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Loew's big Brazil test

AFP, *Rio de Janeiro*

Another semifinal is another battle of nerves for Joachim Loew, who risks becoming Germany's nearly man.

After eight years in charge of Die Mannschaft, Loew so far has one previous World Cup semifinal, the 2008 European Championship final and the Euro 2012 semifinal to show. No trophy.

But the 54-year-old former assistant to Jurgen Klinnsman has brought on a team praised for its attacking play. And his tactics have been hailed by World Cup legends Pele and Diego Maradona.

Loew's image is often seen in Germany where he fronts an advertising campaign for a leading cosmetics brand, but the head coach rarely appears in the media spotlight.

The German Football Association (DFB) likes the team boss. It has already told him his job is safe and Loew is expected to see out his contract which expires after Euro 2016.

"What can be more beautiful in a football dreamland than to play a World Cup semifinal against the hosts?" Loew said of Tuesday's game against Brazil.

But he also acknowledged before the tournament that "the clock is ticking".

Loew himself only made four appearances for West Germany's Under-21s and played as a midfielder for Eintracht Frankfurt, Karlsruhe and VfB Stuttgart.

He won the 1997 German Cup final as VfB Stuttgart coach and after working in Turkey and Austria, Loew became Germany's assistant coach in 2004.

Loew was responsible for tactics with Klinsmann and the pair delighted the nation as Germany finished third at the 2006 World Cup on home soil.

An impressive record of 75 wins in 110 internationals has earned Loew plenty of respect in Germany. And he is not afraid of taking risks.

When striker Mario Gomez struggled at Euro 2008, Loew benched the forward and switched to a 4-2-3-1 system which resulted in a 3-1 quarterfinal win over Portugal en route to the final.

At the 2010 World Cup, Loew took the youngest squad since 1934 to South Africa and Germany swept aside England and Argentina before losing their semifinal to eventual winners Spain.

Pele recently called Loew a "great tactician", while Maradona said that Germany "roamed around with perfection" in their 4-0 group thrashing of Portugal.

Brazil defender David Luiz has played his game in the World Cup with a lot of heart.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

মানসম্পন্ন বাংলাদেশী পণ্যের ব্যবহার
শিল্প বিকাশে সহায়ক
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Brazil ready to cope without Neymar

AFP, *Teresopolis*

Willian and Bernard, the two leading contenders to replace Neymar in Brazil's World Cup semifinal line-up against Germany insisted on Sunday that the team can still win the competition without their star player.

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

Neymar's tournament ended in tears on Friday when he suffered a fractured vertebrae in his back after a crunching challenge from Juan Zuniga in the 2-1 quarterfinal win against Colombia.

Willian, who has made all three of his appearances at this World Cup from the bench, picked up a knock in training on Saturday in a clash with Hernanes, but said that it will not prevent him from being ready against Germany.

However, he warned that fans should not expect him to act as a direct replacement for the Barcelona star.

"You can't compare Neymar with any other player. He has so much quality," he said.

"I have a different style even if we have some similarities, like my pace. Neymar is a forward, while I am more of a midfielder, someone who creates chances for others."

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari could opt to hand a first start in the competition to diminutive Shakhtar Donetsk winger Bernard.

"We were all very sad at the situation and also because Neymar was very sad. Of course the whole group has felt his loss," said the 21-year-old.

"He is a big loss not just as a player but also as a person. He is always smiling and saying positive things."

The introduction of Willian or Bernard could see Oscar moving into a central role behind striker Fred, but Scolari has several options.

He could play with three central midfielders, maintaining Paulinho in the side while also welcoming back Luiz Gustavo after suspension.

"All of those who are here have ability and are capable of coming in and doing a good job," added Bernard, who nevertheless has extra incentive to win a start.

He hails from Belo Horizonte, where Tuesday's match will be played and made his name at local club Atletico Mineiro, playing alongside Ronaldinho in the side that won the Copa Libertadores last year.

Bernard had a positive impact when he replaced Hulk in the second half of last year's 2-1 Confederations Cup semifinal win against Uruguay.

"It is a World Cup semifinal, a special moment," Bernard said. "But if I am not chosen we will have to agree with the coach."

Brazil have played six games without Neymar since 2010, winning five. Their solitary defeat was a 1-0 friendly loss away to France. The victories came against lesser opposition in Iran, Ukraine, Gabon, Egypt and Denmark.

At times during the World Cup, the hosts have appeared to be too dependent on the genius of Neymar, who scored four goals to help them through the group stage.

However, Brazilians can draw hope from the events of the 1962 World Cup, when their star man Pele withdrew injured in the group stage.

Amarildo took his place and scored three goals to help the Selecao retain the title, including one in the final victory against Czechoslovakia.

"Nobody ever expected that we could come to a situation like this, without Neymar," said Bernard.

"But there is still time. We will be able to adjust and find the best way to cope with the situation," he added.

A Maverick leader

AFP, *Belo Horizonte*

Frizzy locks flailing and eyes bulging, David Luiz charged towards the corner flag and karate-kicked it out of the way after sending Brazil into the World Cup semifinals with a stunning free-kick against Colombia.

His celebration is a caricature of his playing style, Luiz rarely does things the conventional way.

The most expensive defender ever having sealed an 85-million-dollar move from Chelsea to Paris Saint-Germain last month, he played the majority of his final season in the Premier League in midfield as Jose Mourinho didn't trust him to defend and is his country's second top scorer at the World Cup.

Now in the absence of injured star Neymar and suspended captain Thiago Silva, Luiz the maverick must become a leader against Germany in Belo Horizonte on Tuesday.

On his 42nd cap Luiz will captain his country, a role many believe he is naturally more suited to than the subdued Silva.

Amongst the tears and crashing of Brazilian nerve against Chile in the last 16, Luiz was a shining light.

His first international goal had put his country in front and whilst others, including Silva and centre-forward Jo shied away when a penalty shootout was needed to decide Brazil's fate, Luiz stepped up to hammer home the opening spot-kick.

"I'm ready, I'm vice-captain. This group is very easy to handle because everyone is humble and fun. We act as a family, a unit," he said when pressed on how his role will change without Neymar and Silva.

With Neymar out of the tournament, Luiz has become Brazil's face of the World Cup. He already rivalled his poster boy teammate for commercial endorsements and his impassioned blaring of the national anthem has become legendary as a 200 million strong nation shuts down for every Brazil match.

More importantly, though, he is not the figure of fun he was often unfairly tarnished as in England. Since Luiz Felipe Scolari returned to take the Brazil job 20 months ago they have not lost a game in which Luiz has played the full 90 minutes.

GPH ispat

Brazil will face the biggest test of that record yet, though, in the form of a German team sick of being nearly men at international tournaments.

"They are a great team with a great philosophy of how to play football," Luiz said of Joachim Loew's men.

"They have a lot of great players, a great coach and it will be a great game. It is a World Cup semifinal."

Cillessen sorry for outburst

REUTERS, *Salvador*

Goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen apologised to his Netherlands team mates and coaching staff for his petulant outburst after he was substituted before the end of Saturday's dramatic World Cup quarterfinal win over Costa Rica, Dutch media reported on Sunday.

Cillessen had been caught by surprise by the decision to replace him with Tim Krul just minutes from the end of extra time as coach Louis van Gaal reckoned Krul would be the better goalkeeper for the shootout.

"I want to apologise. I've already done to Frans Hoek [the Dutch goalkeeper coach] and I will do so to the whole squad. I knew nothing about this. The change was a shock to my system," he told reporters.

Cillessen stormed off and kicked out at several water bottles before taking his place on the bench.

BRAZILIAN BAURU

AFP, *Rio de Janeiro*

VOODOO PRIEST TO CURSE GERMANY

Germany will have to contend with black magic as well Brazil's Selecao in Tuesday's World Cup semifinal as a voodoo priest plans to curse die Mannschaft.

Brazil will be without injured superstar Neymar in Belo Horizonte, but black magic enthusiast Helio Sillman from Rio de Janeiro says his curse will hinder Joachim Loew's team in the semifinal.

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"I'll take their top player and bind his legs so he can't run on the pitch," said Sillman, referring to the voodoo doll of an undisclosed German player that will be cursed in a ceremony before the game.

In his shop "World of Orixas" in the northern neighbourhood of Madureira, Sillman carries out a ritual before each Selecao game.

'I CAN'T FEEL MY LEGS'

Brazil's star striker Neymar cried "I can't feel my legs" after a crunch World Cup challenge by Colombia's Juan Zuniga, coach Luiz Felipe Scolari told Spanish sports daily Marca.

Left back Marcelo was first to reach the striker, who suffered a fractured vertebrae that has ruled him out of the World Cup, after the challenge.

Marcelo knelt next to Neymar and asked how he felt, according to Scolari.

"He replied: 'I can't feel my legs,'" added the coach.

Marcelo shouted for the team doctor, but doctors are not allowed onto the pitch.

Colombia given heroes' welcome

AFP, *Bogota*

Tens of thousands of people mobbed the streets of Bogota to grab a glimpse of their heroes as Colombia's World Cup squad arrived home Sunday after their historic run to the quarterfinals.

The Colombian capital threw a massive party for coach Jose Pekerman and his squad after the Argentinian team led Colombia's players to the last eight for the first time, where they narrowly went down to host Brazil 2-1 in Fortaleza on Friday.

Not that anyone in Colombia was complaining.

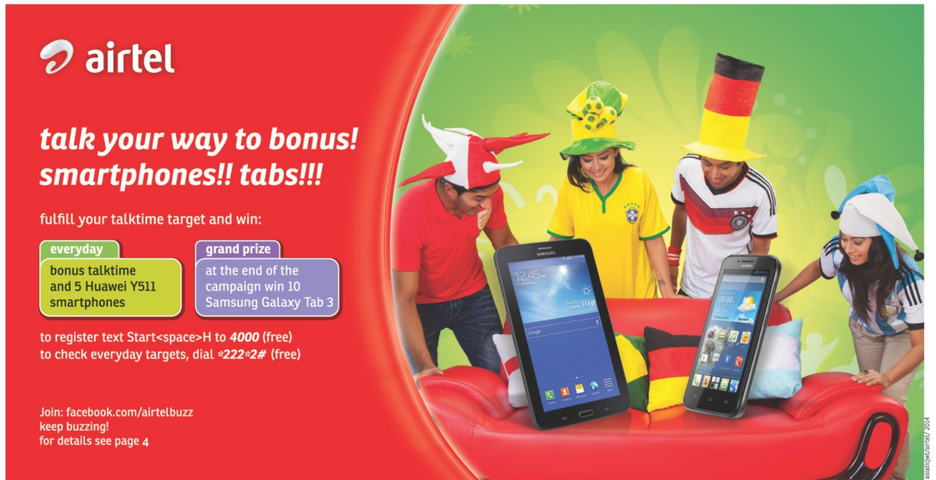
The Avianca airlines plane carrying the squad from Brazil was greeted at El Dorado airport by a huge arc of water fired by local fire crews and the players were led off the aircraft along a red carpet and to an open-top bus.

Security officers and airport workers scrambled to shake hands, kiss or grab autographs of their returning heroes.

"Thanks for always being there, thanks for the support, we love you," Colombia's star forward James Rodriguez, currently top scorer at the World Cup with six goals, told the fanatical crowd.

Nadia Caracol, one of the Avianca flight attendants, gushed: "It was the most exciting flight of my life."

Tens of thousands of people, many of them wearing the team's yellow shirt, hit the streets of Bogota early to get a prime place to see the bus, which slowly made its way from the airport to Simon Bolivar park in the heart of Bogota, where an estimated 50,000 people thronged the area.



Real great Di Stefano no more

REUTERS, *Madrid*

Former Real Madrid soccer star Alfredo Di Stefano, 88, has died in a Madrid hospital two days after suffering a heart attack, Spanish newspapers reported on Monday.

Argentina-born Di Stefano, who helped turn Real Madrid into a leading side in the 1950s and is considered one of the greatest footballers of all time, was taken to the intensive care unit of the Gregorio Maranon hospital on Saturday.

He had suffered an 18-minute respiratory arrest, emergency services sources said.

El Pais and El Mundo newspapers reported Di Stefano's death. The Real Madrid soccer club and the Gregorio Maranon hospital could not immediately be reached for comment.

Aguero fit to play, Di Maria out

REUTERS, *Belo Horizonte*

Angel Di Maria has been ruled out of Argentina's semifinal against the Netherlands but fellow forward Sergio Aguero has recovered from a muscle strain and is fit to play, the team doctor said on Sunday.

Aguero looked comfortable in training at the Argentine camp, but Di Maria was missing and undergoing intensive treatment after hobbling out of their 1-0 quarterfinal win over Belgium.

In their first semifinal since 1990, the South Americans play the Netherlands in Sao Paulo on Wednesday.

"Angel has a Grade 1 injury. Of course he won't play in Argentina's next game. After that, we'll evaluate the situation day-by-day," team doctor Daniel Martinez told reporters.

"Sergio has practiced three times. He's ready to play."

Aguero missed two games due to a muscle strain but on the evidence of Sunday's afternoon training session at their camp in Belo Horizonte, the speedy forward should at least make the substitutes bench.

The absence of Di Maria, the South Americans' most creative player after captain Lionel Messi, will be a big blow but the return to form of Gonzalo Higuain lessens the impact.

Higuain's instinctive strike against Belgium gave Argentina passage to the semifinals.

Roared on by tens of thousands of fans who have crossed the border, Argentina are bidding for a third World Cup. To achieve it on the soil of rivals Brazil would be especially sweet.

The squad looked relaxed during training, laughing and joking with coach Alejandro Sabella.

They are based at local team Atletico Mineiro's training complex, where motivational banners in blue-and-white colours give them encouragement as fans huddle at the gates outside.

"The group as a whole is very happy, except for the situation with Angel, which is a great shame," midfielder Javier Mascherano told reporters. "We hope he recovers soon."

Mascherano said Argentina's improved performance against Belgium was due to a more intelligent approach, which they had to repeat against the skilful Dutch.

"Against Belgium, we used the spaces better. We didn't rush. We waited for the right moment to pass," he said.

"It was a lovely game but it was yesterday. Now we're focused on Holland. We know they are still smarting from defeat [in the final] in South Africa four years ago.

"We've come far, Argentines have waited 24 years for this, but we want to go further."

Defender Jose Basanta said he had been dreaming all his career of playing in the World Cup.

"I'm so happy. Argentina are making history, but we've not won anything yet," he added.

Argentina's Sergio Aguero (R) is almost a surety to play in tomorrow's World Cup semifinal against the Netherlands.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

'Neymar injury bad for Germany'

ESPNFC.COM

Sami Khedira and Manuel Neuer are upset that Neymar will not be fit to face Germany in the 2014 World Cup semifinal, but warned that Brazil cannot be underestimated even without their star man.

Neymar injured his back in the final minutes of Brazil's quarterfinal victory against Colombia and it was confirmed that he will sit out the rest of the tournament after damaging his vertebra.

Bastian Schweinsteiger lamented the Barcelona forward's injury, claiming Germany want to face the strongest opponents possible.

Khedira, who only returned to action in May after missing the majority of the season through injury, told Welt am Sonntag: "We want to compete with the best, and Neymar is one of the best.

"We are anything but happy to hear about the news. It's bad news for us and every single football fan, especially the Brazilians. We want to compete with the best, and Neymar belongs to the best.

"I feel really sorry for him that he can't play against us, and is no longer able to participate in the World Cup at all. He is a great footballer.

"Now we all must take on the challenge and try and make it to the final against a changed Brazil XI.

"It's a semifinal at the World Cup, and everything's at stake anyway. Brazil will still field a team that will stretch us to the limit."

Neuer told kicker that Brazil's dynamic will shift following Neymar's injury but that they will be no less dangerous.

"Without Neymar they will spread their match on many shoulders. Until now, everything was focused on him. He is the star. Now the team is the star," he said.

"It will be down to many factors, Brazil are fired up and so are we. It will be important to bring through our match, and moreover that this match is officiated by a good referee, because of the atmosphere, and the tough duels."

FIFA have appointed referee Marco Rodriguez, who made the headlines for missing Luis Suarez' bite in the Uruguay victory over Italy during the group stages, and also sent off Italy's Claudio Marschisio that day.

REF LENIENCY

FIFA hits back at critics

AFP, *Rio de Janeiro*

FIFA angrily hit back at suggestions referees had been told not to give red and yellow cards on Monday following the bruising World Cup quarterfinal between Brazil and Chile.

The world governing body's chief spokesman Walter De Gregorio told a press conference that a report in Germany citing a "secret plan" urging referees to keep cards to a minimum was "unacceptable."

"[The allegation] that there is a secret plan not to sanction with yellow or red cards, maybe risking or tolerating that players are injured, this is just unacceptable," De Gregorio said.

"We cannot accept that there is a hidden plan from FIFA."

De Gregorio's unusually forthright denial comes after rumbling controversy following Brazil's quarterfinal win which saw star striker Neymar suffer a tournament-ending injury.

De Gregorio said FIFA was expected to announce a decision on whether or not to open disciplinary proceedings against the Colombian player who was involved in the Neymar incident, Juan Camilo Zuniga.

Referee Carlos Velasco Carballo's performance in the match has been severely criticised, with many claiming the Spanish official waited too long to issue his first yellow card.

The referee whistled 41 fouls before issuing his first yellow card in the match. Colombian star James Rodriguez was repeatedly fouled by Brazil throughout the clash.

'Early exit frustrated France'

AFP, *Paris*

France returned home Sunday frustrated by their defeat to Germany in the World Cup quarterfinals, midfielder Morgan Schneiderlin said.

About 200 fans draped in flags and carrying banners awaited the team at Le Bourget airport in the Paris suburbs as their special flight from Brazil landed.

The 23 players and coach Didier Deschamps briefly came out to greet the fans and sign autographs before all took taxis away.

"There is a little frustration, disappointment," said Southampton midfielder Schneiderlin of Germany's 1-0 victory in the quarterfinal.

"But that's life and we are happy to be home again," added Schneiderlin who called the reception "fantastic".

France play a friendly against Spain in Paris on September 4. As host country for the 2016 European Championships, France will not have to take part in qualifying matches that start in September.

INFO ZONE

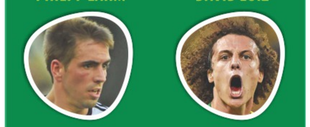
HEAD-TO-HEAD

GERMANY				BRAZIL			
M	W	D	L	M	W	D	L
21	4	5	12	21	12	5	4

LAST MEETING: **GERMANY 3-2 BRAZIL**
(10 AUGUST 2011, INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY)

KEY PLAYERS

PHILPP LAHM — DAVID LUIZ

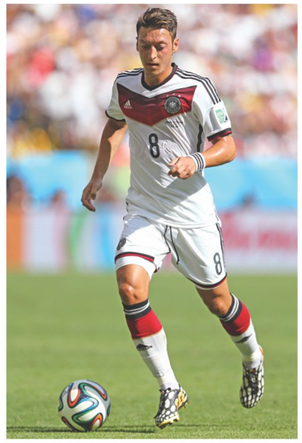


111	CAPS	41
5	GOALS SCORED	2
1	WC GOALS	2

TEAM FORMATION

4-3-3	4-3-3
Neuer	Cesar
4: Howedes, Hummels, Mertesacker, Lahm	4: Maicon, Luiz, Alves, Marcelo
3: Khedira, Schweinsteiger, Kroos	3: Fernandinho, Paulinho, Hulk
3: Ozil, Muller, Klose	3: Oscar, Willian, Fred

CLEMON অফুরন্ত Freshness



Germany's Mesut Ozil not only is playing brilliantly in his new role but also has impressed everyone including the coaching staff of his team.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Brazil - Argentina World Cup final....only a step away from the dream clash

Ozil's new role

REUTERS, *Santo Andre*

Germany's coaching staff fended off criticism of Mesut Ozil on Sunday and said they are more than satisfied with the way he has adapted to his new role in the team.

The 25-year-old previously played at the heart of Germany's high-scoring 4-2-3-1 system, catching the eye with some brilliant goals and delightful passing.

However, after bitter semifinal defeats at the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012, coach Joachim Loew has adopted a more defensive outlook and moved Ozil wide in a 4-3-3 lineup.

Loew's assistant coach Hansi Flick rejected suggestions Ozil had been a flop at the World Cup when asked about his role at a news conference on Sunday.

"We see that differently than you do," he told reporters.

"Mesut is playing a different position now than he used to and he's got a different assignment now. He's got very strong skills with the ball and on top of that he's improved during the course of the tournament."

No longer directing play from the classic number 10 playmaker role, Ozil is being asked to provide the creativity from the flanks and is covering much more ground than he did under the old system.

"We're very satisfied with Mesut," Flick said. "He brings a lot of confidence with the ball into our game and is always ready for a pass."