



Sabella's touchline antics

Argentina manager Alejandro Sabella has caught the eye during the World Cup over his touchline antics. Against Nigeria, he had a funny moment (though he was on the receiving end) as Ezequiel Lavezzi squirted him with water, which provoked a priceless reaction. On Saturday, Sabella did a fine Del Boy impression, as he very nearly keeled over his backside, reacting to Gonzalo Higuain hitting the crossbar. Thankfully, he regained his footing and consciousness before falling flat on his backside. Football management, it's not for the faint-hearted! --INTERNET



Star DHAKA MONDAY JULY 7, 2014 e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net

SPORT

'Argentina an ordinary team'

ESPNC.COM

Belgium boss Marc Wilmots dismissed Argentina as an "ordinary team" despite his side's 1-0 defeat in the teams' World Cup quarterfinal in Brasilia.

An early Gonzalo Higuain goal put Argentina in control and Belgium were unable to find a way back into the game, but Wilmots said Alejandro Sabella's team had taken a negative approach.

"We were not impressed by the Argentinians," he said. "They were just an ordinary team. They can distort the rhythm -- they take 30 seconds to take a throw-in and the referee doesn't do anything."

"They had the goal, and [Lionel] Messi was one-one with [Thibaut] Courtois at the end, but how many shots have they had? If I played that way I would have been destroyed by the Belgium press."

"They didn't give us any space, this was a World Cup quarterfinal and their extra experience probably counted for something."

Wilmots also claimed that Italian referee Nicola Rizzoli had gone easy on Messi during the game.

"I don't want to be a cry baby, but every time there is a little foul it was always in favour of Argentina," he said.

"Every time something happens with Messi, the referee gives him a free kick. I notice he made three fouls and no yellow card; we made one foul and one yellow card."

Higuain's goal came when Vincent Kompany was caught out of position, allowing the Napoli striker to smash the ball into the corner of the net.

Wilmots added: "We make a small, small mistake -- Vincent comes out of position and they score."



Argentina midfielder Angel Di Maria (C) leaves the field of play after picking up an injury during their World Cup quarterfinal against Belgium at Estadio Nacional in Brasilia on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Hefty blow to Argentina?

REUTERS, Brasilia

If a scan on Sunday confirms Argentina midfielder Angel Di Maria is out of the World Cup it would be a significant blow to the South Americans' hopes of winning the tournament for the third time.

Di Maria had to be replaced by Enzo Perez after half an hour of Saturday's 1-0 quarterfinal victory over Belgium, which set up a last-four clash against the Netherlands, when he damaged a muscle in his right thigh shooting on goal.

Media in his native country and in Spain, where he plays for Real Madrid, reported the 26-year-old would play no further part in the finals in Brazil, although there was no immediate confirmation from the Argentine Football Association (AFA).

"Tests will be made today to assess the extent of the injury," the AFA said on their website on Sunday.

Nicknamed "Fideo" (Noodle) due to his slight frame, Di Maria is Argentina's most creative player after captain Lionel Messi.

His electric pace can carry him past and away from opponents, he links up well with Messi and the other forwards and he has an eye for goal as he proved when he netted the winner in the 1-0 win over Switzerland in the last 16.

"He's vital, almost irreplaceable," coach Alejandro Sabella said before the World Cup.

Should he be ruled out, Sabella will have to rely on Di Maria's replacement in the starting lineup to help unlock a well-drilled Dutch defence in Sao Paulo on Wednesday.

He will also be hoping forward Sergio Aguero, who has missed Argentina's last two matches through injury, is fit enough to make an appearance.



My World Cup dream still alive: Neymar

AP, Belo Horizonte

Brazil star Neymar says his World Cup may be over because of a fractured vertebra but his World Cup dream of celebrating the title with his teammates at the Maracana Stadium next Sunday is still alive.

In a video released by the Brazilian football confederation on Saturday, Neymar thanked fans and everyone else for the support in this "very difficult moment."

"I don't have words to describe what has been going through my head and my heart," said Neymar, trying to stay upbeat but still sporting a subdued look on his face. "I just want to say that I will

be back as soon as possible. When you least expect I'll be back."

Wearing a black T-shirt and a black hat turned backward, he spoke in a low tone of voice, his eyes still heavy.

"My dream is not over yet," he said. "It was interrupted by one move, but it will continue and I'm certain that my teammates will do whatever possible so I can fulfill my dream of being a champion. I won't be able to fulfill the dream of playing in a World Cup final, but I'm sure they will win this one, they will become champions, and I will be there with them, and all of Brazil will be celebrating together."

It was the first time Neymar had spo-

ken publicly since fracturing a vertebra late in Brazil's 2-1 win over Colombia in the quarterfinals on Friday.

The video was made just before the striker was airlifted from Brazil's training camp in a medical helicopter to be treated at home for the back injury that ruled him out of the last two games of the World Cup.

Brazil doctor Jose Luiz Runco guaranteed the injury will not have long-term effects on Neymar's career and said the player could even travel to Belo Horizonte to watch the semifinal against Germany on Tuesday if he is not feeling a lot of pain.

Runco said he believes Neymar can

return to action in about 45 days, and that Barcelona doctors were informed of the player's conditions from the beginning.

"He was extremely moved when I gave him the news that he was out of the World Cup," Runco said. "He cried a lot, which was a natural reaction at that moment. But I told him that although his dream was being cut short, he was still a 22-year-old with a lot in front of him. It was still a 'good' type of injury."

The 22-year-old forward was caught with a knee to the back in a challenge by Juan Zuniga late on in the Selecao's 2-1 quarterfinal win Fortaleza on Friday and was ruled out of the rest of the tourna-

ment with a fractured vertebra.

Earlier, Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has shed light on the genuine worry for the Barcelona forward's condition in the immediate aftermath of the clash.

"He said 'I can't feel my legs,'" the 65-year-old told Marca, revealing the details of Neymar's conversation with Marcelo on the pitch. "Marcelo was scared and called the doctor on but the doctor couldn't get on in the confusion. It was a big shock, the image of Neymar being stretched off to the helicopter, in difficulty, crying."

"Neymar was our benchmark, one of our references, because he is a player who

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Of pretenders & contenders

ATIQUÉ ANAM

The current Belgium side has for a while been touted as the latest in the line of 'golden generations' of football, and perhaps not without reason. The offspring of a brilliant blue-print laid out at the turn of the century, one which demanded a uniform formation and style practised all through the age level up to the national as well the club levels -- exported rich talent to the top leagues of Europe while bringing the national side back towards its long-gone glorious past. Before this World Cup, most pundits had touted them as dark horses while others went one step further to predict that they could go all the way.

Now that they are out of the tournament after a rather meek exit from the quarterfinals, it is safe to say that some of those expectations were probably a bit too premature. They certainly lived up to the tag of dark horses by going as far as the quarterfinals, winning all four of their matches on the way. But

did they look anything like a golden generation? Not really.

The golden generations of football, whether they ultimately become successful or not, have a way of catching the imagination, be it through a collection of individual brilliances or with the style they bring in to their football or their ability to step it up against a superior side. The most recent successful generations of football -- namely

THIRD EYE

the French side which started domination of football with the 1998 World Cup win and the Spanish dominance of the last six years, had a collection of talents, with one or two figureheads who could inspire them in crisis. Zinedine Zidane was there for the French whenever they needed inspiration; Andres Iniesta and Xavi Hernandez provided the magic whenever Spain needed to lift their game.

The same probably cannot be said of this Belgian side. For all that progress made over the last decade Belgium needed late, late goals to get out of jail in the first four matches. But when they needed to up the ante a few notches, down a goal against a tactically and technically superior Argentina side, there was no Eden Hazard or Marouane Fellaini or Vincent Kompany to stand up and be counted. In fairness, Belgium looked, at best, like a work in progress and at worst a team which is much smaller than the sum of its parts. They will probably need more time and a leader, and more importantly, a seasoned tactician in the bench to turn them into a complete product.

Talking of seasoned tacticians, there is hard to find a better one in modern football than Louis van Gaal. The former Ajax and Barcelona boss took an unfancied Dutch side to Brazil, one that was already depleted by injuries to Kevin Strootman and Rafael Van der

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This handout photo shows Brazil superstar Neymar lying in a medical helicopter at the team's Granja Comary training centre in Teresopolis on Saturday.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

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