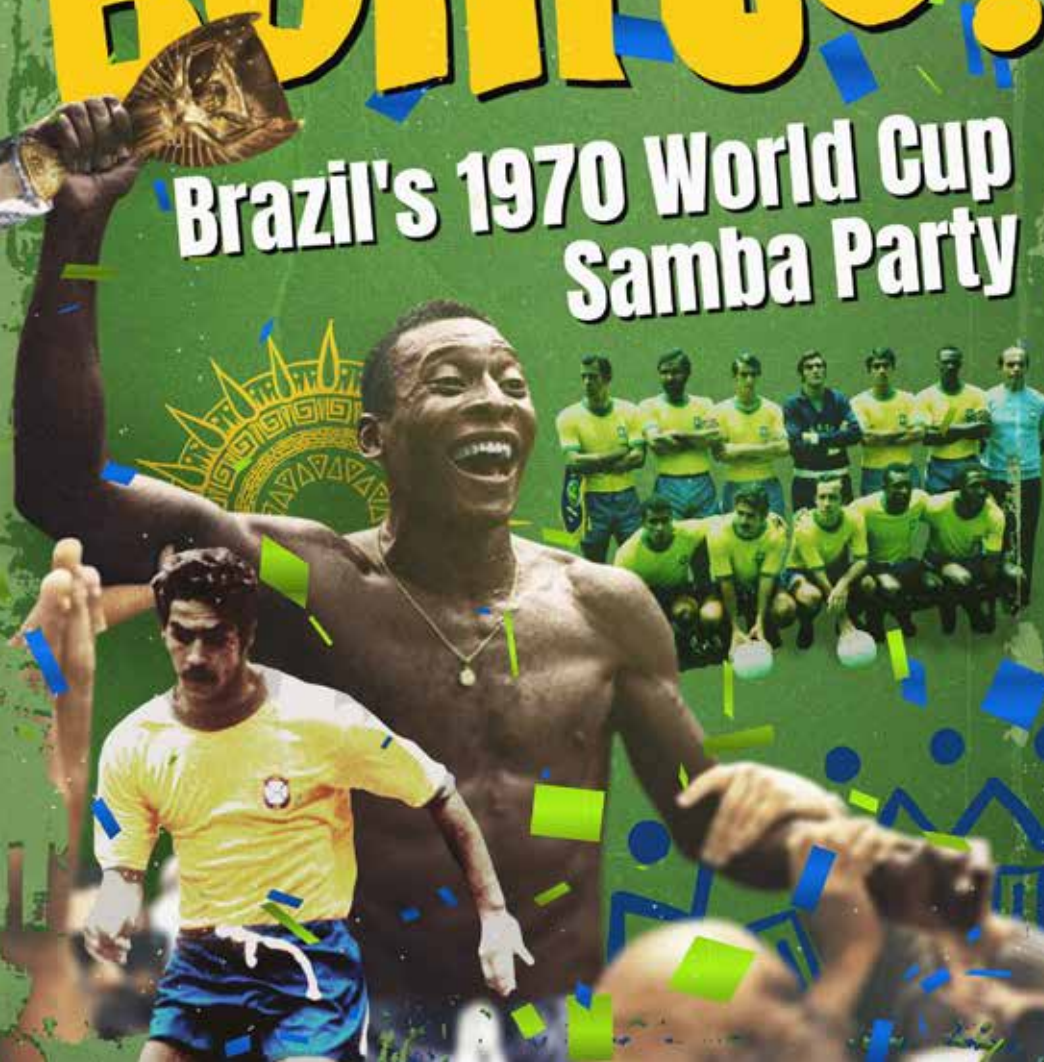


Gary Thacker

O JOGO BONITO!

**Brazil's 1970 World Cup
Samba Party**



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Part 1 – The Long and Winding Road²

² 'The Long and Winding Road', *Let It Be*, the Beatles (Apple & EMI, 1970)

Years of Sorrow

To look at Brazil's performance at the 1970 World Cup in isolation would only be telling a part of the story. As with so many outstanding sporting successes it isn't something that can be reduced to the events of a few weeks. There were years of sorrow to be endured before the years of joy that followed and, even then, a roadblock to be negotiated. After a couple of frustrating failures, the first step was taken in 1958, but there was still a long way to travel before Brazilian football hit its zenith with *O Jogo Bonito*. It was a triumph a dozen years in the making.

1950 and the *Maracanazo*

Following the end of World War Two, FIFA were keen to resurrect the World Cup and, at their 1946 congress, invited countries to bid for the hosting rights for the proposed 1949 tournament. In the aftermath of the conflagration that had cost millions of lives across the previous half a dozen years, however, few countries saw this as an opportunity to grasp, especially those whose infrastructures, economy and social structures had been ravaged during the conflict. Ahead of the war, Brazil and Germany had been competing to host the subsequently cancelled 1942 finals and, with a defeated,

demoralised and largely destroyed Germany in no fit state to resurrect its ambitions, a resubmitted Brazilian bid to host was hastily accepted by FIFA. With so many European countries focusing solely on rebuilding and recovery as their overwhelming priorities, and the previous two tournaments held first in Italy and then in France, South America was a logical choice, with Brazil as the host.

A truncated tournament, denuded by withdrawals, boycotts and absentees, was eventually reorganised to comprise a pair of groups with four teams each, one with three and a final one of just two. It required a sole game to decide who would top that group and move forward into the second stage of four group winners, and was a cobbled-together solution, but at least it got things moving. From there, each of the four top teams emerging from the groups would play each other with the team topping the final group declared as the new world champions. It was a format scheduled not to have a deciding final, but the fates conspired to compromise that plan.

The games in the final group would take place on 9, 13 and 16 July, with the matches of the last day set to be Sweden facing Spain and Brazil facing Uruguay. In the earlier games, Uruguay had first drawn with Spain thanks to a late goal by their captain, Obdulio Varela, before squeezing past Sweden 3-2 after twice trailing the Scandinavians, when Óscar Míguez netted twice in the final dozen minutes. Meanwhile, Brazil had slalomed through their games, defeating Sweden 7-1 and Spain 6-1. The hosts only needed a draw in the final rubber to become world champions and, with the game played at Rio's intimidating Estádio do Maracanã, in front of an official attendance of some 199,000, while unofficially the figure is regarded to

have breached the 210,000 mark – equivalent to around ten per cent of Rio's total population – anything but a Brazilian triumph was surely inconceivable. It was seen to be more of a coronation than a contest. The man who would later break Brazilian hearts, Alcides Ghiggia, later recalled that ahead of kick-off, 'Their supporters were jumping with joy as if they'd already won the World Cup.' For the first time, but hardly the last, a large fee would be demanded for Brazilian hubris.

It was not to be. In a game that was later to gain infamy in Brazil as the *Maracanazo*, despite the hosts taking an early second-half lead through Friaça, Uruguay rallied against all expectation and the fervour of the Brazilian crowd. Juan Alberto Schiaffino, who would later become the world's most expensive footballer when he moved from Peñarol to AC Milan for 52m Lire in September 1954, equalised on 66 minutes after capitalising on a cross from Ghiggia. And when another Uruguayan strike, this time from Ghiggia 13 minutes later, gave the visitors the lead, Brazilian dreams were buried. Ghiggia would later remark that he was one of only three people ever to have silenced the Maracanã. 'Frank Sinatra, the Pope and me,' he recalled during an interview with the BBC.

People broke down in tears in the stadium and Pelé later recalled that it was the only time he had ever seen his father cry. He wasn't alone. In his book telling the story of the World Cup's bridesmaids, those who so nearly reached the crowning glory but fell tantalisingly short, Aidan Williams painted the picture of the enduring effect of that defeat, 'For all of Brazil's footballing grandeur, all of those glittering prizes, those moments when their canary-yellow shirts dazzled as the sun shone on their crowning glories, it is a

moment of sporting tragedy that remains the most morbidly fascinating to Brazilians.³ The trauma was woven into the social fabric of Brazil, and there it would stay entangled, enmeshed, eternally haunting.

Watching in the stadium was a young 18-year-old soldier, who would grow up to deliver three of those ‘glittering prizes’ alluded to by Williams, in World Cup triumphs for Brazil – two as a player and one as a coach. His name was Mário Zagallo and in 1970 he would be the coach of the greatest team ever to win the World Cup. Not far from the stadium there’s a museum, and in a darkened room there, a flickering newsreel retells the story of that fateful game. As Ghiggia scores the goal that turned Brazilian dreams into nightmares, the commentary quietly intones with solemn finality, ‘Two-one Uruguay. The heart of Brazil stops.’ Up until this point, the *Seleção Canarinho* was yet to be born, as Brazil played in white, with blue collars. The trauma and dread spectre of Brazil wearing white would haunt the team for many years to come, not least ahead of the 1958 World Cup Final.

Following the *Maracanazo*, with the white shirts now deemed to be both unlucky and lacking in patriotic links to the country and its culture, Brazilian newspaper *Correio da Manhã* sought permission from the CBD to run a competition inviting readers to submit designs for a new kit for the *Seleção*, which would incorporate the colours of the national flag – yellow, green, blue and white – offering a new start for the national team and wiping away the memories of the *Maracanazo*. The competition was won

3 Williams, Aidan, *The Nearly Men: The Eternal Allure of the Greatest Teams that Failed to Win the World Cup* (Worthing, England: Pitch Publishing Ltd, 2022)

by 19-year-old Aldyr Garcia Schlee, who would later go on to become a celebrated writer, journalist, translator, illustrator and professor. His drawings depicting a yellow shirt, trimmed in green and blue shorts edged in white would later become a world-famous icon of Brazilian football, and adopted by the CBD in February 1954, when the *Seleção Canarinho* took to the field against Chile in Santiago's Estadio Nacional in a qualifying game for the upcoming World Cup.

1954 and the Battle of Berne

Four years after the *Maracanazo*, with a 100 per cent win record across all four of their qualifying games, Brazil arrived in Switzerland to compete in the 1954 tournament. With a squad containing the likes of Djalma Santos, Nilton Santos and Waldyr Pereira – forever known as Didi – they were placed into Group 1 alongside the other seeded team, France, and the two non-seeds, Mexico and Yugoslavia. Presumptively, FIFA had decided who the eight seeded teams – two being in each of the four groups – would be before the qualification process had been completed. Austria, Brazil, England, France, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Uruguay were selected. Turkey threw a spanner into the works when they eliminated the Spanish, but FIFA merely moved the seeding spot to them instead.

Following a strange format, the two seeded teams would not play each other and a thumping 5-0 win over Mexico and a 1-1 draw with Yugoslavia was sufficient to see Brazil qualify along with the eastern Europeans. Officially Brazil finished top of the group, but this had little to do with their massively superior goal difference over the runners-up. That factor was deemed to be irrelevant, with the drawing of

lots bizarrely considered to be a better option of deciding prominence.

Topping the group sent Brazil into a quarter-final with the Magical Magyars of Hungary. After the demolitions of England, Gusztáv Sebes's team were widely considered to be the best on the planet and strong favourites to win the trophy, especially as the location surely favoured a European side over those from South America. In this contest, however, the scintillating play that the cherry red-shirted Hungarians had displayed across recent years was absent as the game degenerated into the infamy of the 'Battle of Berne'. Three players were dismissed, and that number could have been much higher. Even after the final whistle, the teams continued their running battles into the tunnel and dressing rooms.

As with the debacle in the Chilean capital four years later at the Battle of Santiago, again an English referee, this time Arthur Ellis, was the arbiter of fair play, if any could be found. Hungary prevailed 4-2 after twice taking a two-goal advantage, and being pegged back, before Sándor Kocsis put the game beyond the reach of Brazil with a couple of minutes to play. Ellis would later find fame on television as a 'referee' in the slapstick knockabout antics of *It's a Knockout!* and *Jeux sans Frontières*. The contest in Berne was certainly a game without frontiers, and ended up as a knockout for Brazil.

After the traumatising defeat to Uruguay in what was a de facto home World Cup Final in the Estádio do Maracanã four years earlier, Brazil's prospects of becoming world champions barely seemed to have progressed. A quarter-final defeat, albeit in such a tempestuous game, hardly suggested that things were moving in the right direction and, with the next tournament taking place in

Europe again – Sweden the hosts – the prospects were far from dazzlingly bright.

At such times, it's understandable to cast around for the right man to put things back on track, and across the next four years the CBD took to such an exercise with copious amounts of zeal, and equal measures of apparent indecision. Coach Zezé Moreira would not survive in post for long, and returned to his club side Botafogo. Vicente Feola took charge on the first day of July 1954 and would be in charge of the team for precisely two years. The São Paulo coach had a pedigree of success with his club, securing the Campeonato Paulista title in 1948, and retaining it the following year. His time with the *Seleção* was brief but he would take charge again, both three years and 13 years later, with hugely differing amounts of success. Flávio Costa had been the man at the helm of the Brazil team in the 1950 tournament and, had the result been different on that fateful 4 July day in Rio, his fame would have been assured. Following the *Maracanazo*, however, his doom was assured. A brief return after the departure of Feola offered little in the way of redemption for Costa and he was replaced by Corinthians coach Osvaldo Brandão. The new man would flit in and out of contact with the *Seleção* across the next 24 months, before remarkably returning two decades later for a two-year spell in charge.

Teté took over in 1956, but didn't stay long before Flávio Costa returned. His third term with the national team, perhaps significantly, began on 1 April 1956. The wisdom, or otherwise, was confirmed by the fact that just four months later he was again on the move, this time to European club football, taking over at Porto. Sylvio Pirillo had scored six goals in his five games for the *Seleção* and

he was the man drafted in to take charge following Costa's third exit. As with so many others, in the few years since the World Cup elimination in Switzerland, his time was brief, but as well as guiding Brazil to qualification for Sweden his tenure was marked out by one hugely significant event.

With three slots allocated to CONMEBOL, the South American federation, and nine teams seeking qualification, it was a fairly simple matter to produce three groups, each comprising three teams, with the group winners making the trip to Scandinavia. Feola's team were placed into a group alongside Peru and Venezuela, with their task being made easier when the latter decided to withdraw from the competition. A 1-1 in Lima's Estadio Nacional on 13 April 1957 set things up for Brazil to complete the job eight days later back in Rio. The team that faced Peru in Lima had no Pelé – his international debut was still a few months away – but, with Gilmar in goal, both Djalma Santos and Nilton Santos in front of him, plus Didi in midfield and Garrincha in the forward line, the team that would take Brazil to the summit of world football the following year was taking shape. Sure enough, a goal by Didi 11 minutes into the return fixture confirmed Brazil's passage to Sweden.

Three months later, with qualification confirmed, the coach could turn his mind to looking at players likely to be travelling to Europe the following year. On 7 July 1957 Brazil faced Argentina in a Roca Cup game in Rio. The trophy had been donated in 1913 by General Julio Argentino Roca, a former president of Argentina and ambassador to Brazil, to be awarded to the winner of games between the two countries, and this version would mark the debut of a precocious talent. Edson Arantes do Nascimento had made his first appearance

for Santos as a 15-year-old on 7 December 1956, and just ten months later the player who would become universally known as Pelé entered the international arena. He was just 16 years and nine months old. Argentina would win 2-1 but, on 76 minutes, the Brazil goal was netted by the teenager. Across the course of a further 91 appearances for the *Seleção* he would add another 76 to his total. The second was not long in coming. Three days later the teams met again, this time in São Paulo. Pelé opened the scoring after 20 minutes and Brazil went on to win 2-0.

The teenager was a sensation, although no one knew that he would grow up to be regarded as the best player in the world, and few realised how thankful they should be for Pirillo giving the skinny tyro his debut. Pedrinho took over from Pirillo, before Feola was appointed to lead the team into the 1958 World Cup.

* * *

Years of Joy

1958: The First Step on the Journey

Officially, Feola's appointment began on 7 June 1958, the day before the tournament began and Brazil began their opening game against Austria. His first term heading the *Seleção* had hardly been a runaway success. Of his 16 games, he had won eight, drawn five and been defeated in three, averaging just a single goal per match. When the tournament got under way, that record would improve dramatically both in terms of victories and goals scored. A total of 16 strikes in their six matches in Sweden is impressive enough. Throw in the fact that the sequence includes a goalless draw against England, and a single-goal victory against Wales, and the average in the other games rises dramatically.

Feola's squad was a mixture of youth and experience, although only a couple of the 22 players had passed their 30th birthdays. Goalkeeper Carlos José Castillo, who had reached that mark just eight months earlier, was the second eldest, behind the vastly experienced Nilton Santos, who was 33 and had 46 caps to his name. At the other end of the scale, Pelé – still only 17 – had five caps, Vavá had four, Didi and Zagallo just three each, and Orlando a single one. All five would feature in the World Cup Final triumph over Sweden, with Pelé, Zagallo and Vavá sharing the goals.

In the previous two tournaments, Brazil had lost in what was the final – in everything but name – to Uruguay eight years earlier, and had then suffered defeat to what was probably the best team in the world in 1954 as they were eliminated by Hungary. As such, placed in a group with the Soviet Union, England and Austria, they were considered by many to be favourites to progress. On paper, however, the task was perhaps not as easy as some may have thought. The Soviet Union, playing in their first finals, were the reigning Olympic champions and many of the gold medal winners had made the squad for Sweden. Austria had collected the bronze medal in that same competition and, despite England being denuded of some star names following the tragedy of the Munich air disaster, they still had a strong squad, witnessed by the fact that they were the only team throughout the tournament to both deny Brazil a goal and, consequently, victory. It was the first time a game in a World Cup finals had ended goalless.

Brazil started the tournament in confident fashion, disposing of Austria with some comfort. A brace from Altafini, sandwiching Nilton Santos's goal, was more than enough to carry them to victory. Three days later, with Vavá

replacing Didi, they faced a much more resilient opponent as England battled to a 0-0 draw in Gothenburg. The Soviet Union had also beaten Austria and drawn with England, meaning that the final rubber of the group would decide who topped the table and, depending on other results, who would finish in the runners-up spot.

Following his team's failure to find the back of the net against England, Feola made three changes to his starting 11. Zito replaced Sani in midfield with both Garrincha and the teenage Pelé joining the attack in place of Joel and Altafini. The team that would play in the final was taking shape. More than 50,000 fans crowded into the Ullevi stadium to watch the contest and Vavá's two goals saw Brazil top the group. Despite his tender years, and a failure to score, Pelé marked his entrance into World Cup competition with a performance full of skill and promise. Feola's team had prevailed without conceding a goal and the Soviet Union edged England out of second place, and qualification, in a play-off after both teams had finished with four points and matching goals records.

Despite his brace in seeing off the Soviet Union, Vavá was missing against Wales as Altafini replaced him in an otherwise unchanged team. Playing just his second match in a World Cup, Pelé began to deliver on the promise he had shown in the previous group game, and scored the winning goal as the Welsh stretched the eventual champions in what was probably their toughest contest of the tournament.

Joining them in the final four were Sweden, France and West Germany. Brazil were the only non-European team remaining in the competition and, as no team had ever won the World Cup outside of their own hemisphere at that time, there was plenty of opinion that thought the winners would

come from one of the other three sides, who all had good reason to consider themselves worthy of the title.

The hosts were coached by George Raynor, who would go on to be the first Englishman to take a team to the World Cup Final, beating Sir Alf Ramsey by eight years and two tournaments. The Swedes were also fired by a crop of exciting forwards, with some of them making a significant impact in Italy's Serie A, including Gunnar Gren, Kurt Hamrin and Nils Liedholm.

West Germany were the reigning champions, following their defeat of the overwhelming favourites, and conquerors of Brazil, Hungary in Switzerland. A less-than-impressive progression to the semi-finals had seen the Germans win one and draw two of their group games, before edging past Yugoslavia thanks to a goal by Helmut Rahn, who had netted the decisive goal in the final four years earlier.

France not only had the tournament's top goalscorer, Just Fontaine, in their team, but also the brilliant Raymond Kopa who had played for Stade de Reims in the first European Cup Final, when the French club lost to Real Madrid, but then returned to the final the following year, this time wearing the all white of the Spaniards. *Los Blancos* had been so impressed that they paid handsomely to take him to the Spanish capital where he would be part of their European domination for the next three years. Albert Batteaux's team also had the man often regarded as one of the most accomplished defenders in Europe as part of their team, in Robert Jonquet. While Sweden faced West Germany in front of nearly 50,000 fans in Gothenburg, Brazil would travel to Solna's Råsunda Stadium in the other semi-final where an injury to Jonquet would be key in deciding the outcome.