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Romance of an odd couple on hunt

MADRID, June 8: Bebeto may be a crybaby and Romario an egotistic loudmouth. But those who have witnessed their standout performances and rivalry in the Spanish league this season would predict them to be among the stars of the World Cup, reports AP.

Romario leading the league in scoring and recording his 30th in a final-day 5-2 victory over Sevilla as Barcelona won their fourth straight league title.

Bebeto, Spain's leading scorer last season, paced Deportivo La Coruna to the league lead for most of the season, only to be overtaken by his countryman and Barcelona on the final day.

"I don't think there'll be a better frontline in the World Cup this summer than Brazil with Romario and Bebeto," said Barcelona-based European soccer journalist Graham Turner. "The Dutch side may have a top forward line, but there's something different about the skill of the Brazilians.

"They're brought up playing soccer and when they're placed in the right team they're unbeatable."

While Bebeto and Romario recognise each other's merits and know they synthesise perfectly on the Brazilian national team, the two appear to be virtual opposites in personality and play.

In a typical rags-to-riches story, Romario de Souza Faria was born and learned to play ball in the slums of Rio de Janeiro.

At 19, the short but light-

ning-footed player turned professional for Vasco da Gama and began a career that would bring him to Dutch club PSV Eindhoven in 1988 for a reported dls 6 million.

habit of telling Brazilian coaches what they should do and how wonderful he is resulted in him being left off the 1990 World Cup team.

But Romario had the last say

Born in 1964, he also has

had a highly successful though less flamboyant career as a member of Brazil's world champion junior side in 1983. He helped both Flamengo and Vasco da Gama to national titles.

"He's so unassuming, you feel like shaking him sometimes," said Alberto Martinez, who covers Deportivo for the regional El Correo Gallego paper.

Bebeto got the name of being something of a crybaby because he was regularly injured when he played in Brazil. Experts thought he was too fragile to play in the competitive European leagues.

Deportivo, however, have been permanently among the top three teams since he joined, no small feat for a side that only earned promotion to the First Division in 1991.

And his slender physique has not stopped him penetrating opposing defences and finishing sixth in league scoring with 16 goals. Last season he scored 29.

"Bebeto doesn't sleep if he doesn't score and you can almost see the suffering on his face," Martinez said. "In many ways he's just like a child."

For Turner, Bebeto and Romario complement each other perfectly.

"Bebeto is always alert and on the lookout for goalscoring chances and Romario always seems to appear from nowhere to put them in," he said.

And while Romario makes the sign of the cross for every goal he slams home, Bebeto readily tells reporters: "God gave me this talent, I only wish all youngsters were addicted to scoring goals like me."

In 1993, he transferred for another dls 4 million to Barcelona, where he has consistently left fans and opposing goalkeepers gaping in awe at his flashes of brilliance.

"He's absolutely an exceptional player. He does things people just don't expect and in a one-to-one situation he is the best in the world," Turner said.

Romario's defect as a player is that he's lazy and is unlikely to react until he gets the ball at his feet. Then, however, there's often no stopping him.

Off the field he has made a name for himself.

Long known as a loud-mouth—one journalist described him as having a "chronically swollen ego"—his

shy.

when Brazil, who performed miserably in Italy, bowed to popular demand and called him back for their crucial World Cup qualifying game against Uruguay last September. He scored both goals in a 2-0 victory that put Brazil into the World Cup.

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