

'Underdog tag to help Argentina'

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Argentina striker Sergio Agüero believes his side will relish the tag of underdogs when they face Germany in the World Cup final in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday.

The two sides' contrasting routes to the final has made Joachim Löw's men heavy favourites to win the World Cup for a fourth time as they smashed hosts Brazil 7-1 in their semifinal, whilst Argentina only squeezed past the Netherlands on a penalty shootout after a 0-0 draw.

"Germany were always the favourites, along with Brazil, to win the World Cup," the Manchester City man said on Thursday.

"They continue to be so now. We need to play our own game and it suits us that all the pressure is on them."

Argentina's road back to the final for the first time in 24 years has unexpectedly come on the back of a solid defensive record as their fearsome attack, including four-time World Player of the Year Lionel Messi, has failed to hit top form.

And Agüero is aware they may have to withstand plenty of pressure from the Germans once more at the Maracana.

"We are in the final and we have to play it and win it in whatever way possible."

"We want to have control of the ball, but we know that Germany is a great team that know each other off by heart having played together for many years."

"It is clear that Argentina always go out to win, but sometimes during the game you have to be cautious. We are all aware of what the objective is and we will leave everything on the field to achieve it."

And former Liverpool player Maxi Rodríguez insisted Argentina were capable of beating anyone on their day.

"Germany is a very strong, aggressive opponent, but if we are at our best we can beat anyone."

"What I am interested in is leaving as a champion. It is the dream all Argentines have."

Agüero made his return to action for the final 40 minutes against the Dutch after missing the last 16 and quarterfinal victories over Switzerland and Belgium respectively due to injury.

The 26-year-old struggled to get into the game, though, and admits it is difficult to recover full fitness in the middle of such an intense tournament.

"When you come back from an injury, it is always in the back of your mind whether it will return," added Agüero.

"I had to train and try to be as good as I could be. When you miss three games, especially in a World Cup, you realise what you are missing."

Argentina are hopeful of recovering another key player from injury in time for the final as Ángel di María returned to light training on Thursday.

The Real Madrid midfielder missed the semifinal due to a thigh injury.

"Di María trained at between 60 and 80 percent on the pitch," said Argentina team spokesman Andrés Ventura.

"His progress is obvious. He will be observed over the next few days to see if he will be fit."



Argentina's Sergio Agüero is happy with the underdogs tag going into the FIFA World Cup final against Germany at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

মানসম্পন্ন বাংলাদেশী পণ্যের ব্যবহার
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Secret plan to stop Messi

AFP, Santo André

Germany have a secret plan to shut Argentina superstar Lionel Messi out of Sunday's World Cup final at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana Stadium.

Assistant coach Hansi Flick said Thursday there is a "special plan" to cope with the four-time Ballon d'Or winner but refused to give details.

Messi had a relatively quiet match against the Netherlands as Wednesday's semifinal was settled by penalties.

The 27-year-old was often

greeted by two Oranje shirts in Sao Paulo and the Germans are also getting organised.

"We saw how the Dutch managed to keep Messi out, but we too have a special plan for him -- although I won't give that away," said Flick.

"We're looking forward to meeting a compact, organised team and in Messi, they have one of the outstanding players of the tournament."

"We know plenty about Argentina, Germany has to accept the role of favourites, but the final will write its own script."

Defender Benedikt Hoewedes said the Germany defence will pay Messi the same close attention Cristiano Ronaldo received in the 4-0 rout of Portugal in the group stages.

"Messi is one of the best players in the world, but just as I said before the Portugal game when we faced Ronaldo, we have to defend as a team," said the left-back.

"We have to stifle his opportunities to score goal and create dangerous situations."

This is the sixth time Germany will meet Argentina at the World Cup and the second time in the final.

On their most recent meeting, Messi scored two years ago when Argentina enjoyed a 3-1 win over ten-man Germany in a Frankfurt friendly.

The Germans won the most recent World Cup meetings. They routed a Diego Maradona-coached Argentina 4-0 in Cape Town at South Africa 2010 after a quarterfinal penalty shoot-out win in Berlin four years earlier.

Germany lost the Mexico 1986 final 3-2 to Argentina, then took revenge four years later by winning the Italia 1990 final 1-0 when

Argentina finished with nine men in Rome.

Argentina legend Maradona played in both matches, but Germany's veteran striker Miroslav Klose said neither match has any relevance now.

"You can't really make comparisons, Maradona was one player, but Messi is just as fantastic and they are absolutely on par," said Klose.

"We have to come up with a few surprises of our own and I am just looking forward to an exciting game, which will be marked by tactics and a bit of trickery."

Klose praises Ronaldo

AFP, Santo André

Miroslav Klose is delighted to have established his '16 club' after becoming the World Cup's top-scorer, but says it counts for nothing if Germany lose to Argentina in Sunday's final.

The 36-year-old broke Brazil legend Ronaldo's record when he netted his 16th World Cup goal in Germany's 7-1 hammering of the Selecao in Tuesday's semifinal.

The veteran is poised to play in his second World Cup final at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium, 12 years after being on the losing side when Brazil claimed a 2-0 win in the 2002 final in Yokohama.

"Yes, I have overtaken Ronaldo as the best goal-scorer, but that is something to take on board another day," said Klose.

"I'm fully focused on Argentina and if we lose the final, my joy as the top-scorer will be significantly dampened."

Ronaldo welcomed Klose 'into the club' when the German hot-shot equalled the Brazilian's previous record of 15 goals in the 2-2 draw with Ghana in the group stages.

Lazio star Klose said Ronaldo is still hailed as a football god in Italy and the German welcomes any ambitious striker to join him in his exclusive club at future World Cup finals.

"Ronaldo was a first-class striker, I play in Italy and they still say there he was the best player to grace the Italian game," said Klose, after the retired Ronaldo played for both Inter and AC Milan during his career.

"I saw him play and I can only agree with that."

"He was the strongest player I have seen and had a great personality with it."

But 12 years after losing the 2002 final, the last thing the veteran wants is to add Rio heartache to the bitter defeat in Yokohama.

"He welcomed me to the 15 club, all I can say is it's great to be in Miroslav Klose's 16 club and I'd welcome anyone to join me."

Miroslav to party if Germany win

AFP, Santo André

The World Cup's top-scorer Miroslav Klose has threatened to abandon his strict fitness regime to become a 'party animal' if Germany win Sunday's final against Argentina.

The 36-year-old is the sole survivor from Die Mannschaft's last World Cup final in 2002 and is eager to taste victory at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium in his fourth World Cup finals.

He scored a record 16th World Cup goal, his 71st for Germany, in Tuesday's 7-1 semifinal rout of Brazil.

The Poland-born striker is poised to win his 137th cap in Rio and says all his focus is on Argentina -- but the World Cup title may stir his inner party animal.

"I can't really guarantee anything, but if we do win the trophy, I can imagine that I will relax and there is a party beast, even in me," he quipped Thursday.

But 12 years after losing the 2002 final, the last thing the veteran wants is to add Rio heartache to the bitter defeat in Yokohama.

"We enjoyed the win against Brazil,

but we ticked it off after 24 hours," said Klose.

"In the next game, we have to again play to the best of our abilities."

"It feels really awful to lose a final, so it's our time to win this one."

A diligent trainer, Klose puts his career longevity down to his daily fitness regime, and has a gym in his home.

Having made his debut in 2001, he

equalled, then broke Ronaldo's record of 15 World Cup goals during Brazil 2014. But Klose said it will all count for nothing if Germany lose to Argentina.

"It's a hugely emotional thing for me, but people who know me, know that my focus is already on Argentina - 100 per cent," he said.

"Yes, I have overtaken Ronaldo as the best goal-scorer, but that is something to take on board another day."

"If we lose the final, my joy as the top-scorer will be significantly dampened."

Despite having witnessed Brazil's Ronaldo score both goals in their 2-0 victory, Klose said he will not use the 2002 defeat as motivation.

He says the current squad are uni-

fied in their desire to become world champions.

"That was 12 years ago and I was really young, then as now, I just try to soak everything up, but you can't compare the two matches," said Klose.

"Each match is unique, especially for a final."

"The key factor here has been the performances in training."

"You see the degree of respect and commitment the squad has for each other."

"There is no 'B team' or 'A team', where the first team are sure of their places, and there is little difference between the guys on the bench and those on the pitch."

"Team spirit" is not an empty expression, no one is begrudging towards the others.

"They are all very professional and mature, even if some of them are only 25 or 26."

This is the sixth time Germany will meet Argentina at the World Cup and the third time in the final.

Klose scored twice when Germany won the most recent World Cup meeting as Diego Maradona-coached Argentina were routed 4-0 at South Africa 2010.



Germany's (R-L) Miroslav Klose, Mats Hummels and Manuel Neuer look relaxed during a training session.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

FIFA fines Argentina

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Argentina have been fined 336,000 dollars for failing to bring players to four pre-match news conferences during the World Cup, FIFA said in a statement on Friday.

FIFA's disciplinary committee said Argentina had breached its media and marketing regulations in news conferences on the day before games against Nigeria, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands with only coach Alejandro Sabella present.

The coach is supposed to appear alongside a player.

There was no immediate response from Argentina, who face Germany in the World Cup final on Sunday.

Two golden generations meet

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

When the 22 players representing Germany and Argentina step out onto the Maracana pitch for Sunday's World Cup final, roughly half will be fulfilling prophecies made in the previous decade.

From Argentina captain Lionel Messi to Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, the team-sheets will reflect the fact that glory for both teams has been in the pipeline for some time.

The backbone of the Germany team who evicted hosts Brazil 7-1 in the semifinals was drawn from the Under-21 side that triumphed at the European Championship in 2009.

The source of Argentina's achievements in Brazil, meanwhile, can be traced back even further, to the World Youth Championship -- later rechristened the Under-20 World

Cup -- in the Netherlands in 2005.

Of the current Argentina squad, six players featured for the team that overcame Nigeria 2-1 in Utrecht in the competition final.

Pablo Zabaleta, Ezequiel Garay, Fernando Gago and an 18-year-old Messi all started, while Lucas Biglia and Sergio Agüero -- who turned 17 just before the tournament began -- came on as second-half substitutes.

Messi decided the game with a brace of penalties, earning him the Golden Boot and also sparking a run of success that established his team-mates as the most talented group of Argentine players to have emerged in a generation.

In 2007, with Agüero the star, Argentina successfully defended their title, claiming a fifth Under-20 crown in seven attempts.

A year later, a side also featuring Ezequiel Lavezzi, Angel Di Maria,

Javier Mascherano and Sergio Romero triumphed in the Olympic football tournament in Beijing, with Nigeria again in the fall guys in the final.

Six years on in Rio de Janeiro, the 2005 generation continue to carry their nation's hopes.

Zabaleta, Garay, Biglia and Messi are all certain to start against Germany and although Gago has lost his place in Alejandro Sabella's team, Agüero may have a decisive role to play after overcoming a muscular complaint.

On the other side of the halfway line, Germany coach Joachim Löw could align six members of the team that crushed England 4-0 in the Under-21 Euro 2009 final in Malmö, Sweden.

Having progressed together through the youth ranks, Neuer, Benedikt Hoewedes, Jerome Boateng, Sami Khedira, Mesut Ozil

and Mats Hummels embody the staggering progress made by German football since 2000.

Germany's group-phase exit at Euro 2000 prompted a profound rethink of the country's approach to youth coaching, involving the establishment of new football schools and the subsidising of professional clubs' youth academies.

The results have been remarkable, and close to instantaneous, with Germany reaching at least the semifinals of every major tournament since the 2006 World Cup.

But although the seeds of success for both Germany and Argentina were sown in youth football, the two squads collide at very different stages of their development.

While the average age of Germany's players is a youthful 25.7, Argentina's average age is 28.4, making them the oldest squad in the competition.



INFO ZONE

HEAD-TO-HEAD

NETHERLANDS					BRAZIL				
M	W	D	L		M	W	D	L	
12	3	5	4		12	4	5	3	

LAST MEETING: BRAZIL 0-0 NETHERLANDS (4 JUNE 2011, INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY)

KEY PLAYERS

KLAAS J HUNTELAAR THIAGO SILVA



65	CAPS	51
35	GOALS SCORED	3
1	WC GOALS	1

TEAM FORMATION

3-4-3	4-2-3-1
Cillessen	Cesar
3: Martins, Vlaar, de Vrij	4: Maicon, Luiz, Silva, Marcelo
4: Blind, Sneijder, Wijnaldum, Kuyt	2: Fernandinho, Gustavo
3: Depay, Huntelaar, Lens	3: Hulk, Oscar, Bernard
	1: Fred



Fellaini cuts off Afro

AFP, Brussels

Marouane Fellaini endured a tough first season at Manchester United but the midfielder was always one of the most recognisable players on the pitch thanks to his dark flowing afro.

However the Belgium international, who was on Thursday pictured at a hair salon in Brussels sporting a much shorter look, won't stand out quite as much this season after lopping off his famous locks.

Fellaini had reportedly claimed he would cut his hair if Belgium won the World Cup in Brazil, but despite the Red Devils' quarterfinal exit, he has still followed through with his pledge.

The haircut prompted plenty of responses on Twitter with one user in particular posting: "Once an average player with a great haircut. Now? Well..."

Fellaini made 21 appearances for United last season following his £27.5 million (£45 million, 33.2 million euro) move from Everton but failed to score a single goal as the club finished a disappointing seventh in the English Premier League.

His future at Old Trafford has come under heavy speculation this summer with Dutchman Louis van Gaal, who steered the Netherlands to the World Cup semifinals, having taken over from David Moyes, who was a staunch supporter of Fellaini despite the Belgian's struggles.

GPH

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BRAZILIAN BAURU

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

RIO BRACES FOR FAN FRENZY

Rio de Janeiro braced Thursday for up to 100,000 Argentine fans arriving by car, bus and motor home for the World Cup final against Germany at the iconic Maracana Stadium.

Argentina had already sent the biggest contingent of fans to Brazil during the month-long tournament, flooding cities to follow their hero Lionel Messi's team, even though many have not even had tickets to the games.

Tens of thousands who were in Sao Paulo for Wednesday's semifinal triumph against the Netherlands hit the road the next day for the six-hour trek across the southeastern region ahead of Sunday's final.

They were joining others who have been in Rio for days already, anticipating their team's triumph while camping out at the Terreiro do Samba, an open-air concert venue now packed with cars, minibuses and motor homes.

"MARADONA BETTER THAN PELE"

At the Terreiro do Samba, Brazilian beats were replaced by the taunting chants of Argentine fans who sang "Brazil, tell me how you feel! Maradona is better than Pele!"

Alain Rizzo, a 22-year-old prison guard, said he had left the Argentine city of Santa Fe, 2,600 kilometers (1,600 miles) from Rio, with a friend on Saturday afternoon, and they hitchhiked their way north.

"We saw the Argentina-Belgium [quarterfinal] on Saturday in a truck," said Rizzo, who sleeps on the ground under the stars.

For the final, they hope to find a location close to the Maracana, the home of Brazilian football.

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42", 32", 28", 24", 19"

"Tite is the favorite," added Globo, pointing out that the 53-year-old, real name Adenor Leonardo Bacchi and a southerner like Scolari, had in 2012 lifted the Libertadores Cup and Club World Cup -- the latter at Chelsea's expense.

Lance insisted "Felpao showed he was incapable of knowing where he went wrong" by blaming everything on "six fatal minutes" in which Germany added four goals to their openers.

"They should stick with Scolari -- the team will be fine in 2018," insisted former skipper Cafu, although 1970 skipper Carlos Alberto Torres is leaning towards Tite.

CBF vice-chairman Delfim de Padua Peixoto said after the Germany loss -- which he dubbed "much worse" than the shock defeat to Uruguay in 1950 -- that he believed Scolari would go of his own volition.

"I like him personally but have the right to say I think he has had his day."



Octopus Kleiner Paul or Little Paul embraces a feeding box covered with a German flag next to a box with the Argentine flag during an oracle event at Sea Life Aquarium in Oberhausen in western Germany on Friday.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

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