



SNIPPETS



Croatia fans hope to settle old score at WCup final with France

‘They owe us and they will pay us back’

MOSCOW: Croatian soccer fans streaming into Moscow for today’s World Cup final between Croatia and France are hoping their team can settle an old score with the French dating back to the 1998 tournament.

That year, Croatia’s World Cup dreams were cut short as France clawed back from a goal down in the semi-final to beat Croatia 2-1, going on to win the tournament. “They owe us and they will pay us back,” said Drazen Karakasic, a 47-year-old banker from Zagreb, who was wearing his team’s jersey in Moscow.

A day ahead of the final, Croatians in red-and-white checkered hats waved national flags and chanted on a pedestrian street that has become popular with football fans in Moscow. “They are fighting all the time,” Croatian fan Nikola Kresic said of his country’s soccer team.

“Maybe we don’t have the best team but they’ve got the biggest heart for sure.” The success of Croatia, a country of 4.2 million, has come as a surprise even to some Croatians who have been scrambling to secure tickets for the final and flights to Russia. It has been a reunion of sorts for Croatians living in Moscow.

For Nicolas Grbac, who has not lived in his native Croatia since he left as a child in 1989 ahead of the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, the influx of fans from his homeland has made him feel at home.

“It’s really great for me because of all the people from my country, even from my hometown,” said Grbac, who works on the street most popular with fans. “It’s a big football party.” There were fewer French fans visible in central Moscow yesterday, though those present included dedicated supporters such as Akim Snouci from Paris who has been in Russia since the beginning of the tournament.



MOSCOW: Croatia’s midfielder Luka Modric (L) and Croatia’s defender Dejan Lovren attend a training session at the Luzhniki training field in Moscow yesterday on the eve of the Russia 2018 World Cup final football match between France and Croatia. — AFP

“I don’t think it will be a huge win (for France),” he said. “There are no small teams. I’ll be pleased if we win 1-0.” Snouci said he had one regret: his presence at the World Cup final in Moscow today

means that he will not make it to the wild street celebrations that will erupt in Paris if France win. “I won’t be at the gathering on the Champs-Élysées,” he said. “You can’t cut yourself in half.” — Reuters

Sarri appointed Chelsea’s manager

LONDON: Maurizio Sarri has succeeded Antonio Conte as Chelsea manager on a three-year deal, the club announced yesterday. The 59-year-old former Napoli head coach becomes Roman Abramovich’s ninth full-time manager in his 15 years as owner less than 24 hours after Conte parted company with the club he led to a league and FA Cup title.

Chelsea director Marina Granovskaia said: “We are delighted to welcome Maurizio and are looking forward to him bringing his football philosophy to Chelsea.” Sarri, a chain-smoking former banker, said he would be starting his new job “and meeting the players” on Monday ahead of Chelsea’s pre-season Australia tour.

“I hope we can provide some entertaining football for our fans, and that we will be competing for trophies at the end of the season, which is what this club deserves,” he said. Winning trophies didn’t save Conte being shown the Stamford Bridge exit door as he was dismissed after guiding

Chelsea to the FA Cup in May. His days were numbered after he fell out with the board and senior players. Chelsea believe they have got in Sarri an astute tactician who produces sides playing exciting football with his three years at Napoli harvesting two second-placed finishes in Serie A.

“Maurizio’s Napoli side played some of the most exciting football in Europe, impressing with their attacking approach and dynamism, and his coaching methods significantly improved the players at his disposal,” noted Granovskaia.

“He has plenty of experience in Serie A and the Champions League and we know he is relishing the chance to work in the Premier League.” She added: “He has plenty of experience in Serie A and the Champions League and we know he is relishing the chance to work in the Premier League.”

Chelsea finally put an end to Conte’s two year reign on Friday. The former Italy national coach returned to take training this week but the writing was on the wall and the drawn out process was reportedly due to how much compensation the club should pay Napoli for Sarri. Conte began his tenure with a bang, lifting the Premier League title in his first season, but an FA Cup win wasn’t enough to save him even though he has the best win percentage 65.1% of any of Chelsea’s managers in the Premier League era. —AFP



Maurizio Sarri

WORLD CUP 2018

Today’s Match (Local timing)

France 18:00 Croatia

World Cup — road to the final

MOSCOW: France play Croatia in the World Cup final at Moscow’s Luzhniki Stadium today. Here is each team’s path to the showpiece match.

FRANCE Group stage

France had a helping hand from the video assistant referee (VAR) in their World Cup opener and a dash of good fortune when Paul Pogba’s effort deflected off Australia’s Aziz Behich and into the net to seal a 2-1 win. A low-key 1-0 victory against Peru put them in a prime position to qualify and a 0-0 draw against Denmark ensured they topped their group.

Last 16

A 4-3 win against Lionel Messi’s Argentina was one of the standout matches of the tournament. Goals from Angel Di Maria and Gabriel Mercado cancelled out an early Antoine Griezmann penalty before Benjamin Pavard struck a wonderful equaliser and teenager Kylian Mbappe scored twice. A late Sergio Aguero goal was not enough to save Argentina.

Quarter-final

France had far too much quality for a

Semi-final

France knew they had a tough job on their hands to contain a Belgium side boasting Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku but for the second consecutive match they kept a clean sheet. Samuel Umtiti scored the winner in the second half from Griezmann’s corner to take the team through to their third World Cup final as 1-0 winners.

CROATIA Group stage

Croatia were one of only three teams in Russia to win all three of their group matches, beating Nigeria 2-0 in their opener and Iceland 2-1 in their final game. But their standout performance came in their second match, when they swept aside two-time winners Argentina 3-0 to make a huge statement of intent.

Last 16

Goalkeeper Danijel Subasic was the hero,

saving three penalties in the shootout as Croatia squeezed past Denmark. Earlier, they had conceded a goal in the opening minute but hit back quickly to equalise through Mario Mandzukic. Luka Modric missed a penalty shortly before the end of extra-time but Croatia survived.

Quarter-final

Croatia looked like they would have too much quality for a solid but limited Russia side but were again taken to extra-time and penalties. Goals from Andrej Kramaric and Domagoj Vida cancelled out a Denis Cheryshev opener but Croatia watched in agony as Mario Fernandes snatched a late equaliser. Ivan Rakitic struck the decisive penalty to send his side through to the semi-finals.

Semi-final

Croatia were again forced to dig deep against England. Zlatko Dalic’s side looked in deep trouble after conceding an early goal in Moscow but regrouped to equalise midway through the second half. Despite dominating the second period they were unable to force a winner until deep into extra-time, when Mandzukic struck to break English hearts and win the match 2-1. — AFP