

SPORTS
sports

Can Uruguay create history?

The Hindu | London

After a swift start to its qualification campaign, Uruguay collapsed losing three successive matches – 3-1 in Chile, 4-1 at home to Brazil, 2-1 in Peru. Until then manager Oscar Tabarez's strategy was to drop deep and hit on the counter, relying on Edinson Cavani and Luiz Suarez upfront.

But as key components of his team – particularly the midfield – started ageing and two teams which didn't even qualify for the World Cup – Italy and Ireland – thrashed Uruguay, Tabarez changed his tactics. Some of the best talents from the under-20 team such as Federico Valverde of Real Madrid and Rodrigo



Edinson Cavani

Bentancur of Juventus were promoted to occupy key positions in the midfield. Pace was added on the wings and in the full-back regions and Uruguay qualified with ease.

This supply-line of players is probably Uruguay's biggest strength. Of the last 24 players Tabarez has added after the 2014 World Cup in Rio, only three hadn't featured in junior competitions. Such youthful exuberance coupled with the experience of Cavani, Suarez and defender Diego Godin, makes it the favourite to top Group 'A' ahead of Russia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The Goal-poacher: Cavani

Edinson Cavani topped the

FIFA WORLD CUP
RUSSIA 2018

18 days to go.....

South American CONMEBOL region charts with 10 goals. Quick, strong, good both in the air and with his feet, Cavani is known for his incredible work-rate and positioning. The 31-year-old has a penchant for scoring spectacular goals, but is oddly

profligate when presented with simple chances. Of late though he hasn't missed much, as his performance in the China Cup in March showed, scoring both in the semifinal against Czech Republic and the final against Wales.

The Key Player: Luiz Suarez

Luiz Suarez and Edinson Cavani both play the No.9 position for their respective clubs but that hasn't stopped them from combining effectively as a strike duo nationally. Suarez is Uruguay's all-time leading scorer with 50 goals, while Cavani has 42. But Suarez has more than double the number of assists which makes him crucial to his country's chances.

Mexico head to Russia with one aim 'to win': Moreno

AFP | Los Angeles

Mexico head to the World Cup in Russia with a clear objective, to reach the final and win it, defender Hector Moreno said Friday.

"We are going to play the World Cup to win it," the Real Sociedad defender said as Mexico prepared to face Wales on Monday at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. "For me the important thing is to get home and not have any regrets." "We know that we are not favourites. We know that no one thinks that Mexico will win. I think the Mexican team is ready."

Moreno, 30, is part of the 28-player preliminary World Cup squad named by coach Juan



Mexico's defender Hector Moreno is aiming to play in a third World Cup after South Africa in 2010 and Brazil 2014



Hector Moreno

Carlos Osorio this month.

Hector Moreno is aiming to play in a third World Cup after South Africa in 2010 and Brazil 2014.

Osorio was also bullish on the chances that Mexico, who have fallen in the last 16 in the last six World Cups, can surprise in Russia.

"We believe that we can go to the final, as athletes and human beings it's our right to believe, because we work hard for it," Osorio said.

Coutinho reveals his biggest football Idol

Soccer Laduma | Rio de Janeiro

FC Barcelona superstar Philippe Coutinho, who will be taking great form into the 2018 FIFA World Cup with Brazil, has revealed who his biggest footballing idol was growing up.

The playmaker has been in fantastic touch since he joined the Catalan giants in January, and has already contributed to 16 goals in 22 games for his new club.

In a recent interview, the 25-year-old Philippe Coutinho revealed that he wants to stay with the Blaugrana for a long time, and hopes to emulate his idol Ronaldinho.

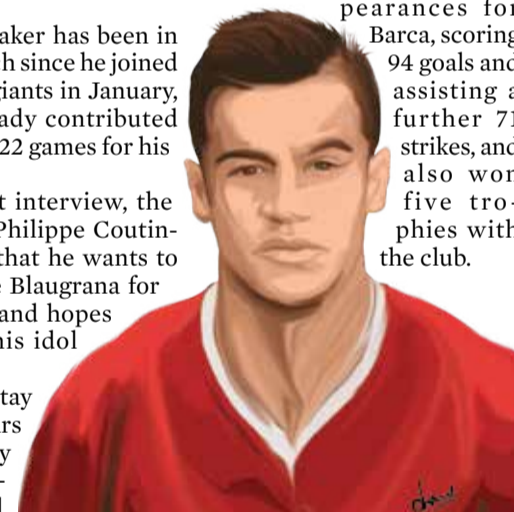
"I hope to stay for many years to win as many titles as possible," he told

Sport.

"When Barca's interest came up, I thought that it had always been my dream to come. That's something I can't deny.

"My biggest idol was Ronaldinho, now I have the same opportunity."

Ronaldinho made 207 appearances for Barca, scoring 94 goals and assisting a further 71 strikes, and also won five trophies with the club.



PLAYER OF THE DAY

Peru's Paolo Guerrero appeals to Swiss court

● Paolo Guerrero had just completed a six-month ban by FIFA

Reuters | London

Peru captain and top scorer Paolo Guerrero on Friday asked Switzerland's highest court to overturn a drugs-related ban that will keep him out of Peru's first World Cup in 36 years, the Peruvian Football Federation said.

Guerrero had just completed a six-month ban by FIFA after testing positive for a byproduct of cocaine consumption when the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) extended the suspension, ruling him out of the World Cup. Guerrero denies having used cocaine.



Paolo Guerrero

The world players' union FIF-Pro and the captains of Peru's World Cup group rivals in Russia next month have appealed to soccer's world governing body FIFA to lift the ban. Both FIFA and CAS are based in Switzerland.

Guerrero filed an appeal before the Federal Swiss Federal

Tribunal with written support from the head of the Peruvian Football Federation, Edwin Oviedo, the federation said.

"He is the unquestioned captain of the Peruvian team and a national emblem of hope for the whole country," Oviedo said in his sworn statement to the court.

Saudi Arabia's Al Shehri not short of creative spark

Reuters | Hong Kong

What Yahya Al Shehri lacks in stature he more than makes up for in influence in the Saudi Arabia side that is heading to the World Cup finals in Russia.

Standing at just 1.6 metres tall, the versatile attacker plays a major role in the creation and scoring of opportunities for Saudi Arabia and he was a central figure in the country's qualification for the World Cup for the first time since 2006.

Although capable of playing on the wing, Al Shehri is most effective when given licence to roam behind lone striker Mohammed Al Sahlawi.

He can often be seen dropping deep to collect the ball from defensive midfielder Abdullah Otayf or the centre backs in an attempt to start Saudi Arabia's attacking moves.

**Robert Lewandowski**

With 16 goals in ten appearances, the Poland captain was the top scorer in Europe's 2018 World Cup qualifiers. Lewandowski, hailed as "the best striker in the world" by coach Adam Nawalka, also became his country's all-time leading scorer.