

POPE SKIPPED FINAL FOR NEUTRALITY

Pope Francis did not watch his native Argentina play Germany in the World Cup final as "a matter of neutrality," the Vatican's chief of ceremonies Guillermo Karcher said Monday. Francis is known as a lifelong football fan and card-carrying member of Argentine club San Lorenzo, but Karcher said he did not even tune in to see the nail-biting final in Brazil, which Germany won 1-0 in extra time. "The pope was updated on the World Cup but said he wasn't going to watch it as a matter of neutrality," Karcher, one of Francis's closest associates, told Argentine broadcaster Radio del Plata. "We kept him informed play by play. We're happy and continue to support the team." The pope stuck to the neutrality principal ahead of the match, limiting himself to a comment about the importance of intercultural exchange on Twitter. "World Cups bring about the encounter of people from different nationalities and religions. May sport always promote a culture of togetherness," he wrote on his @pontifex account. —AFP



Star

DHAKA TUESDAY JULY 15, 2014
e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net

SPORT



FIFA WORLD CUP
BRASIL

GOETZE

the liberator

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

When Germany thrashed Brazil 7-1 with Miroslav Klose becoming the World Cup's all-time leading goalscorer, Mario Goetze could probably have been forgiven for not leading the cheers from the sidelines.

Having arrived in Brazil as his country's first-choice forward he watched the entire semifinal from the bench having been dropped earlier in the tournament and replaced by Klose.

Goetze was again among the substitutes for Sunday's final and would have had few expectations of being involved as coach Joachim Loew understandably kept faith with the team that had marched into the final in such style.

However, Loew threw him on for Klose two minutes from the end of normal time and Goetze repaid him in the most spectacular way possible, smashing home a brilliant goal seven minutes from the end of extra time.

The goal gave Germany a 1-0 win over Argentina and secured his country's fourth World Cup and first since 1990 -- two years before he was born.

Fellow substitute Andre Schuerrle advanced past a tiring Argentine defence down the left and picked out Goetze in the box. The 22-year-old leapt to control the ball on his chest before stretching to sweep a sweet volley beyond Sergio Romero.

A few months ago Goetze's career seemed to be on an unstoppable upward trajectory.

Having helped Borussia Dortmund to two Bundesliga titles and into the 2013 Champions League final he did what all great German players seem to do -- agree a huge transfer to Bayern Munich.

Another league and cup double duly followed and he completely won over Loew, who loved the versatility that allowed him to use the quick-footed and mobile player as a midfielder or even a lone striker.

Once in Brazil he started Germany's opening 4-0 win over Portugal and got the first goal in a 2-2 draw with Ghana but was a

substitute in the final group game against the United States.

He was restored to the starting lineup for the second round against Algeria but played poorly and was hauled off at halftime.

With Klose established in the side he had to settle for another late substitute appearance in the quarterfinal victory over France and must have found it difficult as pundits praised Loew for finally finding the right lineup.

How Goetze must have longed to be involved as Brazil's defence opened up so invitingly in Belo Horizonte.

But the goals were spread elsewhere and it was Klose, supported by Thomas Mueller and Tony Kroos, who were again going to be the goalscoring threat in the final.

Loew's plans for Sunday's final were no doubt disrupted by the pre-match withdrawal of Sami Khedira and then being forced to replace his replacement, Christoph Kramer, with Schuerrle after half an hour.

But there was still time for Goetze to become involved and he grasped the opportunity, becoming the only substitute to score the winning goal in a World Cup final.

"I've got to thank my family and friends who believed in me," said Goetze. "Yes there were some other players who came to me and said, 'You'll do it tonight'."

"The ball was just there and then it was in. It was a deliverance for the team and it's a great feeling to have been able to make a contribution to that."

Klose underlined the team spirit that kept things positive when both men were spending time on the bench.

"It's incredibly important that we stuck together," he said.

"At halftime I told Mario 'I think you'll get a goal tonight.' 'It's just incredible.'"

Loew too felt that Goetze's time had come.

"I had the feeling that he could do something decisive today because Mario is the kind of player who can decide matches," he said. "I had a feeling somehow that he could bring this thing to a conclusion."



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Germany supersub Mario Goetze with his prized possessions -- the World Cup trophy and girlfriend Ann-Kathrin Brommel -- during a team party at their hotel in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday night.

'Golden Ball a marketing gimmick'

GOAL.COM

Argentina icon Diego Maradona feels Lionel Messi did not deserve to win the Golden Ball following his performances at the World Cup.

The Barcelona star beat the likes of Thomas Mueller, Arjen Robben and James Rodriguez to the prestigious individual award after scoring four goals in seven performances at this summer's tournament and guiding his team to the final, yet Maradona feels the 27-year-old only won it for commercial reasons.

"Messi? I would give him heaven if possible," Maradona said during his show on Telesur.

"But it's not right when someone wins something that he shouldn't have won just because of some marketing plan."

Maradona then went on to voice his disappointment with Argentina's 1-0 defeat in Sunday's final against Germany following Mario Goetze's goal in extra-time.

"I feel sorry for my country. Mario Goetze's goal really hurt. There's a huge sadness in my heart that we lost the final."

"All things put together, I think Argentina deserved at least penalties. That Germany won was the result of a misunderstanding in the Argentine defence."

The 1986 World Cup winner also had his say on Alejandro Sabella's decision to replace Ezequiel Lavezzi with Sergio Aguero at half-time and argued that the Argentine boss got things wrong.

"I don't understand the substitution of Lavezzi. He was phenomenal down the wing. Kun Aguero didn't have the same impact. It was not his tournament."

Final sets social media records

AFP, Paris

Germany's nail-biting victory over Argentina in the World Cup final entered the record books on social media giants Twitter and Facebook.

Sunday's match generated a record number of tweets a minute as the final whistle went, Twitter said Monday.

A total of 618,725 tweets a minute were registered after Germany scored the winning goal in extra time to defeat Argentina 1-0, the social network said.

That beat the 580,000 tweets a minute generated during host Brazil's humiliating 7-1 thrashing at the hands of Germany last week.

However, overall number of tweets during the match was 32.1 million, fewer than the 35.6 million posts during the Brazil-Germany semifinal.

Sunday's final was also the most talked about sporting event on Facebook, with a total of 280 million interactions by 88 million users, including comments, likes and posts, the social media giant said.

Scolari fired

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Brazil have sacked manager Luiz Felipe Scolari just hours after the end of a home World Cup in which they suffered two of their worst defeats in the tournament's history, one of Brazil's leading newspapers reported on Monday.

Scolari's Brazil were favourites to win the tournament but were demolished 7-1 in a semifinal defeat by eventual champions Germany. To compound their misery, they then lost the third-place playoff 3-0 against the Netherlands.

Scolari, who led Brazil to the last of their record five World Cups in 2002, said after the game he would make a report to his bosses at the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) and only then would his fate be decided.

But O Globo reported Scolari was fired late Sunday night. The paper said an official announcement would be made on Monday.

There was no confirmation from the CBF.

Scolari took over the post in November 2012 and lost just five of his 29 games in charge.

If his departure is confirmed, early front runners to replace him would be Tite, the man who led Corinthians to the Libertadores Cup and Club World Cup in 2012, and Muricy Ramalho, the current boss of Sao Paulo.

The team is the star 'The dream is over'

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

"Whether we have the best individual players does not matter," said Philipp Lahm with admirable restraint. "You have to have the best team," continued the diminutive Germany captain barely minutes after he had raised aloft the World Cup trophy into a cloudless Rio night sky. Pre-match billing had divided the sides into two broad stereotypes -- the Argentina team, a collection of solid individuals led by the illuminating talents of Lionel Messi, and the German machine, a ruthlessly efficient product of Teutonic engineering. In reality, the truth is significantly greyer than that, but post-match Lahm was perfectly keen to play up the label.

Lahm's proclamations came at a good time. Germany had just lifted their fourth World Cup from their eighth final and statements that generally seem like platitudes now suddenly held weight. Even coach Joachim Loew concurred. "The World Cup is not won by eleven players. You need at least 14 or 15," he said. And that is exactly where Germany had the edge. The title was delivered by a combination of two substitutes. Andre Schuerrle, the early substitute racing down the left wing before sending in a looping cross that late substitute Mario Goetze sent nestling past Sergio Romero into the Argentine net.

It is testament to the talent Germany have at their disposal that they can bring a player like Goetze on at the 88th minute of a World Cup final. Goetze cost Bayern upward of 30 million pounds this season and although injuries have limited his ability to make an impact, the 22-year-old is often described as the most

gifted player of his generation and 'technically perfect.' Cream, it seems ultimately does rise to the top, and courtesy of some choice words from coach Loew, Goetze delivered the Germans their elusive fourth world title, and the first for a unified Germany.

The best part of it is that Germany achieved this remarkable feat playing largely the kind of football that you would hardly associate with them. A country, once bereft of midfielders not of the bruising variety now has a team packed full of them. From final hero Bastian Schweinsteiger to Toni Kroos to Mesut Ozil and Goetze himself, this German team is filled to the brim with bubbling creative talent; a product of Germany's now oft-

THIRD EYE

recognised youth system set in place to compensate for their dark days at the turn of the century.

During the last two World Cups under Loew's tutelage the Germans had gone about redressing the myth of their football being dour, predictable and machinelike. They played a thrilling, vertical counter attack style of football which often put style above substance. It won them fans and admirers but it did nothing to deliver that elusive international title. It also won them the most unwanted of sporting monikers -- that of chokers.

This time though, despite coming into the tournament on the back of many of their players losing form or fitness, the German side had an air of maturity about them. Team spirit was also noticeably higher and Loew how-

ever fleetingly had managed to sew together the two big strengths of his team -- the ability to hold possession and counter-attack effectively -- to create a brand of football ably described as 'quickie-taka', a sort of faster, less precise version of the Spanish pass to kill style.

It didn't always prove remarkably successful, and when it didn't Germany dug deep to show the characteristics that had made them so revered in the 70s and 80s but had been so often dismissed as downmarket during Loew's tenure. The players showed heart and battling qualities, best evidenced by an absolutely storming performance from Schweinsteiger in the final when he bled for the cause but still refused to go off. And therein lies the truth about the beautiful game -- sometimes to go down and dirty.

The German win is also a victory for unity, organisation and preparation. So important is each to Germany that the team not only built their own World Cup base from scratch but also worked relentlessly with app developers to create customised mobile applications designed to prepare players to face their opposition. And then there is their combination with Team Cologne, but that is an article for another day. For now, Oliver Bierhoff and the German management team need to also take a bow for their minute organisation. It seems that some stereotypes do hold true.

In the end, to paraphrase Lahm, Germany's fourth world title is a victory for a side to whom, "the team is the star." Even if the team is an ensemble cast full of stars.

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina's media summed up the national mood as crestfallen but proud Monday after the extra-time defeat to Germany in the World Cup final, coming heartbreakingly close to their third title.

"Heart of champions" read the headline on sports daily Ole's website, with a full-page photo of midfielder Javier Mascherano embracing national hero Lionel Messi, who won the Golden Ball award for best player of the tournament.

"The dream is over. Argentina confronted a powerful Germany head-on, fought hard and created great chances," it wrote. "We lost the final 1-0, but we gave everything we had and returned to the (World Cup) podium after 24 years."

"Thank you World Cup team," it added, saying they "deserve the best welcome."

Messi and company are expected home Monday morning, with President Cristina Kirchner due to meet them on arrival.

Other papers chronicled the team's defeat alongside the violence that broke out Sunday night in Buenos Aires, where hooligans crashed an initially festive post-match party at the capital's iconic Obelisk monument.

The hardcore fans, known as "barras bravas," broke windows, looted shops and threw stones at riot police, who fired tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon in return -- causing the crowd of tens of thousands of people to rush from the area.

"It started as a party but turned into a pitched battle... with robberies, clashes and looting at the Obelisk," said daily La Nacion, which gave a toll of 15 wounded police and 60 people arrested.

But it said the match had left the nation "without the Cup, but proud."

"Elimination hurts like always, but pride swells like never before," it wrote, saying the team were coming home "without glory but with a clear conscience."

Newspaper Pagina/12 ran two large photographs, one of the Argentine players locked in an embrace at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium, the other of a little boy in a Messi jersey sitting atop his father's shoulders at the Obelisk after the match.

"Love is stronger," said its banner headline.