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LITTLE TRICOLORE TARTE FRANCE

French baker Didier Lavry (R) and his wife Vanessa show off home-made little tricolore cakes called "Tarte France" at his Le Petit Mitron bakery in Paris yesterday ahead of Sunday's World Cup final between France and Croatia.



আসল চিনিগুঁড়ার স্বাদ ও সুগন্ধ পেতে
চিনিগুঁড়া চাল **একটাই অপশন**

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FIFA WORLD CUP RUSSIA 2018



A combination of file photos of France's squad (L) in Saint Petersburg and Croatia's squad in Sochi during the 2018 World Cup. France are firm favourites to win the final showpiece in Moscow on Sunday and become world champions for the second time -- 20 years after their first triumph in 1998 -- but they will come up against a hungry Croatia side.

PHOTOS: AFP

European dominance a function of economic clout?

REUTERS, Moscow

A European nation is set to win the World Cup for the fourth time in a row this Sunday and in doing so confirm an unprecedented dominance for the Old World over their once mighty rivals in South America.

Whether France or Croatia lift the trophy in Moscow, it will guarantee a minimum 20-year drought for South American sides.

Until this streak, European teams had never won more than two World Cups in a row and that was back in 1934 and 1938. Confirming the hegemony, only one of the last eight finalists (Argentina in 2014) have come from Latin America.

There are many possible reasons behind the Europeans' superiority and some even recommend caution.

Although Argentina and Peru were disappointing, Brazil outplayed Belgium for much of their quarterfinal defeat, both Uruguay and Colombia did well until being knocked out without their most influential player, and Colombia

were even eliminated in a penalty shootout that could easily have gone their way.

"It's seven matches in one month, a short event - you can make too much out of it," Andy Roxburgh, a member of FIFA's technical study group, told reporters in Moscow. "You have to look at the bigger picture over time to see if there is a trend."

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The trend, however, is clear, with the only question surrounding the reasons.

The most obvious reason is financial. Super-rich European clubs and federations have more to spend on recruitment, development and training.

Although South America's top talents flock to Europe, where playing conditions, security and salaries are all far superior to those

at home, better organisation means the European are churning out more and more good players, as well as snapping up others who are eligible to play for more than one nation.

In addition, there are almost no Brazilian or Uruguayan coaches in Europe and very few Argentines, creating a gap when it comes to tactics and strategy.

Off the field, even modest European clubs are run like any other business, hiring the best candidates at every level, from scouting to nutrition to marketing.

Many South American clubs are still run by amateurs who fulfil the role in addition to their full-time jobs.

The corruption that has bled the game dry is also a factor.

The last three presidents of the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) were indicted in the U.S. as part of the FIFA scandal, as were the last three heads of the Brazilian Football Confederation and the former head of the Argentine Football Association (AFA).

When 75 people voted to elect a new president of the AFA shortly after, 76 ballots were cast in the 38-38 tie.

That chaos has frightened off sponsors and broadcasters who were already reluctant to pay big money to televise competitions shorn of their top players. Unfortunately for South American football fans, neither Argentina, and especially not Brazil, appear ready to embrace change or humility.

When reigning champions Germany were knocked out at the group stages, the shock was soon followed by schadenfreude.

"Is this the team we were supposed to mirror," Rivaldo said in a defiant Instagram post. "Everyone tries but only we've won the World Cup five times."

GOAL.COM

Antoine Griezmann brushed off comparisons to France great Zinedine Zidane as he aims to inspire Les Bleus to a World Cup final victory that he admitted would "change many things".

The Atletico Madrid forward was just seven years old when Zidane scored twice to help France lift the World Cup on home soil in 1998, and 20 years later Griezmann has been hailed as one of the country's talismanic figures in Russia.

As part of a formidable front four alongside Olivier Giroud, Blaise Matuidi and Kylian Mbappe, Griezmann has scored three goals and assisted two, earning him the nickname 'Grizou' - a moniker inspired by 'Zizou', as Zidane is known across France.

Griezmann played down the parallels between himself and such luminaries as Zidane, telling reporters: "I do not like 'Grizou' too much," before describing his ordinary day-to-day habits of playing computer games and drinking tea.

"I'm just like always," he said. "I play Fortnite all day, I enjoy soccer, I drink [yerba] mate.

"I just want to lift the World Cup."

Griezmann described France's defence as key to their chances of clinching the country's second World Cup victory on Sunday, backing himself, Giroud and Mbappe to continue their good form in attack.

France have conceded four goals in six games en route to the final, three of which were scored by Argentina in a thrilling 4-3 victory in the round of 16.

"The defence for us is the most important thing because we know that, at the front, we can score a goal at any time, either with Kylian on the overlap, with Olivier in the centre, or with me in a little madness that can happen to me once in a while," said Griezmann, who denied any interest in winning the Golden Ball awarded to the tournament's best



player.

"It's a chance to win the World Cup, not the Golden Ball," he said. "I do not care if I win the Golden Ball or not; I'll give everything to be world champion."

"I know that a victory can change many things, but we're not really thinking about Monday."

LOOKING BACK AT ALL-EUROPEAN FINALS

FIFA.COM

The clashing of continents is undeniably a key element of the FIFA World Cup appeal. But while Europe has dominated Russia 2018, leaving France and Croatia to do battle in Sunday's Final that need not be a cause for disappointment.

After all, as FIFA.com reflects, all-European Finals have served up some of the most memorable encounters in the tournament's long and illustrious history.

1934

ITALY 2-1 CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Extra time was required to crown Europe's first world champions, with Angelo Schiavio striking to secure the Trophy for Italy on home soil. Gli Azzurri had to come from behind to make history, with Antonin Puc's 71st-minute opener for Czechoslovakia having been cancelled out eight minutes from time by Raimundo Orsi.

1938

ITALY 4-2 HUNGARY

Gino Colaussi and Silvio Piola scored a brace apiece as the Italians retained the Trophy in Paris, establishing Vittorio Pozzo as the only



Italy's Fabio Grosso scores the winning penalty in the shootout against France in the 2006 World Cup final.

coach to win two World Cup titles.

1954

WEST GERMANY 3-2 HUNGARY

'The Miracle of Bern' is enshrined in German football folklore. Hungary's seemingly unstoppable Magical Magyars had thrashed the West Germans 8-3 earlier in the tournament, and raced into a 2-0 lead inside eight minutes of the Final. But goals from Max Morlock and Helmut Rahn sealed a remarkable comeback.

1966

ENGLAND 4-2 WEST GERMANY

Another memorable Final brought England's first and, to date, only world title, with a Geoff Hurst hat-trick - a Final feat still unique to the Three Lions legend - sealing victory in extra time.

1974

NETHERLANDS 1-2 WEST GERMANY

As in 1954, the Germans needed all their

reserves of steel and spirit to come from an early goal down against the heavy pre-Final favourites. A Paul Breitner penalty and a typically opportunist strike from the irrepressible Gerd Muller broke the hearts of Cruyff & Co.

1982

ITALY 3-1 WEST GERMANY

Having failed to win a single match during the group phase, Italy hit their stride in the knockout rounds and clinched a thrilling victory in Madrid. Paolo Rossi opened the scoring before Marco Tardelli, with a wildly celebrated second, and Alessandro Altobelli made sure of Gli Azzurri's third title.

2006

ITALY 1-1 FRANCE (5-3 PSO)

Zinedine Zidane's Panenka opener and Marco Materazzi's headed equaliser preceded a dramatic conclusion, with Zizou famously sent off before Italy won their fourth title on penalties.

2010

NETHERLANDS 0-1 SPAIN

A tense and bruising finale, which included a record 14 yellow cards, was illuminated in extra time when Andres Iniesta fired home to secure Spain's first-ever world title.

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TODAY'S MATCH
THIRD PLACE PLAY OFF
BELGIUM

ENGLAND
Time: **8:00pm**
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