

ROB'S RAMBLINGS

So, I watched both the England and Belgium games in full yesterday. I can still hear the African drums beating – or perhaps that's simply my head pounding after several hours of drinking.....

Both games were surprisingly similar: Europe v Africa with the European teams favouring slow build ups and lots of sideways passing, whereas the African teams being much more direct. Both games had the African teams taking the lead before the colonial powers ultimately exerted their superior power (ed: this is not a Reform Party newsletter). There were even controversial VAR decisions in both games.

Looking at the England match, they probably just about deserved to win simply because they did create more goal scoring chances than Congo. The Congolese goalkeeper – who is just the reserve goalie at Le Havre! – had the game of his life: all the more amazing given that King Leopold had one of his hands chopped off (ed: I think you are getting your history mixed up). In fact, England won when they finally realised that passing the ball to 'Arry Kane was a good idea. Thank you to the Bundesliga for making him so sharp – if only Germany had such a no 9!!

England have only two world class players – Kane and Declan Rice (though Jude Bellingham thinks he is). Belgium have only one in Thibault Courtois – and for much of the Belgium v Senegal game it showed. At 0-2 down in the last quarter Belgium looked down and out, with little threat of scoring. However, manager Rudi Garcia showed all his experience from managing Watford (*ed: that was Javi Garcia*) and his substitutions somehow worked the magic. After finishing his steak-frites and coming off the bench (sagging under his weight) Lukaku scored an instinctive striker's goal and Youri Tielemans finally answered the question that I asked several ramblings ago, namely 'what is the point of Youri Tielemans?'. After over 350 minutes of World Cup football he finally did something useful, making a brave challenge to head in the equalising goal, though the Senegal goalie blundered badly, and then he went on to win - and score - the winning penalty (Romelu allowing him to take the kick whilst he had a quick sandwich break).

The result was probably harsh on Senegal who, over the match as a whole, were the better team. But Belgium did show great fighting spirit to come back from the dead and a common factor from both games was that the African teams demonstrate good skill and great physical stamina but lacked the temperament to "close out" a game when in a winning position.

I mentioned that both games had controversial VAR decisions. In the England game Harry Kane was denied a penalty when in a 1v1 situation with the Congolese goalkeeper. And VAR took a long time deciding whether Belgium's winning penalty was a foul or not. Personally, I would say that both decisions were correct, though each could easily have been made the other way. That's the problem with VAR – whilst the intention is good, you'll always get incidents like these two that are so marginal that it is still not possible to say with 100% certainty what the correct decision is: which defeats the whole purpose of VAR.

The Belgium v Senegal match was not quite up to the level of Belgium v USSR at the 1986 World Cup (for the 95% of you who don't know what I'm talking about, look it up on YouTube – that was a match where it was worthwhile staying up till 2am to watch!) but it was a great atmosphere in Place Dumon at 1am, even if one got looks as if you were Jeffrey Epstein as 75% of the crowd were teenagers (presumably allowed to watch now school is out for summer).

And after the game the car horns were blaring! I believe that tractors were even driving around Erps-Kwerps, Aalst and Haacht beeping their horns late into the night (though they probably do that all-year round – bloody farmers).

But the highlight of the two games for me was seeing a Belgian called Brandon and an English one called Djed (rumours that he was conceived in a shed have not been confirmed).



In the last ramblings we told of the sadness faced by Germany's Nico Schlotterbeck who, after being injured, was given the honour of being the team "Towelmeister" – getting the towels onto the hotel sun loungers before 6am – only for the team to be unceremoniously knocked out (ed: no laughing). However, we were pleased to learn that Nico was at least allowed the possibility to demonstrate his skills on the flight back to Germany.



Staying with Germany the shock of their awful performances was only matched by the shock of the reaction by Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz. Only minutes after the Germans were eliminated on penalties for the first time in their World Cup history, a post from Merz's official X account was published, reading: "Even if elimination hurts: what a game. With your commitment and team spirit at this World Cup," the post continued, addressing the beaten players, "you have thrilled our country. We are proud of you." It is believed that Merz was watching the game from his bunker in Rastenburg.

Merz has also planned an open-top bus ride through Berlin for "die Mannschaft" and that Julian Nagelsmann will be presented with Germany's Order of Merit whilst the players will get a lifetime supply of bratwurst.

Merz's office subsequently claimed that 'the wrong tweet' had been posted – confirming that a) such phoney sports fans have their cabinet preparing multiple messages – at least "the Donald" writes the crap himself - and b) that most of the people working in cabinets are tossers: at that level how can you possibly send the 'wrong' tweet? What if it was something really important, like impending war, and the wrong tweet is sent....?!!

Through exhaustive research we have discovered the tweet that should have been sent it says:

" You were shit. You have betrayed the Fatherland. You are order to return home in disgrace swiftly, when full retribution will be dealt out.

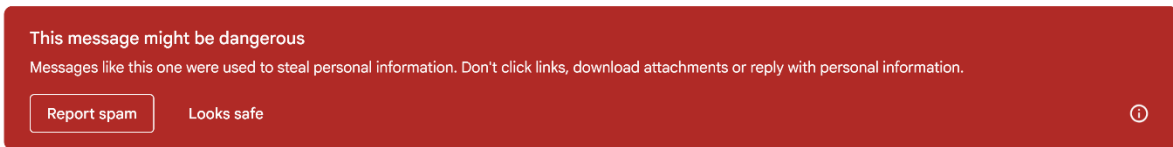
PS Don't put towels out on the seats of the plane as it gives Germans a bad reputation".



I covered VAR incidents in the England and Belgium games, but I should return to its use – or rather it’s non-use in a game in an earlier round. Cast your minds back to the Germany v Ecuador game. Germany’s goal came in spite of a very high boot from a German player which should have been given as a foul for dangerous play. However, the referee was a woman – an American lady by the name of Tori Penso. She probably set back female refereeing by 10 years by her inept performance. In particular it demonstrated that VAR is pointless when you have a female ref: as any married man knows a woman will never admit she is wrong and change her mind, irrespective of the evidence – video or otherwise – presented to her! (*ed: that’s you sleeping in the garage tonight.....*)



Some loyal sweepstakers have reported getting this message with our e-mails:



This is not, in fact, from your internet provider but from the HR department of the European Commission who are concerned that you may be contaminated by my warped sense of humour. (And this is even before we’ve discussed the role of men in childbirth.... I’m still trying to understand why some people attacked Jeremy Doku for leaving the World Cup to be with his wife when their baby was born, yet no-one commented negatively on Cody Gakpo playing on with Netherlands after his wife lost their unborn child.)

