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WHO

Paulo Dybala Argentina's rising forward

Another diminutive left-footer is getting ready to play a bigger role in Argentina's football side. Paulo Dybala, the 23-year-old forward who plays for Juventus club in the Italian league, is likely to be an integral part of the Argentine attack in the future. His illustrious senior peers, Lionel Messi, Sergio Agüero and Gonzalo Higuaín, will all be touching 30 by the time of the next World Cup in Russia in 2018.

Why now?

During the April 11 Champions League quarterfinal between Juventus and Barcelona, billed as a gladiatorial contest between Dybala and Messi, the world of sport witnessed the arrival of an exciting talent. Seven minutes into the game, Dybala had already put his famous compatriot in the shade. Receiving the ball inside the area, Dybala swivelled and let loose a curler which beat the Barcelona defence and keeper. Fifteen minutes later, Dybala scored again and virtually condemned the Spanish side to the sidelines.

Besides his talent and skill, Dybala's

trademark celebration – peeling away with his hand covering the lower half of his face – enlivens his fans. “The Dybal-amask is really simple,” he says. “It’s the mask of a gladiator.” The Juventus Ultras already knew. They had a massive banner with a picture of his celebration unfurled even before the game. Dybala is efficient, moves swiftly and always has an eye on the goal.

Is he the next Messi?

Well, both of them are diminutive and favour their left foot. Dybala is a natural like Messi and most of Argentina, thirsting for a major title in more than two decades, sees Dybala as someone who can take over from Messi and probably deliver where the Barcelona talisman has failed.

Dybala, though, has some way to go before his achievements even begin to match those of the man from Rosario, much less better them, considering that Messi has been at the top of his game for more than a decade.

Stack up their numbers for this season alone and Dybala compares favour-

ably with Messi in terms of assists (seven and nine), chances created (56 and 78) and key passes (49 and 69) as per www.squawka.com, though this comes with the rider that they play in leagues, the Serie A and La Liga, which couldn't be more dissimilar. Messi, of course, is streets ahead in terms of goals scored, 37 to Dybala's 10.

What is interesting is that Dybala has racked up these stats in 30 games across 2,069 minutes, compared with Messi's 34 and 2,830. Comparisons, though, are odious and unfair.

They rarely present the true picture; to put it in perspective, when Dybala first arrived in Italy in 2012, Palermo's Maurizio Zamparini called him the next Agüero.

Dybala himself dislikes the comparisons and has stated: “People have to know that I am not Messi. I am Dybala and I want only to be Dybala, although I understand that there are comparisons.”

Why is he called the 'jewel'? From the time Dybala started at

home-town club Instituto AC Córdoba, he has shown that he can deliver.

Of Polish and Italian descent, Dybala's grandfather immigrated to Argentina during the Second World War. Dybala broke Argentine legend Mario Kempes' record as the youngest ever scorer for Cor-



doba at age 17. No wonder then that he was dubbed *La Joya* (the Jewel). Europe soon beckoned, but the journey from Palermo, his first club in Europe, to Juventus has been anything but smooth.

What next?

Dybala has grown in stature season after season. While his club career is on the ascendancy, his national team appearances have been limited.

Will he lead Argentina's forward line in future? For that to happen he will have to break into a club whose members include Messi, Agüero and Higuaín. The signs are positive, and time is on his side.

On June 3, Dybala has the perfect opportunity to show the world that he has truly moved out of their shadows when Juventus squares off against Real Madrid in the Champions League final.

For now, only the Juventus faithful are copying his mask celebrations, but if Dybala does his stuff at Cardiff, expect a legion of football fans to ape him.

S.V. SRIRAM

WHAT

The lowdown on triple talaq



WHAT IS IT There are three forms of talaq (divorce): Ahsan, Hasan and Talaq-e-Biddat (triple or instant talaq). Ahsan and Hasan are revocable. Biddat – pronouncing divorce in one go by the husband – is irrevocable.

Biddat is considered 'sinful,' but per-

missible in Islamic law. An anecdote in this context is about two men meeting in Medina. The first man asks whether the second has divorced his wife, to which the latter replies that he has done so a thousand times. The man was produced before Caliph Umar, who whipped him. After the lashing, Umar told the man “triple talaq will suffice you.”

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) holds that for the Hanafis, who make up more than 90% Sunnis in India, triple talaq is a matter of faith followed for 1,400 years.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT On October 16, 2015, the Supreme Court questioned whether Muslim personal law practices of marriage and divorce reduce women to mere chattels. In a rare move, it registered a *suo motu* public interest litigation (PIL) petition titled ‘In Re: Muslim Women's Quest for Equality’ to examine whether arbitrary divorce, polygamy and nikah halala (where a Muslim divor-

cee marries a man and divorces him to get re-married to her former husband) violate women's dignity.

The court rued missing the opportunity to address the question of gender inequality in both the Shah Bano and Danial Latifi cases. In the Shah Bano case, the court merely goaded the government to frame the Uniform Civil Code. In the Latifi case, it upheld the right of Muslim women to maintenance till re-marriage. Many Muslim women and organisations backed the court's initiative. However, a Constitution Bench decided to confine itself to examining triple talaq and not polygamy and nikah halala.

WHY DOES IT MATTER This has been an issue of concern for over 65 years for Muslim women, who comprise approximately 8% of the population as per the 2011 census. “Muslim women want to have a life equal to that of another woman, say a Christian or Hindu wife,” the government argued in court. The Centre

claimed that instant talaq is not fundamental to Islam. It promised to bring in a new divorce law for Muslim men in case the court strikes down the three forms of talaq.

The government argued that Muslim marriage and divorce is codified under Section 2 of the Shariat Act of 1937 and came within the ambit of ‘law’ under Article 13 of the Constitution. Hence, they should abide by the principles of dignity and non-discrimination.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board countered that triple talaq is a matter of faith like the Hindu belief that Ayodhya is Ram's birthplace. The courts and the government should leave reform to the community, it said, quoting the Bombay High Court's unchallenged decision in the Narasu Appa Mali case that personal law should not be tinkered with. Where will Muslim men go for divorce if you (the court) strike down talaq and Parliament refuses to pass a new law, the AIMPLB asked.

WHAT NEXT Justice Kurian Joseph,

a judge on the Constitution Bench, ignited a spark by suggesting an alternative that a Muslim bride, at the time of the wedding, be allowed to lay down a condition in the nikahnama that she would not be subjected to instant talaq in case the marriage hits a rough patch.

Days after the court reserved the case for judgment, the AIMPLB filed an affidavit saying that it would issue a public advisory to *qazis* to advise bridegrooms against instant talaq and also add a condition in the nikahnama to exclude instant talaq. The AIMPLB even threatened social boycott of Muslim men who resort to instant talaq.

The hearings also saw the court toy with the idea of making the Muslim Dissolution of Marriage Act of 1939 – applicable only to Muslim women – gender neutral.

Another possibility is that the court may interpret the pronouncement of instant talaq as a single pronouncement of talaq.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

WHY

is Trump losing his way in Washington

Why is he not playing by the book?

U.S. President Donald Trump's politics is built on his chest-thumping confrontation with the ‘Washington establishment.’ There is a ‘Washington playbook’ that the Presidents are expected to stick to, former President Barack Obama once said. When Presidents question that playbook, they are drawn into controversies. “Where am I controversial? When it comes to the use of military power... That is the source of the controversy,” Mr. Obama said, explaining his decision not to bomb Syria. Till today, Mr. Obama's decision is cited as a major failure of his presidency by security czars and the mainstream media.

Why is he undiplomatic?

Mr. Obama was a tactful politician, unlike Mr. Trump. Early on in his campaign, Mr. Trump named and challenged two key players in the equation: the intelligence agencies and the media. The American media's courage to take on the political executive is often exemplary but it is unquestioning in its

propagation of the security apparatus's worldview. Mr. Trump continuously questioned their wisdom and ability. He said everything that America did in the last three decades had been disastrous. American policies built up China into a challenge, he argued. Russia is not an enemy but a potential friend, he declared, horrifying the military establishment.

Who is he attacking?

He touched some raw nerves while making the point that American policies had been foolish, for instance, reminding everyone that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was based on fake intelligence produced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. In power, Mr. Trump has refused to back down, which many think is tactless egotism, but some believe is an essential component of his politics.

Mr. Trump bruised the ego of many in the security and media world, who are used to being sought and feted by



the rest of the establishment, primarily senior leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties. The media-intelligence compact is running a ring around Mr. Trump, who aggravates his own misery with one wrong step after another. The President's perception of his own persuasive power is far removed from reality, often leading him on to landmines cleverly laid for him by adversaries.

Intelligence officials are leaking with impunity – some stories in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*

quote dozens of anonymous sources. But the selective nature of this information exchange between agencies and the media is unmistakable. For instance, the allegations of Russian links maintained by the President's aides and associates is the fountainhead of all controversies in the American capital.

What is the Russian angle?

Former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn had to resign after leaks that he discussed with the Russian Ambassador to Washington the question of American sanctions against Kremlin. Though dozens of intelligence officials appear to be willing to talk to reporters, nobody has thought it worthwhile to ask what actually they discussed in the telephone conversation taped by the intelligence. In a little-noticed report by the National Public Radio, an official who read the transcript said: “Flynn talked about sanctions, but no specific promises were made. Flynn was speaking more in general ‘maybe we'll take a look at this going forward’ terms.”

Mr. Trump's decision to sack FBI chief James Comey has been a trigger for another round of media-intelligence tango against the White House. To cite one episode from this controversy, on May 11, *The New York Times* led with a story that Mr. Comey was sacked after he requested additional staff to investigate Russian interference. A few days later, acting FBI director Andrew McCabe, who defended his former boss unflinchingly, denied the premise and facts cited in the report. “We don't typically request resources for an individual case. ...I strongly believe that the Russian investigation is adequately resourced,” he told the Senate committee. But the media largely ignored his statement.

The one and only time that Mr. Trump got approving nods in Washington in the last four months was when he bombed Syria and Afghanistan. He still has not learnt to sway with the Washington playbook.

VARGHESE K GEORGE

WHEN

30 May 2017

Chasing the monsoon: A man rides his bicycle as rain pounds Kochi on Friday night, while plantation workers in Munnar cover themselves with plastic sheets for protection. Kerala has received intermittent to good pre-monsoon showers over the past week as the southwest monsoon nears the Indian peninsula. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said that conditions are favourable for the monsoon to hit Kerala by May 30. On April 18, in its first forecast, the IMD pegged this year's monsoon rain at 96% of the 50-year average of 89 cm for the four-month season from June to September. It also indicated that the threat to the monsoon from El Nino may have receded. However, it is not clear yet if this will lead to improved rainfall. The IMD's estimate of 96% falls at the bottom edge of what it considers ‘normal’ monsoon rain. The IMD will update its numbers in June when the picture is likely to get clearer. •THULASI KAKKAT



WHERE

In Pune, panic over jobs on an IT campus

As the Indian IT sector goes full-throttle on automation and digitisation, the sprawling IT Park at Hinjewadi in Pune is in a panic over layoffs. Though the IT giants and Nasscom, the industry's apex body, are in denial mode, analysts predict that nearly a lakh jobs will be lost in the \$160 billion industry over this year and next, signalling a crumbling of the world of IT outsourcing.

What happened?

With aggressive automation the way of the future, the Indian IT sector, service-oriented for long, is shifting focus to software product development to produce reliable and highly qualitative enterprise solutions. After Bengaluru, the reverberations of downsizing are being felt acutely across the 2,800-acre Hinjewadi IT Park, which houses all the big guns: Infosys, Wipro, Cognizant, IBM and Tech Mahindra, among others.

Over three lakh people in the city depend on the IT sector for their livelihood. Besides Hinjewadi, Pune is home to more than 800 IT companies of all

sizes, besides having two other IT parks at Magarpatta and Kharadi.

The city's share of IT exports exceeded ₹65,000 crore last fiscal, maintaining a robust 10% year-on-year growth.

How many jobs will go?

Insiders predict that anything between 10,000 and 15,000 pink slips are expected to be given this fiscal, with the brunt likely to be borne by the middle-level management. While youngsters will find it easier to adapt themselves to the situation, mid-level and even senior managers with 10-15 years of experience suddenly find that their skill-sets are obsolete.

The layoffs have been explained away during performance appraisals as ‘routine paring’ of workforces. Yet, the projected retrenchment rate of 2-3% appears sharp when contrasted with the average industry layoff rate in the last few years, which has remained stable under 1.5%.

The Hinjewadi campus is fraught



with anxiety, and several mid-level managers have already lost their jobs.

Are visa issues adding to problem?

Apart from political considerations such as U.S. President Donald Trump's prescription for stringent visa norms and Australia scrapping the 457 visa programme, experts attribute the ‘layoff blitz’ to a dramatically changing Indian technology footprint over the past few

years. While outsourcing has been under the scanner of protectionist governments in the U.S. and Australia, Indian IT majors too have been adopting newer technology, automation processes, cloud-computing and other means to reduce the dependency on manpower.

Wipro, TCS and Infosys have all rolled out their artificial intelligence platforms as IT firms increasingly rely on automation with a view to maximising profits. In Pune, as elsewhere, this has led to the jettisoning of the ‘linear growth’ model, where companies traditionally took in employees to generate more revenue.

What is the road ahead?

The immediate response to the layoffs has been a move towards unionising. As retrenchments gather momentum, the Forum for IT Employees (FITE), an organisation set up to fight layoffs in cities like Bengaluru and Chennai, is set to work towards the formation of a formal union in Pune soon.

The Pune-chapter of the FITE has

witnessed a spike in registrations on its official website.

However, in the longer term, this impels a dramatic overhaul within India's IT industry, which has to shift from being a services to a product-oriented one. The layoffs have given entrepreneurship an impetus. A section of IT employees who have been laid off is focussing on launching new product and cloud-based software start-ups in Pune, which is fast emerging as a start-up hub.

Executives within the IT majors refuse to dub the situation a ‘crisis’ as yet. While certainly there will be more layoffs, hiring is expected to pick up after a while to build the new workforce skilled in new technologies.

However, the rapid adoption of AI platforms will create a higher demand for skilled engineers in niche areas, while doing away with entry-level engineers for such generic tasks as coding, back-office maintenance and applications testing.

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE

