

# A hattrick to forget



Viveros into handling needlessly.

The striker placed the ball on the spot but his powerful left-shot crashed against the crossbar.

Five minutes later Colombians Ivan Cordoba converted the only successful penalty of the match -- five were awarded in all with Cordoba's teammate Hamilton Ricard also missing the task.

This time he went for placement instead of power but Colombian keeper Miguel Calero dived to his left and pushed the ball out.

Palermo hung his head in despair.

However, the only predictable thing about Palermo is his unpredictability. It remains to be seen whether it is the Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde side of his character that will be to the fore when Argentina tackle Uruguay in their last Group C match.

But Palermo is quite capable of confounding his critics yet again.

In injury-time Paraguayan referee Ubaldo Aquino awarded

LUQUE, Paraguay, July 5: Argentina striker Martin Palermo looked like he wished Nostradamus' prediction that the world would end Sunday had come true after missing an astonishing three penalties during his side's 3-0 defeat by Colombia in a Copa America Group C match here Sunday, reports AFP.

The Boca Juniors striker must have wished the earth would part and swallow him up after recording an unwanted hattrick that left football statisticians around the world rethinking for the record books.

Palermo is known as 'El Loco' (the madman) in Argentina. And few would dispute that nickname after his bizarre performance against the Colombians.

Despite his triple bungle Palermo is seen as one of the brightest stars in the Argentinian game and had made a superb start to the Copa America with two goals in his side's opening victory against Ecuador.

The player was earlier this year voted the best footballer in South America -- no mean feat.

His consistency for Argentinian champions Boca has earned him many admirers and Spanish *Primera Liga* side Atletico Madrid are one of many top European sides to have been linked with the well-built forward.

But his unpredictable behaviour has landed him in trouble in the past with referees. He was reported to the police after an unusual goal celebration with Boca teammate Juan Riquelme. Palermo dropped his shorts and simulated a lewd act with his teammate.

Palermo did not take long to make his somewhat idiosyncratic mark on what turned out to be a thrilling match with Colombia.

After four minutes Argentina were awarded the first penalty of the match when the dangerous Palermo panicked Colombian defender Alexander



Argentina's prolific striker Martin Palermo is furious after missing the second penalty shot against Colombia on July 4. — AFP photo

# Pele's nightmare for MU



UNDATED, July 5 (Internet Report): Pele last night exposed the foolishness of Manchester United's decision to pull out of this season's FA Cup in favour of the World Club Championship in Brazil.

The most famous footballer in the world joined the row which is splitting English football when he claimed his own country is incapable of staging a major tournament.

In a grim warning to United manager Alex Ferguson, Pele said: "We do not have one stadium which is up to World Cup standard or could even meet the minimum conditions laid down by FIFA. Not even the Maracana. It's in a terrible state."

The row over United's decision to play in Brazil next January reached boiling point as Fergie's Treble-winning squad prepared to return to pre-season training today.

Sports Minister Tony Banks claimed he did not force United to withdraw from the FA Cup - while Ferguson insisted their hand was forced in order to help England's 2006 World Cup bid.

Banks said: "Ultimately it was United's decision to take part in world club competition."

But Fergie retorted: "It was clear that what the FA and Government wanted was for us to be in Brazil next January."

United's move may be a source of huge regret when they hear a list of chilling warnings for their stars. They Safety fears about the world famous Maracana Stadium which "should be blown up," according to Brazil's former FA president Joao Havelange, who says it is "falling apart".

Major security risks as the murder rate in Sao Paulo was 7,500 in 1995 - which is 50 times the rate in London.

Foreign Office advice to tourists not to resist muggers as many are armed, and to "avoid the central area after dark".

Reports of widespread credit card fraud and drug trafficking.

News that cholera is close to epidemic levels as mosquito-borne diseases are on the increase.

Quotes from 1970 World Cup winner Tostao describing Brazilian football as "the most violent in the world". Two Brazilian teams - Vasco da

Gama and Corinthians - will be playing in the eight-team tournament.

Pele is furious that the Brazilian government should even consider holding this event and bidding for the 2006 World Cup while the nation is in such demise.

The Dutch international team were horrified by the lack of facilities they encountered at the stadium when they played at two friendlies in Brazil in May.

It left Holland boss Frank Rijkaard declaring: "We took every possible precaution but still the heat, the food and the water got us."

"It's not healthy for highly-trained European athletes."

The Dutch took all their own food and a personal chef but ten players were still struck down by stomach bugs. Six of their stars had to flee the pitch during the game - and the match was delayed for 25 minutes while they rushed to the filthy toilets as they suffered stomach bugs.

The Dutch stars also warn of pitch invasions from fans among the 100,000 flare-firing crowd, which sparked a brutal response from armed riot police.

Holland skipper Frank De Boer said: "We've been all around the world to Asia, America, Europe and Russia with Ajax and the national side, but I've never experienced a trip like that."

"It wasn't just the food, water and hygiene - other conditions do not make it easy either. United will have to face temperatures of up to 112C during the height of the day."

Players get so dehydrated in those conditions and overall the hygiene standards are difficult.

"I wouldn't like to go there in the middle of a European season because it takes such a long time to get over it."

Ferguson last night admitted he is concerned about the health and security fears.

He added: "We are looking at everything we can to make the trip a success. We are looking at the food, medical care and travel arrangements."

"We'll ensure everything is done to ease the strain."

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Look at the battle going on between England and Germany. We couldn't compete with that."

"I don't think Brazil could be ready for ten years. We don't have one stadium which is up to the minimum conditions laid down by FIFA." The Maracana could hold 200,000 fans when it

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