

Van Dijk fires back at Van Basten

AGENCIES, Doha

A World Cup draw with Ecuador was not a result the Netherlands was looking for, with the 1-1 outcome meaning Louis van Gaal's team failed to nail down a last-16 place with a game to spare.

But letting Cody Gakpo's sixth-minute opener against Ecuador be cancelled out by Enner Valencia's leveller early in the second half left attacking legend van Basten unimpressed, particularly with the Oranje skipper.

"You go in front very quickly and then I think Virgil should play the leading role in that. He talks a lot, but says nothing. 'Who's the best player on the team? That's Virgil."

"When you see what he does in possession... It's just tapping a ball to the players next to him. He needs to pick up the pace. It just goes way too slow."

Reacting to the remarks, Liverpool centre-back van Dijk told Voetbal International: "I don't think he is ever positive, so what do you do with it?"

"It is easy to make an analysis from [NOS headquarters in] Hilversum. I don't want to say that I played a fantastic game, not at all. But the things that are said about me failing as a captain: what do you do with that? I'm always



Mitchell Duke supplied the only goal as Australia won their first game at a World Cup since 2010 in a crucial match against Tunisia to keep their campaign in Qatar alive. Their fate is now in their hands, with a win against Denmark in their final group game likely to see them through.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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at the front, I lead the team in the best way possible."

Van Dijk made more defensive clearances (6) than any player against Ecuador and was kept busy as the South American side had 15 shots to the Netherlands' paltry two – the team's lowest total at a World Cup since at least 1966, the first tournament for which such data is available.



Duke's 'moment to treasure for life'

REUTERS, Al Wakrah

Before flying to Qatar, Australia's Mitchell Duke had promised to dedicate a goal at the World Cup to his son, and the striker duly delivered when he scored the winner in a 1-0 victory over Tunisia in their second Group D match on Saturday.

Duke tormented the Tunisian defence throughout the game with his physicality and was rewarded in the opening half when his glancing header beat the keeper, helping Australia log their first win at the World Cup in 12 years.

The 31-year-old reeled away in celebration holding up his hands in the shape of the letter "J" for his son Jaxson as his team mates embraced him near the corner flag.

"I spoke to my son when I got selected for the World Cup. As a striker you need that belief and confidence you're going to score in every match," he told reporters.

"I told my son I was going to share it with him, the gesture is the letter J. It's a moment I'm going to treasure for the rest of my life."

"Obviously the moment I scored was pure ecstasy for me. I'd heard only seven Australians had scored at the World Cup and I told Arnie (coach Graham Arnold) I'd be the eighth - or ninth."

Victory moved Australia up to second in the standings on three points ahead of the other game between group toppers France and Denmark.

The Al Janoub Stadium was a sea of red Tunisian fans with a handful of Australian supporters in

pockets around the arena, but the goal silenced the Africans who had been in full voice.

"It was a really hard fought match, Tunisia is very physical and we knew they'd be aggressive and their fans create a hostile environment," Duke added.

"They get very passionate in the game and we had to match that in the game and also beat it."

The striker plies his trade for Fagiano Okayama in the second-tier J2 League in Japan, often spending long periods away from his family, and Arnold praised his commitment to the cause.

"I've got a lot of faith in the kid. I always know when he walks over that white line, he will give more than 100% for the team, for the jersey and the nation," Arnold said.

Meanwhile, Tunisia's World Cup campaign is in deep trouble and they face a daunting task in their final group game after taking just one point from two matches.

They must beat the defending champions France to have any hope of progressing.

"It was crucial for both teams to win today, we did not perform as we wanted to in the first half," said Tunisia coach Jalel Kadri.

"They dominated the first half. We changed tactics two or three times in the second half and had four or five chances but could not score."

"They were efficient in converting their chance, we were not."

As for France, Kadri pledged: "We will play our hearts out."

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'Old Aussie way' shines through in Tunisia win

AFP, Doha

Coach Graham Arnold said "the old Aussie way" helped his side beat Tunisia 1-0 on Saturday to keep their World Cup alive but warned his players they had achieved nothing yet.

A Mitch Duke header in the first half combined with some dogged defending in the second revived the Socceroos' hopes of reaching the last 16 for only a second time.

They face Denmark in their last group game in Qatar with their fate in their own hands. "Our fight, our grit, our determination – the old Aussie way was very important tonight and very, very proud of the boys," said Arnold, whose side were thumped 4-1 by holders France in their opener.

The Group D clash with Tunisia was beamed on primetime television back home and Arnold said he expects there will be "a few hangovers in the morning".

"The fans back at home – it's a moment they'll remember for the rest of their lives," said Arnold, 59. "I said to the boys before the game: let's put a smile on the nation's face."

The fans may be feeling it in the morning, but Arnold has ordered his players to stay focused.

"That one game is done. I don't want any emotion from the players, I don't want them up all night looking at social media and all that stuff," he said.

"I've just said to them, no doubt that the nation is extremely proud."

"But we've done nothing. We've achieved something we can talk about after the tournament but we are here to go as far as we can go."

"I don't want any celebrations. Just enjoy this couple of minutes with the fans and then get yourself in the dressing room, recover and get ready for the next one."

US find no reward for dominance

REUTERS, Doha

The United States shut out a European side at the World Cup for the first time since 1950 but left the tent-like Al Bayt Stadium without a win after Friday's tense goalless stalemate against England, a contest where they were superior for long periods.

England had crushed Iran 6-2 in their Group B opener to justify their status as one of the tournament favourites, but they were fortunate to come away with a point against Gregg Berhalter's young and energetic team.

The U.S., back at soccer's showpiece tournament after eight years, looked set to make a winning return in their first match with Wales. They dominated large chunks of play and were unlucky not to go into the break with a bigger advantage.

Their inspired play went for naught as Wales snatched a 1-1 draw and although they again struggled in the final third of the pitch against England, the clash was always going to be the measuring stick – and the Americans showed they are more than capable of competing on the same stage.

Berhalter, coaching the second-youngest squad at this tournament, made several tactical tweaks that blunted the threat posed by England. His well-drilled team maintained a targeted press while venturing forward and unexpectedly switched to 4-4-2 while defending.

Tim Weah teamed up with surprise starter Haji Wright up front, Tyler Adams and Yunus Musah played centrally, and Weston McKennie flared out to one flank while Christian Pulisic



manned the other.

"Obviously it worked," McKennie said. "We had the ball often, they weren't able to really break through so many times."

"I don't think we gave them a lot of chances to get in behind and to get goal-scoring opportunities. And it worked for us as well, we were able to break them down, have space out wide."

The draw left them with a winner-takes-all contest on Tuesday against Iran, whose two stoppage-time stunners against Wales earlier

on Friday re-ignited their campaign and set up a nail-biting Group B finale.

The U.S. team's lack of consistent goalscoring threat has been a worry since their qualifying campaign and is the final key they need to find to unlock the potential of an otherwise exuberant and confident side.

"There was one thing missing – putting the ball in the net," McKennie added. "The final passes were there. It was unlucky. But we take away the point and it is in our hands."

Swiss defender Elvedi says Brazil are beatable

AFP, Doha

Switzerland centre-back Nico Elvedi said on Saturday his side would not be awed by the might of Brazil, saying they had enough quality to push the tournament favourites.

"Every team in this world is beatable," the Borussia Moenchengladbach defender said ahead of Monday's game against the five-time champions.

"We know the challenge, but we are not going to hide away. We know our quality and what we are able to show."

A second-half goal from Elvedi's former Gladbach teammate Brel Embolo helped Switzerland to a 1-0 win over Cameroon in their opening fixture.

Elvedi said that win "did us good" and "gave us a lot of trust".

Switzerland have qualified for the knockout stage in four of their last five World Cup appearances.

Avoiding defeat against Brazil would put the side in a strong position to reach the last 16 ahead of what will likely be a crucial final group stage clash with Serbia.

Elvedi said the Swiss could draw little hope from the likely absence of

Brazil talisman Neymar, who will miss the match with an ankle injury.

"It won't change much for us," he added. "They have enough top players who can play in that position."

"I will sleep exactly the same as always. I won't be sleeping better because Neymar isn't playing."

Switzerland trail Brazil on goal difference in the early Group G standings.



Elvedi said his team would relish the chance to "measure ourselves against the best".

"We know that this is a really difficult opponent... Brazil is one of the favourites but we are looking forward. We are hot for this game."