

PREMIUM DAIRY ICE CREAM

'Stop walking, Ozil'

Germany legend Paul Breitner has urged Joachim Low to drop Mesut Ozil from his starting side for the semifinal against Brazil. "If [Low] is bold, he'll say: 'I will not play with only 10 people' and drop Mesut Ozil," he told German online portal TZ. "That would be the next step for world titles and above all a big step for the good of the team. Nine men are torturing themselves for 90 minutes and he's going for a walk. That's not what you do at a World Cup."

--INTERNET

PRALINE & CREAM

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TODAY'S MATCH

FIRST SEMIFINAL

BRAZIL GERMANY

Time: 2:00am (Wednesday)
Venue: Estadio Mineirao



Preparing for the Battle Royale ... (L) Brazil players appear in a jolly good mood while (R) Germany's (L-R) Philipp Lahm, Miroslav Klose and coach Joachim Loew get into business seriously ahead of their today's semifinal clash at Belo Horizonte.



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Photo of the Day

Paint Your Imagination

KEY STATS

Remarkably, for two perennial powerhouses who have won eight World Cups between them, this is only the second time Brazil and Germany have met in this competition. In their previous game, Brazil won the 2002 final 2-0.

Germany and Brazil are the joint third highest tournament scorers, with 10 each. They follow Colombia and the Netherlands on 12 goals each. Germany have scored eight goals from open play and two from set-pieces. Brazil have scored seven from open play and three from set-pieces.

Germany's Thomas Mueller and Brazil's Neymar are joint second in the tournament top scorers' chart, on four goals each along with Argentina's Lionel Messi. Colombia's James Rodriguez leads with six goals.

Germany's Philipp Lahm is the best passer of the tournament, with 408 passes completed with a success rate of 86.6%.

Brazil won the World Cup in 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002. Germany won the World Cup in 1954, 1974 and 1990.

BRAZIL V GERMANY

Clash of the titans

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Germany will meet tough-tackling Brazil head-on when football's titans clash in Tuesday's World Cup semifinal with the host nation desperate to win the title for injured superstar Neymar.

Joachim Loew's Germany want to avenge their 2002 final defeat to Brazil by knocking the hosts out in Belo Horizonte to reach Sunday's final in Rio de Janeiro.

Brazil are forced into a reshuffle without play-maker Neymar and suspended captain Thiago Silva as they look to realise dreams of a sixth title on the home soil of the Maracana.

The entire nation laments Neymar's misfortune after the 22-year-old fractured a vertebrae in Friday's uncompromising quarter-final win over Colombia, but the Germans wish he was fit to face them.

"It's always better when the opponent have all their best players, besides it'll bring the (Brazil) team together and they'll want to win the title for him (Neymar)," said Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger.

Brazil paid the price for their rough treatment handed out to James Rodriguez as Colombia met fire-with-fire before Juan Zuniga's challenge on Neymar left the Selecao star in hospital.

"Neymar sets the standard for us. He is capable of deciding any game, so playing without him will be difficult," said Willian.

"We know the quality that we have. We are all very sad at losing him but we are now even stronger after what happened and we can continue to pursue our dream."

The 25-year-old Chelsea midfielder or Bernard are prime candidates to replace Neymar against Germany.

Schweinsteiger kicked off the mind games on Sunday by insisting the referee must pay close attention to the Selecao, who made 59 fouls in the last two matches, compared to the Germans 29 in the same period.

"The Brazilians here aren't the magicians of old, the team has changed and so has their playing style," said Schweinsteiger.

"Hard challenges are definitely a part of their game, it's something we have to be careful of and the referee too."

Remarkably for two World Cup powerhouses with 24 semifinal appearances between them, this will be just their second meeting in the competition after the 2002 final.

"It's an honour and a challenge to play against the hosts, but it have would be better to play Brazil in the final," said Schweinsteiger.

"It doesn't matter how much experience you have, to play the hosts in this football-crazy country is something special."

Having already equalled Brazil legend Ronaldo's record of 15 goals at World Cup finals, veteran Germany striker Miroslav Klose can become the competitions' sole top-scorer by netting against Brazil.

The 36-year-old started up front in Germany's 1-0 win over France in the quarterfinals with Thomas Mueller switched to the wing.

With Silva set to miss out, Germany could well face Brazilian centre-back Dante, which could help both sides, according to his Bayern Munich team-mate Schweinsteiger.

"I hope he starts, we know him very well and know his strengths and weaknesses, but he also knows how we play," said Schweinsteiger.

Germany are desperate to end their 24-year wait for a fourth World Cup title, while Loew's side are determined to avoid a defeat which would mean the third-place play-off - for the third consecutive time.

"I really do not need that, that's something I want to rule out," joked captain Philipp Lahm, who was on losing teams in semifinals at the 2006 and 2010 World Cup finals.

All eyes on Mexican referee

INTERNET

The referee who failed to notice Luis Suarez bite Giorgio Chiellini during the World Cup has been chosen to officiate Brazil's semifinal clash against Germany on Tuesday.

FIFA have confirmed that Mexico's Marco Rodriguez will referee the match in Belo Horizonte, which will be his first knock-out stage game at the tournament.

Rodriguez has so far been in charge of two matches in Brazil - including Uruguay's narrow 1-0 group-stage win over Italy in Natal, which saw Oscar Tabarez's men qualify for the last 16.

The victory was overshadowed by Uruguay star Suarez biting Italian defender Chiellini in the shoulder, which after going unseen and unpunished, resulted in Fifa handing the Liverpool striker a nine-match international ban and a four-month ban from all "football-related activity".

Earlier on in the game, Rodriguez had sent off Italy's Claudio Marchisio for a serious foul.

Meanwhile, Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger said Marco Rodriguez must pay close attention to tough-tackling Brazil in to ensure fouls do not go unchecked.

"I am all for hard, clean challenges, but there were one or two tackles which were over the limit," said Schweinsteiger after watching Brazil's win.

"Brazilians here aren't the magicians of old, the team has changed and so has their playing style.

"Hard challenges are definitely are part of their game, it's something we have to be careful of and the referee too."

Germany coach Joachim Loew echoed Schweinsteiger's sentiments.

"The Brazilians have technically good players, but they are also very robust and it's something the referee must pay close attention to," said the 54-year-old.

Battles within the battle

REUTERS, Belo Horizonte

Here are four key battles in Tuesday's World Cup semifinal between Brazil and Germany in Belo Horizonte's Mineirao stadium.

Brazil defender Dante v Germany striker Miroslav Klose:

This could be the most decisive battle in the game with the central defender shouldering the burden of responsibility in the hosts' backline following the suspension of captain Thiago Silva.

Against the best Germany striker of the last 15 years, Miroslav Klose, Dante will rely a lot on his knowledge of German football, having played in the Bundesliga for the past five seasons.

Dante's pace and his ability to read the game like few defenders in the world will be tested by Klose, who does not need a lot of space to hurt opponents. Chasing a record 16th World Cup goal, the 36-year-old Klose's experience and goal prowess will be needed if the Germans are to advance to their first World Cup final since 2002.

Klose's effectiveness in close-quarter combat is almost legendary but Dante is quicker than teammate David Luiz and should also cope better with Klose's aerial threat.

Brazil forward Fred v Germany defender Mats Hummels:

At the other end of the pitch, Germany central defender Mats Hummels will have to shackle forward Fred, who will have added responsibilities following the injury absence of Neymar.

Fred, hugely experienced, has had a quiet World Cup so far, netting just once. He has had to soak up a lot of criticism for failing to score more goals as Brazil's sole centre forward.

With talismanic Neymar out with a back injury, more will be expected of Fred whose positional sense is outstanding. Hummels cannot afford to

take his eyes off the 30-year-old inside the box even if he is far less effective than a few years ago.

The German can physically match the tall forward, is very strong in the air and more agile than his central defence partner Jerome Boateng which should help him keep wily Fred away from danger.

Brazil midfielder Oscar v Germany defender Phillip Lahm:

The gifted Oscar will also have more attacking duties with Neymar out but he will come up against one of the best right-backs in the business. Oscar's quick pace and skills will be tested by Lahm, who reverted back to his fullback duties midway through the tournament after a less than successful stint as holding midfielder.

With the German captain also adding attacking impetus, Oscar will need to be fully alert if he is to nip quick German counter-attacks launched by Lahm in the bud.

Brazil midfielder Hulk v Germany defender Benedikt Hoewedes:

It will be equally hard work for Germany's left back Hoewedes against athletic Hulk. Hoewedes, a trained central defender, has been deployed as fullback in this tournament and has largely been successful.

While he does not contribute to launching quick breaks and remains a far more defensive fullback than Lahm, he must be at the top of his game against Hulk, who loves nothing more than challenging defenders to match his speed and power.

Hoewedes will need to avoid being lured too far out of position by Hulk, who often switches sides. Extremely powerful and quick Hulk will be a major challenge for workhorse Hoewedes, who lacks the Brazilian's pace and strength.

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