



ON THE RECORD TRAIL: Brazil captain Cafu (L) fights for the ball with Ronaldinho during a training session at Bergisch Gladbach Stadium on Sunday.

Brazil aiming higher Record not on Ronaldo's mind

AFP, Dortmund

Brazil's mighty World Cup dynasty bids for more history and a quarterfinal berth here Tuesday against Ghana, a shocking African debutante talking tough about topping the South American squad.

Defending champion Brazil is only four games shy of a sixth World Cup crown, with 63-year-old manager Carlos Alberto Parreira trying to become only the second man to guide two winners, joining 1930s Italian boss Vittorio Pozzo.

"We hope to maintain our unbeaten record against African teams but we have to respect Ghana," Parreira said. "They're good and they have nothing to lose."

Brazilian playmaker Ronaldo could take sole claim as the all-time World Cup goal king with a 15th career tally while Brazil captain Cafu, a 36-year-old fullback, could break Cup marks with a 19th match appearance and 16th victory.

"To play 19 matches at the World Cup finals is a fabulous thing," Cafu said. "And 16 wins - I will be proud of this record."

He has to get it first. Blocking the path is an upstart Black Stars side that sent home the Czech Republic and the United States, both ranked in FIFA's top five, and brings a

flamboyant, fast-paced style similar to Brazil but tempered with discipline.

"Maybe it's realistic. Maybe not but I believe in my guys," Ghana coach Ratomir Djukovic said.

"They are the first favourites to take it again. But first they have to face Brazilians from Africa. Black Stars are afraid of nobody, not even Brazil."

"It will be very difficult to stop them. But I believe and I am confident the Black Stars can do it."

They will face Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Roberto Carlos and the other Selecao samba stars without top playmaker Michael Essien, the Chelsea midfielder forced to the bench by an accumulated yellow card suspension.

"We're going to miss him. He's a very important player," Djukovic said.

Brazil could be without Real Madrid striker Robinho, 22, who started in the 4-1 victory over Japan. He complained of thigh pain after practice Saturday.

"We can't tell at the moment if there has been a muscle tear or if it's just a pull, but Robinho has never had muscle problems," Parreira said.

Ronaldo, 29, scored twice against Japan to match Germany's Gerd Muller for the all-time Cup scoring mark. Coming off an

injury-hit year for Real Madrid and weight woes, his German nickname is Pummelhaldo, or roly poly.

"Ronaldo is getting better and better," Parreira said. "He is a very special player."

More turning back the clock to his 2002 prime and Pummelhaldo could pummel opponents.

"I have been very patient. You have to keep working and not lose heart," Ronaldo said. "I came to the finals in a much worse physical condition than my teammates (but) I feel better and better."

Parreira's first coaching assignment was with Ghana in 1967. Three decades later, he knows well the obstacle in Brazil's path to a repeat throne.

"It was a lovely surprise to see them go through and fully deserved," he said. "I've not seen them hang back in this tournament. They like to go forward. They have their own style and won't change it because they're facing Brazil."

The Brazil-Ghana winner advances to a quarterfinal on Saturday at Frankfurt against either Spain or France.

Former Juventus midfielder Stephen Appiah, Ghana's captain, made it clear the lone African side in the final 16 welcomes the challenge posed by Brazil.

SEE PAGE 20 COL 5

AFP, Bergisch Gladbach

Breaking the all-time record for goals in the World Cup is not top of Brazil striker's Ronaldo's list but beating African side Ghana in Tuesday's second round clash is.

The 29-year-old's brace against Japan brought the Real Madrid star level with German Gerd Muller's mark of 14 but he said on Sunday that it wasn't really on his mind.

"I dedicated the two goals against Japan to my son Ronald, who was in the stands wearing a Brazil shirt," said Ronaldo, whose second goal especially undermined his critics who said he was too slow and too fat to be in the starting XI of the five-time champions.

"My target is to win the World Cup and if I score goals all the better."

"I am not obsessed being the leading scorer at the World Cup or breaking records."

"I am of course delighted to have equalled the record of 14 goals and if I take it to a new level, I will be even happier but the objective remains as it always has been to win the World Cup."

"These landmarks are always around. For instance if I score

against Ghana I could be the player to score Brazil's 200th goal at a World Cup finals, but so what. Beating Ghana is the most important thing," added Ronaldo, who was top scorer at the 2002 edition including both goals in the 2-0 win over Germany in the final.

While beating Ghana remains his next target, Ronaldo accepts that the African giants will be no pushovers.

"We are in good form, and well prepared to take on whoever is the opponent," said Ronaldo, who like his teammates failed to convince in the first two matches, a 1-0 win over Croatia and a 2-0 win against Australia.

"Now it is the turn of Ghana, who we know well."

"We have watched their matches (the first two a 2-0 defeat by Italy and a 2-0 victory over Czech Republic) and we will try and prey on their weaknesses."

"We know the players well, as 21 of the 23 play in Europe."

"However we must not be complacent, as they have plenty of quality players."

Ronaldo also dismissed suggestions that he was happier playing

SEE PAGE 20 COL 5

BRAZIL V GHANA A battle of samba kind

AFP, Dortmund

Brazilian star striker Ronaldo is unsure who will start alongside him when the defending World Cup champions meet Ghana here Tuesday, but he and his squad know the African upstarts are a serious threat.

Ghana defeated Euro 2004 semi-finalist Czech Republic and 2002 World Cup quarter-finalist United States to book a shock berth in the round of 16, but the Cup debutantes are unfancied against an all-star team with five Cup crowns.

"We must not be complacent as they have plenty of quality players," Ronaldo said. "We've watched their matches. We will try and prey on their weaknesses."

Robinho, a 22-year-old teammate of Ronaldo at Real Madrid, is doubtful with a sore right thigh while two-time starter Adriano was reportedly upset with coach Carlos Alberto Parreira benching him for a 4-1 first-round win over Japan.

"It was no better or worse with Robinho," Ronaldo said, dismissing the notion he favored his club partner. "Everybody is in the same boat, those who play will give everything and those who don't will wait for their chance."

"The squad is in good shape. We are united and confident that we can go the whole way. Every one of us is ready to make sacrifices to win the World Cup."

Ronaldo, nagged at 29 by weight

and fitness issues, scored twice against Japan and could break the all-time World Cup scoring mark he shares with Germany's Gerd Muller by notching his 15th goal against Ghana.

His top concern, however, is advancing Brazil to the last eight.

"I'm not obsessed being the leading scorer at the World Cup or breaking records," Ronaldo said. "My target is to win the World Cup and if I score goals all the better."

"I am of course delighted to have equalled the record of 14 goals and if I take it to a new level, I will be even happier."

"But the objective remains as it always has been - to win the World Cup."

Former Juventus midfielder Stephen Appiah, Ghana's captain, is not awestruck by a Brazil lineup that also includes two-time World Footballer of the Year Ronaldinho and stars Roberto Carlos and Kaka.

"We're happy we're going to face Brazil. No fear. No fear," Appiah said. "We play the same style too. That's why we have a chance against them."

Parreira, who coached Ghana earlier in his career, said the Black Stars will be dangerous even without Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien, suspended after two first-round yellow cards.

"There may be no Michael Essien but there is Stephen Appiah," Parreira said.

"They are good and they have nothing to lose. They are playing against the five-time world champions and one of the favourites for this title."

"They will shoot on sight. They will be aggressive and we have to work out how to pass the ball around under those circumstances."

That's why Robinho's possible absence is a concern.

"We don't know whether it is simply a bruise which would be good news, or in the worst case

KEY QUOTES

Brazil coach Parreira: "Ghana have been a beautiful surprise and they deserved to qualify. They have good technique and play with great speed."

Midfielder Juninho Pernambucano: "It will be a very dangerous game and we have to take care."

Ghana coach Djukovic: "It's very difficult to stop them. If you stop Ronaldinho, there is Ronaldo. If you stop Ronaldo there is Roberto Carlos. If you stop (him) there is Cafu so it will be very difficult, very tough."

"They have excellent individuality. But as a team they are not playing so well as before."

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Brazil v Ghana head-to-head record (FIFA records)
Brazil leads 1-0
1996: Brazil 8 Ghana 2 (Rio Preto)

TEAMS

Brazil (4-4-2)
1-Dida, 2-Cafu, 3-Lucio, 4-Juan, 6-Roberto Carlos, 5-Emerson, 11-Ze Roberto, 8-Kaka, 10-Ronaldinho, 9-Ronaldo, 7-Adriano

Ghana (4-4-2)
22-Richard Kingston, 15-John Paintsil, 13-Habib Mohammed, 5-John Mensah, 7-Shilla Illiasu, 9-Derek Boateng, 10-Stephen Appiah, 20-Otto Addo, 11-Sulley Muntari, 14-Matthew Amoah, 3-Asamoah Gyan

Robinho out of Ghana clash

AFP, Bergisch Gladbach

Brazilian striker Robinho is out of today's World Cup second round meeting with Ghana as the five-time world champions bid to reach the quarterfinals, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said Monday.

The 22-year-old Real Madrid star had a scan on his painful right thigh which forced him to leave training early on Saturday and although he can walk normally the test showed swelling, albeit no tear, a CBF statement said.

"Robinho will therefore miss Tuesday's game against Ghana and carry on with physiotherapy," the statement said.

"It's just a little problem," Robinho himself insisted.

"I'll keep on with the treatment and then, God willing, I can be back in contention if the team beat Ghana."

SEE PAGE 20 COL 1

Ghana won't miss Essien

AFP, Wurzberg

Facing the biggest match of their lives with their star player banished, Ghana's Black Stars are nonetheless confident they can shock five-time champion Brazil without Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien.

Essien will miss Tuesday's second-round knockout showdown at Dortmund in a yellow-card suspension after receiving his second booking of the first round in a 2-1 victory over the United States for a foul on US captain Claudio Reyna.

"I'm happy and disappointed," Essien said. "I'm glad for the team that they are through to the next

round but I am sad for myself that I will not play."

Essien, 23, has an uncanny ability to orchestrate defensively while making mighty contributions to Ghana's attack, both with dangerous long balls and control over flow and position.

"He's a very important player. Of course it upsets me to lose a player of this quality who can make problems. But I have confidence in these guys," said Ghana coach Ratomir Djukovic.

"Any player who comes in place of Michael Essien will do his best, maybe not at a level like Michael Essien but I'm sure he can do it at close to this level."

Essien led Lyon to French league crowns in 2004 and 2005 before Chelsea spent 38 million Euros, the largest transfer fee ever for an African player, and brought him onto the roster which captured a second English Premiership crown this year.

Just as Djukovic stresses before every match that his players have fun, he emphasizes teamwork above the contributions of any individual, even Essien.

"He is not the engine of our team. Always 11," the 60-year-old Serbian said.

Ghana captain Stephen Appiah said the team is disappointed to face Brazil without Essien, but must move on.

Cafu on verge of record

AFP, Bergisch Gladbach

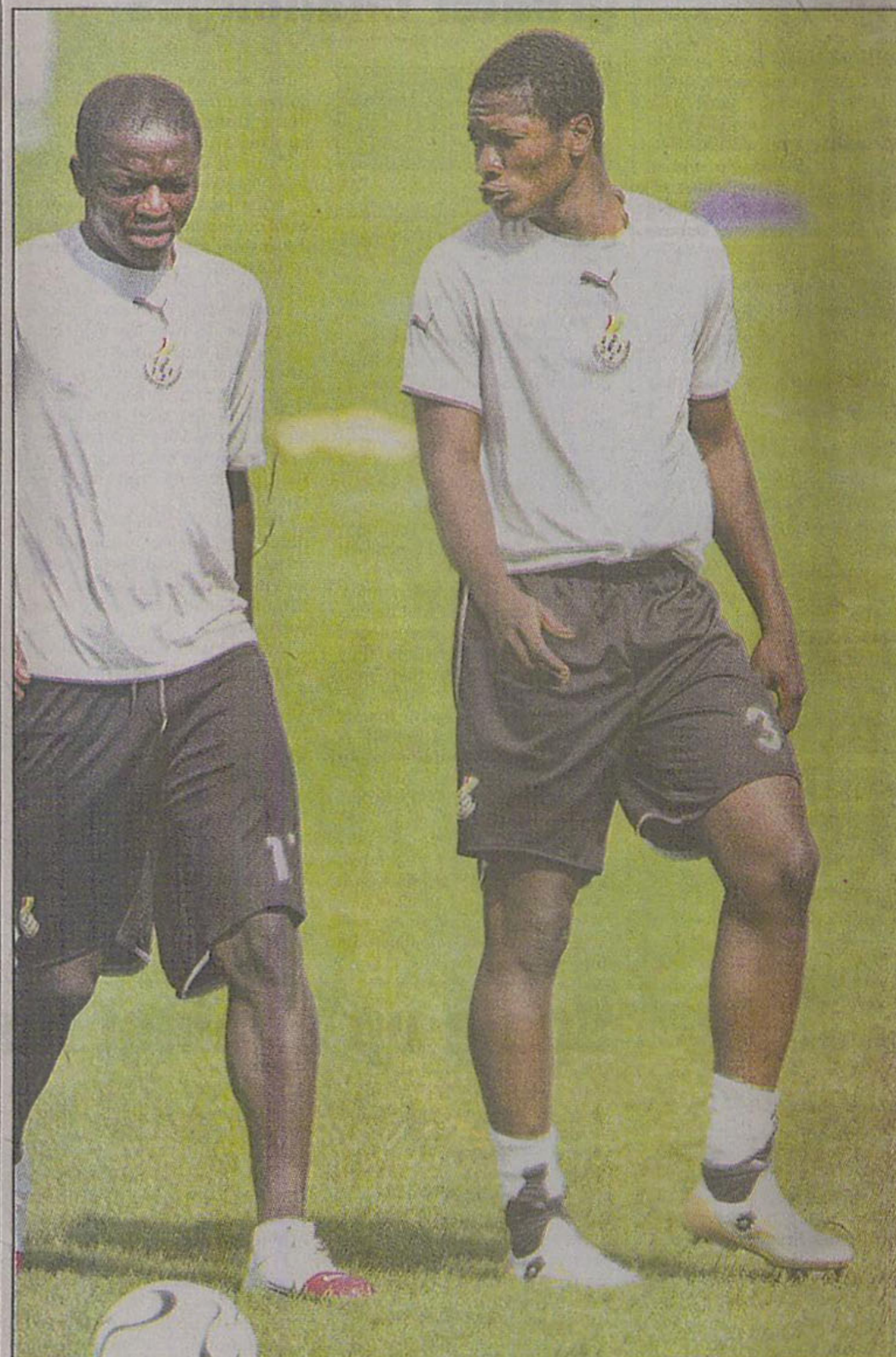
Brazil's evergreen captain Cafu said on Saturday he would be very proud to break the World Cup record for appearances and games won when the five-time champions play Ghana in a second round clash in Dortmund on Tuesday.

The 36-year-old fullback will make his 19th appearance for Brazil in World Cup finals, a national record, when he leads out the team and should they prevail over the classy African outfit break the record number of victories with 16.

"To play 19 matches at the World Cup finals is a fabulous thing," said Cafu, who would be appearing in his fourth successive final were Brazil to make it to the July 9 climax.

"And 16 wins. I will be proud of this record," added Cafu, who stands to become the first player to

SEE PAGE 20 COL 1



WE'RE BACK: Ghanaian forwards Sulley Muntari (L) and Asamoah Gyan discuss tactics during a training session in Wurzberg on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP