Super teams made to sweat



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Argentina, playing at 11,811 feet above sea level, forced a heroic 3-3 draw in Bolivia while Brazil struggled again by drawing 1-1 at home to Peru in the World Cup qualifiers. Argentina increased their lead in the South American group by scoring twice in the last two minutes on Wednesday to grab a point in La Paz, but Brazil dropped to fourth after again belying their reputation as world beaters and entertainers with a drab display.

The Hernando Siles stadium in La Paz is one of Argentina's least favourite venues, and Brazil may now be feeling the same about their own Morumbi stadium in Sao Paulo after being booed off the pitch once more.

The first jeers were heard around the 20th minute and by halftime the 50,000 crowd was chanting "Ole" as Peru passed the ball around. When Peru scored, fans threw Brazilian flags onto the pitch in protest, "Nothing is easy any more. There's no longer that great respect for us that there was before," said Brazil striker Romario.

Four-times world champions Brazil (21 points), incredibly, trail modest Paraguay (23) and Ecuador (22) and look increasingly in danger of losing their proud record as the only country to have taken part at every World Cup.

Only the top four teams qualify automatically for next year's World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea, while the fifth will play off against the winners of the Oceania region.

Brazil are only two points ahead of fifth-placed Colombia and three in front of Uruguay, who they face in Montevideo in their next game. Bolivia remain ninth with 10 points and virtually out of the running, while Peru are seventh with 12 and have only a very remote chance of

Football

World champions France

rebounded from last month's loss to

Spain with an emphatic 4-0 win over

Portugal in a friendly international

and Thierry Henry scored first-half

goals as the World Cup holders and

European champions ripped apart

goal 10 minutes from the end as

on a day of 14 friendlies around

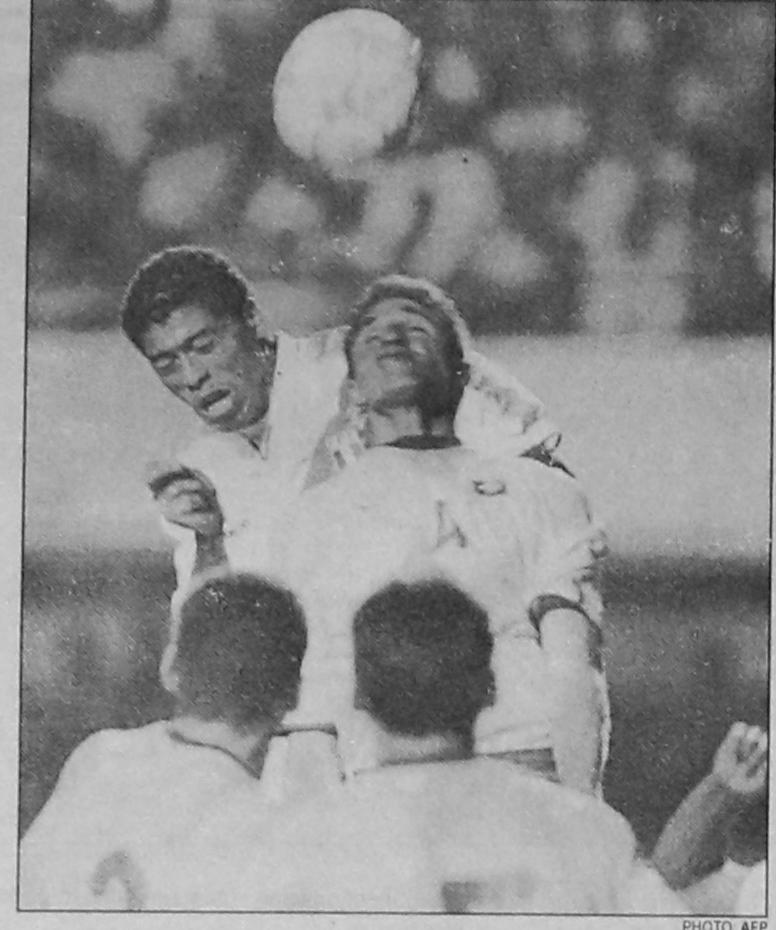
Youri Djorkaeff scored the fourth

Sylvain Wiltord, Mikael Silvestre

REUTERS, London

in Paris on Wednesday.

the Portuguese defence.



Brazil's Edmilson (R) and Juan Jayo of Peru are locked in an aerial tussle for possession during their World Cup 2002 qualifier in Sao Paulo on Wednesday.

CONMEBOL standings

REUTERS

South American World Cup qualifying standings after Wednesday's

1. Argentina	12	9	2	1	30	11	29
2. Paraguay	12	7	2	3	20	11	23
3. Ecuador	12	7	1	- 4	15	15	22
4. Brazil	12	6	3	3	22	11	21
5. Colombia	12	5	4	3	12	9	19
6. Uruguay	12	5	3	4	13	8	18
7. Peru	12	3	3	6 -	11	15	12
8. Chile	12	3	1	8	12	17	10
9. Bolivia	12	2	4	6	8	19	10
10. Venezuela	12	1	1	10	8	35	4

Note: top four qualify for the World Cup in 2002. Fifth team plays off against the winners of the Oceania region.

qualifying.

For most of the game in La Paz, Argentina (29 points) looked as if they would fall victim to FIFA rules wich allow teams insufficient time to adapt to conditions at the world's highest international stadium.

Diego Simeone, Claudio Lopez, Juan Sebastian Veron and Hernan Crespo were subjected to an absurd marathon before the game. They played for Lazio in an Italian championship match on Sunday, flew overnight to Argentina, trained in Buenos Aires on Monday, flew with the team to Santa Cruz in Bolivia on Tuesday and arrived in La Paz two hours before the game.

It is generally accepted that 21 days are needed to fully acclimatise to conditions in La Paz and some of the Argentine players, Veron and Simeone included, seemed barely able to walk in the second half Coach Marcelo Bielsa acknowledged afterwards that his team struggled. Bolivia led 3-1 after Lider Paz, Percy Colque and Joaquin Botero all scored their first international goals.

But Hernan Crespo, who scored Argentina's first goal, reduced the deficit in the 89th minute with his seventh goal of the competition, then Juan Pablo Sorin equalised with almost the game's last kick "The game was in our hands," said Bolivia coach Carlos Aragones. "We were on the point of beating the best teaminthe world."

In Sao Paulo, Brazil gave three players their debut and dropped captain Rivaldo in an attempt to stop the rot.

Veteran Romario, 35, gave Brazil a 66th minute lead with his eighth goal of the competition to huge relief, but it was short-lived.

Defender Juan Pajuelo equalised 11 minutes from time when he rose above a static defence to head in from a free kick.

Peru, to general disbelief, finished the game on the attack and Andres Mendoza nearly grabbed an injury-time winner.

I'M BACK: Ruud van Nistelrooy responds to the crowd after Netherlands' World Cup 2002 qualifier against Cyprus in Eindhoven on Wednesday.

Joy for Ireland, Holland



AFP, Paris

The Republic of Ireland took what they hope will be a vital step nearer to the World Cup finals Wednesday after beating part-timers Andorra 3-Lat Lansdowne Road.

Mick McCarthy's men had to come from behind after Andorra defender Ildefons Lima was allowed a free header to give his side the lead but the hosts roared back and won with goals from Kevin Kilbane, Mark Kinsella and stand-in skipper Gary

The Republic moved on to 14 points from six games, three ahead of both Portugal and Holland.

Portugal were not in Group Two. action - instead they received a 4-0 mauling from world champions France in a friendly at the Stade de France - but Holland took the chance to underpin their own qualifying hopes with a 4-0 battering of Cyprus in Eindhoven.

Manchester United's new 27 million-dollar signing Ruud Van Nistelrooy was among the goals, appearing as a late sub to head home a cross from Boudewijn

"For me the important thing was to get back in the international squad. I got 20 minutes, scored a

Wednesday (PWDLFAP(s):

Groupone

In Belgrade

Switzerland

Slovenia

Yugoslavia

Group two

In Dublin

Netherlands

Ireland

Portugal

Cyprus

Estonia

Andorra

Group three

Malta I Iceland 4

Czech Republic

Northern Ireland

Latvia 1 San Marino 1

InValletta

Bulgaria

Denmark

Iceland

Malta

Groupsix

In Riga

Scotland

Belgium

Croatia

Latvia

Austria

Spain

Bosnia

Liechtenstein

Israel

San Marino

Groupseven

In Innsbruck

Austria 2 Liechtenstein 0

In Eindhoven

Netherlands 4 Cyprus 0

Ireland 3 Andorra 1

Faroe Islands

Russia

Yugoslavia O Russia 1

goal and people can judge me on that," said a delighted Van

Dutch coach Louis van Gaal said he had left out Nistelroov from the starting eleven as the player lacks match fitness having just recovered from the cruciate ligament injury which originally appeared to have scuppered his dream of a move to the English Premiership last year.

His replacement in the front line Chelsea's Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink bagged the first goal on 29 minutes. for the Dutch, before Barcelona winger Marc Overmars and clubmate Patrick Kluivert made the result safe and allowed Van Nistelrooy to come on and share in

Holland now go level second with Portugal, who have a game in hand. Russia are almost home and dry in Group One after they won 1-0 in Yugoslavia thanks to a late effort

from Vladimir Bestchastnykh. The Russians lead nearest rivals Switzerland by five points.

In Group Seven, Austria leapfrogged Spain with a 2-0 win over minnows Liechtenstein but the Spaniards, who now trail the new leaders by a point and who laboured to beat Japan 1-0 in a friendly match, have a game in hand.

Meanwhile, England's World Cup qualifying rivals Albania beat Turkey 2-0 away in a friendly at Gaziantep, Alban Bushi and Ervin Skela scoring the goals while Tayfur Havutcu missed a penalty for Turkey.

Liverani makes history



AFP, Perugia

Perugia midfielder Fabio Liverani wrote a new page in his country's football history here Wednesday when he became the first mixed race player selected at senior level for

an Italian father and Somali mother, was included by coach Giovanni the friendly with South Africa here Curi Stadium.

before the match, was replaced by Tuesday night's ankle injury to Stefano Fiore at the interval he Francesco Totti, irenically sustained produced some skilful touches and in a training ground collision with came desperately close to scoring when South African keeper Hans Vonk turned his freekick onto a post.

Liverani told journalists after the Liverani. match.

played. Now of course I hope to Viterbese.

build on this and take it one step at a time. At least I confirmed I can do it and I did not make any bad mis-

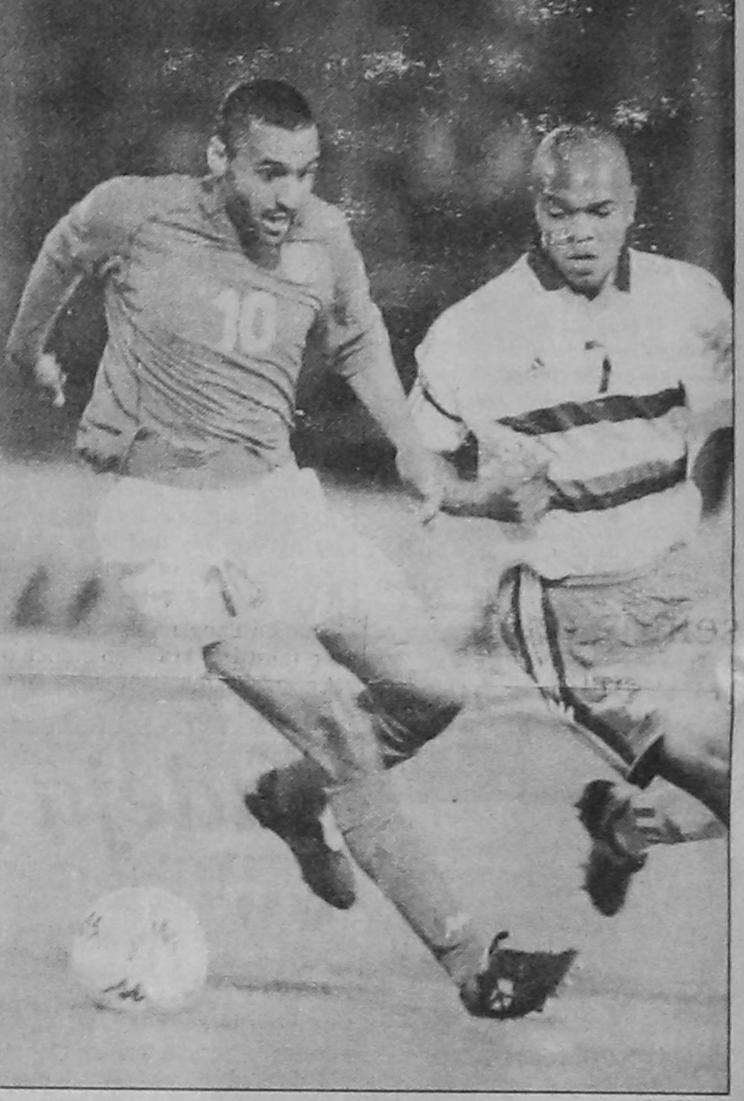
Trapattoni struck a note of caution when he pointed out that Liverani had only played because others were unavailable.

"Don't forget it's not just (Francesco) Totti and (Stefano) Fiore but also (Luigi) Di Biagio and (Demetrio) Albertini," said the coach. "But I was very satisfied with Liverani, the Rome-born son of his performance and he did very

The 24-year-old, given a rousing Trapattoni in his starting line-up for reception by his home fans when he emerged for the warm-up, was on his home ground at the Renato originally going to start the match on the bench but was promoted to Although Liverani, as planned the starting line-up following

Two mixed race players -Reggina's Joseph Oshadogan and "I knew I was not going to play | Inter Milan's Matteo Ferrari - have the whole game and Fiore is a good represented Italy at under-21 level player who deserves to play," but none at senior level until

It completes a remarkable season "It's a pity I could not get a goal for the player who last season was on but I am pleased to have have the books of third division outfit



Italy's Fabio Liverani (L), the first black footballer to play for the country, and Moescheu of South Africa are in pursuit of the ball during their international friendly in Perugia on Wednesday.

European Zone results & standings Guardiola Spurs bound? Collated results of World Cup European group qualifiers played on

REUTERS, London

Barcelona captain Josep Guardiola is to become new Tottenham Hotspur manager Glenn Hoddle's first major signing. The Mirror has reported. The report said the 30year-old midfielder would sign a 50,000 pound a week deal on July "Guardiola will join Spurs on a free transfer once his Barcelona contract expires and immediately become the highest earner at White Hart Lane with a 2.5 million pound (dollars3.57 million) a year deal over four seasons," it added on Thursday. Former Arsenal midfielder Emmanuel Petit has also been linked by English newspapers with a move to Spurs from Barcelona.

Barca close to Riquelme deal

AFP, barcelona

25

Barcelona are close to signing Boca Juniors midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme, a director of the Catalan club said on Thursday.

"We are making progress and have taken another step forward." said Francesc Closa after negotiating with the talented Argentine's representatives in Barcelona.

The deal, reported to be worth about 4,800 million pesetas (dollars 25.89 million), is subject to Riquelme and Boca reaching agreement over the player's claims for a salary increase based on his performance over the last three seasons.

"We are very close to a deal and all we need now is for Boca and the player to reach an agreement," said Barcelona spokesman Gabriel Masfurroll.

If the deal goes through the 22footsteps of Diego Maradona, who have"

joined Barcelona from Boca in 1982 for a then record six million dollars. Riquelme, who hit the headlines after helping Argentina win the World Youth Cup in Malaysia in 1997, has been a Barcelona target since his virtuoso performance in Boca's victory against Real Madrid in the World Club Cup final in

November. Reports suggest the deal will be for five years and the player will earn an estimated 400 million pesetas (dollars2.16 million) a season, close to 15 times his salary at Boca.

Zagallo will carry on till 2013

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

Former Brazil coach Mario Zagallo, who led his country to the 1998 World Cup final at the age of 67 and is now coaching Flamengo, said on Wednesday he would continue his career until 2013.

The 69-year-old, who joined Brazil's most popular team last year. was angry at rumours that he was about to finally end his long career. "They're saying that I'm going to leave and retire from football." said the superstitious coach whose lucky number is 13.

"Then note it down here -- on January 13, 2013, at 1300.1 will retire from football.

Zagallo, who claims he was born with victory by his side, never seems to tire of soccer, even after having coached Brazil at three World Cups. He led them to victory in 1970, fourth place in 1974 and second in 1998 and also won the World Cup as a player in 1958 and 1962 and as an assistant coach in 1994.

When the coach of a rival club suggested recently that Zagallo should retire, the veteran retorted: "I year-old would be following in the hope he wins as many titles as I

merited 1-1 draw. Radoslaw Kaluzny European friendly Internationals results

returned from Poland with a well-

REUTERS Collated results of European friendly soccer internationals played on Wednesday:

In Perugia: Italy 1 South Africa 0

In Paris: France 4 Portugal 0 In Cordoba:

Spain 1 Japan 0

In Budapest: Hungary 0 Finland 0

In Prague: Czech Republic 1 Belgium I

In Oslo: Norway 2 Bulgaria 1

In Copenhagen:

Denmark 3 Slovenia 0

In Gaziantep: Turkey 0 Albania 2

In Bydgoszcz: Poland 1 Scotland 1

In Geneva: Switzerland 0 Sweden 2

In Varazdin: Croatia 2 Greece 2

In Ploiesti: Romania 0 Slovakia 0

In Chisinau: Moldova 0 Estonia 0

Fantastic France opened the scoring for Poland after sive first half display he was replaced

last international for some time if FIFA bans them from international competition on Thursday, squandered a 2-0 lead over Croatia in drawwith Miki Rapaic equalising for Croatia in the last minute. Alekos time. Alexandris, who scored a hat-trick as Olympiakos clinched the Greek championship on Sunday, scored

France ran out the highest scorers both his country's goals. Europe. Many countries experia dispute between the government mented with their lineups before the and the local FA over the running of Norway's 31-year-old midfielder

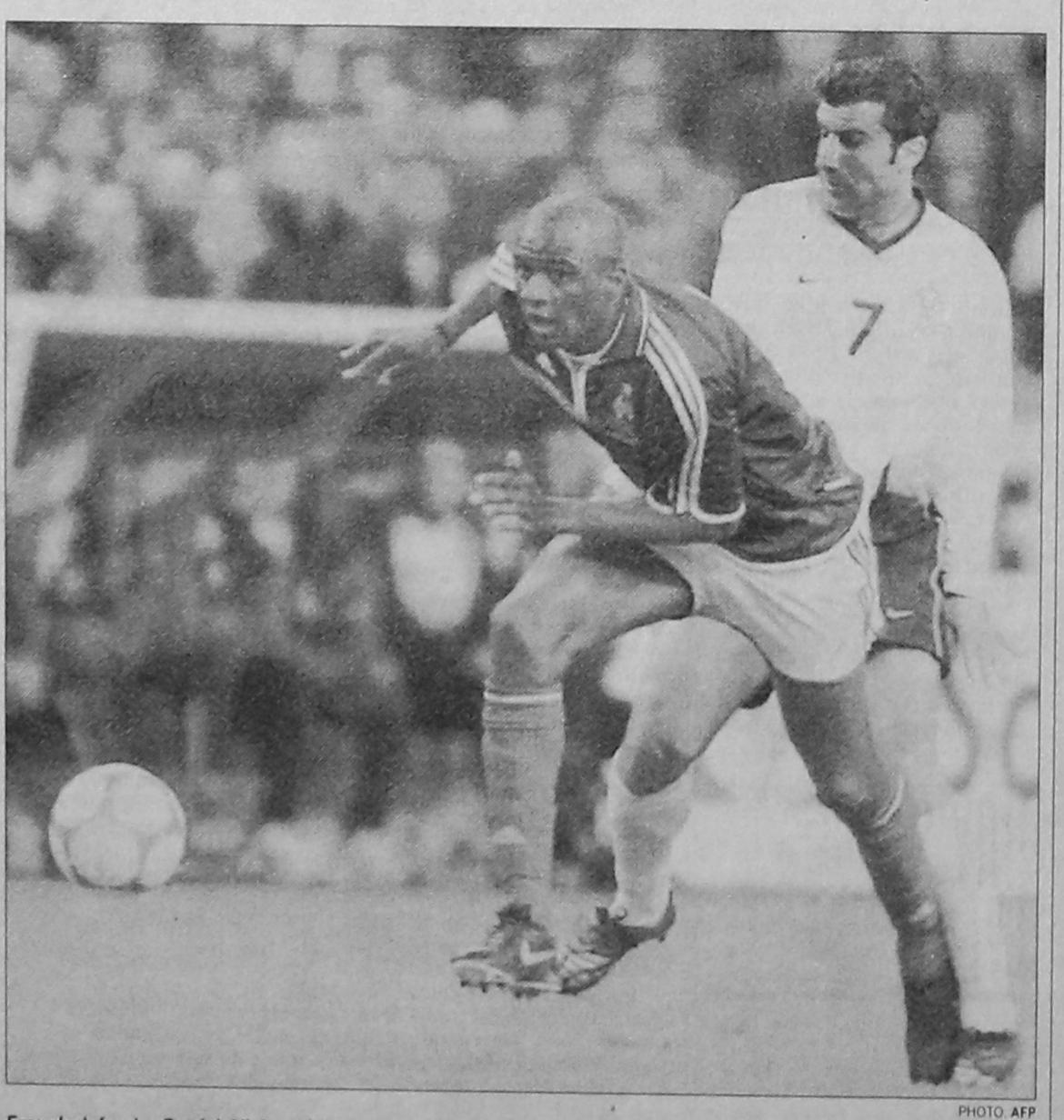
next round of World Cup qualifiers the game in the country. in a month's time. But the tinkering Nothing should stop Italy qualipaid no dividends for Turkey, whose fying for next year's finals but they young side crashed to a 2-0 home defeat to Albania, although an unfamiliar-looking Scotland team

50 minutes in Bydgoszcz, before at halftime. Vincenzo Montella Scott Booth equalised from the scored the only goal -- his first for his penalty spot in the 69th. The Poles country -- after 54 minutes. finished with 10 men after Tomasz South African keeper Hans Vonk Iwan was sent off in the 82nd min- kept the score down with an out- ance for Denmark. The Danes Greece, playing possibly their Africans gave a fine account of themselves despite the defeat. Teenage debutant Milan Baros scored his first goal for the Czech Republic in their 1-1 draw with Varazdin. The match ended in a 2-2 Belgium in Prague, although he

Emile Mpenza had put Belgium making his debut. ahead after only 11 minutes before Baros equalised after 82 minutes to give a youthful Czech side a well-Greece face a FIFA ban following deserved draw. One veteran who had a night to remember was Oyvind Leonhardsen whose season at Tottenham Hotspur has been blighted by injuries.But he forgot were made to battle for a 1-0 win about those problems, scoring twice over South Africa in Perugia, where in two minutes in the second half to Perugia's midfielder Fabio Liverani lead Norway to a 2-1 win over beaten 5-0 by France on March 24, became the first black player to Bulgaria in Olso. Bulgaria had but a poorer result for Spain, who represent Italy. Despite an impres- opened the scoring after just 40 beat France 2-1 four days later.

seconds through Marian Hristov. The curtain came down in Copenhagen to end the great international career of Peter Schmeichel, making his 129th and last appearstanding display as the South marked the occasion with a 3-0 win over Slovenia thanks to goals from Jesper Gronkjaer (61) -- his first for Denmark -- Jon Dahl Tomasson (67pen) and Ebbe Sand (82) Schmeichel, the best goalkeeper in the world for most of the 1990s, left appeared to be well offside at the the stageafter 65 minutes to be replaced by Peter Kjaer, who was

Schmeichel only had one save to make during the match. Although he has quit the international team, he is contracted to play for Sporting Lisbon until the end of next season. And just to prove that there is no logic in the game, Spain needed a last-minute goal from Ruben Baraja to beat Japan 1-0 in Cordoba. It was a significant improvement for Japan who were



French defender Patrick Vieira (L) is under pressure from Portugal superstar Luis Figo during their international friendly at the Stade de France on Wednesday.