



Ghanaian midfielder Haminu Draman (R) shoots the ball past a diving US goalkeeper Kasey Keller (R) for the game's first score during the opening round Group E World Cup football match between Ghana and the United States.

bias when commentating, it is something I have had to endure throughout the entire World Cup and much to my disappointment unlike last time not many of the lesser known nations have made it past the group stages. At least I will be spared their colonial views from the second round onwards.

My father said something very interesting about the World Cup this year; he said this year unlike in 2002 the smaller countries are pushing the traditional powers without beating them. In my opinion he got it spot on, the last World Cup was the underdog's competition, this time the underdogs have gone close to beating their more illustrious rivals but have just not managed to do so. While that has meant that all the traditional names have made it to the knock out stages it also has diminished interest in this year's competition. The whole world took notice of Senegal, South Korea and Turkey last time around because no one expected them to get where they did. Everyone was hopeful of an upset, maybe an Asian or African nation would win the cup for the first time, but this year the progression of all the big names has diminished the hope for another fairytale. This argument can go both ways, people may say that having the big names in the knock out rounds makes for a more even match, which could go anyway. But I see things differently, I would rather have South Korea playing Germany for a place in the final rather than England playing Brazil. But then again that is my opinion, the FA Cup is known for its fairytale stories, non league clubs beating the best in England, to me the World Cup

should be something like that. When a team from nowhere beats the world champions, now that would be great. It happened last time, I guess it was too much to expect it this time.

My final complaint about the group stages of the World Cup is quite simple, the football played has been well below standard. Now I am sure thousands of people will be more than willing to point out superb goals and fine individual performances but for me the first three rounds have lacked oomph. The big names Germany, Brazil, England, France, Italy have all made it through to the knock out stages but their insipid performances have marred the tournament. Even mighty Brazil wore a jaded look for the first three rounds, the samba was missing and so too was their confidence. The worst so far was without a doubt France, since winning in '98 it has taken them eight years to win another World Cup match. They were seemingly impotent and were about as entertaining as a discussion on nuclear physics. England were also a great let down, their squad was brimming with talent but their performances rivalled that of their cricket team against Sri Lanka recently. Germany and Italy made it through as well but their football was a pale shadow of what one expects from them. The world may be happy that the traditional powerhouses made it into the knock out phase of the competition, but for me they may have made it, but certainly did not entertain anyone getting there. This year the competition is a little too staid, what it needs is a little flair. ■

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