

Blame it on Beckham

LONDON, July 10 (The Guardian/Internet): The Bible Society has called on the nation to forgive David Beckham for the sending-off that many feel cost England their World Cup match with Argentina.

Hosts loosen up

From page 13 message, although he won't be free to join the party in the Stade de France on Sunday. A 25-year-old man sentenced to eight months in jail for theft shouted to a Bordeaux courtroom as he was led away in handcuffs: "allez la France" (let's go, France).

The same message will be proclaimed in a giant banner to be draped across the august facade of the French parliament building in Paris today, a national assembly statement said.

With the Tour de France starting on Saturday, millions of French TV sports fans are set for a heady weekend's viewing. But World Cup joy was mixed with outrage in the southern French village of Roussion when fave defender Laurent Blanc was benched from the final after being sent off against Croatia.

Blanc was automatically ruled out after being dismissed for pushing Croatia's Slaven Bilic, who was widely criticised for over-reacting.

"No injustice, solidarity with Laurent Blanc," proclaimed a protest sign being prepared by the village mayor.

Brazil vs Brazil

From page 13 he redesigned the team to stress offence and "art-soccer." But in France, the team has failed to catch fire. While playing well enough to win, Brazil hasn't been the juggernaut many expected. And if their dramatic victories over Denmark and the Netherlands postponing moments, the team's shaky defence helped to make them close.

Through six games, Brazil have scored 14 goals and allowed seven, tops in the Cup in either category and surpassing their totals in 1994.

For team captain Dunga, the two teams have distinct personalities and virtues.

"In 1994, defence was our strong suit," he said. "Now, our team is a killer. It's our nature to play on the attack. No matter how we try to control it, it's impossible."

Guadelajara

From page 13 chateau missed a wide open net. In the 17th minute, Careca, one of Brazil's greatest finishers, completed a three-way muller with Muller and Junior, sending a one-touch shot past goalkeeper Joel Bats.

The French didn't back down to merely try to keep it close. It simply was not their style, and they got the tying goal as Platini ended a scramble in the penalty area with a short shot. On his 31st birthday, no less.

That was the only goal Brazil allowed all tournament. Brazil looked like they were in charge when Bats was forced to tackle Branco in the box with 16 minutes to go. Awarded a penalty kick, up stepped Zico — now the team's coordinator, but then one of their veteran players.

He missed, with Bats making a diving save.

In overtime, both teams had excellent scoring opportunities, but couldn't find the net. That led to the shootout.

Brazil were magnificent in their semifinal shootout against the Netherlands on Tuesday in Marseille, knocking in all four penalty kicks to win. But back in Mexico, they hardly were as sharp.

Socrates, another veteran, shot to Bats' right and the goalie got there to block it. Yannick Stopyra scored for France.

Alemão was successful for Brazil and Manuel Amoros hit for France. Zico, getting another chance, drilled in his shot, but Bruno Bellone connected. It was 3-2 for France.

Branco evened matters, but Platini certainly would give the French the lead. Sorry - he shot well over the crossbar.

That brought on Julio Cesar with a chance to give Brazil the lead and force Hernandez to score to keep France in the shootout. But he hit the goalpost, putting Hernandez in position to win it.

No problem. That began wild celebrations on the field and in Paris - the kind expected Sunday if France wins.

And it began some deep soul-searching in Brazil, where the world title is considered a birthright.

It's time now to form a new selection that has possibilities for winning the next World Cup, midfielder Elzo said. "This can't afford to wait four years."

Tele Santana, who resigned as Brazilian coach after the loss, looked for consolation in the quality and high drama of the match, calling it "the best I've ever seen in a World Cup... it should have been the final."

This time, it is.

French women love football

PARIS, July 10 (AFP/Internet): What was the cliché about French women? Flighty, fashionable, and definitely not one bit interested in football -- whether or not France hosts the World Cup.

The marketing consultants are confused, the advertisers kicking themselves for their mistake. French women are every bit as passionate about football as the country's menfolk.

With polling institutes predicting the run-up to the World Cup that the vast majority of French women were turned off by football, makers of detergents, nappies and dishwashers withdrew prime-time ads, leaving the TV screens to producers of men's shampoos, sports-shoes or electronic goods.

TV's daily offering of Cup matches in the last month have come served up most often with long-haired French football star David Ginola's ads for L'Oréal shampoo, Sony Play Stations or mobile phones.

With match-time ads costing 1.1 million francs (160,000 dollars) for 30 seconds, the advertisers could hardly be blamed for heeding the advice of the marketing consultants.

But to the entire country's surprise, women are watching "le foot", and loving it, albeit with possibly a different eye.

"Absolute bliss," said former cabinet minister Francois Giroud in her weekly column in the up-market Le Nouvel Obser-

vateur news-magazine. "When handsome blue-eyed Di Biagio missed his goal ... a scream of orgasm washed the stadium."

The 82-year-old columnist was commenting on France's victory over Italy, the match that propelled "les Bleus" into the semi-finals.

In the Daily Liberation, journalist Judith Perpignon gloated over a camera "close-up on the muscular left bottom of goalkeeper Fabien Barthez" and the "chocolate-bar stomach muscles of David Trezeguet when he took off his jersey."

"After handing over the carkeys to the women, the men now are going to have to share football, and watch their stomachs," she wrote Friday.

So another cliché bites the dust. Women were everywhere in the streets after France defeated Croatia on Wednesday night, opening the way for the country's first-ever World Cup final.

And television ratings show women are staying at home glued in front of the set to watch the matches, just like the men.

Of the more than 17.5 million viewers who tuned in for the France-Croatia clash on the TF1 network, almost half were women.

The Cup, which was initially aimed at an audience of male aficionados, has become a "people event" because of the unexpected success of the French team," said Francois Marlet, who heads the Centre for Media Research, Credom.

Of the 101 hours screened live between the June 10 launch and July 7, male soccer buffs watched an average 47 hours of matches while women watched 30.

The figures contradict polls ahead of the tournament that said seven out of 10 French women were totally indifferent to the game.

Yet it was on the basis of such beliefs that at least two television channels pledged zero football on their networks during the tournament and that a host of restaurants and clubs have offered special cut-price deals for soccer widows during the Cup.

Male strippers were even brought into town, with Paris' Folies Bergeres for the first time in 130 years putting men on stage.

Trying to establish exactly what France's bored women would do while their men were out of the circuit, Elle magazine at the time said 21 per cent would go see the male-strippers, 55 per cent would visit women-friends and six per cent would take a lover, or at least try.

Said one befuddled marketing consultant of the unexpected change about in women's tastes: "This is proof that women are fickle and unforeseeable."

"Public opinion consultants now have extra work on their hands," said Jean-Christophe Heral of the Publicis advertising firm.

FIFA target cheats

PARIS, July 10 (AFP/Internet): FIFA on Friday insisted it was happy with the standard of refereeing at the World Cup but admitted more had to be done to crack down on cheating players.

Volker Roigt of the FIFA referees' commission backed FIFA president Sepp Blatter's view while there could always be improvements.

Blatter, who on Thursday chaired his first Executive Committee meeting since he was elected a month ago, said that although pleased with the refereeing at France 98 there was a consensus that more work needs to be done to further improve standards.

But Roigt said using video evidence was difficult because it could not easily be applied globally at all levels of the game.

"If you want to change the system of refereeing using videos you'll change the whole game. Around the world there are millions of players. If you change the system at high level and not at lower levels you'll divide football," he said.

"In our way it's the wrong way, it's unnecessary."

FIFA believes its crusade against dangerous tackles has been a success, with the number of sendings off at 21 in 62 matches so far, an average of less than one every three games.

And Roigt said the tackling issue was fading into the background.

"There are now not so many tackles from behind as at the start of the tournament. Now the talk is about shirt-pulling and simulating injury," he said.

Referee Ali Mohamed Buisaim of the United Arab Emirates agreed the main problems now were shirt-pulling and feigning injury, as in the case of Slaven Bilic, who went down as if pole-axed when Laurent Blanc of France pushed him.

"The problem is the simulation of injuries -- some (players) make out like they're dying but when you say 'I saw you' they get up and run around," said Buisaim.

Buisaim said FIFA's move to cut out dangerous tackles had largely been a success -- and he denied any knee-jerk reaction by referees after Blatter insisted they were being too soft earlier in the tournament.

"Don't think that we were influenced by non referee-commission people. We understand the law (on tackling from behind) -- it was very clear," said Buisaim.

"FIFA want to secure the safety of players. Tackles from behind, even from the front and the side, can endanger the safety of the players. That's what we're dealing with. The referees here have allowed the creative players to show their talent."

"It's a very fast game and human error will be there -- but we understand FIFA wants people to be able to see talent," Buisaim added.

Blatter intervened to demand tougher sanctions on tackling just before the South Africa vs Denmark first round match in which there were three sendings-off.

But Buisaim and Roigt denied Blatter's comments had influenced the match referee.

"It depends on the game -- it just happened it came in that match (that there were three red cards). We're dealing very strictly with tackling," Buisaim insisted.

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"I don't think it's a big problem. Shirt-pulling and simulating injury are the problems to solve. But we don't just have cards -- we have our personalities to explain to players their behaviour is unacceptable."

Roigt went as far as to say that "the refereeing in this game was not very good -- but all three red cards were correct. Since then we've seen much better games in my opinion."

Former England World Cup winner Jack Charlton, who coached Ireland in the 1990 and 1994 World Cups, meanwhile blasted the ban on tackles from behind.

"By tinkering again with the rules and banning the tackle from behind we have created a charter for cheats. When you stop players and coaches from doing something they will come up with something else," Charlton said.

Charlton said he believed coaches were now telling their players: "If you feel yourself touched go down."

kick to give Brazil the victory over Holland in the Cup semifinals Tuesday.

Igor Taffarel was born in Belo Horizonte, 210 miles (339 kms) north of Rio de Janeiro, as the gripping shoot-out took place, the O Dia newspaper reported. Bruna Taffarel came into the world in Brasilia, 577 miles (931 kms) northwest of Rio, shortly after.

Her parents considered naming their baby after Brazilian striker Ronaldo but opted for Taffarel after his match-winning performance, the daily reported.

Zidane has had an up and down time so far being sent off against Saudi Arabia earning a two-match suspension, but was back for their quarterfinal against Italy and Croatia semifinal clash.

"We have the chance to go down in history, we must grasp this chance," said Zidane who looked relaxed at the Clairefontaine national training centre to the south of Paris.

Flashback From page 16 an impact," said the 25-year-old with 51 caps.

"I have one last chance and I don't intend to waste it," he said of Sunday's final against France.

He will have to hope the French don't copy Denmark who ruined his free-kicks in the quarter-final by putting a player in his run-up path.

"I don't think that was really fair," he said. "But it was a good idea."

No fear From page 13 lem prompting him to settle for half an hour of gentle jogging around the pitch at the stadium here.

The team's top scorer with four goals did not take part in the training match, and neither did defender Junior Baiano or midfielder Cesar Sampaio, who settled for a run around.

Sampaio has a minor foot injury while Junior Baiano was trying to avoid further thigh trouble.

Team doctor Lidio Toledo said all three would be excused training today but Zagallo insisted their ailments were of no consequence.



READY FOR A RECALL! Brazil coach Mario Zagallo showing some of his vintage tricks at Ozoir-la-Ferriere during practice on July 9. — AFP photo

Ronaldo skips practice

OZOIR-LA-FERREIRE, France, July 10: Ronaldo missed Brazil's practice match here Thursday after logging for half an hour, reports AFP.

Team officials dismissed talk of an injury scare but the striker has been plagued by a knee problem throughout the World Cup and doctors have ordered he rest after Sunday's final against France.

The 21-year-old has scored four goals in six matches.

Zoff the next Italy coach?

ROME, July 10 (AFP/Internet): Cesare Maldini's future as Italy coach will be decided by the end of the month, Italian federation vice-president Giancarlo Abete said Thursday.

Former Italy goalkeeper and current Lazio club president Dino Zoff is tipped to take over.

The 66-year-old Maldini was criticised for Italy's negative tactics and blind faith in an uninspired Alessandro Del Piero in the World Cup.

France beat Italy in a penalty shoot-out after a goalless draw in the quarter-finals.

The Sao Paulo forward, who will join Betis of Spain next season for a world record 34.8 million dollars, said: "In some ways it's frustrating. But I think that pulling on the Brazilian colours at a World Cup at the age of 20 doesn't happen to everyone so I can't allow myself to get uptight about the slightest thing," he said.

Denilson has accepted his place in the current pecking order as a replacement for Ronaldo rather than as a partner for the FIFA world player-of-the-year.

The professor (as the players call Zagallo) has been straight with me and done exactly as he said he would, bringing me on in all the games I've started as sub and I have done what I can to respond to his demands."

"So I accepted the situation. I am privileged to be here and I am very happy."

He added he hoped Brazil supporters would not criticise Bebeto in a bid to ensure he came in instead.

Bebeto is a great and experienced footballer and he should be allowed to get on with playing. He is really strong and a batter and we should all think purely of sending out the team which will do the best job and overcome all obstacles in our way," Denilson said.

But he admitted: "It's always nice to hear the fans chanting your name -- it stimulates you and it's an important boost for me."

Denilson content

PARIS, France, July 10 (AFP/Internet): Brazil star Denilson insists he's happy just to be at the World Cup even if he's spent most of it on the bench.

And that's where Denilson -- full name Denilson de Oliveira -- will very probably start Sunday's World Cup final against France.

The 20-year-old with 20 caps has played only one full World Cup game but has appeared, usually late on, in all six.

Brought on for Bebeto in the semi-final against Holland he made an impact on the left with his speed and ball skills.

"He gives us an extra option in attack," said coach Mario Zagallo who usually puts Denilson on for the last half hour in place of the 34-year-old Bebeto.

"Brazil always used to have exceptional wingers, who were feared by our opponents," said Zagallo, modestly excluding himself from his list of the best, which was topped by Garrincha.

However, he would not commit himself to putting Denilson on at the start against France.

"He's still a young player and he mustn't get carried away with all the praise that is being heaped on him. Sometimes he exaggerates with his dribbling."

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Turf for sale!

PARIS, July 10: Fans unable to buy a ticket for the World Cup final can still bring home a piece of the action, reports Reuters.

The turf of the Stade de France where Brazil and France clash on Sunday is up for grabs after the final, daily Le Parisien reported today.

It will be cut into five-cm squares which will go on sale for 120 francs (20 dollars) each from Monday.

With some 3.6 million squares available the company running the stadium could cash in 432 million francs, Le Parisien said.

Zinedine takes aim

PARIS, France, July 10: France's footballing artist Zinedine Zidane will be doing his best to create a masterpiece in Sunday's World Cup final which will go down in football legend, reports AFP.

Zidane has had an up and down time so far being sent off against Saudi Arabia earning a two-match suspension, but was back for their quarterfinal against Italy and Croatia semifinal clash.

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Blanc ban

PARIS, July 10 (AFP/Internet): Laurent Blanc, sent off in Wednesday night's World Cup semi-final against Croatia, has been suspended for two international matches, FIFA said Thursday.

Spanish referee Jose Garcia-Aranda showed Blanc the red card after Croatia's Slaven Bilic collapsed in a penalty area tussle in the 74th minute of last night's match.

Bilic has been roundly condemned for play-acting and for getting another professional sent off.

Blanc had never been sent off in his football career, either at club level or in his 73 previous internationals.

The fury at Bilic is still raging throughout the football community.

Bilic is an outcast not only in France, as players and officials in England, where he plays his club football for Everton, have voiced disgust at his antics.

But he feels no remorse. "As a fellow professional I feel very sad for Blanc. But the bottom line is that I don't feel blame and I don't deserve to be blamed for my predicament," he says.

"He hit me intentionally in the face - he has admitted he lost control - and technically that is a sending-off. He made a mistake and he got punished for it."

The sad thing is that so many players in this tournament have made bigger and nastier challenges but got away with it."

But the Croat dug himself into a deeper hole when he called the French team that beat Croatia 2-1 in the semi-finals useless and told Pele to shut up.

"The French did not have a clue and every time Pele would say we win 5-0. I wish he would back up," he said.

"I am fed up with Brazil. You would think this tournament was made just for them," he added.

Gordon Taylor, head of England player union PFA, says video evidence should now be used to clamp down on play-acting cheats.

Television replays showed Blanc, who had never been shown the red card at club level or in 73 internationals, merely pushed Bilic, who clutched his forehead as he collapsed.

Even Croatia's biggest selling newspaper called for him to be axed for Saturday's third-place play-off against Holland.

But Veerjij's appeal is unlikely to be heard by coach Miroslav Blazevic.

English Premier League referee Steve Lodge said he has refereed Bilic a number of times and he admitted he had been surprised by his behaviour.

"I thought the red card was a little bit harsh," said Lodge. "I thought it should have been yellow instead of red for adopting an aggressive attitude."

"But the way Bilic went down, the referee understandably thought it was something more serious. He must have thought Blanc had dealt him a left or right hook by his reaction."

"I must say, though, I have refereed Bilic many, many times and I have never had any problem with the guy and I can only take people as I find them."

WC pickpockets

PARIS, July 10 (AFP/Internet): Some 40 international pickpockets, many of them South Americans, have been picked up in and around the Paris area since the June 10 launch of the World Cup, police said Thursday.

A police report said the pickpockets, including Chileans, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Albanians, Romanians and Yugoslavs, were believed to have travelled specially to France for the football tournament.

They were detained snatching or attempting to snatch bags and purses in railway stations, the Paris underground and the city's two football stadiums and on crowded streets.

Police during the same period last year arrested four Chileans on charges of pickpocketing.

All-Stars

From page 13 the Dutch into the quarterfinal with a last-minute goal against the Yugoslavs.

Argentina's Ariel Ortega was a livewire midfielder who burst past opponents with his darting runs to open up goal-scoring chances. But his ejection for head-butting Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar in the quarterfinal would keep him off an All-Star team.

French defender Laurent Blanc, ejected from the semifinal for pushing Croatia's Slaven Bilic in the face, also would be left off an All-Star team. Blanc, who scored the first sudden-death goal in World Cup history to put France into the last eight, could have made the team alongside countrymen Desailly and Thuram.

The powerfully built Desailly let very little past him in the six games he has played. Now he has to team up with Ronaldo and Bebeto in the final, and the French are confident he can handle the pressure.

Thuram performed consistently on the right side of the defence for France even before he came up with his two goals in the semifinal victory over Croatia.

Frank de Boer was assured and confident on the ball in a Dutch defence that was considered a weak point. Going forward, he also set up Bergkamp's wonder goal in the final minutes against Argentina with an accurately aimed pass from about 60 yards.

So Campbell showed a maturity far beyond his age of 23, especially when Ferdinand had to play for 75 minutes short-handed against Argentina after David Beckham was ejected. Campbell thought he had scored England's game-winner, but the ref waved it off because of a foul by teammate Alan Shearer. Argentina ended up winning on penalties.

It was a lapse by Thuram that led to Suiker's goal for the Croats. But he made up for it with a determined charge upfield to score the equaliser a minute later. He scored the game-winner on a low 20-yard blast after stripping the ball from an opponent.

Based on his previous performances, Taffarel came into the World Cup considered a weak link in the Brazilian team. But the goalkeeper, who saved a penalty in the shootout in the '94 Cup final against the Italians, got Brazil to the final again with two saves against the Dutch in a shootout.

Besides that brilliant performance, he's looked solid during play.

Among the eye-catching players from the teams knocked out early were Japan's 21-year-old orange-haired midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata, who could become a star when his country is co-host of the 2002 World Cup with South Korea.

And Morocco's Mostafa El Hadji, scorer of a memorable goal against Norway.

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, July 10 (AP): Come on you Reds!

The World Cup has produced an All-Stars lineup with a difference.

Dutch star Patrick Kluyvert teams with Frenchman Zinedine Zidane in attack with England's David Beckham and Argentina's Ariel Ortega sparking the moves from behind.

At the back, talented French star Laurent Blanc patrols the defence alongside Germany's Christian Woerns and Dutch defender Arthur Numan.

Throw in Cameroon defender Rigobert Song, Scottish midfielder Craig Burley and his Glasgow Celtic teammate from Denmark, Morten Wieghorst, and the lineup is taking shape.

All it needs is a goalkeeper. But there isn't one.