

China too good for Macau

MACAU, Dec 25: Not even Juergen Klinsmann, Carlos Dunga and Franco Baresi could stop tiny Macau from succumbing 4-0 to the might of China in a match on Friday celebrating the ex-Portuguese enclave's return to Chinese rule, reports Reuters.

Four headers by striker Su Maozhen secured victory as China's national squad, playing their first match in two years without the talents of sacked English coach Bob Houghton, made their debut appearance in Macau.

But while the Chinese were celebrating a performance that allowed them to chisel off the rustiness that had developed as a result of a long period of international activity, the real interest in the game lay in the appearance of three of the modern era's greatest players.

Klinsmann, Baresi and Dunga featured for just over an hour before leaving the field to catch flights back to their families in time for Christmas.

Yet in that short time, the memories of some of the game's greatest sporting achievements were revived by a group of players who, among them, have won just about every major international and club honour in the world game.

"I enjoyed playing so much with Franco because it's easier than playing against him," said Dunga, who captained Brazil to their fourth World Cup victory in 1994.

"This match was a very friendly match, it wasn't so aggressive. If we had the chance to spend more time together we probably would have had of a chance to play better together."

"At the beginning we were a bit confused but after that we were okay." I enjoyed playing together (with Klinsmann and Dunga), agreed three-time European Cup winner Baresi.



A NEW BEGINNING: Ronaldo and wife Milene walk on the lawn of his mother's house in Rio de Janeiro on December 24 after their civil wedding ceremony. —AFP photo

Ronaldo bestows his hand upon Milene's

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 25: Brazilian striker Ronaldo on Friday married his fiancée Milene Domingues, who is four-months pregnant, in a civil ceremony attended by 40 friends and relatives, reports AFP.

The 30-minute ceremony presided over by a justice of the peace was closed to the press and started two hours later than the scheduled 1400GMT starting time.

Ronaldo and Milene allowed themselves to be photographed afterwards in the garden of the house of Dona Sonia, the player's mother, where the marriage took place. She lives in the Barra da Tijuca district in the west of Rio.



The newly-wed couple kiss after exchanging their vows. —AFP photo

Swedish fans fight for 'Square Nacka'

STOCKHOLM, Dec 25: More than 500 people demonstrated here Friday as part of a campaign for a square in Soeder, a district in the south of Stockholm, to be named after legendary Swedish footballer Lennart 'Nacka' Skoglund, Swedish television reported, reports AFP.

The rally was timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the birth of 'Nacka' (1929-1975), who was a big star in Swedish football in the 1950s and made his name as a striker in the national team that made it to the 1958 World Cup Final in Stockholm where the host nation was defeated 5-2 by a Brazil team inspired by a 17-year-old prodigy named Pele.

'Nacka' Skoglund had already been a squad member of the Sweden team that finished third in the 1950 World Cup held in Brazil.

As a club player he reached the zenith of his career with Italian giants Inter Milan in 1953-4 where he won a Serie A title.

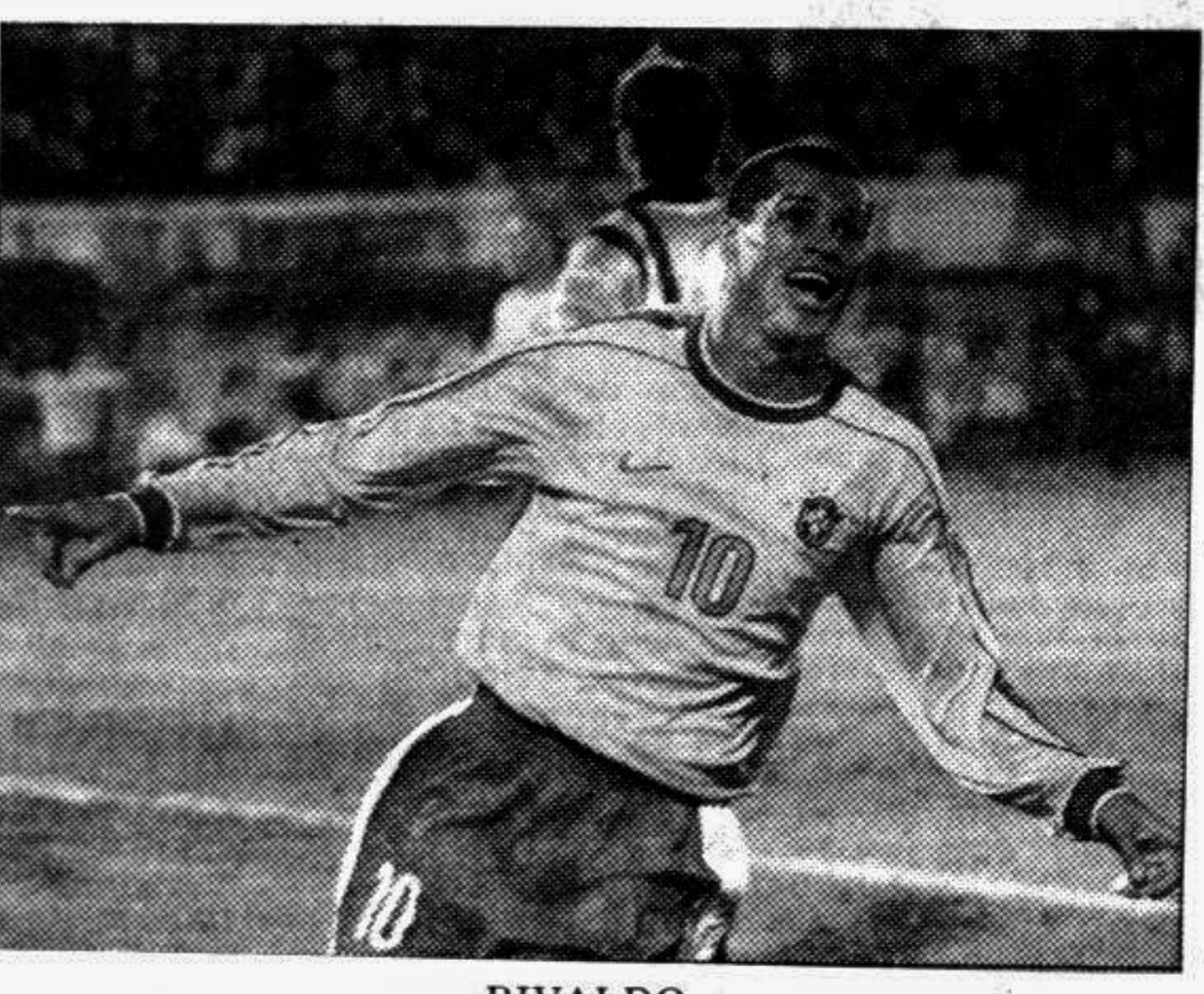
He is still fondly remembered both in Sweden and Italy. Between 1964 and 1967 he played for Stockholm outfit Hammarby.

Rivaldo clears the air

BARCELONA, Dec 25(Reuters/Internet): European footballer of the year Rivaldo insists he does not want to leave Barcelona despite the run-in with coach Louis van Gaal that has left him on the sidelines at the Catalan club.

Rivaldo's refusal to play on the left side of the Barca attack led van Gaal to drop the Brazilian from his squad for Wednesday's Spanish league game against Rayo Vallecano.

Speculation is rife that Rivaldo is on his way out of the club and an Italian newspaper said on Wednesday that Lazio was prepared to pay a world record 62 million dollars to buy him.



RIVALDO

Seedorf now an Inter man

MADRID, Dec 25(Reuters/Internet): Inter Milan clinched the signing of Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf from Real Madrid in a 24.35 million dollars deal on Friday, the Spanish club said.

The signing is now official, subject to a medical. Real vice-president Juan Onieva said on Spanish television after meetings with Inter officials and Seedorf's father, who acts as his representative.

"We've been negotiating for about a month with Inter over this deal." Onieva, who is in charge of economic affairs at the Spanish club, had earlier said on Spanish radio "This is a great deal from a financial point of view."

Seedorf, still only 23, has emerged during his 3-1/2 years at the club as one of Real's most bankable assets.

A busy, attacking midfielder, he possesses a fierce shot and a coolness that doubtless come from having won virtually everything in club soccer at such an early age.

At Ajax Amsterdam, he won two league titles, a European Cup and a European Supercup, while at Madrid he added another European Cup and Supercup, plus one Spanish league title.

Seedorf, who played for Sampdoria for a season before moving to Spain in 1996, has been linked frequently with a move back to Italy.

He appeared to be on the brink of leaving the Bernabeu last season after a difficult 1998-1999 campaign at Real, when he struggled for form and was fine several times for disciplinary matters.

People can come knocking on my door, offering a lot of money, but I'm not moving," Seedorf was quoted then by Spanish sports daily Marca.

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England, France do it the hard way Brazil re-affirm class

UNDATED, Dec 25(Reuters/Internet): Brazil banished memories of their 1998 World Cup Final humiliation by France by successfully defending their Copa America title in Paraguay.

In Europe controversy over the religious beliefs of Glenn Hoddle forced him to hand over the reins of the England team to Kevin Keegan and the new man must have been convinced that he had been good in a former existence as his team enjoyed a charmed life and qualified for Euro 2000.

The other established giants of European football - France, Germany, Spain and Italy - also qualified, some more convincingly than others.



SAMBA BACK ON TRACK: The victorious Brazilian team which clinched the Copa America trophy. —Star file photo

Brazil made their competitive debut under Wanderley Luxemburgo who was leading the deposed world champions into a new era.

He was replacing Mario Zagallo, who uniquely was associated with all four of Brazil's World Cup victories.

Luxemburgo immediately proved he was his own man by omitting the talented but troublesome strike duo of Edmundo and Romario.

After initially naming his squad Luxemburgo made further changes as he enhanced his disciplinary reputation.

Many predicted political turmoil in Paraguay after a chaotic year in which their vice-president was assassinated but the tournament passed off peacefully.

Brazil coasted through the early rounds with Ronaldo easing his way back to form after his World Cup nightmare.

But the real star of the Brazilian effort was Barcelona midfielder Rivaldo. Unusually for Brazil the other player to catch the eye was goalkeeper Dida, who made two vital penalty saves as he cemented his hold on the jersey bequeathed by 1994 World Cup winner Claudio Taffarel.

Argentina performed dismally, though. They had already been thrashed 3-0 by a young Colombia team.

The Boca Juniors forward became the first player to miss three penalties in a single match at international level and was widely ridiculed.

But Argentina blundered through to the last eight where they met Brazil. But they were sent home by their eternal rivals with Ronaldo's winning goal the difference. Roberto Ayala emulated Palermo by missing what would have been an equalising penalty.

It would prove to be an eventful journey home. Coach Marcelo Bielsa and striker Jose Luis Calderon traded insults at Asuncion airport and senior players Diego Simeone and Ayala had to intervene to prevent a public brawl.

Brazil faced Uruguay in the final. The underdogs had omitted most of their senior players for the Copa as

France should go it became clear he was fighting a losing battle and eventually he departed.

Former Leeds coach Howard Wilkinson took over the interim role before handing it over to Keegan, who initially took it also on a short-term basis.

Finally Keegan decided to part company with his club side Fulham and take the job full-time.

But disappointing performances left England on the brink of exit in the qualifiers.

But Sweden unexpectedly beat Poland to give England a play-off match with Scotland.

Two goals from Paul Scholes gave England a 2-0 first leg win at Hampden Park but in the second leg at Wembley Scotland won 1-0 with England hanging on at the end. But nonetheless they became the 16th and final team to reach the Euro 2000 finals.

But England were not the last to reach the Euro 2000 finals.

Denmark had perhaps the most farcical route to Euro 2000. They won their play-off with Israel amid reports that the Israeli players had spent the eve of the first leg in the company of call girls.

But the best performance of all came from the Czech Republic. They won all 10 of their qualifiers but received the dubious reward of being drawn alongside France, co-hosts The Netherlands and Denmark in the final stages.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer
ACROSS: 1 Turns target, 5 Beleave-gured spacecraft, 8 Something to say to a bartender, 12 Confident, 13 Indivisible, 14 Hinge (on), 15 Rashly, 17 Facility, 18 Abbr. on old, 19 Turkish, 21 Piquant, 24 Castle protection, 25 Family member, 26 Ordinary writing, 30 Mas-seuse's workplace, 31 Its motto is 'Friendship', 32 Witness, 33 Staircase adjunct, 35 'My Heart Will Go On' singer

Morocco 2006

Bid chief to drum up support in Nigeria
LAGOS, Dec 25: The man heading Morocco's bid for the 2006 World Cup arrives in Nigeria Sunday with a personal message from King Mohammed VI to President Olusegun Obasanjo, reports AFP.

Exhibition match Catalans beat Yugoslavia

BARCELONA, Dec 25(Reuters/Internet): A goal from Valencia striker Oscar Garcia in first-half injury time saw a selection from the Spanish province of Catalonia beat the Yugoslavia national team 1-0 at Barcelona's Olympic stadium on Thursday.

CROSSWORD grid with numbers 1-35 and 22-38.

Solution time: 27 mins.
HAI DIALS MOP, TINN ENSUE ADE, MAKEAFACE KON, REMPIE ASITER, ARIA HITS WOMAN, YAKS SET TIGER, STEEP AIR NRI, CARLO DOCTOR, CAMEUP ITO, AGO MAKEAWISH, LIVI BREST MOE, EINE SITATE PUP.

CRYPTOQUIP
Z X O H D V D Y O T L G Y D L P G Q
V Z X Y A H D L J R Q E Y T
O D C D O J Z S R P L D Y C
G L J S D O R Q E Y D G A D O
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: A WATCHMAKER IS CAREFUL TO TAKE TIME OFF WHEN HE FEELS THE NEED TO UNWIND.