



WORLD CUP '98 SPECIAL

Old foes fight again Argentina vs Holland

MARSEILLE, July 3 (AFP) — Most of Holland's current crop of players were wearing shorts of a different kind when the Dutch lost the 1978 World Cup final to Argentina in Buenos Aires.

Striker Patrick Kluyvert was just two years old at the time, but for those that can remember the match, the memories of that controversial 3-1 defeat will have constituted a bad childhood experience.

But on Saturday Guus Hiddink's side will have a chance to avenge the defeat — Holland's second consecutive loss in a World Cup final — when they face an Argentine side battered, bruised and drained from their epic clash with England in the second round.

The 1978 defeat still evokes bitter feelings among the Dutch who complained the Argentinians had deliberately, and unsportingly, set out to unsettle them by delaying their emergence onto the pitch for five minutes.

ture of youth and experience. They love to come out and play attacking football — and so do we. Both teams will remain true to their footballing philosophy."

"The conditions seem perfect for an open and exciting match in Marseille and I will be astonished if the match finishes 0-0 at the end of 90 minutes," he added.

The Dutch will be hoping that Argentina's grueling victory on penalties over England in St Etienne will have left Daniel Passarella's side mentally and physically exhausted.

"We have had an extra day to recover after our win over Yugoslavia," says Holland winger Marc Overmars. "Argentina had to play an extra half hour against England in an exhausting game."

"But I am not sure it will make much difference for Saturday's match as they should be fine after four days rest," said the Arsenal star, who added

lessly exposed the side's fragility at the back.

Passarella is counting on the return from injury of veteran defender Roberto Sensini and will leave Gabriel Batistuta up front as a lone striker.

Sensini missed his team's last two games because of a thigh injury including the pulsating second round win against England on Tuesday.

Sensini, 31, Argentina's most experienced defender with 42 caps, pulled a muscle in his left thigh against Jamaica in Argentina's first round game on June 21, a week earlier he had dislocated a finger against Japan.

Sensini trained fully for the first time Thursday and said he was ready to step into the side in place of understudy Nelson Vivas.

"I feel good" said Sensini. "I feel ready for Saturday."

Passarella, dismissed by several defensive lapses against England, is keen to get his most



TERRIFIC TRIO: Holland's deadly forwards Dennis Bergkamp (L), Marc Overmars and fiery midfielder Edgar Davids in a gallant mood at La Turbie on July 1. — AFP photo

The twins want it all

PARIS, July 3 (AP) — Twins Frank and Ronald de Boer were only eight when Rene and Willy van de Kerkhof, the last pair of Dutch twins to represent their country, played in the 3-1 defeat by Argentina at the 1978 World Cup final — but they are determined to put the record straight this time.

Holland will play Argentina in Marseille on Saturday in the quarterfinals, and for the De Boers meeting the South Americans gives them the chance to avenge what they consider a previous slur on their country's footballing pride.

"To beat Argentina would mean we had escaped from the shadow of the De Kerkhofs and also gone some way to expunging the memory of that defeat," Frank said.

The De Boers, who are not particularly close, are desperate

to shed the image of being another set of twins who played in an exciting but underachieving Dutch side and realise that beating Argentina will not be enough if they fail to win the World Cup.

It's true that the 1978 final still rankles with us as a nation as we had a fine team which had played the best football throughout the tournament, and lost to a negative side that relied on Mario Kempes for their win," Frank said.

The De Kerkhofs were part of a memorable team that had to put up with countless moments of gamesmanship from the Argentinians starting with them coming out late for the start of the match and then complaining that Willy de Kerkhof's plastercast on his arm was dangerous.

The De Boers expect much less of that type of play on Sat-

urday, although the Argentinian hardman and captain Diego Simeone appeared to have perfected the art of tricking the referee given his display on Tuesday against England.

The Inter Milan midfielder, who came to prominence in the 1994 World Cup where he played all four matches, tricked the Danish referee into giving a penalty and then his theatrical collapse after David Beckham kicked out at him resulted in the 23-year-old playmaker being sent off.

The Argentinians know all the tricks in the book, but it's hardly surprising as while the Brazilians are brought upon honing their skills they are taught about how to get the better of a decision," Frank said.

"However, they are a tough but fair side with a lot of skill," he added.

Simeone: A con artist

MARSEILLE, France, July 3 (AFP) — Diego Simeone ensured on Tuesday night that England would forever be wary of Argentinian players with the first name Diego.

His theatrical fall following David Beckham's kick led to a red card for the Englishman and more World Cup woe at the hands of the South Americans.

The 28-year-old Argentine captain, who will lead the two-time world champions out against Holland in Saturday's quarterfinal, showed that England were not on the same ballpark as his team in respect of the art of gamesmanship.

His namesake Diego Maradona scored a goal with his 'Hand of God' 12 years earlier in the quarterfinals. Diego junior won a dubious penalty decision and delivered his coup de grace when, like the good South American professional he is, he collapsed when Beckham kicked him.

Simeone knew what the consequences for Beckham would

be as he had noticed that Danish referee Kim Nielsen was looking straight at them.

Even Simeone's fellow Inter Milan clubmates, with whom he had won last season's UEFA Cup, joined in the criticism of his behaviour.

"I know Simeone well, and he was play acting," Italy's number one goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca said.

However, Simeone, who has made a stunning comeback to Italian football after taking a

seven year break in Spain following a torrid time at Pisa, is determined nothing will stand in his way.

Four years ago in the United States Maradona's drugs test ruined team morale.

"I really felt that we had the team that could win the cup and then, as always with an Argentine team, outside forces and a human failing destroyed our dream," he said.

Simeone, keen to improve his scoring rates, which cur-

rently stands at three in 75 appearances, is a keen adherent to the discipline that coach Daniel Passarella has introduced since he took over in 1994.

"To win something you have to compromise — I'd rather win through a solid performance than go down in style," he said. Simeone, whose will to win was hardened further by the 1996 Olympic final defeat to Nigeria, realises that Holland on a man-to-man basis will be a much tougher team than England.

"However, we have great team spirit and the Dutch must be rocking after the punch that Van der Sar threw at Bogarde after their last match, that destroyed the image of unity they had been putting on for the press and don't worry we'll take full advantage of that," he warned.

Simeone, hardman of actor, will be interested only in being one thing on Saturday and that is a winner.



Captain Diego Simeone (C) and Argentine teammates Gabriel Batistuta (L) and Juan Veron (R) listening to a fellow squad member speaking at a combined media conference at L'Etrat on July 2. — AFP photo

The Dutch were further infuriated when the hosts refused to start the match unless Rene van de Kerkhof left the pitch to remove a protective arm shield which they claimed was dangerous.

Holland legend Johann Neeskens, who played in the 1978 final and is working as an assistant to Hiddink at France '98, said the Dutch should try and forget about the match.

"It is the worst memory of my playing career," says Neeskens. "But that's in the past. Saturday is another match."

"People have said we were not well received in Argentina — but it's not true," added the former Ajax and Barcelona star. "We were made to feel very welcome except on the day of the final — but that's understandable."

Hiddink believes Saturday's match at the Stade Velodrome is perfectly balanced between two sides who love to play attacking football.

"I think it's 50-50," he says. "We know Argentina well and they have impressed me from the start. Argentinians have football in their blood."

"Their team has a good mix-

that he prefers to be facing Argentina than England.

Passarella insists that this time round the Dutch will have no cause for complaint if they lose on Saturday and that he is determined to steer Argentina to a triumph at France '98 — unstained by controversy."

"We have never won a World Cup without being muddled by some form of controversy," he said.

"1978 was the regime, 1986 was Diego Maradona's 'Hand of God' goal and when we made the 1990 final it was done with a lack of finesse and disgraceful behaviour on the pitch."

"We had a fine team in 1994 and then senior Maradona goes and blows it again leaving us once more with a sullied reputation and shame on the world stage for the upteenth time," he added.

"This time it will be different. I may be strict but so far it has paid off and the Dutch may moan about what happened 20 years ago but on Saturday they will have no grounds for complaint," he said.

Passarella plans to bolster his defence and revert to a solo striker against Holland, after England's Michael Owen ruth-

experienced stopper back at the heart of the defence against the gifted Dutch.

He is also expected to drop Valencia striker Claudio Lopez, disappointing against England, and replace him with River Plata midfielder Sergio Berti.

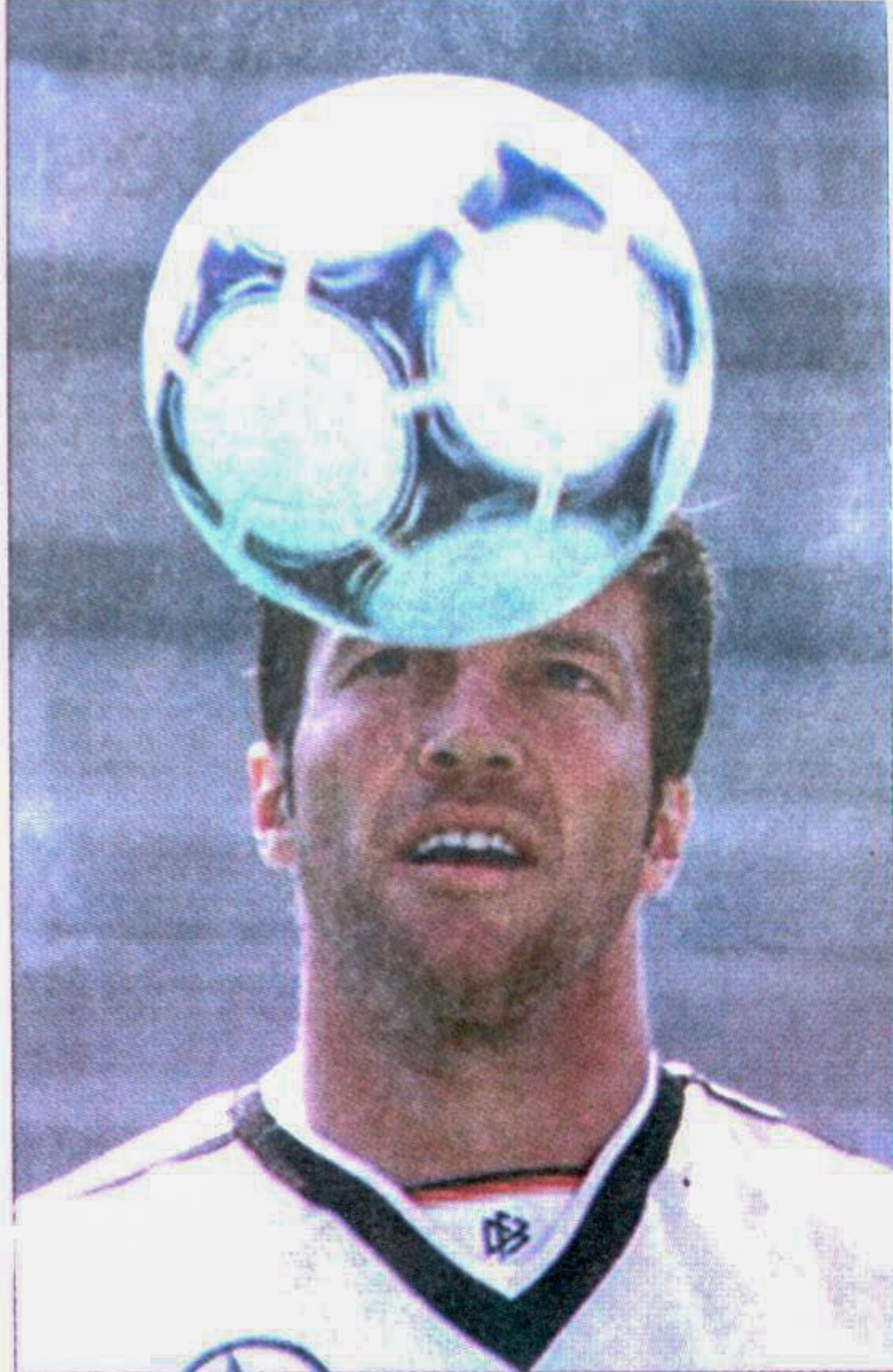
FIFA just say no

PARIS, July 3 (AFP) — FIFA emphatically denied Thursday that any player had tested positive for drugs at the World Cup, moving aggressively to quash rumours that at least one player had been caught for doping.

"Let me make it absolutely clear," said FIFA communications director Keith Cooper. "No player has tested positive for drugs so far at this World Cup."

"We go into the quarter-finals with a clean sheet in that regard."

Even before the World Cup finals began, rumours were spreading that one Argentine player had tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs.



DYNAMIC LOTHAR: Lothar Matthaeus, Germany's battle hardened libero, practices at Nice on July 2. — AFP photo

Matthaeus keeps on going

PARIS, July 3 (AFP/ Internet) — Germany's Lothar Matthaeus, who steals the limelight and lengthens the World Cup record books every time he steps on the field, was never meant to be here.

He owes his place in Germany's squad to the absence of Euro 96 hero Matthias Sammer. The 37-year-old Matthaeus has played 24 World Cup finals games spanning five tournaments, three more than any other player in history.

With his last game against Mexico he clocked up 1,958 minutes of World Cup action, beating compatriot Uwe Seeler by eight minutes, and third-placed Diego Maradona by 15 minutes.

Keen statisticians are wracking their brains to try and think of other juicy benchmarks the rugged defender has set and they will probably be able to fill a small book.

But the fact remains that but for the chronic injuries to the knees of Euro 96 hero Matthias Sammer, the international career of Matthaeus, who held aloft the 1990 World Cup as skipper, would have been a trip down German fans memory

lane. Sammer was the consummate sweeper who operated in front as well as behind the German defence and whose performances in the Euro 96 knockout stages — particularly against intimidating Croatia in the quarter-finals and also in the semis against England and the final against Czech Republic — were simply magnificent.

No one in Germany could touch Sammer in that role. And Matthaeus was still not set to step in because Schalke 04's Olaf Thon, small in stature but neat in possession, was expected to have the first shout at sweeper.

Matthaeus finally had his record-breaking 22nd appearance when adding steel against Yugoslavia for Dietmar Hamann in the second half and his rugged ball-winning helped complete a fightback.

Matthaeus then played full games against Iran and Mexico, when Thon was left out for the second round.

The rest is collated on the computer print-outs of ecstatic statisticians who no doubt will have more exciting facts by the time Matthaeus is through.

First thing first for Batistuta

L'ETRAT, France, July 3 (Reuters) — Gabriel Batistuta has a World Cup marksmen's duel with Christian Vieri and a potential showdown with Ronaldo on the horizon.

But five-goal Batistuta did his best on Thursday to avoid comparisons with his fellow strikers as Argentina prepared for their quarterfinal against the Netherlands in Marseille on Saturday.

"It's a very beautiful duel," the striker said of his neck-and-neck race with Italy's Vieri to be crowned the tournament's top scorer.

"But we're not the only ones and it depends on how many matches we end up playing," he said at Argentina's World Cup camp outside St Etienne.

Vieri, who leads the race with Batistuta after both scored five goals in their first four matches, turns out for Italy in their quarterfinal against hosts France at the Stade de France in Paris today.

If Argentina beat the Dutch they could meet Ronaldo's Brazil in the Marseille semifinal on Tuesday. Brazil meet Denmark in their quarterfinal in Nantes today.

Asked about a duel with Ronaldo for the title of the world's top striker, Batistuta said: "First we have to get through ... I'm not thinking about that but of Holland."

Batistuta said he had no problems accepting being substituted against England on Tuesday. Batistuta came off in the 69th minute before Argentina won their second round clash on penalties following a 2-2 draw after extra time.

"In the heat of the match, I didn't want to come off but we're a squad of 22 and I'm not the exception," Batistuta said.

Ice Rabbit belittles Batigol

MARSEILLE, France, July 3 (AFP/ Internet) — Holland goalkeeper Edwin Van der Sar said here on Friday that Argentina's star scorer Gabriel Batistuta held no fears for him ahead of Saturday's quarter-final here.

The 27-year-old Ajax keeper, nicknamed the 'Ice Rabbit', added that the Dutch team as a whole had no reason to fear the two-time World Cup winners, who beat them 3-1 in the 1978 final.

"I am the best goalkeeper in the world so why should I be afraid of facing Gabriel Batistuta," he said.

"I have faced all the best strikers and so he doesn't intimidate me in the least," he added.

Van der Sar refused to talk about the incident after Monday's second round win over Yugoslavia when he threw a punch at Winston Bogarde who appeared to shove him away from the scrum of players celebrating Edgar Davids' winner.

"We have a stronger squad than Argentina and we are not frightened of anybody. We are very confident," said the player who won the 1995 European Cup with Ajax.

Der Sar was one of the few Ajax players not to decamp after that 1995 European Cup win over AC Milan when Patrick Kluyvert scored the winner.

FIRST TIME CROATIANS STILL HOLDING ON..

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS