

Sport

Satisfaction all around

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 19: Brazilians celebrated their Copa America victory with a quiet contentment befitting a country confident of its team's victory before the game even started, reports AP.

Empty streets filled gradually after the game Sunday, while there were few honking horns and fireworks to commemorate the 3-0 victory over Uruguay.

"Brazil won like I knew they would. It was the best game of all," said Denise Rangel Santana, who watched the game with friends at an Italian restaurant in Copacabana.

Rivaldo, Ronaldinho and Dida were all applauded for their efforts, especially Rivaldo whose two goals made him the leading scorer of the tournament until Ronaldo caught up with a goal of his own.

"This was Rivaldo's cup," said Ademilson Firmino de Mattos, who said he was disappointed Ronaldo missed two opportunities for what seemed like easy goals.

Stoichkov after ministerial job?

SOFIA, July 19: Hristo Stoichkov, the greatest player in Bulgarian football history, has his eyes on a serious political career, the weekly news magazine 24 Chassa reported Monday, says AFP.

Stoichkov, already deputy mayor of his home town of Plovdiv, is a candidate for the post of Minister of Sport, the magazine reported.

Stoichkov earlier this year retired as a player, quitting Japanese J-League club Kashima Reysol to bring an end to his long and storied career.

The 33-year-old striker was the joint top scorer at the 1994 USA World Cup finals where Bulgaria reached the semi-finals. The same year Raging Bull, as he is nicknamed, was voted European Footballer-of-the-Year.

Stoichkov is already Bulgaria's international sports ambassador and has accompanied president Peter Stoyanov on a recent trip to Spain.

Only soccer on Mihajlovic's mind

MILAN, July 19: Lazio's Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, who led sporting protests in Italy over the NATO air-raids against his homeland, is ready to re-discover the joys of football, reports AFP.

Mihajlovic was a spokesman for the many Yugoslav sportsmen in Italy during the war over Kosovo, criticising the bombing, lobbying politicians and appearing on TV wearing "Peace, No War" T-shirts.

Now the bombing is over, the football star who added his support to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic wants only to concentrate on enjoying his career.

"The joy of playing soccer is something that I'm only going to get back this season," he said. "Last spring, it was a just a job. I didn't even get angry when we conceded a goal."

The first week of the war finished with Lazio v AC Milan, and at the time, the only thing people wanted to know was what did Dejan Stankovic and I have on our minds while we were playing.

"Once that match was over and done with, the war became something normal. It's incredible how people can get used to anything."

Mihajlovic clearly sees his job of defending the national cause as being over, but is wary of making a sweeping judgement on Milosevic's future.

The defender, who still has family in Belgrade, said: "During the war, I took advantage of my popularity to defend my people, and therefore to defend the Milosevic regime." But he added: "My job finished there and then."

"Now is the time for reconstruction and therefore for politics. But I am not a politician."

"I cannot set myself against our president," he claimed. "It's clear that Yugoslavia needs western help to be re-born and that this help will not arrive so long as Milosevic stays in power."

"He might draw the consequences of that for himself, or people might force him to do so, or people might decide they want him to stay," he told the Gazzetta dello Sport on Monday.

"These are not questions to be resolved by individuals on their own, but by a popular movement. All Yugoslavia together must decide its own future."

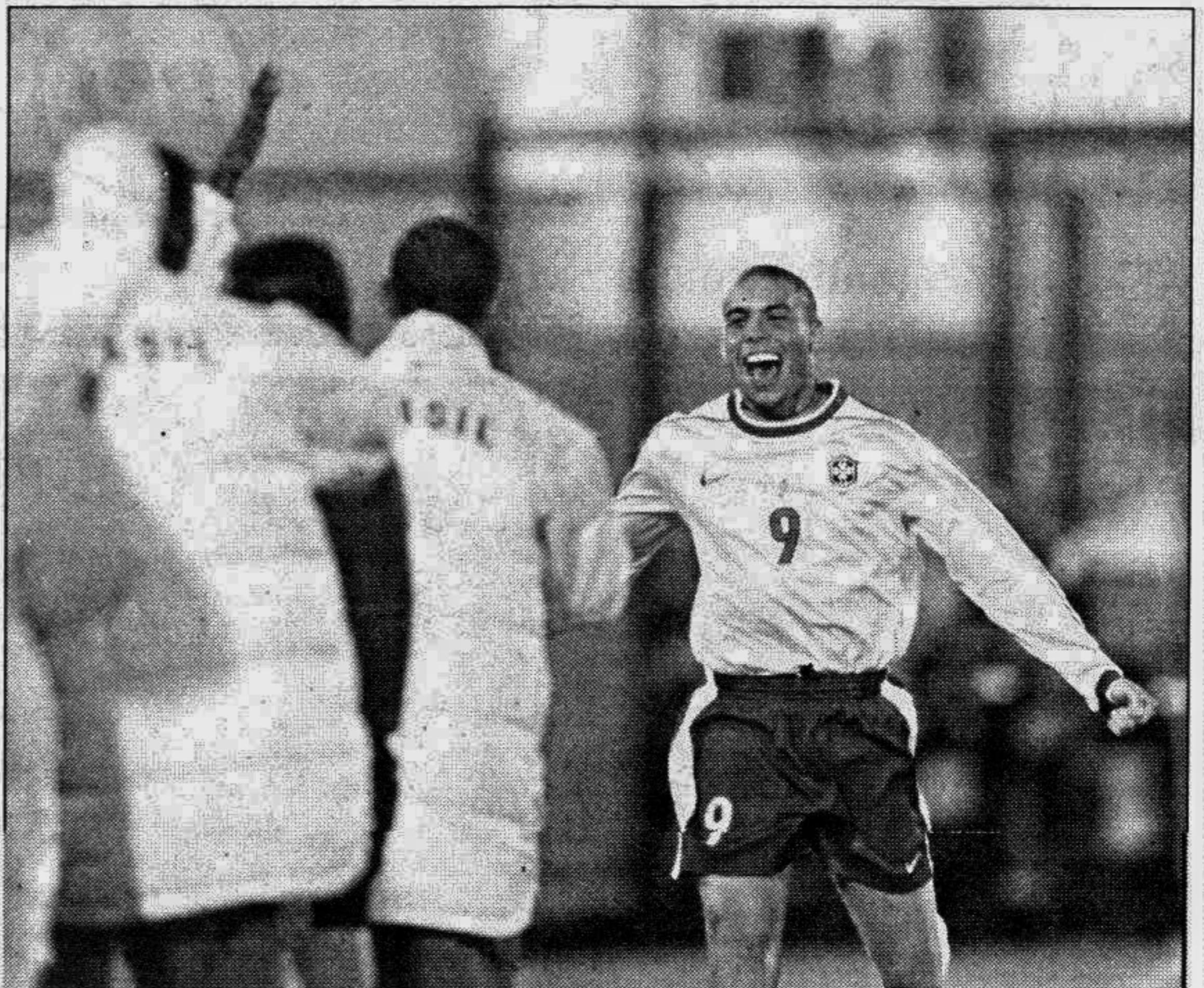
Coventry clinch Hadji signing

COVENTRY, England, July 19 (Reuters/Internet): English premier league Coventry City broke their transfer record on Monday to sign Moroccan World Cup midfielder Mustapha Hadji from Deportivo La Coruna for 6.23 million dollars.

The 27-year-old African player-of-the-year underwent a medical at Highfield Road after agreeing to the move over the weekend.

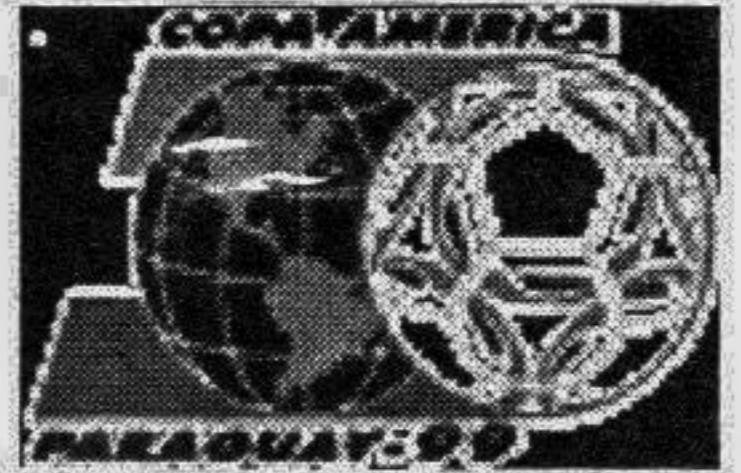
The deal is a coup for Coventry after French club Olympique Marseille made a strong move for the player at the end of last week.

Coventry chairman Bryan Richardson said: "We are delighted Mustapha has agreed to join us. He is an excellent addition to our squad and will excite the whole of the premier league. "He had a very long chat with (manager) Gordon Strachan purely about football and I think that's what sealed it."



EL PHENOM IN EUPHORIA: Superstar Ronaldo rushing towards team officials and substitutes after scoring the third goal against Uruguay. — AFP photo

Ronaldo's redemption



ASUNCION, July 19 (AFP):

When a first ravaged much of her Windsor Castle residence after a year of much-publicised marital problems for her children Queen Elizabeth once famously remarked she was having an 'annus horribilis'.

New Brazil coach Wanderley Luxemburgo was the one man to continue to show his belief in Ronaldo and finally he scored his first goal in the yellow shirt since the World Cup in a warm-up match against Latvia.

Asked if he saw Sunday's 3-0 final win over Uruguay as a victory for Brazil or himself, Ronaldo replied: "Both at the same time."

"After a year of suffering, indecision, uncertainty and treatment, this is a very important moment and I'm very happy," he said. "I thank God, I thank my team-mates, I thank God [coach] Luxemburgo, for the confidence in me."

But Brazil's demanding fans still jeered the striker during the Copa America group games with Venezuela, Mexico and Chile.

But Ronaldo scored the winning goal in the quarter-final against bitter enemies Ar-

gentina to finally silence the critics.

Ronaldo lost his world player of the year title to France's Zinedine Zidane and was even voted the second worst player in Brazil by a magazine poll in that country.

And just to complete a miserable 12 months it emerged just before the Copa that his long-term relationship with girlfriend Susana Werner was over.

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Rivaldo riding high



ASUNCION, July 19 (Reuters/

Internet): While Ronaldo claimed a double triumph on Sunday, saying he had won both the Copa America and his year-long fight to regain fitness, team-mate Rivaldo, who finished alongside Ronaldo as the competition's joint top-scorer with five goals, was equally elated after suffering bitter criticism earlier in the competition.

Rivaldo's battle was to convince the Brazilian critics that he is as good for the national team as he is for his Spanish club Barcelona.

Bitterly criticised for his performance one week ago in the 2-1 quarter-final win over Argentina, Rivaldo replied with the second goal in the 2-0 semi-

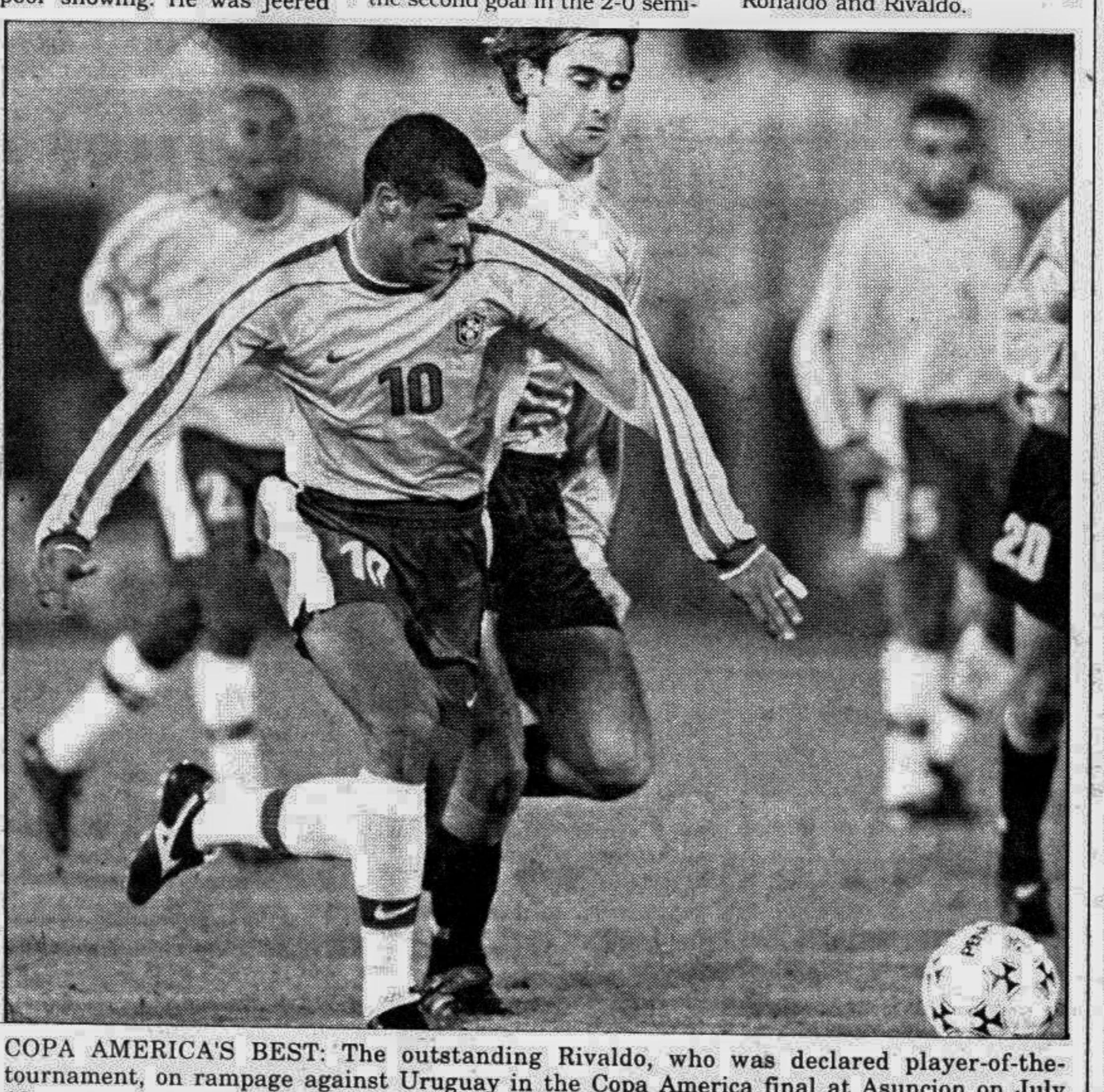
final win over Mexico and then two goals against Uruguay on Sunday.

"I don't think I have anything to prove to anyone," he said. "I know there was a lot of criticism but I just concentrated on playing my game. In five games I played, I scored five goals and for me this is important."

Rivaldo's confidence had grown so much by the second half on Sunday that he even tried a shot with his right foot, which he almost never uses, and came close to completing his hat-trick.

He was singled out for praise by his coach, who has kept faith with a player he coached during a spell with Sao Paulo club Palmeiras. Rivaldo showed today that he can play this function in the Brazil team, distributing the ball and making the team play," said Luxemburgo.

Brazil's next engagement is the Confederations' Cup in Mexico, which begins in one week's time. Brazil will be resting some top players, including Ronaldo and Rivaldo.



COPA AMERICA'S BEST: The outstanding Rivaldo, who was declared player-of-the-tournament, on rampage against Uruguay in the Copa America final at Asuncion on July 19. — AFP photo

Randell says he's innocent

HOBART, July 19: Australia's most experienced cricket umpire, Steve Randell, today pleaded not guilty in the Tasmanian Supreme Court to 32 charges of indecent assault dating back to 1982, reports Reuters.

Randell's trial was not expected to start for two weeks, allowing time for legal argument on how much of the trial should be conducted in open court and for a jury to be sworn in.

Australian Associated Press reported from the court that most of the pre-trial evidence would be heard by video-link, with witnesses speaking from Sydney, Brisbane and towns around Australia.

Randell, 44, who has officiated in an Australian record 36 Test matches, has stood down from umpiring duties and been suspended from his job as a school teacher in Hobart until the matter is finalised.

Read, 20, bagged eight victims in the first Test victory over New Zealand at Edgbaston, and six in the second innings with a record for an England keeper on his debut.

Now he can start preparing mentally for the Lord's Test starting on Thursday, as this may just be the start of a lengthy international career for the Nottinghamshire youngster.

There is, though, a long way to go to come close to matching his mentor Alan Knott, who has been involved in his coaching since the age of 13.

Taylor, who made his Test debut against the Kiwis in 1971 in Christchurch, said, "He looked very good. He's only 20 and it was a big ordeal for him. When they first sat off, I don't judge wicketkeepers standing back, and he did fine standing

Kudos for rookie Read



LONDON, July 19 (Internet report): New England wicketkeeper Chris Read has been given the seal of approval by Test legend Bob Taylor.

England's youngest wicket-keeper has made a big impression with Taylor who was almost 10 years older than Read when he made the first of 57 Test appearances behind the wickets.

Read, 20, bagged eight victims in the first Test victory over New Zealand at Edgbaston, and six in the second innings with a record for an England keeper on his debut.

"I hadn't seen him before Edgbaston. I talked to Clive Rice and Alan Ormrod, the coach at Notts before Rice, and I talk to umpires a lot. They are the best judges of players because they see them in all different conditions and different situations and they spoke very highly of Read."

"I was very impressed. He's young but remember South Africa gave young Mark Boucher his chance 18 months ago and he's had the England series, the West Indies series and now the World Cup and that's all good experience."

Read's hold on the position could well depend on the balance of the England side, an un-

up to Phil Tufnell.

"He's neat and tidy, moves his feet well and looks to have a good pair hands. It looks as if he's got a good future to me."

"Perhaps he could be around for a long time like Alan Knott, but only time will tell."

"I applaud the selectors for bringing him in. I think when he relaxes and becomes a bit more confident - that plays a big part and I'm sure he's got confidence in his own ability - he will come on."

"People tell me he's a lad with his feet on the ground, that he's level headed and has got a good temperament."

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England look set to retain

deposed captain Stewart at Lord's, but there is scope and time to give number one strike bowler Darren Gough the opportunity to improve his match fitness rather than thrust him back into Test cricket after one championship match since straining a calf in June.

Taylor added, "When Ian was batting six or seven they could afford to play me as a pure wicket-keeper. Jack Russell couldn't retain his place with a Test batting average of 29.5. Russell's was 32.5 and mine was nearly 17."

"I'm sure that I wouldn't have played half the Tests if Botham hadn't been around. I probably wouldn't get in the side these days because you have got to be able to bat. But you've got to give Read a chance to show himself as a batsman."

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Kent stymie Kiwis



LONDON, July 19 (Internet report): Yorkshire Phoenix lost for the second day running on Sunday but still retained their lead in the 45-overs National League division one.

Defeat by Warwickshire Bears in the last over on Saturday was followed by a more emphatic loss to Gloucestershire Gladiators, by 128 runs.

Gloucestershire made 261, the former England wicket-keeper Jack Russell leading the way with an unbeaten 91.

Yorkshire were in trouble from the start. They lost half the side for 52 and were dismissed for 133.

They remain on 24 points, four ahead of Worcestershire, who now have two matches in hand.

Hampshire Hawks moved off the bottom at the expense of Essex Eagles after beating them by 139 runs at Southend. Hampshire's Jason Laney made 106 not out in a total of 259 for five.

Essex were never in contention. With England captain Nasser Hussain opening the innings, they managed no more than 120 all out in under 24 overs.

Both teams are still in serious danger of relegation, with the bottom three going down. Sussex Sharks are well placed to win promotion after setting two records in a high-scoring match against Middlesex Crusaders.

Their total of 295 for five and Chris Adams's 163 were both the highest in division two matches. Middlesex finished only nine runs short, scoring 288 for six.

The Karachi-born opener Owais Shah, with 134, and Australian Justin Langer with 51 put on 160 before a wicket fell.

Sussex lead the division by two points from Somerset Sabres, who maintained their 100 per cent record against Surrey Lions.

Somerset scored 227 for eight, Piran Holloway making 101 not out, to overhaul Surrey's 225 for nine.

In the other match played on Sunday, Nottinghamshire Outlaws beat Glamorgan Dragons by 26 runs.

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