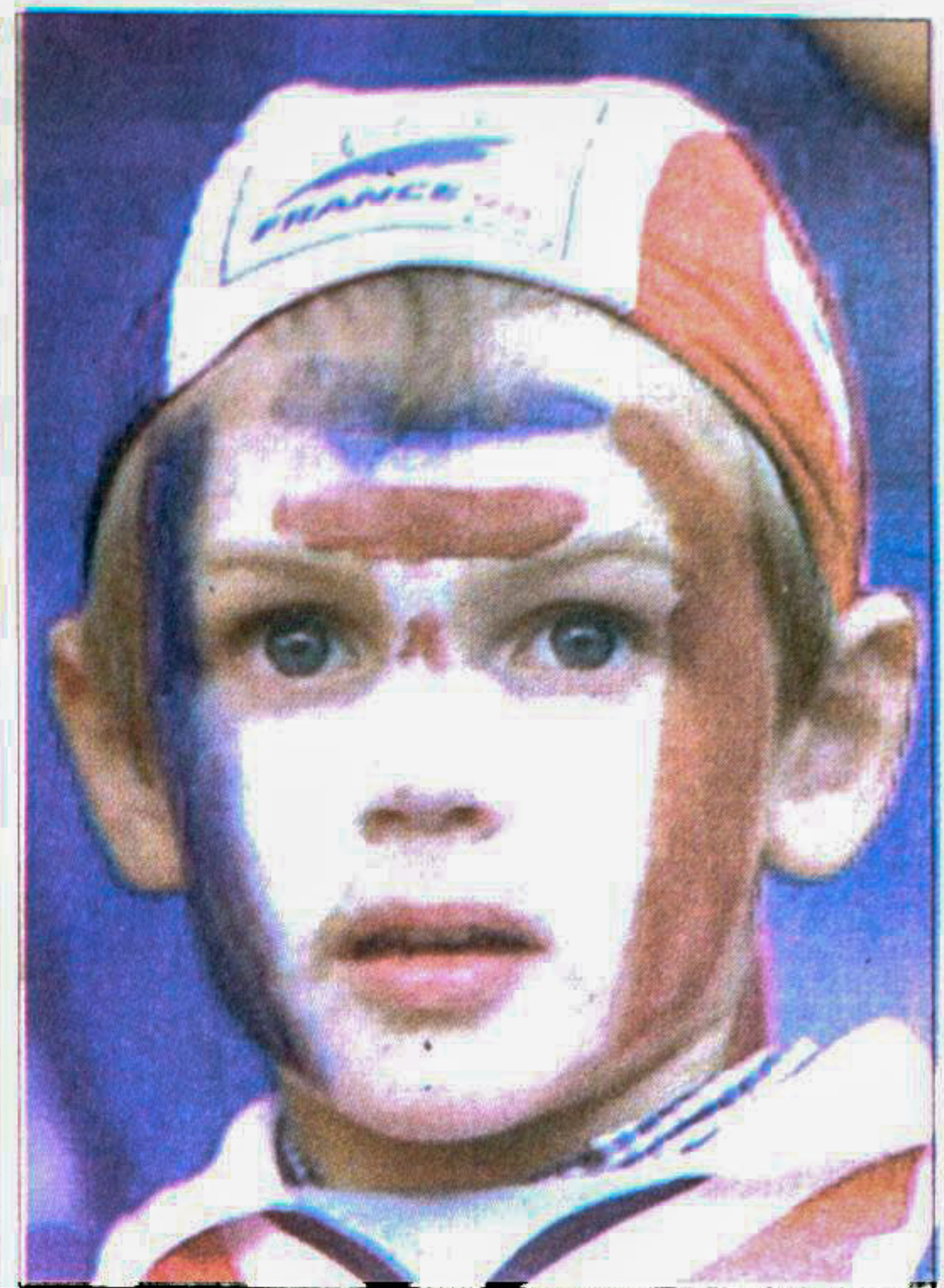




WORLD CUP '98 SPECIAL



FRENCH FUTURE: A tiny French boy with his face painted in the colours of the national flag at the Stade de France on July 8. — AFP photo

Voilà!

Boldly going where none of 'em has gone before

PARIS, July 9 (Reuters): France attempt to become the first nation for 20 years to be crowned world champions on home soil when they face Brazil in the World Cup final at the Stade de France on Sunday.

Not since Argentina triumphed over the Netherlands in Buenos Aires in 1978 has the country that staged the finals won the competition — and never before has the host nation played the defending champions in the final.

ram equalised with his first goal for France in his 38th game.

And after waiting almost four years for his first goal for France, his second came just 22 minutes later and was enough to send France through after a nail-biting finale, made even more never-wracking for the French by the dismissal of Laurent Blanc for pushing Slaven Bilic in the chest.

business suit for a blue shirt and turn the clock back a decade, France would at least possess a player who could grab the chances their defence and midfield create, and their front line continually fail to convert.

France's achievement in reaching the final for the first time in Paris in the last World Cup of the century provides a romantic link with the birth of the tournament.

But the manner in which France progressed to their date with destiny during a 2-1 semi-final win over Croatia suggests anything is possible for coach Aimé Jacquet and his men.

The impotence of their attack is well-documented, but when defenders can score goals like Lilian Thuram's winner on Wednesday, perhaps France could yet become the first team without a forward line to win the World Cup.

But France's 10 men held firm and they now have the chance of becoming only the seventh nation ever to become champions after Uruguay (1930, 1950); Italy (1934-38, 1982); (West) Germany (1954, 1974, 1990); Brazil (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994); Argentina (1978, 1986) and England (1966).

"We can be extremely optimistic," said Jacquet. "We have worked extremely hard for this and we deserve the chance to go up against the masters of world football in the final. It is a wonderful opportunity for us."

Although the first tournament was not staged until 1930 in Uruguay, the competition was conceived of in Paris as early as 1904 when FIFA was founded by Frenchman Jules Rimet and others.

The first goal World Cup history was scored by Frenchman Lucien Laurent in the first World Cup match on July 13, 1930.

After a dull first half in which only French playmaker Zinedine Zidane appeared to come to France and, one after the other, they joined her.

By no means a star Thuram, who learned his trade at Monaco before joining Parma, is arguably one of the finest defenders in Europe but he never attracts headlines.

Wednesday's win also eased the heartache of three defeats in the semifinals of 1958, 1982 and 1986. It was no surprise that Michel Platini, France's greatest player who was in both beaten semifinal teams in the 1980s, was first on his feet in the VIP box to acclaim the success.

And if Platini could swap his

France staged the cup in 1938 and reached the last eight. Frenchman Just Fontaine, among the dignitaries watching Wednesday's semifinal, holds the goalscoring record for one World Cup of 13 goals in 1958 — one more than the entire French team have scored here to reach the final.

How fitting it would be if the last goal scored in the World Cup this century was also scored by a Frenchman to win the cup for the first time on July 12, 1998.

Samba set to storm Bastille

PARIS, July 9 (AP/Internet): It's the final Michel Platini and the World Cup organisers have been yearning for.

It's a big loss for the French. The Blanc-Marcel Desailly partnership has protected goalkeeper Fabien Barthez so well that he has yielded only two goals in six games on the way to the final.

the world's best. Mario Zagallo's men are odds-on to win a fifth title. But there have even been rumblings from within Brazilian soccer that they're not playing the traditional way.

Host France has made it to the World Cup final for the first time, and waiting there is defending champion and four-time winner Brazil.

The Brazilians, the most exciting team in the world, play as if they have a divine right to a fifth title. The French dream of winning it for the first time in front of their own fans — no host has made it this far since 1978.

Frank Leboeuf likely will replace Blanc on the French defence and face up to the formidable Brazilians, who still haven't really caught fire in the championship.

Although Ronaldo, Bebeto, Rivaldo and Cesar Sampaio have scored 13 goals among them, they have not been as bewildering as everyone expected.

The critics say Brazil is sacrificing its flamboyant, fan-pleasing style of slick passing, long-range swerving shots and mesmerising dribbles for a more practical European style of closing down the opposition and relying on breaks from deep positions.

Ze Carlos spent much of the match isolated on the right, from where many of the most dangerous Dutch moves — but not their goal — originated.

He grew in stature when Amerson, a defensive right-sided midfielder, was brought on just before the start of extra-time and gave him some back-up.

"I'll give him ten out of ten," said Cafu, who himself suffered stinging criticism before the See page 14

Roberto Carlos has struggled to find the target with his trademark long-range free kicks and Denilson, the substitute who tries to dance around defenders with his fancy footwork, has left his teammates frustrated by holding onto the ball too long.

But this is the time for the Brazilians to show why they are

If the Brazilians decide to attack the strong French defence, the match could be a thrilling duel of different styles. If they don't, it could become a something closer to the dull 0-0 final between Brazil and Italy four years ago that the Brazilians won in a penalty kick shootout.

Zagallo, however, does not approve of a conservative style. While the French are losing See page 14



THURAM THUNDER: Lilian Thuram (No 15), France's hero in the July 8 semifinal, becomes the toast of euphoric teammates after the match. — AFP photo

Wham! bam! thank Thuram!

PARIS, July 9 (Reuters): Lilian Thuram, the quietest man in the France squad, did not feel the need to make a noise after scoring both goals in a 2-1 victory over Croatia that propelled the host nation into their first World Cup final.

47th minute to level the tie. He then dispossessed Robert Jarni before curling a beautiful left-foot shot with the coolness of a seasoned striker.

"I'm no hero," said the 26-year-old from Guadeloupe after Wednesday's match at the Stade de France. "I did my best as usual but the team won, not just me."

"If you say it's a nice goal, then it must be," he said. "But what counts is that we're in the final, all 22 of us. We worked very hard for it and we deserve it."

Thuram, who had never scored in 37 appearances for his country, struck twice when it mattered most, cancelling out a goal by Davor Suker seconds after the break before hitting the winner in the 70th minute.

Thuram was regarded as a substitute until France's second match of Euro '96 in England against Spain, when he was preferred to the ageing Jocelyn Angloma.

The defender silenced those who have been saying for years that he lacks confidence in front of goal by retaining home a Youri Dorkaev pass in the

He was so outstanding that Angloma never recaptured his place. Coach Aimé Jacquet played Thuram in all 18 matches France played between Euro '96 and the current World Cup — a feat matched by no other player in the squad.

Step aside, it's Cafu time

MARSEILLE, July 9 (Reuters): Brazilian right-back Cafu is itching to return for Sunday's World Cup final after sitting out Tuesday's semifinal through suspension and being replaced by a player making his first international appearance.

to supplement his football income.

"It's much easier on the pitch than it is on the sidelines," said Cafu, whose forays down the right flanks were sorely missed by Brazilians they beat the Netherlands on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

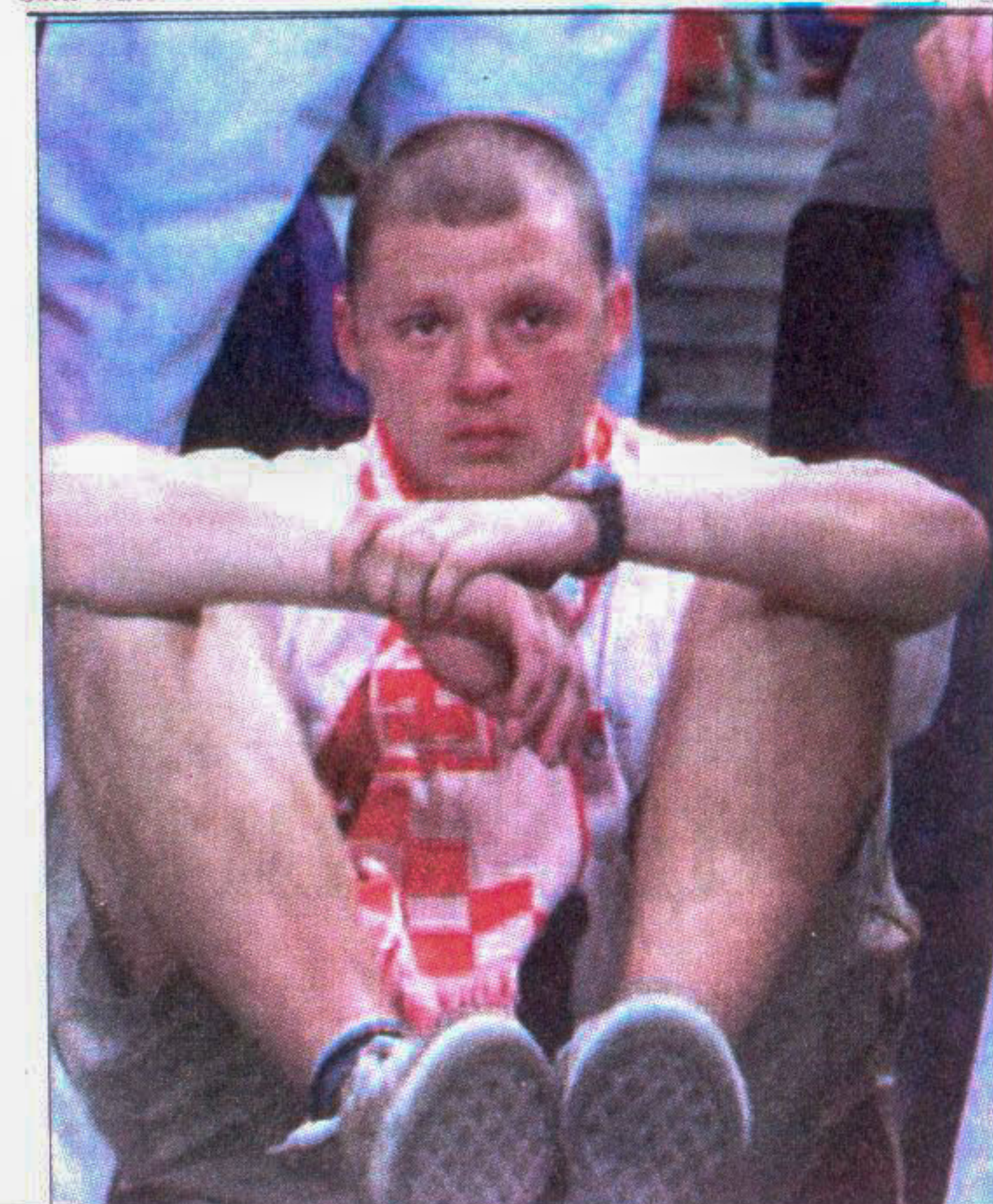
It was an extraordinary move by coach Mario Zagallo, who had included Ze Carlos in the squad for friendlies this year against Germany and Argentina but only played him in a pre-cup friendly against Spanish club side Athletic Bilbao.

"Outside you suffer a lot. I can't wait to get back."

There is no doubt in the ability of Ze Carlos, who has played superbly since joining Sao Paulo in July last year from minor provincial team Matonsense.

Ze Carlos, Cafu's replacement, was making his international debut at the age of 30 and until little more than a year ago sold water melons in a market

But the player who postponed his wedding to play in the World Cup was visibly uneasy in his first outing wearing a shirt that, as the local saying



HE CAN'T BELIEVE IT: A Croatian fan at Stade de France doesn't hide his despair after the semifinal loss.

Out but not down

ZAGREB, July 9 (Reuters/AP): For Croatia the dream lasted longer than anyone had ever expected.

just as they had after Saturday's defeat of Germany.

But on Wednesday night it ended in tears when World Cup hosts France beat Croatia 2-1 to go through to the final against defending champions Brazil.

Some jumped in the fountain, despite the cool weather.

Fans bedecked in their team's red and white colours, cheered to the final whistle, willing them to equalise. Until Saturday's 3-0 victory over Germany few had thought they would even get this far but defeat was still hard to take.

"We did it when they were winning, we are going to do now they've lost," said one youth before rushing down the steps and throwing himself into the water.

The first goal was the key — one minute of celebrations and then, the end," said Kgor, 29.

Television showed similar jubilant scenes from across the country as fans celebrated their team's performance.

Croatia scored seconds after halftime but France equalised almost immediately through Lilian Thuram after he dispossessed Zvonimir Boban. Thuram scored the winner in the 70th minute.

The surprise success in Croatia's first visit to the World Cup has put the small seven-year-old nation on the map, something the fans are as pleased about as the football.

"It was all Boban's fault. We conceded two cheap goals, both from defensive mistakes, this is the end, but it was good as long as it lasted," said Zac, 20. "There's no reason to be sad, we played well throughout the tournament."

"Two days before the quarter-finals Croatia was a small county, but after that all round the world newspapers are talking about Croatia," said Mario Lekic, 28. "I don't know how many people watched this match but I think people who didn't know where Croatia was certainly do now," said Daniel Ritz, 20. See page 14



LILLE LIGHTS UP: Thousands of French supporters celebrate their semifinal victory at Lille's Grand Palace on July 8. — AFP photo

"GIVE ME FIVE!"
SCREAMS BRAZIL

JOHN PLAYER
GOLD LEAF
LIGHTS

সংবিদেব সতীকরণ। ধূমধাম বাহুধে মঙ্গ কতিক