

No tears only cheers in Tehran

TEHRAN, June 28: Blowing trumpets and waving flags, thousands of jubilant Iranians welcomed the World Cup team Sunday, a homecoming that mixed disappointment at the team's elimination with joy over its win against the United States, reports AP.

Some fans waited for hours outside Tehran's Mehrabad Airport, where the team arrived before dawn. Fans waved the red, white and green Iranian flag and wore the team's jersey or T-shirts with the picture of Ali Daei, Iran's star player.

Others blew plastic trumpets in a noisy reception. "Our boys played very well," coach Jalal Talebi said. "We are pleased to see our people receiving the team so warmly." Iran lost 2-0 Thursday to a powerful German team that knocked it out of the World Cup in the first round. But the defeat came just four days after Iran's 2-1 win over the United States, a game charged with political significance born of the hostility between Washington and Tehran since the Islamic revolution of 1979.

FIFA stick to their guns

PARIS, June 28 (AFP/Internet): World football's governing body FIFA on Sunday made an impassioned defence of their ticket arrangements for England's match against Argentina on Tuesday.

Sports minister Tony Banks has called on FIFA to launch an inquiry after an allocation of just 2,049 tickets for England fans for the second round match in Saint Etienne.

But FIFA communications director Keith Cooper insisted the policy had been made public as long ago as 1995, and that exceptions could not be made for individual teams.

"In this particular case, and at any of the other games, how are you possibly going to distribute a large number of tickets within 24 hours - this is what it effectively means."

"You do know the pairings of the first round matches but you don't know the pairings of the second round matches." While there may be a huge demand from England, had it been Romania playing in that particular match there would not have been a huge demand. Cooper added: "If you set aside 20,000 tickets for English fans you would also have had to set aside 20,000 tickets for Romanian fans - and then you would have been sitting on 19,000 unwanted tickets."

The Football Supporters' Association has slammed both FIFA and the Football Association in the wake of the tickets row.

Banks estimated there were 15,000 England fans in the Lens stadium Friday for the match against Colombia, 22,000 in Toulouse for the Romania game, and up to 20,000 inside the ground in Marseille for the opening fixture against Tunisia.

England were initially allocated 3,700 tickets for the game in Marseille, 2,700 for Toulouse and 2,500 for Lens. The allocations were marginally increased after FA pressure.

Brazil eat Chile

From page 13

In the 67th minute Ronaldo hit a post. In the 81th he hit the bar, but he himself had denied Cesar Sampaio the chance of equalling Pele's mark when he took the penalty rather than allowing his teammate to do so even though Cesar Sampaio had scored the first two goals.

The secret of Brazil's success, besides the goals, was the outstanding midfield cohesion of Dunga, Rivaldo and the selfless running of Leonardo.

Cesar Sampaio, who was suspended from the 2-1 defeat against Norway, had an outstanding game. Roberto Carlos looked much improved and Cafu worked like a train on the right flank, one minute defending, the next "eating chances for the forwards."

If there is one criticism of Brazil it is they could have trounced more men forward for the last 20 minutes with the game already won.

Chile fought bravely but looked like two teams in one - a defence and midfield plus an isolated strike force of Ivan Zamorano and Marcelo Salas. "Za-Sa" had no-one linking with them as Jose Sierra, who usually fulfils that role, could find no space or time and was replaced at half-time.

Nigeria or Denmark await the world champions in the quarter-finals on July 3. They will be under no illusions about the enormity of their task.

Zagallo comes

From page 13

innate and how much of their entertainment value is down to Zagallo is clearly impossible to assess.

But Ronaldo, on target twice against Chile and once against Morocco, is evidently convinced.

"Today you saw a fast, creative and unbridled Brazil side. That's the Brazil that every one wants to see," said the Inter Milan sharpshooter.

Zagallo let slip minutes after beating Chile: "I'd rather Brazil play badly but win."

And indeed they can play far better than they showed in the first half in particular.

But that's the point. If they ever get beyond cruising speed the champions are likely to prove impossible to live with.

And the little ant that will have plundered that fifth medal.



Ronaldo heads while Chilean defender Javier Margas watches at Parc des Princes, Paris on June 27. — AFP photo

Searching for 'El Dorado'

LILLE, France, June 28 (AFP): Colombia's uneven run in the World Cup has come to an unceremonious finish and with it the end of a brilliant but often stormy era.

Head coach Hernan Dario Gomez and several players who for years were mainstays in one of Latin America's top teams have announced they're leaving the national team.

After several years of top-flight soccer under Francisco Maturana and Gomez, his pupil, Colombia is in for a revamping.

Gomez, a veteran of two World Cups assisting Maturana before becoming head coach, says the team needs "a new course and fresh ideas."

Veteran midfielders Carlos Valderrama and Freddy Rincon are stepping aside, and striker Faustino Asprilla's future is uncertain following his dismissal for criticizing his coach and teammates.

Colombia came to France hoping to improve on a disastrous first-round elimination in the United States in 1994. But a weak attack, internal turmoil and age wiped out those dreams.

Four years ago, the team suffered a 3-1 loss to Romania in their first match and was eliminated with a shattering 2-1 defeat by the United States. A few days after the team arrived home in Colombia, defender Andres Escobar was dead, shot

for having scored an own goal in the US game.

In France, Colombia's collapse again began with a loss to Romania, this time by 1-0 in both teams' first match.

But even before the team arrived in France there were rumblings that grew to a roar by the time Colombia was eliminated

Friday night with a 2-0 loss to England.

Furious at being benched five minutes from the finish against Romania, striker Asprilla criticised Gomez and some of his teammates. The Parma forward blasted the coach for "favouring untouchable" players, such as the slow-footed Valderrama, 37.

Gomez responded by kicking Asprilla out of the team the following day. But Colombia was unable to recover from the turmoil or the lack of firepower, gaining only a difficult 1-0 win against lowly Tunisia in their second match, before losing to England.

"We lost against two strong teams. We beat Tunisia and we finished where we deserved," Gomez said. "That's the reality of Colombian soccer."

Now, Colombia must start anew. "I'll step aside so that someone else may reap what has been sowed in the past ten years, may fix what's wrong and reach for better things. I did all I could," Gomez said after Friday's match against England. "It's up to others to lay out a fresh course with new ideas."

"Now I'm tired and sad, even sick," he added. "Being in a World Cup is supposed to be a beautiful experience, but it was terribly hard because of all the tension and passion that whirl around a national squad."

To help team spirit coach Manuel Lapuente is allowing the players regular contact with their families.

Veron: Argentine engine

TOULOUSE, France, June 28 (AFP/Internet): If there was a poll of World Cup fans and players asking who has heard of Argentina's Juan Veron, nicknamed "the Little Wizard," the percentage of yes answers might be very low.

But the 23-year-old midfielder, who has recently moved from Sampdoria to Parma, has so far been the engine of the Argentine team and a vital player in support of more illustrious team-mates Gabriel Batistuta and Ariel Ortega.

Against Croatia, Veron was everywhere - defence, attack, midfield - and though he has not scored and only made one goal-creating pass, his influence on the pitch is immense.

He has played every minute of Argentina's three matches so far and the signs are he will earn selection for Tuesday's St Etienne second round clash against England.

Veron was unknown two years ago but has since become a feature of the Argentine team and an indispensable player in Daniel Passarella's system. He was superb against Croatia as he tirelessly worked off the ball for the good of his teammates.

In 1994, Veron made his debut for Estudiantes de la Plata in his home country where he helped them win promotion. But he wasn't there long before a 3.5 million dollar move to top club Boca Juniors in 1995.



VERON

And he has conjured up great performances so far as Japan, Jamaica and Croatia, one after the other, fell under the spell of this low-profile player.

Little is heard in the media from this player who last Sunday did however give best wishes to Passarella.

"It was father's day so I took the opportunity to wish Passarella all the best," he said, with a mischievous smile after the Jamaica game.

Since, there has hardly been a word from him but his actions speak louder than any words he might utter.

Omar Da Fonseca, a former striker of Tours and Monaco, is one of those who has fallen under the spell of the little wizard. "Veron has incredible energy. He's always there in defence, then in attack supporting the strikers. He's the hub of the wheel in the Argentine side around which everything turns."

Because Veron selflessly plays for others and not just himself, he is much less well known than Batistuta, Ortega or Gallardo. But he is very popular in Argentina, not just for his football, but for his engaging personality.

"He is very popular because he has a good image," said one teammate on this player who fits in perfectly with Passarella's demands of no earrings, homosexuals or long hair - in fact Veron has a shaved head like Ronaldo.

Veron created the first goal in the rampaging 5-0 victory over Jamaica last Sunday when his pass split two defenders and fell perfectly into Ortega's path as he rushed into the area in the 32nd minute.

One of Veron's few comments in this tournament, however, was in praise of the Japanese team.

Argentina beat Brazil!

BANGKOK, June 28 (AFP): Thailand's government wearing Argentina strips survived the most physical test of its seven months in office Saturday, narrowly beating the opposition 4-2 in a football "friendly."

With football-mad Thailand in the grip of world cup fever, close to 50,000 spectators packed Bangkok's new Rajamakala National Stadium to watch the game, while police reported traffic jams on roads leading to the venue.

The opposition bedecked in Brazil jerseys began losing their grip on the game in the first few minutes, after Deputy Education Minister Arkom Engchuan shuffled down the pitch to nudge the ball into the net with his chest.

REFS LIST

PARIS, June 28 (Reuters): FIFA assigned referees for the following second round matches at the World Cup finals.

Monday, June 29
Germany v Mexico — Manuel Melo Pereira (Portugal)
Netherlands v Yugoslavia — Jose Maria Garcia Aranda (Spain)

Tuesday, June 30
Argentina v England — Kim Nielsen (Denmark)
Romania v Croatia — Javier Castrilli (Argentina)

Mexicans may pay for staying at home

MONTPELLIER, France, June 28 (AFP/Internet): The loathing of Mexican players to leave home could cost them dearly when they face Germany for a place in the quarter-finals here on Monday, warned former Mexican great Hugo Sanchez.

"We have a very solid team. The only problem is we do not export enough players to Europe or South America," said the former Real Madrid striker.

"It is sad. If we did it would be very profitable for the country. Mexico would have a much stronger team," he added.

But Sanchez refused to write-off Mexico's chances against pulling off a major upset by dumping Germany.

"This is football, and often logic is turned on its head. Mexico could become the surprise team of this World Cup," he enthused.

"I am very proud of what they have achieved so far in the tournament. They have played with their hearts and pride. That is what helped them come back against Holland after being two goals down," he added.

To help team spirit coach Manuel Lapuente is allowing the players regular contact with their families.

When is a hooligan not a hooligan?

PARIS, June 28 (AFP): Already faced with problems with tickets, referees and street violence, the World Cup confronted another troublesome Sunday: Just who is a hooligan?

A public-address announcement at Saturday's Italy-Norway game in Marseille directed at a small group of neo-Nazi Italian fans - "Don't behave like hooligans" - angered the head of the national soccer federation.

Luciano Nezzola said he was upset that fans from Italy, even though they might be fascist sympathisers, were grouped in the same category with the street thugs from England and Germany, where soccer hooliganism has its roots.

Marseille was the scene two weeks ago of three days of violence by English hooligans.

"I am very angry," Nezzola told Italian journalists after the match. "It's not true that Italian fans are hooligans."

World Cup organisers said the stadium announcement in Italian was proper and they dismissed Nezzola's criticism.

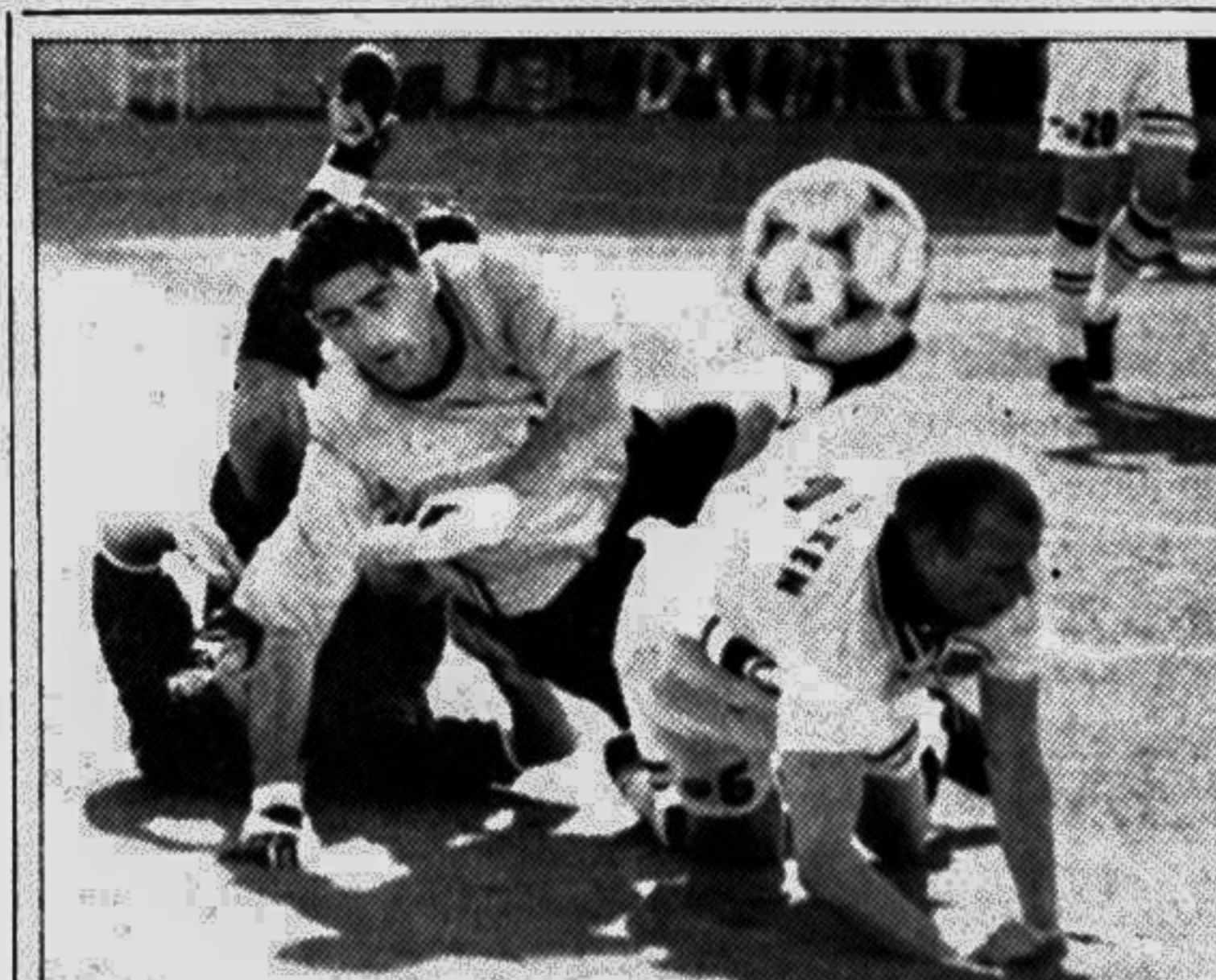
"I understand that it might be an insult to be called a hooligan, but you have to call a spade a spade," said Bruno Travade, a spokesman for the French organising committee.

According to Travade, a small group of fans from Verona, an area of Italy with a sizable neo-fascist community, were stopped as they tried take a flag with the swastika of Nazi Germany into the stadium.

ROUND 2 RESULTS

Italy 1
Brazil 4

Norway 0
Chile 1



Gianluca Pagliuca (C), the Italian custodian, Norway's Stale Solbakken (R) and Italy's Alessandro Costacurta all scramble for the ball during their second round encounter at Marseille on June 27. — AFP photo

Quiet Anderton lets his boots do the talking

ST ETIENNE, France, June 28 (AFP/Internet): England's hero of the hour, Darren Anderton, a quiet man who is set to face Argentina in the second round on Tuesday, let his right boot answer his critics when he scored for England in their last group game.

Anderton's powerful shot on 20 minutes for the first goal in a 2-0 win over Colombia instantly gave credence to England coach Glenn Hoddle's use of the 26-year-old right wing-back.

Anderton scored his sixth goal for England and forged an impressive understanding with unsettled David Beckham, who scored the second and who has been angry at Hoddle who accused him of being uncussed.

Gary Neville has leapt to the defence of Anderton whose injury problems had led many people to wonder why Hoddle had kept him in the squad for France 98.

Neville regards Anderton as

the leading performer in England's successful bid to reach the last 16 where they will face Argentina in St Etienne on Tuesday.

"He turned in another great performance. Some people have been saying that he should not be in the team but everyone here was aware what he could be capable of once he had got himself fit after all his injury problems."

"In our games to reach the second phase he has been our most consistent player and the goal he scored against Colombia rounded off three great performances for him," the defender said.

Praise of Anderton was certainly justified in the Felix-Bollaert stadium where his goal sparked off the singing of Rule Britannia by the 20,000-strong England fans, most of whom had had to buy their tickets off touts.

A Jorge Bermudez header beat Paul Scholes to Michael Owen's cross but the ball then fell to Anderton who rifled the

ball into the roof of the net from inside the box.

It was Anderton's first goal for his country since he got two against Hungary in May 1996 during a season where he had been out for eight months with a groin strain and earn the nickname "sick note."

He went on to play in all five of hosts England's five matches till they lost to Germany in the Euro 96 semi-finals.

He had not played in even one World Cup qualifier, though he has now started all three matches but was substituted with 11 minutes to go by Robert Lee against Colombia.

Anderton has got stronger and more impressive with each game after a two year injury lay-off.

Hoddle believes Anderton has answered his critics - including Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson - in the best possible way with his performances on the pitch.

Ferguson questioned the fitness level of Anderton when attacking Hoddle for his treatment of Beckham, the only England player to appear in all eight qualifiers but who lost his starting place in the opening 2-0 win over Tunisia to the Tottenham player.

But Hoddle, who said Ferguson's comments were "unhelpful" on the eve of their second match with Romania on June 22, felt his selection policy had been vindicated.

Anderton has also had to observe criticism of Hoddle from 1966 World Cup hero Bobby Charlton about the treatment of Beckham. Beckham may have initially lost his place to Anderton but Beckham started in the 2-0 win over Colombia and ironically formed an impressive understanding with his supposed rival.

The 6ft 2in (1.90m), 168lb (76kg) former England youth and under-21 international and brilliant winger, Anderton has always been admired by the Euro 96 England coach Terry Venables who brought him from Portsmouth to Tottenham in the 1992/93 season.

Anderton, who said he would never leave Portsmouth, must be happy with his move to White Hart Lane which launched him into the England side and a probable World Cup re-match with Argentina.

The quiet, shy Anderton lets his feet do the talking and so far the noise has been deafening.



ONE MAN SHOW: Chiles captain and most inspiring player of the night, Ivan Zamorano (front) waltz past Brazilian defender Junior Bianco at Paris. — AFP photo

Italian finishing

MARSEILLE, France, June 28 (AFP): Victory over Norway brought out the best and the worst in Italy's big-name strikers, with joy for Christian Vieri and despair for Alessandro Del Piero.

Vieri arrived at these finals as the top scorer in the Spanish Liga with Atletico Madrid, but underrated by many after being dumped after just one season by champions Juventus.

But he has silenced his critics by scoring in every game Italy have played at these finals, his winner here on Saturday making him the tournament's top scorer with five goals.

Vieri was delighted with the strike, but tried to stress it was more important that Italy had booked their place in the quarter-finals.

"We're all clearly getting better match by match and that gives us hope for the rest of the competition," he said. "But I don't want to make any predictions. It's better if we take one game at a time."

"Today, we created plenty of chances, and Del Piero was unlucky not to have scored a second goal for us. I was lucky and did score."

However, Vieri was touching a sore point for the Italian team. Del Piero may be the new wonder-kid of the Serie A and top scorer in last season's

Champions League, but he is not cutting it at the World Cup finals.

He has played three times now without scoring and at the Stade Velodrome missed three sitters over the course of the game.

"I'm very disappointed to have made mistakes when it came to finishing," Del Piero confessed.

"But it was a great victory and a great performance from everyone."

"What I like most about this Italy team is the great will to get a result, whatever situation we're in. We know how to change tactics when the match is underway. It wasn't easy today because even after we were 1-0 it was really very hard to build our moves."

"Today, the finishing could have been better, and I made a few mistakes which meant that we could have been 2-0 up. And we would all have been a lot calmer about things."

Sadly, there may be no prizes for honesty and coach Cesare Maldini may well find himself turning back to the man he recently dropped in favour of Del Piero - Roberto Baggio.

Baggio scored two and made two of Italy's seven goals during qualifying, but watched the entire Norway game from the bench.

Determined to keep his

promise to Maldini, when the Italy coach offered him a place on his list of 22, Baggio is keeping any frustration or envy over Del Piero very much to himself.

"We won that's the important thing, even if I didn't get to play," Baggio said. "And I don't know if I'll be playing in the next match."

"Del Piero was very unfortunate today, but there will be other times when he can show that he is an excellent player."

But if Vieri has made the biggest contribution to Italy's success at these finals, the second biggest has arguably come from the teammate furthest away from him, Gianluca Pagliuca.

In a World Cup finals which has been littered with goalkeeper howlers, Pagliuca's magnificent reflex save of Tore Andre Flo's header on Saturday kept his team on course for the last eight.

The Inter Milan keeper, sent off against Norway when the teams met in the 1994 World Cup, is convinced Italy can go all the way, but sent a veiled warning to his erratic forward line before quarter-final date.

"We can win the World Cup," he declared. "And today we deserved to win. But we were made to suffer too much in the process, and we should have finished the match sooner."

WORLD CUP NOTEBOOK

PARIS, June 28 (AFP): World Cup notebook:

Former German coach Franz Beckenbauer is not impressed by what he has seen at the World Cup so far and says the tournament is to big with 32 teams.

"What kind of a World Cup is this? Diego Maradona told me, and I can only agree, that there are too many players here with club feet."

"I've not really been impressed by any game or any team," said Bayern Munich president Beckenbauer in a column for the Bild Mass daily.

EARTH CALLING

EINSTEIN
What the French call planet football needs a new Einstein to deal with the technicalities of the modern game, according to new FIFA president Sepp Blatter.

Asked if FIFA would not succumb eventually to the temptation of using video technology to decide on contentious issues such as whether the ball had fully crossed the line Blatter said: "You'd need a new Einstein to find a solution."

The thorny subject of FIFA rankings also required similar genius, Blatter added.

"That's even more difficult than the ball over the line issue then you'd need Einstein to the power of two," he joked, before stressing: "Football's not sci-

ence. That makes it cold. It's passion and emotion."

DYING UAE BABY SAVED

A dying 18-month-old United Arab Emirates baby was saved after a last minute appeal by a World Cup commentator for blood donors, media reports said.

Abu Dhabi television's Mohammed Nejjib interrupted his commentary on the Germany-Iran and Yugoslavia-USA games on Thursday to broadcast an appeal for blood donors to save the life of baby Mohsen, who suffers from sickle cell anaemia.

Nejjib's plea was prompted by a desperate call from the baby's father, Abu Bakar Qassem, who said the infant would die from a lack of red blood cells unless a suitable donor could be found.

Mohsen has a very rare blood type and the hospital to which he was rushed did not have any in stock.

Another commentator, Jassem Mendi, who shares the baby's blood group, immediately left the television studios to join the throng of around 200 donors who rushed to the hospital to give blood.

FIFA'S PROMISE

FIFA president Sepp Blatter on Saturday promised football's world ruling body was determined to develop the game in

India, still dreaming of its first World Cup finals campaign.

Noting that a country of India's size could one day play an important role in the game, Blatter told reporters it was FIFA's declared intention to help develop the sport there.

"India likes football but the game there lacks structures. We are attaching a special group for India - it's already on our agenda."

India failed to make an impression in its qualifying group, finishing behind Qatar, who hammered them 6-0, and Sri Lanka.

BUT WHERE WERE THE REST?

Some 24 million Britons watched the England v Colombia match on television, according to the BBC, either at home or down the pub.

That means about three in four potential viewers tuned in to see Glenn Hoddle's team qualify for the second round.

The previous viewing record for a match was 23.5 million for the England v Germany semifinal at Euro-96.

With the World Cup dominating everyday life the only surprise for broadcasters was how anybody managed to escape watching the big game.