



After being upset by Japan in their first World Cup game, Germany now face a steep task as Thomas Muller and Co find themselves in a must-win situation on Sunday against Spain, who commenced their World Cup campaign in the most rampant way when they routed Costa Rica 7-0 in their tournament opener. PHOTO: TWITTER/REUTERS

Canada excited for ‘hell of a match’ against Croatia

AGENCIES

Canada manager John Herdman said on Saturday his team was fired up for a test against Croatia after the Canadians fell to Belgium 1-0 despite outplaying them.

“We are excited. We have a hell of a match coming,” Herdman told a news conference. With Croatia drawing Morocco, in which Zlatko Dalić’s side had only two attempts on target, all four teams in Group F remain in the hunt to qualify for the knockout stage.

Dalić will hope that their performance against Morocco, in which the 2018 World Cup finalists seemed to lack sharpness going forward, was down to early-tournament teething problems rather than something more fundamental.

“Four and a half years have passed and Croatia has almost a whole new national team ... we cannot draw comparisons between the two generations of players,” Dalić said.

Croatia are making their sixth World Cup appearance, having bombed out in the group stage on three occasions and twice embarking on stunning runs, reaching the semis in 1998 and the final last time around.

If they were unsure what sort of side they were going to face in Canada they will have a much clearer idea after Herdman’s team outshot Belgium 21-9 to give the third-place finishers of the 2018 World Cup a run for their money.



CROATIA VS CANADA		
The two sides have never faced each other before	PLAYERS TO WATCH	
	Luka Modrić (Croatia)	Stephen Eustaquio (Canada)
	Caps 156	Caps 27
	Goals 23	Goals 3

Germany approach ‘first final’ against tech-savvy Spain

AGENCIES

Just one match into the Qatar World Cup, Germany face what amounts to a must-win clash against Spain on Sunday, a team they have not beaten in a competitive fixture since 1988.

The importance of the Spain match at the Al Bayt Stadium cannot be underestimated -- national squad manager and 1996 Euros winner Oliver Bierhoff said losing “our first final” in Qatar would have widespread ramifications for the future of football in Germany.

Far from being haunted by the ghosts of their early exit in Russia however, forward Kai Havertz said the match could represent “a turnaround” for the under-fire side, saying “we all dreamed of playing these games.”

Captain Manuel Neuer on Friday said Sunday’s match was “a huge chance”, emphasising the side could learn from Russia “we blew it once and now we know how not to do it”.

Spain, on the other hand, are apparently in a strikingly contrasting state than Germany are. Following a 7-0 demolition of Costa Rica in their World Cup opener, the Spaniards made it explicitly clear that they know where on the pitch they should be and what they need to do, at all times.

Spaniards impressive positional play may well be

largely down to the fact that coach Luis Enrique has been innovative in his use of technology and outside-the-box thinking to get his players to operate within his set structure.

When Spain train, coach Luis Enrique sometimes stands on a scaffold tower, from where he has a better view of the players’ positions and, using microphones on the back of their training vests, he can instruct them via walkie-talkie.

It saves the coach having to shout and facilitates easy communication without players having to leave their positions before running an exercise again.

“We train more on video than on the pitch,” Luis Enrique said on Twitch channel last week -- with live-streaming another example of his technology use at the tournament.

“There are players who do things with their clubs that are very different to what we ask, but we have seen when they come with us they do brilliantly.”

Spain players use electric scooters to move between their accommodation and the training pitch, meaning the amount of time they have to spend cooped up in the team bus is shorter than ever at the World Cup.

Despite defeat by Japan, Hansi Flick’s side should offer a sterner test than Costa Rica and it will be a chance for the Euro 2020 semi-finalists to see if Luis Enrique’s plan works against teams great and small.

Japan aim to rub salt in Costa Rica’s wound

REUTERS, Doha

Few would have given Japan much chance of getting out of a group that included Germany and Spain when the World Cup draw was made but a win over Costa Rica on Sunday would leave Hajime Moriyasu’s side on the brink of the last 16.

The Japanese came from behind to beat four-times champions Germany on Wednesday and will face a Costa Rica side reeling from their 7-0 thrashing by Spain in their Group E opener.

For Costa Rica coach Luis Fernando Suarez, rebuilding his side’s shattered confidence is the priority.

“I’m worried that mentally the team won’t get out of this slump, this bad result,” he said after the defeat. “We have to take responsibility for what



JAPAN VS COSTA RICA		
HEAD-TO-HEAD	PLAYERS TO WATCH	
	Takuma Asano (Japan)	Keylor Navas (Costa Rica)
Matches 5	Caps 38	Caps 108
Japan 4	Goals 8	Clean sheets 41
Costa Rica 0		
Draw 1		



happened but once we all talk about it, we need to forget about it.”

To help him lift the side, the coach will turn to the few veterans from their 2014 campaign when they reached the quarter-finals after topping a group that also featured England, Italy and Uruguay.

Things look much more promising for Japan, who produced the second major shock of the 2022 World Cup so far with their 2-1 comeback win over Germany.

The Japanese were helped by six Bundesliga players and one more playing in Germany’s second tier, as strikes from Freiburg’s Ritsu Doan and VfL Bochum’s Takuma Asano gave the Asian side their first ever win over Germany.

Costa Rica, who suffered their heaviest ever defeat at the World Cup finals, are unlikely to provide as stiff a test as the Germans.

Spain lie in wait for Japan in their final group game but Moriyasu knows Sunday’s result may mean there is little riding on it.

‘Special emotions’ as Morocco’s Belgian-borns tackle ‘golden generation’

AGENCIES

Morocco coach Walid Regragui said his team would try and draw on the “special emotions” of their Belgian-born players when they take on Roberto Martinez’s side at the World Cup on Sunday.

The north Africans drew their opening game with Croatia 0-0 and victory over Belgium would put them on the brink of reaching the knockout stage for the first time since 1986.

Morocco have four players in their squad who were born in Belgium including Selim Amallah, who started against Croatia and plays his club football for Standard Liege.

Bilal El Khannouss and Anass Zaroury, who both played for Belgium’s youth teams, and Ilias Chair were also born in the European country.

“It’s a special match for them and we all know that,” Regragui said at his pre-match press conference on Saturday.

“We’re in the group of death. Everyone thought Canada would be an easy team but we can see now that won’t be the case,” said Regragui, referring to how Belgium struggled against the pace of a young Canada side despite winning their



campaign opener by 1-0.

However, Regragui was keen to insist that his team were going into the game as underdogs.

“(Kevin) De Bruyne, (Eden) Hazard, (Axel) Witsel. They have great players on the bench -- (Romelu) Lukaku or (Michy)

Batshuayi. Let’s call a spade a spade, they’re the favourites.”

Belgium are still ranked second in the world but many of their “golden generation” of players are in their 30s and star forward Eden Hazard admitted Saturday that Belgium’s best chance to win the World

Cup had come and gone but said they still have the quality and experience to lift the trophy in Qatar.

“To be fair I think we had a better chance to win four years ago,” admitted 31-year-old Hazard.

“The team was better four years ago but ... we have experience and the best goalkeeper in the world (Thibaut Courtois).”

“We have one of the best midfields in the world, right now. We have good strikers. We have the team and I think it’s just the desire to want to win, and the mentality,” said Hazard.

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez was relaxed about his side’s form, highlighting the lack of preparation time before the tournament in Qatar.

“Slowly you’re going to see teams getting ready after three games in the tournament,” Martinez said.

“So rather than having that preparation for a World Cup, for a major tournament where you have three friendlies and you have four weeks to get everybody in the optimal condition, the teams need to get ready while they are in the tournament and that’s dangerous because it can cost you points,” added the Belgium coach.

