



Press roast Ronaldo

AFP, Lisbon

The world's most expensive player Cristiano Ronaldo was roundly blamed by the Portuguese media on Wednesday for the country's 1-0 defeat by Spain in their World Cup Last 16 match.

Coach Carlos Queiroz does not escape censure either, but it is mainly Ronaldo - the team captain - who receives the most stringent criticism as the Portuguese came home early once again without the World Cup having only conceded one goal in their four matches but also only scoring in one game - the 7-0 hammering of North Korea.

"Ronaldo played one of his worst matches ever for the national side," commented Correio da Manhã.

Publico took the same dim point of view of the 25-year-old Real Madrid star's displays.

"Ronaldo missed out completely on this World Cup. (Jose) Mourinho (the new Real Madrid coach) said that Portugal would not win this World Cup even if Ronaldo was going at 1000 kilometres an hour.

"But he (Ronaldo) did not even get near the speed of a cruise ship," it opined in its editorial.

The editor of Diario de Noticias (DN) said that the former Manchester United player - who cost Real Madrid a world record 94 million euros last summer - 'had virtually not existed'.

The same line was taken by sports daily A Bola who said 'Ronaldo had left the World Cup without leaving his mark'.

Its rival Record had a photograph of an upset Ronaldo on its front page with the headline: "We have been cut down in our prime".

Queiroz, who got to know Ronaldo well when he was assistant to Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United, gets blasted as well especially for his removal of lone striker Hugo Almeida in the 58th minute with the match scoreless.

"Portugal eliminated after an error by Queiroz", was the DN headline.

The DN editor was scathing in his assessment of the Mozambique-born Queiroz, who had already attracted criticism during the qualifying stages when the 2006 semi-finalists had to win a play-off to reach South Africa.

Portugal had been led by "an unambitious coach". "Honestly, Queiroz' team reached its rightful level. The best team won, justifiably and without a surprise."

"The huge mistake to take off striker Hugo Almeida in the 58th minute opened the way for our elimination against Spain", asserted the Correio da Manhã.

Goalkeeper Eduardo, who was in tears after the defeat, received praise from all round for a string of saves that denied the Spanish an even more impressive margin of victory.

"Eduardo was a giant, where the score could have been even bigger", purred his club coach Sporting Braga's Domingos Paciencia in DN.

"Eduardo, was very assured, and did not deserve this defeat," agreed Correio da Manhã.



PHOTO: AFP
STORY OF HIS WORLD CUP: Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo is on his knees during their Round of 16 match against Spain at the Green Point Stadium in Cape Town on Tuesday.

'A broken man'

AFP, Cape Town

Portuguese captain Cristiano Ronaldo confessed to being a broken man on Wednesday after his side's crushing 1-0 World Cup defeat to Iberian rivals Spain.

The 25-year-old Real Madrid star said he felt a deep sadness at their exit at the hands of the European champions, who progressed to a quarterfinal meeting with Paraguay thanks to David Villa's fourth goal of the tournament.

"I feel a broken man, completely disconsolate, frustrated and an unimaginable sadness," the 94 million-euro man said in a statement.

Ronaldo arrived in South Africa vowing to confirm his status as one of the game's most enduring talents, but he once again failed to produce his club form at country level at a major championships.

Sporadically decisive in the group phase, when he scored once in a 7-0 thrashing of North Korea, Ronaldo was unable to exert any kind of influence as the 2006 semi-finalists succumbed to Spain's fabled passing carousel.

Having played on the left against North Korea and as a lone central forward in the 0-0 draw with Brazil, the world's most expensive player began Tuesday's game on the right.

His first involvement saw him horribly mis-control a kick-out from Portugal goalkeeper Eduardo and his first dribble down the flank ended with a foul by Carles Puyol that

went unpunished, much to the Real Madrid star's displeasure.

The skipper registered Portugal's first shot on target with a typically ambitious long-range free-kick and his next dead-ball effort, from all of 37 metres, forced a save from club-mate Iker Casillas.

And he spat at TV

INTERNET

Cristiano Ronaldo's disappointing World Cup ended on a sour note as he was caught spitting towards a cameraman following Portugal's 1-0 loss to Spain in the second round.

Portugal captain Ronaldo reacted angrily to the cameraman's attempts to follow him off the pitch in close proximity immediately after the final whistle, waving him away before spitting in his direction while looking down the barrel of the camera, an act that was broadcast around the world.

While he was taking his frustration out on the man behind the lens, Ronaldo's spit appeared to the global audience to be directed towards them in an ugly act that could upset many of the fans of one of football's most marketable men.

After the match, he told reporters to "talk to Carlos Queiroz" about Portugal's elimination from the World Cup.

But the number seven cut a subdued figure in the second half as Spain tightened their grip on the match and was left even more isolated when coach Carlos Queiroz withdrew strapping target man Hugo Almeida in the 58th minute.

Ronaldo appeared to be confused by Queiroz consistently changing tactics and the game finished with Ronaldo once getting the fan out of their seats.

To make matters worse, he was forced to deny that he insulted his coach.

Ronaldo stalked off refusing to answer questions after the match save to remark to a TV crew: "How can I explain it (the defeat). Ask the question of Carlos Queiroz."

Ronaldo, who ended up trophyless at Real Madrid last season after his transfer from Manchester United, was roundly criticised at home for that and for not assuming his responsibilities as the national captain.

"When I said put the question to the coach, it is just because Carlos Queiroz was holding a press conference," explained Ronaldo, the 2008 World Footballer of the Year.

"I was not in a position to explain what was what. I am a human being, and like any human being I suffer and I have the right to suffer alone."

"I know that I am the captain, and I have always assumed and will assume my responsibilities."

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Forlan no longer forlorn

REUTERS, Kimberley

Uruguay striker Diego Forlan, dubbed 'Forlorn' during his spell in England, is relishing a run of form that has helped take the South Americans to their first World Cup quarter-final in 40 years.

"Yes, I'm enjoying the football and everything... I always like playing football," Forlan told Reuters.

He has scored twice at the tournament so far and has clicked with strike partner Luis Suarez, who has three goals, to help Uruguay top a group that included 2006 runners-up France.

Uruguay face Ghana on Friday for a place in the semi-final after defeating South Korea 2-1 in the second round.

Forlan arrived in South Africa after a great season with Atletico Madrid. He scored twice against Fulham in the Europa League final to help the Spanish side lift the trophy.

"The way the team played with Atletico Madrid was nice and also being in the World Cup is really nice so I'm enjoying this," said Forlan.

He is playing in his second World Cup and follows in the footsteps of his father Pablo, a defender who represented Uruguay at the 1966 and 1974 editions.

With his long blonde hair tied back in a headband, Forlan is instantly recognisable among his darker-hued compatriots.

He did not have the best of luck during his two years with Manchester United, where the

goals dried up and he earned the unfortunate nickname Diego Forlorn.

His strike rate of 10 goals in 63 league games, albeit with 40 substitute appearances, hardly set the Premier league alight.

However, he endeared himself to the fans with his habit of whipping off his shirt and bearing his torso when he did score and he does not look back on those days with regret.

"I was very happy. The only thing is I wasn't playing but I had a great time there. I left because I wanted to play regularly. That was the only reason I left," he said.

Forlan has flourished since moving to Spain in 2004, with 120 goals in 208 matches for Villarreal and Atletico Madrid. He won the Pichichi trophy for being top La Liga top scorer in 2005 and 2009 when he also claimed the European Golden Shoe award.

His seven strikes in the World Cup qualifiers played a big part in getting Uruguay to South Africa.

Now Uruguay are still in contention while several big powers have fallen although he sympathised with England's plight.

The 31-year-old has also been a hit with the locals in Kimberley, Uruguay's base camp for the campaign.

When fans were allowed to meet the players at the start of a training session on Tuesday, one teenage girl declared: "I love you!" The ice cool striker faltered if only for a moment.

Villa backs Torres

REUTERS, Cape Town

Spanish goal hero David Villa has rallied behind Fernando Torres after his strike partner turned in another disappointing World Cup performance in the European champions' 1-0 win over Portugal on Tuesday.

Torres has looked well short of his best after returning from knee surgery days before the tournament and Spain's passage into the last eight, where they will face Paraguay, was only secured after he was replaced in the second half by burly Basque striker Fernando Llorente.

"We know what state his knee was in a month ago and I don't agree with those who say that Fernando Torres' performances have been below par," Villa told reporters at Cape Town's Green Point Stadium.

"The only blame you can pin on him in the opening stages (of the World Cup) is that he hasn't scored," he added. "His desire to be with the team has been spectacular."

Coach Vicente del Bosque has kept faith with Torres, deploying him in attack with Villa from the start in Spain's last three matches in South Africa after bringing him on as a substitute against Switzerland in their opening Group H game.

The Liverpool striker has yet to repay that faith with a goal and Llorente's impressive contribution on Tuesday could prompt Del Bosque to reconsider his tactics.

Del Bosque told a news conference after the Portugal match that he had withdrawn Torres because the striker was tired.

"More than a tactical change, it was about bringing on a player who was fresh," he said. "Llorente brought that physical vitality to the team."

Asia can feel proud

AFP, Cape Town

Asia's World Cup may be over with Japan's agonising elimination in a penalty shoot-out, but the Asian Football Confederation teams did enough to reaffirm the region's growing stature.

Two out of four made the last 16, compared to just one out of five from Africa, and they did it in historical fashion with neither South Korea or Japan ever going beyond the group phase on foreign soil before.

Japan came into the tournament under a dark cloud after losing four games in a row, but they left with their dignity restored after beating Denmark 3-1 and Cameroon 1-0, and only narrowly losing 1-0 to the Netherlands.

It put them into the knock-out rounds and they were unlucky to fall 5-3 on penalties to Paraguay on Tuesday after the game ended in a scoreless draw.

South Korea won plaudits for their exploits, which tempted millions of people onto the streets of Seoul and

other major Korean cities to watch their games live on big screen televisions.

They came into the tournament among an elite group of just six nations to have qualified for seven World Cups in a row, along with Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Italy and Spain.

But unlike the rest, before South Africa they could only boast of one win on foreign soil - a 2-1 victory over Togo in 2006.

They added to that here with an opening 2-0 victory over Greece, before crashing 4-1 to Argentina and then drawing 2-2 with Nigeria.

While they shined, Australia, who made the last 16 in Germany 2006, flopped and with coach Jim Verbeek departing a shake up of the old guard is expected.

The Socceroos' campaign got off to a disastrous start when they were routed 4-0 by the Germans and had influential midfielder Tim Cahill sent off.

They kept themselves in mathematical contention for the knockout phase when they drew 1-1 with Ghana and produced their best performance with a pulsating 2-1 victory over the higher-ranked Serbia.

But they ultimately lost out on a place in the last 16 on goal difference.

North Korea, at their first World Cup in 44 years, were the one team truly out of their depth.

They put up an impressive performance in a 2-1 defeat to Brazil but were routed 7-0 by Portugal and 3-0 by the Ivory Coast.

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Silvio's dual passion

AFP, Sao Paulo

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi appeared eager to score points with Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Tuesday, confessing to the president of World Cup-hungry Brazil that he had a soft spot not just for women, but football fans too.

After a closed-door meeting Tuesday in which the countries' recently strained bilateral ties were discussed, Berlusconi emerged to say he had shared a few of his opinions with the Brazilian leader, namely that "football fanatics and women are the most likeable" people in the world.

"Lula told me: 'No, no, I've been married for 35 years.' But he had this look like he was figuring out some things," the Italian leader quipped, to laughter from Lula and aides.

Media tycoon Berlusconi has been involved in

several sex scandals, and his second wife Veronica Lario filed for divorce last year after revelations that he attended the 18th birthday party of an aspiring model who called him "Daddy."

As for football, Berlusconi, who is also president of AC Milan, and his fellow Italians are the ones doing the soul-searching. Their beloved Azzurri were bumped out of the World Cup in the group stage, while Brazil on Monday breezed past Chile and into the quarterfinals.

Lula, a big football fan, lamented Italy's early departure from South Africa.

"We will not have the Brazil-Italy final," Lula said. "But we will have four members of (regional trade group) Mercosur in the quarterfinals of the cup."

Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay - all past world champions -- as well as Paraguay are among the eight remaining teams in the tournament.



PHOTO: AFP
Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (L) gives a signed Brazilian team jersey to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi at a meeting in Sao Paulo on Tuesday.

MARTINO'S TEARS OF JOY

Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino was in floods of tears after his side reached the World Cup quarterfinals for the first time although he was soon trying to play down the waterworks.

A win on penalties over Japan after a dreadful 0-0 draw in the last 16 tie on Tuesday was initially too much for the Argentine.

"There's a lot of fear and tension during a match and it's difficult to go through a match like that," he told a news conference.

"Everybody knows that it's unfair to have it decided by penalties. We didn't play too well but we were looking to be decisive. So many things go through your mind so there is a reason for tears."

But, as if to reassert his authority and set a new target for his players among the emotion, Martino said the achievement meant nothing compared to other personal moments even if it was an almighty success for the small South American nation.

"We may not give the achievement its necessary importance now. We may well give it the necessary importance afterwards," he said.

A FOOTBALLING JUSTICE!

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said the United States, England and France deserved to be eliminated in the World Cup for imposing nuclear sanctions on Tehran, newspapers reported on Wednesday.

"In this World Cup you see a meaningful correlation between politics and diplomacy and football," Mottaki was quoted as saying by Tehran Emrouz newspaper.

"Those who played a key role in new sanctions against Iran such as America, England and France were eliminated in the early stages and some countries that were somehow involved in sanctions did not get into higher rounds," he said.

Iranians are fervent football enthusiasts but their national team did not qualify for this year's World Cup in South Africa.

TRESPASSER FINED

A fan who walked into the England team dressing room after a World Cup match will not face a criminal trial after he agreed to pay a fine, a South African Court ruled on Wednesday.

Pavlos Joseph, 32, was arrested for entering the England changing room following the side's disappointing goalless draw against Algeria on June 18.

His lawyer Craig Webster told Cape Town Magistrates' Court that prosecutors had dropped further charges against Joseph after he paid a 750 rand (\$98) fine for trespassing.

THAI PUNTERS ARRESTED

More than 1,000 punters in the Thai capital have been arrested in a crackdown on illegal gambling during the World Cup, police said Wednesday.

Bangkok's force has arrested 56 bookmakers or their associates and 1,156 gamblers who have made bets totalling 3.4 million baht (105,000 dollars).

Thai courts have so far handed jail sentences ranging from one to six months to 24 gamblers, although most of the sentences have been suspended, the police statement said.

Most forms of gambling are outlawed in the kingdom but it remains popular, despite the threat of a 1,000 baht fine or jail term of up to one year for having a flutter on the tournament, which began on June 11 in South Africa.



MOTTAKI



LIPPI

sky Italia television. "Lippi was guilty of arrogance and that proved to be a catastrophe," slammed the Azzurri hero.

"Everyone got things wrong and he did first of all. He called up players who were unmotivated and I would've made very different decisions.

"We knew for the last year that this squad could not do well. There were no real leaders.

"Besides, after the victory of four years ago in Berlin, we were lacking that hunger for success.

"These players were hailed and praised for four years. If I had been in Lippi's place, I would've called up Francesco Totti, Antonio Cassano, Mario Balotelli and Marco Borriello."