

RONALDO OR ZIDANE IT'S FOOTBALL AT ITS BEST!

JOHN PLAYER
GOLD LEAF
LIGHTS



SHOULDERING FRENCH HOPES: Master playmaker Zinedine Zidane looking relaxed at Clairefontaine on July 9. —AFP photo

Stage set for Zidane

PARIS, July 11 (Reuters/Internet): France count on Zinedine Zidane to inspire their first World Cup triumph and the soft-spoken playmaker says he is looking forward to the challenge.

"I'm happy with my performances so far but there's something missing and that's a goal," he said. "All we have to do is score one more than Brazil and if that goal could be mine, it would be wonderful."

The man they call Zizou has not quite lived up to his reputation in the tournament but his skill and great vision have still played a key role in France's run to their first final.

After being sent off for treading on an opponent in the group match against Saudi Arabia, the Juventus midfielder missed his side's next two games.

"I feared that they might bow out without me," he said. "That would have been awful. I would have felt guilty."

Zidane was back in action when France played Italy in their quarter-finals and when they tamed Croatia 2-1 in their semifinal.

On both occasions, he played well but only sporadically showed his best.

Regarded as Michel Platini's natural heir, Zidane made his debut in 1994 against the Czech Republic.

When on song, the gifted Zidane can turn a match all by himself. His main strength is his ability to make others play by delivering astute passes.

"When somebody does not know what to do with the ball, he gives it to Zinedine who finds out instantly what the best solution is," said fellow midfielder Emmanuel Petit.

His first major tournament for his country was Euro 96 in England.

Zagallo's 160 million critics

OZOIR-LA-FERRIERE, France, July 11 (Reuters/Internet): For every decision, Mario Zagallo has 160 million second-guessers back home.

He takes tranquillisers for stress. His critics call him obtuse, outdated and worse. He can't get enough of it.

"Soccer is passion," the Brazilian coach said. "It's my life. I embraced it and do it for pleasure, even though it's my job."

Perhaps only love can explain what drives Zagallo at 66 to seek a fifth World Cup title against France on Sunday. And he's already talking about a sixth.

"I'm old because of time," he said. "My hair is white, but I have the desire and the determination for another cup."

It's not like he has anything to prove. Zagallo has a guaranteed place in soccer's pantheon as the only four-time winner of the World Cup — as a player in 1958 and 1962, coach in 1970 and assistant in 1994. Not even Pele can make that claim.

Still, Zagallo is anything but a consensus choice to lead Brazil in its biggest soccer moments. Many feel he's too old-fashioned or conservative for today's soccer. Every time the team doesn't win — although it usually does — Zagallo is blamed.

Sometimes it gets to him. "I accept criticism, but what hurts is mockery," he said. "In Germany, I was elected the best coach in the world. In Brazil, I'm ridiculed."

The only time he seemed above reproach was as a player in the 1950s and 1960s, the golden era of Brazilian soccer. On the legendary Botafogo team of Garrincha, Didi and Milton Santos, Zagallo was a gifted left winger with a rare notion for tactics.

Very early he saw how vulnerable the team was on attack. So Zagallo created the "worker ant" style, scurrying back and forth from the front line to the midfield. Soon, all teams were doing it.

After retiring as a player, Zagallo was a natural to become a coach.

In 1970, with Brazil under a brutal military dictatorship, Zagallo was named to replace a popular coach who had displeased the ruling generals. Brazil won the World Cup, but many fans still give Zagallo's predecessor the credit.

Zagallo was back in 1974, but Brazil lost in the semifinals to the Dutch "Clockwork Orange." It was the only World Cup in which he was involved that he didn't win, and it began a 20-year exile from the national team.

Zagallo worked for various teams in the Middle East, where he made his fortune. In Brazil, he coached at the top club level, where his unfashionable con-

cern with defence won titles but not enthusiasts.

Still, in 1994, he was back as assistant to Carlos Alberto Parreira.

He took over as coach after that championship was secured.

Promising to revive "art soccer," Zagallo enjoyed a second honeymoon with fans as his team played brilliantly, winning the 1997 Copa America for the first time outside Brazil.

But a poor performance in the Gold Cup this year and an uneven showing in the run-up to the World Cup were enough to sour the romance again.

Patriotic, superstitious — his lucky number is 13 — Zagallo can't avoid the spotlight. But he considers himself predestined and doesn't plan to leave it soon.

"I thrill when I see our green and yellow," he said. "I am here representing my country and the Americas. I know the responsibility on my shoulders. And I know I am giving the country something positive."

Returning to the continent where he helped Brazil to its first world championship makes it doubly special.

"I've lived soccer for 50 years, and this is my happiest moment," he said, his voice trembling. "After 40 years, our flag will fly again in Europe. The World Cup is safe in our hands."

He made his fortune. In Brazil, he coached at the top club level, where his unfashionable con-

Last chance for Ronaldo

OZOIR-LA-FERRIERE, France, July 11 (AP/Internet): Ronaldo has one game left to make history. The world's best player knows he hasn't made it yet.

"The moment is coming," the Brazilian said on the eve of Sunday's World Cup final with France.

"One more, and we will make history. It is our great challenge."

It also is a personal challenge for Ronaldo. Twice voted FIFA player-of-the-year, the 21-year-old striker has yet to produce the great things expected of him in the Cup.

Sure, he leads Brazil's scorers with four goals in six games. But three teammates have three goals each, and Ronaldo has not been the dominant force many predicted.

Asked to name the key players in Brazil's campaign, coach Mario Zagallo cited Aldair, Cesar Sampaio, Cafu, Rivaldo and Dunga. Not Ronaldo.

But Zagallo simply holds Ronaldo to a higher standard. He knows the Inter Milan striker can do better.

"Ronaldo is rising in production every game," he said. "I am sure the final will be Ronaldo's."

Zagallo has pushed Ronaldo to be more mobile and shake the double coverage he routinely draws. But Ronaldo doesn't always follow the coach's advice.

In Brazil's semifinal against the Netherlands, Ronaldo was invisible for much of the first half, then awoke in the second to score a goal and torment the Dutch defense. It's a pattern that has recurred throughout

the Cup.

The explanations offered for his hot-and-cold play range from tendinitis in his knee to an overdeveloped muscle to excess weight. Ronaldo denies them all.

"Because I won two trophies, people always expect me to resolve everything," he said. "But nobody wins anything alone. The responsibility of helping Brazil to be champion is mine, but also the team's."

It's not easy being Ronaldo. Barely five years ago, soccer's superstar was just another kid from the poor north side of Rio de Janeiro, trying to make a local team. How life has changed.

"Every day, people ask me if I want to be the best, if I will be the high scorer, what I think about being constantly on magazine covers, if all this scares me," he said. "Nothing scares

me. I never was afraid of anything."

But if soccer has changed his life, Ronaldo says he's still the simple youngster from Bento Ribeiro.

"Nothing has changed in my head. Things happen and I keep overcoming obstacles. It's like that everywhere I go," he said. "I'm well off financially, but my behaviour is the same."

In 1994, he watched from the bench as Romario and Bebeto led Brazil to its fourth World Cup title. Now, he's ready to take his role as leader.

"I'll do anything to win. If it takes more sacrifice from me, I'll do it," he said.

The way Ronaldo sees it, his job is the same as it was back in Rio — score and win. It's just that all Brazil is watching.

"The difference now is that a goal makes 160 million people happy," he said.

FOR THE RECORD

PARIS, July 11 (Internet): France and Brazil, who meet in Sunday's World Cup final, have played each other eight times. Brazil have won four, drawn three and lost once, scoring 17 goals and conceding 10.

Date	Category	Result	Venue
24/06/1958	World Cup	Brazil 5 France 2	Stockholm
28/04/1963	Friendly	France 2 Brazil 3	Paris
30/06/1977	Friendly	Brazil 2 France 2	Rio de Janeiro
01/04/1978	Friendly	France 1 Brazil 0	Paris
15/05/1981	Friendly	France 1 Brazil 3	Paris
21/06/1996	World Cup	Brazil 1 France 1	Guadalajara
	(France won 4-3 on penalties)		
26/08/1992	Friendly	France 0 Brazil 2	Paris
03/06/1997	Tournoi	France 1 Brazil 1	Lyon

The two countries also met in the final of the 1984 Olympics in Pasadena, Calif. France won 2-0.

A match in Rio on August 1, 1930 was won 3-2 by Brazil. The French federation does not recognise the game as an official match but the Brazilian federation does.

Brazilian Annan!

UNITED NATIONS, July 11 (AFP): Calling Brazil a "permanent member" of football, UN chief Kofi Annan says he is looking forward to being in the South American nation when it takes on France in the World Cup final Sunday.

"I think it's going to be quite an experience," Annan said at a news conference here Friday before leaving for a five-nation tour of Latin America.

He made it clear that he would join millions of Brazilian fans in watching the live broadcast of the game, played in a Paris suburb.

And he pointed out that just like the UN Security Council, football, too has its permanent members.

"There are countries that are always permanent members ... and I think Brazil is one of them."

Brazilian ambassador to the United Nations, Celso Nunes Amorin, joked that his country and France should put diplomatic stakes on the game.

"I told the French Ambassador (Alain Dejeanmet) that we

should be on a permanent seat on the (Security) Council. Who ever wins the game, gets the seat," said Amorin.

Brazil has been pushing for a permanent seat on the Council to represent Latin America. As a winner of World War II, France already has a permanent Council seat and the accompanying veto power.

Sessions of the 15-member Security Council are often marked by sharp disagreements, but in the past few weeks, "football resulted in unanimity," said Amorin.

"Football is not only the best show in the world, but it is also one of the few universal languages," he said.

Amorin said that on days when games were played Council representatives could be seen leaving for the TV room rather often. "But we were lucky because there were no important meetings those days," he promptly added.

Annan was scheduled to arrive in Rio de Janeiro today before travelling to Bahia on Brazil's north coast Sunday.



PRESSURE FREE: Ronaldo (L) and Taffarel sharing a laugh during a break in practice on July 10. —AFP photo

Head in the clouds, feet on the ground

PARIS, July 11 (Reuters/Internet): Goalkeeper Taffarel may have been the Brazilian hero against the Netherlands but, win or lose in Sunday's final, he is unlikely to get carried away by the adulation.

His two superb saves in the shoot-out against Holland had his name plastered over the front pages of every newspaper in Brazil.

"Saint Taffarel" said a banner headline in leading sports paper Lance, while new-born babies were given the keeper's name.

But the 32-year-old, whose achievement in winning his

100th cap against the Dutch barely attracted notice, has seen it all before and knows that fame can be fickle.

Four years ago he was carried off the Rose Bowl pitch in Pasadena shoulder-high after saving a penalty kick from Daniele Massaro and seeing Franco Baresi and Roberto Baggio miss as Brazil won the World Cup on penalties.

But instead of starting the new season as the star of his Italian Serie A side Parma, he found himself surplus to requirements.

And so, as the rest of the victorious Brazil squad renegoti-

ated their contracts in the world's top leagues, Taffarel ended up out of work.

At one stage he was playing in the northern Italian town of Reggio Emilia for the Church of the Most Precious Blood team — as a striker.

His contribution to the Church was handsomely repaid this week as he deflected the credit for his penalty saves from Phillip Cocu and Ronald de Boer.

"I'm no penalty expert — God was helping me," said the keeper, a Roman Catholic.

Coach Mario Zagallo was under pressure to drop his favourite keeper after a series of blunders for his club Atletico Mineiro during the season. But he kept faith and took him to France for his third World Cup.

Asked if he was surprised by Taffarel's good form, Zagallo said: "Of course not, I always knew he would play well, that's why I continued to pick him when everyone told me not to."

Those critics are nowhere to be seen now as Taffarel enjoys the rare luxury of a goalkeeper of being a star in the Brazilian team.

And when the tournament is over he will start the new season at a new club, after leaving Atletico Mineiro for a lucrative move to Galatasaray of Turkey.

He will still go to Church of course — but the days when his Sunday best included a pair of shorts and a number nine on his back are surely gone for ever.

have, as it were, a big tradition of going in large numbers to see football matches," he said.

The huge crowds will turn up for the Brazil-France final on Sunday, but the noise will be Brazilian.

Zico, Brazil's assistant coach, was in the stadium for the match. He believes that home advantage will not work in France's favour for Sunday's final.

"I don't think the French supporters will make any difference," said Zico. "Against Croatia, the crowd was pretty quiet and didn't even give France a boost even when Thuram scored the second goal."

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Tens of thousands of French revellers were dancing in the streets after Lilian Thuram scored both goals in the 2-1 victory.

In the stadium the crowd was tense, the air was thick, and the applause was polite.

French midfielder Didier Deschamps launched a scathing attack on home fans on Saturday — only 24-hours before the World Cup final.

"I hope they are going to wake up," fumed Deschamps. "I don't want to listen to the samba drums for an hour and a half," he added. "The people are coming to the stadium as if it was the theatre. It is upsetting to think that our 12th man is outside on the street."

The support was so lukewarm that players on the French substitutes bench, led by goalkeeper Bernard Lama, who knows what a real crowd should sound like from his time in the English Premiership with West Ham, felt the need to take to their feet and act as cheerleaders.

The French crowd was looking on with academic interest.

Sociologists would have turned up a needle in a haystack quicker than a true "ull-death-us-do-part" fan.

The French fans reached the Stade de France for the match like commuters arriving at the office.

While towns throughout the country broke into wild celebrations following the final whistle, the fans in the stadium made their excuses and left.

France's respected sports daily, L'Equipe, was moved by the support England generated at the World Cup, deploring the hooliganism but lauding "that strange passion."

British Sports Minister Tony Banks, complaining about the ticket allocation for England fans for their quarter-final against Argentina, deplored the fact that 60 percent of the tickets had gone to the French.

The French simply do not



Brazil's veteran striker Bebeto controlling the ball on his head at Ozoir la Ferriere on July 10. —AFP photo



EVERYONE WANTS TO HEAR FROM HIM: Lilian Thuram, the French defender, makes a point during a press conference on July 9. —AFP photo

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