


Early goals were a blip

REUTERS, Berlin



A leaky Germany defence that let in three first-half goals against Paraguay triggered jeers and whistles during Wednesday's 3-3 friendly draw but the coach and captain put it down to a simple early-season blip.

The triple World Cup winners are on track to qualify for the 2014 finals in Brazil next year and are desperate to build a team that will end a title drought stretching back to 1996.

But Wednesday's defensive display against the bottom team in the World Cup South America qualifying group disappointed the fans in Kaiserslautern.

"It is always difficult to prepare for an international game with just two training sessions," skipper Philipp Lahm told reporters.

"The players came from different clubs with different systems, you need time to find your game. Next time we will be together for five days and that is good time to prepare for a qualifier."

Coach Joachim Loew said: "You could see some players were lacking freshness", referring to the rigorous pre-season training camps the squad have gone through with their club sides.

The Germans found themselves trailing 2-0 after 13 minutes with central defenders Per Mertesacker and Mats Hummels repeatedly exposed by the speedy Paraguayans.

It was only after the introduction of centre half Jerome Boateng in the second period that the home team managed to keep their opponents quiet.

"We know that defensively it did not work. It was clearly our mistakes that led to the goals," said midfielder Thomas Mueller.

Germany have now conceded 10 goals in six internationals this year. Wednesday's game was also the first time since 1964 that they have conceded two or more goals in two consecutive games, after losing 4-3 to the United States in June.

In 12 matches since reaching the Euro 2012 semi-finals, Loew's men have managed only three clean sheets.

"This will not continue because we will definitely stabilise," said the coach of Germany's overall performance. "We will show the team and the individual players the mistakes and use our training to highlight them.

"We made elementary mistakes but I am convinced each player will be much improved come September."

Germany, top of World Cup Group C qualifying with 16 points from six games, host Austria on Sept. 6 before travelling to the Faroe Islands four days later.



Argentina striker Gonzalo Higuain (2nd from R) celebrates his goal with teammates during their international friendly against Italy at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Argentina edge Italy Switzerland stun Brazil

REUTERS, London



Tetchy Brazil were upset 1-0 in Switzerland while Argentina beat Italy 2-1 even without Lionel Messi on a mostly successful night for South American teams in friendlies ahead of next month's World Cup qualifiers.

Paraguay, bottom of their qualifying group and with almost no hope of reaching a fifth World Cup finals in a row, managed a shock 3-3 draw away to an unusually sloppy Germany side on coach Victor Genes's debut.

A largely experimental Spain team earned a 2-0 away win over Ecuador to keep the European flag flying in the steamy Pacific port city of Guayaquil with goals from Alvaro

Negredo and Santi Cazorla for the world champions.

England, by no means sure of a direct berth into the World Cup finals, fought back twice for a 3-2 win over Scotland at Wembley in an enthralling first clash between the bitter rivals since 1999.

In the night's only World Cup qualifier, Russia blew a chance to overtake Portugal at the top of European Group F when they were upset 1-0 by Northern Ireland in Belfast, Martin Paterson scoring the only goal two minutes before halftime.

The 2014 World Cup hosts Brazil, fresh from their Confederations Cup triumph, were disappointing in Berne where they failed to recover from a Dani Alves own goal just after the interval.

Argentina, missing captain Messi due to muscle fatigue, won their first meeting with Italy for 12 years with striker Gonzalo Higuain, a fine successor to Gabriel Batistuta, opening their account with his 21st goal in 34 internationals.

Substitute midfielder Ever Banega added the second before Lorenzo Insigne pulled one back in the match in Rome in honour of Argentine-born Pope Francis and preceded on Monday by the visit of both teams to the Vatican.

Germany were 15 minutes away from a shock defeat, having ended the first half 3-2 down to Paraguay, but substitute Lars Bender came to their rescue with a 75th-minute equaliser.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic, got a hat-trick as Sweden beat neighbours Norway 4-2 in Stockholm.

RESULTS

Sweden 4 (Ibrahimovic 2, 29, 58, Svensson 75)
Norway 2 (Abdellaoue 38-pen, Johanson 43)
Germany 3 (Gundogan 18, Mueller 31, Bender 75) **Paraguay 3** (Nunez 9, Pittoni 13, Samudio 45)
Italy 1 (Insigne 76) **Argentina 2** (Higuain 20, Banega 49)
Switzerland 1 (Alves 48-og) **Brazil 0**
Bosnia & Herzegovina 3 (Dzeko 8, 90, Ibisevic 29) **United States 4** (Johnson 55, Altidore 60, 84, 86)
England 3 (Walcott 29, Welbeck 54, Lambert 71) **Scotland 2** (Morrison 11, Miller 50)
Belgium 0 **France 0**
Portugal 1 (Ronaldo 86) **Netherlands 1** (Strootman 17)

'Luiz not for sale'

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho says there are no circumstances that would move the Premier League club to consider an offer for defender David Luiz.

The 26-year-old Brazil centre-back has been linked with a move to Spanish champions Barcelona but Mourinho says there is no way he would be allowed to leave Stamford Bridge.

"No chance he is going to leave. He is a player we want to keep," Mourinho told BT Sport.

"He is a player with four years (on his) contract, he just signed a contract last year. We like him. He is an important player for the club and the club is not ready to sell him for any price."

Bale out of season's start

AFP, London

Gareth Bale will not feature in Tottenham Hotspur's start to the new Premier League season, manager Andre Villas-Boas said Thursday amid ongoing speculation linking the winger with a world record move to Spanish giants Real Madrid.

The 24-year-old missed Wales's goalless friendly international against the Republic of Ireland on Wednesday with a foot injury and Villas-Boas said the problem would keep Bale out of Spurs' opening Premier League match away to newly-promoted Crystal Palace on Sunday.

Asked if Bale would play at Selhurst Park, Villas-Boas said: "No, because he's been out injured for most of pre-season."



Brazil fullback Daniel Alves reacts after scoring an own goal during their international friendly against Switzerland at the St. Jakob Stadium in Basel on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Suspect temperament

REUTERS, Basel



Brazil's shock defeat by Switzerland exposed the same temperamental weaknesses that led to their downfall at the 2010 World Cup and could undermine their bid to win a sixth title on home soil next year.

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari brushed aside Wednesday's 1-0 loss, putting it down to a lack of preparation time at the start of the season, but the match's apparent lack of importance made Brazil's petulant behaviour all the more noticeable.

Brazil forward Neymar tangled with Stephan Lichtsteiner early in the game and retaliated by kicking the Swiss full back from behind in the 23rd minute, leading to an unseemly scuffle on the touchline in which Brazil full back Marcelo appeared to push Lichtsteiner in the face.

Minutes later, Marcelo hacked down Xherdan Shaqiri with the sort of ugly challenge which, although unpunished on Wednesday, could easily have earned a red card in a competitive match with a less tolerant referee.

Fellow defender Dante then went thumping into Hans Seferovic, generating more Swiss protests.

Neymar, jeered several times when he fell down and failed to win a free kick, complained about Swiss rough arm tactics after the game in what seemed an unfair accusation against the hosts.

"Switzerland are a team who kick a lot, and stay back in defence," he told Brazilian television. "It's difficult to play against that sort of team."

Bizarrely, it was some cheeky skills from some of the Swiss players, in particular the impish Shaqiri, which really appeared to rile Brazil, rather than rough tackling.

The Brazilian players were clearly irritated at being on the receiving end of the sort of trickery they usually enjoy subjecting their opponents to.

Brazil should by now have learned the importance of keeping their cool.

The World Cup, with a group stage followed by a knockout contest, can be a cruel competition where a single slip-up or loss of temper can undo all the previous good work.

That was more or less what happened to Brazil three years ago. They powered through their group and

round of 16 match and looked in little danger at halftime in their quarter-final against Netherlands as they led 1-0 after dominating the game.

But they collapsed after a defensive mix-up allowed the Dutch to equalise and went on to lose 2-1, with midfielder Felipe Melo sent off for petulantly stamping on Arjen Robben.

Brazil completely lost their composure with coach Dunga one of the worst offenders as he spent the second half ranting against the referee.

It was a similar story at the Olympic final against Mexico in 2012, where Brazil never pulled themselves together after conceding an early goal and went on to lose 2-1.

Even their usually unflappable coach Mano Menezes, who had preached about the virtues of patience, spent most of the game ranting at the referee and demanding yellow cards for the Mexican players.

If Brazil cannot keep calm in a season-opening friendly against the usually placid Swiss, their nerves are unlikely to withstand the pressure-cooker atmosphere of a World Cup knockout game.

Rodgers won't talk about Suarez

AFP, London



Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers said on Thursday that he will not talk about Luis Suarez until the unsettled striker is available to play after weeks of speculation about his future.

Arsenal have had two transfer bids for the Uruguay international rejected and Suarez has been forced to train on his own by Rodgers after he went public about his desire to leave.

Liverpool's principal owner John W Henry has declared that Suarez will not be allowed to leave the club, while captain Steven Gerrard has urged him to stay.

Suarez will miss the first six games of the new season as he completes a 10-game suspension for biting Chelsea's Branislav Ivanovic in April, and Rodgers says he does not want to discuss the 26-year-old until he returns at the end of September.

"From our perspective, there is a standpoint from the club and myself that has not changed," said Rodgers.

"What I want to concentrate on is the players that are available for this weekend so I won't be speaking any more about Luis Suarez until he is available."

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