



PHOTO: AFP

INTERVIEW WITHOUT ANY QUESTIONS: Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas (R) is about to be interviewed by journalist and girlfriend Sara Carbonero (2nd from L) after the quarterfinal win over Paraguay at Ellis Park stadium in Johannesburg on Saturday.

Roque sees tough time for Spain

AFP, Johannesburg

Paraguay striker Roque Santa Cruz expects Spain will find it tough to beat red-hot Germany in Wednesday's World Cup semifinal in Durban.

The Manchester City forward said the European champions were not much better than Paraguay in their hard-fought 1-0 win at Ellis Park on Saturday.

It took David Villa's fifth goal of the tournament seven minutes from time to secure passage into the last four for the Spaniards, but Santa Cruz expects the going will get even tougher for them against Germany.

"I think we needed a little more luck and we showed that we could have won," said Santa Cruz, who had a couple of late chances when he came on as substitute for the last 18 minutes.

"Spain weren't better than us, anything but, and we had our chances during the course of the game.

"Spain still have a little way to go and they now play Germany, who showed a great display against Argentina, so it will be a very tough game for Spain again."

It was a far from convincing performance from Spain, who made history by reaching the World Cup semifinals for the first time after finishing fourth in the 1950 tournament when there was no semifinal format.

Spain still counting on Torres

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Spain are still hoping to see the best of out-of-sorts striker Fernando Torres at the World Cup, according to coach Vicente del Bosque.

Torres returned from knee surgery shortly before the tournament in South Africa and turned in another lacklustre performance for the European champions in Saturday's 1-0 win over Paraguay before being substituted shortly after halftime.

Strike partner David Villa again overshadowed the Liverpool forward, scoring an 83rd-minute winner to set up a last-four clash against Germany, whom Spain beat 1-0 in the final of Euro 2008 with a Torres goal.

"He (Torres) is in good shape physically and in his defence you have to say that the team didn't really string together their attacks well," Del Bosque said at a news conference after his side kept alive their hopes of a first World Cup triumph.

A bitter pill for Argentina

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

The World Cup effectively ended for Bangladeshis on Saturday as Argentina crashed out of the tournament in embarrassing circumstances, torn to shreds by a German side full of effervescent, intelligent and effective talents. The Germans took Diego Maradona's Argentina to the cleaners to set up a sumptuous semifinal clash with Spain and ensure that, barring a miracle, the World Cup is staying in Europe.

Spain on the other hand laboured to a 1-0 win over Paraguay in an insipid game that only blew into life for a five-minute period where both sides missed penalties. Oscar Cardozo the Paraguayan culprit and Xabi Alonso the Spaniard at fault. It marked the first time that two penalties had been missed at a World Cup match. David Villa snaked in a late winner to take his tally to five goals and ensure that he retains a good chance of winning the Golden Boot.

But all eyes were fixated on the earlier quarterfinal and soon after Miroslav Klose volleyed in his 14th goal in World Cup's an eerie silence descended upon the city.

But this was on the cards long before.

There had been an increasing belief that this World Cup was heading to Argentina. The cards were all aligned they said, Maradona as coach, a player in his image in the team, Carlos Bilardo as advisor. It was just like it had been in 1986, they said. But these idiosyncrasies hold little weight today. Despite their quite obvious failings, many fans had time and again continued to hedge their bets on Messi. The Barcelona man had developed into a talisman of sorts, one who would protect Argentina and guide them like an infirm through the maze. Sadly though, that is not how things work in real life. As Ossie Ardiles so eloquently put it, 11 individuals cannot better one team.

Maradona's Argentina is a two-faced beast. Wonderful when attacking, abysmal when defending. And Maradona's tactics are not much to write home about either.

And on Saturday, Joachim Loew's Germany exploited it ruthlessly. The game, as many are, was lost in midfield. Argentina's three central midfielders simply had too much work

to do. The player closest to the ball when Germany attacked down the flank came out wide, and the other had to tuck in and form a traditional central midfield 'two' alongside Mascherano. But this left Argentina with no-one on the opposite side of the midfield, and the Argentine three were forced to constantly shuffle across the pitch as Germany worked the ball from side to side, thanks mostly to the imperious Bastian Schweinsteiger.

For Germany, it was the most beautifully simple display of football you'll ever see, both in terms of the tactical plan and the performance on the pitch. There was no bold strategic shock from Joachim Loew, there were no 30-year thunderbolts to remember for years.

It was just pass and move, fluidity and good teamwork, and the basic plan to get the ball into wide areas, then play the ball across the box. The similarity of the three second half goals is so strong it borders on the ridiculous - the only surprise is that they all came from the side of the pitch that the rampaging Phillip Lahm wasn't on.

Some might say that 4-0 was a harsh scoreline. But in the end it was a victory in every single part of the pitch for Germany, who showed the value of cohesive attacking play and defensive organisation. In truth stuff like this does not happen in a World Cup quarterfinal between two first-rate football nations. Usually when a side gets the lead they close the game out often with the next game in mind. Germany, however, didn't have to worry about that because they barely needed to work hard to score - they did it with a minimum of fuss. It may be a new-look, exciting German side, but they retain the professionalism and efficiency of old.

Argentina on the other hand are out in the way many expected with Maradona as manager. Early on in this tournament he seemed to be proving his doubters wrong by playing a solid team that worked well together, but everything fell apart in dramatic circumstances here today. No organisation in defence, not enough numbers in midfield, no cohesion in attack. This defeat will take a long, long time for Argentina to get over.



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Nadal retakes

FROM PAGE 17

Berdych tried to hit straight back in the first game of the second set, and earned himself a break point. It took Nadal 10 minutes, four deuces and another two break points to see off the challenge and the Spaniard never looked back from there.

The Czech served his next two service games to love, but struggled to make inroads on Nadal's serve.

Despite the deadlock, both players were sticking to their game plans, with neither player taking a risk on serve and volley tactics.

The set seemed destined to go to a tie-break.

However, serving at 6-5 down, Berdych, could not find the power or the accuracy to put away a succession of chipped returns, gifting three set points to Nadal and losing it when he hit a forehand just wide.

In the third set, Berdych had an excellent chance to get back into the game when he got ahead in the third game. He fashioned a break point but lost it when he hit the net. Nadal held on and took it on the second deuce.

As the games went with serve, Nadal served the ninth to love to leave Berdych serving to stay in the final.

The game went to deuce and Nadal had championship point when his opponent missed a forehand, then reclaimed the Wimbledon crown with a passing shot.

Euphoria gone

FROM PAGE 17

"It's a relief there are places like this in Bangladesh. I just cannot imagine to miss the big matches for those disturbing power cuts," said Nabil, an Elephant Road resident.

Each of these places, be it popular hangouts or in front of projectors set up in an open field, were full to the brim, people toppling over each other to catch a glimpse of Kaka's perfectly timed through balls or Lionel Messi's mind-boggling dribbling.

Rickshaw-pullers can be seen crowding in front of television stores during the early night matches and some have even gone to the extent of buying a television together to enjoy the late-hour matches.

All this just to join the euphoria of the World Cup. But one must realise that all this enthusiasm was for the two South American giants. While many teams like England, Portugal and Spain enjoyed support from some fans, it all boiled down to Argentina and Brazil.

Shopkeepers in New Market and other shopping malls and markets complained plaintively of abominably low sales on the nights when Argentina or Brazil would play.

The Brazil fans can hardly forget Maicon's goal while

Gonzalo Higuain's hat-trick against South Korea turned him into a demigod in front of the other two deities -- Diego Maradona and Messi.

The dream of a face-off between these two titans in the finals was slowly coming into fruition, but over the weekend the millions of flags had to come down.

In the space of two rather cruel days, Argentina and Brazil were packed off from the World Cup. To Brazilian fans' horror, the Netherlands side came back from a goal down to win 2-1. It was a crushing blow to those who thought this was Brazil's year.

"I feel disheartened by this loss, which we could have easily won if my team played with a little more temperament," said Shadab, an ardent Brazil fan.

And if that was bad, Argentina's 4-0 loss to Germany on Saturday was the icing on a stale cake. It was a shock not yet fully absorbed by many as the margin of defeat is overwhelming to say the least.

"We were hoping for revenge this time for the last world cup, but a loss like this just kills my World Cup," muttered Tousif, a fan of Argentina.

The two teams' elimination must have hurt everyone in their respective countries but the pain is no less far away in Bangladesh.

Anger over WC tickets

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Struggling South African state-owned firms have spent 110 million rand (14.23 million dollars) on World Cup tickets angering trade unions which have accused top executives of selfishness, the Sunday Times reported.

The powerful Cosatu umbrella trade union's general Secretary Zwelenzima Vavi described the purchase of hospitality tickets by the state enterprises, including South African Airways, power utility Eskom, oil company Petro SA, logistics group Transnet, and some municipalities and state departments as 'outrageous'.

Sr Div soccer

SPORTS REPORTER

Victoria Sporting Club posted their fifth victory in the Bashundhara Senior Division Football League with a 2-0 win over last year's runners-up Sunrise SC at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Ashraf gave Victoria a 29th minute lead before Raju sealed the fate of the game eight minutes from time to raise their points tally to 15 from nine games, same as Uttar Baridhara Club, who were held 1-1 by Jatrabari SC in the day's other match.

Swapn put Baridhara ahead in the sixth minute only to be cancelled by Rokib in the next minute.

With fourth draws in nine games, Jatrabari now have 13 points while Sunrise remained glued to 12 from nine outings.

Of No 10s & South Africa

AFP, Paris

It has long been seen as the magic number in football, but the number 10 shirt has failed to live up to its star billing at the South African World Cup.

Wearing the number ten on your back has earned exalted, almost sacred, status over the years thanks not least to the exploits first of Pele with Brazil, then Diego Maradona with Argentina with Zinedine Zidane reprising the role in 1998 for France.

But while what the Brazilians call the 'dez' and the Argentinians the 'diez' has taken on iconic stature, the current generation has thus far failed to live up to their forebears.

Brazil number ten Kaka had hoped to engrave his name in the World Cup hall of fame despite coming into the tournament on the back of an injury-plagued, below par season at Real Madrid.

But his showing remained obstinately on a lower plane as the Brazilians never hit the heights of Pele's generation, bowing out meekly to the Dutch after Kaka again failed to hit the target.

Three assists and no goals was not what fans of the auriverde had been demanding.

As for Lionel Messi, the record books will show that his second World Cup finals ended in similar ignominy as his first.

In 2006, he was left on the bench as Germany beat Argentina on penalties.

This time, he failed to live up to his billing as the world's greatest player continually running down blind alleys as the Germans this time

thrashed his countrymen 4-0.

As for England, Geoff Hurst set the historical bar sky high with his hat-trick in the 1966 final.

But fast forward four decades and this year's vintage, Wayne Rooney, endured a turgid tournament which saw him produce plenty of toil but with little reward.

The Manchester United terrier -- scourge of English Premier League defences -- saw the event completely pass him by as England struggled through the group stages

worthy of the name with his three goals while Diego Forlan continues to prove his class for Uruguay.

But neither is likely to be talked about in the same breath as a Pele, a Maradona, a Hurst or a Zidane.

As for other pretenders to the number ten crown, Cesc Fabregas would walk into most teams -- but Spain believe they can keep a man even of his supreme talents on the bench most of the time.

The Barcelona man, who at least played half an hour in

before crashing out with a record loss to the Germans.

Meanwhile, a detailed look at other squads from title-winning nations who disappointed shows that France and Italy also suffered from poor number ten showings with Sidney Govou and Antonio di Natale respectively not in the same league as Zidane or 1994 finalist Roberto Baggio.

For the United States, Landon Donovan did what he could as he sought to carve out a personal number ten story

Saturday's quarterfinal win over Paraguay, rarely gets the chance to press his case.

At least he is still at the tournament -- and so is Holland's Wesley Sneijder, star of a famous win over Brazil in the quarters, who has now scored four goals in South Africa.

The Dutch have been bridesmaids at this level for too long -- witness their 1974 and 1978 final losses -- so it now falls to the Inter Milan star to keep alive the legend of the perfect ten.

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS: 1 Civil War general, 4 Nev. neighbor, 9 Cry loudly, 12 Eggs very over-weight, 14 Atmosphere, 15 Re tailored clothing, 17 Genetic matter (Abbr.), 18 - carte, 19 Smart people?, 21 Put in the mail, 24 Dagwood's boss' wife, 25 Lawyers' org., 26 Gun the engine, 28 Nasty stingers, 31 Parliamentarian's title, 33 Despondent

DOWN: 35 Eyelid, 36 TV, radio, etc., 38 Fresh, 40 A Gershwin, 41 Poetic foot, 43 Annul, 45 Roman magistrate, 47 Id counterpart, 48 Clay, now, 49 See-through food protector, 54 By way of, 55 Obliterate, 56 Past, 57 A billion years, 58 Postpone, 59 Whammy, 20 Historic times, 21 Tropical tree, 22 Reed instrument, 23 Resident of, 27 Moving truck, 29 Burning heap, 30 Close up tightly, 32 "Buenos -", 34 Die, 37 Entertained, 39 "Parsifal" composer, 42 Trumpet noise, 44 Present, 45 Bear lair, 46 Hodge-podge, 50 U.K. mil. org., 51 "Go, team!", 52 Census statistic, 53 Chicken

Solution time: 24 mins.

CRYPTOQUIP

OR ZAS DOVRF' RJIID
FSXIOHS, OF VRS VG ZASOX
HVKKOFFOVRSY VGGHXSXF
HJDDSY ZAS XVJX JYKOXJD?

Saturday's Cryptoquip: WHEN I WEAR THESE TROUSERS I REALLY THINK I GET STRONGER. I LIKE TO SAY THEY'RE POWER PANTS.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals O