

Five places next time

REUTERS, Tokyo

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC), boosted by South Korea's surprise progress to the World Cup semifinals, has repeated its demand for the continent to be given five places in the 2006 finals in Germany.

AFC general secretary Peter Velappan, pointing to Korea's feat plus Japan's progress to the second round, said on Wednesday his organisation would ask world governing body FIFA after Sunday's final to raise the number of guaranteed places for Asia.

In addition to co-hosts South Korea -- beaten 1-0 by Germany in Tuesday's first semi-final -- and Japan, both China and Saudi Arabia also qualified for this year's finals from Asia.

The continent also had the chance of a another spot through a playoff with a European team but Iran lost out to Ireland.

"China and Saudi Arabia were unfortunate (at this year's finals). Asia's spots will have to be increased, considering the population and the number of television viewers on the continent," Velappan told the Kyodo news agency.

Watertight fort

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Franz Beckenbauer, Berti Vogts, Juergen Kohler and Matthias Sammer.

Veteran Thomas Linke, who is often under-rated by observers, also became an automatic starter and offered faultless performances.

Carsten Ramelow ran the defence in most games, taking over Nowotny's role, while the 22-year-old Sebastian Kehl also played his part.

Voeller relied most of the time on a back-three formation with Metzelder, Ramelow and Linke, successfully switching to a flat back-four on two occasions.

He did it first for the second half of the decisive group game against Cameroon, for which Germany were reduced to 10 men after Ramelow's sending off. It worked, with Cameroon hardly creating an opportunity and Germany scoring twice for a 2-0 win.

The same strategy paid off for the second half of Tuesday's 1-0 semi-final win over South Korea, when Voeller introduced an extra defender to counter bold opponents playing with three men up front.

"You have to be flexible in today's football," Voeller said of his defensive options, which helped his team set up a showdown against either Brazil or Turkey in Sunday's final.

Extrasensory

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"When I saw him with that strange haircut at the training ground, I knew it was a positive sign that he would play," he said.

"If a player does something different like that, it's because he knows he's going to play."

"He has no problem with tiredness. We took him off just to keep him fresh for the final."

Dare go

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Kahn said he was aware Brazil had artists capable of scoring at any time but the 33-year-old, who has conceded just one goal so far in the finals, did not sound too worried.

"I have all due respect for Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo, who are fantastic players, but they still have to beat me," he said.

All quiet on

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after the game that he was proud of his team but "sorry we couldn't give the Turkish people one more reason for optimism."

Some fans, though, were determined to stay on and have fun regardless.

"We're here because we're happy that Turkey got us this far," said Tulay Manbacioğlu, 28.



PHOTO: STAR

A colourful rally was brought out in the city yesterday on the eve of the Bumper Round draw of The Daily Star Rangs Toshiba World Cup Quiz competition. The draw will be held at the Jatiya Press Club Auditorium at 4:30 this afternoon.

Kahn ethic

REUTERS, Seoul

Oliver Kahn has a plain explanation for how the frail teenager with limited skills he once was matured to become the world's most intimidating goalkeeper.

"It's a combination of a lot of hard work and plenty of experience and it's all coming together," the German captain said, looking ahead to Sunday's World Cup final with Brazil.

The 33-year-old, whose broad shoulders will carry much of the triple champions' hopes when they clash with Brazil in the Japanese port city of Yokohama, had to endure a frustrating wait before winning universal acclaim.

For years in the shadow of Bodo Illgner, then Andreas Koepke, he was a reserve goalkeeper at the last two World Cup finals and was also on the bench when Germany tasted their last international triumph at Euro 1996.

One of few German players to escape criticism after the shock first round exit from Euro 2000, he was deeply affected by the fact that his

first major tournament with the national team was a disaster.

He has kept saying since that Germany did not show their true form then and while many had written them off before the World Cup started, Kahn repeated day after day that the team could restore pride by having a great tournament.

He is certainly making the most of his second chance to shine on the big stage and Germany's goalkeeper coach Sepp Maier, a member of the 1974 World Cup-winning side and one of the finest keepers of all time, admitted he was impressed.

"He is at the peak of his career," Maier said of Kahn, who will win his 53rd cap on Sunday and is already dreaming of playing the next finals in 2006 in Germany.

"In my opinion he is the best player of the tournament."

With Kahn stopping everything thrown at him, Germany have conceded just one goal en route to the big game, matching the record set by the Netherlands before they lost 2-1 to Germany in the 1974 final.

Regarded as average in his learning years, Kahn was obsessed

with perfection from an early age and his father, Rolf, still remembers how his son used to wake him up early on Sundays because he wanted to train.

"He had only one goal and that was to become professional," Rolf Kahn, who made the trip to Asia, said of his son.

That aim was achieved in 1990, when he made his Bundesliga debut for his home town club, Karlsruher SC, but his career really took off after he joined Bayern Munich in 1994.

The following year he won his first cap, in a 2-1 victory over Switzerland in Bern, but not until Koepke retired from international football after the 1998 World Cup in France did he become the undisputed number one.

Not unlike Peter Schmeichel with the same massive frame and shock of blond hair, Kahn, who hardly ever smiles even when he cracks a joke, replaced the former Manchester United and Denmark great as arguably the world's best goalkeeper with a fantastic season with Bayern last year.

Brazil on par with Germany

REUTERS, Yokohama

Brazil have become only the second nation to reach three consecutive World Cup finals, equalling the record set 12 years ago by their opponents in Sunday's final, Germany.

Brazil won the World Cup in 1994 when they beat Italy on penalties after a 0-0 draw. They lost 3-0 to France in the 1998 final in Paris.

Germany, playing as West Germany, were finalists in 1982 when they lost 3-1 to Italy, in 1986 when they lost 3-2 to Argentina and in 1990 when they finally beat Argentina 1-0.

Though it is Brazil's third final in a row they have not scored a goal in a final, apart from in penalty shoot-outs, since 1970 when they beat Italy 4-1.

Jiving on samba

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(the Germans) have only suffered one goal in the Cup.

"It is a test of individual talent against the powerful German collective."

Brazil's president Fernando Henrique Cardoso celebrated with reporters and fans outside the presidential palace in Brasilia after the match.

"When we have talent and willingness, no one can hold Brazil back," said Cardoso, who is nearing the end of his second four-year term and is barred from running for re-election in October.

Unlike German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who is running for re-election in September, Cardoso will not go to Japan for the final.

He also declined to say if he would decree a public holiday on Monday if Brazil won the tournament.

Few in the land of soccer greats like Pele and Garrincha expected their team to reach the final after struggling to qualify.

Brazilians complained about the tactics of coach Luiz Felipe Scolari and his decision not to take striker Romario to the finals.

But all that criticism seems to have fallen by the wayside with Brazil winning all six World Cup matches so far, including a 2-1 quarter-final victory over England.

Tvangle

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off a string of magnificent saves. Turkey threatened on fast break-aways, but could not force Marcos into a save. The signs were there though, that the Turks could notch a goal whenever Brazil were not careful. With both teams playing in the right spirit, a goal was imminent.

It came in the early minutes of the second half, and in the form of one of the most exquisite pieces of skill witnessed in this World Cup. And who else but Ronaldo was the man to get it. Receiving the ball on the edge of the box with his back to goal, he turned his marker, blew by a couple of more defenders as only he can, and finished off the move with a toe-poke that was too powerful for Rustu. Sure, the goalkeeper should have done better, but he was possibly not expecting such a finish from that angle, when most strikers would try to curl it inside the far post. Then again, you could blame Rustu for expecting Ronaldo to do what most strikers do.

With a goal in the bag, Brazil's confidence was soaring, and they continued to pour forward, looking for the killer blow. Ronaldo was playing as playmaker now, creating chances for Edison and Roque Junior, both of whom missed. Turkey seemed rattled, and were finding it increasingly difficult to penetrate the trio of Lucio, Edmilson and Roque Junior, who all had their best games of the tournament. Turkey were feeding on half chances, and Sukur nearly rescued them with what

would have been the goal of the tournament. But luck has simply deserted the man, and his volley on the turn didn't find the net. It was an enthralling game, and there could have been so many more goals. Rivaldo looked like he was getting closer and closer with his long range efforts, but ultimately time ran out for him and, more importantly, for Turks. They should not lose heart though. Turkey has a solid system in place now that will ensure they continue producing quality players in coming years, and they will get more such chances in the future.

Brazil are now just one game away from 'El Penta', that almost mythical fifth title. Germany stand in their way, and surely, the first World Cup of the new century has got a fitting final, in that the two most successful nations of the last century are squaring off in it. Whoever win will not only have the right to call themselves world champions, but also the right to be called the most successful nation in World Cup history. A titanic battle should be on the cards and nothing can be taken for granted. Both have faced opposition of more or less similar standard en route to the final. Germany defend as well as Brazil attack. Both are reaching the peak of their form at the right time. Who will make the difference? If what goes around really does come around, it could just be a man wearing number 9 in a lemon yellow shirt.

Redemption Road

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It proved the turning point for his previously-ridiculed team as they secured a 1-1 draw in Kiev and impressively won the return 4-1 to take their place in the finals.

The bookmakers remained unimpressed by either country, however, with Germany attracting their longest odds for years at 14-1 and perennial favourites Brazil ranked behind France, Argentina and Italy and even behind Spain and England by some oddsmen.

Franz Beckenbauer, who the World Cup as a player and coach, said that it was the first time that Germany had sent a team to the tournament with no chance of winning it while three-times winner Pele predicted his countrymen would struggle to reach the semifinals.

But as all the favourites fell, Brazil and Germany steadily went about their work in a businesslike manner.

Both have developed a real team spirit, the players saying their qualifying problems helping

them bond, and despite one or two scares they have arrived in the final relatively untroubled.

Voeller and Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari handled the constant criticism with dignity and have developed a mutual respect after both resurrecting their countries' chances.

Scolari said after Wednesday's 1-0 semifinal victory over Turkey that he was looking forward to reacquainting himself with his opposite number in far more favourable circumstances than when they last met at the World Cup draw last December.

"When we met at the draw, we both had the rope around our necks," said the man known as "Big Phil".

"We both had difficulty qualifying and both reached the finals at the last moment."

"We hugged each other and told each other that maybe we would meet in the final."

"I am sure we will hug each other again then."



PHOTO: AFP

FIFA president Sepp Blatter (L) addresses a joint press conference in Yokohama yesterday. To his left is UEFA president Lennart Johansson.

Uncompromising Blatter

REUTERS, Yokohama

Technology will not be used to aid referees or linesmen for the foreseeable future, FIFA president Sepp Blatter says.

"As long as I (am president) I will make sure that no technical help will be introduced in refereeing because we have to rely on human beings -- and human beings make mistakes," the head of world soccer's governing body told a news conference on Thursday.

There has been renewed debate about using video replays in stadiums, or introducing other aids to determine whether the ball has crossed the line or not following controversial decisions by referees and linesmen in the knock-out stages of this World Cup.

The main matches under the microscope were the second round game between co-hosts South Korea and Italy and the quarter-final meeting of Korea and Spain.

Italy had one goal disallowed and playmaker Francesco Totti controversially sent off against the

Koreans, while Spain had two goals disallowed. The second was after a woeful call by a linesman whose bad decision that the ball was out of play before a cross cost Spain a perfectly good golden goal match-winner.

But although Blatter was fiercely critical of the officiating last week, his message was that football would just have to live with the officials' mistakes.

He was adamant that technology to determine decisions about goals or offside would not be allowed while he was FIFA president. "What we need to do is make sure that refereeing will always be improved, by courses, by technical instruction and also by tactical instruction."

"It is of paramount importance that the assistant referees know and feel football and they have to see and feel how the game will develop."

"But to introduce technical items -- no. This will destroy an essential element of our game -- the emotion. If our game becomes scientific then nobody will have any discussion any longer -- if it was offside or not off-

side, if it's inside or outside the penalty box."

There are plenty of people who disagree with him, not least the 400,000 Italians and Spaniards who sent e-mails to FIFA protesting about the wrong calls they suffered.

Blatter said much the same thing about the refereeing at the 1998 finals, but his opposition to technological aids seems even more resolute now than it was before.

He added that experiments using electronic devices had "destroyed" the test matches in question.

"We have made some experiments and it was destroying matches using electronic devices to control the matches and to change the referee's decisions."

"The referee would take a decision and then you have to come back and change it and you have 50,000 people in the stadium."

"The crowd will accept when someone has made a mistake but they will not accept when something is changed. For the time being football will not accept it."

Home away from home

AP, Saitama

It began as a soccer game and ended as an impromptu samba festival.

Small wonder that Brazil enjoyed a home-away-from-home advantage Wednesday night while locking up a 1-0 semifinal win over Turkey. Always a crowd pleaser because of its stylistic play, the Brazilians had even more fans than usual cheering them on at Saitama Stadium north of Tokyo.

Brazilians have flocked to Japan ever since 1990, when visa rules were changed to make it easier for foreigners of Japanese descent to return to their ancestral homeland to fill a shortage of manual labourers.

According to estimates, more than 220,000 Brazilians of Japanese descent live in Japan. Only Koreans and Chinese are more numerous. Brazil, meanwhile, still claims one of the largest Japanese communities outside Japan.

For both those reasons, four-time champion Brazil may have felt as though it was playing in the famed Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro -- despite temperatures that reached a high of only 63 degrees. Except for a small patch of red

behind one goal, the World Cup venue was a sea of bright yellow jerseys accompanied by a constant samba beat that picked up in tempo every time a Brazilian player touched the ball.

"This was a spectacular win for us," said Ribeiro Renato, a company employee from Rio. "Ronaldo played one of the best games of his life, and we'll beat Germany 2-0 in the final."

After the game, hundreds of Brazilian fans staged a samba festival in the seats behind the goal. Seven fans spelled out R-O-N-A-L-D-O with huge white cardboard letters.

Of course, it didn't help that Turkey defeated Japan 1-0 in the round of 16 to eliminate the co-hosts. It was something that some of Japan's loyal fans refused to forgive.

"They beat us, so of course we were rooting for Brazil," high school student Kazuyuki Amano said. "But we wanted to see Japan play Brazil in the semifinal."

Turkey's small contingent attempted to unfurl a giant Turkish flag at the start of the second half but the strong winds blew it sideways. Minutes later, Ronaldo scored, sending most of the 61,058 crowd

into a frenzy.

Many Brazilian stars -- such as Alessandro Santos and 1994 World Cup captain Dunga -- have played in the domestic J-League, further strengthening soccer ties between Japan and Brazil.

Ties between the two countries date back nearly a century, to when Japanese immigrants went to Brazil to set up farming communities.

Hundreds of thousands of Brazilians, most of them of Japanese descent, have come to Japan over the past decade. Cheering on Brazil in the World Cup has brought them closer to their dream of one day returning to their homeland.

"It's a tough life here but the money is good," said Fabrice Nakaoshi, who arrived from Nagano on Wednesday to watch Brazil's win.

Nakaoshi, whose father is Japanese, arrived in Japan seven years ago with his brother to work in a factory and save up for a better life back home. He was confident of his team's chances of reaching Sunday's final.

"I think we have the best team in the tournament," Nakaoshi said.

Recognition at long last?

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He was involved in the 1996 Olympics but was widely blamed for Brazil's semi-final defeat to Nigeria before leaving the critics behind with a move to Spain's Deportivo Coruna.

Suddenly he was appreciated. His 21 goals in 41 games and obvious dedication to the cause earned him a lucrative move to Barcelona and worldwide acclaim followed.

In Brazil, however, the doubts remained. Despite scoring four goals and being selected by FIFA as his country's best player in the 1998 World Cup and crowned World Player of the Year the following season, supporters lamented that he still failed to reproduce his club form on the international stage.

Rouly booted after Brazil scrambled a last-minute 1-0 qualifying win over Colombia in November 2000, he threatened to quit the national team.

"I've been through many things in my career but that was too much," he said.

Back at the Nou Camp his stock continued to rise, reaching an almost hysterical peak in the last minute of the last league game of the 2000-2001 season.

With Barcelona needing victory over Valencia to leapfrog them into the last available Champions League spot, Rivaldo thumped

home a spectacular overhead kick to complete his hat-trick and a 3-2 victory.

Rivaldo took the adulation and the criticism equally in his stride.

His upbringing kept him eternally aware that whatever the highs and lows of playing football, there was another world where a full stomach represented a successful day.

Consequently he has always been heavily involved in charity work, both in his northern Brazilian homeland and in Barcelona.

"Many people still live in poverty but because of my name and my position I can offer a helping hand," he said in a sentiment all-too rare among soccer's modern millionaires.

His run-up to this World Cup was problematical as a knee injury brought a premature end to his club season and left many wondering if he would regain fitness in time to make the finals.

As so often before, he had to prove the doubters wrong.

"People laughed at me, made jokes about my fitness, which made me a bit sad," he said.

"I worked very hard, 24-hours a day to get fit but people didn't realise this and they criticised me, they said I was crooked and another player should be picked."

Rivaldo's initial impact on the tournament was nothing to be

proud of, however, as his "simulation" of a facial injury after the ball was kicked against his legs in Brazil's first group game versus Turkey earned him widespread ridicule and a FIFA fine.

More play-acting and diving in the 2-1 quarter-final victory over England also left an unpleasant taste but in general he has made the headlines for the right reasons.

Despite looking more ungainly than ever in his white boots, and just as one-footed, he has improved with every game, scoring in five successive matches before the semi-final and impressing again in the 1-0 semi-final win over Turkey.

Rivaldo never lost confidence in himself and to finally get the unconditional backing of a national team manager has helped him shine.

"Luis Felipe Scolari has put a lot of faith in me," he said. "People carried on criticising my football, saying that I shouldn't be in the team but he told me my place was safe and I needn't be concerned about the critics."

"It is great to be trusted by the coach. He gave me confidence and told me my place is safe."

Perhaps by 9:45 p.m. Tokyo time (1:45 p.m. British time) on Sunday night, 170 million Brazilians will finally agree.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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