

YEAR OF THE PHENOMENON

The world is not enough

Football

There is something Ronaldo does that nobody else can do. Something quite miraculous that suggests he may be, well, not quite human.

Until the 2002 World Cup, Ronaldo was destined to play football's tragic prince. The young man who had everything and lost it all.

But in 2002, against all the odds, Ronaldo rewrote history to give himself a happy ending. Now we can remember the man-boy with the crazy haircut who couldn't stop scoring goals.

Even when he wasn't playing, Ronaldo was the world's most talked-about footballer. We all wanted to know what made him such a winner and such a loser.

As for his tragic flaw, yes, there was injury, but there was something more. Whatever it was could be traced back to hours before the World Cup final of 1998.

It was announced that he wouldn't play in the final. A few minutes later another team sheet was produced, this time with his name reinstated.

Questions were asked, everywhere and at every level. It was said that the sponsor of the Brazilian team, Nike, had demanded that he played.

success of Brazil and the World Cup final depended on the success of the brand. Perhaps that was his tragic flaw - he had been used and abused and hung out to dry by big business.

Throughout his short career, he has been a victim of the corporate monster that is modern-day football. After all, this was the boy-man who had been fattened, like a battery chicken, until his legs could no longer support his body.

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Sonia wanted her son to study, to make something of himself. She had seen what football had done to her brother Pipico, who had played for Fluminense and could barely scrape a living after kicking his last ball.

Ronaldo had wanted to play for the great Brazilian club Flamengo, but he was too expensive for them. They were unwilling to splash out on the daily bus pass that would enable him to cross Rio de Janeiro to their training ground.

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PHOTO: AFP

THE KING RETURNS: Ronaldo had this smile on throughout 2002.

Milan he was six foot and 13 stone. After the World Cup, he broke down physically. His knee collapsed, and he hardly played a game in four years.

As a young woman his mother, Sonia dos Santos Barata, visited a witch doctor who told her that one day she would give birth to a boy with enormous skills, and he would transform her life.

But life was tough for them. Look at photos of the wizened little boy Ronaldo. He looks like a boy-man. His eyes are creased and tired, as if they've already seen too much.

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13, he signed for the second division club Sao Cristovao. From there he moved to Cruzeiro, in Belo Horizonte, and by the age of 17 was in the national side.

Most kids from the favelas had bad teeth because of their poor diet. But Ronaldo's teeth were something else. At 15, his teeth were so bucked that he could barely close his mouth.

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They said it!

Football

INTERNET

What the big names in football had to say for themselves in 2002.

COACHES

"To coach is always a pleasure, seeing the players' growth, their passion, the love for the game."

- Giovanni Trapattoni, before the World Cup "He says he would like to go to Italy and if that's possible, I think it's fair to say that I would drive him personally."

- Leeds coach Terry Venables on Olivier Dacourt "If you're a painter, you don't get rich until you're dead. The same happens with managers. You're never appreciated until you're gone, and then people say: 'Oh, he was OK'. Just like Picasso"

- Sir Bobby Robson, coach of Newcastle "I loved that boy. He was a genius, an artist. But he made me tear my hair out. The pity was we saw the beauty he was capable of only so rarely. He destroyed that beauty with his drinking and his eating... he ate ice cream as an hors d'oeuvre."

- Former Lazio coach Dino Zoff on Paul Gascoigne "No team in this division has found any consistency and dogs are eating dogs all over the place."

- Kevin Keegan, coach of Manchester City "He's got a big heart, Shaun, it's as big as, err, as big as him, which isn't very big, but it's bigger."

- Keegan again, on Shaun Wright-Phillips "[Jomo] Sono said that as long as he was part of the team, nobody would stick a knife in my shoulder. But Sono was given so much power that in the end I concluded the man himself was the knife I find in my shoulder!"

- Carlos Quieroz after resigning as coach of South Africa just before the World Cup "Either they've got the ball, or you've got the ball, or no-one's got it... those principles I don't think ever change."

- Graham Taylor explains his tactics at Aston Villa "They sacked me because I wouldn't let him [Al-Saadi Gaddafi] play. And I would never have let him play, even for a minute. As a footballer he's worthless."

- Franco Scoglio who was sacked by Libya after he refused to play Al-Saadi Gaddafi, who is the president of the Libyan Football Federation, owns the country's biggest club Al Ittihad and is the son of the country's President, Colonel Gaddafi "We had just half a slice of bread today and there was no milk for my coffee. The hotel management said that with what they have they could feed us for three days and then things would run out."

- Sierra Leone coach Sam Obi Metzger when his team became trapped after a civil war broke out in the Ivory Coast "Let yourselves be carried along by life."

- Big Phil Scolari stands down as Brazil coach

BOSSES

"We left our balls in the dressing room."

- Lazio Director Massimo Cragnotti explains the 5-1 derby defeat to Roma "We are no more willing to see witch doctors on the pitch than cannibals at the concession stands."

- A CAF spokesman after Cameroon's goalkeeping coach, Thomas Nkono, had been arrested for dabbling in black magic on the eve of their African Nations Cup Semi-final "Those are not fans, only 40 ragamuffins managed by (Juventus General manager) Moggi, people who were there for money."

- Roma chief Franco Sensi claiming that Roma fans who attacked Jonathan Zebina were sent by Juventus "If you put all the German players, except Kahn, in a sack and hit it, you would get someone who deserved it."

- Franz Beckenbauer on Germany, before the World Cup "It is important that people like Rudi's hair, and they do... Compared to a lot of others Rudi has at least got a 'look'. I regard his adherence to the grey mane as a fashionable statement."

- Karl Heinz Rumminge on German fashion icon coach Rudi Voller "Football has collapsed, it's out of our hands."

- Carlos Soto, president of the Chilean players union, Sifup, upon hearing ANFP president Reinaldo Sanchez failed to get to a crisis meeting during September's three-week long strike because of heavy traffic "We don't launder money here at Academia because ... well ... there isn't any."

- Campos Coroa, president at Portuguese club Academia defends himself against suspicion of money-laundering "Everything at Football Club Barcelona works fine... except the football team."

- Barcelona president Joan Gaspart "I just wish Barcelona could have played in Depor's place. [Real Madrid's] defeat makes all Barcelona fans happy."

- Gaspart again, after Real Madrid had lost the Spanish Cup final on their 100th birthday "My good name has been cleared."

- FIFA president Sepp Blatter rejoices after a Swiss court clears him of any wrongdoing "He (the referee) f\*\*\*\* us everywhere, up the arse and everything. And it hurts."

- Alaves defender Oscar Tellez "The gaffer gave him to me and told me to teach him English, but with me not speaking any French that's a bit tough at the moment."

- Liverpool's Emile Heskey on new signing El-Hadji Diouf "When you are a professional footballer you don't dream of playing football in Germany."

- Johan Micoud makes friends when joining Werder Bremen "If they want to take this trophy from us, they'll have to kill us."

- San Lorenzo's Alberto Acosta after his side defeated Atletico Nacional 4-0 in the first leg of the Copa Sudamericana final "I know and everybody else knows that I deserved to win the award this year, but someone comes along and scores a few goals and they give him the award. I'm bitterly disappointed."

- Ghana and Bayern Munich's Sammy Kouffour after El Hadji Diouf had been given the award for African Player of the Year "It is crazy what people say about Senegal. Of course there is tradition in every country and that should be respected. But to say we used voodoo is madness. If we had done that we would be world champions and our players abroad would be winning every European competition!"

- Senegal's Aliou Cisse dismisses rumours of black magic once and for all "This city's inspired me, and I want to end my career here."

- Italian international Angelo Di Livio on going down to Serie C2 with Fiorentina

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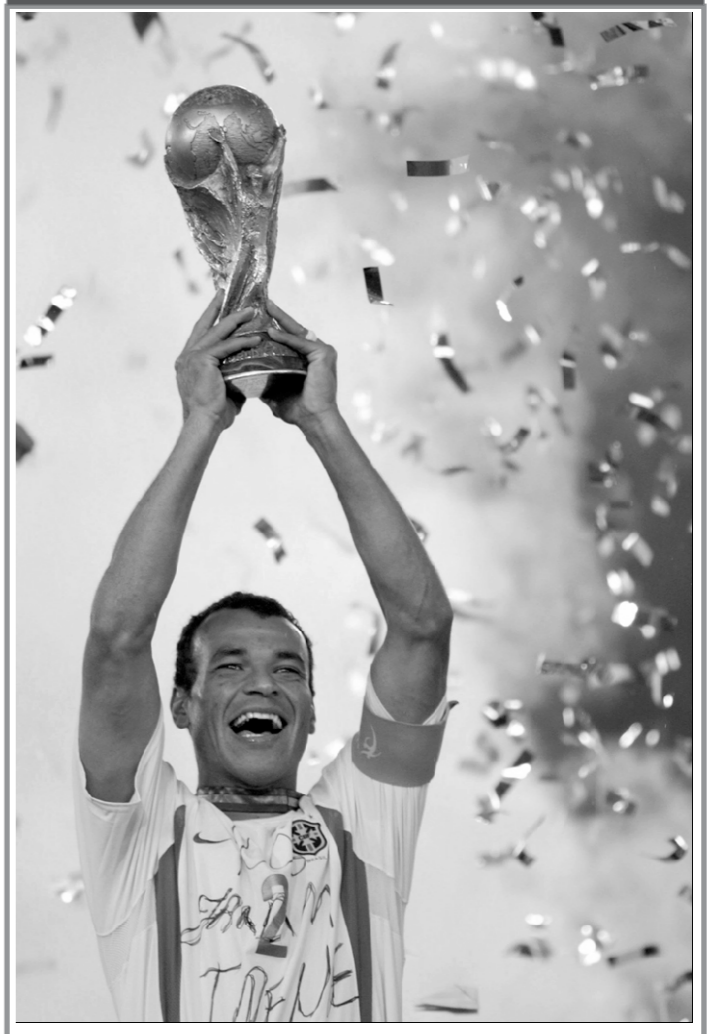
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MADE FOR EACHOTHER



Brazil captain Cafu holds aloft the FIFA World Cup 2002 on June 30 at the World Cup Stadium in Yokohama. Brazil, who always seem to save their best for the World Cup competitions, lifted the world title for an unprecedented fifth time. Brazil were undoubtedly the sports team of the year.

Scolari's ode to the Rs



REUTERS, Paris

Looking back on Brazil's World Cup victory coach Luiz Felipe Scolari paid homage to European Footballer of the Year Ronaldo but singled out Rivaldo as the competition's best player.

"I always put the squad first," Scolari told soccer magazine France Football in an interview published on Tuesday.

"But the success of a squad is only possible if great players help it. That was the case with Rivaldo who, for me, was the best player in the World Cup."

"Tactically as well as in his shots, he was very strong, and I'm not mentioning his new frame of mind."

"He changed his approach to football," said Scolari, who has quit the Brazil team to take over as coach of 2004 European championship hosts Portugal.

But Scolari also paid homage to Ronaldo and to Brazil's medical staff who made it possible for the Real Madrid striker to make it back to his best after years plagued by a knee injury.

"Team doctor Jose Luis Runco (...) promised me that Ronaldo would be fully operational for the World Cup and I believed him."

"Ronaldo's progress, his weight, his muscles, everything was closely monitored."

"Everything was planned for his return to competition during the World Cup to be as smooth and

regular as possible," he said. He added that Ronaldo's intelligence did the rest.

"A team is not a man. There were other solutions in his position."

"But everybody knows that when Ronaldo is on a pitch, the opposition defence are scared because he can be dangerous until the last minute."

Scolari said that, like Rivaldo and the other leading players in his squad, Ronaldo put team spirit ahead of his own performance.

"Not only did he score eight goals, but like the other stars in the team, he put himself at the team's service."

"More than a personal revenge from the previous World Cup, Ronaldo sensed how important that World Cup was for the Brazilian people," Scolari said. Ronaldo was in the Brazil side that lost the 1998 final to France in Paris.

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RIVALDO

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Premiership Gunners' New Year mission

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal New Year's Day match against London title rivals Chelsea at Highbury on Wednesday is a "massive game" according to Gunners' boss Arsene Wenger.

Champions and leaders Arsenal go into the match five points clear of second-placed Chelsea following a 1-1 draw at home to fellow title rivals Liverpool.

"It's a massive game for us," Wenger told Monday's edition of the London Evening Standard.

"I expect Chelsea to attack us more than Liverpool did."

"It will be a more open game and after just losing two points it's a match we want to win," the Frenchman added.

But while defeat may signal the end of Chelsea's push for a first top flight title since the 1954-55 season, Wenger knows that victory will not guarantee Arsenal another Premiership crown.

"We still have 17 games to play. It's a long way and I think there's still a lot for us to do."

Meanwhile his Chelsea counterpart Claudio Ranieri has urged the Blues to put the memory of Satur-

day's 2-0 defeat by Leeds behind them and simply concentrate on their own game.

"Our battle is not against Arsenal but against ourselves. Everyone likes to put Arsenal and Chelsea together, but we're only concerned with our own performance."

"The points difference now is not important. Chelsea is Chelsea and we shouldn't be thinking about Arsenal, Manchester United or Liverpool," the Italian insisted.

Manchester United are also five points behind Arsenal but could be without leading scorer Ruud van Nistelrooy when they take on Sunderland at Old Trafford.

Liverpool (sixth), who have not won in nine league games, travel to in-form Newcastle United (fourth) who go into the game on the back of a 2-1 win against Tottenham.

FIXTURES

(1500GMT unless stated) Wednesday: Arsenal v Chelsea, Aston Villa v Bolton, Blackburn v Middlesbrough, Charlton v West Ham, Everton v Manchester City, Fulham v West Brom, Leeds v Birmingham, Manchester United v Sunderland (1400GMT), Newcastle v Liverpool (1945GMT), Southampton v Tottenham.