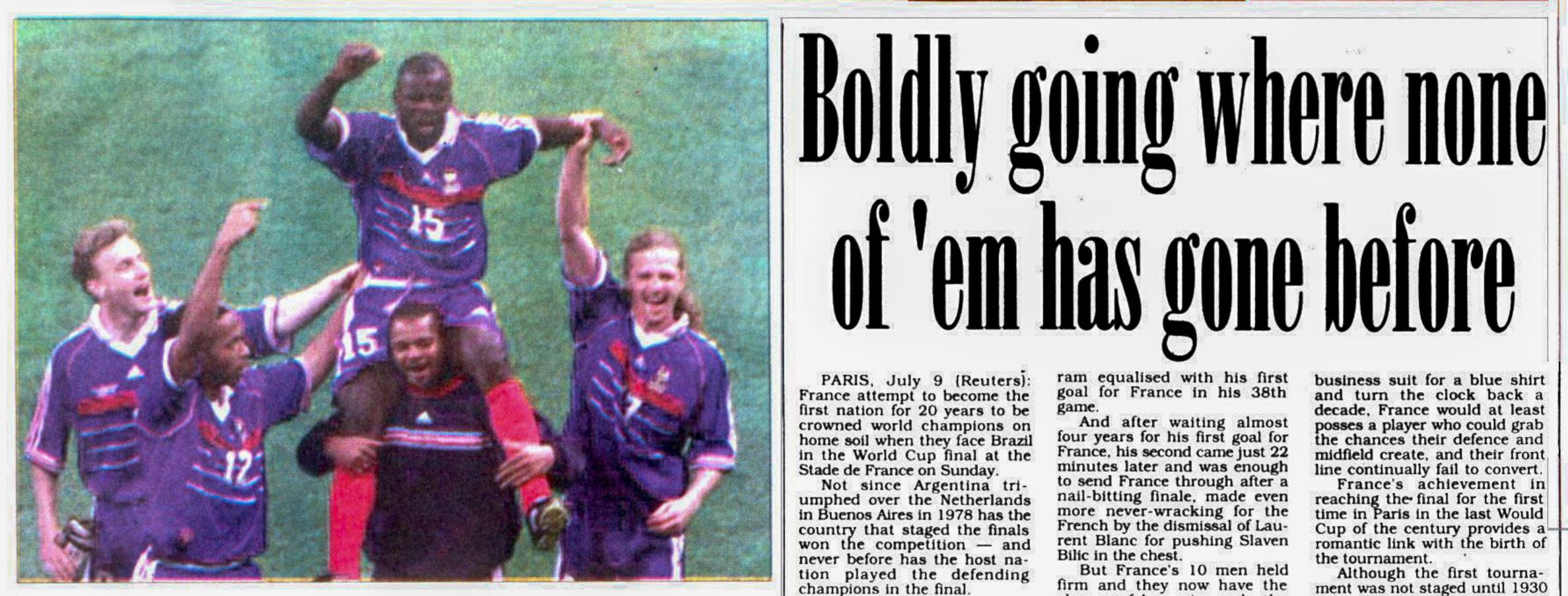




WORLD CUP'98 SPECIAL



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.

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

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.

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

MARSEILLE. July

(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

"It's much easier on the pitch

first international appearance.

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

"Outside you suffer a lot. I

Ze Carlos, Cafu's replace-

ment, was making his interna-

tional debut at the age of 30 and

a 1-1 draw.

can't wait to get back."

47th minute to level the tie.

He then dispossesed Robert Jarni before curling a beautiful left-foot shot with the coolness of a seasoned striker.

"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

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.

He was so outstanding that Angloma never recaptured his place. Coach Aime 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

to supplement his football in-

move by coach Mario Zagallo.

who had included Ze Carlos in

the squad for friendlies this

vear against Germany and Ar-

gentina but only played him in

a pre-cup friendly against

Spanish club side Athletic Bil-

ability of Ze Carlos, who has

played superbly since joining

Sao Paulo in July last year

from minor provincial team

poned his wedding to play in the

World Cup was visibly uneasy

But the player who post-

Matonense.

There is no doubt in the

It was an extraordinary

One of five children, the discreet, almost shy Lilian saw his father leave home when he was a young child. His mother then left Guadeloupe to work in France as a housekeeper.

Lilian and his brother and sisters stayed in Guadeloupe where an uncle looked after them. His mother sent her savings to allow her children 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.

> His double against Croatia will have changed that.

> 'The two goals scored by Lilian are a great reward for us but especially for him." said Jacquet. "He deserves it. He's had such a great World Cup."

> > His teammates seemed to

sense his nervousness. Several

times, they choose to step on the

ball, change direction and pass

to someone else rather than

match isolated on the right,

from where many of the most

dangerous Dutch moves - but

He grew in stature when

not their goal - originated.

Ze Carlos spent much of the

bring him into the game.

goes, weights a lot.

Samba set to storm Bastille

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

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-bitting finale, made even

more never-wracking for the

French by the dismissal of Lau-

rent Blanc for pushing Slaven

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 1 (1954, 1975.

1990), Brazil (1958, 1962, 1970,

1994), Argentina (1978, 1986)

mistic," 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

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 suc-

And if Platini could swap his

Wednesday's win also eased

wonderful opportunity for us."

We can be extremely opti-

But France's 10 men held

Bilic in the chest.

and England (1966).

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

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

umphed over the Netherlands

in Buenos Aires in 1978 has the

country that staged the finals

won the competition — and

never before has the host na-

tion played the defending

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

tack 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

which only French playmaker

Zinedine Zidane appeared two

know where the Croatian goal

was. France came alive in the

second half after recovering

from the shock of going a goal

down within 30 seconds of the

Suker put Croatia ahead, Thu-

Just one minute after Davor

After a dull first half in

the World Cup.

restart.

The impotence of their at-

Aime Jacquent and his men.

champions in the final.

Not since Argentina tri-

Stade de France on Sunday.

Host France has made it to the World Cup final for the first time, and waiting there is defending champion and fourtime 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. One is sure to get their way. On Sunday, before 80,000 spectators at the gleaming Stade de France, Ronaldo, Bebeto. Rivaldo, Denilson and Roberto Carlos will attack possibly the strongest defence in

the 32-team championship. Amerson, a defensive right-Except that the French back sided midfielder, was brought four will be a little weaker beon just before the start of extracause Laurent Blanc is missing. time and gave him some back-The stylish and dependable defender is out of Sunday's final "I'll give him ten out of ten." because he was ejected from said Cafu, who himself suffered Wednesday's 2-1 semifinal vicstinging criticism before the tory over Croatia for pushing See page 14 Slaven Bilic in the face.

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

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.

the final.

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

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 the world's best.

Mario Zagalio'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.

The critics say Brazil is sacrificing its flamboyant, fanpleasing 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.

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 dour 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

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business suit for a blue shirt and turn the clock back a decade, France would at least posses a player who could grab the chances their defence and midfield create, and their front

reaching the final for the first time in Paris in the last Would Cup of the century provides a romantic link with the birth of

ment 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.

France staged the cup in 1938 and reached the last eight. Frenchman Just Fontaine,

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

line continually fail to convert. France's achievement in

the tournament. Although the first tourna-

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

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.

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

Wollas

SAINT-DENIS, France, July 9: Who needs strikers?

Defender Lilian Thuram fired France into the World Cup final for the first time in its history Wednesday with two goals in a come-from-behind 2-I win over outsider Croatia, reports AP.

"This is fabulous," Thuram said. "I don't even score during training."

In a second half for the history books, France ended its World Cup semifinal jinx on its fourth attempt and became the first host nation in 20 years to reach the final where it faces defending titlists Brazil on Sunday.

French president Jacques Chirac cheered with hands aloft while Croatia's counterpart Franjo Tudjman applauded his nation's fairy-tale run that stopped one game short of the unbelievable.

"It is truly the most beautiful day in the history of French sport," Chirac said.

The defence has taken France to the final. Centerback Laurent Blanc fired the quarterfinal winner in extra time against Paraguay and rightback Thuram was the scoring star Wednesday night after his forwards again failed to find the

On top of that, Blanc, Thuram and the others at the back have defended superbly too. Blanc, however, will miss the final after being expelled for pushing Croat defender Slavan

Bilic in the face. "We played our hearts out and that made the difference, French coach Aime Jacquet

Brazil beat the Netherlands in a penalty shootout Tuesday and Jacquet can't wait for the

Croatia, in its first World Cup as a seven-year-old nation, almost scored the biggest upset of all, even taking the lead before finally falling to French

"We needed all the push and energy we could get," Jacquet

The game came alive with two lightning-quick strikes early in the second half.

First Croatia stunned the 80,000 crowd at the Stade de France 26 seconds into the second half when Aljosa Asanovic split the French defense and Davor Suker scored his fifth World Cup goal, slipping the ball under Barthez. "They caught us dead cold,"

Deschamps said. The Croats didn't get time to enjoy it.

One minute later, Thuram stole the ball from captain Zvonimir Boban near the Croat penalty area and sent a return pass that the defender slotted past goalkeeper Drazen Ladic.

In the 70th minute, Thuram was even bolder, surging up the left and setting up a one-two with Thierry Henry, that seemed to go straight to Robert Jarni. But Thuram was not to be denied, winning back the ball and then unleashing a curling 20-meter shot that went wide of Ladic and released a whole nation into euphoria.

"It is a worthy reward after everything he has been doing throughout this World Cup, Jacquet said.

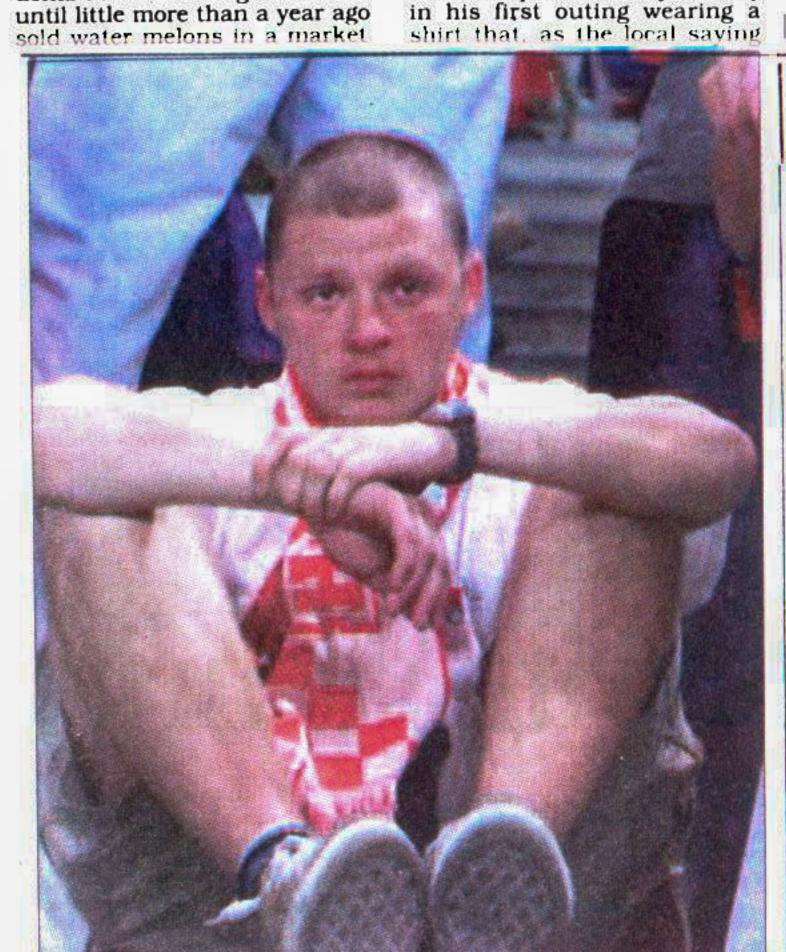
France already had been a losing semifinalists in 1958. -1982 and 1986 but finally earned soccer's biggest stage. It will be the first time the defending champions will meet the host nation in a final.

The first two minutes of the second half packed more action than the whole first half and it was the wakeup call France

In the tense minutes after France's second goal, defender Laurent Blanc tugged at Slaven Bilic's shirt and slammed the palm of his hand in his face. Referee Jose Manuel Garcia sent the standout defender off and he will miss the final.

"Blanc has put us in a terrible position," Jacquet said. Down to 10 men, France

went into a defensive shell, bolstering the last line with Frank Leboeuf. Suker and Goran Vlaovic came close three times in the final minutes but failed to break France's embattled de-



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 then anyone had ever expected.

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.

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.

"The first goal was the key one minute of celebrations and then, the end," said Kgor, 29. Croatia scored seconds after

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

"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." Despite the defeat, fans still headed to Zagreb's central Ban

Jelacic square where they

waved flags, sang and cheered

just as they had after Saturday's defeat of Germany. Some jumped in the foun-

tain, despite the cool weather. "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 wa-

One girl cried inconsilably as loudspeakers blasted out rock music and the crowd started to sing — "everything is super and everything is excellent, when you are male and love soccer ...

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

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

"Two days before the quarter-finals Croatia was a small county, but after that all round the world newspapers are talk-ing 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.

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

