



PHOTO: AFP

**FIVE-STAR:** Striker David Villa gestures towards Spanish fans after their 1-0 win over Paraguay in the quarterfinals at Ellis Park stadium in Johannesburg on Saturday. Villa scored the winner which was his fifth goal at this World Cup.

# El Matador

REUTERS, Johannesburg

All week Spanish fans have been debating which Fernando should lead their line -- the out-of-form Torres or the favoured Llorente.

At the end of their 1-0 quarterfinal victory over Paraguay, the answer was pretty clear. Who is worried when you have David Villa in the team?

Villa's fifth goal of the tournament, a cool winner with a touch of good fortune as the ball flew in off both posts, was only half the reason why.

Playing with Villa down the middle, Spain were transformed.

Until Torres was taken off in the 56th minute, to be replaced by Cesc Fabregas, Spain had struggled to break through a very well organised Paraguay defence, assisted by a midfield that helped crowd out Spain's creative players.

Spain looked to the wide areas for some hope of creating the angles and the spaces to penetrate the Paraguayan back-line but a combination of poor crossing, tenacious defending and lack of movement from Torres undid them.

The criticism that Torres has received in this tournament for his below-par performances is somewhat unfair -- he simply does not look sharp or fit enough, after his knee operation, to be playing in games of this import.

Fabregas came off the bench into midfield with Villa, who had operated on the flanks, moving into a central position and Andres Iniesta moving into a more advanced position on the left.

The significance of the switch was masked somewhat by the penalty which came moments afterwards for

Paraguay but after Iker Casillas saved Oscar Cardozo's spot-kick, the new shape of Spain became apparent.

It was Villa who raced through the middle and was pushed over for a penalty for Spain which Xabi Alonso

converted but was forced to re-take due to encroachment and the second time Justo Villar made a fine save.

The two penalties galvanised both teams and suddenly space began to open up -- and that was only good news for the Spaniards.

## Inching towards record

AFP, Johannesburg

David Villa edged closer to a Spanish record with his game-breaking goal in the European champions' 1-0 win over Paraguay to reach the semi-finals of the World Cup at Ellis Park on Saturday.

Villa became the tournament's leading scorer with his fifth goal to crack the Paraguayan defence seven minutes from time.

It was the new Barcelona man's 43rd goal in his 63rd international and puts him just one goal behind Raul's 44 in 102 games as Spain's all-time leading scorer.

"Finishing as the top scorer is the least of my concerns," said Villa. "The important thing is that we get to the final, whether through me scoring or someone else."

"I'm happy to score the goals but I'm happier if the team wins."

Villa, 28, has already become the top marksman for Spain in World Cup history with eight goals.

Villa has become one of the stars of this World Cup, scoring twice in Spain's 2-0 win over Honduras, the opening goal in the 2-1 victory over Chile, and the winner against Portugal in the round-of-16 before his latest strike against Paraguay.

## His warning to Germany

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Germany will not be happy to face Spain in the World Cup semi-finals after the European champions edged past a valiant Paraguay 1-0 on Saturday to reach the last four, according to Spanish goal hero David Villa.

"We have time now to put the work in to get to the final and Germany will not be pleased that they have to play Spain," Villa told reporters at Ellis Park.

"The match against Paraguay was our most difficult so far and we know that when our opponent sits back and defends it is tough for us but we came through and the important thing is that the team is still alive," he added.

Villa again came to Spain's rescue in a dramatic encounter in which both sides had a penalty saved, following up on a Pedro shot that came back off the upright and netting with a strike that hit one post and went in off the other.

"Things are going well and I hope they continue to do so," Villa said.

"The goals are important but if you win by a big margin and you score once or twice it doesn't have the same value."

Paraguay's game plan had been clear -- to stifle Spain -- and they had done a very good job of that task for an hour but as soon as they gained a little ambition, they left the gate slightly ajar for Spain.

With Villa now aimed at the heart of their defence and Iniesta, Xavi and Fabregas all buzzing around, Spain started to threaten in a way they simply had not managed previously.

When Xabi Alonso went off for the more attack-minded Pedro with 15 minutes left it was clear that Spanish coach Vicente Del Bosque did not fancy sitting through an extra half-hour of football.

That substitution paid off too with Pedro hitting the post before Villa pounced on the rebound and drove home, with the help of a friendly ricochet.

It was not a vintage Spain performance but it earned a last four spot against Germany and served up a very clear reminder of their strengths.

Germany will not need much reminding of those given their European Championship final defeat just a couple of years ago.

The crisp passing and sharp movement of Spain's elegant attacking players really does not require a target man, let alone an out-of-form one.

In Villa they have the perfect modern forward -- a player capable of operating anywhere across the line, with the ability to dribble and pass as well as to finish with deadly accuracy.

Against the Germans, Del Bosque will surely be tempted to start with Villa backed up by the pace and guile of a multi-faceted attacking trio and play to Spain's considerable strengths.

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# Strikers fail Paraguay

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Paraguay exit the World Cup having reached the last eight for the first time and conceded just two goals in the entire tournament. With a little attacking ambition they may have made an even more lasting impression.

Gerardo Martino's side will certainly be remembered as one of the best defensively organised teams who showed, in all their games, an impressive team ethic and discipline.

A 1-1 draw with Italy was a solid start to the tournament and the 2-0 win over Slovakia effectively secured passage to the last 16 -- a process confirmed by a dull but calculated goalless draw with New Zealand.

The game with Japan in the second round, though, showed a disappointing

side to the Paraguayan approach.

Facing a team that they should, given the pedigree of their players, have been confident of beating, Martino's men focused on frustrating Japan's midfield and the game ended a goalless stalemate.

Had Paraguay lost the penalty shootout, they would have headed home with a certain sense of under-achievement but they won the lottery and their prize was a meeting with the European champions at Ellis Park.

Oscar Cardozo had a second-half penalty saved by Spain keeper Iker Casillas and once David Villa put Spain in front it was hard to imagine a way back for Paraguay although Casillas had to be alert to keep out Lucas Barrios and Roque Santa Cruz.

"We gave our all, we had opportunities but unfortunately Spain scored and we

didn't. We didn't have luck with us," Martino said.

Luck was one factor but Martino's reluctance to push players forward and really test the Spanish defence, the inherent cautiousness of Paraguay's approach, was also part of their undoing.

The back-four, marshalled superbly by Antolin Alcaraz, proved to be of the highest standard throughout the tournament but despite having some quality in attack, Paraguay were not able to penetrate enough.

Martino's team have, however, established themselves among the South American elite, and in what has ultimately become a disappointing tournament for that region, Paraguay's resolute rearguard will stand them in good stead for next year's Copa America.

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas won praise from both winning and losing coaches on Saturday for saves that proved decisive in sending the European champions to the World Cup semi-finals.

Casillas saved a penalty from Paraguay's Oscar Cardozo and made a crucial double block at the end of Spain's 1-0 win to thwart attempted equalisers by Lucas Barrios and Roque Santa Cruz.

"Casillas has been extraordinary. He made two magnificent stops and he certainly contributed to our success," Spain coach Vicente del Bosque told reporters after the match.

Striker David Villa's goal with seven minutes remaining at Ellis Park sent Spain through to a last four

clash with Germany, who thrashed Argentina 4-0 earlier in the day.

Casillas's 59th-minute penalty save had, however, crucially kept the scores at 0-0 when a goal would have been a big blow to a Spanish side that had the bulk of possession but could not find a way through a well-organised Paraguay defence.

Casillas said after the game that reserve goalkeeper Pepe Reina had told him which way to dive, suggesting Cardozo would

not go the same way as he did in the penalty shootout with Japan.

"The match was enough to give you a heart attack. A lot of thanks go to Reina who told me which way he was going to shoot," he said.

Spain's team and bench rushed onto the field and

mobbed Casillas at the end of the game.

Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino echoed Del Bosque's comments on the Real Madrid keeper, saying Spain's captain played a key role in his side's defeat.

"Undoubtedly he has been decisive," he said.

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## WILL OF THE POST

With his goal having secured Spain's passage to the World Cup semifinal to face Germany, David Villa was smiling ear to ear after La Roja beat Paraguay.

In comments reported by Marca, El Guaje spoke of the goal that took 83 minutes to come. "The post wanted the ball to enter," said the World Cup's leading scorer, recalling the ball thudding off the far post before nestling into the net.

"The match was the most difficult we [Spain] have had to play. Our rivals pressured us a lot and did not allow us to circulate the ball among our players who like touches". As for the semifinals against Germany on Wednesday, Villa was clear: "Every match is different. I don't think Germany will be pleased that we have progressed".

## FORLAN'S TWEETING EXPLOITS

Uruguay's players celebrated the penalty shootout victory over Ghana which put them in the World Cup last four by partying with fans into the small hours of the morning in their hotel.

The scenes were filmed by goal-scorer Diego Forlan and posted on his Twitter page following Friday's match.

The clip shows the players bouncing up and down in a circle and singing songs, surrounded by fans waving Uruguayan flags in a ballroom of their Johannesburg hotel.

Uruguay beat Ghana 4-2 in a penalty shoot-out in a thrilling quarterfinal on Friday marked by a handball on the line by Luis Suarez which denied Ghana a last-second winner. The Africans missed the subsequent spot-kick, leaving the score 1-1.

Forlan kept fans informed of goings-on in the Uruguayan camp on his Twitter page. Earlier he posted shots of the squad enjoying a Uruguayan-style barbecue in their base camp in Kimberley.

## COLLINA WANTS EXTRA ASSISTANTS

Former top referee Pierluigi Collina wants to continue an experiment with goalline assistants rather than use technology when he takes control of UEFA officials.

The 50-year-old, one of soccer's most famous referees with his bald head and menacing stare, has left his job as head of Italian officials to take up a

similar role organising referees for European competitions.

"I've decided to leave my role because I have received an important offer from UEFA," Collina, who retired from refereeing in 2005, told reporters.

Incidents at the World Cup including England's Frank Lampard having a shot cross the line not awarded as a goal have forced soccer authorities to reconsider the idea of using technology to clear up controversial decisions.

UEFA tested placing extra official on each goalline in last season's Europa League to check for infringements in the area and whether the ball crossed the line.

Collina backs that plan rather than a goalline camera or an electronic chip inside the ball.

"People have said that in last season's Europa League there were no controversial calls but I think it is exactly because of the extra officials in the area," he said.

"I think that some of the shock cases seen in the World Cup would have been avoided."

## IT'S ALL FOR REINA

Hailed as the hero of Spain's triumph over Paraguay with at least two crucial saves, including stopping a penalty, Spanish goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas has deflected the credit, instead dedicating his save to second-string keeper Pepe Reina.

"Reina told me where he [Cardozo] would shoot. He is phenomenal," said the Real Madrid 'keeper of his Liverpool counterpart. Shortly after saving the spot-kick, Saint Iker could be seen pointing to the sideline, presumably at Reina,

in appreciation of the tip-off. The Spanish captain praised his team for their hard-fought win against Paraguay, but also remained cautious ahead of the semifinal tie against Germany. "This team has a lot of quality and can go very far. But we have to be careful because Germany has a great team and we need to have respect for them".

Living in the moment though, the euphoric Casillas finished by emphasising the importance of Spain's historic progression to the semifinals, especially for Spanish fans. "We have superseded a psychological barrier and now we are going for it all."



**PROMISES UNFULFILLED:** Paraguayan model Larissa Riquelme cries at the Defensores del Chaco stadium in Asuncion after Paraguay's 1-0 defeat at the hands of Spain in the quarterfinals on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS