



Vinicius Junior celebrates with Bruno Guimaraes, Luiz Henrique and Raphinha after scoring the opening goal during Brazil's 6-2 thrashing of Panama in international friendly at the Estadio Maracana in Rio de Janeiro on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Brazil depth gives Ancelotti ‘positive doubts’

AGENCIES

Brazil's 6-2 friendly win over Panama at the Maracana yesterday gave Carlo Ancelotti plenty to be pleased about, but the master tactician admitted the performance has made his decisions ahead of the World Cup opener even more difficult.

While Vinicius Jr starred with a goal and an assist, Ancelotti focused on the impact of the players who came off the bench, saying their second-half display created new competition for places in the starting lineup.

"The second half of the game has given me more doubts. That's good, having positive doubts," Ancelotti said after the match.

Brazil took control early when Vinicius scored within two minutes after capitalising on a defensive mistake. Panama briefly equalised through Michael Murrillo's deflected free kick, but Vinicius helped restore Selecao's lead before halftime with a cross that Casemiro headed home.

Ancelotti made sweeping changes at the break, leaving only defender Leo Pereira on the field. The substitutes responded strongly as



Rayan, Lucas Paqueta, Igor Thiago and Danilo all got on the scoresheet, turning a competitive contest into a comfortable victory.

"It was an important performance for the team; the players who came on showed quality and that they can compete," Ancelotti said, suggesting several players improved their chances of starting against Morocco in Brazil's World Cup opener.

Despite the six goals, the coach identified areas that still need improvement. Ancelotti said Brazil's high pressing game, which the team attempted to implement in the first half, did not work as effectively as planned.

"High pressing is something we wanted

to implement in the first half," he said. "The truth is, when pressing isn't working, you need to recover the ball more quickly."

He also acknowledged that Brazil lacked compactness at times and stressed the importance of improving defensive organisation. According to the Italian coach, a lower defensive block can sometimes help the team become more effective on the counterattack.

Ancelotti also confirmed that his lineup for the World Cup remains undecided, noting that key players were unavailable. Neymar is recovering from a calf injury, while Marquinhos, Gabriel Magalhães and Gabriel Martinelli were absent following the Champions League final. "I don't have the team 100% finalised. There are still players missing."

With less than two weeks until Brazil face Morocco, Ancelotti said the coming days will be important for evaluating fitness levels and finalizing his plans. "The doubt is choosing the best lineup for the first game. What is certain is that we have a very strong team."

Ochoa set for record 6th WC outing

AFP, Mexico City

Mexico star Guillermo Ochoa is set to become the first goalkeeper to appear in six World Cup finals after being named in the co-hosts' squad.

The 40-year-old, who plays for Cypriot outfit AEL Limassol, joins Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal and Argentina's Lionel Messi in performing for the sixth time at the quadrennial football festival.

However, while Ronaldo and Messi are automatic first choices, Ochoa is unlikely to have much game time as he has dropped down the pecking order in recent years.

Ochoa, whose first World Cup was in Germany 2006, headlines the squad along with forwards Raul Jimenez and Santiago Gimenez.

WORLD CUP worries grow for Tigresses

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh's tune-up for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup is not going according to plan after consecutive defeats to Scotland and the Netherlands in the ongoing tri-nation series in Edinburgh, raising serious concerns about their prospects with Australia, South Africa and India awaiting in the group stage.

Before arriving in Scotland, the Tigresses held a 7-0 record against Scotland across white-ball formats and had won all three previous T20Is against the Netherlands. Yet, within less than 24 hours, those unbeaten records were wiped out by back-to-back defeats.

Bangladesh's ability to consistently post big totals, chase 150-plus targets have long been far from convincing. Continuing the trend, they managed only 133 for five against Scotland and then fell eight runs short of a 163-run chase.

In both matches, skipper Nigar Sultana Joty stood out with scores of 46 not out off 39 balls and 77 off 51 deliveries. However, the rest of the batting unit failed to make significant contributions, while the bowlers are still adapting to the conditions and wickets.



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Although batting coach Nasiruddin Faruque refused to press the panic button too early, he admitted the defeats served as a "very good learning outcome, or an eye-opener."

"Ultimately, the opening stand is vital because handling the new ball is key, since pace bowlers do not get as much help later. You have to balance understanding the conditions with the need to score runs," Faruque told The Daily Star on Monday, stressing the importance of making better starts in the powerplay.

"Dealing with the new ball is crucial in these swinging conditions. They are trying [to score big in Powerplay], but while we scored 27 or 28 in the first match, we reached 36 yesterday [Sunday]. If that goes up to 45 or 50, those extra 15 runs would help the middle order."

He also pointed to the strong winds and low temperatures at the Grange Cricket Club Ground in Edinburgh as significant factors in both matches.

"The wind is a factor in the open field where the matches are taking place. However, during the World Cup, the stadium might block it more. It is important for the players to realise this. Death-over bowling and the powerplay are the most critical phases here. We need to minimise boundaries while bowling and maximise it while batting."

Joty and teammates will have the opportunity to rectify their mistakes soon, as they face Scotland on Tuesday before concluding the tournament against the Netherlands on June 4.

With less than two weeks left before their World Cup opener against the Netherlands on June 14 in Birmingham, the Tigresses know they have little time left to address their shortcomings.

World champions touch down in Kansas

STAR SPORTS DESK

The drums are beating and the countdown is on. As the world's biggest sporting spectacle edges ever closer, defending champions Argentina have officially landed in Kansas City, USA, where they will set up camp for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Drawn in Group J alongside Algeria, Austria and Jordan, the Albiceleste begin their title defence against Algeria at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas on June 16.

While Lionel Messi and Rodrigo De Paul arrived separately on a chartered

jet, most of the squad flew in aboard Aerolineas Argentinas, the country's state-owned airline. After covering more than 5,500 miles from Ezeiza International Airport, the flight landed in Missouri yesterday.

The flight carried the number 1978 -- a tribute to Argentina's first World



Cup triumph.

Messi may not have been on board, but his presence was impossible to miss. His iconic No. 10 adorned the tail against the national team's famous blue-and-white stripes, while three gold stars beside the aircraft's door symbolised the nation's three World Cup crowns.

Argentina are the first of four teams to establish a World Cup base in the Kansas City metro area. The Netherlands, England and Algeria, who will stay at the University of Kansas in nearby Lawrence, are due later this week.

Messi and company will be based at the Origin Hotel near downtown Kansas City. According to reports, fences have been erected around the property and security has been significantly increased ahead of the team's arrival. Inside, the hotel has been transformed into an Albiceleste outpost, with signs, posters and giant images of Argentina's biggest stars adorning the building.

Bangladesh must rediscover THE HUNGER

ANISUR RAHMAN FROM GOA

Bangladesh's morale-shattering 3-0 defeat to arch-rivals India in the SAFF Women's Championship has triggered widespread debate about what went wrong with the defending champions.

From allegations of internal divisions within the squad and external influences to questions over player management, several theories have surfaced in the aftermath of the loss.

However, beyond all the speculation lies a more uncomfortable truth: Bangladesh simply did not display the hunger, intensity or determination expected in a match of such magnitude.

The defeat was particularly surprising given the team's impressive performances just two months ago. During the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia, Bangladesh earned widespread praise for their spirited displays against Asian giants China and North Korea.

Yet in Goa, the same side has looked a shadow of itself. Despite benefiting from a 15-day training camp and two practice matches in Thailand before the tournament,

Bangladesh have struggled to function as a cohesive unit. Against India, who rested six experienced players including their regular captain, the defending champions were second best in almost every department.



The reaction after the match has also raised concerns. Head coach Peter Butler questioned the commitment of certain players, although he refrained from naming anyone. A source within the team revealed that only a handful of players appeared deeply affected by the defeat, while a couple were seen in tears in the dressing room.

The more pressing issue appears to be

mental rather than physical. Bangladesh looked devoid of the belief, aggression and collective spirit that had become trademarks of their recent success.

The semifinal against Nepal now presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Butler has reportedly spoken individually with each player in an effort to restore confidence and unity within the squad. That may prove more important than any tactical adjustment.

Nevertheless, the coach may also need to reassess his team selection. The absence of experienced players such as Afeida Khandaker, Sheuli Azim, injured defender Nabiran Khatun and midfielder Umehla Marma was noticeable against India. Bangladesh's midfield lacked control while the defence appeared vulnerable under pressure.

If Bangladesh are to keep their title defence alive, they must quickly rediscover the identity that earned admiration against Asia's elite. More than tactics or preparation, it is their mentality, togetherness and fighting spirit that will determine whether they can bounce back against Nepal.

Fonseca fire hits Paris

STAR SPORTS DESK

The late-night chill was still settling over Court Philippe-Chatrier when Joao Fonseca finally allowed himself a smile. It was 12:27am on Monday in Paris, almost four hours after the first ball had been struck, and the teenager had just finished off Casper Ruud to seal one of the defining victories of his young career.

Gustavo Kuerten, the last Brazilian man to dominate Roland Garros, watched on from the players' box as Fonseca moved into his first Grand Slam quarter-final with a 7-5, 7-6 (10/8), 5-7, 6-2 win.

Only three Brazilian men before him have reached the French Open quarterfinals in the Open era. At 19, Fonseca has done so in a tournament already rich in milestones, including two teenagers reaching a Grand Slam last eight for only the fifth time in 40 years.

Ruud, a two-time finalist and one of the tour's most reliable clay-court operators, was expected to test the Brazilian's rising reputation. Instead, he was dragged into Fonseca's relentless storm -- 51 winners,

sustained aggression, and a refusal to blink in decisive moments.

Fonseca's run in Paris has been defined as much by resilience as brilliance. He came from two sets down against Dino Prizmic in the second round, before following it with a similar escape act over Novak Djokovic that confirmed his arrival on the sport's biggest stage.

Next comes Jakub Mensik -- another young name in a draw beginning to feel like a generational shift. But Fonseca is already operating in a different space, with opponents now preparing for him in detail.

He first emerged on the wider radar with a Next Gen ATP Finals title in 2024, before shocking Andrey Rublev on Grand Slam debut at the 2025 Australian Open. Carlos Alcaraz had once predicted he would soon "join the sport's elite".

For now, Fonseca frames it simply: "Just trying to be happy, trying to hit winners, trying to be entertaining."

But in Paris, the message is already louder than the words.

