

Dahlin hangs up his boots

STOCKHOLM, July 6: Sweden's international striker Martin Dahlin said on Monday he was being forced to quit soccer because of a severe back injury, reports Reuters.

Kowalski won't be rushed

GOLD COAST, Australia, July 6: Australian triple Olympic medalist Daniel Kowalski won't be making a premature return to the swimming pool after shoulder surgery, his coach Denis Cottrell said today, reports AFP.

SOCOG says sorry

SYDNEY, July 6: Sydney Olympics organizing president Michael Knight has apologized to American and Japanese schoolchildren axed from the opening ceremony but says the decision won't be reversed, reports AP.

About 1,300 Americans and 200 Japanese marching band members were booked to play at the opening ceremony for next year's Summer Games on Sept. 16. After a local outrage, SOCOG dropped the foreigners and has offered a compromise deal.

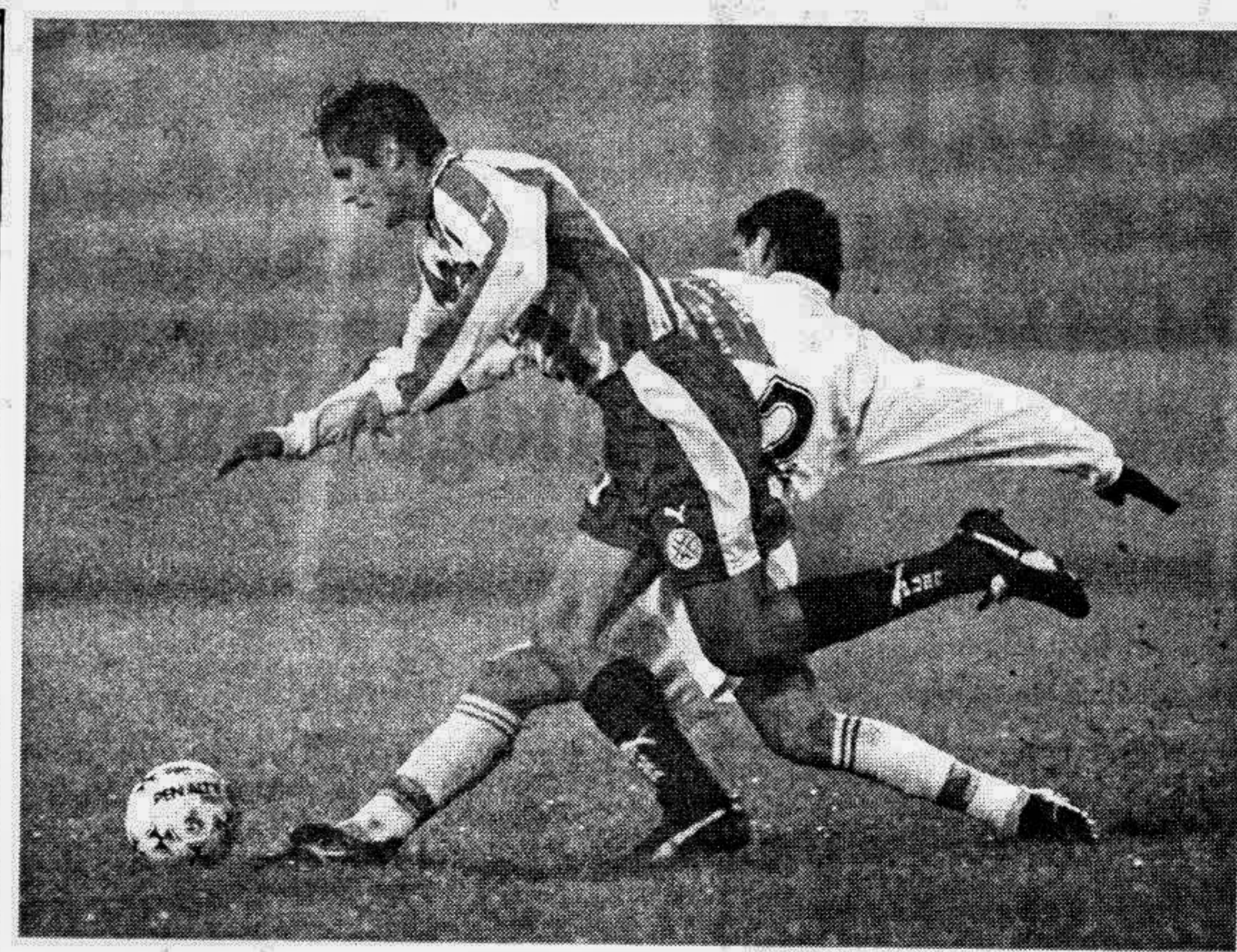
Twenty American and Japanese band leaders are in Sydney this week to be briefed by SOCOG chief executive Sandy Hollway on the compromise worked out with World Projects Corporation president Bill Lutt, who's responsible for assembling the band.

SOCOG wants the children to perform at prominent Sydney sites like the Opera House and Darling Harbour during the Games, although they would be excluded from Olympic venues including the opening ceremony.

The coordinator of the Southern California school marching bands, Roy Anthony, has described the compromise as "unacceptable" and legal action has been threatened against SOCOG.

Top women's tennis earners

- ST PETERSBURG, Florida, July 6 (Reuters): Top money-winner this year in women's tennis, according to WTA Tour rankings:
PLAYER DOLLARS
1. Martina Hingis 1,534,180
2. Steffi Graf 1,189,667
3. Lindsay Davenport 1,160,263
4. Venus Williams 886,582
5. Serena Williams 662,671
6. Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario 469,180
7. Jana Novotna 327,046
8. Monica Seles 324,002
9. Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario 319,192
10. Mary Pierce 311,726
11. Amelie Mauresmo 302,657
12. Elena Likhovtseva 286,257
13. Nathalie Tauziat 279,870
14. Corina Morariu 260,330
15. Justine Henin-Hardenne 251,995
16. Barbara Schett 242,885
17. Lisa Raymond 230,389
18. Conchita Martinez 229,292



TOO HOT TO HANDLE: Paraguay's exciting youngster Roque Santa Cruz (L) tries to go past a Peruvian defender during their Copa America fixture on July 5. —AFP photo

Hosts, Peru in last eight



PEDRO JUAN CABALLERO, Paraguay, July 6: A late goal from the world's costliest teenager Roque Santa Cruz saw hosts Paraguay beat Peru 1-0 to top group A although Peru also made the Copa America quarter-finals following the earlier elimination of Japan and Bolivia, reports AFP.

PARAGUAY-PERU Santa Cruz, who left Olimpia Asuncion for German champions Bayern Munich in May, rounded Peruvian keeper Oscar Ibanez in the 88th minute for a classy finish and his third goal of the tournament.

It was a result that Paraguay deserved after creating the better chances and dominating the second half. However, Peru made the better start with playmaker Roberto Palacios at the hub of some impressive early moves.

Peru continued to outpace Paraguay but the two best

chances of the first half both fell to the host nation. First striker Miguel Angel Benitez shot over from close range after the Peru defence failed to pick him up at a free-kick.

Next Hugo Ovalar, in acres of space, failed to take advantage after springing the offside trap. Just one minute after the interval 17-year-old Santa Cruz came the closest yet when he hurled himself at a cross and saw his header come back off the angle of post and crossbar.

Then on the hour Benitez produced the miss of the night - possibly the miss of the tournament - after he fired over from point blank range after Ibanez failed to hold a shot.

As Paraguay turned up the heat defender Delio Toledo brought the save of the night from Ibanez. Benitez was finally withdrawn but Santa Cruz again tested Ibanez with the Peruvian again proving equal to the challenge.

Paraguay were dominating the second half play after the break but then Peru's Andres Mendoza missed a glorious opportunity, sidestepping over from 10 yards.

Then as the ball ricocheted around the Peruvian penalty box the ball again hit the woodwork with a defender appearing to get the final touch.

Temper frayed as Paraguay continued to push and at one point a brawl nearly ensued. Then Santa Cruz sprung the offside trap to produce the only goal.

BOLIVIA-JAPAN Earlier a 1-1 draw ensured Copa America guests Japan finished bottom of group A and also assigned Bolivia to an early exit as their points haul of two will leave them as the worst of the three third-placed teams.

The draw gave Japan their first point of the tournament but their overall poor performance will turn up the heat on their under-pressure French coach Philippe Troussier charged with turning them into a competitive team by the time they co-host the 2002 World Cup with Korea.

Within a minute Bolivia had forced a freekick and Erwin Sanchez's shot was well held by Japanese goalkeeper Seigo Narazaki.

Japan looked at their most dangerous set pieces and their Brazilian-born star Wagner Lopes just failed to get on the end of a freekick when he was well placed to score.

Narazaki again came to the rescue for Japan when he did well to parry a long distance shot from Bolivian striker Victor Antelo.

After 27 minutes Sanchez nudged Platini for his freekick prowess - curbed another dead ball just over the bar.

Then Jaime Moreno produced a brilliant run to the byline only to misplace his cross with two Bolivian colleagues well positioned.

Lopes again showed his aerial strength forcing a good save from goalkeeper Jose Carlos Fernandez.

Then, with the interval looming, Bolivia were reduced to 10 men when Oscar Sanchez was dismissed for a scything tackle on Toshiya Fujita.

Sanchez was reluctant to leave the field departing the field some two minutes later. Seven minutes after the interval Erwin Sanchez again had the chance to demonstrate his freekick prowess and this time he did not disappoint.

As the stadium filled up with Paraguay fans for the match with Peru that would follow this fixture Japan seemed to take heart from the partisan backing of the home fans.

Real, Barca chase for Ronaldinho

MADRID, July 6: Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona are both in the chase to sign rising Brazilian star Ronaldo Gauchio, it was reported Monday, reports AFP.

The 19-year-old Gremio striker is known as Ronaldo Gauchio, Ronaldinho or Ronaldinho to avoid confusion with his more famous Brazil team-mate Ronaldo, who plays for Inter Milan in Italy.

Madrid sports paper As, closely linked with Real, says Real are poised to bid for the striker, who scored a brilliant goal in Brazil's Copa America 7-0 win over Venezuela.

Real president Lorenzo Sanz said: "There are means of making him come."

Meanwhile, Barcelona paper Sport claimed the player would like to play for Barca - where his namesake played.

Ronaldo Gauchio said: "I am sure that Barca would be a great opportunity because Romario, Ronaldo and Rivaldo all played there."

Sport maintains that the Nou Camp giants would be equally keen to secure the services of the player.

Troussier fairly satisfied PEDRO JUAN CABALLERO, Paraguay, July 6: Japan coach Philippe Troussier said Monday he thought the experience of playing in the Copa America would stand his team in good stead when they co-host the 2002 World Cup with Korea, reports AFP.

The Frenchman remained upbeat even though Japan had finished bottom of group A with a 1-1 draw in their last match with Bolivia - also eliminated - giving them their only point of the campaign.

Troussier said: "The Copa is over for us and I think the result tonight justifies our elimination."

The Frenchman pointed out his team had not had much preparation but admitted he had been expected from Japan, who were invited to compete as guests in the South American championships.

Troussier, who coached South Africa in last year's World Cup, was the subject of criticism by the Japanese press even before the Copa America and his team's poor performance here will not ease the pressure on the man charged with turning Japan into a credible world force by the 2002 World Cup.

Blake passes first test NEWPORT, July 6: James Blake made an auspicious professional debut, rallying to defeat former Wimbledon finalist MaliVai Washington 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the Hall of Fame Tennis Championships, reports AP.

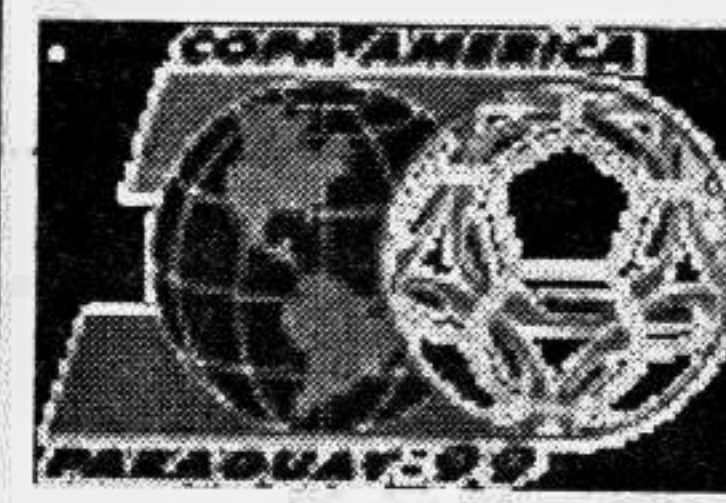
Blake, 19, who reached the National Collegiate Athletic Association final as a Harvard University sophomore before turning pro three weeks ago, blamed nerves for his rough first set Monday.

"After the first set, I told myself to stop worrying and have fun," Blake said. "Going into the match, I had so many thoughts going through my head."

Blake, who competed in the tournament, sponsored by Miller Lite, as an amateur last year, said one of those thoughts was his opponent.

"He was a role model of mine my whole life. The first set I think I was a little tight because of who he is."

Passarella arrives for River Plate derby



LUQUE, Paraguay, July 6: Uruguay coach Daniel Passarella has arrived in Paraguay Monday as his team prepare for their crucial Copa America Group C match with his former team Argentina on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Passarella, who skipped Argentina to World Cup victory in 1978 and coached them in last year's World Cup in France, was appointed coach to Uruguay in May - but he has left team matters in the hands of youth coach Victor Pua for the duration of the Copa.

Uruguay's 2-1 victory over Ecuador Sunday night lifted them above Argentina, beaten 3-0 by Colombia, into second place in Group C - the so-called Group of Death.

With neither side yet guaranteed a place in the quarter-finals the Uruguay v Argentina match could see either team eliminated although both could still go through with Colombia as the best two third placed teams will also progress.

The Battle of the River Plate countries is significant for many reasons. Both teams, with 14 wins each, are seeking a record 15th Copa America title. Their geographical proximity - on opposite sides of the River Plate - always makes this a local derby.

But Passarella's presence adds extra spice even if he will only be watching from the stands as he observes his new charges before deciding his policy for the 2002 World Cup qualifying campaign on which his success or failure will be judged.

He remains a national hero in Argentina ever since leading his native country to their first World Cup triumph on home soil back in 1978.

The Uruguay Football Association (AUF) had to rely on the generosity of sponsors to put together the package that persuaded Passarella across the River Plate to coach the "Celeste" (Sky Blues).

Uruguay, ranked only 74th in the latest FIFA standings, are the fallen giants of world football and have failed to qualify for the last two World Cups.

It is now 49 years since their second and last World Cup triumph against Brazil in Rio de Janeiro's legendary Maracana Stadium in front of a world record crowd of 199,584 and Passarella has been given the task of building a team capable of becoming a world force again with qualification for the 2002 tournament his top priority.

Pua has put his faith in youth for the Copa while Passarella has until now remained in the Uruguayan resort of Punta del Este preparing his World Cup offensive.

Pua has produced highly successful youth teams with Uruguay and this will be the basis on which Passarella will build his side.

AUF officials have confirmed Passarella will attend the game in Luque that could see either his new team or his old outfit consigned to an early flight home.



Brazilian stars Ronaldo (L) and Rivaldo during practice in Foz de Iguazu, Brazil on July 5. —AFP photo

Diego on the attack stars Gabriel Batistuta, Hernan Crespo, Juan Sebastian Veron and Claudio Lopez, who were less than enthusiastic about joining the squad.

And Maradona blasted the current generation of internationals, for in his view, lacking the necessary pride in the national colours.

"There is no time for holidaying or saying one is tired. People are right to get to those who aren't playing in the Copa," he said.

Palermo, who was the first Argentine to score in the Copa, blasted the side's weak showing at the Copa America, but defended Martin Palermo after the striker missed a hat-trick of penalties against Colombia, reports AFP.

Smartering from his country's 3-0 hammering by the Colombians late Sunday, Maradona told Argentine radio that the two-times world champions were losing their pre-eminence in the game "after fighting so much to rise so high" in days when he was terrifying the best defences around.

But the controversial 38-year-old absolved Palermo from any blame.

Boca Juniors' Palermo, attracting huge interest from a host of Spanish clubs, became the first Argentine international to miss three spot-kicks in a match, blasting one against the bar, one over and having one saved against the Colombians on an extraordinary evening.

"At least he had the guts and courage to ask to take them," said Maradona.

"Rather than blame Palermo one has to ask who is running the Argentine set-up (coach Marcelo Bielsa or Argentine Federation president Julio Grondona?)" Maradona added.

The former star blasted the absence of European-based players.

"Enough of this nonsense that 'my toe hurts or my head hurts'. The pride of each and every one of them is at stake," said Maradona, in clear reference to the missing big names.

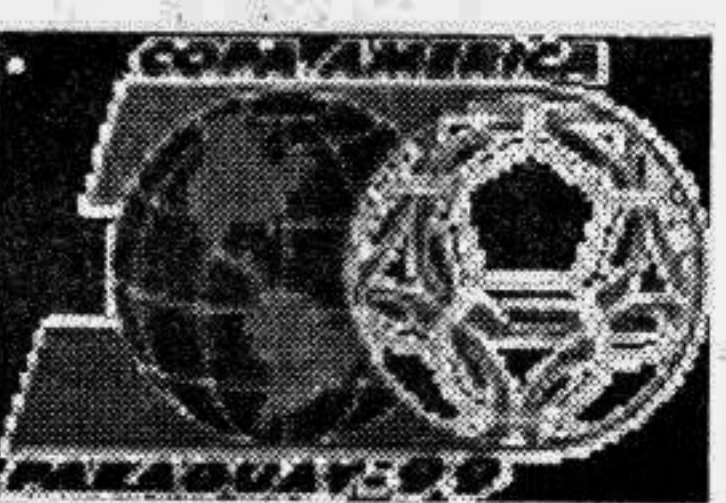
Maradona also revealed that, despite the result, he preferred the team which lost to Colombia than that which started the Copa by beating Ecuador 3-1. Palermo scored two goals in that match.

Argentine must beat Uruguay if their remaining match to be guaranteed a place in the quarter-finals although they could still qualify as one of the best third-placed teams if they lose the Battle of the River Plate.

Ironically Uruguay's new coach is another Argentinian legend Daniel Passarella, although he is letting youth team coach Victor Pua take charge of the team for the Copa as he prepares their World Cup qualifying campaign.

Bridging Old Firm rivalry GLASGOW, July 6 (AFP): The foreign influx of stars to Rangers and Celtic has had a useful off-pitch spinoff as well as on-pitch benefits in growing friendship between the players of the Old Firm rivals.

Blake passes first test



NEWPORT, July 6: James Blake made an auspicious professional debut, rallying to defeat former Wimbledon finalist MaliVai Washington 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the Hall of Fame Tennis Championships, reports AP.

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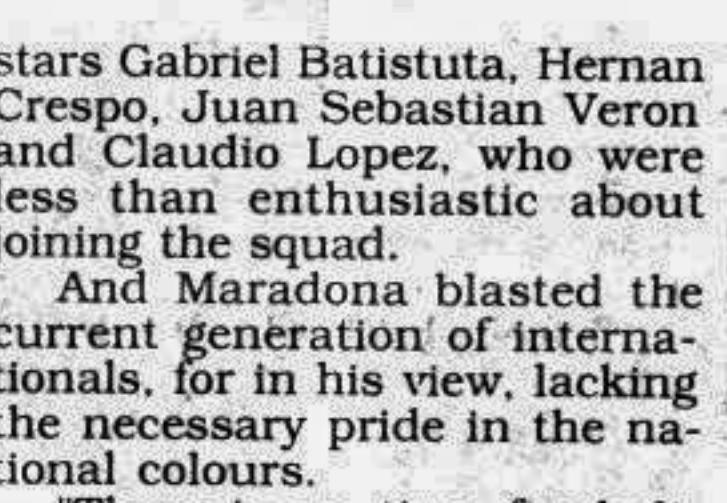
Washington looked great in the first set, dominating Blake with a serve-and-volley attack.

Early in the second set, Blake chided himself, "Would you please make one good return."

He started hitting shots past a charging Washington. At the same time, Washington's game faded.

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Diego on the attack



BUENOS AIRES, July 6: Argentina's former World Cup-winning skipper Diego Maradona on Monday blasted the side's weak showing at the Copa America, but defended Martin Palermo after the striker missed a hat-trick of penalties against Colombia, reports AFP.

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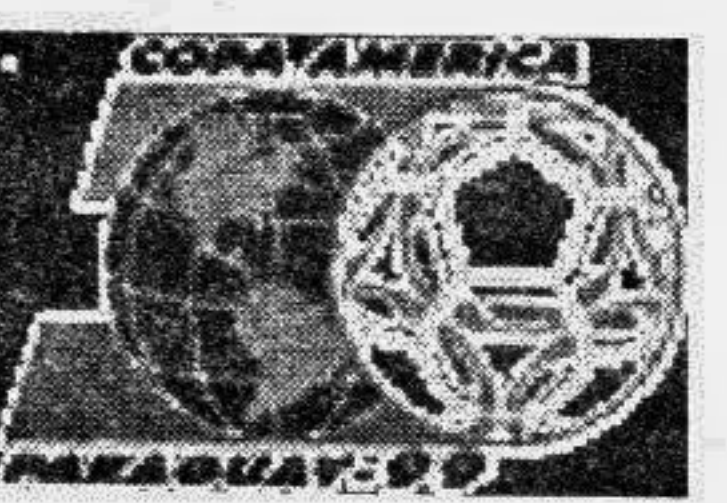
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So far so good



ASUNCION, Paraguay, July 6 (AP): For Paraguayans, the party really started Monday night.

Sure, there's been plenty of gaily all week long, with the country hosting the Copa America, the world's oldest national team soccer tournament, for the first time. But the festivities escalated with the come-from-behind success of the Paraguayan national team.

In a hard-fought and competitive match, where Paraguay obviously led of the hometown crowd, seventeen-year-old striker Roque Santa Cruz scored in the closing minutes to lift Paraguay over Peru 1-0.

The win, coming after a disappointing 0-0 tie with Bolivia and a 4-0 victory over Japan, helped Paraguay secure first place in Group A and gave an emotional boost to the home team heading into the tournament quarter-finals.

Almeida said: "Fortunately, we got the goal and first place, which is what the people wanted."

Indeed, Almeida was glad to come out on the winning end of this, particularly since Peru relied heavily on the play of substitutes. But he saw some things he didn't like.

"The team didn't play a good game," he said. "We didn't maintain the play. We dominate a game, have opportunities we don't take advantage of, and the team suddenly becomes nervous."

Peruvian coach Juan Carlos Oblitas also had gripes. But of a different kind.

Oblitas complained that the pre-tournament scheduled venue change from Asuncion to Juan Caballero, 540 kms northeast of the Paraguayan capital, had affected his team. To make matters worse, he said, the field conditions were a "disaster."

"I don't want to make excuses," Oblitas said. "The conditions were the same for both teams. But one team is more accustomed to them, that's all," he added, referring to Paraguay.

In the end, he conceded: "The difference was that they made the goal and we didn't."

Peru, who had already qualified for the quarter-finals before Monday's match, will remain in Juan Pedro Caballero to face their next opponent, to be determined over the final two days of opening round play.

Speaking in Los Angeles where football's world governing body FIFA is holding an executive committee meeting, Cameroon's Hayatou, a committee member, said: "I believe Africa can win the 2006 race."

He added he would do all he could to ensure that the continent rallied around a single bid.

Warkentin on a gold spree

PALMA DE MALLORCA, Spain, July 6: American Mark Warkentin won his third swimming gold medal at the World Students Games yesterday, reports Reuters.

Having won the 200 metres freestyle on Sunday, he added to his medal collection by winning the 800 metres freestyle and anchoring the US team to victory in the 4x200 metres freestyle relay.

The 20-year-old University of Southern California journalism student won his individual event in a Games record eight minutes 00.81 seconds, slicing almost four seconds off the mark set by Canada's Turlough O'Hare six years ago.

"I thought I might have gone even faster but what can I say, I beat the record by nearly four seconds," Warkentin said.

CROSSWORD by Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS 40 Titanic message 1 Clumps 23 Partogram
1 Informa- tion 41 Be aware of 2 Autumnal stone of Prufrock's creator
5 Letter- man's 45 Summer workplace quaff 3 Moreno or Hayworth 24 Whole
8 Blackbirds 47 Valencia, e.g. 4 One of Ben's certainties 25 Made a duplicate disk
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14 Took off 54 Aerobic 55 Zsa Zsa's sis 9 Chat-room 32 "Poseidon Adventure" participant
15 Computer file 55 Zsa Zsa's sis 9 Chat-room 32 "Poseidon Adventure" participant
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Cryptogram puzzle grid with clues and solution: HC NYQ FQCCTLM, KTMP IYEVQFHYE, VKT, HEFQLMEIT IYSUMEN, FKYQWP UMN M WQSU FQS. Today's Cryptogram clue: S equals M