

Canada rue 'Gretzky' moment during FIFA World Cup exit

25/06/2019 18:08 by admin

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Canada react after they lost their Women's World Cup round of 16 soccer match between Canada and Sweden at Parc des Princes in Paris, France. (Source: AP)

Canada crashed out of the women's World Cup on Monday with a 1-0 loss to Sweden that left many wondering why the country's most prolific goal scorer was not called upon for a late penalty that would have tied the game.

Christine Sinclair, who has 182 international goals, two shy of American Abby Wambach's all-time record, stood helpless as team mate Janine Beckie was denied by an outstanding save by the Swedish keeper in the 69th minute at Parc des Princes in Paris.

The miss was quick to evoke memories of the 1998 Nagano Olympics when Canadian ice hockey great Wayne Gretzky was benched during the shootout of a shocking semi-final loss to the Czech Republic.

Moments after Beckie's well-aimed shot was denied by a diving Hedvig Lindahl, who got both hands to the ball and pushed it around the post, Gretzky's name started trending on Twitter as fans compared the two incidents.

Canada coach Kenneth Heiner-Moller allows the players to decide who will take a penalty and in this instance it was captain Sinclair who offered Beckie the chance.

The 36-year-old Sinclair, well aware that Hedvig saved her penalty kick at the Algarve Cup in March, said she told Beckie if she wanted the shot, it was all hers.

"She said, 'Absolutely.' I feel bad for even asking her, but I have all the faith in the world in her, we all do," said Sinclair, who was playing in what could be her last World Cup.

"She's fearless out there and I asked her after the game if she placed it where she wanted to and she said, 'yes.' Then you can't do anything more, the keeper made a world-class save and you have to tip your hat to her."

While Canada had opportunities, the Lindahl save appeared to suck the spirit out of the players.

The round of 16 loss was beyond disappointing for a heralded, world number five team that had lofty expectations given their run to the quarter-finals at the last World Cup on home soil.

Beckie said the miss would stick with her for a long time but felt she had done all she could with the attempt.

"I'm confident in my penalty, I thought I hit it really well," she said.

"I thought she made a really good save. It's the big moments that are the moments that you live for. You get all the glory if it goes in and take all the blame, it feels like, if you miss."

Grit and experience just enough for U.S to progress

The United States may be one of the superpowers of women's soccer but they needed to draw on all their experience to get past Spain on Monday and set up a quarter-final clash with hosts France.

The Americans needed two penalties as they laboured against a Spain team that often played the more attractive football and captain Megan Rapinoe, whose two penalties settled the outcome, said they had stuck with the basics.

"(It was about) grit and experience in this game. In the knockout round the games are more intense. It was important to stay in it," she said.

"Just to stay it in, keep grinding, keep compact knowing that they are quite good on the ball. It was about keeping ourselves together and taking the chances that presented themselves," she added.

Coach Jill Ellis agreed that in the heat and under pressure, her team had shown those longstanding qualities that have brought so much success for the three-times World Cup winners.

"It was a lot of grit, a lot of resolve, that mental piece," she said.

"You can have all the tactics in the world but that essence of self-belief, that is critical and these players have that and so they want these moments and embrace them," she said.

Ellis conceded that her side had not been at their best when going forward.

"Spain wanted to mix it up, at times our movement could have been better but it's part of this level in terms of the intensity and physicality," she said.

"We knew we could be a little sharper in the final passes, but Spain are a very good team and you look at their previous games, as I have, they have dominated all of their opponents. It was good! It has energised the team" it depends if you are a glass half empty or glass half full person and I am like "holy shit that was awesome".

Some poor defending and positioning from goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher had allowed Spain to draw level in the ninth minute but Ellis said her team had shown maturity not let that impact their approach.

"It speaks to the mental capacity of this team, they parked it and moved on. I felt we were going to win this game with some of the things we were doing with ball movement and possession," she said.

Rapinoe said she was relishing the prospect of facing the hosts in Paris on Thursday.

"I think this is the game that everyone circled. I think it is going to be a great match, I hope it is going to be wild and crazy, hope the fans are crazy and there will be tons of media and that it will be a big spectacle.

"It's incredible for the women's game" two heavy hitters meeting, it's everything you want," she said.

- Reuters