

India's Chhetri says no comparisons with Messi



Sunil Chhetri reacts during a match (file photo)

AFP | New Delhi

India's Sunil Chhetri said yesterday comparisons with Lionel Messi are misplaced after overtaking him in number of goals, and added he remains a huge fan of the Argentine star.

Chhetri surpassed Messi's tally of 72 international goals in India's 2-0 win over Bangladesh on Monday to stand behind top-ranked Cristiano Ronaldo (103) among active players.

"The fact is there is no comparison whatsoever (with Messi)," Chhetri, who has scored 74 international goals, said from Doha.

"When anyone sees those (top goal scorer) chart, be happy for five seconds as an Indian and that's about it. Forget about me and Messi because the whole world, including me, is a fan of Messi."

Chhetri, 36, scored all two goals in India's victory in the qualifying match for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup.

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SUNIL CHHETRI

With 73 strikes Ali Mabkhout, of the United Arab Emirates, is also above Messi -- a six-time Ballon d'Or winner widely regarded as the greatest player of the modern era.

India, who are ranked 105th in the FIFA team rankings, are already out of the race to qualify for the World Cup but can make it to the Asian Cup in China.

Spain sets up 'parallel' Euro 2020 team over virus worries

Spain expand parallel squad after second player tests positive for COVID-19

● Spain coach Luis Enrique now has a shadow squad of 17 players to call on for Euro 2020

AFP | London

Spain expanded its parallel squad yesterday after Diego Llorente became the second player infected with the coronavirus ahead of the European Championship.

Coach Luis Enrique called up 11 players from Spain's under-21 squad to train separately from the main team in a parallel bubble. They will join six other players who had already been called up after captain Sergio Busquets tested positive and was put into isolation on Sunday. Llorente tested positive on Tuesday and also had to leave the team's training camp.

No other players have tested positive so far, the Spanish soccer federation said. Llorente's positive result was made public not long after Spain's under-21 squad beat Lithuania 4-0 on Tuesday night in Madrid in a match that was supposed to be played by the senior team as its final warm-up before "La Roja" opens its Euro 2020 campaign against Sweden on Monday in Seville.

All but one of the 20 players



Spain's coach Luis Enrique attends Spain's national football team's training session

called up for that match — Bryan Gil — had played for the senior national team before. The friendly counted as a first-team match, with players getting caps and an official debut for coach Luis de la Fuente with the main squad. The last time Spain had 10 players on debut for a senior international was in 1941, against Portugal, after the team had not played since Spain's Civil War broke out in 1936.

The Spanish federation did not say whether Busquets or Llorente would be cut from the squad.

Luis Enrique had earlier called up six players to practice separately at the team's training camp: Kepa Arrizabalaga, defender Raúl Albiol, Rodrigo

Moreno, Pablo Fornals, Carlos Soler and Brais Méndez.

Luis Enrique has until Saturday to make changes to his initial list in case of injuries or COVID-19 cases. He only selected 24 players instead of the 26 allowed for each national team at Euro 2020, saying he didn't want to call up too many players who would not likely be used at the tournament.

Among those left out was veteran captain Sergio Ramos — a defender like Llorente — who had been sidelined for most of the second part of the season because of injuries and a spell with COVID-19.

Players who test positive must stay in isolation for at least 10 days, meaning both Busquets



and Llorente will miss the opener against Sweden. It would also be unlikely they would be fit for Spain's second match against Poland on June 19. The team's final Group E match will be against Slovakia on June 23, also in Seville.

Spanish media said the national team players could be vaccinated against COVID-19 in the coming days. There had been some criticism for the delay in getting players vaccinated, contrary to what happened to the Spanish athletes competing at the Tokyo Olympics.

There was also criticism for possibly allowing the soccer players to be vaccinated before other Spaniards who were in line for the coronavirus vaccine.

New Zealand captain Williamson out of 2nd Test against England

AFP | London

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson has been ruled out of the second and final Test against England at Edgbaston with a left elbow problem, team management announced yesterday.

However, the Blackcaps are confident he will be fit to lead the team in the inaugural World Test Championship final against India starting on June 18.

Williamson, who captained New Zealand in last week's drawn first Test against England at Lord's, has been managing the injury since first missing matches in March.

The world's top-ranked Test batsman was ruled out of the second Test yesterday, a day before the match is due to start at Birmingham's Edgbaston ground.

"It's not an easy decision for Kane to have to miss a Test, but we think it's the right one," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said in a statement.

"He's had an injection in his elbow to relieve the irritation he's been experiencing when he bats and a period of rest and rehabilitation will help maximise his recovery."

Stead added: "The decision has been made very much with the ICC World Test Championship final at Southampton in mind and we are confident he will be ready for that match starting on June 18."

Tom Latham will captain the side in Williamson's absence,



New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson (L) speaks with Tom Latham during a match (file photo)

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NEW ZEALAND COACH GARY STEAD

with Will Young, who has made two first-class hundreds for English county side Durham this season, coming into the side at number three.

"Someone of his (Williamson's) leadership, his calibre as a player, it's obviously disappointing that he's been ruled out to nurse his elbow injury," Latham told reporters.

"He's fantastic as a captain. I think it's well-documented how his personality, his calm nature out in the middle, has been vital to this group. He's very

relaxed."

"He doesn't get too high, and doesn't get too low, which has been great for this side over recent years... He'll certainly be missed," added Latham, looking to lead New Zealand to their first series win in England since 1999.

'Big gun'

England captain Joe Root said Williamson's absence represented a "huge loss" for New Zealand.

"He's a big gun, number one in the world," said Root. "He's one of those players you spend a lot of time thinking about how you're going to keep him quiet and get rid of him early."

"It will be a huge loss for them but we're also very respectful that New Zealand have a strong squad and are involved in the World Test Championship final



Tom Latham will captain the side in Williamson's absence, with Will Young, who has made two first-class hundreds for English county side Durham this season, coming into the side at number three

because they have strength in depth.

"We saw last week a debutant (Devon Conway) coming in and getting a double hundred."

New Zealand will also be without spinner Mitchell Santner, who was previously ruled out with a cut finger.

But experienced left-arm quick Trent Boult is set to come back into the XI after missing the Lord's match, having opted to spend time with his family following the suspension of the Indian Premier League.

"It's great to have someone of his calibre come back in," said Latham of Boult.

"The way he can swing the ball, his leadership as well. He's been to this part of the world before and he knows how to perform (in England)."

No smoke without fire: Lazio hints at hiring Sarri



Then Juventus' head coach Maurizio Sarri holds the Champion's trophy (file photo)

AFP | Milan

While Lazio have not officially announced a new coach, a cryptic tweet yesterday made clear that the Serie A club was planning to hire former Chelsea and Juventus boss Maurizio Sarri.

Sarri is a former banker and a notorious chain smoker who wears a track suit on the sideline. The Lazio tweet showed a hand holding a cigarette, track suit tops and a simple drawing of a bank.

The club has not officially announced the signing of the former Napoli, Chelsea and Juventus coach, but Italian media reported that the two sides agreed to a two-year deal

earlier in the week.

Sarri would succeed Simone Inzaghi, who left for Inter Milan after five years at Lazio.

The appointment continues a tumultuous off-season summer in Italy's top flight. So far 12 clubs have changed coaches with only AC Milan and Atalanta in the top 10 keeping their coach.

Sarri, 62, became famed for his 'Sarribal' at Napoli from 2015-18. He joined Chelsea where he spent one season, winning the Europa League, his first trophy as a coach, before moving to Juventus in 2019.

In Turin he won Serie A, but was fired last August after one season in charge.