

## France edged 'a superb England team'

REUTERS

Coach Didier Deschamps said France beat a good England side with their "heart and guts" on Saturday to move into the World Cup semi-finals and keep alive their hopes of back-to-back titles.

An Olivier Giroud header 12 minutes from time kept alive French hopes of becoming the first team in 60 years to retain the World Cup with a 2-1 win over England.

"It's fabulous, it was a big game," said Deschamps. "We played a superb England team who are strong technically and physically."

"It's brilliant for the players to be in the last four again. In these moments you kind of wish time could stop for a while."

"But tonight we're going to enjoy it. We got a bit lucky although we gave away two penalties. We kept our lead with our hearts and our guts."

As Kylian Mbappe was being muzzled by the England defence, it was France's old guard who took the defending champions



France players celebrate in locker room after their hard-fought 2-1 victory over England in the quarterfinal on Saturday, and Les Bleus now look to become the first team to retain their World Cup title since Brazil in 1962.

PHOTO: TWITTER

# Giroud exhibiting his mettle

## The French marksman leaves personal failure behind

ATIQUA ANAM FROM DOHA.

As the world heads into the final week of the Qatar 2022 with only four matches left, including an irrelevant one involving the third-place decider, the focus will be on whether Kylian Mbappe can lead the French to a consecutive World Cup title or whether Lionel Messi can end Argentina's 36-year wait for a third world title.

Croatia's Luka Modric, meanwhile, will be the cornerstone of his team's hopes of erasing heartbreaking memories of the final in Russia four years ago, and the likes of Hakim Ziyech and Achraf Hakimi will also share some of the spotlight, after guiding an unfancied Morocco side to their first ever World Cup semifinal – the first for an Arab and the first for an African nation.

There are others, though, who would just chip away with valuable contributions no matter how much credit they get for those contributions.

Ever since Mbappe exploded onto the scene with four goals in the 2018 World Cup in Russia, earning the Best Young Player Award, the then 20-year-old became the heart of France's attack. The PSG forward has continued to wreak havoc on opposition defences, already scoring five goals in the tournament so far.

However, whenever Mbappe has been found wanting, Olivier Giroud has stepped up and guided the team through. At the ripe age of 36, the AC Milan striker is shouldering as much responsibility as his younger teammate Mbappe is. Also, he is making most of the opportunity that was allowed him following the pre-tournament injury to the reigning Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema.

Giroud has already scored four goals in this tournament, making him a contender for the Golden Boot. And he has scored in crucial

times – a brace against Australia after France were a goal down, opening the scoring in Round of 16 win over Poland and then pouncing with the winner just as England were stilling Mbappe and the rest of France team.

In the meanwhile, he has overtaken Thierry Henry as the greatest goal-scorer ever for France with 53 goals in 118 matches. It is a far cry from the Giroud who failed to get a shot on target in Russia 2018 and then being relegated to the bench at Euro 2020.



The dip in form coincided with his club form as he moved to Chelsea after six fruitful years at the Emirates. However, the Frenchman found life difficult at Stamford Bridge and in 2021, moved to AC Milan where he found a new lease of life.

The Frenchman had begun scoring for fun again, netting crucial goals as Zlatan Ibrahimovic missed long spells of the season through injury. His brace in a 3-0 win over Sassuolo – a 10th and 11th goal in 29 appearances – guided the Rossoneri to their first Serie A title in a decade. Giroud was a champion

again and he was full of confidence, which he carried on to the start of the next season.

Only last week, France coach Didier Deschamps heaped praise on Giroud after the Milan striker equalled Henry's record, saying: "Four years ago he didn't score but he was still an important player. He has had difficult periods in his career. He has often been criticised but people are now seeing his quality."

Dubbed as the most complete striker of this tournament by his predecessor David Trezeguet, Giroud is slowly but decisively marching towards erasing the memories of personal failure from Russia 2018 while making sure he remains as focal as anyone else in the team in their march towards a second consecutive title.

## THE LATERAL VIEW

# Familial devotion trumps above all else

IRESH ZAKER



For me, the best thing flowed on the internet yesterday was footage of Morocco's Sofiane Boufal dancing on the pitch with his mother in celebration after his team's famous victory over Portugal in Saturday's quarter-final game. The short clip encapsulates so much of what is good about the sport in general, and this World Cup in particular.

The ongoing wholesome narrative of familial devotion that Moroccan players have represented has been brilliant throughout the tournament. A poignant reminder: the best of football comes down to our love for the sport, and for each other.

Then there is the theme of confounded predictions and defied expectations brilliantly continued by Boufal and company. Finally a blueprint, provided by the Atlas Lions, for how supposed underdogs can set up against technically superior opponents.

If Boufal gave us the good, then Bruno Fernandes and Pepe, for all their talent, definitely provided one of the low points of Saturday's proceedings. Their insistence that the Argentine on-field referee somehow tilted the field to favour Morocco, so that his home country might eventually have a softer opponent, was laughable; especially given the Portuguese coach Fernando Santos stated in no uncertain terms that the refereeing had little to do with his team's result.

While Bruno and Pepe cannot take the shine off Africa's greatest moment in history, they get absolutely no justification for trying as well.

Moving on, one has to feel for Harry Kane. Whatever one's opinion is of England and Tottenham, it is tough to argue that their captain is a class act. For him to bear the brunt of England's latest heartbreak seems karmically unfair. It was a cracker of a match, which shouldn't have been decided by a penalty miss by one of the sport's finest ambassadors.

Now, to the topic of football not coming home. The insistence that England is somehow football's home is completely ridiculous to me. I mean, they weren't even the first country to play the game. To claim that they have a greater ownership of the sport than other nations smacks of colonial hubris.

Football is a global sport, and we are all its owners. So, regardless of who win the World Cup, the trophy is coming home. Wembley is not the game's only address!

Finally, a word for this World Cup's latest fallen superstar, Cristiano Ronaldo. Alas, there was no last-moment magic from him; though he did come close with an assist, minutes from time.

However, his earnestness on the pitch, along with his heartbreak after the match, reminded us that in spite of his prima donna image, Ronaldo remains a footballer at heart.

A better end for him would have been good to see but, in the end, his tears weren't too steep a price to pay for the image of mother and son dancing together to celebrate their greatest moment of glory.



through to the World Cup semi-finals in a nerve-racking victory.

Goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, midfielder Antoine Griezmann and striker Olivier Giroud were all influential in a thrilling match, playing their roles close to perfection to see off an England team who were left thinking they deserved better.

Mbappe had stolen the limelight from him in France's 3-1 win over Poland, adding a spectacular late double to Giroud's opener, but on Saturday the 23-year-old happily took a back seat and was seen slapping his team mate's face in sheer excitement after the decisive goal.

It was, possibly, the biggest takeaway from France's victory. They can win when Mbappe does not shine or score, and his reaction to Giroud's goal proved Deschamps's point when he said he did not need to manage the Paris St Germain forward's ego.

France next face Morocco, with Mbappe set to battle it out with club team mate and great friend Achraf Hakimi, as Les Bleus look to become the first team to retain their World Cup title since Brazil in 1962.

No team have reached two consecutive finals since Brazil in 2002.

# Mominul's form 'a big worry' as Ctg Test approaches

SPORTS REPORTER

With Chattogram surface usually favouring batters and producing high-scoring affairs, the top-order not being in touch in the longer-version has been the primary cause for concern for Bangladesh ahead of the red-ball challenge against India beginning on Wednesday.

The Tigers approach the two-match Test series on the back of a 2-1 series victory in the ODIs against the visitors.

The opening slot has inexperienced Mahmudul Hasan Joy, who has a knack of coming up with runs when needed, but without the experienced Tamim Iqbal available for the first Test, it remains to be seen whether youngster Zakir Hasan's form with the bat during the two four-day games against India pays dividends.

Other than the aforementioned duo, Anamul Haque Bijoy and Najmul Hossain Shanto are two other options for the opening slot.

"Tamim not being there is a big setback for us since the top-order are not amongst the runs. It's a big concern for us," selector Habibul Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We took Zakir onboard since he scored a lot of runs in domestic matches and for the A team. We are treating him as an opener. But without Tamim, it will be a big

test due to openers' inexperience," he said about Zakir's chances.

It was learned that Tamim underwent a fitness test yesterday and, in two days' time, it will be revealed whether the opener can return for the second Test in Dhaka.

Mominul Haque's form has been the biggest worry for the Tigers in Test format. The number three batter has only reached double digits twice this year in 13 innings.

Averaging just over 13 in Tests this year, Mominul did not find runs bar the one fifty in the NCL recently. There are chances he may not make the playing eleven in Chattogram.

"Mominul is not amongst the runs. We consider him as our biggest name in Tests and him not scoring is a big worry. Can't really say whether Mominul will be in the playing eleven. We will see for a day or two before a decision is made," Bashar said.

Meanwhile, Mushfiqur Rahim turned up for an individual net session yesterday with spinner Taijul Islam at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. The ardent middle-order star has two tons in his last three innings in the international circuit. His technique and perseverance will go a long way to tackling India's spin prowess, led by Ravichandran Ashwin, and hence the Tigers will be hoping the veteran can rediscover form similar to when they played Sri Lanka at home.



Mushfiqur Rahim failed to make his presence felt in the three-match ODI series against India but the Tigers will hope that their batting stalwart would be able to prove that form is temporary but class is permanent in the two-match Test series, starting on December 14 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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