



SUN SETTING ON ITALY OR UKRAINE? A hot-air balloon descends as the sun sets behind the skyline of Hamburg on Wednesday. Italy and Ukraine meet in a World Cup quarterfinal in this northern German city today.

PHOTO: AFP

Berlin bubbling

AFP, Berlin

More than one million people will throng the German capital on Friday to watch or just be part of the experience when the host nation face Argentina in the biggest match of the World Cup so far.

Only 72,000 lucky spectators can be in the Olympic Stadium for the eagerly awaited quarterfinal but millions more will take to the streets of Germany to watch it on giant screens.

It is a phenomenon of this World Cup that instead of sitting in front of their TVs at home, Germans have been going to fan areas set up around the country to watch the action on giant screens.

There they have mingled with visitors from around the world, creating an atmosphere that has exceeded the organisers' wildest dreams.

More than 11 million people have come to the fan zones so far, and millions more will follow in the buildup to the final on July 9.

The biggest hit of all has been the so-called Fan Mile which leads

up to Berlin's best-known monument, the Brandenburg Gate.

On Friday, fans young and old will gather at the Gate ahead of the 1500 GMT kickoff, but they had better be there hours in advance.

For Germany's last game, the 3-0 breeze against Ecuador on Sunday, the police were forced to close the gates for safety reasons after 750,000 people packed in.

Stefan Mey, a 25-year-old Berliner draped in the German flag, was on the Fan Mile to watch France beat Spain on Tuesday and said he would be back on Friday for the Germany match.

"I've just started a new job, but I'll be leaving early to get down here. Normally I hate football, but I just love coming for the atmosphere which is so relaxed and cool."

"I am wearing the flag because it's OK now, it's just normal patriotism like in other countries."

Many commentators have remarked that Germany has finally seemed at ease with itself at this World Cup after decades when overt displays of patriotism were frowned on because of the horrors

committed by the Nazis.

Claudia Bruckner and Verena Masmann, both 16, from Aue in eastern Germany said they had been to the Fan Mile every day of a class visit to Berlin.

"We are so sad because we have to leave Berlin early on Friday, but we'll watch the match on a big screen in our hometown," Verena said.

"Of course we think Germany can win the World Cup, but Portugal have the cutest player, Cristiano Ronaldo."

Argentinians will be joining the crowd too, said Carlos Delprestito, 48, who is leading a tour group from Buenos Aires.

"Some of our group have tickets for the match, but the others will come here. It is a fantastic, friendly atmosphere."

"I am not surprised how great it has been because Germany is football-mad, perhaps even more than Argentina."

Elsewhere in Berlin, bars were ordering in extra beer for Friday's onslaught and any establishment yet to order a widescreen TV was scrambling to do so.

'No luck involved'

INTERNET, undated

Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro insists luck has had nothing to do with his team reaching the World Cup quarterfinals.

The Azzurri, who took on Ukraine on Friday in Hamburg in the last eight, were rescued by a Francesco Totti penalty conversion one minute from time to beat Australia.

"I am annoyed with what has been said regarding the game against Australia," said the Italy captain.

"People claim we were lucky to go through - but if there was a team that was fortunate during the game it was Australia, who played with 11 men against 10 for most of the second half."

"We actually had more goalscoring chances than they did."

The Juventus central defender has been one of the most solid players in Marcello Lippi's side in Germany.

Cannavaro's contribution has been crucial for the Azzurri, who go into the quarterfinals with just one goal conceded after four games

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Klinsi plays mind games

REUTERS, Berlin

With the help of a team psychologist, Germany coach Juergen Klinsmann has been tapping into a vein of national euphoria for short but potent doses to get the best from his World Cup players.

Klinsmann and his players have described in recent days the way they steer clear of the patriotic fervour swirling throughout Germany until just hours before matches -- and then soak up as much of the national frenzy as they can.

"It's important that we don't get complacent in the days between matches and start thinking things like 'we've played a great tournament' and everyone's praising us, even the foreign press is raving about us so that's good enough for us now," defender Christoph Metzelder said in an interview with Reuters.

"That's not enough for us. We've got to stay hungry and blank out everything going on out in the country between matches," he

added after one particularly grueling training session before Friday's quarterfinal match against Argentina.

The workout was held on a pitch miles away from the public. A few dozen journalists who made it past three road blocks and various security checks were the only witnesses to the session in a small venue behind the Olympiastadion World Cup venue.

"And then right before we go to the stadium on match days we open ourselves up to all that enthusiasm buzzing around and soak up as much of the atmosphere as we can," added Metzelder.

"We look at film highlights, get pumped listening to music and let the crowds fire us up even more. They've been just unbelievable. We've been able to absorb all the euphoria and use it to our advantage. It's made us better in every match."

Klinsmann has put an emphasis on the mental aspects of the game ever since he took charge two years ago -- when Germany were in a

deep crisis after Rudi Voeller quit and two other candidates offered the job turned it down.

One of Klinsmann's first acts was to appoint a team psychologist, Hans-Dieter Herrmann from Heidelberg University, to help his players deal with the pressures of playing at the highest level and get top performances out of his men.

It was, like many of Klinsmann's moves, controversial at first when Herrmann became the first psychologist on the payroll in the German soccer association's history.

But it seems to be paying off now.

Klinsmann also put the team in an isolated hotel in a quiet, leafy corner of Berlin. Fans get nowhere near the luxury hotel cordoned off from the public. Klinsmann also picked Berlin for psychological reasons -- the final will be here on July 9.

"From the first matches we've sensed this growing wave of enthusiasm out there in the rest of the country," said assistant coach

Joachim Loew at a news conference on Wednesday.

"We sense that intensively before the match, the euphoria and excitement," he added. "We use the film highlights to get the players going emotionally. We're trying to think up a possible trick or two for Friday."

Before the first knockout round match against Sweden, Klinsmann abruptly switched from being a friendly, supportive, understanding type of coach into a cold, demanding task-master.

He suddenly raised the pressure on his team, demanding victory against Sweden one day before the match and warning darkly it would be a "disaster" for a Germany team to exit before the semi-final.

The trick worked. Germany played their best match in years and easily won 2-0 after two goals in the first 12 minutes.

"I think it was hard for Sweden to react after the two early goals," Klinsmann said in Munich after the match. "They must have been hit hard mentally by that."

World Cup Germany 2006

The story so far after 56 games

Match results

44 won, 12 draws

132 goals in...

67 First half, 58 Second half

Best attacking record

Germany, Argentina, Brazil: 10 goals

Best defence

Italy Portugal Brazil: 1 goal

Goals per match

6 goals	2
5 goals	2
4 goals	9
3 goals	11
2 goals	15
1 goal	11
0 goals	6

Leading scorers

4 goals	Miroslav Klose (Ger)
3 goals	Ronaldo (Brazil)
3 goals	Hernan Crespo (Arg)
3 goals	Lukas Podolski (Ger)
3 goals	Maxi Rodriguez (Arg)
3 goals	Fernando Torres (Spa)
3 goals	David Villa (Spa)

Did you know...

Top scores
Argentina - Serbia-Mont. 6-0
Germany - Costa-Rica 4-2

Average goals per game
2.35

Teams with 4 wins
Germany, Brazil, Portugal

Sanctions

25	310	10
Red cards	Yellow cards	Penalties

280606 AFP

Ukraine make their mark

REUTERS, Berlin

World Cup debutants Ukraine go into Friday's quarterfinal against Italy knowing that whatever the result they have already made their mark.

But although they have surpassed their goal of reaching the knockout stage, they do not want to stop there and have their sights set on creating an upset against the fancied Italians.

"We are not afraid of playing Italy, we will play freely. We are going to aim for victory," coach Oleg Blokhin said late on Wednesday.

"Italy are more under pressure because they are the favourites in our game and we have already

achieved what we wanted to. We have already made history." Ukraine came into the tournament after an impressive qualifying campaign, clinching the first European place at the finals, but they have been criticised for playing uninspiring football in their matches so far.

Whatever the style, the achievement is indisputable.

"People are saying we are playing practical, modest football... I like the football Ukraine are playing -- we are in the quarter-finals," said Blokhin.

The game kicks off at 1900 GMT on Friday in Hamburg and the winner will face either Germany or Argentina in the semi-finals.

Saviola 60% sure

REUTERS, Herzogenaurach

Argentina striker Javier Saviola said beating Germany in Friday's World Cup quarterfinal in Berlin would be the biggest achievement of his career and spur his country towards the title.

"I think it is one of the most important matches of my career," Saviola said on Wednesday.

"If we get through, we'll have a lot of things in our favour, a lot of confidence after beating a direct rival for the title," the player nicknamed "Little Rabbit" told a news conference.

"We have good chances to win, I'd say 60 (percent), let's give it a bit more than Germany," said Saviola, who scored once in the 2-1 win over Ivory Coast in Argentina's opening game, taking his international tally to 10.

Saviola, coach Jose Pekerman's choice to partner Hernan Crespo in attack in all Argentina's matches except the 0-0 draw against the Netherlands, said he expected both teams to go for goal from the start.

"I think that with the quality of the players on the pitch, both teams will look for the rival goal, neither will sit back, it will be an electric match," the 24-year-old said.

"The worst thing we could do is

sit back, hand over the ball... The first team to score will gain a lot.

"Attack is our best weapon," said Saviola, whose team have scored 10 goals and conceded two in four matches. "We must not slow the ball down, our team is made for that (attacking)."

Saviola said he was not worried about facing the tall German defenders.

"I've always been accustomed to defenders being taller, 50 or 80 centimetres bigger. I don't think about that, if I did I could never go out on to the pitch," the 1.69-metre tall Saviola said.

"If we start to play in the air, they're going to get the better of us... We have to keep the ball down and play it quickly like against Serbia," he said referring to Argentina's 6-0 rout of Serbia & Montenegro in their second match.

Saviola, who will win his 35th cap if he plays on Friday, added that Argentina are not thinking about the pressure of a stadium packed with home fans affecting decisions made by the referee, Lubos Michel of Slovakia.

"Jose has always made a point of not giving any importance to the refereeing," he said referring to Pekerman.

Shining out of the limelight

INTERNET, undated

Had Javier Mascherano been a member of Queen, he would have been neither Freddie Mercury nor Brian May. Lead vocals and virtuoso guitar riffs are not for him. Rather, he would have been John Deacon, reliably laying down the bass lines and often writing the songs, but most often remaining in the shadows, doing the essential but unsung work.

What else would you expect from a youngster who in the country of Diego Maradona and Leo Messi, Roberto Ayala and Gabriel Heinze chooses as his role model not a flashy striker or an inspirational defender but that most unsung of water-carriers, Claude Makelele? The holding midfielder is the metronome who allows the Argentina orchestra to mesmerise the opposition. He is also the defensive bulwark who allows Juan

Roman Riquelme and the other virtuosos to strut their stuff, knowing that their backs are covered.

Mascherano, who turned 22 this month, learnt at an early age not only where he wanted to be but who he wanted to be on the pitch. It happened six years ago, when he first saw Makelele directing the Real Madrid midfield.

"I always watched a lot of football and I tried to treat each game as a learning experience, a chance to study the best and pick up things I could then incorporate into my game," Mascherano said. "I always loved watching Matias Almeyda and I've been told my style is similar to his. But, most of all, I love Claude Makelele. He's the best in the world in that position and in many ways is the player I tried to emulate."

He does not see his predilection for the unsung Frenchman as unusual. In fact, you get the sense that his vision of football is far more

Makelele than Maradona. "OK, so you don't get the glory and you don't get into the highlights and maybe some don't see what you do," Mascherano said. "But in that role the game always goes through you. You are always in the middle of it and you are always battling, always fighting. It's like the decathlon, you have to do so many things pass, tackle, foul if necessary and, what's more, you're always thinking. Your brain never gets a rest."

"That's what I love. I've always liked defending more than attacking anyway. And to know that your teammates depend on you so much, that you have so much responsibility, well, that spurs you on even more."

Maturity is not a word often associated with footballers, yet when speaking to Mascherano, it is the first word that comes to mind. He moves with the same precision and self-assuredness on the pitch

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UNSUNG HERO: Argentina midfielder Javier Alejandro Mascherano (L) fights for the ball with Mexican striker Jose during their round of 16 match at Leipzig on June 24.

PHOTO: AFP