

Will Iran pull the rug from under the Germans?

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS



NO POINT ARGUING: Brazil custodian Taffarel (No 1) and defender Goncalves (L) challenging the legitimacy of American referee Esfandiar Baharmast's (2nd from L) penalty decision at Marseille on June 23. —AFP photo

Yugoslavs won't be complacent

NANTES, France, June 24: (AFP) Yugoslavia have done all the hard work, but they still need a point from their final Group F match against the United States on Thursday to be certain of a place in the second round of the World Cup. The Yugoslavs, playing in the World Cup for the ninth time and are two-time semi-finalists, beat Iran 1-0 in their tournament opener and then drew 2-2 with European champions Germany after squandering a two-goal lead. The United States, already eliminated after a pair of dismal losses, should, on paper, pose no threat to the impressive Yugoslavs, but coach Slobodan Santrac is taking nothing for granted. "If we want to be a good team we have to be more consistent, and that is what I am trying to tell my players," said Santrac. The Yugoslavs have three in-



SONG SINGS RED: Rigobert Song (L), the Cameroon defender arguing with the referee after being shown the red card during the match against Chile on June 23. —AFP photo

Boring Belgium better wear scoring boots

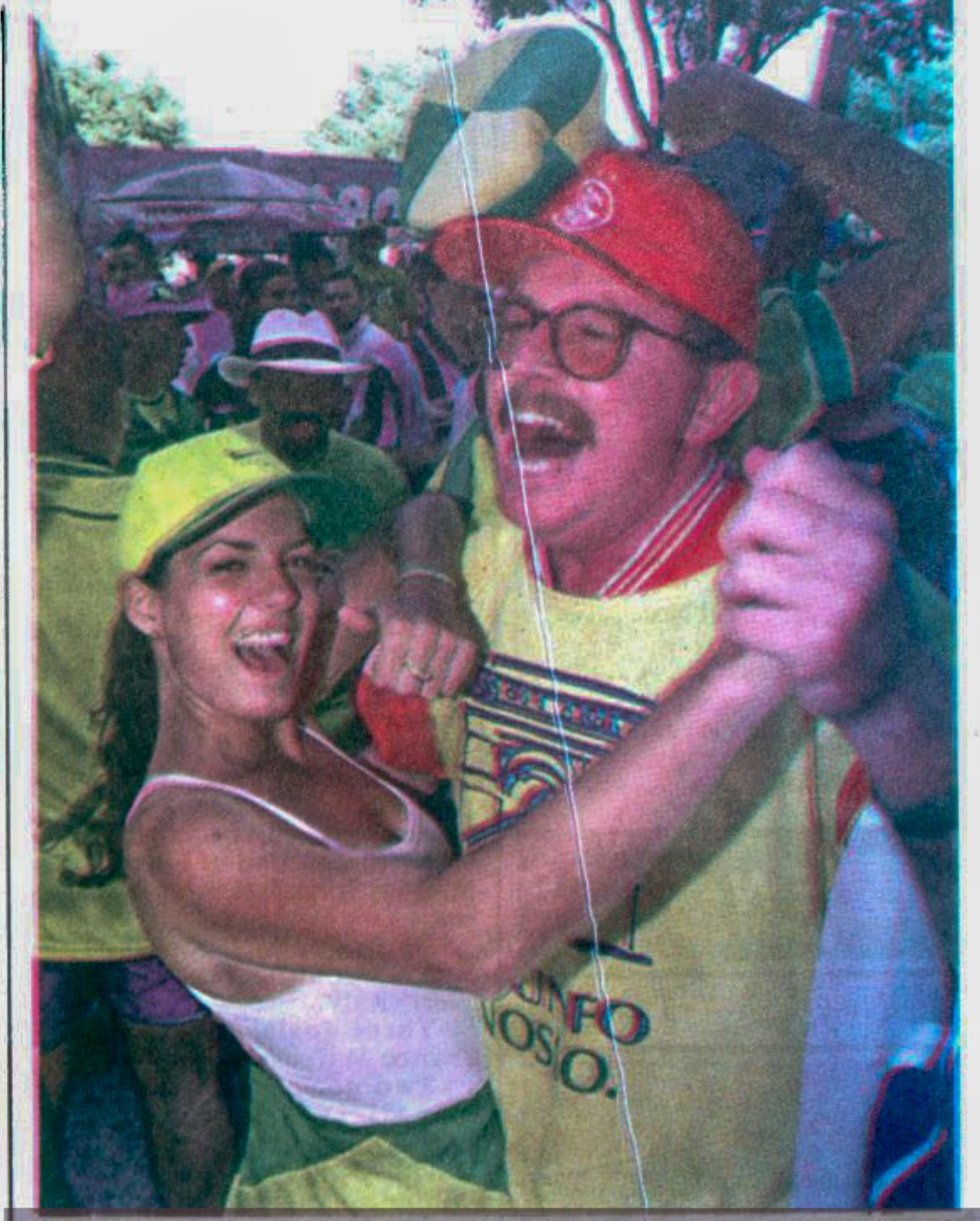
PARIS, June 24: Belgium, dubbed boring and over-the-hill by critics, need to find their scoring touch on Thursday against beleaguered South Korea to stand a chance of remaining in the World Cup. The Belgians, slammed for their defensive approach in the 0-0 draw with Holland and taken apart by coach Georges Leekens for failing to hold on to a 2-0 lead against Mexico, trail those teams by two points in Group E and have an inferior goal difference. South Korea are reeling after the 5-0 hammering by Holland and the subsequent sacking of coach Cha Bum Kun but they will go on a face-saving mission against Belgium to appease their angry fans. The Korean are still looking for their first win in five World Cup finals and that failure is following the team like an albatross. A change of coach, particularly one whose only previous experience is guiding a women's team, might prove a futile attempt to ward off the bad omens in their 14th World Cup game. Belgium beat South Korea 2-0 when they met in the 1990 finals and nothing less will do on Thursday but it's questionable if they have the personnel to make it a stroll in the Parc des Princes. Playmaker Danny Boffin is out through injury and a lot will depend on the back-in-favour Enzo Scifo and Marc Wilmots, scorer of both goals against Mexico. Goalkeeper Filip de Wilde has a groin strain and Leekens may have to play Philippe Van de Walle who has only been capped twice. Also struggling to be fit in time is defensive midfielder

Iran plan Deutsch downfall

MONTPELLIER, France, June 24 (AFP): Iran are bidding to spark the mother of all parties with victory over Germany in the match that nearly never was here in the crunch Group F clash at the Stade de la Mosson on Thursday. Jalal Talebi's side sparked wild celebrations back home when they beat the United States 2-1 in Lyon on Sunday to put themselves in with a chance of reaching the last 16 of France '98. Hundreds of thousands of Iranian men and women poured into the streets of Tehran and partied long into the night after the dramatic victory in once unthinkable scenes of public festivity. And now the Iranians have the chance to one better against a German side who were uncharacteristically sloppy in the 2-2 draw the Yugoslavia before veteran Lothar Matthaeus came on to inspire a fightback from two goals down. Boosted by Iran's display against the states and encouraged by signs of Germany vulnerability, Talebi is confident that his team, written off as rank outsiders before the tournament, can pull off the shock of France '98. "If we beat Germany there will be an even bigger party

Santiago erupts

SANTIAGO, Jun 24: Police using water cannon and tear gas in Santiago and Valparaiso battled with soccer fans, one of whom died falling from a truck, as celebrations for Chile reaching the second round of the World Cup turned sour Tuesday. One flag-waving fan died as he fell from the back of a truck riding through Antofagasta 850 miles (1360 km) north of Santiago, police said. In Santiago, clashes broke out as fans wanted to prolong celebrations for Chile's 1-1 tie against Cameroon and police wanted to clear the streets so as not to cause traffic chaos when offices and businesses closed late in the afternoon. Police said 44 people were detained in Santiago and 18 police officers were injured as fans threw stones at them. In Valparaiso 88 miles (140-km) west of Santiago, local media reported 60 detained and 20 injured as bands of stone-throwing youths clashed with riot police. Immediately after the match, celebrations were festive with tens of thousands of Chileans converging on key points of the capital blowing flag-piercing trumpets, waving flags and dancing. Traffic was brought to a standstill on main roads as Chilean fans ignored government orders not to turn the day into a public holiday. Strangers hugged and kissed under the pale winter sun. Plaza



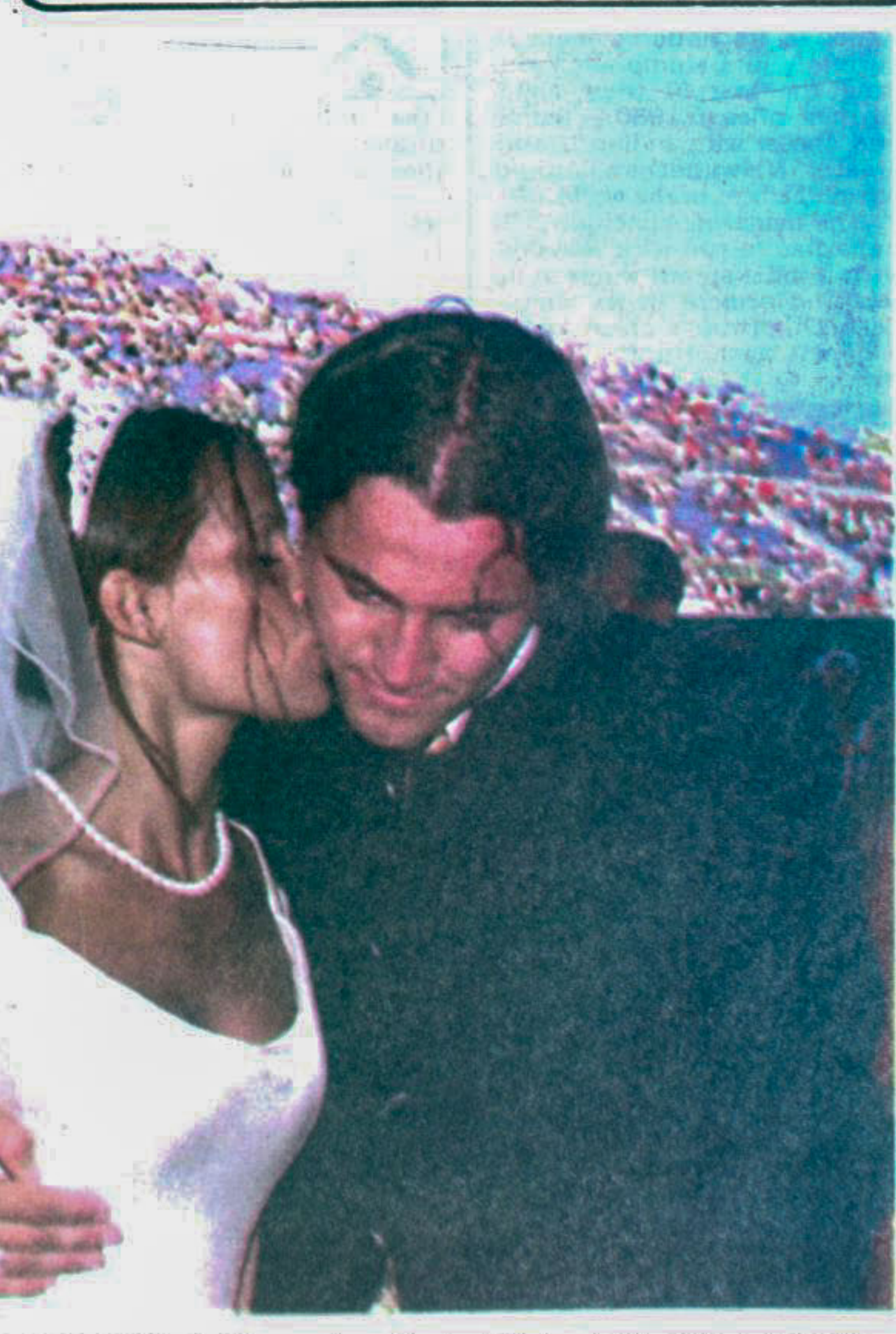
Brazilian fans partying at Marseille before the kick-off with Norway. —AFP photo

World Cup wedding

MARSEILLE, France, Jun 24 (AP): Oivind Ekeland, a tall handsome Norwegian, was playing football on the beach in Rio de Janeiro when he caught the eye of Rosangela de Souza, a breathtaking girl from Ipanema, straight out of the song, Something flashed. Eight years later, on Tuesday night, Oivind and Rosangela were married in the Stade Velodrome, moments before Brazil and Norway played a World Cup match with an audience of millions of people. "The second I saw that woman I knew I wasn't leaving Rio without her," Oivind remembers. "I knew immediately this was my Prince Charming, who had come to take me away," Rosangela recalls. He was 20, and she was 21. They stayed together for a few weeks in Brazil, and then she went home to Stavanger, Norway, with him for a few months. They went back to Rio together. She quit her job as a dentist's receptionist. "They've been together ever since. Now they run the Beverly, a sports bar and restaurant in Stavanger, with a 5-year-old daughter, Kristine. Last year, they decided to tie the knot formally. "I love football," Oivind explained, "and when we saw the draw, that Brazil and Norway were playing in the World Cup, we knew that was a sign." Besides, he added, June 23 is the Norwegians' beloved Midsummer Night, when there is only an hour of darkness. It is the happiest day of the year. Marseille, on the French coast, was a holiday town. Everything was perfect. Oivind wanted to ask FIFA, the World Cup organiser, for permission to be married at the game. "We waited until May because we were nervous that they might say no," he said. "But when I called to explain, the woman laughed and talked to the right people. A week later, we got a letter saying it was okay." A pastor friend, Tore Thomassen, flew down from Stavanger with 30 of Oivind's pals, and his parents, to perform the marriage. Rosangela's mother has died, and her father is sick, but her sister came from Rio. The wedding party started at the Sofitel Hotel, over looking the white yachts and ancient stone walls of the Old Port. A white Cadillac convertible took them through the streets to the stadium. Champagne and a fancy canapes were laid out in the VIP compound. This would be a World Cup wedding to remember. Rosangela wore a white dress with a train. Until he changed to a tuxedo, Oivind was barefoot in Norwegian soccer shorts, a yellow Brazil number 9 jersey with "Ronaldinho" across the back, and a black top hat. "The attraction was so strong on that beach in Rio that you could feel it, like a bolt of magic," said Geir Ekeland, Oivind's cousin and best man. "Everything suddenly stopped when they looked at each other. It was unbelievable." Rosangela's reaction was clearly the same, he added. "Just watching her, I knew they'd be together the rest of their lives." "She now likes football as much as he does," Geir said. "They'll probably eat and sleep football." But not before the honeymoon. Their wedding trip will be to Paris for the World Cup final on July 12.

Norway's finest hour

OSLO, June 24 (Reuters): Norwegians danced in the streets early today after their soccer team pulled off an upset 2-1 win against Brazil in the World Cup. Tuesday's last-gasp victory was hailed by prime minister Kjetil Rekdal as one of Norway's greatest sporting feats. Thousands of flag-waving soccer fans thronged the centre of Oslo, chanting "heia Norge (Norway), heia Norge, ole, ole, ole," in a carnival atmosphere more reminiscent of Rio de Janeiro than a Scandinavian capital. Cars honked horns, trams rang bells and one man climbed on top of a traffic light outside Parliament to fete the upset that put Norway through to the second round of the World Cup for the first time. It was Norway's second win in a row over Brazil after a 4-2 victory in a friendly in Oslo last year. Dozens of youths boarded a truck used for towing away illegally parked cars, dancing to make it bounce as the driver struggled through crowds in Oslo's main street. Others threw streamers of toilet rolls or hung out of car windows to shout support for their team. The victory in France coincided with Norway's annual midsummer celebrations. "This was absolutely fantastic, in my opinion it was one of the greatest Norwegian sports feats in history," Bondevik said on public NRK radio. Norway's other great sporting moments have been mostly in winter sports. "I would like on behalf of all Norway to congratulate the boys," he said. "I must admit my faith was a almost down to zero 10 minutes from the end. Both goals were great." Bebeto gave Brazil the lead in the 78th minute, heading in a cross from Denilson, but Norway equalised through lanky striker Tore Andre Flo in the 83rd. Norway's Kjetil Rekdal scored from a controversial penalty one minute from time. The victory was all the sweeter for Norwegians after their team had been blasted for an unimaginative kick-and-chase style following draws against Morocco and Scotland. One Swedish newspaper last week branded the team a "shame for the whole Nordic region." "The team had been terrible and suddenly they were great," said Daniel Larsen, 22, celebrating the win with his Brazilian girlfriend Mariela da Silva who carried a Brazilian flag in a sea of red, white and blue Norwegian flags. "This is the best thing to happen in Norway since Bjorn Daehlie," he added. Daehlie, who won eight Olympic gold medals is the most successful cross-country skier in history. Other sports fans said Tuesday's win eclipsed a 2-0 soccer victory over Germany at the 1936 Berlin Olympics when Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler was sitting in the stadium. Norway's soccer team has not been beaten since January 1997.



TYING THE KNOT WORLD CUP STYLE: Norwegian Oyvind Ekeland (R) gets a kiss from his Brazilian wife Rose Angela de Souza whom he wed at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille on June 23 prior to the start of their respective nations' Group A clash. —AFP photo