



Two of the world's best defenders will go head-to-head tonight when Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk and Senegal skipper Kalidou Koulibaly battle for crucial points at the Al Bayt Stadium in Group A of the 2022 World Cup. PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

Senegal to miss 'best player' Mane

REUTERS, DOHA

Senegal coach Aliou Cisse said Sadio Mane's absence from the World Cup will be felt by fans across the globe, after the forward was ruled out of the tournament with a leg injury.

Mane, who came second to Karim Benzema in this year's Ballon D'Or vote for the world's best player, damaged his right fibula playing for Bayern Munich and his absence was confirmed on Thursday in a crushing blow to Senegal's hopes for the tournament. Read full story

Senegal kick off their campaign against the Netherlands at Al Thumama Stadium on Monday, and Cisse said the spectacle would be poorer without African football's star attraction.

"We're not just talking about the Senegalese people here. I think people all over the world," he told reporters on Sunday. "The whole football family is saddened by what has happened because he was the second best player in the world and he represents the African continent, as well as representing Senegal."

"It's very, very sad for him. Especially, we wish him a speedy recovery. I hope he gets back to playing football as quickly as possible."

Senegal forward Krepin Diatta described Mane as the team's leader.

"He is our best player. He's a leader in that respect," said Diatta.

Dutch bank on quality while Senegal hope 'young guns' step up

AGENCIES

Netherlands coach Louis van Gaal said his side are keen to deliver like never before as they prepare for their World Cup opener against Senegal on Monday.

The 71-year-old, in his third stint as national coach and who led the Dutch to a third-placed finish in Brazil in 2014, said the quality in his squad is even higher than the team he brought to Brazil.

"I believe that this group of players are well-connected to each other together, they work well together in a professional way, and I think that will always contribute to success," Van Gaal told a news conference on Sunday.

The coach, who won the Champions League in 1995 with a brilliant generation of young Dutch players at Ajax Amsterdam, said he has high expectations.

"In 2014 we came third with a squad that was of lesser quality than this one, and with this group I expect more. It depends not only on technical skills and tactical skills, but it also depends on a bit of luck, that you score at the right time and that the others don't score," he said.

"I think that we could become world champion, but there are squads that, in my view, are at a higher level than my squad ... so I'm saying we can become a world champion. Whether we become world champion is another thing, but we can."

Van Gaal was flanked by Dutch captain Virgil van Dijk, who will not have to face his former Liverpool team mate Sadio Mane

in the opener. The Senegalese striker has been ruled out of the tournament due to injury.

"I called him the next day in the morning, obviously I wanted to know how he was first and foremost, because there was so many rumours coming out and just as a friend I wanted to know how he was," Van Dijk said.

Van Dijk said his team were very much looking forward to the tournament getting underway.

"I'm relaxed, that's it, nothing else - of course I'm excited, just like the other guys, these last few days passed really slowly," he said.

While the Netherlands are hoping to bank on quality, Senegal coach Aliou Cisse told his younger players that it was their time to shine after talisman Mane was ruled out.

"Of course we won't hide the importance of Sadio Mane for the Senegalese team - he's very important, a coach builds his team around his best players."

"But there's also a group here with experienced players, with young players ready to step up. We've had to play matches before without Sadio Mane."

Cisse said the African champions, who also face Ecuador and hosts Qatar in Group A, have "excellent young players".

"I have a lot of depth on the bench so I will be able to make good subs if someone is getting tired," he said.

Senegal have called up Moussa Ndiaye, the 20-year-old Anderlecht defender.

Krepin Diatta, 23, is one of those who could fill the void left by Mane.

Dutch goalkeeping mystery about to be unravelled

REUTERS, Doha

The identity of the Netherlands goalkeeper for their opening World Cup match on Monday remains a closely guarded secret, highly anticipated by supporters as coach Louis van Gaal keeps his cards close to his chest.

Whoever gets the role against Senegal in the Group A clash at the Al Thumama Stadium on Monday, however, will be vastly inexperienced after the shock snub of Jasper Cillessen, who most Dutch soccer pundits assumed would be the first choice in Qatar.

Instead, Van Gaal surprised by picking three keepers with a total of eight caps between them, continuing the indecision that has marked his choice in goal since returning for a third stint in charge of the national team last year.

Ajax Amsterdam's Remko Pasveer is fancied to play in Monday's match, in what would be a remarkable moment in a journeyman career. He won his first cap at the age of 38 when the Dutch beat Poland in September and kept his place for the next game against Belgium - the last the Dutch played before the World Cup.

Pasveer was originally signed by Ajax as a back-up goalkeeper but was thrown into the team when they lost their two leading keepers to suspension and injury and is now on the cusp of a remarkable achievement.

Justin Bijlow has the other caps, used by Van Gaal in his first six games in charge but not used in the nine matches since.

Andries Noppert from Heerenveen is the other goalkeeper in the squad. Reportedly Noppert was the one who had the most practice during the Netherlands' final training session on Sunday. If selected, the 28-year-old will be the first Dutch stopper to make his international debut in a World Cup game.

In the 15 matches Van Gaal has taken charge of since replacing Frank de Boer as coach, he has also fielded Bundesliga-based Mark Flekken four times and Cillessen twice.



Andries Noppert

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INFO ZONE

SENEGAL VS NETHERLANDS
 Senegal and Netherlands will square off for the first time at the international level.

Netherlands are unbeaten in 2022 with six wins and two draws so far, while Senegal are going into the game with a five-match unbeaten streak. They have four wins and a draw in their last five games.

PLAYERS TO WATCH
 Kalidou Koulibaly
 Caps 64

Virgil van Dijk
 Caps 49
 Goals 6

USA up against '100% fit' Bale with points at a premium

REUTERS

The United States and Wales will head into Monday's World Cup clash knowing that victory could decide one of Group B's two qualifiers, with England fancied as heavy favourites to advance as group winners.

With a golden generation of talent spearheaded by Gareth Bale and playing at their first World Cup in 64 years, Wales will be out to echo their recent successes at European level, having reached the Euro 2016 semifinals and the last 16 at Euro 2020.

Manager Rob Page called up nine Premier League players to his World Cup squad - which U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said the Americans must not underestimate despite Wales's preparations being hampered by injuries to key players including Joe Allen and Aaron Ramsey.

"I think that, at least to the American media, Wales is under-rated," Berhalter told reporters. "When I look at their squad, it's basically a Premier League squad. To me, it's a really good squad, a formidable squad. They've been in international

competition before, they know what it's like. And it's going to be a very difficult game."

The U.S. team endured a rocky

Berhalter's youthful albeit unproven squad will look to silence critics when they return to the World Cup stage after eight years.

The Americans will be entering the contest with a rare clean bill of health with most of their first-choice squad healthy and available, and Christian Pulisic, Gio Reyna and Weston McKennie will all be out to leave their mark in their first World Cup appearance.

But Bale warned ahead of the clash that he was 100% fit to play for his country at their first World Cup since 1958.

"I'm fully fit and ready to go. If I need to play three 90s (minutes), I'll play three 90s," Bale told a news conference on Monday. "It's been difficult, mentally more than anything. I guess for everybody, the last three or four weeks, it's been difficult, even hearing stories of players going down and knowing they're going to miss the World Cup."

"Speaking to a few of the boys, even for them having to play this weekend was tough mentally, and we're just praying not to have an injury at all because it's such a big occasion."

Bale also added that Wales were determined to speak out about human rights and LGBT issues surrounding the World Cup.



run-up to Qatar and failed to score in September friendlies against Japan and Saudi Arabia, but

INFO ZONE

USA VS WALES

Wales have only two wins to show for in 2022, with no victories in their last five international outings.

USA boast only a solitary win in their previous five matches.

HEAD-TO-HEAD
 Matches 2
 USA 1
 Wales 0
 Draw 1

PLAYERS TO WATCH
Christian Pulisic
 Caps 52
 Goals 21

Gareth Bale
 Caps 108
 Goals 40

GOAL
 ফ্যামিলি মেডিসিন ডাক্তার
 ডা. মোহাম্মদ হোসেন
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