



Psychologist summoned by Scolari

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has summoned the team psychologist for an extra session with players after crushing World Cup pressure left some of them in tears, a report said Wednesday.

Sports psychologist Regina Brandao made an "urgent" and unscheduled visit to their training camp on Tuesday, ahead of Friday's quarter-final with Colombia, Folha de Sao Paulo said.

The visit came after panicky Brazil nearly crashed out against Chile before squeezing through on penalties, with Neymar, goalkeeper Julio Cesar, David Luiz and captain Thiago Silva all seen crying. Scolari called Brandao on Monday and on Tuesday, she held a meeting with all the players and the technical team, according to Folha. She did not speak individually with players.

The psychologist, who has worked with Scolari for more than 20 years, did not comment on whether the meeting was called urgently.

"The visit formed part of our initial planning. I have classes and I couldn't be here for long," Brandao told CBF TV.

"I speak constantly with the players. We speak to each other on WhatsApp, we speak on the phone, we communicate by email," she added.



The giant-killer ... Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov pumps his fist to celebrate beating defending champion Andy Murray of Britain in the Wimbledon quarterfinals at All England Tennis Club in London yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Novak fights thru', Murray fizzles

AFP, London

Andy Murray's reign as Wimbledon champion came to a stunning end as Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov clinched a sensational 6-1, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 victory in the quarter-finals on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic reached his 23rd Grand Slam semi-final and fifth in a row at Wimbledon as the 2011 champion defeated Croatia's Marin Cilic for the 10th time in 10 meetings.

Top seed Djokovic won 6-1, 3-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-2 and will face Bulgarian 11th seed Dimitrov for a place in Sunday's final.

The six-time major winner went level with Pete Sampras and Rafael Nadal by making the last-four at a major for the 23rd time.

Murray had hoped to become the first British man to successfully defend the

Wimbledon title since Fred Perry in 1936, but the Scot was completely out-classed in a two-hour masterclass from 11th seed Dimitrov on Centre Court.

The 27-year-old's unexpected exit snapped his 17-match winning streak at the All England Club, a magical sequence which had brought him Olympic gold and a first Wimbledon title, and also ended his hopes of reaching a sixth consecutive semi-final at the grasscourt Grand Slam.

Only once before had Murray lost a Wimbledon quarter-final -- against Rafael Nadal in 2008 -- and this was his first defeat against a player ranked outside the top 10 at a Grand Slam since 2010.

After years of struggling to live up to the vast potential that has earned him numerous comparisons with Roger Federer, this was a thrilling performance from 23-year-old Dimitrov, who finally secured his first

win over a top-10 player at a Grand Slam at the fifth attempt.

The world number 13 was playing in his first All England Club quarter-final, but he is a former junior Wimbledon champion and had underlined his grasscourt pedigree by winning the Queen's Club title last month.

He showed no signs of being overawed and secured two break points in the fourth game, converting at the first attempt when he pinned Murray to the baseline then rushed the net to force the Scot to blaze his backhand wide.

By the time Dimitrov broke again for a 5-1 lead a stunned silence had descended on Centre Court and he finished off the set in just 25 minutes.

The shock of dropping a set for the first time in this year's tournament only added to the already-lethargic Murray's malaise.

Murray seemed to have run out of answers when a tame backhand slice drifted out to give the Bulgarian a break for a 4-3 lead in the second set.

The third seed broke back to force a tie-break, but the crucial moment came at 4-4 in the breaker when Murray chose to charge the net behind a weak approach shot.

It was a disastrous gamble as Dimitrov stood his ground and unleashed a blistering backhand winner before serving out the set with a defiant roar.

Murray's game was riddled with mistakes -- he made 37 unforced errors in total -- and it was fitting that virtually his last act as champion was the double fault that gifted Dimitrov a 5-2 lead in the third set.

Dimitrov wasn't going to refuse that gift and he sealed his sensational triumph on his second match point.

Best so far: Valcke

REUTERS, Brasilia

Brazil 2014 may have had organisational glitches, but it is shaping up to be the best on-field World Cup thanks to the exciting soccer being played, FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke said on Tuesday.

"I think it is the best World Cup in terms of the soccer," Valcke said in an interview with Globo television's SporTV cable channel. "It's the World Cup with the most number of goals since 1982."

Even before the 32-nation tournament enters the quarter-final phase this week, more goals have been scored than at the previous World Cup in South Africa in 2010.

Valcke, who complained in 2012 that Brazil needed a "kick up the backside" to speed up preparations of the stadiums, said the World Cup in Brazil has exceeded FIFA's expectations.

"We had some small problems off the soccer fields, nothing major. We saw some things that were unfinished, but in the final analysis expectations were surpassed," he said.

Valcke did not say whether FIFA has joined a match-fixing investigation instigated by the Cameroon federation after it said on Monday it would look at claims of corruption in their Group A games, especially the 4-0 defeat by Croatia.

Instead, he said the world governing body was concerned with illegal betting in soccer at all levels.

Kaka joins Orlando

AFP, Los Angeles

Brazilian star Kaka was officially unveiled Tuesday as the marquee signing of Major League Soccer expansion team Orlando City SC, which will debut in 2015.

The 32-year-old Kaka, who was left out of the Brazil squad for the ongoing World Cup in his home country, was long expected to join the MLS.

"They said to me that they had this dream to get a team and build an amazing team in America," the 2007 FIFA World Player of the Year said.

"So from 2012 until now we have been speaking a lot, flirting a lot until today that we signed this final contract and I'm so happy for that. It's a dream come true."

Club president Phil Rawlins made no attempt to hide his glee at snapping up the former Real Madrid and AC Milan attacking midfielder, who is Orlando's first so-called

Bouchard sets up Halep semi

AFP, London

Eugenie Bouchard moved a step closer to being crowned the queen of Wimbledon as the Canadian glamour girl booked a semi-final showdown with Simona Halep on Wednesday.

Bouchard reached her first semi-final at the grasscourt Grand Slam and ensured a move into the world top 10 by beating German ninth seed Angelique Kerber 6-3, 6-4.

Victory also meant that Bouchard has reached the last-four of all three Grand Slams in 2014.

The blonde Canadian was rarely threatened on Court One where Kerber, a Wimbledon semi-finalist in 2012, was still feeling the effects of her marathon fourth round win over Maria Sharapova 24 hours earlier.

Bouchard, who will rise to number eight in the world next week to equal the record high ranking achieved by a Canadian, said: "It was definitely a tough battle, I've played her a few times and it's always been tough, so I knew it wasn't over."

Bouchard has played Halep just once -- losing in three sets at Indian Wells earlier this year.

But Bouchard, beaten in the last four at both the Australian and French Opens, must find a solution to her semi-final failures against a daunting opponent in world number three Halep on Thursday.

Halep swept into her first Wimbledon semi-final with a crushing 6-4, 6-0 victory over 2013 finalist Sabine Lisicki.

Halep recorded her 250th career win in memorable fashion as the world number three dismissed German 19th seed Lisicki in just 57 minutes on Centre Court.

The 22-year-old reached her maiden Grand Slam final at the French Open last month and, after winning 11 consecutive games to sink Lisicki, she is on the verge of another major final at the All England Club.

Since losing in the Wimbledon second round last year, Halep has enjoyed a rapid rise up the rankings from 32nd 12 months ago to her current lofty position of third and now she stands on the verge of breaking new ground back in south-west London.

Halep, who was only the second Romanian to reach the last eight at Wimbledon, had already made the strong showings at both the Australian and French Opens this year, advancing to the final in Paris last month before losing a three-set classic against Sharapova.

Tailor-made for subs

REUTERS, Salvador

A well-timed substitution can change the course of any soccer match but when the game runs to 120 minutes and is played in the energy-sapping heat of northeast Brazil, substitutes really come into their own.

So it proved in Belgium's 2-1 victory over the United States on Tuesday.

For the first 90 minutes of their World Cup second-round clash, Belgium threw everything they had at the Americans but could not find the back of the net. It ended 0-0 and went to extra time.

Within three minutes of coming on and with his team mates tiring in the humidity and heat of Salvador, Lukaku burst down the wing on a fresh pair of legs and crossed for Kevin De Bruyne to score.

Twelve minutes later, De Bruyne returned the compliment, setting up

Lukaku to fire home Belgium's second. The United States pulled a goal back and again it was a substitute who made the difference.

Teenager Julian Green came on for Alejandro Bedoya in the 107th minute and scored what proved to be a consolation goal within seconds.

Coincidence? Surely not. Goals from substitutes have been a striking feature of this World Cup and prove that teams consist of far more than the 11 players in their starting line-up.

Of the 154 goals scored in Brazil, 29 have come from substitutes.

From Miroslav Klose's historic strike for Germany against Ghana in the group stage to Klaas-Jan Huntelaar's 94th minute penalty for the Netherlands that knocked out Mexico, goals from substitutes have been crucial.

They have been responsible for 18.83 percent of the goals at this World Cup compared with 10.34 percent at the 2010 World Cup.

One reason is that coaches tend to

introduce substitutes much earlier in a match than previously.

In the past, it was quite common for coaches to wait until the final minutes of a game and then throw on three substitutes, either in a desperate bid to win it or to waste time and hold on to a lead.

These days, coaches increasingly accept that, given the physical demands of the modern game, if you can use 14 players rather than 11 you might as well do so.

Ironically, another substitute could easily have given the United States victory.

In the dying minutes of normal time with the match goalless, second-half substitute Chris Wondolowski had a glorious chance to score but scooped his effort over the crossbar from five metres, allowing the Belgians back into the match.

"I said fresh legs would be important today and that is how it was," Belgium coach Marc Wilmots said. "Now the whole of Belgium can celebrate."

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