

Fellaini full of confidence

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Belgium can justify their outsiders tag and win the World Cup for the first time, claimed attacking midfielder Marouane Fellaini who said he'll shave off his afro-style hair if they succeed.

The 26-year-old, who has said he will shave his famed afro-style hair should the Red Devils win the trophy, put aside a difficult maiden season with Manchester United after a £27.5million transfer from Everton and scored with a superb header in the 2-1 win over Algeria on Monday.

His goal couldn't have been better-timed as he seeks to convince new United boss Louis van Gaal that he is worth persevering with when the Dutch national coach takes over the reins after the World Cup.

While the Belgians, appearing in their first major championships since the 2002 World Cup, were slow to get into their rhythm they looked more like the side that went undefeated through their qualifiers by the end of the match when Dries Mertens scored the winner.

"Belgium are capable of winning the World Cup," said Fellaini. "If that proves the case I promise that I will shave my hair."

Fellaini, son of Moroccan parents whose father was a former professional goal-keeper, received rave reviews for his performance when he came on as a substitute against Algeria and with the Belgians trailing 1-0.

Former England striker turned BBC presenter Gary Lineker tweeted an ironic tweet that Manchester United should buy the Fellaini that played for Belgium.

However, Fellaini, who chose to play for Belgium ahead of Morocco, says there is no difference between his performances for his country and United, despite him failing to score a goal in the Premier League last term.

"The Fellaini of Manchester and of Belgium is the same player," he insisted.

"They bought me a year ago. There have been the good moments and the bad ones."

"I was injured, there was a change of coach (his former Everton boss David Moyes was sacked), and the team wasn't playing well. I will see next season. I will try to be better."

Fellaini said he hadn't regarded the game against Algeria as a case of proving himself.

"For me the match was not a case of answering my critics," he said.

"I don't owe anybody anything."



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Argentina's striking pair of Lionel Messi (L) and Sergio Aguero will look for better understanding up front against Iran today.

মানসম্পন্ন বাংলাদেশী পণ্যের ব্যবহার
শিল্প বিকাশে সহায়ক

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ARGENTINA V IRAN

Messi seeks to be offensive

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Argentina captain Lionel Messi believes coach Alejandro Sabella has to back his side's attacking capabilities and include him among a front three when they face Iran on Saturday in Belo Horizonte.

Napoli striker Gonzalo Higuain is expected to return to Sabella's starting line-up as the two-time winners look to seal their place in the second round of the World Cup with a victory over Iran.

Higuain came on as a substitute to set up Messi to score just his second ever World Cup goal as Argentina got their campaign off to a winning start against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Rio on Sunday.

And Messi said he feels more comfortable playing with both Higuain and Sergio Aguero in attack.

"We are Argentina and I think we need to concentrate on ourselves without fixating on who we are playing," said the four-time World Player of the Year.

"We feel more comfortable with two up front and me behind because it makes it easier to counter-attack and, because we have more people in attack, we have more possibilities."

Messi eased some of the pressure on his shoulders to finally deliver his best form at a major tournament for his



country with his stunning effort in the 2-1 win over Bosnia.

However, his underwhelming first-half performance was still criticised by some and he admitted he needs to play closer to the opposition's goal.

"In the first-half I found it difficult to get a hold of the ball and when I did I was very far from goal."

"The truth is when I did have the ball I lost it a number of times and at other times I was playing it backwards. I was annoyed at not being able to play the game I had planned."

Along with Higuain, Fernando Gago could return in

midfield at the expense of Maxi Rodriguez as he too made a positive impression as a second-half substitute against Bosnia.

Javier Mascherano is also expected to win his 100th cap in midfield and insisted he is as hungry for success as he was on his international debut.

"I am not one of those players that makes the difference on the pitch, but more a player that sacrifices myself for the team. What is my secret? I live for this."

Iran made an encouraging start to their campaign too as they held African champions Nigeria to a 0-0 draw in Curitiba on Monday.

Coach Carlos Queiroz fiercely defended his side's tactics in that match given their lack of facilities and poor preparation in comparison to their more illustrious opponents in Group F.

And striker Reza Ghoochannejhad believes his side can enjoy the experience of taking on one of the best side's in the world with nothing expected of them.

"We have to enjoy it and follow the coach's instructions to the letter. We've got absolutely nothing to lose in this match," said the Carlton Athletic striker.

"Argentina are among the favourites this year, while the same can't be said for us. All the pressure will be on their shoulders and we will have to show our resilience, like against Nigeria."

All the way from Rosario

AP, Belo Horizonte

They travelled for 50 hours from Lionel Messi's hometown, Rosario, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Argentina star.

On Wednesday, 120 teenage boys from the Renato Cesarini football academy clustered around the entrance of the team's base in Belo Horizonte, all wearing Argentina's blue and white-striped shirt.

After some negotiations with security guards and team officials at the gate, it was agreed that 10 of them would be allowed in to watch Argentina practice.

Named after the late Argentina player and coach Renato Cesarini, the academy has seen several national team players rise through its ranks, including Javier Mascherano and Martin Demichelis.

Messi, however, did not. The Argentina captain moved to Spain and FC Barcelona at 13, which has made it difficult for him to win the hearts of many of his countrymen, despite all his accolades.

The teenagers from Rosario, though, expressed no doubts about Messi's Argentine heart as they jealously watched journalists pass through security.

"People think that because he went abroad he doesn't play with passion for the national team," said Ezequiel Luna, a 17-year-old defender. "But he keeps it well inside. He wears the Argentina shirt with pride."

KEY STATS

The pair's only past meeting, a draw in 1977, came during a four-team friendly tournament to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of Real Madrid.

Exactly 16 years before Saturday's match on 21 June, 1998, Iran achieved their first World Cup victory by beating the United States 2-1 in France.

Argentina have earned three victories in as many meetings with Asian opponents in the World Cup, overcoming South Korea twice (3-1 in 1986, 4-1 in 2010) and Japan once (1-0 in 1998)

GERMANY V GHANA

Die Mannschaft eye last 16

REUTERS, Santo Andre

Germany will be looking to silence Ghana's Kevin-Prince Boateng in their World Cup Group G match on Saturday after the German-born midfielder accused Joachim Loew's team of lacking a "tough-guy" leader to carry them through tight matches.

Boateng, who once played for Germany's Under-21 team before switching to Ghana, touched a nerve by saying that no German takes charge in tough games - as in their semifinal defeat by Italy at Euro 2012 and a 4-4 draw with Sweden last year.

Germany were in splendid form in their 4-0 win over Portugal and will be looking to secure safe passage to the last 16 with victory over Ghana in Fortaleza.

Loew is hoping to field the same starting line-up that crushed Portugal even though there are question marks surrounding defender Mats Hummels, who hobbled off in the second half

with a severely bruised thigh.

Expectations are running high on Loew and the three-times World Cup winners, who are among the favourites in Brazil, after they reached the semifinals in the last two World Cups and got to the final in 2002.

Their demolition of Portugal, the team they feared most in the arguably the tournament's most difficult group that also includes the United States, put more pressure on Germany to win the World Cup for the first time since 1990.

Germany beat Ghana 1-0 in the final match of the 2010 World Cup group stage to top the standings but Ghana advanced as well. It was a historic match when Boateng and his brother Jerome, a Germany defender, become the first brothers to play against each other at a World Cup finals.

"We need to take the teamwork, confidence and enthusiasm we had in the opening match into the Ghana match," said captain Phillip Lahm, whose team went to clinch a spot in the

round of 16 before facing the United States and their former coach Juergen Klinsmann on June 26.

The Germans were relieved to see Spain eliminated in the group phase, a team they probably feared most.

But they are also aware that the big win against Portugal could be worthless if they lose to Ghana. At the 2010 World Cup Germany won their opening match 4-0 against Australia before losing to Serbia 1-0.

"We won one match so far in the group phase but that's nothing compared to what we came here for," said midfielder Toni Kroos, who had two assists against Portugal.

Loew will likely stick to the 4-3-3 line-up that beat Portugal and set up Thomas Mueller for three goals.

Boateng certainly threw down the gauntlet with his comments.

"I guessed I touched a nerve by speaking the truth about that," said Boateng, who fancies himself as such a tough-guy leader.



PHOTO: AFP

Is Germany forward Thomas Mueller (L) trying to make former German international Cacau understand that hattricks are not something that come daily?

Altidore out of Portugal clash

AFP, Chicago

Forward Jozy Altidore will miss the United States' crucial World Cup match against Portugal on Sunday with a hamstring injury, the US Soccer Federation announced Thursday.

But striker Clint Dempsey and Matt Besler would be ready for the critical Group G match against Cristiano Ronaldo, US officials indicated in a Twitter statement.

Altidore "out" of the USA v Portugal game while Besler and Dempsey "are fit and available," the injury update said.

Altidore left the Americans' 2-1 victory over Ghana on Monday in the 21st minute with a left hamstring strain. Besler went out in the 41st minute with a right hamstring issue.

A team spokesman said they hoped Altidore would be fit for later matches, the next vital one being the group stage finale against Germany next Thursday.

"Obviously Jozy is a big part of our team," Dempsey said. "He played a big part in us getting here in qualifying. We'll have to adjust and everybody will have to step up, that's why we have substitutes."

Dempsey suffered a broken nose in the Ghana triumph and could use a mask to protect his nose from further damage in future matches.

Portugal need a victory over the Americans to get their World Cup back on track after opening with a 4-0 loss to Germany.

NIGERIA V BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Attack casts a shadow

AFP, Cuiaba

The bomb attack that killed at least 21 people watching a World Cup game in Nigeria has cast a sombre shadow over the African champions' build-up to Saturday's date with Bosnia-Herzegovina in Cuiaba.

Tuesday night's bomb exploded in the midst of a crowd watching Brazil play Mexico on a giant screen in Damaturu, capital of Yobe state.

Stephan Keshi's men observed one minute's silence at training on Wednesday as team media officer Ben Alaiya predicted the atrocity would add further motivation for a strong performance at the Arena Pantanal.

Not that any extra incentive is needed as a win would push them onto four points and in a solid enough position to secure a ticket to the knockout stages as runners-up to likely

table toppers Argentina.

"They will have a clearer idea of what's required before kick-off with Iran tackling Argentina earlier in the day."

Nigeria stand on one point, the reward for their part in the much-maligned goalless stalemate with Iran which left them without a World Cup win in nine matches.

One certitude about Saturday's game is that defeat for Bosnia would mean an early trip back to Sarajevo after their concluding first round fixture, against Iran, next week.

Bosnia were stumped by Lionel Messi who set up the opening goal and then conjured up a superb second in Argentina's 2-1 win.

Coach Safet Susic has vowed that his men will step up a gear after a tactical move not to go all out against the South American giants.

Japan lacked ideas: Honda

AFP, Tokyo

Japan midfielder Keisuke Honda slammed the team's lack of creative spark following Thursday's 0-0 World Cup draw with Greece, which left them on the brink of elimination.

"We lack ideas," Japan's bleach-blond talisman told local media.

"We tried to attack but we just can't put the ball in the back of the net."

Honda, who scored Japan's goal in a 2-1 defeat by Ivory Coast in their World Cup opener in Brazil, cut a forlorn figure after a frustrating stalemate against 10-man Greece.

Japan must now beat Colombia, already through to the knockout stage after two wins, in their final Group C game to have any chance of advancing. "Greece were very hard to break down," said Honda. "We have to be more aggressive against Colombia," added the AC Milan player, who ambitiously declared Japan could win the World Cup before the tournament.

"We must somehow find a way to score goals and come away with three points."

Japan, who reached the last 16 of the World Cup four years ago, could still be sent packing even if they beat Colombia with Ivory Coast on three points.

Spanish Fed backs del Bosque

REUTERS

The Spanish soccer federation (RFEF) wants Spain coach Vicente del Bosque to remain in the job despite the team's failure at the World Cup finals in Brazil, according to secretary general Jorge Perez.

Del Bosque, who has a contract until after the 2016 European Championships in France, said he would consider his position after the holders lost their opening two Group B games to the Netherlands and Chile and were eliminated from the tournament.

Perez said there had not yet been any formal discussion about Del Bosque's future and it had been decided to wait until the team, who play their final match against Australia on Monday, was back in Spain before holding talks.

"It is better to let some time elapse and wait to discuss things calmly in Madrid," Perez said on Spanish radio.

"When Del Bosque signed the contract (to 2016) he said that if for any reason we thought he should not continue he would leave," he added.

"Del Bosque has not presented his resignation and if he did we would ask him to carry on."

"From the top to the bottom at the federation we are with Del Bosque. If we have the best why change?"

Del Bosque, 63, has already earned his place in the pantheon of soccer's greatest managers despite the unexpected setback in Brazil.

After taking over from Luis Aragones following Spain's Euro 2008 victory, he led the nation to their first World Cup triumph in South Africa in 2010 and a second straight continental title at Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine.

MI AMORE
PREMIUM DAIRY ICE CREAM
TASTE OF TOGETHERNESS
temptation
CHOCOLATE CREAMO

FROM THE MASTERS OF
MY LOVE
MY FOOTBALL

CLEMON
সুস্বাদু
Freshness

INFO ZONE

HEAD-TO-HEAD									
ARGENTINA					IRAN				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
1	1	0	0		1	0	0	1	
RESULT OF LAST MEETING: IRAN 1-1 ARGENTINA, 1-4 ON PENALTIES (22 MARCH 1977)									

KEY PLAYERS

LIONEL MESSI
87CAPS
39GOALS SCORED
2WC GOALS

JAVAD NEKOUNAM
141CAPS
37GOALS SCORED
0WC GOALS

TEAM FORMATION

4-3-3
Romero
4: Zabaleta, Fernandez, Garay, Rojo
3: Biglia, Mascherano, Di Maria
3: Messi, Higuain, Aguero

4-2-3-1
Davari
4: Heydari, Hosseini, Sadeghi, Belkadehi
2: Nekounam, Teymourian
3: Dejagah, Jahanbakhsh, Shojaei
1: Ghoochannejhad.

HEAD-TO-HEAD									
GERMANY					GHANA				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
3	2	1	0		3	0	1	2	
RESULT OF LAST MEETING: GHANA 0-1 GERMANY (23 JUNE 2010, WORLD CUP)									

KEY PLAYERS

THOMAS MUELLER
50CAPS
20GOALS SCORED
8WC GOALS

ASAMOAH GYAN
79CAPS
40GOALS SCORED
4WC GOALS

TEAM FORMATION

4-2-3-1
Neuer
4: Boateng, Groscheutz, Mertesacker, Howedes
2: Khedira, Lahm
3: Muller, Ozil, Gotze
1: Klose

4-2-3-1
Dauda
4: Opare, Boye, Mensah, Afful
2: Muntari, Essien
3: Asamoah, Boateng, Ayew
1: Gyan

HEAD-TO-HEAD	
NIGERIA	BOSNIA
THEY HAVE NEVER FACED EACH OTHER	
KEY PLAYERS	
VICTOR MOSES	VEDAD IBISEVIC

KEY PLAYERS

VICTOR MOSES
22CAPS
7GOALS SCORED
0WC GOALS

VEDAD IBISEVIC
56CAPS
21GOALS SCORED
1WC GOALS

TEAM FORMATION

4-5-1
Enyeama
4: Ambrose, Emodu, Oshaniwa, Omeruo, Yobo
5: Mikel, Musa, Onazi, Azeze, Moses
1: Emenike

4-4-1-1
Begovic
4: Mujdza, Bickacic, Spahic, Salihovic
4: Hajrovic, Medunjanin, Pjanic, Lulic
1: Ibrisevic
1: Dzeko

AFP, Brasilia

EMOTION TOO MUCH FOR DIE

Tearful Ivory Coast midfielder Serey Die said the emotion of playing at the World Cup had simply overcome him during his country's national anthem before they lost to Colombia on Thursday.

Pictures of Die crying during the Elephants' hymn were beamed around the world, sparking social media rumours that his father had died just a few days ago.

Die dismissed those rumours and said it was simply the occasion that got to him in Brasilia.

"I'm a very emotional person. My life has always been difficult. I thought about my father who died in 2004, and I also thought about my tough life," said Die.

"I never thought I would be here one day, that one day I would play for my country. That emotion took over."

"I fought (to hold back the tears) but I couldn't. I didn't think that could happen to me but it was stronger than me."

PATRIOTIC FERVOUR GET THE BETTER OF ROSBERG
Germany's Formula One championship leader Nico Rosberg will allow his patriotic fervour get the better of him on Saturday as he settles down to

SINGER
LED TV

Screen Size
42", 32", 28", 24", 19"

on the eve of the Austrian Grand Prix to watch his country's footballers to play their second game of the World Cup finals.

Rosberg of Mercedes and his compatriot Nico Hulkenberg of Force India were over the moon at

their country's 4-0 annihilation of Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo and his Portugal team on Monday.

"I expected a strong showing but not 4-0 against Portugal! It was fantastic and so much fun to watch," Rosberg told journalists at the Red Bull Ring.

"I'm just a little concerned that maybe we already played our best game right at the beginning," Hulkenberg joked.

For both drivers, even racing the next day was no reason to give up watching Germany's face-off with Ghana on Saturday evening.

"Of course (I'll watch)," said Hulkenberg, before enquiring about the kick-off time. Told the game would start at 9:00pm (1900GMT), he replied relaxed: "It's doable, it's all good."

Rosberg noted: however that he would be watching games alone rather than with his team -- "or I'll get grief if I cheer when somebody scores against them!" he said even before England lost 2-1 to Uruguay on Thursday.

SPAIN EXIT BAD FOR WC
Defending champions Spain's shock group stage exit from the World Cup is not good for the tournament, Switzerland coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said on Thursday.

The Swiss face France in Friday's Group E clash in Salvador, but Hitzfeld, who in the 2010 finals guided his Swiss side to a surprise opening match win over the Spanish, said he is sad to see Spain take an earlier than expected plane home.

Spain's 2-0 defeat to Chile on Wednesday means Vicente del Bosque's side could no longer finish in the top two in their group having been thrashed 5-1 in their opening match by the Netherlands.

Hitzfeld, who said before the tournament started he thought it almost impossible for a European team to win the title, said it was a shame that such a great side as Spain would play no part in the knockout stages.

"I have great admiration for Mr Del Bosque and I am sorry for him that Spain are on their way home," said German-born Hitzfeld.

Brazil pokes fun at England

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian media turned to The Beatles and the group's classic Abbey Road album to poke fun at England's World Cup flops on Friday.

Lance sports daily headlined England's 2-1 loss to Uruguay as "Bye bye!", a result which followed a 2-1 opening defeat to Italy.

The paper produced an amusing visual take on England's woes by reproducing the cover of the Beatles' Abbey Road album.

The original, historic photo shows John, Paul, George and Ringo crossing the West London street, a site of pilgrimage for Beatles fans.

The Lance version depicted a dancing Daniel Sturridge, a grimacing Steven Gerrard, a frustrated Wayne Rooney and a ponderous Hodgson on the famous crossing outside Abbey Road Studios.

Lyrics from Come Together on the 1969 album actually refer to football -- "He wear no shoeshine, he got toe jam football."

At times, lumbering England looked as if they also had "walrus gumbout" on their

feet as they slid to defeat at the hands of two-goal Liverpool forward Luis Suarez.

Lance depicted Suarez dressed as a phantom -- some Uruguay supporters are in Brazil dressed as ghosts looking to put the hex on the hosts as they did in the 1950 final.

The same cartoon showed a concussed Rooney slumped by a goalpost.

Globo saluted the "Boy from Liverpool" as Suarez, only just returning from knee surgery, accepted a gift of a misplaced header from clubmate Gerrard to bag the winner after heading Uruguay in front.

O Estado de Sao Paulo trumpeted Suarez's achievements as "decisive".

The daily noted: "Back from surgery, Luis Suarez burst on the Cup scene in outstanding fashion, scoring the goals in Uruguay's victory over England."

The same journal noted that with the Corinthians Arena a sea of sky blue the stadium turned into "Montevideo for a day."

Brasilia-based Correio Braziliense and Amazon region daily A Critica agreed that "only a miracle" can now save England from a group phase elimination.