

CESARE MALDINI

Italian inherits tough job

Cesare Maldini will be the oldest coach at the World Cup.

He also will have one of the toughest jobs at the World Cup.

Maldini, father of Italian star Paolo Maldini, turns 70 Feb. 5, a day before he begins work in Asuncion as Paraguay's national team coach.

He inherits a team he knows little about. Maldini's only previous contact with Paraguayan soccer came in 1999 when he attended the Copa America to scout players for AC Milan.

Moreover, he must replace a popular coach, Uruguayan Sergio Markarian, and prepare to play the first two games without Jose Luis Chilavert, Paraguay's goalie and inspirational leader.

FIFA imposed a four-game suspension on Chilavert after a spitting incident with Brazilian star Roberto Carlos in World Cup qualifying. Chilavert, who takes all of Paraguay's penalty kicks and free kicks, will miss the Group B games against South Africa and Spain.

Markarian was fired after Paraguay, without Chilavert, was hammered in its last two World Cup qualifiers.

Maldini has spent his entire career in Italy. He won four Italian titles with AC Milan and played for the Azzurri at the 1962 World Cup. For many years, he worked with Italy's national team program.

He was head coach at France '98, where Italy reached the quarterfinals, before returning to AC Milan, where he worked as the club's chief scout until he was made interim coach for the end of the 2000-01 season.

Cesare Maldini's only previous contact with Paraguayan soccer came when he attended the 1999 Copa America as a scout.

The unassuming Maldini is popular in Italy — his home telephone number was listed in Milan for many years, and he would often receive calls from adoring fans looking for Paolo — although it remains to be seen how well his straightforward approach will go over in Paraguay. ■



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