

ESPN FC

2014 WORLD CUP GUIDE



11-PAGE U.S. SECTION

STOPPING CR7 • JURGEN'S GERMANS • DEMPSEY DISSECTED

BALLACK, HISLOP, KELLER, KEMPES & MACCA PREVIEW ALL 32 TEAMS

HOW TO WATCH LIKE A BRAZILIAN • THE FALL AND RISE OF MEXICO

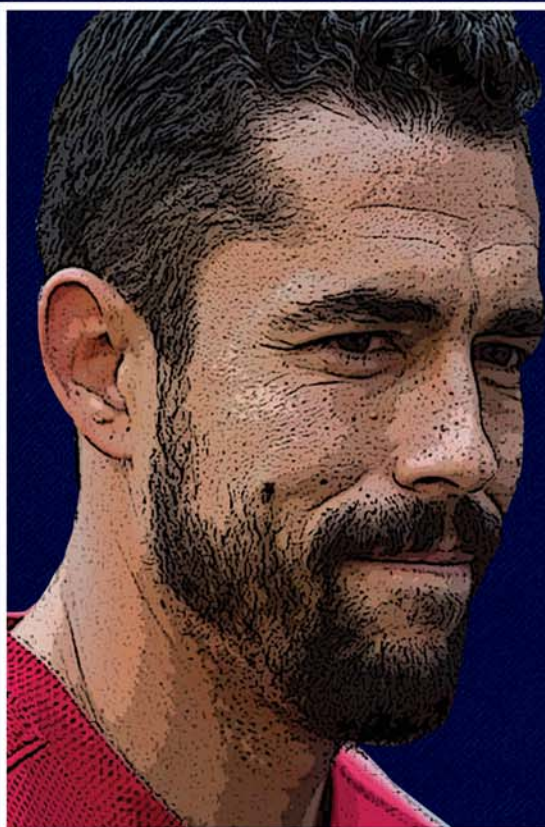
BATTLE OF THE BEST MESSI, NEYMAR, RONALDO, SUAREZ



FROM LEFT:
JOZY ALTIODORE, TIM HOWARD, CLINT DEMPSEY

EVERYONE LOVES A GREAT FINISH ON AND OFF THE FIELD

★ ★ ★ WITH AMERICAN FORWARD HERCULEZ GOMEZ ★ ★ ★



Q: AS A FORWARD AND A SCORER, ARE YOU ALWAYS THINKING ABOUT A STRONG FINISH NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE ON THE FIELD?

A: ANYTIME YOU'RE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO SCORE A GOAL, YOUR MINDSET KIND OF CHANGES RIGHT BEFORE IT HAPPENS. YOU GET A MOMENT OF CLARITY; THINGS SLOW DOWN, UNTIL RIGHT WHEN THE BALL IS ABOUT TO GO IN, THEN IT'S JUST A BLUR. ANYTIME YOU'RE ON THE FIELD, THE MAIN POINT IS TO TRY TO SCORE. YOU HAVE TO TRY TO BE AN OFFENSIVE THREAT ANYWHERE.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR GREAT FINISHES ON AND OFF THE FIELD.

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ON AND OFF THE FIELD

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OTHERS ARE KICKED
OUT OF
COUNTRIES



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The party kicked off at Rio's Carnival!

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So a Ghanaian, a Portuguese and a German walk into a bar ...

ZOOM

Amid a storm that ultimately dumped several inches of snow on Dick's Sporting Goods Park outside Denver, the U.S. men's national team was more concerned about digging themselves out of a different mess. Having lost their opener against Honduras in CONCACAF's hexagonal World Cup qualifier and staring at a trip to Mexico four days later, this March 22 match against Costa Rica loomed as a virtual must-win for the Yanks. In front of 19,374 hardy souls, Clint Dempsey controlled the ball well enough to slot it into the net in the 16th minute. Instead of burying hopes, the Snow Clasico became a moment frozen in U.S. soccer history. —**JORDAN BRENNER**

Photograph by
JOHN TODD/ISI PHOTOS

15

Goals by the U.S. in the Hex [10 games], the group high. Jozy Altidore scored four and Dempsey notched three.

27

Games the U.S. has gone unbeaten in home qualifiers [25-0-2] since a loss to Honduras on Sept. 1, 2001.





ZOOM

WHO

Keepers Tim Howard and Brad Guzan

WHAT

Celebrating the U.S. men's national team's 2-0 victory over Mexico

WHEN

Sept. 10, 2013

WHERE

Columbus Crew Stadium,
Columbus, Ohio

Dos a cereal! For the U.S. and their fans, this Spanish phrase has become a rallying cry. But for Mexico, it's more of a recurring nightmare. The rivals met in Columbus (their fourth World Cup qualifier showdown there since 2001), and for the fourth straight time the Americans triumphed. But the victory wasn't the only cause for the Yanks to celebrate. The win clinched a seventh consecutive World Cup berth for the U.S. with a pair of qualifiers still remaining. So Howard (near right) and Guzan popped the corks, doused their teammates and savored a historic victory with Brazil in their sights.

—JORDAN BRENNER

Photograph by
JOHN TODD/ISI PHOTOS





COLU

15

MICHAEL

14

MIX D

4



Early in Hex qualifiers, the U.S. was desperate. At 1-1-1 with two goals (both by Clint Dempsey), the Yanks looked tanked. Then Jozy Altidore took off. Starting with a goal in a 4-3 friendly win over Germany in June, the forward scored in a U.S.-record five straight appearances. Three of those were Hex wins, the other a friendly victory at Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Altidore had a hat trick. The then-23-year-old capped his scoring with a goal in a 2-0 defeat of Jamaica (right) as the U.S. won CONCACAF for the third time running. With eight goals in 14 games in 2013, Altidore is peaking for Brazil. —**JORDAN BRENNER**

Photograph by
MICHAEL JANOSZ/ISI PHOTOS

21

Altidore's goal total in 65 USMNT appearances, tied with Bruce Murray for sixth place all time.

3.1

Altidore's scoring rate, in games. For context: All-time USMNT goals leader Landon Donovan scores every 2.7 games (through March 7).





U.S. Soccer

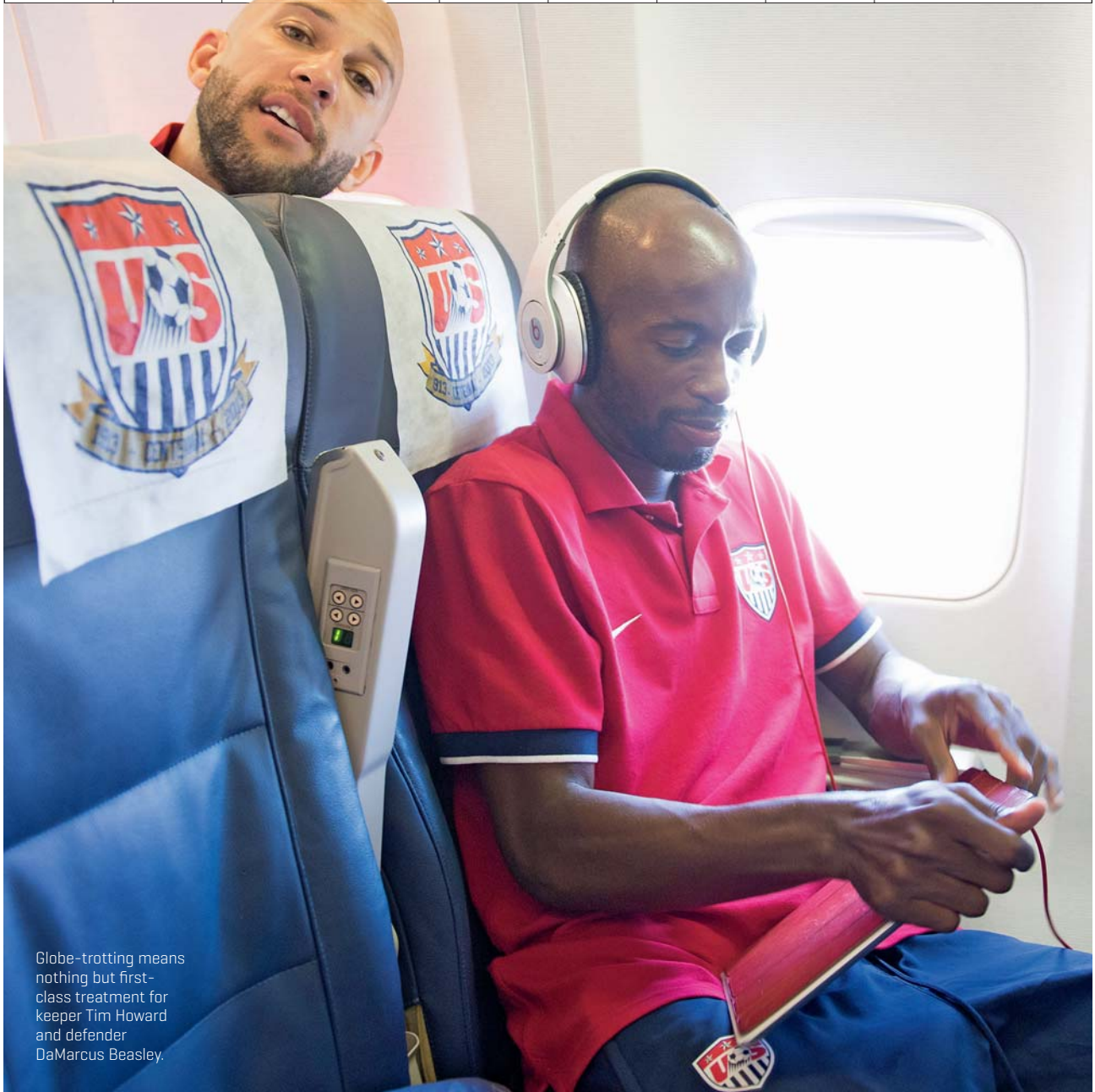


2014
FIFA WORLD CUP™
BRAZIL

ESPN 

JUNE 12TH - JULY 13TH

STARTING XI



Globe-trotting means nothing but first-class treatment for keeper Tim Howard and defender DaMarcus Beasley.

IT'S ALL TAKEN CARE OF

LONG BEFORE THE YANKS QUALIFIED FOR THE WORLD CUP, U.S. SOCCER'S POINT PERSON WAS IN BRAZIL SCOUTING HOTELS AND SECURING FACILITIES. THE MAN LEADING THE CHARGE? WE LIKE TO CALL HIM THE MOST VALUABLE PLANNER. JUST TAKE ONE LOOK AT TOM KING'S TO-DO LIST AND YOU'LL SEE WHY. —STEVE WULF



**THERE'S
NOTHING
THAT'S
KEEPING
ME UP AT
NIGHT.
-TOM KING**

ARRANGE TRAVEL, housing, meals, entertainment and security for 23 players and 27 staff members and officials going to Brazil for the World Cup. Be sure they're well-hydrated and well-protected as they traverse the fifth-largest country in the world. Keep in mind the climate and culture and costs. Keep an eye on the friends and family and fans accompanying them. Project a positive image for U.S. Soccer. Please the folks back home with your all-around performance.

That's pretty much the agenda facing Tom King and U.S. Soccer. He and the organizers for the other 31

countries in the World Cup have to sweat the small stuff, like having enough bottled water, and the big stuff, like a certain 13-pound golden trophy. It's a wonder that any of them are sleeping.

"No, there's nothing that's keeping me up at night," says King, U.S. Soccer's managing director of administration who has led every World Cup effort for the team since 1994. "I actually welcome all these challenges. I want to stress that I am not alone in handling them: We have a fantastic staff at U.S. Soccer, starting with our coach, Jurgen Klinsmann."

King is sitting in his office at U.S. Soccer House in

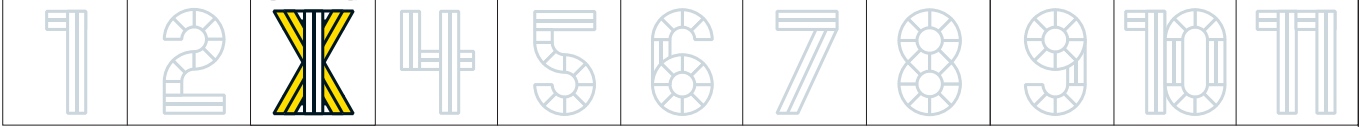
Chicago, where the wind-chill factor is 10 below, and he's talking about games to be played 5,000 miles away, 126 days from now, in tropical heat. U.S. Soccer House is actually two mansions on what was once Millionaires' Row on the Near South Side. One of the stately homes belonged to William Wallace Kimball, whose name reverberates on certain old pianos. The other was owned by Joseph Coleman, a hardware manufacturing magnate.

In a way, their spirits still reside with the engaging King, who exudes harmony and can-do. "Every World Cup is different," he says,

"but every World Cup is a wonderful experience." As it happens, U.S. Soccer House is sometimes used for movie shoots—perhaps you remember seeing it in *Primal Fear* (1996). That's the reaction American soccer fans had to the World Cup draw on Dec. 6, when they found out not only that the U.S. would be in Group G with Ghana, Portugal and Germany, but that it has the Cup's most difficult travel schedule, from base camp at São Paulo FC in the south to three tropical northern sites in Natal, Manaus and Recife. But that wasn't King's take: "I looked at Jurgen and we smiled. There were clearly challenges, but we were not overwhelmed by them, and we looked at the positives."

The granular aspect of the job is seen in a checklist from the qualifier last October in Panama City. Here is just a small sample of hotel requirements:

STARTING



Travel plans for Klinsmann & Co. must be flexible, as proved by a friendly that moved from Ukraine to Cyprus.

- No hospitality rooms adjacent, above or below the players floor
- Inside-facing rooms for players (away from street)
- Clear out minibars, stock with Gatorade and 10 waters
- Menus review—all fruit & veg peeled or cooked
- TVs on in meal room (stream live games)
- 35 local newspapers on a skirted table outside the breakfast room
- No hotel reader board notice
- 40 towels, soaps, shampoo—training room on match day

There are also detailed notes on flights and transport (“back-pocket room for luggage truck driver”), training (“Free Kick wall preferred”), venues (“grass length, take sample”) and VIPs (“ambassador jersey”).

Despite the best-laid plans, well, *gang aft agley*. When the U.S. went to Costa Rica for a qualifier in September, the hosts wanted payback for a snowy 1-0 loss at

Dick’s Sporting Goods Park in Colorado the previous March. So the U.S. team, which is usually expedited through customs, had to run a gantlet past irate fans in the airport. Then the group had to find its own training field, which was at a local dairy factory. And the match balls usually provided by the host nation weren’t provided—luckily, the Yanks brought their own.

Brazil will present its own set of challenges for visiting teams, even beyond the tropical heat. There’s traffic, price gouging, petty crime, a worrisomely slow pace of preparation, protests against extravagance in a nation beset by poverty. Then again, there’s Brazil’s beauty, music, food and drink, fashion and its religious devotion to football.

Security is job one, and the U.S. will not provide details. (In the 2002 book, *Terror on the Pitch*, Adam Robinson wrote that bin Laden-backed terrorists posing as hotel staff

came chillingly close to the U.S. at the 1998 World Cup in France.) Expense is job two, but exact costs, much of which are underwritten by FIFA, again are not shared. You can get an idea by multiplying the cost of a typical Cup vacation package (about \$8,000) by 50, adding costs for training, transportation, extra lodging, special meals, security, communications, hospitality ... forget it.

No nation envies the U.S. travel schedule, but most of them covet its base camp at São Paulo FC. That was a coup for King, who personally scouted 16 sites and 45 hotels in the city prior to the sign-up date of Sept. 1, 2012. Unaware of the U.S. match schedule but knowing that SPFC was easily the best site, King pressed “send” at the stroke of midnight.

What that now means is that the U.S. must fly 1,450 miles to Natal to play Ghana on June 16; 1,670 miles to Manaus for Portugal on

June 22; and then 1,330 miles to Recife to face Germany on June 26. There is talk as to whether the team will stay up north after one game to ease travel, but as King notes, “One thing I’ve learned is the importance of base camp. It’s good to have a home away from home, a place where you can feel comfortable.”

Should the U.S. get out of Group G, travel will be much easier, with most venues in the south and even a semi in São Paulo. Perhaps that’s looking too far ahead, but then, that is part of the job description for King, who was keeping an eye on the Sochi Games with a view toward the 2018 World Cup in Russia. As U.S. Soccer CEO Dan Flynn says, “The most important pass in soccer is the next one.”

And when this World Cup ends, what will King do to relax?

“Don’t forget,” he says, “we have the women’s World Cup in Canada next year.” ■



STARTING



TRAVEL AND EXPANSES

WE'LL SAY IT: THE U.S. IS SCREWED. OKAY, CHALLENGED. SO MUCH SO THAT THEY'VE CONSIDERED SHORTENING THE NEARLY 9,000-MILE TRIP WITH A NORTHERN LAYOVER. WHAT WON'T CHANGE: DISTANT SITES WITH AIR VIRTUALLY DRIPPING FROM HUMIDITY. BELGIUM, THOSE LUCKY DEVILS, DREW THE EASIEST OF THE 32 SCHEDULES. HERE'S HOW THEIR ROADS COMPARE. —EDUARDO ALVAREZ

U.S.

1 Natal | JUNE 16

84	67	99
HIGH	HUMIDITY %	FEELS LIKE

The U.S. has yet to beat Ghana in World Cup play. On top of that, the Black Stars are based just 270 miles south. Not nearly enough travel time for leg cramps to set in.

ROUND TRIP: 2,900 miles, 7 hours

2 Manaus | JUNE 22

87	65	102
HIGH	HUMIDITY %	FEELS LIKE

To avoid overheating, this is where the U.S. and Portugal could really use the newly approved two-minute timeouts (30th and 75th minutes)—if feels-like temps reach 90.

ROUND TRIP: 3,340 miles, 8½ hours

3 Recife | JUNE 26

81	69	94
HIGH	HUMIDITY %	FEELS LIKE

"Playing at 4 p.m. was superhuman," said Spain's Sergio Busquets after a June '13 Confed Cup game in nearby Fortaleza. What will the U.S. and Germany say after a noon game?

ROUND TRIP: 2,660 miles, 6½ hours

BELGIUM

1 Belo Horizonte | JUNE 17

76	50	86
HIGH	HUMIDITY %	FEELS LIKE

If the U.S. drew the Group of Death, the Red Devils drew the group of eternal life. Algeria, which meets Belgium here, and Russia have the Nos. 2 and 4 spots for easiest travel.

ROUND TRIP: 610 miles, 1½ hours

2 Rio de Janeiro | JUNE 22

76	62	88
HIGH	HUMIDITY %	FEELS LIKE

Oh, the fabled Maracana, where Brazil famously lost to Uruguay in 1950. History won't be made here against Russia, but the July 13 final holds promise.

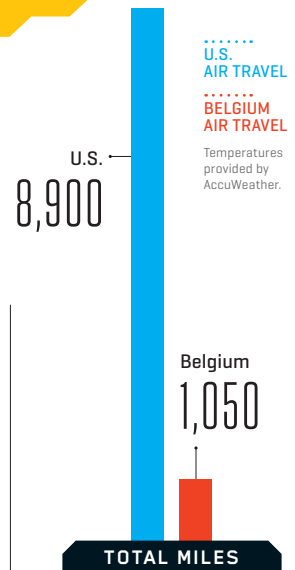
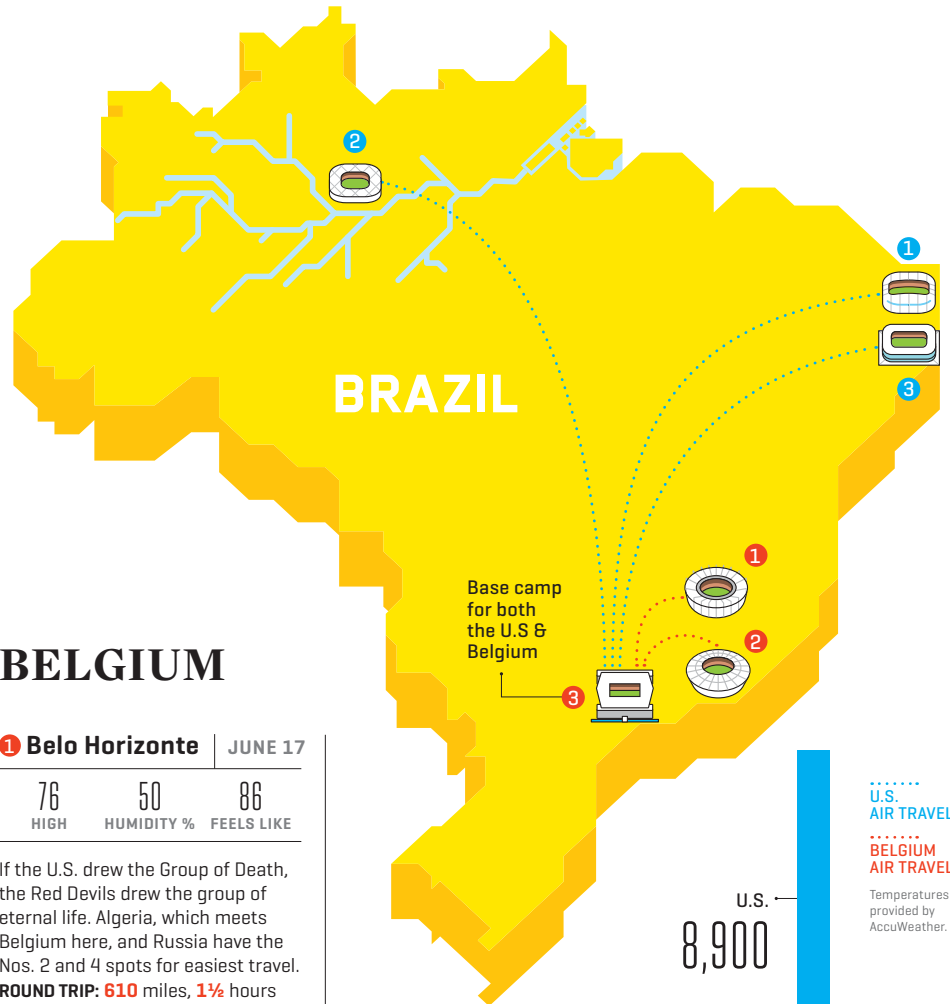
ROUND TRIP: 440 miles, 2 hours

3 Sao Paulo | JUNE 26

70	56	78
HIGH	HUMIDITY %	FEELS LIKE

Two workers died last November when the Arena de Sao Paulo partially collapsed. It's expected to be ready in plenty of time for Belgium's meeting with South Korea.

ROUND TRIP: 0 miles, 0 hours



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27%

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BY THE YEAR 2020



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* Source: The SHARP Center Taken from here: <http://irwg.research.umich.edu/pdf/OCR.pdf> 27% of U.S. public high schools, a total of 4,398 schools, would be without any interscholastic sports programs. When translated into sheer numbers of adolescents, an estimated 1,658,046 girls and 1,798,782 boys would not have any school-based sport activities to participate in by the year 2020.

STARTING

1

2

3

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X

6

7

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9

10

11



COUNTER ATTACKS

WITH SO MANY QUESTIONS SURROUNDING THE U.S. TEAM HEADING INTO BRAZIL, WE WENT TO THE GUYS WITH ALL THE ANSWERS. —DOUG McINTYRE

DOUG McINTYRE: DOES THE U.S. SURVIVE GROUP PLAY?

Alexi Lalas: If it's my money, I'm saying no. If it's your money, I'm saying yes.

Taylor Twellman: This team is disciplined enough to get three points out of Ghana. If they do, I think they've got a legit chance because the game in Manaus will be very difficult for Portugal. The U.S. will be more used to the travel, the weird weather.

WILL MLS BE BLAMED IF THE U.S. DOESN'T ADVANCE?

Twellman: Naturally. Look at the uproar when Clint Dempsey came back. Then Michael Bradley comes back? Immediately, everybody on Twitter and Facebook is saying we're doomed.

Lalas: If the U.S. plays poorly, people will say it's because these players came back to MLS. If the U.S. does well, it will be because these

players are good anyway.

Twellman: Isn't that what I just said?

Lalas: [Laughs] I don't understand half the stuff you say. If I did, I might agree with you.

WHO'S YOUR BREAKOUT PLAYER FOR THE U.S.?

Twellman: Either Graham Zusi or a defender—Matt Besler or Omar Gonzalez.

Lalas: How do you even



PREDICTION FOR THE THREE U.S. GAMES?

TWELLMAN (L)
U.S. 2
GHANA 1

U.S. 1
PORTUGAL 1

GERMANY 2
U.S. 1

LALAS (R)
TIE, TIE, LOSS

know Besler is going?

Twellman: I'm pretty positive he is. But I'll go with Zusi. He's a two-way player in that wide position. He can deliver a ball and do it against these opponents.

Lalas: I'm going with defense. Brad Evans.

Twellman: He's not guaranteed to go.

Lalas: Pretty positive he is.

THE U.S. IS DOWN A GOAL LATE. WHOM DO YOU BRING IN OFF THE BENCH?

Twellman: Is Landon Donovan starting?

FOR ME HE IS, YEAH.

Twellman: I'm not 100% sure Landon's starting.

Lalas: How dare you! It's un-American to say something like that.

Twellman: It was very interesting before the South Korea game, Landon saying he was okay with not starting, that he just wanted the team to win. Was there an underlying message there?

Lalas: That's poetry ... Eddie Johnson can do something off the bench. So can Juan Agudelo.

DOES BRAZIL WIN AT HOME THIS SUMMER?

Lalas: I don't think so. Spain has something to prove. Now they have the opportunity to go to Brazil and become the first European team to win in South America. That's something special.

Twellman: I think Brazil wins.

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RONALDO, MESSI, NEYMAR AND SUAREZ ARE FAVORITES TO WIN THE GOLDEN BALL. BUT WHICH EARN TOP MARKS IN OUR AWARDS? INTRODUCING THE BESTIES. — JORDAN BRENNER



BEST TIPNIK



RONALDO None, so he can give blood twice a year.

MESSI His son's name, Thiago, is inscribed on his left calf, along with the boy's handprints.

NEYMAR Has a tattoo of a diamond along with the word "sorella," which is Italian for "sister." His sister, Rafaella, has a matching design.

SUAREZ The name of his eldest daughter, Delfina, is

inked on his right wrist, which he kisses after he scores.

VERDICT RONALDO

Li'l Messi's hands are cute, but that may get creepy in years to come. Neymar? Sorta creepy now. While Suarez strikes a balance of sentiment and celebration, Ronaldo's choice to go untouched wins, especially considering the cause.

BEST GOAL CELEBRATION



RONALDO According to *The Sunday Mirror*, Ronaldo's 3-year-old son is the result of a one-night stand with a poor American waitress, who allegedly gave Ronaldo full custody and her silence in exchange for \$15 million.

MESSI Messi and his father paid \$5 million-plus in back taxes after an investigation for tax fraud in Spain.

NEYMAR Barcelona president Sandro Rosell resigned in January amid

reports that the club paid Neymar's family as much as 51 million euros to win him.

SUAREZ He bit Branislav Ivanovic of Chelsea as the two got tangled in a 2013 match.

VERDICT SUAREZ

It's tough to overcome tales of Ronaldo's love life—both real and fake—but Suarez really leaves his mark in this category.

BEST SCREEN

RONALDO Two World Cups, 10 games (4-3-3), two goals

MESSI Two World Cups, eight games (6-1-1), one goal

NEYMAR None

SUAREZ One World Cup, six games (3-2-1), three goals

VERDICT SUAREZ

Suarez was consistently sharp on goal during his trip to South Africa—not to mention a match-saving hand ball in

a quarterfinal against Ghana. Critics called him a cheater, but Uruguay—where he's now hailed a hero—lived to play another day.

BEST WORLD CUP RESUME

BEST NICKNAME



RONALDO CR7

MESSI La Pulga Atomica (Atomic Flea)

NEYMAR Joia (Jewel)

SUAREZ El Pistolero (The Gunner)

VERDICT MESSI

You'd think a global superstar could do better than a standard NBA nickname, but that's what Ronaldo got. While Neymar and Suarez are aptly described, Messi's moniker is flat-out perfect—he buzzes about the field with superhuman powers.

RONALDO "The Claw," which represents his son's attempts to climb out of his crib.

MESSI His is generally tame: He looks to the sky in memory of his grandmother.

NEYMAR His February dance with Dani Alves against Rayo Vallecano was epic—and an instant YouTube hit.

SUAREZ Recently mimicked the Hulk.

VERDICT NEYMAR

Given Suarez's well-known temper, the Hulk routine was hilarious and apt, while Messi's heavenly tribute and Ronaldo's references to his son (he also sucks his thumb) are sweet. But Neymar's got moves.

RATION

NDARL

RONALDO Ronaldo is routinely mocked for his embellishment, but nothing quite tops a flop in the 2006 World Cup third-place game against Germany. The opera music accompanying a YouTube vid with more than 600,000 views seals the deal.

MESSI "Messi never dives" is the famous refrain. Except, of course, when he does, like in an attempt to draw a PK against Real Sociedad in 2011. That one earned a bit of veiled snark from then-Real Madrid manager Jose Mourinho, whose team "doesn't dive, unlike some players."

NEYMAR Moments like Neymar's feigned elbow to the face in last year's Confed Cup are why GIFs exist.

SUAREZ Leading up to the first Merseyside derby of the 2012-13 season, then-Everton manager David Moyes chided Suarez for his tendency to dive. So after Suarez slotted a goal home, he raced to the sideline and flopped—at Moyes' feet.

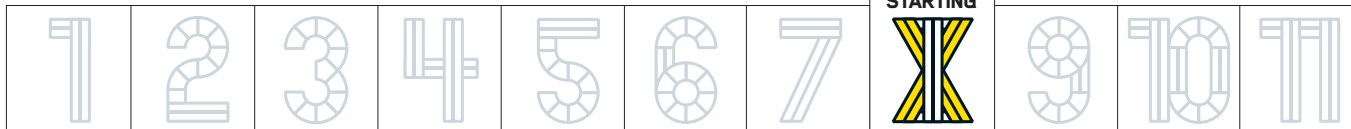
VERDICT SUAREZ

Whether he was reacting to his rep or owning it, you gotta dig the skill—and stones—it took to fire back at Moyes.

BEST DIVE



STARTING



TAKE IT OUTSIDE

For big games in Brazil, streets are closed and fans flood the area to watch their beloved Seleção on the big screen. Closing your street could pose a problem, but getting the TV outside for a game or two with friends and neighbors seems doable.

NO BUDWEISER HERE

Brazilians love their beer, but they are also quite proud of their national tippie: the caipirinha. Simply enough, it is cachaça, a white rum, mixed with lime juice and sugar. Enjoy, but mind the kick.

LEAVE THE SAUCE BEHIND

When it comes to grilling, Brazilians frown upon America's fascination with barbecue sauce. Hot dogs and burgers are also a no-no, as are gas barbecues. All you need is salt for seasoning, a few rump steaks—cooked with the fat—and a charcoal grill.

FORGET THE FIGA

Put away your grandma's *figa*. Brazil's classic good luck charm has been shelved for more modern superstitions like never switching spots on the couch and always wearing the same clothes from game to game. Everyone around you may lose, but maybe your team won't. A more hygienic insurance policy for your side? Clutching small medals etched with images of saints—Mother Mary and St. George are Brazil's go-tos.

SWEAR LIKE A SAILOR

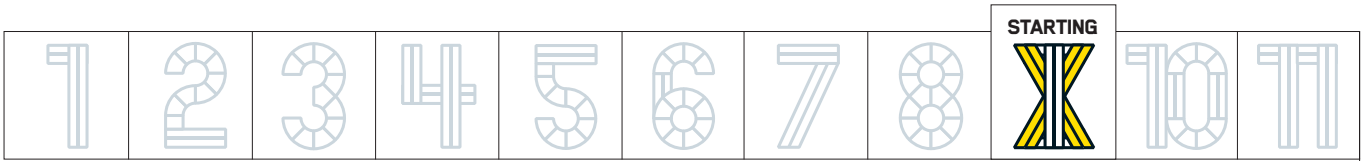
An unwritten law in Brazil grants immunity to those who forget the presence of the kids when shouting expletives during a game. Exactly which expletives, you ask? Well, that's what the Internet is for.

GET PATRIOTIC

Brazilians love to belt out the national anthem before the game, but this doesn't mean they'll get the words right. Brazilians invariably stumble through the very complicated, practically Elizabethan lyrics. "Thou art a beautiful, strong and intrepid colossus/And thy future mirrors thy greatness." Just remember to hit the last line with gusto and you may just pass for a *brazuca*: "Brazil!"

WATCH LIKE A BRAZILIAN

NOT GOING TO THE WORLD CUP? DON'T FRET. HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO TO FEEL LIKE YOU'RE THERE WITH THE OTHER 500,000 OR SO FANS ROAD-TRIPPING TO BRAZIL. —FERNANDO DUARTE

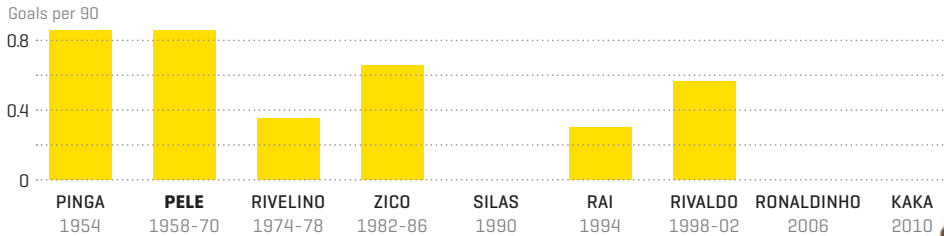


THERE'S NO STRESS LIKE HOME

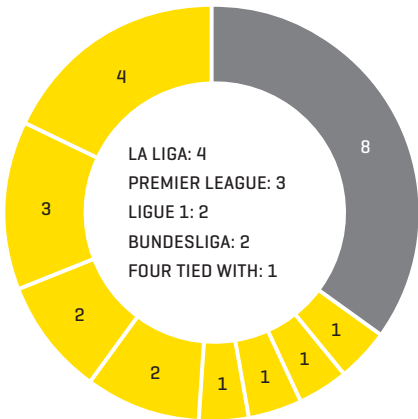
THE SELEÇÃO HAVE BEEN UNBEATABLE IN BRAZIL, BUT THEY'LL STILL FEEL THE HEAT: FROM LIVING UP TO LEGENDS TO STRETCHING A STREAK TO EARNING ALL-IMPORTANT CLUB BRAGGING RIGHTS. —GUEORGUI MILKOV AND FERNANDO OLIVIERI



THE MIGHTY NO. 10s Neymar's .874 Confed Cup scoring rate is better than the WC paces of Pele and Pinga.



A-TEAM DIVIDED



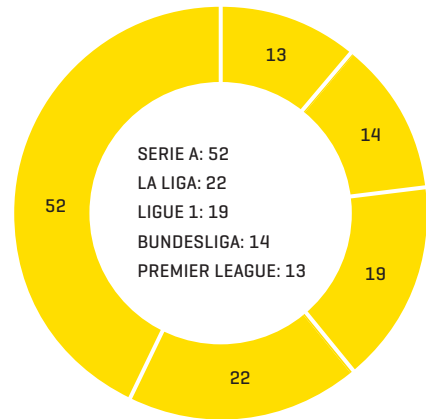
Using Brazil's Confed Cup roster, just eight of 23 players are now on domestic clubs. Fourteen are in seven Euro leagues, and one is in MLS.

THE SELEÇÃO HAVEN'T LOST IN



COMPETITIVE HOME GAMES, A STREAK THAT DATES TO 1975.

EUROPEAN VOCATION

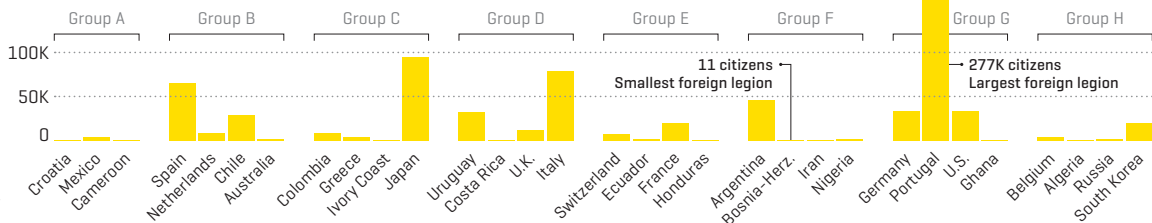


Brazilians flock to Portugal: 105 play in Primeira Liga, only 15 fewer than in the top levels of Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the U.K. combined.

EXPAT FACTOR

Brazil will play to a demanding crowd, whose jeers won't be the only ones in Portuguese.

Figures from Brazil's Ministry of Justice as of July 2012.





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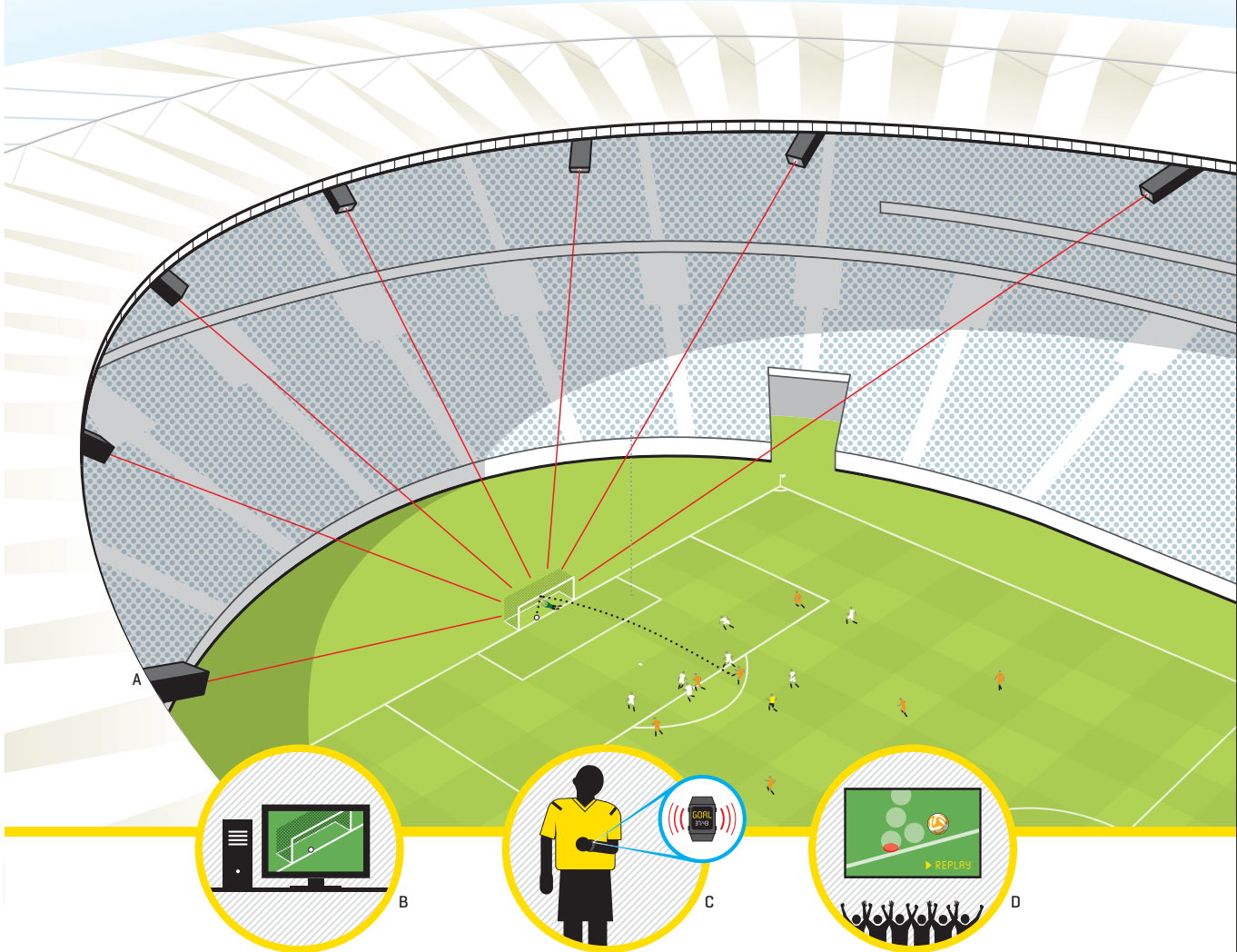
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GOOOOOOOOOAL?

REAL-TIME TECHNOLOGY TAKES THE QUESTION OUT OF THE CALL. —DANIELA HERNANDEZ



DURING THE ROUND of 16 of the 2010 World Cup, Germany was up 2-1 against England before halftime. Then England's Frank Lampard shot what could have been the equalizer. The ball bounced off the crossbar and into the goal. Everyone saw it except the two who mattered most: the ref and his linesman. Germany ultimately trounced England 4-1.

That infamous lost goal exposed a blind spot for FIFA and pushed the sport into the digital age. Four years later, goal-line technology will make its World Cup debut. "The most important decision of the game will be decided fairly and correctly," said Rolf Dittrich of GoalControl, the German company FIFA chose to outfit all 12 host stadiums in Brazil.

GoalControl-4D is powered by a sophisticated system of 14 high-speed cameras set on a stadium's roof and/or catwalk—seven focused on each goal [A]. The cameras are hooked up to a computer [B] and transmit

images taken at about 500 frames per second. The computer scans these pictures to track the ball's location to within two-tenths of an inch. If it detects that the ball crossed the goal line, it beams a signal to special watches worn by the referees [C]. The watches then vibrate and light up to alert the ref of a goal.

This all happens within one second, so there's no need to interrupt the game to review the data. From there, all the data are stored and can be reviewed, replayed and reanalyzed anytime [D].

The system was used in the 2013 Confederations Cup, and even with no close calls, it still has a few hurdles to clear before booting up in June. A FIFA-accredited institute will run field tests to measure accuracy and reliability. And before each game, refs will make the final call on the functionality. Let's hope they're paying attention this time.

THE YANKS ARE COMING

Inside: U.S. Soccer's March to Brazil

Premieres May 13th 7PM/ET

ESPN





WORLD



CUP



GUIDE



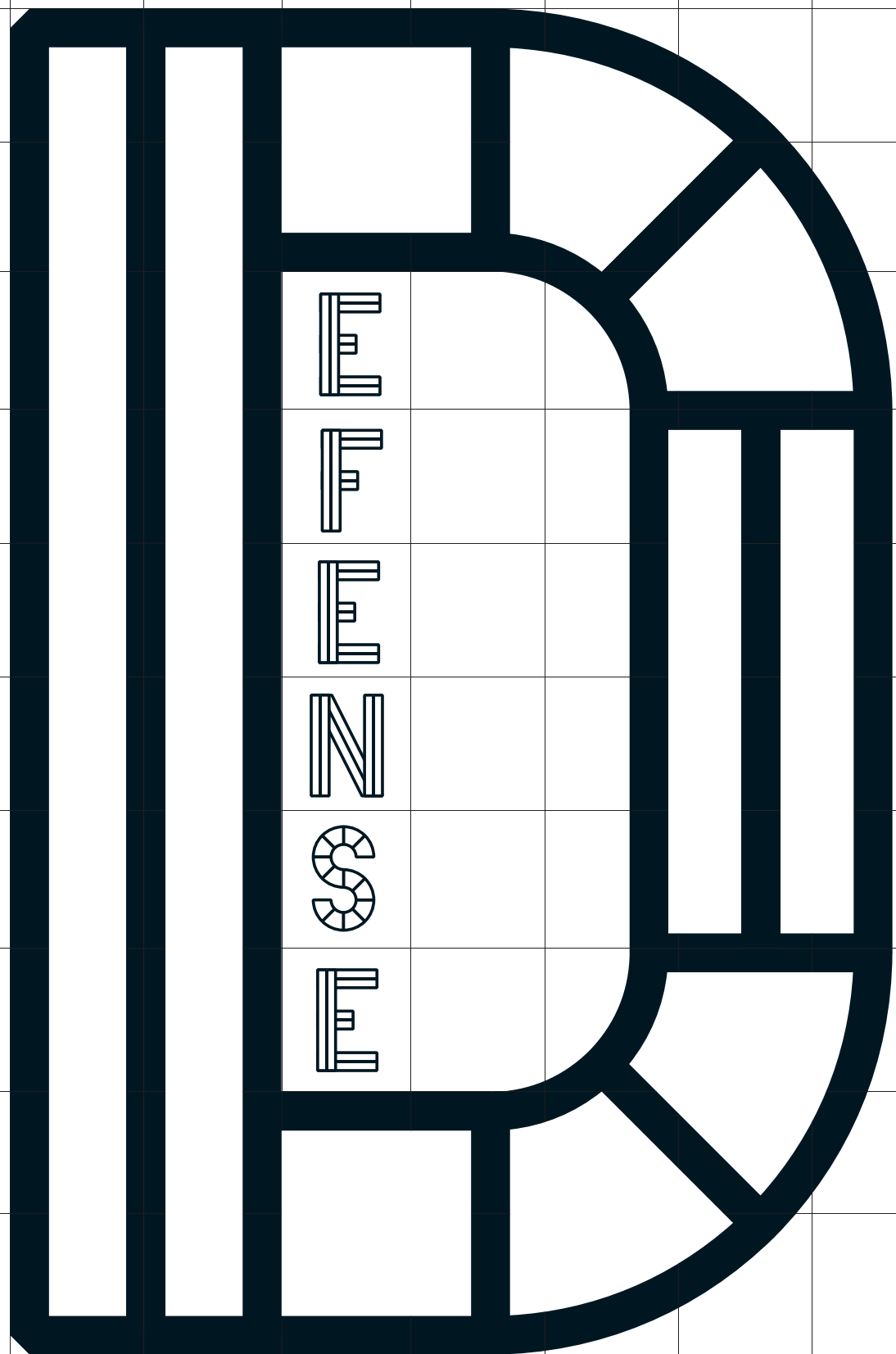
THE WORLD CUP IS NOT JUST A 6-KILOGRAM, 18-KARAT-GOLD TROPHY. IT'S A dream for 32 different nations, a prism that will radiate *futebol* into every corner of the planet, a glorious quadrennial excuse to skip work and celebrate the beautiful game. Trying to capture the history, flavor and prospects of the World Cup in a single issue is pure folly, but we can still try. We will meet the two-headed future of the U.S. central defense, profile Jermaine Jones, the German-American who hopes to open eyes in his long-awaited debut, and talk to U.S. captain Clint Dempsey on the eve of his third and perhaps final World Cup. We'll parse the near-downfall of Mexico, revisit Barbosa, the goalie who was blamed for host Brazil's loss to Uruguay in 1950, and forecast fates for all 32 sides. Basically, we'll take our cue from Michael Bradley, here leading the U.S. men onto the field in Utah to practice before a qualifier against Honduras. Like Bradley, who has also played for teams in Netherlands, Germany, Italy, England and Canada, we're covering a lot of ground.



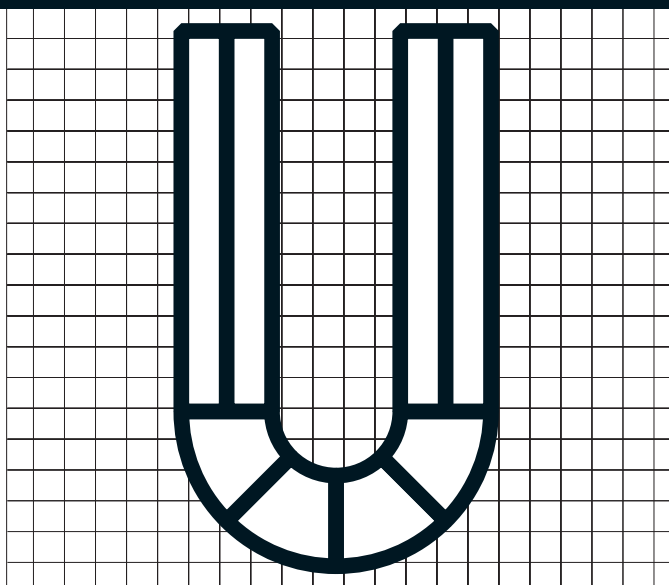
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IF MATT BESLER AND OMAR GONZALEZ BOLSTER A PERENNIALLY SHAKY U.S. DEFENSE, THEY JUST MAY PROVE THAT HOMEGROWN PLAYERS CAN BE WORLD CLASS TOO. BY ANDREW LEWELLEN PHOTOGRAPH BY CRISTAAN FELBER



UNITED STATES NATIONAL

team defender Matt Besler stands in the visiting locker room of the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, waiting to start the most important game of his life. Outside, on a warm March 2013 night, 86,000 Mexican fans are on their feet, eager to watch their beloved national team take down their bitter rivals from the north.

Besler had found out only that morning that he'd be replacing veteran Clarence Goodson, who'd injured his hamstring four days earlier. That afternoon, Mexican fans had swarmed the U.S. team's bus, banging on its side as it pulled into the stadium. The bus shook on its wheels, and fans pressed their red-and-white-and-green-painted faces against the windows, screaming from close range at the men they'd taunt from the stands a few hours later. Rising to exit the bus, Besler took a deep breath. Tried to relax—

tried to act like he'd been here before. Like this wasn't just his second game for the U.S. senior squad. He gathered his composure, strode toward the front of the bus and felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Goodson, holding something in his hands.

"Bees, you forgot your cleats on the bus, on your seat. You might want these for the game."

Now, standing by his locker, he is unsure of what to expect as he watches his coach, Jurgen Klinsmann, walk up to him. Since Klinsmann was named the United States coach in July 2011, he'd been outspoken about his feelings that the best American players should be playing for European clubs. In six World Cup qualifiers in 2012, he'd never started a Major League Soccer player at defense. Besler and his partner at central defense this night, Omar Gonzalez, are the antithesis of Klinsmann's preferred model—they are American-born and have played only in America.

Klinsmann reaches out his hand. Besler shakes it. "Matt, you know you're ready for this," Klinsmann says. "We all believe you're ready for this. Go out and play well."

The words give him confidence. Before kickoff, Besler shakes hands with Gonzalez. "We can do this," they say.

And they do. They close down their men, combining for eight clearances and six interceptions. They survive a barrage of crosses and chances in the last 15 minutes of the game. It isn't always pretty. They make mistakes. Besler earns a yellow card in the 20th minute for a tactical foul. But after 90 minutes of play, Besler and Gonzalez have held Mexico scoreless.

In the locker room after the game, Besler still feels the buzzing energy of the stadium. His head rings. Klinsmann approaches him. "Great game. But I knew you could do it."

THE DILEMMA THAT Besler and Gonzalez still face is one of conflicting dreams. One is the American dream: Come here, improve your life. The other is the dream of the American soccer player: Leave here, improve your game. At the core of that conflict is a single question. Where can the best American soccer players reach their full potential, Europe or America?

Jurgen Klinsmann has a simple answer: Europe. He has said it repeatedly since he began leading the U.S. team in 2011. And for about two years, his players listened; he had four prominent American players in England, one in Italy, one in Holland, one in Denmark. But there was—and is—an inherent problem with



Gonzalez and Besler ranked 1-2 in clearances for the U.S. during qualifying, combining for 88.

Klinsmann's decree: It contrasts with basic American ideals. America is a land of opportunity, not a place that you leave. Except when it comes to soccer. The fledgling MLS cannot compete with leagues whose teams have been competing for centuries. But MLS serves a purpose for U.S. soccer players and filled an important void when it was created in 1996. For Americans who are not identified as potentially great at a young age, the league is an ideal place to develop. Besler, 27, and Gonzalez, 25, have spent their entire careers doing just that since entering the league in 2009 as top-10 picks in the MLS SuperDraft. They both studied under former USMNT defenders: for Besler, Kansas City coach Peter Vermes; for Gonzalez, then-Galaxy defender Gregg Berhalter. Each started more than three-quarters of his team's games as a rookie, and each has since amassed more than 125 caps for the club that drafted him.

MLS got them to that night in Mexico City, enabled them to succeed then and in the months ahead. The two would start at central defense in four of the next five U.S. games after Mexico, all wins. In those four games with Besler and Gonzalez together, the team gave up only four goals and posted two shutouts.

NO LONGER JUST an injury replacement, Besler had become Klinsmann's starter at left center back. And with Gonzalez beside him, it hadn't escaped anyone's notice that they were representing the domestic league on the field. Back in Kansas City, after every practice, reporters asked Besler: "What's it like representing MLS with the U.S. national team?" "You and Omar are both MLS players, and you're forming a great partnership; how has that been so far?" It was fun, he says. It was exciting. "I feel more pride representing the MLS," he says, "than I feel pressure from the MLS to do well."

You have to go back more than a decade to find a time when the domestic league has had such a positive impact on the U.S. national team—and the last time the league reaped such a benefit from the play of the U.S. as well.

Bruce Arena fielded an American team in the 2002 World Cup that featured six MLS starters, two of them—Eddie Pope and Jeff Agoos—at central defense. That squad beat an immensely talented Portugal team in its opener, knocked off bitter rival Mexico in the round of 16 and then lost a heartbreaker to Germany in the quarters 1-0. Four months after the World Cup, the MLS Cup final drew 61,316 fans, still the highest-ever Cup attendance.

Since that 2002 team, no two players have been able to provide

stability at central defense for the U.S., and, not coincidentally, neither the 2006 nor the 2010 team made it back to the quarters. Errors at the position were at the heart of both teams' losses.

"I want to become the backbone of this team," Besler says, fully aware of his position's reputation. But come June, these two defenders will face teams and players the likes of which they have never crossed in a competitive match. Not at a youth World Cup, not in college, not in Major League Soccer, not in World Cup qualifying.

Arena, an advocate for MLS players on the national team and now Gonzalez's coach with the Galaxy, doesn't disagree with Klinsmann when he says the quality of play at the World Cup will be a big step up.

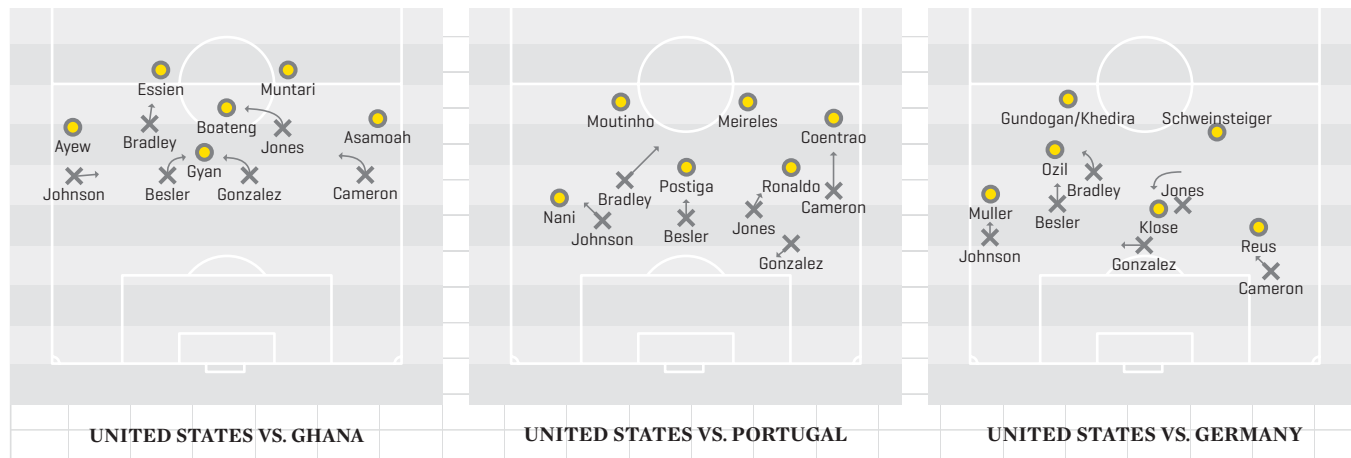
"[In MLS] you don't go against Cristiano Ronaldo, some of the players with Germany," Arena says. "They're different. They're big, strong, athletic. If you don't come from one of the big club teams in the world, you're not playing in those kinds of games during the season. So it's certainly gonna be an awesome challenge."

Pope, the first three-World Cup veteran to spend his entire career in MLS, understands even more fully what these players are up against. "Once you're in the World Cup," he says, "the quality of forwards that you're gonna be marking is massive. As a center back, you have to try to be mistake-free. And it's so hard to do. You can play well for 89 minutes, but you make that one mistake and you've had a bad game. But that's the life of a center back. That's the pressure that comes along with the position."

Central defense hasn't been a glamorous position for decades, not since Franz Beckenbauer and his like had the run of the field as sweepers. It takes an incredibly special performance just to win a Player of the Month honor, let alone the Ballon d'Or, as Fabio Cannavaro did in 2006. For most, worth is measured in caps, not goals. So when Besler admits, "The World Cup is going to be at a different level, so we have to find a way to push each other," perhaps it's not a surprise that Klinsmann wants his players earning those caps in the best leagues possible. Will they be able to reach that World Cup level playing in MLS, where the competition can't stack up to the best in Europe?

IN A CENTURYLINK Field suite at a Sounders game the night before a June qualifier, Gonzalez pulled Klinsmann aside to ask for a bit of career advice. He was in the last year of his contract with the Galaxy, and he had options on the table. Ever since he'd entered

ON THEIR MARKS Each team in Group G poses a new challenge for the Yanks: Ghana's open distribution, Cristiano Ronaldo's world-beating ability and Germany's multipronged attack. —ADRIAN MELVILLE



Ghana wants to distribute into space, so the U.S. defense must stay compact and press into midfield. Besler and Gonzalez both will watch forward Asamoah Gyan while blocking lanes for potential through balls as backs Fabian Johnson and Geoff Cameron pinch in. Jermaine Jones and Michael Bradley will be left to defend Ghana's central mids.

Portugal's best chances are through Ronaldo, so both Cameron and Jones will try to hold him. But if he distributes to his flanks, defender Fabio Coentrao (whom Cameron will pick up) or midfielder Nani (under Johnson's watch) awaits. Besler will man-mark striker Postiga, as Gonzalez sits deep to cover for balls that get through the gap.

Mesut Ozil is Germany's best playmaker, so stopping them begins with slowing him. Bradley picks him up early, but Besler will close in as Ozil runs down the field. Gonzalez will be busy with striker Miroslav Klose, so Jones and Cameron will slide to the center to help with him and Marco Reus. That leaves Johnson alone with speedy Thomas Muller.

MLS, he'd been the most promising defender in America. Now clubs in Germany, England and Mexico were interested in the 6'5" center back, and the Galaxy were ready to counter those offers by making him a Designated Player. He told Klinsmann he wanted to stay in Los Angeles. He asked his coach what he thought.

"He told me he thinks it's fine that I stay here in MLS, and hearing him say that put my mind at ease," Gonzalez says. "Come the year of the World Cup, you want to be playing games. He wants his players playing games. He respects the league, and he respected my decision to stay." But his coach soon added a postscript: Even if not now, eventually Gonzalez would have to go to Europe.

That is, unless a new arrival to the Pacific Northwest has managed to change the script. On Aug. 2, news broke that Clint Dempsey was transferring from Tottenham to Seattle. Five months after Klinsmann called Dempsey's move "a challenge" to overcome, Michael Bradley went and did the same thing—a move from AS Roma to Toronto FC was announced in January. Over the next month, the argument continued to play out in the media. Those who supported the moves argued that taking the field, even for a less talented side, is better than sitting the bench on a European club side. Klinsmann had his doubts: On Feb. 7, he told ESPN he questioned American players' confidence in their abilities. "They have the qualities," he said, "but do they have the belief?"

THIRTEEN DAYS AFTER Dempsey's introduction in Seattle, Gonzalez sat at a table lined with microphones in front of a Galaxy backdrop in the StubHub Center in Carson, Calif., being unveiled as the team's new Designated Player. Arena, sitting to Gonzalez's right, took the

opportunity to make a strong statement, perhaps even pointed at Klinsmann himself. "Omar is what we're about in the United States and Major League Soccer," he said. "He came through our collegiate system, the club system in Dallas, and I think this signing today is significant for all American players."

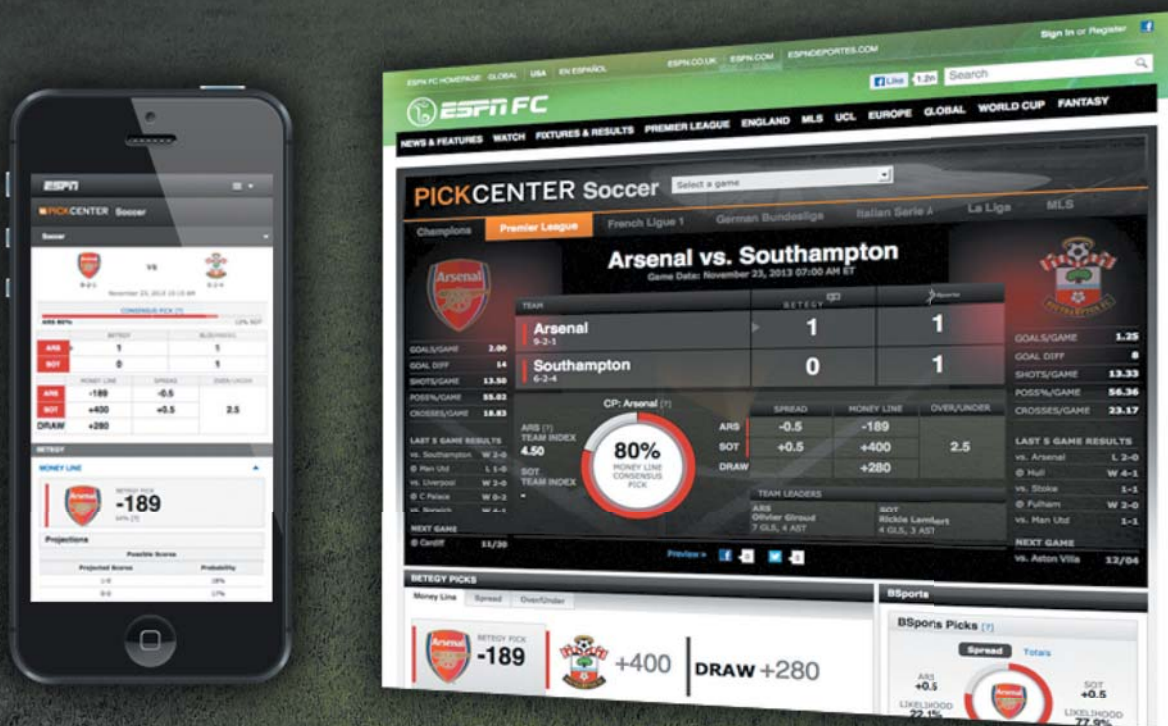
Gonzalez hadn't just become the first American defender to become a Designated Player. He had become the first American player to work his way up the ranks of American soccer, never playing in Europe, and be paid seven figures annually to play soccer in his native country. He and Besler both hope he's not the last. "In the future, MLS should try to have as many national team players as possible playing in America," Besler says. "You see that with Italy. You have almost nine out of 10 guys on the national team playing in Italy."

He's right. On the top European national teams—Spain, Germany, Italy, Netherlands—the majority of the national team players compete in the domestic league. The success of Spain on the international level has been a direct outgrowth of the work Barcelona has done to develop players. That type of model—an American club developing enough players to field a U.S. national team to win a World Cup—is a lofty one.

But perhaps not impossible. And if it happens, two men will look back and remember how it used to be: Besler, a kid from Kansas City playing for his hometown club, and Gonzalez, a child of Mexican immigrants who made history by deciding to play soccer in America. Two athletes trying to resolve the conflict of how to live both the American dream and the dream of the American soccer player. ■

EXCLUSIVE PICKING TOOLS

FOR THE FIFA WORLD CUP AND BEYOND



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JERMAINE JONES STRUGGLED WITH HIS IDENTITY, UNTIL HE FOUND WHO HE WAS MISSING. BY DOUG MCINTYRE

STEPPING INTO THE elevator, Jermaine Jones could feel his heart in his throat. Not much can rattle the six-foot, 170-pound German-American, but the man waiting for him in the lobby did. Jermaine hadn't seen his father since he was 6 years old—and now he was in Miami to meet him. He wasn't even sure he'd recognize him. It'd been so long. Twenty years long. The elevator doors closed, and floor by floor, Jermaine was closer than he'd ever been to the moment he thought might never come.

Just two months earlier, Jermaine had spoken to his father for the first time since he was a child. His wife, Sarah Jones, had tracked him down as a surprise for Jermaine's 26th birthday. "I told him, 'If you want to call your father, here is the number,'" Sarah says. "He couldn't believe it." Father and son have talked regularly since then and planned to meet in Miami when Jermaine was on winter break from his club team at the time, FC Schalke 04. His father, a Mississippi native, said he would make the trip from Southern California.

The elevator slowed to a stop, and the doors opened. "I get out, and I'm looking, looking," Jermaine says. Then he spotted him. How could he not recognize him? This man who looks so much like himself, the same nose and mouth. The same furrowed brow and intense eyes. This man who's also looking for him.

Jermaine collapsed to the floor, crying.







Six years have passed since that day in Miami, and Jermaine Jones has cemented his place on the U.S. men's national team. Of the five players born and trained in Germany who helped the U.S. qualify for a seventh consecutive World Cup in 2013, Jones is the undisputed alpha. He's a heavily tattooed, hard-as-nails defensive midfielder who, since 2011, has picked up more yellow cards at the club level than all but four players in Europe's four elite leagues. The 32-year-old's smashmouth style makes him a favorite of Jurgen Klinsmann's. The coach knows how important his Bundesliga and Champions League experience will be to the U.S.'s fortunes in Brazil. "Our opponents have a lot of respect for Jermaine," Klinsmann says. "He's a guy who will never give up."

Not everyone sees it this way. Many U.S. fans view Jones, now playing for the club Besiktas in Turkey, as a liability, a World Cup-changing red card waiting to happen. They point to his slew-foot tackle of Brazilian superstar Neymar during a 2012 friendly or to the elbow he threw at a Costa Rican defender's head in a qualifying match last year. "Teams need different leaders," says U.S. keeper Tim Howard, "and I think because of the environment Jermaine's been bred in, he's certainly not afraid to speak his mind."

JERMAINE PULLED HIMSELF off the lobby floor. His father, Halbert Jones, was crying too. Unsure what to say to each other, they hugged in the lobby. Halbert didn't know what to expect from this meeting with his first-born son. He feared his son would harbor resentment.

Jermaine has only faint childhood memories of spending time with his father, then a staff sergeant in the U.S. Army. He remembers car rides on his lap to the base outside of Frankfurt and his dad calling him Junior, their shared middle name. "Jermaine was really sensitive when he was little," says Jermaine's mother, Barbara. "If his dad said, 'Listen, you sit there and be quiet,' he would start crying."

He was so young, just in kindergarten, when his father left his pregnant German mother, who then had to care for him and his toddler sister alone. And there in that hotel lobby, Jermaine still didn't know what broke up his family. All he knew was what his mother told him so many years ago: "Sometimes relationships between people who love each other don't work out," she had said.

FOR JERMAINE, SOCCER was always going to be what saved him. His mother moved the family to Bonames, one of Frankfurt's most dangerous neighborhoods. While the kids around him started selling drugs and committing crimes, Jermaine focused on helping his mother raise his brother and sister—and he played lots of soccer. He was a natural goal scorer with endless stamina and a mean streak he's yet to shake. The older kids would pick him for their teams; local hustlers would bet on his games. At 14 years old, Jermaine joined Eintracht Frankfurt's youth football academy. He received a stipend of 200 deutsche marks (about \$100) a week, half of which he gave to his mother. Five years later, he signed a pro contract and went on to represent Germany at the 2001 FIFA U20 World Cup. "I was happy to play for Germany," Jermaine says, "but I'm not the typical German. I always listened to American music. I feel the American side more. And ever since I was young, I wanted the chance to play for America."

Growing up, it was enough for Jermaine to think that his mom and dad just didn't work out. But as a teenager, he really began to miss his father. "That was the moment I said it's bulls— your dad is not here," Jermaine says. At 20, he got his father's initials tattooed on the back of his neck. He contacted the U.S. military to find Halbert, but that led nowhere. Jermaine was out of options. He couldn't help but wonder, "If my father sees a Jermaine Jones playing for America in the World Cup, maybe it would lead somewhere."

There was one problem with this thinking: Since he played in that U20 World Cup, he was no longer eligible to switch teams. The onetime forward then focused on breaking into Germany's all-world squad as a midfielder. And he did, briefly, playing three friendlies for the three-time World Cup winner in 2008 under Jogi Low, Klinsmann's successor. But when FIFA changed its rules in 2009, allowing dual nationals who hadn't appeared in senior-level competitive games to switch allegiances, Jermaine didn't hesitate. It may have started as a boyhood dream to play for the U.S., but the reality was, he also wanted to play in a World Cup. His chances were better with a developing U.S. rather than an established Germany.

A shin injury kept him out of the 2010 World Cup for the U.S., but heading into Brazil, Jermaine has established himself as part of the

In 2011, Jones saluted his dad with his first goal and helped shut out Messi in a friendly.

squad's spine, which also includes 2010 veterans Michael Bradley, Clint Dempsey, Tim Howard and Jozy Altidore. But that's not to say his integration into the U.S. team was always smooth. "Because he grew up in Germany, maybe in the beginning he was more seen as a German kid than an American one," Klinsmann says. "But he's proved that he deserves to be part of this program, and his fighting nature is extremely important to us."

AS THE EVENING went on, the subject finally came up: Why did he leave? Halbert started telling Jermaine about the secret he and Barbara had kept for two decades. How he had been involved in a high-stakes drug trafficking ring and was arrested and charged with smuggling and distributing cocaine and heroin. That he was sentenced to 52 years in the Military Correctional Complex in Leavenworth, Kan. The young couple, married just eight years, he continued, felt they had only one option: They would file for divorce, and the family would stay in Germany. Jermaine's mother promised she would never tell the children; and she never did.

Halbert tried to apologize to his son. He said he would have never thought he'd put his family in that situation. That he was naive then, stupid. Released from prison after about eight years, he had also tried to find Jermaine, but it proved more difficult than he imagined. Since then, he'd remarried, had two children and started driving big rigs cross-country to support them.

Jermaine told his father, "It happened, it's okay. We look forward now. I'm happy that you're here, that my kids can see their granddad. That's more important than what happened years in the past."

The two haven't talked about the past since. They've just found other things to talk about and other things to do. Every time Jermaine vacations at the home he bought in Los Angeles, he includes Halbert in the plans. And just as Jermaine had hoped, his five children get to spend time with their grandfather.

Other relationships have also been forged or mended since that time. In 2011, Halbert visited Germany with his wife for the first time since his arrest to meet the son he never knew, Jermaine's brother, Kevin, and to reconnect with daughter Natasha. "Finding my father was the best birthday present I ever had," Jermaine says. "And not only for me but for my sister, my brother and my kids too."

That same year on Father's Day, Jermaine scored his first goal for the U.S. and celebrated with a salute. He knew Halbert was watching at home. "It was my way of giving my father a little gift," Jermaine told reporters after the game. "He was a soldier: It was a sign of respect for him."

But perhaps the greatest impact of all these colliding worlds will be felt in Brazil when Jermaine and the U.S. open play on June 16. "I plan on going to Brazil for the first week," says Halbert.

And when Jermaine Jones steps onto the field outfitted in red, white and blue, everyone will know exactly who he is. **F**



IN THEIR FATHERS' LAND: [from left] Danny Williams, Jermaine Jones, Terrence Boyd, prospect Julian Green, John Brooks, Alfredo Morales and Fabian Johnson (not pictured: Timmy Chandler)

JURGEN-AMERICANS

Although Jermaine Jones and Fabian Johnson are the only German-Americans expected to start for the U.S. in Brazil, five more could be regulars by 2018. Each was blooded in the all-world Bundesliga, the same circuit that produced U.S. coach Jurgen Klinsmann. All of the German-Americans competing for the U.S. are the sons of former American servicemen. —D.M.

TERRENCE BOYD, 23, F RAPID VIENNA

U.S. caps: 12
The affable Boyd calls himself "probably the most patriotic guy on the team." A physical striker, he's been a prolific scorer with Rapid but is still looking for his first international goal.

JOHN BROOKS, 21, D HERTHA BERLIN

U.S. caps: 3
The rangy, skillful lefty has the size and the tools, but he showed in the Americans' March 5 loss to Ukraine that this summer's World Cup will come just a little too soon. Pencil him in for 2018.

TIMMY CHANDLER, 24, D NURNBERG

U.S. caps: 10
Chandler was expected to rejoin the Yanks before injuring his knee in February. If the defender recovers in time, he would help in Brazil.

JULIAN GREEN, 18, F BAYERN MUNICH

U.S. caps: 0
Klinsmann is aggressively recruiting this goal-scoring prodigy, who trained with the U.S. in March but has yet to commit. Would a World Cup roster spot seal the deal?

FABIAN JOHNSON, 26, D HOFFENHEIM

U.S. caps: 19
The speedy Johnson won a European title with Germany's under-21 squad in 2009, and he is a surefire starter for the U.S. in Brazil. He switched allegiances in 2011, not long after Klinsmann was hired.

JERMAINE JONES, 32, MF BESIKTAS

U.S. caps: 39
Jones arrived about a year before Klinsmann and, until 2014, had spent much of his career playing in Germany with UEFA Champions League mainstay Schalke.

ALFREDO MORALES, 23, D INGOLSTADT

U.S. caps: 1
The hard-tackling tri-national [Peru] trained with the U.S. in March but isn't a legit candidate for this World Cup. He could play a big role next cycle, though—if Peru doesn't snap him up.

DANNY WILLIAMS, 25, MF READING

U.S. caps: 13
Hampered by injury this season, Williams is making a late push for a World Cup spot. It can only help if the Royals earn promotion to the Premier League.

THE MANY SIDES OF



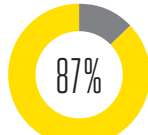
DEMPSEY

WE SAT WITH CLINT DEMPSEY TO TALK THROUGH A LONG YEAR FOR CAPTAIN AMERICA: 37 GAMES, FOUR TEAMS AND LOTS OF AIR MILES.
—DOUG McINTYRE

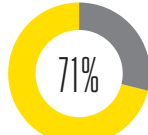
ASSISTED SHOTS



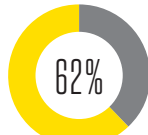
TOTTENHAM



FULHAM



SEATTLE



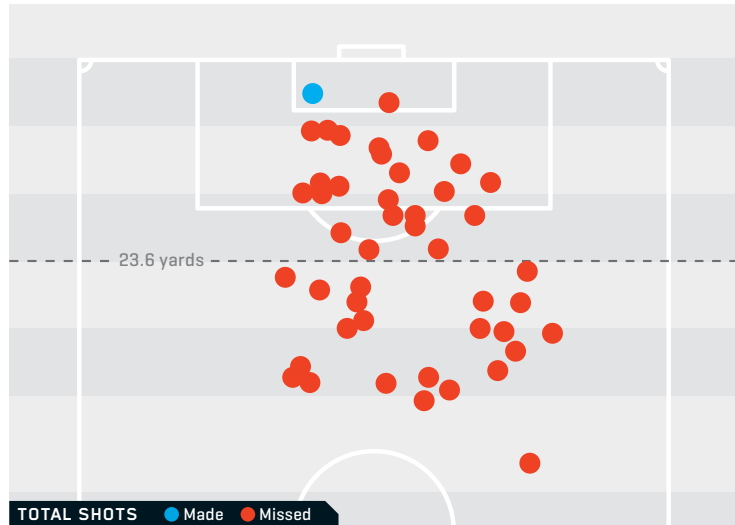
U.S.

TOTTENHAM

MARCH-MAY 2013

10 GAMES, FOUR GOALS

Dempsey began last year's Premier League season as the highest-paid American soccer player ever with a new three-year, \$22 million contract. By March, he'd jelled with his teammates and was utilizing their skill: 27 of his 30 shots were started from a teammate's assist, the highest rate of any team (and a full 28% better than his rate this year for the U.S.). "In Europe, players' first touch is better, and the speed of play is quicker," Dempsey says. "People see the gaps and play passes immediately, which makes it easier to create chances. The quicker that people around you make decisions, the more open looks you're going to get."



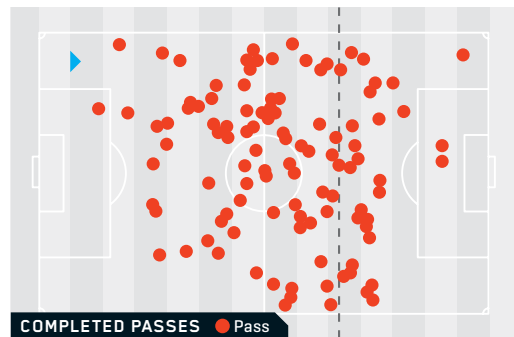
SEATTLE AUGUST-NOVEMBER 2013 | 12 GAMES, ONE GOAL

Despite success at Tottenham, Dempsey moved home to the U.S. in the offseason after Seattle "moved mountains" to get him. But he struggled in his first months, in part because he wasn't selective enough: 57% of his 46 shots came from outside the penalty area, and his average shot distance [23.6 yards] was three yards beyond his career average. Dempsey partly blames a lack of spatial awareness. "Soccer is a team game, and you need team chemistry to play well and create chances to score," he says. "You have to create for yourself too, but if you're not getting the ball in good spots, that's difficult."

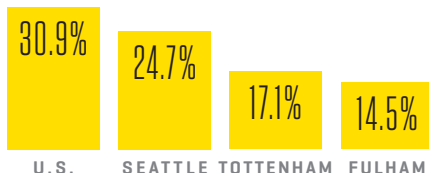
FULHAM JANUARY-MARCH 2014 | FIVE GAMES, ZERO GOALS

During the MLS offseason, Dempsey headed back to the club with which he started his Premier League career for a less-than-inspiring loan. "I was coming off an injury when I went to Fulham," Dempsey notes, "but I knew that it would be a great opportunity to get fit and play against good competition." Playing farther back in the midfield at the Prem bottom dweller, Dempsey attempted just 6.7 passes per 90 minutes in the

attacking third [compared with 11.1 for the U.S., 12.4 for Tottenham and 14.1 for Seattle]. But West London welcomed him back warmly: Two of Fulham's four best-attended games were during his stay, outdoing home games against Man City, Chelsea and Liverpool. "Playing at Fulham was a great time in my career with a lot of good memories," he says. "The fans were fantastic and treated me really well, so it was nice to be a part of that again."



PERCENT OF TEAM SHOTS



U.S. NATIONAL TEAM MARCH 2013-MARCH 2014 | 10 GAMES, FIVE GOALS

Dempsey led the U.S. in shots per game during the 12-month span, taking 31% of total shots over the 10 games in which he played. So if the Yanks are to advance out of the tough Group G in June, they need him to continue his career goal-every-other-game pace. "This is what you live for, to play against the best teams in the world," Dempsey says. "I'm glad I had the experience of not just playing in, but scoring in, two World Cups, but I'm not taking anything for granted this time. Playing in these tough games is what it's all about."

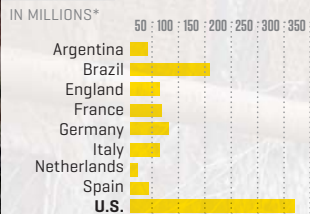
Club stats include Premier League, Europa League, MLS season and playoffs; international stats include WCQ and friendlies.

IN THE LANDS OF

POPULATION BOON

It's pretty obvious: A competitive country needs bodies. And the more bodies, the better the odds of finding 11 guys good enough to win a World Cup. A larger population also increases the chances of producing the kind of superstar who entirely tips the field, as Diego Maradona did for Argentina in 1986 when he carried them on his back through the knockout phase and to a victory over West Germany in the final. But what, you say, about countries like China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh? Together, they total about 3.2 billion potential Peles. That's nearly half the earth's population, and among them, they've *qualified* for the World Cup only three times. Well, that's where the next point comes in.

POPULATION



*as of July 2013

THE PIPELINE

The majority of professionals going to Brazil this summer followed the same path. They began playing in streets, parks and backyards, and then, almost always before age 16, they joined an organized club—whether it was a developmental team or in a rec league. The key here, though, is scouts—real ones or parents or coaches who knew somebody at a bigger, better team—who watch them and flag potential. Without that second step, the pipeline leaks. Soccer, particularly in the developing world, is full of guys with the talent and athleticism who simply lie outside the system. They don't get spotted, don't improve and never make it.

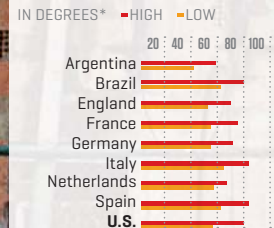
INFRASTRUCTURE

So Pele played in a back alley with an old sock stuffed with rags. But the fact is, training facilities do matter. As a kid, a bumpy, cut-up pitch matters. Shoes that are too small, too big or held together by masking tape matter. Having to take two buses to get to practice versus Mom dropping you off after a 10-minute drive matters. Once they grow up, it matters less. If they're good enough, they'll play professionally in a top league where the facilities will range from very good to excellent. But elite players are forged as kids.

CLIMATE

Ideally, a soccer-playing population would live in a region where the daytime temperatures are between 50 and 70 degrees year-round, with little wind, humidity and rain. Most nations don't exist in such biosphere-like conditions, but it's a question of degree and how much time a player can devote to practicing in that environment. Climate also tends to impact how a nation plays and what sort of players it tends to produce. Broadly speaking, hot and humid conditions lend themselves to a slower and controlled pace, while a cold and windy game gets faster and more physical.

TEMPERATURE



*averages from 1980 to 2010

GIANTS

ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, ENGLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, NETHERLANDS, SPAIN
 SINCE 1966, ONLY THE EIGHT NATIONS LISTED ABOVE HAVE APPEARED IN A WORLD CUP TITLE GAME, BUT THAT'S NOT ALL THEY HAVE IN COMMON. WE EXPLORED THE ROOTS OF SOCCER SUCCESS AND FOUND EIGHT FACTORS THAT ELEVATE THIS GROUP FROM THE MORE THAN 200 OTHER COUNTRIES THAT PLAY THIS BEAUTIFUL GAME. —GABRIELE MARCOTTI

KNOW-HOW

No matter the style of play, having an established soccer culture produces a deep pool of coaches, scouts and fans who think and talk about the game nonstop. It's the stereotype of being a "soccer nation," in which the sport pervades every sinew of a country. Netherlands, population 16.8 million, is a fine example of this: They have reached the World Cup final three times in 44 years. Only Brazil, Germany and Italy have that beaten. It's also no coincidence that arguably two of the last three great tactical leaps in the game—Total Football [players adapting to any position] and possession-based tiki-taka—are credited to a Dutch coach.

CROSS-POLLINATION

In soccer, cultural exchange occurs in three ways. Some nations import high-end coaches and players [Spain], some export them [Netherlands] and some do a bit of both [France]. But no strong nation isolates itself. The ones that open their borders tend to benefit.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

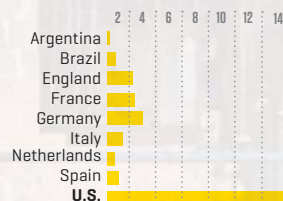
A big economy implies more cash from sponsors, better infrastructure and an ability to attract coaches. But it's the business at the top that drives the development of the next generation at the bottom. While it helps if the overall number is big, how the money is distributed seems less relevant. Brazil and Argentina have a relatively small middle class with a large population in poverty. And yet the economic disparity is largely mitigated because the wealthy at the top fund the game, while the large numbers at the bottom provide its manpower. Germany and Netherlands have low income inequality and a large middle class.

OPPORTUNITY COST

Players from countries with a large middle class often must choose between developing soccer skills and pursuing an education. It's the classic scholar-athlete dilemma. Another factor in lands of opportunity is competition from other sports. There is obviously a technical and skill component to the game, but ultimately it's an athletic pursuit. If the best athletes choose basketball, football or baseball, soccer loses them from the talent pool. This is one of the most cited reasons for the fact that the U.S. lags behind the world. Take heart, America! As these nations prove, it takes only a few of these qualities to dominate the world's game.

GDP

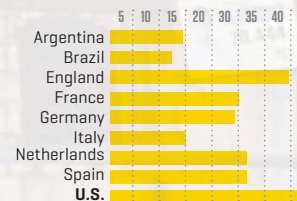
IN TRILLIONS*



*as of 2012

COLLEGE DEGREES

IN %*



*as of 2012, ages 25-64





NO ONE

CAN

MEXICO SUFFERED IN QUALIFIERS, AS EVEN THE BELOVED CHICHARITO LET HIS NATION DOWN. CAN THERE BE ANY HOPE FOR REDEMPTION IN BRAZIL?

BY BILL DONAHUE

SAVE US

BUT THE

SINITS



THE DARKEST MOMENT FOR MEXICO

came last October, early in the World Cup qualifier against Costa Rica. In the 18th minute, Mexico's most adored striker, Javier Hernandez, blitzed his way down the pitch, finding the holes with his trademark panache that has led fans to call him by one name only: Chicharito, or Little Pea. At exactly 17:20 into the game, a teammate fed Chicharito the ball as Costa Rica's goalie, fooled, sprinted out of the box, away from him. The Little Pea was suddenly all alone on the vast green field, and in cantinas all over Mexico City, the faithful no doubt thought: At last. Finally. For without a win here, El Tri almost surely would stay home from the World Cup for the first time since 1990.

Chicharito flubbed it. He passed instead of shooting, and Mexican TV announcers cried a chorus of anguish. "It cannot be," wailed one. It was as though an angel had fallen. In a nation beset with a failing economy and rampant murders and kidnappings, Chicharito is an emblem of hope and purity. He's a humble and devout young man who signed, in 2010, with the most famous soccer team in the world, Manchester United, and became a star right away, scoring 20 goals in his first season. He kneels at midfield before games to pray, and he's given to saying things like, "My little grandmother is very Catholic, and she is the base of our family." In Mexico, he is so exalted that not long ago, billboards there bore a photo of him standing with his arms raised triumphantly, acknowledging a stadium full of admirers raining homage upon him. The caption reads, "You leave as a hero. You return as a legend." But of late, the talent for which he is loved has eluded him. He is riding the bench for Man United.

And he missed against Costa Rica. He missed. Why did he miss?

Throughout 2013, a curse shrouded Mexico's national team. Never mind that El Tri won gold at the London Olympics in 2012, and never mind that only Brazil, Germany and Mexico have reached the round of 16 in each of the past five World Cups. The bad soccer

juju set in like a black cloud last February in Mexico City's Azteca Stadium. El Tri had not lost there since 2001, but they managed only a tie with 98-pound weakling Jamaica. Leaving the field, defender Maza Rodriguez thrust his middle finger at the Mexican press corps. And things only spiraled downward from there: a tie with Panama, a loss to Honduras (Honduras!) and then, worst of all, a 2-0 September loss in Ohio to its archrival, the United States—a defeat so stinging that the newspaper *El Universal* ran a one-word headline: "FIASCO."

At the time Chicharito blundered, El Tri were despondent on the field, lackluster. And in the final minutes of that Costa Rica game, with Mexico poised to lose 2-1, Christian Martinoli, of Azteca television, oozed despair. "No one could save us now but the saints," he said. "When did we lose our way?"

By now, we all know that Mexico found a ticket to Brazil after all. It eked into this year's World Cup on a fluke, after the U.S. knocked Panama out of contention, scoring two goals in stoppage time on the very night of Mexico's Costa Rica disaster. Still, for nine minutes that night, El Tri played believing they were eliminated. The team is now, to many observers, like a heart attack victim risen from his hospital bed, miraculously alive after spending a few moments in the hereafter. Questions abound: Can El Tri dance nimbly away from the grim reaper and find success in Brazil? Can they reach the Cup quarterfinals for the first time since 1986? And what malevolent force ruined 2013 anyway?

For many Mexicans, the answer to that last question lies with one man: Carlos Vela. Widely regarded as Mexico's best active soccer player, Vela, 25, has refused to play for his national team since 2011. He is essentially the bad son who skips his brother's wedding after sowing rancor and dysfunction at the rehearsal dinner. "We don't even know why he won't play for the national team," says Carlos Guerrero, an announcer for Azteca. "He won't say."



Carlos Vela (stripes, facing camera) has spurned Mexico since 2011, and coach Miguel Herrera isn't exactly begging for his return.

Vela is a striker for Real Sociedad, and he recently notched four goals in a single game. In December he was named player of the month for La Liga. He is graceful, loose-limbed. His scores are quite often chip shots—lovely little bloopers that flick sharply skyward, over the keeper's head, as Vela lopes away, grinning. He makes the whole art of chipping look simple, and it's easy to imagine Mexicans gnashing their teeth as they watch each ball land softly in the net.

Even when Vela misses a shot, he laughs. Mexican fans, picking up on this trait, call him the Hyena. Sometimes they also call him Bomber, and none of this makes him happy. "No one asked me if I wanted those nicknames," he said to Radio Marca in October.

The tensions between Vela and El Tri took root in 2010, in Colombia. Before a game there, Vela reportedly ignored a coach's instructions. Former Mexican goalkeeper Antonio Carbajal was so disgusted that he told one reporter that Vela could "go to hell." Retired Mexican star Alberto Garcia Aspe said Vela "needs psychological help." Postgame, Vela took part in a team party that was allegedly attended by a transvestite prostitute. *The Sun* of London ran scintillating photos of the call girl in question. No one ever accused Vela of doing anything untoward at the party, and he's never been caught in a scandal involving, say, drugs or womanizing. Still, when the Mexican Football Federation (FMF) meted out punishments, it banished Vela from El Tri for six months as most other players got off with small fines.

The FMF gave no explanation. It is a mighty organization run by some of Mexico's richest men, and it does not trifle to justify its actions. Vela felt stung. He came back to El Tri only once, for two games in 2011, and even last fall, he still seemed hurt. When asked if he would play in the World Cup, he told Fox Sports, "I'll think about it." To Mexicans, Vela's sangfroid was a betrayal. "He insults his national team and yet he still keeps smiling," says Guerrero, of Azteca. "His smile is mocking. It is ironical; it is sarcastic."

"He doesn't have a passion for soccer," says Israel Marquez, spokesman for the FMF. "If he had passion, he would play much better." That accusation isn't just levied against Vela. In Mexico, any player who flees La Liga MX to earn more money in Europe can be suspected of treason—or at least arrogance. El Tri midfielder Giovanni dos Santos, who plays for Villarreal CF, is disliked, as is his younger brother, Jonathan dos Santos, a defensive midfielder for FC Barcelona.

A popular TV ad now running in Mexico promotes Yale Jeans by alleging that El Tri sputtered in the qualifiers because every single squad member is a lazy prima donna. The ad sees a dozen everyday Mexican men delivering "a message for the national team," and each one stresses the virtue of toil. "We are the 60 million Mexican men who bring fight and desire to our work," says one. "And we don't cost millions of pesos," adds another.

But the ad is a joke, really. El Tri's recent failings are likely due to inept team management. Within a six-week stretch last fall, the FMF fired three successive managers, leading critics to depict the federation as a tyrannical and greedy cabal. "It's not a democracy," says Hugo Sanchez, 55, a former El Tri striker who found fame with Real Madrid during the 1980s. "There's no players' union and no coaches' union, and no one has any liberty to speak except for the directors. If they don't like you, they fire you." El Tri are run by the owners of the 18 teams in La Liga MX, and the owner of the league's wealthiest team, Mexico City-based Club America, is Televisa, which broadcasts all league games. "In Mexican football," says Sanchez, "two TV networks have exclusive broadcast rights, and very little of the money goes to the players. Meanwhile, the people making decisions know nothing about soccer. The level of play is as bad as it's ever been."

Happy accidents can happen, though, and last October, the FMF delighted purists when, just days after the nightmare in Costa Rica, it appointed a new manager for the national team: onetime El Tri defender Miguel Herrera, 46, who has grown paunchy and jowly in his retirement. Herrera is the soul of passion. He was until recently the manager for Club America, and when his team won the Liga MX crown in May 2013, he celebrated with such fist-pumping brio that on YouTube, a clip of his sideline victory dance has gone viral. In the doctored video, lightning bolts crackle out of Herrera's skull and flames erupt from his hair as he leaps, slo-mo, his arms flailing wildly as his necktie whirls in the wind.

Nicknamed El Piojo, which means "the louse," Herrera is a regular guy, chummy with players and quite boisterous. When he took a fishing trip to Acapulco this winter, he wore his baseball cap backward and held slimy whoppers aloft for the press. As El Tri's new coach, however, he was in a tough spot. It was as though he



With nowhere to turn, El Tri's fans are looking to Pulido as their new Chicharito.

were Donald Trump's third wife, coming in after a series of train wrecks. And still he took risks. To qualify for the last remaining World Cup slot, Herrera needed, last November, to beat lowly New Zealand in a two-game playoff. He could have flown in Chicharito and Giovanni from Europe, but instead he chose to use only players from La Liga MX, a roster fans fondly call "the Mexicans." It was a hard-line gesture, a vote against superstars who'd underperformed, but it was also nationalistic. Herrera was showing he believed in his country's talent.

Herrera's lineup included 10 members of Club America, and these worthies set up striker Oribe Peralta, a top scorer for Santos Laguna who'd grown up poor, cradling a soccer ball in his sleep. Peralta had led El Tri through the qualifiers, scoring 10 goals when no one else seemed able to find the ball under his feet, and now, in two games against New Zealand, he knocked in a total of five. Mexico beat New Zealand 5-1 in the first match and then won the next game in Wellington 4-2. "Suddenly," says Juan Villoro, a leading Mexican novelist, "love was in the air."

But can Herrera keep making it happen in Brazil? It's unclear, for El Tri has not coalesced as a team. While most World Cup squads have solidified their rosters, Herrera isn't even sure yet whether he'll bring Chicharito. He's called him "a boy with a great attitude," but he's also said he can't rely on rusty bench riders.

In late January, when Herrera showed up in San Antonio for El Tri's first game of 2014, a friendly against South Korea, he was chomping on a stick of gum as he ambled into a crowded news conference the day before the match, his gut jiggling inside his green-striped El Tri hoodie. One reporter asked about Carlos Vela, and Herrera brushed him away: "That's not the theme here," he said. "Stop sucking my d—." In Spanish, his words formed a wry pun. The room rippled with laughter, and for a moment, Herrera seemed like Bill Clinton—warm and garrulous, beloved even as he cracked off-color jokes.

Later that day, Herrera was more serious about Vela. "When I was a player," he said in an interview at his hotel, "I always wanted to go to the World Cup. It was my biggest wish, and I was never able to go. Vela should realize that representing your national

team in the World Cup is a great honor."

Eventually, Herrera would fly to Spain to confer with Vela, and then on Feb. 3, he'd drop a bomb that would resound across Mexico. Carlos Vela would not travel to the World Cup, Herrera announced. "I am not seeing the commitment that we need, nor the desire," he said, playing the hard-liner again. Vela himself would issue a statement saying that he was not "100% mentally ready" to represent El Tri.

It got very cold on game day in San Antonio, with the temperature dropping to 26 degrees, amid spitting sleet, but still tour buses showed up from throughout northern Mexico. The fans filed out wearing El Tri-themed lucha libre masks and supersize game-day sombreros and dazzlingly fake Pancho Villa mustaches. They pounded on drums and bugled rally songs on cheap plastic horns.

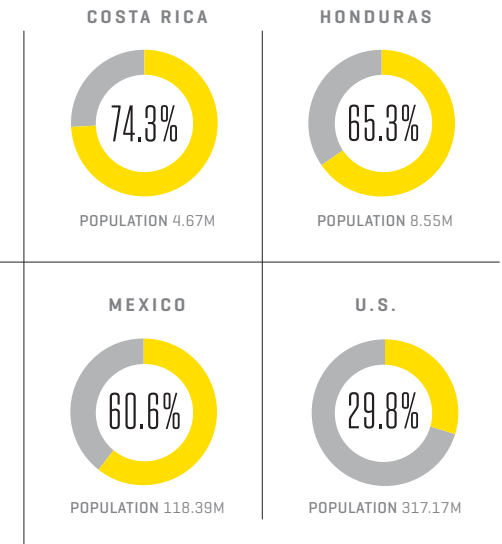
Neither El Tri nor South Korea had their entire squad on hand, but the game was at first close, with each side posing threats. Gradually, though, South Korea disintegrated. In what became a 4-0 drubbing, one little-known striker, Alan Pulido, pulled off a hat trick in his debut for El Tri. Fans danced in the aisles and, after the game, in the corridors under the stands, Pulido found himself swarmed by Mexican reporters, each one solemnly pressing a digital recorder up toward his chin. "We have to keep working toward our dreams," he said. "It doesn't stop with this match. We have to keep improving."

Pulido left the stadium carrying his lime-green cleats in a plastic shopping bag as TV reporters called the 23-year-old "the new Chicharito," their words soft and plaintive, like a prayer for a faltering national institution in need of a new saint.

"Now," said one El Tri fan outside the stadium, "there is a reason to have faith in El Tri." ■

WHICH WATCH?

Percentage of population that viewed 20 or more minutes of a 2010 World Cup game.



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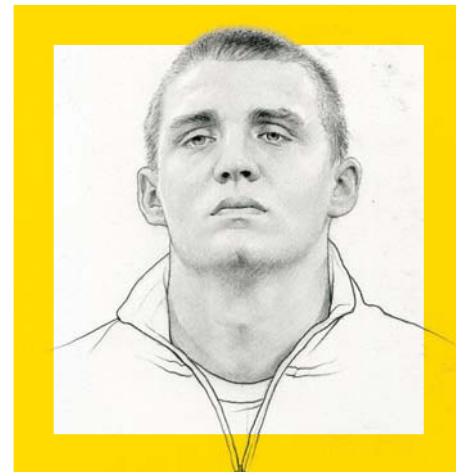
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MORE THAN

THE WORLD CUP HAS A WAY OF TRANSFORMING YOUNG, LITTLE-KNOWN PLAYERS INTO WORLD-WIDE STARS. TAKE SPAIN'S PEDRO. AT 22, THE QUICK, DECISIVE WINGER STARTED THE 2010 FINAL AFTER BEING A REGULAR AT BARCELONA FOR ONLY A FEW MONTHS. ONE OF THE LAST NAMED TO SPAIN'S 2010 ROSTER, PEDRO HAS SINCE WON THREE LA LIGA TITLES, ONE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, ONE FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP AND ONE EURO. HERE ARE OUR BEST BETS TO BREAK OUT IN BRAZIL. —MICHAEL COX



AHMED MUSA ▶

WINGER, NIGERIA, 21

Astonishingly quick, Musa has already tasted success on the international stage, scoring a goal to help Nigeria win the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations title. Capable of playing on either flank, Musa likely will score more and is excellent on the counterattack.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

IN 2013 CONFEDERATIONS CUP PLAY, MUSA WAS SECOND ON THE TEAM FOR CHANCES CREATED. **6**



MATEO KOVACIC ▲

MIDFIELDER, CROATIA, 19

Playing for a nation famed for playmakers like Zvonimir Boban and Luka Modric, deep-lying midfielder Kovacic amazed in his international debut, feeding the attack in a 2-0 victory over fierce rival Serbia last March. He can pierce with forward balls and skip past tough tackles.

PASS PORTAL

91.8% COMPLETED 112 OF 122 PASSES FROM THE ATTACKING HALF, SECOND ON CROATIA.



▶ PAUL POGBA

MIDFIELDER, FRANCE, 21

Released by Man United two years ago, Pogba is now one of the world's finest all-rounders at Juventus and was recently named Europe's best U21 player. Pogba uses incredible power to regularly out-muscle opponents and has earned a rep for superb long-range swerving shots.

FRENCH CONNECTOR

89.5% TEAM-HIGH PASS COMPLETION RATE AMONG PLAYERS WITH AT LEAST SIX QUALIFIERS.



15 MINUTES



JULIAN DRAXLER ▶

MIDFIELDER, GERMANY, 20

With stiff competition in the attacking midfield, Draxler is a serious option for coach Joachim Low. Adept at finding space, a tricky dribbler and a calm finisher (the first international goal was a rebound off U.S. keeper Tim Howard), the Schalke star may be used as a supersub.

CLUB VIP

GOALS FOR SCHALKE IN 2012-13, TIED WITH KLAAS-JAN HUNTELAAR FOR TOPS. | 10



MIRALEM PJANIC

MIDFIELDER, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA, 24

Bosnia-Herzegovina, this World Cup's only debutant, will use ultra-attacking tactics under coach Safet Susic, who believes his side's strength lies up front. Roma playmaker Pjanic will start the attacks from a center-right, advanced position and has added goal scoring to his skill set.

NET WORTH

5 | NUMBER OF ASSISTS IN QUALIFIERS. THAT'S THE MOST ON THE TEAM.



HEUNG-MIN SON

FORWARD, SOUTH KOREA, 21

The best player to emerge from his country since Cha Bum-Kun in the early 1970s, Son has been excellent at Bayer Leverkusen but has yet to shine internationally. If this quick two-footed counterattacker gets good service from teammates, South Korea could surprise.

IT'S A MAGIC NUMBER

3 | IN 2013 HE BECAME THE FIRST KOREAN TO SCORE A HAT TRICK IN BUNDESLIGA.

BERNARD

WINGER, BRAZIL, 21

On a settled Brazil squad largely composed of solid, reliable players, Bernard provides an injection of excitement from the bench. Small and quick on the right flank, Bernard loves dribbling past opponents and has become Luiz Felipe Scolari's wild card.

ON THE RISE

2012 | YEAR HE WAS NAMED BEST NEWCOMER IN BRASILEIRAO.

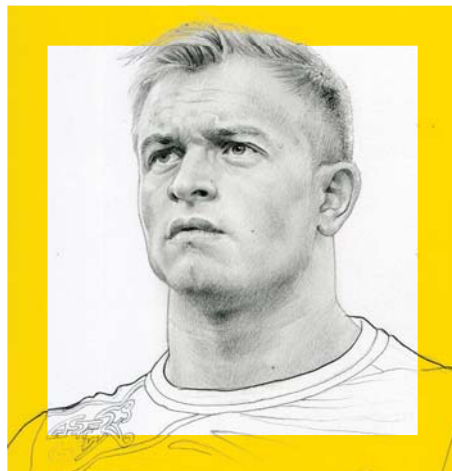
XHERDAN SHAQIRI ▶

WINGER, SWITZERLAND, 22

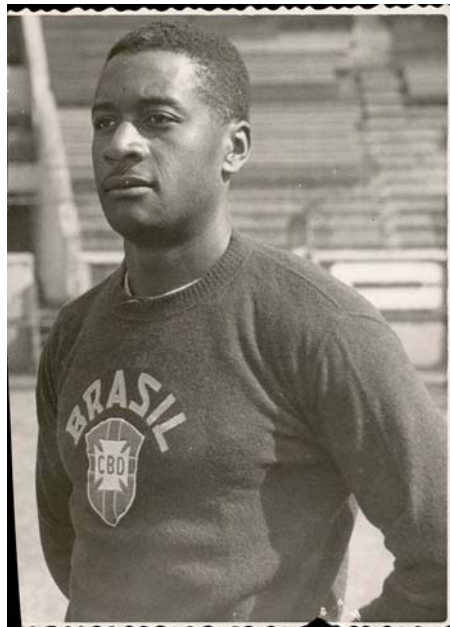
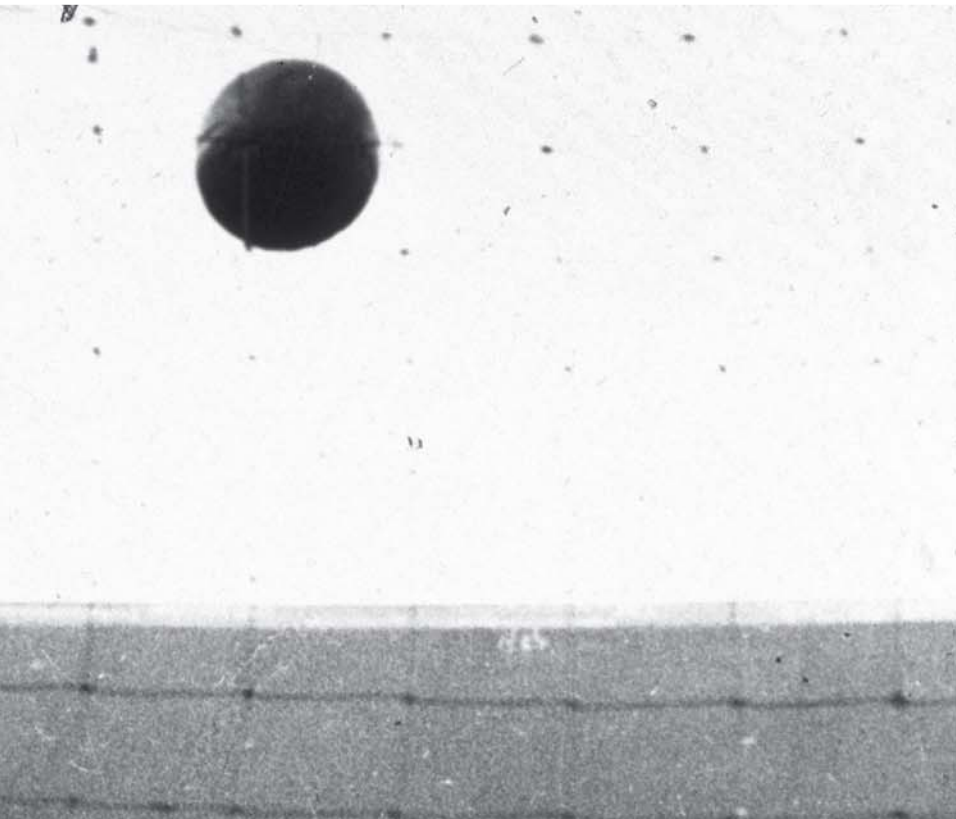
Stocky with deceptive pace, Shaqiri starts mostly on the right flank but can cut powerfully onto his left foot before shooting accurately from long range. Switzerland is in one of the weaker groups, giving the Bayern Munich winger opportunities to dominate matches.

BY THE DOZEN

IN NINE QUALIFIERS, HE TOOK A SQUAD-HIGH NUMBER OF SHOTS ON GOAL. | 12







NOT HIS COUNTRY'S

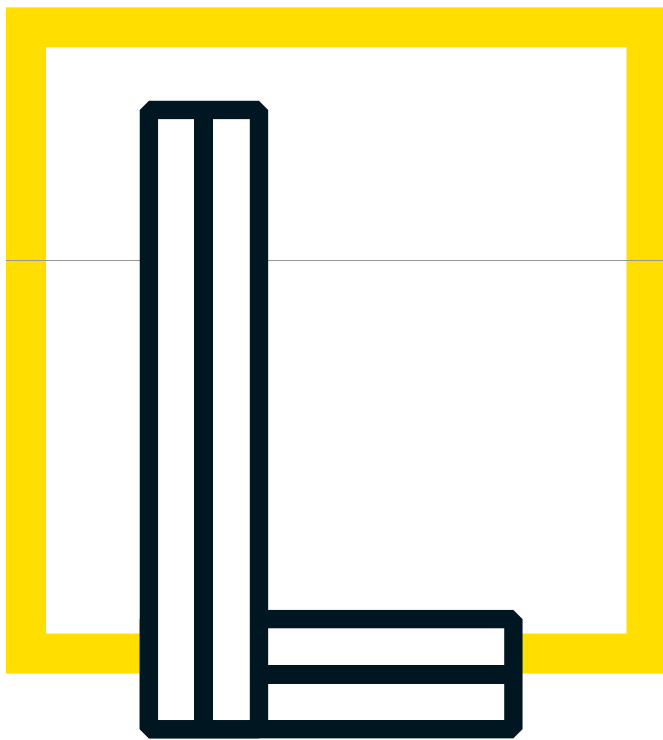
KEEPER



BRAZIL LOST THE 1950 WORLD CUP FINAL ON HOME SOIL, AND THE ENTIRE NATION CAST BLAME ON THE *GOLEIRO*. IT WAS A BURDEN MOACYR BARBOSA WOULD CARRY FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.

BY BRETT FORREST

Despite two decorated decades between the posts, Barbosa is defined by his failure to save this one shot off the foot of Alcides Ghiggia.



“LOOK, MY SON,”

the mother said, walking into a bar, Barbosa's local bar, in Rio de Janeiro. The mother pointed at the old *goleiro* on his stool as though Barbosa were an animal in a cage.

Barbosa minded his business. He'd been through this before. He knew what people thought of him. He wasn't human anymore, they allowed him no dignity, he was Brazil's living tragedy. Barbosa would shrink into his *cachaça*, the events of 1950 returning, often when he had just pushed them from his mind.

“Do you see this man here?” the mother asked her son. “He was the one who brought all of Brazil to tears.”

Something caused Barbosa to turn and regard the boy standing before him. *This breaks my heart*, he thought. *A kid who has never watched the game. This will go on from father to son, and I will never be free. In the penal code, the maximum penalty is 30 years. In Brazil, I am condemned forever.*

Barbosa didn't talk about 1950 much, just now and again. In *Barbosa: A Goal That Lasts for 50 Years*, published in 2000, he shared his thoughts with author Roberto Muylaert. In the last year of his life, Barbosa visited the ESPN studios in São Paulo and spoke a little more. Even after 50 years, there was plenty to tell, but it all resounded with one note: He could never escape the 1950 World Cup, when all of Brazil hung its devastation on his shoulders.

A GOALIE HAS to be perfect. For Moacyr Barbosa, that was never truer than on July 16, 1950. He needed to concentrate now, and for the next 90 minutes. Barbosa focused on the flag that was being raised across Maracanã, the largest stadium in the world. He was 29, at the apex of his training and conditioning. He strained his

📺 WATCH *BARBOSA: THE MAN WHO MADE ALL OF BRAZIL CRY*—ONE OF ESPN FILMS' 30 FOR 30: SOCCER STORIES—ON MAY 6 AT 7 P.M. ET ON ESPN

eyes, trying to read the words rippling in the breeze. “Order and Progress,” it said—what Brazil had always wanted for itself, what had always eluded it.

In 1950, Brazil was not yet the team of modern fable, the champion of five World Cups, more than any other country. In 1950, the *Seleção Brasileira* had yet to win a Cup. This was Brazil's opportunity, and victory was all but assured. Brazil had dismantled Sweden and Spain in the final round, outscoring them 13-2. In a 13-team contest with no knockout round and teams advancing on points, Brazil needed only a tie against Uruguay, which had scraped by with a close win and a tie. This final match against an appendage territory Brazil had once possessed? A mere formality.

During the playing of the national anthems, an Uruguayan player wet himself. Barbosa didn't notice. Instead, he watched the Brazilian flag ascend the pole and thought to himself, *Does anyone else swimming in this ocean of people see what I see, or is this message meant for only me?*

At Brazil's national moment, its flag hung upside down.

BARBOSA DIDN'T POSSESS the ideal dimensions for a goalie, standing just 5'8½". With Rio's Vasco da Gama, one of Brazil's elite teams, he plied his craft in an unorthodox fashion. Goalies of the 1940s stood beneath the crossbar, moving laterally, rarely advancing beyond the goal line. Given his size, Barbosa realized he couldn't wait passively for a shot, then rise to defend it. Instead, he ventured beyond the goal, anticipating play.

When a shot came, Barbosa would spring into action. He perfected a move by which he leaped across the goalmouth for a shot, reaching with his opposite hand for the onrushing ball. His arm would cross his body and stretch over his head. In this way, Barbosa used momentum, hurling himself at a ball, shifting his entire weight from one side of the goal to the other. Those who watched Barbosa used the same adjective time and again: elastic.

There was excitement in Barbosa's play, and something dangerous. Soccer in Brazil had always been the province of the upper class. Afro-Brazilian players dotted rosters, but the soccer establishment preferred a more conservative approach: the play of white goalkeepers. The model was Oberdan Cattani, the tall, barrel-chested goalie for Palmeiras, champions of the São Paulo league. Oberdan didn't run all over the field—he wasn't elastic. He didn't need to be. Oberdan was fundamentally sound, the best goalie in Brazil.

In 1945, Barbosa was a backup, understudy to Oberdan, on the *Seleção*. But before a match with Argentina, Oberdan was injured and Barbosa took the field. The Afro-Brazilian goalie allowed two goals in the first half, so the hobbled Oberdan completed the



The 1950 World Cup was expected to be a coronation for the Seleção (above). Instead, devastation came with the goal by Ghiggia (top right; in later life, bottom right).

match. Barbosa's play confirmed what most believed: that a black player of elasticity could never be the steady Brazilian goleiro.

Flavio Costa, the coach of both the Seleção and Vasco da Gama, believed differently. He gave Barbosa another chance, and Vasco took the Rio championship in 1947, 1949 and 1950. In 1948, Vasco won the world's first continental club championship in Santiago, with Barbosa preserving a scoreless tie. Costa didn't mind that his goalie was unorthodox, and when the World Cup opened in Rio de Janeiro in 1950, the savior of Santiago was in goal for Brazil.

GOVERNMENT OFFICES DECREED July 16 an optional workday. Shops shuttered throughout Rio. The newspaper *O Mundo* printed the Seleção team picture beneath the headline: "These are the world champions." Jules Rimet, the 76-year-old FIFA president and namesake of the World Cup trophy from 1946 to 1970, had prepared a speech, in Portuguese, to give at the awarding of the World Cup. He had neglected to pen anything in Spanish.

Maracanã was built to hold 155,000 people, but the crowd sat on slabs of concrete, not seats, which allowed organizers to sell tickets beyond capacity. The attendance for the game was reported as high as 199,854, but that's likely an underestimation. To this day, it's the largest crowd ever to watch a soccer game.

In the locker room before the game, the mayor of Rio, Angelo Mendes de Moraes, interrupted preparations to finalize details of the victory parade. He addressed the team: "I fulfilled my promises to build this stadium. Now do your duty: Win the World Cup!"

Through 45 minutes, Barbosa was perfect, but the crowd had grown unsettled. The score was 0-0. The mayor's demand came

back to Barbosa at halftime. *That weighs heavily on us all, he thought. As if we don't want the championship ourselves.*

In the second minute of the second half, it looked as though the Seleção might have it. Friaca, a striker, placed the ball inside the left post of the Uruguayan goal to put Brazil up 1-0.

But in the 66th minute, it was Uruguay's turn. Winger Alcides Ghiggia dashed past the Brazilian defense and entered the box as forward Juan Alberto Schiaffino streaked toward the goal. Ghiggia passed to Schiaffino, who drilled it over Barbosa's outstretched arm. The game was tied. In the 79th minute, Ghiggia broke free again, and Schiaffino raced to the goal. *The play has to go to Schiaffino*, Barbosa thought, *just like before*. Barbosa played the pass. Ghiggia shot instead. Barbosa dived to his left, but the elastic man was too late. Ghiggia later said, "Only three people have, with just one motion, silenced the Maracanã: Frank Sinatra, Pope John Paul II and me."

IN THE DAYS after the game, the newspapers of Rio and São Paulo searched for a scapegoat. "Barbosa, who had played so well at other times, failed in a defense in which any second-rate goalie would have succeeded," wrote *O Estado de S. Paulo*. Public opinion quickly crystallized, but Barbosa wasn't reading the papers or listening to the radio. He and his wife, Clotilde, camped out in their home. It took a teammate's warning for him to hear the rumor: People were planning to burn down his house. He and Clotilde had to get out.

Barbosa caught a train to Itacuruçá, along the Atlantic coast. At the station, he bought a copy of *Jornal dos Sports*, then hid his face behind it once he boarded. As the train rolled west, Barbosa listened



A young Barbosa went from star to scapegoat in 1950. It would take decades for him [above, with wife Clotilde] to find peace.

to two men discussing the loss. First, they focused their ire on Ghiggia. “He played free all the time,” the first man noted, asking why no Brazilian player had knocked the Uruguayan from his line.

“What about Barbosa?” countered the second. “He played like a little kid. On both goals. I could have played in that game with dress shoes on and I would have done a better job.”

Barbosa listened from behind his paper, afraid to be recognized.

“You know,” said the first man, “if I ever meet that black, I don’t know what I’ll do to him.”

Barbosa leaped from his seat. “Are you looking for me?” he yelled.

Just then, the train made a stop and the men hurriedly exited the car. But this was an omen. No matter how aggressively Barbosa confronted his antagonists, he’d never be able to subdue them. There were too many—the critics, the angry, the unhinged—projecting lasting frustrations onto the goalie. They were always around, in the stands at games, in the sports pages, on the sidewalks of Rio.

BARBOSA WOULD PLAY just once more for the Seleção, in 1953, a 2-0 win over Ecuador. That year, as the Brazilian Football Confederation debated the World Cup roster, Barbosa suffered a broken leg in a Vasco match. It was convenient happenstance. “In 1954, people thought Barbosa was trash,” says Teixeira Heizer, a journalist who covered Barbosa in his day. “Nobody wanted to talk about him. Everyone in Brazil blamed Barbosa for the loss in 1950.”

Yet Barbosa forged ahead. That is, until a Sunday afternoon in 1962. Barbosa, then 41 and tending goal for Campo Grande, reached across the goalmouth to save a shot and felt his groin tear. The team trainer helped him off the field; the crowd of a few hundred stood and applauded. Barbosa looked around the sparse bleachers and thought, *They are saying goodbye to a friend.*

Barbosa left the game, but the game—particularly that one in 1950—wouldn’t leave him. As he entered middle age, he became an

easy target. People would point at him. They would snicker and whisper when they noticed him. Sometimes they would just say it: “You’re the one who let us all down.”

But Barbosa had his friends. One of them was Abelard Franca, head of Rio’s department of stadium management. Franca noticed how heavily Barbosa bore his cross, so in 1963, he gave Barbosa the cross itself, along with the two posts—the frame through which Ghiggia had scored the winning goal.

Barbosa went home and sawed the goalposts into small pieces. He soaked the wood in coal oil. He placed some pieces in his barbecue pit. He struck a match and lit up Rio with a bright flare. But if this was meant as exorcism, it hardly had any effect.

BY THE TIME Barbosa had retired from soccer, the Seleção had won two World Cups, in 1958 and 1962, and Pele was on his way to being known as the greatest athlete soccer had ever produced. Such international success only reinforced the magnitude of Brazil’s 1950 collapse. Barbosa continually replayed the moment in his mind, the shot he could never stop from going into the net.

I put myself in the best position for the most likely move, he would tell himself. I keep waiting for Ghiggia to take a step forward. He’ll surely make the same move as the first goal.

There was no work for Barbosa in soccer. He was bad luck, an outcast. So one day in 1963, he showed up at Maracanã and joined the staff. When the city built a pool on the grounds, Barbosa taught swimming to children. For more than 20 years, he returned day after day to the site of his defeat. Sometimes, during the city championship or an international friendly, when the crowd made the stadium come alive, Barbosa would wonder what it might’ve been like if Ghiggia had passed the ball.

Barbosa could have been the first prominent black player to win a World Cup for Brazil. But Ghiggia didn’t pass, so that honor went

“I CRIED ALL THE WAY FROM RIO BACK TO SÃO PAULO. THE DEFENSE FAILED. HE WASN’T TO BLAME—NOT BARBOSA.”

—**OBERDAN CATTANI**

to another player, Pele, in another time. Instead of liberalizing attitudes, Barbosa’s play had the opposite effect. “After 1950, black players lost self-confidence,” says Heizer, the journalist. “They were afraid of being blamed, like Barbosa, for teams’ losses.”

In time, the ethnic makeup of the Brazilian national team began to reflect the country’s diversity, with one exception—goleiro—as if Barbosa had placed a hex on the position. Aside from one match in 1966, no black player occupied the goal for Brazil in a World Cup for more than half a century. But on June 13, 2006, the Seleção took the field against Croatia with Nelson de Jesus Silva, known as Dida, in goal. A star with AC Milan, Dida finally broke the taboo. Fifty-six years after Ghiggia’s goal, Brazil again had a black goalie.

IN THE EARLY 1990s, Barbosa, now in his 70s, traveled to Granja Comary, the training facility for the Seleção. The national team was preparing for the 1994 World Cup. Barbosa arrived to pay the team a visit, common practice in a country where former players routinely mingle with current stars. But when he appeared at the gate, the security guards radioed their superior, waiting for the order. Barbosa was not allowed inside. “It was a form of brutality when he was turned aside,” Heizer said. It had been more than 40 years since the loss to Uruguay, but Barbosa was still ostracized.

Barbosa had little reason to stay in Rio. He was tired of being recognized. So in 1994, he found an apartment in the coastal town of Praia Grande, a couple of blocks from the beach. He and Clotilde survived on his Maracanã pension of 150 reais a month, about \$150. Shortly after arriving, Clotilde died of cancer. They had no children. Barbosa was in the last chapter of his life, and he was alone but for his thoughts.

That disaster affected all of us. We didn’t deserve it.

Ghiggia thought wrong and ended up being right. I thought right and was wrong. But it doesn’t matter. Enough time has passed.

Some say I failed. If I failed or not, who’s going to turn back time now? No one.

THERE IS AN old man who says Barbosa wasn’t the one who failed. He lives on a quiet street in São Paulo. Inside, the kitchen is brightly lit. There sits Oberdan Cattani, age 94, born just 25 years after the father of Brazilian football, Charles Miller, imported the game from his English boarding school.

Cattani’s hair is vibrantly black, and a mustache sketches a dandy line across his upper lip, just as it did in the ’40s. He sits regally, stiffly, and he has the long arms and large hands of a goalie. He flexes his biceps, but Cattani has little more to give.

Questions come his way, about why Flavio Costa left him off the

1950 team, about Barbosa’s first game for the Seleção. He tries to respond. His lips flutter, but they make no sound. His daughter repeats the questions, speaking loudly so he can hear, then shaking her head when he appears not to understand.

Cattani speaks. The sound he makes is soft but clear. “Barbosa and I were friends,” he says. “When Palmeiras played Vasco, he was always the best player on the field.” The kitchen falls quiet. “It was much better when we played. It was beautiful.”

“I went to the match,” he continues, and by this he means Maracanã. “I cried all the way from Rio back to São Paulo.” Cattani’s voice trembles and is faint: “The defense failed. He wasn’t to blame—not Barbosa.”

ONE DAY, AS he walked along the tide in Praia Grande, someone called his name, but Barbosa didn’t react. By now, he was conditioned to ridicule—45 years of ridicule. But he heard it again: “Barbosa of Vasco!” Not Barbosa, the one who lost it all—Barbosa, the champion of Rio, the hero of Santiago.

The caller was Mauro Borba, a man who could recite the history of Vasco da Gama. In time, Borba and his wife, Tereza, who managed a bar on the beach, became close with the old goleiro. It was at their bar that Barbosa found his safe haven. Every day, he arrived at kiosk No. 79 to drink cachaça with Cynar and talk to those who gathered.

Barbosa had no daughter. Tereza had no father. On these terms, their paths merged. Tereza called him “my champion.” In time, Barbosa would call Tereza “my daughter.” He told her about his 50 years of condemnation. *There hasn’t been one day of my life I haven’t had to explain myself. I alone wasn’t responsible for the defeat. But I’m going to die, and people will still be looking for a reason.*

One hot summer afternoon, a couple took shelter in the shade of kiosk No. 79. The wife spotted Barbosa, turned to her husband and said, “This is the guy who lost the 1950 World Cup.” Tereza became enraged, but Barbosa, with relaxed charm, invited the couple for a caipirinha. In a quiet moment, he would tell Tereza not to worry.

1950 was the way I entered history, and I will never leave.

In 2000, Tereza threw Barbosa a 79th birthday party. She has the pictures: Barbosa, with his white hair, cachaça with Cynar in hand, surrounded by people who loved him. A week later, he died.

THE SUN SHINES at the Cemetery of the Grand Plain. Tereza walks along the rows of numbered vaults towering 20 feet into the sky. Some have nameplates. Along several vaults, someone has scrawled “not decomposed” into wet cement. It’s an eerie place of great loneliness. She turns down row 300 and stops before Barbosa’s finely kept granite vault. Its assigned number: 50. ■

A WORLD VIEW

A LOOK AT ALL 32 TEAMS THROUGH THE EYES OF FIVE MEN WHO'VE BEEN THERE.

Four years is a long time to wait! So at our wit's end, we pestered ESPN Stats & Information for heat maps, shot charts and field views of the 32 teams booked for Brazil. Then we badgered SportingIntelligence.com editor Nick Harris to quantify how passionately each nation supports the game. Next we hassled Insider expert Adrian Melville to make sense of the draw. And, at our most desperate, we stalked five World Cup veterans until they revealed the outlooks, strategies and vulnerabilities of every team. So dig in. We know you're counting the days until June!



ESPN FC
ANALYSTS



MICHAEL BALLACK, Germany

- German captain from 2004 to '10
- WC runner-up in 2002, third in 2006
- Scored 42 goals in 98 matches



SHAKA HISLOP, Trinidad and Tobago

- Starting keeper in T&T's first-ever Cup
- Played 26 games, captaining five times
- Member of T&T's Sports Hall of Fame



KASEY KELLER, USA

- Most-capped U.S. keeper with 102
- Started in two World Cups
- His 47 shutouts is the best all time



MARIO KEMPES, Argentina

- Scored 20 goals in 43 games
- Won the World Cup in 1978
- Golden Ball winner with six goals



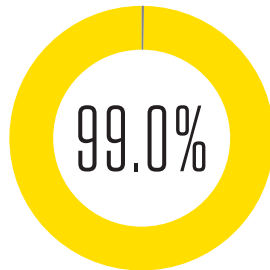
STEVE McMANAMAN, England

- Played in the 1998 World Cup
- Team of the Tournament in Euro '96
- 37 caps in eight years of play

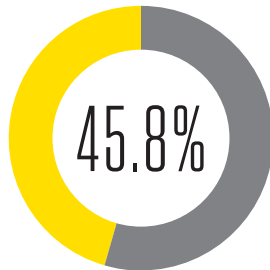
GROUP A



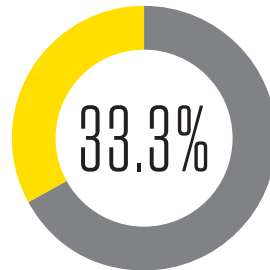
CHANCE TO ADVANCE*
 SPI says it'll take a huge upset for Brazil to fall—they are a 96.9% favorite to win the group and a mortal lock to advance.



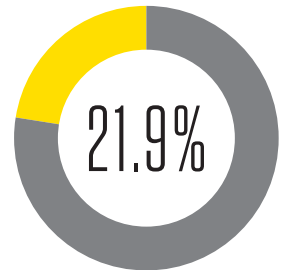
BRAZIL



MEXICO



CROATIA



CAMEROON

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index; all SPI rankings and odds as of March 6.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

If teams weren't already intimidated to play Brazil on their home turf, they will be after viewing footage from the 2013 Confederations Cup, where raucous crowds watched the Seleção win the tournament decisively. Brazil drew first blood in all five of their games, three times within the first 10 minutes of play. Neymar, Oscar and teammates will again look to make a statement from the opening whistle on June 12, so the rest of Group A must somehow make Brazil's aggressiveness work against them.

Croatia took 171 shots in World Cup qualifying (eighth best in Europe) and

will need to poach a goal or two. Mexico's deadly counterattack could rock the Brazilian faithful with quick scores. Both sides possess creative midfielders in Luka Modric [Croatia] and Giovani dos Santos [Mexico] and opportunistic strikers who can score at any moment. And in what likely will be his final moment on the world stage, Cameroon legend Samuel Eto'o will hope to leave an impression against the favorites.

But nobody is predicting Cameroon—or any team in Group A—to beat Brazil. It will be a shock if anyone even slows them down. —ADRIAN MELVILLE



Neymar, Javier Hernandez, Luka Modric and Samuel Eto'o

SCHEDULE

JUNE 12 4 P.M., ESPN BRAZIL VS. CROATIA	JUNE 13 NOON, ESPN2 MEXICO VS. CAMEROON	JUNE 17 3 P.M., ESPN BRAZIL VS. MEXICO	JUNE 18 6 P.M., ESPN CAMEROON VS. CROATIA	JUNE 23 4 P.M., ESPN2 CAMEROON VS. BRAZIL	JUNE 23 4 P.M., ESPN CROATIA VS. MEXICO
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

▶ GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner



GROUP A

BRAZIL

SPI RANK

1



IDENTITY With so many world-class players already up and down this Brazil squad, nobody believed that manager Luiz Felipe Scolari could successfully insert Neymar as the key man—until he proved it when a unified Seleção dominated Spain in a 3-0 win for the Confederations Cup title last year, in part thanks to Neymar’s golazo. Scolari’s tactics of pressuring opponents from all sides of the pitch allow the new No. 10 space up top to roam, with

teammates from defense, midfield and both wings sending him through.

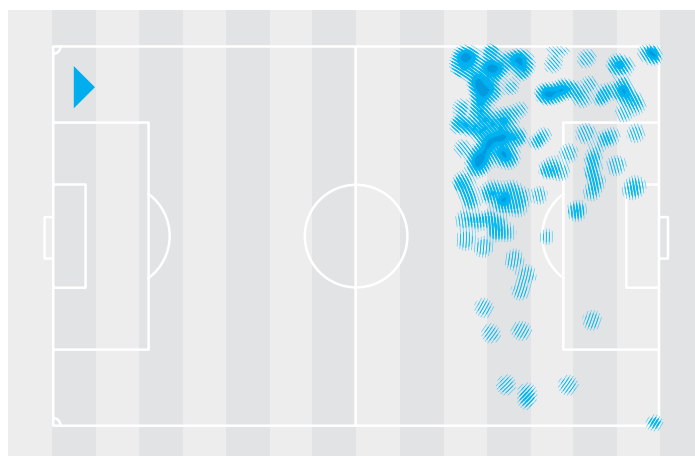
STRENGTH Neymar’s impact for this team is big, but Brazil is not Neymar plus 10. There is seasoned talent all over the squad. They get experience from the goalie, Julio Cesar, who has been on the squad since 2003. In the back four, with Thiago Silva and Dani Alves, they have defenders who can score. The midfield has five players who come out

of the Premier League, and striker Fred scores better than a goal every other game for the Seleção.

WEAKNESS On the field, I can’t find one. The main weakness could end up being the actual country itself. If things don’t work well in the beginning, the pressure of playing at home could actually play to their disadvantage. According to Scolari, they’re the world champs, as he announced last year. The pressure is there, both internally and from the fans. They won’t want a repeat of the title loss in 1950, the last time they hosted the tournament.
—MARIO KEMPES

ATTACK OF NEYMAR

Neymar had his breakout at the Confederations Cup, winning the tournament’s Golden Ball as best overall player. He led all players in touches in the attacking third with 154, and he did most of his work on the left side, with 113 touches in that area.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

JO

2 GOALS

27 MINUTES

The World Cup host played no qualifiers, but when Jo [Atlético Mineiro] scored two goals in three games in last year’s Confederations Cup, it made him more prolific per minute than even Neymar [four goals in 412 minutes] or Fred [five in 423]. —NICK HARRIS



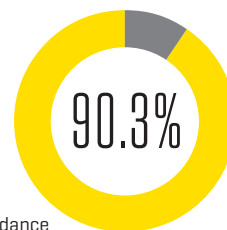
SOCCER NATION RANK



Calculating a nation’s passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

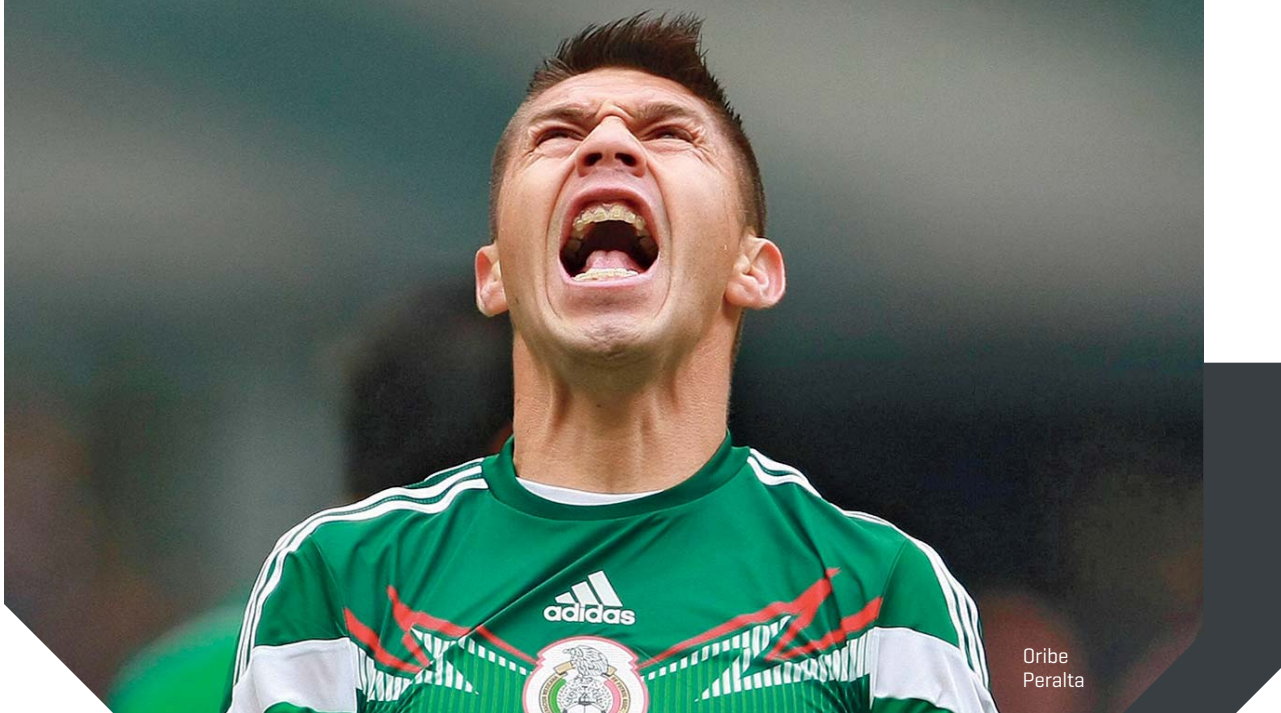
Luiz Felipe Scolari salary
\$3.7M

Per capita income
\$11K



Attendance at Confed Cup

29,208 FIFA clubs



Oribe Peralta

GROUP A

MEXICO

SPI RANK **24**

IDENTITY It sure wasn't easy, but Mexico eventually stepped up when it counted with their 9-3 aggregate defeat of New Zealand in a playoff. But one question remains for Miguel Herrera, who took over during qualifying as Mexico's fourth coach in six games: Can this team, in such a short period of time, put together some sort of team spirit? It's a

lot to ask for, but personally, I'm not one to write off Mexico.

STRENGTH In the end, Mexico may see this poor qualifying as a blessing. After our subpar 1998 World Cup, people took the U.S. for granted in 2002. Mexico may find itself in the same place. And when the going got tough, new players emerged: Midfielder Carlos Pena

was strong, and striker Oribe Peralta scored an insane five goals in the two playoff games.

WEAKNESS Last year was supposed to be a showcase for Mexico's Golden Generation. Instead, names that should have terrified CONCACAF defenses barely could muster chances, much less goals. Brazil won't be any easier, as stars like Chicharito [Man United] are finding it more difficult to take the pitch for their clubs. —KASEY KELLER

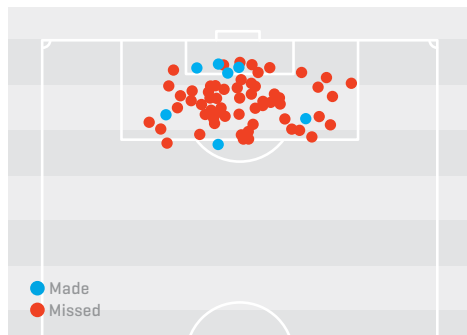
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ORIBE PERALTA

10 GOALS

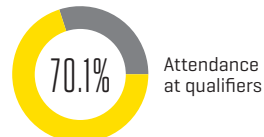
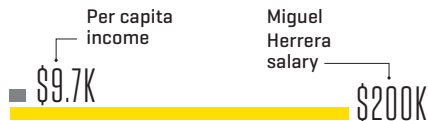
891 MINUTES

Surprisingly, it was Santos Laguna striker Oribe Peralta who scored the goals to clinch Mexico's progress at the end of his country's disappointing campaign. Peralta outshone Chicharito, who scored only five in 16 games and missed the playoffs. —N.H.



BOXED OUT

Mexico struggled for goals in the last stage of CONCACAF qualifying (netting just seven in 10 games), and they especially flailed inside the 18-yard box, despite leading the Hex with 67 shots inside the area. Only Jamaica had a worse scoring rate in the box than Mexico's 10.4%.



311 FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Eduardo

GROUP A

CROATIA

SPI RANK

30

IDENTITY Many things are unclear regarding Croatia right now, especially since they hired new coach Niko Kovac. His first two games were the playoff against Iceland, and Croatia deserved the 2-0 aggregate win. But at times it looked like it was really tough for them, especially in the scoreless draw at Iceland. It will be difficult, but they will fight for second place.

STRENGTH This is a balanced team. Defender Darijo Srna, the captain,

gives the Croatians huge experience in the back thanks to his 110 caps. They have excellent players in midfield, with Luka Modric, Niko Kranjcar and Ivan Rakitic. And Mario Mandzukic is a good, strong striker in the goalmouth.

WEAKNESS Croatia will struggle because no one on this team has good memories from major tournaments in the past decade. They were not qualified in 2010, and they went out in the first stage in 2002 and 2006. There's plenty of experience on the team—nine players have more than 50 caps—but sometimes that's harder when all their game memories are bad ones. —MICHAEL BALLACK

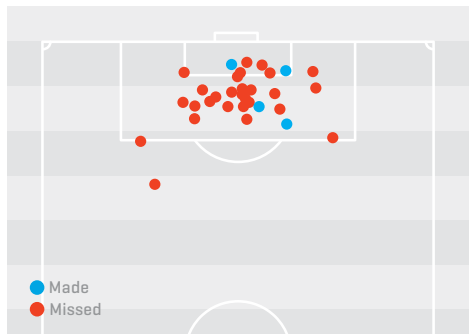
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

EDUARDO

2 GOALS

431 MINUTES

Eduardo's sickening leg break while playing for Arsenal in 2008 raised fears that the talented striker would never see a World Cup, but the Brazilian-born player will play in his first thanks in part to his two goals for his adopted nation. —N.H.

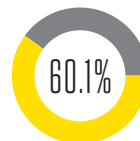
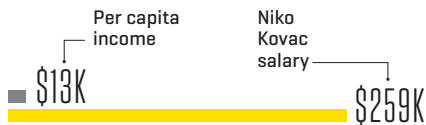


NEAR MAKES

Mario Mandzukic led Croatia with four goals and 32 shots during qualifying, and he preferred to work close to the goal. His average shot distance of 11.5 yards was the shortest of the 57 players who took at least 20 shots during UEFA qualifying.



SOCCER NATION RANK



1,464 FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP A

CAMEROON

SPI RANK

38



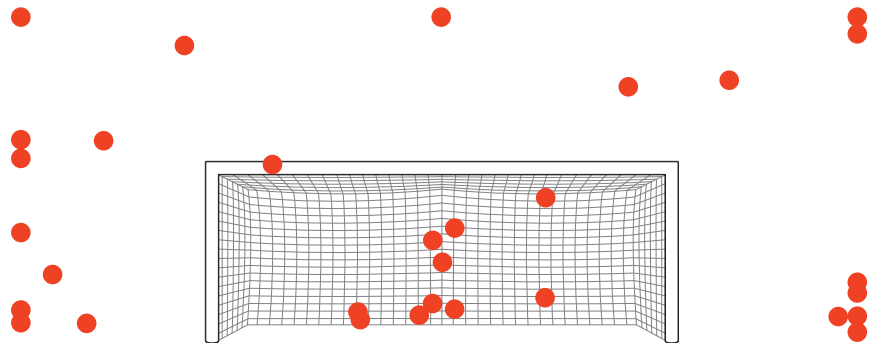
IDENTITY Well, they got past Tunisia in the playoffs, and they really became good in the last stages of qualifying in Africa. A 4-1 win over Tunisia was certainly Cameroon's best performance of the campaign—after lots of 1-0 and 2-1 wins in qualifying, they finally embraced the creativity and entertaining brand of football they used to be known for. There's a lot of talent on the squad, including strikers Samuel Eto'o and Pierre Webo, who scored the first goal against Tunisia, along with midfielders Stephane Mbia

and Jean Makoun. If all these players stay fit and find form, they could have a very good tournament.

STRENGTH Eto'o, the captain, is the most important player for Cameroon on and off the pitch. He is a proven goal scorer at every level, with goals almost every game with his country and an even better pace in his club career. In him they have one of the best and most respected leaders in world football, never mind just in Africa. His experience playing in pressure-filled

games in La Liga and the Premier League, including with his current club, Chelsea, and his technical know-how will be so important for this squad going forward.

WEAKNESS For as talented a squad as it is, Cameroon isn't the youngest side in the draw, and you have to wonder whether they'll have enough in the tank to get out of this group. Both strikers are 32, and there are few other scorers on the team who have any extensive international experience. Alex Song is getting only limited action at Barcelona, and Eto'o has stiff competition at Chelsea, so I'm not sure these key players will have enough game time under their belts to come into the tournament in top shape. —SHAKA HISLOP



RUINOUS CAMEROON

● Made ● Missed (11 shots were blocked by defenders)

In the 2010 World Cup, Cameroon went winless, scoring just two goals [one from the penalty spot], both by Samuel Eto'o. Not including Eto'o, Cameroon took 42 shots in the World Cup without scoring a single goal.

MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ERIC CHOUPOT
MOTING

2

GOALS

300

MINUTES

German-born Moting scored twice in his 300 minutes of action for the Indomitable Lions as they qualified for Brazil with just nine goals in eight games. The Mainz striker will hope his Bundesliga form (five goals in the first 18 games) will win him a place. —N.H.



SOCCER NATION RANK

18

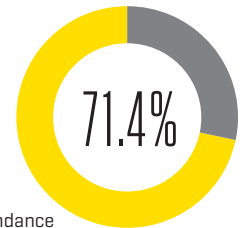
Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Volker Finke salary

\$376K

Per capita income

\$1.2K



Attendance at qualifiers

223

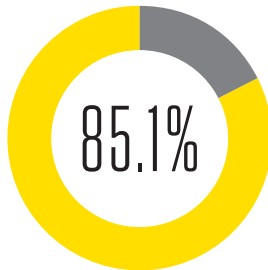
FIFA clubs

GROUP B

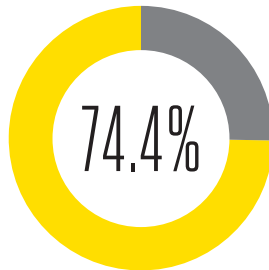


CHANCE TO ADVANCE*

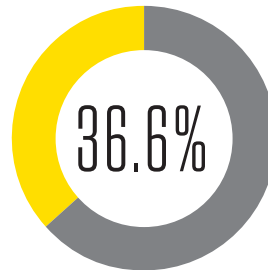
Three of SPI's top 10 teams are in Group B, making the margin of error razor thin—just like the Aussies' hopes.



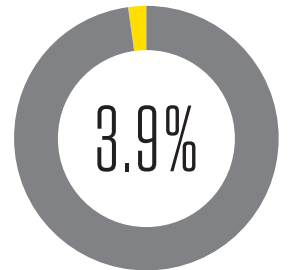
SPAIN



CHILE



NETHERLANDS



AUSTRALIA

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

MURDERERS' ROW

When Spain and the Netherlands battled to a tough 0-0 stalemate at the end of regulation in the 2010 World Cup final, it seemed we were watching two teams that would dominate European football for the foreseeable future. But since Andres Iniesta scored in the 116th minute to win Spain their first Cup, the teams have taken divergent paths. Spain won a second straight Euro title in the middle of a three-year, 29-match unbeaten streak, while the Netherlands bombed, losing all three games in the Euro 2012 Group of Death. Their rematch on June 13 will be a highlight of the group stage, but

neither team can ignore the schedule ahead. Results against a tough Chile team likely will be the difference between the round of 16 and a trip back home. The final game could be the decider: Can Chile's porous defense stop Robin van Persie, or will the Dutch be undone by La Roja's aggressive style and balanced goal scoring?

For all three teams, a win against Australia is a must. The Socceroos have surprised before, reaching the round of 16 in 2006, but to do it in this year's Group of Death would be a different story. —A.M.



Xavi, Arturo Vidal, Robin van Persie and Tim Cahill

SCHEDULE

JUNE 13 3 P.M., ESPN SPAIN VS. NETHERLANDS	JUNE 13 6 P.M., ESPN2 CHILE VS. AUSTRALIA	JUNE 18 NOON, ESPN AUSTRALIA VS. NETHERLANDS	JUNE 18 3 P.M., ESPN SPAIN VS. CHILE	JUNE 23 NOON, ESPN2 AUSTRALIA VS. SPAIN	JUNE 23 NOON, ESPN NETHERLANDS VS. CHILE
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

▶ GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner





Alvaro Negredo

GROUP B

SPAIN

SPI RANK

3

IDENTITY Honestly, what can you say? They are the team to beat, aren't they? It's a fantastic side, and it probably should go down as the greatest national team ever. And out of all the teams that we're going to see, this is the best on the eye. These players might not win the World Cup, but they will play better and more attractive football than everyone else.

STRENGTH Their ability to keep hold of the ball, turn in tight spaces and pass is mesmerizing to watch. They'll have more possession than anybody. They'll have more passes than anybody—they had the top four players in passes completed (and seven of the top nine) in the 2010 World Cup, with Xavi on top with a ridiculous 614. When you

watch Spain, they have 75% or 80% of possession, and the other team just has to defend, defend, defend.

WEAKNESS Gerard Pique and Sergio Ramos are not the biggest center backs, and playing in La Liga, they're not used to the hustle and bustle of having to defend against big center forwards. So any set pieces, corners, free kicks into the box, where height is an advantage—that's big trouble for Spain. —STEVE McMANAMAN

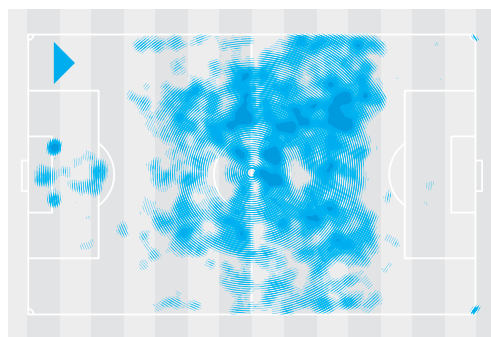
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ALVARO NEGREDO

3 GOALS

167 MINUTES

The 28-year-old striker scored vital goals in a tight qualifying group in which France was breathing down the neck of the reigning world champion. He's been hugely impressive (nine goals in his first 24 games) for title-chasing Manchester City in the EPL in 2013-14. —N.H.



AHEAD BALL

Spain, winner of the last three major competitions, once again will look to dominate possession on the opponent's side of the field. In Euro 2012, the Spanish completed nearly 900 more touches in their attacking half than any other squad.



SOCCER NATION RANK

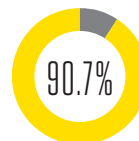


Per capita income

\$28K

Vicente del Bosque salary

\$3.2M



Attendance at qualifiers

18,190

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP B

CHILE

SPI RANK

5



IDENTITY Chile has really thrived under its new coach: When the team hired Jorge Sampaoli at the end of 2012, he unified them. After that, they became one of the best teams in the second round of CONMEBOL qualifying, ending on a 5-0-1 run. They regained an aggressive way of playing that they had lost in previous years. Now they believe in their play—and they believe they're even better than they really are. When these players suit up for the national

team, it feels like they can beat anybody.

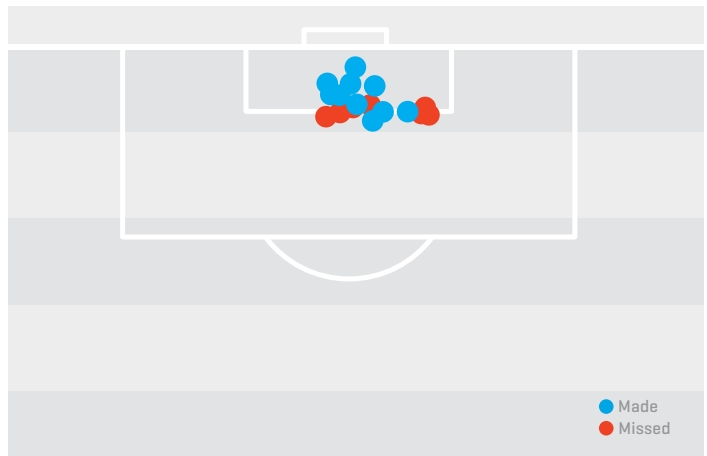
STRENGTH These are not all players on big international clubs—they're not household names. But rather than let their anonymity become a weakness, the squad has a remarkably well-balanced offense. They scored 29 goals in qualifying, behind only Argentina, thanks to six players with multiple goals. Standouts include midfielders Arturo Vidal (five goals) and

Alexis Sanchez (four)—the two also combined for 35 chances created for their teammates—but Chile had 11 others with at least one goal.

WEAKNESS On the pitch, there are no real glaring holes, but you need luck to win the World Cup, and Chile didn't get any. They're drawn in a very difficult group. Even if they do manage to advance, if they finish second behind Spain, they would play Brazil in the round of 16. That said, Chile can beat any big team, including Brazil. And really, if there's a squad that can beat the home team in this World Cup, it's going to be one from South America. —MARIO KEMPES

SHORT-SITED

No South American team scored as many goals inside the six-yard box during CONMEBOL qualifying as Chile, which netted 10 in 16 games. Those 10 goals came from nine different players, also the best in the confederation.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

EDUARDO VARGAS

5

GOALS

925

MINUTES

Vargas, on loan with Valencia, managed five goals for Chile in a low-scoring qualification campaign for La Roja. But the 24-year-old forward has become an important part of the side and outscored the more celebrated Alexis Sanchez. —N.H.



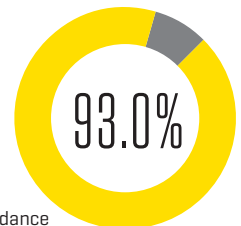
SOCCER NATION RANK



Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Jorge Sampaoli salary
\$1.7M

Per capita income
\$15K



Attendance at qualifiers

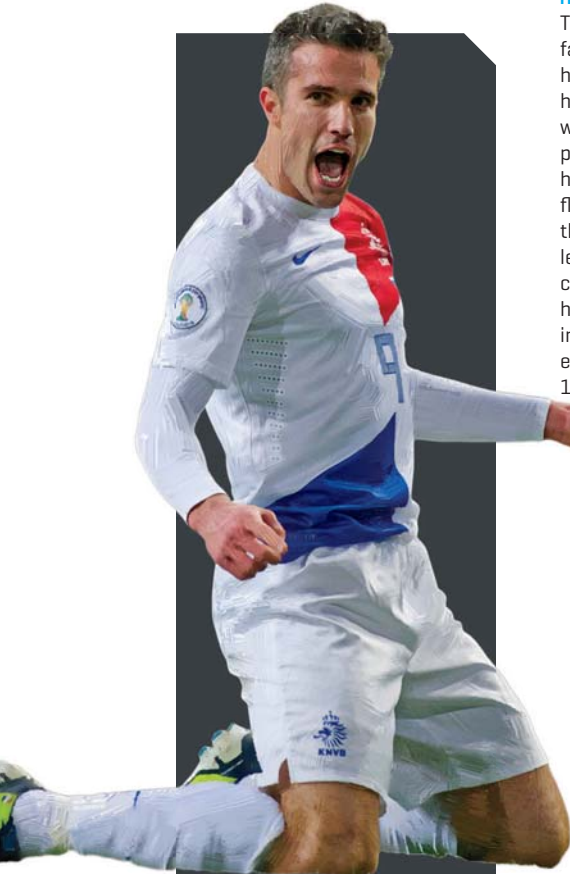
5,762 FIFA clubs

GROUP B

NETHERLANDS

SPI RANK

10



IDENTITY

The Dutch have always been famous for attractive, high-scoring football. They have good individual players who like to have the ball and play their style. When they have a good game, it looks fluid. The ball is spread around the pitch really well, and that leads to lots of chances—they can always score goals. They had the best goal differential in UEFA at plus-29, an extraordinary number in 10 games. Their football is

enjoyable; it's good to watch. And that's exactly what I like.

STRENGTH

The key to this team's performance will be striker Robin van Persie. The team is dependent on his ability to finish—at age 30, he's their all-time leading scorer with 41 goals—and they take a lot from his form. If he's fit and in a good mood, other players step up next to him. I'm also impressed by the offensive ability of the defense and

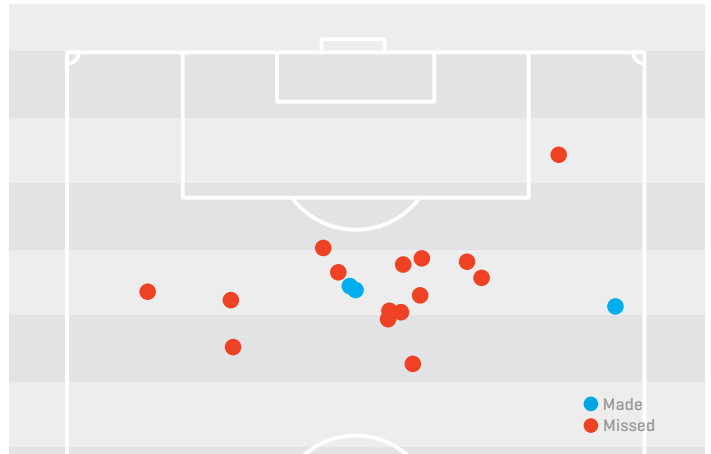
midfield, especially Arjen Robben and Wesley Sneijder and how they create more space for other players.

WEAKNESS

When the Dutch go down 1-0 in a game, what happens? In the past, there were players like Mark van Bommel—extremely tough players who could lead the team. There's a good chance they lose to Spain in the first game, a rematch of the 2010 final. They can't collapse like they did in Euro 2012, going 0-3 in the Group of Death. I'm not sure who the leader is anymore, and that may be the only weak spot on the team. Because from a quality point, I'm not worried. —MICHAEL BALLACK

DIALED DIRECT

After failing to score on 31 straight direct free kicks in competitive matches, the Netherlands scored three free kick goals on 18 shots in World Cup qualifiers—the most in European qualifying. Winger Arjen Robben scored two of the three.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ROBIN VAN PERSIE

11

GOALS

688

MINUTES

With 11 goals in nine games, the prolific forward was the top goal scorer in European qualification. He missed much of Manchester United's dreadful league start after winning his second Golden Boot in 2012-13 with the Red Devils. —N.H.



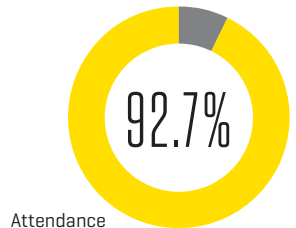
SOCCER NATION RANK



Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Louis van Gaal salary
\$2.6M

Per capita income
\$46K



Attendance at qualifiers

4,856 FIFA clubs



Archie Thompson

GROUP B

AUSTRALIA

SPI RANK **44**

IDENTITY

Now, Australia's a strange one. They've had their day; they had a fine tournament eight years ago in Germany, but many of those stars are still the stars today. Midfielder Tim Cahill and defender Lucas Neill are great, but they're now in their mid-30s. Their leadership will be crucial, though: If things are going badly, Cahill will

take all the pressure on his own shoulders, and he can handle that.

STRENGTH

Cahill is a player I like a lot. I wouldn't call him overly creative, but he's multifaceted. He's very effective in the air, he can play in a defensive or more attack-minded system, and because of his running and the ground he

covers, he contributes at both ends of the park.

WEAKNESS

After a 6-0 thumping by France in a friendly, Australia brought in a new coach, Ange Postecoglou, who has only domestic experience. That's a huge gamble. They have a few friendlies with him at the helm before they get to Brazil in June, but I don't think it'll be enough for Australia to really find any kind of footing.

—SHAKA HISLOP

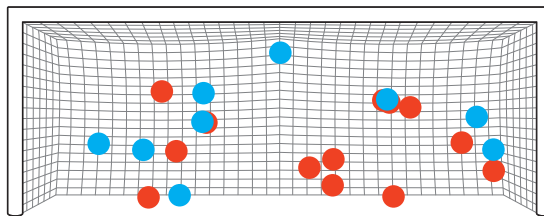
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ARCHIE THOMPSON

2 GOALS

154 MINUTES

The veteran Melbourne Victory forward boasts an impressive 28 career goals for the Socceroos, but 13 of them came in a 31-0 squeaker over American Samoa in 2001. His two in eight caps from the bench in qualifying might be enough to catch the flight to Brazil. —N.H.



TETE D'OR ● Made ● Missed

Since midfielder Tim Cahill debuted for the New York Red Bulls on Aug. 3, 2012, he's been unmatched when it comes to putting his head on crosses. He leads MLS with nine headed goals and 22 headed shots on goal through the 2013 season.



SOCCER NATION RANK

30

Per capita income

\$68K

Ange Postecoglou salary

\$1.3M

62.5%

Attendance at qualifiers

3,868

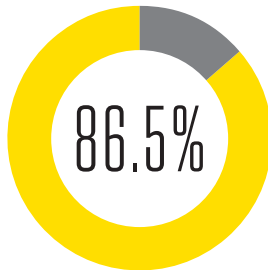
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

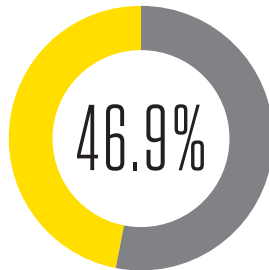
GROUP C



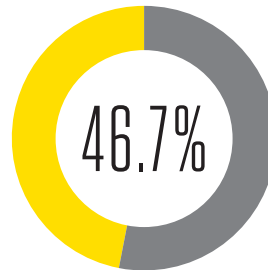
CHANCE TO ADVANCE*
 Colombia missed the past three Cups, but SPI still makes them the heavy favorite. The second spot is up for grabs.



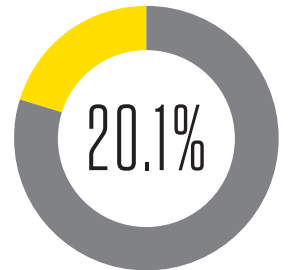
COLOMBIA



IVORY COAST



GREECE



JAPAN

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

TACTICAL DIFFICULTIES

The Colombians likely felt pretty confident when their group was drawn on Dec. 6—their opponents' average SPI rank is just 26—but they still face a challenge unlike most seeded teams. These three opponents, who offer vastly different styles of play, will test coach Jose Pekerman and his staff. The Ivory Coast—no doubt ready for an easier go after being drawn in the Group of Death the past two Cups—will distribute the ball to three of the best players in Africa, Yaya Toure, Salomon Kalou and talisman Didier Drogba in his final World Cup. Greece relies heavily on defense and set pieces, putting

extra numbers behind the ball to grind out a result. And Japan is always one of the fittest teams in the world, while their 16 goals scored in the final round of qualifying showed they are highly technical as well.

But Colombia still has the advantage: This is their most talented group of attackers in two decades, as evidenced by a region-high 96 shots on target in CONMEBOL. Radamel Falcao and his Monaco teammate James Rodriguez combined for 12 goals and five assists in qualifying. If Falcao [ACL] is fit for Brazil, he'll have plenty of chances to make the stat sheet. —A.M.



James Rodriguez, Didier Drogba, Vasilis Torosidis and Shinji Kagawa

SCHEDULE

JUNE 14 NOON, ABC COLOMBIA VS. GREECE	JUNE 14 9 P.M., ESPN IVORY COAST VS. JAPAN	JUNE 19 NOON, ESPN COLOMBIA VS. IVORY COAST	JUNE 19 6 P.M., ESPN JAPAN VS. GREECE	JUNE 24 4 P.M., ESPN JAPAN VS. COLOMBIA	JUNE 24 4 P.M., ESPN2 GREECE VS. IVORY COAST
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

▶ GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner

Year	Colombia	Ivory Coast	Greece	Japan
1998	GS			
2002	GS			
2006	GS	16		
2010	GS	16		



Teofilo Gutierrez

GROUP C

COLOMBIA

SPI RANK **6**

IDENTITY Colombia has always had good players, but they'd lost confidence in the World Cup, last qualifying in 1998. With a strong run in CONMEBOL, the team regained that spirit and now combines talent with strength and fight. Losing Radamel Falcao, who tore his left ACL in January, would be challenging. Post-op, docs put his odds at playing in Brazil at 50-50. But Colombia has more than just one great striker; Teofilo Gutierrez and Jackson Martinez have enough firepower to send Colombia through.

STRENGTH They are a true team, and they play as such. It starts in their training and translates to the pitch: They were second in CONMEBOL in pass completion percentage and assists. With the finishers they have, midfield is crucial, and James Rodriguez and Fredy Guarin are key components.

WEAKNESS They're very inexperienced on a big stage. The way they'll respond if things go south remains to be seen. They qualified extremely well, with just four losses, but come June, the qualifiers are no longer valid. This is when you need to show a champion's character. —MARIO KEMPES

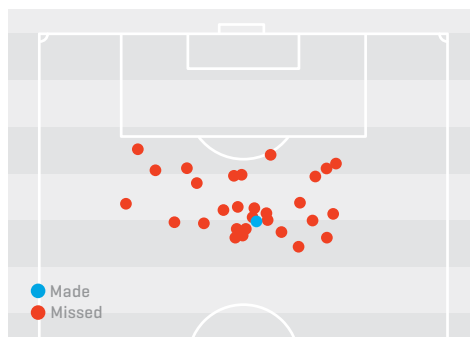
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

RADAMEL FALCAO

9 GOALS

1,091 MINUTES

Falcao's ACL surgery in January was a shocking blow to Colombia's Cup chances. The 28-year-old had tallied nine goals in 13 games during qualification, by far the squad's best total. Teofilo Gutierrez, who had six, is capable of picking up the slack. —N.H.



LONG SHOTS

James Rodriguez is known for passing—he led CONMEBOL during qualifying with 43 chances created. Still, he needs to be more discerning with his shooting; his average shot distance was 27.5 yards, with 30 of his 41 attempts outside the box.



SOCCER NATION RANK

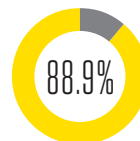


Per capita income

\$7.7K

Jose Pekerman salary

\$1.6M



Attendance at qualifiers

2,773

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Wilfried Bony

GROUP C

IVORY COAST

SPI RANK **16**

IDENTITY This is, as it was in 2010, the team everyone expects to go the deepest of the African squads. But they've always managed to undo themselves—two group-stage exits in the World Cup and two runners-up in the African Cup of Nations are their best showings in the past decade. But in a group that ranks among the least challenging, this

may be their year. I have the Elephants as my dark horse.

STRENGTH You look at talent and this team is better than all others in Africa. Didier Drogba, even at 36, is still as unplayable a center forward as there is—he has a remarkable 62 goals in 98 games. And I don't think there are many better midfielders than

Yaya Toure. He is an incredible player from box to box.

WEAKNESS Coach Sabri Lamouchi has failed to establish a clear directive for the team. When you have as many stars as he does, you're tempted to just let these guys play their games. But as a result, you have roller-coaster shows in form, so you're not exactly sure what the team is trying to do other than allow Drogba and Toure to do whatever they want. —SHAKA HISLOP

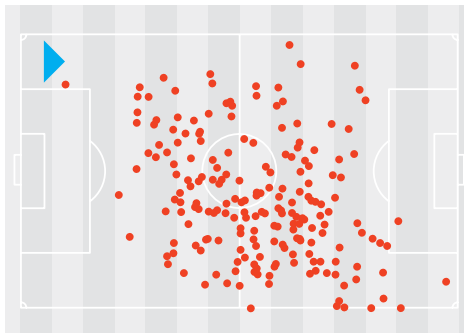
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

WILFRIED BONY

3 GOALS

189 MINUTES

His famed teammates—Yaya Toure, Salomon Kalou and captain Didier Drogba—scored as many or more in qualifying, but none at the rate of Bony, the 25-year-old Swansea City striker. Bony is the youngest of those four players, so the Elephants will count on his pace up front. —N.H.



PRECISION 2010

In the 2010 World Cup (before he became the three-time reigning African footballer of the year), Yaya Toure was brilliant in the so-called Group of Death, attaining the highest pass completion rate, 91.0%, among the tournament's top chance creators.



SOCCER NATION RANK

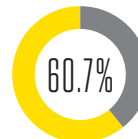


Per capita income

\$1.2K

Sabri Lamouchi salary

\$989K



Attendance at qualifiers

220

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Kostas Mitroglou

GROUP C

GREECE

SPI RANK **26**

IDENTITY Greece did well to qualify, even in a weak group and against a poor Romania team in the playoffs. Coach Fernando Santos has tried to install his Portuguese free-flowing style, but in all honesty, it hasn't made a huge difference—I think they play the way they've played since they won Euro 2004. That defensive style will not hold up anymore.

They just don't have enough quality to go far in June.

STRENGTH The forwards are mostly big, strong guys, and they're all good goal scorers. Georgios Samaras is an imposing 6'4", while top scorer Kostas Mitroglou is 6'2". On the opposite coin, they have winger Dimitris Salpingidis, just 5'6", who plays

very well and who added another four goals in qualifying.

WEAKNESS The midfield still relies on its captain, Giorgos Karagounis, who's about 106—okay, 37. We're talking about a lot of the same old players from the past few tournaments, when they were honestly very average—lots of group-stage and first-round exits. Their midfield just lacks some much-needed pace and creativity. —STEVE McMANAMAN

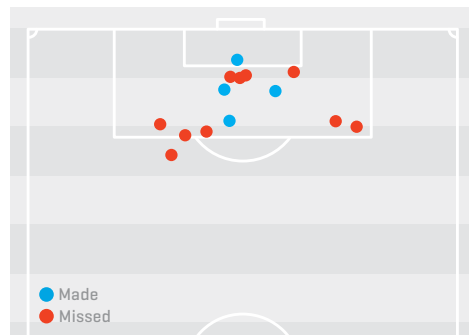
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

KOSTAS MITROGLOU

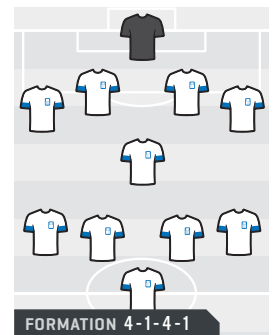
5 GOALS

656 MINUTES

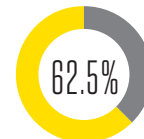
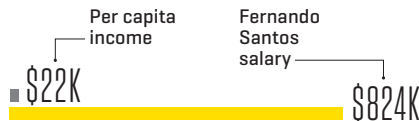
Mitroglou attracted the attention of top clubs as his five goals in 10 appearances drove Greece to qualification at the expense of playoff foe Romania. Fulham paid a club-record transfer fee of nearly \$20 million to buy the striker from Olympiakos in January. —N.H.



FOUR SCORE Greece was ruthlessly efficient in their playoff games against Romania, scoring on four of 14 shots. Taking all but one attempt from inside the penalty area, they put eight on target, a 57% rate that was well above their previous average of 31% during qualifying.



SOCCER NATION RANK **25**



Attendance at qualifiers

5,768 FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP C

JAPAN

SPI RANK

36



IDENTITY Japan finished first in Asian qualifying, and that was fair. They're a strong team, certainly one of the best sides in Asia—creative and dynamic. Their pace of play is fantastic, and they're very quick going forward. They had the best final-round goal differential in AFC at plus-11 thanks to 16 goals in eight games. With ninth-place finishes in both the 2002 and 2010 World Cups, Japan will not be intimidated by anyone in group play.

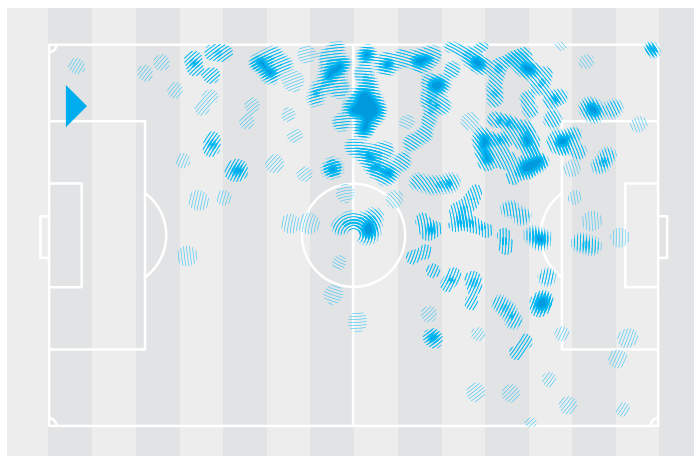
STRENGTH Japan has a terrific midfield. Their three attacking midfielders—Keisuke Honda, Shinji Kagawa and Ryoichi Maeda—combined for 13 goals in qualifying. The rest of the team really takes the creative lead of those players, especially Kagawa, who has had good years with Manchester United (and previously with Borussia Dortmund), and Honda. The defense, a question mark after a poor Confederations Cup, allowed only eight goals

in 14 games in the final two rounds in Asia. If they keep momentum from their qualification, Japan will be competitive.

WEAKNESS Their striker, Shinji Okazaki, did well in qualifying, but I'm not sure he takes enough of his chances. He had just 14 shots in seven games in the 2010 World Cup and the Confederations Cup—not a great ratio for a center forward; in fact, it's the second worst among forwards who played that many games. If Japan fails to get out of the group, it will be because of Okazaki, who simply needs to have too many bites of the cherry to get a goal. —SHAKA HISLOP

LEFT ON THE FIELD

Shinji Kagawa was one of four Japanese players never to sit at the Confederations Cup, where he was used mostly as a left midfielder. That's a much more extreme position than the central role he's played in two seasons with Man United.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER
KEISUKE HONDA

5

GOALS

507

MINUTES

Striker Shinji Okazaki scored eight goals for Japan, but Honda's five in six games, including a penalty to clinch the Cup spot, marked the attacking midfielder as a vital cog on the national side. After a January move to AC Milan, he scored in his second game. —N.H.



SOCCER NATION RANK

15

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Alberto Zaccheroni salary

\$2.6M

Per capita income

\$46K

95.9%

Attendance at qualifiers

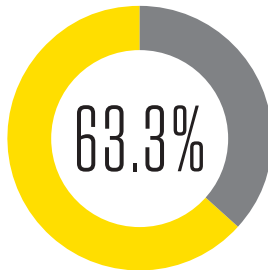
2,000 FIFA clubs

GROUP D

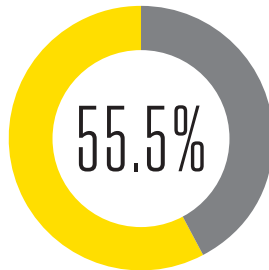


CHANCE TO ADVANCE*

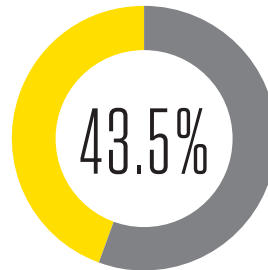
With the top average SPI rank [13.0], this group is the only one without a team with at least 65% odds.



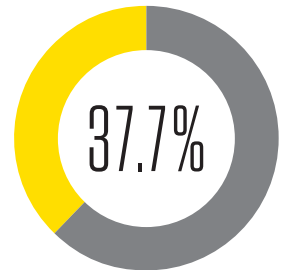
URUGUAY



ENGLAND



ITALY



COSTA RICA

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

DRAMA KINGS

If you like your World Cup with a side of theatrics, look no further than Group D; it features not just three former Cup winners but an equal number of temperamental, world-class strikers in Uruguay's Luis Suarez (Liverpool), England's Wayne Rooney (Manchester United) and Italy's Mario Balotelli (AC Milan).

No other striking tandem can match Uruguay's combination of Suarez (the Premier League's leading scorer at the season's midpoint) and PSG striker Edinson Cavani (second best in Ligue 1). England will counter with a

fast-paced attack when Daniel Sturridge or Danny Welbeck joins Rooney coming forward, while Italy poses problems with the creativity and vision of midfielder Andrea Pirlo. The difference could come down to which stars control their emotions; by their clubs' midseasons, Rooney had been booked for six yellow cards, Suarez two and Balotelli eight, with one red.

Costa Rica's only chance against nations that have combined to win seven World Cups? Bait them into getting carded, and if that fails, just fall to the turf, grab a body part and hope for the best. —A.M.



Luis Suarez, Wayne Rooney, Andrea Pirlo and Alvaro Saborio

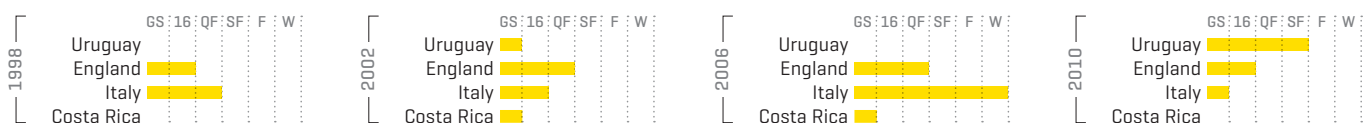
SCHEDULE

JUNE 14 3 P.M., ABC URUGUAY VS. COSTA RICA	JUNE 14 6 P.M., ESPN ENGLAND VS. ITALY	JUNE 19 3 P.M., ESPN URUGUAY VS. ENGLAND	JUNE 20 NOON, ESPN ITALY VS. COSTA RICA	JUNE 24 NOON, ESPN ITALY VS. URUGUAY	JUNE 24 NOON, ESPN2 COSTA RICA VS. ENGLAND
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

▶ GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner



GROUP D

URUGUAY

SPI RANK

8



IDENTITY Uruguay has played the same way since winning in 1930—relentless, with lots of aggressiveness. This side has always had great defenders, so it's hard to score against them. But now they have an added strength in the strikers and a very powerful offense overall. Strikers Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani are topflight starters, and if you need some reinforcements, you have last tournament's Golden Ball winner, Diego Forlan, coming

off the bench. Don't underestimate Los Charrúas just because they had to go to a playoff—CONMEBOL is the hardest place to qualify.

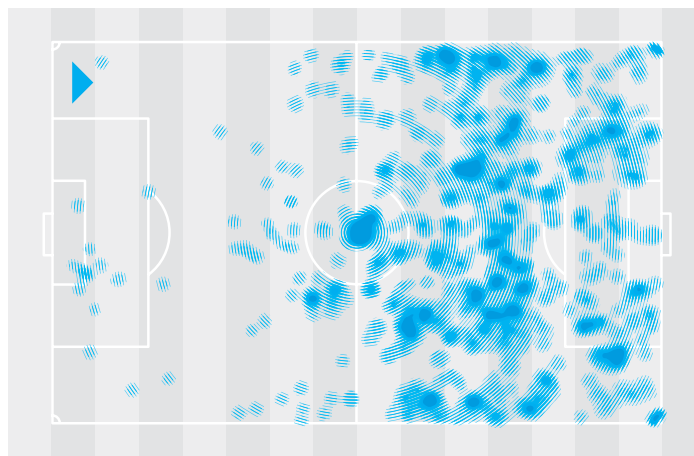
STRENGTH Uruguay's defense didn't allow a goal in the group stage in 2010 and got to the semifinals by not allowing more than a goal before falling to the Dutch 3-2. Qualifying was harder this year, but you saw the defense emerge in the team's playoff, when they kept

Jordan scoreless over two games. With captain Diego Lugano anchoring the back four, their good midfielders—and even their great strikers—are bonuses.

WEAKNESS You get the best and the worst from Uruguay. They have a very hard time getting started, especially in a tournament like this. You saw it in qualification—they struggled in the early games of CONMEBOL, especially away from home, where they were 2-5-1, but they looked strong at Jordan, winning 5-0. In the World Cup, if they get to the round of 16, they'll start transforming themselves into a contender. —MARIO KEMPES

SHELL GAME

Luis Suarez led all players during CONMEBOL qualifying with 11 goals and 87 touches in the attacking penalty area. But the challenge with Suarez is that there is no real spot to key on him. He had 129 touches on the left of the attacking third, 120 down the center of the attacking third and 131 on the right.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

LUIS SUAREZ

11
GOALS

1,416
MINUTES

As well known for his off-kilter on-field behavior as his world-beating goals, Suarez notched 11 scores in 16 games. The Liverpool frontman impressed at club level too, breaking the EPL record for goals in a month with 10 in December. —N.H.



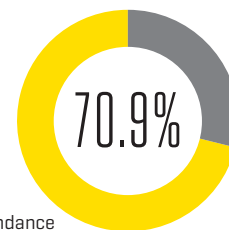
SOCCER NATION RANK

10

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Oscar Tabarez salary
\$1.2M

Per capita income
\$14K



Attendance at qualifiers

1,220 FIFA clubs



Wayne Rooney

GROUP D

ENGLAND

SPI RANK **9**

IDENTITY Ahh, the mighty English! They qualified comfortably enough in the end, but they really bumbled their way through. England saved their best two performances for last, home wins against Montenegro [4-1] and Poland [2-0]. In June they'll need similar performances from captain Steven Gerrard and striker Wayne Rooney, who combined for

three goals in those games. Those two pushed forward, and it made all the players more attack-minded.

STRENGTH As always, the best of England's attributes will be things like work rates. Players will work hard, and they will die for the cause. They will run and fight and fight and fight some more, and that's how they will get through

games. If they can top the group this year and play the second-place team from Group C, that's something worth reaching for.

WEAKNESS I always feel that English players think, I can't make a mistake. So rather than trying things out and being confident, they go for the easy ball instead of something a bit more exciting. You want to see a team go forward and take people on and score nice goals, but unfortunately England doesn't have that. —STEVE McMANAMAN

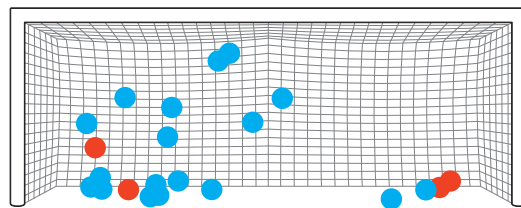
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

WAYNE ROONEY

7 GOALS

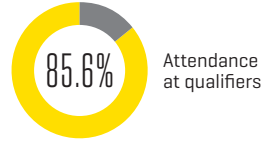
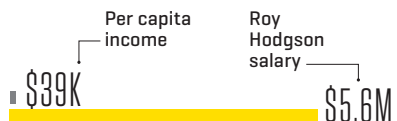
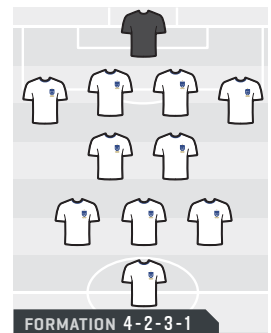
471 MINUTES

The superlative qualification marksman, Rooney scored seven goals in six matches during England's run to Brazil. But doubts remain about the Manchester United player's ability to score regularly on the world stage, as injury has often blighted his appearances. —N.H.



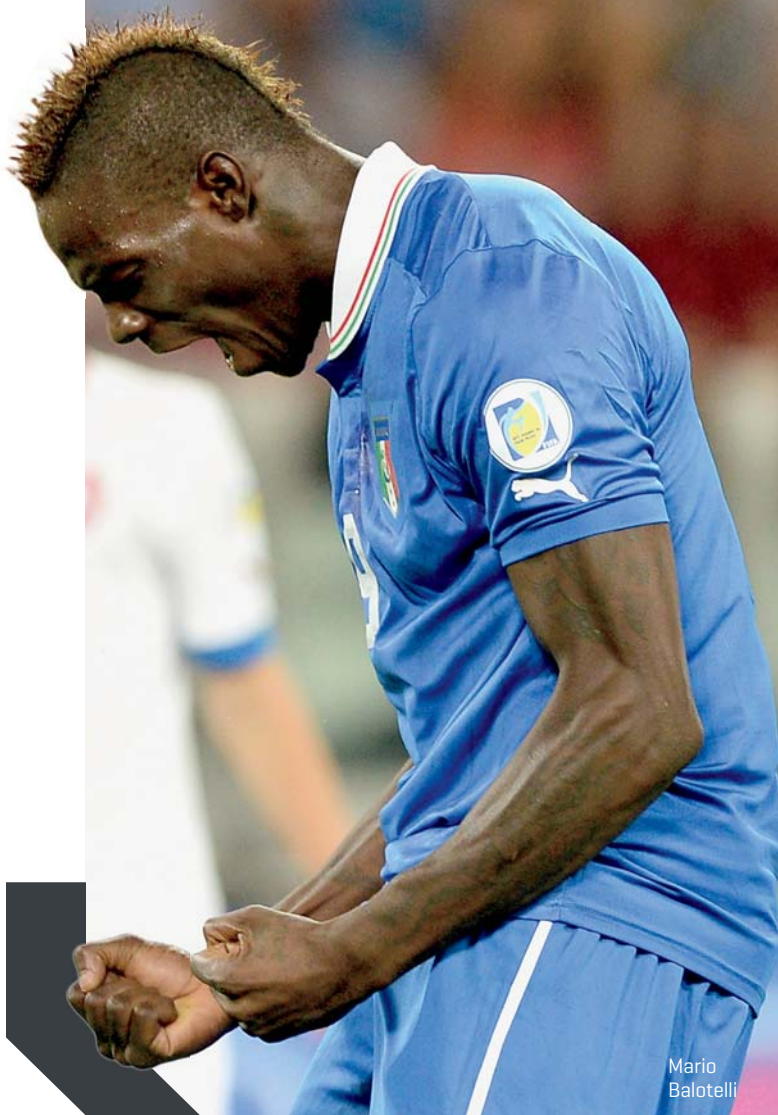
MAKE 'EM PAY ● Made ● Missed

Even late in his career, midfielder Frank Lampard will likely be England's primary penalty taker. In competitive matches for club and country since the 2010 World Cup, Lampard is 18-for-22 on penalties—scoring more than anyone else over that span.



42,490
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Mario Balotelli

GROUP D

ITALY

SPI RANK

12

IDENTITY The Italians are perhaps the best team in the world from a tactical standpoint. They're frustrating to play against because they're so defensive. This was not the most impressive qualification, but they still went undefeated in 10 games and conceded fewer than a goal per game. It's like that in the Italian leagues as well, low-scoring and tenacious. Maybe their brand of football is not so good to watch, but it's successful. We've never liked to play the Italians.

STRENGTH Italy is always very smart in the way they play to their strengths. The players are well organized and technically sound, and Italy has huge experience in guys like goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and midfielder Andrea Pirlo—at Pirlo's age, 35 during the Cup, he's still the heart of this team.

WEAKNESS They'll struggle to keep up with the pace of other teams. In a World Cup, it's really difficult to keep fit and up for every game, and it will be especially so in the South American climate. When a young, inspired team attacks them over 90 minutes, I'm not sure Italy can compete on a physical level.
—MICHAEL BALLACK

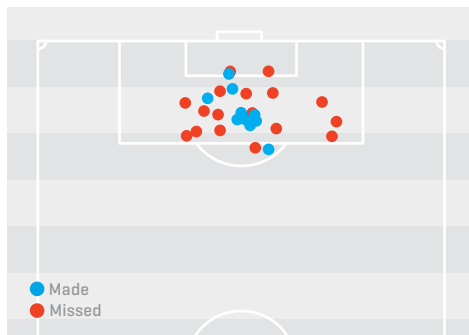
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

MARIO BALOTELLI

5 GOALS

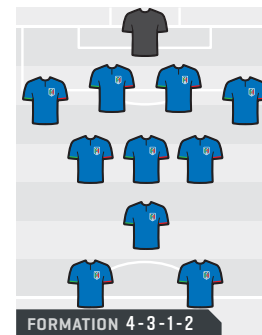
373 MINUTES

The always-controversial AC Milan striker—he's earned five yellows and a red in 15 games for Italy since Euro 2012—had a goal a game in the run-up to his first World Cup. If he can stay on the field, he'll be a huge help for the Azzurri. —N.H.



MARIO NETS

Mario Balotelli has an impressive 10 goals in 15 competitive matches for Italy since Euro 2012, but his numbers get even better when you look inside the penalty area. Those 10 goals came on just 27 shots, and in qualifying for Brazil, five came on 10 shots.



SOCCER NATION RANK

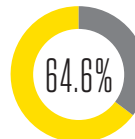
14

Per capita income

\$33K

Cesare Prandelli salary

\$4.1M



Attendance at qualifiers

16,697

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP D

COSTA RICA

SPI RANK

23



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER
RANDALL BRENES

3

GOALS

367

MINUTES

Despite starting just two games in qualifying, El Chiqui grabbed three goals in 367 minutes of action. The diminutive veteran outshone his more heralded teammates, including Bryan Ruiz, by making a vital impact from the bench. —N.H.

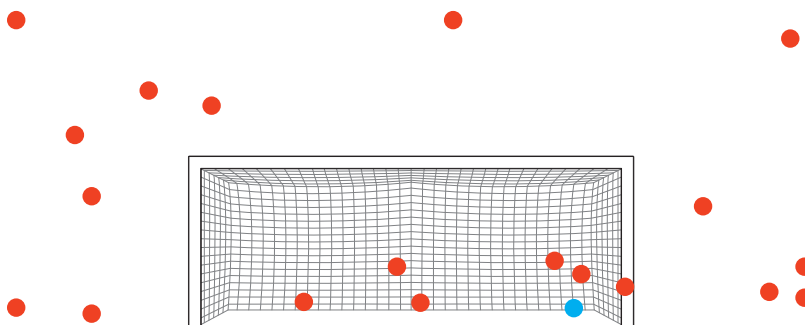
IDENTITY Ticos coach Jorge Luis Pinto focused on defense and played five men in the back to get Costa Rica to Brazil. They pride themselves on that stinginess, so this isn't a team that's going to get crushed, despite their opponents' impressive résumés. But in the end, they're just not going to get enough goal-scoring chances to make up for the ones they give up. Their opponents' fans will be thinking Costa Rica is an

easy win for their teams—and they're probably right.

STRENGTH The ability of the attacking players was a big reason Costa Rica was allowed to play with five defenders and still get the goals needed to qualify. Winger Bryan Ruiz will be expected to pull the strings from a slightly withdrawn position and will need to hold the ball up so speedy striker Joel Campbell can use his pace to get behind opponents' defenses. Talisman Alvaro

Saborio's ability to find the net from set pieces will be crucial if the Ticos are to find the goals to get a result in this group.

WEAKNESS If Costa Rica is unable to hold the ball in the opponent's half—made that much more difficult if they keep the extra man defending—they'll likely see limited attacking opportunities. It's hard to believe they'll be able to completely avoid conceding goals. If Pinto decides to play four at the back in an attempt to keep possession in more advanced positions, he could allow the likes of Luis Suarez or Mario Balotelli too much space. Looks like a case of damned if you do, damned if you don't. —KASEY KELLER



SCATTER SHOT ● Made ● Missed (four shots were blocked by defenders)

Best known for drawing the card that got Matt Besler suspended, forward Joel Campbell also took 24 shots in the final round, second in CONCACAF only to Clint Dempsey's 26. But Campbell scored just once, giving him the lowest goals-to-shots ratio of any of the region's players with a final-round goal.



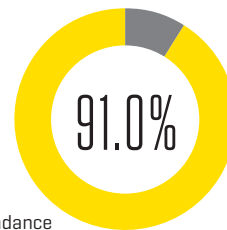
SOCCER NATION RANK



Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Jorge Luis Pinto salary
\$420K

Per capita income
\$9.3K



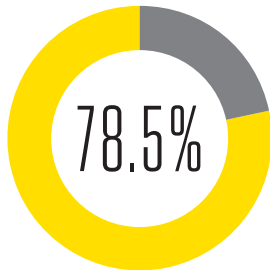
Attendance at qualifiers

254 FIFA clubs

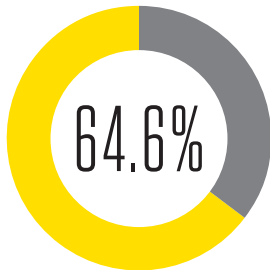
GROUP E



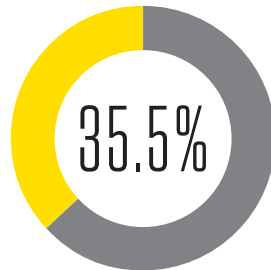
CHANCE TO ADVANCE*
 France needed a playoff to qualify, but SPI doesn't punish for being drawn into a group with Spain, the 2010 champ.



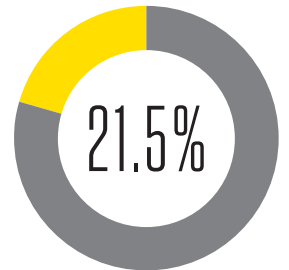
FRANCE



ECUADOR



SWITZERLAND



HONDURAS

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

SEED OF DOUBT

Believe it or not, the Swiss are the seeded team: By dominating a weak UEFA group [so bad that Iceland—49th in FIFA rankings and 66th in SPI—finished second], they earned themselves a Pot 1 spot by ranking seventh in FIFA's charts in October. But after a few more months of play, they slipped to 22nd in ESPN's SPI and are just the third-highest squad in Group E.

On the flip side, France had the bad luck of being drawn in Spain's group in qualifying but has climbed all the way to SPI's top 10 after undoing a 2-0 playoff deficit to beat Ukraine 3-2 on aggregate. [Playoffs aren't considered in

FIFA's seeding.] Ecuador too will be a legitimate challenger for the round of 16 and will do their best work on the flanks. Man United winger Antonio Valencia can wreak havoc on the right and ranked second in CONMEBOL in chances created. Honduras, the group's minnow, also looks to the flanks but will view scoring just one goal, which would be their first since 1982, as a success.

Of course, it's not a lost cause for the Swiss: They qualified unbeaten and can take control with a June 15 result against Ecuador. If not, they'll certainly wonder where the "advantage" of being a seeded team went wrong. —A.M.



Franck Ribery, Antonio Valencia, Valon Behrami and Maynor Figueroa

SCHEDULE

JUNE 15 NOON, ABC SWITZERLAND VS. ECUADOR	JUNE 15 3 P.M., ABC FRANCE VS. HONDURAS	JUNE 20 3 P.M., ESPN SWITZERLAND VS. FRANCE	JUNE 20 6 P.M., ESPN HONDURAS VS. ECUADOR	JUNE 25 4 P.M., ESPN2 HONDURAS VS. SWITZERLAND	JUNE 25 4 P.M., ESPN ECUADOR VS. FRANCE
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

▶ GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner





Franck Ribery

GROUP E

FRANCE

SPI RANK

7

IDENTITY Les Bleus are always unpredictable. This year it's even more important for France to represent their home country well in such a big tournament, because they can't give the same image—bad attitude and boycotted training—that they did four years ago. Individually, they have great players, talented players, and it's a good mix, but they have to be a

unit. That will determine whether they will be successful.

STRENGTH They can score goals from every offensive position, and that makes them dangerous. Also, France isn't intimidated when they face the likes of Germany or Brazil: They can beat everyone. Players like winger Franck Ribery and striker Karim Benzema can

score from any situation. The quality is there, offensive and defensive, but they have to show it at the right time.

WEAKNESS For France, it's not whether they play with one striker or two, or if they can play from behind. It's more a question of attitude. An inability to put egos in the pocket and play for the country and do their best is the weakness of this team. It will be interesting to see how they can adjust their mindsets.
—MICHAEL BALLACK

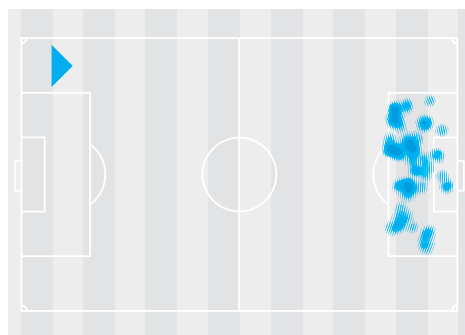
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

FRANCK RIBERY

5 GOALS

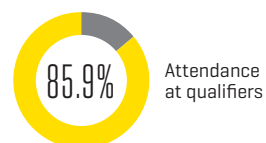
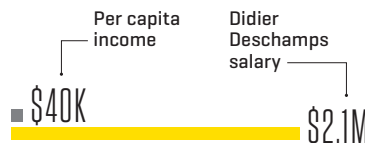
876 MINUTES

Ribery's five-in-10 performance for the national side was instrumental in France's push to qualify despite being drawn in the same UEFA group as Spain. The Bayern star has rediscovered his club form and was one of three finalists for the 2013 Ballon d'Or. —N.H.



PAS DE DEUX

If the two legs of the UEFA playoff are an indication, France needs to practice away from home: Les Bleus completed only nine of 34 passes [27%] into the attacking penalty area in Kiev. But at home [see heat map], they connected on 30 of 61 [49%].



20,062
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP E

ECUADOR

SPI RANK **11**

IDENTITY Ecuador had their moments during qualifying, but they cut it close. Players relaxed, and the team almost lost that fourth CONMEBOL spot. But they showed they're a hard-fighting group when striker Christian Benitez died at 27 after a cardiac arrest last summer. He was the star and the soul of the team, and they really struggled with the loss, finishing 1-2-1 following his death. If they can channel that grief into something positive and pull together, it will be a proper dedication to him.

STRENGTH The offense is better than the defense, though they scored only 20 goals in qualifying. Striker Felipe Caicedo has aimed to make up for Benitez's impact, scoring twice in the four games after his death. Captain and Man United midfielder Antonio Valencia is their most important player—he needs to elevate the rest.

WEAKNESS Ecuador has a fragile mentality. When they're playing with the score in their favor, everything works out. When they're not, they lose track of the game, showing signs of desperation. That's when you start undressing them and you see that lack of cohesiveness. —MARIO KEMPES



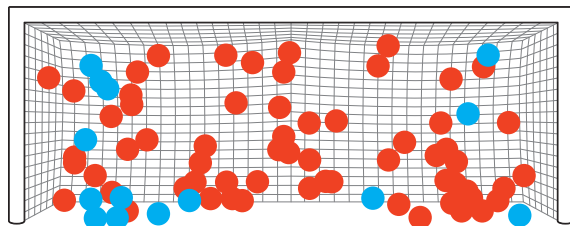
Felipe Caicedo

MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER
FELIPE CAICEDO

7 GOALS

626 MINUTES

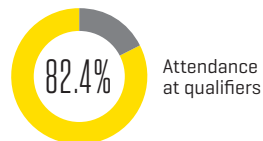
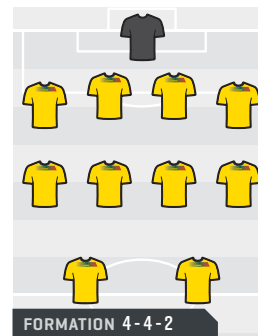
Much-traveled Caicedo scored seven times in nine games for Ecuador this cycle. The striker joined Al Jazira in the UAE in 2013 after spells with Manchester City and Lokomotiv Moscow, as well as in Switzerland, Portugal and Spain. —N.H.



● Made
● Missed

LEFT WANTING

If you want to score on Ecuador, shoot left. Ecuador surrendered 16 goals in qualifying; 10 of 26 shots on target to the left were converted compared with just five of the 52 to the center or right. And for those keeping score—they had one own goal to the right.



201 FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP E

SWITZERLAND

SPI RANK

22



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

FABIAN SCHAR

3
GOALS

270
MINUTES

Basel center back Schar scored an impressive three goals in three appearances as Switzerland finished an unbeaten qualifying campaign. Schar topped the scoring charts for the Alpine nation thanks to goals against Iceland and Norway. —N.H.

IDENTITY Switzerland is young, and to me that'll mean a team full of confidence, full of exuberance. There's no pressure on them whatsoever, and they're able to adapt: Against top-tier sides, the Swiss will try to be goal poachers, but against other squads they'll really try to play football. The players aren't experienced, which isn't always a disadvantage—they'll go out and think, This is the stage for me—I'm going to have a go today.

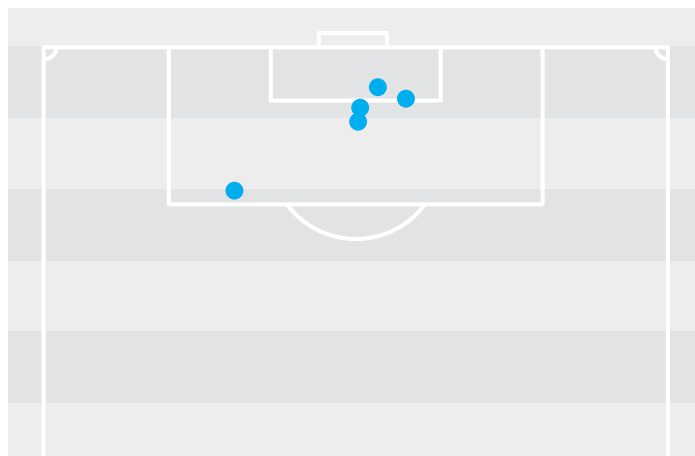
STRENGTH Their best chance comes from those younger players. Defender Fabian Schar and midfielders Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka have really come on in the past couple of years—they scored a combined seven goals in qualification. You saw how that youth helped when this team beat an admittedly weak Brazil side in a friendly last year. Brazil was the better team, but the Swiss went out strong, got the lead and then defended hard. In the end,

they got the right result against a team on an 11-game unbeaten streak. That says a lot.

WEAKNESS A lack of organization defensively is the biggest concern against these high-caliber teams. At the back, they have older players: Philippe Senderos and captain Gokhan Inler in front of him, and most of the defensive players are in their late 20s or 30s. Against a team like France, have those players got the pace? Do they have the mobility to handle Franck Ribery or Olivier Giroud or Karim Benzema running at them? I don't think they'll be organized enough.
—STEVE McMANAMAN

SET POINTS

Switzerland scored five of their 17 goals from corners or free kick set pieces, the most among UEFA group winners. Those five goals came on only 22 such plays, the best rate among group winners. It allowed all the Swiss players to get involved, with defenders tallying three such scores.



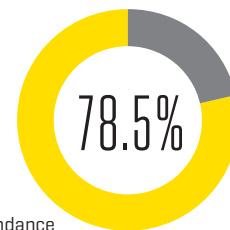
SOCCER NATION RANK

19

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Ottmar Hitzfeld salary
\$3.6M

Per capita income
\$78K



Attendance at qualifiers

1,806 FIFA clubs



Jerry Bengtson

GROUP E

HONDURAS

SPI RANK **32**

IDENTITY Honduras will compete in their second straight World Cup. Often, teams and players can understand this level of play only after experiencing it. And in their second consecutive Cup, Honduras has a few quality players sprinkled around Europe. The real question for this very athletic squad is: Do they have the playmakers to create enough scoring chances?

STRENGTH Honduras will keep things tight at the back. Defender Emilio Izaguirre is arguably their best player, and his ability to balance his defensive responsibilities and help out in the attack will be crucial. Wigan Athletic's Roger Espinoza has become one of CONCACAF's most complete midfielders. He will be asked to cover a lot of territory defensively

and threaten to deliver the killer pass while on attack.

WEAKNESS Scoring goals will be the biggest shortcoming for this squad. Back in South Africa, Los Catrachos conceded only three goals, but they could not score a single one. Their main scoring threat will come from striker Carlo Costly, but the squad's overall quality might not be there—the young players are a little too young and the veterans a few years too old. —KASEY KELLER

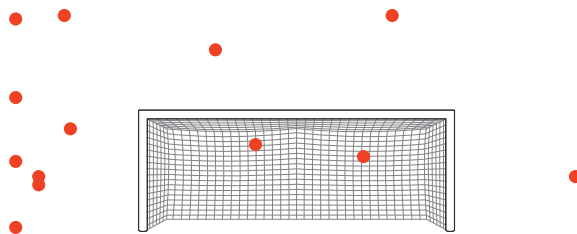
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

JERRY BENGTON

9 GOALS

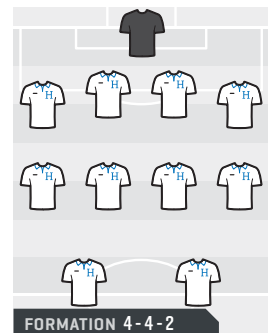
891 MINUTES

Bengtson's return of nine goals in 12 appearances for Honduras helped them over the line to Brazil. The 27-year-old's impressive run for his nation has not carried over to his MLS side, the New England Revolution, where he scored just three goals in his first two seasons. —N.H.



GOAL DISORIENTED ● Made ● Missed [10 shots were blocked by defenders]

South Africa was Honduras' first World Cup in 28 years, and Los Catrachos were one of two teams, with Algeria, that failed to score. Honduras was next-to-last with 23 shots, and their two on target were the fewest in the tourney.



SOCCER NATION RANK

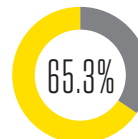
21

Per capita income

\$2.3K

Luis Fernando Suarez salary

\$600K



Attendance at qualifiers

227
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

ARGENTINA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

NIGERIA

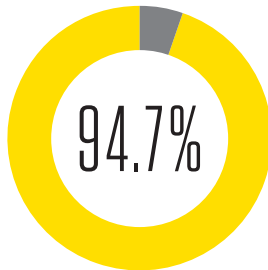
IRAN

GROUP F

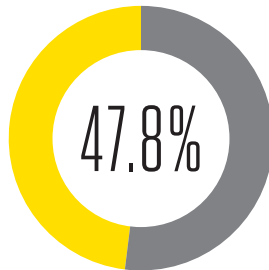


CHANCE TO ADVANCE*

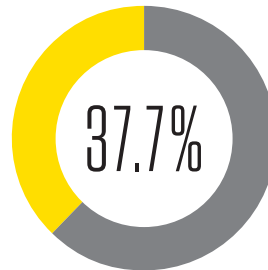
There's no real challenge here for Argentina, whose SPI odds of getting out of group play are second only to Brazil's.



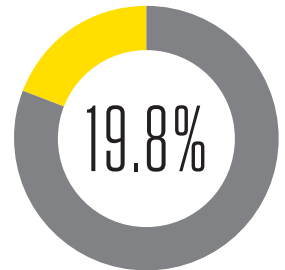
ARGENTINA



BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA



NIGERIA



IRAN

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

MESSI THE MESSIAH?

Sure, Group F favorite Argentina is loaded with other world-class talent, including strikers Sergio Aguero and Gonzalo Higuain (and their 14 qualifying goals), but the story of this team is the otherworldly Lionel Messi. A peerless goal scorer for club (he notched 37 in 36 games in 2013 for FC Barcelona), his 10 goals in qualifying have proved that any chemistry issues with La Albiceleste are a thing of the past. The strain on Messi to win a World Cup is immense, and coach Alejandro Sabella will be tasked with making sure the team remains stable even under the pressure of the highest expectations.

With so much riding on the favorite, relatively little stress has been placed on the rest of the group. Cup debutante Bosnia-Herzegovina will let loose a strike force of Edin Dzeko and Vedad Ibisevic, the best goal-scoring pair in UEFA qualifying, while Nigeria will pack it tight as it did in conceding just four goals in six games on the way to winning last year's Africa Cup of Nations. As for Iran, former Man United assistant Carlos Queiroz admits these teams likely were thrilled to get his side in their group. His goal is simple: Make them wish they hadn't. —A.M.



Lionel Messi, Edin Dzeko, John Obi Mikel and Javad Nekounam

SCHEDULE

JUNE 15 6 P.M., ESPN ARGENTINA VS. BOSNIA-HERZ.	JUNE 16 3 P.M., ESPN IRAN VS. NIGERIA	JUNE 21 NOON, ESPN ARGENTINA VS. IRAN	JUNE 21 6 P.M., ESPN NIGERIA VS. BOSNIA-HERZ.	JUNE 25 NOON, ESPN NIGERIA VS. ARGENTINA	JUNE 25 NOON, ESPN2 BOSNIA-HERZ. VS. IRAN
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner

Year	Argentina	Bosnia-Herz.	Nigeria	Iran
1998	GS:16:QF:SF:F:W:			
2002	GS:16:QF:SF:F:W:			
2006	GS:16:QF:SF:F:W:			
2010	GS:16:QF:SF:F:W:			

GROUP F

ARGENTINA

SPI RANK

2



IDENTITY Certainly, this team still revolves around Lionel Messi—he’s the best player in the world. But Messi has had to learn that he can’t expect to do with Argentina what he does with Barcelona. He’s not playing with these players every week, and they’ve had to learn to work together. After two World Cup quarterfinal exits, in 2006 and 2010, this year it seems they’ve found a rhythm, and Messi was prolific for La Albiceleste with 10 goals in

14 games in qualifying. They were in fantastic form through the campaign—just two losses in 16 games and a plus-20 goal differential.

STRENGTH It’s easy to put all the offensive pressure on Messi, but actually, the entire attack is very solid. There’s good balance up top, and the midfielders, particularly Javier Mascherano, create lots of space for their strikers. As expected, No. 10 is the inspiration, and he led the

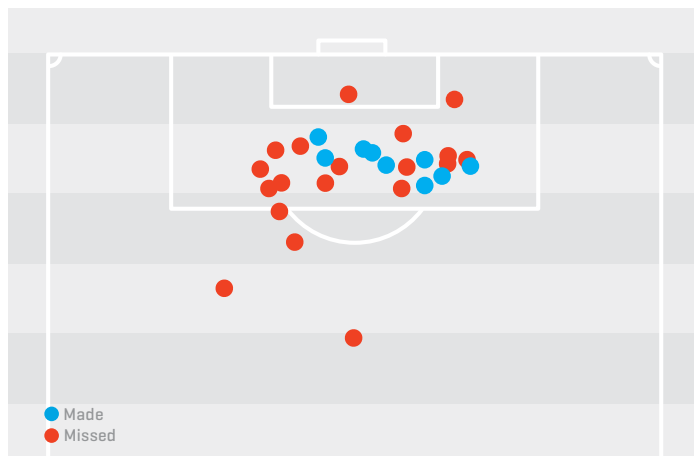
team in goals, but fellow strikers Gonzalo Higuain and Sergio Aguero had nine and five, respectively—those three were by far the best strike force in qualification.

WEAKNESS From midfield and forward, they’re incredibly strong, but from midfield to the back, they’re not quite there yet. The squad’s goalkeeper, Sergio Romero, has been displaced as the starter at Monaco, so he’ll be entering the Cup after an entire season on the bench. Overall, the names are not as big, aside from Man City’s Pablo Zabaleta, so if there is a vulnerable spot, it will be the defense.

—MARIO KEMPES

NEAR MAKES

Gonzalo Higuain was tied with Colombia’s Radamel Falcao for most goals scored in the penalty area during CONMEBOL qualifying with nine, but Higuain took only 25 shots in the penalty area compared with Falcao’s 42. And Higuain embraced the poacher role: He had only three shots from outside the box.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

MAXI RODRIGUEZ

3
GOALS

112
MINUTES

Despite the presence of the Big Three—Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero and Gonzalo Higuain—Maxi Rodriguez made the most of his minutes in qualifying. His impressive tally marked the winger as a potential supersub for one of the favorites. —N.H.



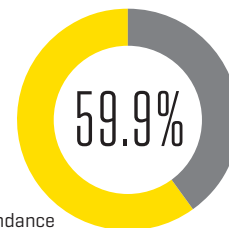
SOCCER NATION RANK



Calculating a nation’s passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Alejandro Sabella salary
\$780K

Per capita income
\$12K



Attendance at qualifiers

3,377 FIFA clubs



Edin Dzeko

GROUP F

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

SPI RANK **15**

IDENTITY They come from such a small nation, less than 4 million, that qualifying is an achievement that can't be overstated. But Bosnia is a hardworking, attractive side. They're so strong defensively, and they like to go forward. They didn't have great teams in their group, but what more can you ask for than 30 goals in 10 matches? Strikers Edin Dzeko

and Vedad Ibisevic scored an incredible 18 combined.

STRENGTH That they conceded only six goals in 10 matches—an excellent record, when you think of it—speaks to keeper Asmir Begovic and how good that back four was at protecting him. Football isn't rocket science: If you're very strong at the back,

like the Bosnians are, and you've got people up front who nick goals, you're going to have a chance.

WEAKNESS They're quite inexperienced, which won't help them at all. And being a small nation, they don't have 15, 16, or 17 standouts who play high-quality football every single week; they've got six or seven. Whether that will be good enough on the day to beat the likes of Argentina? I'm really not sure. —STEVE McMANAMAN

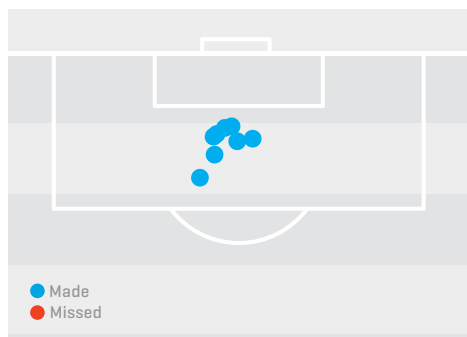
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

EDIN DZEKO

10 GOALS

900 MINUTES

The 28-year-old has impressed in his first few seasons at Man City, and he's found the same success when playing for his young national side. A goal-a-game pace of 10 in 10—in which he played every minute—guarantees him a spotlight in his country's first trip to the World Cup. —N.H.



A HEAD ABOVE

Bosnia scored eight headed goals in UEFA qualifying, second most behind the Netherlands. Star forwards Edin Dzeko (Man City) and Vedad Ibisevic (Stuttgart) tallied four each, and all eight were scored from within six yards of one another.



SOCCER NATION RANK

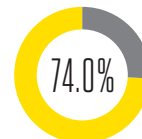
17

Per capita income

\$4.6K

Safet Susic salary

\$336K



Attendance at qualifiers

773

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Emmanuel Emenike

GROUP F

NIGERIA

SPI RANK **28**

IDENTITY Nigeria is a team that has relied on star players in the past, but their coach, Stephen Keshi, has done exactly the opposite this time around. After last year's chaos in the Confederations Cup, when the players arrived late in protest after they didn't receive bonuses, Keshi has tried to foster team spirit. And he has sent a message to his players over the past year: If you want to be part of this team, you have to buy into our ethic. And the players have really responded.

STRENGTH This won't be the Super Eagles we remember from 15 or 20 years ago, when their football was very fast and entertaining. Keshi is a former defender, and he's focused on building this team from the back. They were undefeated in group play in CAF and gave up just one goal to Ethiopia in two playoff games.

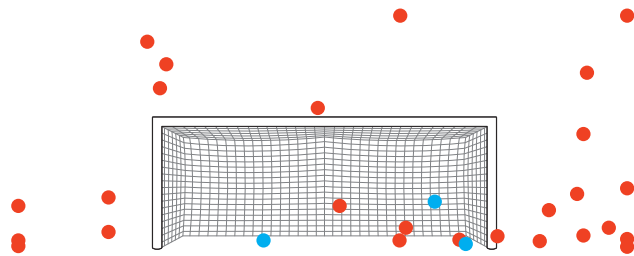
WEAKNESS They were disappointing in the Confederations Cup last year, even after they finally arrived. They just didn't make an impact, scoring only seven goals (six against Tahiti), and went 1-0-2. I worry that if things again don't go well at the start, they don't have any obvious leader to rally around. —SHAKA HISLOP

MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER
EMMANUEL EMIKIKE

3 GOALS

262 MINUTES

Fehnerbahçe forward Emenike scored a goal per game in Nigeria's qualification. In Brazil, the Super Eagles would be happy with the powerful striker's rate in the Turkish league of a goal every other game. —N.H.

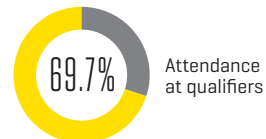
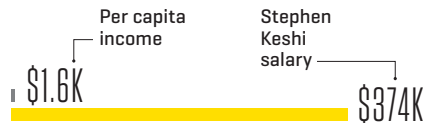


NIGERIAN NIGHTMARE ● Made ● Missed (four shots were blocked by defenders)

Nigeria had the 27th-worst rate of shots on goal in the 2010 World Cup, with just seven of 33 [21.2%] finding the target and three finding net. They should've been more selective; their average shot distance of 25.7 yards was second farthest.



SOCCER NATION RANK
26



52
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Reza Ghoochannejhad

GROUP F

IRAN

SPI RANK **39**

IDENTITY The team's entire outlook changed during qualifying. They started poorly, but give them credit. They turned things around by sharpening the defense, winning games 1-0 and, really, becoming a bit boring. But in the end, they topped the group. We can expect a similar look in June: They'll try to be solid in back and hope to get a goal or two.

STRENGTH The captain, midfielder Javad Nekounam, has been there forever; he's got 135 caps at 33. He's good from set pieces, reads the game well and is a real inspiration in the dressing room. Winger Ashkan Dejagah came up through the German youth system and has played well for Iran, with two goals in four games in the campaign. He

and Dutch-trained forward Reza Ghoochannejhad form a respectable threat.

WEAKNESS The two center halves, Jalal Hosseini and Pejman Montazeri, are good one-on-one defenders, but they don't have a total understanding of each other. That led to a couple of surprise losses in qualifying to teams like Lebanon [then 124th in FIFA rankings] and Uzbekistan [69th]. They do seem to be improving: just one goal allowed in their last five qualifiers. —SHAKA HISLOP

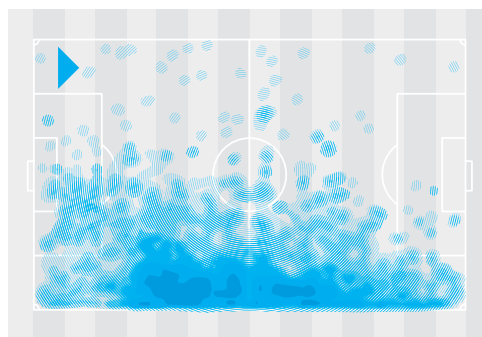
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

REZA GHOOCHANNEJHAD

3 GOALS

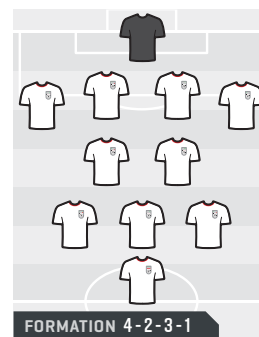
431 MINUTES

Dutch-Iranian forward Gucci managed three goals in five appearances during Iran's successful qualification campaign. A veteran of the Belgian top flight and now at Charlton Athletic, he has cemented his place on the national side, where he scored eight goals in his first 10 games. —N.H.

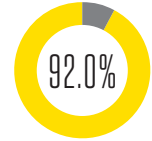
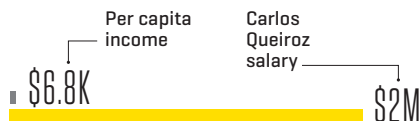


RIGHT ON

Steven Beitashour (San Jose Earthquakes) is the fourth-ranked MLS defender in touches on the right third the past two seasons. More important, he's turned the ball over just 18 times, fewest among right backs with at least 2,000 touches.



SOCCER NATION RANK **11**



Attendance at qualifiers

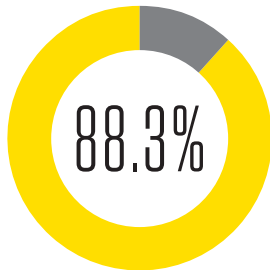
120 FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

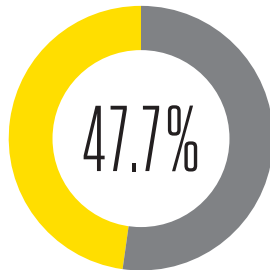
GROUP G



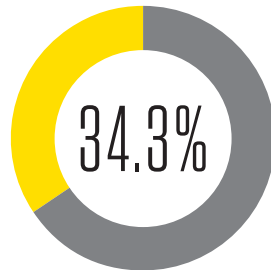
CHANCE TO ADVANCE*
The U.S. was dealt a tough group, and their odds to advance fell 7% from their pre-draw number.



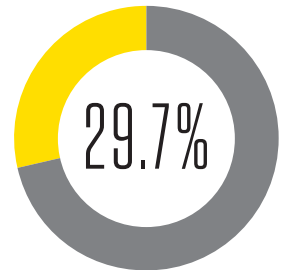
GERMANY



PORTUGAL



USA



GHANA

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

AMERICA THE BOOTABLE

The June 16 opener between Germany and Portugal is getting all the hype, but the second Group G match that day should be just as tightly contested and meaningful. Neither Ghana nor the U.S. will be favored against the two UEFA squads, so earning a result in their early matchup is crucial to displacing a favorite for the second spot. If either wins that first match and can manage a draw against one of the big boys, they could play spoiler in Group G.

The powerful attacks of Germany and Portugal will be imposing in this group and in the tournament at large. So the Yanks need keeper Tim Howard,

who had an EPL-high nine clean sheets for Everton in the season's first half, to steady his inexperienced defense and play the best football of his career. Ghana's central midfield—with 60-plus combined caps between Kwadwo Asamoah and Kevin-Prince Boateng—must control possession.

But in the end, Germany's arsenal of seven players with at least three goals in qualifying and Portugal's big gun, Cristiano Ronaldo, who can beat any team on any day [see: four goals against Sweden], will likely have just too many chances for the U.S. and Ghana to have a shot. —A.M.



Bastian Schweinsteiger, Cristiano Ronaldo, Clint Dempsey and Asamoah Gyan

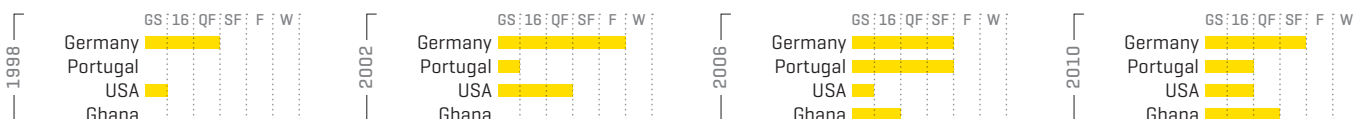
SCHEDULE

JUNE 16 NOON, ESPN GERMANY VS. PORTUGAL	JUNE 16 6 P.M., ESPN GHANA VS. USA	JUNE 21 3 P.M., ESPN GERMANY VS. GHANA	JUNE 22 6 P.M., ESPN USA VS. PORTUGAL	JUNE 26 NOON, ESPN USA VS. GERMANY	JUNE 26 NOON, ESPN2 PORTUGAL VS. GHANA
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner





Andre Schurrle

GROUP G

GERMANY

SPI RANK **4**

IDENTITY German teams have always been physically strong and focused on defending. But in the past few years, they've developed some real technical standouts in midfield—Thomas Muller, Toni Kroos, Mario Gotze. It's led to an offensive, attacking style that's different from what we're used to seeing, but it's successful: They led UEFA in goals with 36 in

qualifying. They're one of the favorites this year—and they'll have to make the final for this Cup to be considered a success.

STRENGTH As important as the young players are, they still need guidance from captain Philipp Lahm (defense) and Bastian Schweinsteiger (midfield). They were new when I was on the

team and were given time to grow with us, play in a European Championship, play in a World Cup. Now they lead the team and anchor younger players.

WEAKNESS Since Germany has put their focus on offensive play, the balance with defense is maybe not 100% right. They allowed 10 goals in qualifying, which was worst among group winners. They need holding mid Sami Khedira to be fit in time to take the pitch in June. —MICHAEL BALLACK

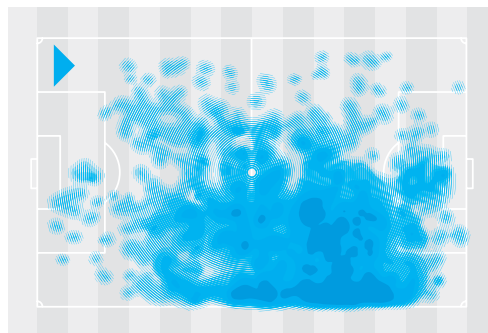
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ANDRE SCHURRLE

4 GOALS

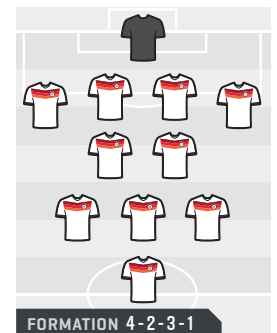
240 MINUTES

A stop-start season at new club Chelsea hasn't prevented the former Bayer Leverkusen man from scoring for Germany. Four goals in only 240 minutes of action helped the Germans to an unbeaten qualification campaign and sealed a World Cup place for Schurrle. —N.H.



RIGHT MINDED

On the right half of the field, Germany topped UEFA qualifying in completed passes (left) and assists and was No. 2 in chances. That's in part thanks to Philipp Lahm, who distributed to playmakers Mesut Ozil and Thomas Muller (and factored into their 12 goals).



SOCCER NATION RANK

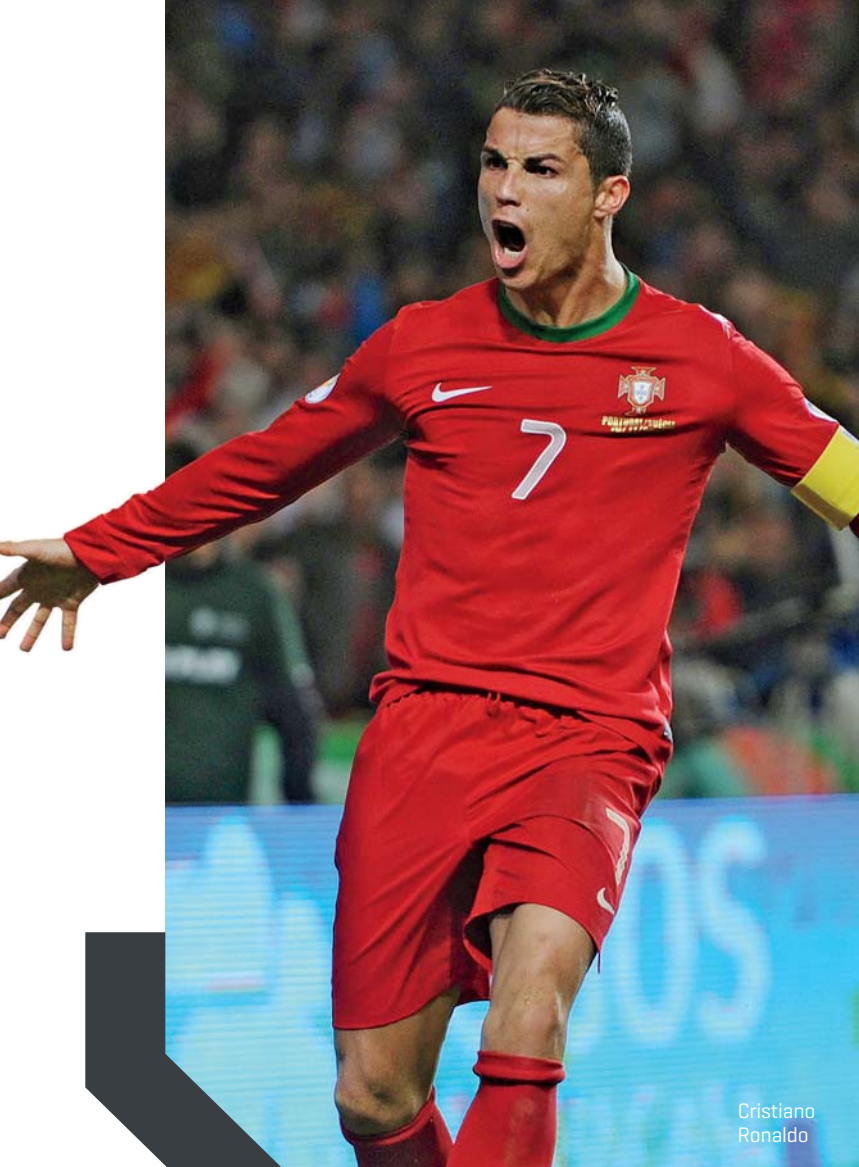
Per capita income: \$42K

Joachim Low salary: \$3.4M

Attendance at qualifiers: 95.3%

26,837 FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



Cristiano Ronaldo

GROUP G

PORTUGAL

SPI RANK 14

IDENTITY Oh, Portugal. This is a wonderfully talented team, but as always, they just seem to mess it up, don't they? They qualified for the World Cup by beating Sweden in the playoffs, but they struggled in a group that should've been easy—I mean, they dropped points at home in a 1-1 draw with Northern Ireland. No disrespect intended to Northern Ireland, but they are a weak team. Portugal is packed with world-class players, yet they play like an average team on the world stage.

STRENGTH Okay, yes, Ronaldo. He's an absolute superstar, and they need Cristiano fit and up for it in June. He needs to be wrapped in cotton wool this spring. But I also think the back four is very good. Bruno Alves and Pepe hold down the center, and Joao Pereira is an attacking right back who looks to get forward.

WEAKNESS This offense is so reliant on Ronaldo's magic that he actually has two jobs: Work to create chances and win balls in the midfield, but also poach goals as a forward. Joao Moutinho, Nani, Raul Meireles—one of them has to get out of Ronaldo's shadow, score some goals and say, "Look, it's up to us now."
—STEVE McMANAMAN

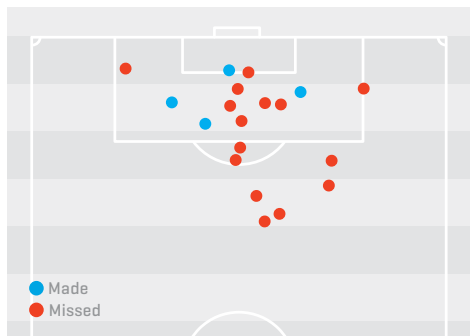
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

CRISTIANO RONALDO

8 GOALS

900 MINUTES

The reigning Ballon d'Or winner and Real Madrid mainstay scored a third of his country's 24 goals during qualification. Eight goals in 10 games, including three absolute golazos in the second leg against Sweden, makes him indispensable to the European Selecao, perhaps to a fault. —N.H.



ALL ABOUT CR7

In Portugal's 4-2 aggregate playoff win over Sweden, Ronaldo scored every goal and took 19 of his team's 36 shots. [The entire Sweden team took just 15.] He did his best work up close: 12 shots and all four goals came from inside the box.



SOCCER NATION RANK

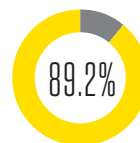
7

Per capita income

\$20K

Paulo Bento salary

\$2.1M



Attendance at qualifiers

2,748

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP G

UNITED STATES

SPI RANK

21



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER
EDDIE JOHNSON

4
GOALS

579
MINUTES

Johnson, currently playing for DC United, arguably had a bigger hand in the Yanks' qualifying for Brazil than the more illustrious Deuce Dempsey. Johnson, like Dempsey a Fulham alum, bagged four goals and an assist for the U.S. —N.H.

IDENTITY Jurgen Klinsmann has tried to get this squad to be more possession-based, more offensive. They've gotten a lot better and emphasize putting other teams under pressure. But you still have to look at the reality: Can they do that against Germany? Probably not. The U.S. has always had strong team spirit, and that can allow this squad to achieve results—in this group, especially, they will have to thrive on an underdog mentality.

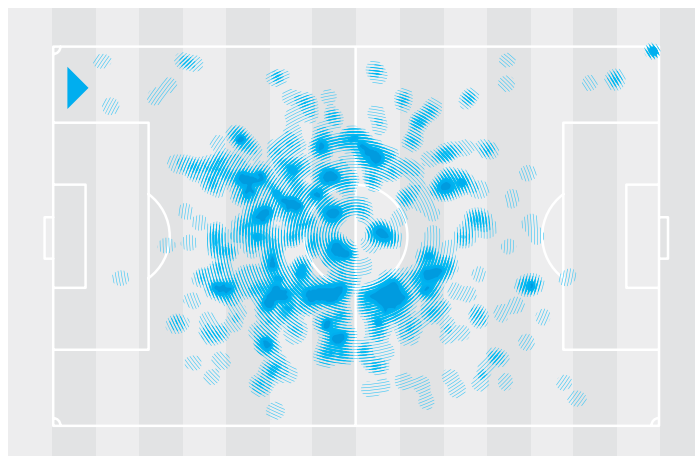
STRENGTH So much of the attack goes through captain Clint Dempsey. His ability to break down defenses (he led the team with eight goals in qualifying) and his flair for the spectacular (we all remember that running volley against Ghana) have proved invaluable. Since he and Michael Bradley have moved back to MLS, the team has swung away from European-based play, which a lot of people consider a drawback. But it's not all bad: Players will be just

three months into the MLS season come June and maybe not as fatigued as those from European leagues at the end of a 10-month slog.

WEAKNESS The defense lacks experience at the World Cup level. Center backs Matt Besler and Omar Gonzalez established themselves during qualifying—opponents scored just four goals in the six games Besler was on the pitch and six in eight against Gonzalez—but they have limited games against such high-quality competition. This defense will have to be tight and look to spring counterattacks for Jozy Altidore. —KASEY KELLER

SPREAD OFFENSE

In six Hex games, Michael Bradley completed 89.3% of his passes, best of all players with at least 300 passes. And he sent them everywhere, completing 115 to the left third of the field, 139 to the center third and 113 to the right third.



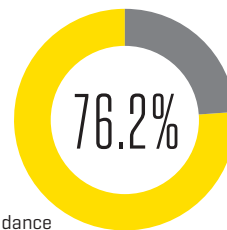
SOCCER NATION RANK

27

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

Jurgen Klinsmann salary
\$2.5M

Per capita income
\$52K



Attendance at qualifiers

9,000 FIFA clubs



Asamoah Gyan

GROUP G

GHANA

SPI RANK **27**

IDENTITY Ghana will come into the Cup in fantastic form—their 6-1 playoff win against Egypt was as dominating a performance as I've seen from them in some time, and they followed it up with an African Nations Championship final, playing mostly their youth squad in a loss on penalties to Libya. This is a team that's not afraid to take their chances—they took the third-most shots of all 32 squads in the group stage in 2010.

STRENGTH The midfield controls the pace and

direction of the game. Andre Ayew will pull the strings and is backed up by experienced players like Michael Essien and Kevin-Prince Boateng. Those two remember the cruel way they went out in the quarterfinals in 2010—a missed PK after Luis Suarez's hand-ball block. That will be extra motivation for them.

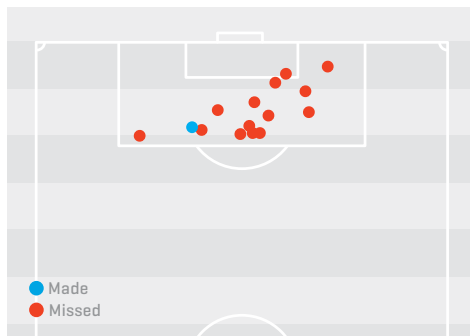
WEAKNESS Ghana surrendered six goals in eight games to qualify for the Cup, but I still wonder how good they'll be defensively. They gave up three in two games against their stiffest qualifying opponent, Egypt. Just as Ghana did four years ago, they'll sit back and try to hit teams on the counter, but it will be tough to get a result. —SHAKA HISLOP

MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER
ASAMOAH GYAN

6 GOALS

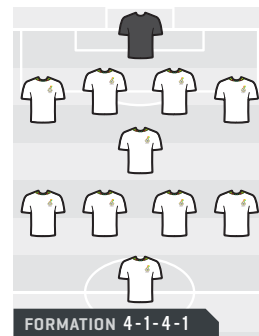
482 MINUTES

Gyan scored a goal per game in his six matches for Ghana in qualification. A controversial move from Sunderland to the Al Ain in the UAE did little to dent his goal-scoring for club; his rate there in the past two seasons is even better. —N.H.

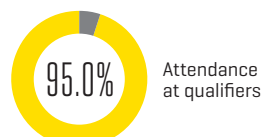
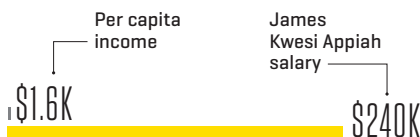


REMEMBER ME?

In the 2010 World Cup, forward Asamoah Gyan had 15 non-penalty shots in the box during the tournament. Only one was on target—and it beat Tim Howard three minutes into extra time to send the Americans home in the knockout stage.



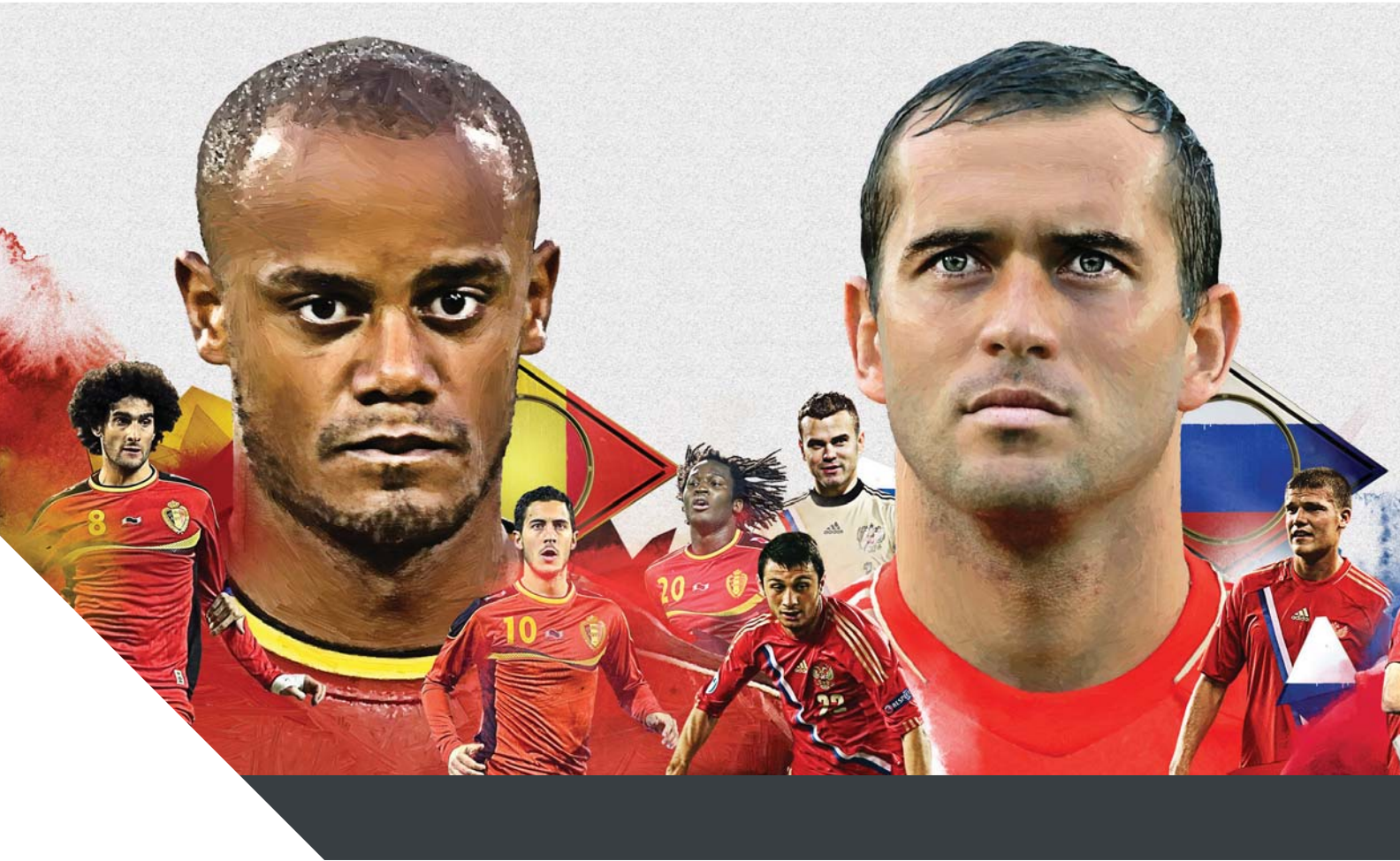
SOCCER NATION RANK



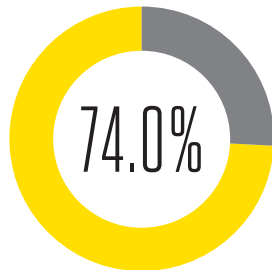
280
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

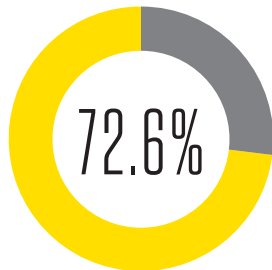
GROUP H



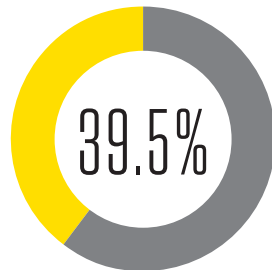
CHANCE TO ADVANCE*
With a group SPI rank of just 32, two teams outside the top 10 are heavily favored to make the round of 16.



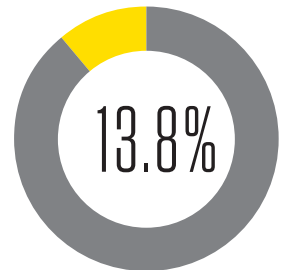
BELGIUM



RUSSIA



SOUTH KOREA



ALGERIA

*Percentages based on 10,000 simulations of the six group games using ESPN's Soccer Power Index.

GROUP OF MEH

Look at Belgium's attack and you can see why the squad is a popular dark horse; it contains three scorers who led their clubs in goals at the Prem's midpoint—Chelsea midfielder Eden Hazard, Everton striker Romelu Lukaku and Aston Villa striker Christian Benteke. Throw in attacking midfielder/winger Kevin De Bruyne [the top qualifying scorer with four goals], who in January transferred from Chelsea to Wolfsburg in the Bundesliga, and Belgium has impressive firepower up front.

Hoping to exploit this young team's inexperience—Belgium's average age

is just 26—will be three decidedly average squads that focus on defense. South Korea is a tight-knit team that aims to score on the break, while Russia allowed only five goals in qualifying. Last [and maybe least among the 32 teams] is Algeria, which didn't score a goal in the 2010 Cup and likely will sit back and play for draws here too. It might be enough to disconcert a Belgium team that breezed past the likes of Wales, Scotland and Serbia to qualify. Among any other four teams, the Belgians wouldn't be favorites. Welcome to the Group of Meh. —A.M.



Vincent Kompany, Roman Shirokov, Park Chu-Young and Madjid Bougherra

SCHEDULE

<p>JUNE 17 NOON, ESPN</p> <p>BELGIUM VS. ALGERIA</p>	<p>JUNE 17 6 P.M., ESPN</p> <p>RUSSIA VS. SOUTH KOREA</p>	<p>JUNE 22 NOON, ABC</p> <p>BELGIUM VS. RUSSIA</p>	<p>JUNE 22 3 P.M., ABC</p> <p>SOUTH KOREA VS. ALGERIA</p>	<p>JUNE 26 4 P.M., ESPN</p> <p>SOUTH KOREA VS. BELGIUM</p>	<p>JUNE 26 4 P.M., ESPN2</p> <p>ALGERIA VS. RUSSIA</p>
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All times Eastern.

HISTORY

▶ GS: Group stage 16: Round of 16 QF: Quarterfinals SF: Semifinals F: Final W: Winner

Year	Belgium	Russia	South Korea	Algeria
1998	GS	GS	GS	GS
2002	GS	GS	GS	GS
2006	GS	GS	GS	GS
2010	GS	GS	GS	GS



Romelu Lukaku

GROUP H

BELGIUM

SPI RANK

13

IDENTITY Belgium is interesting. They've got a powerful base in back with Daniel van Buyten and Vincent Kompany and an attack with experience playing for big clubs in Europe. They were a mild surprise going undefeated through qualification, with eight wins and two draws, but now they enter the World Cup as some people's dark horse. It'll be a test for them to handle even that little pressure. It's a really young team—just one player over 29 among the usual starting 11—and that can make it unpredictable.

STRENGTH They have to be offensive or they have no chance. Their attack is a good mix, with quality on the wings and a big striker in the 6'3" Romelu Lukaku up front. Winger Eden Hazard shone in qualification, with two goals and 14 chances created for teammates.

WEAKNESS Youth can be a benefit and a liability. These players don't have many older role models to look up to. It's difficult to be a young player when you look to the left and the right and don't see any bigger leaders. They realize the team is relying solely on them, and that makes it hard to handle the pressure.

—MICHAEL BALLACK

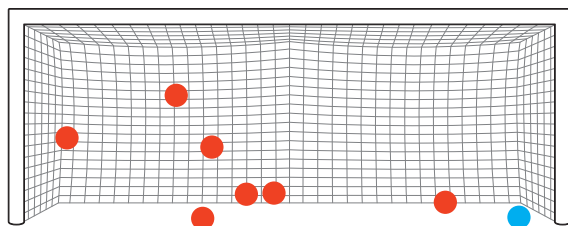
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ROMELU LUKAKU

2 GOALS

210 MINUTES

Lukaku managed only two goals in qualifying for Belgium but did so in just four appearances. The Chelsea striker has been vital on loan with resurgent Everton and should be trusted to transfer his form to the world stage. —N.H.

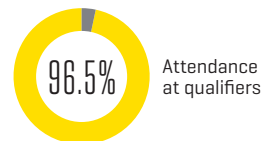
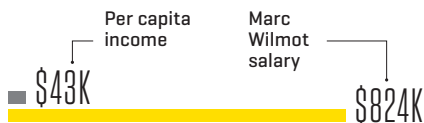


KEEP AWAY ● Made ● Missed

Keeper Thibaut Courtois was crucial to Belgium's stingy defense in UEFA, saving seven of the eight on-target shots he faced inside 15 yards—the best rate in Europe.



SOCCER NATION RANK
13



2,058
FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

GROUP H

RUSSIA

SPI RANK

17



IDENTITY The driving force on any pitch is always the players, but with a manager like Fabio Capello, Russia sees a bigger impact from their coach than most teams. He's organized, tactically aware, and everything with him is about defend, defend, defend. He doesn't have a huge amount of superstars on the team, but he has given them a structure on the pitch that's made this team better than the sum of its parts. The Russians were the unsung

heroes in Euro qualification because they just chugged along, managed a 7-2-1 record and won the group over favorite Portugal.

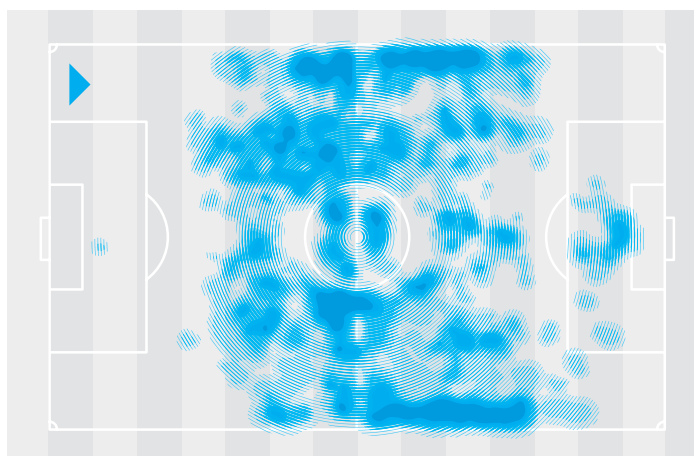
STRENGTH Their success is all about the defense. Goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev was excellent in qualifying, and Sergei Ignashevich at the back showed up ready for it. [Don't worry, nobody remembers that Ronaldo nutmeg.] These types of players have thrived under Fabio, and it's brought a lot of

confidence to the team. That they conceded only five goals is superb form. It helps the offense too: When you know you don't concede, you know any goal wins the game.

WEAKNESS Russia plays well, but they still have a general lack of quality. I think they have the talent to get to the knockouts, but if they finish second in the group, they could meet Germany or Portugal. I don't think they'll manage to stop Ronaldo a second time, despite that 1-0 win in qualification. They haven't played in a World Cup since 2002, and this group won't have the skills to put it together on the biggest stage. —STEVE McMANAMAN

FLANKS... A LOT

Russia possessed most heavily on the wings during World Cup qualifying, especially on attack, as shown by their passes heat map. The Russians created a scoring chance on one of every six crosses, tied for the most among group winners.



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ALEXANDER KOKORIN

4

GOALS

503

MINUTES

Dynamo Moscow striker Alexander Kokorin, 23, was hailed as the future of Russian football after scoring 13 goals in 25 games in 2012-13, and he repaid the national team's faith with four goals in eight appearances during qualifying. —N.H.



SOCCER NATION RANK



Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

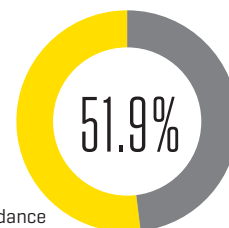
Fabio Capello salary

\$10.7M

Per capita income

\$14K

Attendance at qualifiers



14,329 FIFA clubs

GROUP H

SOUTH KOREA

SPI RANK

33



MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

PARK CHU-YOUNG

6
GOALS

526
MINUTES

Park has struggled to make the Arsenal first team since a 2011 transfer from Monaco, but he stars for his national side, leading the Red Devils with six goals in seven games. The striker, who spent the first half of 2014 on loan at Watford, is a shoo-in for Brazil. —N.H.

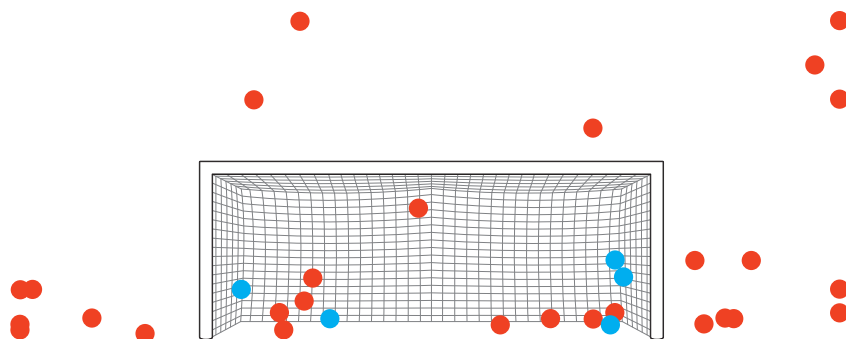
IDENTITY This South Korea team is hugely talented, and they're widely regarded as the best in Asia. They were sorry to finish second in their qualifying group [to Iran] despite an 8-3-3 record over two rounds. In Brazil, they'll grapple with the challenges that come with a new coach; caps leader Hong Myung-bo took over last June after leading the U23s to a bronze at the London Olympics. Meshing his Euro-based players with

domestic stars will be his biggest test.

STRENGTH You look at their lineup and seemingly everybody has the ability to change a game. They outscored opponents by a 27-11 margin in their two rounds of qualifying, and they have a glut of world-class players, especially for an Asian team, many of whom play in Europe. In qualifying, 11 different players tallied goals, including the five

scored by the 2012 Asian player of the year, striker Lee Keun-Ho [Ulsan Hyundai].

WEAKNESS The same variety that makes South Korea an offensive threat also could contribute to a lack of cohesiveness in the latter stages of the tournament. They used 45 different players in their qualifying campaign, which says a lot about the squad's difficulty jelling and about the former coach, who didn't seem to know what he was doing with these players. As a result, they've yet to find the right formation, so Hong has a lot of work in front of him. I'm not sure they can fix all the problems before Brazil. —SHAKA HISLOP



MENTAL BLOCK ● Made ● Missed [16 shots were blocked by defenders]

Only Argentina and Portugal scored more goals in the 2010 World Cup group stage than the five that South Korea scored on a sixth-best 49 shots [above]. But the Red Devils will want to move closer this go-round: 61% of their attempts came from outside the box, likely playing a part in the squad's group-stage-leading 16 blocked shots.



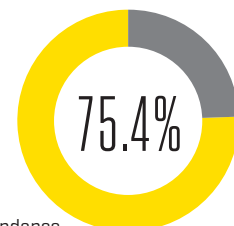
SOCCER NATION RANK

31

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.

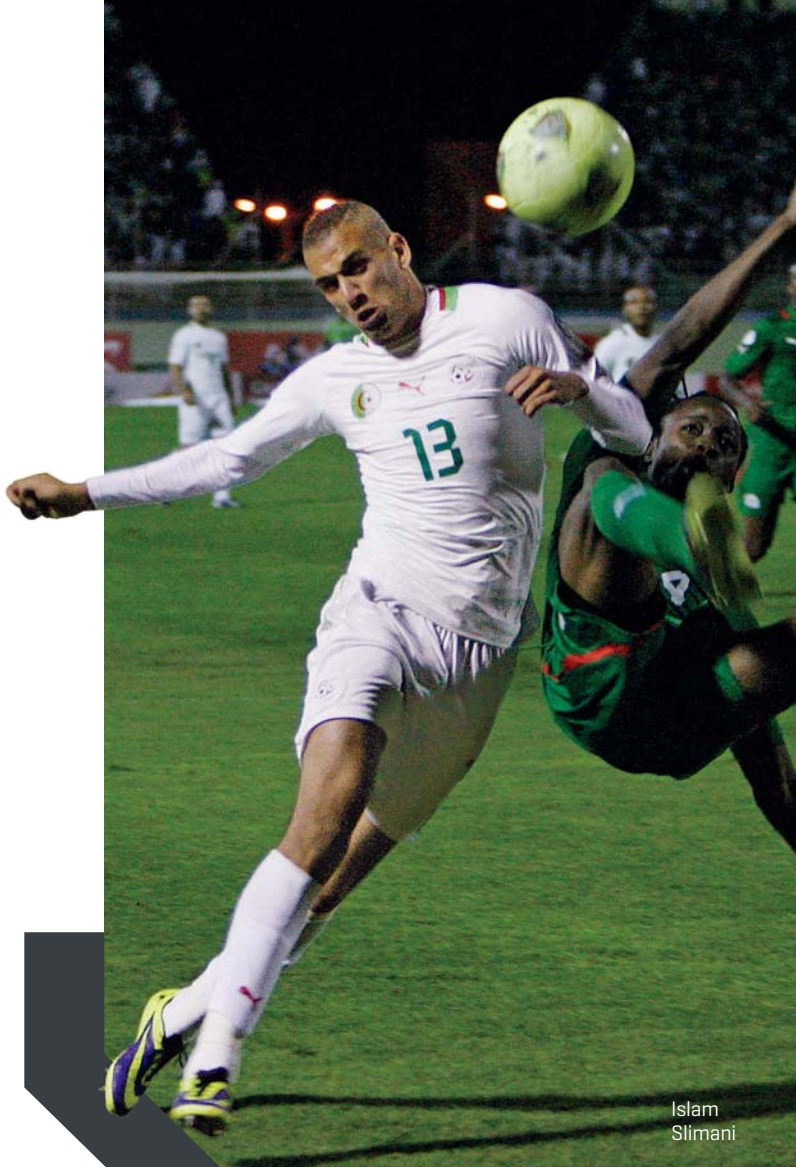
Hong Myung-bo salary
\$758K

Per capita income
\$23K



Attendance at qualifiers

100 FIFA clubs



Islam Slimani

GROUP H

ALGERIA

SPI RANK **66**

IDENTITY Algeria is up against it in trying to better their group-stage exit in 2010. Simply put, they don't have a strong squad; they're not very deep and are fairly undisciplined. Algeria hardly can even rally around their best result, a 2-2 draw against the Ivory Coast in the 2013 Cup of Nations. In that stalemate, Algeria led 2-0 against a watered-down Ivorian side that had already clinched advancement. Algeria won't see anyone playing second-stringers in this challenging group.

STRENGTH They have a decent defensive midfield in Medhi Lacen and Saphir Taider, who provide good protection for the back four and support for the midfield. Combined with the return of Madjid Bougherra to the defense, they've done a lot to make the team look more settled.

WEAKNESS Algeria certainly didn't impress in qualification—their playoff was against the weakest CAF team, Burkina Faso, and they still advanced only on away goals. Really, the players just aren't good enough. The midfielders don't have creative instincts, and the back four won't be able to stop these teams.
—SHAKA HISLOP

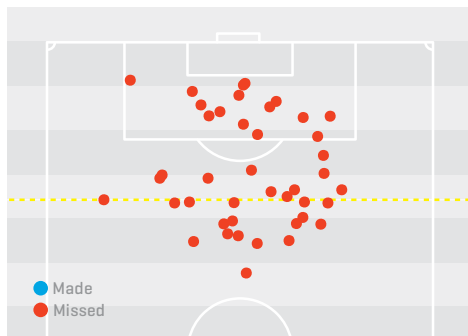
MOST PRODUCTIVE PLAYER

ISLAM SLIMANI

5 GOALS

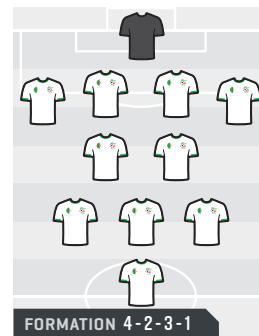
472 MINUTES

Slimani, who won a move to Portugal's Sporting Lisbon in 2013, earned the Algerian Golden Ball as he continued to lead the line in his country's CAF campaign, scoring five goals in seven games. Just two years after his 2012 debut, Slimani, who'll turn 26 during the Cup, has tallied nine in his first 17. —N.H.



LONG SHOTS

Algeria was one of only two teams not to score a goal in the 2010 World Cup, perhaps thanks to their reliance on long-range shots. Algeria averaged six shots per match from 30 yards or farther. No other team averaged more than five.



SOCCER NATION RANK

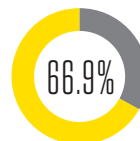


Per capita income

\$5.3K

Vahid Halilhodzic salary

\$960K



Attendance at qualifiers

2,090

FIFA clubs

Calculating a nation's passion for the game based on how well it pays its manager, attends its games and gets out to play.



All eyes, and plenty of hands, will be on Neymar in Brazil.

STOPPAGE TIME

YOU DIDN'T THINK we'd let our World Cup vets escape without revealing their innermost thoughts, did you? All five picked **Neymar** as the Cup's breakout star: "He's the name on everyone's mouth," says Michael Ballack. But c'mon, this isn't 2013! So we made 'em all hype another prospect—and the best matchups on the schedule, to boot. Lastly, we asked them to predict the champ. If you believe in crowdsourcing, three out of five experts agree the crowd in Brazil will be the source of much celebration.

ANALYST	BEST GROUP GAMES	BREAKOUT STAR (WHO'S NOT NAMED NEYMAR)	FAVORITE TO WIN
Kempes	Spain-Netherlands, Argentina-Bosnia-Herz., Brazil-Mexico	Dries Mertens, Belgium	Argentina
McManaman	Brazil-Croatia, England-Italy, Germany-Portugal	Mario Gotze, Germany	Brazil
Ballack	Spain-Netherlands, England-Italy, Germany-Portugal	Mario Gotze, Germany	Germany
Hislop	Spain-Netherlands, Spain-Chile, Italy-Uruguay	Jack Wilshere, England	Brazil
Keller	England-Italy, U.S.-Germany, Brazil-Mexico	Arturo Vidal, Chile	Brazil

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fast or fail

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all in or nothing

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