

Zaccheroni thinking of retirement

AFP, Tokyo

Alberto Zaccheroni, who stepped down as Japan coach following their World Cup exit, said retirement was "an option" as he left the country to return to his native Italy on Tuesday. "I feel very extremely sad to leave," the 61-year-old told reporters at Tokyo's Haneda airport. "It's been an amazing four years. I haven't lost my passion for football, but retiring is also an option."

Zaccheroni, whose Blue Samurai took just one point from games against Ivory Coast, Greece and Colombia in Brazil, was given a surprise airport send-off by Japan captain Makoto Hasebe and defender Atsuto Uchida. "That's a yellow card," joked Zaccheroni, taken aback. "But I'm really happy."

The former Juventus and AC Milan manager added: "I want to take a little break and spend time with my family and then see what the future holds."

"I've made a lot of close relationships at the Japan Football Association [JFA], with the coaches and players. I will keep the memories of these four years in my heart."

Zaccheroni is set to be replaced by Javier Aguirre, who guided his native Mexico to the last 16 of the 2002 and 2010 World Cups.

The JFA have had to of controversy after later telling Dutch television he had given in an earlier incident.

The Dutch Football Association (KNVB) hit out at the way Robben's comments had been reported, insisting he had been misinterpreted.

But speaking a few hours after FIFA confirmed he would face no disciplinary action over the comments, Robben admitted he had made "one stupid action."

Asked for his reaction to the furore, Robben told reporters: "It's a shame because I was very honest."

"Sometimes honesty is punished. I prefer honesty."

"During the first half, there was a foul, I went to the



Dutchman Arjen Robben is in trouble for telling the truth?

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

মানসম্পন্ন বাংলাদেশী পণ্যের ব্যবহার
শিল্প বিকাশে সহায়ক

CROWN CEMENT
FOR SOLID FOUNDATION

Robben defends his admission

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Arjen Robben on Monday defended his admission of diving during Holland's last 16 victory over Mexico as FIFA confirmed he would not be punished for the remarks.

Robben, who won a match-winning penalty as the Dutch downed Mexico 2-1 on Sunday, whipped up a storm of controversy after later telling Dutch television he had given in an earlier incident.

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"During the first half, there was a foul, I went to the

ground because I thought he would tackle but then he removed his leg.

"It's a pity because people forget a great performance by the entire team. And that's the main thing. Sometimes I am honest. I apologise but that's football."



was one stupid action and it had no influence on the game. We had two clear penalties situation, only one was given. No need to talk about it anymore."

FIFA spokeswoman Delia Fischer earlier ruled out any possibility of retrospective actions when asked about Robben's post-match comments.

Fischer said sanctioning after the fact only applied to "serious infringements of foul play which have escaped the notice of the match officials."

Robben has long been accused of being a serial diver and last season engaged in an angry war of words with Arsene Wenger after the Arsenal coach lost his cool on English television following a Champions League game with Bayern Munich.

"Robben is very good at getting something out of nothing, he's a good diver, but that's part of his game," Wenger said after Bayern eliminated Arsenal in March.

"I expect more of great managers, they don't need to resort to claims like that," Robben responded.

Cameroon to oust seven bad apples

AFP, Yaounde

Cameroon football chiefs said they are determined to root out the seven players they termed as 'bad apples' implicated in an alleged match-fixing scandal over their World Cup group game with Croatia.

"Recent allegations of fraud around Cameroon's 2014 FIFA World Cup three preliminary games, especially Cameroon versus Croatia, as well as the 'existence of seven bad apples [in our national team]' do not reflect the values and principles promoted by our administration, in line with FIFA's code of conduct and the ethics of our nation," the Cameroon federation (FECAFOOT) said in a statement on its website.

"We are strongly committed to employ all means necessary to resolve this disruptive matter in the shortest delays."

FECAFOOT added that in 55 years they had never before been punished for "match-fixing or any fraud of any kind."

The launching of the investigation by the Ethics Committee followed a report in Germany in which a Singaporean match-fixer correctly forecast that Croatia would win 4-0 and that a player would be sent off in the first-half.

Barcelona star Alex Song was dismissed for a bizarre elbow assault to the back of Mario Mandzukic in the 40th minute.

Later in the match, left back Benoit Assou-Ekotto aimed a headbutt at teammate Benjamin Moukandjo leading the 'Indomitable Lions' veteran German coach Volker Finke to label their behavior as "one stupid action."

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Keshi quits

REUTERS, Salvador

Nigeria coach Stephen Keshi has stepped down from his post after the country's elimination from the World Cup, FIFA said on Tuesday.

The Nigerian Football Federation have yet to confirm his resignation, however, and Keshi was evasive in answering a question on his future after Monday's 2-0 loss to France in their last-16 round encounter in Brasilia.

FIFA.com quoted a tweet from Keshi, although earlier in the tournament Nigerian officials claimed the manager had no social media presence.

"Friends, it has been a good run and I have enjoyed every moment. It's been an honour coaching the Super Eagles. It is however time to bow out," the tweet said.

Asked what he planned to do after the World Cup, after being linked to the national team job in South Africa, Keshi told reporters on Monday: "I'm going home to visit my wife and kids. I've not seen them for a long time."

While Escobar's death was synonymous with a 1990s Colombia wracked by violence and drug cartels, fans say the star of the 2014 team - baby-faced midfielder James Rodriguez - coincides with the image of the nation's rebirth since then.

It was the early hours of July 2, 1994, that six bullets were shot into Escobar, a tall 27-year-old player known as "El Caballero del Futbol" or "The Gentleman of Football."

He had been part of a talented squad containing the likes of Carlos Valderrama, Rene Higuita and Faustino Asprilla.

But after a shock 3-1 opening defeat by Romania, their confidence drained, especially amid reports back home about disquiet among betting cartels, and death threats to the team.

Then came the fateful game against the United States on June 22, when Escobar stretched to cut out a cross but only steered the ball into his own net for the first goal in a 2-1 defeat.

The frozen pain-etched look on his face said it all.

Colombia managed to win their third game, but it was not enough and they went home to an angry public.

Escobar sought in vain to cheer

Colombia rising for El Caballero

REUTERS, Belo Horizonte

Colombian fans are paying tribute to defender Andres Escobar, gunned down 20 years ago after scoring an own goal in the World Cup, and hope his memory will inspire the current crop's hunt for glory.

In one of the darkest chapters of football history, Escobar was shot outside a bar in Medellin on July 2, 1994, in apparent retribution for an own goal he scored days earlier hastening Colombia's exit from the World Cup in the United States.

Some Colombian fans in Brazil have been carrying Escobar's photo to games as they have watched their team march into the quarterfinals with four wins out of four. And Escobar's brother, Santiago, has urged them to keep going in his honour.

"We dedicate this triumph to Andres Escobar," one fan said on Twitter after Colombia's victory over Uruguay set up Friday's quarterfinal against hosts Brazil.

"Andres Escobar is living through this team," added another in a flurry of social media discussions of Escobar's legacy on the eve of Wednesday's anniversary of his death.

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onymous with a 1990s Colombia wracked by violence and drug cartels, fans say the star of the 2014 team - baby-faced midfielder James Rodriguez - coincides with the image of the nation's rebirth since then.

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Escobar sought in vain to cheer

up the nation with the retrospectively haunting words: "Life doesn't stop here."

In a car-park outside a bar in his hometown Medellin where he had been out with friends, Escobar got involved in an argument with taunting locals, one of whom pulled his gun.

Some reports said the gunman shouted "Goooooo!" as he fired.

Escobar died en route to hospital, and tens of thousands, including Colombia's president, attended his funeral.

His killing was widely assumed to be revenge from betting mafias who had lost heavily on Colombia's poor showing.

For Colombian fans, it is a keen and emotional memory. Even those who were not old enough to witness the 1994 campaign have seen the own goal footage over-and-over again as Colombian football rakes over the memory and the lessons to be learnt.

Twenty years on, though, they have plenty of reasons to cheer with Colombia in the World Cup quarterfinals for the first time despite the absence of injured star Radamel Falcao.

In his place, others have stepped

up, most notably the phenomenal Rodriguez, who is top of the goal-scoring chart on five, ahead of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Thomas Mueller.

"In James and (Jackson) Martinez, Colombia have a deadly, unpredictable attack force. What better memorial for Andres Escobar?" another fan wrote.

Ahead of the showdown with Brazil, and on Wednesday's exact anniversary of Escobar's death, one youth sports organization called Streetfootballworld is hosting a memorial in Rio de Janeiro.

A Brazilian band is to play the song 'Hasta Siempre' (Until Forever), which was created by Colombian football fans to honour Escobar.

"That was a very sad time in football and a very sad time in Colombia's history. Escobar didn't deserve that. He made a mistake," said Gerardo Esguerra, 48, an accountant buying filled corn bread at a street stall in Bogota on Monday.

"Colombia will beat Brazil and keep going in the cup. That would show those who killed Escobar. It would be the best thing for Escobar and his family. Colombia will win for him."

Hazard hails Rodriguez

AFP, Mogi das Cruzes

Belgium's Eden Hazard on Monday praised "super-good" Colombian goal ace James Rodriguez and said he hoped to make similar headlines at the World Cup.

The Chelsea star admitted he has yet to hit form in the tournament as Belgium safely negotiated the group stages to set up Tuesday's last-16 game with the United States.

And with tournament top-scorer Rodriguez grabbing headlines with his fabulous double against Uruguay, Hazard said he was itching to play a decisive role for Belgium.

"I think that each match I've given my maximum. Since the start of the World Cup I haven't had a great match with good moves," Hazard said.

"I haven't had a good match that with good moves that could be decisive for our team. So I hope I can do that and have a good match."

He added: "I would really like it if I can get around the pitch more and see more of the ball -- and make a difference, basically."

Hazard had been tipped to become one of the World Cup's brightest stars but has found himself crowded out in Belgium's group wins against Algeria and Russia.

He nearly opened his account after coming on in the final minutes of the 1-0 victory over South Korea, but saw an angled shot palmed away by goalkeeper Kim Seung-Gyu.

Belgium coach Marc Wilmots said he is still waiting for Hazard to "take hold of a match" and had discussed the problem with the 23-year-old.

Rodriguez scored three times in group play and he blasted Colombia into the last eight, first with a superb volley and then by finishing a team move to seal the 2-0 win.

"He played a super-good match. I knew who he was but most people didn't know much about Colombia," Hazard said of the 22-year-old Rodriguez.

"I think yes, his statistics are the best and he showed yesterday that he can carry a team. We thought it would be difficult for Colombia without [injured striker Radamel] Falcao. But he scored two superb goals."

Despite his indifferent start, the assured Hazard carried a look of intent as he spoke to reporters at Belgium's training base in Mogi das Cruzes, near Sao Paulo.

And Hazard said he would have no hesitation to step forward if the United States game goes to penalties.

"I hope it doesn't happen, because we'll all feel the pressure. But if we have to take them, I prefer to go last," he said.

Hazard added: "In qualifying it's easier because you have more matches. Now we've arrived at the stage where if you lose, you're out."

World Cup's top-scorer with 5 goals, Colombia's James Rodriguez could well be the main threat for Brazil in their way to the semifinals.

AFP, Tereopolis

Fernandinho fires James warning

AFP, Tereopolis

Brazil will be in trouble in Friday's World Cup quarterfinal against Colombia if they afford the outstanding James Rodriguez any space in which to perform, midfielder Fernandinho warned on Monday.

The 22-year-old attacking midfielder has been arguably the player of the World Cup so far, scoring five goals in Colombia's four matches, including a magnificent volley in the 2-0 defeat of Uruguay in the last 16.

And Fernandinho said that he could see that Rodriguez would develop into a star when they came up against each other in a Champions League match between Shakhtar Donetsk and FC Porto in September 2011.

"I played against him in the Champions League. It was at the start of his time in Europe and he wasn't yet a first-choice" for Porto, said Fernandinho.

"Already in that game he showed his technical quality with his left foot. In this World Cup he is showing everyone that the money Monaco paid for him was well invested. The less space he gets against us, the better it will be for Brazil."

Despite that, Fernandinho said there will be no question of Brazil looking to man-mark Rodriguez, who moved to Monaco from Porto for 45 million euros (61.6 million dollars) last year.

"Wherever I have played, man-marking does not exist anymore. It needs to be done zonally," said the Manchester City midfielder.

Meanwhile, Brazil must also prepare to cope with the kind of pressure they faced in Saturday's dramatic last-16 victory against Chile in Belo Horizonte.

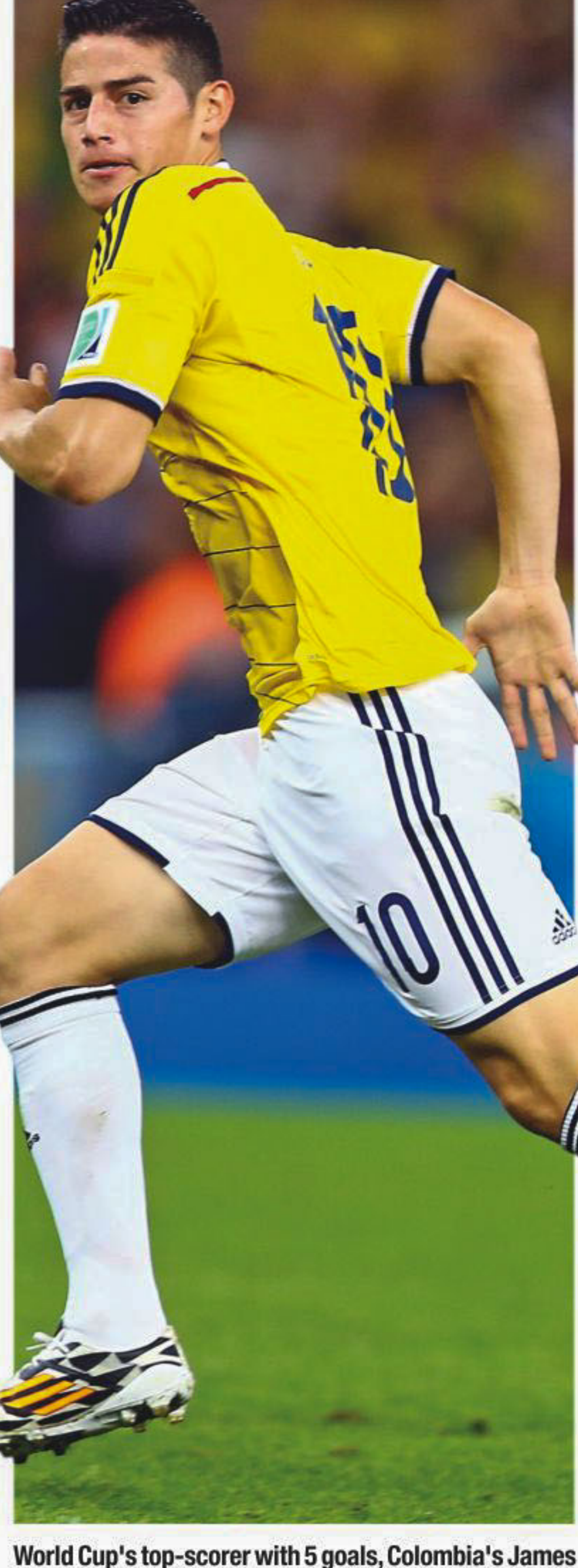
On that occasion, goalkeeper Julio Cesar was in tears before the penalty shoot-out, which Brazil won 3-2, while Neymar was among those who broke down at the end of the match.

Captain Thiago Silva was also seen crying at the end of the match and has since been the Brazilian press for not leading by example.

Alberto, the skipper of side that won the 1970 Mexico, told sports daily have been in the middle of the pitch shouting.

However, Fernandinho said that this Brazil team is enough to win the title on home soil.

"We have been preparing ever since we first got together on May 26. We have worked on the psychological side and there is no need to do any of that now."



World Cup's top-scorer with 5 goals, Colombia's James Rodriguez could well be the main threat for Brazil in their way to the semifinals.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Per loses his cool

REUTERS, Santa Andrea

The usually mild-mannered Per Mertesacker for once lost his temper, his angry riposte startling a German TV reporter who had dared ask the defender why Germany had laboured into the World Cup quarter-finals.

"What do you want from me? What do you want?" Mertesacker snapped after Germany's 2-1 extra-time win over Algeria on Monday. "We're in the last eight and that's what counts."

Mertesacker's outburst epitomised the frustration among the German players who feel that, even with a victory, the fans - and media - back home in Germany will not be satisfied unless Joachim Loew's men dazzle and entertain.

Expectations in Germany are running high for a team that has reached the semi-finals of the last two World Cups - at home in Germany in 2006 and in South Africa in 2010. This is the country's "golden generation" and the nation expects the title - as do

the players.

The hapless ZDF reporter had posed a question to Mertesacker that some 30 million viewers back home had wondered: why did the team play so poorly?

"Do you think it would be better if we played attractive soccer and got knocked out?" the towering centre back continued with uncharacteristic anger. "Do you think that this is just a bunch of downs here playing in the last 16?"

"I can't understand all these stupid questions right after a match."

"We worked extremely hard for 120 minutes and fought all the way to the end, and we played well and won in extra time. It was a battle back and forth the whole way. We played courageously. Okay we let them have too many chances but we didn't give up a goal when it mattered. We won deservedly."

After Germany beat Chile 1-0 in a friendly in March, the fans in Stuttgart jeered the team off the pitch.

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BRAZILIAN BAURU

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

FIFA FINES ALGERIA

FIFA on Monday fined the Algerian Football Federation 56,400 dollars for a laser beam shone in the face of Russia's goalkeeper by Algerians fans.

The federation was also reprimanded over the use of the laser beam, flares and smoke bombs during the June 26 Group H game which ended in a 1-1 draw and saw the Algerians progress to the latter stages of a World Cup for the first time.

A FIFA spokeswoman said Algeria had been "held liable for the improper conduct among its own group of spectators."

SABELLA FORGIVES LAVEZZI

Argentine coach Alejandro Sabella Monday said he was not angry with Ezequiel Lavezzi for splashing him with water, calling the apparent fit of pique a "positive gesture".

Sabella indicated there had been no comeback after Lavezzi, in what looked like an act of irritation, sloshed water from a drinks bottle on his suit during the 3-2 win over Nigeria.

"We know he's a very special person and... a coach must know his individual players," Sabella told reporters in Sao Paulo.

"Of course we want to have a united team but they all are individuals and we have to accept they are different people."

"I understood his gesture as a positive gesture."

Lavezzi spent most of Argentina's first two games against Bosnia and Iran on the bench before coming on for Aguiar after 38 minutes against Nigeria.

While the 29-year-old was drinking water during a break in play, and taking instructions from Sabella, he splashed liquid over his shoulder and onto his coach's suit jacket.

DUTCH LOSE DE JONG

Injured Dutch midfielder Nigel de Jong's World Cup appears to be over, according to a source at the Netherlands Football Federation.

The 29-year-old AC Milan player -- who referee Howard Webb said he would have sent off in the 2010 World Cup final had he seen more clearly his infamous chest high kick on Spain's Xabi Alonso -- suffered a groin injury early on in the Netherlands' last 16 victory over Mexico on Sunday.

"It doesn't look good" a federation spokesman said after de Jong underwent a medical examination on Monday.

Further tests will be conducted in a few days ahead of the Netherlands quarterfinal date with Costa Rica on Saturday.

De Jong came off the field against Mexico in Fortaleza after just nine minutes, with Dutch coach Louis van Gaal declaring the injury was a "big setback" as he plans for the Salvador clash.

WC BREAKS FACEBOOK RECORD

Facebook on Monday said that the World Cup has kicked up more action at the leading social network than any other event in history.

More than a billion comments, posts, and "likes" related to World Cup matches have been racked up since the tournament began on June 12, in a level of online conversation never seen before at Facebook, according to the California-based social network.

About 220 million people have taken part in the unprecedented online conversation.

Knock-out matches that took place during the week-end pushed the overall number of "interactions" at Facebook past a billion.

"Facebook generally sees a large amount of conversation around sporting events, but the World Cup has proven to be a unique moment," the social network said in a blog post.

"Facebook's data editors have never measured an event -- sports or otherwise -- that topped a billion interactions."

NO TO BELGIAN WAFFLES

Waffle House, America's best-known purveyor of the griddled breakfast goodie, is urging a boycott of Belgian waffles ahead of the United States' must-win World Cup clash with Belgium.

"We don't believe in Belgium waffles," Waffle House said on its official Twitter feed.

In fact, "Belgian" waffles aren't offered on the menu at any of the 1,700 Waffle House eateries scattered across 25 states -- most of them in the South where their distinctive yellow signs are familiar roadside sights.

Waffle House spokesman Meghan Irwin told Today.com that the restaurant chain just wanted to have a little fun with that fact and show support for the United States as they battle Belgium for a quarter-final berth in the World Cup in Brazil on Tuesday.

ROUND OF 16 RESULTS

Germany 2 (Schuerrle 92, Ozil 119)

Algeria 1 (Djabout 120+1) after extra-time

France 2 (Pogba 79, Yobo 90+2-og)

Nigeria 0

Argentina 1 (Di Maria 118)

Switzerland 0

Belgium 2 (De Bruyne 93, Lukaku 105)

USA 1 (Green 107)

Costa Rica 1 (Ruiz 52)

Greece 1 (Papastathopoulos 90+1) after extra-time

Costa Rica won 5-3 on penalties

Netherlands 2 (Sneijder 88, Huntelaar 90+4-pen)

Mexico 1 (Dos Santos 48)