



OH NO! Dutch striker Patrick Kluijert buries his head in dejection after the semifinal loss to Brazil in Marseille. — AFP photo

Orange crushed

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands, July 8 (AP/Reuters): For a month, the Dutch painted the town orange. But overnight, the national mood has faded to black, and a hangover has swallowed up the high.

With the World Cup hopes of its dream team suddenly dashed, the Netherlands awoke Wednesday gruff and groggy, doing what it could to piece together some pride after losing to Brazil in a nail-biting semifinal.

Barkeeps swept up orange confetti and peeled beer-soaked orange cocktail napkins from sidewalks, contemplating how a tiny twist of events Tuesday night might have taken Holland to the final for the first time in 20 years.

Instead, the Dutch are down and out. Brazil won 4-2 on a penalty shootout after a 1-1 tie in regulation play and overtime, advancing to Sunday's final to face the winner of Wednesday night's match between France and Croatia. The Dutch have to settle for the third-place match Saturday against the loser of the France-Croatia semifinal Wednesday night.

"Silence. A Fog Hangs Over the Living Room," read a front-page headline in the daily *De Volkskrant*.

"It will take five years to recover," muttered Remco Zanis, an Amsterdamer aimlessly wandering the streets of the Dutch capital after the fateful match.

To call the Dutch soccer-crazy doesn't even come close to reality. This is a nation obsessed, and the grace and power of the Orangemen as they steadily advanced toward the Holy Grail had captured the country's imagination.

From the beer-bellied port workers of Rotterdam to the ruddy-faced farmers in Friesland, more than 11 million Dutchmen tuned in to watch Tuesday's semifinal. Traffic, typically bumper to bumper in this crowded land of 15 million, was practically nonexistent for a couple of hours every time the Dutch played.

Orange, the national colour, was everywhere.

Briefcase-toting businessmen rode the trains to work wearing ridiculous orange wigs and goofy grins. The truly die-hard had dyed hair, mustaches, beards, even eyebrows. Day GLO orange long-stemmed daisies lit up orange flags that fluttered in the breeze.

Croats rebuke pro-Nazi slur

PARIS, July 7 (AP/Internet): The Croatian embassy expressed outrage Tuesday at charges that the nation's soccer team was playing in the colours of the Nazi-era Ustasha regime that was allied to Hitler's Germany.

"It is totally wrong to attribute the historic Croatian coat of arms of 25 red and white chequered squares and the arms of the kingdom of Croatia which dates back to the Middle Ages to the Ustasha regime," the embassy said in a statement.

The European Centre for Research and Action into Racism said in a statement the team's shirt bears the colours of the Ustasha, the Nazi-allied regime that ruled Croatia during World War II.

The allegations were aimed at undermining "the great sports festival that is the World Cup," the embassy statement added.

Croatia plays France in the World Cup semifinals in St. Denis on Wednesday.

side homes, offices and factories.

On Amsterdam's central Leidseplein square, soccer balls dangled like Christmas ornaments from trees wrapped in orange plastic, and fountains spewed orange-coloured water.

In the southern city of Tilburg, one farmer even painted the cows in his field orange.

That party atmosphere has gone from gay to gray. The drinking songs have faded, now that the Cup has slipped from Holland's hands.

"What can you do? What can I say?" a listless Jeroen Oudshoorn said from behind the counter of his Amsterdam sporting goods store, throwing up his hands.

"We played very well, but we didn't have luck. We did the best we could."

Gathered before a giant open-air video screen, the crowd had cheered when the Patrick Kluijert scored a crucial equaliser in the last five minutes of normal play in Marseille.

But elation turned to despair when the Golden Goal failed to yield a victory and the team lost on penalties.

A high-profile security presence discouraged any violence after the game, police said.

"There have been no major incidents," Amsterdam police spokesman Arie Zandbergen said.

A Rotterdam police spokesman said three people had been arrested in the port city for relatively minor offences.

"Of course people are frustrated after our boys lost, but we've only noted a few cases of damage to public property," Maurice Lenfreink said.

But in a few Amsterdam bars just a short walk away from Leidseplein, some fans prepared to party the night away.

At the Cafe do Brasil and Brasil Music Bar, scantily clad women gyrated to a samba beat on the street as disappointed Dutch supporters looked on.

As the Dutch set about shaking off their depression and looking ahead to Saturday's consolation match, they could at least take some comfort in an amusingly timed business development.

Corporate spoilsports

BANGKOK, July 8 (AFP/Internet): Big brand-name companies advertising during World Cup matches have drawn the ire of Thai fans devouring television coverage of the top football tournament, a survey said Wednesday.

The poll conducted by advertising company Ammirati Puris Lintas concluded that some 59 per cent of Thai men and 35 per cent of women found ads during the games to be "annoying."

The most mentioned ads by those surveyed were soft-drink-maker Pepsi, at 25 per cent recall on first mention, and sportswear giants Adidas and Nike, at 16 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

Pepsi rival Coke came in fourth, with some eight per cent of those surveyed mentioning the ad first.

The survey found that 86 per cent of the 320 people sampled regularly watched the World Cup coverage broadcast from France.

Brazil freaks out

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 8 (Reuters/AP): The normally exuberant Brazilian soccer fans went absolutely wild on Tuesday after their team won a tense, nail-biter of a World Cup semifinal against the Netherlands, 4-2 on penalties.

Supporters of the defending World Cup champions burst into spontaneous street parties and horn-honking traffic jams while firecrackers boomed across the country after goalkeeper Taffarel saved a second penalty to put Brazil into Sunday's final.

"Taffarel, Taffarel," fans screamed through tears of relief as they ran, hands outstretched, down the beachfront streets of Brazil's famous carnival city of Rio De Janeiro.

Moments before, their hands were clenched, all eyes glued to televisions and screens set up in bars, offices and on street corners around the city, as they watched in breathless silence.

"It was incredibly tense," a 27-year-old waiter Ahmed Antonio said. Taffarel was absolutely great. I think we're going to win.

"I am still shaking with nerves but I feel marvelous," exclaimed Mariana Ramos, 48, a cook. "I am going out to celebrate and the rest of Rio will do

the same. There will be parties in every neighbourhood. Not many people will sleep tonight."

The victory was heralded with a volley of fireworks lighting up the sky over the city's many hillside shanty towns.

People who had gathered to watch the game on big screens in city squares jumped for joy and hugged each other.

"We were very agitated and nervous during the match but when Brazil won we all embraced. Some of us were crying," said Marinalva Santos, 28. "Now we are going to win the Pentia (a fifth World Cup championship). Without a doubt."

Rio's Saniba schools in slum neighbourhoods, where soccer is worshipped, kicked into action with scantily-clad dancers throbbing to the irresistible beat of the drums.

In Sao Paulo's more serious financial district, Brazilians shouting "five-time champions" and waving banners hung out of cars careening down the wide Paulista avenue, while another part of the street was blocked off and filled with hundreds of thousands of celebrating residents.

There had been teeth grinding and nervous pacing as the Paulistas seated out the unbearably close game, which was

scoreless at halftime. Brazilians take their soccer very seriously, closing shops, government offices and even the stock exchanges during World Cup matches.

Most radio and television commentators predicted that if Brazil played at the same level, they would probably beat the winner of the France-Croatia semifinal to claim a fifth World Cup title.

"Brazil finally looked ready to be a five-time champion," said one radio commentator. Emotion even overtook the usually sedate capital city of Brasilia, where there were at least two major automobile pileups as residents raced madly home in a state of hysteria.

"Of all the games Brazil has played so far, this was the most emotional," said Leyla Werleigh, a longtime Haitian resident of Brasilia.

She was at a party where people were weeping openly during the penalty shoot-out after overtime failed to settle a 1-1 deadlock, one woman nearly fainted when the Netherlands equalised three minutes from the end of normal play.

"That's the real Brazil playing, the one we haven't seen yet," added Werleigh after the happy conclusion.

Politics at play on football field

PARIS, July 8 (AFP/Internet): Croatia's fledgling identity and burgeoning racism in France -- beyond football these are the issues at play at the World Cup semifinal between the two nations.

The surprise success of France's multi-racial team -- playing a semifinal for the first time in 12 years -- has raised hopes here that sport will help speed the demise of the increasingly popular racist far-right National Front.

For Croatia -- whose President Franjo Tudjman is flying in for his side's first-ever World Cup semifinal after qualifying for the finals for the first time -- success on the soccer field is helping forge the identity of a nation only six years of age.

Born on the bloody Balkans battlefield, Croatia's triumph in the tournament has set off such nationalist fervour that gunfire has sounded again, with at least one fatality in neighbouring Bosnia.

"Our biggest motivation is to play for our country and our compatriots who have suffered so much in recent years," said team coach Miroslav Blazevic, a personal friend of Tudjman's with a shared passion for football and nationalist politics.

"People didn't even know we existed as Croats," said captain Zvonimir Boban, a 29-year-old midfielder who used to play for Yugoslavia. "Now the whole country has football fever."

"Nothing will ever be the same again," he said in the daily sports paper *L'Equipe* on Wednesday.

Boban entered Croatian folklore on May 13, 1990, in the Yugoslav league match between Dynamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade when the tension between Croatia and Yugoslavia burst into the open.

When Red Star's Serbian fans attacked Dynamo Zagreb's Croatian supporters and Belgrade police responded by charging the Zagreb fans, Boban, then 21, leapt at a lusty policeman and kicked him.

"I did what any normal person would do and defended innocent people who had no way of protecting themselves from their attackers. I love my country and I love my people and anyone who takes them on takes me on as well," he said.

For host nation France, the tournament too is turning increasingly political.

Only two years ago, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant leader of the extremist National Front, trig-

gered anger and debate by saying there were too many blacks and other foreigners on the team, who did not know all the words of the national anthem, "La Marseillaise."

And last week polls showed that France was the racist black sheep of Europe, with two out of five people openly admitting to racism.

But now the multi-coloured, multi-ethnic national side is being more and more referred to as the "black-white-and-Arab" side rather than the "red-white-and-blues", the French colours.

The mass-circulation Sunday paper *Le Journal du Dimanche* last weekend enthused that the team was made up of second-generation immigrants, French Armenians, a Basque, a Kanak from New Caledonia, and players of African and West Indian origin.

"Players of all colours and cultures who represent the French nation as it is today... This is a punch in the nose for Le Pen," the paper said.

The conservative daily *Le Figaro* said that for the first time in history, second-generation North African youngsters from the slums were brandishing the French flag and singing the anthem in honour of mid-

See page 14



GET SET, OLE! Ecstatic Brazilian players react to goalkeeper Taffarel's save on July 7 which took them to the final. — AFP photo

World Cup watershed

SAINT-DENIS, France, July 8 (AP/Internet): For France, the World Cup semifinal is a chance to end decades of frustration in a tournament it created. For Croatia, just playing in the game is perhaps the biggest event in the nation's history since it broke away from Yugoslavia.

Two different points of view, one goal: a trip to the final to play Brazil for the championship of the world. The team that wins tonight probably will depend on which ironclad defence cracks first.

France, which has never reached the title game, is seeking to become the first host nation in 20 years to play in the final.

Croatia, which gained independence only seven years ago, already has surpassed whatever modest expectation it had to reach the final four in its very first World Cup. Unburdened by pressure, it has improved game by game and is within one win of a shot at being the first World Cup rookie to win the title since Italy in 1934.

Players, coaches, fans, even President Franjo Tudjman,

have talked of soccer success giving the nation an identity. And their team has looked very good.

In the coming-of-age game against Germany, a 3-0 win last Saturday, Davor Suker personified Croatia's play with deft skills and lethal finishing, showing that newcomers can have the cool heads of veterans.

Suker believes Croatia has the edge because it will be fresher for the semifinal than France, which needed a sudden-death overtime goal to down Paraguay in the second round and penalty kicks to overcome Italy after a scoreless draw in the quarterfinal.

"This is our advantage," Suker said. "They will feel that more and more with every minute the game goes on."

French forward Youri Djorkaeff conceded: "They have the wind in their sails."

Yet, the French are considered the favourites.

For one thing, they have the crowd behind them. France, which came up with the idea for the World Cup in the Roaring '20s, has slowly but surely awakened to the prospect of

winning the title, and with every game the pulse of 60 million people has quickened.

At the Stade de France tonight, the vast majority of the 80,000 fans will be rooting for "Les Bleus," dressed all in royal blue for this match of majestic proportions.

Home advantage would seem a formidable help, but no host nation has won the Cup since Argentina in 1978.

Three times before, France's World Cup run ended in the semis - in 1958, 1982 and 1986.

This French team, though, has shown great confidence throughout the tournament, and with a defence like it has, who wouldn't?

Led by Marcel Desailly and Lilian Thuram and Bixente Lizarazu over the wings, it has conceded only one goal so far, a penalty shot against Denmark.

The defence is tall and tough in the middle and quick on the wings to counter deep moves by opponents.

It seems the only person not impressed with the French defence is Croatia coach Miroslav Blazevic. — See page 14



HEARTTHROBBING: Brazilian (L) and Dutch (R) players watching the proceedings anxiously as Ronaldo (extreme L) walks back after scoring the first penalty at Marseille. — AFP photo

AND THEN THERE WERE TWO!

JOHN PLAYER
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