



(Left to right) Brazil fans look dejected after the match. Brazil fan inside the stadium looks dejected after the match. Fans react during the match in Rio de Janeiro — Reuters

Fans dejected after Brazil's defeat

KAZAN (RUSSIA), JUL 7 /-/- Brazilian fans' hopes of celebrating a sixth World Cup title in Russia were dashed on Friday when their national team lost 2-1 to Belgium in the quarter-finals. Belgium struck early and held off a late Brazil fightback to send the five-times champions tumbling out in an end-to-end thriller that earned a semi-final with France. Engineer Flavio Montez flew the more than 12,500 km (7,767 miles) from his home in Sao Paulo to the Russian World Cup host city of Kazan for Friday's game. "We are very disappointed because we came here to go to the semi-finals and finals," he said. "But it was, I think in the end, a great match and Belgium played well. We have to accept that this is football." Daniel De Freitas Ariano, also from Sao Paulo, was not happy with Brazil midfielder Fernandinho, who inadvertently gave Belgium an early lead by scoring an own goal as the ball came off his shoulder into the net from a corner. "We feel bad because Belgium played well. It's always hard when the other team plays well," he said. "But I think the feeling I hate the most is Fernandinho, he basically lost the game for us. "But we came to see the World Cup, and even losing was the best experience of our lives. Just to be here."

Neymar escapes yellow card for blatant dive



Brazil's Neymar looks dejected at the end of the match REUTERS

KAZAN (RUSSIA), JUL 7 /-/- Neymar and Brazil were dumped out of the World Cup 2018 by a clinical Belgium in the last eight stage of the tournament on Friday night. Before the match, Neymar received a lot of criticism for his play-acting during the FIFA World Cup 2018 in Russia. Fans and pundits accused the Brazilian of squirming and crying in distress at the slightest of touches. Neymar's over-the-top theatrics was panned across footballing circles. Needless to say, going into the quarter-final tie in Kazan, all eyes were on the PSG star. With Brazil trailing 0-2 and the time ticking away in the second half, the pantomime villain, in the eyes of many, just could not stop himself from using the dark arts to try and get his team back in the game. Neymar, who was already on a yellow and in the danger of missing out on the semis if Brazil progressed, stuck out his right leg in the 54th minute in a bid to draw out a foul from Marouane Fellaini, who smartly avoided any contact. But that still don't stop Neymar from tumbling over as if someone had pulled the rug out from under him. A majority Brazilian crowd at the Kazan Arena all went up in unison, waiting eagerly for the referee to point to the spot. Brazil coach Tite was also convinced it was a penalty and signalled accordingly for the VAR. But there was none coming. The replays clearly showed there was no contact and Neymar had deliberately taken a tumble but yet the Brazilian somehow escaped punishment. Brazil did manage to pull one back without any use of Neymar's dark arts but the South Americans just didn't have enough time left to take the match into extra-time. And thus, four years after the psychodrama of Neymar's injury and a humiliating World Cup semi-final defeat as hosts, Brazil once again fell short of their goal and exited the tournament in tears. Neymar goes home after scoring just two goals, his greatest impact on the World Cup 2018 being his tears against Costa Rica and, above all, his theatrics.

'Bitter' Brazil boss Tite keeps quiet on future

KAZAN ARENA (RUSSIA), JULY 7 /-/- Brazil coach Tite left questions hanging over his future but refused to point the finger as the five-time champions crashed out of the World Cup after a 2-1 quarter-final defeat to Belgium. Four years after the drama of Neymar's injury and a humiliating 7-1 semi-final defeat to Germany on home soil, Brazil were forced back to the drawing board as they followed neighbours Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia in exiting the tournament earlier than hoped. Brazil had been undefeated in their last 15 games under Tite, a streak in which a resurgent Selecao had conceded only three goals. Their World Cup hopes were turned upside down in 31 first-half minutes when Fernandinho's 13th minute own goal put Belgium ahead before a superb strike from Kevin De Bruyne left Brazil, and Neymar, staring at a spectacular defeat. Tite admitted it was a "bitter" defeat, but he brushed aside suggestions he could resign. "I'm not going to talk about the future, I'm not thinking about the future," said the 56-year-old. "I will do a general assessment of the match and our campaign, but I won't be making any comments on individuals. "This is not very human. And we also have to look at the global context. "We played a match in which we had lots of possession, a lot of opportunities, but in terms of effectiveness... Belgium managed to turn their opportunities into goals. "They weren't superior to us on the pitch, but more efficient. That's certain." Neymar, who appeared in great form when scoring once and setting up another in a 2-0 last 16 win over Mexico, failed to spark on the night despite testing Belgium keeper Thibaut Courtois at the death. The Paris Saint-Germain star, left in tears at the final whistle, refused to talk to waiting media. (AFP)



FIFA World Cup 2018: Of Belgium's golden generation and Scifo's Prediction

Their nimble-footed counter-attacks, the creative genius of their mid-field duo, the safe pair of hands of their finest custodian ever and an experienced yet leaky defence's ability to soak in the pressure and just about not wilt in a crucial match finally gave Belgium's much touted Golden Generation its finest moment

KAZAN (RUSSIA), JUL 7 /-/- Their nimble-footed counter-attacks, the creative genius of their mid-field duo, the safe pair of hands of their finest custodian ever and an experienced yet leaky defence's ability to soak in the pressure and just about not wilt in a crucial match finally gave Belgium's much touted Golden Generation its finest moment. The term 'Golden Generation' is often overused in sports, more so in football. And so it seemed, for long. In the case of the current crop of Belgian players, who had flattered to deceive in two international tournaments. But on a balmy Russian evening in Kazan, this precociously talented bunch finally came of age as they held on, to narrowly edge a Brazilian side, that finally showed the verve and freedom of play in a second-half comeback bid, something the Selecao had missed throughout the tournament. Not since the days of the midfield genius Enzo Scifo, has a Belgian side been earmarked for success at the global stage. A young Scifo's ingenuity as a classical number 10 had helped Belgium finish 4th in the 1986 World Cup, six years after his predecessors had finished runners-up to West Germany in the European Championships, which remains Belgium's best ever finish in an international tournament. Belgian football slumped into mediocrity thereafter as the Red Devils failed to qualify for consecutive World Cups in 2006 and 2010. Continental form and fortunes also plummeted to a new low as they missed the bus for three consecutive European Championships. After the team's failed 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign Scifo had opined in an interview given to FIFA.com, "The team's got talent but that spirit I've been talking about is missing. We've failed to qualify and that's very hard to take, but there's been a change with this new generation and I think the performances will really start to come over the next couple of years." Just like his passes, Scifo's prediction to hit the bulls-eye as the 'new generation' of stars started performing at the highest level. This new Belgian side was slick. It had midfielders with silken touch, burly strikers with good finishing skills and big names in the defence.



Almost the entire first XI was playing in the top English Premier's league clubs and their exploits in the widely followed league meant expectations skyrocketed as the team made it to the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil. Clinical victories in all the league matches and a hard-fought win over the United States meant the Belgians were in the last eight of a World Cup for the first time since 1986. But the young side couldn't get past tournament favourites Argentina as they lost by a single goal. Coach Marc Wilmots' attacking philosophy and ability to get the group together meant Belgium were playing creative football at breakneck speed. Much was expected from this team, which had now matured into a strong contender, during the 2016 UEFA Euro. A 0-2 loss to a tactically superior Italian side in the opener notwithstanding, the Belgians made it to the knockouts, and announced their title credentials with a 4-0 drubbing of Hungary to enter the quarters. But an insipid display against newcomers Wales led to a shock exit and gave way to a discourse doubting this group's ability to cope with pressure at big tournaments. Out went Wilmots and in came Roberto Martinez. The Spanish coach had made a name for himself by helping smaller clubs punch above their weight in English football. But the Spaniard started with a loss against his native La Roja in his first match in charge. That was way back in September 2016 and Belgium have not lost since, under Martinez's watch. A remarkable run of 23 matches unbeaten after their success against Brazil means Martinez's team is now tied fifth for the longest unbeaten streaks in international football. What has changed under Martinez is the team's temperament when under the pump. And that was on display against the Japanese in the round of 16 as the Belgians came back from the dead to complete a remarkable comeback. Kevin de Bruyne and Eden Hazard have matured into world class midfielders with an eye for goal, while Romelu Lukaku is finally delivering in Belgian colours. Thibaut Courtois's acrobatic saves and assured presence under the bar shows he leads the race to succeed Manuel Neuer as the world's best goalkeeper.