

BRAVO, LA FRANCE



A nation takes to the streets to celebrate its almost unbelievable 3-0 victory over football's defending champions

By **ROD USHER** and **WENDELL STEAVENSON**

HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN! THE reigning Champions Brazil—four-time winners of football's highest honor—beaten by the David who failed even to qualify for the last two World Cup finals. No wonder the French crowd heeded the call of captain Didier Deschamps when he asked them to turn the Stade de France into the Stade de Frenzy. Three-nil! A goal for each band of the tricolor.

And if the stadium in Paris was the epicenter, the waves of national euphoria spread right across the country; millions of giddy supporters spilled onto the streets and filled every fountain. The rest of the sporting world couldn't help but share some of their ecstasy. And didn't the world watch: the tournament drew an accumulated total of 37 billion television spectators.

Few thought France could do it. But the team with the best player in the world and 10 others not far behind him, was beaten by one less star-studded, but with enough determination to pull off the impossible dream.

The final ignored the script even before the kick-off. Billed as the world's best attack against the world's best defense, it was supposed to be a tight match that would be decided by the brilliance of Ronaldo, with help from Rivaldo et al. It didn't happen. In part, because just before the match, to the stunned gabbling of the pundits, Ronaldo's fitness appeared to be in doubt. And it might have been better for Brazil had he not been playing; his dodgy ankle left him a shadow of his true self. And the French had Zinedine Zidane—or ZZ Top, as he's now being called. The big midfielder of Algerian descent had a different plot in his head. By half time, his balding pate had speared two balls into the net. The Brazilian second-half comeback never came, and Zidane's team-mate Emmanuel Petit provided the coup de grace only minutes before the Moroccan referee blew the whistle that al-

WHAT A NIGHT Thousands gathered at the Arc de Triomphe where pictures of France's heroes were projected onto Napoleon's monument

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