

World Cup: Brazil tackle Dutch for third-place spot

Neymar has urged his Brazil team-mates to rescue some of their battered pride after their humiliating World Cup semi-final defeat to Germany by beating the Netherlands in Saturday's third-place play-off in Brasilia.

It is the one game that no team ever wants to take part in, but the encounter at the Mane Garrincha National Stadium took on extra significance after the hosts' dream of lifting the trophy at the Maracana 24 hours later was ended by their record 7-1 loss against the Germans.

Neymar missed that match after fracturing a bone in his back in the quarter-final win against Colombia, but the 22-year-old superstar faced the media on Thursday as he called for Brazil to bow out on a high. "It was unbelievable, inexplicable. We had the opportunity to write our names into history in a positive manner, and we failed," he said of the Selecao's embarrassing semi-final loss, their heaviest-ever defeat. "We haven't had a good campaign. We were consistent, which is why we reached the semi-finals, but we didn't play the kind of enchanting football associated with Brazil. "Now we need to approach Saturday's game as if it were the final and finish the World Cup smiling, with a victory. It is not going to lessen the pain, but it is important." The match could prove to be Luiz Felipe Scolari's last in charge, and the coach is likely to make changes to a team whose confidence has been so badly damaged. Captain Thiago Silva will return after suspension, while his Paris Saint-Germain colleague Maxwell, the only outfield player yet to feature, may play a part. Despite Neymar's rallying cry, almost all of those involved in Brasilia would rather be elsewhere, with Daniel Alves having made clear his lack of appetite for the bronze-medal clash. "The important thing is first place. Nothing else matters," said the right-back. "We represent millions of people, so we have to digest this defeat and go out onto the field on Saturday. But, for me, every game is about being first." The mood in the Dutch camp is the same. The Oranje have a day less to prepare for the match after their agonising defeat on penalties to Argentina in Wednesday's second semi-final in Sao Paulo. However, in contrast to Brazil, Holland will be able to look back on a campaign which started with a 5-1 thumping of Spain as a success. Manager Louis van Gaal, who will take charge of Manchester United after the World Cup, told a news conference the third-place game "should never be played" and noted he had been saying the same thing for 10 years. "But the worst thing is I believe that chances are that you lose twice in a row," he said. "And a tournament in which you've played so marvelously well, you would go home as a loser just because you could possibly have lost the last two matches and this has got nothing to do with sport in my view. "So, in a football tournament particularly not at the last stage you shouldn't have players playing match for third-fourth place. Because there is only one award that counts and that is becoming world champion." "We have had a fantastic tournament. Nobody expected us to get beyond the group stage," said coach Louis van Gaal, who must motivate himself for his final match at the helm before he takes over at Manchester United. "We have a day's less rest, which is not very fair. The third-place play-off is pointless. I was saying that 15 years ago, because you can have a fantastic tournament and then finish with two defeats," he added. With the sole exception of third-choice goalkeeper Michel Vorm, every member of the Dutch squad has played some part at the tournament, but Van Gaal may choose to give younger players such as Jordy Clasie and Memphis Depay a run-out from the start here. Meanwhile, Nigel de Jong could miss out after surprisingly featuring for an hour against Argentina, just 10 days after tearing a groin muscle in the last-16 win over Mexico.