



Belgium dump **US** out of World Cup after Balogun row

Benched stars prove no obstacle as clinical Belgium march into the quarter-finals

● **Belgium win 4-1**

● **Charles De Ketelaere score two early goals**

● **Tillman scores for United States**

● **Lukaku adds late fourth goal**

● **Spain await in quarter-finals**

AFP | Seattle

Belgium dumped the United States out of their own World Cup, as Charles De Ketelaere's brace secured a 4-1 win that was eclipsed by the bitter row over Folarin Balogun's ban.

Victory means the Belgians face Spain in the quarter-finals, while the US follow co-hosts Canada and Mexico out of the tournament with elimination in the round of 16 after a thoroughly flat performance.

All attention pre-game had been on Balogun's place in the US starting lineup, after US President Donald Trump asked FIFA to review the striker's one-game suspension for a red card, and the governing body controversially obliged.

But Belgium's XI had a few sur-

prises of its own, with Kevin De Bruyne and Jeremy Doku among the heavyweights benched. And coach Rudi Garcia's gambit proved inspired, with De Ketelaere grabbing an early goal to puncture the feel-good vibes in Seattle.

Malik Tillman grabbed one back from a free kick, but De Ketelaere swiftly restored Belgium's lead. A catastrophic piece of goalkeeping by Matt Freese and a late Romelu Lukaku goal left the Americans dead and buried.

FIFA's move to suspend Balogun's ban after he was sent off in the previous round against Bosnia and Herzegovina has been slammed by football fans, pundits and players around the world, but there were no such misgivings among the Seattle crowd.

A colossal roar greeted the stadium announcement of Balogun's name in the starting XI, vastly dwarfing the cheers even for US talisman Christian Pulisic.

The "USA" thunderclap then echoed around the stadium, utterly drowning out a small corner of chanting Belgium fans in the opening minutes.

But the American party was

swiftly silenced. The majority of 67,000 fans fell silent in the ninth minute as De Ketelaere scored, easily tapping home from close range after Nicolas Raskin's cross evaded some lax defending.

It was the first time the Americans had conceded the opener all World Cup. With the atmosphere deflated, no immediate fightback was visible on the pitch either. The midfield was outgunned and the defense looked nervous.

On the half-hour mark, Balogun drew a foul on the edge of the area and whipped the crowd back to life. He waved his arms frantically as Malik Tillman -- fresh from scoring a free kick against Bosnia -- lined up the ball.

Tillman's shot deflected off the Belgian wall and span into the net, and the stadium shook.

Dream over

But the joy was again short-lived. In the 33rd minute, De Ketelaere leapt up to meet Leandro Trossard's cross and comfortably out-jumped an off-balance Tim Ream to score his second.

The US inched back into the game as the first half closed out, with Balogun blasting over from a long Tillman throw, then nar-

Belgium boosted by furore: Tielemans

Belgium captain Youri Tielemans revealed his team had been fired up by the uproar surrounding Folarin Balogun.

Tielemans said Belgium's players had held a team meeting after Balogun's shock FIFA reprieve and had vowed to make a statement against the World Cup co-hosts.

"Let's be honest: we held a

meeting when we heard the news," Tielemans said of the Balogun controversy.

"We told ourselves we needed to do our talking on the pitch. That's what we did today. I'm very proud of the team," the Aston Villa midfielder told Belgium's RTBF broadcaster.

Tielemans' teammates echoed their captain's words.

Americans resumed play with more intensity, pushing higher up the pitch.

But self-inflicted disaster struck in the 57th minute. Freese came out to collect a Belgium long ball, turned to evade the charging De Ketelaere, but then hesitated with his pass.

De Ketelaere jabbed the ball to Hans Vanaken, who made no mistake with an open goal from long range.

Pulisic limped off with an injury minutes later, and with him went the US dreams of reaching a first World Cup quarter-final since 2002.

His replacement, Sebastian Berhalter, flashed an ambitious shot narrowly wide in the 79th minute, and Balogun had a close-range effort saved soon after.

But Chris Richards handed the ball to Lukaku in stoppage time, and the veteran striker did not hesitate to seal the rout.



The pre-match spotlight focused on Folarin Balogun after FIFA controversially overturned his one-match suspension following intervention from US President Donald Trump

rowly failing to catch a long ball, again from the Bayer Leverkusen midfielder.

US coach Mauricio Pochettino switched formation at half-time, sending Gio Reyna into the number 10 role and pushing Weston McKennie out to the right. The

Close to tears and on his own as Ronaldo's dream ends

● **Ronaldo's World Cup campaign ends**

● **Veteran star shows limited impact**

AFP | Arlington

Cristiano Ronaldo labored through his last World Cup match Monday as the dream of winning the biggest prize of all ended in a 1-0 defeat to Spain and left him fighting back tears.

The 41-year-old Portugal captain and one of the best players of all time says he will now go away and think about what comes next.

He has won it all in a trophy-laden career at some of Europe's biggest clubs, and tasted European glory with his country.

But among his bulging trophy cabinet there will be no World Cup winners medal, and he was largely ineffectual as he huffed and puffed through a disappointing last-16 clash in Texas.

Cristiano Ronaldo



"That's football, that's the life of a footballer," he said, struggling to raise his voice above the crushing disappointment. "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, and you have to move on."

Ronaldo, the leading scorer in the history of men's international football, said he would leave the World Cup stage "with a clear conscience".

"The truth is, the biggest title I won with the national team was in 2016 (Euros), which for me is just as significant as a World Cup, honestly," he said.

Ronaldo's best World Cup will always remain the semi-finals 20 years ago.

His display in a disappointing



Despite the defeat, Ronaldo said winning Euro 2016 with Portugal was "just as significant as a World Cup" in his eyes

game summed up what the veteran talisman has become in recent years -- a shadow of the player that one struck fear into opponents.

He had three attempts at goal and was a peripheral figure playing through the centre of an ineffectual Portugal attack.

He scored three times at the tournament in North America in his World Cup farewell -- twice in a 5-0 thrashing of Uzbekistan and a penalty against Croatia in the last 32.

Ronaldo did not register a single assist at the tournament and at one point against Spain threw his hands up in the air as a teammate's pass went astray.

He left the pitch at the home

of the Dallas Cowboys on his own.

Billionaire footballer

Ronaldo went from growing up in a poor family on the island of Madeira, with an alcoholic father, to become a global superstar.

His eternal thirst for records coupled with a relentless drive for self-improvement and tireless devotion to his art sustained him into his 40s.

Off the field he is a phenomenon too -- the first billionaire footballer, boasting 671 million followers on Instagram and his "Siuuu!" celebration mimicked by star-struck children the world over.

But there was to be no Hollywood-style World Cup happy ending for the attacker, who played first for Sporting Lisbon, before becoming a global icon at Manchester United.

After six years and Champions League glory there he lit up the Bernabeu with Real Madrid, where he conquered Europe four more times.

Then came Juventus, a stint back at United, and now the figurehead of Saudi Arabia's bid for footballing respectability at Al Nassr.

His many accolades and prizes

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It was my last World Cup, yes, but I'll have time to think about the rest, to be with my family, not make rash decisions, and just get on with life

CRISTIANO RONALDO

also include five Ballon d'Ors. In recent years the narrative around Ronaldo has shifted.

With his powers on the wane and lacking the mesmerising turn of foot and pace that were once his hallmark, he moved from the wings to a more traditional number nine role.

Ronaldo and Portugal coach Roberto Martinez have been accused of dragging his international career out beyond its sell-by date.

Martinez made two double changes late on as they chased the game against Spain, but Ronaldo remained on the pitch regardless.

Speaking on the eve of the match, Ronaldo insisted: "I am not going to be more Cristiano Ronaldo or less because I win the World Cup."