

## Exit Brazil: Catastrophe at the World Cup. The 7-1 Loss to Germany on Home Soil

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*It is not merely logically impossible, short of violating the law, to give something away one does not have. The Latin expression nemo dat quod non habet has its uses, trotted out in legal discourse when property is passed unlawfully from one party to another. In the football context, it is particularly applicable to Brazil, who, before a single player has taken to the field, has already been granted titles, trophies and awards. It is a burden most terrible, a psychological award made in advance of action. A priori triumphs are gruesome affairs, and made worse when they are found out to be just that.*

Losses, for that reason, are not merely unacceptable. They are unthinkable. You cannot lose a trophy that is yours, even if your name is conspicuously absent from it. The result, when loss sinks in: trauma, a multitude of terrifying realisations, and the awareness that another side will, in fact, take the mantle.



### BRASIL

The 7-1 loss to Germany on home soil at stages resembled the competition between rudimentarily armed villagers, and the Maxim machine gun. It was a pioneering experiment of gruesome resolution, the sporting equivalent of a slaughterhouse. According to Juca Kfoury of Brazil's *Folha de S. Paulo*, who accepted it as a "massacre", "It was an unthinkable way for Germany to avenge the loss in 2002 (in the World Cup Final). Never has Brazilian football experienced such humiliation."

The first half saw five goals scored with swift precision. The Brazilian players were left in a hypnotic daze, a trance which did the unthinkable: distance the ball from their clay bound feet. The clean sheet of the Germans was only smudged near the conclusion of hostilities, a smudge that still left the goalkeeper Manuel Neuer furious.

The statistics are crude in their devastating effect. This was the heaviest loss for Brazil on home soil since Yugoslavia slotted 8 past the keeper in a friendly in 1934. (On that occasion, Yugoslavia received 4 in reply.) It was also the first loss for Brazil in competitive competition on home soil since 1975, when Peru pulled off a miracle.

It prompted a sea of sobbing, disbelief, and departures from the stadium. The national team's loss at the Maracana stadium (dubbed the Maracanazo) 64 years before would not be avenged. It even saw a round of applause from the Brazilian supporters who remained for the punishment for the last German goal scored. There have been few nights in World Cup football like this.

The fear of riots and mayhem did not materialise on quite the scale anticipated. The stadium was not burned to the ground, but the national flag was. There were incidents in the environs - arrests, vehicles set alight. A group at Copacabana Beach in Rio capitalised in making off with bags and jewellery in a crowd.

Explanations for the loss came at some speed. Luiz Felipe Scolari, the coach, received a hounding, though remained calm. Would the injured Neymar Jr. have made a difference? The team got a predictable bollocking, its philosophy and overall disposition attacked. Long gone was the *jogo bonito* ethos and in its place, the desperate thug, the defensive and cautious system reluctant to thrill in attack.

Even Mick Jagger got a mention from the superstitious ones. His singing, if one can call it that, was never exactly melodious, but his hidden talent for making Brazil lose because of his blessing came to the fore. Reports that he had been spotted at the Mineirão stadium in Belo Horizonte barracking for the home team in a VIP box with Jia Joorabchian, an agent of several Brazilian players, were not received well.

Brazil's followers have called Jagger "pe frio", a jinx, a person of momentous bad luck (Brazil Sun, Jul 9). Not, it seems, merely for the Brazilian side. Each side Jagger has publically backed to reach the next round or win a tournament tends to lose, be it Italy, Portugal or England. The jinx is generous.

There is something also beyond the game itself, one that was meant to be everything. For some, it reads like great art - ordinary artists focus on art as it is; the great ones see it as totality, the hungry, enveloping universe. If it had been left to the ritual of game chatter - the stuff of pundits, coaches and athletes, then Scolari would have been allowed his comment that, "We lost to a great team."

The psychologists are also having a field day, and suddenly, tendentious guff about "BIRGing" - the basking in reflected glory - and "CORFing" - cutting off reflected failure", find an audience. The anxiety jackals have come out to suggest a nation in "uncharted sports-trauma territory" (*New York Magazine*, Jul 9).

This is not entirely true. After the 1998 loss to France, Brazil's congress held investigations and cross-examined athletes with needling fanaticism. What explained Ronaldo's convulsions, his sudden attack of fragility when facing the ultimately triumphant Frenchmen? Was Nike's golden support for the player part of the problem? On this occasion, the questions are bound to be even more assertive. They are also bound to avoid the obvious.

Such losses also have structural roots. Brazilian football stews in corruption and it is axiomatic that middle men and officials often prove bad ingredients to the pot of talent. Youth development, unlike Germany, is not a priority. Talents are not so much cultivated as rushed to a European market in raw form where they quietly disappear into oblivion or become organised team specialists.

The loss also brings into play the untested political dimension, though it is potentially one where only burials shall take place. When the president seeks re-election, will the expenditure of \$11 billion worth have warranted a semi-final placing? Football is the greatest of intoxicants in South America, but it also transforms into a toxin. It prizes money out of the public purse. It magically endows the gravy train for officials.

President Dilma Rousseff took a gamble, and it involved something of a smokescreen. Money was granted for stadium construction, but not health care and education. Laws curbing protests and dissent were enacted. Depending on which poll you care to digest, a majority of Brazilians opposed the grant of the World Cup, or at the very least its management. Rousseff herself did not attend any match after she was verbally abused by home supporters at the opening match with Croatia.

It all had to boil down to the occasionally scintillating commentary of the exit. A post from one Brazilian fan had much humour to it, masterfully combining both psychological meltdown with political statement. "The worst thing is there are no hospitals to treat my depression."

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