

U.S. shocks fifth-ranked Portugal in World Cup

By Linda Robertson
Knight Ridder Newspapers

SUWON, South Korea — The United States has always been the awkward guest at the world's grand soccer party, a lonely team nobody wanted to have much to do with, either at the tournament or back home.

Soccer, they all sniffed, was not an American game.

But on a steamy, surreal Wednesday in a suburb of Seoul, the United States crashed the World Cup and scored goals heard 'round the globe and at the breakfast tables of Americans choking on their Wheaties. By confounding Portugal, 3-2, the United States proved that it was more potent than one of the most feared teams in Europe, and that it deserves to be among the top 32 teams in the world.

It was one of the three greatest upsets in U.S. World Cup history, ranking with a 2-1 victory over Colombia at the Rose Bowl in 1994 and a 1-0 win over England at Brazil in 1950.

The three goals represented a flood compared to the usual American trickle. In 1998, the United States managed to score once in three games, and only six times in its previous nine Cup matches.

When Landon Donovan's streaking cross bounced off the back of Portuguese defender Jorge Costa's head into his own goal, Donovan raised his hands and his eyebrows to pantomime the feelings of all the witnesses at Suwon Stadium: unbelievable.

"I think this victory will grab the attention of a lot of people in the U.S.," head coach Bruce Arena said. "But our goal is to make it to the second round. To do that, we need more points."

In a game as riveting as it was significant, the United States struck early, going ahead 3-0 after 36 minutes, and fended off Portugal's desperate attempts at a tie in the final, tense 20 minutes. The match featured two own goals, bizarre bounces and players on both sides who looked like they thought they were caught in

a dream. As the game ended, the U.S. players leaped into each other's arms, serenaded by a pack of American fans who chanted "Ole, ole, ole, ole!" and "U-S-A, U-S-A, U-S-A!" and "Overrated!"

One man had his bald head painted like a soccer ball and his beard dyed red, white and blue.

"It was a very hectic game," midfielder John O'Brien said. "I think we were feeling a little disbelief. When you're up 3-0 against Portugal, it's kind of a shock. The whole atmosphere was strange. There was a mist over the field."

Strange because before Portugal reasserted itself in the second half, the United States was the instigator of a rout.

Strange because two 20-year-old World Cup rookies — Donovan and DaMarcus Beasley — played better than Luis Figo, FIFA's 2001 Player of the Year and the second-most expensive player in the world.

Strange because the United States, playing without its in-

jured captain and most explosive forward, played its prettiest soccer since beating Argentina in a 1995 tournament.

In fact, the United States played with the type of aggression that is Portugal's trademark.

"Our priority was to defend well, but we wanted to press and attack them," Arena said.

The victory enabled the team's veterans to shake off the shame of 1998, when the United States finished last in France, bickering among themselves and with their coach.

The U.S. win also turned Group D upside down. South Korea and the United States — who meet Monday — are ahead of Poland and Portugal. The top two teams advance to the second round.

For Portugal, ranked fifth in the world, the loss was another missed opportunity for a group of stars who won youth world titles but have never made noise in the World Cup. Vitor Baia was more sieve than goalkeeper, Portugal's defenders were a step

slow and its famous balletic scorers looked droopy.

"We have to realize we made some mistakes that you can't make in the World Cup," Figo said. "All I can say is, there will be no more surprising results for Portugal in the future."

Portugal scored in the 39th minute after O'Brien failed to clear a corner kick. Figo sent a cross from the right side and Beto headed a shot on goal. O'Brien saved it but it bounced back to Beto, who blasted a line drive past goalkeeper Brad Friedel.

Portugal got its act together in the second half. But in another unexpected twist, the usually vulnerable U.S. defense kept repelling Portuguese waves. The game became a nail-biter in the 71st minute, when midfielder Pauleta sent a cross from the left side that Jeff Agoos meant to clear from the box but ended up volleying straight past the flabbergasted Friedel.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (June 6). Don't focus on making money this year. You'll have enough to get by. Your relationships are more important. If you treat people right and keep your word, you'll end up with much more than money can buy. To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) - Today is a 6 - Now comes the test. Can you keep your hot temper under control? Getting rowdy will quickly get expensive, but all ends well.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) - Today is a 4 - Are you getting pushed around? Pay attention. The pace is fast and furious. Figure out what'll happen next, and stay out of the way.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) - Today is an 8 - Don't throw money at the problem. Get your buddies involved. Together, you can create whatever's needed. The answer comes through a friend of a friend.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) - Today is a 5 - A strong leader demands to be obeyed. It's in your best interest to do just that. Schedule meetings, no travel or shopping, for tomorrow. Save tonight for making plans.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) - Today is a 9 - You're looking good. You might even be able to sweet-talk a loved one who's in a snit into forgiving you. An obnoxious intellectual will be proven right, by the way.

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