



World Cup Football



Potential Stars of Germany 2006

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The World Cup Football provides the perfect platform for players to display their talents on the highest stage in front of billions of people. Lets look at the potential stars – youngsters and old stagers alike – of this year's World Cup in Germany.

RONALDINHO (Brazil)

There is no doubt he is the best player in the world now. A wonderfully-gifted footballer, **Ronaldinho** is technically brilliant and with his deadly attacking intent is the most feared player on the planet. The Barcelona star is destined to join the likes of **Pele** and **Diego Maradona** as a legend of the game in Germany 2006.

He has pace, great vision and a strong finish – and such is Brazil's vast array of attacking talent that he is virtually impossible to contain.

He will be 26 and nearing the peak of his powers. He has already won a World Cup (2002) but could step up and be the real star of Germany 2006.

THIERRY HENRY (France)

Arsenal's record scorer has been the Premiership's outstanding striker for the past five seasons, but the World Cup is a stage on which the speedy and stylish forward is yet to excel.

France has long been waiting for **Thierry Henry** to transfer his club form to the international stage – and at **28** his time could be now or never.

Henry will surely enjoy being reunited with **Patrick Vierra** and with the likes of **Zinedine Zidane, Lilian Thauram**.

WAYNE ROONEY (England)

Few had heard of **Rooney** at the last World Cup – but such is his rapid ascent to prominence since that he is now virtually indispensable to England's prospects.

The Manchester United striker has pace, power and strength in abundance as well as the cock-sure attitude that could make all the difference to England's campaign.

Widely acclaimed as one of the best young players in the world for some time, he has so far coped with every challenge thrown at him and will relish the biggest one of all. His partnership with **Michael Owen** is developing well, and if both fire on all cylinders England could really be in contention.

RONALDO (Brazil)

Ronaldo Luiz Nazario da Silva is quite simply one of the greatest strikers in the history of world football, capable of leaving an entire team for dead with his darting runs and dribbling ability, voted **FIFA World Player of the Year** on **three** occasions and already a double **FIFA World Cup winner**. These honours are merely the tip of the iceberg in the record-breaking career of the man they call '**The Phenomenon**'.

ADRIANO (Brazil)

His match-winning qualities were in evidence at last year's FIFA Confederations Cup in Germany when he scored twice in the semi-final against Germany to carry his side through to the final. This tournament was to confirm his standing as a genuine world-class player and saw him win the **Golden Boot** as the **top scorer**, and the **Golden Ball** as the **best player**. Success at Germany 2006 would undoubtedly represent the biggest achievement of his already glittering career.

MICHAEL BALLACK (Germany)

Attacking midfielder **Ballack** carries the host nation's hopes in to the tournament. He is a highly versatile player, who – although most comfortable directing affairs and getting forward from central positions – is equally adept defensively.

Germany has some good young players coming through, and **Ballack (29)** is the key figure to guide them to success.

Ballack and veteran **Oliver Kahn** dragged an otherwise mediocre Germany to the 2002 Final, but they are certainly a better team now.

ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO (Ukraine)

Former **European Footballer of the year Shevchenko** finally gets a crack at the World Cup, after helping Ukraine qualify for the first time. It is certainly a fitting stage for one of the greatest strikers of the modern era. **Shevchenko** has enjoyed considerable success at Club level and deserves the chance to shine in a World Cup. **Shevchenko** has the strength, technique and pace to trouble the World's best defenders – and Ukraine will be fancied to come through a group featuring Spain, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia.

LIONEL MESSI (Argentina)

The 18-year-old rising star of Argentinean football has made quite a name for him after breaking in to the Barcelona first team over the past year.

As a **Spanish citizen**, he was offered the opportunity to play for that country but opted for the country of his birth – where his talent has already been compared to that of **Diego Maradona**.

He may be of diminutive stature but he is prodigiously talented with pace, flair and a great passing range. He also moves forward and finishes well.

HARRY KEWEL (Australia)

An inspired game for Australia against the Uruguay in November 2005 that catapulted his country to Germany 2006 silenced all of **Kewell's** doubters and cynics – one and for all.

The gifted 27 year old put a horror run of long-term injuries behind him to play the game of his life as Guus Hiddink's led Socceroos ended a 32 year hoodoo and qualified for the World Cup finals.

Kewell made his national team debut at 17 and has been Australia's most important player since scoring in both legs of the 1998 World Cup qualifying play-off exit against Iran.

Arguably the best player to come from Australia.



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Team Profile and Verdict

The 32 teams that qualified for the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany, the following teams are expected to be favourite to win the World Cup. Latest **FIFA ranking** are in the parenthesis.

BRAZIL (1)

Coach: Carlos Alberto Parreira

Key Players: **Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Kaka.**

World Cup record and best finish: 18th appearance; Champion (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002).

Last appearance: Champion 2002.

Verdict: The favourite yet again, the World's top ranked team has the most talented players and is expected to have an easy time reaching its fourth straight final.

NETHERLANDS (3)

Coach: Marco van Basten

Key Players: **Ruud van Nistelrooy, Edwin van der Sar, Phillip Cocu.**

World Cup record and best finish: 8th appearance; runner-up (1974, 1978).

Last appearance: Semifinals 1998.

Verdict: One of the few European nations to be a genuine contender, Netherland's young team may lack the experience needed to win the country's first title.

ARGENTINA (4)

Coach: Jose Pekerman.

Key Players: **Hernan Crespo, Juan Rquelve, Carlos Tevez, Lionell Messi.**

World Cup record and best finish: 14th appearance; Champion (1978, 1986).

Last appearance: First round 2002.

Verdict: Argentina has skill at all positions, and is believed to be one of the few teams that can beat Brazil.

ENGLAND (9)

Coach: Sven-Goran Eriksson.

Key Players: **David Beckham, Wayne Rooney, Michael Owen.**

World Cup record and best finish: 12th appearance; Champion (1966).

Last appearance: Quarterfinals 2002.

Verdict: An underachiever since winning its only title, England has the flair and spirit to trouble opponents, but a habit of faltering in the knockout stages.

FRANCE (5)

Coach: Raymond Domenech.

Key Players: **Zinedine Zidane, Thierry Henry, David Trezeguet.**

World Cup record and best finish: 11th appearance; Champion (1998).

Last appearance: First round 2002.

Verdict: France struggled to qualify until veterans Zidane, Lilian Thuram returned to the team and is unlikely to be the force it once was.

ITALY (12)

Coach: Marcello Lippi.

Key Players: [Francesco Totti](#), [Alessandro Nesta](#), [Christian Vieri](#).

World Cup record and best finish: 16th appearance; Champion (1934, 1938, 1982).
Last appearance: Second round 2002.

Verdict: Having disappointed at recent tournaments, the attacking power of Totti, Antonio Cassano and Luca Toni may spur Italy to rival its past deeds.

GERMANY (16)

Coach: Juergen Klinsmann.

Key Players: [Michael Ballack](#), [Oliver Kahn](#).

World Cup record and best finish: 15th appearance; Champion (1954, 1974, 1990).
Last appearance: Runner-up 2002.

Verdict: Germany should be boosted the way hosts usually are, but this team seems to lack the quality needed to emulate its runner-up spot from 2002.

JAPAN (15)

Coach: Zico.

Key Players: [Hidetoshi Nakata](#), [Naohiro Takahara](#).

World Cup record and best finish: Third appearance; second round (2002).
Last appearance: Second round 2002.

Verdict: With several players in Europe and a Brazilian coach with extensive World Cup experience, The Japanese could make it back to the second round despite playing without home-field advantage.

SPAIN (6)

Coach: Luis Aragones.

Key Players: [Raul Gonzales](#), [Xavi Hernandez](#), [Carles Puyol](#).

World Cup record and best finish: 12th appearance; fourth place (1950).
Last appearance: Quarterfinal 2002.

Verdict: The most famous underachiever of all World Cup regulars, Spain looks to have the same mercurial talent and fragile mentality that frustrates fans every four years.

AUSTRALIA (42)

Coach: Guus Hiddink.

Key Players: [Harry Kewell](#), [Mark Viduka](#), [Tim Cahill](#).

World Cup record and best finish: Second appearance; first round (1974).
Last appearance: First round 1974.

Verdict: Hiddink led the Netherlands to the semifinals in 1998 and South Korea to the last four in 2002. Taking the Aussies as far as would be a minor miracle. Whatever the outcome, one thing is sure Soccer/Football will become more popular in down under in years to come.