

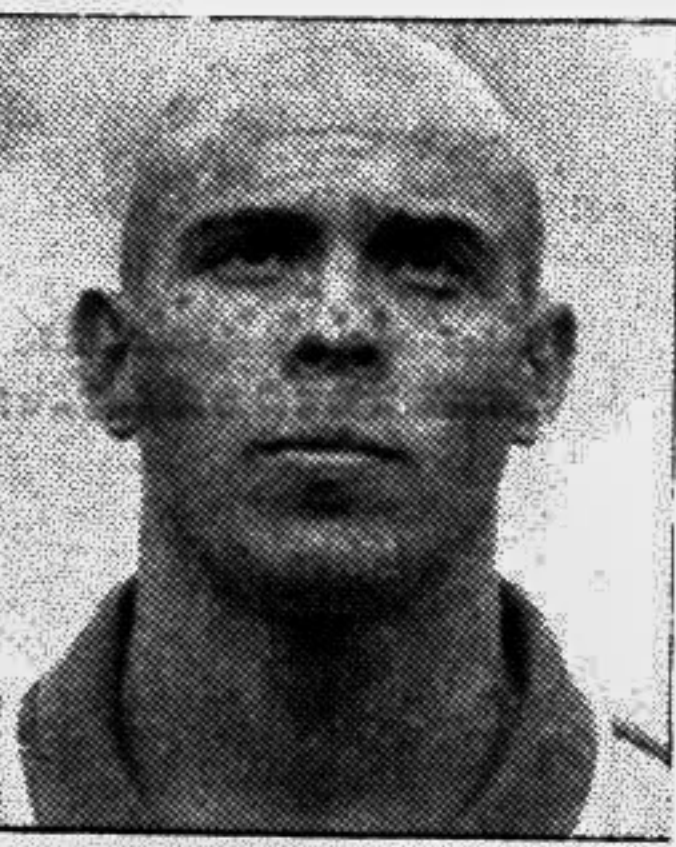
# COMMON FEELING IN THE FRENCH AND BRAZILIAN CAMPS: ANTICIPATION

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS



WHEN ZIDANE CAME CLOSE: A long range effort from French playmaker Zinedine Zidane travelling towards the Croatian goal with custodian Drazen Ladic getting into position on July 8 at Saint Denis. The ball eventually just curled clear of the post. — AFP photo

## France's public enemy No. 1



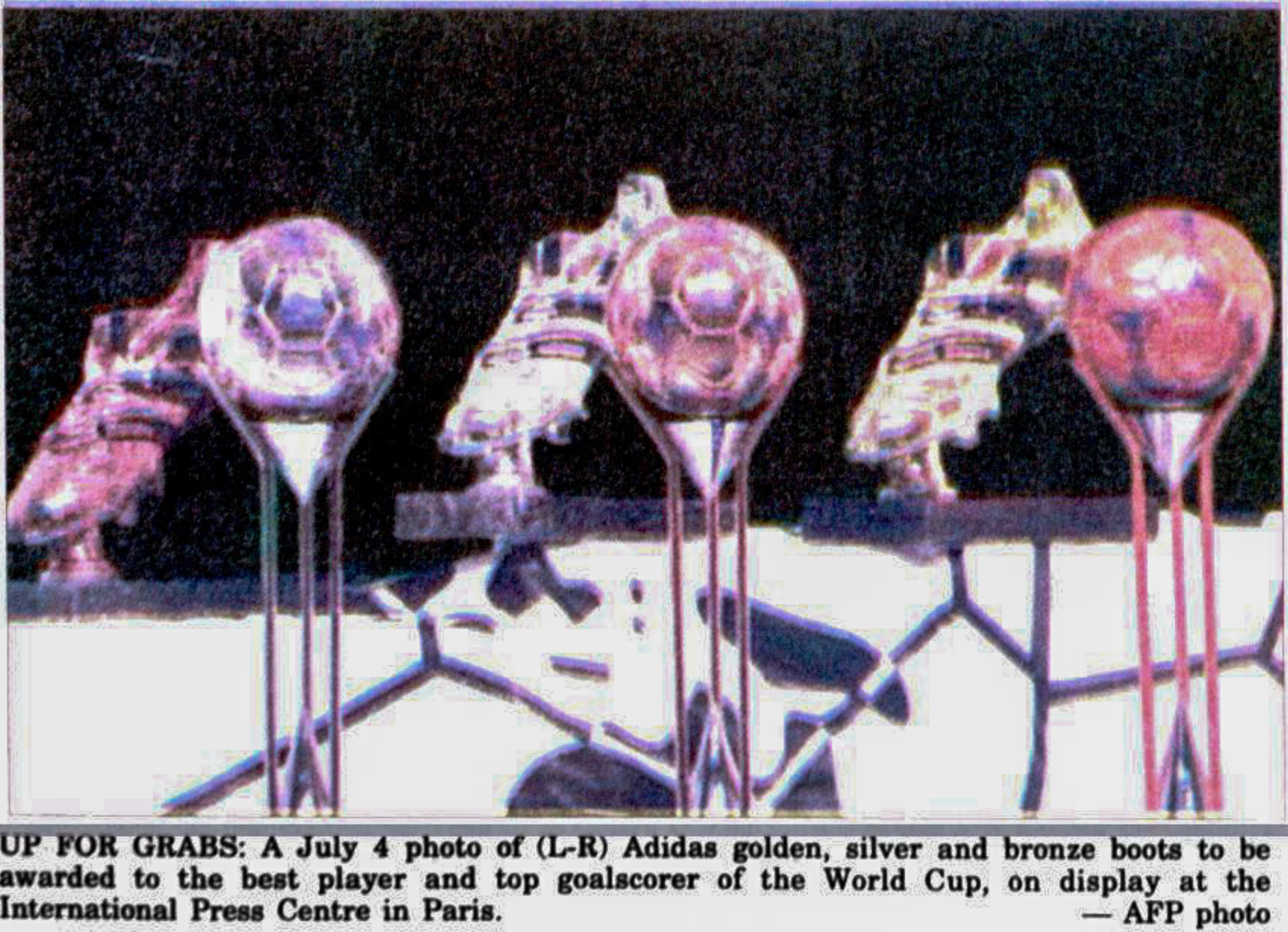
PARIS, July (AFP/Internet): The 'gendarmes' may be leaving him alone, but Ronaldo will be France's public enemy number one in Sunday night's World Cup final.

Arguably denied two penalties against Holland, the twice world footballer of the year is finally living up to his pre-tournament hype after becoming Brazil's top scorer on the way to the World Cup final.

Ronaldo also hit home the first penalty in the shoot-out to set the tone for four perfect penalty kicks to put Brazil into their sixth World Cup final.

Ronaldo's skills have been on show in Europe's top flight with Barcelona and now Inter Milan, who paid the Catalan club a world record 30 million dollars for the striker last summer.

But if the Serie A has honed his ability to score goals under tight marking Zagallo has taught him to make goals as well as score them.



UP FOR GRABS: A July 4 photo of (L-R) Adidas golden, silver and bronze boots to be awarded to the best player and top goalscorer of the World Cup, on display at the International Press Centre in Paris. — AFP photo

# Vive Les Bleus

PARIS, July 9 (AP): French fans poured out of cafes and bars, screaming with triumph and sheer delight late Wednesday after their beloved 'Bleues' made history by reaching the World Cup final with a 2-1 victory over Croatia.

"It's a complete euphoria taking over France," yelled Geraldine Lesieux, 20, as she and hundreds of others ran into a small bar-lined street in Paris' Left Bank.

"And I don't even like soccer that much." France may not have the most diehard soccer fans in the world, but with the amazing success of their team, they have definitely caught World Cup fever.

"We're going to the final!" shouted hordes of fans pouring out of the stadium at Saint-Denis, a northern suburb, their faces smeared with paint.

The famous boulevard was already clogged with revelers minutes after the victory, with their numbers growing by the minute.

The avenue was closed off to traffic as thousands of fans marched triumphantly toward — what else — the Arc de Triomphe.

lice stood by. Draped in flags, the fans yelled in both French and English: "We won!" They were drowned out by a cacophony of honking horns.

"It's amazing" said Jerome Vive, 27, covered with war paint. "The most beautiful day in French sports — France in the final!"

For France, the country that invented the World Cup, it was an exquisite moment of soccer history.

But some saw it as more: the most unifying thing that's happened here in a long time, bringing together old and young, men and women, and different social groups in a burst of patriotic enthusiasm.

On the metro, there were no bands of killed, singing Scots or chanting south American fans. But there were lots of Parisians with cheeks painted the red, white and blue of the French flag.

Philippe Vallot, 36, a computer executive, was headed for

the game after work, in an elegant business suit but with painted cheeks.

"I don't know how long this feeling will last, but let's enjoy it now," he said acknowledging that many French are not the diehard fans found in South America or some European countries, like Italy.

"At least we're all behind the French team for now," he said. "Let's hope they win. It may pass, but we'll have our memories."

"We are going to party all night. And if we have to work tomorrow, we'll work," said engineer Jean-Pierre Lebrun.

"Where are, where are, where are the Brazilians?" groups chanted defiantly, yelling louder as fans in Brazil's yellow and green colours walked by.

"We'll beat them," said a man playing his accordion on the street.

Dozens embarked on hazardous climbs up scaffolding, taking over balconies for a better view. A fan, his face wearing Tricolor war paint, stood on top of a telephone booth chanting to a crowd: "If you are proud to be French, clap your hands."

Chants of "we're in the final, we're in the final, we're in the final," echoed all over the city. Car horns blared and smiling people of all ages danced in celebration.

Scenes of joy, too, in Montreal, Canada, where hundreds of French supporters invaded the streets singing the Marseillaise and waving flags.

"Long live Lillian Thuram,"

# Banned Blanc's brave face

PARIS, July 9 (Reuters): Laurent Blanc tried to put on a brave face after seeing his dream of playing in the World Cup final shattered by a red card on Wednesday.

"Victory is the only thing that really counts," said Blanc, whose dismissal in France's 2-1 win over Croatia meant he will have to sit and watch when the host nation take on Brazil on Sunday as they aim to win the World Cup for the first time.

The 32-year-old libero, playing in his first and probably last final, received his marching orders in the 74th minute of Wednesday's game at the Stade de France for pushing Croatian defender Slaven Bilic's chin with his open hand.

"I'm the only one who's punished and that's good," Blanc said. "The whole team might have been punished if we had lost the match because of me being sent off. It would have been awful. I would have felt guilty."

Blanc said he had reacted angrily after Bilic had let himself fall to the ground when the two went for the ball.

"It was tense between us for the whole match," he said. "I pushed him a bit but it was not nasty. He had tried to make the referee think that I had committed a serious offence and I was afraid I might get sent off. That's why I reacted like that. It

was silly but I don't think it deserved a red card."

Bilic offered a different version: "I tried to block him and he punched me in the face," he said. "I don't care about him. I didn't want him to be sent off but it was his stupid mistake. Let him be punished for it."

French captain Didier Deschamps, who was close to the incident, said he felt the sanction was severe.

"He pushed him on the chest, maybe on the chin, and the guy held his forehead as if he had been punched," he said.

"Blanc managed to convince the referee but really it wasn't worth a red card. We lose a great player who would have deserved

to play a final and who will probably never get another chance," Deschamps added. "All we can do now is win it for him."

After France failed to qualify for the 1994 finals in the United States, Blanc considered ending his international career but changed his mind after some persuasion from coach Aimé Jacquet.

"The whole team did a fantastic job and I played my part," Blanc said on Wednesday. "Playing the final would have been the icing on the cake but never mind."

The libero slot may now be filled by Frank Leboeuf and Deschamps said he had no doubt about the Chelsea player's ability to take over Blanc's role.

"Frank's brilliant player and he gets on well with (stopper) Marcel (Desailly)," Deschamps said. "We all trust him and we're not worried."

But Jacquet said the absence of the towering Blanc might be a problem.

"It will be tough for us without him," he said. "I can't comment on the sending off because I haven't seen the video but I must say that, knowing the man and they player, I'd be surprised if he did anything really reprehensible."

## Cheers from jail

BORDEAUX, July 9 (Reuters/Internet): French football fanaticism entered a solemn courtroom when the last words of a man being led away for a jail sentence were to cheer on the national side.

Court officials in this southwestern city said the 25-year-old was sentenced to eight months imprisonment on Wednesday for theft, five of them suspended, just as France was settling down to watch the France-Croatia World Cup semifinal.

As he was being led out in handcuffs between two policemen, the man turned around and shouted to the court: "Allez la France" (Let's go France).

# Bad Boys of France '98

PARIS, July 9 (Reuters/Internet): Chile and Cameroon came out worst in World Cup disciplinary records released on Thursday.

The figures showed that proportionally fewer yellow cards were handed out in France compared to the last tournament in the United States in 1994, but more reds were shown.

Iran were the cleanest side at the finals. Chile, beaten 4-1 by Brazil in the second round, had the highest number of cautions -- 13 -- and the highest average per match with a figure of 3.3.

Cameroon were unrivalled when it came to sendings off, with three from three matches.

Iran, who also went out after the first round, had just three cautions from their three games.

The Netherlands were second best with 1.2 followed by Belgium, England, Jamaica, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Scotland and the United States on an average of 1.3.

Seventeen of the 32 teams in

## Vogts stays put

BONN, July 9 (AFP/Internet): Bertl Vogts will stay as coach of Germany with the mission of rebuilding the team, German football federation president Egidius Braun said Thursday.

"We aim to find a new way of working together to rebuild the team and there's no-one better to do that than Vogts," Braun said.

Vogts, World Cup team chief Franz Beinhorn and federation vice-president will be called in for a brainstorming session next week.

"We have to keep nothing back, to sat what we think worked and what didn't," Braun said.

## Suker: The lucky loser

PARIS, July 9 (Reuters): Croatia striker Davor Suker can still come out of the World Cup a winner despite his side losing 2-1 to France in their semifinal on Wednesday.

Suker's strike 28 seconds after the break made him joint top-scorer in the competition with five goals.

Gabriel Batistuta of Argentina and Christian Vieri of Italy share the top spot in the scoring charts with the Croat.

But with their teams out of the competition, they could be overtaken by Suker if he can find the net in the 3rd place play-off with the Netherlands on Saturday.

Suker said individual glory came second to team success.

"It's not important for me at the moment," said Suker. "The most important thing is that we beat the Netherlands."

Suker said the key to his scoring success in the tournament has been the service provided by the Croatian midfield.

"You can't score unless you get a chance," said Suker. "Today I got a great ball from Aljosa (Asanovic) which really should count as half a goal. My left foot just finished off the work," he added.

The only other player with any realistic chance of becoming the number one scorer in the tournament is Brazil's Ronaldo.

Florist's touch! LONDON, July 9 (AP): No one will be rooting for Brazil to win Sunday's World Cup final more than Adrian Fitzpatrick. The Birmingham florist stands to become the biggest ever winner from a British bookmaker.



IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES: Parisians go wild at Champs Elysees after the semifinal win over Croatia. — AFP photo

# 'Bilic is a cheat'

LONDON, July 9 (AFP/Internet): Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has led the criticism of Everton defender Slaven Bilic following Laurent Blanc's controversial red card during France's 2-1 World Cup semi-final victory over Croatia in Saint Denis.

Blanc will miss Sunday's final against Brazil following an incident with Croatian Bilic late in the second half.

Bilic fell to the ground clutching his face in the 74th minute after Blanc had pushed him on the chin.

"Bilic went down as if he'd been killed," said Ferguson.

"Laurent raised his hand and some might say he had no excuse after doing so. But I don't go along with that."

"It's part of the Croatian culture to do that kind of thing and he won't worry about it for a second. There's no way he'll regret his actions, it's not in his nature."

"I do feel sorry for Laurent Blanc though. And I would let the lad play in the final."

Ferguson also called for a change in FIFA's disciplinary procedure.

He said: "I've never known a World Cup like this for cheating. Something has to be done about it and I would say that as a result of this, a panel should sit in judgement to look at the big decisions."

"If that means using video evidence, then so be it."

"He raised his hand, but the play-acting of Bilic was dreadful -- but everybody is doing it."

Scotland international striker Ally McCoist claimed he was "embarrassed" for Blanc.

"I was embarrassed for him watching that," McCoist said. "Rules are rules and he

raised his hand, but it is never a sending-off. He (Bilic) went down as if he'd punched him and it's not that bad at all."

However, Scotland coach Craig Brown believed the France defender deserved to be dismissed for raising his hand, although he added that incidents of play-acting were becoming the order of the day.

"I do think it's happening all the time," Brown said. "Bilic made the most of that, but he was man-handled. And you certainly can't touch someone's face like that."

"Although it was a soft one, it deserved to be an ordering-off

and, unfortunately for Laurent Blanc, it was the biggest day of his life which will be ruined."

Meanwhile, France coach Aimé Jacquet is to lodge an appeal against Laurent Blanc's expulsion.

"We still hope Blanc can play in the final," Jacquet said Thursday. "He's been an exemplary leader for four years."

But FIFA said Spanish referee Jose Garcia Aranda's decision will stand and Blanc will be banned for the final.

Communications director Keith Cooper said the sanction would be decided by FIFA's dis-

# Jacquet 2, Blazevic 0

ST DENIS, France, July 9 (AFP/Internet): France and Croatia had never met in an international match, let alone at the World Cup, but their respective coaches knew each other well.

Aimé Jacquet of France and Miroslav Blazevic of Croatia came face to face on three occasions in the rough and tumble of French first division football, with Jacquet winning 2-0, with one draw.

As Croatia teetered on the brink of a war of independence from Yugoslavia, Blazevic was exiled in France as coach of Nantes in 1988.

Jacquet at the time was a former player who had won a few international caps and was considered one of France's most successful club coaches after leading Bordeaux to three French championships.

Nantes, on the other hand, were living in the past and had

yet to become the exciting force that won the championship in 1994.

Under bespectacled, chain-smoking Blazevic they never rose above mid-table.

Jacquet had just guided Bordeaux to a third French championship when Blazevic crossed his path for the first time in October 1988.

The result was a 5-0 defeat for Blazevic's Nantes.

A year later, after Jacquet had quit Bordeaux and took over at Montpellier, the two met again.

This time Blazevic had more success but a lowly Montpellier still managed to hold Nantes to a 0-0 draw.

Jacquet had again switched clubs for their next encounter. He had taken over Nancy for the 1990 season and in September of that year, The third match between the two coaches ended in a 3-2 win for Nancy.



GET UP: French goalkeeper Bernard Lama (R) lifting a visibly disappointed Croatian striker Davor Suker after the semifinal. — AFP photo

## LATEST ODDS

LONDON, July 9 (Reuters): Brazil were still strongly favoured to win the World Cup final on Sunday despite France's victory over Croatia in the semifinals on Wednesday. Latest William Hill odds: 4-11 Brazil 13-8 France Brazil are even money to win in 90 minutes play. A draw is 2-1 and France are 5-2 to win.