



WORLD CUP '98 SPECIAL



BEAT THAT: Rivaldo (No 10) gestures towards the stands after scoring Brazil's winner with a thunderous grounder on July 3 at Nantes. Mounting over him is teammate Roberto Carlos. — AFP photo

His royal highness Rivaldo

NANTES, July 4 (Reuters): Ronaldo was billed as the top attraction when Brazil arrived in France to defend the World Cup but the goofy-grinned striker is now finding himself upstaged by Rivaldo. The original script had Rivaldo providing the passes for Ronaldo to score the goals which would confirm him as the world's best player. However, in Friday's 3-2 quarterfinal win over Denmark the roles were reversed with Ronaldo acting as provider and Rivaldo putting the ball in the net.

Rivaldo stole Ronaldo's thunder by scoring two of Brazil's goals, his second half winner a superb effort which had shades of Rivelino. Ronaldo set up two of Brazil's

Maradona in France

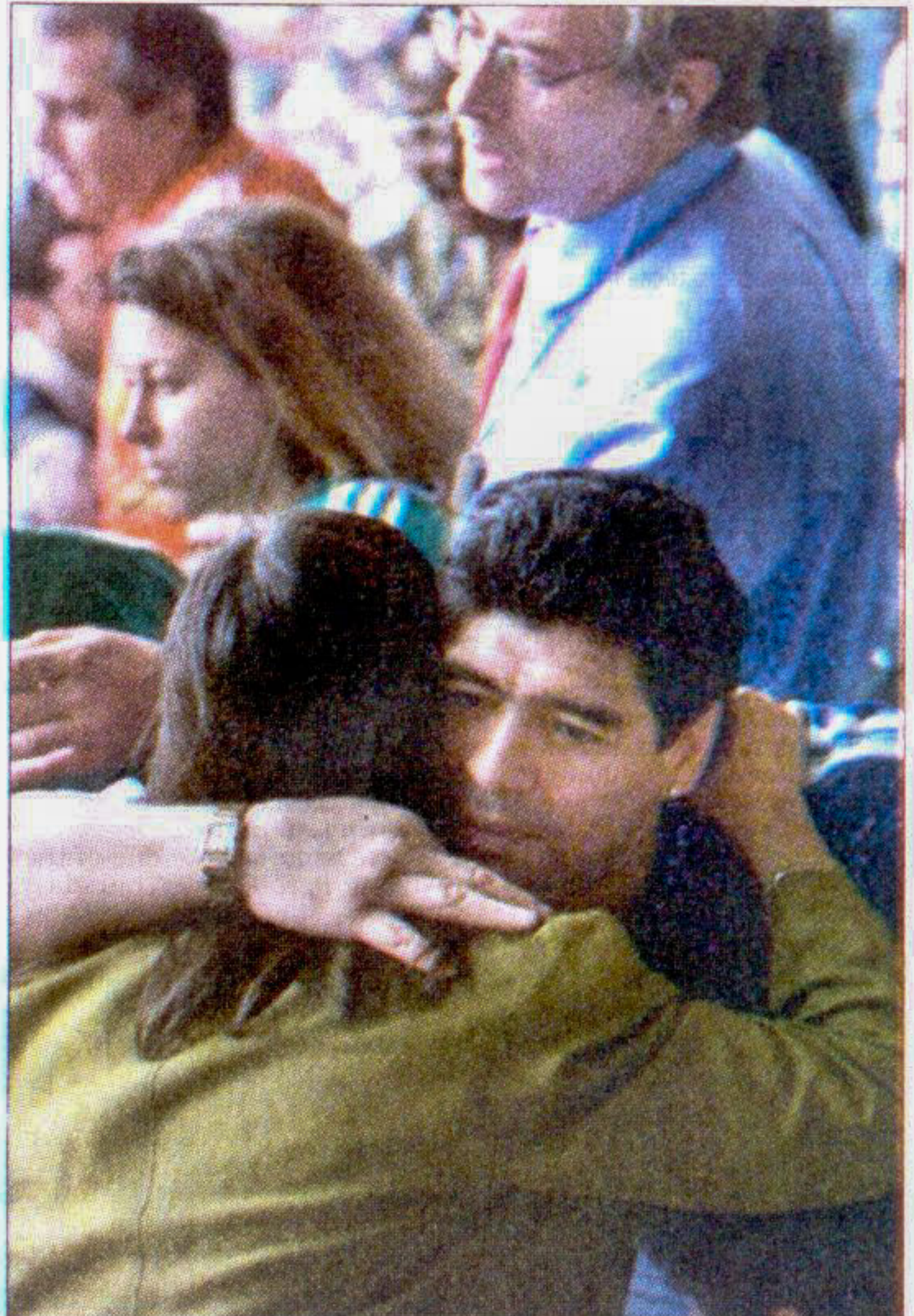
PARIS, July 4 (AP): If it were up to Diego Maradona, there would be a "Han of God II." Before leaving Buenos Aires to fly to the World Cup, the Argentine superstar said that, despite British media reports to the contrary, he had "never" apologised for the famous "Hand of God" goal that helped Argentina beat England 2-1 at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. Maradona instead described the goal as an "astute" play, which the "would repeat, not only against England, but against any team in the world." Maradona, who retired last year at 37, will serve as a commentator for Argentine television during his stay at France '98.

This time he made a quiet entrance, avoiding a crowd of waiting journalists as he arrived Friday morning at Charles de Gaulle airport. He planned to attend the France-Italy quarterfinal game Friday afternoon at Saint-Denis on the outskirts of Paris and then travel to Marseille, where Argentina plays the Netherlands on Saturday.

Before boarding his plane in Buenos Aires, Maradona predicted Italy would beat France and that Argentina would eliminate the Netherlands. He picked Argentina and Italy as the most likely finalists.

three goals. The two are now level on three goals each. Rivaldo has shouldered part of the blame for the fact that Ronaldo has not quite lived up to expectations and there have even been reports of jealousy between the two — something denied by both players. "My relationship with Ronaldo is the best possible," said Rivaldo. "There are no problems," he emphasised. "I have an excel-

lent relationship with other members of the team including Ronaldo and (team captain) Dunga." Ronaldo set up Bebeto's equaliser by threading the ball through the Danish defence in the 10th minute and it was from another cunning ball that Rivaldo put Brazil 2-1 ahead midway through the first half. After Denmark had equalised at the start of the sec-



DIEGO IN TOWN: Argentine football legend Diego Maradona embracing an unidentified friend while watching the Italy-France quarterfinal at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis on July 3. — AFP photo

United colours of football

PARIS, July 4 (AP/Internet): The French team that hopped for joy after beating Italy in the World Cup on Friday is known as the Blues.

A nation increasingly aware of colour hardly noticed that the players were actually black, brown and white.

"It's a wonderful reflection of the actual state of France," said Chirraa Abdelmalek, a Moroccan-born French postal worker in Nantes, who joined in nationwide jubilation from the car-choked Champs Elysees to remote village squares.

France moved to the semifinals in a game as close as soccer can get, outscoring Italy by a single goal in a tie-breaking shootout of five kicks after two overtime periods.

As the first regulation 90 minutes closed to a scoreless tie, the 80,000-seat Stade de France rang with a spontaneous "La Marseillaise." In bars and living rooms from Normandy to Provence, every blocked kick and stolen ball evoked loud cheers.

Reaction was especially fervent in working-class suburbs, heavily populated with immigrant families, which ring most French cities.

"Football brings young people together like nothing else," said Philippe Debarge, a Paris

landscape artist from an old French family. "For us, it is the great equaliser."

Before the World Cup began, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the right-wing National Front complained of too many black players on the French team. He criticised what he said was undue haste in granting papers to players from Africa.

Le Pen's party campaigns under a slogan of "The French First" and argues that immigrants should be sent home to their country of origin. The National Front regularly gets up to 20 per cent in French elections, and it controls several cities.

But hardly anyone seemed anxious to see Zinedine Zidane wearing any other jersey.

"Zizou," cornerstone of the Blues, grew up in one of the roughest neighbourhoods of Marseille, the son of an Algerian night watchman.

Thierry Henry, another hero, was born in Paris to parents from the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. Marcel Desailly is from Ghana.

Christian Karembeu is from New Caledonia, off the east coast of Australia, and Bernard Lama is Guyanese.

Along with Bretons and Basques, there are Armenians and Africans and parts of other cultures.

"This is a great image for France," said Matthieu Wycisk,

a fan in blue, white and red on the jammed metro to the stadium.

His roots are Polish, like those of Raymond Kopa, a French great of the 1950s who remains a national hero.

En route to the stadium, people seemed orderly, almost self-conscious, as French crowds tend to be. Although many love the game, the French are not particularly soccer-mad.

Sebastian Lhoumeau of Bordeaux took a cool approach to the impending match, calculating France's chances to get beyond third place — the best it has ever done in a World Cup — and speculating on strategy.

"We don't get that excited," he said. "We're not Brazilians or Italians."

But that was before. The long, tense match triggered a wild swirl of French flags, a cacophony of honking horns, and a familiar chant that translates: "Who are the best? Obviously, it's us."

For many Frenchmen, the victory was less about soccer than it was a simple assertion of French glory.

President Jacques Chirac, grinning broadly, lauded the Blues and predicted they would bring France the World Cup in the final on July 12. "We have a superb team," he said. "Why not superb ambitions?"

Everyone's a winner

UNDATED, July 4 (AFP/Reuters): Denmark coach Bo Johansson described Brazil as unbelievable after he saw his side beaten 3-2 in a glorious World Cup quarter-final at Nantes on Friday.

"We were fantastic, we were almost as good as the best in the world, but, my players and I had never really believed they were that good," he said.

"It's always a shame to lose but we played a world-class game we can be proud of the way we played."

"We can be proud of our contribution but we should also be a bit disappointed because we didn't win and our players are good enough to win," Johansson added.

"It was a great game and as we said before we were not afraid of Brazil even knowing they are world-class players. To the end we tried to beat them and I wonder if any team would have come closer. The way we tried to perform was fantastic."

"We had the idea of attacking them from the beginning. We had a very good World Cup. It's a pity to see a world-class player like Michael Laudrup stop playing," Johansson said.

Michael Laudrup announced before the World Cup that he would retire after the tournament.

Teammate Leonardo said: "It

was a surprise to go behind after two minutes. It was a very difficult match. Maintaining concentration was very important. We didn't play a great match."

"It's really the football of today. They are all difficult games even if people always expect a spectacular match from us. Easy games don't exist anymore."

"Denmark are technically the best side we have played," admitted star striker Ronaldo, happy to emerge unscathed from an often physical contest.

His attacking partner Bebeto felt the game would stand the Brazilians in good stead later in the tournament. "It proves one thing, that Brazil can go on to win the World Cup. This was a difficult match."

Danish goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel acknowledged his side's efforts to open the game ultimately proved their downfall.

"I'm very proud," he said. "We took the game to them and we weren't scared, but it might have cost us the game in the end."

Denmark's scorer Martin Jorgensen said: "It's not a sad day for Denmark. We showed what we can do, don't forget we were playing Brazil. Denmark's got a future."

A tale of two cities

UNDATED, July 4: Brazilians poured into the streets of Rio De Janeiro for impromptu carnivals all over the country on Friday after their beloved national soccer team beat Denmark 3-2 to qualify for the World Cup semifinals, reports Reuters.

Not even a sudden tropical downpour after the game discouraged the tens of thousands of cheering and singing fans who hugged strangers and danced in the night in the plush beachfront neighbourhood of Ipanema.

Happy crowds wiggled behind a truck heaped with amplifiers and blasting out samba music while drummers hammered out their own beats in packed bars.

In the administrative capital, Brasilia, deafening salvos of firecrackers enlivened a normally sterile scene, and in Sao Paulo, Brazil's biggest city, fans took to their cars to cele-

brate the win in noisy traffic jams.

"Denmark played well but Brazil is Brazil. We're going all the way," Maria Cristina Amoedo, 26, yelled as she sported Brazil's famous yellow-and-green soccer shirt on a Rio street.

"We only played 70 per cent, so when we really get it together, we'll be unstoppable," another fan said.

But not everyone was so confident. A word of advice came from Pele, Brazil's and probably the world's greatest player of all time.

"Let's hope we improve our physical fitness, especially in midfield, because the next match is going to be tougher than tough," Pele told Globo Television.

He said he hoped Brazil's traditional rivals Argentina would beat Holland today to set up an all-South American semifinal despite Brazilian

deep-seated fears about their tough-tackling neighbours.

The way Holland are playing right now, I'd rather have Argentina," he said.

Meanwhile, away at Copenhagen, the atmosphere was equally vibrating.

Around 100,000 cheering Danes watched their World Cup soccer quarterfinal on a huge television screen at an open-air party with beer tents and blaring music.

It was a great match. If you have to lose it's all right to go down in style and with honour intact a team like Brazil as we did," a university student said.

Police said the intense but good-natured event at the downtown city hall square went off peacefully.

Some 20,000 people attended similar boisterous festivities in Aarhus, Denmark's second city, also without major disturbances.



THE TRICOLOR FLYING PROUD: French fans jubilate on the streets of Lens after their entry into the last four. — AFP photo

France hungry for more

ST DENIS, France, July 4 (AFP/Internet): The French enjoy undisputed claim to the title of global gourmets without equal. But when it comes to football, the jury is still out on whether they can come up with a dish fit to win La Grande Nation its first ever World Cup.

After an enthralling — if unspectacular — quarter-final win over Italy at the Stade de France, head chef Aime Jacquet insisted the ingredients were perfect.

"We stuck to our game plan and didn't lose our nerve and in the end the best team won," he said.

France deserved their win, albeit through the lottery of penalties, but a veritable feast of football it was not.

The ingredients might have been right, the recipe wasn't. When the chips are down the French can't hit the target.

Twenty-four efforts went wide. Jacquet's problem throughout his four-year tenure re-

mains an overdose of classy midfielders but a dire famine of strikers.

They began the tournament with Stephane Guivarch.

His injury in the opening game against South Africa let in Marseille's far less prolific Christophe Dugarry, who scored — but then picked up a hamstring injury.

Jacquet's solution for his Italian menu? To pack five men into the midfield, given that Zinedine Zidane was back from suspension.

Rather than gamble the cautious Jacquet decided to leave Monaco's exciting new flavours Thierry Henry and David Trezeguet on the bench.

The result? An *hors d'oeuvre* which lacked spice. France forced corners aplenty — but found nobody was around to eat them up.

The tactic of playing five in the middle meant the French were trying to play the Italians at their own traditional cat and



UNBELIEVABLE: Denmark's goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel finding it too hard to accept the defeat after the absorbing quarterfinal against Brazil. — AFP photo

FOOTBALL AT ITS BEST!

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF

LIGHTS

