

#### Adidas celebrates Messi's birthday

Lionel Messi has just turned 27 on Tuesday. So, to celebrate, Adidas have made a special edition pair of football boots for the superstar to don on his special day. His new footwear are a technicolor version of the adizeroTM f50 Messi boots, which the Argentinian wizard is currently wearing at the World Cup in Brazil. There are to be 27 total pairs made in total -- one for each year of his life -- with two exclusive signed







# MATCHES

NIGERIA ARGENTINA

Time: 10:00pm Venue: Estadio Beira-Rio



Time: 10:00pm Venue: Arena Fonte Nova



HONDURAS **SWITZERLAND** Time: 2:00am (Thursday) Venue: Arena Amazonia



ECUADOR FRANCE Time: 2:00am (Thursday)







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in recrimination and accusation when the full-back Jordi Alba confronted a journalist and told him: "I'll rip your head off." As he was leaving the

Spain's World Cup ended

Arena da Baixada after the 3-0 win over Australia through the mixed zone where journalists gather to speak to players, Alba passed in front of Javier Gomez Matallanas, a reporter for the sports daily AS. Without stopping he said: "Next time I'll rip your head off."

Matallanas expressed his surprise to which Alba added: "Yes, yes, next time ... I'm warning you."

According to journalists who were present, the confrontation continued as the team boarded their

flight back to Spain. Before that second confrontation Matallanas spoke to Onda Cero radio and related the conversation, saying: "I have no idea why. I have not written anything about him. I don't remember writing anything about him at all."



A Brazilian fan cheers for her team against Cameroon at the Mane Garrincha National Stadium in Brasilia on Monday.



# Louis goes on attack

AFP, Sao Paulo

Netherlands coach Louis van Gaal took journalists to task on Monday as he bristled at suggestions he wasn't playing attacking football at the World Cup.

After his team beat Chile 2-0 to top Group B with three wins out of three, Van Gaal fired back questions at the press conference when asked about his counter-attacking set-up.

"Could you give me a definition of attacking football? That's my question to you," Manchester United-bound Van Gaal said to one journalist.

"I'm asking you, if you have such a clever question... If you're going to ask me questions, I'm going to ask you questions."

Opposing coach Jorge Sampaoli had also criticised the Dutch tactics, saying "we wanted to play but the Netherlands were just closing down". Van Gaal refused to comment.

But he did say that his strategies were simply designed to win. In a cagey game of little attacking endeavour, the Dutch struck twice late on through Leroy Fer and Memphis Depay.

"It's all about winning so I use the system I think will let me win... that's what I think football is, " Van Gaal said.

"You have to evaluate a strategy that will help you win, and this is the proof in the pudding. We're not giving away games and we're winning."

Van Gaal added that he had used a similar 5-3-2 system to win the 2009 Dutch championship with AZ Alkmaar. At the World Cup, the Netherlands have beaten Spain 5-1 and Australia 3-2.

"This has nothing to do with the fact that you play more offensive or less offensive," Van Gaal said.

"It simply has to do with the fact that my team, my group and staff always want to score one more goal than the other team."

In a rejigged line-up, World Cup debutant Jeremain Lens was brought in for the suspended Robin van Persie and Dirk Kuyt was in an unaccustomed withdrawn role on the left.

The 33-year-old Fenerbahce forward said he had enjoyed his defensive role and was prepared to play there again. But he also hit back at suggestions of negative tactics.

"You can say what you want but a team that scores 10 goals in three games with an average of 3.3 goals is not really a defensive team," said Kuyt.

### 'Didn't want Chile'

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari on Monday insisted that his side are getting better all the time but acknowledged that a last-16 tie against Chile was not what he wanted.

The World Cup hosts clinched first place in Group A after a Neymar-inspired 4-1 win against already-eliminated Cameroon at the National Stadium in Brasilia.

And the result ensured that they would face Group B runners-up Chile, beaten 2-0 by the Netherlands earlier in the day, in Belo Horizonte on Saturday.

"I feel good now that we have qualified and I am thinking about my team. I know that they are going to keep improving," said Scolari after seeing Neymar score twice and Fred and Fernandinho also find the target.I have played against Chile two times before and I know how difficult a side they are. Some people think we will beat Chile easily but they are a quality side, well organised.

"If I could have chosen our opponents I would not have chosen them."

Brazil and Chile are familiar foes, having met each other twice in friendly matches since the return of Scolari for a second spell as coach.

In April last year the sides drew 2-2 at the Mineriao in Belo Horizonte, the same stadium where they will meet on Saturday, with Neymar scoring one of Brazil's goals that

Then, last November, Brazil emerged 2-1 winners in a friendly played in Canada, with Hulk and Robinho scoring either side of an Eduardo Vargas goal for the Chileans.

Those results indicate that this encounter will be a tough one to call, especially with Chile having impressed in qualifying from their group ahead of 2010 world champions Spain.

And Chile will be eager to get revenge for defeats suffered at the hands of Brazil in the last 16 in each of their last two appearances at the World Cup.

In 1998, Brazil won 4-1 in Paris, while in 2010 they triumphed 3-0 in Johannesburg.

Current form suggests this should be a much closer affair, but Scolari is pleased with the way his side have improved since the start of the tournament as they progress from their group with seven points taken from a possible nine.

"We are almost at the ideal level and it is important to be at that level going into the knockout rounds," said the 65-year-old Scolari, who coached Brazil to glory at the 2002 World Cup.

"Now we need to commit fewer mistakes. In the group stage you can get away with slipping up once as long as you win your other two matches. Now you can't afford to because one goal can decide a match.

"Today (Monday) we scored goals and improved yet again. In the next match we will need to improve a little bit more again to beat a very good Chile team. "Sometimes we wanted to do too well. We

need to calm down. I thought we played well. We had to correct some things at half-time but after that we did better in the second half." Brazil will return briefly to their training base in Teresopolis, outside Rio de Janeiro,

to prepare for the clash with Chile and

Scolari will consider possible changes to his

starting line-up. He is likely to remain loyal to Fred, the under-fire striker who broke his World Cup scoring duck with Brazil's third goal against Cameroon, but Fernandinho made a com-

## Not as good as it seems for Brazil

AL-AMIN

After Brazil's 4-1 win against Cameroon Monday night a lot of people will feel that the Selecao have finally come to the party in the irrepressible fashion that is expected of them. In scoring terms they have definitely entertained the world audience on a night where as many as 14 goals were scored in four games. But for a loyal Brazil follower the performance marked just a slight improvement from their first two games and definitely not one for others to follow. Fred did score a goal which could have been easily ruled off side. Oscar was again below par and midfielder Paulinho was miserable before being withdrawn at the end of the first 45 minutes during which an otherwise lifeless Cameroon side, with two previous forgettable encounters, looked like a team to take the game away.

The only difference between the two sides was Neymar. The bundle of talent not only enjoyed (the rest at times seemed to be suffering from stage fright) his third game on the trot but also produced two clinical finishes.

of a magnificent pass from Luis Gustavo. His second was a masterstroke. But here is the crux of the problem with Brazil. The team is too reliant on a particular player as is the case with Argentina.

Historically, Argentina have banked heavily on individual brilliance. But this has never been the case with Brazil, which over the years have presented the world a magnificent group of players. Pele might be the greatest Brazilian ever to grace a football field or a toothy Rolando better known as El Phenomenon. But even in the eras when the aforementioned rule they produced equally magnificent players like a Garrincha, a Socrates, a Romario et al. However, if we are to accept the cliché that change is the most unchangeable aspect of life we may have to live with the fact that Brazil's title ambitions will depend solely on Neymar's performance as Argentina's will on Messi's.

In the group stages every team has a chance to make amends for mistakes. But with the knockout stage knocking at the door, Brazil can ill afford those mistakes committed in the first three games. On Monday the defence looked pelling case for inclusion in the starting line- His first goal was a perfect placement vulnerable and it is time for Danny Russia. Long live La Roja.

Alves to look into his comical errors instead of spitting venom at his critics like Alan Shearer. The good news for Brazil is that Fernandinho, coming in as a second-half replacement for Paulinho, lent the solidity and flair that Brazil desperately need. And it would be a crime if he dose not start in Brazil's round of 16 clash with Chile on Saturday.

The Dutch continue to impress with Arjen Robben perhaps seemingly

running as fast as a Usain Bolt. Amidst the euphoria of this highoctane World Cup one team bowed out quietly in Curitiba, marking the end of a successful era of tiki-taka. It is not only a sad day for Spain but a day the football world will reflect with a heavy heart about a brand of football that Andre Iniesta and Co preached with great authority. It is a kind of football that captivated the world for the best part of this decade. Sadly though, people are questioning the sustainability of tiki-taka instead of asking if there is any team in the world that has the ability to master this great art that made football richer. We will have to wait for an answer come the 2018 World Cup in

