

Sports

Neymar snags equalizer in return as Brazil draw Colombia 2-2 in friendly

Netherlands shock stunned Germany in 4-2 comeback win

MIAMI: Neymar didn't disappoint in his much anticipated return Friday, grabbing a second-half equalizer for Brazil in a 2-2 friendly draw with Colombia on Friday.

The Paris Saint-Germain star was playing for the first time for club or country since suffering an ankle injury in a friendly against Qatar in June, which ruled him out of the Copa America.

Since then the Brazilian star had been embroiled in a long-running transfer saga that ended this week with the Brazilian staying at PSG — a return to Barcelona finally ruled out. Before a sell-out crowd of 65,232 at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins, Neymar delivered for Brazil, scoring the equalizer in the 58th after setting up Casemiro for the game's opening goal in the 20th minute.

Colombia were lacking top stars James Rodriguez and Radamel Falcao, but thanks to Luis Muriel's brace they gave Copa America champions Brazil a fright before Neymar rode to the rescue and Tite's men extended their unbeaten run.

Although Neymar made a quiet start, it was his cross from a corner that found a soaring Casemiro, who nodded past helpless Colombian keeper David Ospina to open the scoring. The lead didn't last long as Luis Muriel converted from the spot in the 25th after taking a high kick from Alex Sandro. Less than 10 minutes later Muriel fired Colombia ahead 2-1. Roger Martinez launched the counter-attack and Duvan Zapata played a ball out wide to Muriel, who blasted past Ederson.

Brazil almost pulled level seven minutes into the second half but Philippe Coutinho's attempt went wide.

Coutinho was key to Brazil's 58th-minute equalizer, finding Dani Alvez from the halfway line. Alvez's cross found Neymar, who was in the right place to slot a side-footed shot into an empty net.

The draw extended Brazil's unbeaten run to 17 matches, a streak that dates back to their 2018 World Cup elimination by Belgium.

Neymar notched his 61st international goal, put him one behind Ronaldo, who sits second on Brazil's all-time list headed by Pele's 77.

Both countries will be back in action on Wednesday, with Brazil hosting Peru in a Copa America final rematch in Los Angeles and Colombia taking on Venezuela in Tampa, Florida.

Meanwhile, in Hamburg, Netherlands scored four times in 32 second-half minutes to secure a remarkable 4-2 comeback victory against hosts Germany in their Euro 2020 Group C qualifier on Friday. Goals from Frenkie de Jong, a Jonathan Tah own goal, Donyell Malen and Georginio Wijnaldum wrapped up the win after Serge Gnabry had given the hosts an early lead and Toni Kroos had pulled them level at 2-2 with a controversial penalty.

The result leaves Germany on nine points from four games, three behind leaders Northern Ireland, who they face on Monday in Belfast. The Netherlands move to six points from three games and next face bottom side Estonia.

It was a winning return to Hamburg for Dutch coach Ronald Koeman, who won in the port city against the Germans as a player during Euro '88, and a clear mark of his team's improvement after they failed to reach the last two major tournaments.

"I told my players (at halftime) to stay in the game, not to give them so much space, control the ball better," Koeman told reporters. "That we should just keep going and we would get our chances. In the second half the Germans looked more tired and we benefited from that."

"Overall we worked harder than Germany for this victory," he said. Joachim Loew's Germany side, undergoing their own overhaul after a disappointing 2018 World Cup first round exit and Nations League relegation, got off to a good start with Gnabry scoring on the rebound in the ninth minute.

There was little to be seen in terms of attacks from the Netherlands but that changed after the break. They turned the game around within seven minutes, first scoring through De Jong in the 59th and then taking the lead courtesy of Tah's unfortunate own goal.

The Germans, missing several injured players, including Leroy Sane and Leon Goretzka, were struggling with the Dutch pace down the wings and were lucky to level with a



MIAMI: Brazil's forward Neymar Jr. (R) and Colombia's defender Luis Manuel Ojuela vie for the ball during their international friendly football match between Brazil and Colombia at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida. — AFP

73rd minute Kroos penalty after Matthijs de Ligt accidentally handled.

There is no video replay for referees in the qualifiers. The visitors got revenge for their 3-2 loss in Amsterdam in March, striking through debutant Malen in the 79th after a quick combination left the German defence frozen.

Nijaldum completed the victory in stoppage time and ended Germany's 14-match winning run in World Cup and Euro qualifiers. "We played below our skill level and abili-

ties," Loew told reporters. "The Dutch were the better team and we deserved to lose. We went ahead but I never had the feeling that we were in control of the game."

"The Dutch kept pressing and then we ended up playing high balls. That is not how we had planned to play. We will now need to analyse this game and draw our conclusions," Belarus earned a stoppage time 2-1 win at Estonia to claim their first points in the other game in the group on Friday. — Agencies

Bale hopes rescue mission is Wales 'turning point'

CARDIFF: Gareth Bale hopes Wales' 2-1 victory against Azerbaijan can prove a turning point in their race to qualify for Euro 2020 after the Real Madrid star spared his side's blushes on Friday. With just six minutes left at the Cardiff City Stadium, Ryan Giggs' team were on the brink of an embarrassing draw that would have severely damaged their hopes of reaching next year's European Championship.

Despite taking the lead through Pavlo Pashayev's farcical own goal in the first half, Wales had surrendered a sloppy equaliser to Mahir Emreli after the interval. Already in trouble in Group E after successive defeats by Hungary and Croatia, Wales were saved by their captain as Bale headed home from close range. Wales now sit third in the group, three points behind Hungary and Croatia after four matches. "Azerbaijan made it difficult. We were sloppy at times. We ground it through and showed our character," Bale said.

"Scrappy wins help you get a winning mentality and momentum. Hopefully this is a turning point. "We'd like to do it in style but three points is three points. We all believe we can qualify. We'll keep doing that until the end."

Giggs wasn't impressed with Wales' erratic display, but took heart from their determined finish. "It wasn't good enough, first half. We didn't stick to our game plan. Some of our players wanted to do whatever they wanted to do," he said. "We showed character to come back. Everyone needs a little bit of luck. Hopefully it will help momentum. That's what we need." Bale's crucial contribution was another welcome boost for the former Tottenham forward



CARDIFF CITY: Wales' forward Gareth Bale (L) vies with Azerbaijan's defender Maksim Medvedev during the UEFA Euro 2020 Qualifying - 1st round Group E football match between Wales and Azerbaijan at Cardiff City Stadium, Cardiff. — AFP

in what could be a season of vindication. As his country's all-time leading goalscorer, Bale is always guaranteed a warm welcome in Wales — a feeling he hasn't often enjoyed in Madrid during his turbulent spell with Real. Having survived Real manager Zinedine Zidane's latest

attempts to freeze him out after a proposed move to China collapsed, the 30-year-old has battled back into the Madrid line-up.

Bale, who scored his first goals since March 16 in the weekend draw at Villarreal, this week dismissed the suggestion that it has been the worst time of his career and insisted the problems have only made him stronger.

Bale was out-of-sorts in Wales' summer qualifying defeats, but — handed the captain's armband in the absence of Ashley Williams — he was quickly into his stride, bursting down the right wing and crossing towards Tom Lawrence, who volleyed wide at the near post.

Azerbaijan, ranked joint 109th in the world, had already conceded 10 goals in three qualifying defeats, making them the group's whipping boys on paper.

But Wales didn't have it all their own way and Bahlul Mustafazade let rip with a fierce strike that flashed just wide from the edge of the area. Luck was on Wales' side however and they took the lead in bizarre circumstances in the 26th minute. When Bale tried a long-range effort, his shot was deflected off Dmitri Nazarov high into the air towards Pashayev, who instead of getting out of the way, allowed the ball to bounce off the side of his head.

Azerbaijan keeper Salahat Agayev had come out to catch the ball but instead he ended up fooled by the deflection and had to watch as it trickled into the empty net. Azerbaijan kept fighting and they snatched an equaliser in the 59th minute after a series of Wales errors.

Neil Taylor carelessly gave the ball away and Ramil Sheydaev slipped a perfect pass to Emreli, who sprinted area to score at the second attempt after Wales goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey weakly pushed out his first shot.

But, with time running out, Bale rode to the rescue in the 84th minute. Joe Allen's shot was deflected high into the Azerbaijan area and Bale rose highest to head in despite Maksim Medvedev's despairing attempt to clear off the line. — AFP

2000 and 2002. He was part of a golden generation that featured Rigobert Song, the late Marc-Vivien Foe and Geremi as Cameroon also won the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, with the emerging Eto'o both scoring and converting a penalty in the shoot-out win over Spain in front of a blockbuster 114,000 crowd.

His pace left him as his career slowed down with low stints at Russia's Anzhi Makhachkala, Chelsea and Everton in the Premier League. Last year, after a short spell with Turkish side Konyaspor, he joined Qatar league side, Qatar Sports Club, his last club. — AFP



CAIRO: In this file photo taken on July 19, 2019 Qatar SC's Cameroonian forward and captain Samuel Eto'o brings the trophy onto the pitch ahead of the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) Final football match between Senegal and Algeria at the Cairo International Stadium in Cairo. — AFP

War on racism is 'going backwards', says Rashford

LONDON: England striker Marcus Rashford fears football's struggle with racism is "going backwards rather than forwards". Manchester United star Rashford is one of a host of top players to have suffered abuse this season after missing a penalty in a defeat against Crystal Palace.

Rashford's former United team-mate Romelu Lukaku was subjected to monkey chants while playing for Inter Milan at Cagliari last weekend, while his current United colleague Paul Pogba was attacked on social media.

Chelsea duo Tammy Abraham and Kurt Zouma also endured racial taunts on platforms such as Twitter and Rashford doesn't believe enough is being done to eradicate the problem. "It's obviously disappointing. It seems to me like things have been going backwards rather than forwards," he told reporters on Friday.

"You know, it's tough, but like you've been seeing all around the world, people have been standing together and I think in this moment that's all we can do. "We have to rely on the campaigns and stuff like that to deal with the situation because our voice only has so much power." Rashford took part in the Professional Footballers' Association's 24-hour boycott of social media platforms back in May.

Twitter says it has "taken action" on "more than 700 examples of hateful conduct" in the past two weeks. The company has also met "directly affected" clubs, the PFA and anti-racism campaigners Kick it Out in an attempt to "tackle the issue collectively".

But Rashford, speaking ahead of England's Euro 2020 qualifier against Bulgaria on Saturday, insisted the authorities must take stronger action because nothing has changed despite so many high-profile incidents.

"To be honest, I've always said that the more we speak about it, it doesn't have much of an impact," Rashford said. "We've tried. There's been examples everywhere where people have spoken out and I wouldn't say they've been ignored, but nothing has really changed."

"So, just to see it spike in the last couple of months, it's been unbelievable, so we want to just nip it in the bud while it's happening." Rashford, 21, did not see the comments aimed at him on social media after his penalty miss, but the lack of control and protection from platforms such as Twitter has not surprised him.

"Obviously, social media is a big problem because of that," Rashford said when it was put to him that the medium feels like a free for all. "For me, it is too easy to do what you like on the internet and any of us now can go on and create accounts and write what we want under anyone's post and no one would ever know."

"It's easier to sort of figure it out, you know, if you have to show identification to create an account, that means everybody can only have one account. "I know, for me, there's hundreds of thousands of people that use my name on social media, and they can write what they like - so I think obviously a lot of the racism has been coming from social media as well."

Several England players were targeted during March's Euro 2020 qualifier in Montenegro and winger Jadon Sancho admitted recently it could stop him loving football. "To be honest, I think that people will start to come off the platforms and if it is doing more bad than good, I don't think there's a reason to have the channels," Rashford added. — AFP

Vettel keeps Ferrari on top in final Monza practice

MONZA: Sebastian Vettel kept Ferrari on top with a classic demonstration of speed in yesterday morning's closely-fought third and final free practice at the Italian Grand Prix. The four-time champion bounced back from a spell of subdued form to give the tifosi cause for optimism with a best lap in one minute and 20.294 seconds.

That kept him 0.032 seconds clear of Max Verstappen's surging Red Bull with Valtteri Bottas third for Mercedes ahead of Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari. Vettel gained from slipstreaming behind his Monegasque team-mate, a factor that made the difference in a busy session that saw Daniel Ricciardo take fifth ahead of Lewis Hamilton in the second Mercedes.

Nico Hulkenberg was seventh in the second Renault ahead of Red Bull new boy Alex Albon, Antonio Giovinazzi of Alfa Romeo and Daniil Kvyat of Toro Rosso. After Friday's rain, warm and dry conditions prevailed as the session began following a brief delay to remove a sausage kerb at the exit of Parabolica where Alex Peroni was sent spiraling airborne into fencing during the F3 race.

He was unhurt, but one week on from the death of French driver Anthoine Hubert after a Formula Two race crash at the Belgian Grand Prix it was another shocking image for the sport. "If that was an F1 car, it would have been in the forest," said 2016 world champion Nico Rosberg on Sky Sports F1.

Once the action began, it was not long before the teams were practicing their slipstreaming, so important for fast laps at Monza, and pit-stops, having lost so much time on Friday. — AFP

African great Eto'o hangs up his boots

PARIS: Cameroon's four-time African Player of the Year Samuel Eto'o announced his retirement yesterday at the age of 38, declaring "I need a rest". "The end, towards a new challenge," the former Barcelona, Inter Milan and Chelsea striker posted on Instagram.

"Thank you all, big love, adrenalin." "In a few months you'll see me doing something new," Eto'o, who has campaigned relentlessly against racism during his playing days, later said on the margins of an economic forum in DR Congo. "I need a rest, I've been running for 19-years," he added light-heartedly in Kinshasa. He stands alongside Liberia's current president George Weah and Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba as a great of African sport, and cuts a mythical figure in his homeland where he is close to national president Paul Biya.

He is slated for a major role in the Confederation of African Football where he has vowed to fight corruption to ensure funds go into infrastructure. The most memorable period of his club career includes five hugely successful seasons with Barcelona from 2004 to 2009.

Despite an unfortunate knack for ruffling feathers, a return of 108 league goals from just 145 matches in five stunning seasons with Barcelona pays testament to his talent. At his peak he enjoyed electric pace, impeccable touch and instinctive shooting to make him one of the most feared centre-forwards in the world.

He won a pair of Champions League titles and three La Liga crowns before departing under a cloud for Inter Milan after rowing with Ronaldo leading to Pep Guardiola showing him the dressing room door.

He then spearheaded Jose Mourinho's charge to a never to be forgotten treble with Inter of Champions League, Serie A and Coppa Italia titles in his first season in Italy. He led Cameroon to an impressive four World Cups in 1998, 2002, 2010 and 2014 and enjoyed huge success at the Africa Cup of Nations as the Indomitable Lions won in