

PREMIUM DAIRY ICE CREAM

Balotelli at it again

Italy striker Mario Balotelli has stoked more controversy by publishing a picture of himself on Instagram pointing a gun at the camera with the message "a big kiss to all the haters". The AC Milan player quickly removed the photo but his latest gaffe will do him no favours in Italy where he has been a frequent target of racial abuse. A string of previous antics, which have included throwing a dart at a youth team player at his former club Manchester City in 2011, have also put Balotelli's position at Milan in question.

--REUTERS

PRALINE & CREAM

TASTE OF TOGETHERNESS

MI AMORE

DHAKA SATURDAY JULY 12, 2014
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TODAY'S MATCH

THIRD PLACE PLAY OFF

BRAZIL
NETHERLANDS

Time: 2:00am (Sunday)
Venue: Estadio Nacional

KEY STATS

Brazil are taking part in their fourth third-place playoff at the World Cup. They beat Italy in 1978, lost to Poland in 1974 and scored a 4-2 victory over Sweden in 1938.

The Netherlands have taken part in the most unwanted game at the World Cup only once, losing 2-1 to Croatia in 1998.

Despite conceding seven goals against Germany in the semifinals, Brazil have one of the best defences and have won the most tackles (91) of any team at the tournament, according to FIFA statistics.

No player has covered more ground in the World Cup than Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder. In six matches, Sneijder has run 69.6 kilometres, just ahead of Dutch teammate Arjen Robben with Germany forward Thomas Mueller third.



Brazil's Daniel Alves (L) and Thiago Silva take part in a training session in Teresopolis on Thursday as they prepare to take on the Netherlands in the play-off today.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Photo of the Day

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BRAZUCA-FEST 33 FIFA gains in game of losers

SYED ASHEAQUIL HAQUE

Here comes a game that no one wants to be involved in. What glory two losers can achieve from a third-place deciding game? For teams, nothing but the Cup matters. It's just cruel to ask one of the losing semifinalists to lose again.

Crushed emotionally, both the Brazilians and Dutch badly needed a break from football and frustrated fans as well. All they want right now is to hide themselves somewhere for some time and lick their wounds. But Brazil and the Netherlands have no choice. They have to take the field once more and play out the frivolous formality on July 12.

It will take Brazil decades to get over the humiliation they suffered at the hands of Germany. A 7-1 drubbing was a slap across the face of a country that won more World Cups than any other football-playing nation.

Brazil never lost a match by such a huge margin, with their 6-0 defeat by Uruguay coming in 1920, 10 years before the inception of the World Cup. That memory does not possibly even exist in the mind of the last few generations of Brazilians. The German mauling was just gross and a little more than a public flogging. Quite unabashedly, Brazil fans screamed and wept openly in the stands before booing their players off the ground.

Brazilian footballers are always treated as celebrities. They are hardly jeered at by the

fans. In fact, the endless expectation of fans drives footballers, adorably called Selecao by their admirers, to be entertainers and winners. But everything has changed so dramatically since that crazy July 9 evening. To make matters worse for Brazil, arch-rivals Argentina advanced into the final against Germany. Their neighbours too did not look impressive. But they played their semi-final the way Brazil should have played: More defending, less attacking.

Getting back on the field in a competitive match three days into the disaster will be like getting punished twice for the same crime. The reception the Brazil players will receive from the stands when they take to the pitch tomorrow will be interesting to see. And what if they lose again? May God bless Brazilians!

The Netherlands too will want little to do with the match. The Dutch possibly played the most entertaining football throughout the tournament. They were attacking and attractive. Arguably the best team, Netherlands choked on penalties for the sixth time in a World Cup. The quest for their maiden World Cup ended in the most agonising manner. The Dutch would dread playing this meaningless match.

Neither team nor their fans are interested. But Fifa, the game's world governing body, has a pervasive reason to keep the tradition of the third-place play-off going: more revenue. Fingers are crossed for the losers.

Di Maria starts light training

REUTERS, Belo Horizonte

Argentina winger Angel Di Maria trained lightly on Thursday in the hope of being able to play a part in the World Cup final against Germany on Sunday despite suffering a thigh injury just days ago.

Di Maria, the South Americans' most creative player after Lionel Messi, hurt a muscle when shooting at goal during the quarterfinal win over Belgium.

Argentina face Germany on Sunday at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium for football's greatest prize.

The speedy Real Madrid player, who links well with Messi in Argentina's attack, jogged lightly in his first training since the injury at Argentina's camp in Belo Horizonte.

Di Maria is racing against the clock to be ready for Sunday, though, and sources close to the Argentine squad said the best he could hope for would be a place on the substitutes' bench with an outside chance of coming on.

BRAZIL V NETHERLANDS Selecao's pride at stake

AFP, Brasilia

Neymar has urged his Brazil teammates to rescue some of their battered pride after their humiliating World Cup semi-final defeat to Germany by beating the Netherlands in Saturday's third-place play-off in Brasilia.

It is the one game that no team ever wants to take part in, but the encounter at the Mane Garrincha National Stadium took on extra significance after the hosts' dream of lifting the trophy at the Maracana 24 hours later was ended by their record 7-1 loss against the Germans.

Neymar missed that match after fracturing a bone in his back in the quarterfinal win against Colombia, but the 22-year-old superstar faced the media on Thursday as he called for Brazil to bow out on a high.

"It was unbelievable, inexplicable. We had the opportunity to write our names into history in a positive manner, and we failed," he said of the Selecao's embarrassing semi-final loss, their heaviest-ever defeat.

"We haven't had a good campaign. We were consistent, which is why we reached the semifinals, but we didn't play the kind of enchanting football associated with Brazil.

"Now we need to approach Saturday's game as if it were the final and finish the World Cup smiling, with a victory. It is not going to lessen the pain, but it is important."

The match could prove to be Luiz Felipe Scolari's last in charge, and the coach is likely to make changes to a team whose confidence has been so badly damaged.

Captain Thiago Silva will return after suspension, while his Paris Saint-Germain colleague Maxwell, the only outfield player yet to feature, may play a part.

Despite Neymar's rallying cry, almost all of those involved in Brasilia would rather be elsewhere, with Daniel Alves having made clear his lack of appetite for the bronze-medal clash.

"The important thing is first place. Nothing else matters," said the right-back. "We represent millions of people, so we have to digest this defeat and go out onto the field on Saturday. But, for me, every game is about being first."

The mood in the Dutch camp is the same. The Oranje have a day less to prepare for the match after their agonising defeat on penalties to Argentina in Wednesday's second semi-final in Sao Paulo.



Injured Brazil striker Neymar arrives at the team's training centre in Teresopolis on Thursday.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Neymar all for Messi

APP, Teresopolis

Brazilian superstar Neymar said Thursday he wants teammate Lionel Messi to lead Argentina to victory in the World Cup final against Germany.

At an emotional press conference, Neymar broke down in tears as he relived the challenge which broke a vertebrae in his back and left him fearing he would be paralysed.

Neymar said he wants Barcelona teammate Messi to claim the trophy on Sunday against the Germans.

"Messi's history in the sport is so important, he has won a lot of trophies and I will be cheering for him," Neymar told a press conference.

"He is a friend, he is my teammate and I wish him luck."

Neymar was ruled out of the World Cup in a rugged challenge by Colombia defender Juan Camilo Zuniga in Brazil's 2-1 quarterfinal win.

The 22-year-old wiped away tears as he described his fears immediately after the knee in the back that he would be paralysed.

"I was blessed in that situation because it wasn't more serious. Two more centimetres up and, well, I could be in a wheelchair. So it is really difficult. It happened at such an important point in my career," he said. It was something I cannot accept. That challenge and what happened was unacceptable," he added.

"I would not say there was malice because I can't speak for him, but everyone who understands football knows that challenge was not normal."

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