

São Paulo Journal

Soccer Skirmish Turns Spotlight on Brazil's Racial Divide

By LARRY ROHTER

SÃO PAULO, Brazil — In all his years as a soccer player and referee, José de Andrade says, he never felt that being black subjected him to discrimination. But that was before the fateful police league game he supervised here last December, when, he and witnesses say, a retired police colonel, irate at seeing a teammate penalized, called Mr. Andrade a "monkey" and said his skin was the color of excrement.

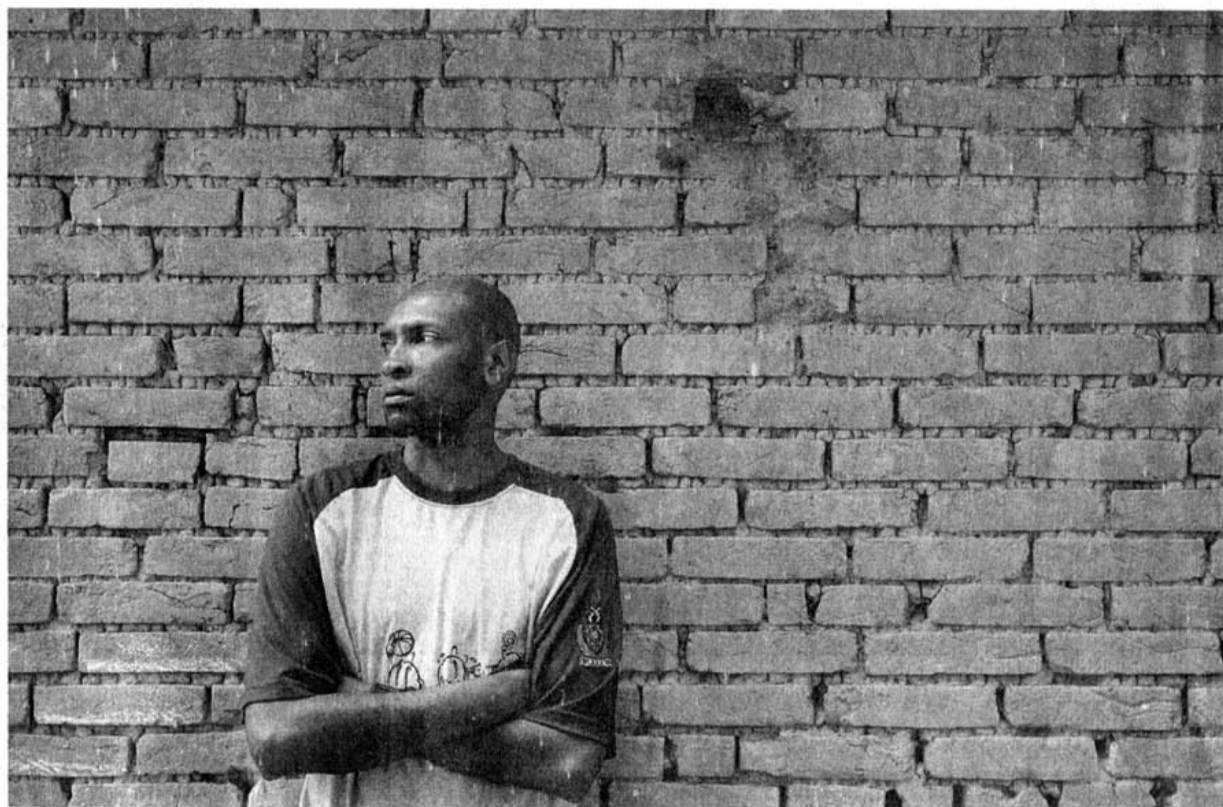
What followed has been a lesson for Mr. Andrade, 36, in the complexities of Brazil's racial politics. He filed a criminal complaint against the police officer, Col. Antônio Chiari, accusing him of defamation, slander and "incitement to racism." But the police officers' club that employed Mr. Andrade pressed him to drop his suit or accept a cash settlement out of court, he says. When he would not, he was harassed by the police.

"I never thought I would have to go through something like this," he said in a recent interview at his house in a working-class neighborhood here in this city of 10 million people, Brazil's largest and most cosmopolitan.

"Sure, as a referee you get used to fans saying a lot of nasty things and players getting worked up at your calls. But this was different, and it reduced me to tears."

The Andrade case has reverberated throughout Brazil — which has the world's largest black population outside of Africa — in part because of a growing national debate on race. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has proposed a Racial Equality Statute that would institute racial quotas in universities and jobs, but opponents maintain that such legislation would prompt racial tensions and resentments.

Though there is a strong correlation between white skin and social and economic status, Brazilians are taught to think of their country as a racial democracy. The traditional view, stated in "We Are Not Racists," a new best-selling book that criti-



José de Andrade, a soccer referee, says that a retired police officer defamed him, calling him a "monkey."

cizes quotas, is that in contrast to "a segregated society like America," Brazil's institutions are "completely open to people of all colors, our judicial and institutional framework is completely colorblind."

Brazil has a comprehensive anti-discrimination statute, passed more than a decade ago. But the growing number of groups advocating equal rights for blacks point out that no one has ever served jail time for violating the racial provisions of the law.

"We are a country in which the majority is not white and deserves to have its rights recognized," said Mr. Andrade's lawyer, Telma Beatriz Villas-Boas, who is white. "José felt compelled to take a stand and seek justice because he has children and hopes to establish a precedent that will allow them to avoid this kind of humiliation. He doesn't want money, he just wants respect."

Mr. Andrade's complaint, now in the courts, has also attracted attention because it involves soccer, the national passion. Sports and entertainment are two of the few areas in which black and mixed-race Brazilians, more than half of the country's 185 million people, have flourished, supposedly because both are fields where talent is all that counts.

Colonel Chiari did not respond to requests for an interview. His lawyer, Nilson Amâncio Jr., a fellow club member who attended the game and has said he did not hear the exchange, dismissed Mr. Andrade's complaint as a "fantasy" with "no credibility" that would eventually be thrown out of court.

"All that took place was an ordinary argument between a player and a referee," he said. "There was nothing said that could be categorized as racist, and nothing was said to denigrate the referee." He added, "I am a friend of both men, but I've taken the colonel's side because he is being wronged in a case that simply did not happen the way it has been presented."

Colonel Chiari, however, is not just any ordinary retired police official. He was the commander of ROTA, a notorious SWAT-like special strike



The retired police officer, Col. Antônio Chiari, once headed a feared special strike force. His lawyer describes Mr. Andrade's criminal complaint as "fantasy."

A dispute is all the more searing because it involves Brazil's national pastime.

force that human rights groups say accounted for most of the deaths during the notorious "Carandiru Massacre" of 1992, in which 111 prisoners were killed during a disturbance. After an official investigation, Colonel Chiari was charged with "causing bodily harm" and temporarily relieved of his duties. He was later absolved of responsibility and promoted.

"Things are better now, but in the past, this was a unit strongly identified with arbitrary, truculent and abusive behavior," said Hedio Silva, a lawyer running for Congress who was the first black person to serve as São Paulo State's secretary of jus-

tice and citizen defense. "Without a doubt, there was a racial element in that pattern of arbitrariness."

Mr. Andrade said that shortly after the original incident he agreed, at the urging of his bosses at the police athletic club, which employs him as a coach and trainer, to meet with Colonel Chiari in hopes of hearing an apology. Instead, the colonel made a point of mentioning his affiliation with ROTA.

Asked how he interpreted that reference, Mr. Andrade replied: "I took it as an attempt to intimidate me. Everybody knows what it means to be part of ROTA."

In fact, shortly after Mr. Andrade filed his suit, a ROTA patrol stopped him one night without explanation near his home. He said that he was "kicked a couple of times," told to take off his shirt, ordered "off the street, into a dark corner" and held at gunpoint for about 15 minutes, before being brusquely told to go home. He said he feared the worst all the while.

"They had my identity documents in hand, so they certainly knew who I was," he said. "There had just been a big story about the case in the paper on Sunday, and this was on a Thursday, so I was worried they were setting me up."

Mr. Andrade also began experiencing difficulties at work. In March, he was suspended from teaching soccer classes at the club, where Colonel Chiari's young son had been one of his students, on the grounds that he was not properly licensed.

Club officials did not respond to requests for comment. But in August, after additional publicity about his difficulties, Mr. Andrade was restored to duty at the club, where he regularly crosses paths with Colonel Chiari.

"All I wanted was an apology," Mr. Andrade said. "I always addressed him by his rank, always treated him respectfully, and he should do the same to me. Now I hope the whole black race will have the courage to denounce prejudice so that our children will not have to accept these offenses."

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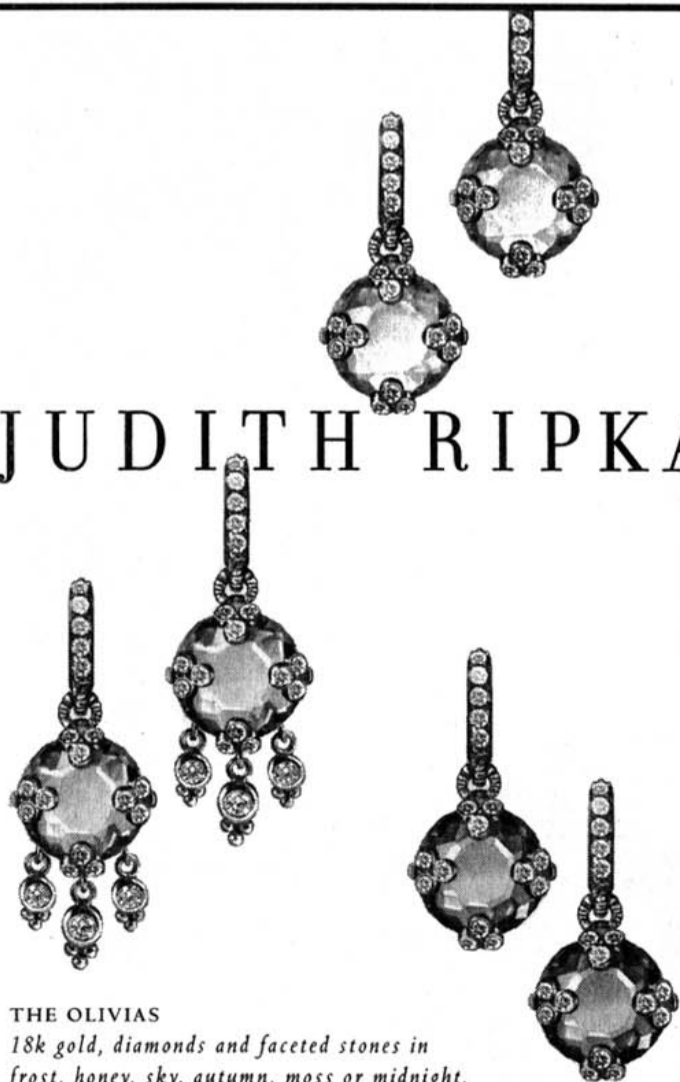
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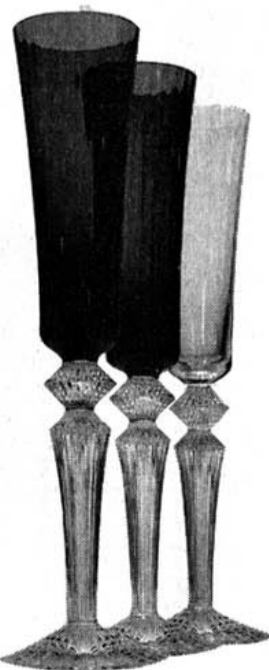
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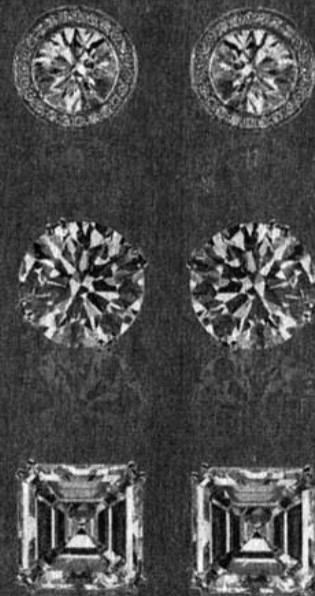
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