

# Fabregas, Torres plead for chance

**SOCERNET**

Spain's Premier League duo Cesc Fabregas and Fernando Torres have made late pleas to coach Vicente del Bosque to be included in the starting line-up for Sunday's World Cup final with Netherlands.

While Fabregas has featured in all but one of Spain's matches in South Africa, the out-of-form Torres lost his place for the semifinal win over Germany after failing to find the net in five starts.

With both players competing with Barcelona's Pedro, who started the semifinal, for one place, Fabregas said: "If I'm lucky enough to get a start, I will give everything I have. But if I have to start on the bench, then so be it. All I can pray for is that I get a chance to play some part of this unbelievable game."

"If I'm not in the team, I will know deep down that Spain winning the World Cup is more important than Cesc Fabregas starting the game or not. So I will still be 100% behind the boys who do go out there. And I will be thinking about what I will do, what I must do if I come on."

The Arsenal captain heaped praise on his country's achievement of reaching the final and spoke of his anticipation of coming toe-to-toe with his club colleague Robin van Persie. He said: "It is a privilege to be part of this

Spanish team because we try to play the correct way.

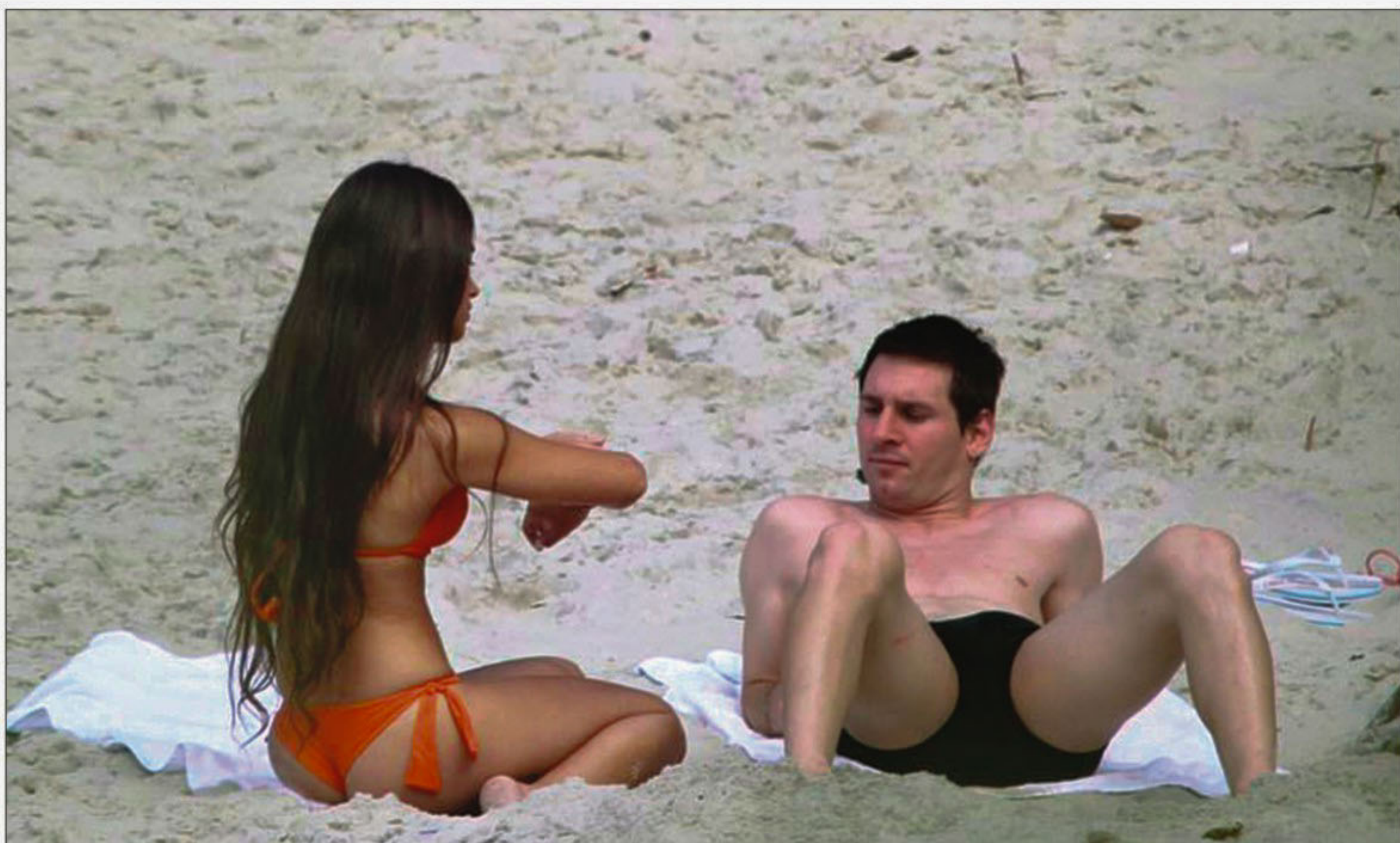
"I know Holland invented Total Football back in the 1970s, and I know those players made the game beautiful to watch. But we try to play the same way and I think the world can see that. Against Germany, we never gave up our principles -- pass, pass, pass and never stop trying to score. Eventually we got our reward."

"I have been texting Robin and we realised the only way we could face each other here was in the World Cup final. We joked about it after the early games and it is fantastic that it has now actually happened."

"It is great for us and it is great for Arsenal to have two players at the World Cup final."

Meanwhile, Torres reportedly spoke to Del Bosque at Spain's hotel on Friday night, urging him to remember his match-winning contribution to the Euro 2008 final, before naming his side to face the Dutch.

A Spanish source told the Mirror: "Fernando went to see del Bosque because he fears he will be left out. Fernando told him he is desperate to play and that he won't let him down. Of course he accepts it has to be Del Bosque's decision but wants to make it as difficult as possible for the coach to leave him out."



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi sunbathes with his girlfriend Antonella Rocuzzo on a beach in Rio de Janeiro on Friday. Messi is enjoying a holiday after his team's exit from the World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP

# Poorer Busquets, richer Spain

**AFP, Johannesburg**

Andres Iniesta, Xavi Hernandez and David Villa may be the media magnets as Spain prepare for the World Cup final against Netherlands on Sunday but Sergio Busquets is catching up fast.

The 21-year-old midfield enforcer from the hyper successful Barcelona club has been an unsung hero as Spain advanced on the back of five Villa goals and the defence-opening artistry of Xavi and Iniesta.

And now the son of one-time Barca reserve goalkeeper Carles hopes to make up for losing a wallet in a midweek theft by collecting a winners medal at Soccer City on a western outskirts of Johannesburg.

"I will gladly swoop my wallet for the World Cup trophy," he told reporters ahead of a showdown that will end with a new name engraved on the trophy that symbolises world national-team dominance.

"No one likes being robbed but there is little to say about it. It happened on the morning of the Germany match and we could not let the incident distract us," he added.

In a final midfield cast featuring superstars Iniesta, Xavi and Dutch duo Wesley Sneijder and Arjen Robben, mentioning Busquets might seem out of place but Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque differs. When personnel adjust-

ments were needed in the opening group match against Switzerland as Spain battled vainly to equalise, Busquets was taken off 30 minutes from full-time.

But in subsequent group and knockout matches, wily old fox Del Bosque has withdrawn experienced Xabi Alonso, once of Liverpool and now a Real Madrid stalwart, leaving Busquets to perform his defensive duties.

Not bad for a footballer who first wore the Barcelona jersey less than two years ago and by the end of that season was helping his club defeat

Manchester United convincingly in the Champions League final.

National call-ups followed and he is now regarded as a critical cog in the success of La Roja Furia (The Red Fury) just as equally unsung midfielder Senna was hailed when Spain were crowned kings of Europe two years ago.

"I feel good. I am young but I feel more comfortable all the time as I get to train with some great footballers. My form is good but the important thing is the team," he stressed.

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# Spain unhappy about Webb

**TELEGRAPH**

On the day when Webb's wife Kay joked that her husband couldn't even take charge of his own kids, let alone the biggest sporting event in the world, they were finding it rather less easy back in Madrid and Barcelona to see the funny side of the Rotherham official being named the man in the middle for the big showdown with Holland.

"Bad news -- Webb will referee the final," was the damning verdict of daily sports newspaper Marca, while another, AS, described the appointment as "debatable" because he had "made two mistakes" which cost Spain during the 1-0 defeat by the Swiss.

Webb had not given an obvious penalty in favour of David Silva and allowed the winning goal to stand which they believed was offside. His officiating would bring back "bad memories for La Roja", grumbled the Barcelona-based Mundo Deportivo.

Meanwhile, Kay Webb could only chuckle about her astonishment that her husband would be officiating in a game which will be watched by an estimated quarter of a billion people.

"I don't know how he does it. He can't take charge of his own children. I don't know how he manages it on a football pitch," said Mrs Webb, who makes it sound as if coping with son Jack and daughters Holly and Lucy is good practice for handling Mark van Bommel and Carles Puyol.

Webb's father Billy, himself a one-time referee and former miner, said: "I encouraged my son to take it up, but when I watched his first game, I encouraged him to pack up. But my brother, a referee too, he said 'I can see something in this young lad'."

History's proven him right and me wrong. The whole thing is jaw-dropping. I just can't imagine my son refereeing the World Cup final."

# Houseboat owners fear chaos

**REUTERS, Amsterdam**

The Dutch are hoping to welcome their World Cup team home with a victory canal parade although Amsterdam houseboat owners are becoming anxious about partygoers climbing onto their homes and sinking them.

Memories are still vivid of Netherlands' 1988 European Championship win over the Soviet Union when scores of euphoric flag-waving, beer-swilling fans draped in orange clambered onto lived-in houseboats which sank under their weight.

Amsterdam authorities have confirmed the national team will be honoured with a canal parade next week if they beat Spain in Sunday's final at Soccer City in Johannesburg and have chosen a route that passes as few houseboats as possible.

"We are a bit worried after seeing what happened in '88," said 43-year-old Danish

housewife Rina Jensen, sunbathing on her family's black holiday houseboat on the Herengracht canal, fronted by white roses on the deck.

# World media tip Spain

**REUTERS, Johannesburg**

Spain are the overwhelming favourites for Sunday's World Cup final against the Netherlands, according to International Sports Press Association members who voted online.

The poll found 63.79 per cent of journalists from 54 countries predicting a victory for Spain in their first World Cup final appearance at Soccer City.

The Dutch, who like Spain have never won the World Cup but appeared in the 1974 and 1978 finals, were tipped by 36.21 per cent of those voting, the AIPS reported on Saturday.

Spain were also the favourites in a poll conducted by the same organisation before the start of the tournament.

# Van Bronckhorst to defy FIFA

**SOCERNET**

Giovanni van Bronckhorst has revealed he will refuse to take a drugs test if Netherlands win the World Cup final.

Van Bronckhorst, 35, will retire from professional football after Sunday's clash with Spain and -- having been tested after the semifinal victory over Uruguay -- he insists he is willing to defy FIFA rulings to avoid missing out on the post-match celebrations this time around.

"I'm not doing a dope test -- this is my last game of professional football," he said in the Daily Record. "I came off the field following our victory against Uruguay in the semifinals and immediately felt isolated when I was taken to be tested."

"That was a great shame because I missed much of the party. I was away from the dressing room for one hour and 15 minutes."

"This will be the last game of my career and it will be a World Cup final so I don't want to miss anything. It could not be more beautiful. It will be the game of their lives for everyone involved."

# A-Z of 2010 World Cup

**REUTERS, Port Elizabeth**

**A - Africa.** The continent's first World Cup was embraced off the pitch but on it, where only Ghana of the record six teams taking part got beyond the group stage, it was a massive disappointment.

**B - Bavaria.** How many people had heard of the little Dutch brewery before it was handed surely the greatest piece of free publicity ever afforded a company? FIFA's heavy-handed arrest of a group of models wearing orange dresses -- from among a crowd of 20,000 orange-clad fans -- was the most spectacular own goal of the tournament.

**C - Convoy.** Not since the Great Trek of the 1830s have so many Dutchmen been on the move in South Africa. The remarkable convoy of orange vehicles that set off from Amsterdam in April brought vivid colour to the country. Even more remarkable is the fact that the whole lot of them went home on a pre-booked ship during the week and the occupants will watch the final in the Netherlands.

**D - Dunga.** A quite incredible display of touchline petulance from Brazil's coach from start to finish. Just when his team were rocking against Netherlands and needed a calm hand on the tiller, Dunga preferred to rant and rave like the most demoted fan.

**E - Europe.** Stories of the continent's demise proved premature as the three European quarter-finalists all became semi-finalists and, for the second successive tournament, two of them will contest the final.

**F - Faking it.** Chile's Arturo Vidal and Kader Keita of Ivory Coast were guilty of appalling pretence to induce red cards for opponents for imaginary blows to the face. Even though the whole world could see, via TV replays, that the offences did not happen the actors got away scot-free while the real "victims" still had to serve suspensions.

**G - Giraffe.** One of the rare

nodes to the location as the designers incorporated giraffe-shapes into the supports for Nelspruit's Mbombela Stadium.

**H - Hand of God II.** The same photo of Luis Suarez's last-gasp handball to deny Ghana a place in the quarter-finals was captioned "cheat" throughout Africa and "hero" in Uruguay.

**I - In-fighting.** France, England, Cameroon, South Africa and no doubt many others suffered from internal tensions with coaches criticised and petulant players objecting. This is usually the favoured approach of the Netherlands but this time, bar the odd Robin van Persie dummy-spit, they have been a harmonious unit -- and look where it got them.

**J - Jabulani.** The ball with a mind of its own. FIFA's insistence of developing a new ball for every tournament backfired with adidas's latest offering delivering the properties of a child's beach ball.

**K - Kingson.** Richard, third choice at Wigan Athletic but arguably the best goalkeeper of the tournament as he kept Ghana on course with a series of saves with his legs and feet.

**L - Linesmen.** Despite the high-profile blunders that cost England and Mexico dear, the standard of linesmanship was generally superb with their split-second decisions on the ever-more complex offside rule invariably proved correct by myriad TV replays.

**M - Maradona.** Diego was the biggest personality of the tournament. With his beard, snazzy suit and heart-on-the-sleeve touchline theatrics he managed as a coach to emulate his role as a player by always being the centre of attention. Just to prove he can still walk the walk, he organised a halfway line hit-the-bar competition for his players in a public training session and duly made contact with his first attempt.

**N - Name.** A new one on the trophy. Eighty years, 19 tour-

naments and, until Sunday, only seven names on the winners list. Either Spain or Netherlands will be a worthy addition.

**O - Overhyped.** Wayne Rooney, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Kaka, Samuel Eto'o, Didier Drogba -- the men who were scripted to light up the tournament all fluffed their lines.

**P - Paul.** An unlikely name for an octopus but it was an unlikely sub-plot as the German-based cephalopod proved an uncanny predictor of results. When it went for Spain ahead of the semi-final Germany fell into a depression, all the more so when it was proved right again.

**Q - Questions.** Many thousands get asked at the hundreds of news conferences held during the tournament. Some induced deep and meaningful insight, others were brusquely brushed away while the odd one produced a bemused silence, such as this from a female Chinese TV journalist ahead of Portugal's game against North Korea: "Hello Mr Ronaldo, I have read that you have not played very well for Portugal for nearly two years and that you cannot score a goal. Now that Lionel Messi has scored (he had not), will you score a goal tomorrow?"

**R - Revolution.** Another French one and heads rolled again. This time it was the Federation boss who faced the metaphorical guillotine after the players revolted in support of Nicolas Anelka after the striker abused departing coach Raymond Domenech and refused to apologise. The fallout continues.

**S - Sneijder, Wesley.** Italian league and Cup double, Champions League title, five goals at the World Cup, four man-of-the-match performances -- just one to go for the man making Netherlands tick to cap a year of achievement beyond anyone's wildest dreams. He even scored with a header.

**T - Tiger.** Allegedly spotted by Paris Hilton -- according to

her "tweets" -- while visiting a South African game reserve.

**U - Upsets.** Italy and France, the winners and runners-up from 2006, not only went out in the first round but both finished bottom of their groups -- an astonishing turnaround for two of the game's superpowers.

**V - Vuvuzela.** It could have been for violence but there was barely any as the pre-tournament horror stories proved largely unfounded. Violence to the ears however, was relentless thanks to the Vuvuzela. African-made it may be but its relentless din succeeded in destroying any reflection of the state of the game via the usual crowd noise and created a surreal atmosphere.

**W - "Wembley Goal."** It took 44 years but Germany finally got revenge for Geoff Hurst's "was it over the line?" goal in the 1966 final. Such goals have since been christened "Wembley goals" by Germans. Frank Lampard's shot was just about the only memorable contribution made by England but at least shook FIFA out of its refusal to investigate goalline technology.

**X - Xavi, or should it be Xabi Alonso?** Both midfield maestros refused to wilt under pressure, maintaining their astonishing pass-completion rate even when it seemed to be taking Spain nowhere. In the end, the gaps always appeared.

**Y - Yellow.** The colours of Bafana Bafana were ubiquitous throughout South Africa as the fans turned out in huge numbers to back their nation, particularly at the Fan Zones, one of the biggest successes of the tournament.

**Z - The row of seats most of Lionel Messi's goal attempts ended up in.**

**NOTICE**

Due to unavoidable circumstances, we could not print the CROSSWORD today. We regret any inconvenience.

Sports Editor

# A final for

**FROM PAGE 17**

out to be a nervy 2-1 win. It was the same story against Uruguay in the semifinals -- 3-1 up they had two clear chances to put the result beyond doubt before the South Americans pulled one back to make it a very nervous finale.

"We've won six straight games and had some phases of good football but we've also been sloppy in finishing," Bert van Marwijk told reporters. "Spain have been less sloppy in that."

The Dutch, arguably the best team never to have won a World Cup, will be relieved not to be facing the host nation in their third final, after losing to Germany in 1974 and Argentina in 1978.

It is their bad luck to be up against a Spain team who seem able to play with the same confidence and panache no matter how far they are away from home.



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