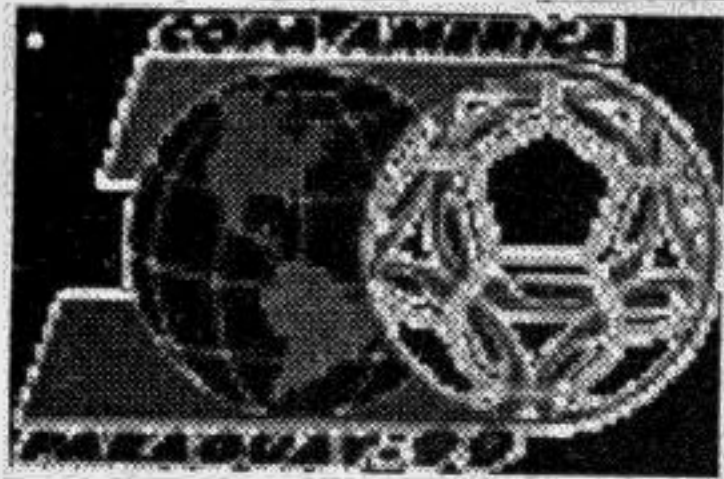


Blanco turns tragedy king

Brazil's three in three



ASUNCION, July 7 (Reuters/AP) : Cuauhtemoc Blanco scored twice to send Mexico into the quarterfinals of the Copa America on Tuesday, then got himself suspended by being sent off.

His goals also sent Chile into the last eight before they started their match against Brazil, which they lost 1-0 to a Ronaldo penalty.

BRAZIL-CHILE

The game was suspended when a dense fog descended on the February 3 stadium in Ciudad del Este.

The South American Football Confederation decided the score would stand after fog brought an end to play in the 85th minute.

Match observer Alvaro Castro told journalists a 1-0 win had been awarded to Brazil in the group B match, meaning the defending champions finished top of the group with nine points, followed by Mexico on six and Chile on three.

A dense fog suddenly descended on the pitch within around ten minutes left, causing visibility to drop from clear to nearly zero in the space of five minutes. The referee waited around five minutes before suspending play.

The decision suited everyone as both teams had already qualified for the quarter-finals and the unlikely event of Chile turning the game around would only have altered the order of finishing in the group. This would not have been matched by the inconvenience of turning out on Wednesday in a competition which has a tight schedule.

Ironically, the problem would not have happened if the match, which began ten minutes late, had started on time.

Before the fog descended, Brazil's Ronaldo had converted a 30th-minute penalty to give his team the lead following a foul by Miguel Ramirez on Ze Roberto.

Ronaldo calmly jogged up and struck the penalty shot at a low, driving ball that sailed under the sprawled legs of Chilean goalkeeper Marcelo Ramirez.

The 22-year-old superstar was inexhaustible in Brazil's final first-round match, constantly attacking the goal only to be denied by bad aim or Ramirez.

In the first half, Ronaldo dashed between two players and around a third before his shot landed in the goal's side netting. Minutes later, Ronaldo charged forward again, this time on a one-on-one, only to be tripped up.

At the other end, Chile kept up the competition's amazing record of missed penalties. Pedro Gonzalez was the culprit, when his weak shot was saved by Dida in the 75th minute.

Brazil dominated the match and Ronaldo was denied from adding further goals by some superb goalkeeping from Chile goalkeeper Marcelo Ramirez.

Ivan Zamorano had several good looks early in the match. Brazilian coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo rested starters Cafu and Antonio Carlos, both burdened with yellow cards. Rivaldo and Emerson were also sidelined, serving one-game suspensions.

Chile were without Lazio forward Marcelo Salas, who received a red card in the team's 3-0 win over Venezuela.

MEXICO-VENEZUELA

Blanco scored two goals and assisted on another as Mexico eliminated Venezuela from the Copa America tournament with a 3-1 victory.

Blanco scored in the 20th and 39th minutes Tuesday, and assisted on Daniel Osorno's goal in the 29th minute. But Blanco, who along with Luis Hernandez formed Mexico's formidable striker duo, was red-carded late in the game for an elbowing infraction. He will not play in Mexico's quarterfinal match.

Venezuela was eliminated from the tournament after suffering its third consecutive loss in Group B play, the first a 7-0 romp by Brazil, followed by a 3-0 loss to Chile.

Playing against a substitute-laden Mexican team, Venezuela did manage to score their first goal in the tournament. Gabriel Urdaneta scored the team's goal

GOALSCORERS

ASUNCION, July 7 (Reuters): Copa America goalscorers after Tuesday's games:

3 — Amoroso, Ronaldo (Brazil), Roque Santa Cruz (Paraguay)

2 — Roberto Holsen (Peru), Ronaldo (Brazil), Martin Benitez (Paraguay), Marcelo Zalayeta (Uruguay), Ivan Kaviedes (Uruguay), Wagner Lopes (Japan), Cuauhtemoc Blanco (Mexico)

1 — Atsuhiko Miura (Japan), Jorge Soto, Israel Zunica (Peru), Luis Hernandez, Isaac Terrazas, Daniel Osorno (Mexico), Ronaldo Assis, Rivaldo, Emerson Ferreira, Alex (Brazil), Victor Bonilla (Colombia), Diego Simeone (Argentina), Ivan Zamorano, Jose Luis Sierra (Chile), Jhonier Montano, Ivan Cordoba, Edwin Congo (Colombia), Erwin Sanchez (Bolivia), Gabriel Urdaneta (Venezuela)



Ronaldo(L) being embraced by teammates after putting Brazil in front against Chile.

— AFP photo

STANDINGS

ASUNCION, July 7 (Reuters): Copa America cumulative results and standings after Tuesday's games:

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Paraguay	3	2	1	0	5	0	7
Peru	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Bolivia	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Japan	3	0	1	2	3	8	1

Peru and Paraguay qualify.
Results: June 29 — Paraguay 0 Bolivia 0; Peru 3 Japan 2; July 2 — Paraguay 4 Japan 0; Peru 1 Bolivia 0; July 5 — Bolivia 1 Japan 1; Paraguay 1 Peru 0.

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Brazil	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
Mexico	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Chile	3	1	0	2	3	1	3
Venezuela	3	0	0	3	1	13	0

Brazil, Mexico and Chile qualify.
Results: June 30 — Mexico 1, Chile 0; Brazil 7 Venezuela 0; July 3 — Chile 3 Venezuela 0; Brazil 2 Mexico 1; July 6 — Venezuela 1 Mexico 3, Brazil 1 Chile 0.

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Colombia	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Uruguay	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Argentina	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Ecuador	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Colombia already qualified.
Results: July 1 — Colombia 1 Uruguay 0, Argentina 3 Ecuador 1; July 4 — Argentina 0 Colombia 3, Ecuador 1 Uruguay 2.

Remaining fixtures: July 7 — Ecuador v Colombia, Uruguay v Argentina.
Note: Top two in each group plus the two best third-placed teams qualify for the quarterfinals.

Palermo puts up a brave face

ASUNCION, Paraguay, July 7 (AP/Reuters): If Argentina's Martin Palermo wanted to make an impression in international soccer, he succeeded.

Palermo has been in the world's spotlight all right; his picture has been splashed across sports pages around the world and his play is attracting the attention of his country's president, Carlos Menem.

But for all the wrong reasons.

Soccer aficionados were still digging through the record books Tuesday, after Palermo reinvented the hat-trick in his team's 3-0 loss to Colombia on Sunday in a first-round Copa America match.

Palermo might have found himself a unique place in history as the only national team player ever to suffer three penalty kicks in an international match.

If that wasn't enough, the botch even had financial repercussions: stock in Palermo's club Boca Juniors slumped nearly 5 per cent the day after his feat. Palermo is considered the club's biggest asset.

The jokes have been relentless: one headline in a Colombian daily newspaper read: "Colombia 3, Palermo 0." But friend Diego Maradona offered soothing words for Palermo. So did Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa. President Carlos Menem told reporters: "Instead of knocking him we should offer support to him and the entire team."

Despite his disastrous fumble, Palermo will remain in Argentina's starting lineup against Uruguay when the teams meet Wednesday as the first phase of the three-week tournament winds down.

"I feel very confident and I like this type of challenge,"

Palermo said Tuesday, describing the entire episode as "unpleasant" but not a "disgrace."

Palermo appeared to have overcome his ordeal as he faced the massed ranks of the Argentine media with the same strength of character he showed on Sunday when he insisted on taking his team's third penalty despite missing the previous two.

"I still have the confidence to take penalties. But the team is more important than the individual and if it is better for the team someone else can take them," he said.

Palermo, who claimed his first international goals in the 3-1 win over Ecuador when he scored twice, acknowledged he had been instantly transformed from hero to something approaching a laughing stock.

On Monday Argentina's most popular comedy show Videomatch dedicated its entire programme to making fun of the blond-haired striker.

As match records rarely include missed penalties it has been impossible to prove whether Palermo has broken any records.

Palermo was more worried about Wednesday's match against Uruguay. Argentina's last in the first round than in whether he had made the record books.

He already has to live with the claim that he is playing only because European-based Gabriel Batista and Hernan Crespo are being rested after a long season with their clubs.

He won his place in the squad on the back of the 32 goals he scored for his club in the 35 games he played last season when Boca, the country's best supported club, won both the Apertura and Clausura championships.

Bielsa is expected to make some changes for Thursday's match.

Velez Sarsfield's Claudio Husain will start in place of Javier Zanetti, out after being red-carded in the last game. Bielsa also said he is considering some tactical adjustments.

With Palermo's debacle hanging over the Argentines, Uruguayan forward Marcelo Zalayeta said the pressure will be on them, not his upstart Uruguay.

Meanwhile, Colombia, is excluding confidence, complete with more threats from coach Javier Alvarez.

Alvarez again issued what is fast becoming his customary pre-game taunt: "Colombia will score on any team that isn't prepared for us."

After clobbering Argentina 3-0 and edging Uruguay 1-0, Colombia will have another South American rival at its hands: Ecuador. Ecuador is still in search of its first points in the tournament.

Thursday night's action has consequences on quarterfinals competition as Colombia leads Group C with six points. Argentina and Uruguay have three each.

As it stands now, Colombia, Argentina, and Uruguay are the most likely from Group C to advance to the next round.

A Colombia victory would eliminate Ecuador, leaving Argentina and Uruguay to battle it out for second and third place. Should Ecuador defeat Colombia, Ecuador would win its first three points in the tournament to open a battle for third place and clear the way for the winner of Argentina and Uruguay to win the group.

Argentina and Uruguay would advance if they play to a tie, regardless of the Colombia-Ecuador outcome.

Balic not bothered

MADRID, July 7 (Reuters/Internet): Real Madrid forward Elvir Balic is confident he can live with the pressure of being the most expensive player in the history of the club which has won the European Cup seven times.

The 24-year-old Bosnian international, signed for a club record \$15 million from Turkish club Fenerbahce, was presented as a Real Madrid player on Wednesday after signing a six-year contract.

And Balic, who scored 18 league goals for Fenerbahce last season following a \$12.8 million move from Bursaspor, is sure he can triumph at Real — despite the record price tag.

"The truth is I'm not going to be under any pressure," he told a news conference at the Bernabeu stadium.

The Spanish league will be a lot more difficult than in Turkey but I'll have great players around me. That will make life a lot easier.

"You could also say that I've been here before. I was supposedly under a lot of pressure after my move to Fenerbahce but I ended up impressing everyone, including the press."

Real president Lorenzo Sanz, who travelled to Geneva on Monday to negotiate the deal, admitted Balic's signing was a risk.

"You can't be sure about any player before he arrives but the coach was keen to sign him. It's definitely a risk but I'm sure that in the end this won't seem like an expensive signing," Sanz said.

Balic is the sixth addition to the Real squad for next season, following the signings of Cameroon midfielder Geremi Njitap, ex-Liverpool midfielder Steve McManaman, Colombian international Edwin Congo and Spaniards Michel Salgado and Ivan Helguera.

Salgado, a 2,000 million peseta (\$12.30 million) acquisition from Celta Vigo, was previously the record but, as an established Spanish international, few eyebrows were raised at the size of the fee.

The amount of money invested in the little-known Balic is far more of a gamble for Real, and in particular their coach John Toshack.

The Welshman, who joined Real from Celtic's midway through last season, recommended the Fenerbahce player immediately and will be hoping desperately to see his judgement vindicated.

For the club, Balic represents a huge investment. The \$15 million paid to Fenerbahce for his services represents the same amount it cost to bring in Predrag Mijatovic and Davor Suker three years ago.

Both players became authentic Bernabeu heroes before leaving the club this summer after becoming surplus to the requirements of the new coach.

Toshack's hopes of making it through a full season at Real will depend to a great extent on whether Balic can become a similar crowd favourite.

Ince to leave Liverpool?

LONDON, July 7 (Reuters/Internet): Liverpool have told former England midfielder and club captain Paul Ince that he is surplus to requirements, newspapers reported on Wednesday.

"Paul Ince is not in my plans for the future. I have told him that. That's life," the club's French manager Gerard Houllier was quoted as saying.

The newspapers reported that Ince, 31, missed training on Tuesday when players returned from their summer break and was expected to remain on Merseyside when his team departs for a Swiss training camp on Friday.

"I still think he is a very good player and I still think he can play for England," the Guardian quoted Houllier as saying. "But we are working towards something here."

"For a player of his profile it would be difficult for him to be on the bench. It is better for him to have a fresh challenge somewhere else," added the Frenchman.

Ince, nicknamed "The gunner," joined Liverpool from Inter Milan for \$6.83 million in 1997. Before that, he spent six years at Manchester United and four years at West Ham United.

He last played for England in a friendly against France at Wembley in February.

Known for his hard-lacking approach, Ince was banned for three international matches by UEFA in October after being sent off against Sweden in a Euro 2000 qualifier last year.

Peruzzi at Inter

MILAN, July 7: Goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi was heading for Inter Milan today, ready to become the latest ex-Juventus star to join their Serie A rivals, reports AFP.

Peruzzi's widely-expected transfer had been held up by a row over the fee.

However, the asking price was lowered by Juventus from 33 billion lira (18 million dollars) to 28 billion lira (15 million dollars) during a telephone call on Tuesday night between the two club owners Umberto Agnelli and Massimo Moratti.

The 29-year-old Italian international arrived here this morning for the routine medical test. He was due to join other members of the Inter squad in Sardinia later in the day, after signing a four-year deal worth a total of 16 billion lira (8.5 million dollars) net income.

Peruzzi had been sought by Inter's new coach Marcello Lippi, who quit Juventus in February, and joins former Turin team-mates Christian Vieri and Vladimir Jugovic in the new-look squad.



Mexico's inspirational striker Cuauhtemoc Blanco(L) under pressure from a Venezuelan defender during their Copa America encounter at Ciudad del Este on July 6. — AFP photo

Trapattoni pledges delight



FLORENCE, Italy, July 7: Fiorentina coach Giovanni Trapattoni opened his pre-season fanfare here

this week by promising the supporters more thrills up front and fewer goals at the back.

Fiorentina dominated the first half of last season, but their title bid ended in February when goal-a-game skipper Gabriel Batistuta was ruled out for six weeks by injury, and then failed to rediscover his scoring touch.

The club finished a respectable third in the Serie A, and will start the preliminary rounds of the European Champions League in August.

But Trapattoni wants to do better next time around and has put his faith in an impressive three-man attack led by Batistuta, flanked by new signings Enrico Chiesa and Yugoslav Predrag Mijatovic, whose goal against Juventus won the 1998 European Cup final for Real Madrid.

"We've plugged the gaps from last season," said the veteran coach in front of 25,000 fans here.

"What can we provide on top of what we did last season? Spectacular football and a more solid defence," he said.

"I want to play with three strikers and three defenders, and only in certain cases will we fall back on the 3-5-2. I'm ready to send on Batistuta,"

Chiesa and Mijatovic all at the same time.

"I know Mijatovic well, he's got great dribbling and creative skills. The others don't need any introduction. Now we can put together physical strength, speed and creativity."

The team's other weakness last season was a poor away record, but Trap insisted: "I think the problems weren't so much a lack of will but a lack of physical pep. Now we've signed major new players and we've added about 10 centimetres to the defence in height."

Now the pitch will tell us whether or not we've done the right thing."

The coach, who has bolstered the defence with Alessandro Pierini, Daniele Adani and Aussie Paul Okon, will also pull Portugal's Manuel Rui Costa from the attacking midfield role he filled so well last season.

Defending his decision, Trapattoni said: "No-one is going to forbid him from beating three players and going forward. And if he scores, then bravo."

But he added: "Last season, when he played behind the strikers he was running out of steam in the last 20 minutes. This way, he can last for longer, and direct the forwards in what they have to do."

Fiorentina were due to arrive on Wednesday at their training base for the next two weeks at the northern ski resort of Bormio.

They start the friendly sea-

son by meeting Rapid Bucharest on July 21 at Lecce, on nearby Lake Como, before heading for New York and a friendly tournament with Aston Villa, Ajax and Panathinaikos.

Penev after club presidency

SOFIA, July 7 (Reuters/Internet): Bulgarian ex-international Lyuboslav Penev launched a campaign on Wednesday to become president of his former club CSKA Sofia.

Penev has spent the past decade playing in Spain. He joined Celta Vigo last August for \$2.3 million, making then his fourth Spanish club since 1989 after Atletico Madrid, Valencia and Compostela.

In the election on July 23, the 32-year-old striker will be challenging the club's current president Iliya Pavlov, a former wrestler. Pavlov is also chairman of Multigroup corporation, which is CSKA's sponsor.

But local media say Penev has a good chance of winning as fans, veterans and the Defence Ministry, which controlled the club during the communist era, have pledged their support.

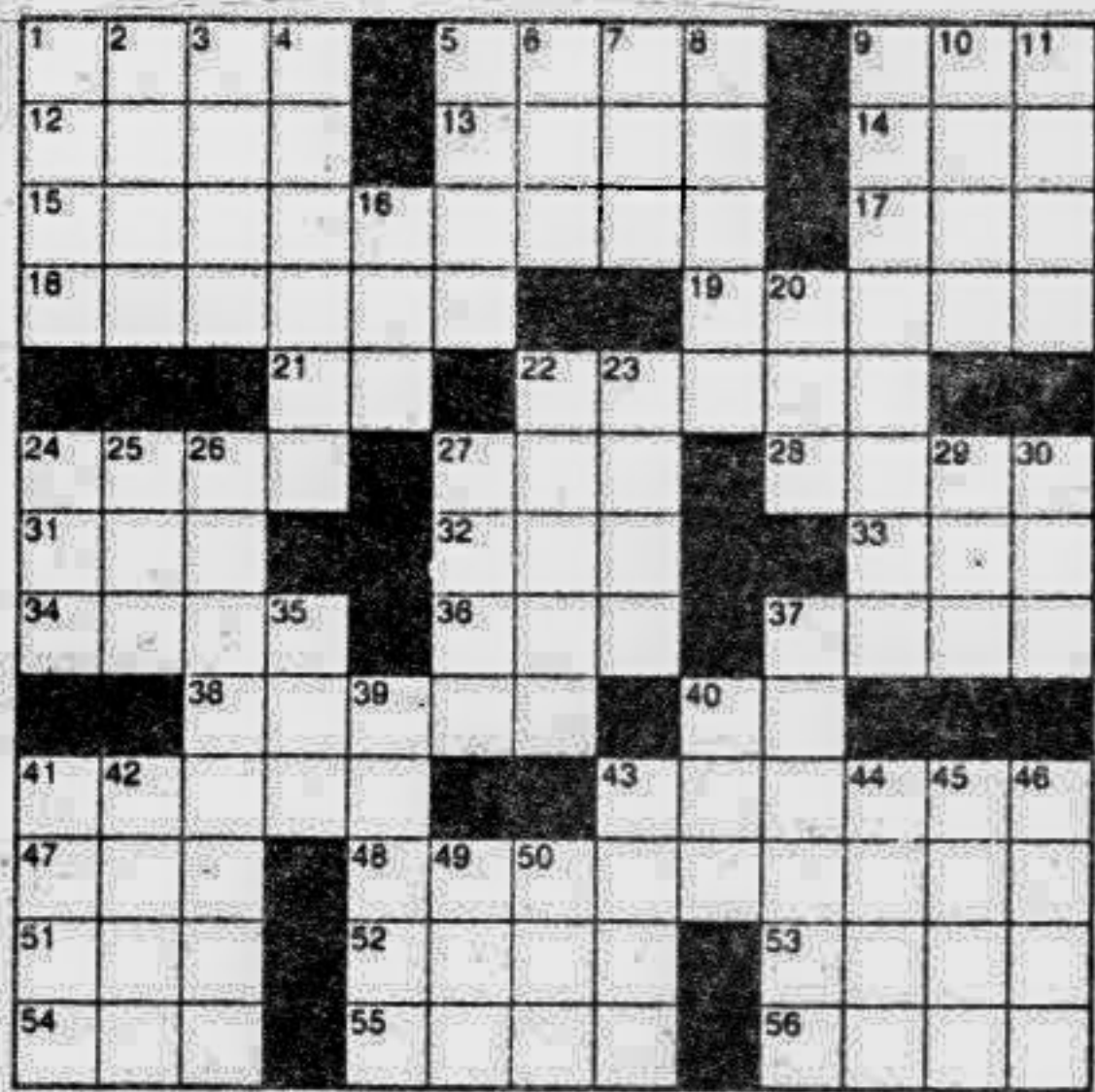
CSKA have won the domestic league title 28 times and provide such players as Hristo Stoichkov and Emil Kostadinov, who helped guide Bulgaria to the World Cup semifinals in 1994.



Fiorentina's Argentine superstar Gabriel Batistuta(C) being flanked by new signing Yugoslav international striker Predrag Mijatovic(L) and club president Vittorio Cecchi Gori during a presentation ceremony of the team for the 1999-2000 season at Florence on July 6. — AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Vatican VIP	1 Brazilian state
5 Purr-fect	2 Actress
9 Johnson or Adams	3 Quarter-bushel
12 His job is in "Jeopardy!"	4 "Waiting to 24" — your old man!
13 Bread spread	5 Soft-drink choice
14 Mrs. England, 1377-99	6 The "Greatest" abbr.
15 River of Quebec	7 Golf-bag gadget
17 Many, many years	8 One direction
18 Capital of Turkey	9 "The Blue Angel" star
19 Aquarium occupant	10 Stench
21 See 27	11 "Peter Pan" 37 Quest
22 Friend of the groom	12 History chapter
24 Judicious	13 Solutions
27 With 21	14 Solutions
28 Make-up artist?	15 Solutions
31 Kyoto sash	16 Solutions
32 Take the prize	17 Solutions
33 IRS employee	18 Solutions
34 Crooned	19 Solutions
36 Dogfight participant	20 Solutions
37 Son of	21 Solutions



CRYPTOQUIP

V F A C M O Z V G O W Z O

E U C G O P D J I Z I P I V M H L

A Z U U O W C V M E Z M C G O L

F D O W C M Z G H J C Z O W C M

Yesterday's Cryptogram: IF YOU SUFFER A HEAD CONTUSION, THE INSURANCE COMPANY SHOULD PAY A LUMP SUM.

Today's Cryptogram clue: W equals H

The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.



THE PICTURE SAYS IT ALL: Players stand puzzled as dense fog engulfs the ground during the Brazil-Chile match on July 6. — AFP photo