



PHOTO: AFP

BORN TO SAMBA: A delighted bunch of Brazilian fans cheer on their national booters in the second semifinal against Turkey at the stands of Saitama yesterday.

Rely always on Ronaldo

AFP, Saitama

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said he always knew he could rely on Ronaldo after seeing the 'Phenomenon' net the only goal in the 1-0 World Cup semi-final success over Turkey here on Wednesday.

The Brazilians thanked Ronaldo's toepoke four minutes after the interval for their triumph - but in the days leading up to the final there had been doubts as to whether he would play following a thigh injury which forced his substitution in last

week's quarter-final win over England.

But Scolari said he had never doubted that Ronaldo would play in the semi-final.

"Of course he didn't worry. He is different from normal people. I wasn't worried either."

"When I saw him with that strange haircut it was a positive sign," said Scolari, referring to a half moon-shaped patch of black hair at the front of the striker's otherwise shaven head.

"I knew he'd be playing this

match. But I decided to bring him off after his goal to keep him fresh for the next match," said Scolari, who brought on Luizao in Ronaldo's place for the final 22 minutes.

Ronaldo himself warned that the Brazilians could not afford any complacency as they seek to overcome the Germans and secure their fifth world crown.

"We know the emotion of reaching a final from 1998," Ronaldo said. "But we must concentrate now. We must not think it is over and let our heads go into the clouds."

The striker, sporting a half moon-shaped patch of hair, described his toe-poked goal as one from the textbook of arch poacher Romario, the hero of Brazil's last World Cup victory in 1994.

"It was a Romario-style goal," he said. "It was not a beautiful goal but it was important."

The 25-year-old also praised Turkey for making a game of it once again, having unluckily lost 2-1 to the Brazilians in the group phase three-and-a-half weeks ago.

"Turkey were well-organised. They are a very good team who deserved to be in the semi-finals," he said.

Ronaldo's sixth goal in six games in Korea and Japan has earned him a chance of redemption after the nightmare he suffered at the 1998 final when he had a fit on the morning of the match and was a shadow of his normal self as Brazil were beaten 3-0 by France.

The Inter Milan star's goal also took him clear of compatriot Rivaldo and Germany's Miroslav Klose, who have both netted five times in the finals.

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PHOTO: AFP

BULL-ENT! Turkey defender Bulent Korkmaz (R) comes flying down on Brazil's central defender Lucio at Saitama yesterday.

An English irony

AP, Yokohama

For an English soccer fan it's hard to swallow. But Germany's in the World Cup final again.

Germany beat South Korea to reach the final for a record seventh time on Tuesday and, watching from their TV screens at home, millions of English soccer fans couldn't believe that this was the same German

soccer team England beat 5-1 in Munich during the qualifying round.

England are back home beaten in the quarterfinal by Brazil and somehow that come-from-behind victory at Munich's Olympic Stadium, where Michael Owen scored a hat-trick to spark huge celebrations back home, seems to have lost some of its lustre.

That triumph in September put

England on the road to going to the World Cup as group winners while Germany were left with getting there through the back door via the nail-biting playoffs. For once, England was looking back at the Germans.

The victory also ended Germany's psychological hold over England in World Cup play. The

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Asian joy

AFP, Hong Kong

South Korea's spectacular World Cup run may have ended short of the final and been tinged by controversy but it has been cheered across the region as a coming of age for Asian football.

"South Korea, you are still the pride of Asia," said the Vietnamese daily Thanh Nien following the co-host's 1-0 loss to traditional powerhouse Germany in Tuesday's semi-final in Seoul.

"What the South Korean players achieved in this competition will become history and a goal that all other Asian teams strive for in the next World Cup," it said.

Bitter rival and World Cup co-host Japan swallowed its own disappointment and magnanimously praised South Korea's achievement in becoming the first Asian side to reach the semi-finals in the 72-year history of the tournament.

"Applause for Asia's tiger," read a headline in Japan's leading daily Yomiuri Shimbun.

"Korea's best eleven, who fought it out with all their strength, were applauded by their proud countrymen and even Japan was deeply

impressed," Yomiuri said.

Newspapers in Australia, which has been gripped by World Cup fever even though the Socceroos failed to qualify for the tournament, enthusiastically threw their support behind South Korea, who were coached by experienced Dutchman Gus Hiddink.

"Every Korean is henceforth an honorary Australian, such is the admiration generated by the Red Devils' success in the World Cup," The Australian said in an editorial headed "Korea, Korea, Korea, Oi Oi Oi."

Sydney Morning Herald columnist Michael Cockerill described South Korea's "marvellous, awe-inspiring charge into the last four" as a "Korean fairytale."

As did others, however, he noted the controversy over the refereeing in South Korea's victories over European giants Portugal, Italy and Spain.

"True, Korea benefited from refereeing decisions but perhaps only Spain have a genuine cause for complaint," he wrote. "The reaction of the Italians has been pathetic."

"The referee didn't beat Italy. The

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PHOTO: AFP

YOU'RE MY HERO! A Turkish supporter encourages her team from the stands at Saitama yesterday.

Oliveira sacked

REUTERS/AP, Lisbon

Portuguese coach Antonio Oliveira has been fired because of the team's poor showing at the World Cup, the head of the Portuguese Soccer Federation said.

President Gilberto Madail said he had sent a fax to Oliveira asking for a "friendly annulment" of his contract, set to run through the European championship in 2004.

"The soccer federation found that the conditions do not exist for him to remain in his job," Madail told a news conference carried live on most radio and television stations.

He added that he had not received a response to the fax but believed Oliveira was out of the country. Oliveira had offered to resign last week.

Oliveira's replacement will be picked by new federation leadership following elections, Madail said.

Pressure had built on Oliveira following Portugal's first-round group D exit in the World Cup. The squad, featuring 2001 World Player of the Year Luis Figo, beat Poland but lost to the United States and South Korea.

Oliveira, 50, took over two years ago and guided Portugal through its undefeated World Cup qualifying campaign.

In a previous stint as national coach, between 1994-96, he led the side to the quarterfinals of Euro 96.

He has recorded the most wins

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Turk heads held high

AFP, Saitama

Turkey's players made vital mistakes in the World Cup semi-final against Brazil here Wednesday as they were under the pressure of expectations from home, coach Senol Gunes said.

"We made fewer mistakes this time than in the first game against Brazil but we still made mistakes going forward when we lost possession," he said after the 1-0 loss that put Brazil into the final against Germany.

"It was a little bit our lack of experience at this stage, but also because of the tension back home in Turkey that put pressure on my players and led to mistakes."

The side's surprise run to the semis provoked huge interest back home in Turkey with thousands taking to the streets of Istanbul and Ankara to celebrate the quarter-final win over Senegal.

Gunes, who had been heavily criticised before the finals for Turkey's poor form, said that his side

had achieved nearly all of their goals.

"We are only sorry that we couldn't give the Turkish people a place in the final," he said.

It was the second time these sides had met at the finals, Brazil winning 2-1 in a bruising opening match marked by a controversial penalty and a rash of bookings.

Brazil eventually topped the group and Turkey qualified as runners-up.

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PHOTO: AFP

GOD HAD OTHER PLANS: Some South Korean tiny tots living in the Indian city of Kolkata praying for their team during the semifinal against Germany on June 25.

Looking ahead already

REUTERS, Seoul

South Koreans have wasted little time moping after their soccer team's extraordinary World Cup adventure ended and focused instead on how to tap the energy unleashed by millions of "Red Devil" fans who backed the side.

Germany beat South Korea 1-0 in Tuesday's semi-final in Seoul, ending a remarkable run that began with limited expectations of a first World Cup win for the Asian side and ended one stop short of Sunday's final in Yokohama, Japan.

"In the end, the South Korean Express simply ran out of steam, the Korea Times newspaper said in a story on how united Germany won its first ticket to the final on the day South Korea marked the start of the war that divided it from the North.

It may have been "game over" for high-tech South Korea, but disappointed yet proud South Koreans, in the media and on the streets, kept things in perspective and saw the bigger picture.

"We need to relax all that passion and excitement and think about how we have created some beautiful history," said the newspaper

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CUP CORNER

AFP, Seoul

The German team is a clapped-out old tank, according to one young South Korean fan who says his own side will always be much better than the team which ended their World Cup dream.

Park Ji-Min, a 21-year-old mechanical engineering student from Seoul, was heading for the semifinal Tuesday pulling a home-made green cardboard tank with a little German flag sticking out of the turret.

"Well, everybody knows the German team are an old tank," said Park with a smile.

Even some of the German tabloids agree, nicknaming the team die

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NO MATCH TODAY

Third Place June 29
Final June 30