



PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS

BRAZIL seek reset against Haiti

STAR SPORTS DESK

Brazil face Haiti on Saturday morning, needing a World Cup reset rather than another misty-eyed reminder of their glittering past, after a disappointing Group C draw with Morocco left Carlo Ancelotti's side bruised, questioned, and with little room for another flop. A moment of brilliance from Vinicius Junior rescued Brazil in their opener, but the five-time champions will need more cohesion and attacking intent against underdogs Haiti at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia -- especially from Raphinha, who is yet to replicate his club form in the tournament.

- Brazil are currently third in Group C, boasting one point from one match, while Haiti are at the bottom of the table, having lost their opening game of the tournament to Scotland.
- Brazil and Haiti have locked horns on three previous occasions, with the former having won all three games, scoring 17 times and conceding only once.
- The only competitive meeting between Brazil and Haiti came in the group stage of the 2016 Copa America, and it ended in a thumping 7-1 win for the five-time world champions.



- Brazil's starting XI against Morocco received a lot of criticism, and Ancelotti could make a few changes for this game. Forward Igor Thiago, who failed to impress, could make way for teenage sensation Endrick, who remained as an unused substitute in the opener.
- Another change may see Lucas Paqueta replaced by Matheus Cunha, though the latter could also lead the line.
- Ancelotti has another bold call to make in midfield. While Bruno Guimaraes is certain to start, Casemiro struggled against Morocco. Fabinho came on to replace him at half-time, and may start ahead of him alongside Guimaraes.
- Still recovering from a calf injury, Neymar returned to training for Brazil recently but remains unlikely to feature in the remaining group fixtures.

High-flying USA face impressive Australia

AGENCIES

Two of the early pace-setters in Group D meet at the Seattle Stadium on Saturday as the USA and Australia look to maintain their perfect starts and take a major step towards the knockout stage of the ongoing FIFA World Cup.

Both sides arrive with confidence soaring after impressive opening-day victories. Co-hosts USA dismantled Paraguay 4-1 in Los Angeles, while Tony Popovic's men absorbed relentless pressure to upset Turkey 2-0.

The match sets up a fascinating contrast in styles. Mauricio Pochettino's USA will look to dominate the ball and replicate the high-octane attacking rhythm that tore Paraguay apart.

However, Australia has already proven they are entirely comfortable playing without the ball. Despite holding just 28.3% possession against Turkey, they were ruthlessly efficient on the counter-attack.

The USA defense must remain hyper-vigilant to prevent the Socceroos from exposing them on the break.

Individual duels throughout the pitch will decide who claims supremacy in the clash. Among them is the heavyweight battle between Folarin Balogun and Harry Souttar. Balogun, brimming with confidence after his debut brace, relies on sharp, pocket-picking movement. He will face a grueling physical test against Souttar, whose aerial dominance and immense clearance rate make him a formidable barrier in the box.

On the flip side, a fascinating generational battle will unfold when Australia's explosive 20-year-old phenom, Nestory Irankunda, drives at the veteran US skipper, Tim Ream. While Irankunda possesses the raw, terrifying pace to stretch the American backline on the break, the 38-year-old Ream counterbalances that with elite positioning and masterful distribution [23 line-breaking passes in their opener]. Ream's ability to cut off the supply line to Irankunda before the youngster can hit top gear will be vital.

The tactical balance shifts significantly depending on Christian Pulisic's fitness.

If the talismanic winger is sidelined by his recent knock, the creative burden shifts heavily to Giovanni Reyna. Reyna will be tasked with finding the inventive, unlocking passes needed to beat an in-form Patrick Beach in the Socceroos' goal.



Morocco's new wave meets Scotland's survival bid

AGENCIES

Morocco, surprise World Cup semi-finalists four years ago, arrive in Boston tonight (Staruday 4am, Bangladesh time) shaping the narrative of Group C, having opened with a confident 1-1 draw against five-time champions Brazil.

Under coach Mohamed Ouahbi, appointed only three months ago after guiding their Under-20s to world success, the North Africans have combined youthful energy with tactical discipline to look an even more efficient unit than the side that stunned Belgium, Spain and Portugal on their run to the last four in Qatar.

Eighteen-year-old midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi has already emerged as a breakout figure, gliding through his first competitive international against Brazil with composure and intelligence that belied his age, reinforcing Morocco's midfield control.

Scotland, meanwhile, arrive in Boston buoyed by a long-awaited opening win over Haiti -- their first



World Cup victory in 36 years -- yet the performance was scrappy and exposed the strain of expectation.

Both sides will be targeting victory to effectively book their place in the Round of 32, with a

draw unlikely to prove damaging. However, Scotland will be especially keen to avoid defeat, as it might leave them needing a must-win result against Brazil on the final matchday to progress.



'TEAM NEEDS TO SCORE, NOT YOU'

Cristiano Ronaldo's record-equalling sixth World Cup appearance began not with celebration, but with renewed questions over his role in the Portugal side after a disappointing 1-1 draw against DR Congo in their Group K opener on Wednesday. According to former France striker Thierry Henry, Ronaldo portrayed an individual desire to score, derailing the team mentality. "The team needs to score, it's not you who needs to score," Henry said during analysis on FOX Sports.

****Read full story on The Daily Star's website**

A Portugal supporter poses with a banner depicting forward Cristiano Ronaldo as a Saint during the Group K match between Portugal and the DR Congo on Wednesday. Ronaldo, however, failed to make any impact as Portugal were held 1-1 in that game. The fans would hope for the inspirational forward to step up soon and forge a turnaround for his side.

PHOTO: AFP



Crucial battle for survival as Turkiye face Paraguay

STAR SPORTS DESK

Group D action continues as Turkiye face Paraguay in San Francisco after both sides suffered defeats in their opening matches. Sitting behind co-hosts USA and Australia in the standings, both teams will look to revive their hopes of reaching the knockout stage as they meet for the first time in a competitive fixture.

Turkiye enter under pressure despite dominating possession and registering 30 shots in their 2-0 loss to Australia. Vincenzo Montella's side have now lost nine of their last 13 matches at major tournaments. Once considered pre-tournament dark horses after reaching the Euro 2024 quarterfinals, the Crescent Stars must respond quickly, with anything less than three points potentially spelling an early exit from their first World Cup since 2002.

Paraguay are also searching for answers after a 4-1 defeat to the USA. Gustavo Alfaro's side endured a poor first half but improved after the break, with Mauricio's goal -- set up by Julio Enciso -- offering brief hope. They have now won just one of their last nine World Cup openers.

With both sides boasting attacking talent but defensive flaws, this promises an intense survival battle.

Spin to dictate terms again?

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh enter Friday's do-or-die second T20I against Australia at the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram needing a victory to level the series. Following a four-wicket defeat in the opener, attention turns to whether skipper Litton Das will return to bolster a struggling batting unit. It will also remain to be seen whether Tigers will select speedsters Taskin Ahmed or Nahid Rana in spin-conducive conditions.

In the first match, Bangladesh's batters failed to apply themselves as Australia's spinners dictated terms, claiming all nine wickets in a T20I innings for the first time. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa and debutant Joel Davies took three wickets each, whilst Matt Renshaw claimed two.

Seeking to replicate their recent improved batting template from the New Zealand series in Chattogram, Bangladesh need more from openers Saif Hassan and Tanzid Tamim, who both squandered decent starts last time out. If Litton remains absent, Soumya Sarkar will get the nod again but must adapt after falling into Australia's boundary trap against the wind.

In-form batsman Tawhid Hridoy bears the responsibility of anchoring and accelerating the innings, provided the top order restrains the urge to recklessly hunt big shots on a 160-170 par pitch.

With the ball, debutant Abdul Gaffar Saqlain's variations could prove vital after his two-wicket haul.

Meanwhile, spinners Rishad Hossain and Mahedi Hasan must exploit the Chattogram conditions to replicate Australia's success and draw the hosts level.