



One centimetre from glory

Chile striker Mauricio Pinilla has had a tattoo etched into his back depicting his agonising miss against Brazil in the second round of the World Cup. With the game tied at 1-1 and the clock ticking down in extra time, Pinilla's shot flew beyond goalkeeper Julio Cesar, but came off the bar. Pinilla not only has the image of that near miss etched into his mind, he also has it tattooed onto his skin, with the phrase 'One centimetre from glory' written below a detailed picture of the



Star DHAKA WEDNESDAY JULY 2, 2014
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QUARTERFINALS

July 4
France v Germany
Estadio do Maracana
10.00pm

July 5
Brazil v Colombia
Estadio Castelao
2.00am

Argentina v Belgium
Estadio Nacional
10.00pm

July 6
Netherlands v Costa Rica
Arena Fonte Nova
2.00am



Belgium midfielder Kevin De Bruyne finally breaks the stubborn USA defence with his low right-footer in an entertaining Round of 16 match that exploded in the last ten minutes of a 120-minute thriller at Fonte Nova Arena in Salvador yesterday. Belgium won 2-1. PHOTO: AFP

Photo of the Day

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We were lucky: Messi

AGENCIES, Sao Paulo

Lionel Messi said he was as nervous as anyone during Argentina's "lucky" World Cup last 16 win over Switzerland Tuesday but urged his team to make the most of their reprieve.

The captain and talisman finally prised open the Swiss defence deep into extra-time in Sao Paulo, two minutes from penalties, and picked out Angel Di Maria for the game's only goal.

And he said the nail-biting win, in front of tens of thousands of Argentine fans, could stand his team in good stead later in the tournament.

"Suffering, suffering that's what I felt but now we know we can go through times like this," said Messi.

"We were lucky, we had luck on our side and now we have to take advantage of it and move on."

Argentina will now take on either Belgium or USA in the quarter-finals on Saturday as they go for their third World Cup title, on the soil of arch-rivals Brazil.

"Just like everyone else, I imagine, at times I was nervous because we couldn't score a goal and any mistake would have put us out of the World Cup," Messi said.

"We didn't want penalties and so we wanted to win it in extra-time.

"For the goal I thought maybe I should take a chance. And then I saw Angel on the right and I passed to him and fortunately we were able to score."

The Barcelona star was named man-of-the-match for the fourth successive time by online voters, ahead of Di Maria who had 10 shots on target -- more than the entire Swiss team.

"I don't know whether I deserve this one (award) or not but what's important is that we've made it to the next stage, which is what we wanted," Messi said.

Argentina coach Alejandro Sabella congratulated his team on their tactical discipline and declared the win "well-deserved."

"It was a game that we deserved to win in 90 minutes," Sabella told reporters while admiring Messi's assist to Di Maria.

Neymar will be fit for Colombia

AFP, Teresopolis

Brazil star Neymar will be fit to face Colombia in Friday's World Cup quarterfinal in Fortaleza, a spokesman for the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) confirmed on Monday.

"It is not a problem for the game. He is undergoing treatment for a heavy knock to the (right) knee and another lesser knock to the (left) hamstring," CBF Communications Director Rodrigo Paiva told journalists at Brazil's training base in Teresopolis.

"It might reduce his involvement in training, but there is no risk for the game."

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari had raised some doubt as to Neymar's chances of playing against Colombia after he came out of Saturday's dramatic last-16 win against Chile in Belo Horizonte battered and bruised.

"We need to evaluate it but we should have three, four or five days to try and make sure he can play the next game," said Scolari on Saturday of Neymar, who took a heavy knock to the thigh after a crunching challenge from Charles Aranguiz with the match just four minutes old.

However, he continued playing and scored a crucial penalty in the shoot-out which the hosts won 3-2 to progress to the last eight.

Belgium overcome spirited USA

AFP, Salvador

Extra time goals from Kevin Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku sent Belgium into the World Cup quarter-finals for first time in 28 years with a 2-1 win over the United States on Tuesday.

American keeper Tim Howard had made a string of fine saves to keep Marc Wilmots' men at bay during the 90 minutes in Salvador.

However, he was finally beaten by De Bruyne's angled drive after good work from substitute Lukaku and De Bruyne then returned the favour to allow Lukaku to slam past his Everton teammate Howard.

The States got back in the game two minutes into the second-half of extra time when substitute Julian Green volleyed home and only a fine save from Thibaut Courtois prevented Clint Dempsey from taking the game to penalties moments later.

But Belgium held on to set up a rematch of their 1986 semi-final defeat to Argentina in Brasilia on Saturday.

Lille's 19-year-old striker Divock Origi had been brought into the side at Lukaku's expense after impressing as a substitute in all three of Belgium's Group H wins and he was denied within the opening minute by Howard's outstretched leg after racing onto Kevin de Bruyne's through ball.

Belgium's pace on the counter-attack was a constant threat throughout the match and they should have gone in front when Jan Vertonghen fed De Bruyne, but having cut inside to open up the goal he slotted wide at the near post.

Jürgen Klinsmann's men were then dealt a blow as one of their standout performers in the group stages, Fabian Johnson, limped off with a hamstring injury to be replaced by DeAndre Yedlin.

However, Yedlin nearly made an instant impact as he burst forward on the right and pulled the ball back for the unmarked Graham Zusi who shanked his shot horribly off target.

Belgium started strongly again in the second-half with the ever dangerous Vertonghen producing another fine cross from the left that both De Bruyne and Origi failed to turn home.

Origina was desperately unlucky moments later as his header from Toby Alderweireld's cross came back off the crossbar.

Vertonghen then saw a low effort saved by Howard and volleyed over before Axel Witsel fired a shot inches wide as the wave of Belgian attacks continued.

Origina was then presented with another great chance after a fine run by substitute Kevin Mirallas, but again his low effort was beaten away Howard.

The Everton keeper's best stop was to come though as he again used his legs to prevent club teammate Mirallas from slotting home 14 minutes from time.

Howard continued his one man

BELGIUM 2 (Bruyne 93, Lukaku 105)
USA 1 (Green 107)

Clash of the Titans

OSAMA RAHMAN

As has been the trend in this tournament of goal-keepers, Vincent Enyeama made one spectacular save after another, but one mistake and Paul Pogba finally had the ball in the back of the net in the 79th minute.

Another goal followed at the end and France had, convincingly or otherwise, sealed their place in the next round, defeating the Nigerians in the process.

Hoping to join the French, Algeria and Germany met, with wounds from the 1982 World Cup fresh in the Algerians' minds. Back then, whispers of a fixed Austrian-German encounter had seen the Algerians eliminated. The game started and dragged on without goals and with the men between the sticks on both end performing on a pedestal above their best. Edging ever close to full time, eyes turned towards Mueller to conjure up his daily-dose of a miracle but it was not to be. It took the 2nd minute of extra time for Germany to finally muster up a goal, with Andre Schurrle notching the first, followed by a Mesut Ozil strike. Algeria, to their credit, struck at the very end of the game, but it was too little too late and Germany progressed 2-1. The Africans, though, played the game of their lives and many among us couldn't help but shed a tear when the stony-faced Vahid Halilhodzic broke down towards the end.

The drama from the day before has now set up a delicately poised battle for the semifinal berth between France and Germany, easily billed in the Clash of the Titans category. The teams have previously met thrice in World Cup, with Germany winning twice and losing once. However, it was the French, in 1958, who managed to seal the biggest win in a World Cup match against Germany, winning 6-3, with Just Fontaine running rampant with four goals.

Unfortunately for Didier Deschamps' men, it is obvious that Karim Benzema is no Just Fontaine. With 24 goals in the last season and three goals in the World Cup, on top of 2 assists, Benzema may not be as good as Fontaine, but he is a dependable striker nonetheless. Germany's forward duties though, seem to change from game to game. Even then, most hopes will rest with Mueller.

The German machine worked as efficiently and clinically as it was supposed to against the crafty Algerians. Putting up road-blocks all over complemented by silky passes and darting runs, Joachim Loew's men exhausted the Algerians before delivering the fatal blow. With France, a similar strategy will be followed. The French team, have options as they have been in a scoring-spree of sorts, with Benzema and Mathieu Valbuena looking especially dangerous.

Starting with Antoine Greizmann, Deschamps can take a leaf out of Halilhodzic's book and attack down Germany's suspect flank. Shkodran Mustafi and Benedikt Howedes have been prone to be caught in the wrong side of the field, with both offering more attacking verve than any defensive dependability.

Germany's saving grace can eventually turn out to be Manuel Neuer. Revolutionising the concept of goal-keeper, the best 'keeper in the tournament of 'keepers, the German plays more as a sweeper-keeper than anything else. Per Mertesacker's lack of pace is a reason behind the German shot-stopper rushing out every now and then, but that's also where he is at his weakest. France have a lot of long distance shooters and can easily capitalise on such a situation. For now though, history is on Germany's side. Breaking out of formation and being innovative as ever, it may be the second

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