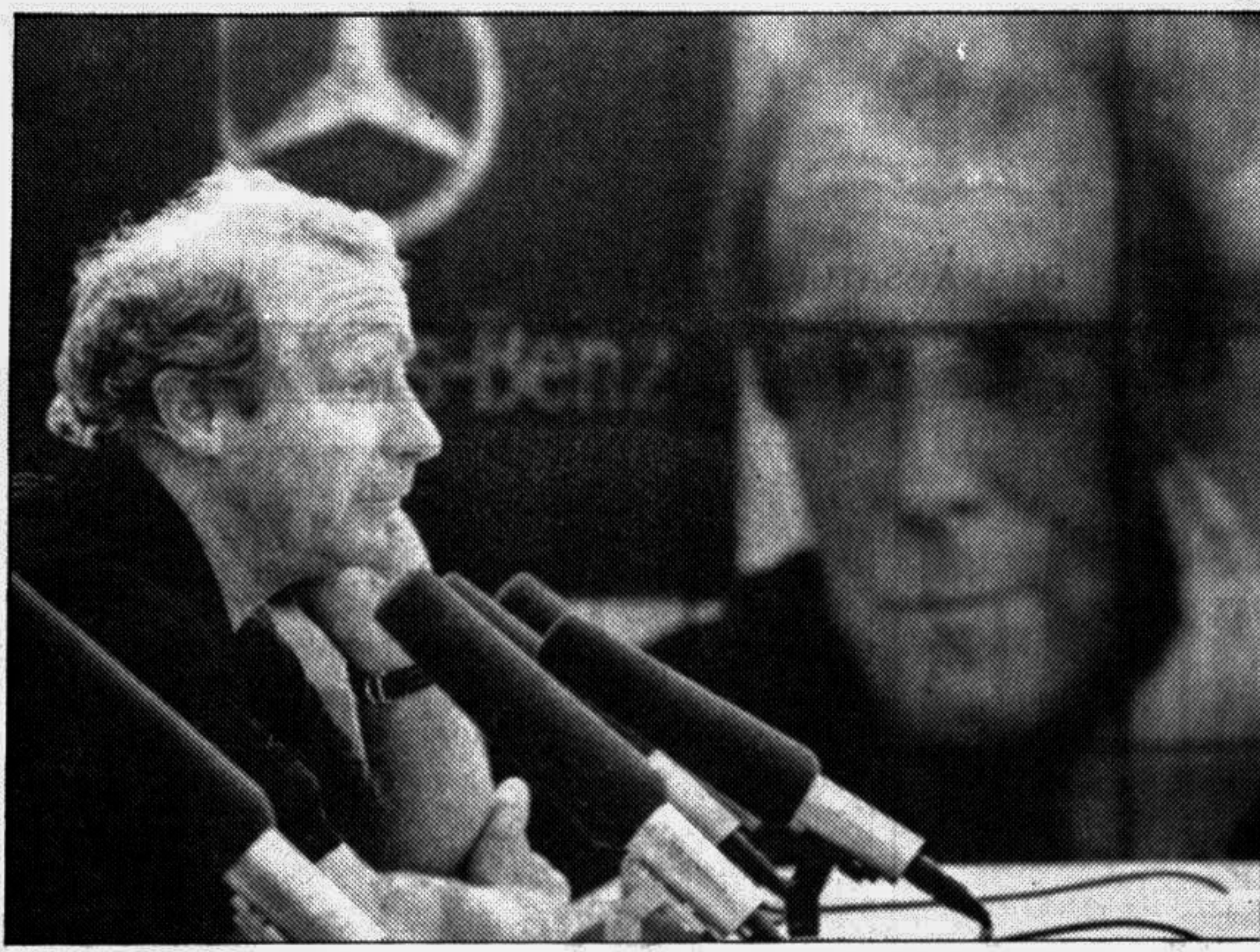


That's Maradona!

BUENOS AIRES, July 3: An unrepentant Diego Maradona said on Thursday he would repeat his "Hand of God" goal if given the chance, reports Reuters. Maradona denied reports that he had apologised for his infamous goal in Argentina's 1986 World Cup quarterfinal win against England and added: "I would do it again, not just against England, but against any team." He also told local radio that the English were not sly enough to score such goals themselves. "Maybe they don't have this cunningness, because the cunningness of the Latin American is unique," he said. "I say to the English people that I'd do it again because I drank it in with my mother's milk. Because I used to score hand goals when I used to play around in the streets." Memories of the "Hand of God" had English fans thirsting for revenge on Tuesday when Argentina met England again. But vengeance was denied them as Argentina went through on penalties. Maradona said he was travelling to France to watch Argentina's quarterfinal against the Netherlands on Saturday. He said he may go to England after the match to discuss what he claims to be a player-coaching offer from Crystal Palace — an offer that the London club have denied making.



German coach Berti Vogts appears at a press conference at the French Riviera on July 1. — AFP photo

Moller: The odd piece in German jigsaw

PARIS, July 3 (AFP/ Internet): Andreas Moller looks to have become the odd piece in Germany's jigsaw as the perennial European favourites for World Cup glory limber up for their quarter-final duel with Croatia on Saturday. Moller has scored 29 goals in his 82 matches for Germany — a good return for a midfielder. But after making a dream start to the World Cup with a goal against the United States the 30-year-old Dortmund star has lost his way. Pulled off against Yugoslavia he was then left on the bench for the final group match against Iran and the second round match against Mexico with coach Berti Vogts preferring to let the likes of Thomas Hassler pull the strings behind strikers Jürgen Klinsmann and Oliver Bierhoff. Hassler appeared to hold less aces at the start, but it is Moller who now has ground to make up if he wants to feature in the Croatia showdown. The former Juventus star has often been criticised by German pundits as a fair-weather player and also suffers from Vogt's aversion to playing both him and Hassler in the

middle of the park. The fair-weather reputation began at Eintracht Frankfurt, where rifts between him and teammates were one factor which cost the club the league title in 1991. But a three-season stint at Juventus, where he won the Italian league and the UEFA Cup, toughened him up after he was once considered "too soft" to make his way in the big time. After returning to the Bundesliga he took over a leadership role at Borussia Dortmund and also in the German national team, winning two league championships and then lifting the European Cup last year — ironically against Juventus. Moller's job is to act as Germany's midfield general. He sprays passes into the path of sprinting strikers, orders his teammates into position and pulls them back when the opposition starts to move downfield. But he has had difficulty slipping into the role in France and Vogts appears to have lingering doubts about him, even though he played in Franz Beckenbauer's 1990 winning side and scored the penalty which put England out of Euro

96 in the semi-finals. He was suspended for that final. Yet Moller won't take things lying down. "I'm not here to be labelled a loser and I'm certainly not going to accept being on the outside looking in," he insisted on learning he was out of the starting line-up to play Mexico. "I'm convinced I'll get another chance. After all, I didn't play against Iran and yet that game hardly went better for us than the one against Yugoslavia, although I admit I didn't really get a grip on that match." What really hurt Moller was the fact that Vogts left him kicking his heels on the bench even when Hassler went off injured. "That hit me even more than not getting into the starting line-up," he said. But Moller remains a key squad member and with question marks against Hassler's fitness after a series of injury layoffs, he is likely to get his chance again sooner rather than later. "If I do get a chance to get back in, I'll grab it with both hands," says the combative star.

Ortega has arrived

PARIS, July 3 (AFP): Argentina's World Cup star Ariel Ortega's rise to intentional fame was beginning just as Diego Maradona was fading off the international scene. Eight minutes from the end of Argentina's opening match against Greece in the 1994 World Cup, Diego Maradona left the field and Ortega came on. Maradona's career was approaching a final precipice and before Argentina's group games were over, he was banned from the tournament after a cocktail of drugs was found in his blood. Ortega went on to play the first knockout match against Romania. Ortega's performance at the rest of this World Cup, starting against Holland in Saturday's quarterfinal, will prove whether he can yet be mentioned in the same breath as his high-profile forerunner. The two players from overlapping yet essentially different generations are continually being compared. Ortega is quick over the first two or three strides as was Maradona, but his skinny frame made his shirt billow in the breeze while Maradona was stocky.

Vogts' bark

From page 16 meet one-to-one. Then again, sometimes you keep your distance," Vogts says revealingly. "The main thing is that I listen." Vogts now has his eyes on the ultimate prize as the Germans prepare to meet the Croatians. And his strategy is to bring the full armoury of German virtues to bear. "That is how we will win. We are never going to play like Brazilians, there is no point in trying to. We must put faith in our traditional values and then we can beat anyone."

Berti proud

From page 16 They are aggressive, but I hope that we can raise our game and beat them," Bierhoff said of Croatia. Against Croatia, Bierhoff will meet his future AC Milan teammate Zvonimir Boban. Bierhoff, 30, has been signed by Milan to lift the famed club after a dismal season. Bierhoff admits that as a relatively obscure newcomer he had some problems gaining acceptance from his German teammates in his early days with the national team. "I tried to talk through my performances on the field, not through talking to the media," he said. "Now, I feel that the team believes in me and that gives even more confidence." Vogts said Italy had been the turning point in Bierhoff's career. "The life in Italy really helped him form as a person. He's become one of the strongest players in the world," the coach said.

Settling old scores

From page 16 Matthaeus. Germany will have to show caution with Lothar Matthaeus, Michael Tarnat, Markus Babel and Dietmar Hamann picking up yellow cards in the second round. Slaven Bilic and Zvonimir Boban are the Croatian players carrying a caution. Croatia are set to arrive in Lyon late Friday afternoon and go straight to the Stade Gerland for open training. Defender Igor Stimac issued a further warning to the Germans. "We are a small nation and no one expected us to be in the quarterfinals, but we aren't finished yet," he said. "The Germans are always able to win the World Cup. It's always the same. Two years ago they were playing the worst football I've ever seen and they won the game," Stimac said. "We have two more years of experience with more big games in our legs and we expect to give them a good revenge. But we are positive in our minds, we don't think we're going to do something bad during the game."

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, July 3 (AP): Don't like the referee's call? Take it to court. That's what the Cameroonian cultural association is doing. The association is suing FIFA over a disallowed goal during a World Cup match against Chile on June 23. The association claims that the "inexcusable mistake" by Hungarian referee Laszlo Vagner disallowing Francisc Omam Biyick's goal unjustly kept the Indomitable Lions from advancing in the tournament. The game ended 1-1; a victory would have put Cameroon into the second round. "We don't look at this in the terms of the sport, but in terms of civil responsibility," said Michel Taupier, the lawyer for the Cameroon association. "We consider the referee is a FIFA official, the FIFA being the civil party responsible for the damaged suffered." The association is suing for 300,000 francs (50,000 dollars) for financial losses and 100,000 francs (17,000 dollars) for emotional distress. Taupier admitted it was an "audacious move."

YET ENGLAND ATOP

Despite David Beckham's red-card retaliatory kick against Argentina, England continue to top the World Cup fair-play standings at France '98. England hold first place ahead of Norway, another team that was eliminated in the second round. Brazil, who won the award in 1994, and hosts France are tied for third. The award is based on several criteria compiled into a points system. Red and yellow cards, positive play, respect toward opponents, respect toward the referee, behaviour of team officials and behaviour of the country's fans are all taken into account. ADIDAS' WORRY It's not been a good World Cup for Adidas. All live players featured in the sporting goods manufacturer's pre-tournament advertising campaign have flopped. David Beckham went home in disgrace after kicking an opponent in England's second-round loss to Argentina. Zinedine Zidane was suspended for two matches after stepping on an opponent in France's first-round match against Saudi Arabia. Patrick Kluivert was suspended for two games for elbowing Belgian defender Lorenzo Staelens in the Netherlands' opening match. Paul Gascoigne was cut from the England team before the World Cup began. Alessandro Del Piero, injured before the tournament began, has not performed up to expectations with Italy.

ENGLISH GREETED

England's contingent of soccer hooligans may not have won many fans during the World Cup, but their soccer team's gritty performance against Argentina won the approval of opera superstars Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras. The three have written to each member of the England team — and manager Glenn Hoddle — to congratulate them on an "heroic" performance. England lost a penalty shootout with Argentina after a fiercely contested 2-2 draw Tuesday which saw England play most of the match with only 10 men against Argentina's 11 after midfielder star David Beckham was sent off. Writing to "Dear Glen and the England team," the three said: "Having seen the heroics performed by all of you on Tuesday night, we would like to send you our commiserations, but also our congratulations on such a classic performance." The three also sent each member of the team a copy of their latest single. "You'll Never Walk Alone," written by Liverpool rock band Gerry and the Pacemakers in 1963 and which is often sung at soccer matches in England.

OWEN IMPRESSES ZAGALLO

Brazilian coach Mario Zagallo is a great admirer of teenage English star Michael Owen, but won't be drawn on commenting on whether he is the best teenage prospect since Pele. French daily sports newspaper L'Equipe on Thursday showered 18-year-old Liverpool star Owen with praise for his performance in England's second-round loss on penalties to Argentina, saying he was the best young player for generations. "He played a very good game against Argentina," Zagallo said. "He didn't feel the weight of the shirt, the pressure of playing for England." "He scored a beautiful goal and has a lot of good qualities. Is he the best? That's up to others to decide." CRUYFF IS THE BEST, SAYS PLATINI The World's best coach is out-of-work Johan Cruyff, according to Michel Platini. "He is the coach who does most to let his players express themselves on the field," said the World Cup organising committee chief of the former Dutch midfielder and ex-Barcelona coach. Platini did note however that not every coach has the advantage of working for a club like Barcelona. "It's true he had a lot going for him at a rich club with first rate players."

World Cup pickpocket

PARIS, July 3 (AFP/ Internet): A Chilean woman was brought in on pickpocketing charges Friday, the latest in a string of Latin Americans allegedly cashing in on tourists during the World Cup boom. Police said the 46-year-old, carrying quantities of cash and stolen travellers' cheques, had advised them during interrogation that she was supposed to be in court at the time to face charges for pickpocketing in April. Last week, police nabbed a Chilean and a Mexican on the Champs Elysees after they snatched an American tourist's wallet. The arrival of some of the world's top pickpockets, most of them South Americans, is the latest thorn in the side of French police faced by burgeoning security worries. Four international (locally-known pickpockets, all of them Chilean, were arrested in the French capital the week before by the Crime Squad (BRB). "They have class," said a French detective who asked not to be identified. "They can smell money a mile away."

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England fan held for murder

GRENOBLE, France, July 3 (AFP/ Internet): A 43-year-old English supporter was arrested Friday on suspicion of having stabbed to death a Frenchman in a train last Tuesday, the day of England's World Cup defeat at the hands of Argentina. Londoner Paul Birch, an engineer, is not listed as a known hooligan but has confessed to stabbing the Frenchman in a Lyon-bound train as it pulled into Saint-Andre-le-Gaz station in the southeastern Isere region, police said. French police said Birch appeared to be mentally deranged. Birch was reported to have confessed to stabbing 33-year-old actor Eric Frachet because he smiled at him. He reportedly mistook Frachet for an Argentina fan and thought he was making fun of him before the key second round match between the two teams in nearby Saint Etienne on Tuesday evening. Birch was sitting opposite Frachet in the train and stabbed him in the stomach. He fled when the train pulled into the station. He was detained overnight Wednesday to Thursday after a fight in a Grenoble hotel involving the night porter. Police who interrogated him after the scuffle connected him with the stabbing incident.

FIFA treat for the Dutch

MONTE CARLO, Monaco, July 3 (AP/ Internet): FIFA bent its rules a little Thursday to allow the Dutch World Cup squad to train in Marseille's Stade Velodrome ahead of Saturday's quarterfinal confrontation with Argentina. Dutch coach Guus Hiddink told reporters early Thursday that he had received "a strange letter from FIFA" saying that his team could not train at the ground on Friday. Hiddink pointed out that the Argentines had been given permission to use the pitch. "We suddenly get a letter saying we are not welcome in the stadium, which I find very strange," Hiddink said. But FIFA officials cleared up the mystery by explaining that teams are entitled to train in a match stadium just once — the Netherlands practised at the Stade Velodrome before its June 20 first round match against South Korea. After Hiddink complained, soccer's governing body gave way and said it would allow the Dutch to train in Marseille after all. Upon hearing the news, a team spokesman said the Dutch might not show up for the practice session anyway. He said Hiddink might instead hold the workout at a field closer to the team hotel.

Vogts plea to referee

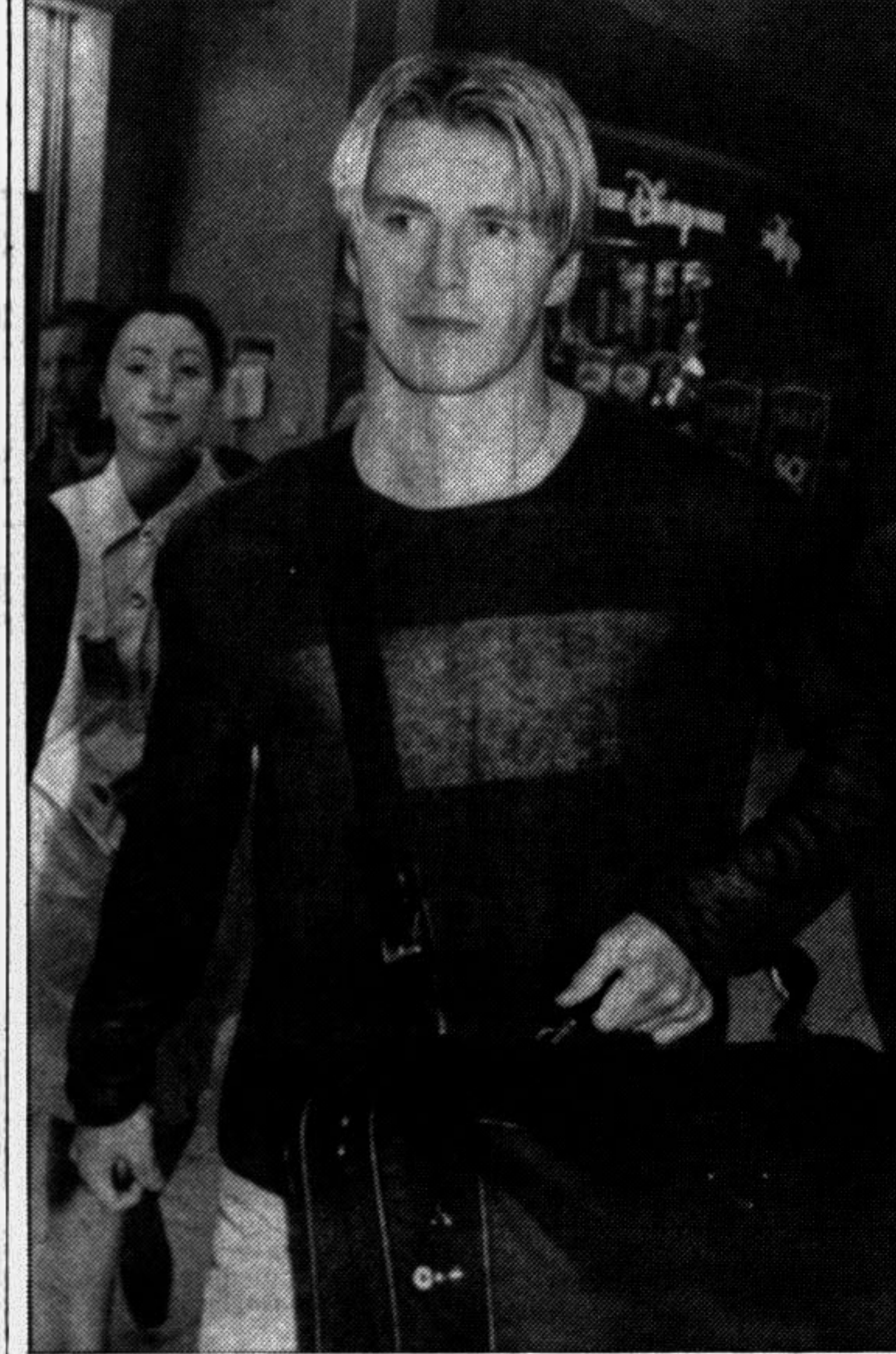
NICE, France, July 3 (AFP/ Internet): Germany coach Berti Vogts appealed here Friday to the referee for Saturday's quarter-final with Croatia to intervene quickly to avoid a repeat of the bruising Euro 96 meeting between the two sides. The 51-year-old, set to take charge of his 100th match as coach of the European champions, also warned his players, several of whom played in the 2-1 win in the Euro '96 quarterfinal, not to react to the Croats aggressive style. "The Germans won that ill-tempered quarter-final but not before Croatia's Igor Stimac, the Derby County defender, was sent off." Directing his message to Norwegian referee Rune Pedersen, Vogts said: "I hope he is going to get involved immediately because I want my players to be protected." The former international defender, who was nicknamed the "Fox Terrier," added: "I have told the players not to lose their cool in face of what I expect to be a very very aggressive Croat side." Vogts, who was assistant to Franz Beckenbauer when Germany won the 1990 title, said he was very satisfied with the preparations for the match. "The mentality of the team is totally different compared to 1994 when the players were only thinking of playing Italy in the semi-finals and felt the Bulgarians (who won 2-1) would be a pushover," he said.

World Cup pickpocket

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From Paris to Nantes

NANTES, July 3: As the TGV train raced from Montparnasse in Paris to Nantes through picturesque, French countryside, the fields outside seemed adorned in the gold green of Brazil. Inside, some Brazilians had created a football temple around their large national flag. Enchanting head gear, the famous Brazil jersey and tempo music, churned from beating anything at hand including traditional instruments, made this a truly samba train. They sang many songs. The only one familiar to me was "Labamba... arba... arba...". To add to the merriment throughout the two-hour journey, they chanted, "Pardon pardon", whenever a male French



GOING AWAY FROM THE MADDING CROWD: New York bound disgraced England midfielder David Beckham at London's Heathrow Airport on July 1. — AFP photo

today. "One is good enough for us," shouted a robust, from deposited in national colours. Rivalry is continuing in the city centre opposite to the Nantes cathedral where the Danes and the Brazilians are dancing together, snapping pictures and making a lot of noise. Native Frenchmen look on with interest but, their mind should be more on Italy with everyone preparing to watch the match live on a giant screen in an hour from now. Match tickets for tonight are being touted for about eight times the face value. Buyers are many and not all of them are from the competing teams. Other things on sale are flags, jerseys, scarves and hats reminiscent of circus clowns. The afternoon sun is trying to peep from behind the steeple of St Uement. No rains as yet but the outlook is gloomy and warm. Respective fans have felt that their full teams are being pitted in the final. The Laudrup brothers, with younger Brian boasting of some of the best close control in world football, is sure to break the formidable defence of Cafu and co, so hope the Danes. The Latins are confident Peter Schmeichel cannot stop Ronaldo, Denilson, Bebeto... their list is long. A Danish disaster tonight could pave the way for Brazil to win the Cup on Euro-soil for the first time since 1958. Brazil will have to believe in manager Mario Zagallo's philosophy. "I'd rather play ugly football and win than play pretty football and lose". Denmark should have no problem in believing in that either. This is no place to show skills. Japan, co-hosts of the 2002 World Cup, may have learnt more than soccer skills from their recent exposure to Argentina, Croatia and Jamaica. They were so impressed with the pitch at Lyon's Gerland Stadium that they have asked groundsman Allan Venditti to do the gardening for 2002 to make their pitches smooth. Said Alain, "You need to give your pitch a lot of love". Teams clashing here tonight will try to offer their opponents more than that. At this stage, you could do with all the help you can. French premier last night boosted local morale by saying, "play like De Gaulle, get just one goal." The Danes would not mind playing like Pele, and the Brazilians will not for go the technicalities of European soccer. Tonight they all just want a goal.

The orange exodus

MONTE CARLO, Monaco, July 3 (AP): Yet again, the lure of bigger pay packets — and bigger audiences admiring the players' skills — is draining the Netherlands of the cream of its soccer talent. With at least two transfers likely to be finalised before next season, only four of the 22-man Dutch World Cup squad are expected to play in the Netherlands come September. The phenomenon is nothing new. The list of past Dutch exports is long and illustrious. John Cruyff, Marco van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard are just a few players who made their names and fortunes in foreign leagues. "For top players, salaries in the Netherlands are about the same as in bigger countries, but the tax system is different," Paul Onkenhout, a soccer writer with respected Dutch daily De Volkskrant said Thursday. "In Italy and England, players keep twice as much money after tax." Of the current crop of Oranngemen, just Edwin van der Sar, Frank de Boer, Wim Jonk and Andre Ooijer look certain to be playing in the Dutch Honor Division next season. Jonk is nearing the end of his career. Ooijer is just beginning his and nobody expects Van der Sar or De Boer to stick around too long. Earlier this year, the De Boer twins suggested the introducing tax breaks for top soccer players as a way of keeping them in the Netherlands. The government rejected the idea. Now Ronald is almost certain to quit Ajax and England's Arsenal reportedly is the most likely club to sign him. Also likely to leave is Feyenoord Rotterdam's Giovanni van Bronckhorst who is expected to sign for Glasgow Rangers — coached by Dutchman Dick Advocaat. Frank de Boer wants out too but Ajax Amsterdam refuses to sell him yet. "I could go to three or four clubs immediately but I have signed at Ajax and they won't let me go," De Boer said. But it is not just cash that sucks players out of the Dutch league. "They get bored," Onkenhout said. "It is no challenge playing against RKC Waalwijk, or Volendam," two teams often to be found in the basement of the Dutch Honor Division, he added. "The players want to perform on the biggest stage. Also you do not improve as a footballer playing for years in the Netherlands." Do Boer and his Ajax teammates past and present almost always play in the Champions League. But the players crave week-in-week-out challenging opposition and that is not available in the Netherlands. As a result, they seek stronger opposition on foreign fields. National trainer Guus Hiddink, who himself played in the United States and coached Spanish club Valencia, says the change of scenery improves the players. He said his current squad has significantly improved since two years ago because so many players now turn out for foreign clubs. "Now they have experienced different clubs, different cultures," Hiddink said. "That pays back into the national team."

Rivaldo rejects greedy tag

NANTES, France, July 3 (Reuters): Brazil's Rivaldo, the man who has been given the job of creating chances for striker Ronaldo, rejected criticism that he is greedy on Thursday. Among the dozens of theories being advanced as to why Ronaldo has been restricted to a modest, for him, total of three goals in the World Cup is that the service from Rivaldo is not up to scratch. Rivaldo has been criticised for hanging on to the ball for too long, leading to speculation that his habit of trying to do it all himself has soured relations between him and the team superstar. The Barcelona player does not agree. "Man, I get criticised for this but I don't hang on to the ball so much," he said. "I watch tapes of games where I have been criticised and, frankly, I don't find the criticism justified. "Sometimes I have to get the ball under control. Being greedy is when you have three, four or five players free and you don't pass the ball. There are times when we have the game in our hands when it is better to keep possession for a while. But when I see a player making a run, then I pass it straight away." In fact, Rivaldo has plenty of reasons to be satisfied with his performance in the competition. He arrived in France with a reputation for freezing every time he pulled on the Brazilian shirt, especially after the Atlanta Games when he was made a scapegoat for Brazil's failure to win their first Olympic gold. Included as an over-age player, his mislaid pass created Nigeria's second goal in their 4-3 golden goal win. Afterwards he was banished from the national team for a year before excellent form at club level earned him a recall for a friendly at home to Ecuador. His four performances in France appear to show that he can play well at international level. Rivaldo has scored one goal in France and has been applauded as one of the most naturally talented players in the world champions line-up. His main faults are inconsistency — he has a tendency to vanish for periods and never really got going in the 3-0 defeat by Morocco — and an almost absolute refusal to use his right foot.

Suker standing tall

PARIS, July 3 (AFP): Davor Suker is going a long way to making up for a wretched season on the sidelines at Real Madrid as he looks forward to a World Cup quarterfinal meeting with Germany in Lyon on Saturday night. Suker kept his nerve admirably as he had to retake a first half injury time penalty when Argentine referee Javier Castrilli saw one of Suker's teammates in the area while he was shooting the first one. But the 30-year-old striker, dubbed "Sukerman" because of his high skill levels, again shot past Romanian keeper Bogdan Stelea with his left foot with more power to put Croatia into the last eight of their first-ever World Cup finals. Neutral observers were unsure whether Gabriel Popescu had initially fouled Aljosa Asanovic but that is now a mere talking point.