

TEAM PROFILE

Enter the new Brazil

AFP, Johannesburg



Brazil coach Dunga believes substance rather than a slavish devotion to can deliver the World Cup, but his 1994 title-winning teammate Branco worries about the team's cutting edge in South Africa.

"From midfield back to the defence this is the best team in the world," says Branco, even if there are many who see a defensively-sound 'Selecao' as not very Brazilian.

Branco does harbour doubts, however, up front.

"I am a little worried about creativity up front as that can decide a game's outcome given that everyone plays a little bunched against Brazil."

Dunga is determined to mould the team in his own tough image based on defensive solidity at least as much as attacking flair as he seeks to emulate Franz Beckenbauer in landing the World Cup as both player and coach.

Twelve years ago Dunga held aloft the trophy as skipper of a side which squeezed home in a dour final after a penalty shootout against Italy.

In 1994, the Brazilian defence conceded just three goals in the entire event and now Dunga is determined

that, once again, opposing attackers shall not pass - even if that has the supporters of the "jogo bonito" (beautiful game) fuming.

The midfield looks creative with Kaka saying he is ready to take the tournament by the throat despite a poor first season with Real Madrid.

And if Robinho is left off the

"We are not here to have a good time - our message is we want to be champions," said the Striker Luis Fabiano adds for his part that winning can't always be synonymous with beauty.

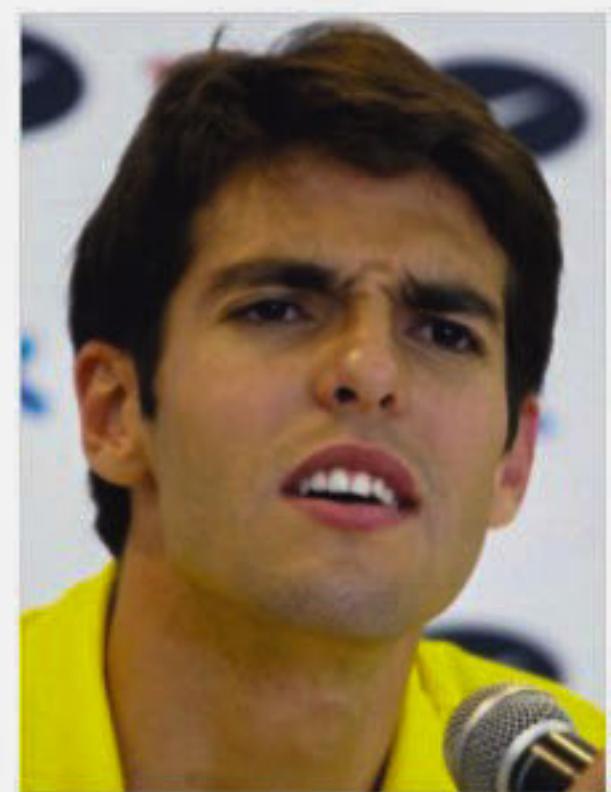
"If I told you we shall be champions then I'll need a crystal ball. I cannot say that winning it."

Dunga has sidelined two potential discordant voices although warm-up romps against Zimbabwe and Tanzania were sufficiently one Panathinaikos veteran and former Arsenal man.

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DUNGA



KAKA

leash that will also give opposing defences cause for concern.

Yet under Dunga's system, Robinho will also have to track back - almost unimaginable for a samba star playing in as far advanced a position.

Dunga will also look to shield the back four with defensive midfielders Felipe Melo and Gilberto Silva, who was talking tough on Wednesday in language which would appeal to Dunga himself.

There is little sign of anyone complaining about the Dunga method.

"We never comment about what the press write or say about us," says reserve keeper Heurelho Gomes of Tottenham.

"The most important thing is to pay Dunga back for the confidence he has in us. We are also going to play for the coach, who believes in us."

In leaving out the aging Ronaldinho and Adriano,

THE KNOWLEDGE

Brazil won the last 6 WC group matches. The Selecao lost at last 1998 against Norway (1-2) but was already progressed. Winning streak.

19 of Brazil's last 20 goals in the World Cup have been scored in open play.

Dunga has made more successful tackles (83) at the World Cup than any other player in the competition since 1966.

but since we started working three and a half years ago to get here that's what we have been working towards - to get to the final and win it." - sided as not to provide any evidence of the effect their absence may have.

Now Dunga's way is to be put to the test as Brazil open their campaign Tuesday against North Korea in Johannesburg and then face Portugal and Ivory Coast in Group G.

Cohesion is key: Heinze

REUTERS



A brilliant World Cup for Lionel Messi would be good for Argentina's chances of victory although it is preferable to rely on the team and not one man however great, according to defender Gabriel Heinze.

"I personally think it's the team that makes you win these very difficult championships," Heinze said three days before Argentina's opening Group B match against Nigeria.

"Lionel is the best in the world, the player who today is in his best form, but Argentina do not depend on Lionel," the battle-hardened 32-year-old told a news conference.

"Argentina depend on each one of the play-

ers who go onto the pitch. We don't need to put any pressure on Lio or anyone," he said after a team practice.

"We all lose and we all win (together) and Lio is one more (among us), it's impressive what he does but he's a human being and people forget he can have good days and bad days.

"Let's hope he has them all good for the good of Argentina. I hope the team is the star of the World Cup," said Heinze, like Messi a member of the Argentina squad that reached the quarterfinals in Germany in 2006.

Heinze said the outcome of the tournament would tell what kind of coach Diego Maradona, who had little experience to speak of when he took the job in late 2008, was.

"It's down to us players whether he's a good coach or not. Hopefully at the end of this championship Maradona will have been the best coach."

Adriano signs with Roma

AGENCIES

Around 5,000 fans turned up at a Rome stadium to greet new AS Roma signing Adriano as he returned to the Serie A.

The Brazilian striker has returned to Italy from Flamengo less than two years after walking out on Inter Milan because of personal problems.

"I feel renewed and mature," Adriano, 28, told the crowd.

AS Roma coach Claudio Ranieri, whose cash-strapped club finished second in Serie A last term, has acknowledged that signing Adriano is a "gamble" given his history.

The arrival of Adriano, on a three-year deal, means fellow striker Luca Toni's time at Roma looks to be over.

The Italian was on loan from Bayern Munich last term but Genoa now wants to sign him.

At his presentation, the burly Adriano, who is renowned for his rocket of a left boot was presented with a scarf that said, "Mo' te gonfio". It is reference to a humorous Italian threat which means to hit so hard that they become swollen.



PHOTO: AFP

DEFENDERS BEWARE: Brazilian striker Adriano, who signed a three-year contract with AS Roma, holds a supporter's scarf of the Italian club after being presented at the Flaminio Stadium in Rome on Wednesday.

Age just a number

REUTERS



A pumped-up Marcello Lippi rejected accusations Italy were too long in the tooth after old timer Mauro Camoranesi gave the world champions a boost in their first South Africa training session

Critics have lambasted coach Lippi for relying too heavily on his 2006 heroes and not bringing more youth to the World Cup following a lacklustre qualification and friendly campaign.

"We are not the oldest, there are a couple of teams older than us," Lippi told a news conference at a college near Pretoria which will act as Italy's "Casa Azzurri" or "home of the Blues" during the tournament.

"We have a mix, nine players from 2006 is less than 50 per cent. I haven't seen a team at a World Cup that four years later turn up with 23 new players. We have the right mix with young players and those with quality."

Italy take on Paraguay in their Group F opener in Cape Town on Monday before meeting New Zealand and Slovakia.

"My motivation is a lot greater than four years ago," Lippi added. "I don't know why. I'm a lot more pumped up now."

Italy, who arrived after dawn following a 10-hour flight, earlier trained at a nearby converted cricket pitch among the rolling, rural hills south of Pretoria.

first two group matches because of a calf problem, was the only member of the squad not to train during the leisurely session.

Winger Camoranesi, 33 and a World Cup winner in 2006, took part in most of the session having nearly recovered from a knee problem which had worried doctors only last week.

Midfielder Claudio Marchisio did some jogging away from the main group as he recovers full fitness after a leg injury.

"It's reasonable to think that next Monday they will all be available except for Pirlo," Lippi added.

"I have clear ideas but I've not been able to translate it onto the field because there have been problems and injuries. But from tomorrow, except for Pirlo, I can do what I have in my head. I want a defence a bit more compact which means we can have players further forward who don't need to defend."

The coach also gave the strongest hint yet that Pirlo will not be replaced in the squad before the first game.

"He came as we all have the confidence that maybe by the third game he can be there. We will cope," Lippi said without wishing to name Riccardo Montolivo as Pirlo's replacement.

Fighter jets roared overhead the training session as around a hundred journalists watched Lippi joke about by throwing corner flag posts around like javelins.

"People say Italy are slow starters, but how often has it worked? Lots," Italy's 1982 World Cup winner Alessandro Altobelli told Reuters.

MESSI WANTS TO WIN OVER DOUBTERS

"I want to show the country that I can play as well for Argentina as I do for Barcelona" said Leo Messi ahead of his country's first match in Group B against Nigeria.

Despite mesmerizing displays for his club side, Messi has still not won the hearts of supporters back home in the way that fellow strikers Carlos Tevez and Martin Palermo have.

"He does not love the shirt", "He does not play for Argentina as he does for Barcelona" have been among the criticisms levelled at the 23-year-old over the last two years. And the shirt with his name on it is not the most popular among the fans.

Messi is aware of the situation and it saddens him and his family. "It hurts us a lot because we love Argentina and they do not seem to value that," said his mother Celia Cuccitini.

South Africa will be Messi's big chance to prove the doubters wrong. "I am going to give my answer on the pitch," he said.

Messi has received the backing of coach Maradona amid suggestions that he has not helped the Barcelona star adapt to the national side.

"How am I not going to want Leo to be the best in the World Cup? How am I going to make him play badly if he is playing for my team," he said.

INIESTA MIGHT MISS OPENER

Andres Iniesta will go to the World Cup after scans suggested the injury to his right thigh suffered in Tuesday's 6-0 win over Poland is not as serious as first feared. The Spanish federation said yesterday that an MRI revealed swelling but it

"does not appear to be a tear". Spain did not say when the midfielder would be fit to play, with their first game looming on Wednesday against Switzerland. Iniesta has had problems with the same thigh muscle for the past year.

PARK AND RIDE

Football fans are being urged to use the park and ride system in Johannesburg. On Thursday the chief of communications of the local organising committee, Rich Mkhondo, said on Radio 702 that fans could simply arrive at the parking areas, buy a ticket and get a ride. Less than an hour later the person responsible for traffic in Johannesburg said on the same radio station that tickets had to be pre-booked and that people who did not have tickets would not be allowed to park. No wonder football fans are confused.



PHOTO: AFP

NOT JUST KEEPY-UPPY: Australian professional football tricks champion Chris Beavon attempts to set a world record for most "double around the worlds" in under a minute in Sydney on Thursday. The 19-year-old managed to complete a record 21 of the maneuvers in 45 seconds.

Australian sets freestyle record

AFP, Sydney

An Australian professional football trickster set a world record for most "around the worlds" in a minute on Thursday in a fundraising event aiming to tap into the World Cup fever sweeping the nation.

Chris Beavon, 19, performed the trick 21 times in 45 seconds before his legs gave out at the Westmead Medical Research Foundation's Football Freestyling contest in Westmead, west of Sydney.

The move involves tossing the ball from between instep and shin and making a full revolution around it with the foot before catching it again and repeating, and Beavon was the first person to attempt a world record with it.

He was disappointed with the result, which he said was hampered by a false start that tired his legs ahead of the record bid.

"My legs just died because it's such a strenuous trick," said Beavon, who has been freestyling for four years, two of them on the professional circuit.

"It's a little bit disappointing because I could have done a lot better. It's still a record, but not quite so impressive," he told AFP.

More than 100 children gathered to watch the bid and take part in a football tricks class with Beavon, who does stunts for commercials, corporate events and pre-match entertainment in Australia.

"With the World Cup coming up it's a big time for football," Beavon said.

His mother suffers from peripheral neuropathy, a painful foot and leg condition which makes it difficult to walk, and Beavon said her illness had driven him to take part.

"When I started doing freestyle football I wanted to do some events to help her out because it's been quite tough on her and our family," he said.

Real close to Di Maria signing

INTERNET

Spanish giants Real Madrid are close to clinching the signing of Argentina's Angel Di Maria, according to media reports on Thursday.

The Benfica winger was featured on the front page of sports dailies AS and Marca on Thursday.

AS said that Di Maria will be "the first signing" of Real president Florentino Perez this summer, and that "his arrival is imminent."

The paper suggested that Real will not pay more than 25 million euros (30 million dollars) for the 22-year-old winger. Perez wants to close the deal "as soon as possible" in order to avoid his price going up due to a "stellar performance" at the World Cup for Argentina.

ONE KEY FITS THEM ALL

Security has been one of the major issues going into the tournament and organisers have said that they have done everything in their power to ensure that the security issue is dealt with. However, that obviously does not extend to changing the locks in the stadium media centre at Soccer City, where international news and photo agencies have their own offices. To their astonishment though they found out that one key fits all the locks.

OWN-GOAL FROM HEALTH MINISTRY

As advice goes, it is likely to be as welcome as an own-goal or a missed penalty in a major tournament final.

Hong Kong's Department of Health on Thursday issued a set of health tips for football fans planning to watch the World Cup.

The advice includes drinking tea instead of beer, eating fruit rather than nuts and crisp and sitting properly while watching matches.

In its "Health Tips for World Cup Fans" the department advises fans to get plenty of sleep, not to buy rounds of drinks, take time to exercise and "to strike a balance between watching matches and fulfilling your social commitments," the spokesman said.

The advice is likely to fall on deaf ears as the six-hour time difference between Hong Kong and South Africa means matches will be screened in the early hours of the morning local time.

CAHILL FIT FOR GERMANY

Tim Cahill is expected to be available for Australia against Germany on Sunday after hurting his neck in a warm-up game against the USA.

Harry Kewell is also back in full training after recovering from a groin strain he picked up earlier this year.

SOCCER CITY TO BE LOCKED DOWN

All roads around Soccer City in Johannesburg will be closed from midnight ahead of Friday's World Cup opener between South Africa and Mexico, Rich Mkhondo, communications officer of the World Cup local organizing committee, said Thursday.

"Soccer City gates will open at 10am (Friday) and we want people seated by 1. The opening ceremony starts at 2." A capacity crowd of 84,490 will be at the opening game where South Africa are hoping to maintain a record that has seen no host nation lose the curtain-raiser in seven previous World Cup editions.

AFP, Bangkok



World Cup fever is sweeping across Asia as hundreds of millions of fans in the football-mad region count down to the start of an event that's a surefire winner for pubs, clubs and bookmakers.

From Seoul to Sydney, Beijing to Bangkok, preparations are underway for Friday's kick-off thousands of kilometres away in South Africa, heralding a month of late nights and bleary-eyed mornings for many Asian fans.

"We're expecting the hotel lounge to be full every night," said Matthew Rashid, manager of the Equatorial in Kuala Lumpur, where many bars and pubs are already decked out with colourful bunting and posters.

In South Korea, who take on Greece on Saturday, giant screens are being set up in public squares, sports stadiums and other locations around the country for people to cheer on the national team.

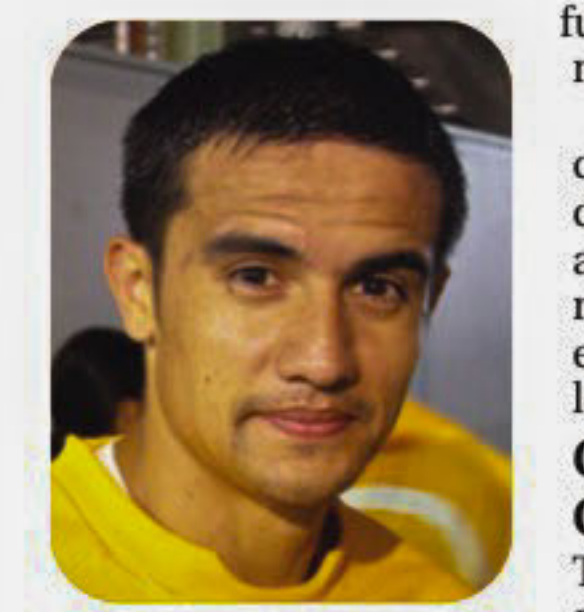
On the other side of the world's most heavily militarised border, North Koreans will be following a rare appearance by their side, who have qualified for the event for the first time in 44 years.

But they risk being left without any television coverage after Seoul refused to provide a free feed to its impoverished neighbour owing to tensions over the sinking of a South Korean warship in March.

In Tokyo, where interest in the sport has taken off since Japan co-hosted the 2002



INIESTA



CAHILL