



PARTY, PARTY AND MORE PARTY: Brazilian fans sing and dance on top of a bus while roaming around in Rio de Janeiro on July 3 to celebrate the nation's becoming the world champions for a record fifth time. PHOTO: INTERNET

Party pooped!



AP, Rio de Janeiro

Fans threw rocks at a bus carrying members of Brazil's World Cup championship team Wednesday after the players cut short a victory parade.

The tour celebrating Brazil's unprecedented fifth World Cup was hours behind schedule when players decided to return to the airport at around 2:00 a.m. in Botafogo, one beach short of the parade's final destination of Copacabana.

The decision left thousands of fans who had been waiting for as long as 11 hours disappointed and angry.

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari and team captain Cafu explained to the fans that the players were tired.

But after the players stepped off the trucks they had been on and

boarded a bus back to the airport, angry fans pelted it with rocks, breaking three windows, police said.

Many of the star players, including Rivaldo and Ronaldino, had abandoned the celebrations at Rio's Antonio Carlos Jobim airport, choosing instead to fly home after more than 30 hours in transit from Japan and an award ceremony at the presidential palace in Brasilia.

The parade was originally supposed to arrive in Rio de Janeiro at around 3:00 p.m., but celebrations involving half a million people in Brasilia, the nation's capital, delayed the team, which arrived in Rio at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Two hours later, the team left the airport atop three trucks accompanied by samba singer Zeca Pagodinho.

Fans lining the parade route since early afternoon slowed the parade's progress to a mere crawl.

By the time the team got to Sao Paulo, at around 4:30 a.m. Wednesday, only team members

Beletti, Cafu, Denilson, Juninho Paulista, Kaka, Marcos, Ricardinho and Roberto Carlos remained out of the 23 players who traveled to Korea and Japan.

The players arrived at Sao Paulo's Sambadrome stadium at about 6:30 a.m. where they paraded for about 30 minutes in front of a few die-hard fans.

A samba party to rival the best of Brazilian carnivals had rocked the country for a fourth day as hundreds of thousands had welcomed the country's soccer champions in Sao Paulo.

Draped in yellow and green, now weary flag-waving fans packed into the streets of Brazil's biggest city to greet their soccer heroes, who arrived from an enormous mountain-to-beach celebration.

Some of the players had already left for their home states, but that did not dampen the wild party as Cafu held the Cup trophy above his head and paraded through the city's sambadrome to a frenetic samba drum beat.

Beletti, Cafu, Denilson, Juninho Paulista, Kaka, Marcos, Ricardinho and Roberto Carlos were greeted during the dawn parade as national heroes by a crowd of some six thousand hard-core fans, others having gone to bed after days of non-stop celebration.

The players had been scheduled to arrive here Tuesday, but the overwhelming turnout of half a million gyrating fans in Brasilia and some 300,000 in Rio de Janeiro dancing to a pulsating samba beat delayed their landing here.

Exhausted but elated, the players earlier had rejoiced in Rio with thousands of screaming supporters who had lined the streets of the sun-drenched city for hours Tuesday to welcome them.

Although the original plan had been for the team to cruise the streets of the city for 3.5 hours, surging crowds meant that they only managed to move five kilometers (three miles) in 90 minutes.

Juninho return on cards

Boro break bank for Maccarone

Juninho's planned second return to Middlesbrough overshadowed the club's record signing yesterday.

The Brazilian World Cup star, 29, a huge hit with the Teesside fans on his two previous stints, is set to complete a switch from Spanish club Atletico Madrid.

And Italian Under-21 striker Massimo Maccarone finally put pen to paper in a £8.15million move from Empoli to cap a fantastic 24 hours for Boro boss Steve McClaren and chief executive Keith Lamb.

But while Maccarone's arrival before pre-season training commences next week will excite the Boro supporters, there is no doubt Juninho's return will guarantee a season-ticket sell out.

A fee, believed to be well short of the £12m Atletico Madrid paid for the Brazilian five summers ago, was agreed by Lamb in Madrid yesterday.

All that needs to be sorted now is the player's terms but McClaren does not believe this will stall the deal.

He said: "Ever since we came here I have known how much he is adored by the Boro fans."

"We have followed his progress with Brazil throughout the year. He's back to full fitness and we decided he'd be a tremendous asset to this club."

"Keith went out and spoke to Madrid and we've agreed a fee."

"All it needs now is for us to speak to the player and see if we can come to an agreement which would bring him back."

England assistant coach McClaren got a close up view of the star during the World Cup.

He added: "I know what kind of player he is, we've watched him very closely. He can do a similar job to Benito Carbone last season. I'm excited and hopefully it will come off."

"We are hoping Juninho wants to come here and take his career forward with us. We've had positive vibes from all parties and now it is up

to the player himself."

If Juninho does agree to sign it will be his third spell at Boro.

He first signed in November 1995 for £4.25m as part of the Boro revolution instigated by chairman Steve Gibson and then boss Bryan Robson.

His silky touch, quality of passing and dribbling skills made him an instant hit.

Juninho moved to Atletico for £12m after Boro were relegated on the final day of the 1997 season after he scored in the 1-1 draw at Leeds.

His passion for the club was clear to see that afternoon as he sat inconsolable in the middle of the pitch after the final whistle.



JUNINHO

Juninho's spell in Spain was hit by a broken ankle and even though he returned to Teesside on loan from September 1999 until the end of the season, he was not the same player.

He returned to Spain and then played for Vasco da Gama and Flamengo in Brazil.

Juninho admitted during the World Cup: "I hope one day to play again in England. I had a very good time with Middlesbrough."

Maccarone, who was a member of the Italy team that reached the semi-finals of this year's European under-21 Championships, has meanwhile signed a five-year deal with Boro.

"We're very pleased to say the least," manager Steve McClaren told the Middlesbrough website on

Don't even think about it!

INTERNET

Manchester United have been warned: Keep your hands off Ronaldinho.

United boss Alex Ferguson wants the £30million-rated Samba star who ended England's World Cup hopes before helping Brazil lift the trophy.

But Paris St Germain are determined to keep the midfield superstar.

Financial director Pierre Frelot said: "We want to make our club better known throughout the world. For this reason it is in our best interests that Ronaldinho stays."

Ronaldinho, who is back in Brazil, said: "I still have four years on my contract. All the talk about PSG and my eventual departure has gone in one ear and out the other."

Ronaldinho has begged England



RONALDINHO

fans to go easy on David Seaman after his 40-yard free-kick caught out the keeper.

He said: "It moved me to see such a great keeper as David Seaman in tears. English people should never forget all that he has done for his national side."

Papa robbed

AFP, Dakar

Papa Bouba Diop, Senegal's star World Cup striker, was the victim of a robbery during a presentation ceremony at his home town of Rufisque near here on Wednesday.

The man who stunned France by scoring a goal against the former world champions in their opening match had a bag stolen containing two portable phones, his passport, car keys and 460 euros (450 dollars) in cash.

Cup fakes!

INTERNET, Milan

Japanese customs officers said Thursday they had confiscated some 65,000 items of fake World Cup merchandise between September last year and the end of the tournament on June 30.

Some 24,000 of the seized items were badges, 17,000 were flags, towels and other textiles and 14,000 were team strips and T-shirts, said a spokesman for the customs and tariff bureau of the Ministry of Finance.

"An increased amount of fake imports (related to the World Cup) started to flow into Japan around September last year. The products were mostly coming from Taiwan, the Philippines and Thailand," the spokesman said.

The confiscated merchandise would be burnt, the spokesman said.

There was no estimate on the value of the confiscated merchandise nor for the amount or street value of counterfeit World Cup goods which made it onto the Japanese market, he said.

Ronaldo Inter's, period

Football

INTERNET, Milan

Internazionale president Massimo Moratti and Ronaldo's agent Alexandre Martins have dampened talk of a rift between the World Cup winner and his club.

"There is no problem as Inter have not received any request to modify Ronaldo's contract," Moratti said.

"His own team-mates tell me he is a content and happy player. The fact that he hasn't spoken about Inter doesn't affect the relationship between us."

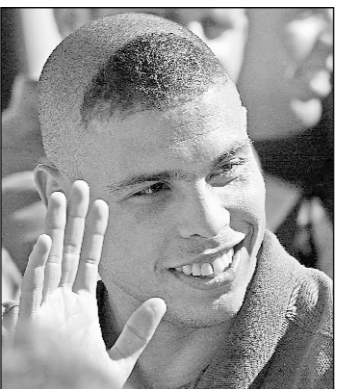
Ronaldo fuelled speculation that he was willing to quit the Nerazzurri when he invited Real Madrid to make an offer for him. He also disappointed the club by stating his next goal was to win Olympic gold with Brazil in 2004 rather than the Scudetto.

But Moratti attempted to cut short the row on Wednesday night, claiming he would not part with Ronaldo for less than £70 million and, in doing so, delighting agent Martins.

"I am very pleased with Moratti," he said. "Ronaldo is the most valuable player in the world, but he is also the greatest. He is the No 1 in the world and he suffered hugely to

get back to the top."

Martins also denied that he would be seeking talks with Moratti over an improved deal for Ronaldo, who has telephoned the Inter squad to reassure them that his comments about Real were a "misunderstanding".



RONALDO

"This is not time to talk about the contract: he will return to Italy after his holiday and he will return to win the Scudetto with Inter, working with joy, as he did with Brazil."

"I have been a friend of Ronaldo's since he was 13 years old. I watched him grow up and in the last three years I have watched him working day and night to recover from his knee problems."

"He didn't only want to play again, he also wanted to be No

1 again. In this period he hasn't given much time to his family, but after winning the World Cup he needs to rest and he has to have time with his relatives."

Ronaldo declared on Wednesday that he was prepared to listen to offers if Inter did not increase his salary to match the success he achieved at the World Cup.

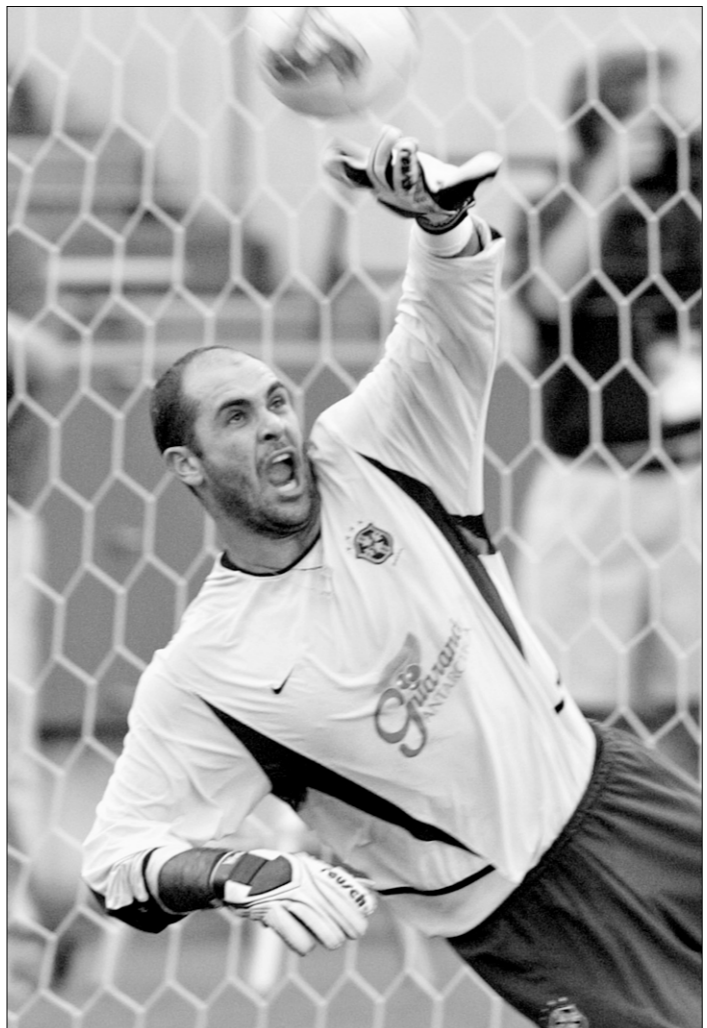
"I owe a lot to Inter, but we will have to talk three ways if Real Madrid decide to make an offer for me," he said.

Ronaldo returned to the World Cup stage in emphatic fashion, scoring both Brazil's goals in the 2-0 final win over Germany and winning the Golden Boot with eight strikes in seven matches.

Prior to the World Cup, Martins called for the striker's salary to be brought into line with that of Christian Vieri, the top earner at the club.

Meanwhile, Brazil colleague Roberto Carlos is desperate to get Ronaldo to join him at the Bernabeu. "I will meet our president Florentino Perez and I will try to convince him that Real Madrid have to buy Ronaldo," the defender said.

Barcelona star Rivaldo is also drooling at the prospect. "A team with him Zidane, Raul, Roberto Carlos and Figo would be something else," he said.



MARCOS

Marcos can't believe it



INTERNET, Brasilia

Brazilian national soccer team goalie Marcos did not mince words Tuesday when he called the media's choice to receive the Golden Ball award, German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, "ridiculous" and expressed his team's displeasure with the vote.

"(Kahn) didn't play any better than I did, not better than Senegal's goalie or Turkey's," Marcos said - alluding to Senegal's Tony Sylva and Turkey's Rustu Recber - amid the celebrations held in Brasilia by hundreds of thousands of people to welcome the squad back to from its fifth World Cup victory.

"The best player in the World Cup was Ronaldo, who scored the most goals," Marcos said.

Ronaldo, a forward for Inter Milan, was the top striker at the World Cup with eight goals, but he came in second with 126 ballots to Kahn's 147 ballots in the vote for the Golden Ball award, which is cast by journalists at the tournament and sponsored by sporting goods manufacturer Adidas.

According to Marcos, the award should not have gone to Kahn, since he was partially to blame for the first of two goals scored by Brazil in the final, when he fumbled the ball, virtually leaving it at the feet of Ronaldo, who easily knocked it into the net.

Other Brazilian players more diplomatic than Marcos said Kahn delivered an impressive performance, but the award should have gone to Ronaldo or Rivaldo.

Wilmot's lied?



AFP, Brussels

Jamaica's World Cup referee Peter Prendergast has asked FIFA to open an enquiry into allegations made by Belgian football star Marc Wilmots that he had apologised to him for overruling his goal in the second round clash with Brazil.

Prendergast told Belgian newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws that he had been put in a difficult position by Wilmots remarks about the goal which would have put Belgium 1-0 ahead in a match they eventually lost 2-0.

"I never discussed this phase of play with Marc Wilmots," Prendergast said.

"I have thus asked FIFA to open an enquiry."

"Wilmots has put in my mouth something that I never said."

"That puts me in an uncomfortable position," he added.

However the Belgian Football Federation stood by their player, who was Belgium's outstanding player at the finals.

"We fully support Marc Wilmots," the Federations' general-secretary Jean-Paul Houben told the same newspaper.

"Marc is absolutely adamant: the referee told him that there was nothing wrong with the goal."

The controversy arose when Prendergast ruled Wilmots had fouled Brazilian defender Roque Junior before heading the ball into the net.

Many observers could discern no foul, and in a number of reports after the match Wilmots said an apology to him by Prendergast was no consolation.

"He had seen the replay on TV and admitted that he got it wrong, but this is no consolation to me," said Wilmots.

Prendergast, however was furious about Wilmots comments.

"Wilmots' claim is outrageous to say the least," the unrepentant Prendergast said last month.

"The decision I made regarding that disallowed goal in the Brazil-Belgium game was fully endorsed as the correct decision by the FIFA Referees Committee," said the man who is the first Jamaican referee to officiate in the World Cup finals.

He is also the first Caribbean referee to have more than one game in a finals.

"The television replay from behind the goal clearly shows the Belgian player pushed the Brazilian player from behind before heading the ball into the goal," he said.

Gunes blasts media

Football

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey boss Senol Gunes on Wednesday took a swipe at the Turkish media who claimed his side were too old, boring and predictable to shine at the World Cup, insisting he always knew they'd be proved wrong.

Gunes, voted the tournament's best manager after he steered Turkey to third place, revealed the criticism was used as a spur by his side to succeed and show the world what they were capable of doing.

"There were many criticisms, even some lies, and you have no right to do that. It was disrespectful on your part," Gunes told journalists

at a packed press conference on Wednesday.

"We could have lost, but in any case we worked and we faced what we needed to face head on. The world has seen that we succeeded."

"We did what we were going there to do, I'm very proud of Turkey. Even France and Argentina, the two favourites didn't get as far as us."

Gunes also took flak for his tactical ploy of leaving the country's top player, Hakan Sukur, as the lone striker.

"We weren't the only team to play with one striker," added Gunes. "Yes it's true Hakan wasn't at his physical best but he arrived at the World Cup in that condition."

Gunes then pleaded with the media to lay-off his side in the future and give "the youngsters a chance to progress in the European Championships."

Ljunberg out for three months

Football

INTERNET

Arsenal's midfield hero Freddie Ljungberg needs surgery on his nagging hip problem.

The Swede will miss the first six weeks of the new season and overall the injury will have kept him out of action for three MONTHS.

Ljungberg has cut short his summer break for the hampered hip recovery. He returned to London on Tuesday after baffled Swedish FA medics finally admitted defeat in trying to find a cure.

Ljungberg snapped: "Now I will be examined by Arsenal's doctors. The most important thing is this will be good for me and I am getting healthy."

It is unlikely that Ljungberg, 25, will figure again until Arsene Wenger's Double kings tackle

Leeds at Elland Road on September 28.

He has not played since facing Nigeria on June 7.

Sweden's doctors at first thought he had a groin strain. Two hi-tech magnetic scans could not find the source of the pain, which Ljungberg rated "like being stabbed."

The medics then tried pulling his right foot, which the star claims has caused internal bleeding and made the injury even worse.

Swedish FA doctor Magnus Forsblad declared: "Of course Freddie got frustrated when he didn't get better. When we pulled his foot the first time it helped, but not afterwards."

"We have contacted Arsenal's doctors and given them advice. It's up to them now."

Meanwhile boss Wenger has offered England keeper David Seaman, who blundered against Brazil, a new contract.