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## A Franco-German banter

German football federation (DFB) president Wolfgang Niersbach engaged France's UEFA chief Michel Platini in some cheeky banter on the eve of Friday's World Cup quarterfinal clash between their countries. The exchange came when DFB boss Niersbach, a member of UEFA's executive board, asked French legend Platini how Germany could beat France at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium. "I sent him an SMS and quickly asked for a tip on how to beat the French," Niersbach said. "He rang

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Star DHAKA SATURDAY JULY 5, 2014 e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net

# SPORT

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**TODAY'S MATCHES**

  
**ARGENTINA vs BELGIUM**  
Time: 10:00pm  
Venue: Estadio Nacional

  
**NETHERLANDS vs COSTA RICA**  
Time: 2:00am (Sunday)  
Venue: Arena Fonte Nova



Germany's Mats Hummels sets off on a celebratory lap after scoring the lone goal against France in the 13th minute of their World Cup quarterfinal at the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro on Friday.

## Germany in last four

AFP, Rio de Janeiro  
Mats Hummels headed Germany into the World Cup's last four as his first-half goal sealed a 1-0 win over France in Friday's quarter-final at Brazil 2014.

The centre-back's powerful 12th-minute header at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium means Germany now face either Brazil or Colombia in Tuesday's semi-final at Belo Horizonte.

French coach Didier Deschamps, who captained Les Bleus to the 1998 triumph, suffered his first defeat in 11 World Cup games as either a player or trainer.

Seven of the German squad had suffered with mild flu in the build-up as Hummels returned to take Per Mertesacker's place at centre-back.

Miroslav Klose was preferred up front with Thomas Mueller switching to the right wing.

Deschamps made two changes from the side who beat Nigeria in the last 16 with centre-back Mamadou Sakho back after a hamstring complaint while Antoine Griezmann replaced Olivier Giroud.

Despite the Germans stranglehold on early possession, the first real chance came to Benzema, who fired wide after seven minutes. The Germans took the lead when Hummels, back in the side after missing Monday's win over Algeria with flu, rose highest to head Toni Kroos' free-kick. His bullet header smashed in off the crossbar to claim his second goal of Brazil 2014.

France's best chance came on 33 minutes when Mathieu Valbuena's shot was saved by Manuel Neuer and Benzema failed to control the follow-up, firing over the bar.

The French came close to being awarded a penalty just before the break when Benzema's header hit Hummels in the stomach, missing his hands by inches.

Sami Khedira earned a deserved booking for fouling Griezmann on 54 minutes as France enjoyed a good spell of pressure as centre-back Raphael Varane's header went straight to Neuer's grateful hands.

**FRANCE 0**  
**GERMANY 1 (Hummels 13)**

Photo of the Day

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## Loew keeps it humble

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

There were no wild celebrations or congratulatory backslaps for Germany after they beat France 1-0 in the quarterfinals on Friday to become the first country to reach the semi-finals at four successive World Cups.

While Germany coach Joachim Loew acknowledged his country's amazing feat, he was also keen to keep a lid on expectations, knowing full well the bittersweet end results of his team's previous World Cup adventures.

Despite making the semifinals at each of the last three World Cups, Germany's incredible consistency remains tarnished by the fact they failed to go on and win those tournaments - something Loew is keen to make amends for this time.

"In the last four World Cups, we have been in the last four permanently, so that is quite a performance," said Loew. "Now, we will try to make the next step. I think we have the intrinsic qualities to do that."

"Titles are marvelous," he added when pressed about his team's recent record of near-misses. "And many of our players from Bayern Munich have already conquered the Champions League so that is important for them - but for us, first and foremost, it's a matter of playing the semi-finals."

The last time Germany won the World Cup was in 1990. They were beaten in the 2002 final then the semi-finals in 2006 and 2010.

Like any shrewd coach, Loew was

reluctant to talk up his team's chances of winning the World Cup, sticking to the mantra that his team was taking it one match at a time after surviving a tough battle with the French.

Germany seized the lead with Mats Hummels' brilliantly taken 13th minute header and defended resolutely as the French poured forward towards the end of the match.

"In the final phase in the second half, the French certainly tried to attack with all they had, it was obvious they had nothing to lose and were trying to score the equalizer," Loew said.

"They had to score so they went for everything or nothing."

"I think both teams showed a great performance on the defensive side and both were also strong on the attack. We did not have that many goal scoring opportunities so I think both teams had a very good defensive solution."

The Germans squandered a couple of late counter-attacking chances to score a second goal but Loew put the misses down to the scorching temperatures and draining humidity.

The match kicked off at the Maracana at 1pm local time and Loew said he was relieved that Germany's remaining matches would all start around sunset when conditions were cooler.

"It was certainly not easy for us Europeans to play at 1pm on the pitch and in that sun," he said. "It was extremely hot, you could hardly breathe. For Europeans, it's hard because we're not used to that."

"It was hard to keep concentrating all the time, so we started making mistakes but I think we managed it very well."

"I think the Latin American and Central American teams have a big home advantage, you cannot deny that. The South Americans are fighting for their life, they are used to these conditions, so they have a big home advantage."

Loew said one of the strengths of the German team was that they could switch players and change their tactics depending on their opponents.

Against France he moved his captain Philipp Lahm from midfield to right back, and the play worked a treat, but Loew said he may choose a different lineup for Germany's semi-final, against either Brazil or Colombia.

"When analyzing France, we knew they had these two defenders in the centre that are so strong so it difficult to go via the centre and the midfield so for this reason I decided to have Lahm on the right side. It was a tactical decision," Loew said.

"It's a matter of seeing how the players coped with this match. We saw players that were injured that had to go all the way, to their limits."

"We have to bring all the forces together and to see how they recover and regenerate over the next few days then we'll make a decision."

"The players are informed about what I have in mind and there are discussions about it. We are able - and this is perhaps is one of our tactical strengths - to play different ways."

## Neuer hails defence

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said Germany's improved defence was the key to Friday's 1-0 win over France as they booked their World Cup semi-final berth for a fourth consecutive time.

Centre-back Mats Hummels' 13th-minute bullet-header settled the quarter-final clash at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium.

Hummels produced a man-of-the-match display on his return to the side after missing Monday's nervous 2-1 extra-time win over Algeria with flu.

Neuer played a huge part in the victory with an outstanding display to repeatedly thwart the French attack, spear-headed by Real Madrid star Karim Benzema.

The Bayern Munich goalkeeper said his back four had raised their game significantly since Monday's below-par display.

"Unlike against Algeria, today we had a game where we couldn't lose, the defence did well and was really compact," said Neuer, who denied Benzema with a key save in the dying stages.

"It was very impressive to play in this stadium against France and this performance was already worthy of a semi-final."

## Deschamps admits Germany are better

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

France coach Didier Deschamps said that Germany's experience of the big occasion and his side's poor finishing proved crucial as the French bowed out of the World Cup on Friday.

"There was not much between the sides," he said after the 1-0 quarter final defeat at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro. "One team is more used to these occasions and has more experience."

"We were not clinical in front of goal and Manuel Neuer made an important save at the end" from Karim Benzema.

"We played much as we had done during the tournament but Germany are a better side than what we have faced so far."

"We were a little timid at the start of the match but after that we did plenty of good things," said the coach, who dismissed suggestions that playing in the mid-afternoon heat and humidity of Rio could be blamed for France's exit.

"The temperature did not help Germany any more than it did us. There was maybe a bit less freshness but everyone has to adapt."

Deschamps is confident that the future is bright for the team.

"A new group was created after our win in the play-off against Ukraine (in November) and I have seen some good things during this campaign."

"We don't have the same experience at this level as Germany but I am proud of what the players have done on and off the field."

"There is work to be done, but the materials are there and we need to maintain the same quality and the same spirit."

"There is lots of sadness and frustration among the players but we can't forget what we have done well up to now."

"I prefer to take away the positives that have been there since we arrived in Brazil. I am proud of everyone and am proud to have come this far with them," said Deschamps, whose thoughts will soon turn to the 2016 European Championship on home soil.

Midfielder Yohan Cabaye echoed the thoughts of his coach, admitting the Germans' extra know-how helped see them through.

"We were not far away from qualifying. They had a bit more experience on their side. We have to accept it, but it's tough," said Cabaye, adding the defeat was "cruel".

Mathieu Valbuena, who has earned high praise for his performances in Brazil making light of the absence of Franck Ribery, said lack of accuracy in front of goal had cost them dearly.

"We had a lot of chances but we did not put them away, we are just dead tonight," Valbuena told French television station beIN Sports.

Benzema said that they had just come across a goalkeeper in fine form.

"We can be proud of our campaign," said the Real Madrid striker.

"We had a lot of chances in the match but the goalkeeper was on his game and was great."

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