

Ronaldo, Kaka show the way



MEGASOCCER, Barranquilla

Brazil conquered the steamy conditions in Barranquilla and the Colombian national team to make a winning start to the protracted defence of their world title.

For the first time in World Cup history the champions have been made to qualify, and Brazil's quest to retain the title they won in Japan last summer got underway nearly three years before the 2006 finals will be played in Germany.

Sunday's 2-1 victory marked the anniversary of Brazilian independence from Portuguese rule, and underlined a nation's hopes as wholly dependent on the elite squad Luis Felipe Scolari assembled ahead of the 2002 World Cup.

Seven of the team that started the final against Germany ran out in the Caribbean port city of Barranquilla yesterday, with one linchpin of the victorious World Cup side, Ronaldo, scoring the first goal and an exciting new addition, Kaka, the second.

A slow beginning in almost 40 degree heat and 90 per cent humidity was only rarely enlivened by the movement of Roberto Carlos and Ze Roberto down Brazil's left. The Real Madrid fullback's 13th minute cross almost led to the opening goal but Colombia keeper Oscar Cordoba saved Rivaldo's effort.

The dangerous left flank combination could not be contained, however, and produced the opening goal on 23 minutes to silence the Roberto Melendez stadium crowd. Ze Roberto received

Roberto Carlos's pass, and when his cross was missed by Gonzalo Martinez the Merengues forward smashed the ball into the roof of the net for his first World Cup qualifying goal.

Colombia made it 1-1 on 38 minutes when Lucio was beaten to Freddy Grisales' cross by Juan Pablo Angel, with the Aston Villa marksman heading past Dida.

On 59 minutes Carlos Alberto Parreira threw on Kaka and Renato, and a minute later, with his first touch of the ball the AC Milan midfielder smashed Brazil in front once more.

Ronaldo masterfully drew four Colombian players to him, creating the space for Kaka and laid



KAKA

the ball into his path. The 21-year-old met it on the run and rifled a first-time shot into the roof of the net from the edge of the penalty area.

The visitors then took control as Ronaldo had a goal disallowed for handball, while Cordoba was forced to make saves from both Ronaldo and Rivaldo.

Brazil defender Lucio twice escaped a red card, when he elbowed Grisales in the face in the first half and then kneed Jhon Jairo Restrepo in the back in the second.

Kaka remarked on his goal: "It's the fruit of a lot of training. Scoring with a first touch is a novelty - I've never done that before."

"Winning the first match was important as we have a long trek

ahead of us," said Ronaldo.

"But it was good for our confidence and showed we are on the right track. We produced some good football."

Colombia coach Francisco Maturana admitted that Brazil were a class above his Cafeteros: "It was a game where we found ourselves playing against a team that is far superior to us, we admit that," he said. "They have a virtuoso in each position and, what's more, they're mature enough to control the rhythm of the game."

"I believe we are capable of building a great team, the magnitude of our rivals may have shattered our dreams but there's only one Brazil," he said.

"Brazil are way ahead of us and it's not a sin to recognise that."

Maturana, whose team face another difficult task on Wednesday when they are away to Bolivia at 3,600 metres above sea level, added: "We're going to look at the positive things and we're going to remember that not every team is Brazil."

Brazil coach Parreira, determined to avoid a repeat of their stuttering campaign in the 2002 qualifiers, was pleased to have made a winning start.

"I don't think I've got much to say except that we started well," he told Brazilian television.

"We are the only team to start with an away win. We deserved the scoreline, we had the better of the game. It's a long road, this was just the first game."

"The experience of the players, who were not intimidated, was very good for the team. The big advantage in this game was that we imposed our rhythm."

He added that the team was forced to slow the pace early on. "It was 40 (degrees) Celsius in the shade when the game began. It's impossible to play at a fast tempo in those conditions."

Brazil are at home to Ecuador on Wednesday in the second match of a marathon 18-game campaign that will finish in November 2005. Colombia are away to Bolivia on the same day.



TURNING IT ON: Brazil superstar Ronaldo (L) trying to outfox Colombian defender Ivan Ramiro Cordoba at Barranquilla, Colombia on September 7.

PHOTO: AFP

Voller under spotlight!



AFP, Berlin

The knives are out for Rudi Voller after Germany's dour 0-0 draw with Iceland on Saturday in the Euro 2004 qualifier with sections of the German press on the offensive following Voller's volcanic eruption after the game.

"I can not allow this to continue any longer - I cannot listen to this shit any more," Voller raged Saturday on German television after more criticism. "The fact that I am being dragged through the mud is the lowest of the low."

The verbal outburst was out of character for the otherwise calm and collected 1990 World Cup winner and led to him being dubbed "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" in the German media.

Comparisons were even made with Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni who infamously used all his Italian emotion to lambast his underperforming Bayern Munich players in a televised press conference.

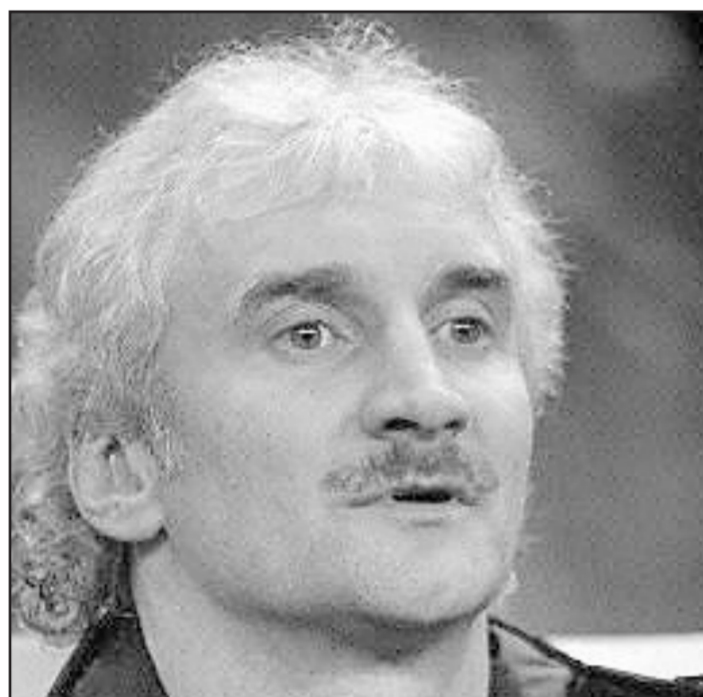
Such a display of raw emotion has prompted questions about the future of 43-year-old Voller with speculation that he may step down if things continue to go awry, although Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, president of the German Football Federation, played down such talk.

"I would not take that so seriously," Mayer-Vorfelder said. "It was an impulsive reaction from Rudi Voller."

The strongest press retaliation came from Germany daily Bild, the country's most popular newspaper, who exclaimed: "Even if you do not want to read or hear it Rudi 'You were awful'."

"No ideas, no passing. We do not deserve to qualify for Portugal playing like this."

It is another example of how quickly things can turn around in



RUDI VOLLER

football with Voller's name sung in the streets on his return from Japan and South Korea, where he had surprised all by guiding Germany to the 2002 World Cup final.

Since then hard fought wins against the Faroe Islands, a 1-1 draw with Lithuania and now the scoreless draw with Iceland in Reykjavik have extinguished the optimism from the World Cup.

"What must improve?" asked German magazine Kicker, with their conclusion being "Everything".

While Voller has been largely attacked by the domestic media the former Roma striker found an ally in Scotland manager Berti Vogts who managed the German team to European Championship glory in 1996.

"I have a lot of sympathy for Voller," Vogts told the Frankfurter Allgemeine. "We reached the World Cup quarter-finals twice and all we got was criticism."

The understanding Vogts could ironically increase the heat on Voller come Wednesday when his Scotland side take on Germany in Dortmund.

It is by no means the first time the former Bayer Leverkusen coach has been under pressure with a 5-1 home defeat by England on September 1 2001, during the 2002 World Cup qualifying campaign, seeing the knives sharpened.

Before the draw in Reykjavik Voller claimed he enjoyed playing in the wind and rain when at Werder Bremen and he must now weather a huge storm.

However, despite the immense pressure Voller still knows that home wins against Scotland on Wednesday and Iceland on October 11 would see the three-time World champions book an automatic ticket to the European championships in Portugal.

Petit says goodbye

AFP, Paris

Emmanuel Petit, a World Cup winner in 1998, has bowed out of international football after winning 63 caps for France.

The 32-year-old Chelsea midfielder, who also won the European Championship with France in 2000, told l'Equipe sports daily he believed he was still good enough to play at international level but saw he no longer figured in national coach Jacques Santini's plans.

"Physically I know I could be in the team," said the player who has returned after a four month break following a groin operation.

"It's a decision I didn't want to take but it's the most sensible. I don't feel France is led by the right man."

He said Santini had not spoken to him since his operation.

"And at 32 I feel I could have a frank conversation," he added.

Petit, capped for the first time as a defender against Poland in 1990, last played for France in the 2-0 friendly defeat the Czech Republic in February.

He effectively lost his place in the French side to Claude Makelele who has joined Chelsea from Real Madrid.

He has played for Monaco (1985-97), Arsenal (1997-2000), Barcelona (2000-2001) and Chelsea (since 2001).

Uruguay eat Bolivia



REUTERS, Montevideo

Striker Javier Chevanton scored twice as Uruguay routed 10-man Bolivia 5-0 in their opening World Cup qualifier on Sunday.

Striker Diego Forlan opened the scoring, Chevanton grabbed the next two goals and Nelson Abejon

and Carlos Bueno got two more in the final minutes as Uruguay kept coach Juan Carrasco's promise that they would break with their defensive traditions.

A miserable afternoon was complete for Bolivia when defender Alvaro Ricaldi, standing in for the injured Marco Sandy, was sent off in the 67th minute for a second bookable offence.

Bolivia, coached by Uruguay-born Nelson Acosta, have a dismal recent away record and their hopes of qualifying for the finals in Germany depend almost exclusively on the advantage of playing home games in La Paz 3,600 metres above sea level.

But this defeat will be a serious blow for their morale.

Bolivia were outclassed from the kick off and Uruguay had already carved out several openings before

Forlan, unmarked in the Bolivia penalty area, fired the Sky Blues ahead from an Alvaro Recoba pass in the 17th minute.

Chevanton, who had scored twice in his previous seven appearances, pounced on a rebound to add the second five minutes before halftime after goalkeeper Leonardo Fernandez had parried the ball.

Chevanton, who plays for Italian side Lecce, was on target again on the hour when he scored from a free kick.

Abejon, given an international recall this year after six years in the wilderness, scored the fourth on 82 minutes after winning possession and scoring from outside the area.

Penarol's Carlos Bueno produced a deft finish to score the fifth with three minutes left.

Kewell the star

AFP, London

Liverpool's newest recruit Harry Kewell scored one goal and set up another as Australia defeated Jamaica 2-1 in a friendly international at Reading on Sunday.

Kewell was instrumental in the Socceroos' opening strike after 19 minutes when he linked up well with Parma's Marco Bresciano whose second attempt beat Donovan Ricketts in the Jamaica goal with the ball going in off the far post.

However the Reggae Boyz hit back within just two minutes when Ricardo Fuller got past Lucas Neill and Tony Vidmar down the left wing.

His shot was only half-saved by keeper Mark Schwarzer and Kevin Lisbie was on hand to slot the ball home from close range.

Kewell then turned on the magic forcing Ricketts into a great save from long distance before rifling a drive off the crossbar.

But he was on target for the winner just on the hour mark when he picked up a pass from Paul Okon to score with his left foot.

"We played very well and created lots of chances," said Australia coach Frank Farina.

"I think this is one of the best Australian squads ever. Players like Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell are world-class and bring a lot to the side."

'Beware of Istanbul'



AFP, London

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson on Sunday warned fans intending to travel to the crunch Euro 2004 clash against Turkey in Istanbul that they could be putting their lives at risk.

The Football Association (FA) have refused to take up their ticket allocation for the match on October 11 because of the bloody history of

games between the two countries.

Three years ago, two Leeds fans were stabbed to death in Istanbul.

However, about 250 England fans bought black market tickets for Saturday's game in Macedonia, when their unofficial presence was applauded by the England players, led by captain David Beckham.

The FA are set to remind the England players not to repeat such actions in Turkey next month, but their prime concern is to stop fans travelling there in the first place.

They want an urgent clarification from the Turkish football federation after weekend reports claimed that

they are prepared to sell tickets direct to thousands of England fans.

"Of course, I should like to see fans at games but, if it's a security problem, then it's better not to travel because you can risk to be injured and can even risk your life, which happened when Leeds were in Turkey," said Eriksson.

"If the security men say it's a problem, then you should listen to them."

Haluk Ulusoy, the president of the Turkish federation, was quoted on Sunday as effectively inviting England fans to travel to Istanbul for the match.



YOU ARE DEAD! Artim Sakiri (C) gets into a verbal duel with England captain David Beckham (L) at Skopje on September 5.

PHOTO: INTERNET

'I'll kill you' doesn't mean a thing!



SUN, London

Artim Sakiri admits he did make a death threat to David Beckham - but claims he did nothing wrong.

The psycho taunt came during England's stormy 2-1 Euro 2004 qualifying victory over Macedonia on Saturday.

But West Brom star Sakiri said: "People say things like 'I'll kill you' during the games, but that doesn't mean it's going to happen."

"Did anything happen to Beckham? Players in England swear all the time during matches." Furious skipper Becks said: "A few of their players were trying to wind us up all night and Sakiri said to me 'Be careful, you're going to die tonight'."

"Some of their players were spitting at us, but we just kept our heads and got on with the job."

The game was also marred by more racial abuse from the terraces, again aimed at England's black players Sol Campbell, David James, Ashley Cole, Emile Heskey and Kieron Dyer.

The FA are considering making an official complaint to UEFA just as they did after racial abuse by home fans during the game in Slovakia.

Tension was increased in Macedonia's 18,000-capacity City Stadium by the presence of approximately 500 England fans, who had defied the FA's request not to travel.

At the final whistle, Beckham led the England players over the corner of the stadium where they had congregated to applaud them.