

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

IF THERE'S ONE THING THE U.S. NATIONAL TEAM LEARNED AT THE WORLD CUP, IT'S THAT THERE'S STILL A LOT TO LEARN

A hard-fought draw against Italy aside, the Americans looked pathetic in Germany, getting bounced after three games. They managed just one goal on their own (the other was courtesy of Italy's Cristian Zaccardo), looked shaky on D and, despite a lofty pretourney ranking, wound up in 25th place. But weak qualifying competition and an expanding talent pool mean the U.S. is all but assured of making the final 32 for South Africa in 2010. If they want to avoid a repeat performance, the Yanks had better study up. Each of this year's quarterfinalists—six of whom are past champs—offers a valuable lesson.

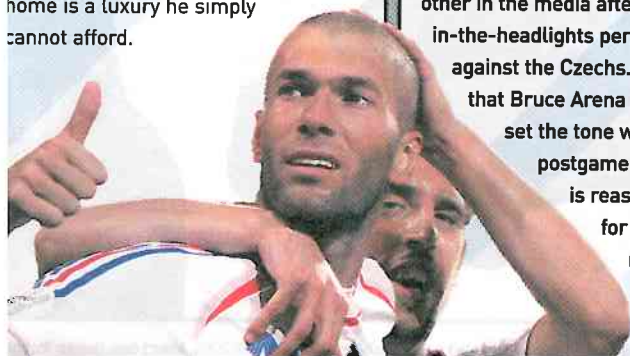
BY LIAM McHUGH



FRANCE

DEAL WITH PRESSURE.

Following their 1998 title, *les Bleus* had struggled in Cup play, going home without a goal in 2002 and looking anemic in their opening two matches in Germany. The response? Needing a win over Togo to advance, Thierry Henry played his best Cup game ever, which allowed **Zinedine Zidane** and Patrick Vieira to conjure some magic in a Round of 16 upset over Spain. The Americans, facing high expectations after their 2002 quarterfinal run, made the aging (and homebound) Czechs look like world-beaters in the opener, then got outclassed by Ghana in their do-or-die finale. To beat the best, more of the top U.S. players need to earn their living in pressure-packed leagues overseas. Landon Donovan (above) may prefer the comfortable lifestyle that staying in MLS allows, but if he wants to be a world-class star, playing at home is a luxury he simply cannot afford.

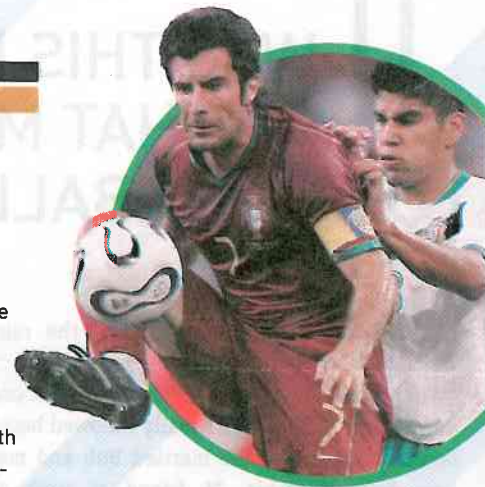
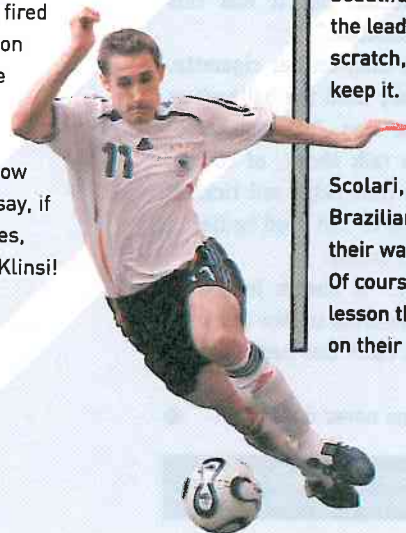


UKRAINE

DON'T POINT FINGERS. Only the Ukrainians, who lost 4-0 to Spain, suffered a more humbling opening result than the Yanks. But despite being hit with the tourney's first questionable red card, they didn't blame the ref, didn't blame their coach and didn't blame each other. (They did blame noisy frogs outside their hotel for a lack of sleep.) **Andriy Shevchenko** (above right) and his 'mates came together against Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. As for the Americans, a team that had bragged about superior chemistry? They took shots at each other in the media after their deer-in-the-headlights performance against the Czechs. The fact that Bruce Arena himself set the tone with his postgame comments is reason enough for the coach to move on.

GERMANY

PLAY TO STRENGTHS. The Germans have relied on their technical, robotic, grind-it-out system for so long that captain **Michael Ballack**, a star offensive midfielder, criticized coach Jürgen Klinsmann for pushing an attacking style. Credit Klinsmann for not listening. With a cast of fast and physical front-runners, led by **Miroslav Klose**, Germany entered the quarterfinals tied with a tourney-best 10 goals. The U.S. doesn't have the soccer history or experience to even have a signature style, but one thing is clear: If you don't shoot, you can't score (unless the other team does it for you). Through the first round, Germany fired 27 shots on net, while the U.S. had a tourney-low four. We say, if Arena goes, bring on Klinsi!



PORTUGAL

NURSE A LEAD. The Portuguese have been living on the edge, winning three of four games by a single goal. And while **Luis Figo** & Co. are capable of playing a beautiful game, when they get the lead they're not afraid to scratch, dive, even head-butt to keep it. Combining the two dynamics is the forte of coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, who showed the Brazilians how to mix it up on their way to winning it all in 2002. Of course, getting the lead is a lesson the Yanks will have to learn on their own.



ITALY

OWN THE BACK LINE. Sure, they dive, and their game isn't always the prettiest to watch, but the Italians are also very good, especially on D. They call it *catenaccio*, the door-bolt technique. The *Azzurri* conceded just one goal in advancing to the semis, and they scored that one on themselves. Behind the virtual brick wall of D **Fabrizio Cannavaro** (above, in blue) and GK Gianluigi Buffon, Italy countered with confidence and attacked freely. Playing from behind isn't a strength for the U.S., which has never won a World Cup game after trailing. The good news? The primary building block is already on staff. Oguchi Onyewu came in as the most hyped American talent, and despite some early jitters against the Czechs and his phantom penalty against Ghana, the massive central defender more than lived up to expectations.

ARGENTINA

ADAPT AND ADJUST. At times during their first four games, the Argentinians looked like the most dangerous attacking force in the field. At other times, they played some of the tourney's stingiest D. Facing Ivory Coast and then Serbia and Montenegro, the New Maradonas pounced early and often, demoralizing their lesser opponents. But after falling behind Mexico, they responded quickly, then got stingy, setting up **Maxi Rodriguez's** *golazo*. Coach José Pekerman adjusted his roster on the fly and fought the temptation to start the electric Lionel Messi, instead masterfully subbing the young striker. (Pekerman would later resign after his team lost on penalty kicks to Germany.) On the flip side, Arena left Eddie Pope in the game for the second half against Italy even though he was practically begging for a second yellow; the coach also struggled to find the right mix in the midfield against Ghana and never got speedster Eddie Johnson into a comfortable flow.

ENGLAND

CAPITALIZE ON OPPORTUNITIES. Soccer is the rare sport in which the team that dominates doesn't always win. Chances are few and far between, which is why Claudio Reyna's strike off the post against the Czechs, Brian McBride's offside nullifying DaMarcus Beasley's goal against Italy and Donovan's inexplicable decision to dish to Ben Olsen instead of shooting late in the game against Ghana will sting for years to come. And then there's England, which hardly looked dangerous but didn't lose a first-round match. Minute for minute, Reyna outplayed **David Beckham** in the group stage. Unfortunately, what will be remembered are Reyna's Ghana giveaway and Beck's brilliant bender against Ecuador. One great play in a win always beats out several good plays in a loss.

BRAZIL

PLAY WITH STYLE. Despite what soccer docs might say, there is no *futebol* gene. Individual skill and style must be developed and nurtured. In Brazil, less structure and minimal emphasis on winning at the youth level have helped build teams loaded with tantalizing talents like **Ronaldinho**, Ronaldo and Kaká. The only American who flashed any kind of creativity and flair was Clint Dempsey—also the only U.S. player, not coincidentally, to score. Perhaps because of this, and especially if he gets his wish to play in Europe, the U.S. team four years from now just might be known as Dempsey's and not Donovan's.

