



Shooting Stars



MAN IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Edgar Davids (C) becomes the centre of euphoric Dutch celebrations after netting the winner against Yugoslavia at Toulouse on June 29. — AFP photo

Dutch discontent

TOULOUSE, France, June 30 (AFP/Internet): It was somewhat appropriate that minutes after Holland's last-gasp 2-1 victory over Yugoslavia, a violent thunderstorm broke out over the Stade Municipal.

For while Edgar Davids' 20-yard drive two minutes into injury time clinched the Dutch a World Cup quarter-final clash against Argentina or England, the reaction to the goal highlighted the fact that rumbles of discontent are never far away where Guus Hiddink's 22 are concerned.

As Davids was mobbed by his jubilant team-mates at the final whistle, there was the extraordinary sight of Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar apparently lashing out at his team-mates after being prevented from joining in the congratulations being heaped on the man they call 'Pitbull'.

Substitute Winston Bogarde, like Davids a member of the Surinam clan in the Dutch squad, seemed irate on refusing the giant white goalkeeper access to hero of the moment.

It was a sour end to a night of Orange delight in France's so-called Pink City and will have done little to eradicate the suspicion that Holland's squad remains divided on racial lines.

Davids, of course, was the player sent home by Hiddink the coach of favouring white players.

Hiddink added another Surinamer, former international Frank Rijkaard, to his coaching staff in a bid to help harmonise the squad for France 98, but the sight of players like Davids, Bogarde,

Clarence Seedorf and Patrick Kluitert forming their own clique in training this week suggests differences have not been entirely buried.

The Van der Sar episode, and Dennis Bergkamp's second-half stamp on Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, suggest that, not for the first time, lack of temperament could be Holland's undoing at a major tournament.

Undoubtedly the incidents took the shine off a dramatic victory against an ultra-cautious Yugoslavia side who despite defending for almost the entire 90 minutes could well have won the game themselves.

Yet when Bergkamp, who later admitted he was lucky not to be sent off over the Mihajlovic incident, hit a Dutch record-equalling 35th goal for his country by firing a low shot under Yugoslav goalkeeper Ivica Kralj in the 38th minute, there looked to be only one winner.

Kralj probably should have done better, but in truth it was only his saves that kept the Yugoslavs in the game as coach Slobodan Santrac opted to start with just one attacker, Predrag Mijatovic.

It certainly wasn't the Real Madrid striker's night.

Three minutes into the second half the Yugoslavs grabbed an unexpected lifeline when Slobodan Komljenovic took advantage of shoddy Dutch marking to head home a Dragan Stojkovic free-kick.

Amazingly, Mijatovic then had the chance to put his side ahead after Jaap Stam clumsily pulled down Vladimir Jugovic in the area. But Mijatovic lost

his composure and blasted his penalty onto the underside of Van der Sar's bar.

It was the first non-shootout penalty miss in a World Cup since Enzo Scifo missed for Belgium against Spain in Italy in 1990.

"I knew Mijatovic liked to wait for the goalkeeper to commit himself so I had told my goalkeeper to wait as long as possible and force Mijatovic to make a choice," said Hiddink afterwards.

Mijatovic, who scored the only goal as Real beat Davids' Italian club Juventus in the European Cup final in May, preferred to blame fate. "Luck was against me," he said. "That was the worst moment of my career."

It was a doubly ironic miss, given that Stojkovic and Mijatovic had smilingly informed the media on Sunday that they didn't practice penalties, and that Yugoslavia's last loss at the World Cup, eight years ago in Italy, was a penalty shootout defeat in the quarter-finals by Argentina.

It left Holland to pour forward looking for a winner, and Kralj saved heroically from Seedorf and Marc Overmars before Davids' drive following a corner deflected off a defender and his fingers into the corner of the net.

"To be frank, I was thinking ahead to extra time and I was about to substitute Davids, who had cramp," admitted Hiddink. "Thank God I didn't."

Davids himself said: "I just gave it everything -- I was cramping up and knew I was going to come off if it went to extra-time."

PARIS, Jun 30 (AP): Christian Vieri became a star at home in Italy. Then he was one abroad in Spain. Now he has taken his ascending fame to the World Cup.

Luis Hernandez was just a fading starlet with Mexican club Necaxa. Two weeks at France '98 changed all that.

Ronaldo was supposed to be the ultimate superstar of this World Cup. Hyped by a massive marketing campaign, the Brazilian striker was reduced to the level of mere greatness along with a few others among the 704 players who have taken the field since the tournament began June 10.

The second round wraps up Tuesday with Argentina vs England and Romania vs Croatia, and if the Coupe du Monde has taught us anything, it is that in soccer's global village, surprises are ever harder to come by. Almost everybody knows one another and any blase armchair fan can always blurt out he's seen it all before — and probably be right too.

That's why the sudden emergence of Hernandez, all long blond manes and good looks, warms the heart.

Out of the blue, he scored four goals for outsider Mexico and gave Germany a mighty fright Monday before the European champions eventually emerged 2-1 victors.

Then again, one can never aspire high enough in the World Cup. With the Germans trailing and being outplayed, Hernandez missed the simplest of tap-ins from close range, keeping Germany in the game and ending

his World Cup heroics on a sour note.

For Atletico Madrid's Vieri, the World Cup run is still alive. With a build seemingly chiseled out of granite, he has rumbled home five goals in just four games and is hot and ready for Friday's quarterfinal against the host nation.

"I'm going through a great spell," he said hoping to enter World Cup history alongside such national heroes as Paolo Rossi and Toto Schillaci, top scorers in 1982 and 1990.

Despite four goals, Ronaldo is on no such high. He's hit the woodwork from several angles. Brazil is through to the quarter-finals, yet he has his work cut out of make sure the 1998 finals will be identified with him.

"He's still not the Ronaldo we all want to see. He has a lot more to give," said Brazil's coach Mario Zagallo.

Of course, Ronaldo has to live up to being selected FIFA player-of-the-year twice. At 21, that is some task.

Argentina's Gabriel Battistuta also has four goals going into Tuesday's second-round match against England. By contrast, England's main man, Alan Shearer, has just a single goal.

Something else has been missing too.

A true No. 10, a playmaker that can singlehandedly turn a game and is an inspiration to his team, still has to emerge.

France's Zinedine Zidane could have been one, but kicking an opponent cost him a two-match suspension, and he's lucky that France won without him and scraped into the quarter-

finals.

Italy's Alessandro Del Piero got his opportunities but was so ineffectual, especially against Norway, that it seemed he was only stealing playing time from veteran Roberto Baggio.

In other positions, the aura of Jose Luis Chilavert stands out. The goalkeeper was great as underdogs Paraguay sent Spain and Bulgaria packing in the first round, and he was even better when he kept France at bay for 114 minutes in Sunday's second-round match before conceding the first World Cup "golden goal."

It could have been different, if France's defence had not been led by Marcel Desailly, truly a giant among the World Cup defenders so far.

Argentina's defence, on the other hand, is one united star. It's the only team yet to concede a goal.

Sometimes it only takes a few seconds to become a World Cup shooting star. Cameroon's Pierre Njankpa set loose from his own half, slalomed past opponent after opponent and a handful of seconds later unleashed a most incredible drive past Austria's Michael Kossel. It is still on daily newsreels all over France.

Danish substitute Ebbe Sand only needed half a minute after entering the game to seal Nigeria's fate with the third goal in a 4-1 drubbing of Nigeria.

Meanwhile, sidestepping most of the spectaculars, Germany keep marching on with singularly solid performances, underlining it takes more than a few flashes to win the Cup.

Maradona England bound!

BUENOS AIRES, June 30: Diego Maradona could be playing in England next season after being offered a job as player-coach, his agent said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The agent, Guillermo Coppola, indicated to a red radio that newly relegated first-division Crystal Palace may be the club.

The offer has taken us by surprise as we were going to France for the Argentina-England match but we will have to postpone it as we have been speaking to an English agent," Coppola said.

"The agent is trying to get everything signed this week," he said, adding the 37-year-old former Argentina captain was being offered an interpreter and a crash course in English and could take two of his Argentinian clubmates with him.

Italian Attilio Lombardo stepped down as player-coach of Crystal Palace after the south-

London club were relegated. Former England coach Terry Venables was hired as manager last month, returning to the club where he began his coaching career.

Maradona, whose brilliant World Cup-winning career was blighted by drug abuse, this month dropped plans to work for Argentine television at the World Cup, saying he was too depressed after a court handed him a suspended sentence for shooting journalists with an air rifle.

He had, however, been expected to fly in for Tuesday's match between Argentina and England in St Etienne but was not on Sunday's Air France flight from Buenos Aires to Paris.

The second round tie will give England a chance to avenge their defeat in the 1986 World Cup quarter-finals, the game in which Maradona battered home

his notorious "Hand of God" goal and which set him on course to lift the trophy for his country.

Were Maradona to sign — and his name has cropped up many times before in a host of unconsummated transfer deals — it would not be his first appearance for an English club.

In 1986, he played for Tottenham Hotspur in a testimonial match for Argentine Osvaldo Ardiles. Playing alongside that day was current England manager Glenn Hoddle.

The Argentine idol might have had a career in England early on. Just after Argentina's 1978 World Cup win the canny Yorkshiremen, who run Sheffield United, felt 700,000 US dollars was too much to pay for the then 17-year-old Maradona, who did not play in those finals. Six years later, Napoli paid Barcelona 9 million dollars for him.



END OF THE ROAD: A dejected Mexican keeper Jorge Campos sits alone after the fixture with Germany. — AFP photo



GREAT ESCAPE: Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van Der Sar watches a bullet spot kick from Yugoslav striker Predrag Mijatovic (not in picture) about to crash on the crosspiece at Toulouse on June 29. — AFP photo

Mijatovic's fatal fluff

TOULOUSE, France, June 30 (AP): Yugoslav star striker Predrag Mijatovic was shattered. Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar said he couldn't be happier.

Mijatovic, who scored the only goal in May's European Champions' Cup final to give Real Madrid the title over Juventus, drove a penalty kick high into the crossbar to waste Yugoslavia's best chance at a victory against the Netherlands at the World Cup on Monday.

Edgar Davids sent a 25-year shot home in the second minute of second-half injury time to lift the Netherlands into the quarterfinals with a 2-1 victory over Yugoslavia.

The penalty kick was awarded in the 51st minute with the score 1-1.

"This is the worst moment in my career," Mijatovic said. "The Dutch goalie is tall, so I decided to shoot high and under the bar. It didn't work. I'm sad for my teammates."

Van der Sar said he got instructions from his coach, Guus Hiddink, that Mijatovic always waits before kicking a penalty to see where a goalie is going to dive. Hiddink trained Mijatovic in Valencia before the Yugoslav striker moved to Real Madrid two seasons ago.

"So I waited a bit longer before making a move," Van der Sar said. "I think this put Mijatovic off. He lost concentration."

"I couldn't be happier. Who knows what would have happened at the end if the Yugoslavs took the lead."

It was the first missed penalty kick in France '98.

The victory put the Dutch in a round-of-eight meeting Saturday in Marseille with the winner of today's Argentina-England match.

Dennis Bergkamp broke through the defensively determined Yugoslavs in the 28th minute, giving him 35 goals in a Dutch uniform and tying him with Faas Wilkes of the 1940s and '50s for the Netherlands' career lead.

Bergkamp ran to a long ball out of the back from Dutch captain and defender Frank de Boer, setting it as Yugoslav defence Zoran Mirkovic fell. He blasted a shot from 15 yards that Yugoslav goalkeeper Ivica Kralj managed to get his hands to, but couldn't stop from squirming through and dribbling inside the left post.

The Yugoslavs came out quickly in the second half, drawing even in the 49th minute. Dragan Stojkovic lofted a free kick from just outside the left side of the penalty area onto the head of defender Slobodan Komljenovic, who drove the ball just inside the far post for his second goal of the tournament.

"We lost all the duels in the first half. The Dutch were always one step ahead of us," Komljenovic said. "In the second half, our game picked up."

"If Mijatovic scored that penalty and we took the lead, it would have been a completely different game for us. But we have to be fair, the Dutch are a great team and they deserved to win."

Beautiful game?

PARIS, June 30 (AFP/Internet): Is this the World Cup finals with the most gifted soccer players on the planet, or is the second round the stuff of pot-bellied pub sides and wheezing Sunday morning footballers?

The World Cup is supposed to be the ultimate perfection of the Beautiful Game — sophisticated elegance and breathtaking ball skills from its greatest exponents, guided by the most sophisticated coaches in the business.

Tactics, training, pre-match strategy, sports psychologists, dieticians, a battery of exercise machines and medical equipment — nothing is left to chance.

Yet the route to the quarter-finals of France 98 is proving to be anything but sophisticated.

Centuries ago, when football was played by English villagers in "matches" involving hundreds of people, the main tactic was booting the ball as hard as you could and having someone else run after it.

For all the sophistication and sponsorship in the modern game, it's a tactic which has now guided both Italy and Holland into the quarter-finals of the 1998 World Cup.

Luigi Di Biagio hoofed the ball upfield in the 18th minute against Norway, and Christian Vieri huffed and puffed as fast as he could after it before crashing his shot into the net.

Italy's coach Cesare Maldini hailed this demonstration of kick-and-run as a masterpiece — "a textbook goal," he trumpeted. Vieri, for the record, had also scored an identical goal against Chile.

On Monday night, another long ball veiled upfield had Dennis Bergkamp scurrying off in pursuit, and his shot sent

Holland on their way to a 2-1 victory over Yugoslavia.

However, the Yugoslavs will not easily forgive Predrag Mijatovic for clubbing his penalty against the crossbar.

Germany didn't need the a mighty punt upfield or a penalty blunder to beat Mexico, but Jürgen Klinsmann's crucial squallier had all the hallmarks of people who usually play with goals no nets.

Dietmar Hamann sent a hopeful cross into the middle, and the ball managed to somehow slip between the legs of defender Raul Lara. It then bobbed straight to the feet of Klinsmann, who promptly whacked it home from half-dozen yards.

For a tournament that cost a billion dollars to stage, the crucial goals are clearly coming in the style of games financed by a whip-round at closing time.

Spain failed to make the second round after failing to recover from goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta's howler against Nigeria, when he shoved a harmless cross into his own net.

And Nigeria keeper Peter Rufai literally had a hand in two of Denmark's four goals by parrying shots and letting the ball drop into the path of an opponent in their second round defeat.

Arguably though, the writ has been on the wall since the very first match at France 98, when Scotland were denied a draw with Brazil after a pantomime own goal set a trend for the rest of the tournament.

The Stade de France may be a feat of modern architecture, but the spectacle sometimes would not be out of place at Hackney Marshes.

D-DAY
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GOLD LEAF

LIGHTS

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