



Uruguay's Luis Suarez (C) is inconsolable after his penalty miss saw the 15-time champions being knocked out in quarterfinals of the Copa America against Peru at the Fonte Nova Arena in Salvador on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Gallese denies Suarez as Peru knock out Uruguay

Goalkeeper Pedro Gallese saved Luis Suarez's spot-kick as Peru beat Uruguay on penalties on Saturday to reach the Copa America semifinals, where they will face Chile.

Edison Flores scored the decisive penalty as Peru, who were thrashed 5-0 by Brazil in their previous match, qualified for the semifinals for the third time in the last four editions of the Copa.

It was a remarkable turnaround for Gallese, who was the villain of that thumping by the hosts, gifting Brazil their second goal by clearing the ball straight to Roberto Firmino, while he was also partially at fault for the first and third scores.

But in Salvador he guessed the right way for the first shoot-out penalty to deny Barcelona forward Suarez, after which Peru's own penalty-takers were faultless.

"I'm very proud of our team, I can't really put it into words," said Peru captain Paolo Guerrero.

"A lot of people said we don't have the fortitude and guts. But we showed today on the pitch that we could take them on head-on.

"Peru has hunger, Peru is a warrior, Peru has guts."

It was the third Copa quarterfinal to finish goalless and head to penalties after Uruguay had three goals ruled out for offside during normal time.

Giorgian de Arrascaeta, Edinson Cavani and Suarez had all put the ball in the net, only to be denied by a linesman's flag.

Brazil beat Paraguay on spot-kicks on Thursday and champions Chile did likewise to knock-out Colombia on Friday.

In the only match to feature any goals, Argentina defeated Venezuela 2-0 on Friday.

Peru will face Chile in the second semifinal in Porto Alegre on Wednesday, a day after hosts Brazil take on Argentina in Belo Horizonte.

Copa winners in 1939 and 1975, Peru lost to Chile in the semifinals four years ago.

After a slow opening, Uruguay burst into life on 15 minutes when Federico Valverde surged onto a loose Peru pass in their own half and picked out an unmarked Luis Suarez on the penalty spot, but the Barcelona forward couldn't keep down his header.

In pouring rain, Uruguay looked set to take the lead on 24 minutes with a rapier counter-attack, but Cavani ballooned the ball into the sky from six yards after Gallese parried Suarez's shot, although it wouldn't have counted as the Barcelona forward was retroactively deemed offside when he received the ball.

De Arrascaeta had the ball in the net on 28 minutes but that was chalked off for an offside against Nandez.

Cavani appeared to have broken the deadlock just before the hour mark as he latched onto a Suarez through ball and chipped Gallese, but he was pulled up for offside.

Suarez poked home a Martin Caceres cross inside the six yard box on 73 minutes, but that too was ruled offside.

Argentina waiting for Messi magic

For the last dozen years, Argentina has been waiting for global superstar Lionel Messi to lead their football team to a major international trophy.

But when the country needed the five-time Ballon d'Or winner most, Messi failed to emulate the feats of Diego Maradona in 1986 -- when for some he almost single-handedly won the World Cup.

Four times Messi has lined up with Argentina in a major final -- the 2014 World Cup and Copa America in 2007, 2015 and 2016 -- but every time they have lost.

He has often come under criticism for failing to reproduce his Barcelona form when wearing the sky blue and white jersey of the national team.

Now, ahead of a mouth-watering Copa semifinal against hosts Brazil in Belo Horizonte, Argentines are simply waiting for Messi to turn up.

"This is the match for Messi to appear," screamed Ole newspaper's online edition after Argentina beat Venezuela 2-0 to secure the Brazil semifinal.

Ironically, at this tournament, while Argentina's performances have been improving steadily, Messi has, if anything, become less influential.

Argentina were all at sea in their opening 2-0 defeat to Colombia and needed a Messi penalty to salvage a 1-1 draw with Paraguay.

But in the 2-0 win over Qatar that qualified Argentina for the knock-out rounds, and the quarterfinal victory over Venezuela by the same score, Messi became an increasingly peripheral figure.

He admitted as much after the Venezuela match, saying: "I'm not at my best level, I'm not playing how I hoped I would. I'm not having my best Copa America."

Brazil centre-back Thiago Silva is not so convinced, though.

"For me, Messi is the best player in history, the best I've ever seen play. It's a privilege to play against him," said a player who hails from the country that produced Pele, Garincha, Socrates, Ronaldo and Ronaldinho.

Messi turned 32 during the tournament and while he doesn't appear close to retirement, it cannot be too many years away.

His game has changed over the years and he no longer produces the same kind of, or quantity of, darting runs at the heart of opposition defences.

He plays deeper than he used to, passes more and is more selective with his runs.

He also rests more than he used to and took an eight-month break from the national team following the World Cup in Russia, only returning in March in a 3-1 friendly defeat to Venezuela.

But he is more than just the star of the team these days, he is the leader and captains both club and country.

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni acknowledges that Messi brings much more than just brilliance on the field.

"For me he gives an essential contribution on the pitch, and if you saw everything he brings in the dressing room..." said Scaloni.

"Messi is Messi, he's the best."

Before the tournament began, much of the talk was about whether Messi could ever land the one thing missing from his impressive list of accolades: an international trophy.

He's won the Champions League four times, La Liga 10 times and the Copa del Rey six times with Barcelona, but nothing major with Argentina, who haven't won anything since 1993.

Tuesday's semifinal in Belo Horizonte looks tailor made for the Messi of old.

The semifinal promises to be a tight affair, in which a moment of Messi magic could be enough to settle it.

Argentina is waiting and praying for just such a moment.



Djokovic, Federer, Nadal primed for title

Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal are set to tighten their private stranglehold on Wimbledon as rivals struggle to keep afloat as they bid to dethrone the sport's A-list stars.

World number one Djokovic is the defending champion and chasing a fifth title at the All England Club.

Federer, promoted to second seed, can win a ninth crown while two-time champion Nadal is seeking to complete a rare back-to-back Roland Garros-Wimbledon double.

Twelve months ago, Djokovic arrived at Wimbledon with his career threatening to spiral into decline.

Unable to shake off the effects of right elbow surgery, the Serb was ranked at 21, his lowest position for over a decade.

But two weeks later, Djokovic had captured the 2018 title to add to his 2011, 2014 and 2015 wins, becoming the lowest-seeded player to take the Wimbledon trophy since Andre Agassi in 1992.

Since then, he has been rejuvenated, going on to claim a third US Open and seventh Australian Open title.

The only blip was a rain-hit semifinal exit to Dominic Thiem at Roland Garros, a loss which ended his attempt to become just the second man to hold all four Slams at the same time twice.

"Coming off from the surgery, being unable to have consistency with results, this was a huge springboard for me, the win at Wimbledon last year," said Djokovic, who will take a 10-2 career record over Philipp Kohlschreiber into their first-round clash on Monday.

Federer, chasing a 21st major, first played Wimbledon in 1999.

Pushing 38, he would be the oldest ever Grand Slam champion if

Nadal was desperately close to a third title in 2018.

Having failed to get past the last-eight since 2011, the Spaniard was only defeated in an epic semifinal by Djokovic, 10-8 in the final set.

"I won here in 2010 after a very, very tough first couple of rounds. Sometimes that helps, especially in this event, that you arrive here without playing much on this surface," said Nadal, who starts his campaign against Japan's world number 258 Yuichi Sugita.

After that looms a possible titanic clash with Nick Kyrgios, who shocked him in 2014, in the second round.

It's been 17 years since anybody not named Djokovic, Federer, Nadal or Andy Murray captured the Wimbledon title.

That long-distant honour went to Lleyton Hewitt in 2002.

The problem for the chasing pack in 2019 is their record at the tournament as well as various frailties in body and spirit.



Swiss master Roger Federer was in serious mood ahead of practice yesterday on the eve of the Wimbledon which gets underway at the All England Lawn Tennis Club today. PHOTO: REUTERS

Sweden end German hoodoo

Stina Blackstenius scored the winner as Sweden came from behind to stun old rivals Germany on Saturday and set up a women's World Cup semifinal against the Netherlands, who reached the last four for the first time.

Sweden had not beaten Germany at a major women's tournament since the 1995 World Cup, failing to win any of their subsequent meetings at World Cups, European Championships and Olympics in almost quarter of a century.

That run included defeats in the 2003 World Cup final and the gold medal match at the 2016 Rio Olympics, but they gained revenge in Rennes, coming from behind to win their quarterfinal 2-1.

Lina Magull had given Germany a 16th-minute lead with a fine finish from a Sara Daebritz assist, but the excellent Sofia Jakobsson equalised soon after on a hot evening in Brittany.

The winner arrived three minutes after half-time, with Blackstenius prodding home the rebound after Almuth Schult had saved a Fridolina Rolfo header.

Despite bringing on star player Dszenifer Marozsan, who had missed the previous three games with a broken toe, Germany remained blunt as the clock ticked down.

Blackstenius had scored Sweden's winner against Canada in the last round and also netted against the Germans in that Olympic final defeat in 2016.

"We have talked about the possibilities here for us to go far and win every game," said a bullish Sweden coach Peter Gerhardsson.

"There's not a single mitochondria in us that's content. We're going to go for it."

The Germans will now be deprived of the chance to defend their Olympic title, with defeat here meaning they fail to qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Games.

Sweden will join the Netherlands and Great Britain -- who have qualified thanks to England's World Cup run -- at the Games instead.

"We are now qualified for the Olympics. That is one thing that has been hanging over our heads for a while," said Gerhardsson.

Sweden players are over the moon following their off a victory against Germany in Women's World Cup quarterfinal on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP



Rapinoe accepts House invitation

The captain of the US women's football squad, Megan Rapinoe, has accepted an invitation from a high-profile Democrat to visit the House of Representatives, just days after bluntly saying she would refuse a similar offer from President Donald Trump.

"It may not be the White House, but we'd be happy to welcome @mPinoe & the entire #USWMNT for a tour of the House of Representatives anytime they'd like," Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the fiery young lawmaker who is a rising star of the Democratic Party, tweeted Friday.

"Consider it done," Rapinoe, the US star forward, quickly replied.

Ocasio-Cortez then tweeted, "The party's on!"

Rapinoe is leading the charge for Team USA at the women's World Cup. On Friday, she scored both of the squad's goals to propel them to a 2-1 victory over France in the quarterfinals.

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