



THE LATERAL VIEW Good stories continue to unfold

IRESH ZAKER

I spent most of yesterday's article worrying about the mayhem that would ensue in Bangladesh if Argentina were knocked out on Wednesday night. In hindsight, my concerns were misplaced. Not only did they qualify with aplomb, the other three teams seemed hell bent on getting themselves disqualified.

In the end, of course, Poland scraped through as a tired second. Their cynical strategy provided a melancholy coda to a group that started proceedings with such vibrant promise.

I have to say this though, that my neighbourhood is fairly tame by Dhaka's boisterous standards. However, the noise that I heard after the final whistle in Argentina's game leaves me concerned about the structural integrity of the buildings in my area should the Albiceleste win it all. It will surely be a glorious mayhem.

Speaking of Argentina lifting the cup, I would like to proffer what is bound to be an unpopular opinion. There are many who have been saying that Lionel Messi deserves to lift the trophy, given that this is most likely his last edition. I understand the emotion behind these protestations. Given the innumerable moments of magic that Leo has provided us throughout his historical career, it would only seem fitting that he walks away with football's biggest prize.

But where does that leave Cristiano Ronaldo – this generation's other great footballer – who, incidentally, is also playing in his last World Cup?

However much we want, we cannot reward all our heroes with all the gifts. In the end, the TEAM that play the best will most likely win the trophy, and I daresay that that is how it should be.

Last night we were again faced with the prospect of two pre-tournament favorites, Belgium and Germany, making ignominiously early exits. Moreover, Germany's game against Costa Rica had a wonderful historical byline regardless of results.

It was the first match in the history of World Cup football to be officiated by an all-female referee crew. Stephanie Frappart was assisted on the ground by Neuza Back and Karen Diaz, and Kathryn Nesbitt serving as the fourth official. Given the sports' long struggle with various prejudices and inequities, this is undoubtedly a welcome development. The Cinderellas may be crashing out one by one, but good stories continue to be written in Qatar 2022.



A series of near-misses saw Belgium, ranked No. 2 in the world by FIFA, crash out of the 2022 World Cup with a goalless draw against Croatia yesterday. Having finished third in the 2018 World Cup, the Belgians' campaign this time around was marred by below-par performances, out-of-place comments and infighting within the locker room which ultimately culminated in a disastrous exit.

PHOTO:AFP

Belgium crash out

AFP, Doha

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez said his team would leave the World Cup with their "heads held high" despite being dumped out in the group stage after a goalless draw with Croatia on Thursday.

The world's second ranked side were left to rue a series of missed gilt-edged chances by Romelu Lukaku in the second half as they went out after scoring only one goal in three Group F matches.

"Today we were ready, we created opportunities and today there is no regrets," said Martinez. "We're out but we can leave with our heads held high."

"You see Youri Tielemans and other young players -- the golden generation is doing something that is bringing the next generation on. It's not what names are on the pitch. The legacy can be left in many ways."

Belgium finished third in their group behind Croatia and Morocco who backed up their 2-0 win over Belgium by beating Canada 2-1.

"We wanted to get through but I'm sure the other national teams wanted to get through and that's the tournament," added Martinez. "In the previous World Cup we won three games in the group stage. We wanted to go all the way."

Lukaku was not fit enough to start any of the games and Belgium were reliant on several ageing stars who could not

produce their best form.

Croatia captain Luka Modric said he was overjoyed to reach the knockouts. "We are overjoyed that we are in the round of 16," Modric said. "We deserved that with the game we played. We lived through some very difficult moments as we were playing against a great team."

"We have achieved the first goal, now let's move on. Today we showed that we are a top team, that we can play against anyone, and whoever comes next, it will not be easy against us."

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez also informed that it was his last match in charge of the Red Devils. The 49-year-old had been in charge since 2016 and his contract was due to run out after the tournament.

"That was my last game with the national team, I can't carry on. It's the time for me to accept that this is the last game. That was the end, whatever would happen, whether we were world champions, whether we went out in the group stage," he said. "It's got nothing to do with being eliminated in the group stage."

"Today, if we would've gone through I think we would've seen the real Belgium and we could've been very competitive in the next rounds," insisted Martinez. "The disappointment was against Morocco. Today we were ourselves, we played a very good opposition... The first two games we weren't ourselves."



Let's not stop here, Regragui urges

AFP, Doha

Morocco powered into the last 16 of the World Cup for the first time in 36 years on Thursday with a 2-1 victory over eliminated Canada.

Goals from Hakim Ziyech and Youssef En-Nesyri ensured the North Africans finished top of Group F ahead of 2018 World Cup runners-up Croatia.

Morocco, who last reached the knockout stages of the World Cup in 1986, will face the runners-up from Group E in the last 16, with the identity of their opponents decided later Thursday.

"It wasn't easy, but when you have an opportunity to make history, you remember it," Morocco coach Walid Regragui said.

"We've made lots of people happy this evening, but let's not stop here."

"Before the tournament we set an objective -- we said we wanted to give everything we've got and get out of the group stages. We can tick that box now."

Canada's defeat capped a disappointing World Cup for the CONCACAF side, who depart after losing all three of their group games on their long-awaited return to the finals.

But coach John Herdman said his team would leave Qatar with heads held high.

"It's been the first time in a long time we've been here. We'd liked to have been longer but we've enjoyed the ride," Herdman said.



"Our players turned up here to compete. We've been fearless in each of the three games and in each of the three games we've had something to celebrate. "This isn't Canada walking away with our heads down -- we leave with our heads held high."

Morocco put themselves firmly on course for the second round after upsetting Belgium 2-0 on Sunday, a result that left them needing only a point against Canada on Thursday to be sure of

advancing.

Achieving that objective never looked in doubt after the Moroccans grabbed the lead after only four minutes in front of 43,102 fans at the Al-Thumama Stadium. Canada captain and goalkeeper Milan Borjan raced off his line to clear an underhit backpass from Steven Vitoria but could only watch in horror as the ball fell to Morocco's Ziyech.

The Chelsea star seized the opportunity ruthlessly, lifting a finish over the stranded

Borjan into the empty net for 1-0.

That early setback winded Canada, who struggled to gain any sort of a foothold against a rampant Morocco who were soon 2-0 up.

Right-back Achraf Hakimi's long ball caught the Canadian defence napping and En-Nesyri darted in behind before smashing home a finish at the near post to beat Borjan.

Canada pulled a goal back on a rare foray forward five minutes from half-time when defender Sam Adekunle skipped clear down the left and rifled in a low cross.

Defender Nayef Aguerd stuck a leg out and the ball deflected into the net past Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou to make it 2-1.

Morocco thought they had restored their two-goal cushion in first-half stoppage time when En-Nesyri lashed home eight yards out only for the effort to be deemed offside.

Canada started the second half brightly, with Alphonso Davies jabbing a shot just wide after a promising attack.

But Morocco dropped deeper and Canada lacked the inventiveness to seriously threaten.

Their best chance of drawing level came from a set-piece on 71 minutes, when substitute Atiba Hutchinson's header from a corner crashed off the underside of the crossbar and bounced off the goal line.

'First love' Ronaldo, 'calm' Silva: Sanjida, Masura root for their heroes

NAZIBA BASHER

The FIFA World Cup 2022 has reached its peak with the showpiece event heading towards the business end -- the knockouts.

As the last 16 are set to be lined up with the final group stage matches scheduled for tonight, fans can relish some major and shocking upsets already. However, many of the top dogs of the tournament are still in the competition and fans all across the country have their fingers crossed.

Two such ardent fans are our very own reigning champions -- Bangladesh women's national team defender Masura Parvin and winger Sanjida Akhter -- who are both supporters of the five-time world champions Brazil.

The Daily Star caught up with the two girls in the middle of a practice session on Thursday at the Bashundhara Kings Arena, and discussed their hopes and expectations from 'the greatest show on earth', along with what we can expect from them in the future.

Sanjida, despite her shyness and quiet demeanour, has proved to be an absolute force on the field. After Bangladesh's victory in the SAFF Championship 2022, she has been busy honing her skills with the Bashundhara Kings, the club that the forward plies her trade for.

Though she is rooting for Brazil, Sanjida revealed that her "first love" is none other than one of the greatest footballers of this generation -- Cristiano Ronaldo.

"Though it is his final World Cup, he is always my player to watch. Yes, new players will come to the next World Cup. But how can one forget their first love?" she smiled.

On the other hand, while almost all Brazil fans have Neymar on the tip of their tongue, the player that fascinates the ever-spunky Masura the most is defender Thiago Silva.



"What I like most about him is how calm he can remain in the toughest of situations. I am a defender myself and I have no idea how to remain this calm. It's something I try to learn from him."

They both revealed that they have supporters of Argentina in their team as well.

Asked whether they get into the common Argentina vs Brazil argument, Masura said, "Arguments, not really. We do banter with each other sometimes. But see, what we have to remember is that it's a game and there will be wins and losses. There is no reason to fight over these things." On the other hand, Sanjida, responding to another question, said, "But I remember, I could not get out of the dressing room when Brazil conceded seven goals against Germany! I was heavily teased by all my teammates. No one can ever forget the '7-up', can they?"

About who they expect to see in the semis, both said this World Cup has been unpredictable.

The chat concluded with their expression of hope of someday making it to the world stage themselves.

The full video interview can be found on The Daily Star's Facebook page and Youtube Channel.



Virat Kohli and the rest of the Indian cricket team landed in Dhaka on Thursday. The men in blue are on their first tour of Bangladesh in seven years and will meet the hosts for three ODIs and two Tests. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED