FIFA U-17 World Cup: Confident France face struggling Spain in pre-quarters

GUWAHATI, OCT 16 /--/ On a roll after three wins on the trot in the group stage, former champions France face fellow European powerhouse Spain in a potentially high voltage round of 16 clash at the FIFA U-17 World Cup 2017, on Tuesday. France have entered into this tournament not as one of the four automatic qualifiers from Europe but after featuring in a fifth place play-off match. But they have been having a brilliant run of form so far in India though they were placed in a comparatively easier group. The 2001 champions side beat tournament debutants New Caledonia 7-1, then prevailed over Japan 2-1 in a close game before thrashing Central American side Honduras 5-1. The 'Les Bleuets' have scored the highest number of goals (14) in the group stages. They will, however, face their toughest test of the tournament in the form of Spain, the European champions, on Tuesday. Just five months back, Spain had beaten France 3-1 in the UEFA European U-17 Championships quarter-finals. Star striker Amine Gouiri had given France the lead in that match before Mateu Morey, Abel Ruiz and Sergio Gomez had replied for Spain to register a resounding victory. Gouiri has been in excellent form in the group stage in India and he is the current leading scorer with five strikes to his name. Mateu Morey, Abel Ruiz and Sergio Gomez are all in the Spanish side here and it should be an interesting tussle of supremacy between the two European sides at the Indira Gandhi Athletics Stadium. Spain have come into this tournament as one of the favourites and are seeking their maiden FIFA U-17 World Cup title but they have struggled to live up to the expectations so far. The 'La Rojita' lost to another tournament favourite Brazil 1-2 in their campaign opener and then beat Niger (4-0) and North Korea (2-0) to qualify for the round of 16 as runners-up from Group D. Their final match against North Korea showed their attacking frailties as they needed a late goal to put the match away after taking an early lead. The Spaniards dominated possession and repeatedly threatened the North Korean goal but had to be content with just two goals and the side's finishing must be a worry for coach Santiago Denia. It could be a matter of time the Spaniards rediscover their brand of football that is synonymous with the Iberian nation - possession football. With six players from FC Barcelona's famous academy La Masia and five from Real Madrid academy, this team can do it and beat France tomorrow to advance further in the tournament. For that to happen, wonderkids like Barcelona's youth team player and captain Abel Ruiz and Valencia starlet Ferran Torres will have to make an impact tomorrow. Ruiz of La Masia academy has been courted by top Premier League clubs like Manchester City, Arsenal and Chelsea while Torres is another bright prospect of Spanish football with two La Liga giants Barcelona and Real Madrid having shown interest in the young striker. On the other hand, Gouiri has continued from where he has left at the European qualifying event where he had scored record nine goals. Here in India, he has scored five from three matches to be the tournament's leading scorer so far. The Lyon player has been in his brilliant form scoring France's two goals in the 2-1 win over Japan and then finding the target against Honduras after coming as a substitute.

TEAMS (FROM):

France: Brahia Bernard, Yahia Fofana, Illan Meslier, Melvin Bard, William Bianda, Vincent Collet, Maxime Lacroix, Batista Mendy, Andy Pelmard, Oumar Solet, Yacine Adli, Maxence Caqueret, Claudio Gomes, Alan Kerouedan, Mathias Picouleau, Lenny Pintor, Aurelien Tchouameni, Alexis Flips, Willem Geubbels, Amine Gouiri, Wilson Isidor.

Spain: Alvaro Fernandez, Mateu Jaume, Juan Miranda, Hugo Guillamon, Victor Chust, Antonio Blanco, Ferran Torres, Mohamed Moukhliss, Abel Ruiz, Sergio Gomez, Nacho Diaz, Pedro Ruiz. Marc Vidal, Alvaro Garcia, Eric Garcia, Diego Pampin, Jose Lara, Cesar Gelabert, Carlos Beitia, Victor Perea, Alfonso Pastor.

Players of the Spain during practice session ahead of their FIFA U-17 World Cup match at Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium in Guwahati on Monday.

Iraq face acid test against Mali in U-17 WC pre-quarters

MARGAO, Oct 16 /--/ Last edition's runner-up Mali will enjoy an upper hand over a gutsy Iraq in a tricky pre- quarterfinal match of the FIFA U-17 World Cup, here on Tuesday. Two-time champions Mali have had a good performance so far though they finished runners-up in Group B. They lost to eventual group toppers Paraguay in a narrow 2-3 result but came back strongly to win convincingly against Turkey (3-0) and New Zealand (3-1) to finish with six points. The African side's speedy run down the flanks and stronger physique will pose a lot of threat for the Iraqi defence and it will be interesting to see how the Lions of Mesopotamia, who will be playing without their star player and captain Mohammed Dawood tomorrow, counter the Mali attackers. For Mali strikers Lassana Ndiaye and Djemoussa Traore have combined well upfront and have posed threats to their opponents' defence with their speedy runs but have been found wanting in front of the goal as they have wasted a lot of scoring chances. Attacking midfielder Salim Jidhou will keep the Mali offensive moves going along with Hadji Drame who look dangerous on either flank.

Mohammed Dawood

The biggest concern for Mali is their defence which was exposed by Paraguay and it is to be seen how the Iraqis take advantage in the absence of their star striker Mohammed Dawood. Iraq finished runners-up in Group F behind England. They drew their first match against Mexico 1-1, then came up with a top class performance to beat Chile 3-0 before losing to England 0-4 to finish on four points. It was a disappointing match for the Asian champions against England as they were not only drubbed 0-4 but also lost captain Mohammed Dawood for tomorrow's match after he received a yellow card in the 62nd minute, his second in the tournament. Dawood has been the inspiration in the attack and was the leading scorer for his side with three goals and his absence will surely be felt tomorrow. Iraq have returned to the place where they played last year to win the Asian U-16 Championships. They have been good only on patches and their coach Qahtan Chathir would be hoping that his boys give their best tomorrow. They have a reason to give an inspiring performance tomorrow as this has been their first ever knock-out stage qualification in this tournament. Iraq have featured in the FIFA U-17 World Cup only once earlier, at UAE 2013. That experience was not particularly memorable as they finished last in their group losing all their three matches.

Teams (from):

Mali: Alkalifa Coulibaly, Boubacar Haidara, Djemoussa Traore, Fode Konate, Mamadi Fofana, Mohamed Camara, Hadji Drame, Abdoulaye Dabo, Seme Camara, Salam Giddou, Mamadou Traore, Mahamane Toure, Soumaila Doumbia, Siaka Sidibe, Abdoulaye Diaby, Youssouf Koita, Mamadou Samake, Ibrahim Kane, Lassana Ndiayne, Cheick Oumar Doucoure, Massire Gassama.

Iraq: Ali Ibadi, Mustafa Zuhair, Abdulazeez Ammar; Ammar Mohammed, Maytham Jabbar, Munladher Mohammed, Munladher Abdulsada, Abdulabbas Ayad, Mohammed Al-Baqer, Ali Raad; Habeeb Mohammed, Saif Khalid, Mohammed Ridha, Abbas Ali, Bassam Shakir, Mohammed Ali (Al Nagda), Moamel Karim, Ahmed Sartip; Mohammed Dawood, Ali Kareem, Alaa.

Match starts at 8pm.

France join top seeds for World Cup draw

ZURICH, OCT 16 /--/ France will be among the top seeds for next month's World Cup draw after they climbed to seventh in the FIFA rankings published on Monday. The draw for next year's finals will be held in Moscow on December 1 when the 32 eventual finalists will be divided into four pots according to their position in the rankings announced on Monday. The seven top-ranked teams plus hosts Russia go into in pot one, the next eight ranked teams in pot two and so on. Each of the eight four-team first-round groups will consist of one team drawn from each pot. The top seven teams on Monday were Germany, Brazil, Portugal, Argentina, Belgium, Poland and France - all among the 23 teams who have so far guaranteed their places in Russia. Spain will be in pot two, where they will be joined by England, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay. Peru, Switzerland and Italy, who all face playoffs in November, will also go into pot two if they qualify. Peru, who face New Zealand in November as they attempt to end a 36-year absence from the World Cup, climbed into the top 10 for the first time. The rankings also confirmed that Switzerland, Italy, Croatia and Denmark will be the seeded teams for the European playoffs, which will be drawn on Tuesday and played over two legs in November. Northern Ireland, Ireland, Greece and Sweden are the other teams involved.

Indonesian goalkeeper Huda dies after mid-game collision

JAKARTA, OCT 16 /--/ Indonesian football was in mourning on Monday after celebrated goalkeeper Choirul Huda died following an on-pitch collision with a teammate. Huda, 38, a long-time regular for his hometown club Persela in East Java, collapsed just before half-time after Sunday's accidental clash with Brazilian midfielder Ramon Rodrigues. Video footage showed the father of two clutching his chest in pain before he was rushed away on a stretcher and taken to hospital. Doctors said he stopped breathing and suffered a heart attack. "He received an emergency treatment for a few minutes in the hospital but he could not be saved. He died before 5:00 pm yesterday," Persela's assistant coach Yuhronur Efendi told AFP. Doctors said the medical team tried to revive the veteran Huda, a former fringe player in the national set-up, for about an hour. "Choirul Huda suffered from traumatic collision with a team-mate which caused him to stop breathing and have cardiac arrest," Yudistiro Andri Nugroho, a doctor from Lamongan hospital, said in a statement. Nugroho said Huda suffered possible neck and head trauma from the impact to his chest and lower jaw after he dived at the feet of on-rushing players and was caught by the legs of Rodrigues. Persela paid tribute to Huda, who played for the team more than 500 times since 1999, calling him "The Real Legend" of the club in a posting on Twitter. Thousands of fans also took to social media in memory of Huda, who had been known to Persela supporters as "One Man, One Club, One Love".

Bowl reasonably quick: Santner's plan in India

MUMBAI, OCT 16 /--/ New Zealand spinner Mitchell Santner on Monday said the key to success against India's much-vaunted batting line-up would be to bowl reasonably quick and induce mistakes from Virat Kohli and Co. India and New Zealand will lock horns in a limited-overs series, comprising three ODIs and an equal number of T20 Internationals, starting October 22. "It is tough (to bowl against India), they are a very good players of spin. They have grown up playing spin. I just try to keep it pretty simple," Santner said ahead of his team's practice game against Board President's XI on Tuesday. "Bowl the ball reasonably quick on the surface and make the batsmen commit a mistake. If you get a few dots and build pressure that way, you can hopefully get a few wickets. That's what I'll be trying to do," he added. Asked about the plans to tackle the ever-dangerous Virat Kohli, Santner was candid enough to admit that it was no easy task. "Not easy. He's a very good player, and so is a lot of their team. They're in good form, the way they played against Australia was very good. The last time we came here, we did OK. Hopefully we can do one better this time and take the series." According to Santner his past experience will help him in this series. "We haven't been here for a while. But for me, it's about taking those past experiences of the way I bowled over here, and the way to bowl spin over here. So I'll be looking to do that," he added. The legendary Daniel Vettori has had plenty of experience of bowling in India and Santner has taken his advice. "I have (learnt from him). He's a very good left-arm spinner. I am not trying to bowl miracle balls every ball. It's about tying up a batsman and waiting for them to make a mistake. "Especially on wickets that offer a little bit, I watched a lot of Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja. They just try to bowl very consistent and good areas and wait for the batsmen to hit a big shot and get out or run past one. I have taken a little bit of footage from there", he added.

Santner said the in-form all-rounder Hardik Pandya is a concern but the Kiwis were ready with ways to tackle him. "He is a very good striker. He tends to hit down the ground very good. So I guess it's key to take the length off him. I saw him hit (Adam) Zampa for 3 sixes in an over. So, once he hits one, he wants to keep going. "So if you can tie him down or make him hit singles, hopefully he will try to play a big shot and go for a ball that's not quite there. But yeah he's a very good player and striker. So we have to beware," he said. Santner said personally he enjoys bowling in India. "It always tends to spin here more, which is a good thing for me as a spinner. But yeah the Indians are very good players of spin, and we have to work really hard. "Hopefully get a little bit of turn out there, but just hopefully be able to control them a little bit. Try and get a few dots in the over and try and be happy with maybe 4 an over. Looking forward to the series, " he said. Santner played a crucial role in New Zealand's win against India in the opening match of World T20 last year and the bowler has fond memories of the game. "I think on that day, we did keep it pretty simple, tried to bowl relatively quick. Didn't try and give them too much and let them make a mistake. We can learn from that experience and take it into this series. We have to adapt, if it's not going to sin as much then you might have to change the way we bowl," Santner recalled. (PTI)

KL Rahul to play for BP XI vs New Zealand in warm-up games

NEW DELHI, OCT 16 /--/ Dropped for the three-match ODI series against New Zealand, opener KL Rahul was today drafted as an additional member in the Board President's XI side which will take on the visitors in two warm-up games. It will be an opportunity for Rahul to get back into the limited overs side as he has not been in great form and also did not get too many opportunities. In addition to the Karnataka batsman, leg-spinner Karn Sharma, who has been in great form for India A against the Black caps A side, was called as a replacement for injured Rajasthan youngster Rahul Chahar. The team will be lead by Mumbai batsman Shreyas Iyer.

Board President's XI team: Shreyas Iyer (Captain), KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant (wk), Karun Nair, Gurkeerat Mann, Prithvi Shaw, Shivam Chaudhary, Milind Kumar, Shahbaz Nadeem, Karn Sharma, Dhawal Kulkarni, Jaydev Unadkat, Avesh Khan. (PTI)

Delhi Dynamos, Special Olympics Bharat join hands

NEW DELHI, OCT 16 /--/ Indian Super League club Delhi Dynamos and Special Olympics Bharat have joined hands for a noble cause of promoting the initiative of inclusiveness in sports via football. Global chairman of Special Olympics, Dr Tim Shriver and the CEO of Delhi Dynamos FC, Ashish Shah were present to kick start the initiative via a unified football match between the Delhi Dynamos Soccer Schools and Special Olympics Bharat young athletes at The Frank Anthony Public School today. The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts. On the occasion, Dr Timothy P Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics said: "We are extremely happy to associate with Delhi Dynamos FC on our mission to promote inclusiveness in sports. Activities like coaches interactive session and unified football training will be some of the key highlights of the program. (PTI)

India unlikely to play any 'four-day' Tests in near future

NEW DELHI, OCT 16 /-- -/ The ICC has decided to start with four-day Test matches on a trial basis but the Indian cricket team is unlikely to play the curtailed version of the longest format in near future. The decision to introduce four-day Test was taken during recent ICC board meeting in Auckland with South Africa and Zimbabwe set to play the inaugural four day 'Test' on the 'Boxing Day'. However BCCI wants to stick to traditional format as has been recommended by the Anil Kumble led ICC Cricket Committee, which was against this experimental move. "India will not play any four day Test matches, atleast in the near future. Any Test match involving India will be a five-day affair," a senior BCCI official privy to developments told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "The BCCI believes that there is a lot of merit in Anil Kumble-led Cricket Committee's recommendations that duration should not be tinkered with. But since four-day Test matches are bi-partite agreements, if two nations are okay, they will go ahead with it," the official said. The other reason for BCCI not warming up to four day Test is because there are no points awarded for the proposed Test league. "Only five-day Tests will have points that will be counted for the World Test Championship. What's the point in playing matches that won't count for anything. In any case, if we play Ireland or Afghanistan also, it will be five-day affairs," the official said. Asked if near future, the broadcasters start pressurising for curtailed Test matches, the official said: "We will cross that bridge when it comes." It is learnt that ICC's main aim towards promoting four- day Test is to ensure that Ireland and Afghanistan are eased into the system along with Zimbabwe being able to remain competitive. "Let's be practical. For Ireland or Afghanistan, it will be very difficult that they can be competitive in a five-day format straightaway. If Test matches against these countries end inside three days or little over it, it is only logical that four-day Tests are tried out," an official of a member board said. (PTI)

Playing as a unit is key to our success: Rohit

MUMBAI, OCT 16 /--/ Star batsman Rohit Sharma today said that playing as a cohesive unit has been the primary reason for Indian cricket team's stupendous success across formats in recent times. "The way we are playing, credit goes to everyone. Because irrespective of whether you play for a city or country, you have to win a match and it is not an easy task. We have won six back-to-back series because we have played together as a unit," Rohit said during a promotional event. In the limited overs format, India defeated West Indies 3-1 in their backyard, they whitewashed Sri Lanka 5-0 in the island nation and decimated Australia 4-1. The right-handed batsman was speaking to reporters after the launch of Adidas Uprising 3.0 here. Unless a team performs collectively, it is difficult to sustain performances. "If you (the team) want to win a tournament, it not that that one or two players will perform and you will win. It is essential that everybody contributes as this is a team sport. We are going towards a goal and that I think is good for team. "The way the team is thinking that is in one direction, which is helping the side and everyone is contributing, not just one or two players," Rohit added. Asked whether the goal was 2019 World Cup, Rohit said, "See, there is one and half year for the World Cup. Now, it will be too early for me to comment on it. Yes, our aim is the 2019 World Cup and the preparations are on." "Like our selectors, coach and captain have said the way our team is playing and the combination of the team has been made keeping the World Cup in mind. It is clear that what the team (management) wants from the players." India play New Zealand in a three match ODI series and as many T20s. On the series, Rohit said, "We haven't thought what we will do. When we will reach the hotel then the preparations will start. Two days before we have finished a series. Our goal will be to beat any team whom we play against". Cricketer K L Rahul and boxer Nikhat Zareen were present on the occasion. (PTI)