

Star SPORT



ARGENTINA-NIGERIA LIVE



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The Nigeria footballers jog ahead of training at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

ARGENTINA V NIGERIA FRIENDLY TODAY

Revenge not the word

SPORTS REPORTER

Argentina coach Alejandro Sabella denied that they would be out for revenge when the two-time world champions take on African champions Nigeria in a friendly at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka today.

"Revenge is not a good word to use. This is not a war," said Sabella, disappointing the near hundred journalists who had gathered at the ballroom of the Ruposhi Bangla hotel yesterday.

The press were understandably trying to play the 'revenge' angle, considering that Argentina had suffered a genuinely humbling 4-1 loss to the same opponents in Abudja in June. And given that this was a friendly international at a neutral venue, any form of incitement would add to the excitement surrounding the game.

But although the trap was set, Sabella was not biting, and although he admitted that he would like to win today's match, he left no doubt in saying that his main focus would be to understand better a side that he had

inherited only a month back.

"We will try to win," said Sabella in almost flawless, albeit heavily accented English.

"It is a different game altogether from the one we played in Nigeria. Different because this is being played on a neutral venue," he continued, before adding bullishly, "I don't know which team Nigeria will be fielding tomorrow, but we feel stronger than them anyway."

Sabella's words though, will have to be backed up by substance, especially after a stop-start victory against Venezuela in his first match in charge at Kolkata on Friday.

"I am not really worried especially because we are creating chances. If we did not create chances, we would be worried but we made good movements and created many chances [against Venezuela]. The strikers could not score, but I am not worried because with confidence the strikers will start scoring," he said.

Sabella readily admitted that he was new to the game and the former Estudiantes manager stressed that

getting to know his team would still be his main goal.

"I'm a new coach. I'm just starting to know players, and the players too are starting to know me. This is not really a very promising position to be in," he said.

Argentina had used a hybrid 4-3-3 in their game against Venezuela with Marseille man Lucho Gonzalez and Javier Mascherano marshalling the midfield. Lionel Messi lined-up on the right side of a front three with Gonzalo Higuain at the tip and Angel di Maria on the left.

Sabella admitted that there might be changes considering his charges had played only on Friday, but according to rumours he might be trying out a new formation with a 3 man backline and two wing-backs.

Ricky Alvarez is expected to lose its place in the line-up to Nicolas Burdisso who will then step into defence, while Jose Sosa or Javier Pastore will take up the reins in midfield in place of Lucho Gonzalez.

Argentina's training session was

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Grand arena made grander

AL-AMIN

The fever pitch is ready for another august occasion. Sorry, it might be an understatement. Let's put it this way: The Bangabandhu National Stadium is ready to host the greatest sporting incident in the annals of the country's history today.

The reason is that one gentleman with a giggling smile will grace the occasion sporting an Argentine shirt in an international football friendly against Nigeria.

The gentleman is Lionel Messi, the greatest footballer of the planet. The two-time world footballer of the year from Rosario in now the biggest phenomenon in the world for his wonderful skills, dazzling dribble, immaculate passing and scoring magnificent goals especially wearing the famed No 10 Barcelona shirt.

Some might argue and say what about the captivating cricket World Cup opening ceremony that the premier venue has hosted earlier this year. That was definitely the proudest moment for the country. But if we talk about a performer than is there anybody bigger than Messi to have set foot on the lush green top of the country's

magnificent oval-shape arena. Let's take a trip down memory lane.

The venue, properly built in 1955 in the commercial hub of the capital, staged the first-ever official Test between Pakistan and India, a landmark indeed and the beginning of a scapular journey. Purpose-built for cricket, the venue eventually turned into a home for every sport and a centre for all occasions. Aga Khan Gold Cup Football, introduced in 1958, was the most colorful annual event staged on this ground during the pre-Liberation era. The jamboree of Asian Youth Football in 1978 was the first major event staged on this refurbished venue. But legendary boxer Mohammad Ali reserved the biggest cheer a year after during a goodwill visit to Bangladesh when he playfully fought with a tiny tot on a stage erected at the centre of the pitch. It was also a time when our domestic football flourished and the venue turned into a fever pitch day in day out. The likes of Kazi Salahuddin, now president of Bangladesh Federation, Enayet, Chunnu and Salam Murshedy were the chief entertainers during those hay days of our football.

Besides, one can still recall that

eventful Asia Cup hockey match between India and Pakistan at this very ground in 1985. The impact of the magical stick works of Kalimullah, Hasan Sardar, Pargat Singh and Hanif Khan in that tournament was so much so that immediately after the event the whole nation turned hockey-savvy as the young ones started playing the game in every nook and corner of the country.

However, it was the turn of cricket to take the centre stage of the Bangabandhu National Stadium in the 90s. Starting from the sultan of swing Wasim Akram to master blaster Sachin Tendulkar the venue adored every champion cricketer in a most spectacular fashion. It is also a place where Bangladesh began its journey as a Test team in 2000. It was a moment to behold on a chilly November morning when Naimur Rahman stood beside Sourav Ganguly for the historic toss of the inaugural Test in which Aminul Islam's 148 was the highlight of Bangladesh first innings total of 400.

The knockout cricket World Cup in 1998 was a big splash at the BNS. And when French legend Zinedine Zidane came here immediately after the 2006

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Nigeria's support import

ANISUR RAHMAN

Approximately 50 Nigerians under the banner of the Nigeria Football Supporters' Club in Asia gathered at the Hazrat Shahjajal International Airport to greet their national team yesterday afternoon as the Super Eagles took 12 hours to reach Dhaka from Madagascar to play their FIFA international friendly against Argentina.

The focus, of course, was on the Argentinean team, more clearly on Lionel Messi, overshadowing the arrival of the Super Eagles. As expected, there was lack of enthusiasm among Civil Aviation employees and the general fans compared to the grand reception during the arrival of Messi's Argentina.

Though no local Nigerian fans were seen greeting the African nation, fanfare lay in wait in the form of nearly fifty Nigerians clad in white, who came from different countries like Malaysia, India, Singapore and Nigeria to watch the game, greeted the Super Eagles by beating drums and blowing vuvuzelas.

Initially the Nigerians, who hired two pick-up vans to go to the airport, were not allowed to enter the airport arena for secu-

rity reasons but they convinced the security officials to let them stand on the footpath on the exit of the VIP road and greeted their beloved booters by waving the national flag.

They even turned up at the Bangabandhu National Stadium to watch Nigeria's practice session in the evening.

One of the Nigerian contingent, Joseph, said that they always try to boost their national team, travelling with them especially when the Super Eagles go to play on foreign soil.

"The spirit of sports helps us to come together and inspire our beloved team," said Joseph, who came here from Malaysia two days earlier.

Like the Argentina team, the Nigerian booters were also welcomed by current and former national booters inside the airport and then by the national women players at Westin Hotel in Gulshan.

On the way to the elevators at the hotel, Nigeria team secretary Achor Enebi told reporters that the players were very tired after the 12-hour journey as they came from Madagascar via Oman after playing a friendly match against Madagascar, and

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Argentina skipper Lionel Messi leads training at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STA

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Where do you plan to greet Lionel Messi?

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Independent TV

Argentina v Nigeria

Int'l Friendly

Live from 7:00pm

TEN Sports

US Open

Men's 4th Rd & Women's Qtrs

Live from 9:00pm

ESPN & STAR Cricket

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 5:30pm

England v India

Second ODI (D/N)

DAY'S EVENT



Argentina v Nigeria

Int'l Friendly

Time: 7:00pm

Venue: Bangabandhu