



# ROAD TO THE WORLD CUP

# TRUE GRIT

## Blackburn Rovers' VINCE GRELLA sets the standard for the Socceros' guts and determination

### How's the fitness?

Good, I've turned the corner. I could have been back maybe two weeks ago (from a quad tear), but we decided to stay out of playing for a couple of weeks and build the fitness up again. Everyone wants you to be on the pitch. In some ways it's a good thing – that means you're still wanted. For me now the important thing is to play games.

### Enjoying life at Blackburn?

It's very solid, the facilities are top class, medical team very good. (Manager) Sam Allardyce pays a lot of attention to finer details. He's really helped with injuries. He's seen my professionalism and how disappointed I've been with injuries and not playing.

### How much have you been thinking about the World Cup?

To be perfectly honest, not a lot. Maybe because my EPL career hasn't been going the way I wanted. My full

concentration is playing in the last few games of the season. If I could have those games in my legs going into the World Cup, it would put me in the best possible position. Above all else I want to produce what I'm good at. If I'm fully fit, I'm able to compete with the best players in the world.

### What was your reaction to the group?

I thought, this is the World Cup. Bring it on; let's see what they can throw at us. We are the type of team that has never really been scared of the opposition. That doesn't mean we're going to beat them all 3-0. They're going to be tough, intense games. I go through their teams and yeah, they have good players, but we have good players.

### The Socceros tend to lift for big games.

Exactly. One of the key factors will be the fitness of the team and for how long we can play at a certain tempo. If we can play at a high tempo for most of the game we'll have a good chance.

### How has the team changed since 2006?

The surprise of some young, good players coming through – maybe people won't know as much about them. The rest of us are that little bit older and more experienced.

### What are you looking forward to most in South Africa?

The challenge. The difficulty of every game. It inspires me to train harder and be more disciplined in everything I do. Without that I would be finished as a player.

### There's a lot of talent on the pitch.

It's a talented team. If we can all get there fit and have a really good training camp with Pim, we can do well. And surprise a lot of people. No one likes to play us at any time.

We've always been tough – and now we have the technical ability. We will give them an absolute run for their money.

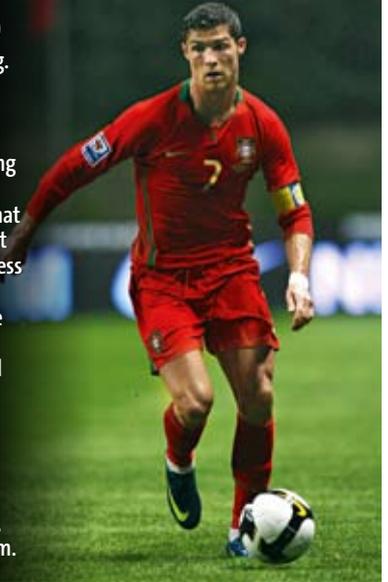


**"This is the World Cup. Bring it on."**

## WORLD CUP 2010 PLAYERS TO WATCH

### CRISTIANO RONALDO

For Manchester Utd he was devastating. For Real Madrid, astonishing. But for Portugal, not so much. No one who watches football doubts Ronaldo's sheer talent and cutting edge: terrifying dribbling, blazing free kicks, ruthless finishing, and a fabulous work-ethic that belies his arrogant, playboy image. But playing in the Portuguese team he is less effective, perhaps because he plays in a slightly different position behind the lone striker, and perhaps because the Portuguese side doesn't have Real and Utd's superstar support. The time for Portugal's golden generation was six years ago, when they lost to Greece at Euro 2004. With the likes of Luis Figo, Rui Costa, Joao Pinto and Paulo Sousa gone, Ronaldo is still a glorious threat, but his team will struggle to match him.



## WORLD CUP CONTROVERSIES

### THE HAND OF GOD

Even people who don't know sport know about Maradona's illegal goal against England at Mexico '86. The move, during a hotly anticipated quarter-final, started with a rampant Maradona charging forward with the ball; he slipped a pass and kept running, while a panicked defender scooped the ball high towards the penalty spot. England goalkeeper Peter Shilton, then 37, came too slow from his line and could barely make the challenge before Maradona threw himself into the air and bridged the gap between ball and head with his arm, deflecting the ball past the Englishman. Springing up, Maradona sprinted away, urging his teammates to start celebrating, too. To Shilton's dawning horror, the referee gave it. Suddenly Maradona was the most hated man in England.



## OFF THE BENCH



**• WHO'S THE BIGGEST LOSS FROM SOUTH AFRICA 2010?** Not Guus Hiddink, who has scrambled into yet another Cup – this time as temporary coach of the Ivory Coast. Hiddink, who disappointed any number of unshaven, sunnies-

indoors-wearing Russian types by failing to qualify their team, will take on Drogba, Toure and gang for a few months, before hopping over to Turkey full-time in August. It just wouldn't be the same without him.

**• FEW TEAMS ARE CLINGING ON BY THEIR FINGERNAILS SO MUCH AS FRANCE,** who scraped through qualifying impressing no one. Comedy coach Raymond Domenech is saddled with two ageing totems in captain Patrick Vieira, who hasn't ventured beyond the centre circle in years, and Thierry Henry, who is fine these days unless you ask him to sprint

or turn. Dare he drop either? Answers on a postcard marked "No".

**• THE ENGLAND TEAM ALWAYS FINDS WAYS TO DROP CLANGERS AT VITAL TIMES,** and no prizes for guessing this year's. How serious John Terry's shagging and subsequent captaincy strippage is depends on your opinion of captains. Does he just toss the coin or is there more to it? Either way, with sex addict Ashley Cole already nursing a broken ankle, and poor Wayne Bridge turning his back on England, any fit left-back in England might start expecting a call.