

Balotelli hits out at his critics

AFP, Paris

Controversial star Mario Balotelli has hit out at what he describes as his "racist" detractors after being blamed for Italy's World Cup exit.

A social media video posting on Instagram by an Italian said: "Mario, do you know what the thing is? You're not Italian, get out."

As a rare Italy international of African origin -- his birth parents are Ghanaian -- Balotelli stands out in an Italy shirt.

Balotelli replied to the video post and sent a link to his impassioned defence on his own Twitter page.

"I'm Mario Balotelli, I'm 23 and I didn't choose to be Italian," he said.

"I really wanted it because I was born in ITALY and I've always lived in ITALY. This World Cup meant a lot to me and I'm sad, angry and disappointed with myself."

"It's true maybe I could have scored against Costa Rica (they lost 1-0 last Friday), you're (in the plural) right, but then what?"

"Then what's the problem? Maybe what you all want to say is this?"

"Don't put all the blame only on me this time because Mario Balotelli gave everything for the national team and didn't mess up anything, so look for another excuse because Mario Balotelli has a clear conscience and is ready to go forward stronger than before and with his head held high."

"Proud to have given his all for His country. Or maybe, as you say, I'm not Italian. Africans would never abandon one of their brothers. NEVER."



PHOTO: AFP

Bosnia and Herzegovina defender Emir Spahic (L) embraces Iranian striker Reza Ghoochannejhad at fulltime after beating Iran 3-1 in their last Group F match at Arena Fonte Nova in Salvador yesterday.

'We don't need Panini stickers'

INTERNET

Italy veteran De Rossi makes apparent Balotelli comments after Azzurri's World Cup exit

Italy midfielder Daniele De Rossi has launched an astonishing attack on some of his teammates following Italy's departure from the 2014 World Cup.

Italy were defeated 1-0 by Uruguay but the match was

surrounded in controversy after Liverpool and Uruguay striker Luis Suarez appeared to bite Italy centre back Giorgio Chiellini. FIFA have since announced they will investigate and the forward is facing a lengthy ban if found guilty.

However that incident overshadowed the fact that Italy were largely pretty poor and their performance hardly merited going through.

Speaking to La Repubblica after the match De Rossi was highly critical of some the team's performances and

although nothing was confirmed it is suspected that he was referring to AC Milan striker Mario Balotelli, who has been linked with a big-money move to Arsenal in recent weeks.

"There were certainly components that affected the result, like the heat or the refereeing, but we must not cling to these things," said De Rossi.

"We must forget about all this quickly. Actually, I take that back: we should remember well what went wrong and begin again with real men."

"We need real men, not Panini stickers or characters. These are of no use to the Nazionale."

De Rossi's comments over Panini stickers could well be a reference to a photo that Balotelli posted on social media with a picture of a Panini sticker album with himself in every slot in the Italy squad.

Balotelli was substituted at half-time during the match by Cesare Prandelli, who afterwards offered his resignation, and although an injury was mooted as the cause the striker had had

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Right or wrong, he is always in the headlines. Suarez did not score Tuesday to send Italy packing but his 80th-minute antics dominated the sports news across the globe.

The baby-faced Latin American snacked on defender Giorgio Chiellini's shoulder when they collided and tumbled onto the ground in the Italy penalty area. Chiellini eventually got up, pulled down his shirt and furiously indicated he had been bitten on the shoulder. Suarez, on the other hand, grabbed his teeth as if he was in pain as well. The Mexican referee too saw the bite mark but took no action at all. But, the bad news for Suarez is that Fifa, the football's world governing body, has weighed in and started a probe that may lead to a lengthy ban on a player of unquestionable talent. The maximum ban for such an offence is for 24 matches or for two years. Fifa is also probing an alleged Suarez punch on Chilean defender Gonzalo Jara during a World Cup qualifier.

It was the third time the man now known as The Cannibal has sunk his teeth on an opponent during a match. His two other teeth offences happened at club level. A mercurial footballer, Suarez was first banned and fined in 2010 for biting the PSV Eindhoven midfielder Otman Bakkal. His wayward teeth again seized the spotlight while playing for English club Liverpool in 2013. This time, the 27-year-old bit Chelsea defender Branislav Ivanovic on the arm and then went on to level the match at 2-2.

This has been his modus operandi in a chequered career of glory and ignominy. He loves to score goals and create controversies.

Ghana will never forgive Suarez. Dominic Adiyiah was about to put Ghana through to the 2010 World Cup semis in the final minutes of extra time, but Suarez leapt up and prevented the ball going in with his hands. The referee saw everything and sent him off. But Asamoah Gyan missed the resulting penalty and Suarez celebrated wildly on the sidelines. That was not enough as Uruguay went on to snatch the victory in a shoot-out, with Suarez making faces.

Suarez was banned for eight matches and fined £40,000 for racially abusing Manchester United's Patrice Evra in 2011. He refused to shake Evra's hand when Liverpool met United again next year. His ban was extended by one match when he was seen making an offensive gesture towards Fulham fans.

He also celebrated a goal by diving in front of the then Everton manager, David Moyes, who had earlier claimed that "divers such as Suarez are putting fans off the English game."

Everybody thought the World Cup was over for Suarez after he got himself badly injured four weeks back. He sat out the first match as he did not recover fully, but, playing in the next match, he scored twice to send England tumbling out of the World Cup. In the match against Italy, he did not score but bit.

Will he bite or score in Uruguay's next match against Colombia on June 29? Of course, he may not be there for the next match or the rest of the World Cup if Fifa decides to take prompt action against the belligerent striker. One thing is for sure -- with Luis Suarez, there is never a dull moment even when he is off the field. Let's wait and see!

Novak survives

Victoria sent packing

AFP, London

Top seed Novak Djokovic survived a testing Centre Court examination at the hands of close friend and veteran serve-and-volleyer Radek Stepanek to reach the Wimbledon third round on Wednesday.

Djokovic, the 2011 champion, carved out a 6-4, 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/5) victory over the 35-year-old Czech who has now lost 11 of the pair's 12 meetings.

But the world number two progressed the hard way, squandering a 5-2 lead in the third set tie-break before recovering his composure.

Confident statistics of 18 aces and 54 winners helped lay the foundation for victory and a third round clash with French world number 44 Gilles Simon.

Defending champion Andy Murray handed out a tough Wimbledon lesson to Slovenia's Blaz Rola, a former US college champion, coasting to a 6-1, 6-1, 6-0 win over a grasscourt rookie playing just the 10th match of his career.

In the women's event, former world number one and double Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka was knocked out, losing 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 to Serb world number 45, Bojana Jovanovski.

The 22-year-old Jovanovski has reached the third round for the first time and will next face Czech qualifier Tereza Smitskova.

Australian Open champion Li Na, a three-time quarterfinalist, swept to a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Austria's Yvonne Meusburger, hitting 33 winners to just four from the world number 38.

Mathews hits back at Vaughan

AFP, Leeds

Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews had the ideal response to criticism from former England skipper Michael Vaughan regarding the Islanders' "county" attack after the tourists completed a dramatic Test series win at Headingly.

Mathews' men won the second Test by 100 runs after paceman Shaminda Eranga dismissed England No 11 James Anderson with the penultimate ball of Tuesday's final day. Victory saw Sri Lanka take the two-match contest 1-0 and represented their first major series win outside of Asia since they triumphed in New Zealand in 1995.

It was the first time Sri Lanka had won a Test campaign in England comprising more than one match and was the perfect riposte to Vaughan, who had damned the Lankan bowlers as "a glorified county attack".

"Eranga bowled a brilliant ball to dismiss Anderson. I'd tried my best to change the bowlers, change the end and we pulled through," the seam-bowling all-rounder added.

Late strike saves Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

A stoppage-time strike from Osei Morison helped Abahani share points with hosts Muktijoddha Sangsad KC in the Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Ghanaian hitman Morison equalled the margin three minutes into stoppage time of the second half from a free-kick outside the box after Enamul Haque provided Muktijoddha Sangsad a lead in the stoppage time of the first half.

With two successive draws, four-time champions and second-placed Abahani is gradually being condemned to the sidelines of the title race as they are now nine points behind league leaders Sheikh Jamal DC with 39 points from 21 matches.

Muktijoddha Sangsad had a good chance to topple third-placed Mohammedan SC with an outright win but had to be content to stay at fourth position with 34 points from 21 matches.

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