
We may have seen Ronaldo & Messi at the World Cup for the last time – Schmeichel

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Russia 2018 may be the World Cup swansong for Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, according to Peter Schmeichel, after both players exited on the same day at the last 16 stage.

Ronaldo and Messi are the two players who have defined their generation, breaking record after record and vying for the title of the world's best player year after year.

However, the pair have again failed to add an elusive World Cup to their trophy-laden cabinets, after Messi's Argentina were defeated 4-3 by France in the last 16 in Russia on Saturday, followed shortly after by Ronaldo's Portugal, who suffered a 2-1 defeat at the hands of Uruguay.

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Goalkeeping great Peter Schmeichel, who is an RT World Cup guest host, says both players looked jaded judging by their performances in the last 16 – and raised doubts over whether fans would ever see the pair on football's biggest stage again.

"We're now speculating, was this the last time we saw Ronaldo and Messi at the World Cup?" Schmeichel asked.

"By the look of their performances today, they looked tired. Ronaldo's looked OK [at the World Cup], but I don't think Messi has."

Ronaldo is 33, and while he says he feels like a 23-year-old, even his obsessive desire to succeed and meticulous approach to staying in shape will not dispel doubts as to whether he appears at Qatar in four years' time. Messi is two years younger than his great rival, having turned 31 during this World Cup, but doubts will be even more fervent over his international future after such a bitterly disappointing campaign in which he scored a solitary goal and cut such a peripheral figure in Argentina's defeat to France.

Ronaldo's World Cup exit is down in large part to the talents of Uruguayan strike duo Luis Suarez and Edison Cavani – the latter of whom scored a stunning double in Sochi.

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Schmeichel was full of praise for an attacking duo he had warned about before the game.

"Cavani was brilliant, he got injured which is a bit of a worry, but he didn't look to be in too much discomfort, but it's a worry."

"He's very important to Uruguay... There's no doubt about the quality of Suarez, but for me Cavani is the big star for the team."

The attacking pair linked up perfectly for Uruguay's open, which saw Cavani send a sweeping cross-field ball to Suarez, before sprinting half the length of the pitch

to turn the return ball home.

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“This is a perfect ball in, to a striker who’s very good in the heading department, and he doesn’t miss from there,” said Schmeichel.

Portugal showed more urgency after going behind, equalizing through Pepe in the second half, although Schmeichel said the game saw the best and worst of the former Real Madrid defender.

“Pepe slipped in with a really good header,” Schmeichel said of the defender’s 55th-minute goal, before finding fault with the 35-year-old for the goal which saw Uruguay re-take the lead.

“But when you have someone like Pepe in the team, he pops up and scores goals, but he also makes stupid decisions in the game.

“For the second goal he made stupid decision to try and win a header, when he should have stayed back, but he left so much space for Cavani.”

Cavani used that space well, curling home from the edge of the box for what proved the winner.

Former Denmark and Manchester United ‘keeper Schmeichel said experienced Portuguese stopper Rui Patricio could have done better.

“It is a great finish, but when you are facing a situation like that as a goalkeeper, you need to be a little bit further out of the goal. Rui Patricio was on the line, and also he got a bit carried away, he was a bit too far to the right.

“It’s nearly in the center of the goal... it’s a quality finish from a great striker... but you always have to question these players, he could have done a bit better.”

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Uruguay closed out the game for the win, with the closing stages to what could be Ronaldo’s World Cup swansong not showing the best from a man who has scored four goals at Russia 2018 – including a stunning hat-trick in Sochi in the opening game against Spain.

“After that there was nothing in Portugal... Ronaldo huffed and puffed, but there was nothing really in that,” Schmeichel said of the closing stages against Uruguay.

With that, Ronaldo’s World Cup in Russia was over as he departed football’s greatest stage along with his greatest rival.

