

Hosts have seen it all



UNDATED, July 23 (Internet): The FIFA Confederations Cup, the most recent addition to FIFA's list of tournaments, will return in 1999 to a country and two stadiums that have already seen a lot of football history in the making.

Mexico will host the eight teams involved in the competition, and matches will be played in the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City and in the Jalisco Stadium in Guadalajara.

Azteca and Jalisco - two names that awaken stirring memories for those who have followed football over the years. When polls are carried out to determine which match people consider the most memorable of all time, then the vote usually goes to the semi-final thriller between Italy and Germany on 17 June 1970, which the Italians won 4-3 after extra time. This was certainly one of the classic games that have been played in the Azteca Stadium in the Mexican capital, which had only been built four years earlier. It has a capacity of 115,000, and no fewer than 19 World Cup matches were played there in 1970 and 1986.

Among them was also the game in 1986 in which Maradona's two now-legendary goals against England went down in history (for different reasons). There were also other great matches, such as the final of the World Youth Championship in 1983. For the 1999 Confederations Cup there will be an interesting link between the past and the present. Back in 1986 the recently crowned World Champions and the team they deposed played each other in the Jalisco Stadium in a quarter-final match, which the French under Michel Platini won against a Brazil team that included Zico, Socrates, Careca, etc., but only narrowly, via a penalty shoot-out.

And we are likely to see excellent football again. If not, it will be a big surprise, in view of the quality of the teams taking part. Defending champions Brazil, who won the Copa America in 1997 and 1999 and were runners-up in the World Cup.

The host country Mexico, who won the CONCACAF Gold Cup in 1998.

World Champions France, designated by UEFA instead of the reigning European champions.

Saudi Arabia, Asian champions 1996.

Egypt, winners of the African Nations' Cup 1998.

Argentina, Denmark, Brazil, ...?

UNDATED, July 23 (Internet): The three previous competitions at a glance: FIFA CONFEDERATIONS CUP 1997

TEAMS

1. Brazil
2. Australia
3. Czech Rep.
4. Uruguay
5. Mexico
6. UAE
7. Saudi Arabia
8. South Africa

FINAL

21.12.97 Brazil - Australia 6:0 (3:0)
King Fahd Stadium, att. 25,000

Referee: Un Prasert, THA
Scorers: Ronaldo 1:0 (15.), 2:0 (28.), Romario 3:0 (38.), 4:0 (53.), Ronaldo 5:0 (59.), Romario 6:0 (75... pen.).

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP 1995 TEAMS

1. Denmark
2. Argentina
3. Mexico
4. Nigeria
5. Saudi Arabia
6. Japan

FINAL

13.01.95 Argentina - Denmark 0:2 (0:1)
King Fahd Stadium, att. 25,000

Referee: Bujasim, UAE
Scorers: Michael Laudrup 0:1 (8.), Peter Rasmussen 0:2 (75.).

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP 1992 TEAMS

1. Argentina
2. Saudi Arabia
3. USA
4. Ivory Coast

FINAL

20.10.92 Saudi Arabia - Argentina 1:3 (0:2)
King Fahd Stadium, att. 75,000

Referee: Lim Kee Chong, MU
Scorers: Rodriguez 0:1 (18.), Caniggia 0:2 (24.), Simeone 0:3 (64.), Owairan 1:3 (65.).

Confederations Cup Prize Money

UNDATED, July 23 (Internet): Following is the amount of prize money for the 1999 Confederations Cup: Champions: 2,000,000 - USD
Runners-up: 1,250,000 - USD
3rd: 1,250,000 - USD
4th: 1,250,000 - USD
5th to 8th: 750,000 - USD



German soccer coach Erich Ribbeck (R) supervising his team's practice in Guadalajara on July 22. —AFP photo

USA, representing CONCACAF, as losers in the Gold Cup final 1998

Bolivia, representing CONMEBOL, as losing finalist in the Copa America 1997

New Zealand, sensational winners of the Oceania Nations' Cup thanks to a victory over their arch-rivals Australia.

The Confederations Cup was first designated a FIFA competition in December 1997, when it was held in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. Previously there had been two other tournaments in Riyadh in 1992 and 1995, under the title of Inter-continental championships. In 1992 the winners were

Argentina, then reigning South American champions. They came with a star-studded team including Batistuta, Redondo, Caniggia and Simeone and carried off the trophy, beating the host country, who had tremendous support from the home fans, into second place.

The other two teams taking part on that occasion were the USA and Côte d'Ivoire. For the 1995 competition six teams took part, and this time it was Denmark who took the honours, with strong performances from the Laudrup brothers earning them victory over Argentina.

Mexico and Nigeria made it to the semi-finals, while Japan and the host country were eliminated after losing both of their group games.

Although the competition came under the FIFA umbrella in 1997, the venue remained the same. This time eight teams were invited to Saudi Arabia. With World Champions Brazil

and the host country being automatically invited, there was room for another Asian team, in this case UAE.

The organisational format was easy this time: eight teams, two groups, semi-finals, finals. The tournament lasted just ten days - perhaps a record short time in view of the number of matches - and in the end it was the pre-tournament favourites Brazil who won the final in the King Fahd stadium. Their opponents in this match were Australia, who had held the South Americans to a goalless draw in their group encounter.

But the final was far from a repeat of that result, with Romario and Ronaldo scoring three each, and no reply from the Socceros.

Even though the competition has now been transferred to another continent, the concept has remained almost the same. Back in 1997 it had been decided to offer an automatic invitation to the title-holder and not to the World Cup winners. But with UEFA nominating France to take part, an interesting line-up has been guaranteed anyway: both World Cup finalists will be there, four reigning continental champions - five if we include Brazil - and, in the shape of the USA and Bolivia, two ambitious countries who want to re-establish themselves in view of recent results (which could be an important consideration in view of the performances of Australia and Uruguay in a similar position last time round).

With home advantage behind them, the host country should also not be overlooked.

After nearly twenty years in the wilderness, New Zealand have staged a comeback at exactly the right time, in 1982 they qualified for the World Cup for the first and so far only time in their history. Now they have a chance to perform in a major competition again - an opportunity to do some PR work for the FIFA U-17 World Championship which they will host in November.

With the high quality of the teams taking part, this competition will enable teams to battle for prestige at intercontinental or regional level - Egypt versus Saudi Arabia for example - and offer a unique opportunity for coaches to test out new ideas and players in a series of games against top level opposition, since apart from the Copa America there is no other continental championship taking place in 1999.

These two weeks in Mexico promise varied and interesting matches, with a lot of the world's established top players on view, and others trying to break into that elite group.

They have a long-standing unbeaten record in the Azteca stadium and will be difficult opponents for Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Bolivia, who are drawn against them in the same group.

World Cup revenge - perhaps in the final, or earlier? The answer to this question could come in what looks like an intriguing opening match - a repeat of the World Cup final between France and Brazil, with New Zealand and the USA looking to have a hard time ahead of them in this group.

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SL may split squads

COLOMBO, July 23: Sri Lanka's selectors are considering following the new trend in one-day internationals and Test matches by selecting two specialist squads, a senior cricket board official said today, reports Reuters.

"We are considering having a very young side for one-day matches and keeping the experienced players for the Test team," the official said.

"There will obviously be a few who will be in both teams, but for the one-day matches we want to focus on youth," he added.

"We are looking four years down the road (at the next World Cup in South Africa in 2003) and we need to take some hard decisions. Might as well bite the bullet now than later," the official said.

He said the squads would be announced after consultations with Australian Dav Whatmore, who was recently taken on again as coach.

Whatmore was widely seen as responsible for moulding the Sri Lankan team which won the World Cup in 1996. He takes over his old job next month.

Sri Lanka are scheduled to play Australia and India in a one-day tournament next month, which will be followed by a three-Test series against Australia.

Sports authorities have revamped Sri Lanka's cricket in recent weeks by appointing Sanath Jayasuriya as captain, bringing in a new selection committee and appointing a new coach.

Sacked skipper Arjuna Ranatunga and experienced batsman Aravinda de Silva, who was also replaced by Mahela Jayawardene as vice-captain, have been included in a 30-member pool from which the squads will be selected for the one-day tournament and test series.

The changes came after Sri Lanka failed to reach the second round of the World Cup tournament in England in May. Sri Lanka have lost 18 of their last 25 one-day matches.

England and World Cup winners Australia already name different squads for one-day internationals and Test matches.

Boon blazes for Durham

LONDON, July 23: Former Australian Test opener David Boon hammered 139 - equalling his best score for Durham - as the visitors, resuming on 359 for three, piled up 552 on the second day of their English county championship match against Gloucestershire at Cheltenham on Thursday, reports AFP.

Boon's compatriots Justin Langer and Greg Blewett were also among the runs.

Boon's first century of the season was sprinkled with 23 boundaries and Gloucestershire were then reduced to 148 for five in reply by the close, still needing 255 runs to avoid the follow on.

Langer, Middlesex's acting skipper, earned his side a 58-run first-innings lead against Somerset at Taunton.

Middlesex resumed on 61 for three and Australian Test star Langer made 96 as the visitors posted 355 in reply to Somerset's 297.

Somerset were 28 without loss, and 30 runs behind, by the close.

Yorkshire resumed on 122 for two replying to Northants' 517 for seven declared but got off to a bad start, David Byas edging to Matthew Hayden at second slip off Devon Malcolm after completing his half-century.

Blewett, 62 not out overnight, dug in and looked poised for his first county century only to be trapped leg before by Graeme Swann for 98.

Yorkshire were eventually dismissed for 289 with former England paceman Malcolm claiming four for 106.

Malcolm bowled Matthew Wood for a duck and then had Michael Vaughan caught behind for 18 as the Tykes struggled again in their second innings.

Minnows' chance to make big



MEXICO CITY, July 23: Some of the less established countries in international football get a chance to rub shoulders with the glitterati in the FIFA Confederations Cup, beginning here Saturday, reports AFP.

Brazil and Germany are the two aristocrats of the world game in this tournament - and with both these sides fielding understrength teams the emerging nations will be eager to claim a famous scalp.

It is Brazil and Germany who will kick-off the tournament on Saturday night in a Group B match. The other two sides in that pool - the United States and New Zealand meet on the same day.

Group A features Mexico and, following tradition, the host nation have been given the easier group with Bolivia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia their opponents.

Brazil, fresh from their Copa America triumph, have opted to rest several stars of that tournament.

Coach Wanderley Luxemburgo has rested Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Roberto Carlos, Cafu, Amoroso and Antonio Carlos for the Confederations Cup.

Luxemburgo will use the tournament to give his promising crop of youngsters

more tournament experience - notably Alex and Ronaldinho Gaucha.

Although he was keen to give youth its fling in the Copa in Paraguay, Luxemburgo used his youngsters sparingly and in the later stages relied on his tried and trusted players.

Now the youngsters will have the chance to really parade their talents.

Germany also indicated that success in the tournament is not high on their list of priorities, also fielding a weakened team.

Coach Eric Ribbeck admitted his team were playing "more by obligation than by desire".

The candid Ribbeck continued: "When we were told we had to play in the Cup we were not very enthusiastic about all because in German football the clubs are in a preparatory phase and the players have to take

Unfriendly friendly!

PERUGIA, Italy, July 23: A riot among players and officials ended with the abandonment of the Perugia v Libya friendly match here on Thursday, reports AFP.

One of the Libyan players was accompanied by police out of the stadium for his own protection following the brawl which erupted in the 17th minute of the first half.

Italian referee Massimo De Santis abandoned the game and police intervened to separate the brawlers before getting them back into their respective changing rooms.



Perugia goalkeeper Angelo Pagotto (2nd R) being escorted off the ground by a policeman after the friendly match against Libya turned violent on July 22. —AFP photo

Hamann now Liverpool's



LIVERPOOL, England, July 23: Liverpool on Thursday completed the signing of German midfielder Dietmar Hamann from English Premiership rivals Newcastle United for a reported fee of 8 million pounds (12 million dollars), reports AFP.

The 25-year-old becomes Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier's seventh capture of the summer.

The German international put pen to paper at Anfield and was due to join up with his new Liverpool teammates in Northern Ireland later on Thursday. The length of Hamann's contract was not immediately revealed.

Liverpool confirmed Hamann had completed his move at Anfield after jetting in from Germany.

The formalities were completed this afternoon at Anfield after the player came in from Munich and he is a Liverpool player now, Anfield spokesman Ian Cotton said.

"He will now fly out to

Belfast to join up with Gerard Houllier's new teammates this evening."

Hamann was signed by former Newcastle manager Kenny Dalglish last summer from Bayern Munich for 5.25 million pounds.

But he claimed that his wife could not settle on Tyneside and was alleged to have had a bust-up with current Newcastle boss Ruud Gullit at half-time during the FA Cup final.

However Houllier is confident that his single season in the Premiership gives him an edge over other imported players.

"He also has one more asset compared to when he arrived in England last season - he knows about the Premiership and that is very important," Houllier said.

"He is still young but he has experience because he has played for Bayern Munich in the Champions League."

Hamann himself believes Liverpool will soon be challenging again for the highest European honours.

The German international originally claimed he wanted to join Arsenal for next season's competition.

But despite Liverpool enduring their worst season for 30 years last season, Hamann is confident his new club will return to the competition soon.

"I realise that had I gone to Arsenal I would have played Champions League football and that Newcastle were still in the UEFA Cup," Hamann said.

"Perhaps people would find it difficult understanding my choice of Liverpool."

"But I see their problems as a one or two-year affair and I know that sooner or later a team of this quality will be in the Champions League."

Hamann insisted that he did not want to return to Germany with Borussia Dortmund, who had also made a bid for the midfielder.

"I had no choice but to leave Newcastle and after Arsenal had pulled out of negotiations to take me to London, I had to choose between Dortmund and Liverpool," Hamann said.

MU fortune rolls on in Asia



HONG KONG, July 23 (Reuters/Internet): The global marketing machine that is Manchester United's friendly against Hong Kong's South China on Saturday. Such is the popularity of the English and European champions that most of the crowd will be cheering for the Red Devils rather than the hometown team.

Thanks to the introduction of live broadcasts of English Premier League matches across Asia, the team has millions of fans across the region.

And that it is an opportunity the merchandising gurus at United, the world's wealthiest club, are not going to pass up.

Taument moves to OFI Crete

BRUSSELS, July 23: Dutch international striker Gaston Taument, who spent last season with Belgian club Anderlecht, on Friday agreed a two-year deal with Greek first division side OFI Crete, reports AFP.

Taument, 28 and capped 16 times, will link up with his compatriot Gene Gerards, who coaches the Greek club.

Their ability to turn success on the pitch into hard cash is unrivalled. "Our first priority is to run a successful football team, and I think we do that rather well," said United chairman Martin Edwards at a news conference in Hong Kong. "On the back of that success we also try and market the brand and we try and capitalise on the team's success."

In Asia, that means the club plans to set up a string of Manchester United megastores across the region. According to a club spokesman, megastores will be opened in Singapore, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, as well as in Hong Kong and possibly Shanghai.

"Without the team's success it's very difficult to enhance the brand, so the team always comes first," said Edwards. "But in today's world, with expensive transfer fees, high wages and everything else you really have to be able to capitalise on your success on the field."

It also means the club will unveil its new away kit on Friday in Manchester - and in Hong Kong and on the internet.

According to kit makers Umbro fans eager to see the latest away strip will be able to view the launch by logging on to www.beaportofit.co.uk.

"A revolving three-dimensional image of one of the

United players wearing the kit will remain on the website," according to the Umbro statement.

"Fans logging on will be able to rotate the image by 360 degrees and zoom in on different areas of the kit... They will also have the opportunity to purchase the kit."

Neville sidelined

MANCHESTER, England, July 23: Manchester United Treble-winning defender Gary Neville will miss the start of the season next month because of groin trouble it was revealed on Friday, reports AFP.

The 24-year-old, who was unable to take part in Manchester United's current money-spinning tour of Australia and China, has taken longer than expected to recover from the injury.

The news comes as a further blow for under pressure England manager Kevin Keegan, who learnt earlier in the week that experienced central defender Tony Adams would miss the vital Euro 2000 qualifying matches against Luxembourg at Wembley and Poland in Warsaw on September 4 and 8 respectively.

England must win both to keep their fading European Championship hopes alive.



LONDON, July 23: Belgian Jean-Marc Bosman has pleaded with Arsenal's unwanted striker Nicolas Anelka to show some respect for the free transfer system, reports AFP.

Bosman - the player who fought through the European courts to establish the right for footballers to move without restriction on their own terms at the end of their contracts - believes Anelka's reported intention to 'buy' his own freedom from Arsenal may do untold harm to the game.

"You could say it's anarchy," said Bosman.

Anelka should always re-

Van Gaal to stay upto 2002



BARCELONA, July 23: Barcelona's Dutch coach Louis Van Gaal has agreed to stay with the Spanish champions through to 2002, club president Josep Lluís Nunez announced on Thursday, reports AFP.

Van Gaal had a clause in his contract allowing him to leave the Catalan club if he were ever offered the Dutch national job "but for now Van Gaal has put aside this possibility and extended his contract," Nunez said.

"Van Gaal informed me a few days ago that he was dropping this clause. It was a big - and pleasant - surprise as our relationship has been perfect and it would be difficult for it to get any better," Nunez added.

Van Gaal originally signed a three-season contract with an option for a further two and had agreed to make his intentions on his future clear by the end of this year.

Van Gaal remains a controversial figure despite winning the league title and earlier this week sparked a row with Spanish journalists, whom he allegedly kept waiting in a car park for six hours before allowing them access to the Nou Camp stadium.

He has also infuriated the media by deciding that all training sessions this season should be held behind closed doors with the press only being admitted at the end of each session.

Some 90 reporters signed a petition complaining at their treatment and handed it to the

club. Some followers of the club are also irked at his policy of playing up to half a dozen Dutch players and roundly booed him early last season after some poor results.

For the Dutchman himself, however, the outlook could hardly be rosier.

"Over the past two years it has become easier and easier to work here. I have been able to impose my way of thinking much better and I have a good relationship with the president and the board."

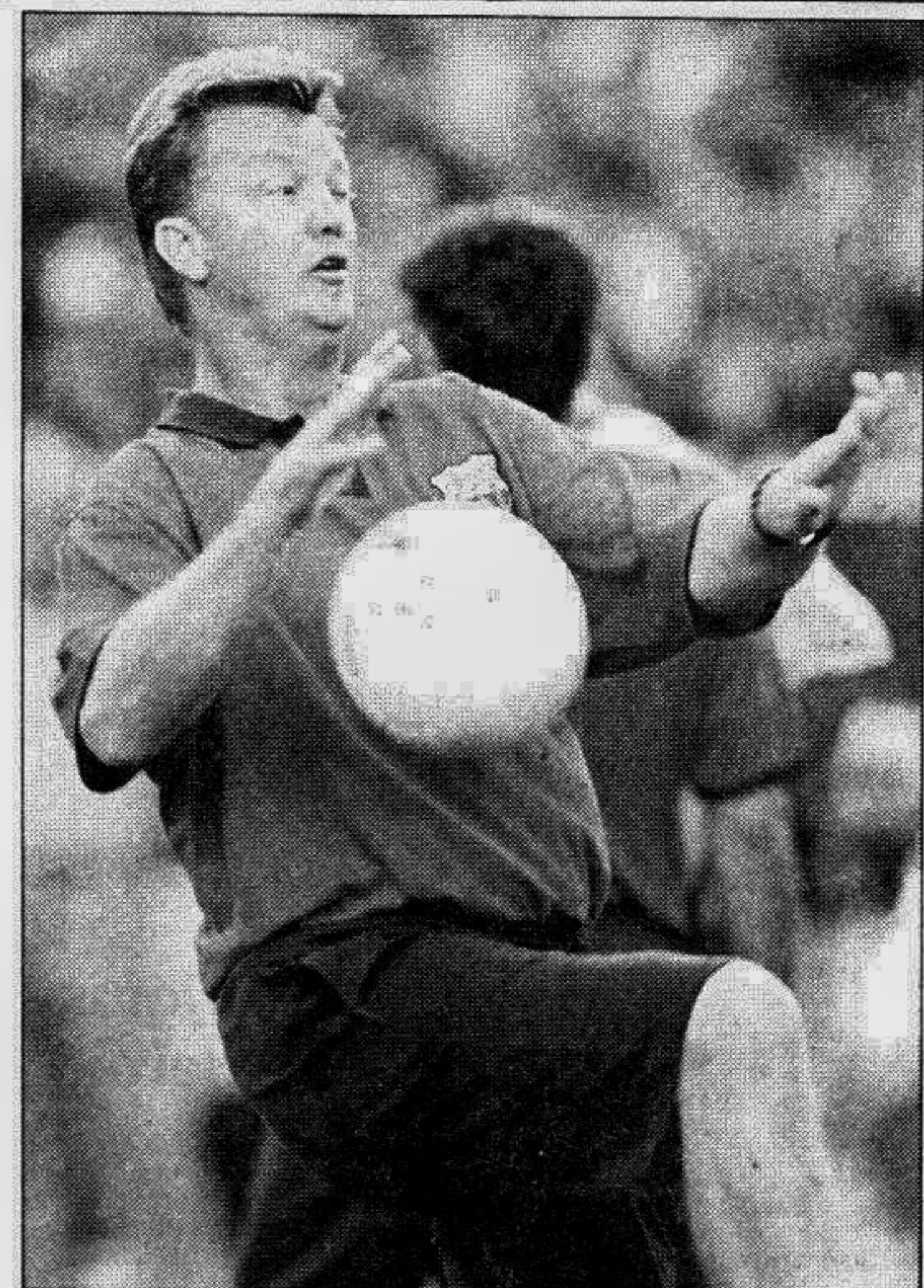
"I always had the confidence of the players and have a fantastic staff. We have a great squad and one which can win trophies," Van Gaal insisted.

On his relations with the media he was somewhat dismissive, however. "It's not an important issue. The players are more important as are my colleagues, president and the board. Winning is the important thing for me."

Buechse bags first gold

ISTANBUL, July 23: Peggy Buechse of Germany claimed the first gold medal of the European swimming championships when she retained her five-km open-water title on Friday, reports Reuters.

At the finish off the coast of the sea of Marmara, Buechse touched just ahead of Viola Valli of Italy. Buechse's German teammate Britta Kamrau took the bronze.



Barcelona's Dutch coach Luis van Gaal shows his soccer skills during a practice session of his team on July 22. Van Gaal extended his contract until 2002 with the club. —AFP photo