



WORLD CUP '98 SPECIAL

GUTS BUT NO GLORY



KID WITH A HOT FUTURE: Michael Owen (C) advances while Argentine defender Nelson Vivas (R) struggles to keep him in check at Saint Etienne. —AFP photo

Beckham: From hero to villain

PARIS, July 1 (AFP/Internet): Multi-millionaire David Beckham is the boy who has everything.

The flash cars, the pop star fiancée, the trophy-studded career and the lavish houses all belong to David Beckham.

Then, to put the most golden of finishes to his personal treasure chest, the English football public clamoured for his presence on the world's greatest stage.

After missing out on the first match of the World Cup against Tunisia, Beckham replaced Paul Ince in the game against Romania - and played one of the best games of his short career.

The fans and the media voted overwhelmingly for Beckham to replace Darren Anderson in the match against Colombia.

Coach Glenn Hoddle opted to play both together and the result produced a fantastic free-kick and a brilliant display by Beckham.

But in one moment of petulance, Beckham tossed away his chance to shine among the world's elite.

The 23-year-old Manchester United star changed the whole game when he was sent off in the second half.

It happened two minutes into the second half when Argentine skipper Diego Simeone clattered into Beckham from behind and left him sprawling face down on the grass. As Simeone walked back past him, Beckham lifted his foot to kick him right in front of the Danish referee: Kim Nielsen, who had no option but to pull out his red card.

England coach Glenn Hoddle was the first to admit it has cost his side the match.

"I don't deny that the sending off cost us dearly. It was a mistake but these things happen in football. I am not denying it cost us the game," said a bitterly disappointed Hoddle.

"David has another World Cup ahead of him and he's got to learn the lesson," said Hoddle.

However, the English national agency Press Association were more brutal.

Their chief sports reporter wrote: "David Beckham was simply a disgrace. He should hang his head in shame this morning after letting England down in the biggest game of his life."

"He deserves to have the Three Lions stripped from his shirt for an act of crass stupidity when he got himself sent off for kicking out at Argentinian captain Diego Simeone.

"So let's not blame the courageous David Batty for missing the penalty that cost England a place in the quarter-finals. Let's instead blame Beckham's peevish and sly kick, foolishly enacted under the nose of referee Kim Milton Nielsen."

Only days earlier Beckham was being hailed the hero.

Manchester United coach Alex Ferguson made a bitter attack on Hoddle when he failed to pick him for England's first group match.

He was supported by Manchester United director Sir Bobby Charlton.

Hoddle defended his decision, claiming that Beckham

was not focused, insisting his mind was more on his showbiz romance with the pop singer than with football.

When the England coach finally put the multi-million dollar star striker in the line-up against Colombia the English press crowed that people power had won the day.

Hoddle hit back saying that it was he that had got the superstar back on track and that people power had nothing to do with it.

After Tuesday night's nightmare, both the public and Hoddle appear to be leaving Beckham hanging out to dry on his own.

On the same day as Beckham's personal earnings of 8.1 million pounds per year were revealed, the 23-year-old landed on the biggest snake of them all to become, for an instant, as reviled as Diego Maradona was 12 years ago in Mexico.

Hoddle however felt the officials had combined to help send his team out of the competition.

Sol Campbell had a late "winner" ruled out for a foul by Alan Shearer on Roa while defender Jose Chamot got away with a handball a minute into golden goal extra-time.

"I could see it from the bench, it was a definite penalty," said Hoddle.

"The problem is the officials didn't see it and there's nothing we can do about it."

"I don't know if destiny was against us. Everything went against us."

England skipper Shearer meanwhile pointed the finger of See page 14

ST ETIENNE, July 1 (Reuters): One moment of grace and one of impetuous indiscipline combined on Tuesday to help create, and destroy, potentially one of the greatest matches in World Cup history.

As Argentina and England served up another classic contest that mixed majesty with misery and sublime skill with raw drama, it was the contributions of Michael Owen and David Beckham, two of the most talented members of England's younger generation, which overshadowed all.

Striker Owen, with his pace, balance and coolness in front of goal, proved beyond doubt that he is the revelation of the 1998 tournament and, at just 18, a great star of the future.

His individual goal after 46 minutes was arguably the best of France '98 so far and his all-round performance marked him out as one of the most dangerous goalscorers.

His penalty, during the tense shootout that settled the outcome, was precision personified by a baby-faced soccer assassin.

But like midfielder Beckham, who was sent off after 47 minutes for retaliation, he is on an early flight home after England's second round elimination by 4-3 on penalties, following a 2-2 draw after extra time.

For Beckham, it was a bitter pill to swallow on a night when, for 45 minutes, he swaggered as extravagantly in midfield as any one in the tournament in front of a noisy mass which included not only Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, but Victoria Adams, his fiancée, of the Spice Girls.

So much was expected of Beckham. He scored a dramatic free-kick last Friday against Colombia to help England with their final Group G fixture and mixed important tackles with his often exquisite passes on Tuesday.

He left the stadium, with a baseball cap pulled down hard on his head, in mute misery as he marched through reporters thronging the mixed zone.

His dismissal had stunned his team and left England condemned to switching tactics from expansive attack to gritty defence with captain Alan Shearer, the team's top scorer, often playing right-back to assist the scrape towards extra-time and penalties.

But coach Glenn Hoddle, while admitting that he could not defend Beckham for kicking out after being fouled by Diego Simeone, was able to balance his views sensibly.

"We can't put all the blame on Beckham," he said. "We handled ourselves very well without him and defended like lions. But if it was 11 against 11, I think we would have won."

For both Beckham and Owen, the night ended in an anguish only they and those who saw their penalties saved — Paul Ince and David Batty — could fathom.

Yet, only a fortnight earlier, neither Beckham nor Owen was selected for England's opening 2-0 victory over Tunisia in Marseille, the city they had hoped to return to for a quarter-final clash with the Netherlands on Saturday.

Instead of an England return, it will be Argentina journeying south after emerging victorious in their hardest match to date, a spectacle that deserved to rank with its predecessors of 1962, 1966 and 1986 for sheer thrills and spills.

Although Daniel Passarella's team struggled to break down England, they showed that in Ariel Ortega they have an elusively-skillful creator who could, against less determined opponents, unlock the door for Gabriel Batistuta.

In this incident-filled match, however, he and "Batigo" were eclipsed by the losing team's duo of the future.

Tens of thousands took part in nighttime celebrations in the capital as similar scenes played out across the country. People poured into streets, doused each other with beer and threw toilet paper over trees.

The Argentines reveled in their victory by dancing in the streets amid showers of confetti and shouts of "Ar-gen-tin-a!"

One young man hung precariously out a window at the top of the spire, waving the Argentine flag. Others leaned from bus windows, shouting and screaming.

The match was closely watched by many mainly because of Argentina's 1986 quarter-final victory over Maradona's punched-in goal and due to the war over the Falklands Islands in 1982.

That year, the former military government in Buenos Aires tried to end Britain's presence on the Falklands, known in Argentina as the Malvinas. Britain's possession of the small South Atlantic sheep-raising islands remains a sore point with Argentina.

At the shamrock pub, some 25 English fans, outnumbered by Argentines, endured the nail-biting, chain-smoking drama played out on a big screen. They made a quick exit amid Argentine cheers. For some, it was more than a soccer

Buenos Aires on cloud nine

Buenos Aires, July 1 (AFP/AP): Thousands of ecstatic Argentines took to the streets late Tuesday after the national team won a spot in the World Cup quarter-finals by squeaking past England in a penalty shootout.

But rowdy celebrations went bad, as sports fans and police clashed, leaving at least one young man injured and over 10 people arrested, according to media reports.

The incidents occurred after police sought to force some celebrants to climb down from television vans in the area, using tear gas and water cannons.

Central Buenos Aires was carpeted in white paper thrown from office buildings, as firecrackers and horns tore through the silence that had reigned until Argentine goalkeeper Carlos Roa held off a second English penalty kick, earning his team a spot in the next round.

Roa saved David Batty's fifth and final penalty to book Argentina's quarter-final date with Holland after Paul Ince and Hernan Crespo had both failed to convert their side's second spot kicks.

Banners sporting Argentina's white and blue national colours appeared on balconies in numbers seldom seen even on national holidays.

match. One Argentine TV station briefly broadcast the headline: "The Malvinas are Argentine."

Exuberant fans shouted standard cheers, as many added, "We'll be champions again, like in '86" which was fast becoming favourite.

A torrent of employees, executives, bankers and students burst into the downtown Corrientes Avenue, gathering around the obelisk to celebrate the 4-2 win.

Meanwhile, drivers moving aimlessly through the capital sounded their horns repeatedly, as even the most formal executives wrapped themselves in the blue and white.

In dozens of other Argentine cities, the same festival atmosphere reigned, but most proud were the inhabitants of Reconquista, the hometown of scorer Gabriel Batistuta, and Ledesma, birthplace of Ariel "Burrito" Ortega.

The joy overflowing in Buenos Aires' streets contrasted sharply with the city's deserted avenues, devoid of people until the moment when Roa saved the decisive penalty kick.

Earlier roars of triumph that resounded in bars and offices after each regular-period Argentine goal had been muted by the tension over the final penalty kick shootout.

Jamaica, arguably the two weakest teams in the entire tournament.

On the positive side, having come through the inferno and survived the lottery of a penalty shootout, Argentina could be galvanised by a sense that it is their destiny to go far here.

Diego Maradona, the architect of Argentina's last World Cup win over England in the 1986 quarter-finals, certainly believes so.

"I knew the game against England would be difficult, but my heart told me we were going to win," he said before announcing his intention to travel to Marseille for Saturday's match.

Passarella, a fully paid-up member of the sergeant-major school of football coaching, puts more trust in meticulous preparation than the whims of fate.

As he counted the wounded at the Argentinian base-camp on the outskirts of St-Etienne.

Thursday, Passarella had the players watching videos of Holland's four matches so far.

"We have beaten one of the toughest teams in the tournament but now we have to get ready for Holland," he said. "It will not be as physical as against England but we know we are up against a very, very good team."

Costly Argentine win

PARIS, July 1 (AFP/Internet): Former England great Sir Bobby Charlton, jumped to the defence of David Beckham on Thursday - begging critics not to crucify him.

Beckham became the most reviled player in England after he got himself sent off at the start of the second half in the do-or-die second round clash against Argentina.

Although 10-man England held on only to lose in a penalty shoot-out, Beckham became the villain, with the British press lambasting him.

But Charlton pleaded for understanding for the 23-year-old Manchester United star.

"You cannot throw him to the wolves. I saw him after the match and he was terribly affected by it. He realised what he had done," said Sir Bobby.

And Manchester United director Charlton, a World Cup winner with England in 1966, believes that Beckham is fully aware of the foolishness of his actions.

Charlton was upset by Argentine captain Simeone's foul on the Englishman.

"It was quite a cynical foul but that's past now... David reacted and he was expelled from the field."

Passarella will be hoping Parma defender Roberto Sensi, who missed Tuesday's match with a thigh strain, has recovered in time to provide defensive reinforcement on Saturday.

But it was not just the Argentinian defence whose self-confidence took a battering on Tuesday night.

Gabriel Batistuta's 6th minute penalty, his fifth goal of France 98, left him level with Italy's Christian Vieri as the World Cup's joint top scorer.

But the spot-kick -- which David Seaman almost saved -- and the flick-on which helped win it were the only flickers from the Argentinian star on a night which saw him snuffed out by Tony Adams and finally substituted with more than 20 minutes of regulation time still to play.

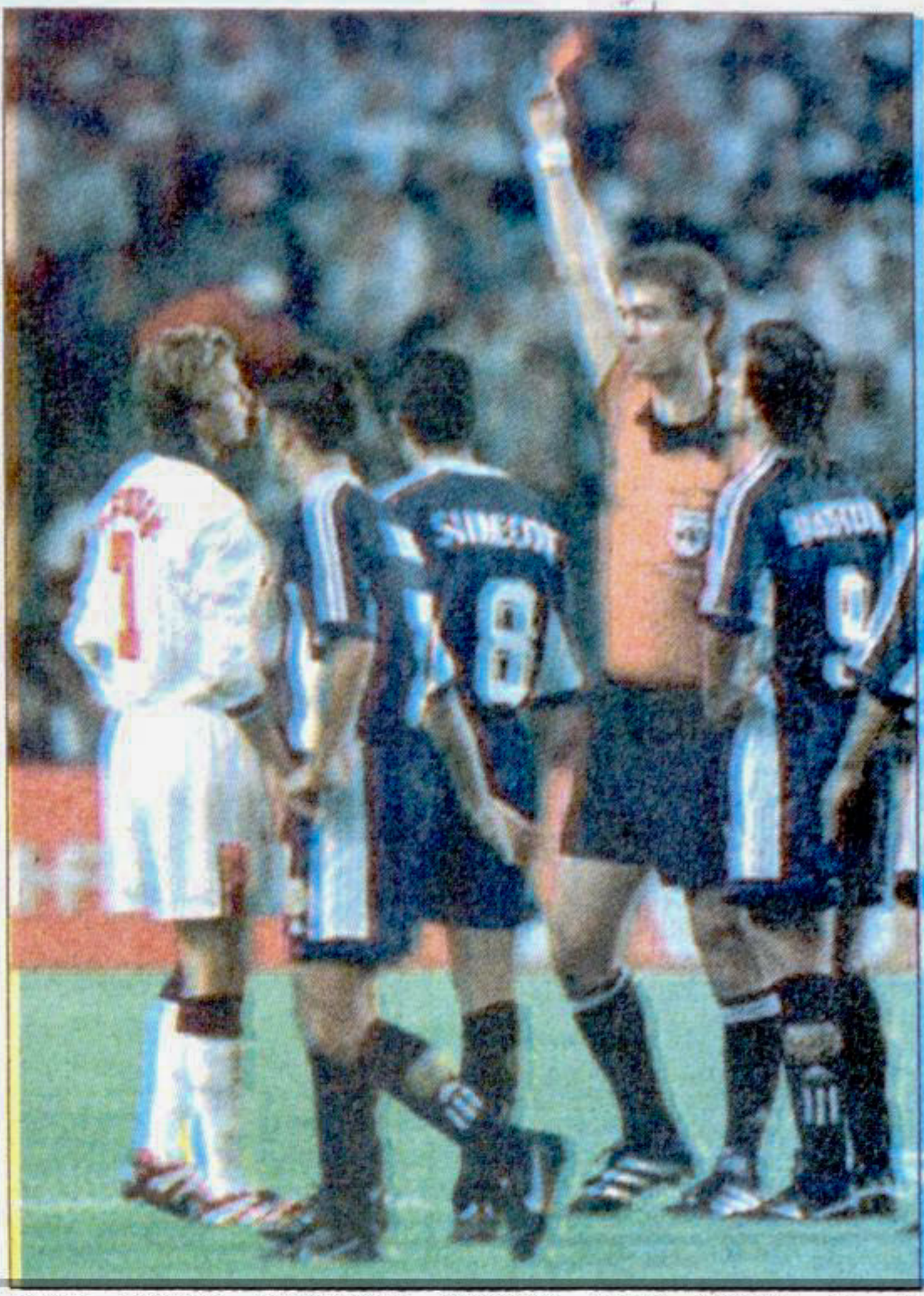
The Fiorentina striker now has an astonishing 47 goals in 64 international appearances.

But his performance in Argentina's first big test in France will only have fuelled the suspicion that he is a brilliant destroyer of weak defences rather than a World Cup winning striker in the mould of Mario Kempes, Argentina's hero in 1978.

Four of Batistuta's five goals have come against Japan and

Two minutes into the second period, Beckham was flattened by Simeone. Lying face down on the ground, he flailed his leg and appeared to kick Simeone's calf. It was less an intentional retaliation and more the petulant wish to get away from it.

England personifies a shootout against Argentina, with David Batty taking the deciding penalty. A moment of hope, a high degree of chance and the knowledge that it will turn out



THE MOST TALKED ABOUT RED CARD: David Beckham (L) being shown the marching orders under controversial circumstances at Saint Etienne on June 30. —AFP photo

England love a loser

I knew England would throw it away. I knew Paul Ince would miss too. And why? Because England always miss. They missed in the 1990 World Cup semi-final shootout and they missed in the 1996 European Championship semi-final shootout. It was fate that they would miss again.

Many eagerly anticipated clashes fail to live up to the pre-match speculation but that was certainly not the case yesterday. Gushing drama, passion, frustration, hope, despair, a couple of penalties, a controversial sending off, and a nail-biting finale, the game will go down as one of the classic World Cup encounters of all time.

The first half was the most enthralling 45 minutes I have ever seen. The second half contrived such unremitting tension that I fell off the edge of my seat. For a moment I thought the script had been written for England to win the game on penalties. But the happy ending didn't occur and the script turned out to be a Shakespearean tragedy.

David Beckham was the central antagonist of this tale of woe. The pin-up poster boy must feel like the ugliest man alive right now. And he will have to carry this burden for the rest of his life. But he shouldn't feel so bad because he is not by any stretch of the imagination an exception to the rule - the rule which clearly states that the English are losers.

How could I ever have imagined that they would beat the Argentinians? They are efficient people who practice their penalties. England, being English, fired too close to the goalkeeper and paid the price. Yet this bunch of losers will be accorded a hero's reception when they return home. And why? Because England loves a loser. They've developed this fondness for failure because they've had to.

England personifies a shootout against Argentina, with David Batty taking the deciding penalty. A moment of hope, a high degree of chance and the knowledge that it will turn out



TOMORROWS TORCHBEARER: A little English boy cheers his team from the stand of the Geoffroy Guichard Stadium. —AFP photo



BABY MARADONA: An Argentine baby enjoy the atmosphere at the Geoffroy Guichard Stadium in Saint Etienne before the start of the second round match with England. —AFP photo

GOAL IS THE NAME OF THE GAME!

JOHN PLAYER LIGHTS GOLD LEAF