



DID YOU GET MY SNAP? Brazil sensation Robinho (L) looks on as teammate Diego holds a Brazilian photographer's camera after a training session in Cuapa's training centre in Mexico City on July 14.

Brazil's bogey prospect!



AP, Mexico City

Brazil, who outplayed Mexico in their first CONCACAF Gold Cup match but still lost, find themselves in a must-win situation against a confident Honduras.

The two will play Tuesday at Mexico City's Azteca Stadium in the second of three opening-round matches in Group A, which is led by Mexico after their 1-0 win over Brazil on Sunday. It will be the first match of the tournament for Honduras.

Another loss will eliminate the Brazilians, who joined Colombia as special invites to the championship of North and Central America and the Caribbean.

The tournament is of little importance to Brazil, who sent their under-23 team to participate. The squad showed its inexperience Sunday as their bigger defenders had trouble controlling and clearing the ball and maintaining pressure against Mexico's offensive stars.

Young Brazilian stars Kaka and Robinho used blazing speed and superb ball control to attack the Mexican zone again and again, but failed to get on the scoreboard as a lack of team work ultimately doomed their cause.

"We had better opportunities, but we didn't play well enough to win," Brazil coach Ricardo Gomes said.

Honduras coach Edwin Pavon said his team was encouraged by Brazil's thrilling but sloppy performance against Mexico, and added that the match gave his team more confidence.

"The result of the Mexico-Brazil game is good for us because it allows us to take the field knowing that with two draws we are in," Pavon said.

Because Brazil already suffered a loss, two draws would be enough for Honduras to qualify for the

quarterfinals.

Honduras shutout Brazil 2-0 during the 2001 Copa America in Colombia and went on to take third place in the tournament. But the Hondurans have never won at Azteca, a venue the Honduran media often refer to as "the stadium of nightmares."

Speedy Brazilian midfielder Diego said his country haven't forgotten their embarrassing loss to Honduras two years ago.

"We have a special motivation to win," he said.

The top two teams in each of the Gold Cup's four groups advance to the quarterfinals Saturday in Foxboro, Massachusetts, where two games will be played. Miami will host one game and another quarterfinal match will be played in Mexico City on Sunday.

The winners will move on to the semifinals July 23 in Miami and July 24 in Mexico City. The championship match is set for the Mexican capital July 27.

Howard now United's

AFP, East Rutherford, New Jersey

Tim Howard became the first American goalkeeper for Manchester United on Monday after his rights were officially transferred to the world-renowned English Premier League club.

Although financial details were not disclosed his United States club team, the MetroStars, were expected to receive two million dollars.

Manchester United also will give the American professional soccer league, which owns all of its player contracts, another 1.5 million dollars if Howard can start for the Red Devils.

"I just feel blessed," said Howard, a two-time MLS best goalkeeper. "I feel fortunate. Not many people are given this opportunity, which has been given to me. I am just so happy."

The 24-year-old Howard played his last MetroStars game on Saturday, a 3-3 tie with the New England Revolution.

Howard is expected to get a 1.4 million dollar salary next season.

The New Jersey native made his debut with the Metros in 1998 at the age of 18.

He posted a 37-36-11 record with a 1.46 goals-against average and 15 shutouts in 85 MLS games.

Kluivert likely to stay

AFP, Barcelona

Dutch international striker Patrick Kluivert looks set to stay with Barcelona under a newly-negotiated contract which would see him take a pay cut.

Talks between the club and the player's agents began on Monday with the cash-strapped Nou Camp giants ready to discuss a one or two year extension in exchange for Kluivert accepting less money.

His package would consist of four million euros a year with the amount to be topped up depending on the team's results and achievements.

"He agreed to earn less if his contract was extended by one or two years," said Paul Footsee, of his agents.

"It was now a question of specifying how much is less."

Kleberson interests MU



AFP, London

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson confirmed Tuesday he was interested in signing Brazil's World Cup winning midfielder Kleberson.

"We are pursuing an interest in Kleberson," Ferguson told a media conference at Old Trafford where United's new American goalkeeper Tim Howard was unveiled.

Newspaper reports claim the Old Trafford club have made an offer of up to seven million pounds (11 million dollars) for the Atletico Paranaense midfielder whose contract is due to expire in February 2004.

Meanwhile Argentina midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron, widely reported to be leaving United for Premiership rivals Chelsea in a 14 million pounds (22.5 million dollars) deal that would more than offset the cost of buying Kleberson, may be staying at Old Trafford in a bid to prove himself to Ferguson.

His representative Fernando Hidalgo said Tuesday: "I think the player wants one more year at United. He wants to repay the club for the faith they have shown in investing in him, and he wants to prove to Sir Alex that he is still a good player."

Hidalgo added: "He will talk to



KLEBERSON

Ferguson because he wouldn't want to leave if the manager still sees a future for him at the club.

"I think the talks planned between Veron and Ferguson will be critical as to whether Chelsea's interest in the player comes to

anything."

Ferguson's major transfer target remains Kleberson's Brazil teammate Ronaldinho.

United hope to wrap up a 19.3 million pounds deal (31 million dollars) deal with Ronaldinho's current club, French giants Paris St Germain, later this week.

However, Ferguson remained cautious: "I don't want to count my chickens. Disappointment can come very quickly in football."

United's English rivals Leeds had thought they were on the verge of signing 24-year-old World Cup winner Kleberson.

But Ferguson was believed to see him as an ideal addition to his midfield following England captain David Beckham's move to Real Madrid.

United chief executive Peter Kenyon was reported to have met Paranaense president Mario Celso Petraglia. Atletico, in deep financial trouble, are keen to do business.

Kenyon has said he hopes to have the Ronaldinho transfer completed by the time United leave for their tour of the USA on Saturday.

Kleberson, linked with Leeds and Newcastle in April, began last year's World Cup on the bench before replacing Juninho and establishing a match-winning partnership with Gilberto Silva, now playing for Arsenal.

Chelsea's plan

AFP, London

Chelsea were reported Tuesday to be lining up a swoop into the transfer market to link Manchester United's Juan Sebastian Veron with Juventus' Edgar Davids next season.

The Sun newspaper said Juventus had already agreed a 10 million pound (16 million dollar) fee but the deal might collapse because the Dutch midfielder was holding out for 3.3 million pounds (5 million dollars) a year after tax -- 90,000 pounds (145,000 dollars) a week.

New Chelsea owner, Russian oil billionaire Roman Abramovich, might balk at that sort of money.

But he was reported to be close to agreeing a 14 million pound (22 million dollar) deal for United's Argentine midfielder Veron.

However, a bid for Inter Milan's Christian Vieri appears to have fallen through after the Italy striker asked Inter for a new contract.

Abramovich took control of the London club last week after agreeing to buy out Chelsea for 86 million euros (97.5 million dollars) and cover debts estimated at around 115 million euros (130 million dollars).

'Don't be fooled by lax Samba'



AFP, Lisbon

Former Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari warned on Monday that the five-time world champions will bounce back from their recent slump.

Brazil were knocked out of the Confederations Cup in France last month during the first round following a 2-2 draw with Turkey - the first time they had failed to progress beyond the first round of an official tournament since the 1966 World Cup in England.

They also put in lacklustre performances in a series of friendlies since last summer's World Cup triumph winning just three matches on their travels.

But Scolari warned against those critics who were writing off the South Americans.



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

"It is what normally happens when you win," he told reporters.

"You can't keep that team and those players motivated when the next World Cup is almost four years away, in 2006."

Scolari, now in charge of Portugal, quit as Brazil coach shortly after leading the squad to victory in Japan and South Korea in 2002.

He is confident, however, that once the qualifiers for the 2006 World Cup get underway later this year, Brazil will rediscover their form.

"Carlos Alberto Parreira (the current coach) is gradually making

the changes that need to be done and Brazil will find itself," said Scolari.

"When the qualifiers begin you will see that Brazil will have some new players and a new spirit."

Brazil, who under new FIFA rules will still have to qualify for the World Cup even though they are defending champions, kick off their campaign in Colombia on September 7.

But Scolari said it is hard for the reigning champions to get fired up over a friendly.

"For the other side, it's different, you want to turn a friendly into a trampoline to jump further and prove yourself," he said.

The 54-year-old Brazilian, who took over the Portuguese side in mid-January, said he expected to have selected the players which will make up the Portuguese squad in the 2004 European championship by the end of the year.

"I already have the national squad defined in tactical terms. I think this is the way we should be playing," he said.

"I think I will get the chance during the four of five matches that are left to be played this year to test a few more players and by the end of the year the team for the Euro 2004 will be defined."

Scolari said he had decided on the make-up of "between 60 and 70 percent" of the squad already, adding he intends to make use of a mix of old and new talent.

"My philosophy is to open a team a great deal to youth," he said. "There will be many experienced players but also many young ones so that there will be a good balance on the team."

As host nation, Portugal automatically qualify for the finals but are playing a series of exhibition games to prepare for the tournament.

Scolari said Barcelona made a proposal earlier this year that he take over coaching duties at the Catalan giants, but he turned the offer down.

"It was just an idea that was raised by Barcelona vice-president Sandro Rosell which I felt would not be fair to Portugal or Barcelona," he said.

Hosts sail into last eight



AFP, Mexico City

Brian McBride and Kasey Keller moved up two career lists while leading the United States into the CONCACAF Gold Cup quarterfinals.

McBride's two goals lifted him into third in scoring in U.S. history, and Keller tied a team record with his 32nd shutout in a 2-0 victory over Martinique on Monday.

Steve Ralston assisted on both goals.

In Monday's first game, Cuba stunned Canada, 2-0, for the first Gold Cup win in its history.

USA 2; MARTINIQUE - 0

McBride scored twice in four minutes to raise his total to 23 goals in international play, breaking a tie

with Bruce Murray. Only Eric Wynalda (34 goals) and Joe-Max Moore (31) have more.

Keller faced only a handful of shots, none in the first half, en route to matching Tony Meola's shutout mark. Keller, who starts for Tottenham Hotspur in the English Premier League, collected his 31st career shutout Saturday in a 2-0 victory over El Salvador.

The win earned a spot for the US in Saturday's quarter-finals at Gillette Stadium, where only 8,780 were on hand to watch the Americans' second straight win. The United States improved to 8-3-2 this year.

The match was nearly unwatchable until McBride's goal in the 39th minute provided some spark.

"Brian was the star of the match and Steve Ralston did real well with his service," American coach Bruce Arena said.

"We're just happy to be positioned to play in the quarter-finals."

A nice give-and-go by Steve Ralston and Richard Mulrooney began the play as the Americans exploited a porous Martinique defence to set up McBride for a header into the near corner of the net.

Ralston and McBride combined again in the 43rd minute, when Ralston fed the ball from the near

goalpost to a waiting McBride, who buried it past goalkeeper Eddy Huerle.

"We made space when we moved the ball quickly," McBride said.

"Landon and I looked at each other when we noticed they were dropping off us - and we hadn't even kicked off yet. That was when we knew they would have seven guys behind the ball."

CUBA 2; CANADA 0

Fewer than 2,500 saw Lester More's goal in the 15th minute set the Canadians on their heels.

More scored again 20 seconds into the second half to further frustrate Canada, taking advantage of a giveaway by Richard Hastings some 20 yards from the net.

Pedro Faife made a clean cross in front of the goalmouth, giving goalkeeper Lars Hirschfeld no chance.

Cuba was kept in the match by the dazzling play of 'keeper Odelin Molina.

Making five world-class saves in the face of late pressure, he kept the sheet clean for the Cubans.

Cuba is almost an entirely amateur side. But it humbled a team stocked with seasoned internationals that won this tournament in 2000.



Judes Vaton (No. 4) of Martinique loses USA's Landon Donovan at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts on July 14.

PHOTO: AFP

Baggio goes thru' minor surgery

AFP, Rome

Brescia striker Roberto Baggio has gone into hospital for a routine operation to remove some debris from his right knee, the Serie A club confirmed Monday.

However the 36-year-old former Italy international is expected to be released within the next 24 hours and could resume training early next month.

Baggio recently pledged his future to Brescia despite the departure of coach and close friend Carlo Mazzone.

Knicknamed 'The Divine Ponytail', Baggio has enjoyed a glittering career in Italy playing for the likes of Fiorentina, Juventus, Inter Milan and AC Milan.

He joined the less fashionable Brescia in September 2000 and has scored 33 league goals since joining the Lombardy club.

Despite being regarded as the darling of Italian football, Baggio is perhaps best remembered for missing the spot-kick in the 1994 World Cup final penalty shoot-out which handed Brazil the trophy.

Beckham's nemesis in town!



AFP, Rome

Lazio midfielder Diego Simeone is on the verge of rejoining Spanish first division club Atletico Madrid, according to Italian news agency ANSA on Monday.

It would mean the 33-year-old Argentinian international living in close proximity to Real Madrid's England captain David Beckham - in whose dismissal in the 1998 World Cup he played an instrumental role.

Simeone - a veteran of three World Cup finals - is believed to be meeting officials from Atletico on Tuesday to discuss a possible return to his former club.

Simeone played for Atletico between 1994 and 1997 before joining Lazio's Serie A rivals Inter Milan.

The South American hardman left Inter in the summer of 1999 to sign for Lazio, who he has been with ever since.

Simeone is perhaps best known for his involvement in the sending-off of Beckham in a tense second

round match at the 1998 World Cup in France.

Beckham, who had already received a booking, kicked Simeone while lying on the floor after being fouled by the Argentinian.

Although contact was minimal, Simeone fell theatrically to the floor and Danish referee Kim Milton Nielsen showed Beckham a red card.



DIEGO SIMEONE

Batigol's Fiorentina dreams



AFP, Rome

Veteran Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta is hoping to finish his career with former club Fiorentina with whom he spent nine seasons, according to the player's agent Settimio Aloisio.

Last week Batistuta signed a two-year deal to play with Qatari club Al-Arabi, but admitted he was tiring of the game and had thought about quitting.

But Aloisio says the 34-year-old forward will not be hanging up his boots and that he is harbouring hopes of a return to Fiorentina.

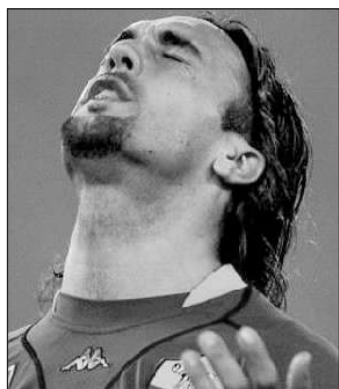
"Batistuta will play football for the next two or three years at the very least. His dream has always been to return to Fiorentina and I'm sure he will do that some day," Aloisio said.

Batistuta joined Fiorentina for the start of the 1991-92 season from Argentine club Boca Juniors.

He was sold to AS Roma in the summer of 2000 to ease the club's crippling debts, a move which sparked riots by angry fans in

Florence.

Knicknamed 'Batigol', the long-haired South American won an Italian league winner's medal for the first time in his career the following year.



GABRIEL BATISTUTA

Batistuta's Roma contract expired last month, the last six months of which he spent on loan at Inter Milan.

He is the latest player to join the lucrative route to football in the tiny Gulf state of Qatar having joined Al-

Arabi.

Qatar, with huge financial resources thanks to its oil and gas wealth, has attracted numerous ageing top-level players in recent months including 1994 Brazil World Cup winning striker Romario, France's 1998 World Cup winning defender Frank Leboeuf and German veterans Stefan Effenberg and Mario Basler.

Batistuta, scorer of 56 goals for Argentina before retiring in November, will be hoping for better fortune on the pitch than Romario, who returned to Brazil after just three months with Al-Saad having failed to score.

Fallen giants Fiorentina went out of business last year following relegation from Serie A and were formally wound by an Italian court.

They remerged as Fiorentina Viola but were then denied a place in the second division by the Italian football authorities because of their massive debts.

Florentia were then put in the regionalised C2 division, the equivalent of the fourth division.

They started their new life well, winning promotion to C1 in their first season and recently reclaimed their former name.