



Wheelchair-bound Neymar arrives in Brazil for surgery

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian superstar Neymar flew into Rio de Janeiro early Thursday ahead of an operation on his fractured foot that will sideline him for up to three months, casting a long shadow over Paris Saint-Germain and Brazil's World Cup preparations.

The world's most expensive player, 26, arrived on an Air France flight from Paris and left in a wheelchair, a photo taken by one of his fellow passengers showed.

Dressed in a black hoodie, a black baseball cap and wearing sunglasses, the PSG star smiled and took selfies with passengers, before leaving on a private jet to an undisclosed destination.

Surgery is booked for Saturday, said national team surgeon Rodrigo Lasmar, who will lead the procedure. But despite the hurry to put Neymar's right foot under the knife in Belo Horizonte, he won't be back on the field soon.

"The [recovery] period will be around two and a half to three months," Lasmar told journalists after arriving with the player on the same Air France flight.

"It's not a simple fracture, but a fracture in an important bone in the middle of the foot," Lasmar said.

The injury has not only ruled Neymar out of PSG's do-or-die Champions League clash with Real Madrid on March 6, but now threatens the much fancied Brazilian national side's build-up to the World Cup, which starts in Russia on June 14.

The initial prognosis did not appear

quite as serious on Sunday, when Neymar suffered a hairline fracture of the fifth metatarsal, as well as a twisted ankle in PSG's 3-0 win over Marseille in Ligue 1.

On Tuesday, the Brazilian's father Neymar Senior had claimed the player would be out for "at least six weeks".

PSG coach Unai Emery had said earlier that there remained a "small chance" of getting him back in time to face Real.

Lasmar's assessment painted a graver picture both in terms of the injury and the timing of Neymar's recovery.

"Yesterday we went back to the hospital [in Paris] and made new exams that left the seriousness of the fracture very clear," he told journalists in Rio.

"There was no doubt left regarding the treatment. We were unanimous in agreeing that it would have to be surgical treatment. More conservative treatment, without surgery, would present a far greater risk for refracture. We can't

run that risk."

PSG lost 3-1 to Real in the first leg of their European tie in Spain two weeks ago and are in danger of being knocked out of the competition in the last 16 for the second season running.

The drama is also a big personal setback for Neymar who has been at the centre of the world's footballing attention since his 222 million-euro move from Barcelona last August.

He has scored 28 goals in 30 appearances for PSG since arriving. But on Sunday he looked to be in tears as he was stretchered off the Parc des Princes.

'WE MAY HAVE LOST THE WORLD CUP LAST SUNDAY'

Brazilians care little about the impact on PSG. Their attention is entirely trained on the World Cup, where they have ambitions of walking away with a sixth title.

"We just might have lost the World Cup last Sunday," one radio commentator, Milton Neves of Bandnews FM, said Wednesday.

Images of Sunday's fateful duel between Neymar and Marseille player Bouna Sarr were being shown incessantly on TV, often in slo-mo, before he was stretchered off.

"I don't think we can really talk about fears of him not being at the World Cup. But there is a noticeable haste to find a solution so that Neymar will have recovered in time," ESPN Brasil sports commentator Mauro Cezar Pereira told AFP.

Lasmar said he was aware of the pressure. "It's clear there are goals to reach in terms of timing and we will do

Obstacles should not stop you. If you come across a wall, don't give up. Find a way to climb it.

NEYMAR
on Instagram

QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

Rajshahi Kings appoint Vettori
Rajshahi Kings, who were runners-up in the 2016 edition of the BPL have appointed Daniel Vettori as their new head coach, a press release informed.

Di Maria double sinks Marseille
Angel Di Maria grabbed two goals as Paris Saint-Germain downed fierce rivals Marseille 3-0 to reach the French Cup semi-finals, hours after the club confirmed Neymar will undergo surgery on his fractured foot.

Pep ready to give up 'yellow ribbon' protest
Pep Guardiola has admitted he would abandon his 'yellow ribbon' protest if requested to do so by his employers, Manchester City, or if he thought the issue was negatively impacting upon his players.

Brazilian superstar Neymar was pictured rolling into the Rio de Janeiro airport in a wheelchair yesterday.
PHOTO: COLLECTED

Hummels, Lewa in war of words

AFP, Berlin

Mats Hummels accused Bayern Munich teammate Robert Lewandowski of an 'attitude' problem in a training ground bust-up on Wednesday, reports say.

According to German daily Bild, Hummels and Lewandowski traded insults in a practise game.

When Lewandowski briefly paused to tie his laces, allowing the opposing team to score, Hummels ripped into the Poland star, sparking a war of words.

"Lewy, are you serious? You're seriously tying your shoes?," yelled Hummels.

Lewandowski fired back, "you just lost the ball," to which Hummels replied: "that was a mistake, but with you it's an attitude."

The pair squared off with neither offering to apologise and when the game ended, the pair ignored each other.

Floodlight familiarity

SPORTS REPORTER

The national team yesterday began training under the newly-installed floodlights at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium with the aim of getting accustomed before possibly playing three matches in the Qualifying Tournament of the Asian Games in Oman under lights.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play one of four Pool A matches against Hong Kong under floodlights while both the semifinal and final are also scheduled to be held at night in Oman, who will host the nine-team Qualifying Tournament from March 8 to 17.

Although the team started their preparations on January 13, yesterday's was their first training under floodlights and it will continue till the team departs for Oman on March 6.

It was also the national team's first training session under floodlights since the completion of the Asia Cup on October 22 last year. The home team could not practice under lights then due to late installation of the floodlights and had to practice in daylight.

"We will have a practice match under floodlights tomorrow [Friday], and then the players will have two more training sessions on March 4 and 5. Practicing under flood-

lights will help the boys become accustomed to playing the group match against Hong Kong," said coach Mahub Harun before training at the Big Bowl yesterday.

Bangladesh will play a practice match against Kazakhstan on March 7 under floodlights before starting their campaign against Afghanistan on March 9.

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation attempted to bring South Korea to Dhaka for a few practice matches, but they did not respond due to their domestic engagements. The hockey team were also supposed to go to India for preparation matches but the plan was dropped due to 'huge expenditure'.

However, Harun believes the practice match against Kazakhstan will be good for his charges as they are from the Russian bloc.

"We chose Kazakhstan because they are a good side and their players once played for Russia. In the 1993 Asia Cup, Kazakhstan drew 2-2 with India but Bangladesh beat Kazakhstan in group stage. Interestingly, Bangladesh then lost to Kazakhstan in the fifth-sixth placing-deciding match. So, they are expected to be a good team," said Harun.

Bangladesh were drawn in Pool A alongside Indonesia, Afghanistan, Thailand and Hong Kong while Pool B consists of hosts Oman, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei and Kazakhstan.



Bangladesh national hockey team began training under floodlights as they attempt to get familiarised with conditions under lights ahead of the Qualifying Tournament of the Asian Games in Oman next month. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Pep's outburst stuns City

AGENCIES, London

Pep Guardiola tore into Leroy Sane during a furious dressing down at half-time of Manchester City's FA Cup defeat by Wigan last week.

Sources said that Sane's City teammates were left in stunned silence as Guardiola accused the winger of failing to pull his weight and not adhering to his instructions in the first half of the 1-0 loss.

The anger extended to the City manager substituting Sane at half-time.

The Catalan was already irate before he entered the dressing room after angry confrontations with Wigan manager Paul Cook in the wake of City defender Fabian Delph's red card.

The mood darkened further when he turned on Sane, with one source claiming the manager's dismay could be heard in the corridor outside the dressing room, although the matter was considered dealt with at the time.

Sane was back in the starting eleven for City's 3-0 Carabao Cup final triumph over Arsenal at Wembley on Sunday, with Guardiola confident that his message has got through to the

'Shambolic' VAR lambasted

REUTERS, London

As snow obscured the Wembley grass and confusion reigned on and off the pitch during Tottenham Hotspur's FA Cup replay against Rochdale on Wednesday the words of former Liverpool manager Bill Shankly sprang to mind.

It was the tough-talking Scot who once said "football is a simple game, complicated by idiots."

Fair to say had he been at the national stadium he might have turned the air blue with his pronouncements on the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system.

It should have been a night for underdogs Rochdale to enjoy their moment to shine, or for Tottenham's Spanish striker Fernando Llorente to savour scoring a hat-trick in a 6-1 win.

Instead, the talk was of how VAR, which could be rolled out at the World Cup this year, left players, managers and fans cold.

Tottenham left back Danny Rose called the tie "shambolic".

Former England full back Stuart Pearce, speaking on Sky Sports, said VAR does not work for football. "There are so many grey areas in our game. Let the guy in the middle make the decision and respect that decision."

Alan Shearer said on Twitter: "... VAR you were hopeless again."

The video assistant was called into



Tierney a tiny shirt-pull by Llorente.

In the 22nd minute Tottenham's Moura was denied a penalty after Tierney, finger in ear, again consulted VAR.

When Son Heung-min did fire Tottenham ahead a BBC Radio Five commentator said: "There can be no argument about that one." Yet Tierney still went to VAR to confirm the goal's legality.

Minutes later Tottenham's Kieran Trippier was bundled over and Tierney awarded a free kick outside the area, only for VAR to intervene and, after a long delay in which fans were left bemused, upgrade it to a penalty.

When Son stopped his run before scoring from the spot -- a breach of rules -- Tierney again checked via VAR before disallowing the goal and booking Son.

A chorus of boos erupted at halftime as fans braving a freezing night witnessed a sport being complicated to death, not knowing what they were watching.

The time taken for the VAR decisions stripped all the raw excitement from what was a great match. Celebrating a goal, whether as a player of a fan, has always been sacrosanct, yet five of the seven goals on the night were checked via VAR before Tierney awarded them.

The referee was merely doing what was asked of him by those who have authorised the trial of VAR in some FA Cup and League Cup ties, but it opened the official to heavy criticism.

Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino sympathised with Tierney, but said the first half was

Shokhi Football Third edition begins Sunday

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust (BLAST) is going to hold the 3rd Shokhi Women's Football tournament, a competition for underprivileged women, at the central ground of the Textile Engineering College in Tejgaon from Sunday.

Six teams, comprising women from different Dhaka slums aged between 15 and 30, will be taking part in the 60-minute knockout matches. The final will be held at the Dhaka University central ground.

BLAST, a legal service and human rights organisation, is running a project named Shokhi which looks after women's health, rights and choices in Dhaka's slums.

Last year BFF and FIFA members were invited to watch the final of the Shokhi tournament and after witnessing them play barefoot and without proper jerseys, the BFF came forward to provide BLAST with logistic support.

National women's team coach Golam Rabbani Choton had an orientation for the women who will be taking part in the tournament.

Griezmann hits Leganes for four

AFP, Madrid

Antoine Griezmann made it back-to-back hat-tricks by putting four goals past Leganes and now Atletico Madrid's star striker has Barcelona in his sights.

Atletico and their French maestro go up against the La Liga leaders on Sunday and will arrive brimming with confidence after subjecting Leganes to a 4-0 demolition, with Griezmann again the star of the show.

His quadruple, fired off in 32 minutes either side of half-time, means he now has seven goals in two games following last weekend's treble against Sevilla, and 12 in his last nine. For comparison, Lionel Messi has hit five goals in the same period.

Atletico have cut the gap at the top of La Liga to four points, but Barcelona have a game in hand at Las Palmas.

However, Griezmann will be the player in focus before the weekend. "I've never scored at Camp Nou. I want to score and to celebrate," Griezmann said. "I want to do something big with my club and my opportunity."

In the 25th minute, a defence splitting pass from Koke set Griezmann away and, after shuffling off the scrambling Gumbau, he slid the ball past Ivan Cuellar. Ten minutes later he was celebrating his second. Again he had Koke to thank, the midfielder winning the foul after a brilliant flick on the edge of the area and this time Griezmann dispatched the free-kick with a curling shot into the corner.

Leganes' early impetus was now extinguished and 10 minutes into the second half, Griezmann completed his hat-trick.

After nonchalantly allowing Costa's pass to run through his legs and reach Filipe Luis, Griezmann darted into the box, jumped high and met the cross with a bullet header into the net.

If his first three goals demonstrated speed, technique and movement, Griezmann's fourth owed much to a slice of luck, a mishit finish from Costa's cross.