

Brazil v Germany: Biggest humiliation in history of Brazilian football as 7-1 thrashing in World Cup signals night the music died

The indignity of this night will haunt Brazilian football for generations as hosts are thrashed 7-1 by Germany in World Cup semi-final

By Paul Hayward, in Belo Horizonte

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Brazil spent \$11 billion on a national calamity. The world's greatest football nation was left numb, humiliated and flummoxed as five German goals flew into their net in the first 29 minutes of a crushing 7-1 defeat.

Neymar was not the only one missing in action. It was true of Brazil's whole defence, discipline and structure. A majestic display of German passing through the centre of this Belo Horizonte pitch will be obscured by the trauma endured by Brazil. But Joachim Löw's men will not mind that. Their eyes are on the prize of becoming the first team from Europe to win a World Cup in Latin America.

The indignity of this night will haunt Brazilian football for generations.

The defeat by Uruguay in the 1950 final at the Maracana has always been the most persistent ghost in the home of football arte. Brazil, though, have won five World Cups since then, and have paraded before the world some of the game's greatest players: Pele, Garrincha, Jairzinho, Rivelino, Zico and Ronaldo. The golden shirt was never meant for journeymen. In international terms, Fred and Hulk are solidly in that category.

"We lost one match to a great team," Luiz Felipe Scolari, their coach, tried to argue, without success. "Five goals [in 29 minutes] – it was because of their skill, and we respect that." It went much deeper, to a failure of Brazilian talent, tactics and temperament.

Around this ground after Oscar's consolation goal there was dismay but also trepidation. What would it mean for public order? What incendiary mix might be sparked by embarrassment and anger? As the scoreboard went potty – and Miroslav Klose broke Ronaldo's World Cup record of 15 goals, just to drive the knife in – the audience inside the stadium could look no further than Brazil's mortification on the pitch.

As **Germany's** second went in a Brazil fan tried to eat his flag. Before that he had been urging

his fellow disciples to get behind a team who started full of zest. At 7-0, in the second half, he was a broken man.

Germany were right to think they would be facing a team of 200 million souls. Or 200 million minus one. But even then Neymar was everywhere, on the caps of Brazil's players, on face masks and in every utterance of the hosts as they sought a passage to the Maracana on Sunday.

The absence of Brazil's national magician was purely physical. Spiritually he was here. For the anthem – a skin-chilling blast of passion – the captain, David Luiz, clutched the No 10 shirt to rev the crowd. So melodramatic was the homage to the star with the broken back that many of us felt unnerved by it. How had this great footballing nation come to be so dependent on a single idol?

This mawkishness backfired on the hosts. It was more distraction than inspiration. They needed to concentrate on quelling a superb German team, not worshipping their absent brother. The focus was all misplaced.

Brazil's players will probably argue that there was a point to this endless worship. The aim was to turn Neymar into a catalyst and talisman: a patron saint who could help them win the game by proxy. The parallel with Pele in 1962 was irresistible. Yet all this sentimentality pointed to the glaring weaknesses at the heart of Scolari's side.

In 2002, in Yokohama, he had been able to draw on Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho, Cafu and Roberto Carlos. With no Neymar, Brazilians were left hoping for a miracle from Fred or some ingenuity from Bernard, Hulk and Oscar.

Scolari went for broke with this team selection. And he broke their chance. A rational approach would have been to pick three deep midfielders to go toe-to-toe with Bastian Schweinsteiger, Toni Kroos and Sami Khedira.

Instead Brazil stuck with two screening players – Fernandinho and Luiz Gustavo – and replaced Neymar with Bernard, the tiny winger. Scolari chose attack as the best form of defence, but left his team horribly vulnerable to the relentless, rhythmic passing of Germany.

This was the first time in 27 matches that Brazil lined up without Neymar. Bernard won the Copa Libertadores with Atletico Mineiro on this pitch last year, which apparently helped his case. All through this World Cup, Brazil tried to exploit the margins. Scolari grabbed at every

tool, from sports psychology to Neymar caps. The despairing fans played their part.

Indignation about the tournament's huge cost was shoved aside when the buttercup shirts took to the field. Here at the Estadio Mineirao, the white jerseys of Germany's supporters were specks in a vast yellow meadow.

The Germans, though, struck the right note. Löw called this "the battle of the continents, Europe v South America. There are 200 million Brazilians here cheering for their team," he said. "Brazil will unleash all its passion on us, emotional and physical." They did, for 10 minutes, but then completely neglected the fundamentals of defence.

Neymar's broken vertebra, brutal Brazilian tackling: these were meant to be the big story lines. Neither was remotely relevant to the action. A reckless team selection by Scolari threw open the gates of Brazil's defensive vulnerability, which had been apparent from the start, in the Croatia game.

Further down this week's road we will turn our thoughts to the brilliance of this Germany side, and how they have shown the rest of the world the right path to youth development. But first there is much more angst to seep out of Brazil. Social equilibrium always appeared dependent on the team's ability to go on winning games. Scolari's promise to bestow a sixth world title on his people was meant to calm the nation's nerves. It reads now like a rhetorical leap off a cliff.

When Germany scored their sixth goal, through Andre Schürrle, poor Fred finally left the stage, along with many Brazil fans, who walked out. Then Schürrle scored a seventh.

There could be even worse in store. Imagine Argentina skipping out at the Maracana on Sunday. Picture an all-European World Cup final in South America. We thought the samba would never stop at this tournament. It just did.

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