



I am their dad, Song says after Onana exclusion

REUTERS, Al Wakrah

Cameroon coach Rigobert Song praised his team's fighting spirit after they salvaged a 3-3 draw against Serbia at the World Cup on Monday, without first choice goalkeeper Andre Onana who was left out of the squad for disciplinary reasons.

Onana was marked as "absent" on the team sheet at Al Janoub stadium and Song explained that he had to put the team first for a game that left the Indomitable Lions on one point in the group before they play Brazil.

"He is a very important player but we are in a competition and my role is to put the team first ahead of an individual," Song told a news conference amid reports of a falling out over tactics.

"He is one of the best keepers in Europe. This is not about his performances but you have to preserve the squad," he added about the Inter Milan keeper. "Maybe we needed a strong signal. It's a big risk that I took. But I'm the dad of these kids so when I have to take risks and make



decisions, I do that and I stand by what I do."

The 46-year-old Song, who won a record 137 caps for Cameroon and played in four World Cups with the African side, has yet to decide whether Onana will be sent home or if he will get a second chance.

"We will see if he continues. We will see if he abides by the rules again," he said.

Stand-in keeper Devis Epassy struggled, notably allowing too much space on his left for Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, but Song was not concerned. "We were leading and then after those two (stoppage-time) goals we thought it was over, but we saw that the players rallied back and I can only be happy about that," Song said.



Ghana midfielder Mohammed Kudus celebrates scoring his second goal in a thrilling 3-2 win over South Korea during their World Cup Group H fixture at the Education City Stadium in Al-Rayyan yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'It's normal – it's Kudus'

AFP, Doha

Mohammed Kudus announced himself on the global stage with his brace at the World Cup on Monday to show why he is one of the most coveted young players in football.

The attacking midfielder scored twice, including the winner, in Ghana's dramatic 3-2 win over South Korea in Qatar. The 22-year-old, who plays his club football for Ajax, almost single-handedly saved Ghana's World Cup campaign when he stroked in left-footed in the 68th minute.

He had earlier scored with a header, before Son Heung-min's South Korea mounted a comeback, only for Kudus to win it for Ghana and their colourful, chanting fans. He has now scored seven times in 20 appearances for his country, having made his debut three years ago.

It remains to be seen how much further Ghana go at the tournament – they have three points from two games and face a grudge match against Uruguay in their final Group H match on Friday. But no matter what they do, Kudus looks set to go far once the World Cup wraps up.

Ghana captain Andre Ayew shrugged and smiled when asked afterwards how impressed he had been by his young team-mate.

"Not impressed at all," the 32-year-old forward said, a smile forming on his face again. "It's normal – it's Kudus."

"He has a bright future in front of him. We know this, I know this, Ghana knows it now, the world is going to know it."



"You'll see, more is coming from my boy."

Crystal Palace's Jordan Ayew – Andre's brother – came into the Ghana side and provided the cross for Kudus's first-half header.

He said Kudus was "shining".

"And hopefully he can keep on shining because he has a really bright future," said the 31-year-old.

Kudus made a piece of history, his double the first by a Ghanaian in a World Cup match.

"He's a good character," said coach Otto Addo.

"He's a very good guy who one against one is fast. He has very good game intelligence."

"He has to work more defensively, this is for sure, but he is on the right track to be a great, great player."

Some of Europe's biggest clubs, among them Milan, Borussia Dortmund and Liverpool, have been linked with Kudus. A summer loan move to Everton fell through.

There was mayhem all around him after Ghana hung on to beat South Korea, but man-of-the-match Kudus seemed to be the coolest man among the 44,000 at

Education City Stadium.

Kudus was still playing for Ajax's youth team as recently as last year, before making an impact on the elite stage with four goals in this season's Champions League.

He has scored 15 goals in 63 appearances for the Amsterdam club and also clocked six assists. Kudus certainly does not lack self-belief.

Speaking to The Guardian in Doha last week, he said: "He's not better than me. He's just a higher-profile player, that's all."

The man Kudus was referencing was Neymar.

THE LATERAL VIEW

Qatar World Cup gets spicy

IRESH ZAKER

Things are getting spicy in Qatar. On the field, nothing is going according to script. Pre-tournament favourites like Belgium are teetering on the edge of elimination, and the qualification picture is changing wildly with every game and every minute of the first round.

Germany looked set to succumb to a prolonged case of the winner's curse, which seemed to have been carried over from 2018 when, as reigning champions, they got booted out of the tournament in the first round.

Certainly, based on Costa Rica and Japan's form in their respective openers, it looked like Japan would easily collect all three points, or at least one, from the encounter between the two countries, and push Germany closer to the edge. But, clearly, things did not pan out that way.

Even in their own game, Germany seemed to have been doomed to defeat against a mostly dominating Spanish side, and again on the brink. But then Sane came on, and helped keep the Mannschaft and their supporters sane for at least one more game.

Within the space of minutes, the Germans went from being almost dead and buried to becoming marginal favourites to finish second in Group E. They still have to beat Costa Rica by more than a goal though, and hope that Japan draw or lose to Spain. Both scenarios are likely but, as we have already seen in this tournament, likely is far removed from guaranteed. No one would be shocked if Costa Rica were to qualify from this group.

The tension and disappointment on the pitch is spreading off it as well. One ridiculous story involved magic-man Lionel Messi himself. Apparently, in spite of ample visual evidence to the contrary, a Mexican boxer named Saul "Canelo" Alvarez insisted on Twitter that Leo was "cleaning the floor" with a Mexican jersey, and asked the Argentine number 10 to pray that he would not run into the pugilist anytime soon.

In another regrettable instance, the Brazilian legend Ronaldo had to come out in furious defence of his compatriot Neymar, who has apparently been subjected to unending abuse on social media ever since news of his injury came out. Abuse that was hurled not by rivals but, stunningly, by people from his own country. The world is, sadly, going slightly mad.

We need to get a grip. It's only halfway through the first round of a long tournament. There is a lot more madness to come on the pitch. Let peace and decency prevail off of it, even if sanity does not.



Indomitable Lions refuse to be tamed

REUTERS, Al Wakrah

Serbia coach Dragan Stojkovic had said his side would approach their World Cup Group G fixture against Cameroon with a view to "taming" the Indomitable Lions, but veteran striker Vincent Aboubakar had other ideas.

With both Serbia and Cameroon desperate for points after their opening defeats, they played out one of the most entertaining games of the tournament, attacking at every opportunity and refusing to sit back.

In the end, a 3-3 draw was probably a fair result in a game where the pendulum swung back and forth as the teams exchanged leads, and it was the introduction of Aboubakar for Cameroon that proved crucial for his side.

Facing the ignominy of equalling the record for nine consecutive defeats in World Cup tournaments, Aboubakar's goal and assist – less than three minutes apart – kept the African side alive in the tournament.

"In these competitions you have to show desire for victory," Aboubakar said.

"My team mates had a great first half despite some small mistakes. We felt they were shaky and bit tired. When I came on, I tried to make the most of it."

Samuel Eto'o was the last player to score a winner for Cameroon at the World Cup 20 years ago, and the president of the country's football federation had waited outside the team hotel to embrace the



squad before their trip to the stadium.

Some of his magic seemed to have rubbed off on the players as Jean-Charles Castelletto opened the scoring to give Cameroon their first goal at the World Cup in eight years.

But Stojkovic's side took back control with three goals either side of halftime to break Cameroonian hearts in the stands while the Serbians were in full voice.

Cameroon coach Rigobert Song cut a frustrated figure on the touchline and when he saw the single-striker formation failing to yield results, he decided to go for broke, throwing Aboubakar into the mix.

Once a teenager who played for Cameroon at the 2010 World Cup, the 30-year-old is now the on-field leader of the African side, providing calmness on the pitch and a touch of class.