



An Uruguayan couple (L) at Independence square in Montevideo feels the pain of their team's defeat as the dejected players (R) trudge off after their semifinal loss against Netherlands at Green Point stadium in Cape Town on Tuesday. PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS

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'I was unfit'

INTERNET
Diego Forlan played against the Netherlands with a thigh injury and "feels useless" about his inability to hurt the Oranje.
Forlan struggled even though he drew Uruguay level in Tuesday's semifinal. Despite his first-half effort, the South Americans suffered a 3-2 defeat.
Forlan was substituted with the score at 3-1, and although his team pulled a goal back in stoppage time, it was too little, too late.
"Personally, I feel useless because I was not in a good enough physical state to be able to perform at my best," said Forlan.
"Collectively I think it was very good, but it cost us a lot to get the second goal, they got two

in those four minutes and that settled it.
"I was not contributing anything to bother them so it was better that another player came in. I was tired.
"I believe I will be okay, now it hurts but I hope to make the [third place play-off] game, it's still several days away.
"We all hope to be well enough to play for third place. We are all very proud even though we lost."
Forlan also claimed that Uruguay -- who faced France, Mexico, South Africa, Korea Republic and Ghana at SA2010 before meeting the Dutch -- were not unduly troubled by the Netherlands.
"The truth is that I have a bitter taste, because there were more difficult games than this," he added.



A FORLORN HERO: Uruguay's mercurial striker Diego Forlan, who scored 4 goals in the World Cup including one in the semifinal against the Netherlands on Tuesday, cuts a forlorn figure as his side bowed out with a 2-3 defeat. PHOTO: INTERNET

Tabarez proud Uruguay's struggle at the top

REUTERS, Cape Town
Uruguay, the last team to qualify for the World Cup, carried the South American flag furthest at the tournament before bowing to European superiority in their 3-2 semi-final defeat by Netherlands on Tuesday.
Uruguay's two-year, 20-match qualifying odyssey, full of ups and downs that sent them into the South Africa finals only after a tight playoff against Costa Rica, stood them in good stead in terms of resilience and self-belief.
"If we had to choose a way to lose it would have been this way," Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez said after his team kept the outcome of the semi-final in doubt until the final whistle.
"This was another opportunity for us to show Uruguay's intentions, to play as equals over and above our limitations," he told a news conference at Green Point Stadium.
"Saturday's match is important to us in that sense," Tabarez said of the third-place playoff in Port Elizabeth.
"When we look back, we can say we are among the four semi-finalists, the other three are powerhouses of Europe."
The World Cup winners will be European for the first time outside Europe as the Dutch await the outcome of Wednesday's second semifinal between Spain and Germany in Durban.
After four South American teams reached the last eight, Uruguay were the only ones to progress with Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay eliminated at that stage.
"I believe we could have put this team that played against us (Netherlands) in difficulty at any point," Tabarez said.
"I'm proud of the team. They've played on an equal footing with the other team. You couldn't ask for more from these players."
"We accept the defeat, our rivals were better in front of goal," Tabarez said. "I knew the Dutch footballers were rich technically, who could score at any moment," he added.
"Now we have seen the second goal was offside and the match could have been different for us... They gained in composure."
"The (Dutch) team has an attacking spirit, one of the best in this tournament but we never gave up and our last (stoppage time) goal showed we were trying until the end."
Uruguay completed two games in South Africa without receiving a single yellow card.
"We have worked with respect, humility and a belief in long-term projects and we have seen the reflection in the result," forward Sebastian Abreu told reporters after Tuesday's game. "It has been very positive for our country."
"Other teams would have thrown in the towel and raised the white flag, but we didn't."

REUTERS, Cape Town
Uruguay's performance in reaching the last four at the World Cup has been an extraordinary struggle against the odds and keeping the tiny country among soccer's elite could prove even more difficult.
In fact, it is quite possible that Uruguay, beaten 3-2 by Netherlands in Tuesday's semifinal, might not even qualify for the next World Cup in neighbouring Brazil in 2014 given the difficulties they face.
Some pundits have sneered at Uruguay, pointing out that they beat Ghana in the quarterfinals after Luis Suarez stopped a goalbound shot with his hand on the line, but there has been much to admire as they hugely exceeded expectations.
Although Uruguay won the World Cup twice back in the early days of the tournament in 1930 and 1950, the country today can barely support a professional league.
Few first division matches attract more than a couple of thousand fans and many of the stadiums would not be considered fit for even semi-professional football in many European countries.
Penarol and Nacional, who once dominated the South American Libertadores Cup, are no longer feared on the continent and Uruguayan clubs won the last of their eight titles back in 1988.
The only way out for most young Uruguayan players is the airport. The lucky few end up in Europe but the country also exports dozens to Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Colombia.
Coach Oscar Tabarez, who also led the Celeste to the second round at the 1990 World Cup, sees his players only a few times a year and has warned frequently that the differences between countries such as Uruguay and rich European nations are growing.
He says that European countries are snapping up Uruguayan players at an ever-younger age, sometimes in their mid-teens, and although the country produces players at an impressive rate, it does not have the chance to develop them.
Before Tuesday's game, a philosophical Tabarez said it would be impossible for Uruguay to stay among the elite, even if they won the World Cup.
"It would be utopian to think of Uruguay's permanence at the summit ... but we can believe in circumstantial results," he said.
Uruguay played a major role in turning soccer into an international sport, winning the 1924 and 1928 Olympic tournaments with a short-passing game which had never been seen before in Europe.
They were also at the forefront as the World Cup became a reality, hosting and winning the first tournament in 1930 at the Centenario stadium which is still used for their home games.
After winning again in 1950, other larger nations equalled their technical ability and, with such a small population, they fell behind.
At one stage, they became synonymous with rough play and gamesmanship, something which Tabarez and his immediate predecessors have worked hard to wipe out.
Uruguay almost missed out on South Africa altogether. They faced elimination when they trailed 1-0 to Ecuador at altitude in their penultimate qualifier but hit back to win 2-1.
That earned them a playoff against Costa Rica where they scraped through 2-1 on aggregate to qualify for only the second time since 1990.
With competition in South America so intense, just getting to Brazil in four years time will once again be a huge challenge.
"The qualifiers are torture, the finals are a party," said Tabarez.

'Domenech to blame for fiasco'

AFP, Paris
The blame for France's catastrophic World Cup campaign should be laid at the door of former coach Raymond Domenech, said veteran defender William Gallas on Wednesday.
The 32-year-old - who is looking for a new club as he is a free agent with his contract having run out at Premier League giants Arsenal - told weekly publication Les Inrockuptibles that he had also been distraught when Domenech had awarded the captaincy to Patrick Evra for the finals.
"If it was a fiasco, then there are reasons for it," said Gallas, who played in all three of France's group matches resulting in two defeats to Mexico and hosts South Africa and a draw with eventual semi-finalists Uruguay.
"And for me there is no need to draw a veil over why: they emanated from the coach."
"The real problem is the coach. Okay I wasn't good, we weren't good. But the coach wasn't up to scratch either. I was appalled that we didn't play with two strikers."
"Even the training sessions weren't up to the level required. You can have the best players in the world in your team, but if you don't have the coach you need, then the results will not be achieved."
Gallas, who under Domenech was part of the team that reached the 2006 World Cup final only to lose on penalties to Italy, revealed striker Nicolas Anelka's foulmouthed outburst at Domenech delivered at half-time of the match with Mexico was bound to happen as it had been festering for a while.
"Domenech was not open. A lot of players were unable to talk to him and it was certainly my case."
"Anelka's incident was a case of him

(Anelka) being fed up for a few weeks prior to that.
"Domenech hammered into us time and again: 'Put your egos to one side'. But I believe that he forgot to do that himself," said Gallas, who also claimed that Domenech refused to speak to Anelka once the outburst with some of the expletives used had been published in L'Equipe.
According to Gallas all the players were united in striking for one day over Anelka's expulsion, though, that claim and his declaration that young Bordeaux playmaker Yoann Gourcuff had not been ostracised by several senior players have not been supported by off the record interviews with several of the other squad members.
Gallas, who apparently is being courted by French side Paris Saint Germain, reveals his own personal source of bitterness when he recounts how he discovered he would not be captain of the side after the sole remaining member of the 1998 World Cup winning squad, Thierry Henry, was told he would not be a starter.
"The hardest part of it, is the manner in which it happened," said Gallas, who after Henry was the most senior member of the squad.
"I realised when I entered the changing-room prior to the friendly with Costa Rica (May 26) that the captain's armband was placed beside Evra's shirt."
"He (Domenech) told me: 'In any case, you would not be a good captain'," added Gallas, who was stripped of the Arsenal captaincy by Arsene Wenger in November 2008 after giving an interview in which he criticised the younger players in the squad and of splits within the club's playing staff.

RAIN FOR SPAIN
Durban, which prides itself on being "the warmest place to spend the World Cup," was expecting rain for Wednesday's semifinal between Germany and Spain. But that wasn't putting a dampener on the big day. Au contraire, rain is a sign of good luck in Africa, a traditional healer reminded the South African Press Association. But good luck for who? Germany or Spain? Sibongile Mndima was less certain about the score. "Spain and Germany are both very strong teams. There could be penalties towards the end of the match," he predicted.

DEFYING JAWS OF DEATH
A South African couple made a big splash by swimming through a crocodile-infested river to try to win tickets for the World Cup final. Maurice Meyer and his wife Nicole, from the north-eastern city of Nelspruit, dove into the Crocodile River and swam to the other side to put themselves in pole position for the tickets being offered by local radio station Jacaranda. Meyer's brother kept watch for crocs with a gun. "I have no idea why I decided to swim the Crocodile River, it just kind of popped into my head," Meyer said. The competition winner has yet to be announced.

NAVAS A PICTURE POSTCARD SELLOUT
The Spanish Football Federation have been handing out thousands of picture postcards to fans who have turned up to watch the European champions train at their training camp. Of the 23 squad members, five of them have sold out completely with four of them being: Off-form striker Fernando Torres, his Liverpool teammate Pepe Reina, Arsenal dynamo Cesc Fabregas, Barcelona star Xavi Hernandez and Jesus Navas. While people are not surprised by the first four having been magnets for the postcard collectors, Navas's popularity has astonished them. The Sevilla winger is regarded as an up and coming star but is still a lot less well known than others in the squad such as leading scorer David Villa.

MAGIC NUMBER
Anyone who doesn't believe that Germany will win the World Cup should take a closer look at the number 3,964. Add the years of Brazil's second title in 1962 and their last one in 2002 and what do you get? 3,964. How about two

other Brazilian titles: 1970 and 1994? Right, the sum makes 3,964. Argentina won the World Cup in 1978 and 1986, which of course makes 3,964, just as the years of Germany's 1974 and 1990 titles. The other German title was in 1954 and the number needed to bring that to 3,964 is ... 2010.

DOPE IN THE VUVUZELAS
Peruvian drug dealers have found a novel use for the vuvuzela, the long, thin plastic horns whose buzzing blare has been the theme sound of the soccer World Cup -- hiding their marijuana.
Two Peruvian women were arrested in front of a school in Lima on Tuesday for trying to sell 100 small bags of marijuana that they had stuffed into their plastic horns, police said.
Vuvuzelas have spread quickly and become standard fare at soccer matches and political rallies in Peru and many other countries. Peru did not qualify for the cup being held in South Africa but its fans have noisily followed the games of other South American teams.

A PRESIDENTIAL VIDEO PLEASER
Uruguay's football-mad president Jose Mujica has had a video of the World Cup semifinalists posted on his official website. The video is a mix of their controversial quarterfinal win over Ghana and the scenes of celebration back in Montevideo as they reached their first World Cup semifinal in 40 years. The video's catchy title is "Asi da gusto" (That gives us pleasure). President Mujica calls the captain Diego Lugano before and after every match.

SPANISH GET SPECIAL BLESSING
The Spanish look to have a valuable ally. The streets surrounding their training camp are adorned with yellow posters promoting NG Gemeente, a Christian organisation, with the logo in English and Spanish greeting the players: "Jesus loves Spain".

PARAGUAYAN FOOTBALL RAKES IT IN
Paraguay's historic run to the World Cup quarterfinals has had another successful consequence -- an invaluable financial pay-off. According to the Paraguayan Football Federation (APF) their success has brought them a windfall of 16 million dollars (12.7 million euros). This money will be reinvested in large part in building stadia and renovating the Asuncion Stadium where the national side plays the majority of its home matches.

