

Super teams made to sweat

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro



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.

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...

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 half-time 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.

CONMEBOL standings

REUTERS

South American World Cup qualifying standings after Wednesday's games:

Table with 5 columns: Rank, Team, P, W, D, L, Pts. Lists Argentina (30), Paraguay (20), Ecuador (15), Brazil (22), Colombia (12), Uruguay (13), Peru (11), Chile (12), Bolivia (8), Venezuela (10).

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 which 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...

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.

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.

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

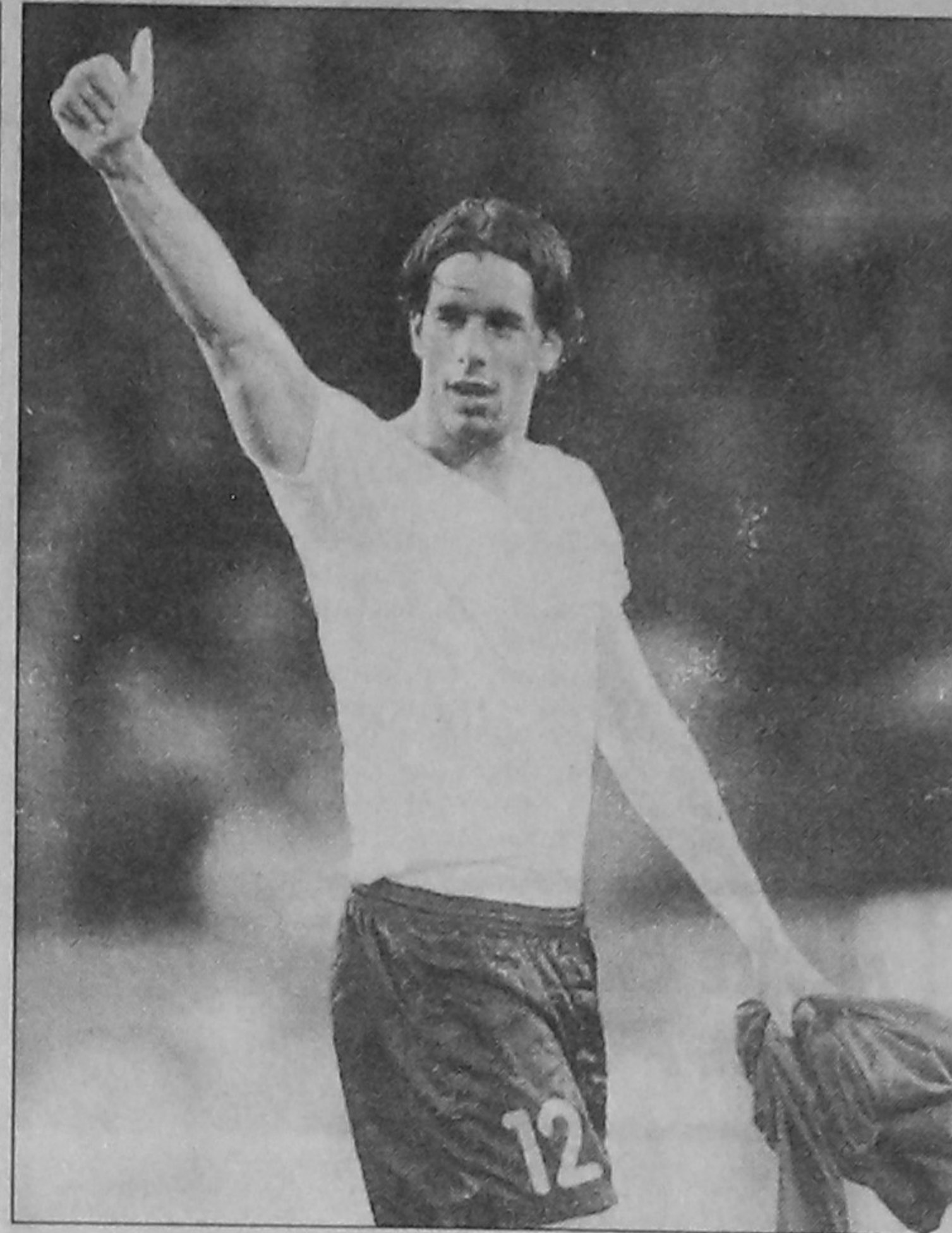
Veteran Romario, 35, gave Brazil a 66th minute lead with his eighth goal of the competition to huge relief, but it was short-lived.

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.

Liverani makes history

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN 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 Italy.

Joy for Ireland, Holland

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN 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 3-1 at Lansdowne Road.

Mick McCarthy's men had to come from behind after Andorra defender Idefons 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 Breen.

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 their own qualification 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 Zenden.

For the important thing was to get back in the international squad. I got 20 minutes, scored a goal and people can judge me on that," said a delighted Van Nistelrooy.

Dutch coach Louis van Gaal said he had left out Nistelrooy 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 club-mate Patrick Kluyvert made the result safe and allowed Van Nistelrooy to come on and share in the win.

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.

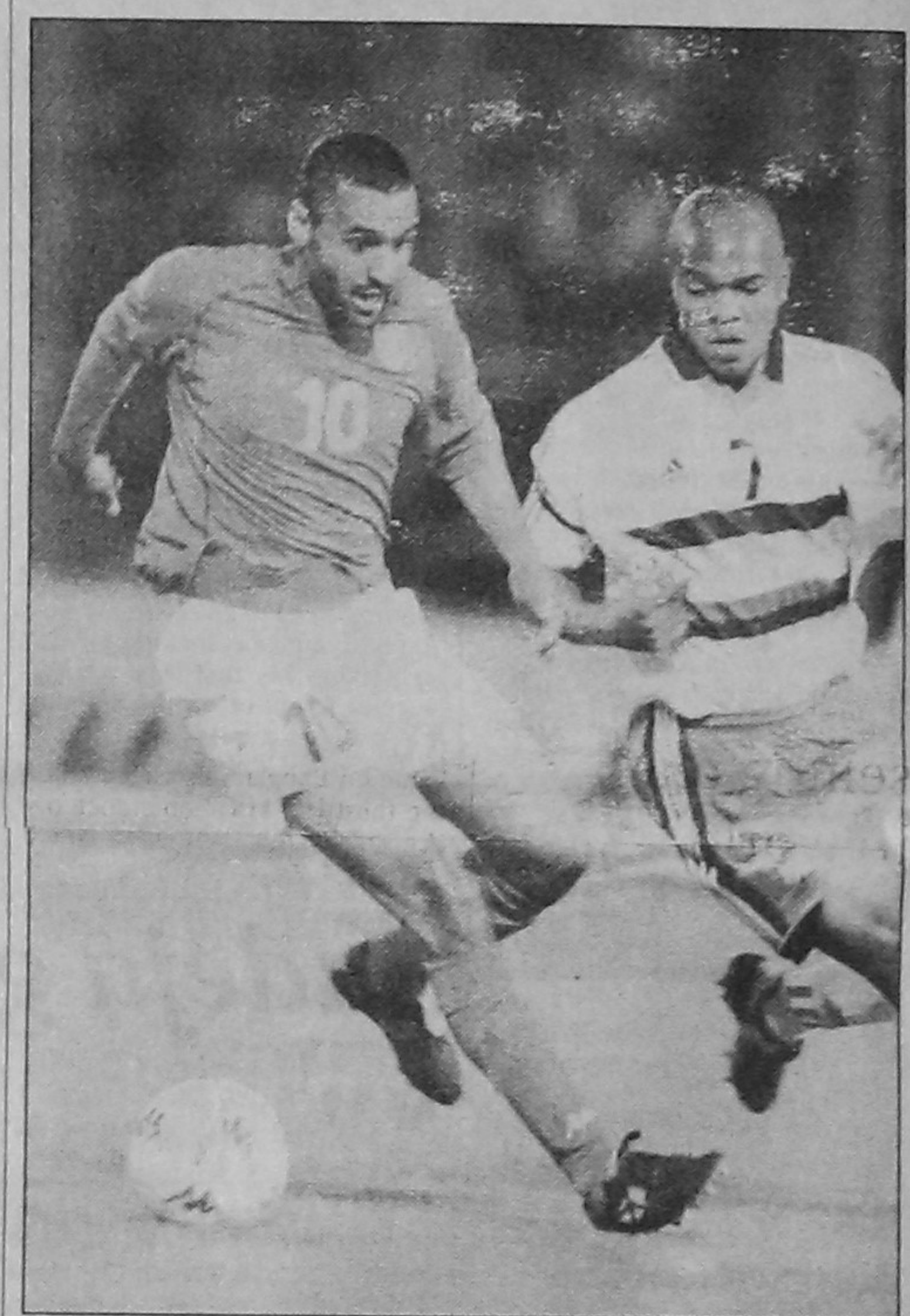
Meanwhile, England's World Cup qualifying rivals Albania beat Turkey 2-0 away in a friendly at Gaziantep, Alban Bushi and Ervin Skela scoring the goals while Tayfur Havuteu missed a penalty for Turkey.

European Zone results & standings

REUTERS

Collated results of World Cup European group qualifiers played on Wednesday (PWD/LF/APTs):

Table of European Zone results and standings, including groups in Belgrade, Eindhoven, Dublin, Valletta, Riga, Innsbruck, and various other cities.



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

Guardiola Spurs bound?

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 30-year-old midfielder would sign a 50,000 pound a week deal on July 1.

Reports suggest the deal will be for five years and the player will earn an estimated 400 million pesetas (dollars 2.16 million) a season, close to 15 times his salary at Boca.

Barca close to Riquelme deal

AFP, Barcelona

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.

Fantastic France

Football

REUTERS, London

World champions France rebounded from last month's loss to Spain with an emphatic 4-0 win over Portugal in a friendly international in Paris on Wednesday.

Sylvain Wiltord, Mikael Silvestre and Thierry Henry scored first-half goals as the World Cup holders and European champions ripped apart the Portuguese defence.

Youri Djorkaeff scored the fourth goal 10 minutes from the end as France ran out the highest scorers on a day of 14 friendlies around Europe.

Many countries experimented with their lineups before the next round of World Cup qualifiers in a month's time. But the tinkering paid no dividends for Turkey, whose young side crashed to a 2-0 home defeat to Albania, although an unfamiliar-looking Scotland team returned from Poland with a well-merited 1-1 draw. Radoslaw Kaluzny

opened the scoring for Poland after 50 minutes in Bydgoszcz, before Scott Booth equalised from the penalty spot in the 69th. The Poles finished with 10 men after Tomasz Iwan was sent off in the 82nd minute.

Greece, playing possibly their last international for some time if FIFA bans them from international competition on Thursday, squandered a 2-0 lead over Croatia in Varazdin. The match ended in a 2-2 draw with Miki Rapac equalising for Croatia in the last minute. Alekos Alexandris, who scored a hat-trick as Olympiakos clinched the Greek championship on Sunday, scored both his country's goals.

Greece face a FIFA ban following a dispute between the government and the local FA over the running of the game in the country.

Nothing should stop Italy qualifying for next year's finals but they were made to battle for a 1-0 win over South Africa in Perugia, where Perugia's midfielder Fabio Liverani became the first black player to represent Italy. Despite an impres-

sive first half display he was replaced at halftime. Vincenzo Montella scored the only goal - his first for his country -- after 54 minutes. South African keeper Hans Vonk kept the score down with an outstanding display as the South 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 Belgium in Prague, although he appeared to be well offside at the time.

Emile Mpenza had put Belgium ahead after only 11 minutes before Baros equalised after 82 minutes to give a youthful Czech side a well-deserved draw. One veteran who had a night to remember was Norway's 31-year-old midfielder Oyvind Leonhardsen whose season at Tottenham Hotspur has been blighted by injuries. But he forgot about those problems, scoring twice in two minutes in the second half to lead Norway to a 2-1 win over Bulgaria in Olso. Bulgaria had opened the scoring after just 40

seconds through Marian Hristov. The curtain came down in Copenhagen to end the great international career of Peter Schmeichel, making his 129th and last appearance for Denmark. The Danes 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 the stage after 65 minutes to be replaced by Peter Kjaer, who was making his debut.

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 beaten 5-0 by France on March 24, but a poorer result for Spain, who beat France 2-1 four days later.

European friendly Internationals results

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 1
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



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