

# Star

# SPORT

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## No more Mr Nice Guy

Theo Walcott admits the pain of being axed from England's World Cup squad made him realise he had to toughen up to fulfil his ambitions.

Walcott has always been regarded as one of the nice guys in a sport rife with rampant egos, but the Arsenal winger doesn't take that as a complement any more.

The 22-year-old was left heartbroken last year when England coach Fabio Capello called him to break the news that he wouldn't be going to the World Cup in South Africa.

- AFP



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

LOOK WHAT I'VE DONE TO THEM: Argentina forward Gonzalo Higuain celebrates his first of two goals as Nigeria defender Okonkwo Chibuzo sits and laments during their international friendly at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.



## Leo didn't attend the dinner!

ANISUR RAHMAN

Most of the Argentine booters including Lionel Messi, Gonzalo Higuain, Di Maria and the whole of Nigerian football team skipped the official dinner Monday night, citing huge gathering at the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel.

The refusal of the Argentine booters to attend the official dinner left sponsors Beximco Group fuming that seemingly led to create a distance between Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and the business conglomerate, who invited many high profile guests after taking away the responsibility from the game's governing body to host the dinner.

It has also been learnt that high-ups of Beximco demanded the BFF to show their agreements with the Argentina team and later they took all unsold tickets with them.

"The players were tired after training and the food-codes on the menu were also different. That's why they did not come to the dinner. Besides, presence of more guests was also a reason," said BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy, adding that the Argentine team also doesn't want the focus to be only on Messi.

"Nigeria finished their practice session at 9:30pm yesterday and then held a press briefing that made them late to the dinner," informed Murshedy.

However, liaison officer of the Argentine team Mohammad Abdul Gaffar told reporters that Argentina coach Alejandro Sabella along with four players joined the dinner.

The BFF had toiled hard to keep Argentina's original schedule intact, but they could only confirm the practice session and the official dinner, which was actually scheduled for Sunday, after BFF president Kazi Salahuddin's sudden visit to Kolkata on August 31 to convince Argentina team.

# You can't contain the best

**"It was impossible to contain Messi. Everything goes around him. We tried to contain him, but you know he is the best player in the world and it's impossible,"**

ATIQUE ANAM

As if it needed any restating, Lionel Messi's electric performance yesterday proved once again that he is the best player in the world. The newly installed Argentina captain produced a magical performance at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday to guide the Albicestres to a comfortable 3-1 win over Nigeria in their FIFA international friendly.

Whenever the little magician had the ball at his feet there was a sparkle in the match and an anticipation that something was about to happen. Messi scored none of the three goals that Argentina scored last night, yet he was in the heart of every move that Albicelste made.

And both the coaches at the post-match press conference conceded the

fact that Lionel Messi was the best player in the world.

"Is there any doubt, really?" said a smiling Samon Siasia when asked if Messi was the difference between the sides.

"It was impossible to contain Messi. Everything goes around him. We tried to contain him, but you know he is the best player in the world and it's impossible," he said.

The Nigerian thanked the fans but captain John Obi Mikel pointed out with an ironic smile that they were indeed slightly partisan.

But the coach was quick to point the positives: "Since we came here, everything has been wonderful. We liked the support, the people and the atmosphere."

For his part Alejandro Sabella was quick to restate that this had been no

revenge.

He admitted that he had tried a different formation, playing today with three center-backs to counter the fast forwards of Nigeria.

"Also I played today different players

**"No matter if Messi scores or not, as long as he's playing well everyone is happy,"**

in midfield, faster players who could link better with Messi and the forwards."

But in the end, it was all about the peerless Barcelona forward and Sabella quickly brushed aside questions about

him not scoring.

"No matter if Messi scores or not, as long as he's playing well everyone is happy," said Sabella.

He admitted that his Argentina team was still at a very nascent stage and that he was happy to have two wins from two in the South Asian tour.

"There is no reform, it is just a new era. As you know, there is a lot of pressure and demand from fans in Argentina. So winning the first two games was very important for me."

Sabella also professed himself happy with the facilities and the pitch and said that before the game he had spoken to the players collectively.

"[I told them] they must play for themselves, for their families, and for the people of Bangladesh as well. It was our duty to play well and give the people a good game."

## Messi says...

ANISUR RAHMAN

"Se grande problema."

Lionel Messi uttered the phrase on way to his room after having lunch on the ground floor at the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel yesterday as the enthusiastic fans, photographers and cameramen gathered to capture his photo whenever he is seen in the lobby.

The sensational Messi's conversation with his teammates was interpreted by a police officer who knows Spanish through experiencing at UN peace missions. The police officer of Ramna Police Station, preferred not to be named, explained the meaning of "Se grande problema" stands "it's a big problem".

Though not a word was heard from the great man so far, the single exasperated sentence was caught by this reporter yesterday.

Nevertheless all focus is on the two-time world player of the year though there are a lot of stars like Sergio Agüero, Angel di Maria, Martin Demichelis, Javier Mascherano and Gonzalo Higuain in the Argentina team but all of them are now overshadowed here by the presence of the magical Barcelona striker who himself expressed his irritation by the Spanish language though it is not understandable to see his always smiling face.

However, there were less fans from outside yesterday compared to Monday's rush but some had checked in at the hotel to catch a glimpse and were trying to take photo with any Argentinean players, especially Messi.

In one incident, a security personnel challenged a youth who impeded Messi & Co but the UK-based Bangladeshi was identi-

fied as a boarder of the Ruposhi Bangla.

After having practiced on Monday evening at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, all members of the Argentina squad were confined to the hotel though they twice came down to the ground floor to have breakfast and lunch before heading to the BNS to play their friendly match against Nigeria yesterday.

"I accompanied many cricket teams like Pakistan, South Africa and Sri Lanka at this hotel but Argentina team is totally different. In the last two days, I have seen from close range that the players do three things practicing, eating and sleeping," said a Ruposhi Bangla official.

Some of the players were seen visiting the souvenir shops at the hotel while Messi paid a visit to the CD shop though none of them bought anything but it was learned from the shop attendants that Argentinean booters desired to buy some souvenirs from the shop on the way back home.

Liaison officer Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury informed Messi did not have breakfast but had lunch as the players were given choice to have breakfast from 8:30am to 10:30am and the lunch time was fixed at 12:00pm at Vintage Restaurant of Ruposhi Bangla.

The former national booter informed Messi skipped the breakfast and had only lunch but all payers had tea at 4:00pm.

Though the players were confined to the hotel, the coaching staffs including head coach Alejandro Sabella inspected the venue and dressing room and almost spent an hour

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