



Van Persie the diva?

INTERNET

Netherlands striker Robin van Persie's petulant reaction to his substitution in their World Cup second-round victory on Monday could be the first headline crack in the united front so far presented by the squad.

Van Persie reacted angrily when he was replaced by Klaas-Jan Huntelaar 10 minutes before the end of the 2-1 win over Slovakia which set up a quarterfinal meeting with Brazil.

The forward came off the pitch and remonstrated with coach Bert van Marwijk and then took no part in the Dutch celebrations of Wesley Sneijder's late goal that doubled their lead.

"What I said to Van Marwijk was not over the top," Van Persie, who has scored just once in four games, told reporters.

"I just want to be important to the team and score. I wanted to stay on as we would have had more space with Slovakia chasing an equaliser, and I felt that I could profit from that.

"I have hardly scored and that was gnawing at me, although I played well."

Van Persie said his reaction had nothing to do with pressure, did not influence other players, and the way he responded to such situations sometimes annoyed even him.

While Van Marwijk said he was not angry with Van Persie and that he understood his disappointment, Dutch media reports said the coach called the squad together when they returned to their hotel in Johannesburg to clear the air.

Van Persie's outburst was in stark contrast to how Dirk Kuyt handled his move to the left flank to make way for Arjen Robben's return on the right for the last 16 match.

Kuyt filled his role without complaint and six minutes from time, when put through by Giovanni van Bronckhorst, spurned a chance to shoot so he could set up Sneijder to settle the game.

"I spoke with Gio before the match about some little things and just needed a quick glance at him to know what he was going to do," Kuyt told Reuters.

"I saw the goalkeeper coming out and, when I got past him, I saw two defenders on their way back to protect the goal. Then you know there will be space for an incoming midfielder at the 16-metre line."

Despite their first win in the knockout phase of a major tournament since beating Sweden on penalties in the Euro 2004 quarterfinals, Kuyt conceded they had a sloppy phase after Robben's opening goal.

Carelessness in their passing game had forced them back, he said, while they also gave away more chances to the Slovaks than they had to previous opponents.

"But we replied with our chances and the second goal and that is also our quality, in every situation we always keep creating our own chances," he added.

Netherlands face Brazil in the last eight on Friday in Port Elizabeth.

Inquest for French coach

AFP, Paris

Disgraced French football coach Raymond Domenech and ex-football federation supremo Jean-Pierre Escalettes will appear before lawmakers on Wednesday to explain France's chaotic World Cup campaign.

The two football heavyweights are to address a hearing of the National Assembly's Cultural Affairs commission, called to discuss the disastrous showing of the French squad in South Africa.

France has reacted with a mix of humiliation and anger to the team's elimination from the tournament which came after two defeats, one draw, a players' strike and foul-mouthed squabbles in the dressing room.

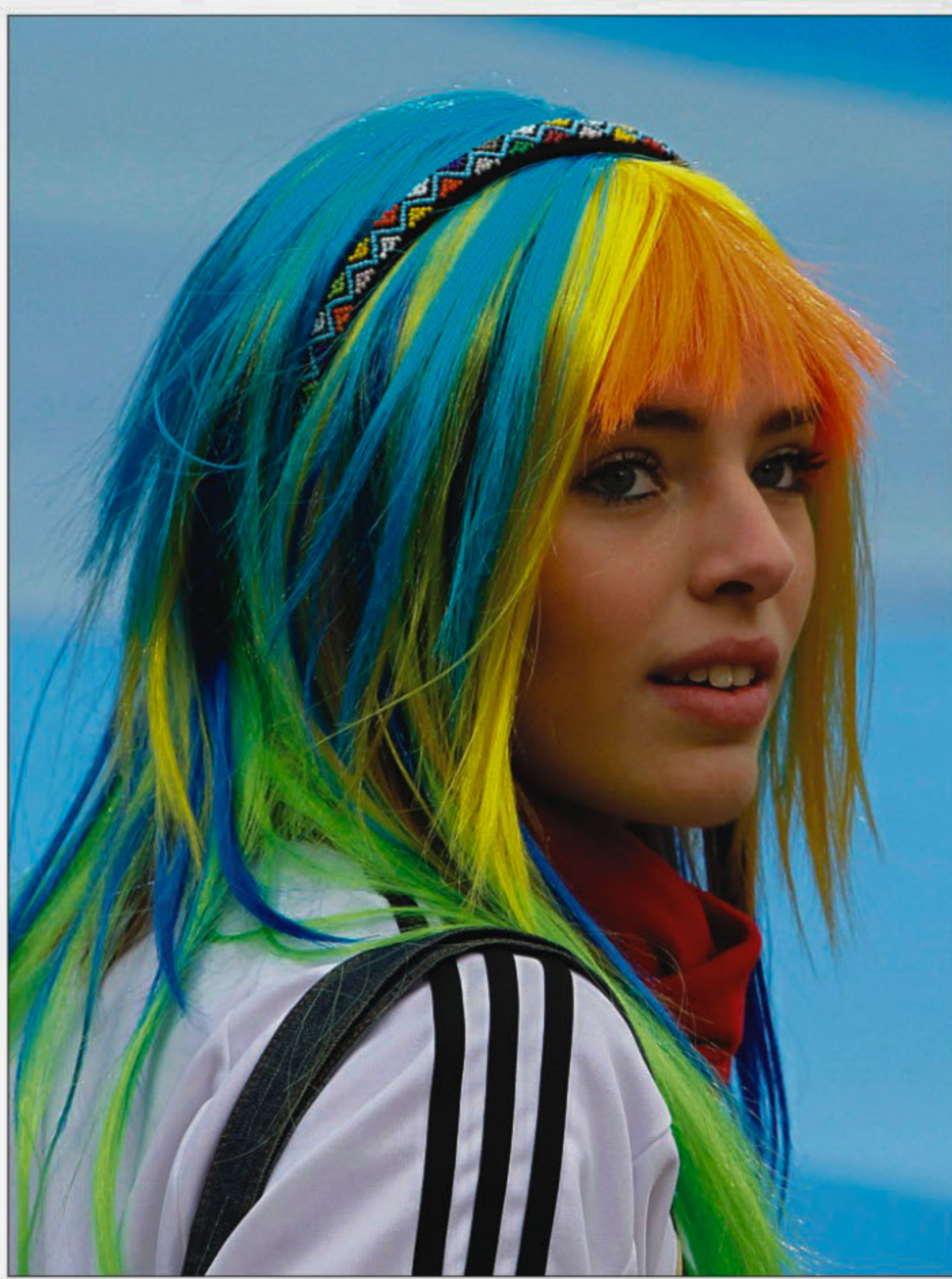
Domenech, the outgoing coach, and Escalettes, who resigned on Monday as French Football Federation (FFF) president, have both been harshly criticised over the Bleus' debacle.

Members of President Nicolas Sarkozy's governing UMP party are pressing for a commission of inquiry while the president himself has said that those responsible for the disaster should be held accountable.

The parliamentary hearings were scheduled as FIFA president Sepp Blatter warned the French government against any meddling in football affairs, which he stressed were the purview of the football federation.

"We don't want political interference," Blatter said in Johannesburg. "The national sports law exists but in the FIFA statutes, no political interference can be tolerated."

French Sports Minister Roselyne Bachelot, who traveled to South Africa and gave the team a severe dressing-down over their poor performance, will also address deputies on Tuesday.



A Japanese fan wearing a colourful wig waits for the start of the 2010 World Cup second round match between Japan and Paraguay at the Loftus Versfeld stadium in Pretoria yesterday.

Blundering refs absent from open day

INTERNET

Referees Jorge Larrionda and Roberto Rosetti were nowhere to be seen Tuesday at FIFA's third open day for media to meet referees in Pretoria.

Larrionda officiated over England's defeat to Germany and caused international uproar when failing to spot that Frank Lampard's second-half shot came off the underside of the crossbar and landed clearly behind the goal-line.

Had the goal stood, England would have levelled the Round of 16 game in Bloemfontein at 2-2 but instead the Uruguayan referee waved play on and Fabio Capello's side went on to lose 4-1.

In the subsequent match between Argentina and Mexico, Italian referee Rosetti allowed Carlos Tevez's opening goal for Argentina to stand even though the Manchester City striker scored it from a clearly offside position.

"They are taking part in a recovery session and they decided not to be here today," explained FIFA's head of refereeing, Jose-Maria Garcia-Aranda. "It's a personal decision."

However, Howard Webb managed to be present at the FH Odendaal High School despite officiating in Brazil's 3-0 victory Tuesday night over Chile, although he did not participate in training.

FIFA president Joseph Blatter apologised to England and Mexico earlier Tuesday for the mistakes by Rosetti and Larrionda, announcing that football's ruling body was now re-opening the discussion on the use of technology in football.

The first talks will be held by members of the International Football Association Boards (IFAB) in Cardiff in July.

Champions League final referee Webb said he sympathised with Larrionda, revealing that when he makes a wrong decision, he is "devastated" and it takes him days to get over it.

"He will be extremely disappointed," said Webb of how he thought Larrionda would be feeling.

The 39-year-old Englishman, who is in the running to referee the World Cup final on July 11, said he is open to idea of new technology in football while Garcia-Aranda said referees would implement any rule changes decided by FIFA.

"It is up to FIFA and the IFAB to decide these things," he said.

Garcia-Aranda also defended the performances of referees in South Africa, arguing that people were talking about "three or four decisions" even though more than 50 of the 64 games have taken place.

"Nobody is talking about the excellent goals which have been allowed because of the excellent decisions taken by the referees and assistant referees in 54 matches," he said.



HOW COULD YOU DO THAT? Netherlands striker Robin van Persie (L) argues with coach Bert Van Marwijk after the former was substituted during their Round of 16 match against Slovakia on Monday at the Moses Mabhida stadium in Durban.

Slovakia hail Robben

AFP, Durban

Slovakia bowed out of the World Cup with a second round 2-1 defeat to the Netherlands on Monday as coach Vladimir Weiss hailed Dutch winger Arjen Robben an "absolute genius".

Robben scored the first Dutch goal, controlling a long Wesley Sneijder pass and cutting in past defenders Jan Durica and Radoslav Zabavnik to drill a left-footed shot in at the near post past the despairing dive of Jan Mucha.

Weiss, whose team had claimed the famous scalp of defending champions Italy in the group stage to ensure their progression to the knockout phase on their World Cup debut, said the Bayern Munich winger had been "decisive".

"We prepared for three days for Robben, but he is an absolute genius," said Weiss.

"He knows exactly what he's doing, that's why he's played for all those great clubs. When I saw his name on the team startlist I knew it made the Netherlands 50 percent stronger."

Weiss admitted that his team failed to capitalise on three opportunities at 1-0, Dutch goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg producing some fine saves before Sneijder made it 2-0 in the 85th minute, although the Slovaks pulled one back with a late consolation penalty from Robert Vittek.

"With a bit of luck we could have been in it," he said. "The penalty will make us feel a little better on the flight home, but the one who advances is the better team."

"The Netherlands were great opponents. My players showed great heart and courage, and good football against Italy and the Dutch."

"I'm very proud that we were in a position to play in the round of 16 and the players showed what they were capable of."

"No coach is ever happy to lose having had three high-quality chances. But we didn't manage it."

Henry, Toure to leave Barca

GUARDIAN

Barcelona have confirmed Thierry Henry and Yaya Toure are to leave the club. Both players were widely expected to leave the Nou Camp this summer, with Henry tipped to move to Major League Soccer in the United States and Toure thought to be on the verge of a switch to Manchester City.

A statement on Barcelona's official website read: "Barcelona director-general Joan Oliver has said that the club has agreed the exits of Yaya Toure and Thierry Henry but that at the moment the final moves are in their hands."

Henry, a member of the France World Cup squad which endured a disastrous campaign in South Africa, joined Barcelona from Arsenal in 2007 but, despite winning the Champions League in 2009 and two La Liga titles, he has not been able to replicate the form he showed in London.

The Barcelona website added: "In case of Toure, Oliver has recognised an understanding between the club interested in the midfielder, Manchester City, and Barca, but the transfer cannot be made official yet."

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Quiet return for England

INTERNET

A tired and weary English team returned home on Tuesday after their ouster from the World Cup.

No fans were in sight to welcome Fabio Capello's men when they stepped off the plane at London's Heathrow airport at around 6:20 a.m.

The players, most of them clad in their England suits, looked weary. Many of them were carrying hand baggage and some had pillows under their arms.

The English squad has been roundly criticized in the press for their poor performance in South Africa, culminating in a 4-1 Round of 16 thrashing by Germany on Sunday.

Several newspapers called on Capello to resign, among them The Sun, which said David Beckham should replace the Italian coach.

The former England captain, who now plays for Los Angeles Galaxy, was ruled out of the squad because of injury but accompanied the team to South Africa and gave them encouragement and tips from the bench.

"Becks looks like a boss in waiting," The Sun headlined, using Beckham's nickname.

"Beckham has been learning fast and though he has always said he wasn't interested in management, looks to have got the taste for it at this World Cup," the tabloid wrote.

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp, 63, was quoted Tuesday as saying that the next England coach should be English, that he was

English and that no Englishman would turn the job down.

On Monday, Capello attributed the squad's lethargic performance to tiredness after a long Premier League season.

In a press conference in Rustenburg, South Africa, Capello said he wanted to stay on as England manager, but would have to wait two weeks to learn if the Football Association (FA) wanted to keep him.

"I have got a contract and I refused a lot of opportunities to be a manager from a lot of important clubs because I would like to stay here," he said.

The 64-year-old Italian, who last month extended his contract until 2012, said: "I understand a lot after this tournament, because the performance was not what we wanted. We were very tired."

English newspapers have speculated that cutting loose Capello and his assistants would cost the FA 12 million pounds (about 18 million dollars).

Shortly before the World Cup, the FA agreed to take a break clause out of Capello's contract, which pays him 5 million pounds a year.

Ex-England national team footballer Alan Shearer was quoted Tuesday as saying that England's team at the World Cup had "simply not played for" Capello.

"They never looked comfortable and I get the impression they were not too happy. It was not a settled camp," Shearer said.

Romero's 'no' to replays

AFP, Pretoria

Argentina goalkeeper Sergio Romero went against the grain on Monday by calling for footballing authorities to resist the temptation to introduce goalline technology.

"I'm against technology in football. If you put a chip inside the ball you'll take away the vibrancy of great players and football is for living not for technology," he said.

Looking ahead to their next match against Germany in the quarterfinals, the AZ Alkmaar stopper said there were plenty of reasons for the South Americans to be wary, although he said the Germans should also be on their guard.

"Without a doubt Germany are a strong team and they slow down the game like they did in Germany (in March in a friendly which Argentina won 1-0), but we dealt well with that," he said.

"(Lukas) Podolski has a great shot from distance and (Miroslav) Klose chases after every ball."

"(Mesut) Ozil is a very good player, he's left-footed and has good technique."

"They have big players who come up for all the corners

and free-kicks but we know that we have great players and it will be difficult for them."

Four years ago Argentina lost on penalties to Germany at the same stage of the competition.

The German goalkeeper in 2006 Jens Lehmann revealed that he had a "cheat-sheet" on which he had written which way each Argentine player usually shot when he took a spot-kick.

Romero said he doesn't have a similar written aid, but admitted that he and his fellow Argentina goalkeepers have been doing their homework.

"All three of us have been studying all players because you can face a penalty at any time," he said.

"It was sly like a fox to have this cheat-sheet but now we know how and where everyone shoots."

SUMMER CONCERT

World Cup fever gripped an open air concert given by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra after Germany's 4-1 victory over England on Sunday. During the third encore the orchestra's brass section put their horns aside and played vuvuzelas painted in red, black and gold, the colours of the German flag. The orchestra's Romanian director Ion Marin congratulated Germany on their win at the beginning of the concert and said he hoped the audience would find the musical evening just as rewarding. They did.

PILLOWTALK

Japan defender Yuto Nagatomo has brought his favourite pillow with him to the World Cup. The player told the news agency Kyodo he hopes it will help him sleep better and gain enough stamina for the Round-of-16 match against Paraguay. "The team with the greatest staying power will win," he was quoted as saying. "We have a similar style to them (Paraguay) and if they are quicker than we won't win the game. They have two fast wingers and we need to stop them getting in their crosses, otherwise it'll be tough for us to win the game."

WAKAWAKA

Shakira's World Cup song Waka Waka is an old Cameroon military march that has been touched up with new lyrics and is now taking the charts by storm. The song, originally titled Zangalewa, was a hit with the Cameroon pop group Golden Sounds in 1986, South Africa's Sunday Times reported. The group said they were both surprised and pleased to hear the new version on the internet, saying it was an honour for Africa to have the song chosen for the World Cup. The song was inspired by a military march dedicated to soldiers who fought in the Second World War.

BUFFON MARADONA

Former star Italian defender Claudio Gentile has called Diego Maradona a buffon after the Argentine coach referred to him as a killer.

"After what he said, I must agree with the opinion of Pele and Platini: Maradona is more a buffon than a coach," Tuesday's edition of the Italian newspaper La Gazzetta dello Sport quoted Gentile as saying.

Pele is a Brazilian ex-footballer widely regarded as the greatest player of all time. Michel Platini is a French ex-footballer who is currently the president of

UEFA, the governing body of European football.

Maradona had recalled Gentile's hard style of play as he commented on a foul against Lionel Messi during Argentina's 3-1 World Cup win over Mexico on Sunday.

"We are not back in the days of killer defenders like Gentile," Maradona said.

Bad blood between the two dates to when the Argentine star played with Napoli in the 1980s, often vying with Gentile's Juventus for the Serie A title.

Gentile, who won the 1982 World Cup with the Azzurri, recalled that Maradona was sent off in the Spain-hosted tournament for kicking a Brazilian opponent.

"I was never dismissed for violent play," Gentile said. "I was red-carded for a handball in the Champions League, and that was it."

"He's a buffon. That's his opinion, but I don't respect it and I don't agree."

HAIRY STORY

Some fans have put Wayne Rooney's below-par performances at the World Cup down to the fact that the England striker has waxed his chest. Rooney managed 34 goals for Manchester United last season but had removed all his chest hair by the time his side were trounced by Germany. Like the biblical Samson, it seems Rooney's footballing power waned once the player decided to cut his hair off.

STORM BUT NO UMBRELLAS

World Cup organizers warned of a possibly severe storm on Tuesday during the evening's Round of 16 clash in Cape Town between Spain and Portugal - and also reminded fans that umbrellas were banned from the stadium for security reasons.

Flags more than two metres long are also banned.

Hours before the match, scheduled for 8:30 p.m. in Green Point Stadium, organizers of the tournament in South Africa said that all but about 300 admission tickets had been sold.

The stadium has a capacity of 64,100.

The match is the first-ever World Cup encounter between neighbours Spain and Portugal. The 2008 European champions, Spain came into the World Cup as joint favourites with Brazil.

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Federer all for replays

REUTERS, London

A controversial goalline decision at the World Cup only served to back up what Roger Federer already suspected -- that soccer needs replay technology and tennis does not.

The case for introducing technology to aid soccer referees was brought into focus on Sunday when England's Frank Lampard was not awarded a goal in the match against Germany despite the ball clearly crossing the line.

England went on to lose the second-round match 4-1, but the decision not to allow Lampard's first-half strike was a major talking point.

HawkEye, which is used to decide whether a ball has landed in court, was first used at Wimbledon in 2007, but FIFA president Sepp Blatter -- a Swiss compatriot of Federer's -- opposes introducing a similar system for soccer.

Federer, a long-time critic of the HawkEye system in tennis, said the significance of

goalline decisions meant it was high time soccer followed tennis's lead.

"We have electronic line calling even though we don't need it," the Swiss said after waltzing into the quarterfinals at the All England Club with victory over Austria's Jurgen Melzer.

"They should have it, and they don't. So it's a choice the guys have to make at the top. I think it's rough. To me it seems like it's just crying (out) for a change."

"One forehead down the line doesn't change the outcome of the match; whereas one goal changes the entire mindset of a team, of a strategy."

Federer said tennis had line judges whose only job was to oversee line calls and so HawkEye was unnecessary.

"Guys are sitting there, not moving. They're only staring at the line. It's so much more simple. It's going to even out throughout a career or a season, the good and bad calls."

"Whereas goals, it's such a huge impact in those 90 minutes. It changes everything."



SHAKIRA

WORLD CUP ONE TWOS SOUTH AFRICA 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP



ROONEY