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## Rooney trains with reserves

The English Football Association has reacted to speculation about striker Wayne Rooney's place in the England team by explaining that he trained with back-up players at his own request on Monday. In a statement on Twitter, the FA said that the Manchester United striker was merely eager to maintain peak fitness between matches. "Contrary to reports, @WayneRooney requested additional training and worked with a wider group of players on Monday," it said. "Following a recovery session on Sunday a number of players continued

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# SPORT

Brazil  
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FIFA WORLD CUP  
Brazil



## Iran parked the bus: Mikel

GOAL.COM

John Obi Mikel has accused Iran of parking the bus after Nigeria drew 0-0 with the World Cup minnows in their World Cup opener on Monday.

In a dire affair that produced the first goalless draw of the competition, the Super Eagles struggled for any sort of attacking fluency, with their star men anonymous.

After the game, the Chelsea man admitted his side had come up short in the final third and said they will need to be sharper in front of goal if they are to reach the knockout stages.

He said: "We are very disappointed because the opening match is very important.

"We looked for the win, but Iran knew what we wanted to do and put 11 men behind the ball. They managed to stop us from playing our game.

"We'll have to create more chances in our next match and be sharp in front of goal."

PHOTO: AFP

Will inspirational Spain midfielder Andres Iniesta (R) be able to lift his demoralised side in the crunch match against Chile?

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## Portugal deny Meireles gesture

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Portugal denied midfielder Raul Meireles gave a World Cup referee the finger in his side's stormy 4-0 defeat to Germany, insisting that he was merely gesturing a tactical switch.

Pictures on social media show Meireles, who sports a distinctive Mohawk hairstyle, raising the third finger on both hands to referee Milorad Mazic who had sent off Real Madrid defender Pepe.

But the Portuguese football federation (FPF) defended the Fenerbahce player, claiming there was nothing vulgar about the gesture.

"He was passing on to teammate Bruno Alves the instructions being relayed by coach Paulo Bento," said a FPF statement.

## Rouhani praises Iran draw

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani took to Twitter on Tuesday to praise his country's 0-0 draw with Nigeria. "Proud of our boys who secured our first point -- hopefully the first of many more to come," Rouhani tweeted on his English-language account, alongside a picture of him in tracksuit bottoms and a sports shirt adorned with the national flag. It was a rare casual image of the president, who is normally seen in a formal robe and white turban, sitting alone on a sofa watching the match on television with a glass of tea and some pistachios.

## SPAIN V CHILE

# Pressure on Del Bosque Mulling the Mueller paradox

REUTERS, Brasilia

Since Friday's shock 5-1 World Cup reverse to Group B rivals Netherlands, Spain coach Vicente del Bosque has been bombarded with advice about personnel changes he needs to make before Wednesday's Chile clash.

It remains to be seen whether the genial 63-year-old will make any adjustments following the holders' woeful second-half performance in their opening match in Salvador but he certainly has plenty of talent to call on if he decides tweaks are needed.

Although the scale of Friday's thrashing was truly shocking, Del Bosque reacted with much the same calm as when Spain slipped to a 1-0 defeat in their opening game in South Africa four years ago before they went

on a six-match winning run that secured their first world title.

"We may make two or three changes," Del Bosque said in an interview with Spanish television broadcaster Cuatro on Monday.

"If I make changes we are not pointing the finger at anyone," he added.

Captain and goalkeeper Iker Casillas looks certain to keep his place despite an error-riddled performance against the Dutch when he lost some of the sheen that earned him the nickname "San Iker" in his native country.

One area where Del Bosque could introduce fresh blood is in central defence, with the versatile Javi Martinez waiting in the wings to replace either Sergio Ramos or Gerard Pique.

Martinez could also come in for Xabi Alonso to bolster central midfield, an area Spain normally dominate effortlessly but where they were brutally exposed on Friday.

Playmaker Xavi, who at 34 is nearing the end of a glittering career, may make way for young pretender Koke, 22, who had a breakthrough season with Atletico Madrid and whom Xavi himself recently named as his natural successor.

Chile forward Esteban Paredes said the South Americans, who began their campaign in Brazil with a laboured 3-1 win against Australia in Cuiaba, had been practising their pressing game before the Spain game in Rio De Janeiro.

"It is going to be a matter of life and death for them and a genuine final for us because a win would

OSAMA RAHMAN

When Germany met Portugal at Salvador, many believed that the match would go towards putting an end to a number of debates in the modern game. The most burning of the issues was the relevance of an out and out striker in the game today. Spain's 'false 9' dominance over the years, the English game's casual brushing off of target men and the emergence of the likes of Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Mario Goetze, Neymar and even Cesc Fabregas, all led to the school of thought that football no longer needs the fox in the box.

To put the theory to test, a game such as this provided the perfect test conditions. On the opposite end of the field, Cristiano Ronaldo was chosen, obviously, to lead the front line for Portugal. Although famed as a winger, Ronaldo was allowed the free-role he desires to drift in and out, making trademark darts from the flank but steadily being forced to contribute to linking up play as opposed to making the most of dangerous through balls and crosses. Again not a traditional striker, Ronaldo, the 2014 Ballon d'Or winner, found himself behind an increasingly poor Hugo Almeida.

Joachim Loew's masterstroke decision to start Thomas Mueller as Germany's forward was met with a few raised eyebrows. Although undeniably talented, the lanky winger came off as lucky to be at the right place at the right time in previous tournaments. Tall, shaggy and skinny in build, Mueller is Germany's enigma. Far removed from past German strikers, who were all glitz, glam and thank you ma'am, Mueller's relative anonymity reflects the one shared by Miroslav Klose. With the latter one goal shy of the Brazilian Ronaldo's mark, it

seems the record is Mueller's for the taking, whether Klose breaks it or not.

Muller made light work of Pepe and Co. The unpredictable Portuguese defence imploded just two goals down, with Pepe showing Muller how to get himself sent off, head-butting Mueller for his reaction to a flaying Pepe arm. Mueller, Mario Goetze and Sammy Khedira continued to make a mockery of Paulo Bento's defensive set-up, culminating in Mueller writing his name in the history books with the tournament's first hat-trick. The beauty behind the hat-trick was the effortlessness. A calm penalty, a quick reaction to the poorest of clearances and excellent eye for goal, all qualities testament to a great striker in the making. However, while you could openly applaud Mueller's game, you'd be forgiven for secretly wondering where the rest of him is.

The 24-year-old already has eight World Cup goals to his name, yet he lacks pace, deft skills and the silky touches and dribbling skills that make strikers and even wingers like himself famous. Mueller, in all evidence, has always been a ghost from the by-gone era of poachers and clinical finishers, paradoxically in the wrong position in the wrong time. He is also the answer to the question whether there is place for an out and out striker in the modern game. There is, provided his name is Mueller and he can play anywhere on the forward line.

In the end, Germany may have eased past Portugal's challenge. A more than lax defence may have helped the German's cause but other teams will not be so forgiving. Let's hope Mueller doesn't become to Germany what Thierry Henry was to Arsenal; a brilliant striker/winger in a team that just could not complete the job anyway.

THIRD EYE

## End of the road?

AFP, Madrid

Stunned by their heroes' 5-1 humiliation by the Netherlands, Spaniards are already bemoaning the end of a glorious era and fearing the worst in La Roja's life-or-death World Cup clash on Wednesday with Chile.

Diego Maradona put the challenge in a nutshell. "So how are Spain going to recover from this massive blow? Spain isn't used to letting in five goals," the Argentine legend told Latin American television station Telesur.

After a historic triple -- Euro 2008, the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012 -- Spaniards are suddenly facing up to the prospect of losing heavily, perhaps even falling out in the group stage.

"I have the impression that it's the end of an era. The cycle of victories is over," said Javier Gomez, sports presenter for

the private television station La Sexta.

He does not think Spain will make it to the quarter finals. "It is the end of a footballing model," he said, the "tiki taka" trademark of Spain and Barcelona in which players make rapid-fire short passes aimed at frustrating the opponents by depriving them of the ball until the moment it ends up their net.

It is a style that is now under challenge from a faster, more physical game, Gomez told AFP.

"Against Chile they may be able to take control because the players have been stung. But it's going to be very difficult because Chile are a very disciplined team, relentless, very physical on the attack," he predicted.

Spain's squad was selected with no thought for the future, Plaza complained. "This team live a lot in the past, in

what they did in the European Cup and the World Cup. There are players who weren't chosen and who could have been a lot better than some in the team have been," he said.

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque is known for being faithful to his players, he added. "If he takes him off, he kills him."

Spanish manager Rafael Benitez, the former Liverpool boss now with Napoli, warned against burying La Roja too soon.

"Their philosophy has given them numerous triumphs in the past. That should not be forgotten. And they should not change that because of a single defeat," Benitez wrote on his blog, quoted in leading Spanish sports daily Marca.

"Spain has to think of victory and scoring goals," he said.

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