

Queiroz Steers Iran to New Heights

SARANSK, Russia (Reuters) – Iran coach Carlos Queiroz has taken three different nations to the World Cup finals but in his current role, he has confronted problems beyond the realm of sports.

The Mozambique-born Portuguese has been hailed as “brilliant” and “difficult”. And he does not mince words himself when talking about others.

Iran’s match against Portugal – whom Queiroz managed in the 2010 World Cup – in Saransk on Monday could be another marker in his career.

Handed a tough Group B featuring heavyweights Spain and Portugal as well as Morocco, Iran played heroically against Spain on June 15 and only succumbed to a late goal.

If they summon up a similar performance against Portugal, they will make the knockout rounds.

Queiroz has built Iran into an Asian powerhouse in the face of adversity. The talent pool is limited and he has made a point of bringing in players from the Iranian diaspora.

The geopolitical challenges are also formidable.

Iran has suffered years of international sanctions.

Friendlies have been hard to come by. Just before the tournament Nike even declined to supply boots to the team over concern this was breach of U.S.



Iran coach Carlos Queiroz

sanctions.

Many have wondered why Queiroz, who enjoyed glory days as assistant manager to Alex Ferguson in two spells at Manchester United, would have taken the job in the first place.

But he has stuck at it for seven years, despite a few walk-outs and reconciliations, and this is the second time in a row he has taken Iran to the World Cup finals.

The team impressed in Brazil 2014 with a dogged display against Argentina, only going down to a late Lionel Messi goal.

He also stewarded South Africa to the tournament in 2002, but left in a dispute before the finals, and Portugal in 2010.

The latter campaign ended in the last 16 and he lost his job.

But the thought of facing his native country’s national side – the current European champions – and a Cristiano Ronaldo who has bagged four goals in two games, does not appear to phase him.

“Portugal have a national side called Cristiano Ronaldo and a group of players who run after him,” he has said.

Queiroz has spent much of his life on the periphery of Portugal, anyway. Born in Mozambique in 1953, he only moved to Portugal when the Carnation Revolution in 1974 led to the collapse of its colonies. He worked in the Middle East, the United States and Japan before

coaching South Africa.

It was at Manchester United where he really started to draw attention as Ferguson’s confidante. He had two spells there from 2002. He was tempted away by Real Madrid in 2003. However, that venture did not work out and he returned to Manchester after 10 months and stayed for four years.

“Carlos Queiroz was brilliant. Just brilliant. Outstanding. An intelligent, meticulous man. He was good for me. He was a Rottweiler. He was the closest you could be to being the Manchester United manager without actually holding the title,” Ferguson said in his autobiography.

He was Ferguson’s own choice to succeed him. But there were prickly relations with players, notably Roy Keane.

“In his second spell when he came back, for some reason towards the end of my time I found him to be really disrespectful towards me so we had a bit of fallout,” Keane said on Britain’s ITV this week. “He questioned my loyalty and I told him where to go.

“And one of my big regrets is that I probably should have ripped his head off – but he’s an excellent coach and he’s doing an excellent job, it has to be said.”

Iran Beat South Korea in FIVB Volleyball Nations League



The photo shows a view of the match between Iran (players in white) and South Korea at the 2018 FIVB Volleyball Men’s Nations League at the Azadi Indoor Stadium, western Tehran, Iran, on June 22, 2018.

TEHRAN (Press TV) - The national Iranian men’s volleyball team has upset South Korea to achieve its first victory at the fifth week of the 2018 Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) Volleyball Men’s Nations League.

The Iranian squad defeated the South Korea side 3-1 (27-25, 23-25, 25-22 and 25-23) at the end of a Pool 19 match played at the Azadi Indoor Stadium in western Tehran.

It was just a high-octane affair with both sides playing aggressively with little at stake. Iran’s firepower and skill, though, proved too much for South Korea.

The hosts fought relentlessly throughout and showcased a slew of astounding defensive efforts. They got

the first set 27-25.

South Korea started the second quickly scoring five of the first seven points. However, Iran’s firepower started to take hold and prove too much for their agile opponents.

With constant pressure, South Koreans dominated Iran’s serves and impressively counterattacked to claim the tight second set 25-23, and level proceedings.

Iran started the third set, in contrast to the previous ones, and Milad Ebadipour landed a couple of brutal blows to ensure the hosts claimed the crucial period by 25 points to 22.

Iranian volleyball players were made to work for their victory, and finally closed the fourth set 25-23.

Switzerland Secures 1-2 Victory Against Serbia in 90th Minute



Switzerland strike late to sink Serbia 2-1

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Switzerland’s 2-1 World Cup win over Serbia was given a mixed reaction by Swiss media who applauded their rousing second-half comeback but criticized celebrations by scorers Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri which appeared to have political overtones.

After falling behind in the fifth minute, Switzerland defied a cauldron-like atmosphere created by fervent Serbian supporters as they hit back with a thunderbolt from Xhaka and a last-minute breakaway goal from Shaqiri.

Both players, who are ethnic Albanians and of Kosovar heritage, celebrated with a gesture which appeared to imitate the eagle displayed on Albania’s flag.

Serbia refuses to recognize the independence of its former province Kosovo, whose 1.8 million people are mostly ethnic Albanians, which broke away 10 years ago.

Second-generation immigrants from the Balkans have played a huge part in transforming the Swiss national side over the past 10 years.

Players such as Valon Behrami -- playing at his fourth World Cup -- Xhaka and Shaqiri have brought both raw talent and passion to a team which was not noted for either in the past.

But their efforts on Friday got a mixed reaction from the Swiss media, which showered praise on their performance but criticized their celebrations.

Maradona: Argentina Never Ever Had a ‘No-Fighting Spirit’

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Argentina’s 0-3 loss to Croatia in their second game of the 2018 FIFA World Cup has been a bitter pill to swallow for many, but none more so than the legend himself, Diego Maradona.

The former footballer, who led Argentina to World Cup glory in 1986, was left utterly disappointed following what transpired during the Group D match. Croatia ran roughshod over Lionel Messi’s Argentina through goals from Ante Rebic, Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic to leave them on the brink of World Cup exit.

Maradona, who watched from the stands in stunned disbelief, writing a column for Saturday’s TOI, said that it was upsetting to see Argentina play the way they did. However, Nigeria’s 2-0 win over Iceland on Friday has given the team some hope, and they will now need to win their last group encounter against Nigeria whichever way possible on Tuesday to stay alive.

“Russia 2018 has been a rude awakening for Argentina, who are in deep trouble following the embarrassing defeat against Croatia. Even if they win their last match, they will be at the mercy of others,” Maradona said.

“I had said that the first two games, especially the second, would be difficult for this Argentina. European opposition, state of the team, questionable strategy and over-reliance on Messi – there were many reasons. Somewhere in my heart, I was still hoping something would happen. Sitting there and watching

the dream crumble was sad. To see the addition of ‘no fighting spirit’ makes it worse.”

The defeat leaves the Argentines facing an ignominious repeat of their 2002 campaign when they also went out at the group stage after being tipped as possible World Cup winners.

“In 2002, we had failed to qualify from the group, but not surrender like we did in Thursday’s 0-3 defeat. I know fingers will be pointed at Leo and his inability to inspire the team. He was subdued, not brilliant, as we expect him to be all the time. Missing the penalty proved costly against Iceland. Against Croatia, he could not make an impact. He tried, yet his moment never came. It was disappointing. But football is not a one-man game. It never was, even when I led Argentina to triumph in 1986. One of the reasons why Leo was ineffective was the lack of quality around him,” Maradona pointed out.

And throughout it all Lionel Messi, arguably the world’s best player, remained a peripheral and largely ponderous figure, briefly flashing to life on too few occasions. And while all the attention after the defeat will definitely focus on Argentina and their star striker, it was also the result of a fine performance by Croatia.

“Giving credit to Croatia, we can ask what our team was doing. Why didn’t we have a settled combination two matches into the World Cup? Why was there no resistance in the midfield? Why did the defense look shaky every



time the ball came near the penalty box? What was the goalkeeper thinking when he went for a chip instead of clearing the ball? There are no satisfactory answers,” added Maradona.

“It’s easy to blame the star when the chips are down. Before that, it’s important to look at the bigger picture.

Argentina need a big win and favorable results in other matches because they have failed as a team. It’s a collective failure and blaming Leo would be diverting attention from issues that need to be addressed. We will come to those after the last group game against Nigeria.”

World Cup Heading for Record Number of Penalties

SAMARA, Russia (Reuters) - One of the central themes from the early stages of the World Cup in Russia is the number of penalties being awarded, many following the intervention of video assistant referees (VARs).

Gylfi Sigurdsson’s missed penalty in Iceland’s 2-0 loss to Nigeria on Friday was the 12th of the

tournament in the first 26 matches, of which nine were scored.

In Brazil four years ago, there were only 13 penalties in the entire tournament. The World Cup record, set in 2002, stands at 18.

The role of VAR goes a long way to explaining this trend, with six penalties so far being awarded following a video review.

A penalty was also disallowed in Brazil’s win over Costa Rica on Friday after VAR deemed there not to have been a foul on Neymar.

FIFA’s director of refereeing, Massimo Busacca, said before the tournament that VAR would not be perfect at the tournament and so it has proved, with inconsistency in decision making frustrating teams

and fans alike.

Both Brazil and England felt that VAR should have been used to review penalty decisions in their opening fixtures, while Australia coach Bert van Marwijk was left furious with the role the system played in his team’s loss to France.

However, FIFA remain convinced that VAR has been a success.

Federer Beats Kudla to Reach 12th Halle Final

HALLE WESTFALEN, Germany (AFP) - Roger Federer booked his 12th career final at the ATP Halle grass tournament on Saturday, beating qualifier Denis Kudla 7-6 (7/1), 7-5.

The Swiss needs to win the title on Sunday - it would be his tenth at the event - to remain world number one heading into Wimbledon.

He will face either Spanish fourth seed Roberto Bautista Agut or Croatian Borna Coric.

Federer’s win was his 20th in a row on grass, dating to June, 2017.

Federer needed just under 90 minutes to get the job done and hold off the 109th-ranked Kudla, who had not lost a set going into the semi-final.

Federer is back in a familiar spot in Halle, which models its Centre court after its namesake at the All England club, as he works to fine-tune with a Wimbledon title defence starting a week from Monday.

The 36-year-old has reached the final four in each of his last 14 Halle appearances.

Taming Kudla was no easy task, with Federer losing a break after taking an early 2-0 lead.

The first set went into a tiebreaker where the 20-time Grand Slam winner was able to step his game up a gear, racing to 6-0 in the decider and taking it two points later with his seventh ace.

The top-seeded Swiss kept the pressure on Kudla in the second, with the qualifier saving break points



Roger Federer celebrates after he beats Denis Kudla during their semi final match at the Gerry Weber Open ATP tennis tournament in Halle, Germany.

before Federer salvaged three of his own to square the set at four games apiece, sealing his effort with an ace, one of his dozen in the match

Federer gained the crucial service break for a 6-5 lead as Kudla returned long, and the Swiss closed out the victory a game later on the first of two match points.

Federer skipped the clay campaign to concentrate on the grass, and after consecutive tournaments on the lawns - he won the Stuttgart title last week - plans a light week of training and rest in London ahead of Wimbledon.