

# WALES CAPTAIN WILLIAMS FIT FOR BELGIUM, SAYS COLEMAN

## FAN FERVOR



**PARIS:** Wales captain Ashley Williams will be fit to face Belgium in the Euro 2016 quarter-final on Friday, manager Chris Coleman said yesterday.

The defender injured his shoulder colliding with team mate Jonny Williams in the 1-0 win over Northern Ireland on Saturday. Although Ashley Williams stayed on the field, he was seen wearing heavy strapping after the game and there were fears he would miss the match in Lille. But Coleman confirmed his fitness for Wales' biggest game since their 1958 World Cup quarter-final with Brazil.

"He'll be ok, it was the way he landed," Coleman told reporters on Monday. "He hasn't dislocated his shoulder. He is not a worry or a doubt. We know we need to look after him." Belgium confirmed their place

in Friday's quarter-final on Sunday when they thrashed Hungary 4-0 with a standout performance from Eden Hazard. But Coleman said they have no particular plans for dealing with the Chelsea midfielder who many of his players compete against in England's Premier League. "You can spend a month in defensive situations to try and stop player like that - in a split second he can disappoint those plans," he said. "He's a great player. "We've faced him before but we won't have special plans for one player."

"We know areas he likes to attack and positions to take up - but the fact we know it doesn't mean we can stop it all the time. I watched the game last night. Yes they are a good team but there's nothing for us to fear." Wales will draw confidence from beating Belgium

1-0 in their Euro 2016 qualifier last year, a result that helped them finish runners up to Marc Wilmot's side in Group B. "Belgium have players that would grace any international team, but in four years we've had four meetings and won one and drawn two," Coleman said.

Coleman said his team, who surprised many by finishing top of Group B in France, are enjoying being in the shakedown for a major international tournament.

"I don't think we can understand it totally because we're in a bubble. We can only imagine it. It is great for Wales, for the nation, they deserve it," he said. "You don't expect anything in football because it's a game that can turn quickly, but I know the group we have is very good. You need luck, you need performances at maximum and if you get that you always get a chance." — Reuters



**TOULOUSE:** Belgium's midfielder Marouane Fellaini (C) jumps for the ball during the Euro 2016 round of 16 football match between Hungary and Belgium at the Stadium Municipal in Toulouse on Sunday. — AFP

## BELGIUM THRASH HUNGARY 4-0 TO ADVANCE TO QUARTERFINAL

**TOULOUSE:** A superb performance by Eden Hazard guided Belgium to a 4-0 victory over Hungary on Sunday and a place in the European Championship quarterfinals. Center back Toby Alderweireld opened the scoring with a header in the 10th minute after poor marking by the Hungary defense. But Belgium had to wait until the closing stages before cruising to a convincing victory at the Stadium de Toulouse, thanks to some moments of brilliance from Hazard.

The Chelsea playmaker surged past a group of Hungary defenders on the left side before supplying a perfect low cross for substitute Michy Batshuayi to steer home in the 78th minute, just two minutes after coming on. Hazard followed up almost immediately with a spectacular solo goal, breaking down the left on another counterattack before cutting inside, skipping past three

Hungary defenders and curling a shot into the bottom right corner. Yannick Ferreira Carrasco scored his team's fourth in added time as Belgium lined up a quarterfinal against Wales on Friday in Lille. "It was a great match," Hazard said. "Beyond my goal, it was a great collective performance. We created a lot of chances and finished enough of them."

### EARLY BLOW

Hungary paid for an early defensive lapse that left its players chasing the game and exposed to Belgium's attacks on the break. Romelu Lukaku and Alderweireld both broke away from the Hungary defense and were left unmarked when Kevin De Bruyne's free kick from the left swerved in. Lukaku was inches away from making contact but Alderweireld jumped at the same time to

power the ball home. Despite the early blow, Hungary defended robustly and looked dangerous at times. But Belgium stretched Hungary's defense on numerous occasions with its creative attacking play, with Hazard and De Bruyne pulling the strings.

De Bruyne hit the crossbar with a free kick in the 35th minute and was lively throughout the match, only to be denied several times by Hungary goalkeeper Gabor Kiraly. Hungary had its chances to equalize, with captain Balazs Dzsudzsak going close with a shot that flew just wide of the post. Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois nearly gifted Hungary a goal when he slipped while trying to control a back pass in the first half. Luckily for the Chelsea player, it trickled out for a corner. Hungary's players had no such luck in the closing stages, as Hazard put the match beyond their reach. — AP

## DRAXLER GIVE GERMANY CUTTING EDGE AT LAST

**LILLE:** Germany coach Joachim Loew appears to have found the right formula to get his attack firing at Euro 2016 after Julian Draxler's outstanding contribution in Sunday's 3-0 win over Slovakia.

The 22-year-old Wolfsburg attacking midfielder was the man of the match as Germany produced arguably their slickest performances since winning the 2014 World Cup to clinch a place in the European Championship quarter-finals. After Jerome Boateng's early opener, Mesut Ozil had a 13th-minute penalty saved before Draxler intervened with an assist and a goal to set the world champions up for a last-eight date with Italy or Spain. Playing on the left wing, Draxler combined superbly with Jonas Hector before cutting the ball back for Mario Gomez to double Germany's lead just before half-time. And the former Schalke prodigy then volleyed home on his right foot from close range following a corner just after the hour mark, securing a comfortable win on a sunny evening in northern France.

Draxler had started Germany's opening two games before being left on the bench in the 1-0 win against Northern Ireland last Tuesday but he was recalled at the expense of Mario Goetze on Sunday and his performance justified Loew's selection.

"It wasn't easy in the last game because I didn't play but today I was happy to play and help the team," said Draxler. "We have a lot of quality in our side so it doesn't matter if I don't play. I just work hard in training so the manager can count on me if needed." Draxler, who said he found out he would be starting the game when he spoke to Loew just after breakfast at the team's hotel, admitted getting into one-on-one situations with the Slovakian defence had been a key part of the German plan. "The coach asked me to do that. He gave me a lot of self-confidence. He trusts in my quality and wanted me to search for the one-on-ones," said Draxler, who gave Slovakia's Bundesliga-based right-back Peter Pekarik a torrid time at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy.

### FALSE NINE EXPERIMENT

A player with "two magic feet" according to Gomez, Draxler's performance summed up why Manchester United have been linked with a £30 million (£36.5 million

euros, \$40.5 million) bid to sign him just a year after he joined Wolfsburg.

It may, however, take far more than that for Wolfsburg to part with a player who is not 23 until September and has four years left on his contract, especially after his display on Sunday.

Draxler's goal was just his second for his country on his 22nd appearance, with his only other strike coming in a friendly defeat to the United States in June 2013.

But his game is more about making chances for others, and Gomez's latest goal-scoring display to follow his winner against Northern Ireland was another source of satisfaction for Loew.

After unsuccessfully using Goetze, the scorer of the winner in the World Cup final against Argentina, as a false nine in the 2-0 victory against Ukraine and the goalless draw with Poland, Gomez has come in and

scored in successive games. And after labouring to convert their chances against Northern Ireland, Germany had a greater cutting edge against Slovakia with Draxler, Thomas Mueller and Ozil supporting Gomez, while Goetze was left on the bench. Asked if Sunday's win was the end of his false nine experiment, Loew replied: "For us, the problem is not having a real or a false nine. If nobody runs in behind the defence we won't do anything. "Against Northern Ireland we did better in that regard than against Poland."

Whether it's Goetze, Mueller or the others, they got in behind every time. Today it was the case as well. "When we got the ball into the box we always had three or four players there. That wasn't the case against Poland."

With their defence keeping a fourth straight clean sheet and an attack clicking into gear at the right time, Germany are going to take some beating. — AFP



**PARIS:** Spanish football team supporters shout and gesture as they watch a giant screen installed at Catalunya square in Barcelona yesterday showing the Euro 2016 football match between Spain and Italy held at the Stade de France stadium in Paris, France. — AFP