

# THE FINAL WHISTLE TO BLOW!

JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS



RELIVING THE SENSATION: A proven neutralizer of penalties, Brazil custodian Taffarel dives to his left to save Dutchman Philip Cocu's shot during the semifinal at Stade Velodrome on July 7.

## Saint Taffarel

MARSEILLE, France, July 8 (AP/Reuters): In Brazil, a goalie with a knack for defending penalties gets the nickname "saint." And it was St. Taffarel who saved them against the Dutch.

The balding 32-year-old picked off shot after shot against the relentless Dutch strikers. But he saved the best for last, blocking two attempts in a penalty shootout to send Brazil to the World Cup final against France or Croatia.

Taffarel saved two Dutch penalties as Brazil won the shootout 4-2 following a 1-1 draw in the semifinal.

Penalty shootouts are widely criticised as a lottery but for Taffarel, who plays in a team that is usually on the attack, they provide a rare opportunity to grab the spotlight from superstars such as Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and Rivaldo.

In 1994, he was also the hero when Brazil won a shootout in the final against Italy and he saved one Italian effort.

As he emerged from the dressing-room, Taffarel resisted the obvious temptation to have a go at the snipers who had said he would be a liability in his third World Cup.

"I don't want to reply to anybody, I'm not interested in this, it's not my style," he said. "I think the only person I have to reply to and satisfy is myself."

"Today, thanks to God, we won but it is a victory for everyone, not just for one person. I

was relaxed, sincerely. I had a notion that De Boer would go to the right," he said about the fourth penalty from Ronald de Boer that clinched victory.

The goalkeeper, who has just signed for Turkish club Galatasaray, became so fed up with criticism in 1995 that he announced he would never play

for Brazil again. He was upset at comments from Ricardo Teixeira, president of the Brazilian Football Confederation, who blamed him for the Uruguayan goal in the Copa America final which Brazil went on to lose on penalties.

But in 1997, he announced he was prepared to play again and was immediately picked by Brazil coach Mario Zagallo — he was playing for Atletico Mineiro in Brazil before the Cup — has not been the best and he has made several blunders in the last few months.

There are around half a dozen goalkeepers in Brazil who are at least the same standard and Zagallo has been under fire for not giving any of them a look-in in warm-up games.

## Motivation did the trick

MARSEILLE, July 8 (AP/Reuters): Marseille's Stade Velodrome saw its fair share of tight finishes in its previous incarnation as a cycling circuit. Nothing quite like this, however.

Brazil's 4-2 victory on penalties over the Netherlands Tuesday ranks as one of the most important — and tense — spot kick shootouts in soccer history.

The prize couldn't have been much greater: a place in the World Cup final.

After 120 minutes of an end-to-end, often raucous 1-1 draw, the shootout was more like a prayer meeting than a soccer match, with each team huddled together, hand-in-hand, nervously watching.

On the bench, some members of both coaching staffs couldn't even stand to open their eyes as player after player stepped up to take his penalty.

Before the shootout, Brazilian coach Mario Zagallo said he spoke to each of his would-be shooters, trying to instill confidence.

"Confidence is a key factor in a penalty shootout," Zagallo said. "Some players think 'If I miss, they'll crucify me.' So I tried to give them confidence."

The "old wolf," who wept on the pitch after Taffarel saved the fourth Dutch penalty to send the world champions into their sixth final, said his words of wisdom made the difference.

Ronaldo, Rivaldo, substitute Emerson and captain Dunga all strode forward and confidently stroked their penalties into the

net to give Brazil a 4-2 win in the shoot-out. The match ended 1-1 after extra time.

"I went to each player who was going to take a penalty, one by one," Zagallo said. "I said we are going to win this championship... we are going to win this match."

"Penalties are a lottery but passing on confidence like this is fundamental."

"Knowing how to pick the players was also crucial," he said, referring to his surprise decision to pick Emerson. The Bayer Leverkusen player has only five international caps and has made only two appearances as a substitute in the Cup.

"A lot of people must have been surprised by Emerson, but I knew he was a penalty taker and he took his penalty just as he did in training. It was an important choice for us."

Zagallo appeared ecstatic with every aspect of his side's performance.

"There must be a tremendous carnival going on back home now," he said. "We are here to win, represent the country, this green and yellow. Our win showed the dedication of each one."

"It was a magnificent win which did Brazil proud. We can't celebrate until the last game. There's just one (match) to go. We will get there."

Zagallo said the Dutch had their chances in the first half when "they were superior but they didn't know how to translate this into goals. In the second half we had more chances."

"We were closer to victory

and we could have decided the game. We had two or three moments... but destiny decided it finished 1-1."

"This was a very tense match but I tried to show a lot of confidence during the penalty kicks."

For Taffarel, the unlikely hero in a match billed as a stage for the high-scoring forwards on both sides, it was a sort of redemption.

"I expected it," Zagallo said. "He's a great goalkeeper even though he has always been criticized in Brazil."

Taffarel was just happy to have been part of the victory, instead.

"I'm very happy to have contributed to this victory. Brazil deserves this moment of joy," Taffarel said.

"We haven't won anything yet except a very tough battle. This Brazil is ready to be five times champion, and we'll do everything we can to win it. The team is very much ready for the final."

Asked whether he was a penalty expert, he said: "no it was God who helped me."

Ronaldo, the two-time world player of the year, was held in check throughout the scoreless first half, but broke free down the middle just 21 seconds after half-time. He took a perfect cross from Rivaldo on left wing, and after a deft touch of the left foot, sent the ball through the legs of goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar.

"When you're in the game, you're relaxed," he said, "and we believed in the victory."



ONLY TEARS LEFT: Dutch goalkeeper Edwin Van der Sar weeps while hugging teammate Philip Cocu (No 11) after their semifinal exit on July 7.

## Dutch search for solace

MARSEILLE, July 8 (Reuters/AP): The Netherlands went out of the World Cup on Tuesday ruing missed chances and with the painful feeling they were more than Brazil's equals.

"It's a pity we didn't have the luck we had in our other games as we really could have beaten this Brazilian side. I believe they were afraid of us," said Phillip Cocu, the first Dutchman to miss from the spot.

Captain Frank de Boer echoed Cocu's sentiments. "We had chances to finish Brazil, they seem to just rely on one man, Ronaldo. That's not our style of play and we dominated the game," he said.

The Dutch had plenty of chances in the first half and were continually pressing for the last 10 minutes of normal time. Patrick Kluyvert scored their equaliser in the 87th minute, but only after missing a clear chance seven minutes before.

The Dutch also believe they had a valid penalty award dismissed two minutes from the end of extra time when Pierre van Hooijdonk went down after some shirt tugging.

"The better team will be playing on Saturday," Van Hooijdonk said. "Saturday's third/fourth play-off was not a game any of the squad wanted to think about."

"Now I don't feel like playing the match, but that will come in time, I guess," said Ronald de Boer.

"The dream is over, it's a pity. We came so close," said De Boer who missed a penalty. "It's a very dreadful feeling is all I can say."

"You have to take penalties and then you lose. In fact there's

little you can do, it's lottery and then I fail to put the ball in the net."

"I don't think we played as well as we did against Argentina. We should have played a bit calmer, we played too deep when it wasn't necessary, but we did our best."

"I should have waited just a moment longer and seen that the keeper was going one way," he said.

The Netherlands have perhaps proved that, like Italy and England, they are not natural winners from penalty shootouts. They went out in the same way against France in Euro '96.

Brazil converted their four chances without the slightest inkling of anxiety: Ronaldo, Denilson, Emerson and Dunga each gave Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar a chance.

By contrast the Dutch, for the first time in the match, looked unnerved.

Frank de Boer and Dennis Bergkamp converted the Netherlands' first and second penalties.

But with the pressure mounting, the third penalty taker, Phillip Cocu, nervously placed the ball centimetres off the penalty spot as he prepared to kick.

After being asked by the referee to put the ball on the spot, Cocu sent a shot low to the right, only to see Taffarel pull off a fine two-handed block.

"If you take a penalty, you know you have a chance of missing it," Cocu said. "I'm cut up about it."

Taffarel made another save from the fourth kick, from Ronald de Boer, and the tension

## Blatter's reply to Beckenbauer

PARIS, July 8: FIFA president Sepp Blatter hit back on Tuesday at critics of the quality of some of the teams competing in the World Cup, reports AFP.

Former German boss Franz Beckenbauer has complained that 32 teams in the finals is too much.

"The standard between the top and the worst team is too great. Only the best in the world should be here," said Beckenbauer.

But Blatter defended the idea of 32 teams in the final.

"The World Cup finals are not about having the best teams in the world competing but having the best teams representing the confederations competing. Also I have not seen a lousy team here," said Blatter.

Meanwhile the FIFA boss also has given his full backing to the "golden goal" system to decide World Cup matches that go to extra time.

Several FIFA officials have cast doubt on the system and said it could be done away with in future.

But on Tuesday Blatter dismissed such suggestions as nonsense.

"I don't see why we should stop golden goals. Personally I think it is better to see a match decided by play on the field, that way the whole team can celebrate."

"It comes to penalty shootouts, the player who missed the penalty is fingered for the next year as the man who lost the match," said Blatter.

## Fans live it up

MARSEILLE, July 8 (AP): Dutchly the Lion stormed the beach Tuesday. A raven-haired Brazilian woman wearing only fragments of green and yellow fabric danced in the Old Port.

Tens of thousands of other Dutch and Brazilians sang, shouted and chugalugged.

Not even the World Cup crowd can drink France dry, but hearty bands of survivors are doing their best. Four nations remain in the tournament.

As the soccer narrows down to high-intensity, high-stakes final stages, so does the partying.

France meet Croatia in Paris on Wednesday to determine which of the two make the final Sunday — and who can throw a better street party. And on Tuesday in Marseille, it was Brazil and Holland.

On a scorching day, both sides partied together at Prado Beach by the giant screen where English hooligans and ethnic

Tunisian locals rumbled last month. Also, they gathered at the port, another England-Tunisia riot scene, now swept clean of broken glass.

"We are the champions," bellowed Stephan Dammers, a 25-year-old medical supplier from Den Bosch with a bright orange face, along with the music blasting out of monster speakers on the beach. This was before the game, but the Dutch had no doubts.

Their opponents, whose faces were painted in blue, green and yellow, had four prior World Cups to boast about. They looked indulgently at the happy Dutch and chanted, "Five times, five times."

As it turned out, Brazil won but not by much. The teams fought to a 1-1 standstill during normal play and two overtime periods, and outcome was settled by a penalty shootout, which ended 4-2 for Brazil.

Dammers had painted his

predicted score in orange on his bare chest, 1-0, without bothering to specify the victor. He arrived Tuesday after a 15-hour bus ride only to head back on the bus — much less jubilant — an hour after the final whistle.

"Of course, it's worth it," he said. "Just look around." Nearby, the team's mascot, Dutchy, a guy in a furry lion suit, had just been ferried in over the waves in an open boat. People in silly orange hats and capes snakedanced on the sand. Others without capes, splashed in the water.

The eclectic mix of music, brought from Holland, was heavy on the universal soccer fans' unofficial theme, "You'll Never Walk Alone." It included "Deep in the Heart of Texas," "YMCA," and, inexplicably, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Among the crowd of gyrating Dutchmen, Karina Ramos from Rio de Janeiro danced in green and yellow short shorts, a matching halter and blue lips. Her friend Nelson Almeida, had a Brazilian flag on the rippling muscles of his bare Tarzan chest.

"Sure we'll win, but we can have fun together," Ramos said, adjusting her Dutch orange cape and partying on.

At the port, it was more of the same. The police who had battled with English and Tunisian fans were relaxed this

and decided to criticise the referees without all of the facts in place," Baharmast said. "People were so quick to judge: Here's a referee from the United States. He's not used to doing the big matches. For people to stereotype and jump to conclusions is a big mistake. It would be like saying that George Weah can't play soccer because Liberia is not a soccer power."

"Sixty-thousand at the Velodrome is not a big number for me. I've refereed in front of 100,000 before. I've officiated matches with Brazil many times before. I was not dealing with anything unfamiliar."

Baharmast, who is a licensed soccer coach and a former player, said numerous French newspapers and media outlets acknowledged they were mistaken in criticising the US ref.

However Baharmast is troubled that English language media outlets have not followed suit.

"When we come out to be correct, they (the media) don't

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## Red card for media

LONDON, July 8 (The News & Observer/Internet): The way referee Eslandir Baharmast sees it, the media has done a real disservice to the men in the middle at France '98. The world media has been overly critical of the officiating at the World Cup, so much so that the United States referee says the media owes them an apology.

"Referees have been tackled from behind by the media," Baharmast said in a phone interview on Tuesday.

Baharmast, who is regarded as one of the best referees in the US, came under undue criticism when he awarded a penalty kick to Norway during its first round match against Brazil. Junior Baiano was judged to have pulled the jersey of Tore Andre Flo and pulled the Chelsea star down in the box in the 89th minute of the match.

Baharmast pointed to the spot. Kjetil Rekdal knocked the shot past Taffarel and Norway went on the win 2-1. Television replays from US media outlets did not catch the entire course of events and made Baharmast's call look severe.

Baharmast was criticised in the press at home and abroad from his "dubious" call and his abilities as an official were questioned. The Moroccan press ran a headline "Norway saved by referee."

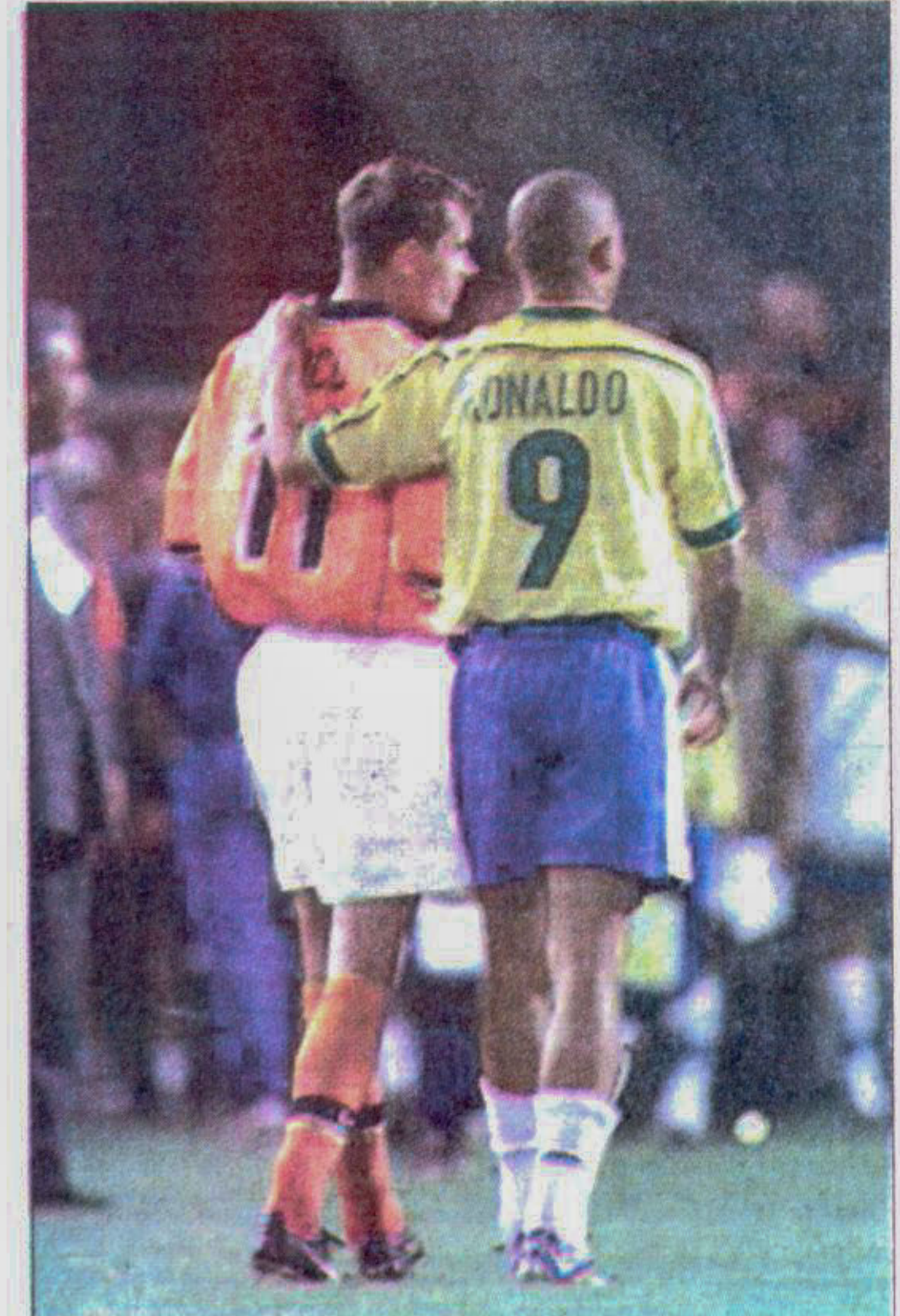
However a replay from Swedish television proved that the US referee had indeed made the correct call. Norway deserved the penalty.

"The media jumped the gun

## LATEST ODDS

LONDON, July 8: Brazil became hot favourites at 11-4 on to win the World Cup after their semifinal victory over the Netherlands on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Latest William Hill odds:  
4-11 Brazil  
9-4 France  
12-1 Croatia



Ronaldo (R) easing Philip Cocu's mind after the first semifinal.



RIO READY TO PARTY: Rio de Janeiro residents cheer their team while watching the semifinal against Holland on TV.

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