



WORLD CUP '98 SPECIAL



French goalkeeper Fabien Barthez (top) and Brazil's Ronaldo taking a fall after a collision during the final at Stade de France. —AFP photo

Curtain falls on carnival

PARIS, July 13 (AP): Europe took the World Cup back from Brazil with a host nation victory for France Sunday and the 3-0 triumph made Mario Zagallo's team of superstars look very beatable.

Ronaldo and company, the defending champions and four-time winners, were expected to carry off the title yet again.

They were soundly beaten by the French at the Stade de France and the balance of soccer power tilted further towards Europe, which had three of the four semifinalists and six of the last eight.

In World Cup '94, it was seven out of eight but still Brazil won the title.

Croatia, the surprise team of this World Cup, wound up third at its first ever attempt. Formerly part of Yugoslavia, the Croatians entered the World Cup for the first time, getting into the finals through the runners up playoffs and upsetting three-time titlist Germany on the way to the semifinal, where they lost 2-1 to France.

The Croatians clinched third by beating the Netherlands 2-1 on Saturday.

"I said before we came to France that no one should underestimate us, that there was no limit on what we could achieve," said coach Miroslav Blazevic.

The Dutch looked almost as talented as the two finalists and went out to the Brazilians after

a semifinal shootout following a 1-1 tie.

Dennis Bergkamp, Edgar Davids and Frank de Boer made standout contributions and, if Patrick Kluyvert had taken a few more of the many chances he had, the Dutch might have made their final appearance in the final.

Italy looked a candidate to win their fourth title until they ran into France in the quarter-finals.

With Alessandro Del Piero well short of top form after struggling to recover from injury, the Italians had to rely on the scoring of five-goal Christian Vieri. But the goals dried up against the French who scrambled through after a penalty shootout with Blanc scoring the deciding spot kick.

Argentina and England were unfortunate to meet even earlier. Michael Owen scored a memorable solo goal but David Beckham's expulsion meant England had to defend for 75 minutes with only 10 men before losing, after a thrilling 2-2 tie, on penalties.

Argentina then went out to the Dutch thanks to a spectacular late clincher by Bergkamp.

The Yugoslavs, returning to the World Cup after being banned because of the nation's involvement in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, showed signs they could be contenders but then faded.

They squandered a two-goal

lead to the Germans and were held 2-2 in a group games and surrendered 2-1 in the final minute to the Netherlands in the second round.

Paraguay, Chile and Mexico did well to make it to the last 16 but never looked likely to get any further. Paraguayan keeper Jose Luis Chilavert excelled, yielding only one goal in four games and almost became the first keeper to score in the World Cup only for Bulgaria's Zdravko Zdravkov to tip his 30-metre free kick over the top.

Marcelo Salas scored four goals and teamed up well with Ivan Zamorano but the Chileans were crushed 4-1 in the second round by Brazil while Mexico tossed away a chance to beat the Germans.

Luis Hernandez hit his fourth goal of the championship to put the Mexicans ahead but missed a golden chance of a fifth and a two-goal lead and the Germans came back to win 2-1.

But it all went wrong for the Germans in the quarter-finals. After defender Christian Werners was expelled, Berti Vogts aging team tumbled 3-0 to Croatia, a result that marked the end of standout World Cup careers of Juergen Klinsmann, Lothar Matthaus, Juergen Kohler, Thomas Haessler and several more big name German stars.

Romania and Norway came



Zinedine Zidane (C) holds aloft the FIFA World Cup trophy at the Stade de France on July 12. —AFP photo

ZZ's top

SAINT-DENIS, France, July 13 (AP/Internet): Add ZZ's top to the list of famous French monuments, alongside the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame and the Sacre-Coeur.

For the rest of his life, everywhere he goes in France, he's the man. Zinedine Zidane's balding pate changed French sports history Sunday night, touching off wild celebrations, mass outdoor parties on the old boulevards that still were going on at dawn.

From the Atlantique North to the beaches of the Cote d'Azur, from the Rhone River valley to the Chateaux of the Loire, Zidane became a revered figure. Twice in the first half, he used his head to redirect corner kicks into the net, and France went on to upset Brazil 3-0, becoming only the seventh nation to win a World Cup.

"Zidane lit a beacon for us," French coach Aime Jacquet said.

And he gave the City of Light a night its suddenly soccer-crazed citizens will never forget. Liberte. Egalite. Fraternite.

And now, Zidane.

What went wrong with Ronaldo?

LONDON, July 13 (The Guardian/ AFP/ Internet): Brazilian coach Mario Zagallo may have been forced to field an unfit Ronaldo in last night's World Cup final by the leadership of the Brazilian Football Association (CBF).

Reports in the Brazilian press this morning suggest that Ronaldo only took his place in the starting line-up after an emergency summit meeting of Brazilian football's high-command in the bowels of the Stade de France, Paris. It is claimed that Zagallo, who wanted to play Edmundo in place of the injured Ronaldo, was overruled by CBF president Ricardo Teixeira.

The intervention of Teixeira, son-in-law of outgoing Fifa president Joao Havelange, may explain why, at the post-match

press conference, Zagallo exploded with anger when reporters pressed him to explain why he had fielded a player who was obviously unfit: "He played because he played," fumed Zagallo. "I am a man. I have my dignity. I am giving you an explanation from the top and you want to drag us all into the gutter. You [journalists] owe me a great deal," he shouted.

Later Zagallo acknowledged that Ronaldo should not have played because of injury: "We asked him if he was up to it, and he said 'I want to play. I want to play.' Just think what people would say. That Zagallo had gone mad, by leaving out Ronaldo, leaving him on the bench. But he should not have played."

The extraordinary meeting

came after a dramatic and unsettling afternoon in the favourites' camp. Reports claim Ronaldo was taken ill around 4.20pm. According to his teammate Roberto Carlos, the striker ran out of his room to call the team doctor.

Not even Ronaldo himself knew what was wrong with him. "I think it was the emotion. A 21-year-old, the best in the world, surrounded by contracts, pressures, demands, something had to give day. And unfortunately it happened on the day of the match," said the Real Madrid player. "You only had to look at him to see something was wrong."

When Zagallo arrived at the stadium around 6pm he was completely at a loss as to what to do. "I was making it up as I went along," he said later. Ronaldo had missed the pre-match team talk and did not join the team on the bus to the Stade de France.

The Brazilian team doctor, Lidio Toledo, had by now ruled out Ronaldo. Zagallo decided to put Edmundo into the starting line-up alongside Bebeto, and released a team list to that effect. The news, distributed to the press corps and on the Internet, electrified the world, not least an expectant Brazilian



A distraught Brazilian fan at the Stade de France after the final had ended. —AFP photo

Coup d'etat

PARIS, July 13 (Reuters/ Internet): France, playing with 10 men for the last 20 minutes, won the World Cup for the first time on Sunday as two goals by Zinedine Zidane spurred it to a 3-0 victory over defending champion Brazil.

The inspirational midfielder headed in twice from first half corners to become the first player to score two goals in the final since Argentina's Mario Kempes in 1978. That final was the last time the host nation had won the tournament.

Emmanuel Petit wrapped up victory in the final seconds when he struck home from inside the area.

France totally dominated the game until Marcel Desailly was sent off for his second bookable offence in the 68th minute. But France held out against a disappointing Brazil side, triggering a night of joyous celebrations across the country.

Four-time champion Brazil can have no complaints after being outplayed throughout, and France can point to half-a-dozen missed chances in the first hour.

France was rampant in the first 45 minutes and took full advantage of disruption in the Brazil camp.

Ronaldo was omitted from the original team sheet but was later included after being cleared to play only 45 minutes before kickoff.

Brazil opted not to come out for a pre-match warm-up, and it looked like a poor decision as

the team was second best for the entire first half.

Stephane Guivarch missed two half chances in the first five minutes, while Youri Djorkaeff headed wide from close in.

It was all France, with Brazilian strikers Ronaldo and Bebeto barely touching the ball, and it was no surprise when the hosts went ahead in the 27th minute as Zidane leaped above Leonardo to head home Emmanuel Petit's corner.

In a frantic end to the first half, France missed two glorious opportunities before Zidane gave it a two-goal cushion.

First, a goal-bound Petit shot was deflected inches wide by Junior Baiano. Minutes later, Guivarch was clear on goal but shot weakly, allowing Taffarel to make a good save.

But in injury time, the Brazilian vulnerability in the air was shown up again as Zidane stormed in to head home a

Djorkaeff corner, this time from the left.

Brazil coach Mario Zagallo brought on Denilson for Leonardo at the start of the second half, and the champions did begin to look more threatening.

Ronaldo had his first sight of goal in the 58th minute. But Fabien Barthez stood up well to make a good save from what was probably the Brazilians' best chance of the game before Denilson hit the bar in the final seconds.

Six minutes later, Guivarch missed another golden opportunity when he seized on a poor Cafu header but blazed over. It was his last contribution as he was replaced by Christophe Dugarry.

Desailly was dismissed after a foul on Cafu, having been booked in the first half, becoming the third player to be sent off in a World Cup final after Argentine duo Pedro Monzon and Gustavo Dezotti in 1990.

Desailly's red card seemed to lift the Stade de France crowd, relatively quiet until then. Desailly's partner, Laurent Blanc, missed the final after being sent off in the semifinal against Croatia.

Dugarry should have settled it seven minutes from time but dragged his shot wide with Taffarel stranded.

Zagallo was on his feet urging the champions forward. But France defended superbly, and Petit's goal was the icing on the cake.

"We are in a miserable period in terms of our ideas and the lack of a real genius," he said.

A French Revolution

Tawfiq Aziz Khan

"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times."

Charles Dickens (A Tale of Two Cities)

For France, the country that gave us the Jules Rimet trophy and the concept of the World Cup some 70 years ago, it was the best of times. On the eve of Bastille Day, an historic occasion synonymous with the French Revolution—France's footballing heroes could not have given their nation a better gift.

The wait for this moment has been agonising. Past French teams appeared to possess more talent but their results had been disappointing. Hardly ever crossing the threshold of the penultimate rounds, even peeping at the glittering trophy remained a dream unfulfilled.

France's prospects to become champions were grossly downplayed. The penetration and scoring potential of the French was downplayed. They were given more credit for their ability to defend themselves against harassment from their rivals.

The futile conjecture which dominated the many arguments for and against the host country winning the title often resulted in a disparaging attitude, overshadowing the actual ability of the team to perform at the right moment. But in the final analysis, being credited only with the sticker of the hosts' and labelled by the experts as the 'underdogs' proved a blessing in disguise for the French.

On the day, the French were quick, decisive, confident and eager in their tackling and interceptions. Their marking of opponents was flawless. They held the whip in their hands for most of the time in their midfield exchanges. Hunting for the ball in packs, they practically blocked all approaches of the Brazilians.

Their dominance in the middle of the pitch was mainly due to Didier Deschamps. The exemplary leadership of their diminutive captain breeds comparisons to that other underdog French genius who led his country to the pinnacle of glory—Napoleon Bonaparte.

France's star player Zine-

Shellshocked

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 13 (Reuters): Brazilians wept on Sunday when France crushed Brazil 3-0 in the World Cup final, a defeat that hit hard where there is little but soccer to boost national pride.

On Rio de Janeiro's famous Copacabana beach hundreds of people clung to each other in pouring rain and sobbed uncontrollably, while others drifted away as if shell-shocked.

"This is a sad day," said 29-year-old geographer Avelino Pereira, his eyes red from crying. "We didn't think we could lose this one, especially to a country that doesn't have a history of soccer."

Soccer is normally a source of great pride for Brazilians, who have suffered years of economic chaos and grinding poverty, and their mood

hard for a fifth World Cup title.

The loss in Paris was felt like a jolt across Latin America, where the poor versus rich aspect of the Brazil-France final found deep resonance.

Mexican radio commentators even wondered whether Brazil had been bought off. "How can such a world class team perform so badly. Were they paid off?" said one commentator on Radio Red.

A call-in television poll of Brazilians before the match found that 86 per cent thought they would win.

Brazilians had shot off firecrackers, blew horns and wildly celebrated in the streets as if the Cup title was their's since beating the Netherlands in a nail-biting semifinal on Tuesday.

But the mood soured quickly



IT'S THEIR NIGHT: Jubilant French footballers on a lap of honour on July 12. —AFP photo

THE FRENCH KNOW ONLY ONE SONG...
'WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS!'
JOHN PLAYER GOLD LEAF LIGHTS