

A June 26 photograph of Moroccan Referee Said Belqola who will be officiating tonight's final between Brazil and France at Stade de France, Saint Denis. -AFP photo

Crowning kings

PARIS, July 11 (AP/ Internet): With as much as a third of the planet watching. Brazil wants to show it's King of the World in soccer, the game closest to its heart and soul. France would like to be King of the World - period.

Soccer for decades has personified Brazil, where it is a way of life more than a sport. The French, suddenly within reach of the treasured World Cup, see it as a means to heal rifts and restore glory.

That little ball has done a lot for humanity -- and for France," said Philippe Debarge, a laid-back Parisian landscaper who scoffs at blind patriotism but suddenly finds himself very proud to be French.

Reaching the finals has unified us," he said. "Arab and black slum kids share something with rich whites. I see now why this game is so important to so many people everywhere."

France's frenzy over reaching the final against Brazil on Sunday was heavily "cocorico,"

a term imitating a rooster that means celebrating Frenchness. The victory energized a nation fraught with self-doubt

over the growing dominance of European union and American accents in an old world the French did much to shape. A grand beau geste, winning

the golden trophy in their brand new stadium, with the whole world watching, would please the French no end. And if they fail, at least they had the last crack at Brazil.

"Of course, we'd love to win at this time in our history." Debarge said, typifying a general

"But to play such a beautiful team is already something. Win

or lose, it's wonderful." For Brazil, a loss is unthinkable. This is a centuryending chance to win a fifth World Cup in a sport that Brazilians live for.

The country stops dead during a match. After each of their early round wins, fans left the stadium looking troubled amid the jubilance. All else was preliminary to the final.

"We stank," muttered Luciana Alvez, a Sao Paulo lawyer, after Norway beat Brazil. Her team had already qualified for the next round, but

she was scared. "If we play like this, we're dead.

Brazilians flew over by the tens of thousands, and their vellow shirts fill the stands. Their full-body cheers ripple like waves, perfectly timed and choreographed, punctuated by deafening drums.

A referee's call, or an opponent's foul, is instantly chastised by a stadiumwide chant. Each fan has strategic advice. Brazil is a nation of 120 million soccer coaches.

Before and after each game, joyful carnival music reminds everyone else that soccer may be serious, but it's also fun.

The French have always been ambivalent toward soccer, more intellectual than passionate about it. They have limited practice at winning and a scant tradition of displaying popular passions.

After the victory against Croatia in the semifinals, team captain Didier Deschamps criticized the dark-suited French VIPs in the stadium who, he said, acted as if they had just come from a funeral.

"That better not happen Sunday," he said. "We don't want to hear only 90 minutes of samba.'

But, at this World Cup, Frenchmen outnumber the Brazilians considerably, and wild support is assured in bars and cafes and living rooms all over France.

If many people first looked with skepticism at a gigantic event that would fill their streets with sandwich-eating foreigners, most have now caught the fever. Grandeur is at stake.

Real French soccer lovers. from the beginning, dreamed of this final showdown. Brazilians master skills they most admire: dazzling footwork to control the ball, daring assaults and thoughtful teamwork.

Above all, French fans believe it is finally their turn. "This Cup belongs to us."

midfielder Youri Djorkaeff declared early on. "Our team was born for this competition." Frenchmen remember that

the World Cup scoring record --13 goals -- belongs to their own Just Fontaine. That was 1958, when Brazil beat France in the semifinals.

See page 14





DCUP'98 SPEC

PARIS, July 11 (AP): It's the dream final.

Brazil and France, soccer's royalty and their gallant hosts, duel on Sunday in the City of Lights for the glory of the biggest, longest and mostwatched World Cup in history.

After 31 days and 63 games, the record field of 32 countries has been whittled to these two. The perennial champions and a first-time finalist. The No 1 offence and the top defence. The hometown team and everybody else's favourite.

It's every bit the drama and pageantry the world expects from the French, and a billionsomething people around the planet are expected to tune in to watch the last Cup of the cen-Brazilian coach Mario Za-

gallo, who has won four World Cups as a player, coach or assistant, knows what this game "This is the biggest sporting

event of the century," he said. "We are representing the Americas, and we cannot let this chance escape from our hands." If the Brazilians feel they belong here, the French have never gotten past the semifi-

nals. It's all a little heady. "We have to realise our adventure is not over yet," said coach Aime Jacquet.

Jacquet's trump card is a stingy defence that has given up just two goals, in six games, the best in the Cup. But Laurent Blanc, a bulwark of the back line, won't be there.

The Olympique Marseille de-fender was expelled and drew a two-game suspension for pushing Croatia's Slaven Bilic in the face in the semifinal. Chelsea's Frank Leboeuf will start alongside Marcel Desailly and get the task of stopping Ronaldo, Bebeto and company.

"We have an anti-Ronaldo plan ready. It's called Marcel Desailly," said French captain Didier Deschamps.

Jacquet also must find a solution for his punchless attack A French striker hasn't found the net since the first round defenders Blanc and Lilian Thuram did all the scoring as France squeaked by Paraguay. Italy and Croatia.

The key is playmaker Zinedine Zidane. The Juventus attacker had a so-so game against Croatia and must shine against Brazil, unlocking the defence for Inter Milan striker Youri Djorkaeff, or if that fails, for himself

affectionately call him, the underdog role suits France fine. "Brazil is the favourite. The whole world sees the Brazilians winning against us. So much

For "Zi Zou," as the French

the better," he said Of course, the Brazilians see themselves winning, too. But they also have something to

Despite scoring 14 goals and showing flashes of greatness Brazil hasn't been the overwhelming force everyone expected. They often played just See page 14



PARIS, July 11 (AP): He played with passion, and a decade later Michel Platini used the same fiery presence to organise the World Cup. On Saturday, that emotion spilled over as he recalled golden moments and a departed friend.

As 60 million French citizens eagerly awaited Sunday's championship match against Brazil, their greatest soccer hero said he was happy to be one of them for bringing off the world's biggest single sports event in a joyful atmosphere.

Then Platini cried, not for the passing of his youth or the end of a job that has consumed him for six years. His tears were for Fernand Sastre, the father of this very French World Cup. who died on the eve of play after a long battle with cancer.

"I'm very proud," Platini said. "And Fernand is looking at us from above, and probably very proud as well."

Heavier now, a chainsmoker away from the cameras, Platini still has the curly black hair that marked him on the field. although it's a bit thinner on top than when he was captain of World Cup semifinal teams in 1982 and 1986.

That second Cup featured another meeting between France and Brazil, in the quarterfinals in Guadalajara, Mexico, and France won 4-3 in a shootout after a 1-1 tie through overtime. Platini scored the French goal on a very special

"I have great memories," he said, the tears for Sastre now stopped and his dark eyes flashing. "It was my birthday, and we beat Brazil. And I scored my last goal for the national team."

As co-presidents of France '98, Platini and Sastre secured government financial guarantees that helped bring the tournament here, then organised an event that came off in true French form — cutting-edge technology, stylish appearance, a little arrogance around the

At a news conference to mark the winding down of the biggest World Cup yet, Platini and officials from French and international soccer bodies acknowledged again that the event had been marred by ticket scandals and street violence in Marseille and Lens.

French prosecutors are investigating several cases of brokers and tour operators defrauding visiting fans, who were left without game tickets far from home. In Lens, a northern industrial town, a policeman remains in a coma after German neo-Nazis bashed his head in with an iron bar after the Germany-Yugoslavia match.

No problems were reported in or around the stadiums. though, and the games produced exciting soccer before enthusiastic sellout crowds, with no major glitches.

"I've had a very easy task," said Lennart Johansson, head of FIFA's World Cup organising panel. "Almost everything went perfectly well."

"I'm very proud to be a Frenchman. I think France can achieve great things."

Is God Brazilian? Jacquet canonised

BRASILIA, July 11 (Reuters/ Internet): Brazil's self-styled No. 1 soccer fan will traipse to church through dawn's early light on Sunday, write a note to the saints asking for victory in the World Cup final over France and quietly leave it on the altar.

Marilza Guimaraes da Silva, her toenails painted a prideful green and yellow, will then sip tea in her green and yellow apartment to calm her nerves until just before kick off.

Then she will light candles and kneel before her green and vellow television set to whisper a prayer.

"Holiest Mother of God, go to the Brazilian team in their prematch meeting and go to the soccer pitches of France ..." she will mutter before settling down to the game. She will have rosary beads in one hand and a pump to measure her blood pressure in the other.

The doctor wants me to stay in (the) hospital but I would die if I didn't see the game," said Guimaraes, 47, a nurse from Brasilia.

For Guimaraes and many millions of Brazilians, soccer transcends sport. It is a fundamental part of life which has given the nation something to feel good about through decades of economic chaos and growing poverty.

Brazil's heroes are nearly all soccer players like Pele, Romario and now Ronaldo, al-

though race car champion Ayrton Senna and a few singers are also held in high esteem. "In rich countries, people

UNITED: Brazilian players practicing in a circle at Ozoir la Ferreire on July 10.

treat the game as just that, a game. For the Brazilians, soccer is fundamental to our self-esteem," said anthropologist Roberto da Matta. He said the sight of Brazilians outwitting supposedly

more advanced Europeans on a soccer field awoke a deep but often dormant sense of patriotism in South America's biggest nation. "We're always last in everything and not least in terms of wealth distribution. But not in

football. We rule the waves when it comes to soccer," da Matta said. Brazil's success in this World Cup in France has produced a tidal wave of good feel

ing in Brazil. It was cited by pollsters as a factor behind strong growth in the popularity of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso

ahead of October's elections. Cardoso, a university professor by training with no personal interest in the sport, seemed to be milking World Cup fervour when he declared God to be on Brazil's side after the tense quarterfinal victory over Denmark.

the championship game also has been a bonanza for Brazil's See page 14

The national team's ride to

CLAIREFONTAINE, France,

July 11 (AP): Even ahead of the final, France already canonized him Saint Aime. Looking at what Aime Jacquet has gone through over the past months. some might just call him a martyr who has converted masses of disbelievers. When he took the helm four

years ago, the future looked bleak. Now he has one game ahead of him to win France's first World Cup, with a team that has stuck together and stood by him, known better for its cohesion than individual "Now, we have the energy

that can move mountains," said Jacquet and the only mountain left is Brazil in Sunday's final at Saint-Denis. Whatever happens, the 57-

year-old bows out after the final, drained by unceasing criticism and the enormity of the task of turning a bunch of losers into World Cup finalists. First, the goal was to reach

the final four, then it was to reach the final, and when the final whistle went after the 2-1 come from behind win against Croatia, he could not even celebrate. He just stood there, dazed. "I was knocked out, standing

up," he said. When he realised the achievement, with France throwing the biggest party in decades, he broke down crying.

Outside France, Jacquet basically was a no-name coming

into the World Cup finals. French coaching was identified with Arsene Wenger, who turned England's Arsenal around and into this season's league and cup double winner.

-AFP photo

Jacquet was bookish, boorish, talked a convoluted, lousy game and could not produce flair for Les Bleus in his first years as coach. He looks wirv and exudes no aura. He became a soft target for critics and it has taken a long time to prove them wrong.

And in as unpredictable and irrational a game as soccer, he relied on a technical four-year masterplan that, in retrospect brought him right into the championship game.

After all, he was the coach who decided against using greats Eric Cantona and David Ginola, when both were at their prime, a brave move when he was already criticised for producing dull soccer. But team unity prevailed,

and the flashy forwards didn't First he harnessed the team

into the stringent defensive straightjacket that yielded a 1996 semifinal loss at the European Championship and loads of media criticism. And during the last two

years without a competitive game on the schedule, his experimenting often dumbfounded observers and rarely produced See page 14



WORLD CUP SPECIAL OPERA: A vast crowd listen to one of opera's greats Luciano Pavarotti singing live at the feet of Eiffel Tower on July 10. Italian Pavarotti along with two other big names in opera Spaniards Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras were performing free as they have done during Italia '90 and USA '94. -AFP photo



PARIS, July 11: The celebrated Three Tenors' kicked off festivities for the 1998 World Cup final with a concert at the foot of France's Eiffel Tower on Friday, but the expected crowds failed to materialise, reports Reuters.

For Jose Carreras, Flacido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti it was a hattrick of World Cup performances, following hugely successful concerts in Rome in 1990 and Los Angeles But the balmy summer

nights in Italy and the United States were a distant memory on a chilly, windswept Parisian evening with both big-name stars and the general public staying away. Organisers had billed the

French spectacular as the biggest concert of all time with the two-hour, 45 minute show broadcast live to more than 75 countries before an estimated global television audience of some two billion people. In addition, around 800,000 people were expected to turn up

in the massive Champs de Mars park to see the famed trio in the flesh, in the end, police esti-mated only some 80,000 made Even the VIP stand, where top tickets cost up to 6,500 francs (1,600 dollars) apiece.

was dotted with empty seats and many people slunk away before the end to escape the cold. "If it had been a beautiful day there would have been a lot

more people," said one official from the interior ministry. But if the poor turn out dis-

appointed the Tanors, they did not show it as they returned to the red carpeted stage for a series of encourses before an emptying auditorium. Accompanied by the orchestra of Paris, the trio sang their

now-standard mix of arias and

popular tunes against the dra-

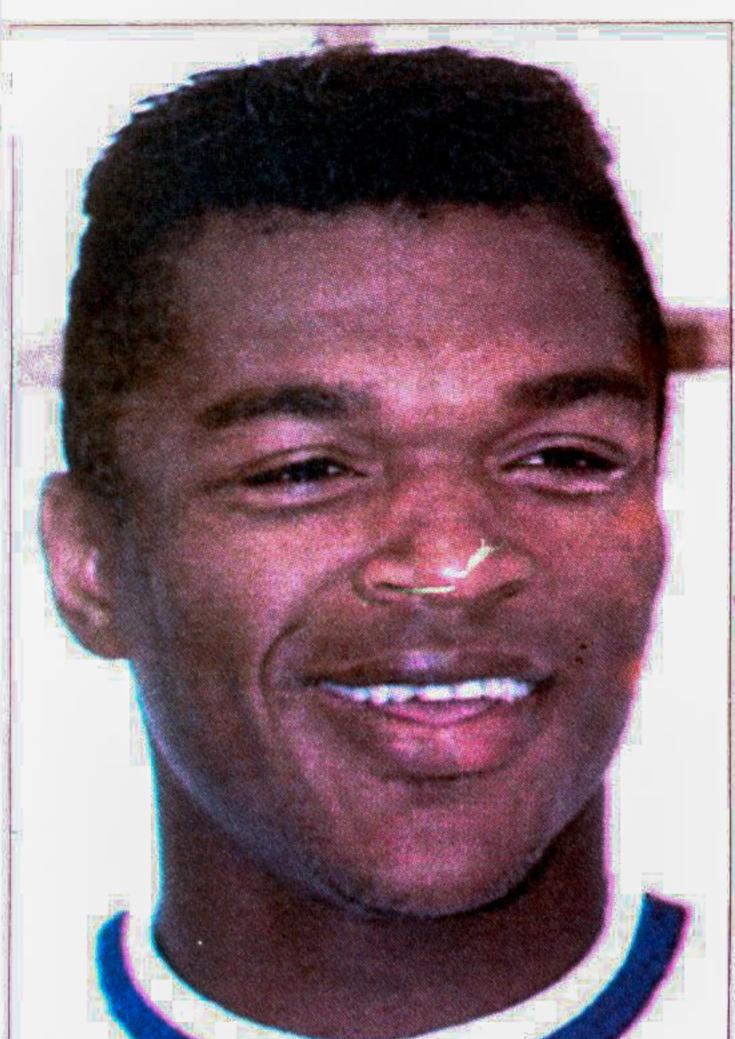
matic backdrop of the illuminated tower. Swooping verdi classics for soccer anthems, 'The Tenors' brought the audience to its feet with their rich rendition of 'you'll never walk alone' its quality infinitely superior to the sound familiar on the terraces

of Liverpool Soccer Club. Football is a common passion for the three men, whose lofty singing has since 1990 been married with images of the game's moments of high skill and intense emotion.

The 1990 recording of the Rome concert is the biggest selling classical concert album of all time, while the 1994 concert was seen by a television audience of 1.3 billion people in more than 100 countries.

The trio's soccer knowledge was revealed earlier this year when they told a joint news conference well ahead of the World Cup that they expected Brazil and France to triumph. Those two teams meet in Sunday's final.

Pavarotti, an Italian and See page 14



HOSTS' PILLAR AT THE BACK: Marcel Desailly, the uncompromising French defender talking to reporters at the July 9 press conference. -AFP photo

