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Qualifying not a certainty for Argentina at this level of play

It would be an understatement to say that Argentina had a very poor first game. We were bad, to be honest. It's very worrying for what is going to happen later in the tournament. Of course Iceland made it even more difficult with the way they were defending, but we have to know how to open up this kind of defence. This is something that happens all the time, especially for people like Messi and Ronaldo. Tactically we were very slow managing the ball, everything was incredibly slow, giving Iceland the time to go, come back and defend in numbers.

Next we face Croatia, who are not going to just come and defend. Not at all! And if we lose there is a great possibility of us heading home. We are going to have to be at our very best, in every way. For that to happen we have to substantially change everything about the way we played the first game. We were so, so poor on Saturday: the defence looked vulnerable, the midfield was kind of non-existent and looked like it had no fight. Even worse, we were extremely poor with the ball and were not able to create play.

Croatia are a very good team and that's no surprise when many of their Internationals play in Europe: their star Luka Modric plays for Real Madrid, Ivan Rakitić for Barcelona, and Mario Mandžukić for Juventus. They are a very well-organised team and it's going to be tough to beat them. In fact they are going to be a very difficult side for anyone to beat.

The game of the tournament so far has been Spain-Portugal. What a wonderful, wonderful match. Spain were the better side but Portugal have Ronaldo and he was just brilliant. A hat-trick in the World Cup to add to all the others, so what else can one say? And to do it against a top team like Spain is even more precious.

As for my adoptive country: most times there is a lot of hype around England but this team is very young and expectations are not high. They are young, ambitious, and I expect them to get past the group stage but then that's when the World Cup really starts and it will all depend on how they play.

The tournament has been going as expected and looks like all the top teams will qualify. The only one that doesn't look certain, unfortunately, is Argentina. Not if we play the way we did against Iceland!

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Argentina in meltdown, over-reliance on Messi to blame

It was another non-performance from Argentina, going from bad to worse in their second game, against Croatia. Argentina looks like a team in turmoil, in meltdown. We created one chance at goal, maybe, and there were a lot of defensive mistakes. I won't say this was our worst defeat ever, but certainly it was in that category – one of our worst defeats in a long, long time.

One of the reasons for this is lack of leadership and over-reliance on Messi. From that point of view we have to look at the manager, Sampaoli. In a way it looks like he's fighting with himself. He doesn't seem sure of what to do, doesn't seem to really know his best team, or how to use the players. Even before the World Cup, he used a lot of players, always experimenting. He was never sure of any player apart from Messi. He has brought this into the World Cup, changing the team for the Croatia match. There seems to be an all-round collapse in our game, and there's a lot of infighting in the camp as well. All this, unfortunately, is affecting the results.

However, we are not totally out yet. Our only chance of making it to the next round is beating Nigeria. We got a lucky break with the African country beating Iceland. Now we need to beat Nigeria and, of course, Croatia has to beat Iceland. Otherwise, we will have to rely on goal difference and, for the moment, Iceland has the upper hand there. So, lots of ifs and buts. It still doesn't depend 100 per cent on us but we can only do what we can, and what we can do is go out there and win. And then pray that the Iceland-Croatia match does our way. End of story!

Otherwise, it has been a wonderful, peaceful World Cup so far with lots of good games, and some upsets as well. The first team I would like to congratulate is Mexico, who have qualified, beating Germany on their way! The defending champions, with their win over Sweden, are still in the tournament, while Spain and Portugal look strong and should qualify. Of course, Belgium is the team that looks the best so far. I didn't expect Argentina to be in this position, but this is the way it is. Hopefully (and I'm praying), we make it to the next round.

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France's win deserved; Cavani's goal best in tournament

First, let me say that France deserved to go through as they were the better team. Argentina, however, did not play as bad a game as they have this tournament. Again, I will say the main culprit has been the manager, and his decisions. I believe the one to start Messi as centre forward against France was wrong because in reality he wasn't there. It was made worse without Higuain or Agüero as that basically meant we were playing without a centre forward until the latter arrived.

France were very good and their midfield was better than ours. And of course they had Mbappé, who had a wonderful game. He scored two goals, was involved with the penalty, and was deservedly named the Man of the Match.

The Argentine defence was a little stronger than before because of the 4-4-3 set up. Sampaoli abandoned the experiment to play three at the back after the game against Croatia as that was clearly not working. Still, we couldn't contain France's pace they were too quick for us, especially Mbappé, and as the game went on France controlled the midfield more and more.

We just couldn't do much against them because Messi, as centre forward, was not receiving the ball. As he went deeper and deeper, there was no one up front. Sampaoli rolled the last dice and brought Agüero on but even he went almost 10 minutes without touching the ball, showing just how much control France had over the game. He did score a wonderful goal, typical of him, but it was not enough.

All in all a very disappointing campaign for Argentina. And, unfortunately, not much of a surprise for me. I said right from the beginning that I was not expecting much because I knew the problems they had, and our No. 1 problem was the manager. From the beginning and even up to last night he did not know this best team.

Even then, it was a wonderful game of football. We may have lost 3-4 but it could have gone either way. We had quite a few chances in the last few minutes. It could have been 4-4 and then who knows what could have happened? That was how enthralling the game was!

I have to also congratulate Uruguay. They had an extremely tough game against Portugal. There have been a lot of stunning goals this tournament but, for me, the first by Cavani last night was the goal of the tournament.

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It's 50-50 for Belgium and France, England should get past Croatia

First I'd like to start with England. They had a very good, professional game against Sweden on Saturday. They were accomplished and very much the better team. Yes, of course, there one or two scares but their 'keeper did good. Overall, a very good performance.

I was disappointed with Sweden, was expecting much more from them. They were the team that eliminated Italy in the qualifiers. They couldn't create any play and the kind of football they played was a bit outdated. I was disappointed with the quality of their game. Having said that, they were in the quarter-finals of the World Cup, while the 'big boys' like Argentina, Germany and Spain were not. So, from that point of view they had a good campaign.

Croatia was definitely the better side against Russia, but the hosts had some incredible crowd support which lifted them all the time. Even when things looked impossible, they managed that late goal to push the game into penalties. The main reason Croatia won was because they have an excellent 'keeper. Overall, however, Croatia was the better side, the difference being their powerful midfield that includes Ivan Rakitic and Luka Modric.

So now in the semi-finals we have an extraordinary game between Belgium and France to look forward to. I have been very impressed by both teams. Belgium have a bunch of very talented players, like Alderweireld, Vertonghen, and Dembele, whom I know extremely well as they play for Tottenham. I know the rest of them playing in the Premier League well too, like Courtois, Kompany, Hazard, Lukaku, De Bruyne, and Fellaini. So I know exactly how good they are.

France have a very young team and I like the speed with which they play the game. Belgium is more experienced but France have won the World Cup before. It's difficult to say who are the favourites here, so level are the sides. So, I would say 50-50.

For me, England are the better team though maybe Croatia have a better midfield. However, they played a very hard game against Russia and the England players will probably be just that much fresher having spent less time on the field against Sweden to get to the last four. It's been 28 years since England have reached a semi-final, and 20 years for Croatia. Both will be hungry to go further, and I'm sure we can look forward to a great game. Between the two, I will go for England.

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France have the better players, man for man, vs Croatia

This World Cup has been one of surprises, and nothing more so than the fact that Croatia will play France in the final on Sunday. This is not to say that they don't deserve to be there. They are a wonderful team and congratulations to them. For a country of less than five million people to reach the final is absolutely great.

Luka Modric was brilliant in the semi-final against England, running the midfield along with Ivan Rakitic. They are the two best players for Croatia there. It may have not have looked like Modric was doing much but in fact he was the one controlling the game, and that's the same way he plays at Real Madrid: giving chances to the front players.

England began very well against Croatia with a Kieran Trippier goal in the fifth minute giving them the lead. Then Harry Kane and Lingard missed chances and England became very defensive especially in the second half. Gradually, Croatia began to come into the game and England conceded the midfield.

I have to say it was not the best game England played in the tournament, and that they looked a little jaded. Still, England have had a great World Cup (no matter which way the third/fourth play-off match goes) as no one really expected them to reach the semi-finals. So from that point of view, they have caught the imagination of the English people and they can look forward to more from them over the next few years.

The France-Belgium semi-final was a very close match. France scored through a corner set piece, and from then on defended pretty well, not allowing Belgium to make a breakthrough. Had Belgium scored first perhaps they would have done the same thing. There was not a lot separating the sides and France hung on for the win. Well done to them.

Now for the final. France have the better players, man for man. The only department Croatia can really challenge France in is the midfield. Otherwise, France has the better attack and defence; they are more solid and talented. My feeling is that France will win their second title.

Croatia will need to take their time, and ensure they do not leave their defence open like they did in the first half of the semi-final against England. What Croatia have in their favour is the way they have arrived at the final. They have shown tremendous courage, and a never-say-die attitude that they will definitely bring into the final and push France to the limit.

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Consistent France lift World Cup, despite a touch of controversy

Congratulations to France! They were the most consistent team throughout and deserved to win the World Cup. You can be sure we are going to see a lot more of them as they are a very young team and are going to be together for a long time. Croatia must be congratulated too. For such a young country to reach the final is a great achievement.

I think Croatia, though, will be feeling a bit aggrieved as the first two goals by France had a touch of controversy. The first I definitely feel was not a foul but it was probably outside the referee's line of sight so you cannot blame him. The penalty, however, was a very bad decision. This, I think, is on FIFA, who must rethink the handball rule. The rule says that it has to be deliberate but most times your arms will be spread when defending. There have been enough arguments over this and the world body really needs to clarify what is deliberate and what is unintentional, and not just leave it up to the referee to decide.

Still, everyone will agree that France was the better team. They fought strongly in the midfield against Rakitic and Modric, Pogba had a very good game, and Griezmann has been brilliant through the tournament. And, of course, they have young Mbappe. He is really special, the emerging new star now that Messi and Ronaldo are on the wane, even though they are still wonderful players.

Mbappe seems a balanced young man, not the type to be a prima donna. I don't think that fame and fortune will spoil him. He is donating his Cup earnings to charity and that tells me that he has his head on his shoulders, and shouldn't have a problem adjusting to the stardom that will inevitably be thrust on him.

Croatia was very good in the first half, but lagged in the second. It must be remembered that they had a very demanding campaign with three many of their matches going to extra-time; two of those to penalty shoot-outs. That may have taken a toll on them physically and psychologically. Still, they never gave up and right to the very end they kept trying, so hats off to them. They have been absolutely wonderful.

As for the tournament itself, Russia gave us an extraordinary, wonderful, and clean Cup. There were no untoward incidents both off and on the pitch. The world's impression of Russia has changed, and friends who were there tell me that the people were fun, polite, and incredibly helpful. So, well done Russia!