

## THE CUP OF THE HOSPITALITY

Rio de Janeiro, July 2014

Finally, the World Cup 2014 belongs to the treasure of the memory of football lovers. Maybe not only of these, but also of those who simply come in the wave of major sporting events that galvanize widespread attention, those who want to be part of these special times when the peoples of the world gather around the same images, thrilling up, rejoicing and suffering from the same vicissitudes of athletes fighting for a symbolic purpose, in the case of football, to make a ball cross the goal line. As the poet would say, "We can not accuse of primitivism those who are satisfied with this ideal outcome."

Paraphrasing the same poet, the Brazilian Carlos Drummond de Andrade, perhaps someone would like to say, in the manner of Homer: "when Arjel Robben of the swift feet rushed with the coveted ball submissive to his left boot of white studs, then the relentless Javier Mascherano, head of warriors, set out on his trail, and sliding by the dark green grass of Itaquera, succeeded in diverting the winged balloon that was leaving rightly towards the Argentine goal". Or: "breaths interrupted in the old Maracanã of high light towers when the artful Lionel Messi, of short and sturdy legs, moved forward and fired the shot that could be fatal against the goal defended by the towering goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, of giant hands, but Pallas Athene, disguised in gentle gust of wind, blew the ball a few inches off the white rectangle". Or: "the crafty Luiz Suarez, of large white teeth, fiercely lashed out against the belligerent defender Chiellini, who fell to the ground stunned by the unanticipated blow." Or, more dramatic: "the Brazilian camp was still crying the falling of the sweet warrior Neymar, described in murmur a thousand times by dry unbelieving throats, when the signal was given for battle against the Teutonic army, which came and spread the plague and destruction across the devastated countrymen of the divine Pelé".

Homers cannot exist anymore, of course, and football has its own technical language, which not dresses epic legends, but merely tries to rationalize and, if anything, to adorn the impressions made and replayed by television images. However, it was a typical Greek value that featured, more than any other, the spirit of this World Cup which was played in Brazil: hospitality. A survey conducted by Datafolha Institute for the daily newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, one of the most prestigious and read in the country, indicated that for 95% of the foreign respondents, the reception they had in Brazil was excellent or good; for 4% of them, the reception was regular; and only 1% considered poor or very poor the hospitality of the Brazilians. Very good was also the opinion of visitors on the organization of the World Cup: 83% considered it excellent or good and 12% fair; only 3% judged it poor or bad. Very interesting was also the reply when they were asked if, after the few days spent in Brazil, would like to live here: 69% said yes! It is worth adding that 61% of the respondents visited the country for the first time.

Other aspects very well evaluated by the tourists were the quality of public transportation for the arenas (good or excellent for 76%) and the safety and comfort offered by the stadiums (good or excellent for 92%). It was not all praise, however. Significant

number of tourists complained about the high cost of living (29% considered it bad or terrible), while 18% complained of poverty and social inequality and, concomitantly, 16% felt unsafe.

The researchers heard 2,209 foreigners from 60 different countries between 1st and 11th July. Note that, according to the Ministry of Tourism, about one million foreigners from 203 countries came to Brazil for the World Cup.

### **THE GERMANS KNEW HOW TO CONQUER**

In this Cup that was of everyone, as I wrote before, in which all the visiting teams were virtually "adopted" by the communities around their places of lodging and training, and their players were revered as stars and football heroes, the new World Champions, the Germans, knew more than anybody how to live with intensity and joy in the reigning spirit. We have already described, in previous articles, how the German team sought to integrate themselves, from the beginning, in the community living around the site chosen by them as the basis of his stay in Brazil, the village of Santo André (Saint Andrew), in the municipality of Santa Cruz Cabrália, Bahia.

It is worth adding now that even the stinging defeat by 7-1 they have imposed to Brazil on that forever "fateful" day July 8 did not diminish the fondness the Brazilian crowd felt towards the sympathetic German players. Very sportingly, the Brazilians applauded the opposing team when their bus left the Mineirão Arena after the match. In return, the next day, the ace Lukas Podolski, one of those that most appreciated the 40 days lived in Brazil, which has been called "the most Brazilian of Germans", posted on his Facebook page a text written in reasonable colloquial Portuguese in which he asked for respect for "the yellow shirt, with its history and tradition," stated that "the football world owes much to Brazilian football", that Brazil "is and always will be the country of football," that "we all grew up watching the Brazil play, our heroes who inspired us are all here ", etc.

Aside from the gestures of sympathy, the German delegation took some more concrete attitudes. They donated 10,000 euros for the purchase of an ambulance for the Village of Santo André; they began the construction of a school for the village; they planted grass in the small football fields on which children of the community use to play.

Therefore, it is no wonder that in the final at Maracana on 13 July, the Germans had the preference of most Brazilian fans who attended the stadium. Contributed to this, of course, the historical, the fierce rivalry between Brazil and Argentina in football. It is true that the almost 100,000 Argentineans that invaded the city of Rio de Janeiro that day, most without tickets to the game, did not contribute much to put in the shade old grudges: "porteños" in large numbers, mainly on the Copacabana beach, where they packed the Fan Fest, irritated very much the Brazilians, all the time singing a refrain that made a pun between the words "feel" and "seven" (number of goals scored by Germany against Brazil), which sound similar in Spanish: "Brasil, decime qué se siente" ("Brazil, tell me how does it

feel"). But they have not had the same good mood when Germany scored the only goal of the final, by the young Mario Götze, celebrated with sincere joy by the Brazilians in Maracanã ... Some outbreaks of fighting threatened to grow, but were soon repressed by the police, who removed the quarrelsome from the stadium.

We began this article reminding Homer and the Greeks, with their tradition of hospitality, and it is appropriate to recall the final books of the *Odyssey*, in which the hero Odysseus comes back to his homeland, Ithaca, but his return, far from triumphant and arrogant, is surrounded by caution, diplomacy and cunning. Despite he had departed from that island as a king, when he sent out to join the expedition of Greek armies against the city of Troy, the wily Odysseus, twenty years later, is not sure of his authority. He comes groping the ground: he doesn't identify himself immediately before his wife, Penelope, who was being courted by other princes of Ithaca, pretenders to the throne; presenting before her as a humble person, a beggar, he just asks for a shelter, which is granted to him. He approaches first his most reliable affections: his aging father, Laertes, the swineherd, Eumaeus, his son, Telemachus, whom he had left when was still a toddler. Only after much conversation and understanding of the situation, certificated of the feelings of affection and respect that Penelope still had for him, is that Odysseus consents to be identified before his wife, and then open your plans for revenge and restoring the throne.

So, we can say that the Germans, in undertaking the conquest of the World Cup in Brazil, were astute and showed themselves familiar with the laws of hospitality, which demand proportionate attention and care from the visitors for kindnesses they receive, and mainly respect to the host. They didn't feel themselves like kings after the first manifestations of affection and admiration; they sought their space with humility, giving back as far as possible the received attention, seeking to participate actively in the community life, even rehearsing up a few words in Portuguese (it was recorded a video clip of farewell, in which various components of the German delegation, including the coach Joachim Löw, pronounce short phrases in our language).

Well considered all the circumstantial facts that paved the way towards the title of the German team (the amazing little resistance opposed to them by strong teams like Portugal, France, and especially Brazil, the tie they snatched against Ghana almost at the last minute, etc.), we could find that they were very lucky to get physically in good shape to the final game against Argentina. However, we could also call this good luck protection of the gods, and even assign to the breath of Pallas Athene the deflected trajectory of the ball kicked by the usually precise and lethal Lionel Messi, which could have given another turn to the final game...

## **TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE DEBACLE OF THE BRAZILIAN TEAM (I)**

The strange, unbelievable score of 7-1 imposed by Germany to Brazil in the semifinals of the World Cup caused astonishment and sadness in our country. How was it possible that the national team that has won the supreme title of football world five times suffers the highest score ever seen in a semifinal? The first comparison that comes to mind reads as an irony of History: we remember 1950, the year of "Maracanazo", in which Brazil beat Spain in the semi finals by a resounding 6-1, with more than 150,000 spectators euphoric singing a song that had success in the carnival, "Bullfighting in Madrid." In the previous game, Brazil had applied another devastating rout: 7-2 against Sweden. That was an unforgettable generation of great players, led by the extraordinary Zizinho, of whom some older friends used to say that "better than him, only Pelé"!

However, Brazil lost to Uruguay in the final of that World Cup by a close score of 2-1, when the draw was enough for the title, and we had the tie in our hands missing only 11 minutes to finish the game. Uruguay also had a great team that had played some hard and balanced games against our team a few months before the event. Therefore, the result could be considered normal. It could, but it was not: the defeat, "hailed" by the most impressive silence in football history, which paralyzed 200,000 voices at the Maracanã, took proportions of a national tragedy. Due to the "disaster", Zizinho and his companions had not the deserved recognition; on the contrary, some were execrated, the goalkeeper Barbosa suffered the rest of his life branded as "guilty".

In 1994, the unfortunate Barbosa tried to visit the players of the national team concentrated in Rio de Janeiro, and the entrance was barred by order of coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, arguing that the players were not to be reminded of negative emotions from the past.

Now, the Brazilian team takes a resounding 7-1 from Germany in the semifinal, a hard blow for the national arrogance that doesn't accept to be the second, although brilliantly. It is not unreasonable to think that it does, after all, a bit of historical justice: it is as if Brazil is paying to the athletes of 1950 a tribute for the injustice they have suffered, it is as if the tormented Barbosa could now once and for all return to the central circle that capricious ball kicked by Ghiggia, at 79 minutes of play.

And Mr. Parreira, that in this World Cup was the Technical Coordinator of the Brazilian team (in practice an assistant of coach Luiz Felipe Scolari), has a huge share of the blame in the vexatious result, for being the cause of a substantial part of the excessive responsibility that weighed on the shoulders of the inexperienced Brazilian team, because of its "festive" and megalomaniac statements made prior to the event. Indeed, Parreira said "modestly," about two months ago, which Brazil had a "super team" and that it was "with his hand in the trophy cup". Something unbelievable and absurd coming from a knowledgeable person who participated in six World Cups as coach (two with the Brazilian team and four with others). Anyone minimally endowed with common sense knows that, a priori, no football team, however good, can be considered the absolute favorite to win the World Cup, given the approximate equilibrium that exists between the top teams and the exclusionary

character of the dispute from the second stage, when one poor performance, an unfortunate day of a team or a very happy journey of the opponent, an unexpected injury of an important player, any expulsion, that is, just one of the many possible vicissitudes in a football game, can cause the premature return to home of a favorite to the title.

Another time, Parreira, inquired if the protests against hosting the World Cup in Brazil could affect the performance of the Brazilian team, said no, that the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) represented "the Brazil that had worked", which had nothing to do with the "problems" observed in the organization of the event, which resulted from the incompetence and irresponsibility of politicians, etc. However, the CBF is a completely discredited entity before the Brazilians, due to the notorious corruption and cronyism that mark their activities, including and especially the elections for their executive positions.

Then again we can draw positive lessons of the defeat, because the conservative media, before the World Cup, eyeing the October presidential elections, bet that the organization of the event, off the field, would be a failure, while the Brazilian team, within the field, would be successful, according to all predictions, including some foreign coaches. Precisely the opposite happened: the event itself, its organization and the receptivity of the Brazilian people, were a success, while the football team and the CBF failed. We should add to the research of Datafolha we refer previously another, led by the British TV network BBC, according to which the World Cup in Brazil was the best of all time for 39% of the respondents.

There is also some justice in this, although we are all saddened by the poor performance of our team, regardless of the concept we have of the leaders of the CBF. Brazilian football lost, but the people won, because they can boast of the great party they did. One day, we all hope, the people will have back its national team, without corrupt directors and arrogant coordinators.

A first step in this direction could be the announcement of the retirement of Mr. Carlos Alberto Parreira, made after the news of his firing as the Technical Coordinator of the Brazilian team. But we know this is very little, so much so that the person chosen to replace Parreira, the former Brazilian national team goalkeeper Gilmar Rinaldi, evokes already suspicions of incompatibility of interests, because of the Rinaldi's recent activities as an agent of players.

The change we need is structural, and the best hope for positive attitudes comes from the political government, precisely from the Brazil who "didn't work", according to Parreira. President Dilma Rousseff has shown herself worried about the disorganization of Brazilian football, with its inhuman schedule, with the irresponsibility in the financial management of clubs, who spend more than they earn, etc. She wants to pass a law that would give clubs the opportunity to pay their tax debts with extended terms and low interest rates, but requiring accountability in return: clubs that do not honor their commitments, which delay wages, will be lowered. Something that has been already done in Germany, without the need for political intervention, after the failure of their team in the Euro 2000.

## **TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE DEBACLE OF THE BRAZILIAN TEAM (II)**

At no time in the World Cup, Brazil exhibited the same level of football played last year, when it won the Confederations Cup in good style. It seems certain that in part this is due to the better quality and intensity of the football played by the other teams in the World Cup. But regardless of this, it was apparent that some players from Brazil were not in the same shape of last year: this was the case, especially, of Daniel Alves, Paulinho and Fred, who were playing badly since the two preparatory matches just before the Cup starting, against Panama and Serbia.

That was not to be the end of the world, the team had replacements in good shape, especially for Daniel Alves (Maicon) and Paulinho (Fernandinho). However, at that moment the Brazilian team showed its perhaps most important problem: the hesitation and lack of energy of its coach, his inability to react quickly to different situations and make decisions that would change the way the team was playing, when needed. I do not know what may have happened to Luiz Felipe Scolari, a coach who was deservedly world champion with Brazil in 2002, which led the Portuguese team to the semifinals in 2006, which has led it to the final of Euro 2004, which, in 2013, at the Confederations Cup, had the great merit of bringing back to the Brazilian national team the support and the confidence of the supporters.

In fact, only in the game against Colombia, in the quarterfinals, is that Scolari decided to replace Daniel Alves for Maicon (before that, Paulinho was replaced by Fernandinho). A little late, perhaps, there was no time for effective adjustments of the new formation. The team played its best first half in the Cup, but fell in defense unnecessarily in the second half, and in the end won by 2-1, but not without a few scares. But then came two facts that terribly worsened the situation of the team before the semifinal game against the mighty Germany: the second yellow card given to Thiago Silva and, especially, the traumatic injury of Neymar, victim of a criminal "assault" by the Colombian Zúñiga.

In the previous games, the main, almost sole, regular attack play of the Brazilian team was the long throw from the defense, the so-called "direct link", which the Brazilian defenders Thiago Silva and David Luiz run with great mastery, it is true, but which is very little for a team that intends to win a Cup. Aside from the direct link, Brazil also had sporadically the counter-attack at speed. In both situations, the direct link or the counterattack, given the absence of effective participation of the midfielders in offensive actions, the only Brazilian player capable of bringing danger to the opponent was Neymar. Only he, through his fantastic dribbling ability and improvisation, his speed and strength, was able to produce goal situations: the center-forward Fred was easily scored by defenders in numerical superiority. It sharpened up, then more than ever, what the critics were already calling "Neymar-reliance," an over-reliance on the individual talent of Neymar, by the Brazilian team.

Then Brazil went to play against Germany without its main player and the important defender Thiago Silva, and in these circumstances the favoritism belonged to the German team, that had played the better football since the start of the competition. But still it was not

the end of the world; Brazil, even without two important players, was still Brazil, a team of much greater weight than others who had previously offered tough resistance to Germany: Ghana, United States, Algeria ... Besides, Brasil was playing at home. So, how to explain the 7-1?

The coach Scolari, at the press conference he gave in the day after the fateful game, attributed the disaster to a “crash” that has gripped the team in the terrible six minutes in which the Germans scored four goals (between 22 and 28 minutes of play, approximately). He said he had no explanation for that crash, and that it was an accidental result which would not be repeated ever again. The media did not accept the thesis of the "accident", that turned even the subject of ridicule in some debates on TV. The predominant criticism was to the effect that the selection had not played well a single match, that Germany was the first really strong opponent it faced, and that, therefore, the shortcomings of Brazil, which already existed, were simply stripped under the pressure of the German national team. They ascribed little importance to the absences of Neymar and Thiago Silva; someone even said that if Brazil could have them in the field, it would lose maybe by 7-3 or 7-2 ...

I disagree with the thesis of the breakdown or accident by Scolari, but also I do not embrace the opinion of those who thought the 7-1 was a normal result in the circumstances. Of course it was not, and I believe that this criticism should be understood in a context in which the direction of football in Brazil has been deeply questioned, in which people take advantage of any crisis situation to demand radical changes.

One reason that can be cited for the debacle of the July 8 is the little time devoted by the Brazilian team, throughout the Cup, to workouts with ball, especially collective drills and set pieces that simulate real game situations. This was an aspect heavily criticized by the media, but few have given due attention to the fact that this deficiency has become more dangerous in the days before the match against Germany, when Brazil knew would play without Neymar and Thiago Silva. The team that would play was not even assembled in a collective training, the set pieces were untested, and this was something critical considering the change that occurred in the Brazilian defense with Dante (by the way, good player from Bayern Munich) entering in the place of Thiago Silva. Remember that the first goal of Germany, important to further destabilize emotionally Brazilian team, emerged from a corner kick, a very well trained move of the German team, who managed to fool the marking of the Brazilian defense and let the scorer Thomas Müller completely alone in the middle of the penalty area to shoot.

But that still does not explain the 7-1 ... We can only speculate what might have happened in the minds of the Brazilian players on the eve of that amazing game. Excessive responsibility on their shoulders, emotional breakdown? After all, all the Technical Commission of the Brazilian team - not just the Technical Coordinator Carlos Alberto Parreira, let's be fair - embraced the overwhelming conviction that Brazil would win the World Cup. The bus of the Brazilian team displayed in large letters the at least provocative phrase: "Get ready! The hexa is coming."

Certainly, the absence of Neymar was a highly depressing factor for a team that had to meet expectations of omnipotence far beyond its abilities. Personally, I imagine that the players depression can be been carried over to a delirious euphoria, and so they believed that they would be able to overcome all obstacles, that at home they would win "anyway", that they would give a "gift" to Neymar, that "God is Brazilian", etc. Thus they even forgot they had an opponent, the strongest opponent. Paradoxically, Brazil, playing without Neymar and Thiago Silva, began playing against Germany with much less defensive care and marking far less than it had done against weaker teams. In fact, Brazil initially ignored the opponent. There was only the ball. We and the ball, as if it were a joke of ours alone. Nobody remembered to mark the Germans. Then we realized that the Germans did exist and that there were many of them, who seemed always outnumber the Brazilian players in all sectors of the field. We then passed from the euphoria to amazement and paralysis, especially Scolari and Parreira, who placidly watched the game in silence and with crossed arms.

### **CONCLUSÃO: A VIDA CONTINUA**

Writing shortly after the game Brazil-Germany for the diary Folha de S. Paulo, the writer Antonio Prata pointed out that the atmosphere he breathed in the streets was very different from the uncontrollable crying, the mood of mourning, which affected the Brazilians that afternoon of 1950 . In the Savassi, the neighborhood of bohemian life in Belo Horizonte, the trade functioned normally, people were coming and going, talking, laughing, stopping in bars and drinking their beer.

Two days after the final of the World Cup in Fortaleza, President Dilma Rousseff inaugurated the summit of BRICS. According to the informative Brazil 247, available on the Internet, "The five countries that make up the acronym BRICS inaugurated, in practice, a new order to the world. They put into practice the establishment of a full economic bloc of political affinities. Now we know that Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa will have its New Development Bank, with initial capital of \$ 50 billion, but it may be increased to \$ 100 billion, to face the World Bank. And they will also form a fund of \$ 100 billion in reserves, according to the Contingency Agreement, exactly in order to not depend exclusively on the International Monetary Fund rescues in crises. The Financial Times published a editorial analysis that gives the correct dimension of all these facts: "Remarkable demonstration of how the economic order is changing"."

In Rio de Janeiro, while FIFA withdrew its temporary premises in Maracanã to return it to the locals, the city resumes its works aiming at another major challenge: the 2016 Olympics. Everywhere we encounter fences, we heard the noise of construction machinery, we see the changes, many temporary, in traffic, etc.

In short, the Brazil "that did not work," according to Carlos Alberto Parreira, doesn't stop, it turns its eyes for the future. Life goes on. In October, we will have presidential



elections, when President Dilma Rousseff, candidate for reelection, will be faced with the pretenders to the throne, the other princes of Ithaca, who tried at all costs to use the "problems" of the World Cup to assault the royal palace, to tarnish the image of the man who travels the world proposing solutions to a new international order: the former president Lula da Silva. Dilma has been weaving its web over four years in office, but in October, to be sure, the cunning hero will help her...

Meanwhile, the Brazil that "worked", the Brazilian Football Confederation, headed by Jose Maria Marin, an old politician notoriously linked to the military dictatorship that ruled the country between 1964 and 1985, attempts old solutions: Scolari, the coach who Out Champion in 2002, leaves, and they speak on the return of Dunga, champion as a player in 1994, coach in 2010, to the command of the Brazilian team. The CBF remains focused on the past. Until when?

**Marcos Roland**