

CONQUERORS OF THE WORLD RETURN HOME: (1) Brazil coach Luis Felipe Scolari (L) and captain Cafu lean out of the cockpit of the aircraft that brought them to Brasilia. (2) A tiny tot (C) couldn't care less about the policemen as he flashes a 'thumbs up' while waiting for the world champions to pass through outside the Planalto Palace. (3) President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (L) embraces superstar Ronaldo at the Planalto Palace.

# Welcome of a lifetime



AP, Rio de Janeiro

Even a five-hour wait didn't dampen the fans' enthusiasm as they greeted the national soccer team on the second stop of their three-city tour honoring them for winning Brazil's fifth World Cup.

After a stop Tuesday in Brasilia, where they were awarded the National Medal of Honor by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the team was greeted by a sea of fans and Rio Governor Benedita da Silva.

Accompanied by samba singer Zeca Pagodinho, the team parade paraded on top of three sound trucks past legions of fans who had filled Rio's streets and avenues since 3:00 p.m. when the players were scheduled to arrive. They only arrived in Rio at 8:00 p.m.

"I never saw anything like this in my life. Leaving the airport I was moved by the millions and millions of people in the street waiting to celebrate," Real Madrid defender Roberto Carlos told reporters.

Two of the team's stars, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho, did not parade, prefer-

ring to head straight from the Rio de Janeiro airport to their hometowns. In Brasilia, defender Lucio, goalie Dida and midfielder Gilberto Silva left the team.

Few fans seemed to care about the hours-long delay. "I'm so happy because if they arrived on time I would have missed them because I was working," said 19-year-old nanny Geraldina Silva Xavier as she waited with some 40,000 other fans on Copacabana beach, the team's final destination in Rio.

Before leaving the airport in Brasilia, team captain Cafu placed a fifth star on top of the Brazilian Soccer Confederation logo on the plane's side to symbolize their unprecedented fifth World Cup victory.

When the team arrived in Brasilia captain Cafu and coach Luis Felipe Scolari leaned out from the two sides of the cockpit waving Brazilian flags.

Cafu triumphantly held the World Cup aloft from the cockpit of the jumbo jet that returned the South American side to a rapturous reception at a military airport where the aircraft landed. The jumbo, embossed with five stars to symbolize the record fifth World Cup victory, was escorted into Brazilian airspace by four fighter jets.

The veteran right-back, the first player to appear in three World Cup finals, then stood motionless at the top of the stairs that led to the runway in front of 300,000 celebrating fans. "This is the sport that brings happiness to 170 million Brazilians," he declared.

The jumbo, embossed with five stars to symbolize the record fifth World Cup victory, was escorted into Brazilian airspace by four fighter jets.

"The airforce are proud to receive the national team to our homeland," a general announced over the airwaves. "Once again the world recognises

the greatness of Brazil."

Holding up the World Cup trophy, Cafu was the first to emerge from the plane, followed by Ricardo Teixeira, president of the Brazilian Soccer Confederation, and the rest of the team.

As they descended the red-carpeted staircase, fireworks exploded and an air force band began playing a catchy samba rhythm.

"I am very happy and I am sure all of Brazil is very happy," Ronaldo, the World Cup's top scorer, told a TV reporter who rushed up to him on the runway.

"Only arriving in our country and receiving this energy do we know that we are world champions."

After clearing customs, the players climbed onto two sound trucks that carried them past an estimated 150,000 people who lined the 15-kilometer (9-mile) route between the airport and the "Plaza of the Three Powers," where the Planalto Presidential Palace, Congress and the Supreme Court are located.

After about four hours, the procession finally entered the plaza where a huge crowd of at least 500,000 greeted the players with loud cheers. The Afro-Brazilian drum beats of the Olodum percussion band beat out the national anthem in a samba rhythm. Overhead, Air Force stunt planes wrote "Five-Time Champion" in white smoke.

After reaching the presidential palace, the players and coach Scolari walked up a ceremonial ramp and were embraced, one by one, by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who presented 17 Merit of Honour medals to the players who had not been part of Brazil's 1998 World Cup side.

"I welcome our national team, who are five times World Cup winners," trumpeted Cardoso. "I welcome the team as President of the Republic. I welcome them as a citizen, as a Brazilian and in the name of all Brazilians. This team is formidable. With determination and humility they won the 17th World Cup."

"I especially want to mention their humility as these players showed this virtue during the whole campaign. After defeating the mighty Germany they were gracious enough to kneel on the pitch in the middle of the stadium and thank God for a victory, a historical victory."

"Brazil has great players, which is why we are, and will continue to be, champions."

Flanked by Cafu and Scolari, the president posed for photos holding the World Cup Trophy.

Scolari, who saw hundreds of banners reading "Felipao for president", was overwhelmed.

"The players gave their answer in Japan and the supporters are now returning their efforts," he said. "I don't think anybody imagined it would be like this."

Denilson added: "This reception is marvellous. We appreciate the love the people have for us."

Tuesday was declared an optional holiday in Brasilia, which allowed banks, businesses and schools to choose whether they would stay open or not.

The team now heads to Sao Paulo, where they are expected to arrive around midnight.

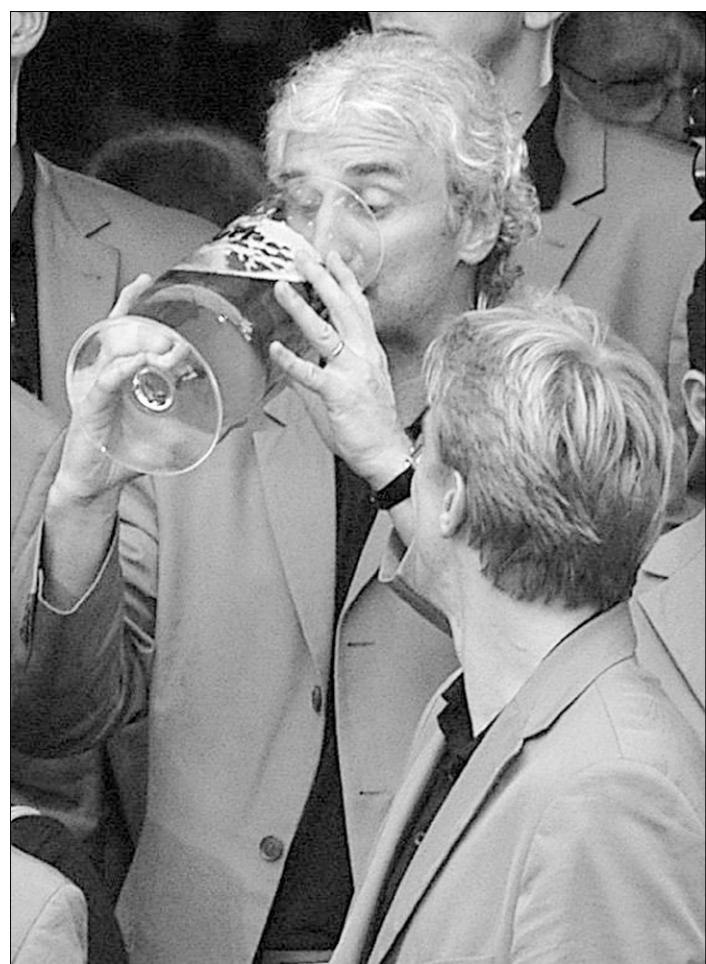


PHOTO: AFP

THE SECRET OF HIS ENERGY! Germany coach Rudi Voeller drinks beer from a huge glass at the Frankfurt Town Hall on July 1.

## Embarrassed Voeller!



INTERNET, Frankfurt

Germany coach Rudi Voeller was overwhelmed by the rousing reception his team received on their return from the World Cup.

"We are almost ashamed as we only got second," he admitted. "What would have happened if we'd won the World Cup?"

Voeller's squad were greeted by 20,000 fans packed into Romberg Square in Frankfurt as part of an official homecoming celebration.

And while Voeller enjoyed the loudest cheer, the crowd left goal-

keeper Oliver Kahn in no doubt that they did not blame him for his blunder in the final that allowed Ronaldo to open the scoring.

"I am almost speechless," said the Bayern Munich star. "Thanks a lot for this outstanding reception, your enthusiasm took us through the tournament."

"I am proud that I was allowed to captain such a great team."

Oliver Bierhoff, who announced his retirement from international football following the World Cup, admitted the celebrations even outshone those of six years ago when the team returned from England as European Champions.

"This enthusiasm is unmatched," he declared. "It's bigger than 1996."

## Zico favourite for Japan job

REUTERS, Tokyo

Former Brazil international Zico is the leading candidate to take over from Frenchman Philippe Troussier as coach of Japan, the Japan Football Association (JFA) confirmed on Wednesday.

Zico, who has been at J-League champions Kashima Antlers in either a playing or a coaching capacity since 1991, is expected to sign a four-year deal up to the 2006 World Cup.

"There are still things like salary and a lot of other conditions to sort out, so it is not decided yet but he is on our list," JFA press manager Hideto Teshima told Reuters.

The shortlist is also thought to include Aime Jacquet, who masterminded France's World Cup triumph in 1998, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger and Bora Milutinovic, available after taking China to their first World Cup.

Troussier, who took charge in September 1998, stepped down after guiding the co-hosts to the second round of the World Cup, where they lost 1-0 to Turkey.

Zico was part of arguably the best team not to win the World Cup when Brazil went out 3-2 to a Paolo Rossi hat-trick in Spain in 1982.

The 49-year-old played alongside another former Japan coach, Falcao, in the Brazilian midfield.

## Keane not keen on Sunderland

AFP, London

Republic of Ireland international striker Robbie Keane rejected a move from Leeds to Premiership rivals Sunderland on Tuesday even though the clubs had agreed a fee earlier in the day.

"I do not want to speak to any other club," the 21-year-old said.

"I am happy at Leeds and am confident that I can impress any new manager with my ability and commitment," added Keane, who scored three goals in the Republic's strong showing at the finals which climaxed with a penalty shootout defeat by Spain in the second round.

Keane, 21, who apart from Ronaldo was the only other player to beat Germany's outstanding goalkeeper Oliver Kahn when he scored in injury-time of their first round clash, cost 18 million dollars when he was signed by Leeds from Inter Milan.

Earlier on Tuesday both Sunderland and Leeds had announced on their official websites that the striker had been given the green light to talk to the north eastern side after they reached a deal over his fee.

## Ronaldo in rumors



AFP, Milan

Inter Milan's World Cup hero Ronaldo has been linked with a move to European Champions League winners Real Madrid, Italian press reported on Wednesday.

Ronaldo's Brazilian teammate Roberto Carlos has reportedly asked Real president Florentino Perez to try and sign him.

"Real like to sign the best players in the world and Ronaldo is certainly one of those," Real leftback Roberto Carlos said.

A transfer of Ronaldo to Real however seems unlikely after

comments from Inter president Massimo Moratti, who does not want to sell the 78-million-dollar rated player.

Ronaldo scored both goals in Brazil's 2-0 World Cup final victory over Germany in Yokohama and finished the tournament with eight goals.

Despite the love-declaration between the Inter president and coach and Ronaldo, the Brazilian star said a strange thing yesterday as reported by Spanish newspaper "Diario AS": "If Real Madrid want me, they have to call".

Then he specified "I'm an Inter player and we'll have to do a triple agreement if there is a real will to buy me in Madrid".

These are words that will probably worry Inter's management,

especially president Moratti, who only a few hours before Ronaldo's declaration concluded that there was no misunderstanding between the management and the Brazilian phenomenon.

Meanwhile, Inter revealed on Tuesday that Ronaldo won't be given a bumper new contract.

Press reports in Italy had suggested this year's Golden Boot winner would have his current four-year contract extended by a year to 2007, with a wage-hike to 11 million euros (10.79 million dollars) a year.

However Inter insist there will be no extended deal for the star.

"Inter haven't received any request on the part of Ronaldo in this case," a press officer for the club told AFP on Tuesday.

## Spain turn to youth coach



REUTERS, Madrid

Former Spain youth coach Inaki Saez says that the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) has told him he will take charge of the national team for the next two years following Jose Antonio Camacho's decision to step down from his post as coach.

"They (the Federation) have told me that I am the ideal person and that they want me to take the team right through to the Euro 2004 tournament in Portugal," Saez told Spanish sports daily Marca on Wednesday.

Camacho's decision to quit on Tuesday after four years as Spain coach appears to have caught the Federation on the hop and they have clearly not lined up a successor to replace the former Real Madrid defender.

Federation president Angel Maria Villar said that he had only found out about Camacho's decision to resign on Monday evening, while Saez, who was immediately appointed as caretaker coach, said he was only told two hours before the announcement.

"It took me completely by surprise," said Saez. "But he (Camacho) has thought it over carefully, it was his own decision and it has to be respected."

The fact that the Federation appears to have had no inkling of Camacho's intentions means that many of the likely candidates to replace him have already committed themselves to their clubs next season.

The Federation is also unlikely to want to get embroiled in a tug-of-war which might end up jeopardising the good will of the clubs that supply the national team's players.

Atletico Madrid president Jesus Gil has already come out and said that club coach Luis Aragonés, who was offered the chance of leading the national team before Camacho, will stay to guide the side on their return to the First Division.

Deportivo Coruna coach Javier



INAKI SAEZ

Irureta has insisted he remains committed to the side he guided to the runners-up place in the league last season, while another of the favourites former Celta Vigo boss Victor Fernandez has only recently signed a two-year deal with Real Betis.

Given the fact that its favoured candidates are unavailable and that Villar has ruled out the appointment of a foreign coach, Saez may well find himself occupying the post on a more permanent basis.

## 'Don't go Big Phil'



REUTERS, Sao Paulo

If God is indeed Brazilian, as the five-time world soccer champions of Brazil like to claim, then national coach Luiz Felipe Scolari is his new prophet.

Scolari descended from the Brazilian skies Tuesday in a Boeing and, once on the ground in Brasilia, leaned out the cockpit window next to the team captain, Cafu, to unfurl the country's yellow and green flag for a legion of fans.

For many, Felipao (Big Phil) had performed a miracle by transforming a mediocre team, winning him the sacred place at the front of the World Cup homecoming plane normally reserved for a player.

"I never imagined he could win this Cup because the team was in bad shape," said Evaneldo da Silva, who works in a Sao Paulo cafe. "But he knows how to put together a team."

What a difference a month has made for the much maligned Felipao, a stubborn man from the deep south who took his share of blows from the country's 170 million people, each considering him or herself a soccer coach.

He was roughed up by fans, his car was kicked and his son took a ribbing from schoolmates who wanted Felipao to take on Romario, the legendary scorer with past discipline problems.

Felipao turned the other cheek and went about building up the "Scolari family," his model of a united and obedient team guided by a stern but loving father.

And like a father, he suffered on the sidelines in South Korea and Japan - cringing, screaming, rejoicing and finally crying when his boys beat Germany in the final for a 7-0 record in the World Cup. Choked by emotion, he told his real son on TV Sunday, "We have the fifth one."

Felipao, 53, took over the team 13 months ago with the task of rebuilding a team broken by embarrassing losses to minnow soccer nations like Honduras, three changes in coaches and a congressional investigation into corruption in soccer.

Fans and media complained about Felipao's rough tactics - he told his teams publicly to foul the opposition - in a country where the "Beautiful Game" is supposed to be won with elegant dribbling and shooting finesse.

They scorned his slow and methodical tests as he tried out 58 players, many of them unknown to

the public, for 23 slots. He only clinched a place in the Cup in the last qualifying match.

"They hardly managed to qualify so few people liked and believed in him," said Rio de Janeiro security guard Valdecir Pedro da Silva. "Now Brazil takes its hat off to Felipao and all his critics are praising him."

They are also begging him to stay.

A survey published in daily Folha de S. Paulo Tuesday showed that 90 percent of Sao Paulo residents want Felipao to continue at the helm with the Scolari tradition in place.

Felipao's contract with the Brazilian Soccer Confederation expires with the homecoming and he has said he would want to try his luck at a club in Europe or even with another national team.

He will also write a book, where he can impart lessons like the one he gave to Brazil on victory day, three months ahead of presidential elections.

"I am not a candidate in any race, but I tell the Brazilian population that they should always remember this image of unity to improve Brazil," he said. "We can achieve what we want if we do things in an orderly way."

## MU extend Blanc contract

INTERNET, Manchester

Manchester United announced on Wednesday that French centre-back Laurent Blanc has agreed a one-year extension to his contract.

"I am very happy. I can't wait for the new season to start," the 36-year-old former Internazionale defender said.

The defender, who said last season that he would stop playing at the end of the 2001-02 campaign, spent most of June at the World Cup but met with Alex Ferguson and representatives from the club on his return.

And Blanc will now play another season at Old Trafford, taking him past his 37th birthday in November.

Alex Ferguson said: "I am delighted. Laurent has been at the World Cup and so I have been awaiting his return. It was merely a matter of agreeing with agents."

Blanc joined United in August last year as a replacement for Jaap Stam, who had been sold to Lazio.

The Frenchman has also played for Montpellier, Nimes, St Etienne, Auxerre, Marseille, Barcelona and Napoli and won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 with the French national team.