



Casemiro, Ancelotti's lieutenant and symbol of Brazil troubles

● **Casemiro subbed at halftime vs Morocco**

● **Limp display draws heavy criticism**

● **Started 12 of 13 recent matches**

AFP | Los Angeles

Recalled by Carlo Ancelotti, Casemiro became an untouchable figure for Brazil -- until a disappointing World Cup start made him a prime target for criticism at home.

The former Real Madrid player, one of the leaders of the squad chasing a sixth world title, looked destined as the man to anchor Brazil's midfield at the tournament after an impressive final season with Manchester United.

But his limp display in Saturday's 1-1 draw with Morocco, in which he was replaced at halftime, has left the 34-year-old enduring his lowest moment

since first pulling on the famous yellow shirt in 2011.

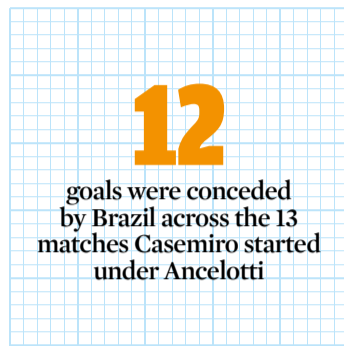
The performance has also strained the bond between Brazilian fans and Ancelotti, hailed as the man who could lead the five-time champions back to the summit for the first time since 2002.

In his first squad selection, Ancelotti surprised many by recalling Casemiro, a five-time Champions League winner with Madrid during a nine-year spell in Spain.

The holding midfielder had been out of the Brazil picture for more than 18 months, but Ancelotti revived his international career, starting him in 12 of the 13 matches he has overseen.

Casemiro captained the side four times, scoring twice and providing two assists. While Brazil continued to show defensive frailties -- conceding 12 goals in those 13 matches -- his presence brought balance to the midfield.

Ancelotti sees Casemiro as an on-field extension of the coach, giving the team structure and



controlling the rhythm in possession.

"There are no players in Brazil with the same characteristics as Casemiro," Ancelotti said last year.

When some suggested two years ago that Casemiro's legs had gone during a turbulent patch at United, Ancelotti did not share that view.

Biggest disappointment

However, in the opening match of his third World Cup, Casemiro looked off the pace, out of sync with Bruno Guimaraes and struggled to recover possession, a hallmark of his game. "He was the player who disap-

pointed most on debut," former Brazil great Romario said on his YouTube channel.

"Casemiro is the coach's favourite -- that's normal -- but given what he represents for the coach and the team, he really disappointed."

Casemiro, who admitted on arrival in the United States that Brazil were "a little step behind" the main favourites, was completely upstaged by 18-year-old Ayyoub Bouaddi against Morocco.

He said Ancelotti explained that his premature substitution was to protect him after he picked up a booking. Fabinho replaced him and provided greater solidity alongside Guimaraes.

Questions now surround whether Casemiro will start Friday's Group C match against Haiti in Philadelphia.

The Caribbean side, appearing at the World Cup for the first time since 1974, pushed Scotland before losing 1-0 in Boston.

"In Brazil we always want the best, we want to win, but it still depends on us," Casemiro said after the opener.

Recovering his form is crucial as his club future remains uncertain following his departure from United.

Reports claim Casemiro has agreed terms to join Lionel Messi's Inter Miami, but the move is on hold due to a compensation dispute with another MLS club, Los Angeles Galaxy, a source close to the player told AFP.

According to the source, Galaxy are claiming discovery rights -- a mechanism that grants MLS clubs priority to negotiate with players.

In this case, it concerns Ancelotti's embattled right-hand man with Brazil.



Casemiro

Ibrahima Konate signs four-year deal with Real Madrid



France centre-back Ibrahima Konate (L) and Spain left-back Marc Cucurella (R) in action during a match (file photo)

AFP | London

Real Madrid confirmed the arrival of defender Ibrahima Konate from Liverpool yesterday on a four-year deal at the end of his contract at Anfield.

Los Blancos and centre-back Konate "reached an agreement for him to become a Real Madrid player for the next four seasons, until June 30, 2030," said the Spanish giants in a statement.

The 27-year-old moved to Liverpool in 2021 from RB Leipzig, playing 183 times and winning the Premier League in 2025 and the FA Cup in 2022 amongst other silverware.

The defender, currently at the World Cup with France, joins a Real side already reinforced this summer by the arrival of Jose Mourinho as coach, as well as the signings of Spain left-back Marc Cucurella and Portugal midfielder Bernardo Silva.

Los Blancos have been linked also with Inter Milan

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Konate's high-profile arrival continues a massive squad overhaul under new manager Jose Mourinho, following two rare, consecutive seasons where the Spanish giants failed to win a single major trophy

wing-back Denzel Dumfries, as they overhaul their squad after going two consecutive seasons without a major trophy.

Real have renewed the contract of centre-back Antonio Rudiger until 2027, after Dani Carvajal and David Alaba left the club at the end of their contracts at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Korea coach slams 'unfortunate' drone incident at training

AFP | Guadalajara

Coach Hong Myung-bo on Wednesday said a drone was spotted flying over South Korea's training session before their eagerly awaited clash with World Cup co-hosts Mexico, calling the incident "unfortunate."

Victory in South Korea's match against Mexico in Guadalajara yesterday would virtually guarantee progress to the knockout rounds, and put the winners in pole position to top Group A, which also contains South Africa and Czechia.

But the Taegeuk Warriors' preparations on Tuesday were interrupted by the incident, which prompted fears of spying, with Korean news agency Yonhap reporting that the drone was brought down by Mexico's military using radio signals.

"Yesterday during our training there was a drone in the sky, and we came to know about the fact. But fortunately it was right before we practiced our tactics, so it did not impact us significantly," said the coach.



South Korea's head coach Hong Myung-bo

"But, while we were preparing for the match, that was the most important timing. So, what happened was unfortunate," he told a press conference.

Drone flights have been banned over stadiums and facilities hosting World Cup matches and events in Mexico, as well as the United States.

Yonhap said a South Korea team security officer spotted the device, and a Mexican mil-

itary drone-interdiction specialist stationed at the training camp brought it down by emitting radio signals.

Two men who were suspected to be the drone operators retrieved the crashed device and fled the scene.

The Korea Football Association has filed a report to FIFA and requested reassurances that there will not be a repeat.

Rayo appoint Benat San Jose as Perez replacement



Benat San Jose

AFP | London

LaLiga side Rayo Vallecano appointed Benat San Jose as their new coach yesterday to replace the departed Inigo Perez.

The Spanish club said that San Jose was "officially the new coach of Rayo Vallecano" without specifying the length of his deal.

San Jose had been coaching Eibar in Spain's second division after spells with teams in Mexico, Chile, and Saudi Arabia, among other countries.

Perez, who led Rayo to the Conference League final last month, moved to Villarreal at the start of June after Marcelino Garcia Toral left the Yellow Submarine.

Lula jokes he is thinking of 'signing Messi' for Brazil

AFP | Rio de Janeiro,

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva suggested Wednesday that Brazil should hire Argentina's Lionel Messi, when asked about his country's performance in the World Cup so far.

The five-time world champions were held to a 1-1 draw by Morocco in their opening match, which highlight-



Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva

ed several frailties in their game.

Brazil's fiercest football rivals Argentina had a far better time, with Messi scoring three goals against Algeria on Tuesday.

"I was thinking about signing Messi to play for Brazil," Lula said, laughing, when journalists asked him about his country's showing at the World Cup.

However, he noted it wasn't

a "big deal" for Brazil to draw with Morocco, which he said was its strongest opponent in the group.

"They say that whenever Brazil is heavily doubted, they win the World Cup... let's see."

Brazil faces Haiti on Friday. All eyes are on Neymar, 34, who was included on the team after a near three-year absence due to a mixture of injuries and poor form.