

Is Brazil's Seleção Becoming Complacent?

Contributed by Paolo Bassi
Tuesday, 27 June 2006

There are confident supporters of Brazil, who rationalize that Brazil has yet to play its best football and there is nothing to worry about. After all, this is Brazil, with its Ronaldinhos, Ronaldos and Kakás and half a dozen other players capable of scoring goals.

True enough, however, this is scant comfort when Brazil's performance so far is compared to Germany, Argentina and even Spain. Brazil's ability to score may not overcome the cohesiveness and discipline of these teams should they meet.

In the group stage, Brazil barely beat Croatia in the opening match. It was left to Kaká, a mid-fielder to rescue Brazil. The subsequent win over Australia was not convincing and the 4-1 victory over Japan rather flattered Brazil.

Brazil simply have not looked as sharp or as hungry as they did in 2002, when they were trying to make up for the debacle of France 1998. The two goals against Japan, will no doubt boost Ronaldo's confidence, however, he still looks disjointed and a step too slow.

His weight issue has been exaggerated. What is lacking is a mental hunger. If the great man can regain that appetite, he may still be Brazil's saviour. Of course, as the world knows, the real brilliance of Brazil is that it has 9 other potential scorers.

Brazil's opponent in the last 16 is Ghana, the sole African representative. Ghana has an old and respected football pedigree - albeit restricted to the African Cup of Nations - and will be difficult opponents.

Ghana play fast and physical and showed what they can do by beating the highly ranked Czechs and U.S. More significantly, Ghana are desperate to show the world what an African team can do and what a trophy Brazil would make.

Whatever happens, Brazil will be back, but the underdog Ghanaians know this magic moment may not come back for decades. The sheer hunger of Ghana may provide the psychological edge. Should Ghana score first, Brazil may find it very difficult.

Brazil for all their skill are no Germany when it comes to resurrection from the dead. Brazil's play is built on confidence and putting on a show and for that they must score first to settle them and allow their natural game to flow.

Should Ghana do the unthinkable and win, it will be the biggest shock since the U.S. beat England in Brazil 1950. Returning to reality however, chances are Brazil will prevail.

Since 1994 there has been an inevitability about Brazil - somehow, someway, they will make it. The battle will then continue against France or Spain, both with records to set right, and in Spain's case, playing rather well.

Some may think that supporting Brazil is rather like siding with America in war, but this is one supporter who will be wearing the famous gold jersey tomorrow and saying a prayer, just to be sure.

Paolo Bassi is an attorney in Colorado. He was raised in Europe and has visited Brazil and fell in love with the country and its people. He is very interested in the social aspects of football and how it helps to define certain groups of people. Bassi has also written on politics and culture. He can be reached at i.paolo.bassi@gmail.com.