

SPECIAL EDITION **BRAZIL 2014**

World Soccer GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

Summer 2014

**WORLD
CUP
2014**

**COLLECTOR'S
ISSUE**

736 player profiles

Inside story on
every team

Expert analysis
and opinion

156
PAGES OF
ESSENTIAL
INFO





EXPERIENCE THE BEAUTIFUL GAME. BEAUTIFULLY.

This is the opportunity to enjoy the finest football action, world class entertainment and outstanding hospitality.

As a Club Wembley member, you will enjoy a guaranteed seat with outstanding views for some of the world's greatest events, including all England Men's Senior International home games, The FA Cup Semi-Finals and Final, The FA Community Shield and The Football League Cup Final.* You will have access to a range of hospitality choices, from fine dining and lounge-style restaurants to bars on our dedicated concourse. Exclusive member opportunities such as invitations to England team training days and even breakfast with the England manager make membership even more rewarding.

Membership options are flexible, with seat and hospitality choices to suit all budgets. For more information, call 0800 783 1440 or email sales@wembleystadium.com.



CLUB WEMBLEY

*Club Wembley is sold on a long term licence until 2017. Matches that form part of a bid event where The FA is not the owner such as the Rugby World Cup and UEFA Champions League Final are not included.

THIS MONTH

- 6 **From the Editor**
- 10 **The View from Brazil** Tim Vickery looks forward to Brazil 2014 and back to Brazil 1950
- 14 **Officials** A list of all the referees and assistant referees officiating in Brazil
- 16 **Contributors** The global contributors behind this special issue of World Soccer
- 18 **The stadiums** A guide to the 12 stadiums that will host this year's tournament
- 154 **The games** The 2014 World Cup schedule, group by group, match by match



England hope... Wayne Rooney

THE TEAMS

World Soccer's guide to the 32 finalists, with opinions and predictions from our global network of correspondents, plus detailed squad lists and tactics.



- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 20 Algeria | 88 Greece |
| 26 Argentina | 92 Holland |
| 32 Australia | 96 Honduras |
| 36 Belgium | 100 Iran |
| 40 Bosnia-Herzegovina | 104 Italy |
| 44 Brazil | 108 Ivory Coast |
| 48 Cameroon | 112 Japan |
| 52 Chile | 116 Mexico |
| 56 Colombia | 120 Nigeria |
| 60 Costa Rica | 124 Portugal |
| 64 Croatia | 128 Russia |
| 68 Ecuador | 132 South Korea |
| 72 England | 136 Spain |
| 76 France | 140 Switzerland |
| 80 Germany | 144 Uruguay |
| 84 Ghana | 148 USA |



140

LYLE & SCOTT



BY APPOINTMENT TO
H.R.H. THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH
SUPPLIERS OF KNITWEAR
LYLE & SCOTT, HAWICK, SCOTLAND

www.lyleandscott.com/140





FROM THE EDITOR

Gavin Hamilton

History in the making

For all its problems, Brazil 2014 offers a stage for the great players to leave a lasting legacy

THE BUILD-UP to the World Cup is always accompanied by concerns over whether the hosts will be ready in time. But preparations for Brazil 2014 have been particularly fraught. After South Africa 2010, FIFA has convinced itself and its sponsors that the World Cup can be held anywhere, in any conditions, as long as the TV companies can provide an exciting spectacle for their viewers.

In that respect Brazil 2014 will be like every other World Cup of the modern era.

Concerns over accommodation, travel and infrastructure will be placed on hold – and the football will take centre stage.

I suspect that worries over the climactic conditions in Brazil, expressed by coaches, mostly European, will turn out to be less than valid. Most of the potential stars of this tournament – Neymar, Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez, Alexis Sanchez –

are non-European and will not be deterred by such problems. It should be our overriding hope that the players can provide a spectacle that will be remembered for years to come.

The coaches need to play their part, though, and unfortunately there will be many who will be motivated by caution. Success on the greatest stage of all has, if past finals are anything to go by, prompted cautious and often negative tactics. We can only hope that the players can overcome that fear of failure and earn a place in history.

We have endeavoured to provide you with all the essential information you will need to follow the World Cup. We went to press before the official 23-man squads were announced. So we will be providing an update in our next issue and, in an exciting development, we will be providing a digital update on the iPad for our digital subscribers. Enjoy the World Cup!

We can only hope that the players can overcome their fear of failure – and earn a place in World Cup history



Brazilian sunset...beach footballers in Rio de Janeiro



World Soccer

NEXT MONTH

Complete World Cup coverage
from World Soccer

June Issue

- World Cup interview special
- Face to face with the tournament's biggest names

● On sale **June 12**

July Issue

- The full story on the 2014 World Cup from our team of writers in Brazil

● On sale **July 18**

GLOBAL FOOTBALL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1960



iPad edition **DIGITAL UPGRADE**

- The Summer issue, updated with the official World Cup squads, will be available as a digital upgrade to digital subscribers from June 4



WORLD CUP 2014

“



Tim
VICKERY

THE VIEW FROM BRAZIL

Brazil can overcome the problems if they invoke the spirit of 1950

Inspired by the idea of covering the 2014 World Cup, Danish journalist Mikkel Jensen studied Portuguese and based himself in Brazil to observe the build up to the big kick off on June 12.

But in the middle of April he went back home, proclaiming that “the dream has become a nightmare.” He had come to the conclusion that the tournament was doing nothing to help the ordinary Brazilian – indeed, he felt that in some cases it was even making things worse, and he no longer wanted to be part of it.

“My presence here,” he said before he left, “is only contributing to an unpleasant show of Brazil – one which two-and-a-half years ago I was dreaming of being part of, but which now I will do everything in my power to criticize and focus attention on the real price of the World Cup in Brazil.”

It is an understandable, coherent reaction to a flawed tournament. Jensen has looked under the rock, and what he found was not pretty. Many Brazilians share his sentiments and feel that their country has other, far more urgent priorities. The support of the local population was cynically taken for granted. At the start of the process they were told by Ricardo Teixeira, at the time president of both the CBF and the Local Organising Committee, that this was a private event, where the only public spending would be on much needed infra-structure works.

“This line of argument never corresponded to reality,” admits Luis Fernandes of Brazil’s Sports Ministry. “At the same time he was saying this, the Host City and Stadium Agreements were being signed, committing the government to guarantees and obligations with the World Cup. From the beginning the process was being operated with the necessary participation of the public power.”

Beyond belief

It is, then, almost beyond belief that until 2012 there was no government representation on the Local Organising Committee. Fernandes acknowledges that this was “an error. Because the operational plan, security, public transport, energy, health service – all depends on the public power.” The tardy entry of the government in the LOC is one of the explanations for the delays, which have pushed up the cost of the World Cup and reduced the scope of the works, leading large parts of Brazilian society to the conclusion that they are paying too much to host the tournament and not getting back enough in return.



“Nowadays, only one man survives [from the 1950 World Cup Final] – ironically enough, Alcides Ghiggia, the winger whose goal won the trophy for Uruguay”



In the light of this, the Mikkel Jensen course of action is one possible response – and many of us with some involvement in such mega-events must surely have had pangs of conscience along the way. Are we all really guilty by association?

Come together

My personal position is that for all the flaws of the 2014 World Cup, there is still value to be found in the mere fact that the planet can come together in this way – and as evidence for my case, I present the example of the 1950 Final, the previous time that the tournament was held in Brazil.

There will be immense pressure on the home side this June and July – but although the population of Brazil is now four times greater and the intrusive, modern 24/7 media was not yet in existence, the stakes were higher for their 1950 predecessors.

The 2014 team will be representing Brazilian football. The debate about what kind of society Brazil is and could be will be raging outside the stadiums. But back in 1950 everything was taking place on the pitch. Going into the decisive game against Uruguay, Brazil were hailed by their own people as mighty world champions.

Their triumph would indicate that the “land of the future” was about to arrive – and there could be no more appropriate setting than the newly-built Maracana stadium, like some giant spaceship parked just to the north of Rio de Janeiro’s city centre.

So when Uruguay came from behind to win 2-1 it was felt as a crushing blow to the hopes of a nation.



Big occasion...Brazil and Uruguay meet at the Maracana in 1950 in front of a crowd estimated to be over 200,000

It was a defeat which, at the time, appeared to condemn Brazil to endless underachievement.

Those on the field paid a heavy price. “I played for 19 years,” wrote Zizinho, the outstanding member of the side, on the first page of his autobiography, “I won some titles and along with the other players of that campaign I’m remembered as a loser.” His inside-forward colleague Jair spent decades worried at the prospect of someone coming at him with a knife because he lost that game. Many years

later keeper Barbosa, beaten on his near post for the decisive goal, held a ceremonial burning of the Maracana goalposts. It did not bring closure. He died in 2000, still lamenting that the maximum jail-time in Brazil was 30 years, while he had served a 50-year penalty for a crime he did not commit.

Mutual respect

But going through such a profound experience produced something other than bitterness. The match helped forge a bond between the players of Brazil and Uruguay. Nowadays, only one man survives – ironically enough, Alcides Ghiggia, the winger whose goal won the trophy for Uruguay. But while most of the players were still alive, members of the two teams would get together for reunions, or visit each other in a warm atmosphere of affection and mutual respect.

This is a striking and excellent symbol of the often silent work that football does in bringing people together, giving them a common language and cementing international friendships. Sixty-four years after Brazil’s first World Cup, many more bonds will surely be established between people from different backgrounds, as supporters of 32 teams (plus the neutrals) criss-cross this giant country in search of a spectacle. Despite all the many defects, there should be much to celebrate when 736 of the best players of the global game plus hundreds of thousands of fans assemble in Brazil for the 2014 World Cup.



Final disappointment...the Brazilian players line up before the 1950 World Cup Final clash with Uruguay

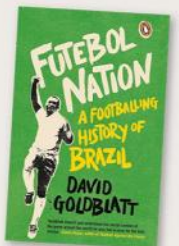
The Seleção



Our selection for the carnival of football. Brazil's finest, a map of the tournament and England dreaming. 100% old school cotton.

Plus! With any shirt bought, purchase half-price and exclusively signed, David Goldblatt's new book 'Futebol Nation', just £4.99.

Available from www.philosophyfootball.com or call 01255 552412



THE MATCH OFFICIALS

Referees and Assistant referees by continent



Jamel Haimoudi

AFRICA

Neant ALIOUM

Cameroon; international debut: 2008

Daniel BENNETT

South Africa; int deb: 2003

Noumandiez Desire DOUE

Ivory Coast; int deb: 2004

Bakary GASSAMA

Gambia; int deb: 2007

Djamel HAIMOUDI

Algeria; int deb: 2004

Assistants:

Redouane Achik (Mor)
Jean Claude Birumushahu (Bur)
Djibril Camara (Sen)
Abdel Etchiali (Alg)
Felicien Kabanda (Rwa)
Evarist Menkouande (Cam)
Marwa Range (Ken)
Songuifolo Yeo (IvC)



Yuichi Nishimura

ASIA

Alireza FAGHANI

Iran; int deb: 2008

Ravshan IRMATOV

Uzbekistan; int deb: 2003

Yuichi NISHIMURA

Japan; int deb: 2004

Nawaf SHUKRALLA

Bahrain; int deb: 2007

Benjamin WILLIAMS

Australia; int deb: 2005

Assistants:

Yaser Tulefat (Bah)
Hakan Anaz (Aus)
Matthew Cream (Aus)
Hassan Kamranifar (Ira)
Bakhadyr Kochkarov (Kyr)
Toshiyuki Nagi (Jap)
Abdusamidullo Rasulov (Uzb)
Toru Sagara (Jap)
Ebrahim Saleh (Bah)



Nicola Rizzoli

EUROPE

Felix BRYCH

Germany; int deb: 2007

Cuneyt CAKIR

Turkey; int deb: 2006

Jonas ERIKSSON

Sweden; int deb: 2002

Bjorn KUIPERS

Holland; int deb: 2006

Milorad MAZIC

Serbia; int deb: 2009

Svein ODDVAR MOEN

Norway; int deb: 2005

Pedro PROENCA

Portugal; int deb: 2003

Nicola RIZZOLI

Italy; int deb: 2007

Carlos VELASCO CARBALLO

Spain; int deb: 2008

Howard WEBB

England; int deb: 2005

Assistants:

Roberto Alonso Fernandez (Spa)
Mark Borsch (Ger)
Darren Cann (Eng)
Bertino Miranda (Por)
Dalibor Djurdjevic (Ser)
Bahattin Duran (Tur)
Renato Faverani (Ita)
Tiago Trigo (Por)
Kim Haglund (Nor)
Mathias Klasenius (Swe)
Stefan Lupp (Ger)
Michael Mullarkey (Eng)
Tarik Ongun (Tur)
Milovan Ristic (Ser)
Andrea Stefani (Ita)
Sander Van Roekel (Hol)
Daniel Warnmark (Swe)
Juan Carlos Yuste Jimenez (Spa)
Erwin Zeinstra (Hol)



Walter Lopez

CONCACAF

Joel AGUILAR

El Salvador; int deb: 2001

Mark GEIGER

USA; int deb: 2008

Walter LOPEZ

Guatemala; int deb: 2006

Roberto MORENO SALAZAR

Panama; int deb: 1996

Marco RODRIGUEZ

Mexico; int deb: 1999

Assistants:

Eric Boria (USA)
Joe Fletcher (Can)
Sean Hurd (USA)
Leonel Leal (CR)
Marcos Quintero (Mex)
Marvin Torrentera (Mex)

William Torre (EIS)

Juan Zumba (EIS)

OCEANIA

Norbert HAUATA

Tahiti; int deb: 2008

Peter O'LEARY

New Zealand; int deb: 2003

Assistants:

Jan Hendrik Hintz (NZ)
Ravinesh Kumar (Fij)
Mark Rule (NZ)



Victor Carrillo

SOUTH AMERICA

Victor CARRILLO

Peru; int deb: 2005

Enrique OSSES

Chile; int deb: 2005

Nestor PITTANA

Argentina; int deb: 2010

Sandro RICCI

Brazil; int deb: 2011

Wilmar ROLDAN

Colombia; int deb: 2008

Carlos ALFREDO VERA

Ecuador; int deb: 2006

Assistants:

Rodney Aquino (Par)
Carlos Astroza (Chl)
Juan Pablo Belatti (Arg)
Emerson De Carvalho (Bra)
Humberto Clavijo (Col)
Eduardo Diaz (Col)
Christian Lescano (Ecu)
Hernan Maidana (Arg)
Sergio Roman (Chl)
Byron Romero (Ecu)
Marcelo Van Gasse (Bra)



Blood, Sweat and Tears

Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve



World Cup Collection, Coming May 13th

Art-of-Football.com



May 2014 Vol 54 No 9

EDITOR

Gavin Hamilton

ART EDITOR

Gary Payne

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Nich Hills

PICTURE EDITOR

Duncan Bond

NEWS EDITOR

Jamie Rainbow

EDITORIAL SECRETARY

June Hiscock

PICTURES

Pictures copyright: Press Association Images, Getty Images, Action Images and Reuters

Thanks this issue to

Mike Hughes, Debbie Millett, Peter Neish, David Preston

EDITORIAL

Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street,

London SE1 0SU

Tel: +44 (0) 20 3148 4817

Fax: +44 (0) 20 3148 8130

E-mail: world_soccer@ipcmedia.com

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP

Kerry Edmondson

Tel: +44 (0) 20 3148 2515

+44 (0) 20 3148 2823

E-mail: kerry_edmondson@ipcmedia.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Tom Jennings

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

Hamish Dawson

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Paul Williams

Advertising +44 (0) 20 3148 2503
+44 (0) 20 3148 2823
Back issues +44 (0) 20 3148 4816
Binders +44 (0) 20 3148 4816

International licensing enquiries

+44 (0) 20 314 85490

E-mail: bianca_hamilton-foster@ipcmedia.com

IPC|INSPIRE

SUBSCRIPTIONS ORDER HOTLINE

+44 (0)845 676 7778

E-mail: ipcsbs@qss-uk.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES

Annual sub is for 12 months (13 issues, prices include postage) UK: £54.70 Europe/Eire (inc. VAT): 89.66euros (airmail) USA: \$131.08 (airmail) Rest of world: £95.53 (airmail)

Periodicals paid at Rahway,

NJ Postmaster: send address changes to

World Soccer, c/o MAIL America,

365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA.

USPS004075

SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPARTMENT

Rockwood House, 9-17 Perrymount Road,

Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 3DH,

England Tel: +44 (0) 1444 475 675



● A Bola (Portugal) ● De Telegraaf (Holland)
● ElftVoetbal (Holland) ● Fanatik (Turkey)
● Frankfurter Allgemeine (Germany) ● Kicker (Germany) ● Goal News (Greece) ● Marca (Spain) ● Nemzeti (Hungary) ● So Foot (France) ● Sport-Express (Russia) ● Sport/Foot (Belgium) ● TIPS Bladet (Denmark) ● World Soccer (UK)

● Titan Sport (China) ● KickOff (S Africa)
● Netease (China) ● Sportalkorea (S Korea).

WORLD CUP 2014 CONTRIBUTORS

Contributors



PADDY AGNEW is based in Rome, where he reports on Vatican affairs for the Irish Times and Italian football for World Soccer.



NICK BIDWELL is World Soccer's Germany correspondent. He is a contributor to publications and websites across Europe.



MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER is World Soccer's Mexico correspondent. He is a regular contributor to FIFA.com.



JOHN CHAPMAN is World Soccer's Belgium correspondent. He is based in Brussels and edits the Belgoot.be website.



KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT is World Soccer's Holland correspondent. He is a contributor to a number of Dutch football publications, including Elf Voetbal.



JOHN DUERDEN is World Soccer's South Korea correspondent. Based in Seoul, he writes on Asian football for a variety of publications and websites.



LOU ECONOMOPOULOS is World Soccer's Greece correspondent. Based in Athens and hosts a weekend show on Athens International Radio.



ADEL FERDOWSIPOUR is World Soccer's Iran correspondent. Based in Tehran, he is the host of the TV show Navad (90).



PAUL GARDNER is the USA's best-known football writer. He is the author of a number of books, including *The Simplest Game*.



MARK GLEESON is Africa's leading football writer. Based in Cape Town, he is a regular broadcaster on the BBC World Service.



BRIAN HOMEWOOD covers Swiss and central European sports for various media, including Reuters, from his base in Berne.



HOWARD JOHNSON is World Soccer's France correspondent. He was the founding editor of the Football365 website.



TOM KUNDERT is World Soccer's Portugal correspondent. He is based in Lisbon and runs the portuGOALnet website.



SID LOWE is World Soccer's Spain correspondent. He is the author of *Fear and Loathing in La Liga: Barcelona vs Real Madrid*.



MIKE PLASTOW is World Soccer's Japan correspondent. He has lived in Tokyo since 1983 and Japan for more than 30 years.



ZDRAVKO REIC is World Soccer's Croatia correspondent and a veteran writer on football in the Balkans.



JOEL RICHARDS is World Soccer's Argentina correspondent. He is the author of *Super Clasico* and also writes about current affairs.



TIM VICKERY is based in Rio de Janeiro and a prolific writer and broadcaster on South American football for, among others, the BBC, Sports Illustrated and SBS.



CARL WORSWICK is World Soccer's Colombia correspondent. Based in Bogota, he contributes to a number of publications and websites.



SIMON HILL is World Soccer's Australia correspondent. He is based in Sydney, where he is a commentator for Fox Sports.

WWW.UKSOCCERSHOP.COM
INFO@UKSOCCERSHOP.COM : 0844 332 1221

UKSOCCERSHOP
NUMBER ONE FOR FOOTBALL SHIRTS



**SHIRT
PRINTING**

CUSTOMISE THIS SEASON'S NEW 2014
WORLD CUP SHIRTS FROM BRAZIL,
GERMANY, HOLLAND, PORTUGAL,
ARGENTINA AND MORE IN THE LATEST
PRINTING STYLES! PLAYER AND CUSTOM
NAMES AVAILABLE!

**NEXT DAY
DELIVERY**

DHL NEXT DAY DELIVERY TO UK,
EUROPE AND USA. REST OF THE
WORLD: 2/3 DAYS.
FULLY TRACKABLE SHIPPING TO
EVERY COUNTRY!

NEW 2014 WORLD CUP SHIRTS NOW AVAILABLE!



SWEDEN
14-15 HOME SHIRT
£59.99



IRAN
14-15 HOME SHIRT
£65.00



14-15 URUGUAY
(SUAREZ 9)
£65.00



14-15 LIVERPOOL
(SUAREZ 7)
£59.99



14-15 CHELSEA
(HAZARD 17)
£59.99



GERMANY
14-15 MINI KIT
£44.99



BRAZIL
14-15 MINI KIT
£44.99



ENGLAND
14-15 MINI KIT
£39.99



ITALY
14-15 MINI KIT
£39.99



PORTUGAL
14-15 MINI KIT
£39.99

ALL 32 WORLD CUP NATIONAL TEAM SHIRTS AVAILABLE!

The stadiums

Costing an estimated US\$3.47 billion, 12 stadiums in 12 different cities will play host to this year's World Cup finals. Seven of the grounds are brand new, while the other five have been extensively renovated to meet FIFA requirements.



1 Estádio do Maracana



2 Estádio Mineirão



3 Estádio Nacional do Brasília



4 Arena Pantanal



5 Arena da Baixada



6 Estádio Castelão



8 Estádio das Dunas



10 Arena Pernambuco



11 Arena Fonte Nova



7 Arena Amazonia



9 Estádio Beira-Rio



12 Arena de São Paulo

1 RIO DE JANEIRO

Estádio do Maracanã

Capacity: 76,804

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 15: Argentina v
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Jun 18: Spain v Chile
Jun 22: Belgium v Russia
Jun 25: Ecuador v France
Jun 28: 2nd round – C1 v D2
Jul 4: Quarter-Final 2
Jul 13: FINAL

2 BELO HORIZONTE

Estádio Mineirão

Capacity: 62,547

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 14: Colombia v Greece
Jun 17: Belgium v Algeria
Jun 21: Argentina v Iran
Jun 24: Costa Rica v England
Jun 28: 2nd round – A1 v B2
Jul 8: Semi-Final 1

3 BRASILIA

Estádio Nacional do Brasília

Capacity: 68,009

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 15: Switzerland v Ecuador
Jun 19: Colombia v Ivory Coast
Jun 23: Cameroon v Brazil
Jun 26: Portugal v Ghana
Jun 30: 2nd round – E1 v F2
Jul 5: Quarter-Final 4
Jul 12: 3rd/4th place play-off

4 CUIABA

Arena Pantanal

Capacity: 42,968

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 13: Chile v Australia
Jun 17: Russia v South Korea
Jun 21: Nigeria v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Jun 24: Japan v Colombia

5 CURITIBA

Arena da Baixada

Capacity: 41,456

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 16: Iran v Nigeria
Jun 20: Honduras v Ecuador
Jun 23: Australia v Spain
Jun 26: Algeria v Russia

6 FORTALEZA

Estádio Castelão

Capacity: 64,846

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 14: Uruguay v Costa Rica
Jun 17: Brazil v Mexico
Jun 21: Germany v Ghana
Jun 24: Greece v Ivory Coast
Jun 29: 2nd round – B1 v A2
Jul 4: Quarter-Final 1

7 MANAUS

Arena Amazonia

Capacity: 42,374

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 14: England v Italy
Jun 18: Cameroon v Croatia
Jun 22: USA v Portugal
Jun 25: Honduras v Switzerland

8 NATAL

Estádio das Dunas

Capacity: 42,086

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 13: Mexico v Cameroon
Jun 16: Ghana v USA
Jun 19: Japan v Greece
Jun 24: Italy v Uruguay

9 PORTO ALEGRE

Estádio Beira-Rio

Capacity: 48,849

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 15: France v Honduras
Jun 18: Australia v Holland
Jun 22: South Korea v Algeria
Jun 25: Nigeria v Argentina
Jun 30: 2nd round – G1 v H2

10 RECIFE

Arena Pernambuco

Capacity: 44,248

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 14: Ivory Coast v Japan
Jun 20: Italy v Costa Rica
Jun 23: Croatia v Mexico
Jun 26: USA v Germany
Jun 29: 2nd round – D1 v C2

11 SALVADOR

Arena Fonte Nova

Capacity: 48,747

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 13: Spain v Holland
Jun 16: Germany v Portugal
Jun 20: Switzerland v France
Jun 25: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Iran
Jul 1: 2nd round – H1 v G2
Jul 5: Quarter-Final 3

12 SAO PAULO

Arena de São Paulo

Capacity: 65,807

World Cup 2014 Matches:

Jun 12: Brazil v Croatia
Jun 19: Uruguay v England
Jun 23: Holland v Chile
Jun 26: South Korea v Belgium
Jul 1: 2nd round – F1 v E2
Jul 9: Semi-Final 2



ALGERIA

Modest group raises Algerian hopes

“Fennec Foxes” look to finally realise their potential

Algeria have made much progress in a short span of time, emerging from the impact of a long civil war that stymied the country's football progress and reduced the national side from their powerful position in the 80s and 90s to a mediocre muddle.

The “Fennec Foxes” were fortunate to qualify for the last finals in South Africa, but four years on they have moved rapidly up the rankings and return to the World Cup finals with a growing self-belief as a sense of potential emerges.

Algeria are reaping the benefits of long-standing migration to Europe and are able to dip into two separate markets for their players: there is an obvious pool of players at home in what has always been a well-organised and competitive league, as well as a sizeable migrant community, mostly in the former colonial power France.

Having missed out in the past on talents such as Zinedine Zidane, Karim Benzema and Samir Nasri, Algeria now assiduously court any likely player with a connection to the land of their forefathers. Although this means a national side with more French-born players than those from Algeria, they are also a better-drilled and more competitively tuned team these days. It has taken an extraordinarily long time to get this disparate group to gel but Algeria look to be getting it right at last.

Their World Cup prospects are heightened

by the fact they are in a relatively modest group alongside Belgium, Russia and South Korea. And, while certainly not favourites to advance, their prospects look far better than they were in 2010.

Algeria are playing with more style and flair than seen for many years, but still struggle to keep their defence tight under pressure, and have struggled for some while to find a recognised striker. However, a strong season in Portugal at Sporting Lisbon for Islam Slimani might just solve that problem.

Preparations for the finals have been somewhat overshadowed by speculation over a premature departure for taciturn Franco-Bosnian coach Vahid Halilhodzic, who has irritated the Algerian Federation by refusing to talk about a contract renewal.

Mark Gleeson

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 24	Training camp at Algerian Football Federation centre in Algiers
May 29	Leave for a training camp in Geneva, Swi
May 31	Friendly v Armenia in Sion, Swi
Jun 4	Friendly v Romania in Geneva, Swi
Jun 6	Travel to Sorocaba in Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP H FIXTURES

Jun 17	v Belgium (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 22	v South Korea (Porto Alegre)
Jun 26	v Russia (Curitiba)



The Algerian squad will be staying at the Pitangueiras Hotel, a one-time horse farm situated in the countryside near Sorocaba, a city 60 miles outside São Paulo. They will train at the ground of local side Atletico Sorocaba, which is a 13-minute drive away.



Strike hope...Slimani (centre) will lead the Algeria line

THE VIEW FROM ALGERIA

- “Algeria have been strong competitors for a long time.”

Claude Le Roy, vastly experienced coach of Congo



- “It will be difficult for Algeria because there are two big teams in their group in Russia and Belgium, and to get past both of them would be a miracle.”

Joseph-Antoine Bell, former Cameroon goalkeeper and now French radio analyst





COACH PROFILE

Vahid HALILHODZIC (Bos)

Age 61 (15.10.52)
Algeria coach since July 2011

How he got the job

Appointed with the task of reaching the semi-finals of the 2013 African Nations Cup and qualifying for the World Cup. Kept his job despite his failure to fulfil the first part of that agreement.



Past successes as a coach

Won the African Champions League with Raja Casablanca in 1997, the French league with Lille in 2000 and the French Cup with Paris Saint-Germain in 2004.

Past failures as a coach

Fired by PSG after the side dropped to seventh in Ligue 1. Was sacked by Ivory Coast just a few months before the start of the 2010 World Cup following the team's shock defeat by Angola in the quarter-finals of the African Nations Cup.

Achievements as a player

Top goalscorer in France's Ligue 1 in 1983 and 1985 while playing for Nantes.

World Cup experience

Played 60 minutes in two substitute appearances for Yugoslavia during the 1982 tournament in Spain.

Relationship with the media

Notoriously testy as he frequently ignores press conferences.

Relationship with the public

Supporters have a guarded admiration for the Bosnian, a situation boosted by their World Cup qualification.

Style of management/coaching

Hard-nosed and tempestuous with frequent touch-line outbursts.

Notable backroom staff

His assistant is former Algeria striker and captain Abdelhafid Tassafout, who scored 35 goals for his country.

After the World Cup

Numerous run-ins with the Algerian FA mean he is extremely unlikely to still be in charge after the summer.

● "The team is very young and inexperienced. It will therefore have to compensate with a passion in their play."

Yazid Mansouri, former captain



● "Algeria can imagine they will qualify with the group they've been given – but it's a group that will be decided on very small details."

Philippe Troussier, former South Africa and Japan World Cup coach



Creative force...Algeria winger Sofiane Feghouli

WORLD CUP 2014 ALGERIA SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS

5
0



Azzedine DOUKHA

USM El Harrach
Age 27 (05.08.86)
Third choice who lacks the necessary height for international level but is known as a strong shot-stopper. Captain of his club and a rarity as an African-based player in a World Cup squad.

27
0



Rais M'BOLHI

CSKA Sofia (Bul)
Age 28 (25.04.86)
Has played club football in Scotland, Greece, Japan, Russia and France, as well as Bulgaria, and had a trial with Manchester United prior to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, where he kept a clean sheet against England.

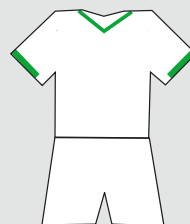
4
0



Mohamed ZEMMAMOUCHE

USM Alger
Age 29 (19.03.85)
Was the last player cut when coach Rabah Saadane finalised his 23-man squad for the 2010 tournament, but could now be first choice in Brazil. His form this season helped his club to win the Algerian league title.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS

12
0



Essaid BELKALEM

Granada (Spa)
Age 25 (01.01.89)
Sluggish centre-back with an imposing presence who has not had much game time on loan at Watford in the English Championship this season. Represented Algeria at the 2013 Military World Cup.

61
4



Madjid BOUGHERRA

Lekhwiya (Qat)
Age 31 (07.10.82)
Tough skipper who won the league title in Qatar again this term. French-born, he played at the 2010 finals and won the Scottish Premier League three times with Rangers. Always useful going forward at set-pieces.

6
0



Liassine CADAMURO

Real Sociedad (Spa)
Age 26 (05.03.88)
Full-back who was born in France, to an Italian father and an Algerian mother. Spent the second half of this season on loan to Spanish second-tier side Mallorca. Made his international debut in 2012.

5
0



Faouzi GHOULAM

Napoli (Ita)
Age 23 (01.02.91)
French-born left-back whose elder brother, Nabil, ran for France at the 2004 World Cross Country Championships. Moved from Saint-Etienne to Napoli on a four-and-a-half year contract in January.

27
1



Rafik HALLICHE

Academica (Por)
Age 27 (02.09.86)
Centre-back who is finding his feet again after a series of injuries curtailed his time at Fulham. Was sent off in the semi-finals of the 2010 Nations Cup, but played in all three games at the World Cup finals later that year.

MIDFIELDERS

1
0



Nabil BENTALEB

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 19 (24.11.94)
Born in Lille and capped by France at under-19 level, he won his first senior cap for Algeria against Slovenia in March. Central midfielder who broke into Spurs' first team when Tim Sherwood replaced Andre Villas-Boas.

4
0



Yacine BRAHIMI

Granada (Spa)
Age 24 (08.02.90)
Played in the France side that reached the Euro Under-19 semi-finals in 2009 before switching his international allegiance in February 2013 and making his Algeria debut a month later.

17
5



Sofiane FEGHOULI

Valencia (Spa)
Age 24 (26.12.89)
Creative force with an array of skills. Can be used either on the right side of the attack or in a more central role and has a £12m price tag on his head as he is likely to be sold after the tournament in Brazil.

27
2



Adlene GUEADIOURA

Crystal Palace (Eng)
Age 28 (12.11.85)
A sub in all three of Algeria's games at the 2010 World Cup. His father was an international striker, his mother a former Spanish basketball player and younger brother Nabil has played for Nottingham Forest's under-21s.

28
0



Medhi LACEN

Getafe (Spa)
Age 30 (15.03.84)
Born in Paris to an Algerian father and an Italian mother. He was first called up by Algeria in 2006 but missed out on the 2010 Nations Cup finals because his wife was pregnant. Has since gone on to captain his country several times.

FORWARDS

2
0



Ishak BELFODIL

Internazionale (Ita)
Age 22 (12.01.92)
Did not make the grade at Paris Saint-Germain before moving to Italy, where he tried to live up to his early potential at Bologna, Inter and Livorno (on loan). Made his international debut last August after opting for Algeria over France.

16
1



Ryad BOUDEBOUZ

Bastia (Fra)
Age 24 (19.02.90)
Looks to have patched up his differences after a falling-out with Halilhodzic which saw him sidelined after last year's Nations Cup. Represented France at junior level but switched to Algeria to play at the 2010 World Cup.

4
1



Nabil GHILAS

Porto (Por)
Age 24 (20.04.90)
A late surge of form at club level this year has put him in contention. Born in Marseille, he made a belated start to his professional career three years ago, at Moreirense in Portugal, after which he moved to champions Porto.

18
9



Islam SLIMANI

Sporting Lisbon (Por)
Age 25 (18.06.88)
Voted Algerian player of the year for 2013 and moved to Europe from Chabab Belouizdad last summer. Made his international debut in May 2012 and was Algeria's top scorer in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

20
10



El Arabi SOUDANI

Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
Age 26 (25.11.87)
Among the few players in the squad who originally hail from a club in Algeria, having spent six seasons at ASO Chlef before moving to Vitoria Guimaraes, and then Croatia. Scorer of some vital goals in the qualifying campaign.

TACTICS

4-3-2-1



Safety-first approach

The first thing to realise is that "Coach Vahid" is not one to stick by 11 first-choice individuals. Within his favourite **4-3-2-1** system, players come and go, constantly mixing and matching according to the form of his personnel and what he perceives to be the strength and weaknesses of the opposition.

While the crafty Franco-Bosnian steadfastly maintains that his side is far more attack-conscious than the Algeria team which took part in South Africa 2010, the truth is somewhat different. Throughout his coaching career, prudence, pragmatism, rigour and discipline have formed the core of Halilhodzic's philosophy. In tough Group H ties against Belgium and Russia, he will not take risks, looking to contain, counter-attack and make hay from a set-piece.

In order to give his team that maximum security feel, he is likely to deploy two hermetically sealed defensive layers: a traditional back four and a trio of midfield holders, all of whom are comfortable on the ball, but will be under strict instructions to sit deep and plug gaps. The wide attacking midfielders (normally **Sofiane Feghouli** on the right and the left-sided **El Arabi Soudani**) exist as the supply line to star striker **Islam Slimani**, but also are expected to tuck in and do their share of pressing.

Algeria will be dangerous at set-pieces where captain **Madjid Bougherra** can contribute effectively. But defensively they have proven weak on the flanks and often look rattled under pressure.

The likes of **Yacine Brahimi** and **Ryad Boudebouz** are strong options off the bench, but other choices are more limited. **Nabil Ghilas** has emerged as a possible alternative to Soudani.

Plan B?

Only in Algeria's second match versus South Korea will the handbrake be released. This could mean a switch to a **4-2-3-1** – with one of the midfield holders (possibly Yebda or Taider) moving forward into a no10 slot – or a 4-3-3, with Feghouli and Soudani operating as out-and-out wingers.

When the Algerians have to chase a game and up the tempo, Halilhodzic often throws attacking midfielder **Yacine Brahimi** into the mix and should he require extra firepower, may turn to **Ishak Belfodil**, who despite being too much of a maverick for the coach's liking, does possess a hint of goalgetting X factor.

4-2-3-1



1
0



Fethi HAREK

Bastia (Fra)
Age 31 (21.10.82)
Back in the frame six years after his only cap and set to be the back-up at left-back in Brazil. His return to the international scene comes after a strong season in France after winning promotion with Bastia two years ago.

24
1



Carl MEDJANI

Monaco (Fra)
Age 29 (15.05.85)
Can play in central defence or as a defensive midfielder. Has spent this season on loan to Olympiakos in Greece and then Valenciennes of France. Born in Lyon, he captained France under-21s before switching allegiance.

25
0



Djamel MESBAH

Parma (Ita)
Age 29 (09.10.84)
Left-back who can also play in the midfield and even played as a makeshift striker for Lecce in Serie A. Selected for the first time by Algeria just before the 2010 World Cup finals, where he made one appearance.

0
0



Saphir TAIDER

Internazionale (Ita)
Age 22 (29.02.92)
Has not missed a match for Algeria since his debut against Benin in the World Cup qualifiers last year, where he scored. His elder brother, Nabil, plays for Tunisia – where their father hails from; their mother is Algerian.

24
2



Hassan YEBDA

Udinese (Ita)
Age 30 (14.05.84)
Has played for clubs in France, Portugal, England, Italy and Spain, including Benfica, Portsmouth and Napoli. Was a world champion at under-17 level with France in 2001 and played all three games at the last World Cup finals for Algeria.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Aissa MANDI (D, Age 22, 22.10.91, 1/0, Reims, Fra)

Ali RIAL (D, Age 34, 26.03.80, 0/0, JS Kabylie)

Mehdi MOSTEFA (M, Age 30, 30.08.83, 22/0, Ajaccio, France)

Rafik DJEBBOUR (F, Age 30, 08.03.84, 33/5, Nottingham Forest, Eng)

Foued KADIR (F, Age 30, 05.12.83, 23/2, Rennes, Fra)

Riyad MAHREZ (F, Age 23, 21.02.91, 0/0, Leicester City, Eng)



LOVELL SOCCER PRESENTS

THE COMPLETE FOOTBALL BOOT PACKAGE

The only place to get Pro Boots, FREE Boot
Personalisation & FREE UK Delivery*

LOVELL  soccer

To get the complete football boot package go to
WWW.LOVELLSOCCER.CO.UK



FREEiD



PRO FOOTBALL BOOTS

Wear all the latest **Pro Boots**, just like your idols, from Lovell Soccer.

FREE BOOT PERSONALISATION

FREE Football Boot Personalisation on **ALL** Boots at Lovell Soccer.

FREE UK DELIVERY

FREE UK Delivery on all orders over £100 at Lovell Soccer.*

Freephone 0800 804 8521 | sales@lovellsoccer.co.uk

[facebook.com/lovellsoccer](https://www.facebook.com/lovellsoccer) twitter.com/lovellsoccer

Lovellsoccer

*Applies to UK orders only.



ARGENTINA

It's not all about attack for Sabella's men

Goals shouldn't be a problem, but there are defensive worries

Argentina will travel to Brazil expecting to make the semi-finals at least – and that would be an improvement on the past 20 years. The firepower at their disposal is formidable and, for the superstitious, Messi's age (26) is the same as Maradona's when Argentina last lifted the World Cup.

In terms of talent and ability, arguably any one of the three strikers of Lionel Messi, Gonzalo Higuain and Sergio Aguero have the potential to be top scorer in the competition – meaning that if Alejandro Sabella opts to play those three, goals should be guaranteed.

While the coach may have prepared a Plan B, his A-game is all about Messi. Since the disaster of the 2011 Copa America, the little man has been transformed, scoring almost a goal a game for his country. The image of a dejected Messi in blue and white, or of supporters who question his commitment to his country, are long gone.

But analyse lines behind the attack and question marks appear. In midfield, there are concerns over the form and fitness of Fernando Gago, and after that there is not an obvious like-for-like replacement in the role alongside Javier Mascherano, especially as Ever Banega has failed to find consistency at club level. And the defence continues to suffer from organisational and individual mistakes. Finding the balance of keeping a water-tight

defence while unleashing the full armoury is the biggest challenge facing Argentina.

The debate rages over Carlos Tevez, whose impressive form in Italy has not been met, as yet, with a call-up to national duty. He was only included in the Copa America squad at the very last minute after the pressure to include the striker from fans and media alike forced then-coach Sergio Batista's hand.

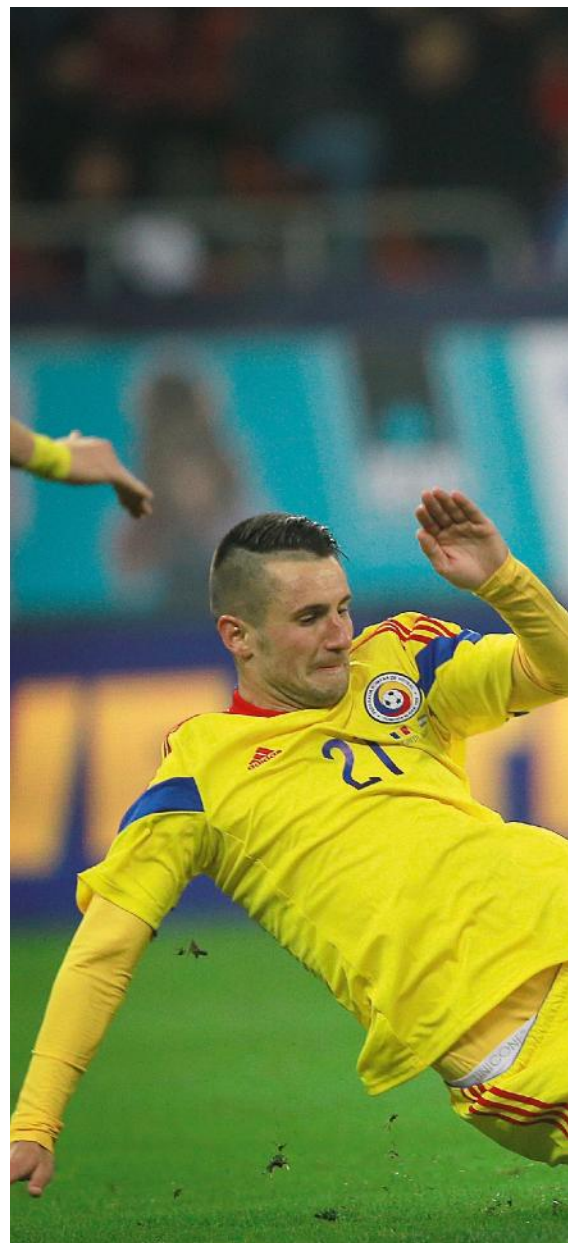
True, it was Tevez who missed the penalty against Uruguay that sent Argentina out but the team's ills went deeper than a missed spot-kick – and the prevailing optimism that has crept in since is tempered by those defensive frailties. Grumbles of Sabella's favouritism towards former Estudiantes players continue, too.

The group phase is viewed favourably by the coaching staff, not only in terms of the opponents but also logistically. They face short distances to matches from their base in Belo Horizonte, allowing ample recovery time – which should see the side enter the knockout phase in good health.

Joel Richards

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

Jun 4	Friendly v Trinidad & Tobago, La Plata
Jun 7	Friendly v Slovenia, Buenos Aires



Little master...Messi will be vital to Argentina's chances

BASECAMP



GROUP F FIXTURES

Jun 15	v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 21	v Iran (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 25	v Nigeria (Porto Alegre)



Argentina will be staying at the Atletico Mineiro training centre, which is in Vespasiano, an area to the north of Belo Horizonte. Their longest flight will be the one hour 30 minutes – for their final group game with Nigeria – while their second group game is in Belo Horizonte itself, a mere 20-minute journey from their base camp.

THE VIEW FROM ARGENTINA

● “We are candidates for the title – along with Brazil, Spain and Germany – but with one clarification: we depend heavily on how Messi makes it to the World Cup. We have to light not just one candle but many so that he makes it in good form. With Messi playing well we are a totally different team. Without him, we drop down a level and that puts us alongside national teams like Holland, Portugal, France, England, Uruguay and Belgium.”

Marcelo Gallardo, former Argentina international



● “In Brazil we'll have to play against 40,000; in Italy, we were lucky to play in Naples, but the rest were terrible. In Brazil it is different. They



still think about the Maracanazo. For us it is the worst country to play in. Brazil is football. The team selection and tactical decisions are Sabella's decision. I had the same with Ramon Diaz in 1990. There is always a player who is left out. I hear people mentioning Tevez, but you only know if you are right after the World Cup."

Carlos Bilardo, coach of the 1986 team



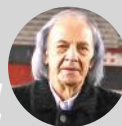
● "I think Messi is in good form, this has to be his World Cup. He's 26 years old, I hope it happens. He has more than enough ability but you can't compare him to Maradona – for me there never was nor will there ever be a player like him. I am a big fan of Tevez, he's a player who would

have fitted into the 1986 team. Wherever he has gone he has been a champion. I'd definitely take him, instead of the fantastic four [Messi, Aguero, Higuain, Lavezzi] it should be the fantastic five."

Hector Enrique, 1986 World Cup-winner

● "I don't think the national team has found its form yet. We have the best player in the world, and another three who would play in any team in the world. But you have to make a team from 23 players. Brazil has become a utilitarian team, but then it also has technique. Everyone thinks Brazil will reach the Final but I think it's going to be tough and very difficult."

Cesar Luis Menotti, 1978 World Cup-winning coach



COACH PROFILE

Alejandro SABELLA

Age 59 (05.11.54)

Argentina coach since August 2011

How he got the job

Was set to fly to the Middle East for a lucrative job offer when the AFA called him in 2011. Sergio Batista's side stumbled at the quarter-finals of a Copa America that Argentina were hosting and Sabella became the country's fourth coach in as many years.



Past successes as a coach

For nearly 20 years he was assistant coach to Daniel Passarella. After going it alone in 2009 he won the league and Libertadores Cup with Estudiantes and came within two minutes of beating Barcelona in the Club World Cup.

Past failures as a coach

Nothing more than the odd blip.

Achievements as a player

A bit-part performer at River Plate, he was a classy playmaker in England with Sheffield United. He later went home and won two titles with Estudiantes.

World Cup experience

Was Passarella's assistant at France 98.

Relationship with the media

He plays a straight bat with the local media who recognise what he has done with improving Messi's form – even if comments such as "I'd be happy to win half-nil" bother some.

Relationship with the public

His predilection for Estudiantes players continues to rile some, although supporters mostly view him as a pragmatic choice after the rollercoaster rides of Diego Maradona and Batista.

Style of management/coaching

"Born at River, adopted at Estudiantes" is how he describes himself, bridging the two different schools of thought on how the game should be played.

Notable backroom staff

Like the coach, all very low profile.

After the World Cup

Barcelona's Gerardo Martino is being tipped to replace him, but then so is Atletico Madrid's Diego Simeone...

KEY **123** caps **12** goals (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS

Mariano ANDUJAR

Catania (Ita)
Age 30 (30.07.83)
Veteran of Sabella's Libertadores Cup-winning Estudiantes side, he is Romero's understudy but has impressed in Italy and there is support from some of the local media for him to start.


Agustin ORION

Boca Juniors
Age 32 (26.07.81)
A dip in form this season should not prevent him from being third choice in Brazil. Played in the September 2011 friendlies against Brazil that involved only local players and was a regular in the squad during qualifying.


Sergio ROMERO

Monaco (Fra)
Age 27 (22.02.87)
Installed as Argentina's number one by Diego Maradona, "Chiquito" was in goal at the 2010 World Cup. Lapses of concentration in the last of the qualifiers have raised doubts about his position, as has a lack of first-team action with his club.

KITS

First kit

Second kit
DEFENDERS

Jose Maria BASANTA

Monterrey (Mex)
Age 30 (03.04.84)
Relatively unknown in Argentina as he plays his club football in Mexico, but drafted into the squad to act as both back-up for central defence and possibly left-back. Dependable, but has not stood out when called upon in qualifiers.


Hugo CAMPAGNARO

Internazionale (Ita)
Age 33 (27.06.80)
Admitted to being surprised when Sabella called him up for his debut. Offers defensive cover for the right-back position should Zabaleta switch. Having played in a back three in Italy, he is another option in the centre.


Federico FERNANDEZ

Napoli (Ita)
Age 25 (21.02.89)
Solid centre-back who was brought through both at club and international level by Sabella. Moved to Napoli in summer 2011 but spent a period last year on loan at Spain's Getafe before returning to Serie A.


Ezequiel GARAY

Benfica (Por)
Age 27 (10.10.86)
Strong, solid centre-back who didn't play in the Copa America but proved to be a key figure in the World Cup qualifiers. Impressive penalty and free-kick specialist, although he's behind Messi in the pecking order.


Lisandro Ezequiel LOPEZ

Getafe (Spa)
Age 24 (01.09.89)
Talented and versatile centre-back who hasn't broken into starting line-up but is likely to feature in the coming years. Not to be confused with the former Lyon and Porto player of the same name.

MIDFIELDERS

Ever BANEGA

Newell's Old Boys
Age 25 (29.06.88)
Seen as the heir to Gago, but injury and inconsistency have prevented him staking a stronger claim for a regular place. Moved back to Argentina ahead of the World Cup to try to gain extra playing time.


Lucas BIGLIA

Lazio (Ita)
Age 28 (30.01.86)
Neither a straight swap for Mascherano nor Gago, he has earned himself a squad place for bringing work-rate and crisp passing when called upon. Has often been employed by Sabella late in games to shore up midfield.


Angel DI MARIA

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 26 (14.02.88)
Pace and skill, coupled with his work-rate have made him a vital cog in the machine, operating from deep in support of the front three. Scored the winner in the 2008 Olympic win and is regularly one of the side's top performers.


Fernando GAGO

Boca Juniors
Age 28 (10.04.86)
The former Real Madrid man is struggling to be fit after suffering a left-knee injury in April. With his range of passing and vision, he is important in linking defence with attack and has no obvious like-for-like replacement.


Javier MASCHERANO

Barcelona (Spa)
Age 30 (08.06.84)
Mainstay in the national team who has recovered his form after passing on the captaincy to Messi in 2011. Combative and industrious, he maintains his role in midfield despite playing in the centre of defence for Barcelona.

FORWARDS

Sergio AGUERO

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 26 (02.06.88)
Brings pace, creativity and goals, having been fast-tracked into the national side as a teenager. Perhaps Messi's most important attacking partner, he has an excellent understanding with his team-mates.


Gonzalo HIGUAIN

Napoli (Ita)
Age 26 (10.12.87)
Only scored one goal less than Messi in the qualifiers, but played three fewer matches. "Pipita" is the reference point in attack, proving clinical and effective, as well as offering a huge work-rate to test opposition defences.


Ezequiel LAVEZZI

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 29 (03.05.85)
Well-liked member of the squad who offers pace and versatility from the bench, not to mention work-rate. Has been used as a winger as well as a striker and has not matched his club goalscoring record for his country.


Lionel MESSI

Barcelona (Spa)
Age 26 (24.06.87)
Captain and star player. When he's not scoring Argentina's goals he's most likely setting them up. The Maradona debate will never be buried, but leading the side in Brazil to success could be a trump card in the argument.


Rodrigo PALACIO

Internazionale (Ita)
Age 32 (05.02.82)
His excellent form in Europe has won him a place in Sabella's thinking, even if memories of him under performing at the 2006 World Cup linger. Strong alternative in terms of characteristics that he can bring to the side.

TACTICS



Potent front three have it all

Argentina might be built around **Lionel Messi**, but it is not the Catalan version, where Barcelona press from the front and seek to dominate possession. Sabella's side is designed to play more on the counter-attack from deep than Barca.

Plan A is simple: maximise the quality, pace and sharp finishing

offered by the potent front three of Messi, **Gonzalo Higuain** and **Sergio Agüero**. In the preferred **4-3-3** formation, Messi is free to move wide and deep while Agüero's interlinking with Messi is complimented by Higuain's positioning as the most advanced reference point.

Angel Di Maria's dynamism in taking attacks forward, while also diligently tracking back on the left flank, is crucial to the team's overall balance.

The midfield requires a player with vision and range in his passing, making **Fernando Gago** central to the functionality of the side. Alongside **Javier Mascherano**, Gago is vital to help launch those attacks and statistically, the Boca Juniors midfielder is the player who passes the most to Messi.

Gago, however, has had a knee injury that will keep him out of action until the tournament starts. Esteban Cambiasso's name has been mentioned, but Sabella may opt for **Ever Banega** or **Lucas Biglia** for the group games and wait for Gago to recover.

Ventures forward by the full-backs **Pablo Zabaleta** (on the right) and **Marcos Rojo** (on the left, who plays as a centre-back for his club) are sometimes limited as Sabella aims to provide a solid base from which to allow his forward line to inflict damage.

Other options include **Maxi Rodriguez**, who provides movement and width in midfield, while **Rodrigo Palacio** and **Ezequiel Lavezzi** have similar characteristics in attack. Midfielders **Jose Sosa** and Biglia have both been favoured when removing one of the forwards in order to add presence in the centre of the side.

Plan B?

Argentina employed a five-man defence for games at altitude during the qualifiers, and this could be used to shore up the defence in a **5-3-2** formation.

Such a system would operate either with an extra centre-back or the introduction of another midfielder, such as Biglia to allow Mascherano to play a deeper role, closer to the one he fulfils for Barcelona.

Either Higuain or Agüero would give way for the extra midfielder.



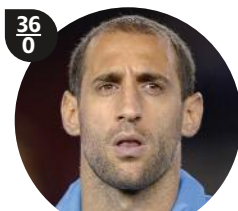
Nicolas OTAMENDI

Porto (Por)
Age 26 (12.02.88)
Central defender who was a 2011 Europa League winner with Porto and will join Valencia in July. Spent this season on loan to Brazilian side Atletico Mineiro, whose training complex will be Argentina's World Cup base.



Marcos ROJO

Sporting Lisbon (Por)
Age 24 (20.03.90)
Not everyone's favourite, but one of the few options for left-back. Plays in the middle for his club and not as dynamic going forward, but strong in the air at set-pieces. Viewed as the weak spot of an already questioned defensive line.



Pablo ZABALETA

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 29 (16.01.85)
Dependable and ever-present member of defence at right-back, who has covered on the left. Charged with adding width to attacks while bringing defensive organisation. First choice since after the 2010 World Cup.



Maxi RODRIGUEZ

Newell's Old Boys
Age 33 (02.01.81)
Former Atletico Madrid and Liverpool midfielder who returned home to Newell's in 2012 to end his career. He brings experience and width to midfield despite losing the dynamism that characterised his style when in Europe.



Jose SOSA

Metalist Kharkiv (Ukr)
Age 28 (19.06.85)
Versatile attacking option in midfield who is one of the Estudiantes alumni that Sabella sticks with. Effective when called upon, fulfilling the role asked of him. Left Metalist for a six-month loan at Atletico Madrid in January.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Gino PERUZZI (D, Age 22, 09.02.92, 4/0, Catania, Ita)

Esteban CAMBIASSO (M, Age 33, 18.08.80, 52/5, Internazionale, Ita)

Augusto FERNANDEZ (M, Age 28, 10.04.86, 7/1, Celta Vigo, Spa)

Ricky ALVAREZ (F, Age 26, 12.04.88, 5/0, Internazionale, Ita)

MISSING OUT

Carlos Tevez is resigned to not being part of the squad in Brazil, despite an excellent season for Juventus.

Sabella is reluctant to break up his attacking triumvirate to find space for a player who has not been in the side since he missed a penalty against Uruguay in the quarter-finals of the Copa America in 2011.

"I've already bought tickets to go with my wife and my three children to Disney World," Tevez has conceded.

Paris Saint-Germain midfielder **Javier Pastore** is another big name player set to miss out – he simply hasn't been called up under Sabella.

World Soccer

SEND THIS COUPON TO

UK World Soccer Subscriptions, FREEPOST CY1061,
Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3BR (No stamp required)

The Ultimate Subscription Package!

- ☐ **YES! Please can I subscribe to the Ultimate Subscription Package for just £64.98 for two years saving 72% off the normal price. Please send me the Print, iPad and iPhone edition.**

BEST DEAL!

Or Print/iPad and iPhone only

Yes! Please send the Print or iPad/iPhone only edition for just £59.99 for two years saving 50% off the normal price. (Please tick).

- ☐ **Print Edition only**
☐ **iPad/iPhone Edition only**

YOUR DETAILS

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss: _____ Forename: _____

Surname: _____

If you would like to receive emails from IPC Media and World Soccer containing news, special offers and product and service information and take part in our magazine research via email, please include your email below.

Email: _____

Address: _____

Zip/Postcode: _____

Country: _____

Home Tel No: (inc. area code) _____

Would you like to receive messages to your mobile from IPC Media and World Soccer containing news, special offers, product and service information and take part in our research? If yes, please include your mobile phone number here.

Mobile: _____

Year of birth:

PAYMENT DETAILS

I enclose cheque/international money order for £ _____
made payable to IPC Media Ltd.

Or please debit my ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ Visa Debit ☐ Amex ☐ Maestro (UK only)

Card No:

(Maestro only) Start Date: (Maestro only) Issue No: / Expiry date: /

(I am over 18)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**OVERSEAS SUBSCRIBERS
SAVE UP TO 40%**

Visit: www.worldsoccersubs.com/iwsvs

Offer closes 30th September 2014. introductory offer open to new subscribers only. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 1 year, paying £59.99 for 13 issues. Ultimate subscription package full rate is £119.98 a year. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. **For enquiries from the UK please call: 0844 848 0848, for overseas please call: +44 (0)330 3330 233 or e-mail: ipcsubsquadrantsubs.com.** *M&S voucher only available for subscription orders placed online and only on subscriptions delivered to the UK mainland. Vouchers are digital and can be redeemed either in-store or online and will be fulfilled by email only. Your voucher will be emailed separately within 28 days after your first payment has been taken. World Soccer, published by IPC Media Limited, will collect your personal information to process your order. World Soccer, and IPC Media would like to contact you by post or telephone to promote and ask your opinion on our magazines and services. Please tick here if you prefer not to hear from IPC Media ☐ IPC Media may occasionally pass your details to carefully selected organisations so that they can contact you by telephone or post with regards to promoting and researching their products and services. Please tick here if you prefer not to be contacted ☐ IPC Media who publish World Soccer, would like to send messages to your mobile with offers from carefully selected organisations and brands, promoting and researching their products and services. If you want to receive messages please tick here ☐ IPC would like to email you with offers from carefully selected organisations and brands, promoting and researching their products and services. If you want to receive these messages please tick here ☐

U18

WORLD CUP EXCLUSIVE

The Ultimate Subscription Package

Print and iPad/iPhone

ULTIMATE PACKAGE

Print only



SAVE 50%



SAVE 72%

iPad/iPhone



SAVE 50%

More great reasons to subscribe...

- 2 years for the price of 1
- Enjoy the ultimate subscription package and benefit from the print edition delivered direct to your door plus access on your iPad and iPhone and save 73%
- Join the most knowledgeable people in football
- Money back guarantee – if you find World Soccer is not for you then we will be happy to refund any unmailed issues

BY PHONE

0844 848 0848

Quote code **U18**

7 days a week from 8am to 9pm (UK time). Overseas: +44 (0)330 3330 233

WORLD SOCCER

EXCLUSIVE INTRODUCTORY OFFER

2 YEARS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE!

LEGENDARY SUBSCRIPTION OFFER



ORDER ONLINE

worldsoccersubs.com/U18



Complete the coupon opposite



AUSTRALIA

The bigger picture

Socceroos will use finals to prepare for next year

With expectations not exactly sky high – which is understandable given the almost impossible nature of Australia's group – hopes for this summer therefore rest more on performances rather than results. And if the "Socceroos" can give a good account of themselves against heavyweights Spain and Holland, the football fraternity back home will be in forgiving mood of Ange Postecoglou and his recalibrated squad.

The regeneration undertaken by the coach is designed to address some pretty fundamental flaws in a team that was too old, too slow and, overall, rather too predictable.

No one expects them to come away with anything but a big zero in the points column

The struggle to qualify for Brazil only amplified the noise around the so-called "golden generation", who are revered but largely past their sell-by date. In their place come a new breed of hungry, quicker youngsters that – particularly in the case of Tom Rogic and Mathew Leckie – are hugely exciting.

However, the step up in quality is liable to find out some of the newcomers – as witnessed in the friendly with Ecuador in March, when Australia raced into an exhilarating 3-0 half-time lead, only to lose 4-3 once the South Americans sent on their big guns and 'Roos goalkeeper Mitch Langerak had been sent off.

Preparations have been limited for Postecoglou as he only came into the job after qualification had been achieved. But the team's big strength is the fact that no one expects them to come away from Brazil with anything but a big fat zero in the points column – so they will be able to play stress-free and build for the 2015 Asian Cup on home soil. Traditionally, the Socceroos have fantastic resilience in the face of adversity and they also have a habit of surprising bigger nations – although many of their biggest upsets (3-1 v England in 2003, 2-1 v Holland 2008, 2-1 v Germany 2010, all away from home) have come in friendlies.

Postecoglou's big challenge is to revive the Socceroos "brand", which has taken a hammering after years of rather reactive football under Pim Verbeek and Holger Osieck. And that is hugely important in a country where football isn't the number one sporting passion.

As for the team's biggest weakness? Well, that's quite simple: they don't have players anywhere near as good as those of group opponents Spain, Holland and Chile.

Simon Hill

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 26	Friendly v South Africa in Sydney
End of May	Travel to training camp in Vitoria
Jun 2	Friendly against local club side in Vitoria (tbc)
Jun 6	Friendly v Croatia in Salvador, Brazil



Focal point...Australia's Tim Cahill (no4)

BASE CAMP



GROUP B FIXTURES

Jun 13	v Chile (Cuiaba)
Jun 18	v Holland (Porto Alegre)
Jun 23	v Spain (Curitiba)



The Socceroos will be based in Vitoria, the state capital of Espirito Santo on Brazil's eastern coast. The city – which is ideally situated for travel to Australia's three Group B venues – has a pleasantly relaxed feel, and many of the thousands of Australian fans who have snapped up tickets are likely to base themselves there as well.

THE VIEW FROM AUSTRALIA

● "The expectations for this tournament are realistic. The World Cup is important for performances more than results – the Asian Cup is more important six months later. We want to see a future; a philosophy on which way we are going to go. There was a need at one stage for foreign coaches, but Pim [Verbeek] and Holger [Osieck] didn't do enough to ensure the future of the 'Roos because their mandate was to get results."



Robbie Slater, ex-Socceroo and Fox Sports TV analyst



● “Qualification from the group would be a dream, but a highly unlikely one. Beyond that, I’d like to see a competitive Australian team, one that is not embarrassed the way we were four years ago – one that looks to the future, where the young players show there is hope.”

*Sebastian Hassett,
Sydney Morning Herald journalist*



● “They will struggle. The golden generation is finished, and it seems the coach is heading in a different philosophical path and taking a longer term view. I actually think things could get really

ugly – Chile are underrated here and I think they could get out of the group.”

Scott McIntyre, reporter for SBS Television

● “Australia will probably lose all three games. There’s no shame in that in such a tough group, but the key is how they play. Postecoglou has lots of goodwill, based on his willingness to play in an ‘Australian’ way, and giving the youngsters responsibility. He’s also got to focus on the Asian Cup – so the World Cup is not the end, but the means to the end.”

Tom Smithies, Daily Telegraph



COACH PROFILE

Ange POSTECOGLOU

Age 48 (27.08.65)

Australia coach since October 2013

How he got the job

Replaced Holger Osieck, who was fired after successive 6-0 friendly losses to Brazil and France, and given a five-year contract.



Past successes as a coach

The most successful domestic coach ever in Australian football, he won four national titles: two in the old NSL with South Melbourne and two in the A-League with Brisbane Roar.

Past failures as a coach

Was fired as coach of Australian junior teams after failing to qualify for the Under-20 World Cup in 2007.

Achievements as a player

Captained South Melbourne to two NSL titles and was capped four times.

World Cup experience

Coached Australia’s junior side at three successive Under-20 World Cups – in 2001, 2003 and 2005 – and twice reached the round of 16.

Relationship with the media

Excellent. Worked as a TV pundit for Fox Sports and understands the need to engage with supporters.

Relationship with the public

Very good. Still enjoying a honeymoon period, after public opinion turned hostile towards predecessor Osieck amid calls for an Australian coach to take charge.

Style of management/coaching

Proactive. Likes to attack, sometimes at the expense of defence. Changed the A-League with his commitment to possession football at Brisbane Roar.

Notable backroom staff

His number two Ante Milicic is an ex-Socceroo who previously assisted Tony Popovic at Western Sydney Wanderers. World Cup veteran Craig Moore works as mentor to the squad.

After the World Cup

Build-up begins for January’s Asian Cup on home soil – which he will be expected to win.

KEY 123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and including 05.03.14)
12 goals

GOALKEEPERS

8
0



Eugene GALEKOVIC

Adelaide United
Age 33 (12.06.81)
First choice for his club for seven years and the most consistent stopper in the A-League. His overseas career consists of just two games for Portuguese side Beira Mar. Went to the 2010 World Cup as third choice.

3
0



Mitch LANGERAK

Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 25 (22.08.88)
As number two to Roman Weidenfeller at Dortmund he has only played a dozen games in four years and a red card against Ecuador in March highlighted his rustiness. Agile, confident and imposing, his time will come.

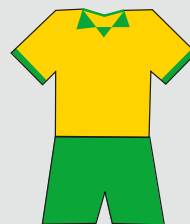
5
0



Mat RYAN

Club Brugge (Bel)
Age 22 (08.04.92)
Small for a keeper, but an excellent shot stopper. Distributes well, which suits Postecoglou's ideal of playing out from the back. Had an outstanding debut season in Belgium after leaving Central Coast Mariners last year.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS

5
0



Jason DAVIDSON

Heracles (Hol)
Age 22 (29.06.91)
Left-back who can also play as a left-sided central defender. Scored an own goal on his international debut, against Scotland. His grandmother is from Hiroshima and his father, Alan, played for Nottingham Forest.

7
0



Ivan FRANJIC

Brisbane Roar
Age 26 (10.09.87)
Combined playing with a job on a building site as a carpenter before turning pro at 21. Super fit and very mobile, he has developed into a fine attacking full-back whose next step is probably a move to Europe.

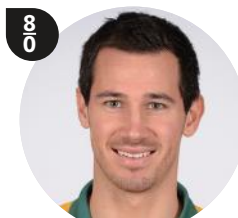
1
0



Curtis GOOD

Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 21 (23.03.93)
Central defender or left-back who has struggled to break into Newcastle's first-team. Injury hampered his loan at Dundee United this season, but he played at Wembley with Bradford City in the 2013 League Cup Final.

8
0



Ryan MCGOWAN

Shandong Luneng Taishan (Chn)
Age 24 (15.08.89)
Central defender or right-back whose organisational skills and no-nonsense defending earmark him as a potential partner to Spiranovic in Brazil. Younger brother Dylan is on the books at his former club Hearts.

17
0



Matthew SPIRANOVIC

Western Sydney Wanderers
Age 25 (27.06.88)
Tall, rangy centre-back who is comfortable on the ball and equally at home in defensive midfield. His career stalled after a bright start in Germany with Nuremberg. Sister Laura plays for Melbourne Victory's ladies team.

MIDFIELDERS

2
0



Oliver BOZANIC

Lucerne (Swi)
Age 25 (08.01.89)
A central or left-sided midfielder, he moved to Switzerland last year and has established himself as a hard worker and a regular goalscorer. Previously tried his luck in England with Reading. Son of ex-Socceroo Vic Bozanic.

73
13



Mark BRESCIANO

Al Gharafa (Qat)
Age 34 (11.02.80)
Deep-lying playmaker preparing for his third World Cup. Both a creator and a scorer of goals, his many years of European experience in Italy's Serie A could be crucial in Brazil. Famous for his "Spartacus" goal celebration.

43
4



Mile JEDINAK

Crystal Palace (Eng)
Age 29 (03.08.84)
A solid tackler, he is good in the air with an excellent long-range shot. His former coach at Central Coast Mariners, Lawrie McKinna, dubbed him the "Silent Assassin" for his quiet, yet ruthlessly competitive demeanour.

45
1



Matt MCKAY

Brisbane Roar
Age 31 (11.01.83)
A late developer who made his debut in 2006 but had to wait three years for his next cap. Able to play anywhere in midfield or at left-back, he is a busy, hard runner and a fans' favourite at Brisbane.

27
2



Mark MILLIGAN

Melbourne Victory
Age 28 (04.08.85)
Now a box-to-box central midfielder, having made his name as a centre-half, he is set to go to his third World Cup, but yet to take to the field. Victory turned down bids from Crystal Palace and Bani Yas (Israel) for him this season.

FORWARDS

67
31



Tim CAHILL

New York Red Bulls (USA)
Age 34 (06.12.79)
The nation's all-time top scorer, he almost missed out after representing Samoa – the country of his mother's birth – in a junior tournament in 1994. He had to wait 10 years to get clearance, with a FIFA rule change in 2004.

35
17



Josh KENNEDY

Nagoya Grampus (Jap)
Age 31 (20.08.82)
Appearing at his third World Cup after an eclectic career that has taken him from Germany to Japan. Nicknamed "Jesus" by fans for his long-flowing locks and beard – which have since been replaced by a shorter look.

6
1



Matthew LECKIE

FSV Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 23 (04.02.91)
Second striker or right-winger, his powerful running, pace and eye for goal earned him a move to Borussia Monchengladbach in 2011, but he is now in the German second tier. Once modelled for lads mag *FHM*.

4
3



Adam TAGGART

Newcastle Jets
Age 21 (02.06.93)
Pacy and direct, he has put himself in the frame by winning the golden boot in the A-League. He and Emile Heskey have forged a profitable partnership at Newcastle. Has a knack of scoring goals from outside the box.

TACTICS



Big new hope Rogic may have to make do with a role from the subs' bench

Postecoglou likes to play a **4-3-3**, which is very much in vogue in Australia due to the national curriculum, developed by Dutch technical director Han Berger.

Whereas predecessor Osieck preferred a 4-4-1-1 shape, reliant largely upon experience and

defensive structure, Postecoglou's teams are set up to attack. Evident from his first friendly was a commitment to quick forward transition, playing out from the back, with **Mile Jedinak** or **Mark Milligan** often dropping in between the central defenders to set up the play.

The defence will be inexperienced if former captain Lucas Neill fails to play his way back into contention. Full-backs **Ivan Franjic** and perhaps **Jason Davidson**, in the problem left-back position, will be expected to push high and offer additional support to wide men **Tommy Oar** and **Matthew Leckie**, but the key could be **Tomas Rogic**.

Arguably the most talented player produced by Australia in years, Rogic is a classic number 10 but is raw and has struggled with injury. It may be that he is used off the bench, with **Mark Bresciano** taking on more responsibility in the creative role. Bresciano, who was hit with a FIFA ban for an illegal transfer from Al Nasr to Al Gharafa, has been training with Melbourne Heart to stay fit.

Tim Cahill is still the most reliable source of goals, particularly from set-pieces, where his strength in the air, despite his diminutive frame, could be crucial. **Josh Kennedy** came off the bench to replace Cahill in the final qualifier against Iraq, a controversial move at the time, but he went on to score the winner.

Matt McKay is a potential "defensive" substitute, with **Oliver Bozanic** a back-up in central midfield. Further forward, Oar doesn't have searing pace but his trickery allows him to create angles for crosses to the likes of Cahill and Kennedy. **Dario Vidosic** has an eye for goal and can pick a pass.

Plan B?

Cahill and Kennedy could possibly play together in a 4-4-2 diamond if they are searching for a goal late on, but Postecoglou isn't keen on just lumping the ball in the air. More likely is the 4-3-3 becoming a more defensive **4-5-1** if Australia are trying to close out a game, with wide men Oar and Leckie tucking in.



1
0

Alex WILKINSON

Jeonbuk Motors (SKo)
Age 29 (13.08.84)
Centre-back who made his debut, as a sub against Ecuador, in March at the age of 29. Starred for many years as the unflappable captain of Central Coast Mariners before moving to Korea. Once co-owned a greyhound called "Schwarzer".



79
8

Luke WILKSHIRE

Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
Age 32 (01.10.81)
Feisty individual who, at right-back or in midfield, is one of the "golden generation" whose place is under threat following Postecoglou's arrival. Allegedly the highest-paid Australian footballer, earning a reputed US\$5m a year in Russia.



10
0

Michael ZULLO

Utrecht (Hol)
Age 25 (11.09.88)
A tenacious and tricky left-winger who has been converted into a left-back or left-sided midfielder. Has spent the past year on loan to Adelaide United after finding it hard to secure a starting place in the Eredivisie.



13
1

Tommy OAR

Utrecht (Hol)
Age 22 (10.12.91)
Plays centrally for his club but on the left flank for his country. Scored the goal of the tournament at the 2011 Under-20 World Cup with a 30-yard free-kick against Ecuador.



9
0

Tomas ROGIC

Celtic (Sco)
Age 21 (16.12.92)
Playmaker who, despite his talent, is the latest to struggle with the label of "best since Harry Kewell". On loan to Melbourne Victory this season. Got his big break by winning "The Chance," run by the Nike Football Academy.



21
2

Dario VIDOSIC

Sion (Swi)
Age 27 (08.04.87)
Attacking midfielder who will be going to his second World Cup, although he nearly opted for Croatia after being left out of the 2008 Australian Olympic squad. His father, Rado, is assistant coach to Frank Farina at Sydney.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Brad JONES (G, Age 32, 19.03.82, 4/0, Liverpool, Eng)
Chris HERD (D, Age 25, 04.04.89, 0/0, Aston Villa, Eng)
Lucas NEILL (D, Age 36, 09.03.78, 96/1, Watford, Eng)
Trent SAINSBURY (D, Age 22, 05.01.92, 0/0, PEC Zwolle, Hol)
James HOLLAND (M, Age 25, 15.05.89, 12/0, Austria Vienna, Aut)
Brett HOLMAN (M, Age 30, 27.03.84, 63/9, Al Nasr, UAE)
Massimo LUONGO (M, Age 21, 25.09.92, 1/0, Swindon Town, Eng)
Adam SAROTA (M, Age 25, 28.12.88,

3/0, Utrecht, Hol)
Tomi JURIC (F, Age 22, 22.07.91, 3/1, Western Sydney Wanderers)

MISSING OUT

Robbie Kruse was ruled out after he tore cruciate ligaments in his left knee, while defender **Rhys Williams** tore an Achilles tendon.

Harry Kewell retired from football at the end of this season.

Another key player from the 2010 campaign in South Africa, **Brett Holman**, appears to have fallen out of favour with coach Postecoglou.

BELGIUM

Back in business

The “*Diablos Rouges*” end a dozen years in the wilderness

It had been 12 years since Belgium last qualified for a major tournament so – on October 11, 2013 – there was much rejoicing on a wet night in Zagreb, Croatia, as a Romelu Lukaku brace confirmed qualification.

Now that Marc Wilmots’ men are off to Brazil, the considered opinion is that they will qualify from Group H. After that, with Germany or Portugal likely to provide the opposition in the last 16, the hope is that Belgium could match anyone over 90 minutes.

The team conceded just four goals in 10 qualifying games, although that gives a somewhat incorrect picture as the defence

been the preferred option. However, his recent injury has caused a headache for Wilmots as the introduction of Lukaku is not a like-for-like replacement.

In terms of support, the team is incredibly popular and all their recent matches have been sold out within hours. The media coverage will be close to 24/7 with all the major stations, from both sides of the language divide, broadcasting from Brazil.

Towards the end of last year, after Zagreb, there was a feeling that Belgium could reach the Final and maybe even win the tournament. Now, after three friendlies and no victories – against Colombia, Japan and Ivory Coast – hopes are more realistic.

The recent poor results in the post-qualifier friendlies have taken the heat off Wilmots and, with several players – notably, Marouane Fellaini, Thomas Vermaelen and Jan Vertonghen – underperforming in the “big” leagues, the coach is looking forward to regrouping before settling on his final 23.

But most importantly, after a long wait, Belgium are back on the biggest stage of all.

John Chapman

Towards the end of last year, there was a feeling that Belgium could maybe even win the tournament

is perhaps their weakest area. Undoubtedly, Thibaut Courtois is one of the finest keepers on the world stage, but there are question marks about all of the possible back four, with the exception of Vincent Kompany.

It’s in midfield – with Eden Hazard, Axel Witsel and Kevin Mirallas, to Dries Mertens, Kevin De Bruyne and Moussa Dembele – that coach Wilmots is spoiled for choice with a number of combinations available.

Up front, Belgium have nearly always played with a lone striker, and Christian Benteke has

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 19	Squad gather in Genk
May 25	Friendly v Luxembourg in Brussels
Jun 1	Friendly away to Sweden in Solna
Jun 7	Friendly v Tunisia in Brussels
Jun 10	Squad fly out to Brazil



On their way...Belgium players get in the World Cup spirit

BASE CAMP



GROUP H FIXTURES

Jun 17	v Algeria (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 22	v Russia (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 26	v South Korea (Sao Paulo)



Belgium will stay at the Paradise Golf & Lake Resort (above) at Mogi das Cruzes, just to the east of Sao Paulo. They are conveniently located for all three of their group games – the longest journey being a 35-minute flight to Belo Horizonte for their opening game.

THE VIEW FROM BELGIUM

● “The results in recent friendlies have meant that the team have their feet on the ground and it’s better that way as Belgium performs well when viewed as an outsider. The group means that we could go through to meet Germany or Portugal, and with luck we could go even further. Remember, in 1986 the team only won one game in 90 minutes but we still reached the semi-finals. Kevin De Bruyne could prove that Chelsea were wrong to let him go – he could be a revelation to some people.”

Jan Ceulemans, Belgium’s most-capped player with 96 appearances



COACH PROFILE

Marc WILMOTS

Age 45 (22.02.69)
Belgium coach since May 2012

How he got the job

Became assistant to national coach Dick Advocaat in 2009 and remained as number two under Georges Leekens.



Past successes as a coach

None.

Past failures as coach

In 2004-05, he coached Sint-Truiden, the club where he had started his playing career in 1987. He was sacked after just six months.

Achievements as a player

Won the title with Mechelen in 1989. After five seasons with Standard Liege, he joined Schalke in 1996 and helped them to win the UEFA Cup in 1997, scoring the decisive penalty in a shoot-out with Internazionale.

World Cup experience

He went to four World Cups as a player but did not play in 1990 and made just one appearance in 1994. Was ever-present in midfield in 1998 and had a goal disallowed in the 2002 quarter-final against Brazil.

Relationship with the media

Generally keeps the press on a tight rein, but this has not been a problem during his successful period in charge.

Relationship with public

As Belgium have qualified, with a squad that plays in Europe's major leagues, he can do no wrong.

Style of management/coaching

He demands loyalty and discipline from his players and in return he's loyal to those who have brought him success. Very much a hands-on coach and happiest out on the training pitch.

Notable backroom staff

Vital Borkelmans was in the 1994 World Cup squad with Wilmots, while chief physio Lieven Maesschalck has worked with players from many nations.

After the World Cup

Has signed for four more years, taking him beyond the Euros and up to 2018.

● "It's after the group stage where the difficulty starts. If it's Germany, then it could be over. I'd be more confident against Portugal as we could beat them if we play to our best.

The loss of Benteke could lead to a change in style but Michy Batshuayi could come in and surprise people"

Ex-international Franky Van der Elst



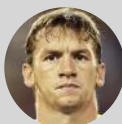
● "Belgium had a good qualifying campaign and it's certain that they will progress from the group stage. After that, anything could happen. In a one-off match, it depends on the circumstances. This team has many good individuals – Witsel,

Lukaku, Defour, Mertens – but it all depends on the team playing well together on the day."

Enzo Scifo, played in four World Cups for Belgium

● "It would be difficult if they play Germany or Portugal, but if you want to achieve something you have to beat at least one big team at a major tournament. We have to prove that we are no longer an underdog. Dries Mertens is performing well for Napoli and could be a surprise for many people. If Belgium reach the quarter-finals it will be a huge performance."

Geert De Vlieger, ex-international



KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



15
0

Thibaut COURTOIS

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 22 (11.05.92)
Undisputed first choice and arguably one of the top five in the world, he stands 6ft 6in and has an arm span of 6ft 9in. His sister, Valerie, is an international volleyball player. On loan to Atletico Madrid since July 2011.



15
0

Simon MIGNOLET

Liverpool (Eng)
Age 26 (06.03.88)
First choice for his club but on the bench for his country. Once criticised by Courtois for suggesting that he should be number one. Speaks five languages and has a degree in political science.



13
0

Silvio PROTO

Anderlecht
Age 31 (23.05.83)
A great shot-stopper but with a reputation for being outspoken. There have been stories in the press, which have since been denied, that he once refused to be in the squad if it meant he would only be third choice.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



32
1

Toby ALDERWEIRELD

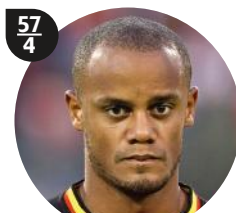
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 25 (02.03.89)
A centre-back by nature, but right-back for Belgium. He has tattoos of Antwerp Cathedral and the Virgin Mary. From the Gernard Beerschot/Ajax stable, he had nine years in Amsterdam before a 2013 move to Madrid.



8
0

Laurent CIMAN

Standard Liege
Age 28 (05.08.85)
A centre-back who gets his place in the squad as reserve right-back. Versatile defender who has enjoyed an effective season with his club side and Wilmots appreciates his loyalty to the cause.



57
4

Vincent KOMPANY

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 28 (10.04.86)
The squad's leader on and off the pitch. He's invested in a football club – BX Brussels – to give youth a chance, has his own limo service and dabbles in the music business. Supports charities in DR Congo, which is his father's birthplace.



25
2

Nic LOMBAERTS

Zenit (Rus)
Age 29 (20.03.85)
Reserve centre-back, he was voted "best foreign player" in the Russian league in 2012 and is a big fans' favourite at Zenit. Nicknamed "The Mountain", he speaks four languages and has a law degree.



12
0

Seb POCOgnoli

Hanover (Ger)
Age 26 (01.08.87)
Reserve left-back. His move to Hanover last year got him a place in the national squad but rarely one in the Bundesliga side. A member of Belgium's Olympic squad in 2008.

MIDFIELDERS



18
2

Nacer CHADLI

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 24 (01.08.89)
Seen as a winger at previous club Twente, but more often used centrally by Wilmots and at Spurs. Of Moroccan parentage, he played in a 2010 friendly for Morocco before opting to represent Belgium.



20
4

Kevin DE BRUYNE

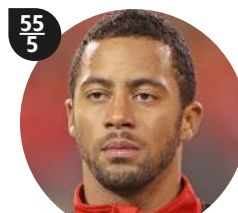
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 22 (28.06.91)
Influential in the qualifiers and the team's leading scorer with four goals. Had a tough time at Chelsea following his 2012 move from Genk but is finding his form again at Wolfsburg. A regular on the wing or in midfield.



42
2

Steven DEFOUR

Porto (Por)
Age 26 (15.04.88)
Standard Liege's youngest-ever captain when he was 19. National team-mate Witsel was once in his shadow but Defour is now something of a bit player at Porto. His qualities are still appreciated by Wilmots, though.



55
5

Moussa DEMBELE

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 26 (16.07.87)
Martin Jol, his manager at former club Fulham, once forecast that Dembele would become the top playmaker in the Premier League, but he's not yet reached that level. Has rarely disappointed for Belgium, though.



48
8

Marouane FELLAINI

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 26 (22.11.87)
Started out as a defensive midfielder in Belgium, found fame as a "false nine" with Everton and is now desperately seeking a position with United. A regular in the Premier League's "most fouls committed" lists.

FORWARDS



0
0

Michy BATSHUAYI

Standard Liege
Age 20 (02.10.93)
Anderlecht couldn't handle him as a teenager but he has resurrected his career at Standard. Known for his speed, attitude, goalscoring and inconsistency. An under-21 international.



43
5

Eden HAZARD

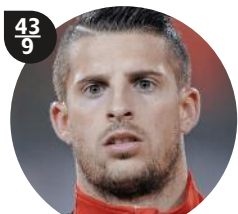
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 23 (07.01.91)
Undoubtedly talented but has rarely performed for Belgium. Famously left the stadium and was spotted at a burger stall during a game against Turkey in 2011 after he had appeared as a sub and was then substituted himself.



27
5

Romelu LUKAKU

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 21 (13.05.93)
Leading scorer in the Belgian league at 16 and now regularly among the goals in England – but on loan rather than with Chelsea. Wilmots always preferred Benteke but his injury now makes Lukaku the main striker.



43
9

Kevin MIRALLAS

Everton (Eng)
Age 26 (05.10.87)
After playing in a UEFA Cup match for Lille at 16 his career nose-dived, but he's now quietly becoming a key figure for club and country via spells at Saint-Etienne and Olympiakos. Can play centre-forward or on the wing.

TACTICS



Benteke absence poses problems for Wilmots

It has been well documented that the Belgian FA developed a blueprint for players' development that included the adoption of a **4-3-3** formation by the youth teams of club and country. Wilmots, however, favours a 4-3-3 that can look like a 4-1-4-1 with the midfield four interchanging and **Axel Witsel** fulfilling his

disciplined role in front of the back four. And the defence behind him could certainly struggle against the world's best teams due to the necessity to play centre-backs in the two full-back positions. **Toby Alderweireld** and **Jan Vertonghen** will start at right-back and left-back respectively, with captain **Vincent Kompany** and **Thomas Vermaelen** in the centre.

In the qualifiers, the key players were the spine of the team – goalkeeper **Thibaut Courtois**, Kompany and Witsel – and their consistency allowed the creative players in midfield to assert their authority. **Kevin De Bruyne** became the fourth essential player after he was introduced against Serbia in Belgrade. He was a revelation from that game on and his lack of match fitness was a contribution to the team's poor performances in the post-qualifying friendlies.

Christian Benteke's injury is a headache for Wilmots as it is questionable as to whether **Romelu Lukaku** can play a similar role in holding the ball up to allow team-mates to break through from midfield.

De Bruyne is likely to play to the right of Lukaku, with **Eden Hazard** on the left of a front three. **Moussa Dembele** and **Nacer Chadli** are the most likely partners alongside Witsel in midfield, with **Marouane Fellaini** set to start on the bench after a difficult first season at Manchester United.

Plan B?

The pre-tournament friendlies will be the place to try out alternatives. There could even be a switch to **4-4-2** but it's a bit late in the day for such a move.

Wilmots once tried Hazard as a "false nine" but with limited success and questions remain as to why Belgium rarely get the best out of such a promising talent.

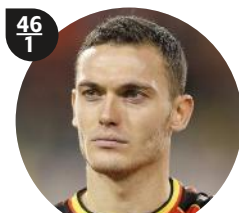
In competitive games, Wilmots has hardly ever had to switch to a "Plan B", but he has so many attacking options in midfield that he could simply change personnel and hope that fresh legs could prove effective.

If he did go 4-4-2, Wilmots could bring **Kevin Mirallas** into the centre, alongside Lukaku, and leave out Chadli from the midfield quartet.



Daniel VAN BUYTEN

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 36 (07.02.78)
Stands 6ft 6in and played at the 2002 World Cup. In his eighth season at Bayern, he is only the second Belgian to have won the UEFA Champions League, after Eric Gerets. His father was a successful wrestler.



Thomas VERMAELEN

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 28 (14.11.85)
Vice-captain and centre-back. One of several players in the squad who started out with Germinal Beerschot before moving to Ajax. Has endured an injury-hit season at the Emirates, where he is no longer first choice.



Jan VERTONGHEN

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 27 (24.04.87)
A centre-back who plays left-back for his country. He's a class act, especially going forward, but his stock has dropped along with that of his club in recent months. Another from the Germinal Beerschot/Ajax stable.



Dries MERTENS

Napoli (Ita)
Age 27 (06.05.87)
Discarded by Anderlecht for being too small, he carved out a career in Holland, at Utrecht and PSV, before becoming a favourite at Napoli. Fast, clever winger who scores and makes goals.



Timmy SIMONS

Club Brugge
Age 37 (11.12.76)
Hugely influential and respected by all, he was a member of the 2002 World Cup squad. In 2012, he covered more miles in the Bundesliga than any other player. Second only to Jan Ceulemans in terms of all-time caps for Belgium.



Axel WITSEL

Zenit (Rus)
Age 25 (12.01.89)
Wilmots' trusted lieutenant, dictating play from his position in front of the back four. Rarely makes an error, rarely injured. Left Benfica for Zenit in September 2012 in a deal worth a reported €40m.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Colin COOSEMANS (G, Age 21, 03.08.92, 0/0, Waasland-Beveren)

Thomas KAMINSKI (G, Age 21, 23.10.92, 0/0, Anderlecht)

Anthony VANDEN BORRE (D, Age 26, 24.10.87, 24/1, Anderlecht)

Thorgan HAZARD (M, Age 21, 29.03.93, 1/0, Chelsea, Eng)

Adnan JANUZAJ (M, Age 19, 05.02.95, 0/0, Manchester Utd, Eng)

Radja NAINGGOLAN (M, Age 26, 04.05.88, 5/1, Cagliari, Ita)

Divock ORIGI (F, Age 19, 18.04.95, Lille, Fra)

Jelle VOSSSEN (F, Age 25, 22.03.89, 12/2, Genk)

MISSING OUT

Main striker **Christian Benteke** tore an Achilles while training with Aston Villa in April and is expected to be out for up to eight months. Third-choice goalkeeper

Koen Casteels misses out after breaking a shinbone. **Jean-Francois Gillet** of Torino had been the regular third-choice keeper until he got caught up in betting scandals. He was banned for 43 months, reduced to 13 months.



BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The history makers

The “Dragons” are competing in their first major finals

Whatever happens in Brazil, Bosnia-Herzegovina have already achieved all their goals. Ravaged by a war that brought it to its knees, the poorest country in Europe can take great pride in just having gained a place on the biggest stage of all.

Four years ago, under the guidance of veteran Croat coach Miroslav Blazevic, Bosnia made it to the play-offs, but their dream of going to South Africa was ended by Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal. Safet Susic took over just before the Euro 2012 qualification campaign and once again the side narrowly missed out.

They were 13 minutes away from Poland

When it all works, they can look brilliant...but things can just as easily fall apart

and Ukraine when Samir Nasri scored a controversial penalty that saved the hosts France and sent Bosnia into another play-off. Once again, they fell short against Portugal and an even-better Ronaldo.

This time round, however, the “Dragons” did not leave anything to chance and marched through their group, scoring 30 goals in 10 games, and clinched qualification with a 1-0 win in Lithuania, courtesy of Vedad Ibisevic’s close-range strike. They lost just once, a 1-0 reverse at home to Slovakia.

From the outset of the campaign, when

hat-tricks from the twin strike-force of Ibisevic and Manchester City’s Edin Dzeko helped trounce Liechtenstein 8-1 away from home, Susic opted for extremely attacking – and very risky – tactics. When it all works, his side can look brilliant. The trouble is, things can just as easily fall apart.

A perfect example of this could be seen in the team’s first friendly of the year, when they lost 2-0 to Egypt in Innsbruck. Even allowing for the friendly status, the performance was terrible and confusing, and it was followed by heavy criticism from both journalists and fans. The team was booed from the pitch and, amid the chaos, the players publicly criticised the coach and his methods.

So it is vitally important that Bosnia go into their first major finals in the right frame of mind. Everything will be new to them, so the pre-tournament preparations – where they are staying, how the players will react to spending months together, and the collective discipline – could all affect the side’s chances.

If they can manage to neutralise all the negatives and just enjoy the fact that they have already overachieved, anything is possible.

Sasa Ibrulj

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 15	Training camp in Sarajevo
May 31	Friendly v Ivory Coast in St Louis, USA
Jun 5	Friendly v Mexico in Chicago, USA



Dual threats...Bosnia strikers Dzeko (left) and Ibisevic

BASE CAMP



GROUP F FIXTURES

Jun 15	v Argentina (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 21	v Nigeria (Cuiaba)
Jun 25	v Iran (Salvador)



Bosnia will stay at the five-star Casa Grande Hotel in Guarujá on the Atlantic coast, south of Sao Paulo and will train at the 8,000-capacity Estadio Municipal Antonio Fernandes, which is just five minutes from their base.

THE VIEW FROM BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

● “We have to know that we are outsiders, the only debutants, and that there is no need to put pressure on our backs. The group is difficult, but I think a lot depends on our approach. I hope for a good result and a promotion of our country’s football and the country itself.”

Meho Kodro, ex-Bosnia captain



● “It is difficult to discuss Bosnia’s chances at this World Cup, primarily because we have no experience of such a tournament. Matches against Nigeria and Iran are crucial, while Argentina is on the different level. It is



COACH PROFILE

Safet SUSIC

Age 59 (13.04.55)
Bosnia-Herzegovina coach since December 2009

How he got the job

Replaced Miroslav Blazevic when he left to join Chinese side Shanghai Shenhua.

Past successes as a coach
None.



Past failures as a coach
Has never stayed more than two seasons as a coach of any club side.

Achievements as a player

Named Bosnia's best-ever player in 2004. Won the French league in 1986, the French Cup in 1983 and was named the best foreign player in France for the 1982-83 season.

World cup experience

Was a member of the Yugoslavia squad in Spain 1982 and in Italy 1990, when they reached the quarter-finals. He scored one goal, against the UAE.

Relationship with the media

At first he was very friendly with all of the journalists and media, but after the criticism following the Egypt game, relations are now rather colder.

Relations with the public

Acclaimed as a hero after the team secured their World Cup spot but his support dwindled after some poor performances. Opinion is divided, with many disappointed over his team selection and tactics.

Style of management/coaching

Calm and rarely seen to react. Not pragmatic when it comes to tactics and stubbornly sticks to his plan A.

Notable backroom staff

Elvir Baljic, who was a Real Madrid record signing in 1998 when he moved from Fenerbahce, is his assistant. Also on the staff are Borce Sredojevic, who has worked with the last two national coaches, and Tomislav Piplica, who is a former goalkeeper.

After the World Cup

Coaches of Balkan sides can go from hero to zero in no time at all. If Susic makes the most of Brazil he could be offered a lucrative new contract.

important for the players to see this as the beginning of the job, not as a job done. It is a really big responsibility for both Susic and the players to create a winning atmosphere in totally new surroundings."

Dario Mehmedovic, Federalna Televizija TV station

● "Bosnia is in a specific situation where anything is possible. With our mentality, it would not be surprising to see some sort of chaos, with things going downhill if they lose to Argentina in the first match. However, I am an optimist. We have a solid team that can get to the second round and then meet teams like Switzerland, France, maybe even Ecuador,

and eventually create a miracle. It is the first major tournament, we'll see the reaction to it, you never know."

Aleksandar Hemon, Bosnian-American writer



● "The mentality can be a problem, but this generation proved through the qualifiers that they have matured and that they know how to focus. If they retain that approach, anything is possible. The group is difficult, but Nigeria and Iran are not unbeatable and, with some luck, we could enjoy a good run in Brazil."

Slaven Niksic, Dnevni list

KEY 123 caps goals (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



Asmir AVDUKIC
Borac Banja Luka
Age 33 (13.05.81)
 Likely to be the only player in the squad who plays in the Bosnian league. Had brief spells in Croatia and Iran, before joining Borac and winning the league title in 2011.

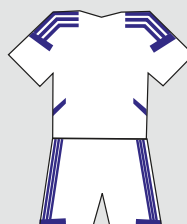


Asmir BEGOVIC
Stoke City (Eng)
Age 26 (20.06.87)
 Undisputed number one and a fans' favourite. Great shot-stopper who is known as the "minister of defence". Has flourished since moving to Stoke in 2010 and is now one of the most reliable keepers in the Premier League.



Jasmin FEJZIC
Aalen (Ger)
Age 28 (15.05.86)
 Plays in the German second tier and is competing for a role as back-up to Begovic.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Ermin BICAKCIC
Eintracht Braunschweig (Ger)
Age 24 (24.01.90)
 Born in Bosnia, he moved to Germany as a boy and has played in the top three tiers of German football. Made his international debut in August last year.



Sead KOLASINAC
Schalke (Ger)
Age 20 (20.06.93)
 Left-back, born in Germany, who played for their under-20s before being called up by his parents' homeland. He made his debut against Argentina and impressed with his fighting spirit, earning him the nickname "Destroyer".



Mensur MUJZDA
Freiburg (Ger)
Age 30 (28.03.84)
 A regular for the national side at right-back, he is a reliable performer on the pitch – when fit. He is injury prone and missed most of this season's Bundesliga campaign.



Boris PANDZA
Gornik Zabrze (Pol)
Age 27 (15.12.86)
 Good in the air, he will be back-up for central defence. After three years in Belgium with Mechelen he moved to Poland to boost his chances of a trip to Brazil.



Emir SPAHIC
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Age 33 (18.08.80)
 National captain who has the total respect of his team-mates and holds the back four together. Gives his all in every match but struggles with discipline and is often booked.

MIDFIELDERS



Anel HADZIC
Sturm Graz (Aut)
Age 24 (16.08.89)
 A possible option for the role of holding midfielder, having switched to Bosnia after representing Austria in youth games. He made his senior international debut this year.



Izet HAJROVIC
Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 22 (04.08.91)
 The scorer of probably the most important goal in qualifying, to win 2-1 in Slovakia. Born in Switzerland, he represented the country at youth level and was capped by Ottmar Hitzfeld before opting to represent Bosnia.



Senijad IBRICIC
Kayseri Erciyesspor (Tur)
Age 28 (26.09.85)
 Attacking midfielder with good vision. He lost his squad place after a period of poor form in Turkey, where he moved after a spell at Lokomotiv Moscow, but he has since upped his game to offer an alternative in the middle.



Haris MEDUNJANIN
Gaziantepspor (Tur)
Age 29 (08.03.85)
 A member of the Holland under-21 team that won Euro 2006, he decided to represent his homeland three years later. A creative midfielder for his club, he is more often used in a defensive role for the national side.



Zvezdan MISIMOVIC
Guizhou Renhe (Chn)
Age 32 (05.06.82)
 He struggles for pace and fitness, but the German-born midfielder is fantastic in possession. A key figure in Wolfsburg's surprise Bundesliga win in 2009, he takes things slowly but can still be very dangerous.

FORWARDS



Edin DZEKO
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 28 (17.03.86)
 The centre-forward is his country's all-time top goalscorer and their one big star at this summer's finals. Not always a starter at Man City but vital for his country. Scored 10 goals in 10 qualifying matches.



Vedad IBISEVIC
Stuttgart (Ger)
Age 29 (06.08.84)
 Often in Dzeko's shadow, he was raised in St Louis and made his name in Germany. In 2008 he scored 18 goals in 17 matches for Hoffenheim before injury ended his season.



Senad LULIC
Lazio (Ita)
Age 28 (18.01.86)
 Raised in Switzerland, Susic has used him as a left-winger, although he can also play in midfield or at full-back on that side of the pitch.



Edin VISCA
Istanbul BB (Tur)
Age 24 (17.02.90)
 Fast and mobile, he is often used as substitute to inject pace. Moved from Zeljeznicar to Istanbul BB and stayed loyal to the team after they were relegated, winning the approval of the fans.

TACTICS



Unbalanced, but still dangerous

During qualifying, Susic packed his side with attacking, creative players, even against solid defensive teams such as Greece. However, his preferred set-up, with a midfield diamond, has started to be exposed.

He publicly admits that he has only 12 or 13 good players and that the alternatives are not on

the same level, so his problem is trying to squeeze those players in to a starting XI. As a result, there is a lot of improvisation and unbalance in the team.

Bosnia are dangerous when in possession, but their big problem comes when they have to defend. The lack of a quality holding midfielder is most noticeable against top-notch, mobile opposition. The central defenders are slow and need support in the middle, where **Haris Medunjanin** and **Sejad Salihovic** compete for a place.

A number of options open up when Bosnia are attacking. **Zvezdan Misimovic** and **Miralem Pjanic** are the creative duo in midfield and they provide the service for **Edin Dzeko** and **Vedad Ibisevic**.

The emergence of full-back **Sead Kolasinac** has given more balance to the left side, allowing **Senad Lulic** to become a regular on the left flank. On the right, **Mensur Mujdza** is an attacking full-back.

Pjanic, Salihovic and Misimovic are all considered to be free-kick specialists.

Susic makes no bones about his attacking approach. Last year, he told *World Soccer*: "I do not have any choice! Look at my team. We have two top strikers in Dzeko and Ibisevic, a couple of very creative but also attack-minded midfielders like Misimovic and Pjanic, then Lulic, Salihovic, Mujdza.

"We have to play like we do now. It may sound tactically immature, I am fully aware of that, but I just think that it would be wrong to play differently. We know that we expose ourselves too much and that there is a huge risk in the way we play – using one defensive midfielder and opening up huge space for an opponent – but it would be unfair to the fans.

"We know that it can cost us, but that is the price we are willing to pay. In the end, we play to score more goals than the opposition – and it has paid off so far."

Plan B?

Although Susic is considered stubborn, he has experimented with different systems and there is a chance that he could decide to go **4-2-3-1**, with Ibisevic dropping to the bench and Medunjanin joining Salihovic.



11
0



Ognjen VRANJES

Elazigspor (Tur)
Age 24 (24.10.89)
Solid defender who Susic has used most at right-back. After Borac Banja Luka and Red Star Belgrade, he tried his luck at Sheriff Tiraspol, and Krasnodar and Alania Vladikavkaz of Russia before moving to Turkey.

12
0



Avdija VRSAJEVIC

Hajduk Split (Cro)
Age 28 (06.03.86)
Hard worker who compensates for lack of quality with a fighting spirit. Often criticised by the public, he got his chance under Susic after Mujdza's injury as the only proper alternative on the right side.

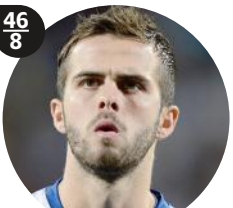
6
0



Ervin ZUKANOVIC

Gent (Blg)
Age 27 (11.02.87)
Versatile defender who can play on either flank or as a centre-back. Started his career in Bosnia with Zeljeznicar but moved abroad in 2008.

46
8



Miralem PJANIC

Roma (Ita)
Age 24 (02.04.90)
Raised in Luxembourg and began his career in France, he turned down both countries to represent his homeland. The "Little Prince" is Bosnia's most creative player and will be key to the team's success this summer.

40
4



Sejad SALIHOVIC

Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 29 (08.10.84)
Raised in Berlin, where he fled during the war, he joined Hoffenheim when they were in the third tier and has now been with the club for eight years. A cool penalty-taker who can play on the left as a full-back, winger or defensive midfielder.

20
0



Adnan ZAHIROVIC

Bochum (Ger)
Age 24 (23.03.90)
Once a first choice for the position of defensive midfielder, he lost his place in the squad after leaving Dinamo Minsk for German second-tier side Bochum. Can also play at right-back.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Dino ARSLANAGIC (D, Age 21, 24.04.93, 0/0, Standard Liege, Blg)
Toni SUNJIC (D, Age 25, 15.12.88, 5/0, Zorya Luhansk, Ukr)
Muhamed BESIC (M, Age 21, 10.09.92, 7/0, Ferencvaros, Hun)
Tino-Sven SUSIC (M, Age 22, 13.02.92, 1/0, Hajduk Split, Cro)

MISSING OUT

Elvir Rahimic of CSKA Moscow confirmed that Susic has explained to him that he will be excluded from the team because of his age (38) and the fact that he is not playing enough in the Russian league.



BRAZIL

Only victory will do

Pressure on the hosts to succeed will be huge this summer

“There is no other objective that we’re interested in,” says coach Luiz Felipe Scolari. “So we need to state it: we’re at home, the conditions are in our favour, we’re going to win.” Back in 2012, Brazil’s players were handed their schedule of activities for the World Cup period – and that involved going all the way to the Final.

A little more than a year ago, this might have come across as empty hubris; after taking an ageing squad to the previous World Cup, Brazil’s results suffered as coach Mano Menezes blooded a new generation. There was no noticeable improvement in the first few

No matter how brilliant the football, a bad 15 minutes can be enough to end the dream

months of 2013 after Scolari was brought back, but last June was always going to be crucial. With friendlies against England and France followed by the Confederations Cup, Scolari had an extended period of time to work with his players. And the results could not have been better. Where all had been in doubt at the end of May, by June 30 Brazil had installed themselves as World Cup favourites.

Even more important than the 3-0 triumph over Spain in the Final of the tournament was the fact that they had forged an identity as a team, winning over their own fans up and down the land. The turbulent political situation even

seemed to have worked in their favour. Before the matches, when the music for the national anthem stopped, the fans and players kept on singing, providing a powerful symbol of the bond linking the stands to the pitch.

With his starting line-up settled, Scolari has been able to use subsequent friendlies to try out little experiments. Almost everything has worked: the recall of Ramires, the introduction of Willian and Fernandinho, Robinho used as a “false nine”. Brazil’s problem now is who to leave out; Maicon or Rafinha at right-back, for example. Dani Alves played a few minutes at left-back in a recent game – is Scolari really thinking of sacrificing a reserve in order to find room for all his attacking options?

Doubts remain about the form of keeper Julio Cesar after his lengthy period of inactivity. But the main worry is the cruel nature of the competition; the harsh lesson of 1950 is that no matter how brilliant the football, a bad 15 minutes can be enough to end the dream.

Brazil reacted well to conceding goals in friendlies, but they won the Confederations Cup without ever going behind. How will they cope should it happen when it really matters?

Tim Vickery

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 26	Training in Granja Comary, in the hills outside Rio
Jun 3	Friendly v Panama in Goiania
Jun 6	Friendly v Serbia in Sao Paulo



High hopes...will Brazil be celebrating on July 13?

BASECAMP



GROUP A FIXTURES

Jun 12	v Croatia (Sao Paulo)
Jun 17	v Mexico (Fortaleza)
Jun 23	v Cameroon (Brasilia)

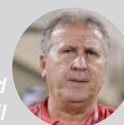


The hosts will base themselves at the CBF Training Centre at Granja Comary, near Teresopolis. It is located in a mountainous region in Rio de Janeiro state, on the edge of the Serra dos Orgaos National Park. The complex, which includes five football pitches and a 39-suite hotel, has recently been extensively renovated prior to the World Cup.

THE VIEW FROM BRAZIL

● “I believe Brazil have an 85 per cent chance of being champions, based on the way the team have been playing and the balance that Scolari has achieved and the manner the public have been brought close. The support that the fans gave in the Confederations Cup will be even bigger this time. We have a top team, full of great players, which doesn’t depend on just one or two of them. All of the world powers have won their home World Cups and Brazil have everything it takes to triumph this time.”

Zico, who played in three World Cups for Brazil



● “My expectations are high. In the Confederations Cup the team looked solid,



COACH PROFILE

Luiz Felipe SCOLARI

Age 65 (09.11.48)

Brazil coach since November 2012

How he got the job

Appointed after Mano Menezes was sacked, he was the popular choice, seen by many as being the only candidate with the necessary strength of character to take charge of a home World Cup.



Past successes as a coach

Won the 2002 World Cup and the 2013 Confederations Cup. Also took Portugal to the Final of Euro 2004 and the semi-finals of the 2006 World Cup.

Past failures as a coach

Has described losing the Euro 2004 Final, at home to Greece, as the biggest disappointment of his career. His spell with Chelsea would have to go down as a failure. Was sacked by Palmeiras prior to being appointed by Brazil.

Achievements as a player

A defender in the lower leagues.

World Cup experience

Won it with Brazil in 2002 and came fourth with Portugal four years later.

Relationship with the media

Usually has them eating out of his hand.

Relationship with the public

His father-figure charisma and steely "man of destiny" glare go down a treat.

Style of management/coaching

A pragmatist, but can also be instinctive and surprising. He had always favoured 4-4-2 with a big target man, so it was a shock when his previous spell in charge of Brazil was characterised by the use of a back three. A skilled and sensitive man-manager.

Notable backroom staff

His faithful assistant is Flavio Murtosa and his co-ordinator is Carlos Alberto Parreira, a World Cup-winning coach in his own right. The physical preparation specialist Paulo Paixao is credited with playing a vital role in the 2002 triumph.

After the World Cup

Unclear. In 2002 he quit just after winning the tournament.

it imposed itself on the games – you could see its strength. The players looked focused, aware of the importance of what they're doing, and they've built up credit with the supporters, meaning that they're unlikely to be booed by the crowd in the early games even if things are not going well."

Falcao, a former World Cup player and ex-national team coach



● "I think Brazil have real chances of winning the World Cup, as was shown by their performances in the Confederations Cup, especially the game against Spain. Brazil got their confidence back and the people saw the spirit in which they approached the competition, with lots of unity, and no vanity. The undoubted

star of the team is Neymar, and we saw that his team-mates were demanding the best from him, just as he was from them – all pulling together to achieve the victory."

Juninho Paulista, former Brazil player



● "We're one of the strong candidates for the title. Everyone, including myself, was pessimistic about our chances until the Confederations Cup, when the team totally transformed the perception. The coach Scolari has built a team that play modern, compact, attacking football, very different from the stuff played by our club sides, and with the support of the fans we have a great chance of going all the way."

Andre Rizek, SporTV

KEY **123** caps **12** goals (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



Julio CESAR
Queens Park Rangers (Eng)
Age 34 (03.09.79)
Third choice in 2006, first choice in the last World Cup and recalled by Scolari last year. The worry, however, is whether a long period of inactivity at QPR, before he joined Toronto on loan in January, has taken the edge off his game.



JEFFERSON
Botafogo
Age 31 (02.01.83)
Lithe, athletic and an excellent shot stopper, he is now established as second choice – with his form in this year's Libertadores Cup leading to some calling for his promotion. However, not always entirely comfortable off his line.



VICTOR
Atletico Mineiro
Age 31 (21.01.83)
The hero of his club's Libertadores Cup triumph last year, he was briefly Brazil's first choice in their first few games after the 2010 World Cup. Would seem to be ahead of Diego Cavalieri in the race to be the third keeper.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Dani ALVES
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 31 (06.05.83)
Took over from Maicon as right-back after the 2010 World Cup, where he also featured in midfield. Quick and skilful, he strikes the ball well and is a threat when joining the attack. Out of contract this summer.



DANTE
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 30 (18.10.83)
Big, left-footed centre-back introduced by Scolari at the start of last year. Has played most of his career abroad. Signed a one-year contract extension in March, keeping him at Bayern until at least June 2017.



David LUIZ
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 27 (22.04.87)
Exuberant centre-back introduced after the last World Cup. Prone to recklessness, he often features for his club in central midfield. Has been tipped to move to Barcelona this summer.



MARCELO
Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 26 (12.05.88)
Talented attacking left-back who scored on his debut, just after the 2006 World Cup, but then had to wait four years for a regular call-up. Part of the problem was his temperament – he can often lose his head and see red.



MARQUINHOS
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 20 (14.05.94)
Promising centre-back whose debut was late last year as a sub against Honduras and has enjoyed a rapid rise in European club football. Made his name with Roma after a handful of games for Corinthians.

MIDFIELDERS



FERNANDINHO
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 29 (04.05.85)
Successfully recalled in March against South Africa, where he looked uncomfortable in the holding role but lively when moved further forward. Has terrific lung power. Scored the goal that won the 2003 World Youth Cup.



Luiz GUSTAVO
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 26 (23.07.87)
Was not well-known to the Brazilian public before his introduction on the eve of the Confederations Cup proved such a turning point for the team. Tall holding midfielder whose distribution is simple and effective.



HERNANES
Internazionale (Ita)
Age 29 (29.05.85)
Versatile midfielder who can strike the ball beautifully off either foot. Made his debut in 2008 but took a long time to consolidate his place. Has been Paulinho's understudy, but the rise of Fernandinho could push him back further.



OSCAR
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 22 (09.09.91)
The hero of the 2011 Under-20 World Cup Final who was a revelation when promoted to the senior side. His slight frame belies his versatility; he can skip across all sectors of the pitch, marking, organising, creating and scoring.



PAULINHO
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 25 (25.07.88)
All-rounder who times his runs into the opposing box so well. The key man in the Corinthians side that won domestic, Libertadores and World Club titles, he has had a mixed first season in England.

FORWARDS



FRED
Fluminense
Age 30 (03.10.83)
Tall, technically proficient centre-forward who scored at the 2006 World Cup but later went a little off the rails. Can be injury-prone and was laid off after the Confederations Cup – where he had been one of Brazil's heroes.



HULK
Zenit (Rus)
Age 27 (25.07.86)
Barrel-strong figure who can feature all across the front line but usually plays wide on the right for Brazil, showcasing his capacity to track back and mark, and also to cut inside and unleash his booming left-foot shots.



JO
Atletico Mineiro
Age 27 (20.03.87)
Lanky left-footed centre-forward given a surprise recall on the eve of the Confederations Cup. Was frittering away his promise with nightlife excesses, but has rebuilt his career. Top scorer as his club won last year's Libertadores Cup.



NEYMAR
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 22 (05.02.92)
Brazil's poster boy and great attacking hope. Outrageously skilled, capable of improvisation at pace and a crisply efficient finisher off either foot. Superb from free-kicks, the hopes of the host nation are piled on his slender shoulders.



ROBINHO
Milan (Ita)
Age 30 (25.01.84)
One-time wonderkid who never quite fulfilled his promise but who was recalled last year and tried out in the "false nine" role. Can also play wide, and his versatility should win him the final attacking slot ahead of Bernard.

TACTICS

4-2-3-1



Holding midfielder Gustavo provides security for Scolari's attacking outlook

The pieces in Brazil's jigsaw started to come together when **Luiz Gustavo** was installed as the holding midfielder. It balanced out the side and stemmed the flow of goals being conceded from the space in front of the centre-backs **Thiago Silva** and

David Luiz. Gustavo's presence also frees **Paulinho** to launch his well-timed forward runs. The fact that he is left-footed makes it easier for him to protect the weaker side of the defence.

Another change down the spine of the team introduced by Scolari was the return of a target-man centre-forward. **Fred** provides a reference point for a quick, dynamic midfield and his prowess with his back to goal helps bring **Neymar** into the game.

The line of three behind Fred shows considerable mobility, with Neymar on the left usually the furthest forward. The all-round ability of **Oscar** enables him to drop deep to orchestrate the play in addition to ghosting into the box, though there are doubts over whether he will be fresh enough after three intense years. The physical capacity of **Hulk** will see him bursting forward down the right flank. Hulk normally starts, but can be a useful impact sub.

Jo is an obvious direct alternative for Fred, while **Willian** can play across the attacking line. **Hernanes** could come in for Paulinho, while **Fernandinho** would be a slightly more defensive replacement.

There will be periods during matches where Scolari will seek to press the opposition high up the pitch, which is a relatively new concept for Brazil – and one which could add to the problems for referees. During the Confederations Cup the player who was most fouled was Neymar – a reflection both of his ability and of his capacity to draw challenges in areas from which his set-pieces can be so dangerous. But he – followed by Oscar – was also the player who committed most fouls as Brazil sought to stop their opponent's counter-attacks at source. The officials will have lots of decisions to take, and with the home crowd howling for free-kicks, the pressure will be on.

Plan B?

Scolari's principal tactical variation is to switch to **4-3-3**, with **Ramires** coming in for Hulk. He will sit in alongside the two midfield holders, with Oscar and Neymar pushed up alongside Fred.

4-3-3



7
0

MAXWELL

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 32 (27.08.81)
Steady reserve left-back recently given a run in the squad, but his place could be under threat if Scolari uses Alves as cover for left-back in order to increase his attacking options.



2
0

RAFINHA

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 28 (07.09.85)
Recently recalled for his second cap in March, against South Africa, after making his debut in 2008. Has had more playing time for his club this season under Pep Guardiola, and could be in front of Maicon as reserve right-back.



45
2

THIAGO SILVA

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 29 (22.09.84)
A non-playing reserve in the 2010 squad who has matured into the team's captain and the defensive linchpin. Quick, classy and comfortable in possession. Not the most vocal of leaders, but quietly commands respect.



41
4

RAMIRES

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 27 (24.03.87)
Recalled after the Confederations Cup. Not a great passer of the ball, but a lithe runner with great stamina. Has a tendency to dive into tackles and pick up cards – he missed the 2010 quarter-final against Holland through suspension.



5
1

WILLIAN

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 25 (09.08.88)
Like Fernandinho, the move from Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk to England has given him extra visibility at home. Was once an orthodox no10 for Corinthians and has since learned to operate all across the attacking midfield line.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Diego CAVALIERI (G, Age 31, 01.12.82, 3/0, Fluminense)

DEDE (D, Age 25, 01.07.88, 9/1, Cruzeiro)

HENRIQUE (D, Age 27, 14.10.86, 4/0, Napoli, Ita)

MAICON (D, Age 32, 26.07.81, 66/6, Roma, Ita)

LUCAS Leiva (M, Age 24, 09.01.87, 25/0, Liverpool, Eng)

BERNARD (M, Age 21, 08.09.92, 10/1, Shakhtar Donetsk, Ukr)

KAKA (M, Age 32, 22.04.82, 85/27, Milan, Ita)

Lucas MOURA (M, Age 21, 13.08.92,

31/4, Paris Saint-Germain, Fra)

MISSING OUT

Just like his two predecessors as coach of Brazil, Luiz Felipe Scolari had a quick look at **Ronaldinho** and discarded him, after coming to the conclusion that he no longer has the physical capacity to tip the balance at the highest level.



CAMEROON

“Indomitable Lions” fearing the worst

Problems on and off the field for the former pride of Africa

Lucky breaks characterised an unconvincing qualifying campaign for Cameroon, who this summer will arguably be fielding their weakest team at a World Cup finals.

It will be a seventh appearance at the tournament for the corruption-ravaged central African country – whose football association president sits in jail, where their star player has accused team-mates of not wanting to pass to him, and while the recently imported coach spends much of his time trying to put out fires.

It has long been this way for the “Indomitable Lions”, who continually astound all convention by qualifying for football’s biggest show. No African country has been to as many World Cup finals, but chances of Volker Finke’s side making any impact in 2014 are slim.

In an unconvincing qualifying campaign, Cameroon benefitted from the folly of others and only came alive in the decisive game at the end of 18 months of torment-filled form.

Key to their success was the fact that opponents Togo were found to have fielded a suspended player in the group game last June when they beat Cameroon 2-0 in Lome. The result was later overturned and the visitors were awarded the three points.

The 4-1 win over Tunisia in November to win the qualification play-off was against a weak side, but did suggest that coach Finke might finally be bringing some organisation to the side – as well as stability and tranquillity

to a camp long divided by the tempestuous personality of Samuel Eto’o and clashes with other players, notably Alex Song.

A 5-1 friendly defeat by Portugal in March emphasised the mediocrity of the qualifying campaign, and the concern is that the Brazilian adventure could turn out to be as disastrous as the trips to the World Cups in Japan in 2002 and South Africa four years ago, where Cameroon lost all their matches.

Indeed, they have won only one game at the finals since their heroics of 1990, when they became the first African side to reach the last eight. The charisma of that Italia 90 team has not been matched since and there is nothing to suggest a miraculous turnaround in fortunes when Group A kicks off.

Mark Gleeson

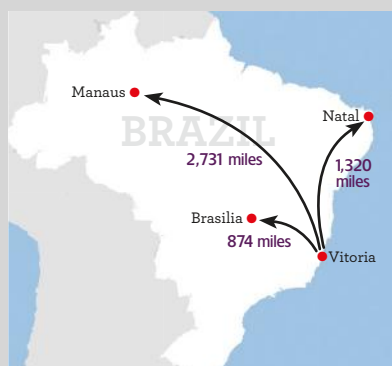
PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 20	Training in camp in Kufstein, Aut
May 26	Friendly v Macedonia in Kufstein, Aut
May 29	Friendly v Paraguay in Kufstein, Aut
Jun 1	Friendly away to Germany in Monchengladbach
Jun 2	Return to Yaounde
Jun 4	Travel to Brazil



Joy or despair?...Cameroon face a tough test in Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP A FIXTURES

Jun 13	v Mexico (Natal)
Jun 18	v Croatia (Manaus)
Jun 23	v Brazil (Brasilia)



After a good deal of deliberation, Cameroon opted to set up camp at the Sheraton Hotel in Vitoria, an island city on the east coast that is the state capital of Espirito Santo. Their training base is eight miles to the north west, in the town of Cariacica, at the Estadio Kleber Andrade – home to the state’s most successful team, Rio Branco.

THE VIEW FROM CAMEROON

● “Cameroon football really needs to step up a notch otherwise its going to lose ground against the other countries.”

Jacques Songo'o, former Cameroon goalkeeper

● “There is a culture of performance in this country. Cameroonians are mentally strong despite all the difficulties back at home – and they always seem to come to the fore at World Cup tournaments.”

Claude le Roy, ex-Cameroon coach





COACH PROFILE

Volker FINKE (Ger)

Age 66 (24.03.48)

Cameroon coach since May 2013



How did he get the job

Was appointed as the replacement for Jean-Paul Akono in 2013.

Past successes as a coach

Took Freiburg up to the Bundesliga for the first time and was in charge there for 16 years, gaining a reputation for innovative coaching methods.

Past failures as a coach

Did not impress during a year at Urawa Red Diamonds in Japan or as technical director at Cologne.

Achievements as a player

None.

World Cup experience

None.

Relationship with the media

Needs some prompting to engage, but is co-operative and obliging.

Relationship with the public

There was criticism over the appointment of a foreigner in the wake of others' failures, but after qualification he was named Cameroon sport personality of the year.

Style of management/coaching

Professorial, cajoling and patient, but with a good dollop of Teutonic discipline and structure.

Notable backroom staff

Ibrahim Tanko, a former Ghana international who played in the Bundesliga

After the World Cup

Likely to seek out more foreign adventures but will want to stay for the 2015 African Nations Cup.

- "Cameroon has some history with Brazil. On a purely sporting level for Cameroon, it could also have been worse – at least they have a prestigious opponent."

Joseph Antoine Bell, ex-goalkeeper and now French radio analyst



- "The group is not simple but it is far from insurmountable for Cameroon. It will be a dream for us to play against Brazil."

Former Cameroon international striker, Patrick Mboma



Star man...striker Eto'o

WORLD CUP 2014 CAMEROON SQUAD

KEY $\frac{123}{12}$ caps goals (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



$\frac{11}{0}$

Guy-Rolland ASSEMBE

Nancy (Fra)
Age 28 (28.02.86)
Back-up at the last World Cup finals as well as this year's. Limited appearances in Ligue 1, having spent most of his career in the second tier with Nantes, Valenciennes, Nancy and now on loan at Guingamp.



$\frac{7}{0}$

Charles ITANDJE

Konyaspor (Tur)
Age 31 (02.11.82)
Made several key saves in the play-off against Tunisia. Born in Paris and a former France junior international, he left Liverpool after angering fans when caught on camera laughing during a Hillsborough memorial service.



$\frac{1}{0}$

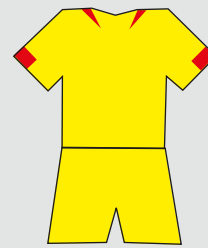
Sammy NDJOCK

Fethiyespor (Tur)
Age 24 (25.02.90)
Made his debut in Finke's first away match: a 0-0 draw with Ukraine. Born in Cameroon, he grew up in France and was a junior at Lille but, as a Turkish second-division regular, he does not inspire much confidence.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



$\frac{20}{0}$

Benoit ASSOUEKOTTO

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 30 (24.03.84)
Solid left-back who was born in France but made his debut for Cameroon in 2009 and played at the last World Cup. Since then he has had a lengthy spell of self-imposed exile. Spent the season on loan at QPR.



$\frac{28}{0}$

Henri BEDIMO

Lyon (Fra)
Age 30 (04.06.84)
Left-back who narrowly missed out on selection for the last World Cup. Went to France aged 15 and won the Ligue 1 title with Montpellier two years ago.



$\frac{11}{0}$

Gaetan BONG

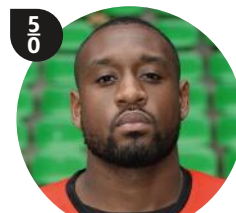
Olympiakos (Tur)
Age 26 (25.04.88)
Former France under-21 who spent his formative years at Metz. Right-sided defender who has made only one international appearance in the last year because of a lack of game time after moving to Greece this year.



$\frac{29}{1}$

Aurelien CHEDJOU

Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 28 (20.06.85)
Central defender, and occasional defensive midfielder, who joined Galatasaray for a reported €6m last summer from Lille, where he won league and cup honours in 2011. Played one match at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.



$\frac{5}{0}$

Jean-Armel KANA-BIYIK

Rennes (Fra)
Age 24 (03.07.89)
Born in Metz when his father, Andre Kana-Biyik, who played at two World Cups for Cameroon, was competing in Ligue 1. Represented France at junior level before switching to Cameroon and making his debut last year.

MIDFIELDERS



$\frac{32}{2}$

Enoch EYONG

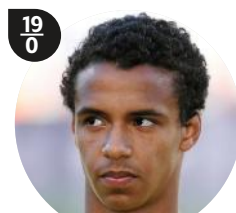
Antalyaspor (Tur)
Age 28 (23.03.86)
Marco Van Basten signed him for Ajax but his successor, Frank De Boer, rarely used the defensive midfielder. Was suspended, with Eto'o, by the Cameroon federation for eight months for his part in a player revolt over unpaid bonuses.



$\frac{68}{5}$

Jean MAKOUN

Rennes (Fra)
Age 31 (29.05.83)
Right-sided midfielder who got two goals in the vital qualifying win over Tunisia to book a place in Brazil. Made his name at Lille before a €15m move to Lyon in 2008, then Aston Villa and now Rennes.



$\frac{19}{0}$

Joel MATIP

Schalke (Ger)
Age 22 (08.08.91)
Born in Germany to a Cameroonian father who was a professional player. Plays either centre-back or defensive midfield and competed at the last World Cup as an 18-year-old. Brother Marvin also plays for Cameroon.



$\frac{47}{3}$

Stephane M'BIA

Queens Park Rangers (Eng)
Age 28 (20.05.86)
His preferred position is as a defensive midfielder but Cameroon have used him more at right-back. Played as centre-back in Marseille's Ligue 1-winning side in 2010 and has been on loan to Sevilla in La Liga this season.



$\frac{13}{2}$

Benjamin MOUKANDJO

Nancy (Fra)
Age 25 (12.11.88)
Tricky left-winger who made his international debut two years ago. Moved from the Kadji Sports Academy to France aged 18, playing for Rennes, Nimes and Monaco before settling at Nancy.

FORWARDS



$\frac{22}{2}$

Vincent ABOUBAKAR

Lorient (Fra)
Age 22 (22.01.92)
In fine form this season, finally living up to the billing as the "future Eto'o" when he first arrived in Ligue 1 after the last World Cup. Hails from the mainly Muslim town of Garoua in northern Cameroon but is a Protestant.



$\frac{23}{9}$

Eric-Maxim CHOUPO-MOTING

Mainz (Ger)
Age 25 (23.03.89)
German-born with a Cameroonian father, he received FIFA clearance to play at the 2010 World Cup after playing for Germany at Under-21 level. Started at Hamburg, who sent him to Nuremberg on loan and then let him go free to Mainz.



$\frac{113}{55}$

Samuel ETO'O

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 33 (10.03.81)
Has won a record four African Footballer of the Year awards, three Champions League titles, and titles in Spain and Italy. He played at the 1998, 2002, and 2010 World Cups, scoring three goals in seven games.



$\frac{37}{6}$

Mohamadou IDRISSEU

Kaiserslautern (Ger)
Age 34 (08.03.80)
Recalled after a two-year hiatus following the 2010 World Cup as Cameroon continue to look for someone to partner Eto'o in attack. He has played for the last 14 years in German club football.



$\frac{52}{18}$

Achille WEBE

Fenerbahce (Tur)
Age 32 (20.01.82)
Left home to begin his search to become professional at Nacional in Uruguay in 2000 before moving to Spain in 2003. A traditional centre-forward, he is now in Turkey where he helped Fenerbahce to the league title.

TACTICS

4-2-3-1



Eto'o, the main man, will call all the shots

During his 16 years in charge of German over-achievers Freiburg, "Indomitable Lions" coach Volker Finke was nothing less than a progressive, an advocate of free-flowing attacking football, who could not cram enough technically-gifted, intelligent and flexible

players into his midfield and attack. But with precious few Cameroon professionals fitting that bill, he has had to proceed differently, forgetting the invention and interplay and instead packing the engine room with athleticism, fighting spirit and punch.

While **Alexandre Song** and **Enoh Eyong** make for a first-class pair of midfield holders – with Eyong taking on the stay-at-home role and Song pushing on far more frequently – the composition of the attacking midfield three remains a source of concern. Although **Benjamin Moukandjo** on the left is a bright, lively and elusive customer, his right-sided counterpart, **Vincent Aboubakar** is happier working through the centre and **Jean Makoun** clearly is more enforcer than playmaker; a driving force rather than tempo-setter or distribution hub.

Despite occasionally being shifted out to the right, team standard bearer **Samuel Eto'o** is likely to spend his swansong tournament in his natural line-leading habitat.

Plan B?

Should Cameroon go behind, Finke could well switch to a **4-3-3** face-saver, a template boasting Song, Makoun, Eyong or **Joel Matip** as the midfield three and Eto'o flanked by Aboubakar and Moukandjo. The experienced **Achille Webo**, the physically-imposing **Mohamadou Idrissou** and the elegant **Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting** will offer striking alternatives from the bench.

Up against hosts Brazil, CONCACAF heavyweights Mexico and a very capable Croat side, the Indomitable Lions undoubtedly are in one of the toughest first round pools and if Finke does fall victim to big-match nerves, a solution might be a 4-3-1-2, with a teak-tough trio of enforcers protecting the back four, Moukandjo in the "hole" and Eto'o and another forward up front.

Cameroon are more likely to be used to the Amazonian heat and humidity of Manaus than opponents Croatia, and this game could hold the key to their entire campaign.

4-3-3



Nicolas N'KOULOU

Marseille (Fra)
Age 24 (27.03.90)
First-choice centre-back who is among the best up-and-coming defenders in European club football with a value of some €10m. Made his debut for Cameroon aged 18 and played at the last World Cup finals.



Dany NOUNKEU

Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 28 (11.04.86)
Moved to Europe after playing for Cameroon in the World Under-17s in 2003, but was almost 24 when he won his first senior cap, against Italy in 2010. Galatasaray signed him on a four-year deal in 2012 but loaned him to Besiktas in January.



Allan NYOM

Udinese (Ita)
Age 25 (10.05.88)
Paris-born right-back who has been on loan at Granada for five years from Udinese. In France he only played in Ligue 2 at Arles-Avignon before Udinese bought him and then sent him to Spain to gain experience.



Landry NGUEMO

Bordeaux (Fra)
Age 28 (28.11.85)
Started his career at Nancy in France followed by a loan spell in Scotland before moving to Bordeaux in 2011. He is a keen falconer and owns a white-tailed eagle he calls "Mr George" in honour of George Weah.



Alexandre SONG

Barcelona (Spa)
Age 26 (09.09.87)
The only player to feature in all eight qualifiers, making up for an 18-month exile from the side following a bust-up with Eto'o at the 2010 finals. His uncle, former captain Rigobert Song, is now the team's administrative manager.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Frank BAGNACK (D, Age 19, 07.06.95, 0/0, Barcelona, Spa)
Samuel UMTITI (D, Age 20, 14.11.93, 0/0, Lyon, Fra)
Christian BEKAMENGA (F, Age 28, 09.05.86, 3/1, Laval, Fra)
Jean Marie DONGOU (F, Age 19, 20.04.95, 0/0, Barcelona, Spa)
Edgar SALLI (F, Age 21, 17.08.92, 7/0, Monaco, Fra)
Jacques ZOUA (F, Age 22, 06.09.91, 5/0, Hamburg, Ger)



CHILE

All-out attack could spring surprise

Sampaoli's exciting side only know how to play one way

"Chile are a team who play incredibly well," said Germany coach Joachim Low in March after his side's fortunate 1-0 win over Jorge Sampaoli's men. "They showed a lot of dynamism and very good football."

Neutrals will merrily recall this high-tempo, high-pressure attacking approach from Chile's displays in the last World Cup, when Marcelo Bielsa's young team lit up the tournament. Four years later, under Bielsa disciple Sampaoli, there are even more reasons to be cheerful.

Chile's players have been convinced that they can impose their game on anyone, anywhere. The promises of 2010 have now matured into intimidating realities; midfield powerhouse Arturo Vidal would stroll into any side, while Alexis Sanchez is a dazzlingly tricky

Humberto Suazo is unlikely to be fit and no one else has really made the position his own. Sanchez and Eduardo Vargas are very talented, but there might be times when more of a penalty-area presence will be required – evidence offered by the Germany game, when Chile could easily have scored six, but lost 1-0.

And then there is the draw. To make it through to the knockout stage, Chile will have to eliminate one of the 2010 finalists: Spain or Holland. Perhaps meeting Australia, in theory the weakest team in the group, in the opening fixture will work in Chile's favour, since with three points in the bag they will be able to put pressure on the loser of the Spain-Holland game. Alternatively, facing Australia first could work against them. Should the group be decided on goal difference then the advantage might lie with those who play the Soccerosos later, after they have been softened up.

If they can get out of the group then Chile will frighten anyone, and Brazil appear more concerned by the prospect of meeting them in the round of 16 than either Holland or Spain.

Whatever happens to the Chilean challenge, it is going to be fun watching it unfold.

Tim Vickery

If they can get out of the group then Chile will frighten anyone

striker. Some observers are even picking Chile as tournament dark horses.

A couple of problems have emerged, however. In recent times, defence has not been Chile's strong suit, especially in the air. This will surely not be improved by the fact that Marcos Gonzalez, the chief supplier of defensive height, is without a club. He has been training at the national team's facilities in Santiago, but his match sharpness must surely be in question.

At the other end of the pitch there are doubts over the centre-forward position;

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 19	Training camp in Santiago
May 30	Friendly v Egypt in Santiago
Jun 4	Friendly v Northern Ireland in Valparaiso
Jun 7	Fly to Brazil



Brazil-bound... Chile players celebrate qualifying for the World Cup

BASE CAMP



Chile will be using the facilities of Brazilian club Cruzeiro at the Toca da Raposa II sporting complex in Belo Horizonte. These include four full-size pitches, a medical centre, fully computerised gymnasium, pool, sauna and a hotel. Chile's first game is a flight of one hour, 43 minutes from Belo Horizonte, but their remaining group games are less than 40 minutes away by air, in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

GROUP B FIXTURES

Jun 13	v Australia (Cuiaba)
Jun 18	v Spain (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 23	v Holland (Sao Paulo)

THE VIEW FROM CHILE

● "We're in a very difficult group, but I have a lot of confidence that Chile will qualify from it. Whatever happens, I think we'll see a very good Chile side, as in the time of Bielsa. Sampaoli took over at a tough time, but he's got Chile playing very well; not only qualifying in style, but also winning the respect of Europe in the last few friendlies."

Manuel Pellegrini, Manchester City's Chilean manager



● "It's a complicated group, but there's no reason to be afraid. If we



start lamenting our luck before the thing has started then it would be better not to go to the World Cup! There's plenty of faith in this team and we have to keep dreaming because we have players operating at a top level in Europe and it's clear that we are capable of beating anyone."

Nelson Acosta, Chile coach at the 1998 World Cup



● "If we don't beat Australia then we don't have much chance of getting out of the group, so that first game puts us in a must-win situation. But this group of players have shown

that they can take on the world's best on equal terms, and for that reason I believe that we have a team who can go on to do something important in the World Cup."

Leonardo Veliz, played for Chile in the 1974 World Cup

● "It's obvious that the draw could have been kinder, but also that we have to have faith because it's clear that we're in the presence of a tremendous generation, who are playing at a high level and who are well capable of giving us something to celebrate."

Jorge Garcés, former caretaker coach of Chile

COACH PROFILE

Jorge SAMPAOLI (Arg)

Age 54 (13.03.60)

Chile coach since December 2012

How he got the job

Replaced Claudio Borghi after Chile's qualification campaign went off the rails. Sampaoi was a disciple of his fellow Argentinian Marcelo Bielsa, who had done so well with Chile at the 2010 World Cup, and his run of triumphs with Universidad de Chile made him the natural candidate.



Past successes as a coach

His standout work was with Universidad de Chile. In the 2011-12 period, the side won three consecutive domestic titles and the Sudamericana Cup, and reached the semi-finals of the Libertadores Cup.

Past failures as a coach

His first crack at the big time came with Juan Aurich of Peru in 2002, but he was sacked after winning only one of his eight matches in charge.

Achievements as a player

A midfielder or wingback, he had to give up his playing career at the age of 19 because of injuries.

World Cup experience

None.

Relationship with the media

After more than three years of unbroken success, his stock is high.

Relationship with the public

His obvious commitment to the cause is infectious.

Style of management/coaching

His enthusiasm for dynamic, high-tempo pressing in the opponent's half of the field has convinced the players that they can take on anyone. He is also a live-wire on the touchline – and moaning at referees got him sent off several times with "La U".

Notable backroom staff

His long-term assistant is compatriot Sebastian Becaccece. Nicolas Diez, another Argentinian, is also on the coaching staff.

After the World Cup

His contract takes him up to the 2015 Copa America, which Chile will host.

KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)
 12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



Claudio BRAVO
 Real Sociedad (Spa)
 Age 31 (13.04.83)
 Captain and first choice for nearly nine years. Not the tallest, but strong, agile and excellent at playing out from the back. His judgement on leaving his line could be tested. Chasing Leonel Sanchez's record of 84 caps.

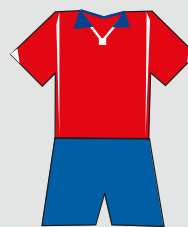


Johnny HERRERA
 Universidad de Chile
 Age 33 (09.05.81)
 A Sampaoli stalwart at "La U" and recalled when the coach took over the national team. Has had legal problems with drink-driving charges – he was found guilty of killing a woman in 2009 while speeding, but was spared jail.

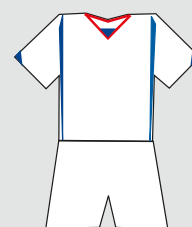


Christopher TOSELLI
 Universidad Catolica
 Age 25 (22.06.88)
 One of the graduates of the Under-20 side that came third in the World Youth Cup in 2007, in which he went 492 minutes without conceding a goal. Now maturing into a potentially top-class keeper.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Marcos GONZALEZ
 (unattached)
 Age 34 (09.06.80)
 Supplier of central defensive height for Sampaoli both at "La U" and now the national team. Was released this year by Flamengo of Brazil, who judged him to be too slow. Spent the first two years of his life in Brazil.



Osvaldo GONZALEZ
 Universidad de Chile
 Age 29 (10.08.84)
 Rugged defender, nicknamed "Rocky", who is best suited to the right-sided role in a back three. Offers little going forward and was part of Sampaoli's "La U" team.



Mauricio ISLA
 Juventus (Ita)
 Age 26 (12.06.88)
 Flying right-back with terrific lung power who is given full licence to storm forward as much as possible. Quickly promoted to the senior ranks after starring in the 2007 under-20 side. Ever-present at the 2010 World Cup.



Gonzalo JARA
 Nottingham Forest (Eng)
 Age 28 (29.08.85)
 Defender with the pace and versatility to be comfortable as a centre-back in a back three or four, where he can offer cover to the full-backs. Played in all four games in the 2010 World Cup. Has been in England since 2009.



Gary MEDEL
 Cardiff City (Eng)
 Age 26 (03.08.87)
 Another 2007 Under-20 graduate who was fast-tracked into the senior side. "Pitbull" made his name as a combative but talented central midfielder, snappy in the tackle and crisp in his distribution.

MIDFIELDERS



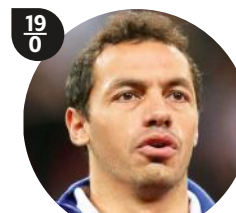
Charles ARANGUIZ
 Internacional (Bra)
 Age 25 (17.04.89)
 Yet another to have made the jump from Sampaoli's "La U" to the national team, he is an all-rounder, combining technique, intelligence and lung power. The midfielder most likely to pop up in the opposing penalty area.



Jean BEAUSEJOUR
 Wigan Athletic (Eng)
 Age 30 (01.06.84)
 The son of a Haitian father, he can fill any position down the left flank. Scored the winner against Honduras that settled the side in Chile's opening game of the last World Cup.



Carlos CARMONA
 Atalanta (Ita)
 Age 27 (21.02.87)
 Aggressive, defensive midfielder who featured more under Marcelo Bielsa but whose presence might be important against Spain and Holland. Captained Chile to third place at the 2007 Under-20 World Cup.



Marcelo DIAZ
 Basle (Swi)
 Age 27 (30.12.86)
 Sampaoli's representative on the field, first with "La U" and now with the national team. Has taken time to find his feet, but is now established as the side's deep-lying organiser, combining intelligence and passing ability.



Matias FERNANDEZ
 Fiorentina (Ita)
 Age 28 (15.05.86)
 Argentinian-born attacking midfielder, at his best launching powerful surges. Powerful shot and dangerous from long-range free-kicks. Has not fulfilled his youthful promise, and was more important under previous coaches.

FORWARDS



Fabian ORELLANA
 Celta Vigo (Spa)
 Age 28 (27.01.86)
 Little right-winger who could sneak into the squad as an option off the bench. Scored a famous goal that beat Argentina in 2008 – the only time Chile have got the better of their neighbours in the World Cup qualifiers.



Mauricio PINILLA
 Cagliari (Ita)
 Age 30 (04.02.84)
 A teenage prodigy who seemed set on frittering away his talent in a series of nightclub escapades. Has been far more disciplined in recent seasons, and would seem the best option for the role of penalty-area target man.



Alexis SANCHEZ
 Barcelona (Spa)
 Age 25 (19.12.88)
 The star of the 2007 under-20s, he has matured into the star of the senior side. A dribbler of dazzling ability who is also an effective goalscorer. Happy in a central role as well as his more customary position on the right.



Eduardo VARGAS
 Napoli (Ita)
 Age 24 (20.11.89)
 Skilful, fast and dangerous, he can be highly strung and his career has been marked by ups and downs. Joint top-scorer in qualification, most of his best moments have come under Sampaoli. Joined Valencia on loan in January.

TACTICS

4-3-1-2



Opening game against Australia will be all-important to Sampaoli's attacking plans

Sampaoli says Chile's style is non-negotiable – they will always seek to impose themselves, pressing their opponents in their half of the field and creating two-against-one situations down the flanks. But that does not mean that the formation is set in stone.

Sampaoli was in charge for the last seven World Cup qualifiers: in three of them Chile defended with a back three, while the others featured a line of four.

In both cases the full-backs are expected to push up at the same time. Against weaker opponents the tendency is to field two centre-backs – one to mark and one to cover – and this is the likely template for the opener against Australia.

The inactivity of **Marcos Gonzalez** at club level is making his place vulnerable, but there are few alternatives in central defence. **Gary Medel**, despite his lack of height, will play alongside him.

In front of the defensive line, **Marcelo Diaz** has a vital role in reading the game, closing down the spaces and organising the play from deep. The Australia match could be an important occasion for **Jorge Valdivia**, a talented but wayward playmaker who is set to be used as a "false nine". He will be tasked with threading the passes through for **Alexis Sanchez** and **Eduardo Vargas**, and make the most of runs from midfield by **Arturo Vidal** and **Charles Aranguiz**.

But Valdivia may not figure from the start in the other games. In a friendly against Spain last year, a back three, with more midfield protection, drew with the world champions, and a back three was also used against Germany. It would seem a logical step to use it in the meetings with Spain, to combat their midfield possession, and also against Holland, as protection against their speed on the transition.

Plan B?

A switch to a back three for the games against Spain and Holland would see **Gonzalo Jara** coming into the side as the extra centre-back, with Vidal being pushed further forward as an attacking replacement for Valdivia.

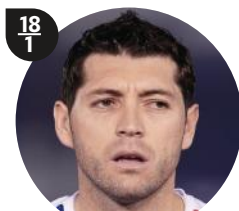
An alternative up front is the use of Sanchez as a central striker, with Vargas operating on the right and **Jean Beausejour** coming in on the left.

3-4-1-2



Eugenio MENA

Santos (Bra)
Age 25 (18.07.88)
Classy left-back who was promoted to the Universidad de Chile first team when Sampaoli took over, and became an important part of a successful side. Established himself in the national team during the qualifiers.



Jorge ROJAS

Universidad de Chile
Age 30 (23.06.83)
Left-footed centre-back. Not the quickest or the strongest, but a good reader of the game who is his club's captain and defensive organiser, commanding the high defensive line. Happy in a back three or a four.



Francisco SILVA

Osasuna (Spa)
Age 28 (11.02.86)
Tall defensive midfielder who, because of Chile's lack of defensive height, was tried out in the back line in the March friendly against Germany and did so well that he would appear to have made sure of a squad place.



Felipe GUTIERREZ

Twente (Hol)
Age 23 (08.10.90)
Slightly built, left-footed attacking midfielder who can operate either centrally or in a wider role. May well have a role to play when Chile opt to pack the midfield.



Jorge VALDIVIA

Palmeiras (Bra)
Age 30 (19.10.83)
Skilled playmaker whose career has been dogged by problems with fitness and discipline. Sampaoli seems to trust him and Chile hope that this will be his finest hour.



Arturo VIDAL

Juventus (Ita)
Age 27 (22.05.87)
Rapidly promoted from the 2007 Under-20 side, he was seen as a fledgling centre-back before becoming a feared midfield powerhouse. Joint-top scorer in qualification and now at the peak of his powers.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Pablo GARCES (G, Age 29, 02.08.84, 1/0, O'Higgins)

Miiko ALBORNOZ (D, Age 23, 30.11.90, 1/1, Malmo, Swe)

Enzo ANDIA (D, Age 21, 16.08.92, 4/1, Universidad Catolica)

Jose Pedro FUENZALIDA (M, Age 29, 22.02.85, 22/1, Colo Colo)

Pablo HERNANDEZ (M, Age 27, 24.10.86, 1/2, O'Higgins)

Gustavo CANALES (F, Age 32, 30.03.82, 1/0, Union Espanola)

Carlos MUNOZ (F, Age 25, 21.04.89, 11/3, Baniyas, UAE)

Humberto SUAZO (F, Age 33, 10.05.81, 60/21, Monterrey, Mex)

MISSING IN ACTION

Forward **Junior Fernandes** broke a leg in April while playing for Dinamo Zagreb, on loan from Bayer Leverkusen.

 COLOMBIA

Long wait over for “Los Cafeteros”

Sixteen years after their last finals appearance, Colombia are back in the big time

The look on Colombia boss Jose Pekerman's face said it all. Having trailed by three goals in his side's penultimate qualifier at home to Chile, Colombia now had the chance to draw level from the penalty spot.

With seven minutes left, the normally stoic coach leapt from his seat and went bounding down the touchline; fists punching the air. As TV cameras chased this rare expression of emotion from the Argentinian, the 64-year-old turned and unleashed a barrage of post-watershed expletives.

Pekerman had cracked but, across the country, 47 million Colombians understood. It had been 16 years since the nation's last World Cup finals appearance, and as Radamel Falcao slotted home the decisive spot-kick to seal a remarkable comeback and take a point, the lengthy hiatus was finally over for “Los Cafeteros”.

Last year may have been a memorable one, but ever since the page turned on 2014, Colombia's World Cup plans have started to unravel. Falcao's cruciate knee injury at the end of January was an obvious hammer blow.

After years of struggling with the defensive tactical constraints of previous managers, the 27-year-old had become a vital cog in Pekerman's new attacking system. Falcao's nine goals in qualifying was a Colombian record, but even if he wins his improbable race against time, he's unlikely to be at his best. Jackson Martinez and Carlos Bacca are strong candidates to step in, but neither is tailored to the tactical plan in quite the same way.

But Falcao is not the coach's only headache. Juan Zuniga's long-running injury problems, Pablo Armero's lack of playing time and concerns over Macnelly Torres' form since a move to the Saudi Arabian league have all left the Argentinian scrambling for alternatives.

“When we qualified we could never have imagined the amount of problems we were going to have,” grumbles Pekerman. The form of waning centre-backs Luis Perea and Mario Yepes has been the coach's most long-standing worry. Both were again ruthlessly exposed in March's friendly against Tunisia. Time is running out to find a solution.

Still, there's room for optimism. Colombia's group draw has been kind and with Pekerman in control they are in good hands. Furthermore, they have relatively short distances to travel from their Sao Paulo base to games – and a World Cup in South America should provide a sharp advantage over most rivals.

After the fiasco of 1994, when the team flopped out in the first round under weighty expectations, two decades of hopes are being kept sensibly under wraps. But even if Falcao fails to beat the clock, Colombia have enough quality to at least reach the second round.

Carl Worswick

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 31	Friendly v Jordan in Buenos Aires, Argentina (tbc)
--------	--

BASE CAMP



Colombia will be based at the President Laudo Natel Training Centre in Cotia, on the western outskirts of Sao Paulo city. It is one of two impressive training complexes owned by Sao Paulo FC and is mainly used by their youth teams. The 220,000 square metre-site boasts 11 training pitches and state-of-the-art training facilities – including an outside water walkway for players to cool aching leg muscles.

GROUP C FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Greece (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 19	v Ivory Coast (Brasilia)
Jun 24	v Japan (Cuiaba)



Qualified success...James Rodriguez celebrates his winner over Ecuador

THE VIEW FROM COLOMBIA

● “In the last three World Cups Colombia have participated in, we've been our biggest rivals. From being knocked out by Cameroon at Italia 90, where the team was left chewing on the rage of unfulfilled promises, to Asprilla bizarrely abandoning the camp in 1998, our biggest problems have always come from the head rather than the feet. The main virtue of Pekerman's team, however, has been its maturity and the aplomb shown by his players. There is therefore reason to be optimistic about our chances.”

Federico Arango, editor of website *Bestiario del Balon*



● “Colombia's return to the World Cup comes on the back of what has been a



tortuous 16-year wait. Following qualification for three consecutive finals in the 1990s, Colombians got used to playing against the world's top teams. However, we were unable to build on that and also failed to properly support our coaches. Using the generation of players who were South America youth champions in 2005, Jose Pekerman achieved qualification as group seeds for the first time in our history. Now the most pressing target is to get out of the group and equal our best performance from Italia '90. There's a lot of belief, but our group isn't easy. Nobody in Colombia wants a repeat of the fiasco of 20 years ago, but at the same time nobody wants to be on that first plane back after just three games."

Alejandro Pino, online editor of *GolCaracol.com*



● "Colombia got it right in qualifying by showing the team's collective and individual talents. They proved that by using a credible coach they are capable of achieving big things. We needed to appoint a foreign coach as a way of making a clean start. Previously there were a lot of uncertainties surrounding the team, with journalists knowing who was going to be called up before the manager. It was a difficult environment but a new cycle began following the arrival of Pekerman. Colombia's first game [against Greece] is going to be important, but we will have to wait and see how the team responds to the enormous responsibility of playing a World Cup."

Jorge Bermudez, ex-Colombia international who is now a journalist living in Argentina



COACH PROFILE

Jose PEKERMÁN (Arg)

Age 64 (03.09.49)

Colombia coach since January 2012

How he got the job

Succeeded ex-player Leonel Alvarez who was axed after less than 100 days in the job.



Past successes as a coach

Three times under-20 world champion – in 1995, 1997 and 2001 – with Argentina, as well as twice youth champion of South America.

Past failures as a coach

Patchy record as boss of Tigres where, despite saving the Mexican side from the drop, he achieved just one win in 10 before being dismissed.

Achievements as a player

Forced into retirement at 28 due to a serious knee injury following an unspectacular playing career as a midfielder for Argentinos Juniors and Independiente Medellín.

World Cup experience

Led Argentina to the 2006 World Cup quarter-finals before losing to Germany on penalties.

Relationship with the media

Holds tight control over all team affairs and refuses to give interviews. Often locks the press out of training sessions.

Relationship with the public

Much admired for his achievements on the pitch, but prefers to keep a very low profile. Was reportedly offered Colombian citizenship upon achieving World Cup qualification.

Style of management/coaching

Meticulously prepared and incredibly knowledgeable about the game. Favours a high-pressing and possession-based approach.

Notable backroom staff

Assistant Nestor Lorenzo played for Argentina in the 1990 World Cup Final and was part of Pekerman's staff at the 2006 finals. Also includes Gabriel Wainer, who is the team's tactical guru.

After the World Cup

Unknown. Pekerman has refused to be drawn on talks to extend his contract, which runs out after the World Cup.

KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)
 12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



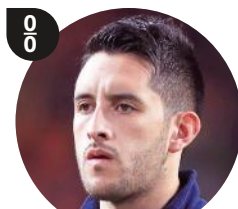
Faryd MONDRAGON

Deportivo Cali
Age 42 (21.06.71) 49/0
Brought back into the national fold by Pekerman, he will break Roger Milla's record as the oldest player to play in the finals if he appears this summer. Was first choice at Colombia's last finals, in 1998, and sat on the bench at USA 94.



David OSPINA

Nice (Fra)
Age 25 (31.08.88)
One of the stars of the qualifying campaign. Fearless, reads the game well and has superb reflexes. His sister, Daniela, is a volleyball player.



Camilo VARGAS

Santa Fe
Age 24 (01.09.89) 0/0
A key player in Santa Fe's run to the Libertadores Cup semi-finals last year. Began his career as a striker but switched roles because he was considered too fat.

KITS

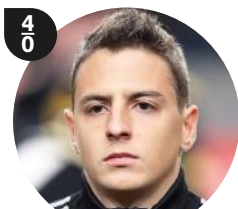


First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Santiago ARIAS

PSV (Hol)
Age 22 (13.01.92)
Impressive as cover for the injured Zuniga in friendlies against Holland and Belgium late last year, but very much the back-up option.



Pablo ARMERO

Napoli (Ita)
Age 27 (02.11.86)
Rampaging wingback who is the preferred choice down the left. Questions remain over his defensive input and he has lacked playing time at Napoli and on loan at West Ham United. Lost half a thumb in a childhood accident.



Luis PEREA

Cruz Azul (Mex)
Age 35 (30.01.79)
Vastly experienced and was Yepes' partner in central defence throughout qualifying, although he can also play at full-back. Only made his professional debut at 22 and was a match-day ice-cream seller in Medellin before then.



Carlos VALDES

San Lorenzo (Arg)
Age 28 (22.05.85)
Has lost ground since forcing his way into the squad and could be a late exclusion. Is a quick centre-back who also poses a threat from set-pieces but needs to make an impression at new club San Lorenzo.



Mario YEPES

Atalanta (Ita)
Age 38 (13.01.76) 95/6
Highly respected former Milan and Paris Saint-Germain central defender who is the national team's captain. First called into the side 15 years ago and set to make his World Cup debut after three failed qualifying attempts.

MIDFIELDERS



Abel AGUILAR

Toulouse (Fra)
Age 29 (06.01.85)
A steady choice as a link between defence and attack, but often comes unstuck against the stronger sides. Played in the same under-11s side as Falcao.



Juan CUADRADO

Fiorentina (Ita)
Age 26 (26.05.88)
Blessed with an endless repertoire of tricks and skills, and enjoying a rich run of form in Serie A. Is sometimes guilty of over-elaborating, but has a chance of starting on the right wing.



Fredy GUARIN

Internazionale (Ita)
Age 27 (30.06.86)
Used sparingly by Pekerman who isn't convinced by his tactical discipline, but remains a useful attacking option from the bench. Will have to sit out Colombia's first group game, against Greece, through suspension.



Aldo Leao RAMIREZ

Morelia (Mex)
Age 33 (18.04.81)
Was a surprise inclusion in Pekerman's first squad after four years without an international call-up. Has since been a regular member, appearing from the bench in a role that combines defensive and attacking duties.



James RODRIGUEZ

Monaco (Fra)
Age 22 (12.07.91)
Colombia's creative motor and vital to the team's chances of progressing in the tournament. Married to goalkeeper Ospina's sister.

FORWARDS



Carlos BACCA

Sevilla (Spa)
Age 27 (08.09.86)
Ditched a life selling fresh fish on the streets of Puerto Colombia to make his Colombian top-flight debut at 23. Moved to Europe, to Belgium, two years ago and has been in imperious form in his first season in La Liga.



Radamel FALCAO

Monaco (Fra)
Age 28 (10.02.86)
The team's big star is a real concern following a cruciate ligament injury in January. Revitalised under Pekerman, "El Tigre" is a national hero and the country's joint-second all-time leading goalscorer.



Teofilo GUTIERREZ

River Plate (Arg)
Age 29 (28.05.85)
Forged an impressive partnership with Falcao in qualifying, dropping deep and creating space and chipping in with six goals. Comes with huge behavioural baggage, despite playing piano, guitar and guacharaca in a Christian band.



Victor IBARBO

Cagliari (Ita)
Age 24 (19.05.90)
Compared to Faustino Asprilla due to his strength and explosive turn of pace. Is usually employed as a left-winger, he likes to run at defenders and cut inside.



Jackson MARTINEZ

Porto (Por)
Age 27 (03.10.86)
Could emerge from Falcao's shadow if the Monaco striker is ruled out of Brazil. Has an incredible goalscoring record at club level but has so far failed to impress for his country.

TACTICS

4-2-2-2



Stability will be rocked if Falcao misses out

Squad stability has been a hallmark of Pekerman's tenure, with few changes expected from the side that strolled through qualifying.

Blessed with flair, balance and an exciting mix of attacking options, the coach favours a loose 4-2-2-2 system that seeks to dominate possession and push teams on

the back foot. Whether overawing opposition defences via the raw pace of wingbacks **Pablo Armero** and **Camilo Zuniga**, or by exploiting the tricks and decisive passes of **David Rodriguez**, **Macnelly Torres** or **Juan Cuadrado**, Colombia are most comfortable when dictating the flow of the game. Pekerman didn't make wholesale changes to the sterile and ponderous side he inherited in January 2012, but instead gradually tweaked the squad in terms of fine-tuning both personnel and tactics.

It is, however, surely time for the curtain to fall on the central defensive partnership of **Mario Yepes** (38) and **Luis Perea** (35), with both players looking as old as their years suggest. But, as yet, neither **Cristian Zapata** nor **Carlos Valdes** have convinced as alternatives and defensive midfielder **Edwin Valencia** will continue to drop back and shore up the yawning gaps. Alongside Valencia, Pekerman needs to decide whether he prefers a similarly minded midfielder like **Carlos Sanchez**, or instead play somebody like **Abel Aguilar**, **Aldo Leao Ramirez** or **Fredy Guarin** in a more mixed role.

Pekerman's two-year building exercise could face its most rigorous examination without leading light **Falcao** if he fails to make the trip. How to seamlessly integrate potential replacements **Jackson Martinez** or **Carlos Bacca** – who both failed to score a single goal in qualifying – into the side in such a short time will be one of the coach's biggest challenges. Falcao and **Teofilo Gutierrez** are the indisputable first-choice strike pair. But if Falcao doesn't make it, it will be two from Gutierrez, Bacca and Martinez.

Behind the strikers Rodriguez is a certainty to start on the left while Cuadrado is strong on the right. Torres was an important player in qualifying but could be on the bench because of a lack of speed.

Plan B

The alternative to two strikers is to go for just one main forward supported by three creative players. **Victor Ibarbo** could move onto the left wing, with Rodriguez moving into a more central position.

4-2-3-1



21
0

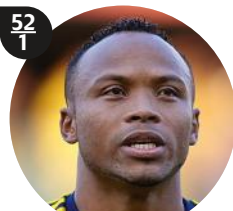


Cristian ZAPATA

Milan (Ita)
Age 27 (30.09.86)

Regular squad member who was the back-up option to Perea in central defence during qualifying, but is expected to play a bigger part in Brazil alongside Yepes due to concerns over the side's lack of pace at the back.

52
1



Camilo ZUNIGA

Napoli (Ita)
Age 28 (14.12.85)

A constant conundrum for opposition defences with his explosive speed and power down the right, he is also an option as a left wingback and played there for Napoli before being sidelined with a knee injury last year.

43
0



Carlos SANCHEZ

Elche (Spa)
Age 28 (06.02.86)

Adds bite and energy to a midfield that is sometimes overrun by stronger opposition.

39
3



Macnelly TORRES

Al Shabab (Sau)
Age 29 (01.11.84)

Brought back by Pekerman to inject new ideas and loosen the creative dependency on Rodriguez. Wonderful passer but lacks pace. His move to Saudi Arabia has cast doubt over his suitability. Named after a local baseball star.

15
0



Edwin VALENCIA

Fluminense (Bra)
Age 29 (29.03.85)

One of Pekerman's most trusted players and a sure starter – if he's fit. Extremely reliable and effective in helping to paper over the cracks that plague Colombia's creaking defence.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Eder BALANTA (D, Age 21, 28.02.93, 1/0, River Plate, Arg)

Aquivaldo MOSQUERA (D, Age 32, 22.06.81, 30/1, America, Mex)

Alex MEJIA (M, Age 25, 07.09.88, 8/0, Atletico Nacional)

Juan Fernando QUINTERO (M, Age 21, 18.01.93, 3/0, Porto, Por)

Luis MURIEL (F, Age 23, 18.04.91) 5/1, Udinese, Ita)

Adrian RAMOS (F, Age 28, 22.01.86, 23/2, Hertha Berlin, Ger)

MISSING OUT

Atletico Nacional defender **Stefan Medina**, an outside contender for a squad place, is likely to miss the tournament after an ankle injury sustained in April ruled him out for two months.

COSTA RICA

Tough draw dents “Ticos” dreams

Pinto's side are up against three previous world champions

Had the World Cup draw been more merciful, Costa Rica may well have had their sights set on the round of 16. The “Ticos” boast what is probably their best group of players since the legendary Italia 90 side and they could quite reasonably have aspired to finish among the top two teams in most of the groups at Brazil 2014.

However, fate was not kind for Jorge Luis Pinto and his side as they landed alongside heavyweights Italy, Uruguay and England. The

Games against Costa Rica could well decide who advances in the group

draw has now reduced the Costa Ricans' status from round-of-16 candidates to hopeful party-poopers.

However, the quality of the opposition doesn't mean that Costa Rica's quality will go unnoticed. The team boasts some real talent and their vaunted rivals will have to be very attentive if they wish to avoid an unpleasant surprise against their Central American rivals. In fact, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to say that the games against Costa Rica could well decide who advances in what is the most difficult group of the competition.

The team's mainstays are Keylor Navas, Joel

Campbell and Bryan Ruiz, and all three are poised to make an impression in this summer.

Navas has had a fantastic season with Levante and he is now widely considered one of the best goalkeepers in La Liga, which is no mean feat considering that he has only been first choice for his side since the second half of the 2012-13 season.

Campbell has finally realised his potential at Olympiakos, where he was one of the stars of their Champions League campaign, and his form may have earned him a move back to his parent club, Arsenal, next season. After a disappointing stint in England with Fulham, Ruiz has come back into his own at PSV in Holland after joining them on loan last January.

The rest of the squad is not at the same level, but are competent enough to make the team competitive in Brazil, and Costa Rican fans – even if they don't have any delusions of making it to the knockout stage – expect the “Ticos” to be hard to beat in all three games.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 16	Training camp in San Jose
Jun 2	Friendly v Japan in USA (tbc)
Jun 6	Friendly v Republic of Ireland in USA (tbc)
Jun 7	Travel to Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP D FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Uruguay (Fortaleza)
Jun 20	v Italy (Recife)
Jun 24	v England (Belo Horizonte)



Costa Rica will be using Santos, 45 miles outside of Sao Paulo, as their World Cup base. They will stay at the Mendes Plaza Hotel and will train at the Urbano Caldeira stadium, the one-time club ground of Brazil's greatest-ever player, Pele. Despite being based in the south of the country, Costa Rica's first two group games are in the north-east, both nearly three hours away by air.



Mainstay...goalkeeper Navas

THE VIEW FROM COSTA RICA

● “It could hardly be more difficult or complicated for us: two great European sides and the 2010 semi-finalists. But we want to go to Brazil to compete, not just to participate. We want to make history and leave a footprint for the future generations.”

Bryan Ruiz, Costa Rica captain





● “Costa Rica’s players are relishing their surprise package status. They will play a defensive formation against Uruguay and Italy but will switch to a more aggressive stance for the game with England, whom they don’t see as being as strong as the other two. They will try to counter-attack and take advantage of the speed of their forwards.”

Juan Carlos Aguero, Teletica

● “Costa Rica know that they will need more than their best football to make history. The team is mentally prepared to play their souls out, even if that might come short in the end. The idea is to make life hard for their rivals and try to get as much as they can. All eyes will be set on Keylor Navas and Joel Campbell.”

Andrea Zamora, Canal 13



COACH PROFILE

Jorge Luis PINTO (Col)

Age 61 (16.12.52)

Costa Rica coach since September 2011

How he got the job

Returned as coach for a second spell after the FA decided to sack Ricardo La Volpe following a disappointing Copa America in 2011.



Past successes as a coach

Has won league titles in Peru (three), Costa Rica (two), Venezuela (two) and Colombia (one).

Past failures as a coach

He failed to qualify Costa Rica for the 2006 finals in Germany and also missed out with Colombia, who sacked him after they finished seventh in the South American qualifiers for South Africa 2010.

Achievements as a player

Didn’t play professionally.

World Cup experience

None so far.

Relationship with the media

He now has a respectful relationship with the media after some turbulent times, first in 2004–05 and then at the beginning of the qualifying cycle, when the team finished the first group phase in a distant second place behind Mexico, losing both their matches against their regional rivals.

Relationship with the public

People are very happy with what he has achieved and expectantly wait to see what the team can offer in Brazil. He has a webpage in which he’s constantly in contact with the public.

Style of management/coaching

Likes balanced football. As he was never a professional, he’s known as a football academic with an extensive tactical knowledge who likes to adjust according to the opposition and the circumstances of the game.

Notable backroom staff

None of note.

After the World Cup

His future will be decided when Costa Rica end their participation, although it’s difficult to see him staying for four more years.

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



51
0

Keylor NAVAS

Levante (Spa)
Age 27 (15.12.86)
One of the team's main stars. Fantastic since taking over the starting spot at Levante in La Liga, to the extent that he could move on elsewhere after the World Cup. He makes few mistakes and also provides leadership off the pitch.



20
0

Patrick PEMBERTON

Alajuelense
Age 32 (24.05.82)
Long-time second choice who has been the best keeper in the domestic league for the past decade. A lack of height has limited his chances and he's more spectacular than safety first.



0
0

Luis TORRES

Cartagines
Age 29 (16.03.85)
Due to the form of Navas and Pemberton he has been consistently called-up into the national squad but is yet to win a cap. Solid and reliable but will only see action in Brazil in case of an extreme emergency.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



26
1

Johnny ACOSTA

Alajuelense
Age 30 (21.07.83)
Central defender who has a good aerial presence although he is less comfortable with the ball at his feet. Played seven matches in the qualifiers and, while world-class, might end up starting because of the absence of alternatives.



60
1

Junior DIAZ

Mainz (Ger)
Age 30 (12.09.83)
A physically imposing central defender or left-back, he has been plying his trade abroad for almost a decade. Currently playing in the Bundesliga, his experience will be essential for the national side.



10
0

Oscar DUARTE

Club Brugge (Bel)
Age 25 (03.06.89)
Young and very solid right-footed central defender who seems to have earned a spot after a fairly successful campaign in Belgium with Brugge. He was born in Nicaragua but moved to Costa Rica aged seven.



24
1

Cristian GAMBOA

Rosenborg (Nor)
Age 24 (24.10.89)
Usually plays at right-back, but can also operate in midfield. Moved to Europe from a very early age and is now a starter at Rosenborg. Fast and intelligent, although he still has defensive flaws, he seems back to full fitness after a leg injury.



46
1

Roy MILLER

New York Red Bulls (USA)
Age 29 (24.11.84)
Veteran centre-back who plays as a left-back for his club. Fast and solid, he is one of the leaders of the dressing room. His versatility is very important for Pinto's tactical flexibility, allowing him to change to five at the back if needed.

MIDFIELDERS



51
4

Michael BARRANTES

Aalesund (Nor)
Age 30 (04.10.83)
Veteran defensive midfielder who is locked in a battle with the younger Tejada for a starting spot in Brazil. Offers more experience and solidity but less speed and vision. Named the best midfielder in the Norwegian league in 2011.



53
2

Christian BOLANOS

Copenhagen (Den)
Age 30 (17.05.84)
Quick and technically proficient right-winger who hasn't managed to fulfil his immense potential. On the fringes of the starting line-up after a good Champions League campaign but his inconsistency will probably see him on the bench.



61
14

Celso BORGES

AIK (Swe)
Age 26 (27.05.88)
One of the most prominent members of the team and essential to Pinto's system. It's surprising that he hasn't been able to move to a bigger club than Sweden's AIK but a good World Cup could change that.



9
1

Diego CALVO

Valerenga (Nor)
Age 23 (25.04.91)
A very fast winger who has improved tremendously since moving to Norway. Scored some important goals for the national team in the qualifiers although he is still on the fringes of the side.



39
7

Carlos HERNANDEZ

Wellington Phoenix (Aus)
Age 32 (09.04.82)
Attacking midfielder who has been a part of the national set-up since 2005 and one of the few survivors from the 2006 World Cup. His move to the A-League put him out of the coach's view but he is expected to make the trip.

FORWARDS



38
8

Randall BRENES

Cartagines
Age 30 (13.08.83)
Seems to still be in pole position for the fourth attacking spot despite a disappointing club season. Scored the goal against Jamaica that ensured qualification for the finals and was one of the team's top strikers in the qualifiers.



31
9

Joel CAMPBELL

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 21 (26.06.92)
The next big thing in CONCACAF football and has the tools to become a top striker. On loan to Olympiacos, he hasn't managed to secure a work permit in the Premier League yet but a good World Cup can change that.



61
12

Bryan RUIZ

Fulham
Age 28 (18.08.85)
The team captain and its most talented player, he plays the second-striker role. On the rebound from a disappointing stint in England with Fulham, he has been one of the best players for PSV this year.



93
31

Alvaro SABORIO

Real Salt Lake (USA)
Age 32 (22.03.82)
One of the best players in MLS over the past five years, his role for the national team diminished with the emergence of Campbell but he's still a very valid attacking option for Pinto. Extremely potent and very intelligent in the box.

TACTICS



Ticos look for strength in numbers as they plot rapid counter-attacks

Costa Rica seem to have a very defined plan for Brazil 2014. Coach Jorge Luis Pinto looks set to play with a European-style **4-4-2**, with **Joel Campbell** operating as a pure number nine and **Bryan Ruiz** as the support striker. The "Ticos" have an interesting

blend of vision and speed and will look to play to their strengths.

Pinto is a great admirer of Jose Mourinho's tactical astuteness, so it's little surprise that the Costa Rican game is based around defensive solidity, combined with swift counter-attacking. The approach has its critics but paid dividends in the final stage of CONCACAF qualifying – and will be essential in Brazil given the quality of their opposition.

There will be a lot of responsibility on the central midfielders **Yeltsin Tejada** and **Celso Borges** to protect the back-four and to also stifle the creative skills of the likes of Pirlo, Rooney and Suarez.

A few doubts remain in the composition of the starting XI, the most important of which regards the recovery of Everton's **Bryan Oviedo**, who was initially ruled out of the World Cup but now seems to be on schedule to make the pre-tournament training camp in San Jose, although his fitness still remains in some doubt.

Other than, that the starting XI seems to be set, and few surprises are expected in the 23-man squad. The core will be the same as the one that booked its ticket to Brazil eight months ago.

Plan B?

If Oviedo recovers his full fitness in time, a switch to a 5-4-1 is possible. This was used in the qualifiers on a number of occasions and would see an extra centre-back coming in, allowing the full-backs, particularly Oviedo, to push.

It would also involve **Christian Bolanos** switching to the left, where he would be dangerous cutting inside, and Bryan Ruiz or Joel Campbell dropping to the left side of midfield.

Alvaro Saborio could come in as the lone central striker, although Campbell's form this season for Olympiakos should see him kept on in this role.



Bryan OVIEDO

Everton (Eng)
Age 24 (18.02.90)
If he makes it to the World Cup it will be one of the feelgood stories of the finals. Suffered a leg fracture just as he was breaking into the Everton side and seemed to be out for a long period. His speed and positioning will be key.



Jose SALVATIERRA

Alajuelense
Age 24 (10.10.89)
First-choice right-back who overcame what seemed to be a recurrent season-ending knee injury to regain his spot in the national side. If his injury doesn't recur, he will offer pace and solidity to the back line.



Michael UMANA

Saprissa
Age 31 (16.07.82)
Solid central defender who has been in the international fold since 2006. He's one of Pinto's more trusted men and a dressing-room leader, so the coach expects him to exert his influence on and off the pitch.



Osvaldo RODRIGUEZ

Herediano
Age 23 (17.12.90)
Solid midfielder who has had a good season with Herediano despite not being a starting regular, which has put his national-team status in doubt. If he makes it to Brazil it will be as a sub.



Yeltsin TEJEDA

Saprissa
Age 22 (17.03.92)
Has broken into the starting XI thanks to his solidity and ball-recovery skills – but also because of a lack of choices in his position. Has a lot of potential but the World Cup might have arrived a little early for him to be at his best.



Rodney WALLACE

Portland Timbers (USA)
Age 25 (17.06.88)
He seemed certain to be going to Brazil until an untimely injury put his place in doubt. If he manages to recover, his physical strength and drive could be very useful for destabilising opposition defences.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Waylon FRANCIS (D, Age 23, 20.09.90, 1/0, Columbus Crew, USA)
Giancarlo GONZALEZ (D, Age 26, 08.02.88, 33/2, Columbus Crew, USA)
Kendal WATSON (D, Age 26, 21.01.88, 2/0, Saprissa)
Kenny CUNNINGHAM (M, Age 29, 07.06.85, 13/1, Wellington Phoenix, Aus)
Jairo ARRIETA (F, Age 30, 25.08.83, 17/4, Columbus Crew, USA)





CROATIA

Brazil first up...again

Hopes high for better finale after repeat of 2006 opener

Despite minimal experience as a head coach – just eight months in charge of Croatia's under 21s – newly installed "Hrvatski" boss Niko Kovac could not be more qualified for this most demanding of jobs.

During his 12 years as a defensive midfielder for the national team, no other player in red-and-white worked harder, covered more ground or showed as much spirit and leadership. And if the ex-Bayer Leverkusen, Hamburg and Bayern Munich "water carrier" can persuade his current charges to follow his turbo-charged example, he might be more than halfway there.

Kovac wants an amalgam of Croat flair with German-like application and drive.

Surprisingly, for a squad with an abundance of individual class and technical virtuosity, the Croats do have a tendency to quickly run out of self-confidence. But with his emphasis on collective virtues and going that extra mile, Kovac believes he has found the antidote. In response to those who claim he is overly defensive in his methods and organisation, the coach states that he simply wants to achieve the best of both worlds – the amalgam of Croat flair with German-like application and drive.

"We want to play beautiful, attractive football," says Kovac. "If you're having fun,

you've got a good chance of success. When I enjoyed a certain subject at school, I got better marks."

Croatia might be one of the smallest countries competing at World Cup 2014 but that doesn't mean that expectations at home are of the low-key variety. Proud of their third-place finish at France 98 and the industrial quantities of top-class players they have nurtured over the years, fans of the national team feel justified in setting the bar as high as possible. There is confidence that their side can at least achieve second place in Group A behind hosts and favourites Brazil.

"I am confident that we have the players to enjoy all the games," states Kovac. "If we had to be drawn in the same pool as Brazil, the best outcome for us was to meet them in the opening game. The pressure is all on them. They are the title favourites and I'm hopeful we can spring a surprise."

And if Kovac's men do manage to avenge their 2006 opening game defeat against Brazil, then expect expectations back in the Balkans to rocket skywards.

Zdravko Reic

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 23	Squad gathers in Zagreb
May 31	Friendly v Mali in Osijek
Jun 3	Fly to Brazil
Jun 6	Friendly v Australia in Salvador, Bra



Suspended...Croatia will be without Mario Mandžukić against Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP A FIXTURES

Jun 12	v Brazil (Sao Paulo)
Jun 18	v Cameroon (Manaus)
Jun 23	v Mexico (Recife)



Croatia fought off fierce competition to secure their place at the Tivoli Eco Resort, a five-star luxury complex located near the fishing village of Praia do Forte, which in turn is a few miles away from the town of Mata de Sao Joao. They will use a newly built training centre, just a three-minute drive away from the resort.

THE VIEW FROM CROATIA

● "Objectively, Croatia have a better team than Cameroon and Mexico. I believe we can make it through to the knockout stage."

Igor Stimac, former national coach

● "We have a beautiful task at Brazil 2014: to open the World Cup and make all Croatians around the world proud. I'd like





that we progress to the next round and that we get Spain there."

Davor Suker, former player and president of the Croatian football federation

● "We have perhaps the strongest midfield line at our disposal – Luka Modric, Ivan Rakitic and Mateo Kovacic are able to outplay most opponents. We have Mario Mandzukic as well – a player who is able to take advantage of semi-chances to score. We should get through

the group stage of the competition. I would like to play Spain next because in that game we would not be without chances."

Tomislav Zidak, reporter for daily paper Jutarnji List

● "Croatia may be a surprise, as in France 1998 when we ended up in third. We have excellent players. I'm sure we're going through."

Miroslav Blazevic, national coach at the 1998 World Cup



COACH PROFILE

Niko KOVAC

Age 42 (15.10.71)

Croatia coach since October 2013

How he got the job

Replaced the sacked Igor Stimac for the play-offs after Croatia finished second, behind Belgium, in their World Cup qualifying group.



Past successes as a coach

After coaching Salzburg's juniors and assisting first-team coach Ricardo Moniz, he took charge of Croatia's under-21 side and won four out of four qualifying games for Euro 2015 with a goals for/against record of 13/0.

Past failures as a coach

None.

Achievements as a player

Won 83 caps for Croatia and was long-standing captain of the national side. Spent most of his club career in German football where he won the league-and-cup double with Bayern Munich in 2003. Also played for Hertha Zehlendorf, Hertha Berlin, Bayer Leverkusen, Hamburg and Salzburg.

World Cup experience

Played in the 2002 and 2006 tournaments, although Croatia failed to get past the group stage.

Relationship with the media

Only speaks to the media at organised press conferences and rarely gives interviews – except to the German media. Very restrained, he says that he "likes to be boring".

Relations with the public

A favourite as a player for his fierce, combative approach and patriotism.

Style of management/coaching

Insists on maximum preparation and requires all his players to do their defensive work. Not overly prone to experimentation.

Notable backroom staff

His brother, Robert, is his assistant.

After the World Cup

Has a contract until the end of the qualifying campaign for the 2016 European Championship.

KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



0
0

Lovre KALINIC

Hajduk Split
Age 24 (03.04.90)
Giant Split-born youngster who sits at three in the national-team goalkeeping pecking order but is the probable long-term successor to Pletikosa. Injured earlier this year but expected to be fit in time for the finals.



109
0

Stipe PLETIKOSA

Rostov (Rus)
Age 35 (08.01.79)
Extremely religious, he sometimes spends 10 days of the summer praying in a monastery and wears a shirt with a picture of Our Lady of Medjugorje under his kit. Known as "The Octopus" because of his long reach and reflex stops.



6
0

Danijel SUBASIC

Monaco (Fra)
Age 29 (27.10.84)
Pletikosa's loyal understudy since 2009, he has had to make do with international scraps, despite playing with distinction with Monaco for the past two-and-a-half seasons. Lives a modest lifestyle in a small apartment outside Monte Carlo.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



71
4

Vedran CORLUKA

Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
Age 28 (05.02.86)
Stopper who can also play as right-back if needed, he reads the game well, is good in the air and can start an attack from deep. Nicknamed "Charly", he is a Bosnian Croat who was only five when his family fled to Zagreb.



24
2

Dejan LOVREN

Southampton (Eng)
Age 25 (05.07.89)
Central defender with an explosive temperament – as witnessed by a fight he had with Ivan Strinic after defeat in Scotland. Has enjoyed an excellent first year in England. Can also play at left-back. Forced to miss Euro 2012 with a foot injury.



49
0

Danijel PRANJIC

Panathinaikos (Gre)
Age 32 (02.12.81)
"Retired" in 2010 after a row over the naturalisation process which brought Brazil-born Sammir into the squad, but now back in favour under Kovac. Unhappy when first selected in the left-back role but now comfortable with his position.



20
0

Gordon SCHILDENFELD

Panathinaikos (Gre)
Age 29 (18.03.85)
No-nonsense back-up central defender who does the simple thing and avoids risks. Not that fast but reads situations well. Has had eye problems during his career. Has Austrian antecedents and played for Sturm Graz.



111
21

Dario SRNA

Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
Age 32 (01.05.82)
Captain of club and country, he can play full-back or the right side of midfield. Always reliable in his defensive duties, but also a threat going forward. Has the name of his brother Igor, who has Down's syndrome, tattooed on his chest.

MIDFIELDERS



0
0

Marcelo BROZOVIC

Dinamo Zagreb
Age 21 (16.11.92)
Boy wonder attacking midfielder or second striker, who has been shining brightly this season for Dinamo and the Under 21s. Technically brilliant and very sharp in front of goal, he has signed a seven-year contract with Dinamo.



8
0

Mateo KOVACIC

Internazionale (Ita)
Age 20 (06.05.94)
Talented midfield all-rounder capable of turning on the style in box-to-box mode or as a deep-lying playmaker. In a perfect world, he would push hard for a starting slot, but is suffering from a distinct lack of first-team football at Inter.



81
16

Niko KRANJCAR

Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 29 (13.08.84)
Creative player who has always promised a lot but struggles with fitness. Spent this season on loan to English second-tier side Queens Park Rangers. Son of former national coach Zlatko Kranjcar. This will be his fourth major finals.



1
0

Mate MALES

Rijeka
Age 25 (11.03.89)
Industrious and tactically-disciplined central midfielder who recently forced his way into Niko Kovac's plans. Strong enough as a character to quit Hajduk Split for arch-rivals Dinamo Zagreb as a youngster.



73
8

Luka MODRIC

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 28 (09.09.85)
The "Croatian Cruyff" is the team's most important player. Elegant, precise and remarkably resilient for one so small and slim. His grandfather was murdered by Serbian paramilitary forces during the Balkans conflict.

FORWARDS



61
29

EDUARDO

Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
Age 31 (25.02.83)
Born in Brazil but moved to Zagreb when he was 15 and later took Croatian citizenship. Suffered a serious leg break when playing for Arsenal in 2008 that kept him out for a year. Says he would have liked to have been an economist.



31
5

Nikica JELAVIC

Hull City (Eng)
Age 28 (27.08.85)
Centre-forward who has overcome serious injuries to both knees during a career which faltered at Everton. Missed out on May's FA Cup Final with Hull as he was cup-tied. Bankrolls his old Bosnian club, GOSK Gabela.



48
13

Mario MANDZUKIC

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 27 (21.05.86)
Hard-working centre-forward who looks set to leave Bayern when Robert Lewandowski arrives this summer. Will miss the opening game against Brazil through suspension following his red card in the play-off against Iceland.



90
18

Ivica OLIC

Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 34 (14.09.79)
Gutsy, energetic and versatile frontrunner who has a happy knack of scoring on the big occasion. Signed a new contract in April, keeping him at Wolfsburg for another two years. Previously with Bayern Munich.

TACTICS



Defensive discipline and cunning counter-attacks are the Kovac way

Nico Kovac is a coach who seeks discipline above all else in a game and expects everyone to get behind the ball when possession is lost. He likes to play with two midfielders in front of a back four. Although one of those, **Luka Modric**, is a naturally

attacking player he too is forced to sacrifice much of his creativity for defensive responsibilities. Kovac will probably pair him with **Ivan Rakitic**. **Mateo Kovacic** would only play in tandem with Modric if an all-out attacking system is called for.

Left-back is a major problem for Kovac. **Danijel Pranjin** will probably be picked ahead of **Ivan Strinic**, who is better going forward than defending.

Croatia will hope to expose opponents on the counter-attack and feed **Ivica Olic** and **Mario Mandzukic**, but this has to be done at speed. The more they push forward and commit players to joining the attack, the more vulnerable they become at the back.

With his flair for taking chances, mobility, cunning movement and vast international know-how, **Eduardo** is the ideal impact sub.



Ivan STRINIC

Dnipro (Ukr)
Age 26 (17.07.87)
Fills the problem left-back slot but has not always convinced. Adventurous and constructive going forward, but lacking somewhat in his positional work. Early in his career failed to make the grade at French side, Le Mans.



Domagoj VIDA

Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 25 (29.04.89)
Powerful central defender whose father, Rudika, was a lower-league centre-forward. Was once thrown off his club's team bus for opening a beer. Bounced back from a poor spell at Leverkusen to impress for Dinamo Zagreb and Dynamo Kiev.



Sime VRSALJKO

Genoa (Ita)
Age 25 (10.01.92)
Considered Srna's long-term successor at right-back, the youngster has had his share of injury problems over the past year, but when operational is a class act, a good mixture of positive intentions and defensive watchfulness.



Ivan PERISIC

Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 25 (02.02.89)
Nimble and quick-witted craftsman usually employed by Kovac on the left-flank, but also capable of putting in a shift in a central string-pulling role or as a second striker. Fell out with Jurgen Klopp at Borussia Dortmund.



Ivan RAKITIC

Sevilla (Spa)
Age 26 (10.03.88)
Arguably in the form of his career, the Sevilla ace can play anywhere in the engine room, but normally lines up with Modric in a deep role. Born in Switzerland after his parents emigrated there and represented them at youth level.



Ognjen VUKOJEVIC

Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 30 (20.12.83)
Classic midfield pitbull, who could play if coach Kovac wants a more ball-winning bite in front of the back-line. Often compared in style to Gennaro Gattuso. Has fought back well from a disastrous spell at Belgian club Lierse in 2005.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Dario KRESIC (G, Age 30, 11.01.84, 1/0, Mainz, Ger)

Ivan VARGIC (G, Age 27, 15.03.87, 0/0, Rijeka)

Igor BUBNJIC (D, Age 21, 17.07.92, 2/0, Udinese, Ita)

Hrvoje MILIC (D, Age 25, 10.05.89, 4/0, Rostov, Rus)

Ante REBIC (F, Age 20, 21.09.93, 3/1, Fiorentina, Ita)

Duje COP (F, Age 24, 01.02.90, 0/0, Dinamo Zagreb)

MISSING OUT

Defender **Josip Simunic** will not travel to Brazil after losing his appeal against a 10-match international ban imposed by FIFA as punishment for his celebration following Croatia's play-off victory over Iceland. The veteran Dinamo Zagreb defender shouted "for the homeland" over a stadium microphone, to which fans responded "ready". The chant has associations with the Ustasha pro-Nazi regime that ruled Croatia during World War Two and which was banned in 1945.

Plan B?

When a situation occurs that they need to chase the game the system turns into a **4-4-2**, with Srna probably moving from right-back to right midfield, with **Domagoj Vida** taking his place. A second attacker, usually Olic, is then pushed up alongside Mandzukic. **Nikica Jelavic**, strong in the air and physically robust, offers an alternative.

Another option that Kovac may explore to protect his backline is fielding three central defenders and going 3-5-2.

Another way Croatia could force the issue, to take more of the initiative, would be for long-time Bundesliga professional Kovac to adopt a Bayern Munich-like 4-1-4-1, a system, of course, star striker Mandzukic knows all about. This would entail **Mate Males** or **Ognjen Vukojevic** guarding the back-door; Perisic working the right-flank; Modric and Rakitic pulling the strings in a much more advanced position and Olic buzzing down the right.

Given the crossing ability in the side and the aerial threat posed by Mandzukic and Jelavic, the Croats would be more direct as they chased the game.





ECUADOR

Work to be done to make it past the group stage

Defensive problems and a lack of goals must be addressed

"There are seven games in the World Cup," says Ecuador coach Reinaldo Rueda, "and I want to reach the seventh" – bold words which express the confidence of a country that has taken huge strides in recent times.

Less than 30 years ago Ecuador were little more than a Latin American footballing version of Luxembourg; now they have reached three of the last four World Cups. Last time out, in 2006, they belied their reputation as altitude specialists by beating Poland and qualifying for the second round, where they went down to England. If they can do that in Europe, what might happen on their own continent?

More players have international club experience since then, and the current team is physically strong with plenty of pace and skill down the flanks. But games are won and lost in the penalty areas, and here Ecuador's confidence takes something of a battering. They managed just 20 goals in 16 qualifiers – scoring only five times away from home.

Opportunities were being created, but as Rueda lamented last November: "We're failing in the last metres. At this decisive moment we are lacking precision, and we have to improve."

With seven goals, centre-forward Felipe Caicedo was comfortably the team's top scorer in qualification, though three of those came from the penalty spot, so his patchy form this year is a cause for concern.

There are also grounds for alarm at the

back where Rueda is struggling to replace Ivan Hurtado, the classy centre-back who held Ecuador's defence together for 15 years, and his giant partner Giovanni Espinoza. Jayro Campos, the best of the current crop, is an injury casualty, while centre-back Fricson Erazo has had such a disastrous time at Flamengo of Brazil that he scarcely gets on the bench. Without him, Ecuador went three down to Australia during a catastrophic first-half display in a March friendly, before striking back to win 4-3 after Rueda made some much-needed changes at the interval.

"We've had problems in this sector," admitted the coach. "It's no use trying to cover up the sun with our hands." He will hope that, with time on the training field, he can patch up a defence that will give sufficient cover to carry Ecuador out of their group.

Tim Vickery

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 17	Friendly away to Holland in Amsterdam
May 26	Assemble for training in Quito
May 31	Friendly v Mexico in Arlington, USA
Jun 4	Friendly v England in Miami, USA
Jun 5	Travel back to Quito
Jun 9	Fly to Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP E FIXTURES

Jun 15	v Switzerland (Brasilia)
Jun 20	v Honduras (Curitiba)
Jun 25	v France (Rio de Janeiro)



Ecuador will stay in Viamao, on the outskirts of the southern city of Porto Alegre. They will stay and train at the Vila Ventura Resort (above), which features an underground, purpose-built cave with two thermal pools and a jacuzzi. One downside of their southerly base is that they will face a 1,000 mile-plus trip to Brasilia for their opening match.



High hopes...Ecuador players during a qualifying win over Paraguay

THE VIEW FROM ECUADOR

● "I think that we have to make it through to the second round in Brazil – not because it's some kind of obligation but because I believe we have the best Ecuador side we have ever had. The quantity of players who are doing well abroad is far greater than we have ever had in my lifetime. The order of the group games should also help us to make it through. Then, in the knockout round, we'll just have to see what happens, but I'm betting our team can do well."

Alex Aguinaga, former Ecuador World Cup player





● “In our group we have the advantage of knowing Honduras, who we’ve beaten before in friendlies. Switzerland have a strong team, but I’m sure that we can beat them, and against France we have to take advantage of the fact that they are not as good as they have been.”

Polo Carrera, former national team player and coach



● “The first match, against Switzerland, is going to be vital to our chances. We have the strength in depth to beat Honduras, and hopefully Switzerland as well – because things will be a bit

more complicated against France, an opponent with much more tradition.”

Alfredo Encalada, former national coach

● “In my view Ecuador are certainly in the fight to make it out of their group. If we do, then we will take on someone from Group F – a group that has Argentina in it. With a bit of destiny, luck and football we will qualify from our group, which will already be a success, and with a bit more luck we’ll make it to the quarter-finals.”

Oton Chavez, daily newspaper El Universo



COACH PROFILE

Reinaldo RUEDA (Col)

Age 57 (16.04.57)
Ecuador coach since July 2010

How he got the job

Approached after his achievement of qualifying Honduras for the World Cup in South Africa, and due to Ecuador’s previous track record under Colombian coaches.



Past successes as a coach

Took Colombia’s under-20s to the World Youth Cup in 1993 and again in 2003, when they reached the semi-finals. He also won the Toulon youth tournament in 2000. As a result of taking Honduras to the World Cup he was granted citizenship of the country.

Past failures as a coach

His first tournament with Ecuador, the 2011 Copa America, was a clear failure which could have cost him his job.

Achievements as a player

None. Realised early on that he was better suited to coaching than playing.

World Cup experience

Went to South Africa with Honduras four years ago – where they only picked up one point.

Relationship with the media

Personally is very affable and hard to dislike. Cultivates good relations.

Relationship with the public

Can come across as a little cold. Experience has shown, however, that it is far easier for a foreign coach to stand outside the sniping between the two major cities, Quito and Guayaquil.

Style of management/coaching

Rational, methodical figure who trained and studied in the former Yugoslavia and in Germany. His academic nature is not always an easy fit with the more gifted individual talents in his squad.

Notable backroom staff

His assistant is former Colombia international Alexis Mendoza. Another ex-Colombia player, Pedro Zape, is in charge of preparing the goalkeepers.

After the World Cup

Will talk about a new contract after the World Cup has finished.

WORLD CUP 2014 ECUADOR SQUAD

KEY **123** caps **12** goals (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



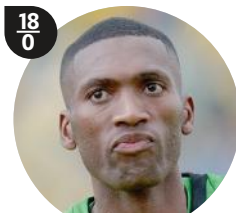
Maximo BANGUERA

Barcelona SC
Age 28 (16.12.85)
Played as one of the permitted over-age players in Ecuador's gold-medal campaign in the 2007 Pan-American Games before graduating to the senior squad. Plays in a cap and has suffered with weight problems.



Adrian BONE

El Nacional
Age 25 (08.09.88)
Athletic third-choice keeper whose elder brother, Elvis, is a centre-back with Deportivo Cuenca. Made his international debut in September 2011 in a friendly against Jamaica.



Alexander DOMINGUEZ

LDU Quito
Age 27 (05.06.87)
Tall, gangly and awkward looking, he took over as first choice after the 2011 Copa America. His pre-football jobs include house painter, bus conductor, waiter, hotel porter and agricultural labourer. His father is Colombian.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Gabriel ACHILIER

Emelec
Age 29 (24.03.85)
Physical centre-back who is a clear candidate to pick up yellow cards. His father and uncle were both defenders for Emelec in the 1980s. First called up for national team duty in 2008 and has been used sporadically since then.



Walter AYОВI

Pachuca (Mex)
Age 34 (11.08.79)
Attacking left-back who plays in midfield for his club side. The only outfield player to start in all 16 of the South American World Cup qualifiers, he has a booming left-foot shot and is dangerous from set-pieces. Was in the 2002 squad.



Oscar BAGUI

Emelec
Age 31 (10.12.82)
First-choice left-back in the 2007 Copa America, but has otherwise spent most of his time with the national team on the bench. The bulk of his caps have come in friendlies. Made his debut in January 2005 against Panama.



Fricson ERAZO

Flamengo (Bra)
Age 26 (05.05.88)
Lanky, left-footed centre-back, who is elegant on the ball, but whose defensive vulnerabilities have been horribly apparent after his move to Brazil this year. His lack of games for Flamengo is a huge worry for Rueda.



Jorge GUAGUA

Emelec
Age 32 (28.09.81)
Centre-back who has been in the squad as far back as the 2001 Copa America and made three appearances in the 2006 World Cup. Has never looked entirely convincing at international level and is not the quickest.

MIDFIELDERS



Segundo CASTILLO

Al Hilal (Sau)
Age 32 (15.05.82)
Strong, imposing defensive midfielder of vast experience, his career includes the 2006 World Cup as well as spells with Red Star Belgrade, Everton and Wolves. A goal threat from his long-range shot and in the air at set-pieces.



Fernando GAIBOR

Emelec
Age 22 (08.10.91)
Talented all-round midfielder, he was a product of the under-20 side who has recently broken into the senior squad. Dynamic, passes well and times his forward runs intelligently.



Renato IBARRA

Vitesse (Hol)
Age 23 (20.01.91)
Slightly-built flying right-winger who is mostly used as a second-half substitute to run at tiring defences and free Antonio Valencia to move inside. Made 10 appearances in qualification, but only started one game.



Henry LEON

Independiente del Valle
Age 31 (20.04.83)
Rangy central-midfield captain of a small club who has made huge recent progress. Has plenty of lung power and can also fill in at centre-back. Has played once for the national side, against Chile in August 2012.



Edison MENDEZ

Santa Fe
Age 35 (15.03.79)
Stocky, classy midfielder who has played in all of Ecuador's World Cup games and scored the winner against Croatia in 2002. A thunderous striker of the ball, he is now firmly back after a few years when he was blighted by injury.

FORWARDS



Felipe CAICEDO

Al Jazira (UAE)
Age 25 (05.09.88)
Lanky, left-footed centre-forward who is yet to fully realise the potential of his youth, although his recall midway through qualifying was important and he finished as top scorer. Fell out with Rueda after the 2011 Copa America.



Fidel MARTINEZ

Tijuana (Mex)
Age 24 (15.02.90)
Skilful left-footer who was one of the most impressive performers at the 2007 Pan-American Games before his career stalled with a move to Brazil. Re-emerged with Deportivo Quito before moving to Mexico in 2012.



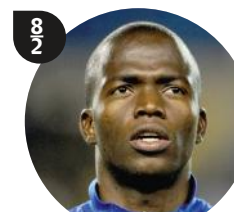
Jefferson MONTERO

Morelia (Mex)
Age 24 (01.09.89)
Made his name as the star turn in the 2007 Pan-American Games gold medal campaign and soon thrown into the senior side. A tricky dribbler who can glide past his marker on either side, but can be frustrating to watch.



Joao ROJAS

Cruz Azul (Mex)
Age 24 (14.06.89)
Quick and capable of operating anywhere across the attacking line. Such versatility makes him a favourite of Rueda, but he has yet to demonstrate that he can tip the balance at international level. A likely option from the bench.



Enner VALENCIA

Pachuca (Mex)
Age 25 (11.04.89)
Quick, strong and versatile, he was often used wide on the right but is now seen as a central support striker. In rich form, making a good start in Mexico. Previously with Emelec, where he was given his debut by Chile's Jorge Sampaoli.

TACTICS



Death of Benitez leaves a huge hole in the starting line-up

Christian Benitez, who tragically died last year, was a player Rueda could ill-afford to lose – in both an emotional sense (he was hugely popular in the squad) and a tactical one, as his talent and versatility helped balance out the coach's system. Benitez was the

country's most-respected goalscorer and was quick enough to play on the shoulder of the last defender or to tuck back and form part of the midfield block. He would take it in turns with **Felipe Caicedo** to drop deep, presenting opposing defences with different challenges while ensuring the team stayed relatively solid within the framework of their **4-4-2** formation.

There is no exact replacement for such a complete player. If a quick attacker such as **Enner Valencia** is used, then the team can look very open and the vulnerability of the defence exposed. Another option might be to move **Antonio Valencia** inside, thus creating an opening on the wing for the jet-heeled **Renato Ibarra** or maybe **Joao Rojas**. This, however, would be taking the team's best player away from the role in which he is most effective.

Otherwise, the structure of the side looks relatively settled. **Juan Carlos Paredes** and **Walter Ayovi** are an adventurous pair of full-backs in a team which will seek to counter at pace. **Segundo Castillo** will hold the fort in central midfield while **Christian Noboa**, with his range of passing, will look to get the ball moving quickly to the wingers.

It is here, on rapid transitions, if **Jefferson Montero** or Valencia can get one-on-one with the opposing full-backs, that Ecuador can do some serious damage.

Plan B?

Ecuador rarely vary from the 4-4-2 template. However, the death of Benitez has left them with a huge gap to fill, and the twin strike force of Caicedo and Enner Valencia may struggle.

One possible option would be a switch to a **4-5-1** formation, bringing in an extra midfielder, such as the veteran **Edison Mendez**. However, there is a danger that such a move would highlight Ecuador's lack of pace in and around the penalty box.



John NARVAEZ

Emelec
Age 23 (12.06.91)
Rangy, confident figure who did well at centre-back at under-20 level, and has since established himself at right-back with his club and forced himself into the senior side, although he has yet to make his debut.



Juan Carlos PAREDES

Barcelona SC
Age 26 (08.07.87)
Pacy right-back who is sometimes used as a wide midfielder at club level. Became first choice for his country after the 2011 Copa America. Has suffered appendicitis, a virus and knee problems this year.



Christian NOBOA

Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
Age 29 (09.04.85)
The boss of Ecuador's midfield, with the vision and range of passing to move the ball quickly to the team's dangerous wingers. Has spent the last six years playing in Russia and is married to a local. Made his debut in 2006.



Luis SARITAMA

Barcelona SC
Age 30 (20.10.83)
Originally an attacking midfielder, a lack of pace means he is now more successful using his passing skills from deeper. In the 2006 squad, having made his senior international debut in 2003 against Peru.



Antonio VALENCIA

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 28 (04.08.85)
The first Ecuadorian to make an impact in the decisive stages of the Champions League. Was made team captain to help the squad react positively to the death of his great friend Christian Benitez. His country need him to hit top form.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Luis CHECA (D, Age 30, 21.12.83, 7/0, Barcelona SC)

Isaac MINA (D, Age 33, 17.10.80, 19/2, El Nacional)

Christian RAMIREZ (D, Age 19, 15.08.94, 2/0, Fortuna Dusseldorf, Ger)

Michael ARROYO (M, Age 27, 23.04.87, 20/2, Atlante, Mex)

Alex BOLANOS (M, Age 28, 22.01.86, 7/0, Barcelona SC)

Pedro QUINONEZ (M, Age 28, 04.03.86, 10/0, Emelec)

Massimo LUONGO (M, Age 21, 25.09.92, 1/0, Swindon Town, Eng),
Adam SAROTA (M, Age 25, 28.12.88, 3/0, Utrecht, Hol)

Jaime AYОВI (F, Age 26, 21.02.88, 27/9, Tijuana, Mex)

Carlos TENORIO (F, Age 35, 14.05.79, 51/12, El Nacional)





ENGLAND

In the cut-throat group

Tough task ahead for Hodgson's men

When England were drawn with Italy, Uruguay and Costa Rica in a tough first-round group, Football Association chairman Greg Dyke was caught by the TV cameras making a throat-slitting gesture as he sat alongside manager Roy Hodgson in the VIP audience in Salvador, Brazil.

As a reflection of the pessimistic mood that took hold of the country following the draw, Dyke's gesture took some beating. Hodgson had said before the draw that the one place he wanted to avoid was Manaus. So, inevitably, England were drawn to face Italy in their opening game in the north-western city, where climactic conditions may overwhelm European sides.

But as the months have passed since the draw, so the expectations have begun to grow. While nobody is declaring England to be world-beaters, there are signs that their campaign is flickering into life.

Hodgson is one of England's biggest assets. For the first time since Bobby Robson in 1990, England have a manager who has coached a team at a World Cup before. His stewardship of Switzerland at USA 94 may be a distant memory but it has given him valuable insight into how to manage a squad at a tournament in the Americas.

England will have pace and youthful verve on their side – typified by the role played by young forwards Daniel Sturridge and Raheem Sterling in Liverpool's surprise title challenge, and by Adam Lallana and Ross Barkley. Both have played important roles in the impressive league form of their respective clubs.

Barring a total disaster, Hodgson will be in charge for the Euro 2016 qualifiers – and this tournament may be seen as valuable preparation for the finals in France in two years time.

To that end, the selection of Lallana and others will give a pointer to England's intentions. The left-back position is a case in point. Ashley Cole has been displaced by Leighton Baines as first choice and now faces a challenge from Southampton teenager Luke Shaw. Will Hodgson gamble on taking Shaw for the learning experience, or fall back on the security of Cole's century of international caps?

In early May, Hodgson faced a nervous wait for news that his players had avoided injury in the remaining domestic club fixtures. He has already lost Theo Walcott to a serious knee injury and was sweating on the fitness of midfielder Jack Wilshere.

The draw may have dampened expectations but England are not quite ready to roll out the white flag – no matter what Dyke says.

Gavin Hamilton

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 30	Friendly v Peru in London
Jun 1	Fly to Miami for training camp in South Florida, USA
Jun 4	Friendly v Ecuador in Miami, USA
Jun 7	Friendly v Honduras in Miami, USA
Jun 8	Travel to Brazil



Heading for Rio...England's talisman, Wayne Rooney

BASE CAMP



GROUP D FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Italy (Manaus)
Jun 19	v Uruguay (Sao Paulo)
Jun 24	v Costa Rica (Belo Horizonte)



England will be staying at the five-star Royal Tulip Hotel in Rio de Janeiro, close to the city's famous Copacabana beach. The FA switched hotels after plans were revealed for a giant World Cup fanzone outside their original choice, the Windsor Atlantica. There are few prettier settings than England's ocean-side training camp at the Urca military base, which lies in the shadow of Sugarloaf Mountain.

THE VIEW FROM ENGLAND

● "We've got some really good players that are young, and they're almost unexposed to failure at any level. And when I mention those players I'm looking at the likes of Daniel Sturridge, Ross Barkley, Adam Lallana and Raheem Sterling. Players like that, nobody knows if you throw them in at the deep end in a World Cup, one of them might absolutely shine and take the world by storm and you try stopping them after they play well once or twice. There's something about being really young [at a World Cup] and having no fear at all, and having pace and a mindset that says you're going to dominate someone and not have any fear of anyone. We've got a bit of that. Yes, there are probably better teams in the





COACH PROFILE

Roy HODGSON

Age 66 (09.08.47)
England coach since May 2012

How he got the job
A safe pair of hands (and was not Harry Redknapp) following the abrupt resignation of Fabio Capello.



Past successes as a coach

Won league titles in Sweden and Denmark. Guided Switzerland to the 1994 World Cup and Euro 96 finals. Took Internazionale to the 1997 UEFA Cup Final and Fulham to the 2009 Europa League Final.

Past failures as a coach

Undone by player power at Blackburn and fan expectations at Liverpool.

Achievements as a player

Limited to non-league, he worked as a PE teacher while earning his coaching badges in his 20s.

World Cup experience

Took Switzerland to the last 16 at USA 94, where they lost to Spain. Worked as part of FIFA's technical inspection teams at subsequent World Cups.

Relationship with the media

Cordial and respectful while never giving too much away.

Relationship with the public

Respected by most for his decency and hard work – with the exception of Liverpool fans.

Style of management

The antithesis of a showbiz manager, a coach's coach who likes to drill his sides on the training pitch. Long-time student of the world game, multi-lingual and a keen reader of modern literary fiction.

Notable backroom staff

Gary Neville has attracted some criticism for combining his coaching alongside Hodgson with commentating for Sky and a newspaper column. Assistant coach Ray Lewington is a colleague from his time at Fulham.

After the World Cup

Is contracted until 2016, so barring a complete disaster in Brazil will stay on to oversee the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign.

competition than us but if we get on a nice little run then I don't see us without a chance."

Michael Owen, ex-striker who is now a TV pundit

● "There are always ifs with England. If Wayne Rooney stays fit. If the balance is right in midfield. If the players can keep the ball. If the players don't melt when the heat rises. If they don't sit deep on taking the lead. If they find some psychological strength. If the game doesn't go to penalties. England have some strengths. The keeper Joe Hart is in form. The captain Steven Gerrard is on a mission. Jordan Henderson, Daniel Sturridge and Adam Lallana all bring energy and ideas. If England get out of a tricky group that will be success."

Henry Winter, Telegraph football correspondent



● "All depends on the period from May 19 to June 14, when Roy Hodgson will have almost uninterrupted access to his players. If they can develop a club-style pattern of play, England could be one of the big surprises. Especially if the club they come to resemble is Liverpool. The outfield player they can least afford to lose is Steven Gerrard, who has become a true leader during Hodgson's brief era and is key to the creation of an Anfield-ish core. Raheem Sterling could be a sensation. But it's equally important that there are good team men around: Leighton Baines, Phil Jagielka (if fit), Wayne Rooney (if in the mood), Gary Cahill, Jordan Henderson, James Milner. Teamwork is usually England's weak suit."

Patrick Barclay, Evening Standard columnist



WORLD CUP 2014 ENGLAND SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



1
0

Fraser FORSTER

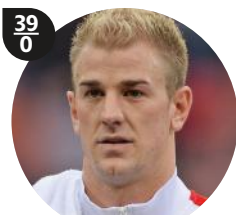
Celtic (Sco)
Age 26 (17.03.88)
Former reserve keeper at Newcastle whose strong performances for Celtic in the 2011-12 Champions League earned him an England call-up. Made his debut against Chile in November 2013.



6
0

Ben FOSTER

West Bromwich Albion
Age 31 (03.04.83)
After a promising early career at Man United was hit by injuries, he has been rehabilitated twice by Hodgson: at West Brom and now with England. Quit international football in May 2011 but made himself available in February 2013.

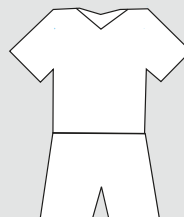


39
0

Joe HART

Manchester City
Age 27 (19.04.87)
Form has dipped over the past two seasons, being dropped by Man City, but has remained first choice under Hodgson. Occasional mistakes are offset by his command of the penalty area. A promising schoolboy cricketer.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

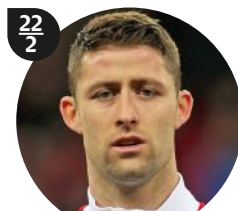
DEFENDERS



22
1

Leighton BAINES

Everton
Age 29 (11.12.84)
Has displaced Ashley Cole as left-back under Hodgson. Has stuck with Everton despite the keen interest of Manchester United. A big Indie music fan, he has written a regular column about music for Everton's website.



22
2

Gary CAHILL

Chelsea
Age 28 (19.12.85)
First choice centre-back who has thrived since moving to Chelsea in January 2012. Has good positional sense and doesn't rush into tackles, preferring to block. Missed Euro 2012 with a broken jaw.



107
0

Ashley COLE

Chelsea
Age 33 (20.12.80)
One of the best left-backs of the past decade, he has fallen out of favour at Chelsea this season and lost his England place to Baines. May lose out to Luke Shaw in the final cut. Missed the crucial penalty in the Euro 2012 semi against Italy.



24
1

Phil JAGIELKA

Everton
Age 31 (17.08.82)
Tough, no-nonsense centre-back who began his career as a midfielder. Has struggled with injuries this season but confident of returning in time for the World Cup. A Polish grandfather means he could have played for Poland.



50
1

Glen JOHNSON

Liverpool
Age 29 (23.08.84)
Attacking right-back who was criticised by Hodgson for lapses when Liverpool manager – but he will head to Brazil on the back of a strong season with Liverpool. Studying for a maths degree at the Open University.

MIDFIELDERS



3
0

Ross BARKLEY

Everton
Age 20 (05.12.93)
Talented all-rounder with good mix of technique, vision and tenacity. Has enjoyed a rapid rise over the past year, blossoming at Everton after spending last summer in England's under-performing team at the Under-20 World Cup.



31
0

Michael CARRICK

Manchester United
Age 32 (28.07.81)
Midfield metronome who provides a useful role as a link man but who has been criticised for lacking adventure and shirking the physical side of the game. His wife Lisa has taken to Twitter to admonish his critics.



109
21

Steven GERRARD

Liverpool
Age 34 (30.05.80)
Captain of club and country who has enjoyed an exceptional season with Liverpool in a more disciplined role at the base of midfield. His cousin, 10-year-old Jon-Paul Gilhooley, was the youngest victim of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster.



8
0

Jordan HENDERSON

Liverpool
Age 23 (17.06.90)
Sunderland-born all-rounder who has thrived alongside Gerrard in Liverpool's midfield this season. Struggled to adapt following his £20m move to Anfield in 2011 but offers more dynamism than Carrick or Frank Lampard.



3
0

Adam LALLANA

Southampton
Age 26 (10.05.88)
Has played for Southampton in three divisions, emerging this season as a real talent, a clever ball-player with passing and dribbling ability. The Saints skipper mainly plays on the left flank but can also play through the middle.

FORWARDS



9
2

Andy CARROLL

West Ham
Age 25 (06.01.89)
Combative but injury-prone target man whose height makes him a threat at set-pieces and gives any team a direct route to goal. Discarded by Liverpool when they cut their losses on a player signed for £35m in January 2011.



14
3

Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN

Arsenal
Age 20 (15.08.93)
A surprise call-up to the Euro 2012 squad but injuries have slowed his progress. Arsene Wenger sees his long-term role in central midfield, not a winger, the position of his father, Mark Chamberlain, who won eight England caps in the 1980s.



89
38

Wayne ROONEY

Manchester United
Age 28 (24.10.85)
England's talisman who is capable of great things but has rarely performed on the big stage for his country. England's all-time top scorer in World Cup qualifying but has yet to find the net in a finals tournament.



10
3

Daniel STURRIDGE

Liverpool
Age 24 (01.09.89)
Livewire striker who has found his feet at Liverpool after difficult spells at Manchester City and Chelsea. Often is asked to play out wide for England. Committed Christian who regularly thanks God in interviews.



8
2

Danny WELBECK

Manchester United
Age 23 (26.11.90)
An injury-affected season has seen him slip down the pecking order at Manchester United, but he remains an important option for Hodgson. Scored with a cheeky backheel against Sweden at Euro 2012.

TACTICS



Hodgson has several options but will need to balance defence and attack

Since Roy Hodgson took over as England coach, he hasn't been scared to try out a variety of different formations, often reacting to which players he has at his disposal. His most favoured option has been **4-3-3**, a fluid system that also helped disprove the theory

that **Steven Gerrard** and **Frank Lampard** can't play together in the same team.

However, in Brazil, and particularly for the crunch games against Italy and Uruguay, there will be a need to keep things tight, which could see Hodgson playing two holding midfielders as part of a 4-2-3-1 formation. Gerrard would be one, possibly partnered by **Jack Wilshere** if he is back to full fitness.

Ahead of them would be a deeper-lying **Wayne Rooney** and a tucked-in wide-man. **Adam Lallana** is well-suited to the role, although Hodgson is a big fan of **James Milner** and started him in every game at Euro 2012. Past selections point to an out-and-out winger on the other flank, and with Theo Walcott out injured, this seemingly clears the way for **Raheem Sterling**. This would leave **Daniel Sturridge** operating as the lone front man.

An even more cautious approach for the team would be a 4-4-2 set-up – Hodgson's favoured option at club level – but one that drew plenty of criticism when he introduced it for a friendly against the Republic of Ireland last year.



Phil JONES

Manchester United
Age 22 (21.02.92)
Brave, tough tackler who has been touted as a ball-playing centre-back. Exceptionally versatile, he can also play at right-back and in defensive midfield. Has been likened to the legendary Duncan Edwards.



Chris SMALLING

Manchester United
Age 24 (22.11.89)
Signed from non-league Maidstone by Hodgson when he was in charge of Fulham. Likely to be included for his versatility, at right-back and central defence, but unlikely to start. Height makes him a useful asset at set pieces.



James MILNER

Manchester City
Age 28 (04.01.86)
Not a regular starter for City but admired by Hodgson for his discipline, industry and versatility. One of the youngest players to score in the Premier League, he was a useful schoolboy cricketer who represented Yorkshire.



Raheem STERLING

Liverpool
Age 19 (08.12.94)
Jamaican-born winger promoted from the Under-21s by Hodgson. Another Liverpool player who has excelled this season with his exciting pace on the flanks but can often be more effective playing through the centre.



Jack WILSHERE

Arsenal
Age 22 (01.01.92)
One of the great hopes of English football, comfortable in possession with good passing vision, but yet to make a real breakthrough at the very top level. Troubled by injuries, the latest being a foot injury that has sidelined him since March.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

John RUDDY (G, Age 27, 24.10.86, 1/0, Norwich)
Luke SHAW (D, Age 18, 12.07.95, 1/0, Southampton)
Joleon LESCOTT (D, Age 31, 16.08.82, 26/1, Manchester City)
John STONES (D, Age 19, 28.05.94, 0/0, Everton)
John FLANAGAN (D, Age 21, 01.01.93, 0/0, Liverpool)
Gareth BARRY (M, Age 33, 23.02.81, 53/3, Manchester City)
Frank LAMPARD (M, Age 35, 20.06.78, 103/29, Chelsea)

Rickie LAMBERT (F, Age 32, 16.02.82, 4/2, Southampton)
Jermain DEFOE (F, Age 31, 07.10.82, 55/19, Toronto, Can)

MISSING OUT

Arsenal winger **Theo Walcott** and Southampton striker **Jay Rodriguez** have both been ruled out with cruciate knee ligament injuries. Another winger, **Andros Townsend** has had an operation on ankle ligaments, while his Tottenham team-mate **Kyle Walker** is likely to be absent with a pelvic problem.

Plan B?

The more expansive 4-3-3 formation is likely to be introduced when England are chasing goals, potentially in their final group outing against Costa Rica. This would enable the full-backs, **Glen Johnson** and **Leighton Baines**, to push down the flanks, safe in the knowledge that there is always someone to cover in behind them. This would see Rooney adopting a more central role, with Sturridge running the channels down the right.

And then, of course, there is England's more traditional "Plan B" – hitting it long to a big target man. Hodgson isn't afraid to use it, and it worked for him against Sweden in Euro 2012, but the chances of seeing it in Brazil will very much depend if Rickie Lambert or **Andy Carroll** are in the coach's final 23.



FRANCE

Anything is possible for "Les Bleus"

Play-off scare will not dampen spirit of Deschamps' side

Memories are short in football. But nowhere are they shorter than in France. After almost missing out on qualification for Brazil, now that "Les Bleus" are there – after overturning a 2-0 first-leg deficit to beat Ukraine in a play-off – the French public is happy to talk up their team's chances of reaching the Final. Daft as it sounds, though, with France anything is possible.

It's in France's footballing DNA to always expect the unexpected. They have always been

It will be another national scandal if France fail to get to the knockout stage

technically strong, yet their World Cup performances have yo-yoed from the sublime to the ridiculous. You only have to look at the previous two competitions to spot the madness.

In 2006 they made it to the Final only to lose on penalties to Italy in Berlin. And the team's fine performance on the day was all but forgotten in the aftermath of the Zinedine Zidane head-butt incident.

Four years later they went home early with their tails between their legs after finishing bottom of Group A without a win and scoring only one goal. And the infamous player revolt in Knysna, where the squad refused to train after

Nicolas Anelka had been sent home after criticising coach Raymond Domenech, further tarnished France's reputation.

So which France will turn up in 2014? Who knows? But what can be said is that the squad is packed with outstanding young talent.

Hugo Lloris is a quality goalkeeper, central defender Raphael Varane is mature beyond his years and a born leader, Paul Pogba is an outstanding midfield prospect and, at 26, Karim Benzema is at the peak of his attacking powers. With a spine like that you've always got a chance. And that's without mentioning one of the best players in the world, Franck Ribery.

No team will fancy taking on the French, but do they have enough strength in depth? If a key man gets injured they may get knocked off course. Drawn in what looks like a ridiculously easy group alongside Switzerland, Ecuador and Honduras, it will be another national scandal if France fail to progress to the knockout stage.

Howard Johnson

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 19	Squad to meet up at the national football training centre in Clairefontaine
May 27	Friendly v Norway in Paris
Jun 1	Friendly v Paraguay in Nice
Jun 8	Friendly v Jamaica in Lille

BASE CAMP



GROUP B FIXTURES

Jun 15	v Honduras (Porto Alegre)
Jun 20	v Switzerland (Salvador)
Jun 25	v Ecuador (Rio de Janeiro)



The French team have chosen to base themselves in Ribeirao Preto, 190 miles north of Sao Paulo. They will stay at the Hotel JP, where local workers are being given intensive French lessons to make their guests feel at home. Their training base is 11 minutes away, at the Santa Cruz stadium, a 50,000-capacity ground that is home to Botafogo.



French fancy...Pogba is one Europe's best young talents

THE VIEW FROM FRANCE

● "The key is to go to Brazil with a competitive side. You know it's going to be difficult and you want to go a long way in the competition. You're not there to dance the samba or go sightseeing for a fortnight. You're there to win the World Cup. That's the objective and the team have to get that into their heads from the start."

Raymond Domenech, former France coach





● “I think France are in good shape. The players are aware of the qualities they have. I’m not talking about individuals, but the team as a whole. They’re a strong group, and in a big tournament that’s the most important thing.”

Claude Makelele, World Cup finalist in 2006

● “For me the mark of sporting excellence is to be able to get good results even on an off day. That’s what great teams do – and we’re not a great team yet. If we could get to the quarter-

finals and some young players really came through, then that would be a good World Cup for us.”

Bixente Lizarazu, 1998 World Cup winner



● “The draw’s been kind to us, but you still have to go out there and win. And if France qualify for the knockout phase they will be up against some big teams, so they have to be ready for that.”

Jean-Pierre Papin, scored 30 goals for “Les Bleus”

COACH PROFILE

Didier DESCHAMPS

Age 45 (15.10.68)
France coach since July 2012

How he got the job

Was unhappy as coach of Marseille following differences with sporting director Jose Anigo when the call came to replace Laurent Blanc after a disappointing Euro 2012 campaign.



Past successes as a coach

Took Monaco to the Champions League Final in 2004, led Juventus to the Serie B title in 2007 after a financial scandal saw them demoted, and won the French league with Marseille in 2010.

Past failures as a coach

None on a sporting level, but fractious personal relationships at Juventus and Marseille led to a parting of the ways.

Achievements as a player

Captained the national side to World Cup glory on home soil in 1998 before going on to win Euro 2000.

World Cup experience

For a player with 103 caps, he only appeared in the 1998 finals after France failed to qualify in both 1990 and 1994. This is his first World Cup as a coach.

Relationship with the media

Spikey. He’s not slow in putting a journalist down with a withering comment if he feels the need and often refuses to discuss subjects relating to player selection.

Relationship with the public

Lifted the World Cup in front of an adoring French public, so he’s got plenty of credit in the bank.

Style of management/coaching

A big fan of the collective, not afraid to ruffle individual feathers and make big decisions if he has to.

Notable backroom staff

His assistant, Guy Stephan, was number two to former France boss Domenech and also coached Senegal before joining Deschamps at Marseille.

After the World Cup

Signed a contract extension until 2016 following qualification for Brazil.

WORLD CUP 2014 FRANCE SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



Mickael LANDREAU

Bastia
Age 35 (14.05.79)
A dependable back-up who holds the record for the most matches played in Ligue 1, having this season beaten Jean-Luc Ettori's 602 appearances.



Hugo LLORIS

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 27 (26.12.86)
A great shot-stopper with superb reflexes who doesn't have a serious rival as first choice. Holds the dubious record of being the only French international keeper to have been sent off – against Serbia in 2009.



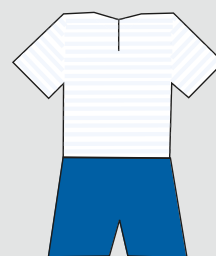
Steve MANDANDA

Marseille
Age 29 (28.03.85)
Congo-born, he tried out for Aston Villa before joining Marseille from Le Havre in 2007. Sometimes seems too nice and laid-back to be a real winner. His brother, Parfait, is Congo's national keeper.

KITS

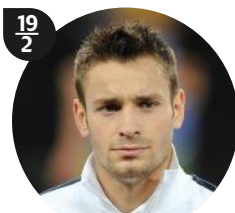


First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Mathieu DEBUCHY

Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 28 (28.07.85)
A full-back with the ability to make lung-busting touchline runs all day long, he spent 10 years with his only other club, Lille, before heading to England last year. His brother, Gregoire, is a professional in the French lower leagues.



Lucas DIGNE

Paris Saint-Germain
Age 20 (20.07.93)
Left-back whose rise has been remarkably swift, given that he only signed his first pro contract with Lille in July 2010. Moved to PSG in July 2013 on a five-year deal and has impressed enough to challenge Evra and Clichy.



Patrice EVRA

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 33 (15.05.81)
Tough, spiky left-back whose international career is threatened by the emergence of Digne. In the twilight of his career but this son of a Guinean diplomat will not be short of takers if, as seems likely, he leaves United this summer.



Laurent KOSCIELNY

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 28 (10.09.85)
Has his share of critics, but many admire his never-say-die attitude, good positional play and uncanny ability to put strikers off their game. Of Polish descent, he recently saved an accordion factory from going bankrupt in his home town of Tulle.



Eliaquim MANGALA

Porto (Por)
Age 23 (13.02.91)
A much sought-after central defender who represents France despite having grown up in Belgium. Joined Porto from Standard Liege in 2011, but looks set to step up and achieve even bigger and better things.

MIDFIELDERS



Yohan CABAYE

Paris Saint-Germain
Age 28 (14.01.86)
A hard-working yet skilful midfielder who also scores spectacular goals. Joined Newcastle United for €5m in 2011 and left for PSG for €23m in 2014. His star is clearly in the ascendant.



Clement GRENIER

Lyon
Age 23 (07.01.91)
An attacking midfielder who was called up for the first time by Deschamps last year and made his debut against Uruguay in June. A lynchpin at Lyon, he's already made over 100 appearances for the club.



Blaise MATUIDI

Paris Saint-Germain
Age 27 (09.04.87)
Arrived at PSG from Saint-Etienne in 2011 despite the misgivings of several board members. Has since gone on to prove his worth as a combative, box-to-box competitor with an insatiable appetite for work. Pops up with vital goals as well.



Rio MAVUBA

Lille
Age 30 (08.03.84)
Recognised as one of French football's nice guys, he was born on a boat to a mother fleeing civil war in Angola. Combative and consistent, his tough start in life makes him a competitor on the pitch and a gentleman off it.



Dimitri PAYET

Marseille
Age 27 (29.03.87)
A talented and creative player born on the island of Reunion, who has played for four big French clubs: Nantes, Saint-Etienne, Lille and now Marseille. Deschamps says he has it in him to be a match winner, but he hasn't proved it yet.

FORWARDS



Karim BENZEMA

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 26 (19.12.87)
France's main striker, he is strong, clever in the danger area, with a cold-blooded finishing instinct. Left out of the World Cup squad four years ago, he suffered a dry spell of 16 months before scoring against Australia in October 2013.



Olivier GIROUD

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 27 (30.09.86)
A willing workhorse who does the dirty stuff in uncomplicated fashion, often operating as a solitary striker for his club. Has reportedly been ordered to get a move back to France by his wife after rumours about his love life.



Antoine GRIEZMANN

Real Sociedad (Spa)
Age 23 (21.03.91)
An exciting new talent who can play in a number of different attacking positions, he made his senior debut against Holland in March. Signed by Sociedad in 2006 after being turned down by a number of French sides.



Mathieu VALBUENA

Marseille
Age 29 (28.09.84)
A right-sided attacker who makes up in heart what he lacks in stature. Has impressive ball skills and can deliver a killer cross, but probably lacks the star quality that instils real fear in the world's best defenders.

TACTICS

4-2-3-1



Winnable group may see Deschamps go for the jugular

Prior to the qualifying play-offs Deschamps favoured a **4-2-3-1** system with **Paul Pogba** and **Blaise Matuidi** providing blanket cover in front of the back four and **Olivier Giroud** or **Karim Benzema** leading the line alone. Needing an emphatic home

victory to qualify in the second leg against Ukraine, the coach went for a more adventurous 4-3-3, adding **Yohan Cabaye** for extra midfield muscle and pushing **Franck Ribery** into a more forward role alongside **Mathieu Valbuena** and Benzema. The tactic worked like a charm and the French showed themselves capable of dealing with a pressure situation, while embracing some tactical tinkering.

In a qualifying group that looks eminently winnable, Deschamps may go for the jugular from the off, potentially bringing in the adaptable **Antoine Griezmann** to offer a number of interesting attacking permutations.

France's starting XI looks solid and capable of going well. **Hugo Lloris** will let no one down between the posts, a back four of **Mathieu Debuchy**, **Raphael Varane**, **Eliaquim Mangala** and **Lucas Digne** is certainly exciting, but perhaps lacks a leader, so **Patrice Evra** may be the answer there. With Pogba and Matuidi sure to start, it looks like Deschamps will opt for Cabaye to add midfield balance, while a hard-working front three of Ribery, Griezmann and Benzema gives France the capability to snuff out opposition attacks and yet still break quickly and in numbers.

Deschamps' big problem may be the lack of real game-changing quality on the bench if his Plan A is going flat. Are **Moussa Sissoko**, **Dmitri Payet** or Valbuena going to unduly worry opponents? With the possible exception of **Loic Remy**, France look a little undercooked where fringe players are concerned. And what if Benzema gets injured?

Plan B?

The option if France find themselves chasing the game in Brazil would be to move to a traditional **4-4-2** system with two out-and-out strikers. Deschamps has been reluctant to take this step to date, but the idea of Benzema being partnered by Giroud or possibly Remy at the expense of a central midfield player is one that could appeal if Les Bleus need a goal quickly.

4-4-2



39
0



Bacary SAGNA

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 31 (14.02.83)
Will battle it out with Debuchy for a starting berth at right-back. Earned his move to the Gunners after playing every league game of the 2006-07 season for Auxerre. After seven years with Arsenal his contract expires this summer.

16
2



Mamadou SAKHO

Liverpool (Eng)
Age 24 (13.02.90)
A strong, powerful and athletic centre-back who has had a number of career ups and downs. Came back into the France team for the second leg World Cup play-off game against Ukraine and scored two goals.

5
0



Raphael VARANE

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 21 (25.04.93)
Outstanding prospect who joined Real Madrid from Lens in 2011 and is now established as a centre-half who is mature beyond his years. Signed his six-year contract with Real Madrid while still waiting for his A-level results.

8
1



Paul POGBA

Juventus (Ita)
Age 21 (15.03.93)
At 6ft 3in he offers real physical presence together with admirable close-ball skills. Turned his back on Manchester United after two years in England to join Juve. Captain of the Under-20 World Cup-winning side last year.

81
16



Franck RIBERY

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 31 (07.04.83)
Quick feet are matched by a fine footballing brain and a desire for work that is more German than French. A prostitution scandal in 2009 didn't affect his form or popularity and he remains the heartbeat of any side he plays in.

14
0



Moussa SISSOKO

Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 24 (16.08.89)
An athletic powerhouse who has the ability to do great things but sometimes lacks finesse. Isn't consistent enough to be sure of a place in Deschamps' starting line-up, but is a useful sub to have around for a sudden injection of energy.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Eric ABIDAL (D, Age 34, 11.09.79, 67/0, Monaco)

Gael CLICHY (D, Age 28, 26.07.85, 20/0, Manchester City, Eng)

Rod FANNI (D, Age 32, 06.12.81, 5/0, Marseille)

Charles KONDOGBIA (M, Age 21, 15.02.93, 1/0, Monaco)

Jeremy MENEZ (M, Age 27, 07.05.87, 24/2, Paris Saint-Germain)

Samir NASRI (M, Age 26, 26.06.87, 41/5, Manchester City, Eng)

Andre-Pierre GIGNAC (F, Age 28, 05.12.85, 17/4, Marseille)

Bafe GOMIS (F, Age 28, 06.08.85, 12/3, Lyon)

Loic REMY (F, Age 27, 02.01.87, 22/4, Queens Park Rangers, Eng)

MISSING OUT

Midfielder **Yann M'Vila** was banned until June 2014 by his own federation after visiting a Paris nightclub while on duty with the French Under-21 team back in October of 2012. Technically, he is available again after the ban was reduced on appeal, but it's hard to see the 23-year-old making the squad.



GERMANY

Low's side are a class act

This squad is the nation's most talented for many years

Ready Like Never Before". The slogan dreamt up by the ad men for the German World Cup 2014 marketing campaign should resonate across the nation.

In a survey conducted by the country's leading sports magazine, *Kicker*, 86 per cent of respondents were confident of Joachim Low's team making at least the semi-finals, and there are all manner of pegs on which to hang such optimism – not least the DFB's attention to tournament detail, even to the point of building their own training camp in Brazil. Then there is the national side's excellent recent record in international competitions: semi-finalists in the 2006 and 2010 World Cups, plus silver medallists at Euro 2008.

A progressive thinker, motivator and tactician, Low is one of the most accomplished coaches in Europe and, in terms of individual class, Germany are seriously overmanned. Not only can they boast the brilliance of full-back or midfielder Philipp Lahm, engine-room regulator supreme Bastian Schweinsteiger and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, but they also have a clutch of young-gun creators and sharpshooters – notably Thomas Müller, Mario Götze, Toni Kroos, Marco Reus, André Schürrle and Mesut Özil.

It's no act of blind faith to depict the "Class of 2014" as the most talented group to represent the country since Beckenbauer, Müller, Maier, Breitner and Overath ruled the roost at the 1974 World Cup finals. But as Low knows only too well, there are still some areas that need his attention.

From time to time – and perfectly illustrated in the qualifying campaign by the 4-4 draw at home to Sweden and the 5-3 away win against the same opposition – Germany's back line can be a concentration free-zone. Added to that, their set-piece work is hit or miss, number one striker Miroslav Klose is creaking somewhat at the grand old age of 36, and far too many key players are either out of form, short of match practice or injured.

Playmaker Özil has been on the sidelines recently with a hamstring complaint, centre-back Mats Hummels has struggled with a foot injury, Schweinsteiger was out for three months after ankle surgery and midfielder Sami Khedira faces a race to be fit after damaging knee ligaments.

In Brazil's taxing climatic conditions, Low will need everyone to be fit, firing and focused. Certain German pundits never tire of describing Low and company as big-game chokers. A touch more defensive steel and the naysayers could be running for the hills.

Nick Bidwell

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 13	Friendly v Poland in Hamburg
May 21-31	Training camp in South Tyrol, Austria
Jun 1	Friendly v Cameroon in Monchengladbach
Jun 6	Friendly v Armenia in Mainz
Jun 7	Fly to Brazil



Captain brilliance...Lahm (right) in action against Chile

BASE CAMP



GROUP G FIXTURES

Jun 16	v Portugal (Salvador)
Jun 21	v Ghana (Fortaleza)
Jun 26	v USA (Recife)



The Germans are leaving very little to chance for their World Cup campaign. They will be staying at a multi-million pound, custom-built complex, 19 miles north of Porto Seguro, christened "Campo Bahia". Commissioned by the German DFB, it will become a sports and nature resort, including a youth academy, once the World Cup is finished.

THE VIEW FROM GERMANY

● "We have the quality to win our first world title in 24 years. We certainly have the strength in depth. 'Jogi' Low has 30 to 35 top-class players and has two or three good alternatives for every position. There's a good atmosphere in the camp, everyone involved communicates well and there's no rivalries between the Bayern and Dortmund players. We've nearly all the ingredients one needs to go all the way. The only thing we lack is the nasty characters."

Lothar Matthäus, captained Germany to 1990 World Cup success



● "Germany will be world champions. There's no better team than us. Spain are not as strong as they were in 2008 and 2010. The only side



who could pose problems to us are Brazil, who are used to the climate and conditions and performing under pressure. We've some injury concerns at the moment, but it's always been like that in the run-up to a big tournament. But we have the pool of players to cope. In fact, we've never had a wider choice than now."

Jürgen Kohler, a member of Germany's 1990 World Cup-winning team

● "You don't have to be an expert to place Germany alongside Brazil and Spain as the favourites. The champions will come from this trio, with Argentina as more of an outside bet. Personally, I'd say Germany and Spain were stronger than Brazil, but home advantage will count for a lot. I think we have every right to consider ourselves in with a great chance. At the

end of the day, the smallest of details will decide the eventual winner."

Rudi Voller, a winner in 1990 and coached the national team to second place in 2002

● "We've our best squad ever, we've an outstanding coach and some super individual players. Our team is in a great position to take the title. We've played some extraordinary football under Low, but now is the time for the next step. Without doubt, Mesut Özil has all the potential to play a vital role in Brazil. He's not a dominant personality, and the role of leader is not part of his character, but with his huge talent he still has much to offer the team creatively."

Gunter Netzer, German footballer of the Year in 1972 and 1973



COACH PROFILE

Joachim LOW

Age 54 (03.02.60)
Germany coach since July 2006

How he got the job

After two years as Jürgen Klinsmann's assistant he was promoted to the hot seat when his boss walked away at the end of the 2006 World Cup.



Past successes as a coach

Countless near-misses with Germany: silver at Euro 2008 and third place at the 2006 and 2010 World Cups. Led Stuttgart to the German Cup in 1997 and the Final of the Cup-winners Cup.

Past failures as a coach

Germany's 2-1 loss to Italy in the Euro 2012 semi-final was supposed to be the game his side could not lose.

Achievements as a player

Won four caps as a striker for West Germany under-21s.

World Cup experience

Lauded for his strategic sense of adventure at the last two tournaments.

Relationship with the media

Increasingly strained. Critics point to tactical and selection failures in the Euro 2012 semi-final and the defensive shambles in a 4-4 draw with Sweden in the World Cup 2014 qualifiers.

Relationship with the public

Some 52 per cent of respondents in a recent poll rated his work as either good or very good – only a fifth felt he would have to go if Germany did not make the quarter-finals.

Style of management/coaching

Relaxed, cerebral and inclusive, with emphasis on the collective and the psychological. Highly principled, he would not dream of playing ugly, though he can be ruthless if required.

Notable backroom staff

Goalkeeping coach, Andy Kopke, team manager Oliver Bierhoff and assistant coach Hansi Flick, who will become DFB technical director in September.

After the World Cup

Has a contract until 2016 but may go if Germany fail to triumph.

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



Manuel NEUER

Bayern Munich
Age 28 (27.03.86)
First choice for the past four years, he has built his world-class reputation with his sharp reflexes, superior concentration, distribution and restrained reliability. Unusual in preferring not to have a man on the far post at corners.



Roman WEIDENFELLER

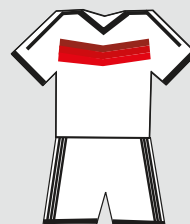
Borussia Dortmund
Age 33 (06.08.80)
Classic late developer who, in winning his first cap against England in November, became Germany's oldest goalkeeping debutant. His big-match experience with Dortmund makes him the ideal number two to Neuer.



Ron-Robert ZIELER

Hanover
Age 25 (12.02.89)
Ex-Manchester United youth-teamer who reads the game well and comes off his line with purpose. Dismissed against Argentina two years ago, he is the only German international keeper to be sent off.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Jerome BOATENG

Bayern Munich
Age 37 (03.09.88)
Berlin-born son of Ghanaian father and German mother who played in both full-back positions but now is an automatic choice in central defence. The half-brother of Schalke and Ghana attacking midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng.



Kevin GROSSKREUTZ

Borussia Dortmund
Age 25 (19.07.88)
Recalled this spring after a two-year absence, he made a name for himself as a rampaging left-sided midfielder, but this season has impressed at right-back for Dortmund, the team he supported as a boy.



Benedikt HOWEDES

Schalke
Age 26 (29.02.88)
Despite some muscular problems this season, the Schalke captain remains a valuable squad man. Solid in the air, he provides back-up at right-back and in central defence. The public face of a cancer awareness campaign.



Mats HUMMELS

Borussia Dortmund
Age 25 (16.12.88)
Smart and stylish centre-back who has not quite hit the same heights with the national team as with Dortmund. May have to make do with a second-string role in Brazil. Tends to speak his mind, which has not endeared him to Low.



Marcell JANSEN

Hamburg
Age 28 (04.11.85)
In Germany's squad for the 2006 and 2010 finals, he can play anywhere on the left flank but will probably be used in Brazil as Schmelzer's deputy. Rumoured to be on his way out of Hamburg, his club for the past six years.

MIDFIELDERS



Lars BENDER

Bayer Leverkusen
Age 25 (27.04.89)
The twin-brother of Dortmund "water carrier" Sven, the hard-working and tactically astute Leverkusener is likely to be on understudy watch in Brazil, waiting in the wings for the chance to shine in defensive midfield or right-back.



Mario GOTZE

Bayern Munich
Age 22 (03.06.92)
The twinkle-toed starlet is a danger anywhere in the attacking third, but because of the competition for places he is yet to cement a permanent spot in the starting line-up. Elder brother Fabian plays for third division Unterhaching.



Sami KHEDIRA

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 27 (04.04.87)
The ex-Stuttgart midfield dynamo has been making a remarkable recovery after tearing cruciate ligaments in November – and such is his influence in the side that Low is determined to give him every chance of proving his fitness.



Toni KROOS

Bayern Munich
Age 24 (04.01.90)
Has vision, technique, industry and intelligence – which means he can operate in a deep-lying role, further forward or in wide positions. His father Roland is a youth-team coach at Hansa Rostock and brother Felix plays for Werder Bremen.



Mesut OZIL

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 25 (15.10.88)
His first season at Arsenal has had its highs and lows, and there is much debate in Germany about the playmaker's effectiveness on the big occasion. But no one in Low's side has more imagination and plays a better final ball.

FORWARDS



Mario GOMEZ

Florentina (Ita)
Age 28 (10.07.85)
Powerful front man criticised by some for clumsiness and a lack of mobility, but he is a proven scorer for club and country, and has lots of big tournament experience – at the 2008 and 2012 Euros, and the 2010 World Cup.



Miroslav KLOSE

Lazio (Ita)
Age 36 (09.06.78)
With 14 goals in three finals tournaments he is just one short of Ronaldo's World Cup record. The Polish-born striker shuns the limelight. He has struggled with injuries this season and is out of contract with Lazio in June.



Thomas MULLER

Bayern Munich
Age 24 (13.09.89)
While usually lining up on the right wing, he can take on any type of attacking role, including that of the "false nine". An all-action player who makes and takes chances, will run all day, puts in a defensive shift and has a flair for finding space.



Marco REUS

Borussia Dortmund
Age 25 (31.05.89)
By his own high standards, the left-winger has not had the best of seasons, but in hot, sapping conditions "Rolls Reus" could make the difference with his powers of acceleration, dribbling and changes of direction.

TACTICS

4-2-3-1



Low's 2014 vintage are more attack-minded than their predecessors

Low first went with a **4-2-3-1** system in the Euro 2008 quarter-final win over Portugal and ever since it has been his gold standard – a model based on a collective pressing game, care in possession, quick-fire passing and blink-of-an-eye changes of

tempo, particularly when breaking forward from entrenchments deep in their own half.

Compared to West Germany sides of the 1980s, the current team is much more inclined to the spectacular and adventurous, always ready to chance its arm, even at the risk of leaving the back door ajar.

There are, however, weaknesses. The lone striker can be easily crowded out, and if the wide attacking midfielders, normally **Marco Reus** and **Thomas Muller**, fail to track back, disaster awaits. Against weaker sides, six defensively minded players – four defenders plus midfielders **Bastian Schweinsteiger** and **Toni Kroos** – is a clear case of overmanning and unnecessarily relinquishing the initiative. So in an attempt to give the system more verve and flexibility, Low has regularly – eight times in the last two seasons – opted to forego the traditional centre-forward in favour of a fashionable “false nine”.

He has any number of individuals to play the hybrid role: **Mario Gotze**, Reus, Muller or **Andre Schurrle**. The line leader in this instance might not be a dead-eye goalpoacher or aerially powerful target man, such as **Miroslav Klose**, but the rationale is for the constantly interchanging front four to sweep the confused and disorientated opposition defence off their feet.

The form of **Mesut Ozil** has dipped during his first season at Arsenal, prompting much debate in Germany about his usefulness, but Low is still likely to start him as playmaker.

Philipp Lahm has proved a revelation in the defensive midfield role for Guardiola's Bayern Munich this season but is likely to start in the more familiar role at right-back.

Plan B?

Low's Plan B is a **4-1-4-1** formation, which will probably be unleashed when Germany are chasing the game or playing the flat-track bully. It's a template with twin playmakers – perm any two from Ozil, Kroos and Gotze – while the anchor man will either be Schweinsteiger, **Sami Khedira** (if fit) or Lahm, with **Kevin Grosskreutz** coming in at right-back.

4-1-4-1



105
5



Philipp LAHM

Bayern Munich
Age 30 (11.11.83)
Germany's skipper might have the look of a choirboy, but he has the inner steel of a natural “*spielführer*”. After many seasons as a top-notch full-back he was switched to a central midfield role this season by Bayern coach Pep Guardiola.

96
4



Per MERTESECKER

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 29 (29.09.84)
Although lacking in pace and mobility, the beanpole stopper more than compensates with his nose for danger, crisp challenges, strength in the air and consistency. Runs a foundation for disadvantaged children in his hometown of Hanover.

16
0



Marcel SCHMELZER

Borussia Dortmund
Age 26 (22.01.88)
Busy, gritty and turbo-charged Dortmund undoubted who is the best of the options at left-back, though sometimes guilty of allowing his attacking gusto to cloud his defensive judgement. A left-winger at first club Magdeburg.

112
46



Lukas PODOLSKI

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 29 (04.06.85)
The goal-hungry left-sided midfielder has started only occasionally for Germany since Euro 2012, but retains his place in the squad thanks to his powerful shooting, positive attitude and vast international experience.

31
11



Andre SCHURRLE

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 23 (06.11.90)
Comfortable on either flank or as a second striker, this most unassuming of internationals could well be Low's favourite impact substitute this summer and might even push Reus for a starting spot on the left-wing.

101
23



Bastian SCHWEINSTEIGER

Bayern Munich
Age 29 (01.08.84)
Provided he can steer clear of injury, the canny central midfielder and national team vice-captain is the man who effectively holds the side together, setting the creative tempo with his laser-like passing. His other passion is basketball.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Rene ADLER (G, Age, 29, 01.01.85, 12/0, Hamburg)
Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (G, Age 21, 30.04.92, 3/0, Borussia M'gladbach)
Matthias GINTER (D, Age 20, 19.01.94, 1/0, Freiburg)
Shrokan MUSTAFI (D, Age 22, 17.04.92, 0/0, Sampdoria, Ita)
Heiko WESTERMANN (D, Age 30, 14.08.83, 27/4, Hamburg)
Sven BENDER (M, Age 25, 27.04.89, 7/0, Borussia Dortmund)
Julian DRAXLER (M, Age 20, 20.09.93, 10/1, Schalke)

Andre HAHN (F, Age 23, 13.08.90, 0/0, Augsburg)
Max KRUSE (F, Age 26, 19.03.88, 6/1, Borussia Monchengladbach)
Pierre-Michel LASOGGA (F, Age 22, 15.12.91, 0/0, Hamburg)
Sidney SAM (F, Age 26, 31.01.88, 5/0, Bayer Leverkusen)

MISSING OUT

Dortmund midfielder **Ilkay Gundogan** is battling injury and unlikely to be fit in time. Leverkusen striker **Stefan Kiessling** tore a hamstring at the end of April.



GHANA

Bold “Black Stars” fancy their chances

Tough group holds no fear for Appiah's side

Ghana's “Black Stars” do not lack in self-confidence but maybe need a little realism as they set their sights on becoming the first African side to make the semi-finals at the World Cup.

The bold assertion of coach Kwesi Appiah seems to disregard the small matter of getting through arguably the toughest of the opening round groups in Brazil, in which they take on Germany, Portugal and the USA. But if self-belief proves a key factor then Ghana

The bitter manner of their defeat at the hands of Uruguay still rankles

might well find themselves getting through to the knockout phase – and off on their mission to better the quarter-final finish they achieved in South Africa four years ago.

The bitter manner of their defeat at the hands of Uruguay – and Luis Suarez's handball in particular – in the last eight in Johannesburg still rankles but is also a massive motivation.

Most of the key players from that encounter are back again in a bid to rewrite what they feel was a massive wrong.

Striker Asamoah Gyan – whose missed penalty cost Ghana a place in the last four – leads that list, and there is an added bonus with

Michael Essien back in the squad after missing out on South Africa 2010 through injury and then going on a prolonged exile from the team.

However, the difficult nature of Group G, featuring the world's second and third-ranked teams and Ghana's recent form, suggest that justice is unlikely to be extracted.

The “Black Stars” have competed at two African Nations Cup tournaments since the last World Cup and have come short in both, proving they are among Africa's better teams but still not capable of dominating in a way their talent suggests they should.

In both the 2012 and 2013 National Cup finals they finished fourth, losing semi-finals in which they were clear favourites as the rigours of tournament play and the burden of the occasion became too much.

Mark Gleeson

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 25	Training camp in Rotterdam, Hol
May 31	Friendly away to Holland in Rotterdam
Jun 2	Training camp in Los Angeles, USA
Jun 9	Friendly v South Korea in Miami, USA
Jun 10	Travel to Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP G FIXTURES

Jun 16	v USA (Natal)
Jun 21	v Germany (Fortaleza)
Jun 26	v Portugal (Brasilia)



Ghana are staying in the north east, at Maceio, the state capital of Alagoas. They will train at the city's main stadium, the Estadio Rei Pele, home to the clubs CRB and CSA, and named in honour of Pele. Maceio has a warm, tropical climate and is prone to high rainfall and humidity in July, which is similar conditions to Natal, Fortaleza and Brasilia – where Ghana will be playing their group games.



Black Star...Ghana's midfielder general, Sulley Muntari

THE VIEW FROM GHANA

● “I believe the tournament is really going to show us high-class football – and one thing also I have noticed in tournaments is that there is always a revelation.”

Tony Baifoe, former Ghana full-back



● “Against the A-class nations Ghana have struggled. The team, while solid, is one grossly lacking in an ability to win with trophies at stake.”

Colin Udoh, TV analyst





COACH PROFILE

Kwesi APPIAH

Age 53 (30.06.60)
Ghana coach since March 2012



How he got the job

Promoted from his position as assistant after Serbian coach Goran Stepanovic was fired. He had already served as caretaker for several games after the 2010 World Cup.

Past successes as a coach

Fourth place in the 2013 African Nations Cup and a thumping of Egypt in the World Cup qualifiers.

Past failures as a coach

Beaten by outsiders Burkina Faso in the 2013 Nations Cup semi-finals.

Achievements as a player

Played at the 1992 African Nations Cup, where Ghana were runners-up. He also won several domestic titles with Asante Kotoko.

World Cup experience

Assistant to coach Milovan Rajevac when Ghana reached the quarter-finals in 2010.

Relationship with the media

Patient but is frequently exasperated by a poor, and often personal, line of questioning at press conferences.

Relationship with the public

As a local coach in charge of a national side he has been largely hailed across Ghana, although there are many who believe an outsider is best suited.

Style of management/coaching

Cajoling and encouraging, perhaps missing a little fervour as he navigates through several prickly egos.

Notable back room staff

Maxwell Konadu, a former Ghana international striker.

After the World Cup

Depends entirely on a satisfactory return from Brazil.

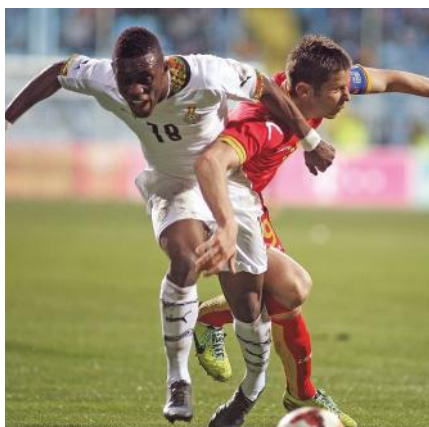
● "We have been there twice and on both occasions we made progress. In 2010, most people thought we couldn't make it out of the group stages but we made it through to the quarter-finals."

John Mensah, former centre-back



● "Portugal against Germany is a potential World Cup Final on its own – and to find Ghana alongside them in the group clearly tells you that we have an uphill task ahead of us."

Isaac Vorsah, centre-back who played for Ghana at the 2010 World Cup



Goal threat...striker Abdul Majeed Waris

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)
 12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



0
0

Stephen ADAMS

Aduana Stars
Age 24 (28.09.89)
 A recent call-up as Appiah seeks options in the weakest department in his squad. Played at January's African Nations Championship for home-based players and won two man-of-the-match awards as Ghana reached the Final.



16
0

Fatau DAUDA

Orlando Pirates (SAf)
Age 29 (06.04.85)
 First choice for the qualifiers but has since been warned he needs more first-team action for his South African club side. Just a handful of league games this season means he is in danger of sitting on the bench in Brazil.

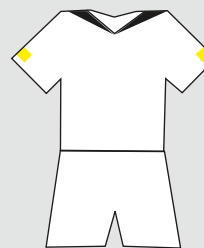


20
0

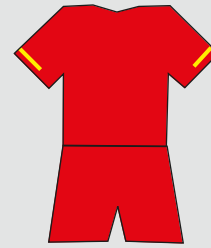
Adam KWARASEY

Stromsgodset (Nor)
Age 26 (12.12.87)
 Born in Norway with a Ghanaian father, he is a Norway under-21 international who switched allegiance to Ghana three years ago. Won the Norwegian league last year and was named the competition's top goalkeeper.

KIT



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



9
0

David ADDY

Vitoria Guimaraes (Por)
Age 24 (21.02.90)
 Left-back who made his international debut at the age of 18. Moved to Porto in 2010 but soon went out on loan, before moving to Guimaraes in 2012. An Under-20 World Cup winner with Ghana in 2009.



39
0

Harrison AFFUL

Esperance (Tun)
Age 27 (24.06.86)
 Adept at full-back on either flank, he missed out on the last World Cup finals despite having played regularly in the qualifiers. Scored the goal that ensured an African Champions League triumph for his Tunisian club in 2011.



8
1

Jerry AKAMINKO

Eskisehirspor (Tur)
Age 25 (02.05.88)
 Part of the squad at last year's African Nations Cup but not yet able to establish himself as a first-choice at centre-back. Played for Heart of Lions in Ghana, where he was named Defender of the Year.



29
3

John BOYE

Rennes (Fra)
Age 27 (23.04.87)
 Injury and a loss of form have restricted his appearances in Ligue 1 this season but he is Ghana's key defender. Can also be used at right-back and broke into the team after an injury crisis at the 2012 African Nations Cup.



44
1

Samuel INKOOM

Platanias (Gre)
Age 25 (01.06.89)
 An Under-20 World Cup winner, he starred for the senior team at the 2010 African Nations Cup with his attacking wide play. Moved to Swiss side Basle but his career has waned since at clubs in Ukraine, France and now Greece.

MIDFIELDERS



13
1

Albert ADOMAH

Middlesbrough (Eng)
Age 26 (13.12.87)
 London-born midfielder who was playing part-time while studying industrial painting some six years ago, coming through the league ranks with Barnet and Bristol City. Made his international debut against Brazil in 2011.



47
7

Emmanuel AGYEMANG-BADU

Udinese (Ita)
Age 23 (02.12.90)
 He has been in Italy since the age of 19 at Udinese but has only been a regular for the last two seasons. Scored the deciding kick in the penalty shoot-out that saw Ghana beat Brazil in the 2009 Under-20 World Cup Final.



59
4

Kwadwo ASAMOAH

Juventus (Ita)
Age 25 (09.12.88)
 Began his career as a playmaker but is now a key figure down the left flank. Named Ghana's Player of the Year for the last two years, he has just won a second scudetto with Juventus, who co-own his contract with Udinese.



21
4

Christian ATSU

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 22 (10.01.92)
 Tricky left-winger who Chelsea bought from Porto on a five-year contract at the start of the season and then parked in the Dutch league with Vitesse for the season. Had his football education at the Feyenoord academy in Ghana.



45
5

Andre AYEWE

Marseille (Fra)
Age 24 (17.12.89)
 Eldest son of Abedi Pele, who won three African Footballer of the Year titles, he has emerged as a real talent in his own right. Back in the "Black Stars" ranks after a year's self-imposed exile caused by a spat with the coach.

FORWARDS



20
4

Dominic ADIYIAH

unattached
Age 24 (29.11.89)
 His career has not taken off as predicted after a move to Milan in 2009. His most recent club side, Arsenal Kiev, went bankrupt this season and he has been anxiously trying to find a new club deal in the run-up to Brazil.



12
2

Jordan AYEWE

Marseille (Fra)
Age 22 (11.09.91)
 Born in France, where his father Abedi Pele played for Marseille, he has been on loan at Sochaux since January. Disciplinary problems have restricted his appearances, leading to his exclusion from the 2013 Nations Cup squad.



11
2

Kevin-Prince BOATENG

Schalke (Ger)
Age 27 (06.03.87)
 German-born to a Ghanaian father, he played against his German half-brother in the last World Cup. Retired from international football shortly afterwards but made himself available again last year.



77
38

Asamoah GYAN

Al Ain (UAE)
Age 28 (22.11.85)
 Ghana's record goalscorer who missed a crucial penalty against Uruguay at the 2010 World Cup denying Ghana an historic place in the semi-finals. Quit the national side for a while but is now back leading the line as captain.



8
3

Abdul Majeed WARIS

Spartak Moscow (Rus)
Age 22 (19.09.91)
 English-educated after starting his career as a 12-year-old at an academy in Ghana with strong links to Manchester United. Moved to Sweden, then Spartak Moscow and has been on loan at Ligue 1 club Valenciennes since January.

TACTICS



Appiah will be relying on the drive and experience of Essien to set the tone

The highlight of Ghana's qualifying campaign had **Michael Essien** at the heart of it – somewhat ironic given both a lack of game time at club level over the last years and his long absence from the national side. His storming box-to-box runs through the

midfield proved the pivot around which the "Black Stars" constructed one of the most famous qualifying wins of all time on the African continent: a 6-1 mauling of multiple African champions Egypt in Kumasi that set them on their way to Brazil.

Essien's incisiveness through the middle, with **Sulley Muntari** alongside and **Kwadwo Asamoah** out wide on the left, saw Ghana rampant in a performance that offered them plenty of confidence going to the World Cup – even with a difficult draw.

Just like his predecessor Milovan Rajevac, coach Akwasi Appiah favours a **4-2-3-1** formation, utilising the pace and strength of **Asamoah Gyan** up front. His support will come from the recently returned **Kevin-Prince Boateng** or the promising **Abdul Majeed Waris**.

Out wide, the likes of **Mubarak Wakaso** and **Andre Ayew** also offer good options, while the full-backs, **Daniel Opere** and **David Addy**, sit relatively high, even if their cover can be a little sloppy at times.

Like all their African contemporaries heading to Brazil, Ghana's weakest area is defence and there is a potential crisis in the goalkeeping department, with **Fatau Dauda** struggling for form and game-time. Too many heavy first-touches and poor decision-making in recent friendlies is another area which Appiah will look to work on in the build-up to Brazil.

But on the front foot, Ghana will prove capable of pushing the ball around, holding possession and testing the most solid of defences with their pace and incisive passing.

Plan B?

If they are forced to chase a game, Ghana tend to push their wide-men further forward, albeit at the expense of their defensive duties. The emergence of Waris also gives Appiah the chance to switch to **4-4-2**, with the Spartak Moscow man operating as a genuine support striker alongside Gyan.



Jonathan MENSAH

Evian (Fra)
Age 23 (13.07.90)

Tough-tackling centre-back who played three matches at the last World Cup finals while still a teenager. He signed for Udinese in 2009, who then loaned him to Granada in Spain, before he moved on to Ligue 1.



Daniel OPARE

Standard Liege (Bel)
Age 23 (18.10.90)

Signed by Real Madrid after the 2007 Under-17 World Cup but he did not make the grade and moved to Belgium. Made his international debut against England in 2011, having been fast-tracked from junior level.



Michael ESSIEN

Milan (Ita)
Age 31 (03.12.82)

Highly influential midfielder who returned last September after a two-year international exile. Despite a lack of game time at club level, he played a significant role in the thrashing of Egypt in the qualifying play-off.



Sulley MUNTARI

Milan (Ita)
Age 29 (27.08.84)

Made his international debut at the age of 17 and has played at the last two World Cups. His club honours include two Serie A championship wins, although his time in Italy has also been blighted by disciplinary lapses.



Mubarak WAKASO

Rubin Kazan (Rus)
Age 23 (25.07.90)

A graduate of the Ghana under-17 side, he came into his own for the senior side at last year's African Nations Cup finals. Moved to Spanish side Espanyol in 2008 before moving on to Russia last summer.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Daniel AGYEI (G, Age 24, 10.11.89, 5/0, Free State Stars, SAf)

Rashid SUMAILA (D, Age 21, 18.12.92, 4/0, Mamelodi Sundowns, SAf)

Yussif CHIBSAH (M, Age 30 30.12.83, 13/1, Djurgarden, Swe)

Isaac COFIE (M, Age 23, 05.04.91, 1/0, Genoa, Ita)

Richmond BOAKYE (F, Age 21, 28.01.93, 7/2, Juventus, Ita)

Mahatma OTOO (F, Age 22, 06.02.92, 3/0, Sogndal, Nor)

Prince TAGOE (F, Age 27, 09.11.86, 36/7, Kelantan, Mly)



GREECE

Maturity and optimism

Greeks look to improve on their poor finals record

Winless and goalless in 1994, and with only one victory in 2010, playing in the World Cup finals has given Greece fans little to get excited about. But Fernando Santos' side head for Brazil boasting more maturity and with signs of optimism that they will be able to get beyond the group stage.

The key to success this summer will be carrying on the momentum they achieved in the qualifying phase.

A lethargic performance and a 2-0 loss at home to South Korea, in a friendly in March, certainly had coach Santos worried, even though he was trying out some new players in an experimental line-up. And an injury to his key player in the qualification, Fulham striker Kostas Mitroglou, doesn't exactly help matters. But despite these problems, the belief is that Greece have a chance of advancing from a group containing Colombia, Ivory Coast and Japan.

The opening match, against Colombia in Belo Horizonte, should be the key to what to expect the rest of the way.

"It is a very open group," says Santos. "It is a perfectly balanced group where anything can happen. You might say that Colombia has a 55 per cent slight edge over the rest, with the other teams at 45 per cent – but what is important now is to analyse and study as best we can our opponents, to be ready in Brazil and give 100 per cent of our strength."

Team captain Giorgos Karagounis is equally upbeat, adding: "The players will be ready,

focused and determined when the time comes to play in the World Cup.

"For this, there will be no doubt. We will have all the elements needed to represent Greece as befits the modern history of the Greek team. We want to advance to the next stage of the tournament for the first time in our history and we will try to achieve our goal with all our might."

Greece continue to be a team that does not concede goals easily – a habit left over from German coach Otto Rehhagel's reign – while Santos has installed a more attacking edge which has taken some of the pressure off his often hard-pressed defenders.

It's 10 years since Greece pulled off a major upset by winning Euro 2004, but they have now achieved a regular top-15 FIFA world ranking.

"Our obligation is to dedicate ourselves 100 per cent and stick to the fundamentals of our team," states the upbeat Santos. "To have passion, organisation, a clear mind and always play to win."

Lou Economopoulos

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 1-30	Training camp in Athens
May 31	Friendly away to Portugal
Jun 3	Friendly v Nigeria in Pennsylvania, USA
Jun 6	Friendly v Bolivia in Harrison, USA
Jun 7	Travel to base in Aracaju

BASE CAMP



GROUP C FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Colombia (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 19	v Japan (Natal)
Jun 24	v Ivory Coast (Fortaleza)



Greece will be staying at the Radisson Hotel in Aracaju – capital of Brazil's smallest state, Sergipe. Their training ground is at the Estadio Estadual Lourival Baptista – commonly known as the "Batistao" – which is home to the city's four main football clubs: Associacao Desportiva Confianca, Cotinguiba, Club Sportivo Sergipe and Vasco Esporte Clube.



On their way...Karagounis (no10) leads Greek celebrations

THE VIEW FROM GREECE

● "We are proud of a national team which demonstrates that Greek football maintains consistent growth in international competition. I'm sure our players will do their utmost to distinguish themselves in in Brazil and that the FA will be there to form the most ideal preparation. Our team has done its duty in qualifying for the finals and now the aim, is to qualify for the next round."

Giorgos Sarris, president of the Greek FA

● "We will play in the group stage against three different styles of football from three



different schools. We have much work ahead of us to the final phase of the World Cup, but again our goal is to get the ticket for the last 16."

Takis Fyssas, team technical director

- "We always have better performances when our opponents consider us the outsiders. See what happened to the Romanians in the World Cup play-off. At the 2010 World Cup we failed to advance from a group we thought would be easy. The group for this World Cup will be wide open."



Qualifying for the last 16 is our goal, but it will not be easy."

Giorgos Mazias, writer for SportDay newspaper

- "The draws of major tournaments are divided into two categories: easy and difficult. But over the last 10 years, a third scenario has emerged: that of Greece, with coaches Rehagel and Santos creating ways towards the happy end. The players can make things difficult for opponents. The draw has not opened the road to the last 16, but it has not stopped us from dreaming."

Antonis Katsaros, sports website pamesports.gr

COACH PROFILE

Fernando SANTOS (Por)

Age 59 (10.10.54)

Greece coach since July 2010

How he got the job

Well known in Greece – having coached AEK, Panathinaikos and PAOK – he was considered the best replacement for German coach Otto Rehagel, the legendary figure who guided Greece to their shock success at Euro 2004.



Past successes as a coach

Led Porto to the Portuguese league title in 1999, and the Portuguese Cup in 2000 and 2001, and won the 2002 Greek Cup with AEK. Also took Greece to the quarter-finals of Euro 2012.

Past failures as a coach

Lasted just four games in charge of Panathinaikos in 2002 and was sacked after losing three times.

Achievements as a player

His career ended at the age of 21, in 1975, after having played for Maritimo and Estoril.

World Cup experience

None.

Relationship with the media

Exceptionally good. Hardly ever is he criticised for his actions either on or off the pitch.

Relationship with the public

Excellent. Has always said that he feels like a Greek.

Style of management/coaching

Players have said he is easy-going and a master of tactics. Can show signs of anger at times if a player makes a costly mistake, but he is very understanding of the Greek players' volatile mentality.

Notable backroom staff

Leonidas Vokolos (assistant coach) and Takis Fyssas (technical director).

After the World Cup

Will be leaving this summer when his contract expires, regardless of how the team performs in Brazil. Has said he wants to coach a club team, without mentioning which team.

WORLD CUP 2014 GREECE SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



17
0

Orestis KARNEZIS

Udinese (Ita)
Age 29 (11.07.85)
Tall, good all-rounder who has good positional sense. During qualification for Brazil he did not concede a goal in 596 minutes. Spent the season on loan to Granada in Spain but has mostly been on the bench.



15
0

Michalis SIFAKIS

Atromitos
Age 29 (09.09.84)
Used frequently during the Euro 2012 qualifiers before an injury kept him out for five months. Now back to full fitness and expected to challenge again. Won a 2009 fair-play award for his calm reaction to a pitch-invading Iraklis fan.



16
0

Alexandros TZORVAS

Apollon
Age 31 (12.08.82)
Started all three games in South Africa after keeping two clean sheets against Ukraine in the 2010 play-offs. Has good reflexes and has restored his reputation in Greece after a disappointing spell in Italy with Palermo and Genoa.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



20
1

Jose HOLEBAS

Olympiakos
Age 29 (27.06.84)
With his speed down the flanks and accurate crossing he is as important in attack as defence. Born in Bavaria to a Greek father and Uruguayan mother, he also takes good set-pieces but can be careless with some of his tackles.



28
0

Giannis MANIATIS

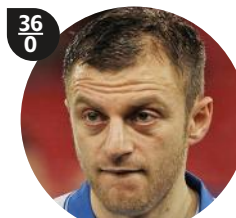
Olympiakos
Age 28 (12.10.86)
Solid performer who is strong in the tackle, has great stamina and a surprisingly good passing range. Covers team-mates well and capable of shooting from distance. Midfield enforcer for his club, he has played right-back for Greece.



6
0

Kostas MANOLAS

Olympiakos
Age 22 (14.06.91)
Quick, excellent in the air and comfortable when left one-on-one with an opponent. He is the nephew of Greece legend Stelios Manolas. One of seven players dropped from the squad on the eve of the 2010 finals.



36
0

Avraam PAPAODOPOULOS

Olympiakos
Age 29 (03.05.84)
Strong, steady Australian-born performer who often concedes free-kicks with his aggressive play. Serious knee injury during Euro 2012 put him out of action for eight months. Began his career with Aris Salonika as a forward.



46
0

Sokratis PAPAETHOPOULOS

Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 26 (09.06.88)
Strong, aggressive defender who is good in the air, marks diligently and tackles well. At 19 he was the youngest-ever captain in AEK Athens' history before moving onto Italy and then Germany. Drives a tiny FIAT car.

MIDFIELDERS



16
1

Lazaros CHRISTODOULOPOULOS

Bologna (Ita)
Age 27 (19.12.86)
Nippy and resourceful supersub who has played well in Serie A since January. Nicknamed "The Builder" as a result of him telling the media he would be better off working on a building site than playing for PAOK.



16
3

Giannis FETFATIDIS

Genoa (Ita)
Age 23 (21.12.90)
Skilful and speedy individual who can rip it up on either flank or play in the "hole". Can be frustratingly selfish, but on his day, is a genuine matchwinner. Left Olympiakos for Genoa last summer in a €4m deal.



132
10

Giorgos KARAGOUNIS

Fulham (Eng)
Age 37 (06.03.77)
Greece's most-capped player of all time, despite his age he is still relied upon to spark the team in midfield, although mostly as a substitute these days. Deadly from free-kicks and a master at keeping possession.



109
9

Kostas KATSOURANIS

PAOK
Age 34 (21.06.79)
A veteran from Euro 2004, he still warrants his place even though he is slowing down. A quarter-back in midfield and dangerous with free-kicks, he remains an excellent passer. Has 21, his preferred squad number, tattooed on his hand.



14
0

Panagiotis KONE

Bologna (Ita)
Age 26 (26.07.87)
The aggressive right-winger or attacking midfielder has scored spectacular goals in the Italian league, notably a scissor-kick volley against Napoli last season. Born in Albania but moved to Greece at the age of two.

FORWARDS



69
24

Fanis GEKAS

Konyaspor (Tur)
Age 34 (23.05.80)
Once the top scorer in Germany and Greece, he was also Europe's leading marksman in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers with 10 goals. Santos persuaded him to come out of international retirement.



29
8

Kostas MITROGLOU

Fulham (Eng)
Age 26 (12.03.88)
Bustling, German-born front man who was the hero of the play-offs. Became the most expensive Greek player of all time when he joined Fulham from Olympiakos for £12m in January but has been hampered by a persistent knee injury.



73
13

Dimitris SALPINGIDIS

PAOK
Age 32 (18.08.81)
Stocky, pacy, mobile and gritty attacker who wrings every last drop of effectiveness from the ability he has. Great on the counter-attack, he epitomises the steely, opportunistic Greece of the last decade.



71
8

Giorgos SAMARAS

Celtic (Sco)
Age 29 (21.02.85)
Multi-purpose forward who dribbles well and has a strong shot. Had an indifferent time at Manchester City but has blossomed at Celtic. The son of former international Ioannis Samaras.

TACTICS



Not pretty but effective: defence is still the key to success for Greece under Santos

For almost a decade and a half the Greek national team has been set in its ways: functional, defensively orientated, hard to beat, adept at making the most of its limited attacking opportunities and sticking to tried-and-tested personnel. Although not

particularly pretty, the system has proved to be very effective.

Santos will almost certainly keep the same successful shape that enabled Greece to qualify for the finals. His flexible **4-3-3** system can easily be adapted to that of his opponent, whether they are 4-4-1-1, 4-2-3-1 or even 4-4-2.

The first objective is to create a compact defensive unit, which is traditionally Greece's greatest strength – as seen in their successful Euro 2004 campaign. **Dimitris Siovas** and **Sokratis Papastathopoulos** will keep things tight in central defence, with **Kostas Manolas** pushing for a start. Santos likes his team to attack more than Greek national sides in the past, so **Vasilis Torosidis** and **Jose Holebas** will be expected to surge forward down the flanks.

Midfield could be a problem for Santos, with veterans **Giorgos Karagounis** and **Kostas Katsouranis** – who were part of the Euro 2004-winning squad – finding it hard to play the full 90 minutes these days, so **Alexandros Tziolis** is likely to start, along with **Giannis Maniatis**.

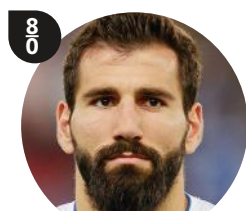
Up front, **Kostas Mitroglou** – if he is passed fit – will make all the difference, with support from **Dimitris Salpingidis** and **Giorgos Samaras**.

Plan B?

Santos sometimes finds it hard to come up with an alternative strategy, and his team can lack fluidity and control and regularly overdo the long ball.

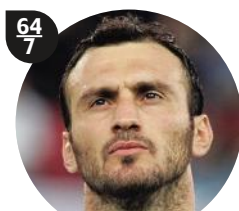
When a game begins to ebb away from Greece, Santos will turn to the skilful attacking types he does not completely trust, such as **Sotiris Ninis**, **Giannis Fetfatidis**, **Lazaros Christodoulou** and **Panagiotis Kone**.

To give the side more dynamism, a **4-2-3-1** may be used, with Olympiakos midfield holding duo of Maniatis and **Andreas Samaris** offering more "legs" than Tziolis, Karagounis or Katsouranis. Fetfatidis as a "false nine" is another option.



Dimitris SIOVAS

Olympiakos
Age 25 (16.09.88)
Hard-as-nails central defender who is quick in the air, can pass accurately and also poses a goal threat. Broke his right ankle in January but is expected to recover. Established himself in the first team during the qualifiers.



Vasilis TOROSIDIS

Roma (Ita)
Age 29 (10.06.85)
Capable of playing almost anywhere on the pitch, but used exclusively at right-back by Santos. Energetic and provides dangerous crosses from the right flank. A good header of the ball and also shoots well from distance.



Giorgos TZAVELLAS

PAOK
Age 26 (26.11.87)
Capable but temperamental reserve left-back or central defender. Prior to joining PAOK in 2013, he spent three seasons with Eintracht Frankfurt and Monaco. Famously scored from 70 metres out in a Bundesliga game.



Sotiris NINIS

Parma (Ita)
Age 24 (03.04.90)
Youngest-ever scorer for Greece at the age of 18, he has been on loan to PAOK this season but has seen limited action. Santos still respects his capabilities, which include speed, agility and remarkable ball control.



Andreas SAMARIS

Olympiakos
Age 24 (13.06.89)
Excellent young midfielder all-rounder who earned a starting position for his club this season and has also impressed Santos, who has kept a close watch on him. His father, Zois, played for lower-league Varda.



Alexandros TZIOLIS

PAOK
Age 29 (13.02.85)
Tall defensive midfielder whose main assets are his combativity and reliability. Played every minute of Greece's 2010 World Cup. Has played for clubs in Greece, Germany, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, France and is currently on loan in Turkey.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Panagiotis GLYKOS (G, Age 27, 03.06.86, 1/0, PAOK)
Loukas VYNTRA (D, Age 33, 05.02.81, 47/0, Levante, Spa)
Kostas FORTOUNIS (M, Age 21, 16.10.92, 12/0, Kaiserslautern, Ger)
Stefanos ATHANASIADIS (F, Age 25, 24.12.88, 6/0, PAOK)
Dimitris PAPADOPOULOS (F, Age 32, 20.10.81, 23/2, Atromitos)

MISSING OUT

After being out for a year with a leg injury, Schalke defender **Kyriakos Papadopoulos** dislocated his shoulder in training and it looks certain that coach Santos will not look his way for Brazil. He was already doubtful due to little playing time in the last year.

 HOLLAND

Too soon for young “Oranje” stars?

Van Gaal's youthful squad faces a tough task

Holland will start this World Cup where they finished the last one – but it could be the beginning of the end. The repeat of the 2010 Final against Spain will reveal a lot about their chances this time round.

Louis Van Gaal's side will face stiff competition and if they do get out of their group – most likely as runners-up – they will probably face favourites and hosts Brazil in the next round. And no one is expecting a repeat of their triumph in the quarter-finals of the 2010 tournament.

Although the Dutch FA has set the target of at least reaching the semi-finals, Van Gaal is more realistic. “There are eight to 10 teams better than we are,” he says. “The chances of reaching the quarter-finals are 20 per cent.”

The former Ajax, Barcelona, AZ and Bayern Munich coach has every reason to be doubtful. Many players – especially those in defence – still perform in the inferior Dutch league. In addition, the absence of key midfielder Kevin Strootman could be fatal and there is a big question mark over whether injury-prone stars Arjen Robben and Robin Van Persie will be able to deliver after a long and exhausting season. Not surprisingly even the ever-optimistic Dutch fans have their doubts.

Basically, the current Holland squad wouldn't stand a chance without Van Gaal at the helm. One of the world's most successful coaches, he is known for his professional

preparation. But is there enough time to gel them into a winning team, since some will have played club football until the end of May?

He isn't afraid to use inexperienced players on the biggest stage. After all, back in 2001, he led Holland to the quarter-finals of the Under-20 World Cup in Argentina. Many of those players, including Robben and Rafael Van der Vaart, were two years younger than their opponents as Van Gaal preferred talent to age.

So will he do it again and wash away his own failure of having been blocked to the 2002 World Cup by the Republic of Ireland? Or will it be a harsh learning experience for a generation consisting of players who won the 2011 European Under-17 Championship, with this World Cup being a tournament too soon?

Klaas-Jan Droppert

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 7	Training camp in Hoenderloo for players whose club seasons have finished
May 17	Friendly v Ecuador in Amsterdam
May 20	Training camp at Faro in Portugal
May 29	Training camp in Rotterdam
May 31	Friendly v Ghana in Rotterdam
Jun 1	Training camp in Alkmaar
Jun 4	Friendly v Wales in Amsterdam
Jun 5	Fly to Rio de Janeiro



Up for it...Robben's fitness will be key for Holland

BASECAMP



GROUP B FIXTURES

Jun 13	v Spain (Salvador)
Jun 18	v Australia (Porto Alegre)
Jun 23	v Chile (Sao Paulo)



Like England, Holland have opted for the bright lights and beaches of Rio de Janeiro as their World Cup home. They will be staying at the Caesar Park Ipanema Hotel, on the famous Ipanema beach. The team will be put through their paces at Estadio Jose Bastos Padilha Gavea, Flamengo's training base.

THE VIEW FROM HOLLAND

● “I think Holland have a good chance against Spain because they are a bit over the hill. Holland have got a solid line-up, but much will depend on what Van Gaal can manage during the preparation time. Holland have to rely on the vulnerable Van Persie, Robben and Sneijder. If these players aren't in form it's impossible to be successful. Brazil are the favourites and one of the other South American countries will also go far.”

Jack Van Gelder, radio and TV reporter for NOS



● “The general feeling is that European teams won't stand a chance on South American soil, but I don't agree. The pressure



COACH PROFILE

Louis VAN GAAL

Age 61 (08.08.52)
Holland coach since July 2012

How he got the job

Replaced Bert Van Marwijk after Euro 2012. On being appointed national coach for the second time he said: "This is the challenge I have been waiting for."



Past successes as a coach

Won the Champions League, UEFA Cup and World Club Cup at Ajax and the UEFA Super Cup at Barcelona. Also won national titles and cups at Ajax, Barcelona, AZ and Bayern Munich.

Past failures as a coach

Did not succeed in qualifying Holland for the World Cup in 2002. Had to resign as technical director at Ajax after losing an internal power struggle with coach Ronald Koeman in 2004.

Achievements as player

Failed to make the Ajax first team but played 333 league games for Royal Antwerp, Telstar, Sparta Rotterdam and AZ. Was a strategic midfielder with good vision but lacked pace.

World Cup experience

None.

Relationship with the media

Disastrous. Always clashing with journalists who he regards as natural enemies – especially *De Telegraaf* as they openly supported Johan Cruyff during the power struggle at Ajax.

Relationship with the public

Better than with journalists. They respect his class, his tactics and his prizes, although they sometimes feel ashamed of his over-the-top outbursts.

Style of management/coaching

A tactical genius. He likes to work with youngsters and give them the best football education he can.

Notable backroom staff

Danny Blind and Patrick Kluivert were players at Ajax when he won the Champions League in 1995.

After the World Cup

Looks all set to join one of the European giants.

on Brazil, and Argentina, will be immense. I have real doubts that they can handle it. Brazil usually don't deliver when they are the big favourites: see the 1982 World Cup. For me, Germany are the favourites. Low will use the Bayern Munich players as the nucleus of his team and will introduce Guardiola's tactics. I think that putting opponents under pressure in their own half is the right tactic in Brazil's climatic conditions."

Aad De Mos, former coach of Ajax and PSV

● "The football will be excellent with players like Cristiano Ronaldo, Messi and Suarez available. Brazil are the favourites but don't underestimate Italy. Holland, on the other hand, won't gain enough points to reach the

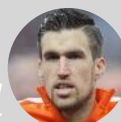


next round. They have only two world-class players and the rest of the squad is mediocre. That's nothing to be optimistic about."

Jan-Hermen de Bruijn, editor of Elf Voetbal

● "By starting against Spain you can immediately show what you've got. For that game there are no excuses, you've got to be at your best. There is a lot of criticism that we've got many players from the domestic league. It's so typically Dutch to disregard our own clubs and league. Why be so negative? Ajax have beaten Barcelona this season – that's a huge effort and not many teams are capable of doing that."

Kevin Strootman, injured Roma and Holland midfielder



WORLD CUP 2014 HOLLAND SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



5
0

Jasper CILLESSEN

Ajax
Age 25 (22.04.89)
Displaced Vermeer for both club and country last year. Calm and reliable, he is the safest pair of hands in the squad. Joined Ajax from NEC in 2011 and made his senior Holland debut in June 2013 in a friendly against Indonesia.



3
0

Kenneth VERMEER

Ajax
Age 28 (10.01.86)
Athletic and strong in one-on-one situations, but has a tendency to make silly mistakes under pressure. Has been unable to maintain his place for a sustained period. Of Surinam descent and a winner at the 2006 Euro Under-21s.



14
0

Michel VORM

Swansea City (Eng)
Age 30 (20.10.83)
A reserve at the 2010 World Cup, where he returned home for a quick visit to his new born son, and at Euro 2012. Has established himself as a firm favourite at Swansea since his move from Utrecht in 2011.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



9
0

Daley BLIND

Ajax
Age 24 (09.03.90)
Son of assistant coach and former international Danny Blind. Boomed during the Ajax power struggle in which Johan Cruyff blocked his father's appointment, he is now a fans' favourite. Lacks pace but is an excellent reader of the game.



13
0

Daryl JANMAAT

Feyenoord
Age 24 (22.07.89)
Fast and strong right-back who likes to get forward. Initially rejected by Feyenoord's youth academy, he returned to the club after spells with Den Haag and Heerenveen. His brother, Robin, is an amateur footballer and model.



0
0

Terence KONGOLO

Feyenoord
Age 20 (14.02.94)
Physically strong central defender who can also play at left-back. Won the European Under-17 title in 2011. His parents hail from DR Congo. Younger brother Rodney, is expected to join Manchester City this summer.



13
2

Bruno MARTINS INDI

Feyenoord
Age 21 (08.02.93)
Left-footed central defender who is the Portuguese-born son of parents from Guinea Bissau. Came to Holland as a baby. Can fill in at left-back if needed. Already firmly established as a key figure for club and country.



37
0

Gregory VAN DER WIEL

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 26 (03.02.88)
A scapegoat of the Euro 2012 disaster, he only returned to the squad in November and is now back-up to Janmaat. His father is of Antillian descent. A product of the Ajax academy.

MIDFIELDERS



7
0

Jordy CLASIE

Feyenoord
Age 22 (27.06.91)
At 5ft 7in he was once regarded too small by Feyenoord and sent out to satellite club Excelsior. His tattoo "You mean everything to me", in honour of his father who raised him after his mother left the family, is misspelt.



69
1

Nigel DE JONG

Milan (Ita)
Age 29 (30.11.84)
Tough tackler but, according to Van Gaal, he loses too many balls. Runs an exclusive car company with some former Hamburg team-mates. Is ambassador of a kidney foundation since his mother suffers from the disease.



5
0

Leroy FER

Norwich City (Eng)
Age 24 (05.01.90)
Box-to-box powerhouse who links defence and attack but who can lack pace. Once bought a horse for his girlfriend only to be told that her flat wasn't a suitable place to keep it. Parents hail from the Caribbean island of Curacao.



1
0

Davy KLAASSEN

Ajax
Age 21 (21.02.93)
Cool in front of the goal, a persistent groin injury kept him out of the whole of the 2012-13 season. Was hailed as a wonderkid following his club debut as a sub in November 2011 when he scored after just 42 seconds.



73
22

Arjen ROBBEN

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 30 (23.01.84)
Preparing for his sixth major finals. Essential in Van Gaal's plans and the only player the coach makes an exception for when it comes to fitness and match practice. Would have had twice as many caps if he hadn't been so injury prone.

FORWARDS



4
0

Memphis DEPAY

PSV
Age 20 (13.02.94)
Son of a Ghanaian father and Dutch mother, his left-wing runs are often more streetwise than well thought out. Has a blistering shot. Member of the Holland Under-17 team that won the European title in 2011.



60
34

Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR

Schalke (Ger)
Age 30 (12.08.83)
A goal poacher who was originally Van Gaal's first choice but has now been surpassed by Van Persie. Has rediscovered his form after unhappy spells at Madrid and Milan. Returned to training in January after tearing knee ligaments in August 2013.



98
24

Dirk KUYT

Fenerbahce (Tur)
Age 33 (22.07.80)
Willing runner and hard worker who is past his prime but remains important for team-building qualities. The son of a fisherman, he has his own charity foundation for disabled children.



20
7

Jeremain LENS

Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 26 (24.11.87)
Can play in various positions up front, but needs to control his temper. Once played unofficial matches for his native Surinam. His uncle Sigi is an agent who survived a 1989 plane crash in which many Dutch-Surinam players died.



82
41

Robin VAN PERSIE

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 30 (06.08.83)
Once regarded as persona non grata at Feyenoord but now the absolute leader of the pack. Has so far failed to deliver at big finals but is Holland's all-time top scorer. His 11-year-old son, Shaqueel, trains with Manchester City.

TACTICS



Van Gaal looks to youthful Oranje set-up

Holland will play a traditional **4-3-3** system but it is uncertain which players will be included in Van Gaal's starting line-up, particularly in goal and midfield where he has several options and problems. Ideally the coach would like to pick **Kenneth Vermeer** as his keeper,

but as only a reserve at Ajax these days his lack of match practice would suggest that team-mate **Jasper Cillessen** will probably be first choice.

Ever since his days in charge at Ajax, Van Gaal prefers multifunctional players who can build attacks and are masters of the passing game. And it is also no surprise that he is keeping an eye on players coming through the youth ranks of the Dutch clubs and the defence options include promising youngsters such as **Daryl Janmaat**, **Joel Veltman**, **Daley Blind** and **Bruno Martins Indi**.

The absence of the injured Kevin Strootman is a major blow since Van Gaal has no decent replacement. It could also have consequences for the slowing **Wesley Sneijder** as the Roma midfielder was covering a lot of ground for him. Normally Van Gaal would opt for one defensive midfielder but he could now switch to two in big games.

Although Van Gaal is known for his wilfulness he must have noticed that he needs powerhouses in midfield to prevent his team being blown away. Characters like **Nigel De Jong** and **Leroy Fer** would be suitable. However, his favourite is Blind, although placing his assistant's son in midfield would leave a gap at left-back with the coach not convinced about his back-up options.

Up front, **Robin Van Persie** and **Arjen Robben** are definite starters and much will depend on their form and fitness if Holland are to play a decisive part in this World Cup. **Jeremain Lens** will probably also get a place, with **Memphis Depay** as a replacement on either flank.

Plan B?

Van Gaal never varies from the 4-3-3 template, but he could opt for two defensive midfielders against stronger opponents. Fer would come in for Sneijder in this scenario.

The hard-running **Dirk Kuyt** would also offer an alternative to Robben up front, **Klaas-Jan Huntelaar** a replacement for Van Persie.



Joel VELTMAN

Ajax
Age 22 (15.01.92)
Has good positional sense and likes to play from the back – which has proved costly at times in the past. Has enjoyed a rapid rise: was playing for Ajax's reserve team in the Dutch second tier at the start of this season.



Ron VLAAR

Aston Villa (Eng)
Age 28 (08.10.85)
Nicknamed "Concrete Ron" in Holland for his physique. Good in the air and has a powerful shot, but not the most mobile of defenders. Joined Villa from Feyenoord and has been captain at both clubs.



Stijn SCHAARS

PSV
Age 30 (11.01.84)
Captain at his club and a good reader of the game. Was an uncapped stand-in for the 2006 World Cup and a squad member in South Africa but didn't play. Winner at the 2006 European Under-21 Championship.



Wesley SNEIJDER

Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 29 (09.06.84)
The undisputed captain under Van Gaal two years ago but the coach now has doubts about his fitness. If he can repeat his 2010 World Cup form he will be of immense value; if not, he could be a troubling influence in the camp.



Rafael VAN DER VAART

Hamburg (Ger)
Age 31 (11.02.83)
Played a key role during the qualifiers as playmaker and regular goalscorer, but has been a peripheral figure at four of the five tournaments he has been to with Holland. Given his debut by Van Gaal in November 2001.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Tim KRUL (G, Age 26, 03.04.88, 5/0, Newcastle United, Eng)
Stefan DE VRIJ (D, Age 22, 05.02.92, 9/0, Feyenoord)
Patrick VAN AANHOLT (D, Age 23, 24.08.90, 1/0, Vitesse)
Jonathan DE GUZMAN (M, Age 26, 13.09.87, 8/0, Swansea City, Eng)
Tonny VILHENA (M, Age 19, 03.05.95, 0/0, Feyenoord)
Jean-Paul BOETIUS (F, Age 20, 22.03.94, 1/0, Feyenoord)
Luciano NARSINGH (F, Age 19, 13.09.94, 7/2, PSV)

MISSING OUT

Influential midfielder **Kevin Strootman** is out after tearing a cruciate ligament in his left knee while playing for club side Roma.

PSV full-back **Jetro Willems**, who became Holland's youngest player to play at the European Championship when he appeared at Euro 2012, was also ruled out with a knee injury.

 HONDURAS

The underdogs with great expectations

"La Bicolor" make history with a second successive finals

At the beginning of the qualifiers nobody expected Honduras to book one of CONCACAF's three direct tickets to Brazil 2014. The golden generation of Suazo, Pavon and Guevara had retired and the new blood didn't seem to be talented enough to fight against the region's heavyweights. If anything, the Honduran fans expected to compete with Panama for the play-off spot and then sneak their way in to the World Cup finals.

In the end, great teamwork, spirit and an historic win at the Estadio Azteca against Mexico to shock the region saw Luis Fernando Suarez's side take third place behind the USA and Costa Rica. Against all odds, qualification for a second consecutive World Cup for the first time in their history prompted big celebrations all over the country.

This, however, tells only part of the story. The team was very inconsistent in the qualifiers and the main issues still prevail. Suarez doesn't appear to have enough individual talent at his disposal for his team to compete at the maximum level. Despite being in one of the easier groups in Brazil, Honduras will probably need another historic performance to gain a point, let alone a victory.

The core of the squad is made up of players plying their trade in Britain, but they have all taken a step backwards since 2010. Maynor Figueroa and Wilson Palacios are still head and shoulders above their team-mates, but their

careers in England seem to have stalled, while Roger Espinoza and Juan Carlos Garcia are still waiting for theirs to take off. Only Celtic's Emilio Izaguirre seems to be on an ascendant path.

And no one is getting any younger. Of the team that booked their tickets to Brazil, only Andy Najar and Luis Garrido will be younger than 28 when the tournament starts, so they might struggle against quicker teams.

However, this doesn't necessarily mean that *"La Bicolor"* will be pushovers in June. Honduras are renowned for always providing tough opposition and the players regularly punch above their weight when they don the national shirt. The team also seems to be united and coach Suarez is a master motivator. Don't forget that in South Africa 2010, despite the squad having serious internal troubles, they only lost 1-0 and 2-0 to Chile and Spain respectively, and were considered unlucky to get only one point from a heavily fancied Switzerland side.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 29	Friendly v Turkey in Washington DC, USA
Jun 1	Friendly v Israel in Houston, USA
Jun 7	Friendly v England in Miami, USA
Jun 8	Travel to Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP E FIXTURES

Jun 15	v France (Porto Alegre)
Jun 20	v Ecuador (Curitiba)
Jun 25	v Switzerland (Manaus)



Honduras are one of a number of teams based in the state of Sao Paulo. They are staying at the brand new Hotel Transamerica in the small city of Porto Feliz, and will train at local club Desportivo Brasil (above) – a team that has an official link-up with Manchester United.



Joy...Honduran players celebrate a crucial qualifying win over USA

THE VIEW FROM HONDURAS

● "Honduras need to improve their performance of the last World Cup, where they couldn't win a game or even score a goal. I think we can beat Ecuador and Switzerland and advance to the round of 16. We beat Spain at the London Olympics and could do something similar again. I expect much of Najar, Espinoza and Palacios."

Diego Daniel Paz, Diario Diez



COACH PROFILE

Luis Fernando SUAREZ (Col)

Age 54 (23.12.59)

Honduras coach since March 2011

How he got the job

Appointed after the team had been without a coach for several months. He had never worked in the country before but had a good reputation after leading Ecuador to the round of 16 in 2006.



Past successes as a coach

Took Ecuador to the knockout stage of the 2006 World Cup. Won the Colombian league with Atletico Nacional in 1999.

Past failures as a coach

Sacked by Ecuador after losing the first three qualifiers for South Africa 2010, scoring just one goal and conceding 11.

Achievements as a player

A Colombian international, he won the Libertadores Cup with Atletico Nacional in 1989.

World Cup experience

Coached Ecuador at the 2006 finals.

Relationship with the media

After a very rocky start that extended well into the final qualifying round, he won the media over by beating Mexico and securing a finals place one month later after drawing in Jamaica. Now the relationship is very good.

Relationship with the public

Cuts an affable figure and is well liked by the fans, although when the results were not that good the perception of him was that he let the players get their way too much.

Style of management/coaching

Better known for his motivational abilities than his tactical acumen, he's usually very well liked by his players. Inspires his team with speeches that go from psychology to metaphysics.

Notable backroom staff

No one of note.

After the World Cup

The Honduran FA want him to stay and he has stated that he would like to, but everything will be decided after the World Cup is over.

● "I had about four or five of Ecuador's current squad when I was there so I know something about them. What might help us more is playing in Manaus against Switzerland as it will be hotter and more humid than playing France in Porto Alegre which will be cold. Our challenge is to get into the next round."

National coach Luis Fernando Suarez



High jump...Carlo Costly after scoring against Ecuador

KEY **123** caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)
12 goals

GOALKEEPERS


4
0

John Alston BODDEN

Victoria
Age 32 (03.10.81)
A decent local league keeper who has never managed to challenge for first choice. Fighting with Donis Escobar for a spot on the bench, but is highly unlikely to see any action.



2
0

Kevin HERNANDEZ

Real Espana
Age 28 (21.12.85)
A talented keeper who will have to content himself with a place as back-up to Valladares. Despite being a little on the short side, he's more reliable than spectacular and will probably take over as number one after the World Cup.



119
0

Noel VALLADARES

Olimpia
Age 37 (03.05.77)
Set to play in his second World Cup, so he's arguably the best keeper in Honduran history. He was never very acrobatic to start with so his skills haven't dimmed over time. An important influence as captain since 2010.

KITS


First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS


21
1

Brayan BECKELES

Olimpia
Age 28 (28.11.85)
Solid right-back who's in competition with Peralta for a starting spot. He's more solid than his rival but less attack-minded. Despite not being a regular with the national team until very recently, he has always performed when needed.



75
3

Victor BERNARDEZ

San Jose Earthquakes (USA)
Age 22 (24.05.82)
A physically imposing centre-back, he has formed a formidable partnership with Figueroa during the last four years. He's a bit on the slow side, however, and can be exposed by speedy attackers.



52
0

Osman CHAVEZ

Wisla Krakow (Pol)
Age 29 (29.07.84)
A knee injury looked to have sidelined him for the finals but the centre-back has managed to recover in time to make himself available. His lack of playing time at club level might affect his fitness. Dangerous at set-pieces.



101
3

Maynor FIGUEROA

Hull City (Eng)
Age 31 (02.05.83)
Defensive stalwart arguably the team's most important player. His leadership on and off the pitch are essential to the ambitions of *"La Bicolor"*. He hasn't had his best season in England but is untouchable for the national team.



33
1

Juan Carlos GARCIA

Wigan Athletic (Eng)
Age 26 (08.03.88)
Has had an extremely disappointing stint at Wigan, but his place in the national team seems to be safe – for now. He can play either as a left-back or a defensive midfielder thanks to his speed and workrate.

MIDFIELDERS


39
4

Marvin CHAVEZ

Colorado Rapids (USA)
Age 30 (03.11.83)
Despite not having had a good year in MLS, the left-winger is still instrumental for the national team. Nicknamed "the son of the wind" because of his speed, he has lost a little pace since turning 30 but remains first choice.



39
3

Roger ESPINOZA

Wigan Athletic (Eng)
Age 27 (25.10.86)
Born in the USA but decided to play for Honduras before the 2010 World Cup and has become a stalwart since. Has failed to earn a starting spot at Wigan but his never-say-die attitude makes him essential to the national team.



4
0

Wilmer FUENTES

Marathon
Age 22 (21.04.92)
Defensive midfielder who seems set to break up the Palacios-Espinoza partnership in the near future. This World Cup seems to have come too early for him though, and he will probably have to wait for his turn from the bench.



90
0

Oscar GARCIA

Houston Dynamo (USA)
Age 29 (04.09.84)
His father always wanted him to play football – to the extent that his middle name is Boniek in honour of the Polish playmaker of the 80s. A lively right-winger, he is one of the team's main sources of attack.



90
0

Luis GARRIDO

Olimpia
Age 23 (05.11.90)
Solid defensive midfielder who has been extremely successful with Olimpia at local level thanks to his speed and never-say-die attitude but struggled with the physicality on loan to Red Star Belgrade. He started most of the qualifiers.

FORWARDS


40
18

Jerry BENGTON

New England Revolution (USA)
Age 27 (08.04.87)
Once touted as the future of Honduran football, he has never realised his potential but has still been instrumental for the national side for many years now. An elegant and clinical finisher, he scored eight goals in the qualifiers.



68
30

Carlo COSTLY

Real Espana
Age 31 (18.07.82)
Comes into his own when wearing the national team shirt. Has globetrotted the world failing for club after club only to regain his form with Honduras at the best possible moments. Missed the 2010 World Cup due to injury.



20
4

Jerry PALACIOS

Alajuelense
Age 32 (01.11.81)
Brother of Wilson and Johnny, this will be the second World Cup of his career after South Africa 2010. He's been a regular in the national team squad while never holding a regular starting spot. Will be on the bench again in Brazil.



24
3

Roger ROJAS

Olimpia
Age 24 (09.06.90)
A second striker who prefers roaming in the last quarter rather than staying as an out-and-out centre-forward. He's scored constantly for his club side, but hasn't managed to replicate his form with the national team.

TACTICS



Ball-winners, not ball-players, hold the key to Suarez's defensive gameplan

Luis Fernando Suarez usually deploys a basic 4-4-2 in which the most important thing is defensive organisation. The two central midfielder spots are usually taken by defensive-minded players, **Wilson Palacios**, who stays deep and **Roger Espinoza** who plays

box-to-box but prioritises ball recovery rather than generation of offensive play.

The team relies on fast wingers to feed crosses to the tall, powerful strikers, usually **Jerry Bengtson** and **Carlo Costly**, who scored 8 of the 13 Honduran goals during the qualifiers.

The big decision for Suarez is whether to play one or two wingers. He has **Mario Martinez** on the left and **Oscar Garcia** on the right, while **Andy Najar** has featured on either flank. In the qualifiers, two wingers featured against lesser opponents, but at the World Cup, against more accomplished opponents, it is more likely that Garcia will switch to the left, with **Luis Garrido** coming in to defensive midfield.

There seemed to be no other options up front but the emergence of youngster Jonathan Mejia, currently on the fringes of the squad, could provide the team with a powerful option up front if he finally makes the cut.

At the back, the team relies on the physicality of **Maynor Figueroa**, who plays centre back for Honduras, and **Victor Bernardéz**, while **Noel Valladares** provides experience and sobriety in goal.

Down the sides, **Emilio Izaguirre** is usually the more entrepreneurial one down the left while **Brayan Beckeles** or **Arnold Peralta** stay further back on the right.

Plan B?

In qualifying, Suarez played with a single striker, usually Costly, on a number of occasions. This strategy could take a number of forms. In a 4-1-4-1, Garrido plays the midfield holding role, allowing Garcia and Najar to attack on the flanks. In a 4-4-1-1, Garcia switches to a second striker role behind Costly, with Najar moving to the right and Espinoza on the left.

Roger Rojas has also performed the lone striker role, though he can also play behind the main man.



Emilio IZAGUIRRE

Celtic (Sco)
Age 27 (10.05.86)
Probably the side's most in-form player at the current time, having been in excellent form in Scotland and will play a major role in Brazil. His attacking forays down the left wing are one of the team's most threatening attacking options.



Johnny PALACIOS

Olimpia
Age 26 (08.03.88)
Brother of Wilson and Jerry, he was part of the national squad in South Africa 2010, although he didn't make an appearance. He's been in and out of the team since, and his fate may be repeated again at this year's finals.



Arnold PERALTA

Rangers (Sco)
Age 25 (29.03.89)
Plays as a right-winger for his club side but usually deployed at right-back by the national team. Hasn't been a great success in Scotland but the experience could help him win a starting spot in Brazil.



Mario MARTINEZ

Real Espana
Age 24 (30.07.89)
At 19 he was the youngest member of the Honduras squad at the 2008 Olympics and also starred four years later in London. One of the stalwarts during World Cup qualifying, he has tried his luck twice in Europe but failed both times.



Andy NAJAR

Anderlecht (Bel)
Age 21 (16.03.93)
The new big hope of Honduran football, the talented right midfielder he was born in the US and was named rookie of the year at 17. After a long courtship, he decided to play for Honduras and has since become a fan favourite.



Wilson PALACIOS

Stoke City (Eng)
Age 29 (29.07.84)
The best Honduran player of the last decade, he is still instrumental for the national side despite having seen his career in England stall at Tottenham. Solid off the ball and comfortable on it, the Honduran play always passes through him.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Donis ESCOBAR (G, Age 34, 03.02.80, 25/0, Olimpia)

Miguel CASTILLO (M, Age 30, 30.09.83, 7/0, Real Espana)

Jorge CLAROS (M, Age 28, 08.01.86, 46/3, Motagua)

Jonathan MEJIA (F, Age 25, 07.01.89, 1/0, Real Jaen, Spa)



IRAN

A touch of realism

Queiroz hopes his "Team Melli" will be hard to beat

By the time Iran line up against Nigeria in their opening match of the World Cup, in Curitiba on June 16, it will be almost a year since a sensational triumph against South Korea in Ulsan ensured their qualification. There were nationwide street parties as an eight-year absence from the finals coincided with the outpouring of joy that hailed the unexpected presidential election of moderate candidate Hasan Ruhani.

However, the celebrations did not last for long as economic sanctions and negotiations in Geneva and Vienna, over Iran's controversial nuclear programme, overshadowed football

For 119 days following the final qualifier, the national team failed to play a game

matters. All planned overseas training camps were cancelled and no major national side was willing to play Iran, possibly due to fear of political sanctions.

For 119 days following their final qualifier, the national team failed to play a single game. But to make up for lost opportunities, coach Carlos Queiroz convinced the country's football federation to end the domestic season in early April so that preparations for Brazil could get under way much earlier than previously planned.

While the prospect of facing Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero and Edin Dzeko is a nightmare

for any defence, Iran's solid rearguard in qualification offers some hope in their group games. Queiroz's major concern is a lack of creativity in midfield and the dependency on Charlton's Reza Ghoochannejhad for goals. Ashkan Dejagah has been in good goalscoring form for Fulham in the Premier League, but his season has been hampered by a series of niggling injuries.

Expectations for 2014 are far more realistic than in 2006, when the country's belief that they could qualify from the group stage ended disastrously and led to the departures of their long-standing captain, their coach and even the head of the football federation.

However, Queiroz has vowed that his team won't be a punchbag for the other teams in the group – and with an experienced and popular coach at the helm, fans are hoping for a happier World Cup ending this time around.

Adel Ferdowsipour

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 12	Travel to Austria for training camp
May 18	Friendly v Belarus in Kapfenberg, Aut
May 26	Friendly v Montenegro in Hartberg, Aut
May 30	Friendly v Angola in Hartberg, Aut
Jun 4	Fly to Brazil
Jun 8	Behind-closed-doors friendly v Trinidad & Tobago in Sao Paulo



Korea clincher...Iran celebrate World Cup qualification

BASE CAMP



GROUP F FIXTURES

Jun 16	v Nigeria (Curitiba)
Jun 21	v Argentina (Belo Horizonte)
Jun 25	v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Salvador)



Amid much secrecy and denials, Iran have decided to avoid unnecessary travel to the airport by staying at the Hotel Caesar Sao Paulo International Airport in the Sao Paulo suburb of Guarulhos. They will be preparing for their games at the Joaquim Grava Training Centre (above) – the training ground of one of Brazil's most famous clubs, Corinthians.

THE VIEW FROM IRAN

● "Iran's preparation has been hugely affected by the sanctions and economic hardship. Having said that, I think Queiroz has done a positive job considering the resources made available to him, which were nowhere near what he would have been used to at this level before. I expect that Iran will play the Italian *catenaccio* way: allow their opponents to have the ball, sit in their own half, try to defend solidly and look for opportunities on the counter. People want to see brave performances with a never-say-die attitude."

Amir Hajrezaei, a TV Channel 3 pundit



COACH PROFILE

Carlos QUEIROZ (Por)

Age 61 (01.03.53)
Iran coach since April 2011

How he got the job

Iran had failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup and his Portugal side had had an unhappy time in South Africa. Iran wanted a well-known coach, so he signed a two-and-a-half-year deal to replace Afshin Ghotbi.



Past successes as a coach

Led Portugal's under-20 side to the world title twice and guided South Africa to 2002 World Cup. Won the Portuguese Cup at Sporting Lisbon and, as assistant manager at Manchester United, won three Premier League titles, one FA Cup, one League Cup and the Champions League in 2008.

Past failures as a coach

His first spell in charge of Portugal ended in failure to qualify for Euro 92 and the 1994 World Cup. His biggest regret was at Real Madrid, where he failed to bring the best out of his stars.

Achievements as a player

Limited. Played only a few years in his birthplace of Mozambique.

World Cup experience

In charge of Portugal in 2010 when they were knocked out by eventual winners Spain in the last 16.

Relationship with the media

Not a charismatic figure.

Relationship with the public

It started as just professional respect but the clenched-fist reaction to his South Korean counterpart following Iran's tense qualifying win booked his place in most Iranian hearts.

Style of management/coaching

An intelligent chess player who chooses his game plans. He will go with a conservative 4-2-3-1 formation in Brazil. His blueprint is stamped on Iran's disciplined play.

Notable backroom staff

Assisted by former Portugal international Oceano da Cruz.

After the World Cup

Not officially announced, but he is likely to leave after the finals.

● "The opener against Nigeria is important and the performance against Argentina will be vital in terms of the team's character building. The team we had in 1998 was better in terms of technical, physical and character levels. But this time around, without significant friendlies in the past year, Iran have a huge mountain to climb. Queiroz will go for a cautious 4-5-1 and that is the main reason for Iran's lack of goals. Teymourian and Dejagah will be the character and technical leaders of the team on the field."

Bijan Zolfagharnasab, Iran assistant coach at 1998 World Cup



● "We all expected to be in Brazil, but to be honest Carlos Queiroz did a wonderful job in the last three crucial qualifiers. He is the man for the difficult days. Trying to stop Argentina's fluid front three is one hell of a task for Iran but they need to stay together and play like a unit. On paper, at least, we are miles behind our opponents, but you never know with the World Cup; as we all remember the likes of Senegal in 2002. Everybody hopes Iran can defend Asian football's credibility in Brazil."

Mehdi Mahdavia, played in the 1998 and 2006 World Cups for Iran



KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



10
0

Rahman AHMADI

Sepahan
Age 33 (30.07.80)
Much under-appreciated keeper who made a brilliant double save against South Korea to ensure Iran's qualification for Brazil. May lack the European experience of Davari but makes up for it with his agility and bravery.



3
0

Daniel DAVARI

Eintracht Braunschweig (Ger)
Age 26 (06.01.88)
Born and raised in Germany by his Iranian father and Polish mother, he made his international debut in November. Communicating with his team-mates is a problem as he rarely speaks Farsi. Inconsistency may cost him his place.



2
0

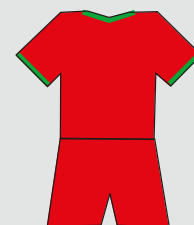
Hamed LAK

Tractor Sazi
Age 23 (24.12.90)
Athletic and brave but needs more experience at this level. It has been said that if he were to concentrate more on the training and keep his off-the-field activities to a minimum that a bright future awaits.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



12
0

Hashem BEIKZADEH

Esteghlal
Age 30 (22.01.84)
A surprise inclusion in the last three qualifiers who performed superbly. The centre of media jokes about how he will cope with Lionel Messi in the World Cup. Two-footed, he has the ability to perform on either flank.



4
0

Mehrdad BEITASHOUR

Vancouver Whitecaps (USA)
Age 27 (01.02.87)
Right-back who was born in San Jose, California, where he is known as "Steven". He was twice called up by the USA but switched allegiance to the country of his parents after failing to get a game. Made his debut in October.



58
1

Ehsan HAJSAFT

Sepahan
Age 24 (25.02.90)
Experienced left-footer who has a good balance, a deceptive turn of pace and the ability to get past defenders. A previous captain of the side, he is dangerous from free-kicks and also possesses a long throw.



47
0

Khosro HEYDARI

Esteghlal
Age 30 (14.09.83)
Overlapping right-back who can also play in midfield if required. Plagued by hamstring injuries this season, which could jeopardise his starting place. Has plenty of experience and has played for six different clubs in Iran.



81
6

Jalal HOSSEINI

Persepolis
Age 32 (03.02.82)
Tough central defender who relishes the physical side of the game and is particularly dominant in the air, which also makes him a threat at set-pieces. Strong in the tackle, he has been extremely consistent in recent years.

MIDFIELDERS



11
4

Ashkan DEJAGAH

Fulham (Eng)
Age 27 (05.07.86)
By far Iran's best player in recent years, the former Germany junior international's flair and stamina will have to be at their best for his side to have any chance. Born in Tehran but moved to Europe when he was a child.



16
0

Ghasem HADDADIFAR

Zob Ahan
Age 30 (12.07.83)
Skilful left-footer who provides good back-up for central midfield. Plays his club football alongside his brother, Alireza. Made his international debut in 2010, in a friendly against Armenia



6
0

Reza HAGHIGHI

Persepolis
Age 25 (31.01.89)
Central midfielder who was involved in a controversial bust-up with Persepolis team-mate Sadeghian. He claims to have rejected an offer from Dynamo Kiev to remain in Iran.



4
1

Alireza JAHANBAKSH

NEC (Hol)
Age 20 (08.10.93)
Promising midfielder who has gained valuable European experience in the Eredivisie. Technically good with an impressive goalscoring instinct. Mojtaba Jabbari's withdrawal enhances his chances of starting.



57
6

Mohammad Reza KHALATBARI

Persepolis
Age 30 (14.09.83)
Diminutive, skilful attacking player who has proved himself to be a useful late substitute. Was once signed by Diego Maradona during his brief spell as coach at United Arab Emirates club Al Wasl.

FORWARDS



39
9

Karim ANSARIFARD

Tractor Sazi
Age 24 (03.04.90)
Talented striker with an impressive goalscoring record at club level although he is yet to repeat that form on the international stage. Made his international debut aged 19 and scored the winner in a friendly against Iceland.



0
0

Sardar AZMOUN

Rubin Kazan (Rus)
Age 19 (01.01.95)
Never made an appearance in the Iranian league, but has had an impressive debut season in Russia, catching the eye of scouts from, among others, Arsenal.



11
9

Reza GHOOCHANNEJHAD

Charlton Athletic (Eng)
Age 26 (20.09.87)
Emigrated to Holland as a child and played for their junior sides before switching to the country of his birth. A clinical poacher at national level, despite recent unhappy club spells and a lack of regular club action in England.



52
5

Masoud SHOJAEI

Las Palmas (Spa)
Age 30 (09.06.84)
His inconsistent form in the national team has armed his local critics, but he has found footballing happiness in the Canary Islands following a foot injury that sidelined him for more than a year.

TACTICS



Queiroz hoping to build from a solid defensive base

Having conceded just two goals in their final eight qualifying games, Iran will be hoping that their back line can hold firm once again in Brazil.

Central defenders **Jalal Hosseini** and **Pejman Montazeri** make a formidable pair, with the option of using the latter at right-back and

playing **Amir Hossein Sadeghi** in the middle if needed.

The injury prone **Khosro Heydari** is normally first choice on the right flank at the back, but his attacking tendencies could be a double-edged sword against the likes of Argentina and Nigeria. At left-back, the impossible dilemma is who will suffer less against Lionel Messi when Iran face Argentina. Queiroz may stick with **Hashem Beikzadeh** ahead of the more attack-minded **Ehsan Hajsafy** and the defensive **Mehrdad Pooladi**.

The big question is who will take over in goal following the unexpected withdrawal of Mehdi Rahmati. Will the Portuguese coach opt for the domestically impressive but internationally inexperienced **Rahman Ahmadi** or the European-based **Daniel Davari** who has had some scintillating performances in the Bundesliga but is prone to occasional lapses?

Javad Nekounam and relentless runner **Andranik Teymourian** will take the holding midfield roles, with the elegant **Masoud Shojaei** and determined **Ashkan Dejagah** in front of them.

Alireza Jahanbakhsh looks to be the favourite to replace Mojtaba Jabari, while **Reza Ghoochannejad** will lead the attack as a lone striker.

Plan B?

Queiroz's tactical alternatives will probably only be variations on his safety first 4-4-1-1 set-up, with players coming in to cover injured players. The most likely of these would involve the back four moving around to cover the potential loss of Heydari.

It is possible that **Mohammad Reza Khalatbari** could be added to the line-up if Iran need to chase a game.

Karim Ansarifard is a useful replacement for first-choice striker Ghoochannejad when it comes to leading the line.



Pejman MONTAZERI

Umm Salal (Qat)
Age 30 (06.09.83)
Central defender who is a very good reader of the game and whose recent form is likely to see him take the place of Hadi Aghili who has fallen out with Queiroz. Can also play at right-back.



Mehرداد POOLADI

Persepolis
Age 27 (26.02.87)
Left-back who was sidelined for almost a year with a toe injury. Defensively solid but not creative enough going forward. In 2012 he had to undergo surgery on a finger after punching a glass door after substituted in a league game.



Amir Hossein SADEGHI

Esteghlal
Age 32 (06.09.81)
Left-footed defender whose performances in the last three qualifiers were an important part of Iran's defensive dominance. Likely to be first choice if the injury-prone Heydari struggles for fitness.



Javad NEKOUNAM

Al Kuwait (Kuwait)
Age 33 (07.09.80)
Inspirational skipper who, despite his indifferent recent club form, has a knack of scoring crucial goals. The former Osasuna player's experience of European football is vital to a team not used to the big stage.



Payam SADEGHIAN

Persepolis
Age 22 (29.02.92)
A gifted player who courts controversy with problems on and off the pitch. Reached the Asian Champions League Final with his previous club, Zob Ahan, in 2010.



Andranik TEYMOURIAN

Esteghlal
Age 31 (06.03.83)
Aggressive, strong runner who is tireless and determined. He had a stint in England with Bolton Wanderers and is from Iran's Armenian community, which has a strong footballing tradition.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Mehرداد JAMAATI (D, Age 24, 07.10.89, 1/0, Foolad)
Hossein MAHINI (D, Age 27, 16.09.86, 21/0, Persepolis)
Yaghub KARIMI (M, Age 22, 31.08.91, 7/4, Sepahan)
Ali KARIMI (F, Age 35, 08.11.78, 128/37, Tractor Sazi)
Reza NORUZI (F Age 31, 21.09.82, 6/0, Naft Tehran)
Mehdi SHARIFI (F, Age 21, 16.08.92, 0/0, Sepahan)

MISSING OUT

Deteriorating relations between the coach Queiroz and several of the squad will mean there is no place on the plane to Brazil for goalkeeper **Mehdi Rahmati** or defender **Hadi Aghili**.

Attacking midfielder **Mojtaba Jabari** announced earlier this year that he no longer wanted to be considered for the national side.





Positive signs for the “Azzurri”

When it comes to finals, few perform better than Italy

With a squad containing the quality of Gianluigi Buffon, Andrea Pirlo and Mario Balotelli, the intelligence of coach Cesare Prandelli, an excellent record in finals tournaments and the team's fine showing in last summer's Confederations Cup, things are looking good for the “Azzurri” in Brazil.

Pay no attention to the fact that Italy went five games without a win between last September and May. The reality is that their last win – a 2-1 victory over the Czech Republic – saw them reach the finals with two qualifiers still to play. In other words, Italy have been playing “friendlies” since September – and as we all know, Italy simply do not “do” friendlies.

In contrast, they certainly do “do” finals tournaments. Since 1982, the four-times World Cup winners have reached five Finals and two semi-finals in 12 World Cup or European Championship tournaments. History also tells us that, when the pressure is on, Italy often overachieve.

In reality, Italy will probably have to overachieve again if they are to reach the semi-finals. Prandelli often says that his side holds its own with the strongest teams in the world thanks to its mental and physical preparation and its tactical discipline. On paper, opponents such as Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Spain all seem to have stronger and more talented squads than Italy – but they will underestimate the “Azzurri” at their peril.

If it is true that Italy perform best in moments of difficulty – Spain in 1982 and Germany 2006 being prime examples – then they should perform well in Brazil, after a year in which not a single Italian club made it to the Champions League quarter-finals.

It may also help that expectations back home are very mixed. A recent opinion poll in daily newspaper *Corriere Della Sera* recorded that the largest group of fans, 29.4 per cent, believe Italy will not get out of the group phase. However, the next highest group, 19.9 per cent, believe that their team will actually win the World Cup.

As always, much will depend on the form of a handful of key players. Will the strain of a tiring tournament finally catch up on 36-year-old captain Buffon or 35-year-old playmaker Pirlo? And will the mercurial Balotelli manage to keep his cool?

However, if the three of them perform to their best, then so too do Italy.

Paddy Agnew

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 31	Friendly v Republic of Ireland in London, England
Jun 4	Friendly v Luxembourg in Verona
Jun 5	Fly to Brazil
Jun 8	Friendly v Fluminense (tbc)



Mercurial talent...Italy striker Balotelli

BASE CAMP



GROUP D FIXTURES

Jun 14	v England (Manaus)
Jun 20	v Costa Rica (Recife)
Jun 24	v Uruguay (Natal)



Picked before the first-round draw, Italy chose to stay at the seaside resort of Mangaratiba, 75 miles south of Rio de Janeiro, even though their opening group games are far away up north. They resisted any temptation to change their base because Mangaratiba offers a hotel complete with its own training ground, which avoids time and energy-wasting coach trips.

THE VIEW FROM ITALY

● “I think it will go very well for Italy. We have a good team with a good coach who has been able to create his own space and impose his own ideas, both tactically and ethically. Our record is good and history also shows that when little is expected of Italy, then Italy does well. Some people say that, given the climatic conditions, Prandelli will pick as many young players as possible but I doubt that. A national coach has to pick the best players available, regardless of age. Sometimes it matters more to have experienced players. Look at Buffon and Pirlo, they've had great seasons in Serie A so you have got to pick them.”

Gianni Rivera, former Italy international





● “I think much will depend on the opening game against England in the heat of Manaus – since historically the English can be difficult opponents for us. But, at the end of the day, I wouldn’t make too much out of the climatic conditions, given that they are the same for everyone. Rather, I would say that the side which arrives in Brazil in optimal physical and mental condition is the team that has the best chance of winning, but that is always the case. Today’s players will arrive at the finals after exhausting domestic league and Champions League campaigns – and often some of them just don’t have the time to recover their best form.”



Simone Perrotta, a member of Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning squad

● “We come into this World Cup on the back of a total failure in South Africa four years ago, so this Italy has to do better but, unfortunately, we find ourselves in a very tough group. That would suggest that, this time, Italy cannot allow itself its usual slow start. This is a good Italy but not a great one, we have no outstanding match winner in the side. Balotelli might have been that player but he seems to have lost his way a little. The fact that Prandelli is thinking about using Cassano or maybe Immobile or Destro says it all. As for Pirlo, he is a fantastic player but he is not in the first flush of youth is he? All in all, I would think this Italy is good enough to make the quarter-finals but no further. Sides like Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Spain look stronger than us.”

Fabrizio Bocca, La Repubblica



COACH PROFILE

Cesare PRANDELLI

Age 56 (19.08.57)
Italy coach since May 2010

How he got the job

Took over from Marcello Lippi immediately after Italy's miserable first-round elimination at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.



Past successes as a coach

A successful youth-team coach at Atalanta, he established himself with Parma and then Fiorentina, where he built a competitive team which finished fourth in Serie A three times.

Past failures as a coach

Resigned from relegation-bound Serie A side Lecce in February 1998 after only 18 games in charge.

Achievements as a player

Was a useful performer at Juventus, even if his main role was as a second-half substitute.

World Cup experience

None.

Relationship with the media

Good. He is simply too smart, too courteous and too worldly wise to make needless enemies.

Relationship with the public

Hugely popular. Gestures such as taking the national team to Calabria to train on a pitch built on land sequestered from the mafia, and his repudiation of homophobia, have enhanced his public standing. He also gained much sympathy when he resigned as Roma coach in 2004 to look after his terminally ill wife, Manuela.

Style of management/coaching

Much more a man manager than a howling sergeant. It is no coincidence that Balotelli has played easily his best football – the Euro 2012 semi-final win against Germany, for example – under Prandelli.

Notable backroom staff

Former Parma midfielder Gabriele Pin has served as his assistant with Parma, Fiorentina and now Italy.

After the World Cup

Has agreed to stay on until the 2016 European Championship in France.

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



Gianluigi BUFFON

Juventus
Age 36 (28.01.78)
The most-capped Italian of all time remains an inspirational captain, on and off the pitch. This will be his fifth finals, although he did not get off the bench in 1998. Made a huge contribution to yet another successful Juve season.



Simone SCUFFET

Udinese
Age 18 (31.05.96)
A big revelation this season, making his Serie A debut for Udinese in February and keeping his place in the team ever since. Prandelli might just take him to Brazil with an eye on the future.



Salvatore SIRIGU

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 27 (12.01.87)
Made his debut in Prandelli's first game as coach – a 1-0 defeat by Ivory Coast in August 2010. In good form for PSG this term and an able deputy for Buffon if called on.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Ignazio ABATE

Milan
Age 27 (12.11.86)
Versatile, attacking right-back who has remained firmly in the national set-up despite his club enduring their worst season for years. His father, Beniamino Abate, was a goalkeeper and played 67 times in Serie A.



Andrea BARZAGLI

Juventus
Age 33 (08.05.81)
Central defender who made a huge contribution to the success of Juve this season. A member of the 2006 World Cup-winning squad, he played against Australia and Ukraine.



Leonardo BONUCCI

Juventus
Age 27 (01.05.87)
Tough central defender who, when confronted by an armed robber outside a Turin car showroom two years ago, hit him.



Giorgio CHIELLINI

Juventus
Age 29 (14.08.84)
A cornerstone of the side who has enjoyed a successful season with Juventus. Tough, versatile and experienced, he is an automatic first choice for Prandelli, either at left-back or in central defence.



Domenico CRISCITO

Zenit (Rus)
Age 27 (30.12.86)
Useful left-back who was ruled out of Euro 2012 when his name came up in a match-fixing investigation. Officially still one of 149 people under investigation for that incident, but likely to be included this time.

MIDFIELDERS



Antonio CANDREVA

Lazio
Age 27 (28.02.87)
One of the best, right-sided attacking midfielders in Serie A over the last three seasons. Helps to switch the play quickly from defence to attack.



Daniele DE ROSSI

Roma
Age 30 (24.07.83)
Provides fundamental midfield cover but, if necessary, can also play central defence. Good in the air, he can also deliver a telling pass. Serie A's highest-paid player, earning €10m a year gross. His father is Roma's youth coach.



Claudio MARCHISIO

Juventus
Age 28 (19.01.86)
His midfield dynamism, in providing both cover and attacking bite, could prove invaluable despite struggling to get a regular starting place in his club side's midfield this season.



Riccardo MONTOLIVO

Milan
Age 29 (18.01.85)
Midfield schemer who played under Prandelli for five seasons at Fiorentina. One of the few linguists in the squad, he speaks German as his mother comes from Kiel.



Thiago MOTTA

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 31 (28.08.82)
Born in Brazil, in the state of Sao Paulo, and won two senior caps before switching allegiance to the homeland of his paternal grandfather. His tactical awareness and professionalism is greatly appreciated by Prandelli.

FORWARDS



Mario BALOTELLI

Milan
Age 23 (12.08.90)
Quite capable of making things difficult for himself even without Milan's dreadful season in which he failed to deliver on his huge potential. However, Prandelli's Italy seem to bring out the best in him.



Alessio CERCI

Torino
Age 26 (23.07.87)
The closest thing to a genuine winger in Italian football today, he has been outstanding over the last two seasons for mid-table Torino. Has pace as well as dribbling and shooting skills.



Sebastian GIOVINCO

Juventus
Age 27 (26.01.87)
At 5ft 5in he has been in the shadows of Tevez, Llorente and Osvaldo at Juve this season, but often shows his class when coming on as a substitute.



Ciro IMMOBILE

Torino
Age 24 (20.02.90)
His terrific late-season form will probably see him get the nod ahead of Dani Osvaldo, who has failed to convince on loan at Juventus from Southampton.



Lorenzo INSIGNE

Napoli
Age 23 (04.06.91)
Stands just 5ft 4in, but a big danger from free-kicks. Scored on his debut against Argentina last August.

TACTICS

4-3-2-1



Everything goes through Pirlo

By now, foreign observers will have understood that Prandelli's Italy is not quite the usual defence-oriented, speculative Italy. In agreement with his players, the coach has always wanted to impose a more positive style, with Spain as the ideal role model.

However, on the eve of the finals, a realist might suggest that

he would be better off resorting to old-style, tried and tested Italian methods. In other words, while he has a more than useful backbone to his team, in the shape of **Gianluigi Buffon** in goal, **Giorgio Chiellini** and **Leonardo Bonucci** in defence, **Daniele De Rossi**, **Andrea Pirlo**, **Claudio Marchisio** and **Riccardo Montolivo** in midfield. However, his attacking line-up right now represents a major question mark.

Mario Balotelli is obviously the main man up front but will he reproduce his Euro 2012 level of performance? Even if he does, it is unclear who will play alongside him.

Prandelli likes to play with a positive **4-3-2-1** line-up where the game plan is to knock it around in midfield and wait for Pirlo to either hit a through ball for Balotelli and others, or to score from a free-kick.

As always, much will depend on Pirlo, meaning that De Rossi, Marchisio and Montolivo will cover for him, affording him time and space to spray the ball around and keep the team ticking over nicely. If Pirlo is man-to-man marked, then the supply line can break down.

Much also depends on the ability of full-backs to provide the attacking options.

Plan B?

It is not impossible that Italy may also resort to a classic five-man defence. If **Romulo** is picked, many will see his last-minute inclusion as a clear indication that Prandelli feels the need to cover himself.

A return to defensive methods and a **5-4-1** could see **Gabriel Paletta** play central defence alongside Bonucci and **Andrea Barzagli**, freeing up Chiellini for left back.

The use of a player like Romulo in midfield could be useful if things do not work out for the unpredictable Balotelli up front, prompting Prandelli to field an inexperienced or lightweight attack (**Ciro Immobile**, **Lorenzo Insigne** or **Sebastian Giovinco**) or even recall the mercurial Antonio Cassano. In such a case, Romulo could offer a deal of protection to the overworked midfield trio of Pirlo, Marchisio and Montolivo.



9
0

Mattia DE SCIGLIO

Milan
Age 21 (20.10.92)

A full-back with the ability to play on either flank, he may get the nod due to doubts about Christian Maggio's fitness.



1
0

Gabriel PALETTA

Parma
Age 28 (15.02.86)

Argentinian-born centre-half who was an Under-20 World Cup winner in 2005 before switching allegiance to the country of his great-grandfather and making his senior international debut for Italy against Spain in March.

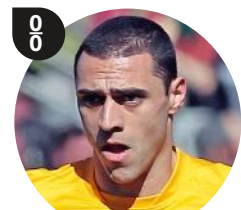


108
13

Andrea PIRLO

Juventus
Age 35 (19.05.79)

One of the great playmakers of the modern game. Voted Serie A's best player for the past two seasons, he is pivotal to everything good that Italy do. But will he have the physical resilience for a long, tough Latin American World Cup?



0
0

ROMULO

Verona
Age 27 (22.05.87)

Full name is Romulo Souza Orestes Caldeira. He was born in Brazil and called up for a two-day training camp by Prandelli in April. Can play in different midfield and defensive roles.



4
1

Marco VERRATTI

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 21 (05.11.92)

Hugely promising young midfielder who has been in good form for his club and is seen as the eventual replacement for Pirlo.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Morgan DE SANCTIS (G, Age 37, 26.03.77, 6/0 Roma)

Antonio MIRANTE (G, Age 30, 08.07.83, 0/0, Parma)

Christian MAGGIO (D, Age 32, 11.02.82, 34/0, Napoli)

Angelo OGBONNA (D, Age 25, 23.05.88, 9/0, Juventus)

Alberto AQUILANI (M, Age 29, 07.07.84, 33/5, Fiorentina)

Emanuele GIACCHERINI (M, Age 29, 05.05.85, 19/3, Sunderland, Eng)

Marco PAROLO (M, Age 29, 25.01.85, 2/0, Parma)

Antonio CASSANO (F, Age 31, 12.07.82, 35/10, Parma)

Mattia DESTRO (F, Age 23, 20.03.91), 5/1, Roma)

Alberto GILARDINO (F, Age 31, 05.07.82, 55/17, Genoa)

Dani OSVALDO (F, 12.01.86, 21/4, Southampton, Eng)

Giuseppe ROSSI (F, Age 27, 01.02.87, 29/7, Fiorentina)

5-4-1



IVORY COAST

Third time lucky?

Drogba looks for knockout-stage swansong

After twice being drawn in tough groups, it could finally prove to be third-time lucky for the Ivory Coast, who feel they have had a change in tournament fortunes. They have a modest World Cup group this summer and will be fancied to get past the first round after missing out in 2006 and 2010.

The Ivorians will, however, be under the microscope following successive failures at five past African Nations Cup tournaments, where they started each as favourites yet failed to climb the winners' podium. It has earned the West African team the tag of "chokers" – and one that is not entirely unjustified.

A World Cup quarter-final would prove a fitting swansong for Drogba

Add in their two previous World Cup finals appearances in Germany and South Africa – where they were handed admittedly stiff competition – and there is a lot of experience about the squad, but also a lingering sense of under-achievement.

This summer, much of the focus will be on Didier Drogba and the three-time African Footballer of the Year, Yaya Toure, as the country seeks to advance to the second round. And that is the extent of their ambition, according to coach Sabri Lamouchi, as they take on Colombia, Greece and Japan.

But there will be high hopes that should

they get through the group phase they will have every chance of emulating other recent African sides in making the last eight.

A World Cup quarter-final would prove a fitting swansong for Drogba and many others in the squad who are set to finish their international careers after the finals. Indeed, the recent dilemma for the Ivorians has been freshening up an ageing team, with Lamouchi bravely sidelining several established stars in an attempt to blood new talent as the "golden generation" starts to look increasingly jaded.

It's a tough task for the Frenchman in his first coaching role, but it's one that he relishes and he takes great pride in taking them to Brazil. He sees Drogba as his most potent strike threat and can also call on the likes of Swansea City's Wilfried Bony up front.

Indeed, there is plenty of individual strength in the side but also frailty in defence, where the Ivorians have struggled over the years to find a solution. With few alternatives available, it will be left to an ageing Kolo Toure and Didier Zokora to marshal the back four and protect the diminutive and error-prone goalkeeper Boubacar Barry.

Mark Gleeson

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 31	Friendly v Bosnia-Herzegovina in St Louis, USA
Jun 4	Friendly v El Salvador in Dallas, USA



Inspiration...Ivory Coast captain Drogba

BASE CAMP



GROUP B FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Japan (Recife)
Jun 19	v Colombia (Brasilia)
Jun 24	v Greece (Fortaleza)



Created by former Brazil international Oscar Bernardi, the Oscar Inn Eco Resort in Aguas de Lindoia will provide accommodation and training facilities for the Ivory Coast. The small town is a two-hour drive away from the nearest airport at Viracopos-Campinas.

THE VIEW FROM THE IVORY COAST

● "In the last two World Cups, the draw was unkind. This time, God has answered our prayers. The draw gives us a good chance."

Yeo Martial, former Ivory Coast coach

● "It's an exceptional generation of players that the Ivorians are taking to Brazil."

Claude le Roy, well-travelled Franco-African coach



● "Ivory Coast will be 'the eye of the storm'. They will be familiar with the hot weather."

Alberto Zaccheroni, Japan coach



COACH PROFILE

Sabri LAMOUCHI (Fra)

Age 61 (09.11.71)

Ivory Coast coach since May 2012



How he got the job

Appointed just five days before the start of the World Cup qualifying campaign against Tanzania, following the sacking of Francois Zahoui.

Past successes as a coach

Qualified the Ivorians for this World Cup with a play-off win over Senegal, after topping Morocco in their group.

Past failures as a coach

Being knocked out by Nigeria in the quarter-finals of the African Nations Cup in South Africa last year.

Achievements as a player

Won Ligue 1 and the French Cup with Auxerre, and was also a French champion with Monaco.

World Cup experience

Heartbreakingly cut from the World Cup squad just before France 98.

Relationship with the media

Cautious at first but now obliging. Somewhat serious, but attempts to answer questions as best as possible.

Relationship with the public

Still trying to win them over after his surprise appointment and the fact he had no previous coaching experience before "The Elephants".

Style of management/coaching

Self confident but reliant on the experience of his senior players.

Notable back room staff

None.

After the World Cup

Contract is up but could stay on depending on the team's performance.

- "It's important that we start well. The team can realise its dream of getting past the first round after God smiled on us with the draw."



Lassina Kone, newspaper correspondent

- "I'm worried about the Ivory Coast, it will be difficult for them. 'The Elephants' will pass the first round. I see Colombia and Japan in the second round."

Philippe Troussier, Frenchman whose first national-team job was with Ivory Coast



World class..Midfield general Yaya Toure

KEY **123**
12 caps
goals

(Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS

75
0**Boubacar BARRY**

Lokeren (Bel)
Age 34 (30.12.79)
Among the old guard who will depart after Brazil after playing at the last two World Cups. Better known by his nickname "Copa", he was a Belgian Cup winner this season.

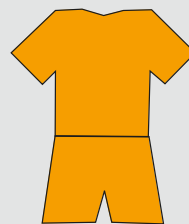
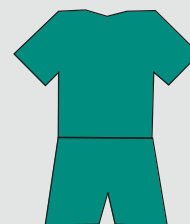
0
0**Sylvain GBOHOUO**

Sewu Sport
Age 25 (29.10.88)
Likely to be the only home-based player in the squad after winning back-to-back Ivorian titles with his club and also competing in the African Champions League. Named best goalkeeper in the Ivorian league in 2012.

1
0**Sayouba MANDE**

Stabaek (Nor)
Age 20 (15.06.93)
Made his debut in March in the friendly in Belgium. Moved to the Norwegian league in 2012 and has been a regular for his club.

KITS

**First kit****Second kit**

DEFENDERS

7
0**Serge AURIER**

Toulouse (Fra)
Age 21 (24.12.92)
Right-back or central defender who looks set for a major move after the World Cup. Brought up in France, where he began his career at Lens before moving to Toulouse. His Ivorian debut came last June in a World Cup qualifier.

42
2**Souleymane BAMBA**

Fenerbahce (Tur)
Age 29 (13.01.85)
Centre-back who played in both qualifying play-off legs. Underwent surgery for an ankle injury in January but is expected to be fit for the World Cup. Born in France but failed to make the grade at PSG before a move to Scotland.

75
1**Arthur BOKA**

Stuttgart (Ger)
Age 31 (02.04.83)
Diminutive left-back who has played in Belgium, France and Germany. A veteran of all of the last seven tournaments in which the Ivorians have played, but likely to provide cover at this one. Can also play as a defensive midfielder.

3
0**Constant DJAKPA**

Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 27 (17.10.86)
Made a return to the side in March, six years after his last appearance – at the 2008 African Nations Cup finals. Elevation to the Bundesliga ranks this season has precipitated his return. Has also played in Norway and Romania.

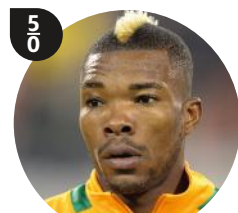
83
2**Siaka TIENE**

Montpellier (Fra)
Age 32 (22.02.82)
Left-sided wingback who has been a consistent squad member since his debut in 2000 and played twice at the 2010 finals in South Africa. Brazil will probably mark the end of his international career.

MIDFIELDERS

2
0**Mathis BOLLY**

Fortuna Dusseldorf (Ger)
Age 23 (14.11.90)
Played for Norway at junior level but has switched allegiance to the Ivory Coast, where his father hails from. Career started at Lillestrom before he moved to Fortuna Dusseldorf. Renowned for his speed off the mark.

5
0**Serey DIE**

Basle (Swi)
Age 29 (07.11.84)
Was banned for eight games in Switzerland in 2012 for slapping a ball boy and given a four-month ban, later lifted, by FIFA for failing to honour a contract with Egypt's Zamalek. A latecomer to the international ranks at the age of 28.

25
0**Jean-Jacques GOSSO**

Genclerbirligi (Tur)
Age 31 (15.03.83)
Selected for the last World Cup finals but did not play. Was used as makeshift right-back at the 2012 Nations Cup but more effective in midfield. Left Monaco for Turkey in 2011.

22
3**Max GRADEL**

Saint-Etienne (Fra)
Age 26 (30.11.87)
Raised in France but started his career in England with Leicester City and then played for Leeds United. His best position is on the left, but equally adept in the centre, behind the strikers or on the right side of midfield.

46
4**ROMARIC**

Bastia (Fra)
Age 31 (04.06.83)
Christian Koffi Ndiri (his full name) is a graduate of the ASEC Academy and has played club football in Belgium, France and Spain. A squad member at the last two World Cup finals, scoring in 2010 against North Korea.

FORWARDS

24
9**Wilfried BONY**

Swansea City (Eng)
Age 25 (10.12.88)
Scored 36 goals in 36 games at Vitesse and was named Dutch Player of the Year for 2013. Swansea paid a club record £12million for the out-and-out striker who might get a starting berth ahead of Drogba.

18
3**Seydou DOUMBIA**

CSKA Moscow (Rus)
Age 26 (31.12.87)
Top scorer in Russia after moving from Young Boys, who he helped to the Swiss league title in 2010 and earned himself a place in the World Cup squad for South Africa. Did not play in a single qualifier for these finals.

99
61**Didier DROGBA**

Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 36 (11.03.78)
Twice African Footballer of the Year but yet to win international honours despite playing in seven tournaments with the Ivorians. Scored the penalty shoot-out winner in the 2012 Champions League Final.

51
13**GERVINHO**

Roma (Ita)
Age 27 (27.05.87)
Gervais Yao Kouassi has shown a vast improvement in form since moving to Serie A from Arsenal. His trademark is pace and tricky skills on the left flank.

65
23**Salomon KALOU**

Lille (Fra)
Age 28 (05.08.85)
Moved to France last summer after six seasons at Chelsea. In 2006, when he was on the books of Feyenoord, he made a failed bid for Dutch citizenship. His elder brother, Bonaventure, is a former Ivorian captain.

TACTICS



Defensive frailties need addressing if attacking strengths are to be realised

As a star midfielder at Auxerre in the 1990s, current Elephants boss Lamouchi never played in anything but a **4-3-3** and like his old mentor Guy Roux swears by the aforementioned system. Much of the Ivorians' chances will depend on striking the right midfield balance

and in the box-to-box monster that is **Yaya Toure** and the more defensively-inclined **Didier Zokora** and **Romaric** (or **Cheick Tiote**), the blend is strong and forceful but arguably lacks guile and true playmaking ability. The Ivorian Class of 2014 will not outsmart or outmanoeuvre the opposition, but can outrun and overpower.

In order to keep **Didier Drogba** supplied with chances, **Gervinho** and **Salomon Kalou** will be expected to hug the touchlines, though the latter does tend to wander inside a little too much. Full-backs **Serge Aurier** and **Arthur Boka** are instructed to take turns on the overlap, but with contrasting fortunes; Aurier proving considerably more explosive and effective than the veteran Boka.

One of the reasons why Lamouchi is so criticised by the Ivorian media is his alleged lack of tactical nous. Detractors claim he only makes position-for-position substitutions, never changes his opening-whistle game plan and is far too star-struck, preferring big names to the search for real team chemistry.

Team standard bearer Drogba also poses a problem. At the grand old age of 36, he cannot be expected to last 90 minutes every four days and so will have to be rested whenever possible. Lamouchi faces an interesting choice between the iconic presence of Drogba and the goalscoring form of **Wilfried Bony**.

Set-piece options are numerous and talismanic players like Yaya Toure and Drogba can easily turn games their way.

They have several strong options off the bench too in Romaric, **Didier Ya Konan**, **Seydou Doumbia** and **Max Gradel**, all with good attacking qualities.

Plan B?

The ability to switch to a three-man defence of Kolo Toure, Zokora and **Souleymane Bamba**, or a strike-force duo, Bony joining Drogba, undoubtedly would make the Elephants a more rounded, complete outfit. But up to now, Lamouchi has shown neither the will or the imagination to play **3-5-2**.



Kolo TOURE

Liverpool (Eng)
Age 33 (19.03.81)
Won the Premier League with Arsenal in 2004 but moved to Manchester City after a dressing-room bust-up with French defender William Gallas. Two of his brothers are also professional footballers.



Didier ZOKORA

Trabzonspor (Tur)
Age 33 (14.12.80)
Moved to central defence from midfield at the last World Cup. Has played in all six of Ivory Coast's past World Cup matches and in the Belgian, French, English, Spanish and Turkish leagues. Most capped Ivorian international of all time.



Cheick TIOTE

Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 27 (21.06.86)
Hard-tackling midfielder who has a reputation for the reckless and picked up 25 cautions in his first 50 games in the Premier League. Won the Dutch title with Twente in 2010 and played at the World Cup the same year.



Yaya TOURE

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 31 (13.05.83)
One of only three players to have won the African Footballer of the Year award three times. Driving midfielder who has been a league winner in Greece, Spain and England, with cup-winners medals from four different countries.



Didier YA KONAN

Hanover (Ger)
Age 30 (25.02.84)
Has come back from injury this season to put himself back in contention to make the squad. Won league honours with Rosenborg in Norway in 2009 before moving to Germany.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Ismael DIOMANDE (D, Age 21, 28.08.92, 0/0, Saint-Etienne, Fra)
Jean-Michel SERI (M, Age 22, 19.07.91, 0/0, Pacos de Ferreira, Por)
Giovanni SIO (F, Age 26, 31.03.89, 6/0, Basle, Swi)

MISSING OUT

Giant striker **Lacina Traore**, who joined Everton on loan from Monaco in January, has been sidelined after undergoing surgery for a hamstring injury. He is not expected to be fit in time for the World Cup.

Emmanuel Eboue, displaced at right-back by Serge Aurier, is the first of the "golden generation" to be dropped by Lamouchi.



JAPAN

“Blue Samurai” need to strengthen in defence

Back problems remain major headache for Zaccheroni

Japan, like their fellow Asian qualifiers, know that while it is one thing to reach the World Cup finals, it is another matter entirely to do well once there. And while Alberto Zaccheroni's side will be looking to at least equal their round-of-16 finish last time out, the coach knows that the team's defensive frailties need to be addressed.

During his first unbeaten year in charge, Zaccheroni could do no wrong, and a 2-2 draw away to Holland and 3-2 win in Belgium last November confirmed that there is plenty to get excited about with his team. On the attack, the side has produced both goals and spectacles, most impressively the narrow 4-3 loss to Italy in the Confederations Cup. However, the defensive problems have been there for all to

see and were exposed during a shaky 4-2 win over New Zealand in a friendly in March.

The previous national coach, Takeshi Okada, faced similar issues in 2010 and he resolved them at the last minute by bringing in an extra holding midfielder. And while Zaccheroni may also have a surprise up his sleeve, the mood in the country remains cautiously optimistic, with fans not quite sure what to expect this time.

Colombia are the standout team in the group and Japan generally struggle against the big teams from the Americas. They lost 3-0 to Brazil and 2-1 to Mexico at the Confederations Cup, and 4-2 to Uruguay in a friendly in August. However, their record against African countries is better, not least a victory over Cameroon in the opening game of the 2010 finals and a 3-1 win over Ghana last September. And as proved against Italy, Holland and Belgium, European opposition holds no special fear for Japan, so they will be hoping for good results against Ivory Coast and Greece.

With much of his squad playing their club football in Europe, Zaccheroni selected Florida for the pre-World Cup training camp to acclimatise his squad to the heat and humidity. Then it's off to Itu for the real action to begin.

Mike Plastow

BASE CAMP



GROUP C FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Ivory Coast (Recife)
Jun 19	v Greece (Natal)
Jun 24	v Colombia (Cuiaba)



Sao Paulo state was an obvious choice for Japan's base camp – with almost 700,000 people of Japanese descent living there. They will be staying just outside the city of Itu at the luxurious Spa Sport Resort, which includes a fully equipped training complex.

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 27	Friendly v Cyprus in Saitama
May 30	Travel to training camp in Florida
Jun 2	Friendly v Costa Rica in Tampa, USA
Jun 6	Friendly v Zambia in Tampa, USA

THE VIEW FROM JAPAN

● “Japan are capable of matching almost any team for style, but recent performances have been very inconsistent and there is no telling which Japan will turn up on the day. The team has been undone by careless defensive errors several times over the past year, but there is real talent in the side and players like Shinji Kagawa and Keisuke Honda could make a real impact in Brazil. They look well placed to qualify and after that a place in the quarter-finals seems a reasonable goal to aim for.”

Andrew McKirdy, Japan Times football writer



Dutch double...Japan earned a fine 2-2 draw with Holland last year

● “Japan's fate is completely in their own hands as not much separates them from the others in the group. The current team has more international experience than previous World Cup sides and technically they will be among the best in Brazil. When fit – and they should be this summer – Japan can cause a lot of problems for even the biggest of opponents as they showed versus Italy at the Confederations Cup. With such an emphasis on attack in Alberto Zaccheroni's concept, however, Japan can be prone to leaking goals, especially with a less-than-stellar central defence. Injuries to captain Makoto Hasebe and defenders Atsuto



Uchida and Maya Yoshida have made them doubtful, and it remains to be seen how their potential absences will impact a team which has largely been unchanged since Zaccheroni took over Japan after South Africa.”

Shintaro Kano, Kyodo News sportswriter

● “This is Japan’s fifth consecutive World Cup and simply qualifying is no longer enough. Japan reached the round of 16 last time, their best-ever aside from when hosting, and winning through the group must now be seen as the norm. None of the teams in Group C has won the World Cup. Of course, it is very hard to call but this isn’t a

hopeless draw. They beat Cameroon in the opener in 2010 and many of the same players will be back – and they can surely ride the wave if they repeat the trick against Ivory Coast this time. If all goes well they’ll meet a team from Group D in the round of 16 and that will be their chance for a first-ever quarter-final place. Yes, there are worries. Key defensive players have been injured this year and attackers Honda and Kagawa have been struggling at their clubs. And if the manager cannot react more flexibly than he did at the Confederations Cup, including in player selection, an early exit really could be on the cards.”

Naoya Tanizawa, Weekly Soccer Digest

COACH PROFILE

Alberto ZACCHERONI (Ita)

Age 61 (01.04.53)

Japan coach since August 2010

How he got the job

After the 2010 World Cup, Japan wanted a top European tactician to take the team up a notch. They first looked to Spain before hitting on Zaccheroni.



Past successes as a coach

Coach of 13 Italian clubs from 1983 to 2010, most recently with Juventus, and won Serie A with Milan in 1999. Won the 2011 AFC Asian Cup and 2013 East Asian Cup with Japan.

Past failures as a coach

Was sacked at Milan after disappointing Champions League showings in successive seasons. Lost 5-1 to Arsenal while at Internazionale and oversaw Juventus’ 4-1 defeat away to Fulham in the Europa League in 2010.

Achievements as a player

Career cut short very early by injury.

World Cup experience

None.

Relationship with the media

Always polite, patient and friendly, taking the time to answer every question. His good results also help.

Relationship with the public

Japan’s most popular national coach at a World Cup finals.

Style of management/coaching

Highly tactical with careful attention to detail and a strong preference for attacking football. Although softly spoken in public, he reportedly exploded after last year’s World Cup qualifying loss in Jordan.

Notable backroom staff

Technical director and former Japan striker Hiromi Hara is his right-hand man. The core staff are mostly Italian: coach Stefano Agresti, goalkeeping coach Maurizio Guido, physical coach Eugenio Albarella and technical assistant Giampaolo Colautti.

After the World Cup

Zaccheroni says that he is only thinking as far ahead as the World Cup.

KEY **123** caps **12** goals (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and inc 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS


Shuichi GONDA
FC Tokyo
Age 25 (03.03.89)
 Handed his first cap by Okada against Yemen in January 2010, he has been a regular member of Zacccheroni's squad but with only one further cap – at the 2013 East Asian Cup – to show for it. Played at the London Olympics.



Eiji KAWASHIMA
Standard Liege (Bel)
Age 31 (20.03.83)
 First choice since May, 2010, just in time for South Africa, where he played every match. Saved a Frank Lampard penalty against England in a friendly prior to the last World Cup.



Shusaku NISHIKAWA
Urawa Red Diamonds
Age 27 (18.06.86)
 First made the bench under Ivica Osim in 2006 and has picked up occasional caps since 2009. Won consecutive J.League titles with Sanfrecce Hiroshima in 2012 and 2013 before moving to Urawa Reds this season.

KITS

First kit

Second kit
DEFENDERS


Jubilo Iwata
Age 28 (28.08.85)
 A central defender who has been ever present in the squad since late 2010 but hasn't played since coming on against Iraq last summer and his cause has not been helped by playing second-division football this season.



Gamba Osaka
Age 31 (25.01.83)
 Centre-back who has been almost ever present since 2006. Zacccheroni also stood by him all last year while Gamba played in the second division. Started out as a holding midfielder and can play on either flank as well.



FC Tokyo
Age 27 (21.05.87)
 A striker turned midfielder turned defender, he is now a centre-back. First made the national team bench in 2008, but then had to wait until last summer for his next chance. Ever present since then and especially strong in the air.



Internazionale (Ita)
Age 27 (12.09.86)
 Tireless at left-back, he is the source of many of Japan's best attacks. Started playing for FC Tokyo while still at university and made his international debut in 2008. Wrote his graduation thesis at Meiji University on British culture.



Stuttgart (Ger)
Age 23 (14.03.91)
 No relation to Hiroki, Gotoku was born in New York to a German mother. A physically tough, attacking full-back who can play on either flank. One of four brothers, two of whom have signed with his old club, Albirex.

MIDFIELDERS


Sanfrecce Hiroshima
Age 28 (22.02.86)
 Rugged, defensive midfielder with a thundering shot who has won the J.League title two years in a row with Sanfrecce Hiroshima. A more robust alternative to Hasebe or Endo.



Gamba Osaka
Age 34 (28.01.80)
 Japan's most capped player of all time, he has spent his entire club career in his homeland and was voted Asian Player of the Year in 2009. A dead-ball specialist, he dictates the play, changing the rhythm and delivering a killer pass.



Nuremberg (Ger)
Age 30 (18.01.84)
 National captain who plays a pivotal role in holding midfield – covering, distributing and also dribbling forward to create space. Made his debut in 2006, he is battling to recover from a right-knee injury in time for Brazil.



Milan (Ita)
Age 27 (13.06.86)
 Scored against Cameroon and Denmark in 2010 and his game has continued to grow, first with CSKA Moscow and now Milan. Brave, strong and a master of the one-touch passing game, he plays in the hole behind the striker.



Hertha Berlin (Ger)
Age 28 (10.06.86)
 Hard tackler who became Japan's main back-up defensive midfielder after his debut against Paraguay in 2010. Most of his caps have been from the bench and he hasn't seen much international action since the Confederations Cup.

FORWARDS


Kashiwa Reysol
Age 23 (06.05.90)
 Hard-running, skilful finisher who now mostly plays wide on the right for his club side but can also operate at centre-forward. Scored on his debut against China last summer. Played at the 2011 Club World Cup.



Mainz (Ger)
Age 28 (16.04.86)
 Became Japan's joint-third top scorer of all time with his two goals in March's 4-2 victory over New Zealand. Quick and very hard working from wide on the right, he often arrives unnoticed in the penalty area to score.



Munich 1860 (Ger)
Age 24 (18.05.90)
 Slim but agile centre-forward who is skilful on the ground and moved to the German second tier from Kashiwa Antlers in January. Scored against Holland in November.



Sagan Tosu
Age 29 (11.04.85)
 The classic late developer, a journeyman centre-forward who has done the rounds of low-profile clubs but has averaged 20 goals a season for the past three years. Strong in the air, he scored at the Beijing Olympic Games.

TACTICS

4-2-3-1



Quick-passing, high-tempo game plan will put pressure on opponents

Japan's starting **4-2-3-1** formation packs midfield and makes maximum use of the flanks with both full-backs overlapping. The left wing is particularly strong, with **Shinji Kagawa** and **Yuto Nagatomo** on that side. Kagawa's combination play with the

overlapping Nagatomo as he cuts inside is a key link in Japan's quick-passing game.

The aggressive wing play places special onus on the central defenders and two holding midfielders, but everyone is expected to defend fiercely from the front in a high-intensity game.

In players like **Makoto Hasebe**, **Yasuhito Endo**, **Toshihiro Aoyama**, **Hajime Hosogai** and **Hotaru Yamaguchi**, Zaccheroni has holding midfielders who can also initiate attacks and score. Hasebe and Endo are the preferred first-choice partnership in central midfield. Defender **Masahiko Inoha** can also play the holding midfield role.

The three attacking midfielders and centre-forward could as well be described as four forwards. The rapid, one-touch passing and bold side changes are aimed at breaking the opponents down from every angle.

While Hasebe regulates the play, Honda is the physical dynamo who can receive, keep and release the ball in front of the box, while Kagawa and **Shinji Okazaki**, or **Hiroshi Kiyotake**, cut in from the wings. **Masato Kudo** is another attacking midfield option on the bench.

The dead-ball skills of Endo and Honda are also powerful weapons.

At centre-forward, Zaccheroni tends to prefer taller players who are good in the air. **Yuya Osako** is the likely starter, with **Yohei Toyoda** the most likely replacement.

Plan B?

Against both Ghana and Guatemala in friendly matches last September, and then again in October when playing Belarus, Zaccheroni tried out a **3-4-3** set-up.

An extra centre-back came in for the centre-forward, the full-backs moved up into wide midfield positions and the three attacking midfielders become forwards in name as well as substance.

3-4-3



15
0



Hiroki SAKAI

Hanover (Ger)
Age 24 (12.04.90)
The quick, tall, powerfully built full-back has been a regular squad member since January 2011, after winning the second tier with Kashiwa Reysol. Named the league's best young player before moving to Germany in 2012.

65
1



Atsuto UCHIDA

Schalke (Ger)
Age 26 (27.03.88)
Despite his slight build, he has established himself as a dynamic and resolute chance maker at right-back. Was dropped for the 2010 World Cup and a thigh injury now threatens his prospects for 2014.

38
2



Maya YOSHIDA

Southampton (Eng)
Age 25 (24.08.88)
Centre-back who suffered a knee ligament injury in March but is expected to recover in time for the summer. Scored the Dutch league's goal of the year in 2011-12, with a bicycle kick for VVV Venlo against PSV.

54
17



Shinji KAGAWA

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 25 (17.03.89)
An attacking midfielder with great vision and skill, he also has an eye for goal. He followed up Bundesliga titles at Borussia Dortmund with the Premier League at United last season but has not had so much playing time this term.

24
1



Hiroshi KIYOTAKE

Nuremberg (Ger)
Age 24 (12.11.89)
Can create goalscoring opportunities from either wing. He made his debut in 2011 and has rarely been out of the team since; sometimes starting, sometimes finishing, but seldom playing the whole game.

9
0



Hotaru YAMAGUCHI

Cerezo Osaka
Age 23 (06.10.90)
Ever present in the squad since making his debut and being voted most valuable player at last summer's East Asian Cup. A highly mobile defensive midfielder, he is a natural leader and played every match at the London Olympics.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Yuichi KOMANO (D, Age 32, 25.07.81, 78/1, Jubilo Iwata)
Yuzo KURIHARA (D, Age 30, 18.09.83, 20/3, Yokohama F Marinos)
Tomoaki MAKINO (D, Age 27, 11.05.87, 14/1, Urawa Red Diamonds)
Takashi INUI (M, Age 26, 02.06.88, 11/0, Eintracht Frankfurt, Ger)
Manabu SAITO (M, Age 24, 04.4.90, 4/1, Yokohama F Marinos)
Hideto TAKAHASHI (M, Age 26, 17.10.87, 7/0, FC Tokyo)
Mike HAVENAAR (F Age 27, 20.05.87, 17/4, Vitesse, Hol)

Yoichiro KAKITANI (F, Age 24, 03.01.90, 9/4, Cerezo Osaka)
Ryoichi MAEDA (F, Age 32, 09.10.81, 33/10, Jubilo Iwata)



"El Tri" long for a fifth game at the World Cup

Getting beyond round of 16 has become a national obsession

For the last 20 years, every World Cup for Mexico has appeared to be a repeat of the previous one: high hopes, a good performance in the group stage and then home after the round of 16. For Mexican fans, the so-called "fifth game" has become something of a national obsession.

This time around, things seem to be a bit different...but not for the best of reasons. Mexico will arrive in Brazil with some serious doubts, having gone through a tortuous

Carlos Vela, the country's best player, will not be playing at the World Cup

qualifying campaign, which finally ended with a play-off victory over New Zealand.

Worryingly for some fans, Miguel Herrera seems to have more confidence in players from Mexico's domestic league rather than the stars playing in Europe. Indeed, it is quite possible that his starting XI this summer will not contain the names of Javier Hernandez, Guillermo Ochoa or Giovanni Dos Santos – not to mention Carlos Vela, the country's best player, who has already announced that he will not be playing at the World Cup due to his poor relationship with the Mexican FA.

Since taking over as coach, Herrera has not

lost in six games, although his side is yet to face anyone who could be considered a top-class team. In three warm-up matches so far this year, two of them exclusively with Liga MX players, "El Tri" beat South Korea 4-0 and drew 0-0 with Nigeria and 2-2 with USA.

Against this backdrop, the main focus will be on avoiding elimination in the group phase – which hasn't happened to Mexico since 1978. In a group in which hosts Brazil are almost certain to occupy one of the top two places, the duel for second place seems to be between Mexico and Croatia – a team that is considered within reach, although "El Tri" has no individual talent to rivals the likes of Modric, Mandzukic and Rakitic.

Cameroon may also have something to say about this, so even getting through to a fourth game may be a tough task for Herrera's men.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 28	Friendly v Israel in Mexico City
May 31	Friendly v Ecuador in Arlington, USA
Jun 3	Friendly v Bosnia-Herzegovina in Chicago, USA
Jun 6	Friendly v Portugal in Foxborough, USA
Jun 7	Travel to Brazil



Kiwi clincher...a win over New Zealand got Mexico to Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP A FIXTURES

Jun 13	v Cameroon (Natal)
Jun 17	v Brazil (Fortaleza)
Jun 23	v Croatia (Recife)



Like their fellow CONCACAF qualifiers Costa Rica, Mexico are basing themselves in Santos – the coffee capital of Brazil. They will be staying at the Hotel Parque Balneario in the heart of the city's historic district and will train at the CT Rei Pele – the lavishly equipped training ground of Santos, which was named in honour of their most illustrious player, Pele.

THE VIEW FROM MEXICO

● "Mexico's main problem is having enough time to arrive at their best. Miguel Herrera will say they have done so, but the reality says otherwise."

Rafael Ocampo, chief editor of national sports newspaper La Afición



● "Not even the coach Miguel Herrera knows what the real level of the team will be when they face Cameroon in their World Cup opener. Mexico has been a huge question mark so far and will remain so until the ball starts rolling."

David Faitelson, ESPN Mexico





Local affair...Juan Carlos Valenzuela (centre) in action during a 2-2 friendly draw with the USA

COACH PROFILE

Miguel HERRERA

Age 46 (18.03.68)

Mexico coach since October 2013

How he got the job

The Club America coach took over for the play-off games against New Zealand following the sacking of Victor Manuel Vucetich. After disposing of the "All Whites", he was named national coach until after the World Cup.



Past successes as a coach

After years of his teams being known for playing good football but failing to win any titles, he broke that streak as his America team won the Liga MX clausura last year. They finished the next tournament in first place, but lost in the Final.

Past failures as a coach

Failed to save Veracruz from relegation in 2008.

Achievements as a player

Won 19 caps in the 1990s.

World Cup experience

Missed out on USA 94 after he punched a photographer during a league game in the run-up to the finals, and was dropped from the squad.

Relationship with the media

Excellent so far, maybe even too close. Never refuses interview requests and sometimes says more than he should.

Relationship with the public

Active on social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, where he posts almost daily. Much respected figure so far, but that might change if Mexico don't advance to the second round.

Style of management/coaching

He likes attacking football and comes from the "Lavolpista" school – after Ricardo La Volpe, who coached Mexico at Germany 2006.

Notable backroom staff

Nobody of note, but they all are former team-mates from when he was a player, or were players he has coached.

After the World Cup

If he makes it to the round of 16, he will be offered a longer contract.

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



31
0

Jesus CORONA

Cruz Azul
Age 33 (26.01.81)
Had been locked in a tug of war with Ochoa for the starting spot but now appears to be the clear-cut first choice. Good in the air and comfortable with the ball at his feet. Captain of the team that won Olympic gold in 2010.



56
0

Guillermo OCHOA

Ajaccio (Fra)
Age 28 (13.07.85)
Third choice in 2006 and reserve in 2010, it seems he will again have to content himself with a place on the bench despite scintillating performances in France that have seen him linked to Milan and Marseille.



12
0

Alfredo TALAVERA

Toluca
Age 31 (18.09.82)
Has been extremely solid since moving to Toluca a few years ago and has been a feature of the national side since 2011, although almost exclusively as third choice. Good in the air, physically sound and a good trainer.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



26
3

Paul AGUILAR

America
Age 28 (06.03.86)
Played 55 minutes of Mexico's first game in South Africa 2010 before being replaced. He looks to be the starting right-back this time but there are still many doubts about the level of performance he will offer in Brazil.



11
0

Miguel LAYUN

America
Age 25 (25.06.88)
The rags-to-riches story of the national team. Ridiculed two years ago for a perceived lack of talent but now revered by fans and media. A fast and attacking left-back with a powerful shot and great crossing ability. A sure starter in Brazil.



120
15

Rafael MARQUEZ

Leon
Age 35 (13.02.79)
The team's captain and leader, will be the first player in the history of the World Cup to have skipped his team in four consecutive finals. He has lost some of his speed but still has superb positioning and technique.



50
1

Hector MORENO

Espanyol (Spa)
Age 26 (17.01.88)
The team's defensive stalwart, he has been on the up since moving to Europe at age 19, to AZ. Now in Spain, his good season has generated interest from all over Europe. A very complete left-footed central defender.



12
0

Diego REYES

Porto (Por)
Age 21 (19.09.92)
The new rising star of Mexican football, this technically sound central defender was transferred to Porto after starring for Mexican side America. Has struggled in Portugal but his position in the national team is not in doubt.

MIDFIELDERS



21
0

Javier AQUINO

Villarreal (Spa)
Age 24 (11.02.90)
Despite having had a good season in Spain, he is under pressure to make the cut for the final squad list. A diminutive right-sided midfielder with great speed and sound technical qualities, but he hasn't played much under Herrera.



5
0

Isaac BRIZUELA

Toluca
Age 23 (28.08.90)
Known as "Little Rabbit" for his speed and versatility, the diminutive playmaker has been one of the best players of the Liga MX for the past year. He offers the team vision and skill, and has a decent long-range shot.



11
4

Marco FABIAN

Cruz Azul
Age 24 (21.07.89)
One of the eternal hopes of Mexican football, this talented but inconsistent playmaker finally seems to have come into his own after a high-profile move from Guadalajara to Cruz Azul and has regained the trust of Herrera.



100
14

Andres GUARDADO

Valencia (Spa)
Age 27 (28.09.86)
One of the most polarising figures in Mexican football, he is considered indispensable by some and surplus by others. He hasn't had the best of seasons on loan to Leverkusen in Germany, but can be either a left-winger or wingback.



10
0

Hector HERRERA

Porto
Age 24 (19.04.90)
Poised to be one of Mexico's top performers at the World Cup after enjoying a good first season at Porto. An extremely versatile midfielder who feels more comfortable in a box-to-box role but can also play as the anchorman.

FORWARDS



73
14

Giovani DOS SANTOS

Villarreal (Spa)
Age 25 (11.05.89)
Despite having had a scintillating season with Villarreal in Spain, he doesn't seem to have much love from Herrera. He has the talent but the coach might decide not to take him because "he doesn't fit in his system".



58
35

Javier HERNANDEZ

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 25 (01.06.88)
Despite a disappointing club season and losing his starting place in the national side to Peralta, "Chicharito" (little pea) is still expected to make an impact in Brazil – either as the second striker or as a sub.



22
4

Raul JIMENEZ

America
Age 23 (05.05.91)
Propelled his status after scoring an impressive bicycle-kick against Panama that allowed Mexico to stay alive in the qualifiers. He's physically the strongest Mexican forward and a Herrera favourite after playing club football for him.



26
16

Oribe PERALTA

Santos Laguna
Age 30 (12.01.84)
Scored the two goals that gave "El Tri" the gold medal at the London Olympics in 2012 and five times in the play-off games against New Zealand. Considered to be the best striker at the World Cup not currently playing in Europe.

TACTICS



Herrera puts his faith in wingbacks and Liga MX players

Herrera has adopted the attacking line-up used by former national coach Ricardo La Volpe in Germany 2006 to such an extent that he often seems to overlook the team's stars in favour of those players that have already played under him at club level and who

know his **5-3-2** system.

In Herrera's system the wingbacks play a big role and they are in charge of generating the side's attacking thrust with well-timed forward runs. There's only room for one anchorman and the other two midfielders are used more in box-to-box roles, recovering possession and offering support for the wide players. Of the two strikers, one usually operates as a pure centre-forward while the other takes up a more withdrawn position. The pair can, however, swap roles during the game.

It's a very attack-minded system in which all the players have to be confident with the ball, but it is also one that can be very risky as up to seven players can be in the opposing side at the same time, leaving the anchorman and the three central defenders very exposed at the back.

Herrera has stated that he's prepared to change his set-up if the need arises, but from what has been seen in this year's friendlies that doesn't seem to be the case. It's safe to assume that Mexico's games in Brazil will feature plenty of goals, although it remains to be seen how many of them will be scored by "El Tri".

It seems that Herrera may well stick to his guns and use mostly local Liga MX players in his starting XI, with the only exceptions being Espanyol's **Hector Moreno** and Porto pair **Diego Reyes** and **Hector Herrera**.

While there doesn't seem to be a place in the starting line-up for talented players such as **Giovani Dos Santos**, the finals will give left-back **Miguel Layun**, box-to-box midfielder **Carlos Pena** and striker **Oribe Peralta** the chance to shine on the world stage.

Plan B?

While Herrera is unlikely to be swayed from his 5-3-2 set-up, he could change the personnel. The most likely scenario will be to accommodate both Dos Santos and Peralta up front.



Francisco RODRIGUEZ

America
Age 32 (20.10.81)
A controversial figure as most fans blame him for the Confederations Cup and qualifying debacles. Lost his spot in the squad but returned for the New Zealand play-offs. Solid in the air but a lack of speed will probably see him on the bench.



Jorge TORRES

Tigres
Age 26 (16.01.88)
Solid left-back who was the preferred choice for most of the qualifiers until Herrera arrived and preferred Layun. He's a more defensive kind of player, who could be used if Mexico need to protect an advantage.



Juan Carlos VALENZUELA

America
Age 30 (15.03.84)
Central defender who is a prime example of the sort of domestic player who might not appear to have the quality required to represent "El Tri" but is likely to get a place because he knows how to play in Herrera's system.



Juan Carlos MEDINA

America
Age 30 (22.08.83)
Despite recent doubts about his talent at the top level, he seems to be the main candidate to start in the lone anchor position for Mexico in Brazil. He's technically sound and covers a lot of ground, but lacks speed and physical prowess.



Luis MONTES

Leon
Age 28 (16.05.86)
Alongside Pena and Marquez, one of the stalwarts of a Leon side that won the Liga MX in December. A highly technical and intelligent midfielder who struggles against more physical opposition. Most likely to be used as a sub in Brazil.



Carlos PENA

Leon
Age 24 (29.03.90)
Known as "Gullit" for his dark skin and long hair, this physically powerful midfielder has taken the Liga MX by storm. His speed and stamina are very important for Herrera's side and he also has a knack for scoring important goals.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Moises MUNOZ (G, Age 34, 01.02.80, 13/0, America)
Enrique PEREZ (D, Age 25, 13.10.88, 3/0, Atlas)
Jose Juan VAZQUEZ (M, Age 26, 14.03.88, 2/0, Leon)
Alan PULIDO (F, Age 23, 08.03.91, 3/4, Tigres)

MISSING OUT

The big absence is **Carlos Vela**, who has fallen out with the Mexican FA. The Real Sociedad striker has not played for the national side since 2011 after he was publicly humiliated when details were revealed of a party in the team hotel after a friendly against Colombia.

NIGERIA

Keshi's side capable of second place

Draw gives "Super Eagles" good chance of progressing

The "Super Eagles" arrive in Brazil as reigning African champions but arguably at their most unconvincing in decades with an enigmatic aura about them.

Nigeria's triumph in South Africa last year was as unexpected as it was unconvincing. They stuttered through the opening round but then upset favourites Ivory Coast in the quarter-finals and went on to beat Mali and Burkina Faso to take the title. But their subsequent performance at the Confederations Cup in Brazil in mid-year proved disappointing and their World Cup qualification path was the easiest of the five African sides.

It leaves a scepticism about their potential, tempered by a favourable draw in a group with Argentina, the favourites to take top place. However, Nigeria believe they can easily take second spot ahead of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iran. They could even have progress sewn up after their two opening games and before they complete their schedule, against Argentina.

Nigeria have twice come through the group stage, famously letting slip a lead late in their second-round game against Italy in Boston in 1994, and then in 1998 beating Spain in the group phase only to be hammered by Denmark in the knockout stage.

Coach Stephen Keshi does not have any international-class stars at his disposal but the squad does have a dynamism and pace about it. John Obi Mikel, who missed the last World Cup

through injury, is their most recognisable player. Peter Odemwingie could return after a row with Keshi and Shola Ameobi of Newcastle United adds experience, but it is largely a youthful squad.

The trip to Brazil last June would have been invaluable to Keshi in emphasising where his squad needed strengthening. He had set a course without many of the more established internationals when he first took over, with the side needing a shake-up in the wake of surprise failure to qualify for the 2012 Nations Cup.

Keshi gambled on promoting home-based talent despite the fact the bulk of Nigeria's stars are based abroad. Rather than backfire, the bonhomie in the group saw them through to 2013 Nations Cup success, but they will need much more at the World Cup, even if progress to the second round is well within their grasp.

Mark Gleeson

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 28	Friendly v Scotland in London, Eng
May 29	Travel to training camp in Houston, USA
Jun 3	Friendly v Greece in Philadelphia, USA
Jun 7	Friendly away to USA in Jacksonville, USA
Jun 11	Travel to Brazil

BASE CAMP



GROUP F FIXTURES

Jun	v Iran (Curitiba)
Jun 21	v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Cuiaba)
Jun 25	v Argentina (Porto Alegre)



Nigeria will be based at the Vitoria Hotel Concept in Campinas, a city to the north west of Sao Paulo that initially grew rich on coffee production. Based in the upmarket district of Cambu, the hotel even boasts a heliport. The "Super Eagles" will train at the 40,988 capacity Estadio Brinco de Ouro de Princesa, which is home to Guarani.



Eagles clipped...Nigeria lost to Spain at the Confederations Cup

THE VIEW FROM NIGERIA

● "It's a good group for us. Argentina are the world powers, but you cannot afford to underrate Iran or Bosnia. We will respect all the teams and take it game after game."

TV analyst and assistant coach
Daniel Amokachi



● "The players know what they are up against. They need to play their hearts out."

Ex-Nigeria goalkeeper
Joseph Dosu



● “Once we’ve roughened out the edges the ‘Super Eagles’ will be ready to fly very, very, very high in Brazil, like the true Eagles they are supposed to be and which we know them to be.”
Enthusiastic commentator Cyril Nwokeji

● “With an African Nations Cup victory in the bag, and confidence high among fans, media and players, Nigeria’s timing for chaos has arrived earlier than usual in the form of an open Cold War between federation and coach.”
Journalist Colin Udoh



Midfield star...John Obi Mikel

COACH PROFILE

Stephen KESHI

Age 52 (23.01.62)

Nigeria coach since November 2011

How he got the job

Nine years after his unceremonious exit as an assistant coach he returned as a replacement for Samson Siasia, whose contract was terminated after Nigeria failed to qualify for the 2012 African Nations Cup.



Past successes as a coach

Won the African Nations Cup with Nigeria last year and qualified Togo for the 2006 World Cup.

Past failures as a coach

Fired by Togo before the 2006 World Cup in Germany after a clash with Emmanuel Adebayor and did not get past the first round of the 2010 Nations Cup in Angola with a highly-fancied Mali team.

Achievements as a player

Captained Nigeria to 1994 African Nations Cup success and won the Belgian League with Anderlecht in 1991. Runner-up in 1990 European Cup-winners Cup.

World Cup experience

Captain of Nigeria in 1994 but dropped for first two games and played just 90 minutes.

Relationship with the media

Jocular and jovial, as well as incredibly patient given the verbosity of the Nigerian media. However, he never offers anything revealing.

Relationship with the public

Long loved by the Nigerian supporters who admiringly refer to him as “Big Boss” but knows defeat comes with heavy criticism.

Style of management/coaching

Encouraging and enthusiastic with a heavy emphasis on a father-figure type role.

Notable backroom staff

Assisted by former international colleague Daniel Amokachi, who was once a striker with Everton and Club Brugge.

After the World Cup

Building for the future and attempting to try to make Nigeria into potential World Cup winners in 2018.

WORLD CUP 2014 NIGERIA SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)  12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



Chigozie AGBIM

Gombe United
Age 29 (28.11.84)
Third choice who has won all his caps in non-competitive matches. Came in for some criticism last year because of his small size and weakness in the air. Captained Nigeria at this year's African Nations Championship.



Austin EJIDE

Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr)
Age 30 (08.04.84)
Long-standing deputy who has been to eight major tournaments but played only three matches. Won his first cap in 2001 and has played club football in Tunisia, France and now Israel.



Vincent ENYEAMA

Lille (Fra)
Age 31 (29.08.82)
Captain of the team who will be at his third World Cup after one game in 2002 and all three in South Africa. This season he almost broke the French league record for the longest spell without conceding a goal but fell short on 1,062 minutes.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



Efe AMBROSE

Celtic (Sco)
Age 25 (18.10.88)
First-choice right-back who won his first cap in 2008. Has admitted that even on holiday at home in Nigeria he cannot stop playing, sometimes getting up at 6am for a game with friends.



Azubuike EGWUEKWE

Warri Wolves
Age 24 (16.07.89)
An imposing defender, he lacks pace so will be back-up for the centre-backs. Unused squad member at the 2013 Nations Cup but made three substitute appearances at last year's Confederations Cup in Brazil.



ELDERSON Echiejile

Monaco (Fra)
Age 26 (20.01.88)
Left-back who had a starring role at the 2007 Under-20 World Cup, after which he signed for French club Rennes. After a spell in Portugal, he is now back in Ligue 1 and signed a new four-and-a-half year deal in January.



Godfrey OBOABONA

Caykur Rizespor (Tur)
Age 23 (16.08.90)
Has missed only two of Nigeria's last 33 games – both low-key friendlies – playing all eight of the qualifying games. Plays at the heart of the defence but was not picked up by a European club until after last year's Confederations Cup.



Kenneth OMERUO

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 20 (17.10.93)
Has had a successful loan spell in the Championship this season with Middlesbrough. Loaned to Den Haag in the Dutch league last term. Mostly used as a full-back at club level but Keshi has played him in central defence.

MIDFIELDERS



Brown IDEYE

Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 25 (10.10.88)
A glut of missed chances at last year's Confederations Cup came as a blow to his confidence. Plays with much pace and power but could do with little more finesse.



Nosa IGIEBOR

Real Betis (Spa)
Age 23 (09.11.90)
Had a starting berth at the beginning of last year's African Nations Cup but lost his place during the tournament and missed the Confederations Cup because of injury. Plays on the right side of midfield.



John Obi MIKEL

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 27 (22.04.87)
Has made his reputation as a crunching tackler in midfield but often finds himself in a more forward role for Nigeria. His club highlights include a stellar performance when Chelsea won the 2012 Champions League.



Victor MOSES

Chelsea (Eng)
Age 23 (12.12.90)
Former England under-21 winger who changed his allegiance after growing up as an asylum seeker in Britain. Has failed to feature while on loan to Liverpool, and his future at Chelsea probably depends on how he performs in Brazil.



Ahmed MUSA

CSKA Moscow (Rus)
Age 21 (14.10.92)
Speedy winger who was one of the few Nigerians to play in all of the eight World Cup qualifiers. Spotted at junior World Cup and signed by Dutch club VVV Venlo, where he added technique to his raw power and energy.

FORWARDS



Shola AMEOBI

Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 32 (12.10.81)
Moved to England aged five and won 20 caps at under-21 level before switching his allegiance and making his debut for Nigeria in 2012. A self-confessed computer games addict, his two brothers are also professional footballers.



Emmanuel EMENIKE

Fenerbahce (Tur)
Age 26 (10.05.87)
Suffered serious injury at last year's Nations Cup but still ended up top scorer despite missing the Final. Returned to score vital goals in the World Cup play-offs. Arrested but later released in Turkey for alleged match-fixing.



Ezekiel IMOH

Standard Liege (Bel)
Age 20 (24.10.93)
A bid by Belgium to fast track a passport application and have him in contention for the "Red Devils" was stymied, opening the door for Nigeria to hand him a first cap in March. Has been in fine scoring form for his club side this season.



Victor OBINNA

Chievo (Ita)
Age 27 (25.03.87)
Strong striker and set-piece specialist who has made the most of his appearances as an impact sub. Played at three successive African Nations Cup finals from 2006 to 2010 but has had a limited time with the team since.



Peter ODEMWINGIE

Stoke City (Eng)
Age 32 (15.07.81)
Born in Uzbekistan, grew up in and played for clubs in Romania, Belgium, France and Russia before moving to England after appearing at the 2010 World Cup. Fell out with Keshi and has not played for the last two years.

TACTICS



Quick transition from defence to attack

Nigeria's coach Stephen Keshi insists he wants his side to play attractive football and leave a good impression, but too often his side are too frenetic.

Nigeria are very quick to turn defence into attack and like to get the ball over the top of the opposing back line for one of their quick strikers to run onto. They also

push the ball around well, but they are not as effective when trying a slower build-up.

The team play with a flat back four, one holding midfielder and two wide wingers with **John Obi Mikel** pushing far more forward than he usually does at club level. They have either two strikers or one target man and another wider. **Vincent Enyeama** is the obvious choice in goal with **Efe Ambrose** and **Elderson Echiejile** as full-back and **Godfrey Oboabona** and **Kenneth Omeruo** as centre-backs.

It is a lot more fluid in midfield with **Ogenyi Onazi** a regular feature on the right behind Mikel. **John Ogu** might be used as a holding midfielder when Mikel plays behind the strikers. **Emmanuel Emenike** and **Shola Ameobi** could lead the attack, or Ameobi could be used as an impact substitute if Keshi elects to go with Emenike as a lone striker. Wingers **Victor Moses**, on the left, and **Ahmed Musa**, on the right, will offer support to Emenike.

Peter Odemwingie has been out of the squad following a dispute with Keshi, but the pair recently held discussions about a possible return to the fold.

Plan B?

An alternative plan would be to have Mikel as a goalkeeper in front of the back four, in a loose 4-1-4-1, allowing Musa or **Nosa Igiebor** and Moses to drop back into the midfield. The defence was impressive at the last African Nations Cup but outgunned at the Confederations Cup last June. This more cautious approach would allow Nigeria to offer more protection to the defence and then play a more counter-attacking game.



Juwon OSHANIWA

Ashdod (Isr)
Age 23 (14.09.90)

Will provide cover at left-back, having been a regular squad member without commanding a starting line-up berth. Moved in 2012 on a four-year deal from Nigerian club Sharks to Israel.



Joseph YOBO

Fenerbahce (Tur)
Age 33 (06.09.80)

Played at the 2002 and 2010 World Cups and won a recall in March after more than a year out of the squad. Has been on loan to Premier League strugglers Norwich City this season.



Nnamdi ODUAMADI

Milan (Ita)
Age 23 (17.10.90)

Dribbling wizard on the left side who has been loaned out to Serie B side Brescia this season. Scored a hat-trick in the Confederations Cup against Tahiti, returning after injury kept him out of last year's Nations Cup-winning squad.



John OGU

Academica (Por)
Age 26 (20.04.88)

Journeyman central midfielder who played in Slovenia and in the lower leagues in Portugal and Spain before winning a first international cap at the age of 25. Featured in all three games at last year's Confederations Cup.



Ogenyi ONAZI

Lazio (Ita)
Age 21 (25.12.92)

Right-sided midfielder who has also played as a right-back. Moved to Italy after the 2009 Under-17 World Cup where Nigeria were runners-up. Began his career at a team set up by renowned Nigerian "prophet" TB Joshua.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Leon BALOGUN (D, Age 25, 28.06.88, 1/0, Fortuna Dusseldorf, Ger)

Sunday MBA (M, Age 25, 28.11.88, 21/5, Bastia, Fra)

Fedor OGUDE (M, Age 26, 29.07.87, 16/0, Amkar Perm, Rus)

Michael UCHEBO (F, Age 24, 02.02.90, 1/0, Cercle Brugge, Blg)



PORTUGAL

Brothers in arms

Close ties with host nation will help the “*Selecção*”

Portugal may be making their eighth successive appearance at a major tournament but, with Brazil hosting the event, it promises to be an extra special World Cup for the “*Selecção*”. Paulo Bento’s men are expected to receive plenty of backing from the Brazilian public – not to mention the millions of emigrants and Portuguese descendants living in the “brother” country.

Portugal have landed a tough group, but that is precisely the situation in which they usually shine. At Euro 2000 and Euro 2012 most pundits wrote off their chances of reaching the knockout stage, yet on both occasions Portugal reached the semi-finals.

A close-knit squad with a strong identity, a tried and trusted tactical formula, and bags of experience in high-pressure situations, augurs well for a successful tournament. The focus will inevitably fall on captain Cristiano Ronaldo, and should the Real Madrid man maintain his sensational form of recent months he will take some stopping this summer.

Pepe, Fabio Coentrão and Joao Moutinho are also world-class players, and the team is likely to be boosted by the emergence of the exciting young holding midfielder William Carvalho. The Sporting Lisbon starlet has been easily the best player in Portugal in an outstanding debut season.

Nevertheless, there is one major weakness. As has so often been the case, Portugal’s major shortfall is the lack of a top-quality centre-forward. Either Helder Postiga or Hugo Almeida will get the nod – and neither exactly

strikes fear into the heart of opposition defenders. More worrying still, two key players have had poor seasons. Moutinho, their most important player after Ronaldo, has struggled since his move from Porto to Monaco, while Coentrão has rarely played for Real Madrid.

The mood of the nation is one of cautious optimism. There is none of the euphoria witnessed ahead of the 2002 World Cup or Euro 2004 – but there is also little sign of a typically Portuguese trait: a tendency to default to pessimism. People are genuinely excited about the whole event and how Portugal will be received in a country that means so much.

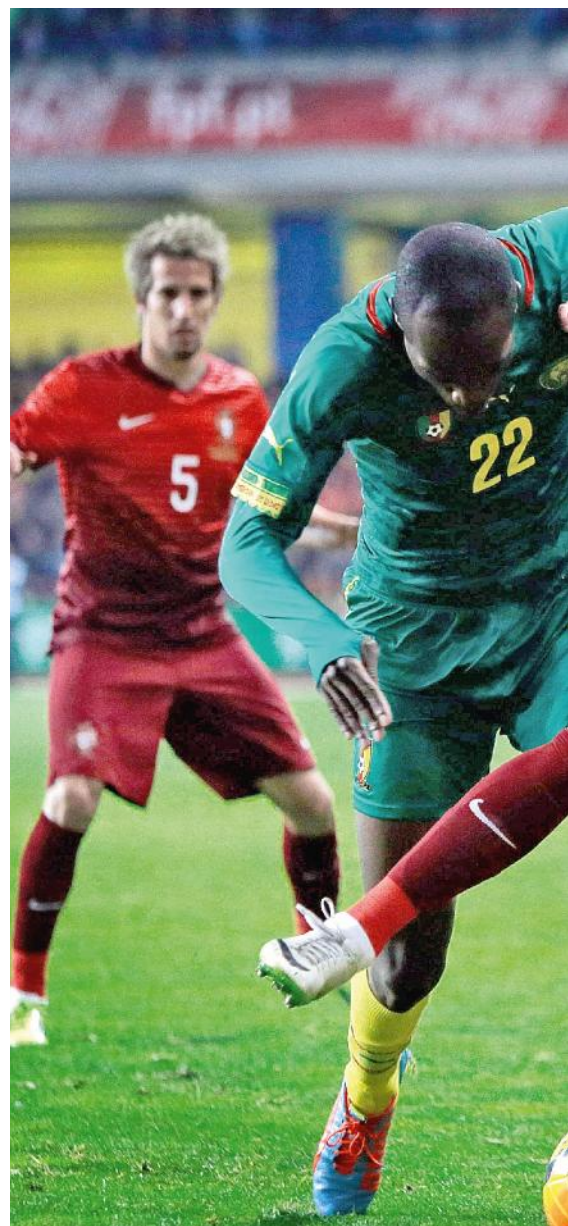
The Portuguese football federation appears to have left no stone unturned in its effort to provide a meticulous preparation schedule. Before choosing the Campinas base in São Paulo state, a total of 27 cities were visited and analysed, with the aid of national and international experts.

All systems go. What price an all Portuguese-speaking Final on July 13?

Tom Kundert

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 21	Training in Cascais
May 31	Friendly v Greece in Lisbon
Jun 6	Friendly v Mexico in Foxborough, USA
Jun 10	Friendly v Republic of Ireland in New Jersey, USA
Jun 11	Arrive at Campinas in Brazil



The main man...Portugal's Ronaldo

BASECAMP



GROUP G FIXTURES

Jun 16	v Germany (Salvador)
Jun 22	v USA (Manaus)
Jun 26	v Ghana (Brasília)



Portugal, like Nigeria, will be based in the pretty city of Campinas, staying at The Palms, a boutique hotel within the Royal Palm Resort. They will train at the Moises Lucarelli Stadium – home to one of Brazil’s oldest clubs, Ponte Preta – and also at the club’s recently upgraded training ground.

THE VIEW FROM PORTUGAL

● “Portugal have to approach the first phase with optimism, but also with realism. Portugal now have a responsibility to put in a good performance, with consecutive qualifications and good showings at major tournaments and World Cups. The year 2014 started very badly for Portuguese football with the passing of two great footballers in Eusebio and Mario Coluna. Their passing can act as a source of courage, inspiration and self-esteem for everybody involved with the Portuguese delegation. I think it can act as inspiration to try and emulate the glory that Eusebio and Coluna brought to Portugal.”

Antonio Simoes, finished third at the 1966 World Cup with Portugal





● “I expect Portugal to cause a surprise. I expect Portugal to give performances in the group phase that will make people see them as one of the potential favourites for the World Cup. I hope to see them go from outsiders to one of the favourites to win the tournament. It’s crucially important for Portugal that Cristiano Ronaldo is playing at full fitness. The favourites for this World Cup, because they are the hosts, are Brazil. Then you have to include Spain, Germany and Argentina as the major favourites. But like I said, I expect Portugal, after the opening phase, to join this group as one of the favourites to win the trophy.”

Vitor Baia, capped 80 times by Portugal



● “I think the opening group game against Germany is very important. Portugal are seen to be highly reliant on Cristiano Ronaldo, both in Portugal and abroad, but the important thing is that Portugal play as a team. I don’t think Portugal have such a balanced group of players as they had in 2000 or 2004, for example. There are 10 or 11 good players, but the alternatives for each position are not as strong as they were back then. But the fact that the tournament is in Brazil can be a positive factor. For sure, the Brazilians will want Portugal to win every game – as long as we are not playing against Brazil!”

Domingos Paciência, former Porto and Portugal striker and ex-Braga coach



COACH PROFILE

Paulo BENTO

Age 44 (20.06.69)
Portugal coach since October 2010

How he got the job

After a disastrous end to Carlos Queiroz’s reign, the Portuguese federation tried and failed to hire Jose Mourinho, on a temporary basis. “It’s an honour for me to be chosen behind the best coach in the world” said Bento after his appointment.



Past successes as a coach

Led Sporting Lisbon to four consecutive runners-up spots, coming desperately close to winning the Portuguese championship in 2007 when they finished just one point behind Porto. Won the Portuguese Cup twice and the Portuguese Super Cup twice.

Past failures as a coach

Bento’s Sporting progressed from the Champions League group stage only once in three attempts and were subsequently embarrassed with a 12-1 aggregate thrashing by Bayern Munich.

Achievements as a player

Capped 35 times, he won one Portuguese championship, three Portuguese Cups and one Portuguese Super Cup.

World Cup experience

Played in the 2002 World Cup.

Relationship with the media

Known for his straight talking when responding to journalists, he enjoys a relatively good press, aided by largely successful results.

Relationship with the public

Respected by the majority.

Style of management/coaching

Authoritarian, conservative, very set in his ways. Stubborn say some; a man with strong convictions, say others.

Notable backroom staff

Has worked with assistant Leonel Pontes for nigh on a decade, going back to their Sporting Lisbon days.

After the World Cup

Agreed a two-year contract extension until the end of Euro 2016.

WORLD CUP 2014 PORTUGAL SQUAD

KEY **123** caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)
12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



6
0

BETO

Sevilla (Spa)
Age 32 (01.05.82)
A penalty-saving specialist with remarkable agility, bravery and unwavering concentration. A late bloomer, he is now in the best form of his career as first-choice goalkeeper at Sevilla after several years as understudy at Porto.



32
0

EDUARDO

Braga
Age 32 (19.09.82)
Enjoyed a magnificent 2010 World Cup, conceding just one goal in four matches and earning a lucrative move to Serie A club Genoa. Things did not work out for him in Italy but is now back to his best after returning to Portugal.



29
0

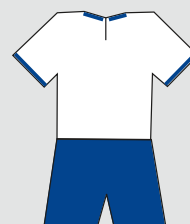
Rui PATRÍCIO

Sporting Lisbon
Age 26 (05.02.88)
The undisputed number one keeper, he made his debut in Portugal's 4-0 win over world champions Spain in 2010. Strong arms and wrists, combined with lightning reflexes, enable him to pull off some spectacular saves.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



70
10

Bruno ALVES

Fenerbahçe (Tur)
Age 32 (27.11.81)
Tall, solid centre-back who is also a potent attacking threat in the opposition box. His Brazilian father Washington Alves was one of five brothers who played professional football, as do Bruno's brothers, Geraldo and Julio.



8
0

Vitorino ANTUNES

Malaga (Spa)
Age 27 (01.04.87)
A solid, unspectacular but hard-running left-back who first came to prominence with Pacos Ferreira. After a miserable five years in Italy with Roma he has rediscovered his best form and is now a regular in La Liga.



43
3

Fabio COENTRAO

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 26 (11.03.88)
Bustling with energy, he is a vital component of the Portuguese set-up, both in defence and attack. His ability to smother opposing wingers and work in conjunction with Ronaldo on the left flank is a huge asset.



16
1

Ricardo COSTA

Valencia (Spa)
Age 33 (16.05.81)
Experienced central defender who can also play at full-back. He has represented Portugal at every age group level and made his debut for the senior team in 2005. He has played in the Bundesliga and Ligue 1 as well as La Liga.



6
0

Luis NETO

Zenit (Rus)
Age 26 (26.05.88)
Replaced the suspended Pepe for the crucial World Cup qualifier against Russia in Lisbon; the fast centre-back responded with a man-of-the-match performance. Suspensions could well see him stepping in again in Brazil.

MIDFIELDERS



10
0

Ruben AMORIM

Benfica
Age 29 (27.01.85)
An unspectacular but consistent performer who is enjoying the form of his life. Back in Lisbon after a long loan spell at Braga, he can play in a variety of positions and has recently revealed his creative side as a playmaker.



2
0

William CARVALHO

Sporting Lisbon
Age 22 (07.04.92)
The holding midfielder has been the best player in Portugal in his debut season and is set for a big-money move. Born in Angola, he turned down the opportunity to sign for Benfica as a 13-year-old because he was a Sporting fan.



0
0

FERNANDO

Porto
Age 26 (25.07.87)
Born in Brazil where he was capped at under-20 level, he became a Portuguese citizen in December 2013. A holding midfielder who is nicknamed "the Octopus" due to the way his long legs strangle opposition attacks.



73
10

Raul MEIRELES

Fenerbahçe (Tur)
Age 31 (17.03.83)
His tattoos and unusual appearance contrast sharply with a non-extravagant, efficient playing style. Totally professional, with an impeccable attitude, he has Premier League experience with Liverpool and Chelsea.



16
2

Ruben MICAEL

Braga
Age 27 (19.08.86)
A razor-sharp passer with good close control and an eye for goal, the Madeira-born midfielder is now returning to his best after suffering with injuries and a loss of form at Porto. Is currently on loan from Atletico Madrid.

FORWARDS



53
17

Hugo ALMEIDA

Besiktas (Tur)
Age 30 (23.05.84)
Tall, burly player who is powerful in the air but not over-endowed with technique. Since moving to Turkey he has earned as many column inches for his "old-school" Portuguese moustache as he has for his goalscoring exploits.



72
14

NANI

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 27 (17.11.86)
Tricky winger whose excellent initial impact in the Premier League has been followed by a disappointing few seasons, disrupted by numerous injuries. Has played precious little football this term but can still be a threat.



66
27

Helder POSTIGA

Lazio (Ita)
Age 31 (02.08.82)
First-choice striker since the retirement of Pauleta and Nuno Gomes. Often cited as the team's weakest link but has a happy knack of finding the net at crucial moments. Only five players have scored more goals for Portugal.



110
49

Cristiano RONALDO

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 29 (05.02.85)
Portugal's superstar skipper has thrived since the appointment of former team-mate Bento as national coach, scoring 24 goals in 32 games since his arrival. This will be the third World Cup for the World Player of the Year.



21
4

Silvestre VARELA

Porto
Age 29 (02.02.85)
An industrious winger who has made a number of important contributions as a late substitute. Born in the resort of Costa da Caparica, he was nicknamed "the Drogba of Caparica" due to his likeness to the Ivory Coast striker.

TACTICS



Ronaldo will roam but Bento is likely to stick with his tried and tested formation

After taking up the reins of the national team in 2010, Paulo Bento said he would be imprinting what he sees as the nation's football DNA, a **4-3-3** formation – and has been as good as his word. Second guessing the coach's first-choice starting XI

became the easiest job in football journalism before, during and after Euro 2012, with the exact same line-up selected in eight out of nine competitive games.

The system has proved fruitful on the whole, especially against stronger opposition with a lethal counter-attacking game plan working to perfection in two successive play-offs to reach the last two tournaments, and against Holland and to an extent against Spain at Euro 2012, for instance. The problem comes against theoretically weaker teams who set up defensively, as shown by the draws during World Cup qualifiers against Israel (twice) and Northern Ireland.

Criticised for his tactical inflexibility, Bento has been loathe to experiment other systems, although a 4-4-2 alternative has made the odd appearance, usually for small segments of games. Given Portugal's dearth of strikers, this has involved moving **Cristiano Ronaldo** into a central striking role. But, just like at Real, he is likely to be given a licence to roam, depending on the state of the game.

One intriguing question is how Bento will use **Ricardo Quaresma**, if he picks him in the squad. Ever since Quaresma emerged alongside Ronaldo at Sporting in 2002 (where they were team-mates of Bento's) Portugal fans have dreamed of the two supremely gifted wide men tearing into the opposition on either wing. The likelihood, though, is that the Porto star will be used as a weapon off the bench.

Plan B?

With the emergence of **William Carvalho** and the eligibility of Brazilian-born **Fernando**, some pundits have called for a 4-2-3-1 to accommodate the two high-class holding midfielders – although **Raul Meireles** might have something to say about that. The most plausible chance of seeing that system in operation would be in the opening game against highly-rated Germany.

Nevertheless, the smart money is on Bento rolling out his tried and trusted 4-3-3 throughout World Cup 2014.



PEPE

Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 31 (26.02.83)
His hard-man reputation and gamesmanship detract from what a fine centre-back he is. Born in Brazil, he owes his powerful physique to his father, who would regularly make him run and swim with weights strapped to his legs.



Joao PEREIRA

Valencia (Spa)
Age 30 (25.02.84)
A committed but occasionally hot-tempered right-back. He came through the ranks at Benfica but was sold after falling out with coach Ronald Koeman. Had spells at a number of clubs before moving to Spain in 2012.



Joao MOUTINHO

Monaco (Fra)
Age 27 (08.09.86)
Broke into the Sporting first team at the age of 18 and was captain within two years. His box-to-box dynamism, pinpoint passing and intelligence on the pitch are proof that innate talent can thrive in spite of a diminutive stature.



Ricardo QUARESMA

Porto
Age 30 (26.09.83)
Famed for his swerving crosses using the outside of his foot, he has been one of Portugal's most talented yet frustrating footballers of the last decade. Has scored a series of spectacular goals since a surprise move to Porto in January.



Miguel VELOSO

Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 28 (11.05.86)
A classy midfielder with a fine passing range. The son of the Benfica and Portugal defender Antonio Veloso, he initially failed to live up to his early promise but has become a mainstay in the side since Bento took charge.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Anthony LOPES (G, Age 23, 01.10.90, 0/0, Lyon, Fra)

JOSUE (M, Age 23, 17.09.90, 4/0, Porto)

Adrien SILVA (M, Age 25, 15.03.89, 0/0, Sporting Lisbon)

Ivan CAVALEIRO (F, Age 23, 18.10.93, 1/0, Benfica)

EDER (F, Age 26, 22.12.87, 6/0, Braga)

Carlos MANE (F, Age 20, 11.03.94, 0/0, Sporting Lisbon)

Rafa SILVA (F, Age 21, 17.05.93, 1/0, Braga)

MISSING OUT

Defender **Silvio** was ruled out after breaking his leg in Benfica's Europa League quarter-final against AZ Alkmaar. The full-back suffered the injury when he missed the ball and collided with team-mate Luisao. Lyon defender **Miguel Lopes** also broke a leg and misses out.

Bento has failed to tempt midfielder **Tiago Mendes** of Atletico Madrid out of international retirement, while Monaco defender **Ricardo Carvalho** remains out of favour with the coach.



RUSSIA

Looking to the future

Coach Capello may have one eye on the 2018 finals

Although Russia will go into the 2014 tournament with one eye on their own hosting of the finals in four years' time, many of those players who are set to be key in Brazil are unlikely to still be around in 2018.

Sergei Ignashevich, Vasili Berezutski, Yuri Zhirkov and Roman Shirokov are all over 30, while Alexander Kokorin, at 23, is probably the only relatively young player whose place in Fabio Capello's squad is guaranteed. It is worth noting that the 23 that travel to South America under the Russian flag this summer will almost certainly be drawn exclusively from the domestic league, with the older generation –

Lack of pace and fitness problems may lower chances of reaching the next round

who played in England, Italy and Spain – now mostly retired, and the younger ones not getting serious offers from abroad.

Experience is one of Russia's big strengths at the moment, but a lack of pace and possible fitness problems may lower the team's chances of reaching the knockout stage. A mobile South Korea – even though Russia beat them 2-1 in a friendly in November – will pose a very serious threat, as will the young and rapidly progressing Belgium side.

Capello also has to deal with the Russian Premier League's calendar change. Playing the season from autumn until spring is still a new

experience for the Russian players and it is difficult to say what sort of condition they will be in physically come June.

Russia are contesting their first World Cup finals since 2002 and, recalling when Guus Hiddink led the team to Euro semi-finals in 2008, local fans are once again pinning their hopes on a charismatic, overseas boss. Six years ago, the Dutch coach Hiddink used the two-week training session prior to the tournament to miraculously improve the players' physical conditioning.

Capello is also a man who knows what needs to be done and remains optimistic about the forthcoming tournament, despite the pessimists saying that the low standard of the Russian league does not give national captain Shirokov and his team-mates the feeling of a real international-level game.

Russian clubs' poor performances in European competitions is a vivid testament to this in an environment where even the style of refereeing outside their homeland often leaves Russian players confused and bewildered.

Victor Gusev

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 21	Squad trains at the Eduard Streltsov stadium in Moscow
May 26	Friendly v Slovakia in St Petersburg
May 31	Friendly v Norway in Oslo
Jun 6	Friendly v Morocco in Moscow
Jun 7	Fly to Brazil



Old hand...experienced centre-back Vasili Berezutski

BASE CAMP



GROUP H FIXTURES

Jun 17	v South Korea (Cuiaba)
Jun 22	v Belgium (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 26	v Algeria (Curitiba)



With Germany opting to switch base camps, Russia were able to take up coach Fabio Capello's preferred choice of staying at the San Raphael Country Hotel, a tranquil setting not far from the city of Itu. The Russians will venture into Itu for their training sessions at the city-owned Estadio Dr Novelli Junior.

THE VIEW FROM RUSSIA

● "The group is seemingly easy, but Belgium are the top contestants here, taking into account that their players occupy key positions at some of Europe's best clubs. Russia can cope with the other two rivals if we play our best game. My biggest concern is defence – with two experienced but ageing players in the centre. Much will depend on Ignashevich and Berezutski's physical condition. In attack the only sure candidate is Kokorin, so finding four strikers for the World Cup is a problem."

Mikhail Gershkovich, former national coach

● "Much will depend on Russia's first game against South Korea, who are physically fit, aggressive, disciplined and motivated – the qualities our players often lack. Belgium are



very good, but their time may come later. Individual work and self-preparation will be the key issue for Russia. For many of the payers it will be their last chance. I can foresee only half of the present squad surviving till 2018."

Yegor Titov, former Spartak Moscow and Russia midfielder



● "The Russian team is in the middle of major changes. Arshavin and his Euro 2008 team-mates have been replaced by Kokorin and others who will form the bulk of the World Cup squad in 2018. Unfortunately, Capello does not have a wide choice of players. What he has to work with is an experienced but ageing squad. The progress of Dzagoev, Shatov and Kokorin does not change the overall picture. Russia are capable of making it

to the last 16, but are unlikely to get past Germany or Portugal."

Konstantin Kleschev, former editor-in-chief of Sport-Express

● "The only real Russian advantage is the outstanding manager. I'm sure that Fabio Capello learned from his experience with England in 2010. Russia do not have world-level stars, but captain Shirokov is a very smart playmaker and striker Kokorin can make a goal by himself. Russia may reach the second round, but will have no chance later if they meet Germany. All other options, including Portugal, give Russia a chance of reaching the quarter-finals – which is by far the maximum for this team."

Igor Rabiner, Russian football journalist



COACH PROFILE

Fabio CAPELLO (Ita)

Age 68 (18.06.46)
Russia coach since July 2012

How he got the job

Took over from the departing Dick Advocaat after Russia's exit from Euro 2012.



Past successes as a coach

Won the league title in nine of his 16 seasons in charge of Milan, Real Madrid and Juventus. Led Milan to Champions League victory in 1994 and qualified England for the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012 finals.

Past failures as a coach

Resigned as England manager in 2012 following a dispute with the FA.

Achievements as a player

Earned 32 caps for Italy as a midfielder, scoring eight goals. Won three Serie A titles with Juventus and one with Milan.

World Cup experience

Played in 1974, scoring against Poland as Italy lost 2-1 and failed to qualify for the second round. As a coach, he took England to the last 16 in 2010.

Relationship with the media

Watches domestic games more often than his predecessors, so he has a well-balanced, business-like relationship with the press. However, the team remains closed to the media most of the time.

Relationship with the public

Respected by the public, who acknowledge his experience and talent. He is welcomed even by those who think that only a Russian should be coach of the national team.

Style of management/coaching

Seemingly more on the conservative side, he has complained that his choices are very limited due to the insufficient number of Russian players in a league dominated by foreigners. Has introduced stricter disciplinary rules.

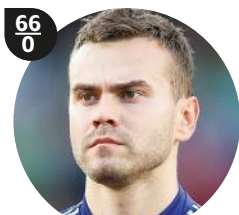
Notable backroom staff

He is assisted by former Italy defender Christian Panucci and ex-Russia goalkeeper Sergei Ovchinnikov.

After the World Cup

Recently signed a new contract until the end of the 2018 World Cup finals.

KEY **123** caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and including 05.03.14)
12 goals

GOALKEEPERS


66
0

Igor AKINFEEV

CSKA Moscow
Age 28 (08.04.86)
Made his top-tier debut at the age of 16, when he saved a penalty for CSKA, and at 18 became the youngest Russian to play for his country. Guilty of some bad mistakes recently, but that does not alter his status as first choice.



1
0

Yuri LODYGIN

Zenit
Age 24 (26.05.90)
Born in Russia, he moved to Greece at the age of 10 and played for their under-21 team. Made his debut for Russia in November 2013 in a friendly against World Cup opponents South Korea.



1
0

Sergei RYZHIKOV

Rubin Kazan
Age 33 (19.09.80)
Experienced and reliable, but is very much the third-choice keeper. The hero of Rubin's Champions League games against Barcelona, he is important for team morale and creates a good atmosphere in the dressing room.

KITS

First kit

Second kit
DEFENDERS


78
1

Alexander ANYUKOV

Zenit
Age 31 (28.09.82)
Fast and inventive in attack, but his once-guaranteed place at right-back has recently been questioned, not only in the national team but also for his club side. Describes his hobbies as fishing and cooking.



76
3

Vasili BEREZUTSKI

CSKA Moscow
Age 31 (20.06.82)
Defensive mainstay for more than a decade. Twenty minutes older than twin brother Alexei, he is a regular for both club and country alongside Ignashevich. Lacks pace but good in the air. Has a few important goals to his credit.



4
0

Vladimir GRANAT

Dynamo Moscow
Age 27 (22.05.87)
Replacement central defender who can also fill in as a wing-back. Effective when going forward for set-pieces. A non-playing member of the Euro 2012 squad, he made his debut during the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.



94
5

Sergei IGNASHEVICH

CSKA Moscow
Age 34 (14.07.79)
A good long-range passer who can shoot from distance and is strong in the air. Had a conflict with Akinfeyev a few years ago over the CSKA captaincy. Nicknamed "Sergei the Silent" over his refusal to speak with the media.



20
1

Dmitri KOMBAROV

Spartak Moscow
Age 27 (22.01.87)
One of twins who joined Spartak after six seasons with Dynamo Moscow. Unlike his brother, Kirill, he is a Spartak and Russia national team regular. Fast, with a good shot, he is often used as a left-back by Capello.

MIDFIELDERS


41
0

Igor DENISOV

Dynamo Moscow
Age 30 (17.05.84)
Former captain who is not as effective playing for Dynamo as he used to be with Zenit. A good tackler but has a suspect temperament and refused to play for Russia under Guus Hiddink prior to Euro 2008.



30
8

Alan DZAGOEV

CSKA Moscow
Age 23 (17.06.90)
Russia's best player at Euro 2012. Inventive but ill-tempered, he picks up too many yellow and red cards so is not one of Capello's favourites. One of the most important figures for his club side, where he plays in the holding role.



16
4

Viktor FAYZULIN

Zenit
Age 29 (22.04.86)
Attacking midfielder who has become an important part of the squad under Capello. A workhorse who is often played alongside Shirokov. Made his national team debut in August 2012 and has a useful goalscoring record.



26
3

Denis GLUSHAKOV

Spartak Moscow
Age 27 (27.01.87)
Former Lokomotiv attacking midfielder who has a good shot and has been used in the holding position since he joined Spartak. Last year was the best of his career so far. Has displaced Denisov as first choice.



14
3

Alexander SAMEDOV

Lokomotiv Moscow
Age 29 (19.07.84)
Sharp and speedy right-winger with a good shot who is dangerous from set-pieces. Having Azerbaijani roots, he was booed by the local crowd and had things thrown at him when Russia played a qualifier in Baku.

FORWARDS


2
0

Artyom DZYUBA

Spartak Moscow
Age 25 (22.08.88)
One of the few tall strikers at Capello's disposal, but has had few chances so far. He is one of this season's top scorers in the Russian Premier League. Coming to the end of a two-year loan to Rostov from Spartak.



2
0

Alexei IONOV

Dynamo Moscow
Age 25 (18.02.89)
Capable winger who may get a last-minute call-up for Brazil due to the lack of good Russian-born strikers and his good spring performances since moving to Dynamo Moscow from financially troubled Anzhi.



78
24

Alexander KERZHAKOV

Zenit
Age 31 (27.11.82)
Disappointed at Euro 2012, where he failed to score despite having several good opportunities. Remains the Russian Premier League's all-time top marksman. Fell victim to a business fraud in 2012 and lost about US\$10m.



19
5

Alexander KOKORIN

Dynamo Moscow
Age 23 (19.03.91)
Centre-forward and Capello's big attacking hope. A good finisher and improviser, he can also play the role of second striker. Began as a boxer before switching to Lokomotiv Moscow's football academy.

TACTICS

4-1-4-1



Capello draws defensive strength from a packed midfield

Capello will most likely use either a **4-1-4-1** or 4-2-3-1 formation, with **Denis Glushakov** sat in front of the back four, **Roman Shirokov** controlling the game from the centre of a packed midfield, with **Alexander Kokorin** working as

a lone striker. The system proved watertight in qualifying, with only five goals conceded by Capello's men.

Depending on the opposition, an additional midfielder may either join Glushakov in front of the back four or share the playmaking role with Shirokov. **Yuri Zhirkov**, who is no longer a wing-back as he was in previous national line-ups, will attack from the left, supported by **Dmitri Kombarov** who also feels more comfortable going forward.

Set-piece expert **Alexander Samedov** will control the right flank with a fast wingback behind him. Capello has several options here, including **Andrei Yeschenko**, **Alexander Anyukov** and **Alexei Kozlov**.

There is almost no real alternative to **Sergei Ignashevich** and **Vasili Berezutski** in central defence. Their CSKA team-mate and long-time first choice **Igor Akinfeev** will probably keep goal, although for the first time in recent years he may have a challenger in Russian league newcomer **Yuri Lodygin**.

Unless Capello decides to use the tall **Artyom Dzyuba** as the lone man up front, Russia will try to keep the ball on the ground and play quick, medium-range passes. Shirokov is the key figure here, with his good vision, quick mind and great technical skills.

Alan Dzagoev, who is probably the country's most talented playmaker, may be paired with Shirokov in the centre as an alternative to Fayzulin – so long as Capello does not exclude the ill-tempered player from his squad for disciplinary reasons.

Plan B?

Russia played a more attacking **4-3-3** under Dick Advocaat at Euro 2012. Although Capello's natural inclination is to pursue a defensive outlook, he adopted this system against lesser sides in qualifying. Here, **Alexander Kerzhakov** comes in as the main striker, with Kokorin moving to the left flank in place of Zhirkov. Shirokov and Fayzulin form a three-man midfield alongside Glushakov.



Alexei KOZLOV

Dynamo Moscow
Age 27 (25.12.86)
Tall right-back who was capped as a Kuban Krasnodar player before moving to Dynamo this year. Reliable and good in attack, he played in the German lower leagues at 16 before returning to Russia in 2007.



Georgi SCHENNIKOV

CSKA Moscow
Age 23 (27.04.91)
Fast and unyielding, he stated his claim for a left-back spot next to his distinguished defensive partners at an early age. He is the son of Olympic walking star Mikhail Schennikov, a 1996 Olympic silver medallist.



Andrei YESCHENKO

Anzhi
Age 30 (09.02.84)
One of the right-back candidates with a reasonable chance of making the starting line-up. Lost his parents in a fire at the age of nine in Siberia. Was with Dynamo Kiev from 2006 to 2011; joined Anzhi from Lokomotiv in 2012.



Oleg SHATOV

Zenit
Age 23 (29.07.90)
Ex-futsal player who joined Zenit from Anzhi last summer. Good technical skills and game vision make him a first-choice substitute for Andrei Arshavin at Zenit. Scored on his Russia debut.



Roman SHIROKOV

Krasnodar
Age 32 (06.07.81)
Russian player of the year in 2013, he left Zenit for Krasnodar last winter after a conflict with the then Zenit coach Luciano Spalletti. Noted for his sharp interviews and Twitter comments. Recently named captain by Capello.



Yuri ZHIRKOV

Dynamo Moscow
Age 30 (20.08.83)
Ex-CSKA and Chelsea, this prolific and technically skilled midfielder was turned into a left-back by previous coach Guus Hiddink. Good anywhere in midfield, he is now mostly used as an attacking left-winger.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Alexander BELENOV (G, Age 27, 13.09.86, 0/0, Kuban Krasnodar)
Vladimir GABULOV (G, Age 30, 19.10.83, 10/0, Dynamo Moscow)
Alexei BEREZUTSKI (D, Age 31, 20.06.82, 53/0, CSKA Moscow)
Vitali DYAKOV (D, Age 25, 31.01.89, 0/0, Rostov)
Igor SMOLNIKOV (D, Age 25, 04.09.88, 1/0, Zenit)
Vladimir BYSTROV (M, Age 30, 31.01.84, 47/4, Anzhi)
Alexander RYAZANTSEV (M, Age 27, 05.09.86, 3/0, Zenit)

Andrei ARSHAVIN (F, Age 33, 29.05.81, 75/17, Zenit)
Fyodor SMOLOV (F, Age 24, 09.02.90, 5/2, Anzhi)

MISSING OUT

Central midfielder **Pavel Mamaev** of Krasnodar, who had an outside chance of making the squad, was ruled out after tearing an Achilles tendon in his side's Russian Cup semi-final victory over CSKA Moscow in April.

4-3-3





SOUTH KOREA

Hong raises hopes for the “Taeguk Warriors”

Recent friendly results have helped to gloss over a less-than-impressive qualifying campaign

As it has been for every World Cup this century, South Korea will be looking to get to the knockout stages. To do so for the third time in four tournaments would be seen as a big success, with anything more as a huge bonus.

The draw has been kind – although Group H opponents must be thinking the same – with the only downside perhaps being the fact that expectations have risen at home along with the pressure. Not too much though, as the “Taeguk Warriors” limped through their qualifying campaign and rarely impressed.

All of the team’s weaknesses were on display in the final round of qualification: an inability to create chances, never mind take them (though that was an issue too), a tendency to fall back on the long-ball at the earliest of opportunities and, most seriously of all, problems at the back.

Defending set-pieces has been an issue ever since current coach Hong Myung-bo retired from the centre of defence in 2003, but this weakness very nearly blew Korea off the road to Brazil.

Hong, who took over last July, hasn’t had much time to solve the problems, but is familiar with most of the squad as he took the under-20s to the last eight of the 2009 World Youth Cup and the Olympic side to bronze in 2012.

He has also been to watch plenty of games involving domestic players. There have also been trips to Europe, the Middle East and North America for international friendlies, and a January training camp in Brazil. Results have been mixed but that has not been a major issue; it has all been about giving Hong time to look at his team, and especially to try to do what his predecessor Choi Kang-hee struggled with: blending the European-based stars with those who play their club football at home.

Encouragingly, it has all started to come together against decent opposition. A 2-1 win over Switzerland in November saw some of the best and fastest attacking play from the Koreans for many a year. The team attacked in waves and overran a team that had arrived in Seoul on the back of an 18-month unbeaten run. Full of young and energetic players with some experience, there is confidence that June could be a good month for Korean football.

John Duerden

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 28	Friendly v Tunisia in Seoul
May 30	Arrive in Miami, USA for a training camp
Jun 9	Friendly v Ghana in Miami, USA

BASE CAMP



GROUP H FIXTURES

Jun 17	v Russia (Curitiba)
Jun 22	v Algeria (Porto Alegre)
Jun 26	v Belgium (Sao Paulo)



Having originally planned to stay in Curitiba, South Korea will now be basing themselves at the Bourbon Cataratas Convention & Spa Resort in the southern city of Foz do Iguaçu. One of Brazil’s top tourist destinations, it is on the borders of Paraguay and Argentina, and is close to the spectacular Iguacu Falls. They will train at the local Flamengo Esporte Club.



Key man...midfield playmaker Koo Ja-cheol

THE VIEW FROM SOUTH KOREA

● “South Koreans would love their team to reach the knockout stage at least but it won’t be easy. It is still a young squad and one of the lowest-ranked teams to qualify for the World Cup. However, not having a South American team in the group could work in Korea’s favour as all four teams will be playing in an unfamiliar environment.”

Rachel Hur, Sports Donga newspaper

● “This is a team with a lot of lingering questions. I think people look at the defence and say it could give the team some headaches, but I’d say goalkeeping should be an even bigger concern. Jung Sung-ryong, who started every game at the 2010 World Cup, already seems to be on the downhill at the age of 29. Can anyone step



up to take his place? On a brighter note, South Korea has some depth on the wings and in midfield. Son Heung-min, Lee Chung-yong, Koo Ja-cheol, Kim Bo-kyung and Ki Sung-yueng are still in their early to mid-20s and should form the core for years to come. South Korea may be able to pull out a victory, but I don't think it will be enough to put them in the round of 16."

Yoo Ji-ho, Yonhap News Agency

● "Hong has all the coaching experience except managing a senior team at national or club level. He is a specialist in motivating younger players and has had success in tournaments. He knows how to manage tournaments like the World Cup and Olympics. His short experience of managing the senior team is a risk because the average age of the starting XI is relatively young. That's why

the first game is very important; not so much the result but the performance. If Korea play well against Russia in the first game I think they will qualify for the second round. This is a young but well-organised team with players who have played together since teenagers."

Seo Hyung-wook, MBC-TV commentator

● "It's a good draw but still Korea will have to be at their best to get through, especially the goalkeeper and defenders. If Korea can be solid then the attacking talent is there to get out of the group, although that will probably be as far as they go and everyone will be happy with that. A lot depends on coach Hong Myung-bo; he doesn't really know failure and seems to have a talent to do well in tournaments."

Oh Ban-seok, freelance sports writer

COACH PROFILE

HONG Myung-bo

Age 45 (12.02.69)

South Korea coach since July 2013



How he got the job

As the nation's favourite footballing son, it was inevitable he would be coach one day and his chance came following the resignation of Choi Kang-hee.

Past successes as a coach

Led the under-20s to the last eight of the 2009 World Cup and the Olympic team to bronze in 2012.

Past failures as a coach

None yet.

Achievements as a player

Played at four World Cups, was captain of the 2002 semi-final team and was named by Pele as one of the 125 greatest living players in 2004.

World Cup experience

Played at every World Cup finals from 1990 to 2002.

Relationship with the media

Distant but still pretty good.

Relationship with the public

Very popular at the moment.

Style of management/coaching

Korea's first internationally renowned coach, he is friendly and charismatic – but can also be tough.

Notable backroom staff

His defensive partner from the 2002 World Cup, Kim Tae-young.

After the World Cup

Will stay on and lead South Korea at the 2015 Asian Cup.

WORLD CUP 2014 SOUTH KOREA SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and including 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



59
0

JUNG Sung-ryung

Suwon Bluewings
Age 29 (04.01.85)
Preparing for a second World Cup but there are major doubts over his form for club and country over the past 12 months. Big and strong, but his place as first choice is weakening.



1
0

KIM Jin-hyun

Cerezo Osaka (Jap)
Age 26 (06.07.87)
Trying to hold off Lee Bom-young for the third spot, he can be prone to errors.

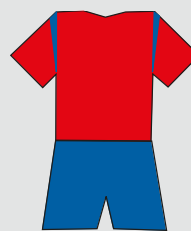


5
0

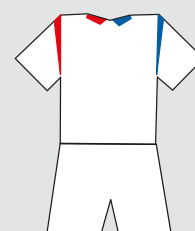
KIM Seung-gyu

Ulsan Hyundai
Age 23 (30.09.90)
Was given a chance to show what he could do in January with three starts but his performances were inconclusive. Has the talent to shine but it remains to be seen if he has the mentality.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



23
1

HONG Jeong-ho

Augsburg (Ger)
Age 24 (12.08.89)
Korea have high hopes for this cultured centre-back who now plies his trade in the Bundesliga. Expected to be a mainstay of the Korean back four for years to come.



4
0

JANG Hyun-soo

Guangzhou R&F (Chn)
Age 22 (28.09.91)
Cultured centre-back who recently moved from Japan to China for over US\$2million but his value in Brazil will only rise if one of the first-choice central defenders is out.



9
0

KIM Jin-soo

Albirex Niigata (Jap)
Age 21 (13.06.92)
A new addition to the set-up who looks good going forward from left-back, but not quite so comfortable defensively. Expected to move to Germany soon, his inexperience sometimes shows in his positioning.



19
1

KIM Young-gwon

Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
Age 24 (27.02.90)
A left-footed centre-half, he has improved his game in the Chinese league under Marcello Lippi, who has tipped him to go to the very top. Has all the tools to do so but needs to cut out silly mistakes and lapses of concentration.



33
5

KWAK Tae-hwi

Al Hilal (Sau)
Age 32 (08.07.81)
Adds some experience to the squad but the big centre-back is unlikely to start. Never quick, he has slowed further since playing in Saudi Arabia, but is a threat from set-pieces.

MIDFIELDERS



12
0

HA Dae-sung

Beijing Guoan (Chn)
Age 29 (02.03.85)
Cool operator who captained Seoul before leaving for big-money in China. Maybe a little too similar to Ki in style to start but is a handy back-up.



8
0

HAN Kook-young

Kashiwa Reysol (Jap)
Age 24 (19.04.90)
Vying for a defensive midfield spot, although he is still to convince at international level. Lacks a little aggression but could challenge Park Jung-woo for a starting spot.



56
5

KI Sung-yeung

Swansea City (Eng)
Age 25 (24.01.89)
Married to a famous TV presenter, Han Hye-jin, he sets the tempo from midfield. Has been on loan to Sunderland this season, where he has been involved in a relegation battle. Plays in a deeper role for his country.



26
3

KIM Bo-kyoung

Cardiff City (Eng)
Age 24 (06.10.89)
Has had an indifferent season in the Premier League and it remains to be seen if he can make the position behind the striker his. Has talent but sometimes lacks confidence.



35
12

KOO Ja-cheol

Mainz (Ger)
Age 25 (27.02.89)
Lively and aggressive midfielder who was captain of the 2012 Olympic side. Has an eye for goal and likes to arrive in the area late. Has had a few injury issues but, when fit, one of Asia's most complete midfielders.

FORWARDS



26
8

JI Dong-won

Augsburg (Ger)
Age 23 (28.05.91)
Former Sunderland striker who will join Borussia Dortmund in the summer. Can play anywhere along the front line, or even in midfield, he is intelligent and tactically aware.



26
3

KIM Shin-wook

Ulsan Hyundai
Age 26 (14.04.88)
Stands 6ft 5in and known as "The Wookiee", he will battle it out with Park for the role of central striker. The best Korean striker in the K-League for the past 18 months, he is good on the ground for a big man and is improving all the time.



62
18

LEE Keun-ho

Sangju Sangmu
Age 29 (11.04.85)
Currently a serving soldier, was Asian Player of Year in 2012. Creative and clever, and at his best just behind the striker, his finishing frustrates – likely to miss the easy ones and score some great ones.



62
24

PARK Chu-young

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 28 (10.07.85)
Has spent the season on loan to Watford in England's Championship and is struggling with a toe injury. In what will be a third World Cup he has much to prove, but is still probably Korea's top striker.



23
6

SON Heung-min

Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Age 23 (08.07.92)
The "Sonsation" could be the key to Korea's chances from the left side of attack. Likes to break from deep and shoot from the edge of the area.

TACTICS



Counter-attack is key strength of Hong's side

The wide players are crucial to the way South Korea play. **Lee Chung-yong** on the right side of the three in a **4-2-3-1** with **Son Heung-min** on the left offer pace, dribbling and an ability to get behind defences. As Korea play more of a fast counter-attacking

game under Hong, it could suit Son's game perfectly as he is at his best when running from deep into space and attacking the ball.

Look for the wide men to get behind defences and then seek late arriving midfielders such as **Koo Ja-cheol**. The full-backs have traditionally been strong points for the team and while going forward, they will offer good support to the attack, defensively they are suspect and finding that balance could be key.

Ki Sung-yeung's midfield partner is another question to be settled. Ki plays deeper for his country than he has been doing in English football this season and is not defensively strong. Always available for the defence to pass to, his partner, whoever takes that role, has a major job in protecting the defence as Ki moves into attack.

Plan B?

Striker **Kim Shin-wook** is a walking Plan B. He is not far off 2m tall and he has improved immensely on the ground in the last season or so to become the best forward in the K-League. As soon as he enters the pitch, the long balls start and it is a game that is not best-suited to the team's technically-minded players. But for the last 15 minutes or so with Korea needing a goal, expect "The Wookie" to make an entrance.

There has been the occasional, and not very successful, experiment with a **4-4-2** formation though it is unlikely that Hong will feel secure enough in midfield to play with two strikers unless it is absolutely necessary.

This set-up could have the same defence, with a midfield four of **Lee Keun-ho** on the left, Ki Sung-yeung in the middle with **Han Kook-young** or **Park Jung-woo** and Lee Chung-yong on the right. The two strikers would be Son Heung-min, playing a little deeper, behind **Park Chu-young**. However, to make it a real Plan B, you could replace Park Chu-young with Kim Shin-wook.



10
0

LEE Yong

Ulsan Hyundai
Age 27 (24.12.86)
A recent recruit to the set-up, a right-back who is pushing for a starting place. Impresses when going forward and with his quality crossing, but there are question marks about him defensively.



13
0

PARK Joo-ho

Mainz (Ger)
Age 27 (16.01.87)
Making a late push for the left-back position after a good season in Germany, although a recent injury will have disrupted his pre-tournament preparation.



53
6

LEE Chung-yong

Bolton Wanderers (Eng)
Age 25 (02.07.88)
High-school drop-out who plays in the English second tier. Korea's most skilful player, he is an excellent dribbler and creator, but can be let down by poor finishing.



11
0

NAM Tae-hee

Lekhwiya (Qat)
Age 22 (03.07.91)
A versatile attacking midfielder who started his professional career in France. Faded out of the national set-up after a move to Qatar but his excellent form in the Middle East has put him back in contention.



10
0

PARK Jung-woo

Guangzhou R&F (Chn)
Age 23 (10.03.89)
Tough tackler who needs to add more to his game if he wants to start in Brazil. Banned from the 2012 Olympics medal ceremony for a "political" celebration after winning a bronze against bitter rivals Japan.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

LEE Bum-young (G, Age 25, 02.04.89, 0/0, Busan IPark)

CHA Du-ri (D, Age 33, 25.07.80, 65/4, Seoul)

HWANG Seok-ho (D, Age 24, 27.06.89, 3/0, Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Jap)

LEE Myung-joo (M, Age 24, 24.04.90, 9/0, Pohang Steelers)

KIM Seung-dae (F, Age 23, 01.04.91, 0/0, Pohang Steelers)

LEE Dong-gook (F, Age 35, 29.04.79, 99/30, Jeonbuk Motors)

MISSING OUT

There was some debate in South Korea about a possible return for **Park Ji-sung**, who retired from international football in 2011, but the talk came to nothing.





SPAIN

One tournament too far?

Form and fitness could scupper Del Bosque's title-defence

Something strange happened to Spain during qualification for the 2014 World Cup – they did not win every game. The World and double-European champions had reached Euro 2012 and the 2010 World Cup with a record that read: played 18, won 18.

This time, things were not so easy. For a while, too, there were fears that they may not get through, at least not as group winners. Two draws in a row, albeit five months apart, meant Spain had to travel to the Stade de France and win in order to avoid a play-off.

So that's what they did. Pedro's goal gave them a 1-0 win. It was another reminder of

Should Spain finish second, it is likely that their next opponents will be Brazil

how reliable Vicente Del Bosque's men have been over the last six years. There are few teams that can exercise the control that Spain impose upon games; in midfield, Xabi Alonso in particular was outstanding. Naturally, they travel to Brazil as one of the favourites, even if it is hard to escape the feeling that another trophy may be just one step too far – if only because a run this good has to end sometime.

There are more tangible doubts of course. It was galling for Spain to see France, who they pushed into second place, get a significantly easier group at the tournament itself. The opening game is a repeat of the Final from

four years ago, and after Holland come Chile and Australia. It will be far from easy. Nor is it just the group: should Spain finish second, it is likely that their next opponents will be Brazil.

And then there are the doubts over form and fitness. Xavi, the ideologue at the heart of so much of Barcelona's play, is 34 now and has had a difficult season.

Iker Casillas, the captain, has not played a single game in the league, although he has performed superbly in the Spanish Cup and the Champions League. His deputy, Victor Valdes, performed ably in Paris, but the Barcelona goalkeeper has suffered a cruciate ligament tear and will not be going to Brazil.

With Alvaro Arbeloa also suffering injury, it is not clear who the right-back will be, while inspirational centre-back Gerard Pique missed much of the season run-in with injury.

At the other end, increasingly, Spain have encountered teams that have closed up and denied the space. They will be hoping that Atletico Madrid's in-form striker Diego Costa will be the man to find the gaps.

Sid Lowe

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 30	Friendly v Bolivia in Seville
Jun 2	Travel to training camp in Washington, USA
Jun 7	Friendly v El Salvador in Washington, USA
Jun 8	Travel to Brazil



Leading the line...New Spain striker Diego Costa

BASE CAMP



GROUP B FIXTURES

Jun 13	v Holland (Salvador)
Jun 18	v Chile (Rio de Janeiro)
Jun 23	v Australia (Curitiba)



The defending champions will be based at the Alfredo Gottardi training centre, a luxurious sports complex in the city of Curitiba, which is home to Atletico Paranaense. The facilities include eight full-size football pitches, a thermal swimming pool and gym. The Spanish opted for the milder climate in Curitiba after contending with high temperatures further north during the Confederations Cup.

THE VIEW FROM SPAIN

● "If Iniesta and Xavi arrive fresh at the World Cup, that's a big problem for all their opponents. They're the ones that make the machine work.

Those players who are playing their last World Cup will do so with hunger. The veterans are not a problem."

Louis Van Gaal, Holland coach



● "I think Spain will win again. It's difficult because it is in Brazil but they still have the best squad in the world."

Marcos Senna, former Spain international



COACH PROFILE

Vicente DEL BOSQUE

Age 63 (23.12.50)
Spain coach since July 2008



How he got the job

Seen as a safe pair of hands for a talented generation of players.

Past successes as a coach

Euro 2012 and 2010 World Cup winner with Spain and won two European Cups with Real Madrid.

Past failures as a coach

A run of poor results in Turkey with Besiktas culminated in the sack.

Achievements as a player

Played over 300 games for Real Madrid, winning five league titles and four Spanish Cups. Played in the 1981 European Cup final versus Liverpool. Won 18 caps for Spain.

World Cup experience

Won it in 2010.

Relationship with the media

Warm. Admired and respected by all. Cautious, polite and usually open, without exposing himself.

Relationship with the public/

Perfect. A Marquis who rarely puts a foot wrong and exudes generosity and decency. His son Alvaro, who suffers Down's Syndrome and has become one of the team's most famous fans, is pulled into team celebrations by the players and is popular too.

Style of management/coaching

"Left hand" as the Spanish put it: gentle, respectful and always listens to his players.

Notable backroom staff

Toni Grande is his number two. Won two league titles and a Spanish Cup with Real Madrid.

After the World Cup

Recently renewed his contract.

● "When I look at Spain I see a huge amount of fatigue. They will be tired, emotionally and physically, when they get to the World Cup. If they can reach 80 per cent of their capabilities they will be candidates."

Cesar Luis Menotti, 1978 World Cup-winning coach



● "Spain are favourites but I think it will be very, very hard. Argentina, Brazil and Germany all have a chance of winning it too."

Ronald Koeman, Feyenoord coach



David Villa...back to his best with Atletico Madrid

WORLD CUP 2014 SPAIN SQUAD

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

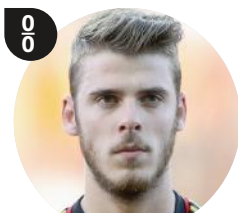
GOALKEEPERS



153
0

Iker CASILLAS

Real Madrid
Age 32 (20.05.81)
Sub for his club, captain for his country – even if his games for Real this season have included the Champions League semi-final. Celebrated the 2010 World Cup victory by kissing his touchline-reporter girlfriend live on TV.



0
0

David DE GEA

Manchester United (Eng)
Age 23 (07.11.90)
If there was one person who was convinced David De Gea could cope with the pressure of being Manchester United keeper, it was David De Gea. Valdes' injury opens a place in the squad for a man who is the future of "la seleccion".



29
0

Pepe REINA

Napoli (Ita)
Age 31 (31.08.82)
Spain's MC when it comes to celebrations – even if that famous role has served unfairly to overshadow his goalkeeping. Has spent almost a decade in the squad. His father, Miguel, also a keeper, played for Atletico and Barcelona.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



24
5

Jordi ALBA

Barcelona
Age 25 (21.03.89)
Began his career in the youth system at Barcelona as an attacker, but was converted to a full-back by Unai Emery at Valencia before returning to Camp Nou. Scored in the 2012 Euro Final.



45
0

Raul ALBIOL

Napoli (Ita)
Age 28 (04.09.85)
Central defender who will miss Arbeloa, his inseparable friend and partner in squad PlayStation competitions; they chose England and wore England shirts. Enjoying regular games at Real Madrid after a frustrating time at Real Madrid.



5
0

Cesar AZPILICUETA

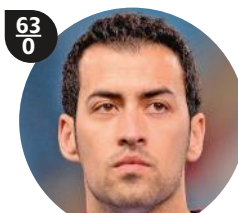
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 24 (28.08.89)
Club-mates call him Dave even though he insists that it's not that hard to say his surname and he even produced a video to explain how. Reliable, versatile full-back who is able to play on either flank.



0
0

Dani CARVAJAL

Real Madrid
Age 22 (11.01.92)
Returned to Real after a year in Germany and alternated the right-back slot with Arbeloa – whose injury has given him his opportunity to shine. Has played superbly, making him a likely debutant this summer.



63
0

Sergio BUSQUETS

Barcelona
Age 25 (16.07.88)
Brilliant defensive midfielder who can drop back into defence. Tactically astute and strong tackler who appears to take risks – until you realise he always gets away with it. Son of former Barca keeper Carlos Busquets.

MIDFIELDERS



61
10

Santi CAZORLA

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 29 (13.12.84)
Smiley, happy character who is one of the most popular men in the squad and one of the nicest guys in football. Missed out on the 2010 World Cup through injury. Doesn't even know if he's right or left-footed.



87
13

Cesc FABREGAS

Barcelona
Age 27 (04.05.87)
False number nine in the Final at Euro 2012, crossing for the first goal, and scorer of the decisive penalty against Italy in 2008. Has rarely been an undisputed starter but his contribution has been enormous.



95
11

Andres INIESTA

Barcelona
Age 30 (11.05.84)
In the words of Sergio Ramos, he is "touched by a magic wand." Has stood out for his brilliant performances in an otherwise difficult season for his club. Scored the winning goal in the 2010 Final.



35
3

Jesus NAVAS

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 28 (21.11.85)
Once considered the man that would never leave Seville, having suffered anxiety attacks when away from home. But he performed superbly in 2010: began the move that led to the winner in the Final. Extremely fast.



78
20

David SILVA

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 28 (08.01.86)
Born in the Canary Islands in the same town as Juan Carlos Valeron. A recent injury has turned out to not be as serious as first feared, but it does mean that he is not guaranteed a place in the squad.

FORWARDS



1
0

Diego COSTA

Atletico Madrid
Age 25 (07.10.88)
Claims that he doesn't take his work home with him – which is probably a good job as on the pitch he is a fighter capable of landing a few low blows. A brilliant player and the revelation of the season in Spain. Played twice for Brazil.



21
10

Alvaro NEGREDO

Manchester City (Eng)
Age 28 (20.08.85)
Contrary to reports, he was never known as the "Beast of Vallecas" while in Spain, but admits that he likes the nickname now. Powerful, skilful and quick, he has the best goals-per-minute record of all the strikers tried out by Spain.



38
14

PEDRO

Barcelona
Age 26 (28.07.87)
Rarely talked about as one of the team's stars but always contributes. Fast, generous and with a real eye for goals. Has an adopted sea lion at an aquarium in the Canaries, named Pedrito.



95
56

David VILLA

Atletico Madrid
Age 32 (03.12.81)
"El Guaje" (The Kid) is unique among Spain's strikers; none have his style and none fit Spain's approach quite so well. So says Del Bosque himself, but Villa is still not certain of a place. Father was a miner.

TACTICS



Plenty of options for Del Bosque as he seeks control as well as creativity

Few national teams have a tactical or footballing identity as clear as Spain. "Tiki-taka" will once again be the approach, with Vicente del Bosque admitting in the midst of debates about Spain being "boring" at Euro2012 that he prefers not to

allow the other team the ball to attack them. Spain's style has an aesthetic quality as well as a practical one. It is about control as much as it is about creation.

Spain's style is of course similar to that employed by Barcelona but la seleccion's version is reinforced with two deep midfielders not just one: **Sergio Busquets** and **Xabi Alonso** will play together. In front of them, the wealth of technical midfielders is astonishing: **Xavi**, **Santi Cazorla**, **David Silva**, **Juan Mata**, **Pedro**, **Thiago Alcantara**...

Increasingly, Spain have found that teams close up against them, defending very deep and looking to launch the very occasional counter-attack. The challenge then has been to find a way to change the game and open up spaces. Del Bosque's preferred option from the bench is usually **Jesus Navas**. Meanwhile, from set plays both **Sergio Ramos** and **Gerard Pique** are dangerous.

At the World Cup, Fernando Llorente was also used to great effect against Portugal, pushing them back and offering Spain a target, but it is not clear whether he will go to Brazil and the striking position has caused the greatest doubts – not least because Spain's style makes it so hard for the no.9, denying him space in which to play. Llorente, Fernando Torres, Roberto Soldado, **Alvaro Negredo**, **David Villa**, and Michu have all been tried there and Spain have now "signed" **Diego Costa**.

Some hope Costa will provide the bite and nastiness that Spain need and he has been arguably La Liga's outstanding player this season, but he too will find the space in which he is so lethal denied to him, as he saw in his debut against Italy.

Plan B?

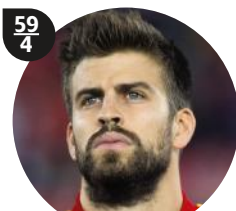
An obvious switch would be to adopt a false no.9 again, just as they did at Euro 2012, when **Cesc Fabregas** played in the Final and created the first in a 4-0 win. Winger Navas is also a key second-half change if Spain need to stretch the game.



14
0

JAVI MARTINEZ

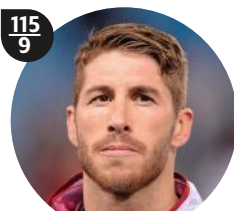
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 25 (02.09.88)
Left Athletic Bilbao for Bayern, where he has continued to play a dual role: at centre-back or central midfield. Neat on the ball and a good athlete, his versatility makes him even more valuable to Del Bosque.



59
4

Gerard PIQUE

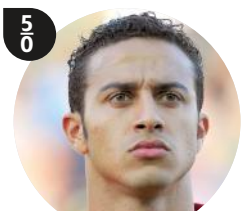
Barcelona
Age 27 (02.02.87)
Embarked upon an odyssey at the end of the 2010 World Cup in search of a very special memento of the Final: the goal nets. "Piquenbauer" is a classy defender who says he would like to be Barcelona's president one day.



115
9

SERGIO RAMOS

Real Madrid
Age 28 (30.03.86)
A defender with a striker's soul and ice cool – as he showed with a "Panenka" penalty at Euro 2012, he always comes good when it matters. Expecting a child with TV presenter Pilar Rubio.



5
0

THIAGO ALCANTARA

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 23 (11.04.91)
Born in Italy, his dad won a World Cup for Brazil, and his brother played for Brazil Under-20s, but he chose Spain, with whom he had starred at under-21 level. Looked certain to go to the World Cup, but an injury put his presence in doubt.



110
15

XABI ALONSO

Real Madrid
Age 32 (25.11.81)
Smooth, deep-lying midfielder with a touch of steel. Few players have his range of passing or tactical intelligence. Staff at Real Madrid admit he is the man who gives balance to the side. Banned for this year's Champions League Final.



130
13

XAVI

Barcelona
Age 34 (25.01.80)
Probably the last chance for arguably the most important player Spain have ever had; the man Luis Aragones asked to take control in 2008 and who has won everything since. Football-mad, he will watch any game, anywhere, any time.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

INIGO MARTINEZ (D, Age 23, 17.05.91, 2/0, Real Sociedad)
JUANFRAN (D, Age 29, 09.01.85, 6/1, Atletico Madrid)
Alberto MORENO (D, Age 22, 05.07.92, 2/0, Sevilla)
ISCO (M, Age 22, 21.04.92, 2/0, Real Madrid)
KOKE (M, Age 22, 08.01.92, 7/0, Atletico Madrid)
Juan MATA (M, Age 26, 28.04.88, 32/9, Manchester United, Eng)
Fernando TORRES (F, Age 30, 20.03.84, 106/36, Chelsea, Eng)

Fernando LLORENTE (F, Age 29, 26.02.85, 24/7, Juventus, Ita)

SWITZERLAND

Hitzfeld relies on non-Swiss talent

Players from immigrant families form backbone of the side

Switzerland's last two World Cup appearances, in 2006 and 2010, have hardly set the competition on fire. In 2006 they became the first team to be knocked out without conceding a goal after losing on penalties to Ukraine after a sterile 0-0 draw, and they only scored four themselves in as many games. Four years later, they managed one goal for and one against in three outings as they fell at the first hurdle.

This time, hopefully, it should be different. The Swiss will travel to Brazil with a young, attacking side which includes a number of players from the sides that won the Under-17 World Cup in 2009 and reached the Final of the 2011 European Under-21 Championship.

The Swiss federation runs a well-developed youth programme and has tapped successfully into the country's large immigrant community. Several members of the squad are from families that moved to Switzerland from the Balkans during the 1990s. Players such as Xherdan Shaqiri, Granit Xhaka, Haris Seferovic and Josip Drmic, the feisty Stefan Lichtsteiner and Gokhan Inler, give the team plenty of attacking options, not to mention bite.

In fact, the weakness is probably now the defence where Philippe Senderos, Johan Djourou and Steve Von Bergen have all had unhappy experiences at club level. Contrary to the national stereotype, the side has become quite unpredictable. They can beat anyone on

their day, as they showed with a friendly win over Brazil in Basle last year. But they are also prone to lapses such as the 4-4 draw at home to Iceland in the qualifiers, where they squandered a 4-1 lead.

Veteran coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who will retire after the tournament, has set the last 16 as his first target – a realistic if not easy option given that the Swiss struggle against Latin American opposition and must face Honduras and Ecuador. And he has already admitted that the heat and humidity will be a challenge for his side, who will have to adjust their pressing style.

Despite the respectable results over the past few years, Switzerland is not a country which is passionate for football and it is often hard to believe that the World Cup is just around the corner. In fact, the sport has an image problem in the country, thanks to the lingering problem of crowd violence and partly due to the goings-on at FIFA, whose presence is seen by many Swiss as something of an embarrassment.

Brian Homewood

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 25	Training camp at Weggis, on the banks of Lake Lucerne
May 30	Friendly v Jamaica in Lucerne
Jun 3	Friendly v Peru in Lucerne
Jun 6	Fly to Brazil



Dominant figure...key midfielder Valon Behrami

BASE CAMP



GROUP E FIXTURES

Jun 15	v Ecuador (Brasilia)
Jun 20	v France (Salvador)
Jun 25	v Honduras (Manaus)

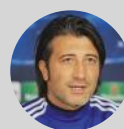


Situated on the beach front near Porto Seguro, La Torre Resort will be home for the Swiss team. The city is in the southern state of Bahia and its hot and humid climate will help the team acclimatise for their final Group E game against Honduras at the Arena Amazonia in Manaus. Training will take place at the Estadio Municipal Antonio Carlos Magalhães.

THE VIEW FROM SWITZERLAND

● "Any team which is among the top seeds does not need to hide from opponents who are seeded two, three and four. We can and should go into this group phase with great self-belief. Ottmar Hitzfeld's Switzerland team shouldn't even be overawed by the French. I am optimistic that we will get to the quarter-finals."

Basle coach Murat Yakin



● "The chances of surviving the group stage aren't that bad. The last few times



Switzerland played France we were really close, but after that it's probably over for Switzerland. Xherdan Shaqiri doesn't play that regularly, so it's really tough for a team if they depend on one or two players – and Switzerland don't have that many good players. If the one or two good players don't bring their A-game to Brazil, it's over for them.”

Rene Rodiger, St Galler Tagblatt

● “It's certainly do-able, but it certainly won't be easy for Switzerland. Ecuador will be unpleasant opponents, they are a very robust and physically strong team with

Antonio Valencia as the key player.”

Alain Sutter, former Switzerland forward

● “Switzerland has never had such a high-standing collection of players who have imposed themselves at big foreign clubs. They have everything needed to get a good result at the World Cup. I trust them to get at least to the ‘eighth-finals’ [the last 16]. The second-generation immigrants are cheekier than the typical Swiss and carry this through to the rest of the squad.”

Ex-Grasshoppers and Aarau coach Rolf Fringer



COACH PROFILE

Ottmar HITZFELD (Ger)

Age 65 (12.01.49)

Switzerland coach since July 2008

How he got the job

His appointment was the perfect marriage: giving Switzerland a successful, high-profile coach and him a break from the club game which had clearly worn him down.



Past successes as a coach

Won the Bundesliga five times with Bayern Munich, twice with Borussia Dortmund and the Champions League once with each.

Past failures as a coach

Lost the 1999 Champions League Final when Bayern conceded twice at the death to Manchester United. One of his first matches in charge of Switzerland was a 2-1 home defeat by Luxembourg.

Achievements as a player

Relatively modest, winning two Swiss league titles with Basle.

World Cup experience

In charge of Switzerland in 2010 when they beat eventual winners Spain in their opening match but failed to score another goal and went out in the group stage.

Relationship with the media

Revered in Germany and highly respected in Switzerland, despite the failure to qualify for Euro 2012.

Relationship with the public

As with the media, although it faltered slightly after failing to qualify for Euro 2012, when many questioned if his contract should be renewed and there was a public discussion over his salary.

Style of management/coaching

A qualified maths teacher, he prepares for matches with geometric precision and doesn't accept indiscipline lightly. Made a point of appointing Gokhan Inler, a player with Turkish roots, as captain of the national team.

Notable backroom staff

Michel Pont has been assistant coach since 2001.

After the World Cup...

Offered a two-year extension but turned it down and says he will retire.

WORLD CUP 2014 + SWITZERLAND SQUAD

KEY **123** caps **12** goals (Age as of 12.06.14; caps up to and including 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



55
0

Diego BENAGLIO

Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 30 (08.09.83)
A safe pair of hands, excellent reflexes and a commanding presence in his penalty area. First choice since just before Euro 2008 and will be playing at his third major finals. Has spent most of his career in the Bundesliga.



5
0

Yann SOMMER

Basle
Age 25 (17.12.88)
Basle's regular keeper since 2011, winning three successive titles. Has excellent reflexes, is calm and self-assured and averse to risk taking. He will move to Borussia Mönchengladbach after the World Cup.



11
0

Marco WOLFLI

Young Boys
Age 31 (22.08.82)
Captain and the longest-serving player at his club, he made his Swiss debut in 2008. Always in Benaglio's shadow and now below Sommer in the pecking order. Tore his Achilles tendon in December but is expected to be fit in time.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



43
1

Johan DJOUROU

Arsenal (Eng)
Age 27 (18.01.87)
Central defender who was born in Ivory Coast and is set to make his season-long loan to Hamburg permanent in July. Played at the 2006 World Cup but suffered a knee injury in 2009 that cost him a place at the 2010 World Cup.



5
1

Michael LANG

Grasshoppers
Age 23 (08.02.91)
Played for Switzerland at various youth levels and is now understudy to Lichtsteiner at right-back. Began his career with St Gallen before joining Grasshoppers in 2011.



61
4

Stephan LICHTSTEINER

Juventus (Ita)
Age 30 (16.01.84)
Feisty right-back whose storming runs down the flank have earned him the nickname "Forrest Gump". He completed an apprenticeship in banking as a young player at Grasshoppers. Plays on the flank of a five-man midfield for his club.



19
0

Ricardo RODRIGUEZ

Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 21 (25.08.92)
The first-choice left-back provides an endless supply of crosses for his forwards, is strong in the air and dangerous at free-kicks. Has settled quickly at Wolfsburg. Born in Zurich to a Spanish father and Chilean mother.



5
3

Fabian SCHAR

Basle
Age 22 (20.12.91)
One of Swiss football's most important recent discoveries, a central defender with good long-range passing and set-piece specialist. Scored both goals in the crucial 2-0 win in Norway in qualifying.

MIDFIELDERS



46
4

Valon BEHRAMI

Napoli (Ita)
Age 29 (19.04.85)
Happy at right-back or in midfield, he has revived his career at Napoli since 2012. His tattoos and haircuts are not always to the liking of the reserved Swiss. Sent off against Chile at the 2010 World Cup. Born in Kosovo.



32
1

Blerim DZEMAILI

Napoli (Ita)
Age 28 (12.04.86)
A central midfielder who has been a substitute for most of his international career. Has settled in Serie A after an unhappy spell at Bolton. Born in Macedonia, his parents moved to Switzerland when he was four.



46
2

Gelson FERNANDES

Freiburg (Ger)
Age 27 (02.09.86)
Defensive midfielder who scored Switzerland's only goal at the 2010 World Cup when he was a key player, although he now finds himself on the fringes. Born in Cape Verde, he moved to Switzerland at the age of five.



71
6

Gokhan INLER

Napoli (Ita)
Age 29 (27.06.84)
Swiss captain and a hard-tackling midfielder who turned up at his official Napoli presentation wearing a lion mask. An excellent long-range shooter, he also played at Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup.



2
1

Pajtim KASAMI

Fulham (Eng)
Age 21 (02.06.92)
Versatile midfielder with poise, skill and a powerful physique, he was world under-17 champion in 2009. A move from Fulham to Pescara in 2011 broke down due to faulty wi-fi in a Milan hotel. Born in Macedonia.

FORWARDS



5
2

Josip DRMIC

Nuremberg (Ger)
Age 21 (08.08.92)
Two-footed, clever in and around the box, although somewhat weak in the air, he has had an excellent first season in the Bundesliga. Born in Switzerland but has Croatian roots and scored his first two goals against Croatia in March.



10
4

Mario GAVRANOVIC

Zurich
Age 24 (24.11.89)
Centre-forward with a good scoring ratio who could provide a useful option off the bench. Born in Switzerland to Croatian parents. Suspended by Zurich for insulting their assistant coach after being left out of the team last year.



19
1

Admir MEHMEDI

Freiburg (Ger)
Age 23 (16.03.91)
A good season at Freiburg has propelled the Macedonia-born player into contention. Previously at Dynamo Kiev, where he was used as a substitute and struggled to get going. Played at the 2012 Olympic Games.



9
1

Haris SEFEROVIC

Real Sociedad (Spa)
Age 22 (22.02.92)
Won the 2009 under-17 world title in Nigeria, where he was the tournament's top scorer. Lots of ups and downs at club level and has fallen out of favour at Sociedad. Born in Switzerland to Bosnian parents.



31
8

Xherdan SHAQIRI

Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 22 (10.10.91)
An outstanding prospect who can play on either flank and is always a threat with his powerful shooting and free-kicks. Despite being below Robben and Ribery in the Bayern pecking order, he has been given plenty of outings.

TACTICS



Youngsters offer exciting attacking options but central defence could be the weak spot

Switzerland almost invariably play with a **4-2-3-1** system. In goal, **Diego Benaglio** has been the first choice for the last six years with **Yann Sommer** a distant second. **Stefan Lichtsteiner** of Juventus on the right and **Ricardo Rodriguez** on the left

are the two full-backs and both like to get forward.

The central defensive pairing is less clear cut. **Philippe Senderos** and **Johan Djourou** both have experience in Europe's top leagues but both have suffered form and injury problems over the last couple of years; in the key matches against Norway and Albania last autumn, Hitzfeld preferred youngster **Fabian Schar** alongside **Steve Von Bergen**.

Team captain **Gokhan Inler** and **Valon Behrami** play holding roles in front of the back four. Both play for Napoli although media reports suggest their relationship has become strained recently. **Blerim Dzemaili**, also of Napoli, is another option in that area.

Ahead of them, **Xherdan Shaqiri** is the creative inspiration on the right of the attack. He can run with the ball and likes to cut inside and shoot Arjen Robben-style. **Granit Xhaka** distributes the ball from the centre and **Valentin Stocker** is another pacy, tricky player on the left.

That leaves the centre-forward spot, where Switzerland have plenty of promising youngsters such as **Haris Seferovic**, **Admir Mehmedi**, **Josip Drmic** and **Mario Gavranovic** but no automatic first choice. On current form, Drmic might just get the nod thanks to a free-scoring season in the Bundesliga with Nuremberg, although Mehmedi is another option.

There are plenty of options at free-kicks where Schar, Shaqiri and Inler all pack a powerful shot.

Plan B?

Hitzfeld has not deviated from his preferred 4-2-3-1 format. One alternative scenario would be the option of playing Shaqiri as a "false nine".

Gelson Fernandes is often brought on when Switzerland are leading to beef up the centre of the midfield.



52
5

Philippe SENDEROS

Valencia (Spa)
Age 29 (14.02.85)
His club career has been hit by injuries and spells in the reserves, but he remains a regular for his country and is set to play in his third World Cup. Born in Switzerland to a Spanish father and Serb mother, he speaks six languages.



40
0

Steve VON BERGEN

Young Boys
Age 30 (10.06.83)
Central defender who made his debut against Costa Rica in 2006 and has been in and out of the team since. Missed Euro 2008 through injury but played at the last World Cup. Well-travelled, he recently returned to Switzerland.



14
0

Pirmin SCHWEGLER

Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 27 (09.03.87)
Fiercely competitive defensive midfielder with excellent passing. A reserve at international level and could be even further down the pecking order after various injuries this season. His brother Christian plays for Salzburg.



22
3

Valentin STOCKER

Basle
Age 25 (12.04.89)
Features regularly on the left side of a three-man midfield, the pacy and tricky Stocker scored the first goal of Ottmar Hitzfeld's reign in a friendly against Cyprus which was also his international debut. Has won a hatful of titles with Basle.



24
4

Granit XHAKA

Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger)
Age 21 (27.09.92)
Elegant and composed, he played in all but one of the qualifiers. Known as "Little Einstein" because of an interest in science, he has publicly supported Kosovo's campaign to be allowed to play international matches.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Roman BURKI (G, Age 23, 14.11.90, 0/0, Grasshoppers)

Reto ZIEGLER (D, Age 28, 16.01.86, 34/1, Sassuolo, Ita)

Tranquillo BARNETTA (M, Age 29, 22.05.85, 73/10, Eintracht Frankfurt, Ger)





URUGUAY

Will lightning strike twice for “La Celeste”?

Tabarez side seek a repeat of 1950 upset in Brazil

“We know we’re not among the favourites,” says Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez. “But we also know that if we prepare well we can be a very difficult team to play against, and that’s going to be at the centre of our thoughts.”

This, then, will be the same Uruguay that Tabarez has brought back to football’s top table, reaching the semi-finals of the last World Cup and winning the 2011 Copa America, while all the time accepting and playing within their limitations. And this is basically the same squad – indeed many of the group have been together since the 2007 Copa America.

Strikers aside, some of the key members of the first team are arguably past their best. Tabarez, though, stresses that “I have the intention of using the experience that most of the players have acquired”.

Time will tell if this is a tournament too far for the group. The order of the games would seem to help; a win against Costa Rica in the opening fixture will allow the team to take on England and Italy in the way they feel most comfortable: sitting deep, protecting the lack of defensive pace, and slipping in Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani on the break.

Could such a method conceivably take “La Celeste” all the way? Obviously, many in Uruguay and elsewhere are excited by the possibility of a repetition of the 1950 triumph.

“There’s no comparison,” says Tabarez. “The

world was different then. It was a different Brazil, and Uruguay had a position of power that we no longer occupy. But let’s hope we face Brazil because it will mean we’ll have made progress in the competition.”

Such humility makes it easy to forget that Uruguay pushed Brazil all the way in the semi-final of last year’s Confederations Cup, falling 2-1 to a late goal. Had Diego Forlan converted an early penalty perhaps things could have been even harder for the hosts.

Uruguay’s experience, tradition and self-esteem mean that few will relish facing them – and even fewer will relish dealing with Suarez and Cavani in full flight. Such virtues may not be enough to go all the way, but they might be enough to confirm the coach’s view that “in football we are party-poopers”.

They poured water in Brazil’s champagne in 1950, and spoiled things for the hosts in 2010, as well as in the last two Copa Americas.

Whose party will they ruin this time?

Tim Vickery

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

Late May	Training in Montevideo
May 30	Friendly v Northern Ireland in Montevideo
Jun 4	Friendly v Slovenia in Montevideo
Jun 9	Fly to Brazil



Christian Stuani...one of the stars of the qualifying campaign

BASE CAMP



GROUP D FIXTURES

Jun 14	v Costa Rica (Fortaleza)
Jun 19	v England (Sao Paulo)
Jun 24	v Italy (Natal)



Uruguay will be based in the inland city of Sete Lagoas, 50 miles from the state capital of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte – the city where England were humbled 1-0 by the USA in the 1950 World Cup. The players will stay at the JN Resort a few miles outside the city and train at the Arena de Jacare, home of local side Democrata.

THE VIEW FROM URUGUAY

● “We have two of the world’s best strikers in top form and a team which has been together for a long time. But there’s a big difference between now and back in 2010. Four years ago there were no expectations and the team grew during the competition. This time we arrive with a certain obligation. It will be seen by many as a failure if we don’t go all the way to the Final, or at least equal what we did last time and get to the semis. Being the protagonists in this way is often difficult for Uruguay, and our group is not an easy one.”

Luis Eduardo Insaurralde, *El Pais*



● “It might be better for Uruguay to start off against a big team and play Costa Rica in the third game. They’re usually poor starters and Tabarez often needs a game or two to sort the side out. This is an ageing team, but one well aware of its strengths and its limitations. If Cavani and Suarez are in good shape, they can carry “La Celeste” into the quarter-finals. And Martin Silva should be the first-choice keeper.”

Martin Fernandez, O Globo

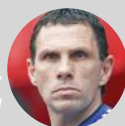
● “Uruguay have one of the most promising strike partnerships in world football, backed up by a solid team behind them. I think that at world

level Uruguay are not given the respect we deserve and this could be a favourable point for the chances of Tabarez and his team.”

Diego Perez Ilundain, El Pais

● “Uruguay are not a one-man team. They have a system of play and they are very difficult to play against, with commitment, an identity and two very good strikers. If I have to choose between England and Uruguay then I would put my money on Uruguay – and I’m not being biased.”

Gustavo Poyet, former Uruguay international



COACH PROFILE

Oscar TABAREZ

Age 67 (03.03.47)
Uruguay coach since May 2006

How he got the job

Appointed for the second time after Uruguay’s failure to qualify for the 2006 World Cup. Charged with overhauling all the national teams – from youth to the senior level.



Past successes as a coach

Reached the semi-finals of the last World Cup, won the 2011 Copa America. Also won the Argentinian title with Boca Juniors and the Libertadores Cup with Penarol.

Past failures as a coach

A tame second-round elimination at Italia 90. Also had an unhappy time with Milan in 1996.

Achievements as a player

Spent over a decade as a defender in Uruguay and, briefly, Mexico.

World Cup experience

Coached Uruguay in 1990 and 2010.

Relationship with the media

Calm, approachable and intelligent, he has cultivated good relations with the press. A recent scandal in his private life – he was revealed to have been having an affair with a woman accused of stealing from him – received remarkably little coverage.

Relationship with the public

Slightly cooler, though there is clear respect for his recent achievements – and Penarol fans are unlikely to forget that the last of the club’s five Libertadores titles came on his watch.

Style of management/coaching

A qualified teacher, he resonates quiet authority. Increasingly pragmatic, he took over with the fixed idea that all Uruguay’s sides should play 4-3-3. It was scrapped after just one competitive game. Ever since, he has been aware of playing within the team’s limitations.

Notable backroom staff

Celso Otero, Uruguay’s third-choice keeper in the 1986 World Cup.

After the World Cup

Likely to stay on.

KEY **123** caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)
12 goals

GOALKEEPERS



0
0

Rodrigo MUNOZ

Libertad (Par)
Age 32 (22.01.82)
Unspectacular performer who appears to be winning the race with the veteran Juan Castillo for the third keeper's position, though Martin Campana of Defensor might seem to be a better long-term candidate.



56
0

Fernando MUSLERA

Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 27 (16.06.86)
Grabbed the first-choice keeper's slot towards the end of the 2010 qualifiers, and has held it ever since. Elastic-limbed performer who can occasionally be prone to flapping at high balls. Born in Argentina to Uruguayan parents.

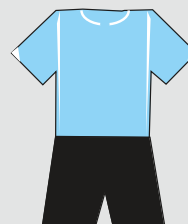


4
0

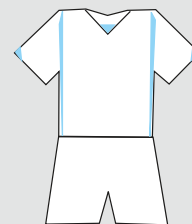
Martin SILVA

Vasco da Gama (Bra)
Age 31 (25.03.83)
Impressively calm keeper whose profile was raised by a splendid 2013 Libertadores campaign with Olimpia of Paraguay. Was given a rare opportunity in the play-off against Jordan, deputising for the injured Muslera.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



55
1

Martin CACERES

Juventus (Ita)
Age 27 (07.04.87)
Aggressive, versatile defender who can feature anywhere across the back line, but is used mostly at left-back. One of the first successes of the Tabarez years, he was swiftly promoted from the 2007 under-20 side.



39
0

Jorge FUCILE

Porto (Por)
Age 29 (19.11.84)
Full-back who can play on either flank but has struggled with injury. He did not feature in the play-off against Jordan, but had played in the previous four qualifiers. A 2010 regular who faces an anxious wait for a place this time.



4
0

Jose Maria GIMENEZ

Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 19 (20.01.95)
Centre-back whose superb displays in last year's World Youth Cup earned him a call-up. Was thrown in against Colombia last September, when both Lugano and Godin were suspended, and looked instantly at home.



76
3

Diego GODIN

Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 28 (16.02.86)
Centre-back who is calm, combative and with excellent positional sense. Enjoying a magnificent club season. Tabarez trusts that he can carry his form into the World Cup, where he will be expected to protect Lugano.



90
9

Diego LUGANO

West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
Age 33 (02.11.80)
Centre-back and captain, and a commanding aerial presence in both penalty areas. But slowing up, and likely to pick up cards. Intelligent and articulate, though ruthless on the field. First made his name in Brazil with Sao Paulo.

MIDFIELDERS



52
0

Egidio AREVALO RIOS

Morelia (Mex)
Age 32 (01.01.82)
First choice midfield destroyer. Aggressive little hit man who plays within his limitations, covering space, snapping in with his tackles and seldom attempting to create. Has played in Brazil, Italy, the USA and Mexico.



60
1

Walter GARGANO

Parma (Ita)
Age 29 (23.07.84)
Little defensive midfielder who has been a solid squad player ever since the 2007 Copa America. Has been based in Italy for seven years, and is married to the sister of former Napoli team-mate Marek Hamsik.



43
2

Alvaro GONZALEZ

Lazio (Ita)
Age 29 (29.10.84)
Right-sided midfielder who can also cover right-back or central midfield. Missed out on the last World Cup but played in 12 qualifiers this time (half of them off the bench). The emergence of Stuani threatens his position.



24
3

Nicolas LODEIRO

Botafogo (Bra)
Age 25 (21.03.89)
Stocky, left-footed attacking midfielder who was sent off in the first game of the 2010 World Cup and later suffered serious injury. Has yet to fulfil the hopes around him, but started – and scored – in the play-off against Jordan.



85
2

Diego PEREZ

Bologna (Ita)
Age 34 (18.05.80)
Feisty little central midfielder who encapsulates the side's warrior spirit. Unlucky to miss out on the 2002 World Cup, but has made up for it with a long international career, which presumably will come to an end in Brazil.

FORWARDS



60
20

Edinson CAVANI

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 27 (14.02.87)
Described by Tabarez as "the perfect son in law", his capacity for work is such that he can be best described as a box-to-box centre-forward. Scored one and helped set up all the others in the 5-0 play-off win over Jordan.



105
36

Diego FORLAN

Cerezo Osaka (Jap)
Age 34 (19.05.79)
Technically gifted striker who can also operate deeper. He lost his place during the qualifiers but is still an important option from the Bench. Voted the tournament's best player at the last World Cup in South Africa.



11
7

Abel HERNANDEZ

Palermo (Ita)
Age 23 (08.08.90)
Lanky, left-footed striker with a fine burst of pace. A product of the 2009 under-20 team, his opportunities have been limited, but he celebrated a rare start, in the Confederations Cup, by scoring four goals against Tahiti.



77
39

Luis SUAREZ

Liverpool (Eng)
Age 27 (24.01.87)
Uruguay's all-time top scorer, who struck 11 goals in qualifying. Fast, strong, skilful, unpredictable – on his day all but unplayable. In the shadow of Forlan four years ago, how will he cope with carrying his country's hopes this time around?

TACTICS



Tabarez to stick to what he knows best

In the last World Cup, in every game that Uruguay played, they had less possession than the opposition but more shots. "As a team we want to be as we were in South Africa – difficult to play against," says coach Tabarez. "I don't aspire to anything else."

This reveals much about Uruguay's approach. There

are few pretensions of midfield elaboration in the team. Instead, they will be happy to grind out results with **4-4-2**, waiting patiently for space to open up into which they can then spring their dangerous strikers.

The Tabarez team has been noted for its tactical flexibility, for the capacity to adopt to different formations, sometimes with no changes in personnel. There has, however, been less of that over the last two years, although they did play a third centre-back away to Ecuador in October when the coach clearly felt that the altitude of Quito called for extra defensive cover. And, intriguingly, they used a back three in two friendlies against France – away in August 2012 and then at home the following June – keeping a clean sheet both times.

But while that variation is still in their locker, ever since a disastrous 4-0 defeat to Colombia in September 2012, Uruguay have stuck to a back four. With **Christian Stuani** and **Cristian Rodriguez** as specialist wide midfielders, it enables them to keep the defensive line close together and limit the space that the veteran defender **Diego Lugano** has to cover. Keeping things so compact has allowed Tabarez to drop one of his pair of central midfield markers, with **Diego Perez** giving way of late so that the more creative **Nicolas Lodeiro** can come in alongside **Egidio Arevalo Rios**, who is the leading midfield hit-man.

Luis Suarez will spend most of his time on the shoulder of the last defender, while **Edinson Cavani**, with his extraordinary capacity for hard work, will play the role of box-to-box striker, dropping deep when necessary to link the side together.

Diego Forlan, the hero of the last campaign, remains a dangerous and respected option on the bench.

Plan B?

Experiments with a back three are likely to remain on the backburner. One possible variation on the regular 4-4-2 framework is to bring on Forlan as a third striker in a **4-3-1-2**, playing him in place of Lodeiro behind the main strike pair.



Alvaro PEREIRA

Sao Paulo (Bra)
Age 28 (28.11.85)
Dynamic left-sided player who was a vital part of the side at the 2010 finals and the 2011 Copa America, but who has since struggled for form. At his best, his pace helps link the strikers with the deep defensive line.



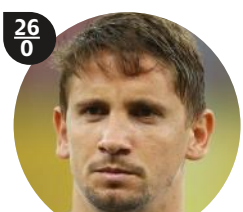
Maxi PEREIRA

Benfica (Por)
Age 30 (08.06.84)
Stocky, tough and quick right-back, who has been a fixture in the side during the Tabarez years. Joined Benfica in 2007, after first making his name with Defensor. Opened the scoring in the play-off against Jordan.



Andres SCOTTI

Nacional
Age 38 (14.12.75)
Veteran reserve centre-back, who is favoured by Tabarez as much for his calming experience in the dressing room as he is for his performances. Managed to get sent off last year against Tahiti in the Confederations Cup.



Gaston RAMIREZ

Southampton (Eng)
Age 23 (02.12.90)
Lanky, attacking midfielder with an excellent left foot. A product of the 2009 Under-20 side, he was promoted to the senior squad soon after the last World Cup. Has the potential to be a very useful supply line for the strikers.



Cristian RODRIGUEZ

Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 28 (30.09.85)
Stocky little left winger, known as "onion", full of cunning and reduced-space skills. Has been around the national team since the Copa America of 2004, but missed out on the last World Cup due to suspension.



Christian STUANI

Espanyol (Spa)
Age 27 (12.10.86)
Successfully incorporated into the team in the tense home run of qualification – one of the very few "outsiders" to break into the squad since the last World Cup. A right-sided midfielder capable of pushing forward into the box.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Martin CAMPANA (G, Age 25, 29.05.89, 13/1, Defensor)
Sebastian COATES (D, Age 23, 07.10.90, 13/1, Liverpool, Eng)
Alejandro SILVA (D, Age 24, 04.09.89, 2/0, Lanus, Arg)
Giorgian DE ARRASCAETA (M, Age 20, 01.06.94, 0/0, Defensor)
Sebastian EGUREN (M, Age 33, 08.01.81, 51/7, Palmeiras, Bra)
Alvaro FERNANDEZ (M, Age 28, 11.10.85, 11/0, Chicago Fire, USA)
Gonzalo CASTRO (F, Age 29, 14.09.84, 3/0, Real Sociedad, Spa)



USA

The enigmatic States

Who knows which US team will show up in Brazil?

When Winston Churchill talked about “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma” he was referring to the politics of the Soviet Union, but his words ring just as true about the USA’s football team.

This is a side that at times can look inept to the point of being laughable, yet one that can also beat Italy – in Italy. It is also one that has no clearly defined style; not least because Jurgen Klinsmann has been chopping and changing his starting line-up for almost every game. He says he wants to play a high-speed, high-pressure style, but his charges are quite clearly often playing a counter-attacking game.

Qualification may have been achieved by winning the group, although the fans were

crumbled back to shapeless incoherence in the second half as Mexico tied it up at 2-2.

In Bradley, Clint Dempsey and Landon Donovan, the States have a trio of virtually world-class players. But there are problems with the supporting cast. The goalkeeping is fine as always, that’s an American strength, and Tim Howard continues the tradition. But the back four is unsettled, inexperienced and slow.

In midfield, Jermaine Jones may be a rock but he is also a huge liability and prone to violent play. Alongside Bradley, Fabian Johnson and Graham Zusi are both solid if unremarkable players. Up front, Dempsey is running into goalscoring form with perfect timing – which is handy because his likely partner, Jozy Altidore, has suddenly lost his scoring touch.

Klinsmann’s aim is to get out of a very difficult group that he calls “the worst of the worst”. He will be hoping to spring a surprise or two, but the US will need help. For progress to be made, a few miscues from Ghana, Portugal and Germany will have to replace the riddles, the enigmas and the mysteries.

Paul Gardner

The fans were always left wondering what might happen from game to game

always left wondering what might happen from game to game. Klinsmann talked about watching his team develop and commented on how gratifying it was to be able to say “it’s working”. And in March’s friendly against Mexico, one could at last see what he meant.

Led by a dominating performance from midfielder Michael Bradley, his team produced a first-half performance that was as good as any produced by a senior US national team: stylish, skilful, intelligent soccer that was worthy of the two-goal lead. What a pity that it

PRE-TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

May 14	Training camp in San Francisco
May 27	Friendly v Azerbaijan in San Francisco
Jun 1	Friendly v Turkey in Harrison
Jun 7	Friendly v Nigeria in Jacksonville
Jun 8	Travel to base in Brazil



Main man...the USA's influential midfielder Bradley

BASE CAMP



GROUP G FIXTURES

Jun 16	v Ghana (Natal)
Jun 22	v Portugal (Manaus)
Jun 26	v Germany (Recife)



Despite facing group games in the northern venues of Manaus, Natal and Recife, Jurgen Klinsmann has stuck to his original plans to base his squad in the city of Sao Paulo, where the team held a training camp in January. They will be staying in the heart of the city, at the Hotel Tivoli Sao Paulo Mofarrej, and will use the Frederico Germano Menzen training centre.

THE VIEW FROM THE USA

● “On paper, the United States has little or no chance of getting out of their group in the World Cup. But the US is a group of believers and their coach Jurgen Klinsmann is a masterful motivator. Michael Bradley is in great form and will need to stay healthy for Klinsmann to play the possession-oriented football he so desperately desires. Probably the biggest factor going against the US is the fact that they have gained enough respect that teams will now take them very seriously.”



Steve Sampson, former national coach

● “The USA’s record over the last two years under Jurgen Klinsmann is – on paper – impressive, but the USA has rarely played



like a team capable of matching its formidable rivals in Group G. Of its three best players, Michael Bradley and Clint Dempsey were lured back to MLS because of huge paydays but also because of their concerns about playing time with their European clubs, while Landon Donovan has slowed down considerably since returning from his hiatus at the start of the 2013 season."

Paul Kennedy, editor-in-chief Soccer America

● "For coach Jurgen Klinsmann, secure in the knowledge that he has four years remaining on his contract, the knockout stage and beyond is the goal. It's no secret that the US have to play at the top of their level – or over their heads – to accomplish this. The spirit of the US players is high; if they are



competitive but miss out on advancing, the players will see this as a failure. The bar in America has been raised and cries of 'atta-boy' and 'good try' will no longer do."

Roberto Abramowitz, Futbol Mundial magazine

● "Obviously, it's a very tough group, but I think that if, on the day, we bring our 'A' game, our chances of advancing are fair to pretty good. We played well – and beat – Portugal in the 2002 World Cup, and we're certainly due for a win against Ghana. That's the troublesome game, the first game. But I like the way Klinsmann has them playing, the way he wants to pressure and attack opponents."

Nick Sakiewicz, CEO of MLS club Philadelphia Union



COACH PROFILE

Jurgen KLINSMANN (Ger)

Age 49 (30.07.64)
USA coach since July 2011

How he got the job

Having unsuccessfully courted Klinsmann in 2006 and 2010, US Soccer hired the German after Bob Bradley's team were outplayed 4-2 by Mexico in the 2011 Gold Cup Final.



Past successes as a coach

Guided Germany to third place on home soil at the 2006 World Cup.

Past failures as a coach

In his second coaching stint he was fired by Bayern Munich after just eight months in charge.

Achievements as a player

A World Cup winner in 1990 and a Euro champion in 1996 with Germany. Won UEFA Cup titles with Internazionale (1991) and Bayern Munich (1996), and also lifted the Bundesliga title (1997).

World Cup experience

Played in 1990, 1994 and 1998 World Cups, and coached Germany at the 2006 tournament.

Relationship with the media

He successfully sued German newspaper *Bild-Zeitung* for libel in 2006, but in the USA he has a cosy relationship with the mainstream media that largely treats him with reverence.

Relationship with the public

Popular among fans. Communicates on Facebook and Twitter, hosts open training sessions and frequently thanks fans for their support.

Style of management/coaching

A big believer in motivational techniques. He once hired a frying-pan folding, phonebook-ripping minister to inspire his players.

Notable backroom staff

Former Germany coach Berti Vogts joined as an assistant two months before the World Cup.

After the World Cup

US Soccer renewed his contract through until 2018 in December.

KEY  123 caps (ages as of 12.06.14; caps as of 05.03.14)

GOALKEEPERS



Brad GUZAN
Aston Villa (Eng)
Age 29 (09.09.84)
Has plenty of English experience, as Aston Villa's first choice. Called upon when Howard is injured, has always played well. Has a good record for saving penalties.

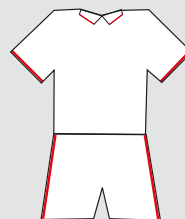


Tim HOWARD
Everton (Eng)
Age 35 (06.03.79)
First choice since 2007. He was the back-up to Kasey Keller in the 2006 World Cup and first choice in 2010. Solid in every aspect of goalkeeping, and now has over 10 years of Premier League experience, mostly with Everton.



Nick RIMANDO
Real Salt Lake
Age 34 (17.06.79)
Third-choice who has played in MLS for 15 years. Compensates for his relative lack of height with formidable athleticism.

KITS



First kit



Second kit

DEFENDERS



DaMarcus BEASLEY
Puebla (Mex)
Age 32 (24.05.82)
Started as a forward, where his tricky dribbling earned him the nickname "Jitterbug". After spells in Europe he moved to Mexico. By this time he was a left-back, and Klinsmann has made use of his skills and speed in that position.



Matt BESLER
Sporting Kansas City
Age 27 (11.02.87)
A late bloomer who, at age 26 has become Klinsmann's choice as a central defender. Tall, sturdy, with above average technical skills. Keeps his game simple, not given to offensive forays.



Geoff CAMERON
Stoke City (Eng)
Age 28 (11.07.85)
A versatile player who is useful for Klinsmann who has had troubles finding reliable defenders. Has also played in midfield. Hard tackling and good aerial ability are his strengths, but not considered an attacking threat.



Brad EVANS
Seattle Sounders
Age 29 (20.04.85)
A midfielder for his club but called up by Klinsmann as an emergency full-back for the key qualifier in Jamaica – where he responded by scoring a late winning goal.



Omar GONZALEZ
Los Angeles Galaxy
Age 25 (11.10.88)
Dominant in the air, his \$1.25m contract with Galaxy makes him the highest paid American defender in MLS. A spell in Europe ended prematurely in 2012 when he tore knee ligaments while training on loan with Nuremberg.

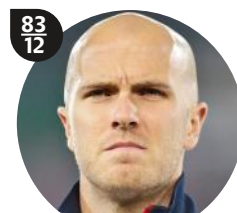
MIDFIELDERS



Kyle BECKERMAN
Real Salt Lake
Age 32 (23.04.82)
Feisty midfielder who has spent his entire career in MLS. Instantly recognisable because of his dreadlocks. Hard tackler, good passer. Plays a mostly defensive role, but scores four or five goals per season for his club.



Alejandro BEDOYA
Nantes (Fra)
Age 27 (29.04.87)
Has enjoyed a good season with Nantes, in an attacking wide role. Of Colombian descent, his quickness and guile – not often a characteristic of American midfielders – are a big part of his game. His first World Cup.



Michael BRADLEY
Toronto
Age 26 (31.07.87)
Son of former US coach Bob Bradley. Non-stop midfielder whose clever and accurate passing have moved him ahead of Donovan as the USA's most essential player. Back in MLS after spells in Holland and Italy.



Mix DISKERUD
Rosenborg (Nor)
Age 23 (02.10.90)
Born and raised in Norway. Mother is American. An admirer of Xavi and Andres Iniesta. Highly rated by Klinsmann: "With Mix we have a player I think is a special talent, has a special vision, he can pass between people."



Landon DONOVAN
Los Angeles Galaxy
Age 32 (04.03.82)
The most complete player the USA has ever produced, he still possesses the rare artistry and creativity that have made him so important to the USA. But a noticeable loss of pace threatens to curtail his influence.

FORWARDS



Jozy ALTIDORE
Sunderland (Eng)
Age 24 (06.11.89)
A year ago the powerfully built and speedy striker seemed to be the USA's prime goalscorer after some prodigious scoring with Dutch club AZ. Things have turned sour at Sunderland but he remains Klinsmann's first-choice.



Clint DEMPSEY
Seattle Sounders
Age 31 (09.03.83)
The most potent attacking player the USA possesses and hugely important – as a playmaker and a goalscorer. A sharp-shooter with either foot, a crafty passer of the ball and tall enough to pose an aerial threat.



Julian GREEN
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 19 (06.06.95)
Another of Klinsmann's German-trained players. Short, slight, elusive forward, a tricky dribbler, but has played just three minutes for the Bayern senior team. Pep Guardiola says he can play up front or wide.



Aron JOHANNSSON
AZ (Hol)
Age 23 (10.11.90)
Born in Alabama to Icelandic parents, he moved to Iceland aged three. Has developed into a mobile, skilful forward, scoring prolifically in the Dutch league. The Icelandic federation was not best pleased when he opted to play for the USA.



Chris WONDOLOWSKI
San Jose Earthquakes
Age 31 (28.01.83)
A classic late bloomer who scored just seven goals in his first six MLS seasons. In 2012 he equalled the MLS single-season record with 27 goals in 32 games. Quick and brave in the box, purely and simply a natural goalscorer.

TACTICS



Dempsey and Bradley are the main men ...with Donovan on the bench

Klinsmann's basic formation is a **4-4-2**, shading in its defensive version to a 4-1-4-1. The back line is Klinsmann's biggest headache, where he has to find the answers to an overall lack of speed, and an out-of-form Gonzalez. The likely set-up is

a central pairing of **Omar Gonzalez** and the comparatively inexperienced **Matt Besler**, with **Michael Parkhurst** at right-back and **DaMarcus Beasley** on the left. Expect Gonzalez and Besler to stay home, while Parkhurst and Beasley both have plenty of attacking skills.

The favoured defensive midfielder is **Jermaine Jones**, but **Kyle Beckerman** is a strong challenger. **Michael Bradley** is a fixture in centre midfield, with **Fabian Johnson** on his left, **Graham Zusi** to the right.

Clint Dempsey plays up front with **Jozy Altidore** – but Altidore's lack of goal-scoring form could open up a place for either **Aron Johannsson** or **Julian Green**.

Dempsey goes into the World Cup in fine scoring form. He will get good support from Bradley, adept at providing dangerous through balls, while Zusi is a good crosser. If Altidore proves ineffective up front, the likely replacements to play alongside Dempsey look good – Johannsson, coming off a 26-goal season at AZ, and the highly promising youngster Green.

With this formation, **Landon Donovan** would be used as a substitute. It is a set-up geared to Klinsmann's wish to play a high pace, high pressure style. But it brings its own problems when opponents counter attack rapidly. The ability of the USA's unreliable defence to deal with those situations is a source of concern. At the least, it means a tough time for the defensive midfielder, where Jones' aggressive style would be likely to attract yellow cards.

Plan B?

As for an alternative, Klinsmann will withdraw a forward into the midfield to make it a **4-5-1**. Klinsmann has often played with a single forward, usually Altidore, and having Clint Dempsey and Landon Donovan in a five-man midfield even though they're the best US scorers.

One of the central defenders – Jones or Beckerman will mainly serve as a sweeper in front of the back four.



46
5

Clarence GOODSON

San Jose Earthquakes
Age 32 (17.05.82)

Reliable, straightforward centre-back who returned to MLS in 2013 after a five-year spell in Norway and Denmark. Tall, good in the air, less so on the ground, with good positional sense.



25
0

Michael PARKHURST

San Jose Earthquakes
Age 30 (24.01.84)

Without a dominating physique, he has built a reputation as a, smart, skilful and clean-tackling centre-back in MLS. After a five-year spell in Denmark, he is back in MLS, playing as an attacking full-back.



19
0

Fabian JOHNSON

Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 26 (11.12.87)

Fast, technically sound player who can play on the back line or in midfield. Played alongside Khedira and Ozil in Germany's under-21 side but responded positively to Klinsmann's invitation that he switch allegiance to the USA.



39
2

Jermaine JONES

Besiktas (Tur)
Age 32 (03.11.81)

One-man wrecking crew who was controversially appointed captain by Klinsmann for two games in 2012 while serving an eight-week Bundesliga ban. Made three friendly appearances for Germany before switching to play for USA.



20
3

Graham ZUSI

Sporting Kansas City
Age 27 (18.08.86)

The quintessential American midfielder, physically strong, super-high work rate, combined with good tackling and passing skills – but all utterly straightforward. Artistry and subtlety are lacking, however.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

Tony BELTRAN (D, Age 26, 11.10.87, 3/0, Real Salt Lake)

DeAndre YEDLIN (D, Age 20, 09.07.93, 2/0, Seattle Sounders)

Maurice EDU (M, Age 28, 18.04.86, 46/1, Bursaspor, Tur)

Eddie JOHNSON (F, Age 30, 31.03.84, 63/19, DC United)



Tiempo Legend V
FG - 78310 - £139.99

JUNIOR TIEMPO FROM £40

Within Nike's Touch category lays the Tiempo, engineered for enhanced ball control for a dominating, perfect first touch.



Mercurial Vapor IX
FG - 78233 - £159.99

JUNIOR MERCURIAL FROM £40

The Mercurial Vapor sits in Nike's speed category and is engineered from top to bottom for elite-level play at top speeds.

FITNESS

POWERSPIN®

PROBABLY THE WORLD'S SIMPLEST EXERCISE DEVICE

Guaranteed to give you arms, shoulders and abs to die for when used from just 6 minutes per day!



...just ask Karen, 48

ONLY £19.99

amazon

Argos

powerspin.com

TESCO

STUDIO

MISCELLANEOUS



shytoobuy.com
because you are not alone
0207 084 7595

VIDEO/CINE FILMS

Soccer Matches on DVD 1954-2014

World Cups, Euro Champs, Euro Cups, Copa America, Maradona, Pele, Cruyff, Brazil, Milan, Juventus, Barcelona, Southern America, Europe, Asia.

Email for 4,000 Games List
sammi271@btinternet.com
Very cheap prices

PROGRAMMES

FREE
FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES

To receive a FREE programme plus a copy of our latest catalogue (listing several thousand different mint condition: Big Match, League, Scottish, Irish, Foreign and Non-League teams programmes etc.) please send your name and address to:

STEVE EARL FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES (DEPT.WS)
BROAD STREET, BUNGAY, SUFFOLK, NR35 1AH, ENGLAND
or phone 01926 892621 or visit www.footballprogs.co.uk
2014 World Cup Programme (English Edition) £12 (inc. p&p)
(Credits/Debits Cards & PayPal accepted)

MISCELLANEOUS



Johnson's
SPORTS SEED



Johnson's
SPORTS SEED

World Soccer

TO
ADVERTISE
HERE
PLEASE
CALL
RICHARD
TOREY
ON
020 3148 2518

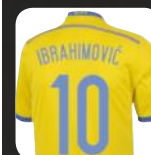
FOOTBALL KITS



14-15 COLOMBIA
HOME SHIRT
£54.99



14-15 COLOMBIA
HOME FALCAO SHIRT
£64.99



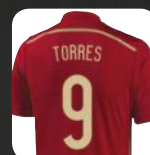
14-15 SWEDEN HOME
IBRAHIMOVIC SHIRT
£64.99



14-15 GERMANY HOME
OZIL SHIRT
£64.99



14-15 JAPAN HOME
KAGAWA SHIRT
£64.99



14-15 SPAIN HOME
TORRES SHIRT
£64.99

TEL: 0845 8382442
EMAIL: SALES@SUBSIDE.CO.UK
WWW.SUBSIDE.CO.UK



2014 World Cup schedule

(all kick-off times BST)

GROUP A

● BRAZIL ● CROATIA ● MEXICO ● CAMEROON

12.06.14	Brazil v Croatia	Arena de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo,	(9pm)
13.06.14	Mexico v Cameroon	Arena das Dunas, Natal	(5pm)
17.06.14	Brazil v Mexico	Estadio Castelao, Fortaleza	(8pm)
18.06.14	Cameroon v Croatia	Arena Amazonia, Manaus	(11pm)
23.06.14	Cameroon v Brazil	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(9pm)
23.06.14	Croatia v Mexico	Arena Pernambuco, Recife	(9pm)

GROUP B

● SPAIN ● HOLLAND ● CHILE ● AUSTRALIA

13.06.14	Spain v Holland	Arena Fonte Nova, Salvador	(8pm)
13.06.14	Chile v Australia	Arena Pantanal, Cuiaba	(11pm)
18.06.14	Spain v Chile	Estadio do Maracana, Rio de Janeiro	(8pm)
18.06.14	Australia v Holland	Estadio Beira-Rio, Porto Alegre	(5pm)
23.06.14	Australia v Spain	Arena da Baixada, Curitiba	(5pm)
23.06.14	Holland v Chile	Arena de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo	(5pm)

GROUP C

● COLOMBIA ● GREECE ● IVORY COAST ● JAPAN

14.06.14	Colombia v Greece	Estadio Mineirao, Belo Horizonte	(5pm)
15.06.14	Ivory Coast v Japan	Arena Pernambuco, Recife	(2am)
19.06.14	Colombia v Ivory Coast	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(5pm)
19.06.14	Japan v Greece	Arena das Dunas, Natal	(11pm)
24.06.14	Japan v Colombia	Arena Pantanal, Cuiaba	(9pm)
24.06.14	Greece v Ivory Coast	Estadio Castelao, Fortaleza	(9pm)

GROUP D

● URUGUAY ● COSTA RICA ● ENGLAND ● ITALY

14.06.14	Uruguay v Costa Rica	Estadio Castelao, Fortaleza	(8pm)
14.06.14	England v Italy	Arena Amazonia, Manaus	(11pm)
19.06.14	Uruguay v England	Arena de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo	(8pm)
20.06.14	Italy v Costa Rica	Arena Pernambuco, Recife	(5pm)
24.06.14	Italy v Uruguay	Arena das Dunas, Natal	(5pm)
24.06.14	Costa Rica v England	Estadio Mineirao, Belo Horizonte	(5pm)

GROUP E

● SWITZERLAND ● ECUADOR ● FRANCE ● HONDURAS

15.06.14	Switzerland v Ecuador	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(5pm)
15.06.14	France v Honduras	Estadio Beira-Rio, Porto Alegre	(8pm)
20.06.14	Switzerland v France	Arena Fonte Nova, Salvador	(8pm)
20.06.14	Honduras v Ecuador	Arena da Baixada, Curitiba	(11pm)
25.06.14	Honduras v Switzerland	Arena Amazonia, Manaus	(9pm)
25.06.14	Ecuador v France	Estadio do Maracana, Rio de Janeiro	(9pm)

GROUP F

● ARGENTINA ● BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA ● IRAN ● NIGERIA

15.06.14	Arg v Bosnia-H	Estadio do Maracana, Rio de Janeiro	(11pm)
16.06.14	Iran v Nigeria	Arena da Baixada, Curitiba	(8pm)
21.06.14	Argentina v Iran	Estadio Mineirao, Belo Horizonte	(5pm)
21.06.14	Nigeria v Bosnia-H	Arena Pantanal, Cuiaba	(11pm)
25.06.14	Nigeria v Argentina	Estadio Beira-Rio, Porto Alegre	(5pm)
25.06.14	Bosnia-H v Iran	Arena Fonte Nova, Salvador	(5pm)

GROUP G

● GERMANY ● PORTUGAL ● GHANA ● UNITED STATES

16.06.14	Germany v Portugal	Arena Fonte Nova, Salvador	(5pm)
16.06.14	Ghana v USA	Arena das Dunas, Natal	(11pm)
21.06.14	Germany v Ghana	Estadio Castelao, Fortaleza	(8pm)
22.06.14	USA v Portugal	Arena Amazonia, Manaus	(11pm)
26.06.14	USA v Germany	Arena Pernambuco, Recife	(5pm)
26.06.14	Portugal v Ghana	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(5pm)

GROUP H

● BELGIUM ● ALGERIA ● RUSSIA ● SOUTH KOREA

17.06.14	Belgium v Algeria	Estadio Mineirao, Belo Horizonte	(5pm)
17.06.14	Russia v South Korea	Arena Pantanal, Cuiaba	(11pm)
22.06.14	Belgium v Russia	Estadio do Maracana, Rio de Janeiro	(5pm)
22.06.14	South Korea v Algeria	Estadio Beira-Rio, Porto Alegre	(8pm)
26.06.14	South Korea v Belgium	Arena de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo	(9pm)
26.06.14	Algeria v Russia	Arena da Baixada, Curitiba	(9pm)

SECOND ROUND

28.06.14	(2R1) Win Gp A v Run-up Gp B	Est Mineirao, Belo Horizonte	(5pm)
28.06.14	(2R2) Win Gp C v Run-up Gp D	Estadio do Maracana, Rio	(9pm)
29.06.14	(2R3) Win Gp B v Run-up Gp A	Estadio Castelao, Fortaleza	(5pm)
29.06.14	(2R4) Win Gp D v Run-up Gp C	Arena Pernambuco, Recife	(9pm)
30.06.14	(2R5) Win Gp E v Run-up Gp F	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(5pm)
30.06.14	(2R6) Win Gp G v Run-up Gp H	Est Beira-Rio, Porto Alegre	(9pm)
01.07.14	(2R7) Win Gp F v Run-up Gp E	A. de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo	(5pm)
01.07.14	(2R8) Win Gp H v Run-up Gp G	Arena Fonte Nova, Salvador	(9pm)

QUARTER-FINALS

04.07.14	(QF2) Win 2R5 v Win 2R6	Est do Maracana, Rio de Janeiro	(5pm)
04.07.14	(QF1) Win 2R1 v Win 2R2	Estadio Castelao, Fortaleza	(9pm)

QUARTER-FINALS

05.07.14	(QF4) Win 2R7 v Win 2R8	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(5pm)
05.07.14	(QF3) Win 2R3 v Win 2R4	Arena Fonte Nova, Salvador	(9pm)

SEMI-FINALS

08.07.14	Win QF1 v Win QF2	Estadio Mineirao, Belo Horizonte	(9pm)
09.07.14	Win QF3 v Win QF4	Arena de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo	(9pm)

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

12.07.14	Estadio Nacional, Brasilia	(9pm)
----------	----------------------------	-------

FINAL

13.07.14	Estadio do Maracana, Rio de Janeiro	(8pm)
----------	-------------------------------------	-------



ORIGINAL CLASSICS



[TWITTER.COM/
CLASSICSHIRTS](https://twitter.com/CLASSICSHIRTS)

[FACEBOOK.COM/
CLASSICFOOTBALLSHIRTS](https://facebook.com/CLASSICFOOTBALLSHIRTS)

CLASSIC **FOOTBALL**SHIRTS.CO.UK



£19.99
BASEL 12 HOME

£5.99
SERBIA BOTTOMS



CLEARANCE



£29.99
DC UNITED

£64.99
REAL MADRID PADDED



£22.99
LEGIA WARSAW

EXTENSIVE
AS ROMA KAPPA RANGE
AT GREAT PRICES



£5.99
REAL MADRID 11
SOCKS

£9.99
ITALY 08 SHORTS

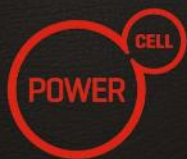


CLASSIC **FOOTBALL**SHIRTS *Boots*



POWER UNLEASHED

THE PUMA evoPOWER 1 L FG - £164.99 - 68912



evoPOWER

