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Autor: Wey, Alain / Pont, Michel / Busacca, Massimo
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South Africa, here we come!

The Swiss football team will be in action in June at the World Cup in South Africa. We look ahead to the tournament with Michel Pont, assistant coach of the national team, and referee Massimo Busacca from Ticino. By Alain Wey

The Swiss team is heading off to the World Cup. The adrenaline will start to pump on 18 June when they face Spain in Durban. This is the first World Cup on African soil. After performing well in the qualifiers, this is the fourth time in a row that Switzerland's footballers have reached the finals of an international tournament. That's quite an achievement. As always, we have to show our belief and get behind the team. Anything is possible in sport.

While the Swiss squad's World Cup ambitions may not have changed since the arrival of Ottmar Hitzfeld on 1 July 2008, Switzerland's head coach already belongs to football's hall of fame. He is one of only two managers to have won the Champions League twice with two different clubs - Borussia Dortmund in 1997 and Bayern Munich in 2001. This saw him voted "World Coach of the Year" on both occasions. His list of honours is one of the most impressive in football history. He won the Swiss Cup with Aarau in 1985 and with Grasshopper in 1989, the Swiss championship (as well as the Swiss Cup) with Grasshopper in 1990 and again in 1991, the Bundesliga title in 1995 and 1996 with Borussia Dortmund, and in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2003 with Bayern Munich. His experience will prove vital at the World Cup.

Switzerland's opponents at the group stage all come from Latin countries. Spain, the European champions, have won all their qualifying matches. Chile finished second in the South American qualifying group and Honduras topped its group ahead of Mexico. There is still much work to be done to ensure Switzerland peaks at the right time for these exciting matches. Let's hope the senior team draws inspiration from the victory enjoyed by the under-17s at their World Cup!

MICHEL PONT: "MORE IMAGINATIVE IN ATTACK"



Interview with Michel Pont, aged 55, assistant Swiss coach since 2001. He believes Switzerland have a chance of getting through the group stage.

"SWISS REVIEW": *Tell us about Switzerland's group matches.*

MICHEL PONT: Our three opponents are quite similar as they are all Latin teams. Their style of play presents problems for us as they have fast, small players with very good technical ability. We have chosen this kind of opposition for our warm-up matches, in which we face Uruguay, Costa Rica and Italy. Clearly we are up against the World Cup's big guns in Spain, the tournament favourites. We must do well in the first game ahead of what will be a crucial match against Chile. But I believe we have a chance.

What are the pitfalls to be avoided?

We, the team, can be our own worst enemy. We are capable of playing extremely good football and putting in solid performances. We need to find the right balance between being well organised and more imaginative in attack. We must focus primarily on ourselves. As we can see, our problems have started with the injury to

Frei and two or three slightly bigger setbacks. Our squad has to be as strong as possible if we are to have a chance. If we have five or six players out injured, life will soon become difficult as our squad does not have the same strength in depth as some other teams that have a larger pool of players to draw from.

Which areas of team strategy have to be improved before the tournament gets underway?

Technique and self-belief during the game. We have to improve fundamental parts of the game and, technically, we give far too many balls away. We must also work on converting opportunities and game-building. These are the areas where we need to make progress between now and May.

What type of coach and person is Ottmar Hitzfeld?

Highly intelligent and very quick-witted. An absolute perfectionist. He has vast experience and great self-belief. He's a coach who enforces his views and has a passion for football which he transmits to the team. Football isn't so much about developing new tactics and incredible technique; above all, it's about the belief conveyed by the coach.

You've taken part in two European Championships and one World Cup. What is your role in the team?

Hitzfeld is a man who wants to know everything, be on top of everything and always be kept up to date with developments. My role is therefore to gather information, to keep a close eye on the players (current form, injuries) and handle the organisation and planning of training sessions, the team

environment and the medical staff. This should enable Hitzfeld to make the best possible decisions and to do his job of working out the right tactics and selecting the best team he can based on his instinct and understanding of football. Everything has to go right on the big day.

Will Ottmar Hitzfeld make the difference in South Africa?

First and foremost, it's the players who have to make the difference. Then we all hope that Ottmar Hitzfeld's experience at this level will help us to get through to the latter stages.

Are there already selection certainties?

We're getting there slowly. The full squad, who I watch week in week out, contains 45 players. There are lots of young players, injured players and players coming back from injury. The core ten or twelve players are not going to change dramatically between now and May. If Benaglio, for example, recovers fully from injury, he will play in goal. Knowing Hitzfeld, I imagine he will name 23 players at the start of the two-week training camp in Crans-Montana on 23 May.

Will you and the players draw inspiration from the under-17s' World Cup victory?

Personally, I find it inspirational because we'd all like to follow in their footsteps. But this is a completely different challenge. We will try to do the best we can with our strengths and weaknesses. Mentally and psychologically, this victory is important and can help us.

What are your predictions for the final stages?

I believe Spain will be crowned world champions. It will be extremely open between the big teams - Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Germany and England, who are playing extremely well at the moment. I think the winner will come from among these five countries.

MASSIMO BUSACCA:
"SAVOUR THE FOOTBALL AND THE BEAUTIFUL GAME!"



41-year-old Massimo Busacca from Ticino is one of the best referees in the world. The World Cup in South Africa will be his second time at a World Cup.

"SWISS REVIEW": What are your best memories of the World Cup in Germany?

MASSIMO BUSACCA: On the pitch, savouring the football and the beautiful game in some incredible matches. It was my first World Cup. I refereed Ukraine vs. Spain, England vs. Sweden and the quarter-final between Argentina and Mexico, a really passionate occasion. And every day, there were throngs of people in the streets.

What's your philosophy as a referee?

To have good communication with the players, talk to them and try to anticipate problems. What qualities are required of a referee? An understanding of the players and a strong personality. A referee has to understand the players, know how to gain respect, stay unbiased, and sometimes take a firm hand.

Is refereeing your main occupation?

I am a professional in my mind, but not on paper. In future, we need to move towards professionalism be-

cause you need to have the same status as the teams and the players. I don't have a contract in Switzerland, in Europe or with FIFA. There are no guarantees in refereeing: you live from day to day. I also work in human resources for the canton of Ticino in Bellinzona, where I live.

Have you ever calculated the number of kilometres you run during a match?

Between 10 and 15 depending on the match. We sometimes run more than the players. In fact, we run almost as far as the player who does the most running during a match.

Which matches do you dream of refereeing?

I've already accomplished a great deal in my career including Champions League and UEFA Cup finals. I'm thrilled to be one of the 10 European referees among the 24 taking part in the World Cup.

What about video technology in refereeing?

I'm against it. There would be too many interruptions, and situations are not 100% clear. One day they could perhaps introduce something for the penalty area in specific situations.

What would you change about refereeing?

Professionalism. A referee has to take split-second decisions every weekend and that calls for a great deal of preparation and training, as well as time for relaxation and recuperation. There are professional referees in the UK and Sweden.

FIXTURES:

Group H:

Spain, Switzerland, Honduras, Chile

- Switzerland vs. Spain, Wednesday, 16 June, Durban
- Switzerland vs. Chile, Monday, 21 June, Port Elizabeth
- Switzerland vs. Honduras, Friday, 25 June, Bloemfontein

Quarter-finals:

- G1* vs. H2, Monday, 28 June, Johannesburg
- H1 vs. G2, Tuesday, 29 June, Cape Town

*(Group G: Brazil, North Korea, Ivory Coast, Portugal)

<http://fr.fifa.com/worldcup>