



SAMBA SAMURAI: Superstar Ronaldo sporting a 'Samurai' wig, at New Tokyo International Airport in Narita yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

World his oyster

REUTERS, Yokohama

When Ronaldo's knee collapsed two years ago the injury was more than a blow for his club Inter Milan and his country Brazil -- the whole world felt his pain.

Twice voted World Player of the Year, the hugely popular striker had become a symbol of the game, in the manner of greats such as Diego Maradona, Johan Cruyff and his compatriot Pele.

Yet at the age of 23 his career was threatened and he faced the prospect of being remembered as one of the finest talents never to fully realise his unquestionable ability.

Now his two goals in Brazil's World Cup triumph over Germany on Sunday have finally restored him to his status as the world's favourite footballer.

He had been the best forward of

the World Cup throughout and his performance in the final surely made him the player of the tournament.

As the reaction to his night of glory testifies, Ronaldo's popularity has always been based on more than goals alone.

An honest, straightforward football-mad lad, who is also a young father, husband and a genuine advocate for children's charities, Ronaldo's reputation has never been sullied by play-acting, violence or scandal.

The huge smile on his face as he celebrated his country's unprecedented fifth World Cup win appears to have closed three seasons of agony, frustration and nagging doubts.

Sunday night in the International Stadium in Yokohama seemed to belong to a different era from the time when he struggled into Inter's

training ground on crutches and winced as he had to deal with questions about his future.

Since then he has had to deal with accusations that he had become overweight, panics surrounding every minor muscle strain and the general, if largely unspoken, belief that he would never again be the player he once was.

Ronaldo's injury misery began in late 1999 when he had an operation on his right knee.

His comeback match for Inter six months later, as a substitute in the Italian Cup final against Lazio, lasted only six minutes when he tore ligaments in the same knee.

This time, a painstaking recovery took almost two years but his comeback was then cut short by a series of frustrating muscular injuries.

SEE PAGE 14 COL 6

It's for Ronald

INTERNET, Yokohama

Ronaldo has finally revealed the secret behind his wacky hairstyle.

Brazil's eight-goal World Cup hero shaved the front of his head into a bizarre half moon shape - to stop his son Ronald mistaking him for team-mate Roberto Carlos.

The striker's little boy, two, made the error while watching the Samba stars against England in the quarter-finals.

The tot - said to be named after the McDonald's clown - ran to the telly, shouting "Daddy, Daddy!" when he saw the Real Madrid defender.

In a phone call to his wife Milene.

SEE PAGE 14 COL 4

Champs catch home flight

AFP, Narita

The elated Brazilian national team left Japan on Monday to bring home the World Cup trophy.

Ronaldo, who netted the two goals in the final match to defeat Germany 2-0, wore a Samurai-style wig when he appeared at the Narita airport, east of Tokyo.

"O-Samurai!" Ronaldo said in front of cheering crowd of Japanese supporters at the airport, shortly before the team's chartered flight departed at 8:14 pm (1114 GMT).

Ronaldinho danced while beating on a small drum as other players gave autographs to fans.

Earlier in the day, some 200 Japanese and Brazilian football fans surrounded a hotel in Yokohama, south of Tokyo, where the Brazilian team stayed after their victory.

Cruyff speaking

AFP, Hilversum

Dutch legend Johan Cruyff has criticised this year's World Cup by branding it as an "unmemorable" tournament and slamming winners Brazil for playing "anti-football."

In a stunning outburst on Dutch TV, Cruyff also insisted Brazil clinched a 2-0 win over Germany in Sunday's final because of a series of mistakes by Rudi Voller's man.

"The 2002 World Cup is unmemorable, in August no-one will be talking about it. There haven't been any real stars," Cruyff said while working as an expert for Dutch TV during their World Cup final coverage on Sunday.

Cruyff won three successive European Cups with Netherlands side Ajax as the Dutch philosophy of

SEE PAGE 14 COL 1

As good as old

REUTERS, Yokohama

A superb World Cup that ended on a gloriously romantic night has done much to restore the image of the world game.

After months of in-fighting between FIFA's rulers when football's name was sullied by unsavoury allegations, the top players have proved that ultimately the game is all about them and the fans.

The last month has proved that it can still be a Beautiful Game, even if it's not quite as innocent as it once was. Brazil's 2-0 victory over Germany in the final featured two goals by a revived Ronaldo - what more could the organisers have wished.

Part of the beauty of the tournament was that the form-book was thrown out the window in the first round when shock followed shock after France's defeat by Senegal in the opening match.

Although Sunday's final was between two giants of the game -- Brazil and Germany -- their appearance in it was something of a surprise following their pre-tournament form.

Less of a shock than Senegal beating the world champions or the United States beating Portugal for sure, but not widely tipped when it began a month ago.

The success of South Korea and Turkey who both reached the semi-finals for the first time also boosted the competition, especially after they played out a thrilling third place

play-off and sportingly congratulated each other and the Korean fans after Turkey's 3-2 victory.

The millions who embraced the tournament in host nations South Korea and Japan, many of them hooking into the sport for the first time ever, proved that the global attraction of the game has not dimmed.

Of course not everyone went home happy - France, Spain, Italy and Portugal will look back on this month and want to weep. But overall, this World Cup has been an uplifting experience for millions around the world.

It was not perfect, but then again it was never going to be.

Poor decisions by referees and linesmen blighted the second round and the quarter-finals, with Spain deprived of a rightful place in the last four after having a golden goal winner disallowed against South Korea in the quarter-finals.

Italy were also aggrieved by their exit at the hands of the Koreans in the second round when they had two goals disallowed and Francesco Totti controversially sent off, but they missed clear match-winning chances they could not blame on the referee.

Four years ago in France, FIFA president Sepp Blatter said his priority was to improve the officiating.

While the men in the middle show a lot more common sense

SEE PAGE 14 COL 6



PHENOMENON OF TACTICS: Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari pumps his fist after the final at Yokohama on June 30.

PHOTO: AFP

Samba never dies

INTERNET, Yokohama

The day replayed-over the course of a passion-filled month, 32 nations from every corner of the globe were painfully and tearfully whittled to two towering giants, two fierce contenders.

And in just 90 dramatic minutes in Yokohama, Japan, a legend was forged, and an age-old tale told, as 'Pentacampeao' Brazil and Ronaldo, with his velvet feet and Golden Shoe, danced off a new continent with the sun on their faces and stars in their eyes.

And as he remembered lying, crying on an operating table with blood pouring from his knee, Ronaldo fought with valour for the vindication and rebirth only a bouncing ball and a Final can offer.

"My biggest victory is that I can play again," Ronaldo told honoured guest and orthopaedist Gerard Saillant in Yokohama.

And play he did, though it seemed France 98 déjà vu all over again as he missed three golden opportunities in the first 45 minutes in a ghostly reminder of football's crueler fate. Brazil poured forward

in homage of their fanciful, rhythmic forebearers. But after flouting chance after chance, German efficiency and cold realism looked to be lurking with intent.

Lev Yashin Award winner, 'keeper and captain Oliver Kahn shined like a true legend, a statue carved from the roughest stone as he put the Mannschaft on his broad shoulders one last time.

But as the woodwork played a crucial role, the cruellest of all twists and the brightest bits of lady luck's spoils rained down on the night. As Rivaldo rifled a shot in on Kahn, the finest, seemingly infallible goalkeeper in all the land, spilled the ball right to the feet of the previously luckless Ronaldo. And in a moment, the snake-bitten striker was born again after years of pain and self-doubt...and perhaps a legend too.

The now-lordly "Phenomenon" struck again as Rivaldo dummied brilliantly leaving a simple strike for the finally blessed South American Samba king to grab his twelfth final goal and a place among the pantheon of football's true greats.

SEE PAGE 14 COL 8

Salute Scolari

REUTERS, Yokohama

Luiz Felipe Scolari, who until little more than one year ago was a club coach best known for achieving success without worrying how he did it, turned world beater on Sunday as his Brazil side won the World Cup.

Scolari, who became infamous for publicly telling his teams to foul the opposition, was rewarded for standing by his convictions, often in the face of enormous public pressure.

He refused to change his controversial 3-5-2 system even though many critics wanted Brazil to use 4-4-2.

He kept faith with Rivaldo, even though many had suggested the Barcelona player seemed ill at ease in the Brazil shirt and only produced his best form for his club.

He also stubbornly refused to pick veteran striker Romario, defying enormous popular pressure and a lobby that included Brazil President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

His decisions were justified as

Brazil won all seven of their games. Rivaldo scored five goals and the three-pronged strikeforce of Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho produced movement off the ball which Romario -- who prefers simply to lurk in the penalty area -- would never have been capable of.

Yet only 13 months ago, when the man known as Big Phil was made coach of Brazil, his appointment was greeted with enormous apprehension.

Although Scolari had been hugely successful in club football, winning South America's Libertadores Cup with both Gremio and Palmeiras, his methods shocked some observers.

A modest former central defender who played for small clubs in Brazil's deep south, his teams generally played a tough, physical, disciplined game in which fouling the opposition was considered a legitimate tactic.

Scolari encouraged his players to use gamesmanship and was once

SEE PAGE 14 COL 2

Oh no! Oliver



PHOTO: AFP

BEING BEST DOESN'T MATTER: The best custodian of the tournament Oliver Kahn on his way to board the plane along with teammates at Narita yesterday.

REUTERS, Berlin

German newspapers mourned their team's loss in Sunday's World Cup final by mixing criticism of a goalkeeping error with praise for a side no one expected to advance so far.

In their Monday morning editions, most German papers blamed goalkeeper Oliver Kahn for the loss after his first mistake of the tournament -- failure to hold a shot from Rivaldo -- enabled Ronaldo to score on a rebound in the 67th minute.

"One mistake is a mistake too many," read the headline in Munich's Sueddeutsche Zeitung, available late on Sunday, after Brazil beat Germany 2-0.

"Of all people Kahn, who is possibly the best goalkeeper in history, makes the sort of blunder that happens to goalkeepers around the world," the newspaper wrote. "It was a football irony that blighted this nearly wonderful football party for Germany."

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) summed up on its front page the disappointment Germans are feeling even after their side unexpectedly advanced so far in the tournament.

"It wasn't meant to be, Brazil defeats Germany," read the paper's front page banner headline.

On its sport page the influential newspaper also zoomed in on Kahn's responsibility for the defeat.

SEE PAGE 14 COL 5



JOY UNBOUND: Brazilian's at Ipanema Beach in Rio de Janeiro let out their joy after their country was crowned world champions.

PHOTO: INTERNET