

World Cup Teams Bring Favorite Foods With Them to Brazil

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In this photo taken May 21, 2014, U.S. soccer sports performance dietitian Danielle LaFata talks in Stanford, Calif., about the team's food menu as the team trains in preparation for the World Cup soccer tournament in Brazil. Long

before the U.S. team traveled to Brazil in June, chef Bryson Billapando and LaFata took a fact-finding mission to the team's hotels in Sao Paulo, Natal, Manaus and Recife to scour the kitchens and dining spaces and scout

food options. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

SAO PAULO (AP) — Italy packed Parmesan, olive oil and prosciutto. The U.S. brought oatmeal, Cheerios, peanut butter and A1 Steak Sauce.

The Mexican team, of course, required a little more spice. El Tri traveled with the ingredients for pozole, along with chile peppers, chipotle chiles and nopales — or cactus.

When it comes to World Cup food, teams aren't willing to leave anything to chance. They expect their players to have top nutrition, and also want them to enjoy some favorites so they are comfortable and at their best when it's time to play.

For the Azzurri, attention to culinary detail is nothing new. The Italians are particular about their pasta.

"Pasta is our preferred fuel, and before matches we play with the tricolore: pasta (white), tomato (red) and extra virgin olive oil (green)," explained Italy team

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nutritionist Elisabetta Orsi, referring to the country's flag colors.

With everything else taking up suitcase space, the Italians left their bottled water back home this time because of the high cost to bring it, even though the federation has a water sponsor.

For England, ketchup once again is allowed on the menu by coach Roy Hodgson after predecessor Fabio Capello banned the condiment.

Italy and the United States have put a greater emphasis into nutrition under new coaches, each carefully planning meals with the guidance and direction of a dietitian or nutritionist and a chef. For Italy, even the medical staff might offer input to well-known team chef Claudio Silvestri, who has his own TV commercials.

Everything is planned carefully based on the climate, availability of fresh fruit and vegetables, and other conditions.

"Generally, the nutritionist establishes a dietary plan for the squad based on the type of training necessary match by match," Orsi said. "The physicians are responsible for pointing out problems with individual players so the nutritionist can formulate a specific diet."

Long before the U.S. team traveled to Brazil this month, chef Bryson Billapando and sports performance dietitian Danielle LaFata visited the team's hotels in Sao Paulo, Natal, Manaus and Recife to scour the kitchens and dining spaces and scout food options.

Avocados for this group are a must. The Americans go through an average of a case a day.

Coach Jurgen Klinsmann loves a diet of fresh, organic vegetables — pesticide-free and flavored with herbs and spices instead of fatty options such as butter and oil. Between 80 percent and 90 percent of the food served are made from scratch.

While the Americans had an on-site chef in South Africa four years ago, this is the first time one has been part of the lead up to the tournament.

Klinsmann is particular in all aspects of his team's performance, and he and LaFata speak daily.

"He's very involved," LaFata said. "I think he's more nutrition conscious than myself sometimes."

Color rules.

Each meal includes two cooked vegetables featuring two colors, then players are encouraged to add more variety from fruit and the salad bar.

In the land of flowing Caipirinha cocktails, the 36-year-old LaFata even makes her

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version of "spa water" with herbs and fruit to cut down on the juice intake. The 5-foot LaFata pulls around a square cooler on wheels that's nearly as big as she is, filled with fresh fruit.

"They're big juice drinkers," she said, noting the suggested coffee limit is three cups per day.

There's an emphasis on hydration and the right number of calories at the right time. LaFata makes pre-workout energy shooter drinks, then personally blends smoothies for each player after games — geared toward body weight and time played. Even those who don't get in exert themselves during warmups before and throughout matches.

Billapando and LaFata can be responsible for feeding as many as 50 people each day when it comes to the 23-man roster, coaching staff, medical and training staffs, and support personnel.

"The level we want to take this to, it's going to be as high as we can take it because we never know what that 1 percent might be that takes us to the championship," Billapando said.

The teams' care with food is well-founded. Last month, a Brazilian consumer defense agency said it discovered food past its expiration date in the hotels where Italy and England are staying during the World Cup.

The Americans are glad they brought their own food and chef, and the players appreciate the added emphasis on nutrition.

"It's just been top notch," midfielder Kyle Beckerman said. "I think Jurgen's really taken the U.S. national team in terms of all of those things to another level. You just really trust in what you're eating. You know that whatever you're eating, it's giving you the best thing to recover and to be at your top level come practice or game time."

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