

Showtime in London

For one night only a galaxy of talent from eight nations makes the capital the centre of football's universe, writes **Mike Rowbottom**

Four international matches will take place simultaneously in the capital tonight - none of them involving England - confirming the new truth in world football: when it comes to friendlies, London is everybody's mate.

The most obviously appetising prospect, Brazil's meeting with Portugal, will offer Arsenal another opportunity to showcase their new stadium to a predicted live worldwide TV audience of 300 million just four months after the club hosted Brazil's 3-0 win over Argentina.

It is a fixture which brings not just a plethora of stellar players to the capital, but also Portugal's Brazilian coach, Luis Felipe Scolari, who is making his first trip to England since turning down the job which Steve McClaren eventually took up.

The three other matches taking place in the latest scheduled Fifa slot for friendlies are in west London, where Brentford host Nigeria v Ghana, Craven Cottage stages Greece v South Korea, and Australia v Denmark takes place at Queen's Park Rangers.

Loftus Road has built a reputation as one of the most popular London venues for international friendlies over the past six years, with Trinidad, Jamaica and Australia being the common denominators because of the numerous expats from each of those countries who live nearby.

"When it comes to friendly matches, London is the perfect answer for so many federations because of its geographical position - it's right in the middle of the world football map - and because the majority of players involved play either in England or Europe," said Gary Hooper, the QPR commercial manager.

"Rather than flying players back to Australia or Africa it is a lot easier to have them play in London. It's also a lot cheaper for the federations that way, and it suits the clubs and the players. As far as the players are concerned, Loftus Road is in a good situation because it is so close to the A40 and access to Heathrow. Teams can stay locally and get in and out easily. It also makes sense to try and have the matches as close as possible to where most potential supporters live.

"We were one of the first London clubs to host international friendlies and it's good for us for a number of reasons. It helps raise our profile and it makes us a little bit of money, because we more than cover our costs on the stadium hire. We get a good atmosphere at these games. Our capacity is 19,000, and we are usually three-quarters full for internationals. Places like the Emirates Stadium are better for the very large games, but we are in a perfect situation for lots of smaller ones."

Loftus Road might just as easily have hosted the Ghana v Nigeria match tonight - after

Theatreland: Four stages for the greatest game in the world

Where the international drama is tonight

 <p>Ghana (28) v Nigeria (9)</p> <p>Venue: Griffin Park Home of: Brentford Kick-off: 7.45pm Capacity: 12,750 Tickets: Still available £22-27 Telephone: 0870 3456 442 Pop in London: Ghana 46,000, Nigeria 50,000</p>	 <p>Australia (39) v Denmark (23)</p> <p>Venue: Loftus Road Home of: Queen's Park Rangers Kick-off: 7.45pm Capacity: 18,500 Tickets: Still available £15-25 Telephone: 0870 112 1967 Pop in London: Australia 41,000, Denmark 6,500</p>	 <p>Brazil (1) v Portugal (8)</p> <p>Venue: Emirates Stadium Home of: Arsenal Kick-off: 8pm Capacity: 60,432 Tickets: Sold out Pop in London: Brazil 100,000, Portugal 36,000 <small>(*figure in brackets denotes Fifa world rankings)</small></p>
		
 <p>Portugal's Deco</p>	 <p>Greece (16) v South Korea (51)</p> <p>Venue: Craven Cottage Home of: Fulham Kick-off: 8pm Capacity: 22,000 Tickets: Still available £18-25 Telephone: 0870 442 1234 or visit www.fulhamfc.com Pop in London: S Korea 20,000, Greece 30,000</p>	 <p>Brazil's Robinho</p>

their last friendly, between Ghana and Australia, both nations enquired about booking again. Australia got back to Hooper first, so Ghana went down the road to Griffin Park.

Philipp Grothe is one of the partners involved in Kentaro, the company which owns the rights to Brazilian friendly matches and helped to set up the meeting between Brazil and Argentina at Arsenal last October.

"The G14 group of clubs has an agreement with national federations not to play friendly matches that involve more than

six hours' travel out of Frankfurt airport," Grothe said. "London is popular as a venue because of its position and its cosmopolitan make-up. It is a big compliment to the authorities here that so many matches are being staged. Being able to host four matches this week will also be a very good indicator for the 2012 Olympics."

Among the many Brazilian expats watching proceedings at the Emirates tonight will be Fernando Duarte, British correspondent for *O Globo*, a major national newspaper based in Rio. Duarte, who has worked in this

country for the past six years, is based in Stockwell - which he has been discovering recently is one of the city's strongholds for Portuguese. "I know a lot of them from the local cafe," he said. "They are confident that they are going to beat us because they did better in the World Cup. They are pretty cocky, to be honest, and they have been taunting me about it for the last fortnight. But we are very friendly. We share the same language, although the accents are different, and we use the same songs in our chants." There is no Brazilian quarter

in London, as there is for the Portuguese in Stockwell or the Australians in Earl's Court. Duarte points out that his fellow countrymen are far more dispersed in the capital. "Some estimate there are 100,000 Brazilians in London, although we have only got 20,000 who have officially registered with the Consulate," he added.

While Duarte will be reporting the match from the press seats, his friend Fabrizio, a catering manager from Streatham, will be taking his place behind one of the goals with his girlfriend

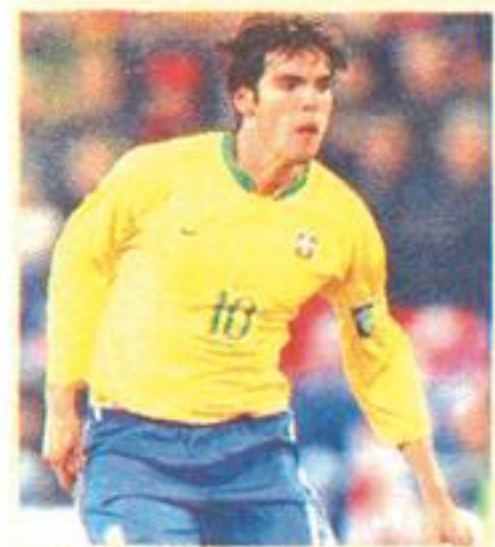
and her two sons. "I was brought up in the north of Brazil, and the national team only ever played in Sao Paulo or Rio, which was two days' drive away, so I never got to see them," said Fabrizio.

"But because I am in London I got my chance. I am 30 now, and when I went to see them play Argentina at Arsenal last year it was the first time I'd seen Brazil. It was a great day - I had such a good feeling to see them at last. I didn't care how much it cost."

Fabrizio has paid £35 for each of his tickets tonight - and he was one of the lucky ones, as the stadium, which has a capacity of 60,000, swiftly sold out. "The last match was like a big party, and this will be the same," he said. "It is going to be cold, but there will be a great atmosphere. We will all be wearing yellow shirts. We know that so many of our friends will probably be watching back home on TV and trying to recognise us."

Ademar Pereira, who works in the administration department at the Brazilian Embassy, will be among a group of 150 supporters, 50 of whom are from his work, following the boys in yellow. "We will be travelling by Tube, and we have lots of flags and banners," he said. "Brazil are going to win 2-0."

Top of the bill Star 11 treading the turf in London



Kaka: Brazil

■ **BRAZIL**
Adriano (Inter), Robinho (Real Madrid), Kaka (Milan)

■ **PORTUGAL**
Ronaldo (Manchester United), Deco (Barcelona)

■ **GREECE**
Stelios Giannakopoulos (Bolton)

■ **SOUTH KOREA**
Lee Dong Gook (Middlesbrough)

■ **AUSTRALIA**
John Aloisi (Alaves)

■ **DENMARK**
Jon Dahl Tomasson (Stuttgart)

■ **NIGERIA**
Aiyegbeni Yakubu (Middlesbrough)

■ **GHANA**
Michael Essien (Chelsea)



Yakubu: Nigeria