

Into extra time

A fraught run-up to the dress rehearsal for next year's World Cup



Just about ready for the action

Brazil has built some of the world's "best and most modern stadiums" for next year's football World Cup, boasted the president, Dilma Rousseff, in her weekly radio broadcast on May 27th. That is true. But at almost the same moment a section of the roof of one of them, in Salvador in the north-east, collapsed because of heavy rains. The mishap was minor compared with the scale of the construction works: seven stadiums are being built from scratch and five more being refurbished. But it illustrated how a late start and slipping deadlines have turned the country's preparations for the tournament into a fraught, costly race against the clock.

Brazil was chosen as host in 2007. But it took so long to select venues, arrange funding and start building that only two of the six stadiums for this month's Confederations Cup, a warm-up tournament, were finished last December as planned. Brasilia's new stadium (pictured above), the venue for the first match, only opened on May 18th, while Rio de Janeiro's rebuilt Maracanã will manage just one test game before the tournament starts.

Successive missed deadlines have strained relations with FIFA, world football's governing body. Last year Jerome Valcke, FIFA's secretary-general, said Brazil needed to "give itself a kick up the backside"; the resulting row took months to patch up. On May 14th he returned to the fray. No extensions would be granted for the six stadiums still being built, he warned. Work on São Paulo's Itaqueroão, due to host the opening game, only started in mid-2011. Unless the pace picks up, it could be dropped from the list before tickets go on sale on August 1st, said Mr Valcke. FIFA should "feel free" to look elsewhere, retorted Corinthians, the club building it. The 20,000 temporary seats needed during the World Cup will be added only next year, whether that suits FIFA or not.

There is some good news: strong advance sales mean this will probably be the best-attended Confederations Cup yet. Almost all the tickets have been bought by locals, meaning the country has a year before its overcrowded, tatty airports must handle hordes of foreign fans. Contracts to revamp three airports were auctioned last year; two more are scheduled for September. But there is time now only for the quickest of fixes.

The budget for the 12 stadiums now stands at 7 billion reais (\$3.3 billion), three times the total spent by South Africa for the 2010 World Cup. Most of that is public money, despite a government pledge in 2007 that the private sector would pay for stadiums. Public funds were

supposed to be used for transport and urban-renewal projects. But in the race to finish the venues, these have been delayed or dropped. Rail lines to São Paulo's two main airports will now only be completed after the tournament. And some of the pricey new venues will get little future use. Brasília's new stadium cost over 1 billion reais, but the city has only fourth-rate football teams which draw few spectators. At the official opening the sports minister, Aldo Rebelo, enthused that Brazil's "New Rome" now had its Colosseum. It may see much less sport than the original.

Fonte: The Economist, London, v. 407, n. 8838, p. 38, 1 a 7 Jun. 2013.

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