

Pele still backing South Africa

BRUSSELS, Dec 12: Pele reiterated his support for South Africa's bid for the 2006 World Cup here Sunday even though Brazil are still in the race - and despite fierce lobbying from his friends.

Pele revealed that, although he has publicly debunked Brazil's bid, he believed South Africa winning the right to stage the world's biggest sports event would also be to his homeland's benefit.

He said: "Africa has never staged the World Cup. If the fight between England and Germany continues maybe we can support South Africa and they can support Brazil for 2010."

South Africa, Brazil, England, Germany and Morocco are the five contenders to stage the 2006 tournament.

Pele also revealed his support for South Africa was causing a tug-of-war for his services between German legend Franz Beckenbauer and English football great Sir Bobby Charlton, both friends of the Brazilian.

Pele said: "Beckenbauer he says to me 'Why are you saying no to Germany?' and then Bobby says: 'Stop saying South Africa.'"

Matthaeus Bayern's until March

BERLIN, Dec 12: Veteran German midfielder Lothar Matthaeus is set to stay with his German club Bayern Munich until March 10 before joining the New York/New Jersey MetroStars, German newspaper Bild reported on Saturday, reports AFP.

Matthaeus, 38, was originally due to join the MLS side in January but was then reported to be staying with the German champions until the end of the 1999-2000 season after they suffered defensive problems.

Bild reported that Bayern manager Uli Hoeness had reached an agreement with New York/New Jersey manager Charly Stittano over Matthaeus' date of departure.

Matthaeus is expected to make his farewell appearances for Bayern in European Champions League matches against Real Madrid on February 29 and March 8.

French First Division

Lyon back on track

PARIS, Dec 12: Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson headed Lyon back into the French title race on Saturday with his 13th goal of the campaign securing a 2-1 win at Rennes to end a three-match losing streak, reports AFP.

Anderson headed home following a corner to end stubborn resistance from Rennes, who have been hovering around the top five in recent weeks following a bad start to the season.

The win puts Lyon back into second spot above Paris Saint Germain, who play at Metz on Sunday.

Leaders Monaco, still five points clear of Lyon, travel to Corsica for a difficult fixture at Bastia, who recently sent Lyon packing 3-0 at their Stade Furiani.

Monaco currently have 39 points from 18 matches while Lyon now have 34 from 19 with PSG on 33 from 18.

Bordeaux, clearly feeling the effects of their midweek battling Champions League draw with Fiorentina, find themselves 12 points behind Monaco after the reigning champions went down 2-0 at promoted Troyes, who cemented their position in midtable with goals from Sladjan Djukic and Farid Ghali.

Bordeaux are still sixth but could fall to ninth by Sunday night if results go against them.

Highly-rated midfielder Steven N'Zogbo put Lyon ahead after 18 minutes after a through ball from Bastia but within six minutes Rennes were level through Cedric Bardon and it needed Anderson's brave lunge to nod the winner in a game spoilt by a rain-soaked pitch.

Rennes had most of the play in the second half but failed to make their greater industry count against a side who were reeling from ten goals conceded in three matches, including a midweek 4-0 thrashing at Werder Bremen which brought Lyon a premature UEFA Cup exit.

Scottish Premiership Celtic demolish Aberdeen

GLASGOW, Dec 12: Aberdeen manager Ebbe Skovdahl said he will relive the horror of his side's 6-0 trouncing at the hands of Celtic at Pittodrie on Saturday on video, reports AFP.

John Barnes' side handed out another humiliating defeat to the bottom club, who collapsed after being outplayed throughout a one-sided contest.

Celtic have now scored 18 goals without reply in just three league games against Aberdeen this season as Celtic turned on the style without mercy today with six different scorers.

Skovdahl said: "I will torture myself looking at the game on video to analyse the details of the game. You can never imagine losing so many goals to one team."

For me it looks like Mark Viduka is causing us a lot of problems. Every time the ball went forward he held it up and allowed other players to support him which is a great quality for Celtic.



Pele talking at a press conference yesterday ahead of the Euro 2000 draw at Brussels. — AFP photo

Euro soccer c'ships 1960-96

BRUSSELS, Dec 12 (AFP): Brief history of the European Championships: The European Championships was the brainchild of UEFA's French general secretary Henri Delaunay, who died in 1957 before the inaugural event in 1960.

1960: Only four teams took part in the final stages of the inaugural 1960 tournament — then called the European Nations Cup — 17 had entered in all.

The four to qualify were the Soviet Union, France, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The final between the Soviets and Yugoslavia was a tight affair with Viktor Ponedelnik scoring a 113th-minute winner for the Soviets who prevailed 2-1.

1964: Spain's only victory in a major senior football tournament took place on home soil.

The individual star of the tournament was Denmark's Ole Madsen, however, who finished top scorer with 11 goals.

The Danes lost to the Soviet Union in the semi-finals. In the final in Madrid, Spain beat the Soviets in another close encounter.

Jesus Maria Pereda gave the hosts a sixth-minute lead only for Galimian Khusainov to square the match two minutes later. In the 83rd minute Marcelino scored with a diving header to win the match for the Spaniards.

1968: Rebirth of the European Championships it was the only time Italy — a three-times World Cup winners — have prevailed in the continental tournament.

In goal for the Italians was Dino Zoff, now coach to the Azurri and a member of the 1982 World Cup-winning side.

But after a semi-final 0-0 draw with the Soviets, Italy won through to the final on the toss of a coin. Skipper Giacinto Facchetti correctly called heads.

The final was a close affair, too. Dragan Drazic gave Yugoslavia the lead only for a late free-kick from Angelo Domenghini to give the Italians a replay.

Luigi Riva and Pietro Anastasi gave Italy a 2-0 win in that replay.

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match. A qualifying match between Scotland and England at Hampden Park set an attendance record for the tournament of 134,000 that is unlikely ever to be beaten.

1972: In a one-sided final West Germany dispatched the Soviet Union 3-0 with two goals from Gerd Muller and one from Herbert Wimmer.

That outstanding German side would form the basis of the one that won the World Cup on home soil two years later.

Franz Beckenbauer, Muller, Gunter Netzer, Sepp Maier, Paul Breitner, Jupp Heynckes and Uli Hoeness featured in the winning side.

1976: Both semi-finals and the final needed extra-time.

Czechoslovakia, coached by Dr. Jozef Venglos, beat Holland 3-1 and West Germany overturned a 2-0 deficit to emerge 4-2 winners against Yugoslavia.

The Germans also came back from two goals down in the final to force the game into a penalty shoot-out with Bernd Holzenbein's equaliser coming deep into injury time in normal time.

Uli Hoeness missed a penalty for Germany — no German player has missed a shoot-out penalty since — and Anton Panenka wrapped up victory for the Czechs with a nonchalant chipped penalty into the middle of the goal as Sepp Maier dived to his right.

1980: West Germany ruled again and owed their victory largely to an inspired Bernd Schuster.

Feuding with his country's football authorities later limited Schuster's participation in future international football.

Belgium had astonished everyone by reaching the final and were sunk by a goal in the 88th minute to lose 2-1.

Germany's matchwinner was an unlikely hero. Clumsy-looking forward Horst Hrubesch scored both goals in that final.

1984: France's first success in a big tournament came on home soil.

Michel Platini, with nine goals, was the undisputed star of the show but he featured in a magnificent midfield alongside Jean Tigana, Alain Giresse and Luis Fernandez.

Spain's nerves proved costly. In the final a bungle from Spanish goalkeeper Luis Arconada allowed Platini's free-kick to creep over the line.

Bruno Bellone wrapped up the 2-0 victory for the host nation with a delightful chip in stoppage time.

1988: Holland came into the tournament with Ruud Gullit being touted as the player who would win all the accolades.

In fact, Gullit was upstaged by compatriot Marco van Basten, his teammate at AC Milan.

Van Basten destroyed England with a brilliant hat-trick and also scored against West Germany.

In the final against the Soviets, Holland were leading with a Gullit header when Van Basten produced his masterpiece.

1992: Denmark's first success in a big tournament came on home soil.

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His fearsome dipping volley from the right-hand edge of the penalty area is still considered one of the greatest goals to win a major tournament.

It was Holland's first success in a major tournament and allowed the "Oranje" to consign the Johan Cruyff era to the past.

1992: Denmark are the only losers ever to win a major football tournament. The Danes were eliminated from the tournament in qualifying only to be recalled for the final stages when United Nations sanctions led to the expulsion of Yugoslavia. Denmark had spent most of the time on the beach — but it did not seem to matter.

Legendary goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel staked his first claim to greatness by saving a penalty in the shoot-out to win the semi-final with Holland.

The unlucky Dutchman was ironically Van Basten, the hero of the previous tournament.

In the final, Denmark again upset the formbook with goals from John Jensen and Kim Vilfort wrapping up a 2-0 win over Germany in Gothenburg.

1996: Germany's first major title as a re-united nation came on English soil — sweet revenge for their controversial loss in the same Wembley Stadium in the World Cup Final 30 years previously.

Their semi-final victory against England on penalties was an epic with Andreas Kopke saving Gareth Southgate's spot kick.

England had flattered to deceive with a brilliant 4-1 defeat of Holland but in truth had ridden their luck, benefiting from dubious refereeing decisions in the quarterfinal with Spain and also when Germany had what looked a good golden goal chalked off in extra-time.

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British Open goes to Joyce

ABERDEEN, Scotland, Dec 12: Lailani Joyce became the first Maori to win the women's British Open squash title with an upset 5-9, 9-6, 9-3, 10-8 win over World Open champion Cassie Campion on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Joyce was also the first New Zealander to land the crown since the great Susan Devoy seven years ago — reversing the result of her semifinal against the British player at the World Open two months ago.

Exceptional speed about the court was the chief reason for Joyce's triumph over the top seed in the final. It enabled her to retrieve several seemingly lost causes and pressured Campion into going for tighter and tighter margins, eventually forcing mistakes.

Campion started well, taking seven points in one service sequence to recover from 5-2 down to win the first game.

But she started to hit trouble halfway through the third. A brilliant retrieve won second seed Joyce a point from what seemed an impossible position to take her to 4-3 and for a while Campion appeared rattled, failing to win another point in the game.

The English player fought back in the fourth and led 5-1, only to miss an open court with a drop volley drop at 5-4 and that seemed to unsettle her again.

Joyce won her first match point but the Hamilton player made no mistake second time, bringing another volleying error from her tense and pressurised opponent.

"I have achieved a lifetime goal," said Joyce. "My father sat me down in front of a video of Susan Devoy when I was 10 and said 'now we are going to work to become British Open champion,' and now 15 years later it has happened."

Holder and world champion Peter Nicol of Britain will play arch-rival and world number one Jonathon Power of Canada for the men's title today.

Scot Nicol avenged a recent defeat by England number one Simon Parke in winning their semifinal 15-13, 15-10, 15-8.

Power beat Egyptian third seed Ahmed Barada 15-11, 15-13, 15-7 but the success was not straightforward.

Barada led 7-4 and 13-12 in the crucial fifth game before the top seed's creative front court game squeezed him home.

Power protested to the referee about Barada's language. He's saying the worst swear words possible but he's speaking in another language, (so) it's okay," he complained.

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