



SNIPPETS



Rampant Mexico see off South Korea to close on last 16

Hernandez, first Mexican player to score 50 goals

ROSTOV-ON-DON: Mexico built on the momentum from their stunning victory over world champions Germany by overpowering South Korea 2-1 yesterday to take a giant step towards the World Cup last 16. Carlos Vela put them ahead from the penalty spot in the 26th minute at Rostov Arena, which had been taken over by Mexico's sea of fanatical supporters. All-time top scorer Javier Hernandez sealed victory in the second half, finishing off an unstoppable move from breakout player Hirving Lozano.

It was Hernandez's 50th goal for his country and his fourth strike at a World Cup, taking him level with Luis Hernandez as Mexico's leading scorer in soccer's global showpiece tournament. Korea's talismanic forward Son Heung-min struck a scorching consolation goal in stoppage time from outside the area.

Mexico will clinch their place in the next round if Germany fail to beat Sweden in the other Group F game. The hapless Koreans, who have no points after two matches and have only won one of their last 11 World Cup fixtures, will be eliminated if Sweden draw or win against Germany.

"We came to Russia with a lot of criticism but we're working hard and have a lot of talent. We have humility but we beat Germany and South Korea and now we have to play against Sweden and stay cool and calm," goalscorer Hernandez said. "We cannot afford to get caught up in all this, we have to continue our job and stay humble, of course we should enjoy this but tomorrow we start working again."



ROSTOV-ON-DON: South Korea's defender Kim Young-gwon (R) challenges Mexico's midfielder Hector Herrera (L) during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group F football match between South Korea and Mexico at the Rostov Arena in Rostov-On-Don yesterday.— AFP

ROUSING CHANTS

As the game kicked off Mexico fans sang "We are the home team" and with green shirts dotted all over the stadium and rousing chants of "Ole!" bellowing around the arena every time their side passed the ball, it was hard to disagree.

Conditioned by the dry heat that has been a feature of every game at the Rostov Arena, Mexico did not quite have the same thrust and energy as against Germany although they still controlled most of the play and looked far more dangerous.

Korea improved on their opening defeat by Sweden although their main tactic consisted of searching for Son with long balls behind the defensive line. The closest they came to scoring in the first half was with a header from a corner which Mexico goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa tipped over the bar.

Mexico's breakthrough came when captain Andres Guardado's cross was blocked by a stray arm from Korean defender Jang Hyun-soo, and Vela kept his nerve from the spot, sending goalkeeper Cho

Hyeon-woo the wrong way and stroking the ball home. Lozano proved a constant threat to the Koreans whenever he came darting down either wing, blasting over in the first half and later having a goalbound shot blocked by opposing captain Ki Sung-yueng. His remarkable pace punished Korea, catching them out on the break, allowing Hernandez to finish them off, beating a defender with a flick of his left foot and tucking the ball into the net with his right. — Reuters



MOSCOW: Moscow's Nikolskaya Street has unexpectedly become the party zone of choice for thousands World Cup fans.

World Cup fans flock to party in Moscow's 'street of lights'

MOSCOW: A quiet pedestrian street leading off from Red Square, Moscow's Nikolskaya Street has unexpectedly become the party zone of choice for thousands of international World Cup fans, to the bemusement of locals. During the day but even more so at night, the 700-metre-long street with elegant stucco facades is packed to bursting.

Walking through, a passerby has to squeeze past ubiquitous groups of Argentinian supporters, pass a cafe taken over entirely by Tunisians and shake hands with innumerable Mexican fans, all of them wearing sombreros.

"Normally, Nikolskaya Street is very quiet," said Armen, an Armenian student living in Moscow who was watching highlights of the Croatia-Argentina match. The street is usually more of a shopping destination with some luxury boutiques, especially since it was pedestrianised five years ago. But for some reason, fans have chosen this particular street as their main hangout. Colombian Harold Castillo, a 22-year-old student, puts its popularity down to the spectacular curtain of lights that hangs over the street.

"I came here by chance. I've been walking all over Moscow using TripAdvisor and I just saw the lights. There are other pedestrian streets but it's wonderful here." Multiple garlands of lights hang over most of the street, giving it a festive air as soon as night falls.

Even before the World Cup kicked off, Iranian fans were rubbing shoulders with Saudis here and

flag-draped fans from each South American country colonised a part of the street. Fans are travelling great distances across Russia to follow teams—the Peruvians went to see their team lose to France in Yekaterinburg in the Urals and the Tunisians have left for southern Volgograd to watch the game with Belgium. Yet while fans come and go, Nikolskaya has retained its vibrancy.

"This is the fans' street," said Mohamed Chaaben, a 28-year-old Tunisian engineer sitting on the terrace of a cafe with his friends, a national flag wrapped round his shoulders. "It has the best atmosphere, it's a pedestrian street and it feels safe, there's no risk." He and his friends were amused at the interest from locals in their national Tunisian headgear, round red caps with tassels known as chechias. Plenty of Russians are coming to stroll on Nikolskaya Street too, eyeing the exuberant fans with a mixture of surprise and amusement. Argentinians have nicknamed the party-zone street the "house of lights," said Santiago Saltiva from Argentina's city of Cordoba.

He said that's how he was directed there by a WhatsApp group of Argentinian fans as soon as he landed in Moscow, while he has not heard of the street's real name. "They told us that all the Argentinians were here on this street," the 42-year-old businessman said.

"This street is like a Tower of Babel," he said. "Every nationality is here, every country is represented, everyone is speaking a different language." The fans' choice of Nikolskaya Street as their main base caught the city authorities by surprise and they had to make some rapid changes. Public toilet cubicles were brought in and barriers removed.

The crowds of fans have been great news for local traders, many of whom have opted to remain open for 24 hours "We've had to bring in staff from other branches," said Maria Kuzina, the 22-year-old manager of a cafe that is part of a large Moscow chain. "We did predict there'd be more customers but this has been way more than we expected." — AFP

England seek trusty lieutenants to captain Kane

REPINO: Handed a winning start for the first time in a major tournament for 12 years by captain Harry Kane's injury-time winner against Tunisia, England can look forward to today's meeting with Panama with a rare sense of World Cup calm. A two-time Premier League Golden Boot winner, Kane banished any remaining doubts over his ability to perform on the biggest stage for his country with the first double by an English player at the World Cup since Gary Lineker in 1990.

But Kane's heroics in Volgograd papered over the cracks of his team-mates' failure to find the net with a host of simple first-half chances. Raheem Sterling and Jesse Lingard were particularly culpable and while Kane saved an inquest into England's profligacy and ponderous second-half performance, Sterling's place against Panama may now be in jeopardy. The first media storm of a hitherto relaxed campaign for the Three Lions was brewing on Friday after Gareth Southgate's planned team was inadvertently revealed when assistant manager Steve Holland's notes were photographed at training on Thursday.

According to the notes, Marcus Rashford will replace Sterling with Ruben Loftus-Cheek stepping in for Dele Alli, who suffered a thigh injury against Tunisia. Southgate criticised the media for giving England's opponents an upper hand. "If we were to give the opposition the opportunity of having our team it's a disadvantage to us," said Southgate.

"So of course our media has to decide if they want to help the team or not." In contrast to his 23-goal season at club level for Premier League champions Manchester City, Sterling now hasn't scored in his last 21 internationals.

However, Rashford refuted suggestions England are too dependent on Kane for goals. "I don't think that's happening in this group," said the Manchester United striker, who admitted to being an admirer of Kane's ability to be in the right place at the right time. "He gets himself in great positions. If we can find him, we will, and, more often than not, he's going to score." — AFP

WORLD CUP 2018

Today's Matches
(All local timings)

England	15:00	Panama
Japan	18:00	Senegal
Poland	21:00	Colombia