

Restrained Brilliance

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For all its glory, for all its hype, and for all its wait, the World Cup is only a maximum of 7 matches to be played for a team. And that's only for the two teams reaching the final – everyone else plays even fewer matches. While the seasonal fans may not realize it, the World Cup is a much, much inferior tournament in terms of quality and the football, obviously, and does not require the same tactical clarity that the best of the best need to win the UCL or for an extensive, arduous, and testing league campaign.

When nothing else looks like it's working, individual quality or one moment of magic can pull you and your team through. We've seen this in the UCL time and time again and the World Cup is an even shorter format consisting of a majority of teams whose players meet each other thrice a year and now have to battle it out for football's most "biggest" competition. So it makes sense that individual quality would be able to carry teams through here as well. And it does. For all their brilliance and squad depth, teams like France and Belgium don't exactly have great managers. Deschamps and Martinez are neither tactically astute and don't possess the greatest decision-making skills – Deschamps is often criticized for continuously playing Giroud in his team and putting Blaise Matuidi at LW (not to forget leaving out Martial and Lacazette for the WC) while Martinez is criticized for leaving out one of the best box-to-box midfielders in the world in Nainggolan out of the team and experimenting with weird formations and tactics that seemingly never get the best out of his players.

However, to the life-saving aid of both these men, their teams are stacked and possess an abundance of talent and skill. When the team isn't playing well (quite often in France's case these days) they have the sheer star-power to bail them out – Pogba, Mbappe, Dembele, and Griezmann, just to name a few, responsible for that. Belgium have the likes of Hazard, De Bruyne, and Mertens among their ranks. This just goes to show us that for tournaments where teams will be playing a very small number of matches, tactics can often be overshadowed by the brilliance of players who can get the job done for their team. While the group stages have been interesting to a large extent, they have been quite boring as well with a lot of

narrow one goal victories. France have struggled in their group but relied on flashes from their players to get through and Belgium have had a good time in their group (although a much easier one) and their game against England, where it was both teams' best interests to lose, when both played their B-Team, just serves as evidence that when absolutely nothing is working in a match, 3-seconds of skill and technical brilliance from Adnan Januzaj can be the difference at full-time. Belgium do have the easiest match in their bracket but the French team will be licking their lips at the sight of their dysfunctional Argentina team.

Even if the brackets are completely unbalanced, with Uruguay, Portugal, France, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Belgium on one side with only England, Croatia, and Spain on the other, unlike previous tournaments, you can put your money on a team like France and Belgium making it past their competition.