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DHAKA SATURDAY JUNE 17, 2006

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banglalink picture of the day



THIS ONE IS FOR YOU: Argentina's Maxi Rodriguez (L) spreads his arms for joy after he opened the goalgate against Serbia and Montenegro in their World Cup Group C encounter while legendary Diego Maradona (R) reciprocates from the stands at Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

Awesome Argentina

Argentina 6 Serbia & Mont 0

THE GUARDIAN, Gelsenkirchen

The general consensus after this tournament's first series of matches was that only Argentina, Spain and the Czech Republic had shown the fizz, finesse and fear-some finishing of potential world champions. But on the evidence of Argentina's awesome destruction of Serbia and Montenegro at Gelsenkirchen on Friday, the Spaniards and Czechs will have to up their game considerably if they're to thwart the boys from Buenos Aires.

Jose Pekerman's troops began at a cracking pace and were three up at half-time before adding another three after the break - two of the goals, in particular, being works of rare beauty.

Serbia and Montenegro are certainly no mugs - they had conceded only one goal in 10 qualifying matches - but they were dominated from the outset, Argentina forcing two corners in the first minute. Seven minutes later,

Rodriguez knocked the ball wide to Juan Pablo Sorin, who helped it on to Saviola with a wonderful flick. The little striker skipped past his marker to lay the ball into the path of the in-rushing Rodriguez, who finished what he'd started by firing first-time past goalkeeper Dragoslav Jevric.

The second goal, after 32 minutes, was even better, concluding a majestic 24-pass move that went the whole length of the pitch. The climax came when Riquelme exchanged a snappy one-two with Saviola, who clipped it to Cambiasso at the edge of the box. The Internazionale man took one touch to find Hernan Crespo, who returned the ball to him with a smart back-heel and Cambiasso blasted it into the roof of the net. If you didn't see it, don't worry: it will be shown on TV over and over again for decades to come.

The fact that Cambiasso had only come on as a substitute 14 minutes earlier in place of the injured Luis Gonzalez proved that in addition to class, speed and cohesion, Argentina have strength

in depth. When Lionel Messi and Carlos Tevez came on in the second half, the point was underlined emphatically.

The third goal was more straight-forward than the previous two but illustrated yet another quality of this exhilarating young Argentina team: their hunger. Two minutes before half-time, 5ft 5" Saviola chased a rare punt from defence and outmuscled 6ft 4" Mladen Krstajic before twisting past Milan Dudic and into the box. His low shot was blocked by Jevric, but as ever an Argentine was first to rebound, Rodriguez pouncing to slam it home.

Argentina had the match won and everyone knew it, from the elated Diego Maradona dancing in the stands to the outclassed Serbian players battling gamely throughout the second half in a bid to preserve their pride. Savo Milosevic even had a chance to grab a goal for Ilija Petkovic's charges, but he headed weakly wide from six yards after excellent work on the right by Danijel Ljuboja.

Though they played with slightly less adventure in the second period, Argentina continued to zing the ball around via sublime one-touch football or extravagant dribbles and flicks. Any straw of hope the Serbians were clutching to was ripped from their grasp in the 65th minute, when Mateja Kezman was harshly sent off for a two-footed tackle on Javier Mascherano, even though he got the ball.

When Messi joined the fray moments after that the Serbians must have feared a massacre and, sure enough, the precocious Barcelona forward soon created a fourth goal, hurdling down the left to deliver a low cross to the back post, where Crespo slid it into the net.

Six minutes from time, it was the turn of another substitute, Tevez, to bring his tricks to the party. Collecting a dainty chip from Mascherano, the 22-year-old nutmegged one defender then barged past another before curling it deftly past the keeper's outstretched arm.

Crespo could have made it six two minutes later but Jevric made a solid block. That was only delaying the inevitable, however, as Argentina were playing at such a rarefied height their opponents simply couldn't live with them. Their sixth goal came in the 88th minute and was almost as breathtaking as the second. After yet more slick interplay, Crespo and Tevez performed a one-two before the

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THIRD EYE

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

If you had thought that the performance of South American team Ecuador was a flash in the pan, then think again. Ecuador yet again proved their critics wrong by handing out a 3-0 drubbing to Central American rivals Costa Rica in a match that saw them take the lead in Group A. Over in Nuremberg, the English sneaked to a late win over Trinidad and Tobago. And in Berlin, Paraguay were sent packing by a late goal from Freddy Ljunberg.

All eyes were in Nuremberg however as Trinidad coach Leo Beenhakker looked to pull through the promise he had made to Sven Goran Eriksson of beating the English. And he came very close as well as John Terry had to clear off the line in the end of the first half.

The islanders held off English attacks courageously and looked on the verge of a historic draw. However, it was not to be as Peter Crouch made up for his profligacy in front of goal by putting in a thumping header. And Gerrard made the scoreline that much sweeter by curling in a 25-yard left foot effort. It was 2-0 in the end; a result that could be said was unfair to Trinidad & Tobago. The English however will be buoyed by the return of Wayne Rooney and the encouraging performances of Aaron Lennon and David Beckham who had to contend with a right back role near the end. If mathematical permutations work out in favour of the neutral, then we could well be seeing an England-Germany clash in the second round.

In Berlin, there was late drama as Freddy Ljunberg headed home

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ITALY V USA

Wary of backlash

AGENCIES, Kaiserslautern

Italy fear that the United States' determination to keep their World Cup hopes alive will make them dangerous opponents here in Saturday's Group E match.

The Americans were trounced 3-0 by the Czech Republic in their opening game and are in danger of an early exit, while victory for the Italians could be enough to earn them a last 16 place.

"We won't be underestimating the United States because they have to win against us or they're out," said Andrea Pirlo, scorer of Italy's first goal in their 2-0 win over Ghana, which stretched their unbeaten run to 19 matches.

"They were well beaten by the Czechs in their first match, but that will only make them more determined to get the three points. They know that they have to play the game of their lives."

Italy coach Marcello Lippi

TEAMS

Italy (4-3-1-2)

1-Gianluigi Buffon; 19-Gianluca Zambrotta, 13-Alessandro Nesta, 5-Fabio Cannavaro, 3-Fabio Grosso; Daniele De Rossi, 21-Andrea Pirlo, 20-Simone Perrotta; 10-Francesco Totti; 9-Luca Toni, 11-Alberto Gilardino.

United States (4-4-2)

18-Kasey Keller; 7-Eddie Lewis, 22-Oguchi Onyewu, 23-Eddie Pope, 6-Steve Cherundolo, 15-Bobby Convey, 10-Claudio Reyna, 4-Pablo Mastroeni, 17-DaMarcus Beasley; 21-Landon Donovan, 20-Brian McBride.

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Italy ready for America's war

AP, Duisburg

If the United States considers its next game "war," Italy is ready.

Even if the Azzurri believe statements made by US forward Eddie Johnson were a little over the top.

"We'll do our talking on the field. That's what we're here to do," forward Vincenzo Iaquinta said Thursday. "But if they consider it war, then it will be war for us, too."

The American team spent Thursday and Friday nights at Ramstein Air Base outside Kaiserslautern, where the United States play Italy today.

Johnson said Wednesday that he hoped some of the troops' spirit

would transfer over to the US team.

"It's like us in the World Cup. We're here for a war," the 22-year-old forward said. "We came here to battle, we came here to represent our country."

The Americans are coming off a 3-0 loss to the Czech Republic and need a win to avoid elimination. Italy opened with a comfortable 2-0 win over Ghana in Group E.

"A war seems a bit exaggerated but we'll prepare ourselves appropriately," striker Alberto Gilardino said.

"We're not underestimating any of our opponents. This is the game of their lives. We have to go out and

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TODAY'S MATCHES

ALL MATCHES LIVE ON ESPN

TEAM	TIME	VENUE
Portugal v Iran	6:50 pm	Frankfurt
Czech Rep v Ghana	9:50 pm	Cologne
Italy v USA	12:50 am (Sunday)	Kaiserslautern

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