

Potential win-or-go-home scenario for Cameroon and Serbia

REUTERS, AL RAYYAN

Cameroon and Serbia go into Monday's Group G match knowing that anything less than a victory could send them packing from the World Cup by the time Brazil and Switzerland play later in the day.

Serbia are bottom of the group after losing 2-0 to pre-tournament favourites Brazil while Cameroon's 1-0 loss to Switzerland means the African side are still seeking their first victory in the World Cup since 2002.

The match arguably gives both Cameroon and Serbia their best chances of opening their account in Qatar.

But a loss for either team - combined with a draw between Brazil and Switzerland - would prematurely bring the curtains down on their campaign, with nothing to play for but pride in their final group game on December 2.

Cameroonian Football Federation president Samuel Eto'o, the last player to score a winner for the country in the World Cup 20 years ago, predicted his team would reach the final but a five-match winless run since September says otherwise.

This is a fairly young Cameroon team with little to no World Cup experience, however.

Although they did give a good account of themselves against the Swiss, coach Rigobert Song has promised improvement.



CAMEROON VS SERBIA		
HEAD-TO-HEAD	PLAYERS TO WATCH	
	Frank Anguissa (Cameroon)	Aleksandar Mitrovic (Serbia)
	Caps 44	Caps 77
	Goals 5	Goals 50
	Matches 1	
	Cameroon 0	
	Serbia 1	

"The mistakes that were made (against Switzerland) will not be made again in the next game," he said after the opening loss.

On the other hand, Serbia have a well-drilled unit that prevented Brazil from making inroads in the first half before they were carved open in the second following a drop in intensity.

"The impression is that we started the second half with too much respect for the Brazilian national team and that cost us a positive result," Serbia's national team director Stevan Stojanovic said.

"Somehow we raised our hands prematurely in surrender, which in the past was not characteristic of this generation."

Serbia coach Dragan Stojkovic lamented the fact that his key players such as top scorer Aleksandar Mitrovic were not fully fit.

But they will be glad to have got Brazil out of the way nice and early, and he has promised change in the next two games.

"We have to face that fact. It's defeating to not have 100% of all your players... You will see a different team (against Cameroon)," Stojkovic said with a reassuring tone.



Even though Brazil boast an enviable pool of forwards, the five-time World Champions will bank on Vinicius Jr to penetrate the Swiss defence, especially with the Selecao's star player Neymar sidelined with injury, in their Group G game at the Stadium 974 on Monday. Meanwhile, Switzerland, who trained at the University of Doha Training Facilities ahead of today's game, were confident of churning out a better result than their 1-1 draw against Brazil in the 2018 World Cup.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Swiss challenge for injury-hit Brazil

REUTERS

Five-times world champions Brazil have to contend with a number of injuries, talisman Neymar's ankle injury the most mentionable of all, but have a host of young talents to step in as the Selecao face Switzerland in their World Cup Group G game on Monday.

The latest on the list of Brazil players that could miss today's game is midfielder Lucas Paqueta as an illness could see the 25-year-old sidelined against the Swiss.

Brazil were already set to miss their talisman Neymar and reliable full back Danilo, both ruled out by ankle injuries suffered in their opening 2-0 win over Serbia.

The World Cup favourites trained behind closed doors at the Al Arabi Stadium on Saturday and coach Tite gave no clue about team selection in his news conference on Sunday.

But it was learned that Paqueta was unable to train fully, affecting Tite's plans to compensate for Neymar's absence against the Swiss.

However, midfielder Casemiro remained totally unfazed, saying Brazil at times feel 'sorry for rivals' with so many young talents at their disposal.

"We have other players that have been performing in

the same level like Vinicius Jr, Raphinha Richarlison, Gabriel Jesus," Casemiro said.

"We, those who play in the back end, often joke that we feel sorry for our rivals because we can replace Raphinha for Antony, Richarlison for Gabriel Jesus. We have Rodrygo, Gabriel Martinelli..."

Real Madrid prodigy Rodrygo would be the first option if Tite decides to use the same system with four up-front.

The 21-year-old forward played in Neymar's position in three practice games in Turin before the World Cup.

But the option of pairing Fred with his Manchester United team mate Casemiro to strengthen the midfield is also very much in play.

Meanwhile, Swiss midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri remained confident of portraying a better showing against Brazil than they did when the two met in the previous World Cup. The teams last met in the group stage of the 2018 tournament in Russia,

where they drew 1-1.

"That was a positive outcome," Shaqiri said of the 2018 draw. "We are aware of what we can do and I think we have made progress. We have more experience and have been challenged by greater teams since."



BRAZIL VS SWITZERLAND		
HEAD-TO-HEAD	PLAYERS TO WATCH	
	Vinicius Jr (Brazil)	Breel Embolo (Switzerland)
	Caps 17	Caps 60
	Goals 1	Goals 12
	Matches 9	
	Brazil 3	
	Switzerland 2	
	Draw 4	



AGENCIES

Portugal could qualify early for the next phase of the World Cup with a game remaining if they beat Uruguay on Monday, a task probably much easier said than done.

Uruguay have the World Cup edge in winning the tournament twice, albeit a few generations ago, and are more than familiar with Portugal, having knocked them out of the contest in 2018 in the round of 16.

Although Cristiano Ronaldo stole the show on Thursday, setting a record by scoring in his fifth World Cup in Portugal's 3-2 win over Ghana, his team lacked inspiration and have much to do to shake off a dismal run of World Cup form since reaching the semifinals in 2006.

Uruguay, while failing to score any goals or even record any shots on target in their opener against a gritty South Korea on Thursday, were composed, organised and looked like a team capable of another deep World Cup run, with veterans and neophytes combining seamlessly and moving the ball with confidence.

All five goals in Portugal's opening game against Ghana came in a frenetic final 25 minutes likened by coach Fernando Santos to a storm. He said he is untroubled



PORTUGAL VS URUGUAY	
HEAD-TO-HEAD	Matches 3
	Portugal 1
	Uruguay 1
	Draw 1
PLAYERS TO WATCH	Joao Felix (Portugal)
	Caps 25
	Goals 4
	Darwin Nunez (Uruguay)
	Caps 14
	Goals 3

going into the Uruguay match because he knows what needs fixing.

"It's nothing I'm worried about because I know that my players can do better than that, but that's football," he said. "I am totally confident that they can perform much better than this."

Portugal do have a headache, in the form of the injury of defender Danilo Pereira.

Pereira, started alongside Ruben Dias in central defence for Portugal in their opening 3-2 win over Ghana, fractured three ribs during a training session on Saturday and is set to miss the remaining two group stage games.

The 31-year-old is set to undergo further scans to determine whether he could return should Portugal reach the knockout

stage.

Portugal, with a habit of going down to the wire in the World Cup group stages, may want to avoid that this time with a final match against South Korea, the team that ended Germany's title defence in 2018.

Equally, Uruguay will want to avoid defeat against Portugal so their fate can remain in the own hands in their final match against Ghana.

Uruguay have looked good since Diego Alonso took over late last year and turned things around in qualifying. He has every player available in his squad, except Barcelona's Ronald Araujo, recovering from thigh surgery.

Alonso's defence looked sturdy against South Korea and he is blessed with plenty of attacking options through Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani - despite their age - and Liverpool's Darwin Nunez and Manchester United's Facundo Pellistri, who looked dangerous on their World Cup debuts.

Alonso expects a tough game on Monday and for the group to be decided in the final match.

"Obviously the second game is key as is the third," he said. "Whether we qualify or not depends on us."

Relaxed South Korea coach expects 'different' Son against Ghana

AGENCIES

South Korea coach Paulo Bento said the team would see a "different" Son Heung-min against Ghana on Monday after the forward got used to his face mask during their opening World Cup match.

Son wore the mask during his side's 0-0 draw against Uruguay in Group H following surgery to repair a fracture around his left eye he suffered earlier this month while playing for Tottenham.

Portuguese boss Bento said he was not worried

SOUTH KOREA VS GHANA		
HEAD-TO-HEAD	PLAYERS TO WATCH	
	Son Heung-min (South Korea)	Mohammed Kudus (Ghana)
	Caps 105	Caps 19
	Goals 35	Goals 5
	Matches 9	
	South Korea 4	
	Ghana 4	
	Draw 1	



about his team's lack of a cutting edge in the first match ahead of their second game in Qatar.

"It's completely normal to face some challenges during the first game," he said on Sunday.

"As far as Son is concerned, he was recently injured and he was also adapting, trying to feel comfortable with the face mask."

"First he needed to feel at ease with his teammates and afterwards with the opponents. The second game will be different."

Bento said he did not feel under strain ahead of Monday's match.

"I feel no pressure whatsoever and I would love our players to feel the way I do but I know they come from a different culture," said the Portuguese.

Meanwhile, Ghana coach Otto Addo reasserted his claim that his side had been unlucky to lose to Portugal but also apologised for his post-match criticism of the refereeing. He said he had not faced any sanction from FIFA for the outburst.

"Maybe in the public's eye we lost but for us we learnt," Addo added of the 3-2 defeat by the Portuguese. "We have a lot of respect for South Korea, but we know we can compete with them."

