

Belgium face tough test

Reuters | Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

Belgium's credentials as a genuine outside bet for World Cup success face a tougher examination against Tunisia today after a relatively sedate opening against Panama.

Roberto Martinez's star-studded squad emerged as 3-0 winners in their opening Group G game in Sochi on Monday but will likely find Tunisia a far more robust and defensively astute opponent when they meet at the Spartak Stadium in Moscow.

It will mean the creative acumen of captain Eden Hazard and Kevin De Bruyne will be vital if Belgium are to move closer to the second round and effectively end Tunisia's tournament.

Both Premier League stand-outs took a while to get going in Monday's match but their obvious ability eventually made the requisite impact. De Bruyne set up the second goal for Romelu Lukaku with a characteristically innovative pass and the Manchester City midfielder said on Wednesday he saw that as his primary task at the tournament.

Tunisia have a well-earned reputation in African football for their ability to close down matches through a combination of bloody-minded defence, time-wasting tactics and gamesmanship.



HAZARD

Dedryck Boyata will keep his place in defence as neither Vincent Kompany nor Thomas Vermaelen are ready to play for Belgium.

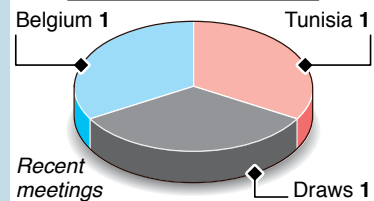
Overall few changes, if any, are expected from the side that beat Panama 3-0 in their first group match of the 2018 World Cup

Belgium
Nickname | Red Devils

3 FIFA rank 21

BEL 3-0 PAN Match 1 TUN 1-2 ENG

HEAD-TO-HEAD



Recent meetings

2014	Belgium	1-0	Tunisia
2002	Tunisia	1-1	Belgium

WORLD CUP RECORD

15	Wins	1
9	Draws	4
18	Losses	8
1.31	Goals for*	0.69
1.57	Goals against*	1.4

Fact box

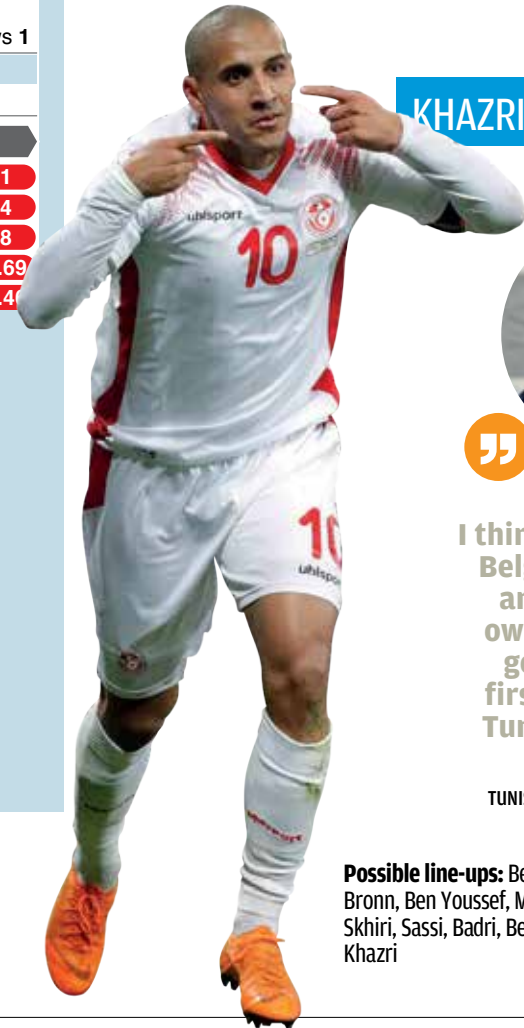
- » Belgium started their World Cup campaign with a comfortable 3-0 win over Panama.
- » Tunisia lost 2-1 to England but the scoreline could have been a lot worse had England Belgium are clear favourites to win today and should make it two wins from two without much difficulty.

Possible line-ups: Courtois, Alderweireld, Boyata, Vertonghen, Meunier, Carrasco, Witsel, De Bruyne, Hazard, Mertens, Lukaku

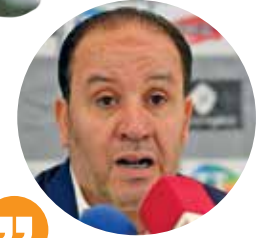
Tunisia

Nickname | The Eagles of Carthage

Mouez Hassen suffered a shoulder injury in the first half of Tunisia's 2-1 defeat to England and is unlikely to feature again this World Cup. Farouk Ben Mustapha will start in goal as a result



KHAZRI



”

I think we will have Belgium's respect and we have our own ambitions of getting past the first round which Tunisia has never done before

TUNISIA COACH NABIL MAALLOUL

Possible line-ups: Ben Mustapha, Bronn, Ben Youssef, Menah, Maaloul, Skhiri, Sassi, Badri, Ben Youssef, Sliti, Khazri

Germany expects turnaround

AFP | Sochi

World Cup holders Germany face enormous pressure ahead of their second group match against Sweden, dubbed an "early final", with Joachim Loew's team knowing

defeat today would effectively end their campaign.

The pre-tournament talk in Germany focused much on the bid to become the first team for 56 years to retain the FIFA World Cup.

But after a shock 1-0 defeat to

Mexico, the four-time winners must beat the Swedes in Sochi to be sure of staying in the tournament.

Suddenly, the sweet taste of their victory in Rio de Janeiro four years ago seems like a long time ago. An atrocious first-half display

against Mexico stunned fans in football-mad Germany, who have grown used to regular success.

The World Cup winners, accustomed to easy questions from their press and the backing of adoring fans, have been stung by a swarm of criticism.



NEUER

Germany

Nickname | The Team

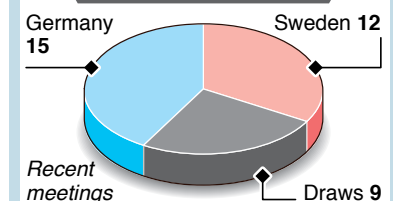
Mesut Ozil was fit to start the 1-0 loss to Mexico, but may drop out of the side here, with Marco Reus in line to start. Ilkay Gundogan could also come in for Sami Khedira in the middle of the park, while Jonas Hector is set to start at Marvin Plattenhardt's expense at left-back

Possible line-ups: Neuer, Kimmich, Boateng, Hummels, Plattenhardt, Goretzka, Kroos, Muller, Ozil, Reus, Werner

1 FIFA rank 24

GER 0-1 MEX Match 1 SWE 1-0 KOR

HEAD-TO-HEAD



Recent meetings

2013	Sweden	3-5	Germany
2012	Germany	4-4	Sweden

WORLD CUP RECORD

66	Wins	17
20	Draws	13
21	Losses	17
2.09	Goals for*	1.60
1.14	Goals against*	1.47

Sweden

Nickname | The Blue and Yellows

Victor Lindelof missed the 1-0 win over South Korea through illness, but is set to come in for Pontus Jansson at the back. Sweden head coach Janne Andersson may resist wholesale changes here

Possible line-ups: Olsen, Lustig, Jansson, Granqvist, Augustinsson, Claesson, Larsson, Ekdal, Forsberg, Toivonen, Bergr



BERG

Son under pressure

AFP | Saint Petersburg

South Korea's Son Heung-min is bearing the weight of expectation at the World Cup just as heavily as Mohamed Salah, Cristiano Ronaldo and Harry Kane.

Even Lionel Messi, whose bid to add a World Cup to his career collection has become something of a communal objective for football, enjoys the support of a star-studded Argentinian side, from Angel Di Maria to

Javier Mascherano to Sergio Aguero.

For Son and South Korea, the pressure is shared in the kind of unequal measure that perhaps only Salah would know with Egypt, before his own tournament was hampered by injury.

South Korea are teetering on the brink too, after a 1-0 defeat by Sweden left them needing at least a draw, and probably a win, against Mexico today to keep any hopes

of progressing from Group F alive.

Son blamed himself for the opening loss. Responsibility is one take, pressure another.

Son is a star in his home country, to the extent he has to wear a disguise when he leaves the house and Korean journalists are employed in London, where they wait to speak to the forward after every Tottenham fixture in the Premier League.

South Korea

Nickname | Asian Tigers

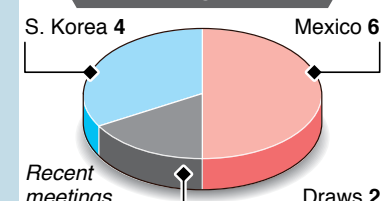
Park Joo-Ho is expected to miss out for South Korea today after sustaining an injury in the first half of their World Cup opener against Sweden. Kim Min-Woo should deputise at left-back.

Possible line-ups: Cho, Y. Lee, Jang, Y. Kim, M. Kim, Ki, J. Lee, Koo, Hwang, Son, S. Kim

57 FIFA rank 15

KOR 0-1 SWE Match 1 MEX 1-0 GER

HEAD-TO-HEAD



Recent meetings

2014	Mexico	4-0	South Korea
2006	Mexico	0-1	South Korea

WORLD CUP RECORD

5	Wins	15
9	Draws	14
18	Losses	25
0.97	Goals for*	1.07
2.13	Goals against*	1.70

Mexico

Nickname | El Tri

Mexico have no reason to make any changes from the side that shocked reigning world champions Germany in their World Cup opener.

Miguel Layun played in an advanced position down the right flank against Germany and Juan Carlos Osorio might be tempted to start a natural forward against South Korea.

Possible line-ups: Ochoa, Salcedo, Ayala, Moreno, Gallardo, Herrera, Guardado, Layun, Vela, Lozano, Hernandez