



Argentina forward Sergio Aguero (R) controls the ball past midfielder Ever Banega (L) during a training session in Buenos Aires on Sunday ahead of Tuesday's friendly against Haiti.

Neymar ready for Brazil

AFP, Undated

Neymar acknowledged on Sunday that he was "not yet at 100 percent" after surgery on his fractured right foot, but the Brazil forward said he was ready to play for his country at the World Cup.

"I'm not yet at 100 percent. That will come with time. I'm still a bit scared of going all out, but there are still several days before our start," the Paris Saint-Germain star told reporters at Brazilian football headquarters in Rio de Janeiro.

"It's going to take a bit more time for this fear to go away, but I'm ready to play. Nothing can stop me from doing so," Neymar added, hours before a planned flight to London where the team will continue their World Cup preparations.

The world's most expensive player hasn't played since hurting himself in a French league game against Marseille on February 25, but Neymar has been training for the past 10 days and took part in a national team preparation camp this week in Teresopolis.

"I feel good physically. My foot is fine. Of course I have to adjust to certain things. I'm feeling a bit of discomfort but it's not going to stop me from playing," he said.

The 26-year-old also reflected on what was a frustrating 2014 World Cup experience on home soil, as a back injury ruled him out of Brazil's humiliating 7-1 loss to

Germany in the semi-finals.

"It's a dream to play in another World Cup, a dream which I hope won't be interrupted again," he said.

HOPE FOR SALAH AS RAMOS VILIFIED

Egyptians held their breath Sunday amid fears star striker Mohamed Salah could miss the World Cup after suffering an injury when wrestled to the ground by Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos in the Champions League final.

Ramos, who locked arms with Salah before falling on top of the forward's

on Egyptian newspaper El Watan said it was reverting Ramos's fate to God, in a tone echoed on social media networks.

Ramos's Facebook and Twitter accounts have been flooded with insults in Arabic and English, some even translated into Spanish.

A petition was even launched on the change.org platform, calling on FIFA and UEFA to punish Ramos for "intentionally hurting Mohamed Salah". The petition has collected more than 111,000 signatures.

Ramos sent Salah a "Get Well Soon" Twitter message, adding he regretted that football "sometimes (shows) it's bad side", but "above all, we are comrades".

Despite the anger some Egyptians remain optimistic, taking the incident with the philosophy of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"He will participate in the World Cup and everything will be fine, God willing," said Mahmoud Saad, a Salah and Real Madrid fan, as he watched the match at a cafe in downtown Cairo.

Egypt's national team doctor Mohamed Abou al-Ela remains optimistic on Salah's chances officials at Liverpool assured them no bones were broken, the Egyptian Football Associated said Saturday.

"Relief in Egypt's streets after the medical report," a headline in the state-run Ah-Ahram newspaper said.

The Al-Akhbar newspaper was even more optimistic -- its headline was "Salah to participate at the World Cup".

Carvajal still hopeful

AFP, Madrid

Spain defender Dani Carvajal is still in contention to play at the World Cup, despite injuring his hamstring playing for Real Madrid against Liverpool on Saturday.

A tearful Carvajal had to be substituted during the Champions League final in Kiev, prompting fears the right-back would miss this summer's tournament, which starts in less than three weeks' time.

However, after undergoing medical tests with Real, a statement released by the national team on Monday indicated the 26-year-old will remain with the squad. "Carvajal this morning underwent medical tests with his club, with the doctors of the Spanish national team present," the statement read.

"The tests showed an injury in the hamstring of the right thigh. He will begin the recovery process of this injury with the medical group of the national team, who will stay in close contact with his club."

Spain's first World Cup match will be against Portugal on June 15.

Childhood memories of WC-bound stars

At Russia 2018, they will be the ones creating the memories. But before they were players, the likes of Neymar, Harry Kane, Son Heungmin and Javier Hernandez were passionate football fans. As such, they all have vivid memories -- both pleasurable and painful -- of the beautiful game's greatest competition: the FIFA World Cup. Here are some of memories of the past tournaments, players and matches that stood out for the prospective stars of Russia 2018, published at FIFA.com.

NEYMAR

My first memory is from 1994. Although I was two years old, I think my first memory was watching on TV and the goal Romario scored against Holland. I remember that Bebeto crosses, and he takes it first time, and it's a 'golazo'.

PAUL POGBA

I remember France's 3-0 final win over Brazil in 1998. I was really young, just six or seven, and I was at home watching the match with all the others. As soon as France won, we all went outside and climbed over the cars. There were horns sounding and we were all happy.

HARRY KANE

I remember 2002 and Ronaldinho putting that free-kick into the top corner (against England in the quarterfinals). It still hurts

to celebrate the competition -- it's almost an obligation for the community. Hopefully I will get the chance to play at the World Cup in Russia to repay all the joy it has brought me.

IGOR AKINFEEV

I remember watching the World Cup in USA in 1994. It was an overwhelming feeling. That was the first time that I understood what football was -- every move, the entire game. My best memories are of watching the game against Cameroon, when Oleg Salenko scored five and Russia won 6-1."

LUKA MODRIC

I was 13 at the time [of France 1998] and I watched with my friends and family in Zadar. After every win, we just got happier and happier. At the same time, it was a great advert for Croatia -- all the world finally knew about us.



Neymar leads his Brazil teammates as the five-time champions set off from Rio de Janeiro for the World Cup in Russia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

me to this day! That was my earliest memory of a World Cup and since then it has always been a dream to go on and play in one.

SON HEUNGMIN

I have a lot of good memories of 2002. I remember after the penalty shoot-out against Spain in the quarter-final, everyone was going crazy. We couldn't believe it. Everyone was wearing red shirts in 2002, including myself!

GABRIEL JESUS

For the past three World Cups I have painted the streets (of hometown favela, Jardim Peri)

THIAGO ALCANTARA

My first memory is the 1994 World Cup, which my father (Brazil's Mazinho) won. I was only three and though I don't remember the matches, I remember him coming home, the celebrations, and all the family being there. I also remember the 2010 Final between Spain and the Netherlands, obviously, and Andres's [Iniesta] goal. It's the most important moment in the history of Spanish football. We were with the U-19s at the time. When Andres scored, there were fire extinguishers going off and oil and knives flying in the air. The TV ended up on the floor as well.

HC rejects bar on foreign flags

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court bench yesterday refused to hold a hearing on a writ petition that challenges the legality of hoisting national flags of foreign countries across the country at different times, particularly during the upcoming FIFA World Cup.

The bench of Justice Naïma Haider and Justice Zafar Ahmed also dropped the petition from its hearing list.

The HC judges did not disclose any reason behind refusing to hear the petition, Advocate Dewan Abdun Naser, the lawyer for the writ petitioner, told The Daily Star.

The lawyer also said he will move the same writ petition before another HC bench after receiving the copy of the order from the bench led by Justice Naïma Haider.

Mohammad Nurul Amin, a freedom fighter from Gaibandha, submitted the writ petition to the HC on May 27 seeking its directive on the government to stop people from hoisting national flags of foreign countries.

Advocate Naser said supporters have been seen hoisting the flags of participating countries during previous tournaments in violation of the law.

No foreign flags can be flown without specific permission from the government, except in foreign diplomatic offices, as per Bangladesh Flag Rules in 1972, he said citing from the writ petition. The petitioner further said that as a freedom



With the World Cup looming, flags of Argentina and Brazil once again dominate the rooftops of Dhaka city.

PHOTO: STAR

fighter, Nurul was shocked to see foreign flags being hoisted across the country during the global showpiece event.

With just 16 days remaining for the start of the FIFA World Cup, supporters have already started hoisting their colours on rooftops. As Brazil and Argentinian fans rule the football supporting community in Bangladesh, flags of these two countries mostly dominate the skyline in Dhaka city and elsewhere.

Shakib plays down Rashid factor

SPORTS REPORTER



Upon reaching Dhaka a day after his Indian Premier League side Sunrisers Hyderabad lost the final to Chennai Super Kings on Sunday, ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan immediately rush to the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel to receive the Rupchanda Prothom Alo Sportsman of the year award yesterday.

However, before that the 31-year-old did interact with the media at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on various issues, including his Hyderabad teammate from Afghanistan and the number one spinner in T20Is Rashid Khan, his experience in the IPL this season and the upcoming three-match T20I series against Afghanistan.

The most talked about issue during the Tigers' just-concluded training camp was the possible threat of Rashid in the upcoming series, but when the question was put to Shakib, Bangladesh's Test and T20I captain, in his unique fashion, came up with counter questions. "Who are discussing him [Rashid]? You [journalists] are asking the players about him and the players are answering? Or are the players talking about him? Whatever it is, it's fine as anyone who plays international cricket is a good bowler. So, someone will bowl well while some will bowl badly. Good batsmen will handle him well... that's the rule," Shakib said.

So it was again asked whether Bangladesh



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Test and ODI captain Shakib Al Hasan receives the Shakib Al Hasan Rupchanda Prothom Alo Sportsman of the Year award at a city hotel yesterday.

need to plan separately for Rashid as there has been a lot of discussion about him. Shakib, however, remained unmoved.

"If you [reporters] ask questions then there will be discussion, and I did not answer so there will be no discussion," said Shakib.

When asked who the favourites are for the upcoming series, Shakib said: "Actually, there is nothing called favourite or underdog in the T20 format as any team can beat any side on a given day. As Afghanistan are two places ahead of us in the rankings, I will say they are the favourites."

He also opined, when asked whether Bangladesh will be looking to attack Afghanistan, that it is not necessary to play attacking cricket in every situation; it will depend on the situation which style of cricket will help the team most to be successful.

On the IPL, Shakib said that he had a good experience but there was also some dissatisfaction about his batting. Shakib scored 239 runs in 17 matches at an average of 21.72 and strike rate of 121.31, but his highest score was 35.

"It was good, maybe it could have been better but overall I am satisfied, considering the team result. Plus, I am also satisfied from a personal point of view but there is some dissatisfaction as I was unable to score big despite getting good starts in all the games," said Shakib.

This was the first time that Shakib played all the matches of an IPL season and according to the all-rounder, his experience will help the Tigers in the upcoming series.

"The conditions are similar and all the games will be played at the same venue. Although we have not played any games in Dehradun, we think it will remain the same. Normally the pitches in India are the same everywhere and my experience will definitely help us for the upcoming series," added Shakib.