



Cinderella narrative pops up

IRESH ZAKER

Cinderella, in the form of Japan, has finally arrived at the party. I suppose that Morocco's qualification at the expense of Belgium also defied expectations, but Japan knocking out Germany has to be the definitive David and Goliath story of the ongoing World Cup.

A straightforward knockout would have been spectacular enough, but no one in that group was interested in a linear narrative. All four teams in Group E looked like they would go through at various points during Thursday night's double header and, in the end, of course, it was Spain and Japan who prevailed. It was breathtaking, legendary stuff that will be retold for many a decade.

Admittedly I have been guilty of being frustrated by tournament underdogs flattering to deceive. I suppose I had not really thought deeply about the nuances of the



THE LATERAL VIEW

Suarez is no stranger to controversy, and many have harshly criticized his lack of ethics in doing what he did. When it comes to this particular incident, however, I am squarely on Suarez' side.



After sensationally defeating Portugal 2-1, South Korea's players held their breath and watched Uruguay's game against Ghana in the middle of the field. After the final whistle blew in that game without the Uruguayans having netted a decisive goal that would have knocked South Korea out, Song Heung Min and Co. broke out into rapturous celebration.

'Tears of happiness' flow in South Korea

AFP, Doha

South Korea captain Son Heung-min said he cried "tears of happiness" after the Asian team beat Portugal 2-1 to reach the World Cup last 16 on Friday.

The Koreans appeared to be heading out of the tournament in Qatar for much of the game but Hwang Hee-chan's 91st minute winner lifted them to second in Group H, behind Portugal.

They faced a nervous wait on the pitch for Uruguay's match against Ghana to finish. The South Americans won 2-0 but were unable to find the one goal extra they needed, going out on goals scored.

Tottenham striker Son was again not at his best and has still not scored in Qatar, but produced a brilliant assist for Hwang's winner.

"I believe these tears are tears of happiness," said Son. "We waited really long for this moment and we as players believed altogether we could do this."

"There were moments when I wasn't able to do my best and I am thankful for my team-mates that they were able to cover me in the moments I wasn't able to fulfil my duties, and I'm very proud of them."

South Korea, who were eliminated in the group stage in 2014 and 2018, have now reached the knockout phase for only the third time in their history.

If Brazil finish top of their group later Friday they will face South Korea in the next round.

"Going into the round of 16 was our goal and now we have higher goals and we will do our best to achieve those goals," said Son.

"No one knows the world of football, especially now, and (if) we have a chance to beat Brazil we will do our best and prepare our best game."

Goalscorer Hwang said: "I was convinced he would pass me the ball. It was an excellent pass and it made my job much easier."

"It was difficult waiting for the Uruguay-Ghana result but we proved we could make the knockout phase."

"As a Korean I am extremely proud and want to thank all the Korean fans in Korea."

This is a present for them. More than anything I want to say I am very, very proud," added Hwang, who missed the first two games in Qatar because of injury.

"Before the match Son said I would do something today -- 'we trust you'," said Hwang, who had come on in the 66th minute as Korea chased the goal they so badly needed. "It was an excellent pass and made my job much easier," he added.

Portugal coach Fernando Santos said: "We are somewhat upset. This served as a warning to our team."



Cinderella narrative.

To begin with, Cinderellas are rare. Moreover, the Cinderella story begins with an unexpected and short-lived triumph, is followed by a passage of great tribulation, and ends with enduring euphoria. As faithfully as Japan stuck to the script, I suppose that it was unfair to expect Iran and Saudi Arabia to do the same.

In a way, one Cinderella is enough though, especially when the players and fans conduct themselves with such dignity and class.

One of yesterday's compelling stories is the match between Uruguay and Ghana. It is a restaging of the famous encounter between the countries at the 2010 World Cup. In that game, forward Luis Suarez cleared the ball from the goal line with his hands, requiring Ghana to win by converting the ensuing penalty, which Asamoah Gyan had missed. The game then went to penalties, and Uruguay beat Ghana by a score of 4-2.

Suarez is no stranger to controversy, and many have harshly criticized his lack of ethics in doing what he did. When it comes to this particular incident, however, I am squarely on Suarez' side. He did what he had to do to help his country progress, even if that came at the expense of his personal participation and reputation. It was the Pavlovian response of a man driven by an intense desire to win. Far from being nefarious, I thought the act was heroic.

He had gone on to become an Anfield legend at Liverpool, something that excuses all manner of sins for me. Except perhaps the biting, as even a diehard Kopite like myself has trouble forgiving that. But not the handball. Never the handball.

Ghana exact a measure of vengeance

AFP, Doha

Ghana centre-back Daniel Amartey admitted that his team were determined that if they could not qualify for the World Cup knockout stage on Thursday, they would at least prevent Uruguay from doing so.

The bad blood between the two nations dates back 12 years to the infamous Luis Suarez handball that prevented a certain goal for Ghana but helped Uruguay go through to the World Cup semi-finals in South Africa.

Suarez was sent off but Asamoah Gyan missed the subsequent penalty and Uruguay triumphed in the shoot-out. Ghana were thus prevented from becoming the first African side to reach a World Cup semifinal.

And in a drama-filled Group H clash in Qatar on Friday, Uruguay triumphed 2-0 but both sides were eliminated due to South Korea's 2-1 win over Portugal. Late in the game, with Ghana chasing two goals to go through, Uruguay also realised they needed another one, creating a frantic end-to-end final 20 minutes.

"I just told my teammates that we need a goal now but they need a goal now so we have to defend for ourselves so that if we can't go, they don't go,"



Amartey said.

Asked if it was important to deny Uruguay a place in the last 16, Amartey said: "For me, yes."

"It was tough because you can see their centre back, everybody comes (forward). Uruguay needed one goal to go through and you can see we defend four against five or three against two but we managed to defend."

12 years after he had conspired to knock Ghana out from the World Cup quarterfinals in South Africa, Luis Suarez was left in tears at the end of Uruguay's tie against the Black Stars yesterday, giving their fans some consolation. Ghana crashed out of the 2022 World Cup with a 2-0 loss, but Uruguay fared no better, crashing out due to inferior goal difference.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Amartey denied the Ghanaians had revenge on their minds for what happened in 2010, pointing out that no-one in the current squad, except captain Andre Ayew, was even at the South Africa World Cup.

And he admitted the team did have some regrets after Ayew missed a penalty minutes before Uruguay opened the scoring in the first half.

Worst day of my career: Kimmich

AGENCIES, Doha

The German Football Association (DFB) will next week launch a round of talks to identify the reasons for their second consecutive World Cup flop, after the team were eliminated in the group stage again on Thursday night.

But for some, like captain Joshua Kimmich, no answer would be sufficient.

"It's the worst day of my career," the Bayern Munich midfielder said, his voice nearly trembling.

"When I came to the Germany national team, they were World Cup winners, and in Euro 2016 we made it to the semi-final. Then we messed up 2018, wrote off the Euros and failed to make it out the group stage again here."

"My aim, attitude and responsibility was to help the team progress. I find it hard to cope with the fact that I'll be linked with these failures. I'm a little afraid of falling into that hole."

The campaign questioning the 27-year-old's moral fibre had already started last week. Bild called him "Chefchen" after a 2-1 loss to Japan, which translates as "wannabe boss" and is the same disparaging term the paper had used to describe Bastian Schweinsteiger before the 2014 triumph.

"It's not just bad luck, it's also inability," Kimmich said. "Opponents don't have to do much to score goals against us."

After their latest exit, DFB President Bernd Neundorfer told reporters on Friday: "You can imagine that today there is deep disappointment. This elimination is extremely painful. But we have to look ahead and so we will lead a process on how to deal with this."

Liton captain for India ODIs

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced Liton Das as captain for the three-match ODI series against India following a groin injury to Tamim Iqbal, which ruled the left-handed opener out of the series.

Liton had been part of the leadership group for a while and was handed the Test vice-captaincy earlier in the year when Shakib Al Hasan was handed the Test captaincy.

Earlier, with Tamim ruled out of the ODI series on Wednesday, speculations arose regarding whether Shakib Al Hasan may be handed the ODI captaincy for the upcoming series.

The all-rounder did not participate in the practice session yesterday but arrived at Mirpur later and chatted with head coach Russell Domingo and spin coach Rangana Herath.

He had a look at the wickets and was seen in discussion with head curator Gaminini de Silva before leaving and his involvement gave the cue that he may not be handed the captaincy.

Liton's role and influence grew in the side following tremendous performances in all three formats and the BCB saw it fit to hand the right-handed batter the role for the important home series against India.

"Liton is one of the more experienced players in the side and has demonstrated leadership qualities. He has a sharp cricketing mind and reads the game well," BCB cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus was quoted as saying in a media release yesterday, adding that Tamim would be missed tremendously.