

THE LATERAL VIEW

All boils down to which England show up

IRESH ZAKER

I have to admit that one of the biggest surprises for me in this World Cup was finding out that Olivier Giroud is the highest scorer in the history of French men's football, but I guess it should not come as that much of a shock.

After all, the guy has apparently been around and immaculately coiffed roughly since the end of the second great war. It is just that, I have actually never met a fan of Les Bleus, or any of the many clubs that Giroud has represented, who wholeheartedly embraced the man's talent or contribution. Arsenal fans especially tend to recall him with snide disdain, but that could just be because of his move to cross-town rivals Chelsea.

I never imagined him scoring more goals than Henry, Platini, or Trezeguet, but with grudging respect, I tip my hat to France's latest greatest goal scorer, and Hugo Boss model, Olivier Giroud.

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What is also surprising to me is that England and France have only met four times in their long footballing past. No one has been keen on repeating Waterloo, I guess.

Nevertheless, tonight's encounter promises to be an exciting one. Both sides have great young talent who are setting the world alight now, and promise to get even better in future.

The one player I do not envy is Kyle Walker, who will bear the primary responsibility of containing Kylian Mbappe. One statistic is enough to underscore the enormity of his task: Mbappe has been clocked at 38 kilometers per hour when running at full speed. That is actually faster than Usain Bolt's average pace during his world record 100 meter sprint. Yes, you read that right!

I think though, the quality of the match will all boils down to which England show up. The one that went almost all the way at last year's Euros, or the one that can choke in quiet desperation in a uniquely English way. We have seen both in this World Cup, but I hope for the sake of the game that it is the good England that we see.



Brazil players fall to the floor in dismay after losing 4-2 in a penalty shootout against Croatia in a World Cup quarterfinal yesterday. The loss means the five-meant champions will at least equal their longest run without a World Cup trophy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

We share joy, we share sadness, says Tite

AFP, Doha

Brazil's team of superstars were left ruing what might have been and flexing every sinew of stoicism on Friday after a heart-breaking World Cup quarterfinal loss on penalties to Croatia which left them sobbing on the turf.

Minutes from the semifinals after Neymar had smashed the ball into the roof of the net at the end of a sublime move in extra-time, they allowed Croatia substitute Bruno Petkovic to fire home to level.

With Croatian keeper Dominik Livakovic rightly named man of the match for a gargantuan performance, penalties were the last thing five-times champions Brazil wanted, and so it proved as Livakovic saved the first penalty -- from Rodrygo -- and Marquinhos slammed a post to seal Brazil's fate.

"It's difficult. You have to lift your head," Brazil captain Thiago Silva said. "I'm very proud of the boys and what we've done, but unfortunately, it's part of football. When we lose something important that we had as a goal, it hurts a lot. But now it's time to try to lift my head and carry on. There's no other alternative. I'm a guy that every time I fall, I get up."

Midfielder Casemiro, who scored for the five-times champions in the shootout, said: "We are sad, we are sure that everyone in the group gave their best. We were upset by the way it happened. It was in our hands, and it slipped away," he added, before reflecting philosophically: "Now it's time to keep calm and life must go on."

With two Brazil penalty misses, Neymar never got to take a spot kick, but coach Tite defended the decision to put Neymar fifth.

"The fifth is the decisive one," he told reporters. "There is more pressure, and the players who are better prepared should take this one."

Tite, who had previously said he was stepping down at the end

of this tournament, railed at suggestions the Brazilians had been disorganised, telling one reporter: "Disorganised? It is because of you not because of me. I do not agree we were disorganized. We put high pressure at the front and tried to retain the game with Pedro.

"I respect the result. These things happen sometimes in football," he added, before defending his decision to return to the changing room and not stay on the pitch with his distraught players as they cried in the arena.

"When we also won different matches I did not stay on the field of play. Have you seen me celebrating in other instances? That's not my style. The players know how proud I am of their performance. Time will tell what my legacy is."

He also had some words for fans.

"We share joy, we share sadness. No one wanted to provide that joy more than us. We are feeling it, with our families, with ourselves and there is a beautiful generation emerging. We grow stronger in adversity. We are all responsible. It's hypocritical to say there's only one, don't label a hero or villain."

He also shot back at questions about Brazil's effectiveness and mental strength.

"In the last game, we had an effective first half, four goals. We came to this game and created a very large volume (of chances).

Maybe the precision wasn't enough, maybe it could have been more. There were 19 shots, if I'm not mistaken, with ten on goal.

"Croatia couldn't take a shot. They had control of the ball in their field and a little bit in ours. We saw a lot of difficult saves from their goalkeeper. So, we had control. Did it lack effectiveness? Maybe. But the goalkeeper was also good. This mental strength of ours against a strong team from Croatia, who didn't hurt us in the match, except for the deflected goal.

"Speaking in mental terms, when you go to the game, score in extra-time and the opponent ties with barely any time, it is difficult. It's hard to stay mentally strong in a situation like that."



'Beating Brazil may be the best feeling ever'

AFP, Doha

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic pledged "this is not the end" after his team sensationally dumped Brazil out of the World Cup on penalties at the quarter-final stage on Friday.

"This is a victory for Croatian people," said Dalic. "A great match. We eliminated the main favourites. This is Croatia -- pride, courage, faith and patriotism."

He said his team had risen to the challenge when under the most intense pressure.

"Croatia is the best when it's needed. When it matters, Croatia always succeeds. No one should underestimate us. This is not the end, we are moving on. We can achieve a lot."

Croatia defender Borna Sosa said beating Brazil was the "best feeling ever".

"There were a lot of emotions, a lot of happy tears there," Sosa said. "We are really showing many, many (good) results with our country. Nobody expects this, nobody believes in us, never, so that's why it's really emotional when you achieve things like this, when you beat Brazil.

"For me Brazil is football, and football is Brazil. To beat Brazil is maybe the best feeling ever."



"As to the penalty shootout we are fighters, we played our hearts out and that's it," said Croatia keeper Dominik Livakovic, who was named man of the match. "We are experienced and we are raised as fighters.

"We spare no effort giving our best, and that is our recipe for success."



Tigers target 'Banglawash'

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite the ongoing FIFA World Cup taking the centre stage in the sporting world but Bangladesh cricket team grabbed some limelight by playing quality cricket against India to seal the three-match ODI series with a game in hand.

The hosts are now eyeing to pull off a 'Banglawash' by winning the third and final game at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chattogram today.

Bangladesh had the tendency of being unable to pass the hurdle in crunch situations to eventually end on the losing side, especially against India over the years, but the two latest hard-fought victories, resulting to one-wicket and five-run wins in the first two ODIs, will surely aid the Tigers to regain that lost faith.

Liton Das and his troops, however, appear to be motivated to conclude the series on a further high as the hosts would want to stamp their authority at home in the fifty-over format, especially against a team like India.

"The job is never done. We don't take international matches lightly. This team have never beaten India 3-0, so that's a massive goal for us," Bangladesh fielding coach Shane McDermott told the media yesterday.

"When we don't win 3-0, we really pride ourselves on being hard to beat. We have come close against Pakistan in New Zealand.

"We came close to potentially making it to the T20 World Cup semi-finals. We have been competitive and we are in pressure moments more often than not. I know that after the series win, the boys have one eye on one more win in this ODI series," said McDermott.

All-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who scored his maiden hundred in the second ODI, remained the hero for the Tigers with the bat in both games, while Mahmudullah Riyad also played his part with a fifty. However, on the flip side, the Bangladesh team management will hope for a collective approach from the batting unit.

Back to positives, the Tigers bowling unit, especially their seamers, deserves a pat on the

back as the likes of Ebadot Hossain and Mustafizur Rahman remained instrumental in both the games, while Shakib Al Hasan led the spin department. It remains unlikely that the team management will tinker with the playing eleven for the third game despite having already secured the series.

India, on the other hand, are struggling with injuries. Skipper Rohit Sharma has already been ruled out from the third ODI and is also doubtful for the upcoming two-match Test series, deepening the concerns within their camp.

The visitors have been on the receiving end of heavy criticism from back home and, with the extra pressure of avoiding the whitewash, it won't be an easy task for head coach Rahul Dravid to form a settled playing eleven.

The pitch, however, can provide some confidence in the Indian camp as the Chattogram surface has historically favoured the batters with a higher scoring rate. Regardless of how the surface behaves, it is expected that yet another high-voltage drama awaits at the port city.

