



Thierry Henry (L), a World Cup winner with France and now the inspirational assistant coach of Belgium, will be plotting his nation's downfall on Tuesday night in the World Cup semifinals.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'Want to show Henry he chose wrong' No ban for Vida

AFP, Moscow

REUTERS, Istra

France will go into their World Cup semi-final against neighbours Belgium with a "hunger to win" and a desire to show their 1998 World Cup winner Thierry Henry that he picked the wrong side, forward Olivier Giroud said on Sunday.

Retired French striker Henry is now a member of the Belgian coaching staff. The two sides will meet on Tuesday to decide who plays in July 15's World Cup final.

"It is bizarre to have Thierry against us in this match," Giroud told reporters. "I would be very proud to show Thierry that he chose the wrong camp."

Both teams have earned their billing as pre-tournament favourites, with France ousting Uruguay in the last eight and Belgium stunning five-times champions Brazil to book their own semi-final spot.

"I would have preferred to have Henry on our side, to give me and the other French forwards advice, but I am not too jealous," the 31-year-old Giroud said.

The forward has been criticised by Henry in the past, but he said there were no hard feelings - just his hunger to win.

"It has been a few years since he said what he said about me. My job is to be good on the pitch, to represent France as well as possible. It is also a particular match for him."

"I really want to communicate (to France teammates) my hunger to win."

The game, as expected, has monopolized the front pages in both countries, complete with references to their long comic book traditions.



A then six-year-old Kylian Mbappe (R) was overjoyed when the opportunity to snap this picture with one of his heroes, Thierry Henry, presented itself in 2005.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

"It is more than a match," Aujourd'hui en France newspaper said on a full front-page spread that featured the two countries' most beloved comic characters - Tintin for Belgium and Asterix for France.

Le Journal du Dimanche devoted six pages to the Franco-Belgian friendship and rivalry - this time with an excerpt from an Asterix comic book on its front page, while sports daily L'Equipe twisted Tintin's "Destination Moon" to feature French and Belgian players.

Giroud said his teammates knew Belgium very well with many players from both teams competing in the English Premier League, including himself.

But he said France were talented and experienced enough to break

down Belgium's defensive "wall" around keeper Thibaut Courtois.

"Courtois is difficult to play against. He is very good in this World Cup with a good defence in front of him," Giroud said. "There will be gaps that will have to be used," the forward added.

"I am convinced that we will break down this wall."

Kylian Mbappe also admitted it would be bizarre to see his former idol backing Belgium.

"It's going to be weird to see Thierry again. He is someone I like a lot," the teenager told Telefoot. "There is a lot of respect between us. He was a great player, he inspired me."

"He is French, but he will be on the bench of the opponent. It will surely be weird for him too."

Croatia defender Domagoj Vida escaped a FIFA ban on Sunday after posting a clip dedicating his country's victory over Russia in the World Cup quarterfinal to Ukraine.

Vida scored an extra-time goal and one of Croatia's penalties in a 4-3 shootout win over the World Cup hosts in Sochi on Saturday.

Croatia will play England in the semifinal on Wednesday and some Russian officials had called on FIFA to take tough disciplinary measures.

The ponytailed 29-year-old shouted "Glory to Ukraine!" in a video posted by former Croatia international Ognjen Vukojevic shortly after the dramatic finale in Sochi.

Vida used to play for Ukrainian club Dynamo Kiev. Vukojevic also played for the club and now works for them as a scout.

FIFA said it had studied the video and decided to issue a warning to Vida but not take further measures.

"We can confirm that FIFA's disciplinary committee has sent a warning to the player Domagoj Vida due to his video statement," a spokesman told AFP.

"Glory to Ukraine!" was a slogan of the former Soviet republic's pro-EU revolution that toppled a Russian-backed president in 2014.

The revolt was condemned as illegal by Moscow and sparked a crisis in relations between the two neighbouring states.

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There were rapturous celebrations from Croatians as they paraded around Zagreb in large numbers with flares and flags in hand.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'The dream continues'

AFP, Zagreb

Croatian media on Sunday praised their team after the dramatic win on penalties against World Cup hosts Russia that set up a semifinal against England.

"Moscow, Croatians are arriving! Dear England, it's so nice to see you again!" read the Sportske Novosti paper.

"Croatian dream continues," the paper said, remembering the success of the legendary 1998 team, who reached the semifinals in Croatia's first World Cup as an independent nation. "After 20 years we are in the World Cup semi-finals. And there, there are Englishmen who owe us something, ever since 2009."

England beat Croatia 5-1 in a World Cup qualifier in 2009. It followed another humiliating defeat the previous year -- Croatia lost 4-1 to England at home.

Saturday's game in Russia's Black Sea resort of Sochi finished 2-2 after extra-time but Croatia, led by captain Luka Modric, held their nerve to win the shootout 4-3, with Barcelona's Ivan Rakitic scoring the decisive spot-kick.

The press said Russia had been a tough nut to crack -- Jutarnji List said the "Russians had 100 lives and simply did not want to die."

"Croatians do not give up!" read the paper's frontpage headline, accompanied by a large photo of Rakitic on his knees.

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