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Dream Bigger



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Qatar players in training ahead of Senegal clash





Qatar players break a sweat at Asipre Academy training pitch in Doha on Tuesday night. Hosts Qatar, which conducted a closed-door training session yesterday, will take on Senegal in their second Group A match at Al Thumama Stadium tomorrow. The kick-off is slated for 4:00pm. Qatar, who lost to Ecuador on Sunday, will play the Netherlands in their final Group A clash on November 29.



By Rizwan Rehmat

apan yesterday stunned fourtime World Cup winners Germany 2-1 in a thrilling FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 match at Khalifa International Stadium.

Two second-half goals by super subs Ritsu Doan and Takuma Asano eight minutes apart yesterday lifted threetime Asian champions Japan to their first win in Qatar.

After conceding a goal in the first half when Ilkay Gundogan – the Manchester City midfielder – converted a penalty in the 33rd minute, Japan delivered a ferocious counter attack after the break in the Group E clash.

Coached by Hajime Moriyasu, Ja-

Coached by Hajime Moriyasu, Japan clicked as a unit in the second half when substitutes Doan and Asano combined in superb fashion to script a hard-fought win against a side that has played the most number of FIFA World Cup matches (112).

Earlier on Tuesday, Moriyasu candidly admitted at a news conference that his players had improved their game by frequently appearing for Bundesliga sides over the years.

Yesterday, Japan looked the part as they undid the global football giants.

"At the end they came at us with the

full power," Moriyasu said yesterday.
"In the past maybe we would have given up (in such a scenario) but the players have been playing in Germany and Europe they've learned so much from that, so we held on," Moriyasu added.

"United as one, we needed to hang tough until the final whistle went and we were able to grasp our opportunity," the Japanese coach said. "We wanted to start aggressively,

we wanted to dominate the game but Germany are very strong so we needed to defend persistently and take our chances," he said.

"In our tactics, we had many op-

"In our tactics, we had many options and looked at many scenarios. We knew there was a chance we could go a goal down, we planned for it, we prepared for it."

After scoring the goals, Doan and Asano celebrated their magical moment with teammates on the touchline as thousands of Japanese fans at Khalifa International Stadium rejoiced in the stands.

With veterans Thomas Muller and Manuel Neuer – both appearing in their fourth World Cup editions – Germany looked set to launch their Qatar campaign on a positive note but it was not to be against a side that did not give up even after conceding a penalty in

ne first half. In an early sign of aggression, Bayern

7.	_Stats		
		į	
d		. (80)	
Match	JAPAN	*	GERMANY
, 5	12	: Shots	26
g d "	4	Shots on Target	-
"	9	Chances Created	7
	6	Corners	6
7,	8	Saves	2
t	24%	Possession	76%
-	4	Offsides	4
r	14	Fouls	6
	0	Yellow Cards	0

Munich striker Serge Gnabry charged into the Japan box but a couple of Samurai Blue defenders stayed firm to block the move in the third minute.

Red Cards

0

Japan retaliated by clinching the first corner in the 5th minute but failed to make any inroads. Three minutes on, Celtic forward Daizen Maeda outpaced his marker Antonio Rudiger and deflected the ball into the net but the linesman quickly adjudged the move offside much to the dismay of the Japanese supporters. Maeda held his hands in despair knowing he had moved a fraction of a second too soon.

Six minutes later, Joshua Kimmich unleashed a powerful shot a little away

from the edge of the box but VbF Stuttgart defender Wataru Endo produced a sliding tackle to block the shot heading towards his goal.

In the 16th minute, tall defender Rudiger jumped high over the Japanese defenders but his deflection hit the outside of the Japan net. Four minutes later, Kimmich unloaded a powerful right-footed drive that sailed past a couple of defenders but Japan 'keeper Suihchi Gonda dived to his right to deflect the ball away.

Shortly afterwards Hiroki Sakai – positioned close to Neuer – could not find the elevation on a header following a cross from the deep right flank. Three minutes from the half-hour mark, striker Gnabry found Gundogan who fired a bullet that was saved by 'keeper Gonda.

Soon afterwards David Raum charged into the box after clutching a loopy cross from Kimmich. Raum grabbed the ball and returned back but he was brought down by the Japanese 'keeper in his own box prompting the referee to point to the spot kick in the 31st minute.

Gundogan easily converted the penalty that went to the right of Gonda who chose to dive to his left in the 33rd minute. Despite being sluggish for most part of the first half, Germany were quick to grab the lead when the

opportunity arose. With momentum on their side, Niklas Sule found Kimmich with a neat short cross but the Bayern Munich defender saw his shot gobbled up by 'keeper Gonda five minutes before from the first-half whistle, Midfielder Jamal Musiala – on the edge of the Japanese box – sent his right-footed drive sailing above the crossbar in another wasted opportunity to score soon afterwards.

In the dying seconds of the first half, Kai Havertz deflected the ball into the net from close range following a cross from Gnabry a few feet away. The linesman called it a goal but VAR showed Havertz had moved ahead of the Japanese backline. Just seconds later, Japanese 'keeper had deflected a bullet from Kimmich who was on the edge of the box.

In their best chance to equalise, Maeda's header – on a cross from Yuto Nagamoto – narrowly missed the goalpost to Neuer's left. Seconds later the two teams walked off the pitch with Muller barely breaking a sweat in the entire first half.

Muller, early in the second half, picked up a loose ball and charged ahead with a Japanese marker in tow. Close to the edge of the box, the German star found Gnabry on the right. Gnabry sneaked into the Japanese box following the cross from Muller but his

powerful drive sailed above the crossbar. Muller wanted the ball back but Gnabry went solo. In the 50th minute Musiala – after dodging three makers in the Japan box – sent the ball above the crossbar from close range.

Gundogan was unlucky in the 58th minute when his shot from the edge of the box went through a Japanese defender's legs but the ball ricocheted off the goalpost left of 'keeper Gonda who had no chance to dive and stop the shot

Muller, who had not played a full 90 minutes since September, was benched by manager Hansi Flick in the 65th minute after a lackluster show by the German. In the 75th minute, Japan equalized.

Takumi Minamino – on the edge of the German box – slipped in a cross towards Neuer who threw out his left arm and parried the ball which landed at unguarded substitute Doan's feet. Doan quickly found the top of the net with a bullet from six yards out.

Asano gave Japan the lead with a breathtaking run of about 30 yards following a free kick cross from Itakura in the 83rd minute. Asano charged into the six-yard box while being chased by Nico Schlotterbeck. With the ball to his right, Asano slipped a shot into top of the net with Neuer unable to stop the flick from close range.

Match___Report

Morocco earn opening draw against Stuttering Croatia

Croatia will now turn their attentions to their game against Canada on Sunday, when Morocco will face Belgium

Reuters Al Khor

roatia's World Cup campaign got off to a stuttering start with a 0-0 draw against a battling Morocco yesterday as the 2018 runners-up lacked the punch and guile of the side that went so close in Russia.

Chances were at a premium at Al Bayt Stadium as an even Group F contest produced little goalmouth action and ended in the third goalless draw in nine games at the World Cup so far.

There were glimpses for both sides, with Nikola Vlasic going close for Croatia at the end of the first half while Noussair Mazraoui had a header saved for Morocco, but nobody could find the breakthrough as the mercury soared on an energy-sapping afternoon.

Croatia, who were beaten 4-2 by France in the final four years ago, will now turn their attentions to their game against Canada on Sunday, when Morocco will face Belgium.

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic was far from downcast with how his side had performed, with his only criticism that they lacked bravery to take more of the fight to their opponents.

"We were very cautious not to make a mistake and were a bit indecisive," he said. "I might say a bit of courage was missing on our side... but today Croatia had control and possession but not enough opportunities."

Croatia's best moments predictably hinged on Luka Modric, who was given the freedom of the park, floating effortlessly from back to front, with football's traditional midfield roles seeming not to apply to Croatia's captain. One minute he was patrolling in front of his back four, the next hanging off the shoulder of Andrej Kramaric up front, but always looking to open up the North Africans, whether he was hov-



Croatia's Mario Pasalic (centre) attempts to score during the FIFA World Cup Group F match against Morocco at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor yesterday. (Reuters)

ering at right back or hunting further

Morocco coach Walid Regragui was over the moon that his side had prevented the Croatian schemer from wreaking too much havoc. "Modric was unbelievable, what a player," he said

before declaring his satisfaction with a draw against Croatia, who he described as "one of the best teams in the compe-

Yet this Croatia performance lacked the cut and thrust of the team four years ago, which also boasted the talents of

the now-retired Mario Mandzukic up front and midfielder Ivan Rakitic, who has called time on his international ca-

Morocco looked principally to Hakim Ziyech for inspiration and the Chelsea winger, recalled to the squad following Regragui's appointment, was their most dangerous attacking outlet in the early stages, although his good work lacked an end product.

While the encounter was low on action it was at least high on intensity, as both sides battled for midfield su-

Fouls 11 **Yellow Cards** Red Cards premacy, but the first half ended with neither goal really threatened until the closing moments when Vlasic's low ef-

Shots

Shots on Target **Chances Created**

Corners

Saves

Possession

Offsides

35.2%

CROATIA

64.8%

fort was saved by Yassine Bounou.

Borna Sosa's cross to the near post found Vlasic, who poked out a leg to steer it towards goal, but he couldn't beat Bounou. There was more action in the first five minutes of the second half when Morocco had raucous appeals for a penalty waved away after Sofiane Boufal's shot appeared to hit Dejan Lovren's arm, seconds before Mazraoui's header was saved by Dominik

Moments later, Lovren's effort on the slide at the other end was blocked by Sofyan Amrabat, but that was about as good as it got for Croatia until centre back Josko Gvardiol's header went wide in the 80th minute. Morocco were perhaps the better side in the second half, but for all their efforts their only other chance of note was Achraf Hakimi's swerving shot from distance that was punched away by Livakovic.

The two sides are likely to be happy with a point from a match in which there really was nothing to separate them, with both having seven attempts at goal and just two on target.

Prev_iew

Masked Son can play for South Korea against Uruguay, says coach Bento

Reuters

outh Korea's Son Heung-min will be able to play with a mask in their World Cup Group H opener against Uruguay today, coach Paulo Bento said as the talismanic forward returns from a surgical procedure to stabilise a fracture around his left eye.

Son was injured midway through Tottenham Hotspur's Champions League tie at Olympique de Marseille earlier this month and there were doubts the 30-year-old would be fit in time for the World Cup group stage.

"Sonny will be able to play," Bento assured reporters yesterday. "I think the fact that he will be wearing a mask is not an inconvenience for him, it's quite natural for him. We stuck with the plan when we arrived here... But we will see tomorrow how it will be. Our hope is that he will be comfortable to the greatest extent possible and use the best strategy so that he can feel at ease during the game. He knows and we know that after his injury we cannot take any risks."

Bento confirmed that Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang Hee-chan had not recovered in time for the game while the team will take a late call on defender Kim Jin-su. South Korea have failed to replicate their magical run to the 2002 World Cup semi-finals in recent tournaments and Bento said he would not burden them with the aim of qualifying for the knockout stages, taking things "one match at a time" instead.

"Our aspirations is something we conveyed, we wish to compete in the best 📊 manner possible in the three group games," he said. "We are well aware that we will face many difficulties with rivals we play against and we're aware that in the history of World Cups, South Korea only advanced to knockouts twice – one of them when they were co-hosts with Japan. I don't see any reason to put any pressure on their shoulders. If this was a team that always advanced, then I would say, 'Yes, we need to qualify (for the next stage)."

Midfielder Jung Woo-young, one of the most experienced players in South Korea's World Cup squad, said set pieces



South Korea's midfielder Son Heung-min (right) takes part in a training session with teammates at the AI Egla Training Facility in Doha yesterday, on the eve of the World Cup Group H match against Uruguay. (AFP)

would be one of their "biggest weapons" and brushed aside concerns that Uruguay's taller players would have an ad-

"Set pieces are very important to de-

again in 1950, are at their 14th World Cup.

quarter-finals in Russia four years ago.

When: Thursday, Nov 24, 4pm

Capacity: 40,000

Key stats:

Where: Education City Stadium

editions of the tournament.

termine the outcome of the match, so this will be a big advantage for us," said the 32-year-old, who plays for Al Sadd in the Qatar Stars League.

"We have an excellent kicker in our

team and we have players that are physically equipped. We also have tall players. so we're not worried about the height. It is not a determining factor in football, so

Box

◆ Uruguay, champions at the inaugural World Cup in 1930 and

Uruguay have reached the knockout stages in their last three

appearances after failing to qualify in 2006 and reached the

and 11th overall, failed to get out of their group in the last two

◆ South Korea, who are at their 10th consecutive World Cup

South Korea's best performance at the World Cup was

SOUTH KOREA VS URUGUAY



this doesn't bother us."

reaching the semi-finals in 2002, where they lost to Germany. Uruguay failed to win their opening match in six of their last seven World Cup appearances (L-3, D-3), but won all three of their group games in Russia in 2018 without conceding a goal.

◆ South Korea have not won their opening game at the last two editions of the World Cup (L-1, D-1) and have won two of their last nine World Cup matches (L-5, D-2). Their last victory was a stunning 2-0 upset of defending champions Germany

Previous meetings: The two countries have met eight times, with Uruguay winning six, including two at the World Cups in 1990 and 2010. Korea won their only game against Uruguay in their most recent encounter in a friendly in 2018.

Spot__light

Alonso savs 'best in the world' players can deliver for dark horses Uruguay

Reuters Doha

ruguay coach Diego Alonso believes he has the "best players in the world" whose fierce national pride makes them contenders for another World Cup run, as the perennial dark horses gear up for their opening match

today against South Korea. Alonso said there was excitement and enthusiasm in a team whose preparations were exceptional going into their three matches in Group H, where they also meet Ghana and Portugal. "Uruguay players are the best in the world, they defend us through thick and thin," Alonso told a news conference yesterday. "That's the most important tool we have is the feeling the Uruguayan players have, how they identify themselves, the sense of belonging they have."

World Cup winners in 1930 and 1950, Uruguay, a nation of only 3.5mn people, have a knack of causing upsets and making extended runs during their 14 appearances in the tournament, making them wildcards each time, and a team big names hope to avoid.

Alonso said he was not talking out of arrogance or referring to the individual ability of his players, but about their determination to deliver for their country. "When I say Uruguayan players are the best in the world it's because they're my players," he said, drawing parallels with the love of his children. "Uruguayan players respect the team, that's why they're the best."

The squad was injury free, he said, except for Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo, who underwent thigh surgery in Sep-



Uruguay's coach Diego Alonso attends a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Center yesterday. (AFP)

tember but was making good progress. "He's playing well every day. His body will tell us when he's fit," he added.

Alonso joined Uruguay in December last year, replacing Oscar Tabarez after 15 years in charge of the national side. He has picked a squad with a huge age gap, which includes six players 35 years or older - some with four World Cups under their belt - alongside 13 first-timers, among them Liverpool striker Darwin Nunez.

Longtime captain Diego Godin is 36 and in Qatar will add to his more than 150 appearances for Uruguay. He played down questions alluding to the impediments of his age. "The Godin of 20 years ago was different but I give my utmost, my everything on the pitch," he said.

"We're very eager, very excited and have that enthusiasm you usually feel before first match is a feeling we all share.

Tomorrow is moment of truth and we will speak on the pitch."



Pre___view

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Portugal coach says will not be distracted by Ronaldo's saga

'This conversation has not come up at any moment, not even from him'

Reuters

ortugal will not be distracted by the drama surrounding captain Cristiano Ronaldo's acrimonious departure from Manchester United, coach Fernando Santos said yesterday, a day before their World Cup Group H opener against Ghana.

"This is something that has not even been discussed," Fernando Santos told reporters. "This conversation has not come up at any moment, not even from him."

Manchester United announced on Tuesday that Ronaldo would leave the club with immediate effect, bringing to a bitter end his second spell at Old Trafford after he said in a media interview that he felt betrayed by the club.

Portugal midfielder Bruno Fernandes, who plays for Manchester United, told the same news conference in Qatar that he had not discussed the situation with his now former club teammate.

"I don't feel uncomfortable. I don't have to pick a side," Fernandes said, adding it had been a dream to play with him in the English Premier League.

"We know that nothing lasts forever. It was good while it lasted."

Santos said it was "critical" that Portugal perform better in the World Cup this year than they did in Russia in 2018 when they were beaten by Uruguay in the first knockout round, starting with today's encounter with Ghana.

He said he did not want to repeat the experience of Euro 2016 when Portugal drew all of



O TIME OF SELECTION OF SELECTIO

Portugal's coach Fernando Santos (left) and Portugal's midfielder Bruno Fernandes at a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday. (*Reuters*)

their three group stage games, even if they then went on to win the competition. Saudi Arabia's shock win over Argentina on Tuesday showed the risks facing the traditional powerhouse teams at the World Cup as players from smaller countries increasingly played in the world's top leagues, Santos said.

"This is not just about what happened to Argentina. This has happened to several other teams." he said.

Portugal vs Ghana
When: Thursday November. 24, 7pm

Where: Stadium 974, Doha

Key stats:

◆ Portugal's best World Cup finish was third in 1966. They have qualified for the previous five tournaments in a row, reaching the knockout rounds on three occasions (2006, 2010 & 2018).

Capacity: 40,000

 Ghana are appearing at a fourth World Cup finals having qualified three times in succession between 2006 and 2014, but missed out in Russia four years ago. They have reached the knockout rounds twice, with a quarter-final finish in 2010 their best result.

 Portugal have met African opposition five times before at the World Cup, recording three wins, a draw and a 3-1 loss to Morocco in 1986.

• Ghana were within a late Asamoah Gyan penalty of being the first African nation to reach the semi-finals in 2010, but the striker missed from the spot against Uruguay and the Black Stars then lost in a shootout.

Previous meetings:

The only previous clash between Portugal and Ghana was at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, where a John Boye own goal and Cristiano Ronaldo strike helped the European side to a 2-1 victory in the group stage.

Opin___ion

Ghana captain Ayew believes sideshow won't affect Portugal



Ghana's midfielder Andre Ayew attends a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday.

Reuters

hana captain Andre Ayew does not believe Cristiano Ronaldo's messy exit from Manchester United will have any bearing on their World Cup Group H opener against Portugal as he urged his side to be "brave" in their clash at Stadium 974 today.

Ronaldo announced he had parted ways with the Old Trafford club by mutual consent on Tuesday following scathing public comments he had made towards the United hierarchy and coach Erik ten Hag.

However, Ayew said this should not be a distraction for Portugal. "It is not our problem what is happening within the Portuguese team," the 32-year-old told reporters yesterday. "They are all great professionals playing at top teams and they will be ready for the World Cup, whatever else is happening."

Tunisia and Morocco have

already managed to hold more fancied European opposition at this World Cup and Ayew said there was no reason why Ghana can't do the same or even better. "We go into this game with Portugal favourites on paper.

But we have to show that it is

more important what happens on the pitch. We are playing a big side with top players, but we believe in ourselves and will make it very difficult for them," he said. "When you are playing the first game of a tournament it is never the decisive one. Whatever happens, you still have a chance to go through

chance to go through.

"The first game is one where you can go for it and be brave. It would be a great bonus for us to get something (from the match)."

LONE SURVIVORS

Ayew and his brother Jordan are the only survivors from the Ghana side that lost 2-1 to Portugal in their final group stage clash in 2014, when Ronaldo scored the winner 10 minutes from fulltime.

"The two teams have changed a lot since then. It is a different game, when we played them in 2014 we had to win by two goals to advance," Ayew said.

"It is not the same game, or the same moment, it is completely different. Every game has its own realities and we will try to give them a tough time.

"We all know in these big tournaments there are surprises that can happen, we just need to be ready."

Head to___Head

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Swiss World Cup team is 'best ever', says manager

Reuters Al Rayyan

witzerland manager Murat Yakin said yesterday the current national team is the "best that ever existed" and is determined to reach the later stages of the World Cup in Qatar.

Switzerland, who will play their opener against Cameroon today, have progressed from the group stage in three of their last four tournaments, missing out only in 2010.

Yakin, who took the reins last

Yakin, who took the reins last year after Switzerland's run to the Euro 2020 quarter-finals, predicted the country would have its best showing at any World Cup in Qatar, where they will also face Brazil and Serbia in Group G.

"I think that we are seeing the best Swiss national team that has ever existed," Yakin told a news conference.

"We have improved a lot and now we want to write history. We are not only here to participate. We are here to win and we want

to get to the next round."
Captain Granit Xhaka, the Arsenal midfielder, was hesitant to describe the squad in the same way, saying it would not be fair to the 2018 Swiss team that was eliminated by Sweden in the round of 16.

He said, however, the Swiss team now was younger than it was four years ago and maybe "a little more hungry" to go far in



Switzerland's midfielder Granit Xhaka (left) and team coach Murat Yakin pose prior to a press conference in Doha yesterday.

the tournament. Between them, the Swiss and Cameroonian teams have played at 19 World Cup finals, with Switzerland making their debut in the 1934 tournament and Cameroon in

The high point for both teams has been reaching the quarter-finals, which Switzerland did in 1934, 1938 and 1958, while Cameroon's best performance came in 1900

Although Cameroon are considered the least likely side in the group to reach the round of 16, the attacking talent of Napoli's Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa has the potential to destabilise the Swiss.

"We know that Cameroon have very good individual players who perform at a top level," Xhaka said. "It's a team that can be very dangerous if we let them play."



Key stats:

★ Between them the two sides have played at 19 World Cup finals, with Switzerland making their debut in the 1934 tournament in Italy and Cameroon in 1982 in Spain.

The high point for both teams has been making it to the quarterfinals, which Switzerland did in 1934, 1938 and 1958, while Cameroon's best performance came in 1990.

 Cameroon come into the game on the back of one win, one draw and three losses in their last five games, while Switzerland have won three and lost two.

 Cameroon's last victory in a World Cup group game came against Qatar's neighbours from Saudi Arabia, who they beat 1-0 on June 6, 2002 in Saitama, Japan. They lost all their group games at the 2010 and 2014 tournaments.
 Switzerland have progressed from the group stage in three of their

last four tournaments (2006, 2014 and 2018), missing out in 2010. **Previous meetings:** This is the first time the two sides have met.

Calm Cameroon keen to avoid past mistakes against Swiss: Song

Reuters

ameroon manager Rigobert Song has enjoyed a quiet build-up to the Qatar World Cup and is hoping it will benefit his squad in their opening Group G game against Switzerland at the Al Janoub Stadium today.

Song, who played in four World Cup finals as a player, said that the country's football association had learned the lessons of the past and that the current structure provided a great foundation for success at the tournament.

Previous Cameroon World Cup teams have been hindered by internal conflicts and disputes over pay and bonuses.

"We are very calm, and we're pleased that all of the mistakes we've made in the past have not been repeated. We haven't had any disputes about wages, about money, things have changed," Song told reporters yesterday.

"The CFA has (former striker) Samuel Eto'o as president, he's a hard worker, he's there every day trying to make sure the players are as well prepared as possible. We've seen mistakes made in the past, but this time we're calm we're ready, we're focused," he added.

The Indomitable Lions haven't won a group game at



Cameroon's coach Rigobert Song speaks at a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday.

the World Cup since defeating Saudi Arabia in 2002, and Song is hoping that his experience — including being sent off at two different tournaments — will enable him to help his side.

"That experience is helpful when I talk to the young generation, they are professional, they know what they have to do, I'm just trying to support them, to help them do the best they can," the 46-year-old said.

Song was tight-lipped about his line-up and who would captain the team, but he was joined at the news conference by midfielder Samuel Oum Gouet, who said the squad is looking forward to getting going in the tournament. "We're very excited about being here. Any footballer or manager who gets to the World Cup is very excited, and we're very focused," the 24-year-old said. With FA president Eto'o saying that his nation could win the tournament, Song said little that might dampen those expectations.

"We know we are at a very good level and the organisation behind the scenes is good as well, so the footballers can focus on their job, I think that's why we're more focused today and there's no doubt in our minds what we are capable of,"

he said.

"They are a very strong group, but perhaps I can make them even stronger."



Brazil's Neymar (centre), Lucas Paqueta and Thiago Silva (left) during a training session at the Al Arabi

Bruno

Guimaraes

Buoyant Brazil face fearless Serbia in World Cup opener

American giants.

wenty years have passed since Brazil last hoisted the FIFA World Cup trophy. Most of the current team mempers would have been in primary school when Cafu and his men lifted the trophy in 2002, held jointly in South Korea and

The closest Selecao have come in recent World Cups was when they reached the semi-finals as host nation in 2014, but they were drubbed by Germany 1-7. In Russia 2018, the five-time champions bowed out in the quarter-finals losing to Belgium, making it a long way for the South

The new generation Brazil players, with 16 of them making their World Cup debut, face confident Serbia in a tough Oatar 2002 campaign opener at the Lusail Stadium today. Brazil have exited the last four World Cups early after defeats by European heavyweights - France and Zinedine Zidane in

2006, the Netherlands and Arjen Robben in 2010, Toni Kroos and Germany in 2014, and Belgium and Kevin De Bruvne in 2018. Brazil have found some of their mojo again, going unbeaten en route to Oatar. scoring 45 goals and conceding just five. As

the World Cup. "The pressure is natural. Brazil have the biggest history in soccer and with that legacy always comes the pressure. Pressure is inevitable," Tite said yesterday. Tite said it is not his responsibility that Brazil have not won the tournament in 20

impressive as the qualifying campaign was,

Brazil and coach Tite know its significance

will be limited when playing the very best at

He said he can only be accountable for the last four years, his only complete cycle since Brazil lost against Belgium in the quarterfinals in Russia in 2018. "In Russia we only had two years to fix the team and I came to the rescue. Now it is

different because I had the opportunity to

build the team the way I wanted," Tite said.

"That's why my feeling today is com-

It will be a tough game. An extremely difficult game. But the game starts 0-0. And we are not afraid of anyone in the world. Not even of Brazil"

Dragan Stojkovic

pletely different than four years ago. I'm not that nervous because all the work has been done," the 61-year-old Brazilian said. Veteran defender and captain Thiago Silva, who is playing in his fourth World Cup, said he is better prepared this time than in previous editions "I am prepared and very motivated." Silva

said vesterday. "Sometimes you have to live through tough experiences to learn. I'm more at ease now. This is the best version of Thiago Silva and I'm in the best stage of my career," said the 38-year-old Chelsea centre-back.

Brazil is going with fit and firing Neymar, and a well-balanced squad around him. "I think Nevmar is coming into this competition in great form," said Silva. A 30-year-old Nevmar arrives fresh from

a fantastic start to the season with Paris Saint-Germain in which he has scored 15 "His preparation this time has been different. In 2014 he got injured just as he was

playing so well, and in 2018 he came into the ournament in a different way because he had a serious injury so hadn't played much. This time is different and he has not been injured. Neymar is a lot better prepared." Talking about Brazil's players that have never played a World Cup match, Silva said: Vinicius Iunior and Rodrygo have already shown they can handle high-stakes pressure for their clubs. Both were key members of the Real Madrid team that won this year's UEFA Champions League title by beating Liverpool 1-0 in Paris. They will help Neyman because they can divide up the responsibility and create space for him. The mixture of experience and youth is very important," the

38-year-old Chelsea centre-back said. The favourites Brazil can't underestimate Serbia, who boast a rich vein of form in its third appearance at the global showpiece as an independent nation after debuting in South Africa in 2010.

A well-knit Serbia finished their qualifying campaign by beating Portugal away and topping their group and played six UEFA Nations League matches this year and won four of them. "It will be a tough game. An extremely

difficult game. But the game starts 0-0. And we are not afraid of anyone in the world. Not even of Brazil," said Serbia coach Dragan Stojkovic, who was appointed in February last year to succeed Ljubisa Tumbakovic after Serbia failed to qualify for Euro 2020,

Serbia's winger Filip Kostic is in danger of missing the match due to a thigh injury. "We already have 99% of the line-up in mind. But what I can say is that there is still a big question mark over Kostic," Stojkovic said. The Juventus player has only done running practice in Qatar so far



Serbia's coach Dragan Stojkovic leads a training session of his team at the Al Arabi Stadium in Doha yesterday, on the eve of their Qatar 2022 World Cup match against Brazil. (AFP)

Brazil v Serbia

Where: Lusail Stadium Capacity: 80,000

◆ Brazil have won the World Cup five times and are pre-tournament favourites to win a record-extending sixth title. ◆ Brazil have played in every World Cup since 1930 but they have not reached the final since they last won the title in

Neymar was Brazil's top scorer in the World Cup qualifiers with eight goals as they qualified for the tournament without

losing a single game. Aleksandar Mitrovic, Serbia's all-time top scorer with 50

goals, also netted eight times in the World Cup qualifiers but is an injury doubt for the group opener. Serbia were also unbeaten in their qualifying campaign where they topped the group with a 90th-minute winner from Mitrovic against Portugal in their final game to seal

automatic qualification. Serbia have never gone past the group stage since they split from Montenegro in 2006.

 Brazil and Serbia also met each other in the group stage of the 2018 World Cup, with the South American team winning 2-0 after Paulinho and Thiago Silva scored. They have met each other only one other time previously with Brazil winning 1-0 in a friendly in 2014.

Brazil stars want World Cup triumph for

I have a photo with him that went viral. treated us well and has created a I was in the youth teams at Audax (a small club in Sao Paulo), when he was winning a lot of things with Corinthians. So I asked him for a photo. That shows you my admiration for him as a person and as a coach. He's a very intelligent guy and has real tactical insight and knowledge. more than a lot of coaches I've worked with in Europe. I remember when I was at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics qualifying tournament and I had Atletico Madrid his face." interested in me, though I'd already given my word to Juninho (Pernambucano), the then director of football at Lyon. Juninho

to them and that he knew other clubs were after me. Tite came to watch one of our games. He got hold of me, hit me on the chest and said: 'What you have here is something I honour with my life: your word. If you have your word, you're a man.' That made a big impression on me. He really is a man of his word. If he says he's going to do something, he does it."

called Tite and told him I'd given my word

warm and welcoming environment with the national team. He's one of those people who gives you praise... but who's not afraid to give you some home truths. We've learned a lot with him. I'm talking about being brave, smart, and tactically disciplined. Whether we like it or not, it's his last World Cup and we're going to do all we can for him to bow out with a smile on



o matter the outcome for Brazil at dor in Quito in the qualifiers for Russia September 2016 when the tournament finishes. The hope for both Tite and his players is that they have seven matches left together; specifically that they reach the final in Lusail Stadium on December 18.

Brazil begin their campaign at the final Mario Zagallo tried to defend the title venue, against Serbia, today at the Lusail won in Mexico in 1970 at the German Stadium and have subsequent Group G encounters with Cameroon and Switzerland. Born Adenor Leonardo Bacchi, the 61-year-old Tite kicked off his impressive ent desire to keep pushing his team for Selecao tenure with a 3-0 defeat of Ecua- improvement, regardless of their impres- to shut down space and

Qatar 2022, coach Tite will leave 2018. That was the first of the 57 wins the team plays is essential to that sustained South Americans have recorded in his 76 development. Tite's side like to stretch games in charge. Title has lost only five matches during his six-year tenure.

> That record reveals exactly why Tite has been entrusted to oversee successive World Cup campaigns, the first Brazil coach to have that honour since tournament four years later.

So what is the secret to Tite's success? The simple answer to that is an inher-

sive results. The pace at which Tite's the play and probe down the flanks, giving influential attacker Neymar more space in which to roam in the

middle of the pitch. **Equally, the Brazilians** are effective in the press, making the most of their speed and agility to harry and close opposing players, as soon as possession is conceded. The team works as one

prevent the opposition from playing the ball forwards. They boast a rich blend of talent and a system that maximises the team's breadth of attributes.

While these factors were instrumental to their serene qualification, another crucial ingredient in this successful side is the human touch provided by the man the players call The Professor, a common nickname for coaches in

FIFA+ spoke to some of Tite's charges, who had only praise for the outgoing coach - and are desperately keen to give their Professor a

golden send-off.

First of all, I want to thank to give me a chance with the national team and for bringing me here to Qatar. I wouldn't be here without him. He's become very important for me, not just for what he passes on to me whenever I'm with A Seleçao, but He's a great coach. We all know how for what I can take away with me capable he is, I'm so honoured to to my club. He's given me a lot of have worked with him all this time confidence and the tools I need and to have shared that experience to keep those confidence levels with him. I have a lot of admiration for as high as possible." him, not just because he called me up though I am grateful to him for having spotted me (laughs) - but because of the type of coach he is. The most important thing I've learned from him has to do with his human touch, the kind of person he is. He's a lovely guy who treats everyone the same way, from the keeper to the kitman. He's really Raphinha attentive. Above all, he's someone we love to have around because of the joy that is in him." Brazil's coach Tite walks on the field during a stadium familiarisation at the Lusail Stadium. (AFP) Spot___light



Man United owners consider selling Premier League icon

The Glazer family is working with financial advisers on the process, which could lead to a partial sale of the Old Trafford club or investments including stadium and infrastructure redevelopment

Reuters

anchester United's US owners have begun looking at options for the 20-time English soccer champions, including a new investment or a potential sale, 17 years after the Glazer family bought the club.

The Glazer family is working with financial advisers on the process, which could lead to a partial sale of the Old Trafford club or investments including stadium and infrastructure redevelopment, the club said in a statement.

Manchester United fans have been clamouring for a change of ownership and the Glazers have been the target of intense criticism as the team, which has a record 13 English Premier League titles, have gone five years without winning a trophy.

The last silverware they won was the Europa League and League Cup back in 2017.

"As we seek to continue building on the club's history of success, the board has authorised a thorough evaluation of strategic alternatives," Avram Glazer and Joel Glazer, executive co-chairmen and directors of United, said in the statement.

"We will evaluate all options to ensure that we best serve our fans and that Manchester United maximises the significant growth opportunities available to the club today and in the future," the statement said.

Its sale may attract high-profile investors. In August, British billionaire and a long-standing fan of the club, Jim Ratcliffe had expressed interest in buying United, Reuters reported. At the about planning to buy the club.

Chemical firm INEOS, where Ratcliffe is chairman, declined to

comment yesterday. Manchester United shares



A man takes a photo outside Old Trafford next to a Cristiano Ronaldo picture after it was announced by the club that Ronaldo would be leaving Manchester United.



An aerial view shows Old Trafford stadium, home ground of the Manchester United football team in Manchester vesterday.

jumped as much as 13% in early more than 14% rise after news of the sales process on Tuesday

The company was worth \$2.5bn at the close of US trad

ing on Tuesday, but the shares

The club's capitalisation as a public company peaked at \$4.3bn in 2018. Asian tycoons, especially those from China,

IPO price of \$14.

have been buying European teams in recent years including Premier League side Wolverhampton Wanderers and Italy's Inter Milan.

However, football clubs have since been deemed unfavourable assets by China and any major overseas purchase would seem unlikely at the moment, said Mark Dreyer, Beijing-based author of Sporting Superpower, a book about China's sports am-

"It's almost impossible to see how any Chinese-related entity could justify a purchase of this magnitude in the current climate," he said, citing the economic fallout of China's ongoing battle to contain Covid-19 in-"No state body would approve this kind of deal."

The Glazers, who also own National Football League team Tampa Bay Bucccaneers, are under pressure with United sitting fifth in the Premier League halfway through the season, which has been suspended because of the current Qatar World Cup.

LATEST IN PLAY

More big clubs are in play. Liverpool chairman Tom Werner has said the Premier League side's owners Fenway Sports Group (FSG) were exploring a sale of

In May, Roman Abramovich sold Chelsea Football Club to an investment group led by Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital for \$3.2bn (£2.5bn). Jefferies analysts said they believe ManU would fetch more - the club's Old Trafford stadium is bigger, the club has more than 1bn followers, far more than its London rival, and generates more revenue and core profit.

Hargreaves Lansdown senior investment and markets analyst Susannah Streeter estimated the club's worth at more than \$4.5bn. Also on Tuesday, the club said that star striker Cristiano Ronaldo will leave with immediate effect, marking a bitter end to the Portugal captain's second spell at Old Trafford after he said he felt betrayed by the club.

The Glazers bought the club for £790mn (\$939.07mn) in 2005 in a highly leveraged deal which has been criticised for loading debt onto the club.

They sold 10% of their holding via the 2012 US listing and have sold more shares since.

The Raine Group is acting as

financial adviser and Latham & Watkins LLP is the legal adviser to Manchester United. Rothschild and Co is acting as

financial adviser to the Glazer family shareholders. Among the fan protests

May 2021 that forced the post-League campaign in terms of ponement of a home match points earned, failing to qualagainst Liverpool, one of the club's biggest rivals. It was the Champions League competition. first Premier League match to be

Ronaldo banned for two matches and **fined £50,000 over Everton fan clash**

Cristiano Ronaldo has been banned for two matches and fined £50,000 (\$60,000) for hitting a mobile phone out of a teenage fan's hand at Everton, the Football Association said yesterday, AFP reported from London.

Ronaldo, now a free agent following his release by Manchester United on Tuesday, was involved in a flare-up with a 14-year-old boy following the Red Devils 1-0 loss away to Everton in the Premier League at Goodison Park on April 9. He was cautioned by Merseyside Police, while the FA also charged the Portugal forward with improper conduct. Now an independent panel has

handed down a suspension and a fine. The ban will be transferred when Ronaldo joins a new club in any country, but does not ap-

ply in the ongoing World Cup in

Qatar, where the 37-year-old is

set to feature today when Portugal launch their campaign against Ghana. "Cristiano Ronaldo has been suspended for two matches, fined £50,000 and warned

as to his future conduct for a

postponed because of a protest.

United finished sixth last

ify for the lucrative European

They won the last of their

breach of FA rule E3," said a statement from English football's governing body. "The forward admitted that his conduct after the final whistle of the Premier League game between Manchester United FC

and Everton FC on April 9, 2022

was improper. "An independent regulatory commission found that his conduct was both improper and violent during a subsequent hearing, and imposed these sanctions.

Ronaldo requested a personal hearing in a bid to avoid a suspension.

During the hearing, held via Microsoft Teams on November 8. Ronaldo said he had "legitimate concern... for his own physical safety and well-being and leaving the field of play" after approaching the tunnel where Everton fans were gathering.

The panel, however, said Ronaldo's conduct was an "act born of frustration and annoyance rather than fear or concern for his well-being", but they also rejected the FA's bid to have him banned for three games.

record 20 top-flight league titles in 2013, the year the great Alex rerguson stepped ager after more than 26 years in charge. The club have hired Dutch manager Erik ten Hag from Ajax Amsterdam in a bid to turn around their fortunes.

Reyna relishing battle with 'best friend' Bellingham at World Cup

Doha

nited States attacker Gio Reyna is relishing a potential battle with rising England star Jude Bellingham with the Borussia Dortmund teammates poised to face off at the World Cup tomorrow.

Reyna, who sat out the USA's 1-1 draw with Wales on Monday but is expected to feature this time, has forged a close bond with Bellingham since the English teenager joined Dortmund two years ago. Reyna, 20, said Bellingham had been a source of support during the American's injury-ravaged 2020-2021 season, where he hardly played.

"He's definitely my best friend at Dortmund," Reyna said. "We have a really close relationship on and off the field.

"He's been really great with me over the last year, just talking with me. Obviously it's been a tough year for me.

"But he's been the one that's been reaching out the most, making sure everything's all

"We sit next to each other on the bus, and when we fly anywhere we're sitting close to each other as well. We really feed off each other, on and off the field. He's a great player and a great guy."

Bellingham, 19, produced a dazzling performance in England's 6-2 win over Iran on Monday, confirming his status as one of the brightest young talents in world football. It was the kind of performance that comes as no surprise to Reyna, who has witnessed the English midfielder's rapid evolution up close over the past two seasons.

Bottom__Line

Turn the heat down against 'small teams' and you're in trouble, says France's Dembele

Reuters

ermany's defeat by Japan, a day after Saudi Arabia stunned Argentina at the World Cup, goes to show that there cannot be any room for complacency against the so-called 'small teams', France forward Ousmane Dembele (pictured) said yester-

Japan, like Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, came from behind to beat Germany in a frenzied finish in Group E for the second major



upset after less than three full days of competition in Qatar.

"Huh? Oh yeah?," Dembele said when told about the Germany vs Japan result at a news conference at France's training camp. The 25-year-old, who with the defending champions avoided such fate as they beat

Australia 4-1 on Tuesday, said the big guns needed to be full on from start to finish, regardless of the opponent.

"In modern football there's no small teams," he said. "If you turn down the intensity, you're in trouble. Now everyone works a lot technically, tactically. We saw how Saudi Arabia were incredible from a tactical point of view. "We also saw it ourselves against Denmark."

France suffered two consecutive defeats by Denmark in the 2022 Nations League so there is no chance that they will take anything for granted when the

two teams meet again in Group D on Saturday, even if the Danes struggled in their opener against

LUCAS RULED OUT They will have to do it without

left-back Lucas Hernandez, who was ruled out of the tournament with an ACL injury and will be replaced in the starting line-up by his brother Theo - a player with a more offensive mindset.

Coach Didier Deschamps will hope that nothing happens to the older Hernandez brother as he does not have another proper left back in store in Qatar.

Guardiola 'cannot be in a better place' as he extends Man City deal until 2025

ep Guardiola said "I cannot be in a better place" as he announced he had agreed a two-year contract extension that will keep him at the Premier League champions until

The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager, 51, has won nine major trophies, including four Premier League titles, since taking charge at City in 2016.

"I am so pleased to be staying at Manchester City for another two years," said Guardiola in a club statement issued vesterday.

"I can't say thank you enough to everyone at the club for trusting me. I am happy and comfortable, and I have everything I need to do my job as best as possible."

The Spaniard added: "I know the next chapter of this club will be amazing for the next decade. It happened over the last 10 years, and it will happen in the next 10 years because this club is so stable.

"From day one I felt something special being here. I cannot be in a better place*?*

City chairman Khaldoon al-Mubarak said: "I am delighted that Pep's journey with Manchester City Football Club will continue.

"He has already contributed so much to the success and fabric of this organisation, and it's exciting to think what might be possible given the energy, hunger and ambition that he clearly still has."

Guardiola's current deal at the Etihad Stadium is due to expire at the end of the season.

He has already extended his contract twice during his time at the

Guardiola, who has 271 wins from 374 matches in all competitions as City manager, said talks over his latest contract extension started soon after the team had retained the Premier League title in May.

As for feeling he could "not be in a better place", he added: "The moment I don't feel that - for family reasons, or I have achieved everything I want to achieve, or I don't feel comfortable with the team, or it's not a pleasure to fight for another Premier League – when these

feelings disappear, I will step aside. "That is normal in life. I am not eternal. Every day we are here, we

are closer to the end. That is normal. "But still I have this feeling there is something more to do. That is my feeling right now. And that is why we continue together."

City are currently second in the Premier League table, five points behind leaders Arsenal, and will face RB Leipzig in the Champions League last 16 when elite club football resumes after the break for the

ongoing World Cup in Qatar. As well as the league triumphs, Guardiola's trophy haul at City also includes one FA Cup and four League Cups

But Guardiola, who guided Barcelona to two Champions League titles, has still to win European club football's greatest prize at City, although they were runners-up when

losing 1-0 to English rivals Chelsea in the 2021 final.

That match in Portugal is still the only time City have reached the final of either the Champions League or its forerunner, the European Cup, with their lone piece of major continental silverware coming when they won the now defunct European Cup Winners' Cup back in the 1969/70

Guardiola added: "I have the feeling we can do better. This is the reason I want to do more - the job is not done. We want more and I want more. We feel that.

"Still, we are in the process. If I feel it is done, the relations would remain forever, and another chapter for both sides will be taken. Simple







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Kane trains with England despite ankle scan

Al Wakra Reuters

■ ngland captain Harry Kane trained with the team vesterday ahead of their clash with the United States despite an ankle injury that required a scan, teammate

Jordan Pickford said. Kane suffered a knock to his ankle after a tackle by Iran's Morteza Pouraliganji early in the second half of England's 6-2 opening win in Group B and was replaced late on.

The Football Association confirmed that the striker, whose 51 goals for his country is just two behind Wayne Rooney's record,

had undergone a scan, but Pickford offered an upbeat assess-

"Yeah I think he's good, obviously a little but sore, but I think he's fine, he was out on the grass with us," goalkeeper Pickford told reporters at England's training base.

"It's good because he's our captain."

The possibility of Kane's wellchronicled ankle injuries returning during a World Cup that has started in almost perfect fashion for England will be a worry for coach Gareth Southgate.

Although on the flip side, five England players found the net against Iran with Bukayo Saka scoring twice and teenager Jude

Match___Report

Bellingham notching his first international goal.

Kane remains England's talisman, however, having won the Golden Boot at the 2018 World Cup with six goals as England reached the semi-finals before losing to Croatia.

Southgate would be unlikely to risk a less than 100% fit Kane against the United States tomorrow, when a win could send them into the last 16 with a game to spare, preferring to make sure he is ready for the latter stages of the tournament.

If so, Pickford is confident England have enough quality in the squad to make do without their skipper.

"I think everyone took their

chance when Harry came off, Callum (Wilson) came on and played really well and got the assist for Jack (Grealish) and was very unselfish.

"Everyone's training really hard and everyone's here for a reason," the Everton stopper said. "But obviously Harry is an unbelievable player, he sets an example in the squad.

"He's the leader, he's the captain and we all look up to him but there are opportunities for the other lads too."

Defender Kyle Walker, who was not deemed fit enough to play against Iran after recovering from groin surgery, trained yesterday and could be an option for

A youthful United States team drew 1-1 with Wales in their opening Group B game on Monday and while England will be favourites to beat them for the first time in three attempts at a World Cup, Pickford said they posed a threat. Chelsea's Christian Pulisic leads their attack and several other members of the US squad are Premier League regulars.

"They are a top nation, they have a lot of experienced players in the Premier League," Pickford

"Pulisic is a top player, played against him for a few years now. He's good with both feet and very clinical."

England's final Group C match is against Wales.



Saudi's al-Shahrani to undergo surgery after **World Cup collision**



Riyadh: Saudi defender Yasser al-Shahrani was set to undergo surgery yesterday after sustaining injuries in a collision during his team's shock World Cup win over Argentina, the national team said. Al-Shahrani was "transferred by medical evacuation to the National Guard Hospital in Riyadh, and he will undergo surgery in the coming hours, according to the treatment plan set by the medical apparatus for him," said a statement posted on the team's official Twitter account. Medical examinations conducted in Hamad Medical City Doha revealed al-Shahrani to be in "stable condition" after suffering a strong clash in the head, chest and abdomen". the statement said. Al-Shahrani collided with Saudi goalkeeper Mohamed al-Owais during stoppage time of the second half during which ended in an upset 2-1 victory for the Green Falcons. Al-Owais's left knee connected squarely with al-Shahrani's

"I would like to ensure you that I am ok, pray for me and congratulations on winning, al-Shahrani said in a video clip from his hospital bed posted on social media. Saudi Arabia were propelled

to victory by a stunning goal from Salem al-Dawsari. bringing Argentina's 36-match unbeaten run to a shuddering

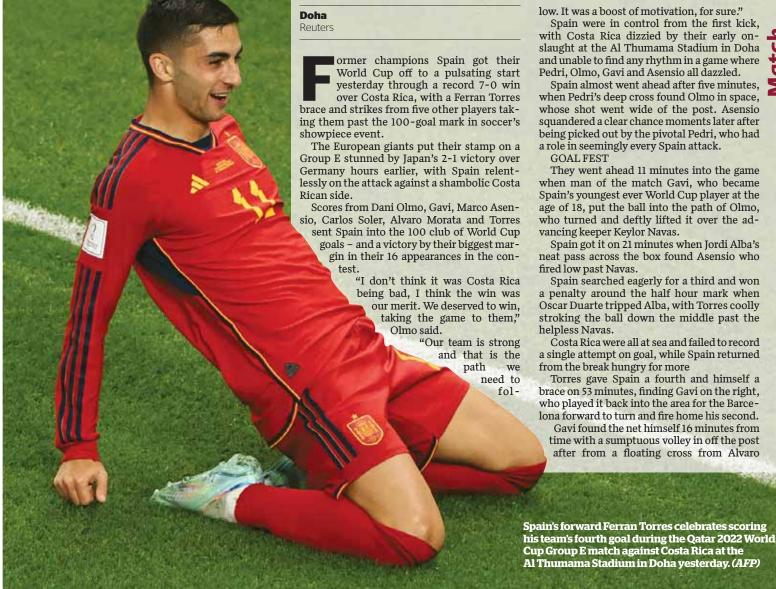
The Saudis' next match is on Saturday against Poland. (AFP)



Stunning Spain join World Cup 100-goal club with 7-0 Costa Rica rout

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'Our team is strong and that is the path we need to follow. It was a boost of motivation, for sure'



low. It was a boost of motivation, for sure." Spain were in control from the first kick, with Costa Rica dizzied by their early onslaught at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha and unable to find any rhythm in a game where Pedri, Olmo, Gavi and Asensio all dazzled.

Spain almost went ahead after five minutes, when Pedri's deep cross found Olmo in space, whose shot went wide of the post. Asensio squandered a clear chance moments later after being picked out by the pivotal Pedri, who had a role in seemingly every Spain attack.

GOAL FEST

when man of the match Gavi, who became Spain's youngest ever World Cup player at the age of 18, put the ball into the path of Olmo, who turned and deftly lifted it over the advancing keeper Keylor Navas.

Spain got it on 21 minutes when Jordi Alba's neat pass across the box found Asensio who fired low past Navas.

Spain searched eagerly for a third and won a penalty around the half hour mark when Oscar Duarte tripped Alba, with Torres coolly stroking the ball down the middle past the helpless Navas.

Costa Rica were all at sea and failed to record a single attempt on goal, while Spain returned from the break hungry for more

Torres gave Spain a fourth and himself a brace on 53 minutes, finding Gavi on the right, who played it back into the area for the Barcelona forward to turn and fire home his second.

Gavi found the net himself 16 minutes from time with a sumptuous volley in off the post after from a floating cross from Alvaro

Stats **SPAIN COSTA RICA** 17 Shots 0 Shots on Target **Chances Created** 0 Corners Saves 82% Possession 18% Offsides 12 8 Fouls Yellow Cards 2 0 **Red Cards**

Morata, then Carlos Soler and Morata completed the demolition with two goals in the dving minutes. Costa Rica defender Kendall Waston said he

felt hurt and ashamed by the thrashing.

"It's a result that nobody wants to experience, lose 7-0 in a World Cup," he said. "We need to stand up together and fight back in the two games that are left."

Costa Rica's coach Luis Fernando Suarez said his was outplayed by a far superior side.

"They kept the ball throughout the match. We did the exact opposite, we didn't have possession, we didn't really attack," he said. "They played an amazing game and

Spot___light

Batshuayi fires Belgium to win over Canada

AFP Doha

Batshuayi's first-half goal proved enough for a below-par Belgium to squeeze to a 1-0 win over a Canada side playing their first World Cup match for 36 years yesterday.

Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois saved Alphonso Davies' early penalty and Batshuayi opened the scoring against the run of play in the 44th minute.

John Herdman's Canada, roared on by their vocal support, also had another strong penalty appeal turned down

and dominated the second half to no avail. Belgium were without injured record goalscorer Romelu Lukaku and struggled throughout with the pace of Canada's forwards.

But the 2018 semi-finalists clung on to move top of what could prove a hotly-contested Group F after Croatia and Morocco's goalless draw earlier yesterday. Canada will head into their game against Croatia on Sunday still full of confidence after more than matching the team ranked second in the world, who next face Morocco.

North Americans, matching Belgium in formation by playing three at the back, made a bright start and Jonathan David's low effort was deflected wide.

From the resulting corner, Tajon Buchanan's strike was blocked by Yannick Carrasco with his arm and a penalty was awarded after a VAR check in the 11th minute. But Davies produced a weak effort which was saved low to his right by Courtois, before David lashed the rebound over the crossbar.

Belgium's ageing defence were struggling with the pace of the Canada attackers and Junior Hoilett got in behind before firing a shot wide.

The underdogs kept coming, as Courtois palmed away right wing-back Alistair Johnston's fierce drive and David headed off target. Canada had a big penalty appeal turned down despite a VAR review when Axel Witsel was outpaced by Richie Laryea inside the area and then tripped his opponent.

Belgium grabbed the lead out of nothing when a simple long ball over the top from Toby Alderweireld found the run of Batshuayi who hammered home left-footed.

There was still time for Canada to create, and waste, another glorious opportunity before the break, as Laryea's low cross was fired over on the slide by Buchanan from six yards out. Belgium coach Roberto Martinez made a double substitution at half-time to try



Belgium's Michy Batshuayi (second from right) celebrates with his teammates after scoring against Canada yesterday. (AFP)

and stem the tide, with Thomas Meunier replacing Carrasco and Everton youngster Amadou Onana coming into the midfield. Canada could have levelled just minutes after the restart, though, as David headed wide from Stephen Eustaquio's

delicious cross after the Porto midfielder had nutmegged Kevin De Bruyne. Herdman's men continued to flood forward, but could not find the finishing touch required, with Buchanan miskicking horribly from the edge of the box.

FIFA launches case over Ecuador fans' **World Cup chants**

FIFA launched disciplinary proceedings on Tuesday over chants by Ecuador fans during their World Cup opener against hosts Qatar. Football's world governing body did not say what the chants were but said it came under article 13 of its disciplinary code, which includes discriminatory or abusive words. Ecuador beat Qatar 2-0 on Sunday to launch the World Cup. "The FIFA disciplinary committee has opened proceedings against the Ecuadoran Football Association due to chants by Ecuadoran supporters during the Qatar v. Ecuador FIFA World Cup match played on 20 November," it said. It is the first such disciplinary measure of the Qatar World Cup, which ends on December 18. (AFP)