

KEYSTATS

Argentina have won the World Cup twice, in 1978 and 1986.

In previous Group F matches, Argentina beat Bosnia 2-1 and Iran 1-0 have already qualified for the Group of 16.

Nigeria are playing in their fifth World Cup. Their best performances were in 1994 and 1998, when they reached the Round of 16.

Nigeria drew with Iran in their opening Group F match then beat Bosnia 1-0. They need a point against Argentina to ensure going through in the event that Iran beat Bosnia.

Nigeria are reigning African champions.



Rest assured ... with Argentina already qualified for the round of 16, their goalkeeper Sergio Romero can afford to take a break from the rigours of training in Belo Horizonte on Sunday.

NIGERIA V ARGENTINA

Daunting task for Super Eagles

Nigeria face Lionel Messi's already qualified Argentina in Porto Alegre on Wednesday with a first appearance in the last 16 since 1998 tantalisingly within the African champions' grasp.

Tens of thousands of Messi fans are expected to make the trip up from Argentina to this southern port city for the closing Group F clash where a draw would secure the Nigerians the all important runners-up spot after Peter Odemwingie's goal against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Cuiba on Saturday ended the west Africans' nine-match World Cup winless run.

Defeat to Argentina, who sit top with wins over Iran and Bosnia, could still see Stephen Keshi's men prolong their stay in Brazil, if Iran fail to beat Bosnia up in Salvador.

And FIFA might even have to get out their straws for the drawing of lots should Iran win 1-0 and Nigeria lose by the same score, leaving the sides inseparable on points, goal difference, number of goals and head-to-head.

Argentina approach the game with their noses put out of joint by media criticism of their performances so far, with only Messi's goals against Bosnia and Iran saving their blushes.

"Obviously it hurts when you hear people saying that they don't like you, when people say different things to us," Real Madrid forward Angel Di Maria said at the weekend.

Messi, who turns 27 on Tuesday, and his teammates have a significant incentive to notch up their third win here and into the table as that would mean likely avoiding Didier Deschamps' impressive France for a second round date instead with Group E's runners-up, likely to Ecuador or Switzerland, although Honduras could still snatch that honour.

The two-time former champions may have failed to set the 2014 World Cup stage alight in their opening forays but Messi predicts the Argentine pot is slowly coming to the boil.

"We are not showing what we can do, but with a run of games I think we will get there," said Barcelona's fourth world player-of-the-year.

ECUADOR V FRANCE

No room for let-up

Nigeria's talismanic keeper Vincent Enyeama is relishing the renewal of his rivalry with Argentina's Lionel Messi in Wednesday's closing World Cup Group H game where the African champions are aiming to seal qualification to the last 16.

Enyeama faced the player he hailed on Tuesday as "a genius" at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa where despite some notable saves the Argentines won 1-0.

Asked if he was anxious about the looming skirmish with the four-time World Footballer of the Year the Lille shot-stopper replied: "To tell you the truth I'm never afraid of footballers."

"Messi is one of the best players on the planet, but it's not a game between him and me, it's a game between Nigeria and Argentina."

"Everybody knows he's made a lot of progress since the last time we played against each other in 2010."

"Messi is a genius, one of the best footballers the world has produced, but tomorrow's game is against Argentina, not just him."

After an opening goalless draw against Iran and a 1-0 win over Bosnia-Herzegovina the Super Eagles are assured of taking the runners-up spot behind already qualified Argentina if they come away from the game at Porto Alegre's Beira-Rio stadium with a draw, irrespective of how their rivals for second spot, Iran, fare against Bosnia.

Coach Stephen Keshi, appearing alongside Enyeama at the pre-match press conference, hinted that defender Godfrey Oboabuna, sidelined for Bosnia after an injury in the opening game, was fit again and could return to his starting XI.

France are vowing no let-up of their thrilling attacking style as they seek to storm into the last 16 of the World Cup against Ecuador on Wednesday.

Didier Deschamps's side have been one of the revelations of the tournament so far, bagging eight goals in two games to all but seal qualification from Group E.

A draw in Wednesday's game at the Maracana Stadium would be enough to clinch first place and avoid a probable meeting with Argentina in the last 16.

But France full-back Mathieu Debuchy says his team-mates will aim to finish with a flourish to maintain momentum.

"We need to avoid taking our foot off the gas even if there is not a huge amount at stake," Debuchy said.

"We want to win this match and maintain our positive dynamic in order to prepare well for what is to come."

France's huge goal difference of plus six also means they could even lose to Ecuador and still win the group.

Switzerland, level with Ecuador on three points but trailing on goal difference, would then need to win big against Honduras to have any chance of advancing.

France's comfortable position means Deschamps can shrug off the loss of suspended midfielder Yohan Cabaye, with Lille's Rio Mavuba set to come in.

Deschamps can also contemplate replacing centre-back Mamadou Sakho -- who came off against the Swiss with a thigh problem -- with Laurent Koscielny. Eliaquim Mangala is also on standby as Raphael Varane has been laid low by a stomach bug.

Debuchy meanwhile praised the spirit of unity in the French squad, a stark contrast to the divisions and acrimony that torpedoed their 2010 campaign in South Africa.

"Honestly, it is great to play in this side. We feel great and I love the attacking football," he said.

"I might be a defender, but I like it when everyone plays together as a team."

With Ecuador favouring a direct approach, Wednesday's game could well be a high-scoring encounter.

Wingers Antonio Valencia and Jefferson Montero will provide the ammunition for Felipe Caicedo and



INFO ZONE

HEAD-TO-HEAD									
NIGERIA					ARGENTINA				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
6	1	1	4		6	4	1	1	
LAST MEETING: ARGENTINA 3-1 NIGERIA (6 SEPTEMBER 2011, INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY)									
KEY PLAYERS									
VICTOR MOSES					EZEQUIEL LAVEZZI				
	22	CAPS	31			31			
	7	GOALS SCORED	4			4			
	0	WC GOALS	0			0			
TEAM FORMATION									
4-4-2					4-3-3				
Enyeama, Oghenabrige, Omeuo, Yobo					Romero, Zabaleta, Rojo, Mascherano, Garay				
4: Mikel, Onazi, Emenike, Babatundé, 2: Odemwingie, Musa					3: Fernandez, Gago, Di Maria, 3: Palacio, Lavezzi, Higuain				

'Wait for more from Dutch'

Man-of-the-match Arjen Robben warned there was more to come from a flying Dutch team after they made it three wins out of three at the World Cup in Brazil on Monday.

Late goals from Leroy Fer and Memphis Depay, who toe-poked home Robben's cross, downed Chile 2-0 in Sao Paulo as the Netherlands finished top of Group B.

The Netherlands also thrashed 2010 champions Spain 5-1 and overcame Australia 3-2 to raise hopes they could finally go all the way and win their first World Cup.

"We have to take time to enjoy this fantastic result but it shouldn't end here," said Robben, who nearly scored one of the goals of the tournament after an electrifying run from deep.

"We have to change our mindset and look ahead because we really want to move forward."

Coach Louis van Gaal was guarded over their chances of reaching a fourth World Cup final, citing uncontrollable factors like the debatable penalties they conceded against Spain in Australia.

"We'll have to wait and see. I think it depends on so many factors and a team doesn't always control all these elements," van Gaal said.

মানসম্পন্ন বাংলাদেশী পণ্যের ব্যবহার শিল্প বিকাশে সহায়ক

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA V IRAN

Persians chase goals

Ashkan Dejagah is confident Iran can end their goal-drought by beating Bosnia and Herzegovina on Wednesday to reach the World Cup last 16.

Iran are third in Group F with one point after a goalless draw with Nigeria and the heartbreak of their 1-0 defeat to Argentina when Lionel Messi scored in added time.

In Salvador, the Iranians must beat Bosnia, who are already out, while hoping Nigeria fail to pick up a point against Argentina in Porto Alegre, which also kicks off at 1300 local time.

Salvador's Arena Fonte Nova has seen 17 goals in three games after the Netherlands 5-1 romp over Spain, Germany's 4-0 hammering of Portugal and France's 5-2 rout of the Swiss.

Iran can now do with scoring a few of their own at the same venue.

If they win and Nigeria loses, both sides will finish with four points leaving goal difference to decide who goes through to the last 16 clash in Brasilia next Monday against the Group E winners.

Fulham's Dejagah says his side must bounce back from the disappointment of their Argentinian defeat with a win.

"We still have a chance to go through and who would have thought our World Cup would last longer than England and Spain," Dejagah said.

"We had such a bad feeling after the match against Argentina because of the way it ended."

"We tried to make it tough for them and with a little bit of luck we would have won this game or even got a draw."

BRAZILIAN BAURU

Queen Mathilde of the Belgians made an embarrassing gaffe when congratulating the team for their second round qualification on Sunday. Mathilde congratulated Romelu Lukaku, who is of Congolese origin, for scoring the winner against Russia.

Lukaku, who had shouted abuse at coach Marc Wilmots when he was substituted in the second half, corrected the queen by pointing out Divock Origi. The player of Kenyan extraction was the true scorer and had replaced Lukaku.

Unconcerned by such a politically incorrect mistake, Queen Mathilde kept her composure and told Lukaku: "In any case, you played very well. It's wonderful, thank you." Lukaku was brought off because he had a second poor game in a row.

HAIR HOMOGENEITY IN SWITZERLAND

Switzerland's cosmopolitan squad are trying to strengthen their unity by sporting a common haircut. Blerim Dzemaili and Granit Khaka turned up to a press conference on Sunday sporting the same look, with shaved back and sides and skull-cap style patch on the top.

Khaka explained that: "I started to get my hair cut like [Johan] Djourou. He [Dzemaili] saw my haircut and started copying me, but it doesn't look very good on him."

PAPAL SUPPORT FOR ARGENTINA

Argentina's last gasp 1-0 win over Iran on Saturday was as much due to Pope Francis, an Argentine, as it was Lionel Messi's brilliant goal, according to a priest in Argentina.

"I have no doubt that the pope watched the game and cheered like we did," said Father Lorenzo from Vedia.

"Jesus teaches us about faith and passion. Living with passion is a good thing, and things that generate positive passion like football are good."

Father Lorenzo watched the game with some of his flock on a television set up in his church above a crucifix.

JUST ONE LAST KISS

Belgian players have been following a strict vow of chastity during the World Cup as coach Marc Wilmots banned players' wives and girlfriends from the team hotel in Brazil.

However, affection-starved players were given a brief respite following their game against Russia at the Maracana on Sunday as they escaped up into the stands to give their partners a kiss and a cuddle. Winger Kevin De Bruyne and midfielder Alex Witsel were seen passionately kissing their partners.

SPANISH PASS MASTERS

Spain maybe out of the World Cup but they are still the tournament's pass masters -- true to their trademark tiki-taka game. After their first two matches, the deposed defending champions had carried out 1,385 passes with an 83% success rate, according to FIFA's statisticians.

Germany were second on 1,301 passes with an 82% success rate. Italy had 1,291 passes but the best success rate at 87 per cent.

USA-PORTUGAL TIE SETS RECORD

Sunday's dramatic World Cup match between the United States and Portugal may have ended in a disappointing 2-2 draw for Team USA, but it was a record-setter on US television.

Cable sports network ESPN said Monday the late-afternoon game pulled an average 18.2 million viewers to become "the most-viewed soccer match in the United States ever" -- and the biggest event on ESPN that wasn't



France forward Olivier Giroud honing his bicycle-kick skills during his team's training session at Santa Cruz Stadium in Ribeirao Preto on Sunday.

Neymar hails 'best performance'

Two-goal Neymar hailed Brazil's 4-1 victory over Cameroon as the hosts' "best performance yet" after a man-of-the-match display that fired his team into the World Cup last 16 on Monday.

"The most important thing was the team and I think this was our best performance," said the 22-year-old after receiving his award at the National Stadium in Brasilia.

"Not because of the number of goals we scored but because of how we played, pressing our opponents in the way we wanted to. Congratulations to everyone."

"We are on the right track and are growing all the time as we get closer to making our dream come true."

Brazil's win saw them finish top of Group A on goal difference from Mexico and took them through to a last-16 tie against Chile on Saturday in Belo Horizonte.

"I think it will be a very difficult match. Everyone who is watching the World Cup knows that there are no weak teams in the competition," said Neymar, who has now scored four goals in his first three World Cup matches, equalling a feat achieved by his great predecessor Pele.

"Everybody is at the same level. Football is becoming harder and harder so we will be up against very strong opposition."

Neymar also praised his fellow forward Fred and claimed that the striker's new moustache helped him get among the goals for the first time in this World Cup.

"I told him that he needed to have a moustache to score goals and when he got the goal I reminded him of that," said Neymar.

Fred came in for constant criticism for his performances in Brazil's opening 3-1 win against Croatia and in the 0-0 draw with Mexico last week, but he produced a much-improved all-round display against Cameroon, including netting his side's third goal on the day.

HONDURAS V SWITZERLAND

Swiss want to win now

Switzerland have a chance to put right their dramatic failure of 2010 on Wednesday when they again face bogey team Honduras for a place in the World Cup knockouts.

The situation is eerily similar to four years ago, when the Swiss were in contention for the last 16 but missed out when they drew their last group game with the Central American minnows.

This time around, having scaled the FIFA rankings to a dizzying high place, expectations are high for Ottmar Hitzfeld's respected side.

But confidence was hit in last week's 5-2 rout by France. Meanwhile, Honduras broke a 32-year World Cup finals goal drought in their 2-1 loss to Ecuador.

Midfielder Blerim Dzemaili said Switzerland would be taking nothing for granted when they face the Central Americans in steamy Manaus.

"Everyone can nurture big dreams, but first we have to do a little homework and that is to beat Honduras," said the 28-year-old.

"We have seen that the big teams just relying on individuals are quickly eliminated, which little Switzerland can't afford."

"We have to give our all together, like we

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TASTE OF TOGETHERNESS

TIRAMISU

MY LOVE MY FOOTBALL

HEAD-TO-HEAD

HONDURAS					SWITZERLAND				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
1	0	1	0		1	0	1	0	

LAST MEETING: SWITZERLAND 0-0 HONDURAS (25 JUNE 2010, WORLD CUP)

KEY PLAYERS									
CARLO COSTLY					XHERDEN SHAQIRI				
	71	CAPS	32			32			
	32	GOALS SCORED	9			9			
	1	WC GOALS	0			0			
TEAM FORMATION									
5-3-2					5-4-1				
Valladares, Beckeles, Izaguirre, Garrido, Bernardes, Figueroa					Benaglio, Lichtsteiner, Rodriguez, Inler, Djourou, Von Bergen;				
3: Garcia, Claros, Espinoza					4: Shaqiri, Behrami, Seferovic, Xhaka				
2: Costly, Bengtson					1: Mehmedi				

