

Brazil's Sorry Style



Brazil, under Phil Scolari, have been a depressing eyesore throughout this World Cup.

By the time many are perusing this page, Brazil's fate in this World Cup shall have been sealed, with either a berth in the final or third place play-off secured. And I suspect I'm not the only observer who hopes they don't end this tournament as champions.

To see a team in those famous canary yellow jerseys revert to kicking their opponents as often as they could while lumping the ball upfield or out of play has been the greatest disappointment of this tumultuous tournament.

To concede 31 frees as they did against Colombia (the latter proving hardly saintly either when running up 23 fouls), playing in a thoroughly brutish manner has been painful to the point of personally crushing from a fan's perspective.

Brazil, for so long the global trend setters of the beautiful game, threading the ball about the pitch in a balletic manner before scoring in the most thrill-seeking of manners, don't play that way any more.

This is largely due to the fact that they're no longer producing the ball players that previous generations grew up thoroughly enamoured by - be it Pele, Jairzinho, Socrates, Zico, Careca, Bebeto, Romario, Ronaldo, Kaka and Ronaldinho to name but a few.

Of the current generation, only the fallen Neymar bears any comparison with the Selecao's past attacking stylists, while captain Thiago Silva is certainly among the better defenders which the South American giants have produced over the past 20 years.

'Big Phil' Scolari, indignant with the media for having the temerity to ask him legitimate questions (annoying him in a manner similar to Davy Fitzgerald's current ire with The Clare Champion), knows the strength of the hand he has to play with.

He conceded that if his team has to “win ugly”, then so be it, and from a purely practical point of view, having stuck with more-or-less the same starting XI since the Confederations Cup last year, then one can see the logic of that approach.

However, for those of us who have, perhaps, an all-too idealised vision of what Brazil should be in footballing terms, the past month has been painful to watch, painful to the point of depressing even.

There’s an argument to be made that Kaka, off to the MLS next season, and the equally past his best Ronaldinho would still be contributing more to Brazil than the likes of Fred, Jo or Hulk.

The latter three have been utter embarrassments at this level of the game and surely wouldn’t have made any previous World Cup squad, even the defensively cautious Brazil that won the 1994 World Cup on penalties.

Witnessing Marcelo and David Luiz driving the ball out of play or upfield to no-one in particular against Colombia was the most un-Brazilian soccer experience I’ve ever observed. But it doesn’t appear that the match-going Brazilian public are all that perturbed by the most spectacular departure from tradition since Bob Dylan went electric.

Yet consider this. Twenty four years ago, Eamon Dunphy was the sole voice of dissent as an Irish team, full of ball-playing midfield talent, was instructed to lump the ball upfield, and that tactic proved sufficient to reach the World Cup’s last eight. The rest of us were largely blind to the aesthetic as we were too busy enjoying the party.

But come on, this is Brazil we’re talking about. It’s just not meant to be like this.