to the goal he scored in Argentina's first game, contributed to his odds of winning the Golden Boot fall to 2-1 on Monday.

Argentina are now second favourites to win the World Cup, falling from 12-1 to 5-1 after two first round wins.

was on Batistuta to win the Golden Boot. Boyce said he expected the hours from before England plays Romania until Scotland plays Morocco to be the busiest

24 hours of soccer betting ever in Britain. "They're both crucial matches, they both offer attractive betting possibilities and of

course they're both prime time

viewing," he said. Boyce said odds on Scotland qualifying for the next round

had shortened to 8-13.

Ladbrokes spokesman Sean Boyce said all the clever money