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SPORT

France must stay
'focused' against
crowd favourites
Morocco at Al Bayt



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FIFA World Cup
Qatar 2022:
Golden Boot
contest hots up



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Messi and Argentina cruise into World Cup final as Croatia crumble

AYENI OLUSEGUN
THE PENINSULA

Lionel Messi and Julian Alvarez were on target as Argentina put on a clinical performance to beat Croatia 3-0 at full-capacity Lusail Stadium to book their spot in the final of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Messi got the ball rolling from the penalty spot just past the half-hour mark for his fifth goal in Qatar to tie with Kylian Mbappe as the top scorers in the tournament. Alvarez extended the lead six minutes before the half time whistle and made it three in the 69th minute as Croatia crumbled to a devastating defeat.

This will be Messi's second World Cup final for Argentina, and the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner will hope to clinch the elusive trophy after falling short in 2014. On the other hand, Croatia failed to make it to back-to-back finals, losing to France four years ago in Russia.

"What I can say is I am enjoying this a lot. I am feeling good, and I feel strong to face every match," Messi, who was named man of the match, told reporters.

"The previous match was a big sacrifice because of the extra time. Today we were tired, but we pulled our strength to earn this victory. We knew they (Croatia) would have the ball, and we would need to run. We prepared for this match in a very good way, and personally, I feel well in this World Cup, and luckily enough, I am able to help my team." La Albiceleste will now wait for the winner between France and Morocco in the other semi-final to be played today at Al Bayt Stadium.

"The result does not reflect our superiority; we deserved to win," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said.

"They played very well in the first few minutes. They have three midfielders who have been playing very well together. The feeling was they had the ball, but we read the game and played with our own style. We need to enjoy this historical moment, but that is it. We need to focus on the upcoming match," he added.

Croatia had stayed World Cup favourites Brazil in the quarter-final thanks to their shootout prowess, but against Argentina, they faced a familiar foe, seeking revenge for their 3-0 thrashing in Russia.

The South Americans, who have recovered well from their shock opening day loss, started on the front foot as Nahuel Molina beat his defender for pace, but his cross flashed across the face of goal with Dominik Livakovic untroubled.

On the other end, Ivan Perisic sent in a cross, but Emi Martinez commandingly collected.

Croatia enjoyed possession early on with some crisp and intricate passing looking to carve open the Argentine defence, but the South Americans held firm. Messi went down on the edge of the Croatian box off a pass from Alexis Mac Allister, but referee Daniele Orsato waved off his claims for a free kick.

Croatia almost got into trouble as a poor Dejan Lovren clearance fell to Messi, but his first touch let the PSG man down.

When it seemed Croatia were asserting their dominance, especially in midfield, Argentina broke away and worked the ball well down the left, but the resultant cross failed to find any white and blue stripe in the box.

Seconds later, Livakovic was tested, but the Croatian shot-stopper reacted quickly to push out Enzo Fernandez's effort.

Luka Modric showed off some beautiful skill to get free of his markers, but the attack came to nothing as Argentina, on a swift counter, were awarded a penalty just past the hour mark. Croatia felt hard done by as they wanted a corner on the other end.

Referee Daniele Orsato judged Livakovic to have fouled Alvarez, who was clean on goal. Messi made no mistake from 12 yards, smashing his effort into the roof of the net to put the South Americans ahead.

Still recovering from the goal, Croatia went two down thanks to some schoolboy defending. Alvarez picked up the ball just past his half, outran his marker and benefited off several ricochets before Borna Sosa fluffed a clearance as the ball fell kindly for Alvarez to stab home from close range.

Almost immediately, the 22-year-old Alvarez could have made it three with a header, but Livakovic was alive to punch out.

An energized Croatia emerged for the second half as Zlatko Dalić rang in the changes as Mislav Orsić replaced Sosa, while Nikola Vlašić came on for Mario Pasalic. A brief spell of

possession for the Croatians ended in a wayward pass from Lovren, but on the other hand, Argentina also struggled to string passes together as the Europeans ended up with the ball again.

Argentina had the best chance for all of Croatia's possessions as Messi shrugged off his marker to get a shot away, but Livakovic saved.

Croatia had a chance to pull one back, but Argentina managed to clear their lines as Martínez flapped at a dangerous ball into the box.

As Croatia pushed for a goal, Argentina looked to exploit the open spaces, but they lacked the final ball to see off the 2018 finalists.

The two-time champions made it three in the 69th minute to put the game to bed as Messi produced a magical moment to set up Alvarez for his second.

The 35-year-old in vintage style beat Josko Gvardiol down the wing and turned the 20-year-old inside out before finding an unmarked Alvarez, who slotted home from 10 yards out.

Croatia looked bereft of ideas and collapsed after conceding the goal, resulting to long-range strikes. Regardless, Martínez ensured it remained blank for the Europeans with a good save from Perisic's free kick.

Modric came off to warm applause for what could be the veteran's final game at the World Cup.

The 37-year-old's quality had been on display throughout the tournament.

A quick free kick almost resulted in the fourth goal for Argentina, but Mac Allister sent his volley just wide.

Croatia's frustrating night in front of goal continued as Perisic flicked a set piece onto the path of Lovren, but the former Liverpool man couldn't connect from close range as Argentina held on to clinch a thrilling win.

"We need to thank our players for everything they have done. We need to get back on our feet to play the third place," Dalić said after the match.

"We did have ball possession, but we conceded a very suspicious goal. It was a little too cheap and easy (the penalty). We tried to go back, and they had another counter-attack, and it was done."



Julian Alvarez celebrates with Lionel Messi and Nahuel Molina after scoring Argentina's third goal against Croatia, yesterday. REUTERS

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All for Al-Annabi

Friend or foe? Mbappe and Hakimi's dilemma

DESMOND SAMITH
THE PENINSULA

"After we play against Morocco, I have to destroy my friend," Kylian Mbappe said in a short video during a trip to Doha in January.

"I'm going to kick him," a smiling Achraf Hakimi responded.

Banter apart, Paris Saint-Germain teammates and good friends Mbappe and Hakimi being pitted against each other will become a reality today as France meet Morocco in their World Cup semi-final at Al Bayt Stadium.

The pair are on a collision course as forward Mbappe plays on the left flank for France while Hakimi is Morocco's right-back.

The pair met when the Moroccan joined the Paris club from Inter Milan in 2021 and it's reported that Mbappe took him under his wings. But their bond is not purely on the football field. The pair sits next to each other on plane trips; they play video games and holiday together. And their bromance is well known.

"Achraf Hakimi. Best RB I right-back in the world," Mbappe wrote on Twitter praising Hakimi's spectacular performance with Morocco's national team in the Africa Cup of Nations.

After Morocco's win against Portugal to qualify for the semi-finals at Qatar

in 2022, Hakimi tagged his friend Mbappe on Twitter, saying: "See you soon my friend."

Born just a month and 16 days apart in 1998, Mbappe and Hakimi are known for their speed on the pitch and the pair even shares their goal-celebration routine.

For Mbappe the cross-armed slide was his trademark celebration previously after scoring. He now goes down on one knee, places the thumb of his left hand on his nose with the little finger stretched out and his right hand behind his back. The first time Mbappe showcased this routine was in unison with Hakimi back in April, in a Ligue 1 game against Lorient.

Hakimi celebrated his winning penalty against Spain in the last 16 in Qatar by imitating a penguin (penguin dance) - something he does with Mbappe and Sergio Ramos at PSG.

Mbappe with five goals in Qatar is expected to carry his country's hopes against Morocco – a team which has conceded just a single goal (an own-goal) in the entire tournament. However, Mbappe will have to breach the defence posed by Hakimi first if he is to beat Morocco's star goalkeeper Yassine Bouchnak.

Morocco's coach Walid Regragui yesterday said that he expects Hakimi's friendship with the French star to take a backseat during today's crucial match.

"I have no doubt that Hakimi will be on top form to get the better of his friend," Regragui told a news conference.

Hakimi has been key in helping Morocco concede only 10 shots on target in their five matches.

Regragui said his team will not have any special plan to stop Mbappe alone (a ploy used by England with Kyle Walker marking Mbappe in their 2-1 quarter-final loss).

Reportedly, Mbappe visited Hakimi at his hotel in Doha, and was among the first to congratulate him when Morocco qualified for the quarter-finals.

France captain Hugo Lloris said he was confident that the friendship will be put on hold at the Al Bayt Stadium.

"The event will take over. Even if you're friends off the pitch, it's the World Cup so you separate the two," he told a news conference.

Tonight at the end of the match either France or Morocco will advance to the World Cup final. But both Mbappe and Hakimi will have a good reason to celebrate.

Morocco midfielder Ounahi attracting attention

REUTERS - DOHA

Several of Morocco's big World Cup performers are already the subject of transfer speculation, with previously little-known midfielder Azzedine Ounahi attracting most attention.

Spain's sport press have linked the 22-year-old midfielder to Barcelona and his French club Angers say they are resigned to losing him after standout performances as Morocco have gatecrashed the last four of the tournament in Qatar.

If he were to make a move in the January transfer window, it would be a remarkable rise, accomplished almost solely on football's biggest stage as Ounahi arrived at the start of the World Cup unheralded outside of Morocco and Ligue 1.

Thin and frail, he looks a featherweight presence, but his performances in the heart of the Moroccan side have shone, even with better-known team mates also catching the eye and taking the man-of-the-match awards.

"Which opposing player impressed me? I was pleasantly surprised by number 8. I no longer remember his name, I'm sorry about that," said Spanish coach Luis Enrique, highlighting Ounahi's lack of profile, after Morocco knocked his team out.

Two-and-a-half years ago, Ounahi was playing at Avranches in the French third division, having been released by Racing Strasbourg after moving from Morocco at the age of 15.

After one season, he moved into the top flight signed by Angers and this time last year got a surprise first callup by Morocco for the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon, where he went straight into the starting line-up for the first game.

Today's World Cup semi-final against France will mark his 16th game for Morocco this year, as he takes firm command of the midfield.

Ounahi drives the team forward in possession, linking play cleverly with a wide range of passes, quick feet in small spaces and seemingly endless energy.

In the game against Spain, he ran almost 15km.

"He will go a long way, that's for sure. I know I won't be able to keep him for very long. But we accept that, because we are a club that is a springboard, which uncovers players," Angers president Said Chabane told French radio yesterday.

Spanish newspapers said Ounahi's pre-World Cup transfer value of €4m (\$4.25m) will have increased, with Barcelona preparing to make a bid.

Morocco coach Walid Regragui said it was inevitable the world was taking note of his players but transfer talk was premature with the team still in the tournament.

"You have some players at small clubs - I don't like using that term - so this is a good event to show their quality," he said.

"Everybody's focused for the World Cup. They want to make history, then afterwards their agents can do business."



Kounde calls for speed to unsettle Morocco

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

France defender Jules Kounde has said that speed and intensity will be key for France in their FIFA World Cup semi-final against Morocco.

The defending champions face the tournament's surprise package in Wednesday night's second semi-final and Kounde said that France will need to move the ball quickly against opponents with a superb defensive structure.

Morocco have conceded just one goal en route to the semi-finals and the Barcelona defender told FIFA: "It will be a difficult and intense game. They're a team that have had an exceptional journey and have knocked out some big nations so they're an opponent that we will take seriously."

"We'll need to be more intense, with or without the ball, so that we can move their well-organised defence around." In their knockout-stage wins over Spain and Portugal, Morocco have ceded possession to their opponents yet defended brilliantly without the ball.

Against Spain, Walid Regragui's men had 22 per cent of the ball and spent 39 per cent of those long

passages of play without it in a low defensive block. Spain managed just one attempt on target before, with the

game goalless, Morocco prevailed on penalties. The same formula was seen in last Saturday's quarter-final against

Portugal. Morocco had 23 per cent of possession. They spent 34 per cent of their time without the ball defending in a low block. And they limited Portugal to three attempts on target in their eventual 1-0 win.

To underline their defensive excellence, in five games so far in Qatar their opponents have managed just 10 efforts on target.

Morocco coach Regragui questioned the value of dominating possession when he told reporters before the semi-final: "It's amazing how journalists love these figures but what's the point if you have no shots? If we can keep the ball we will, but if they don't let us do so be it. We're going to fight with the tools we have."

Whether he will have defenders Romain Saiss and Nayif Aguerd fit remains to be seen after both went off with muscle problems during the Portugal match. Whoever is fit for the game, Kounde reiterated the need for speed from France.

He added: "We'll need to be quicker in transitions, make few ball touches and try to harm them as much as we can by both building attacks and our counter-attacks."



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All for Al-Annabi

France must stay 'focused' against crowd favourites Morocco at Al Bayt

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Being the only Arab and African nation left in the World Cup, Morocco have drawn a huge support from fans after their stunning performances in Qatar.

Dubbed "the Rocky Balboa of this World Cup" by coach Walid Regragui, Morocco have on their side fans from African and Arab nations besides an overwhelming support from their compatriots, who have made the Atlas Lions feel right at home.

With 30 flights being put on to fly supporters in from Morocco ahead of their semi-final against France, the reigning champions are aware of a pressure from the sea of red during tonight's semi-final at the Al Bayt Stadium. The venue can accommodate over 68,000 fans and has operated at full capacity in almost all of its World Cup games.

"A lot of Morocco fans will encourage their team and it is going to be tough. We will have to remain focused," France captain Hugo Lloris told reporters yesterday.

"There are no secrets we have to perform on the pitch. You have to score more goals than your opponent. We need to show a great effort against them," he added.

France coach Didier Deschamps rejected the term "hostile" when asked about the huge crowd support expected for Morocco, saying his players will be ready to cope up with the pressure.

Morocco fans cheer during the quarter-final match against Portugal on December 10. Pic: AYMAN KAMEL



France's Hugo Lloris during the press conference, yesterday. Reuters

A lot of Morocco fans will encourage their team and it is going to be tough. We will have to remain focused: Hugo Lloris

level," said the French captain. "When a team is capable of beating Belgium, Spain and Portugal, and finish top of their group, it is because they have lots of quality on the field and undoubtedly off it too, in terms of cohesion and team spirit," he said before expecting a difficult challenge from Morocco.

"It is already a success for Morocco by reaching the semi-finals but believe me they would not like to lose. We need to focus and play with concentration," he said.

Morocco's Ilias Chair, meanwhile, hoped his team to continue their fine performance in the semi-final.

"We are facing the world champions who are the best team in the world. We will give a great effort against them to reach the final," the midfielder said.

"We are in the World Cup semi-finals which I never dreamed of in my life. I am proud what the team has achieved at this World Cup and we look to continue our run."

wins over Spain and Portugal.

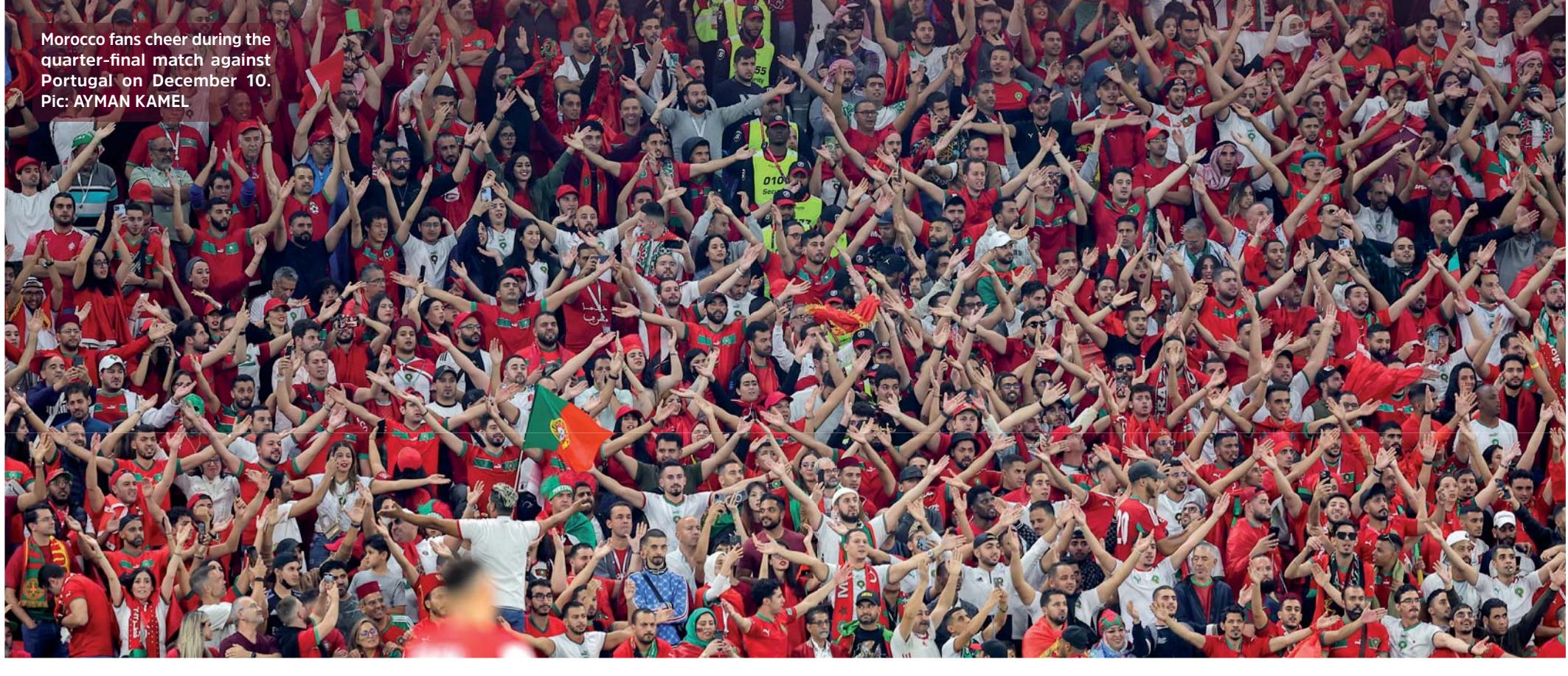
"We're deeply grateful for the show of support from our fans. It's expensive to travel to Qatar from Morocco but such is the passion and emotion of our fans. This is another motivation for us to win tomorrow," he said.

Meanwhile, Lloris, who won a French record 143rd cap in victory

over England in the quarter-final, said his team is excited for the semi-final.

The Tottenham Hotspur goalkeeper said the Atlas Lions deserve the praise after showing remarkable performance in the tournament.

"We can only have respect and admiration for what they have done, but nothing happens by chance at this



Global greats to unite and share joy at FIFA Legends Cup

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Greats of the global game will lace up their boots in Doha this week when the FIFA Legends Cup takes place at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex.

Streamed live on FIFA+, the FIFA Legends Cup will feature eight teams, 18 matches, and nearly 100 FIFA Legends across two days of pre-FIFA World Cup Final fun.

Kicking off at 1400 (local time) tomorrow, match-day one will feature 12 matches as some of the best players in FIFA World Cup history unite to entertain supporters on a modified, centre-court pitch at the tennis complex.

Six matches will be held on matchday two (Friday), with games starting at 1400 (local



FIFA legends on the sidelines of friendly match against Workers at Al Thumama Stadium on Monday.

South American Panthers, European Dragons, and South American Eagles featuring in Group B.

The top two teams in each group will advance to the Semi Finals on matchday two, with the bottom two teams from each group playing ranking matches.

All matches will be 30 minutes in duration, with 15-minute halves separated by a five-minute half-time break. Further player information will be shared on FIFA+ prior to the start of matches.

The FIFA Legends Cup will be held on the rest days between the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Semi Finals, and the 3rd Place match and Final, providing more football for fans globally to enjoy ahead of the biggest match in world football.

time) and concluding with the Final at 1800 (local time).

FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, said the FIFA Legends Cup is a way to bring icons of world football together and celebrate stars of the sport.

"We are here with incredible Legends, world champions, players who have written the history of football."

"They (FIFA Legends) have made us fall in love hundreds

and hundreds of times with the game. These football players who are here, they are not ex-football players, they go from the status of football player to the status of Legend."

Some of the stars set to feature include FIFA World Cup winners Iker Casillas, Carles Puyol, Cafu, Francesco Totti,

and Kaka. Didier Drogba, Mehdi Benatia, Ali Al Habsi, and John Terry will also take their place on the pitch, alongside many more male and female FIFA Legends.

Group A will consist of the African Lions, Northern Bears, East Tigers, and Arab Falcons, with the European Wolves,

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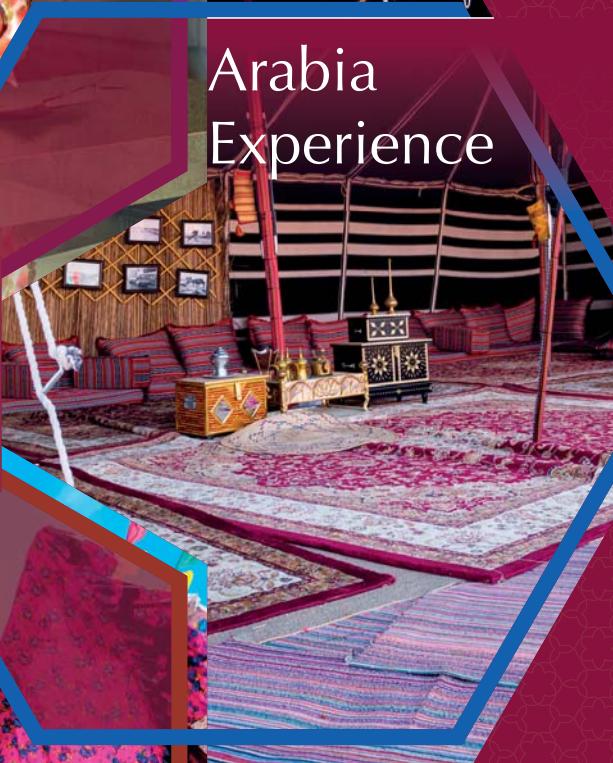


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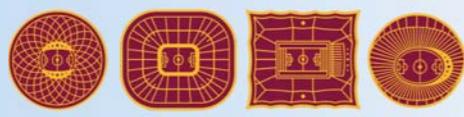
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FIFA WORLD CUP 2022 - SEMI FINAL

INSIGHTS

01 Kylian Mbappe has scored five times in five games, surpassing his goal tally from his previous appearance in the tournament in 2018, when France won the World Cup. At 23 years old, Mbappe has scored nine World Cup goals in 12 appearances.

02 Morocco are the first Arab and African country to reach the World Cup semi-finals. Coach Walid Regragui became the first Arab manager to lead a team to the knockout rounds.

03 France are the first reigning champions to reach the World Cup semi-finals since Brazil in 1998. They will be looking to become the first back-to-back finalists since Brazil in 2002. Italy (1934 and 1938) and Brazil (1958 and 1962) are the only nations to win two consecutive World Cups.

04 Morocco have yet to concede a goal from an opposition player at the tournament. The only goal against them in four games came in their 2-1 win over Canada, when Morocco defender Nayef Aguerd accidentally flicked a cross past his own goalkeeper.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

France and Morocco have met five times in official international fixtures. The first took place in 1988, which France won 2-1, but their history goes back further. They played unofficial games in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. France have never lost an official match against Morocco. The most recent clash was a 2-2 draw in Paris in 2007.

France
63%

KYLIAN MBAPPE
Position - Forward
64 GAMES **33 GOALS**



HUGO LLORIS
Position - Goalkeeper
143 GAMES **00 GOALS**

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN
Position - Forward Midfielder
115 GAMES **42 GOALS**

KEY PLAYERS



KEY PLAYERS



Morocco
13%

ACHRAF HAKIMI
Position - Right-back
59 GAMES **08 GOALS**

SEMI-FINALS
14 DECEMBER 2022
FRANCE VS MOROCCO



AL BAYT STADIUM
CAPACITY - 68,895



FIFA WORLD CUP
Qatar2022

HAKIM ZIYECH
Position - Winger Midfielder
48 GAMES **19 GOALS**

ROMAIN SAISS
Position - Centre back
71 GAMES **02 GOALS**

WIN
02
LOSS
01

GROUP STAGE #03

FORM
W W L W W

ROAD TO SEMIFINAL

FORM
D W W W W

FRANCE 4 - 1 AUSTRALIA
Al Janoub Stadium

FRANCE 2 - 1 DENMARK
Stadium 974

TUNISIA 1 - 0 FRANCE
Education City Stadium

KNOCKOUT STAGE
ROUND OF 16

FRANCE 3 - 1 POLAND
Al Thumama Stadium

QUARTER-FINALS

ENGLAND 1 - 2 FRANCE
Al Bayt Stadium

QUARTER-FINALS

MOROCCO 1 - 0 PORTUGAL
Al Thumama Stadium

DRAWS
01

WIN
02

GROUP STAGE #03



MOROCCO
FIFA world ranking
No. 22
Regional ranking
2nd (CAF)
World Cup appearances
05
(CAF Third Round
winner: (agg 5-2 vs.
DR Congo))
How qualified
Coach
Walid Regragui



FRANCE

FIFA world ranking
No. 04
2nd (UEFA)
Regional ranking
World Cup titles
2
World Cup appearances
15
UEFA Group D
winners: 5W-0L-3D
How qualified
Didier Deschamps
Coach

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ميناء حمد

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Lionel Messi



Kylian Mbappe



Olivier Giroud

Qatar rest senior players for Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

Qatar will field a revamped team at the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup to be held in Basra, Iraq, from January 6 to 19 next year.

The Qatar Football Association announced a 27-member squad for the tournament, with most of the senior players who took part in the FIFA World Cup being rested.

Those include regular captain Hassan Al Haydos, Akram Afif, Almoez Ali, Abdulaziz Hatem, Karim Boudiaf, Abdelkarim Hassan, Boualam Khoukhi, Bassam Al Rawi, Saad Al Sheeb and Pedro Miguel.

The team will be coached by Portuguese Bruno Pinheiro at the eight-nation tournament.

Qatar, three-time winners of Arabian Gulf Cup, will begin their campaign in Group B which will also feature Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE. Group A includes Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

QATAR SQUAD:

Meshaal Barsham, Yousef Abdullah, Tarek Salman, Abdullah Al Yazidi, Faisal Mohammed, Mustafa Meshaal, Muhammad Waad, Yousuf Abdurisag, Hashim Ali, Salem Al Hajri, Ali Asad, Ismaeel Mohammed, Shehab El Laithi, Muhammed Ayash, Diab Haroun, Assim Madibo, Muhammed Muntari, Abdulrahman Fahmy, Naif Al Hadhrami, Tamim Mansour, Homam Al Amin, Amro Suraj, Ahmed Fadel, Khaled Muneer, Hazem Ahmed, Mahmoud Abunada and Jassim Jaber.

Golden Boot contest hots up

CHINTHANA WASALA

THE PENINSULA

The race for the FIFA World Cup title has reached the final stretch, and the glittering golden trophy is the only thing the top stars have kept their eyes on.

Among the coveted trophies which will be presented at the Lusail Stadium on December 18 at the conclusion of the FIFA World Cup final will be the Golden Boot, presented to the player who scores the most goals at Qatar 2022.

Qatar 2022 has seen 161 goals scored in 61 matches as of now, with an average of 2.64 goals per match.

However, the race for individual honours is currently led by Argentinian superstar Lionel Messi and France's Kylian Mbappe, who have both scored five each.

Messi scored two goals during the group stage, including one against Saudi Arabia in a match which went down in the history books as one of the biggest shocks in the World Cup history.

The Argentine also scored during their wins against Australia in the Last 16 and Netherlands in the semi-final.

Messi, who yesterday equalled Lothar Matthaus' record for the most World Cup appearances with his 25th start in yesterday's semi-final against Croatia, scored their opening goal to take his tally to five.

Frenchman Kylian Mbappe also has scored five goals ahead of today's semi-final against Morocco. The 23-year-old scored one against Australia and braces a g a i n s t T u n i s i a and Poland. Mbappe's teammate Olivier Giroud has scored four goals as of now and is also in contention for the top prize.

Giroud's goal against Poland in the last-16 clash made him France's all-time top scorer with 52 goals as the 36-year-old surpassed Thierry Henry. Prior to that, Giroud netted a double in the



TOP SCORERS AT FIFA WORLD CUP

1930: Guillermo Stabile (8 goals)
1934: Oldrich Nejedly (5)
1938: Leonidas da Silva (7)
1950: Ademir de Menezes (8)
1954: Sandor Kocsis (11)
1958: Just Fontaine (13)
1962: Florian Albert, Garrincha, Valentin Ivanov, Drazan Jerkovic, Leonel Sanchez and Vava (4)
1966: Eusebio (9)
1970: Gerd Muller (10)
1974: Grzegorz Lato (7)
1978: Mario Kempes (6)
1982: Paolo Rossi (6)
1986: Gary Lineker (6)
1990: Toto Schillaci (6)
1994: Oleg Salenko and Hristo Stoichkov (6)
1998: Davor Suker (6)
2002: Ronaldo (8)
2006: Miroslav Klose (5)
2010: Thomas Muller (5)
2014: James Rodriguez (6)
2018: Harry Kane (6)

defending champions' 4-1 win against Australia in their opening game before scoring one against Poland in the Last 16.

Argentine Julian Alvarez, who scored a brace against Croatia yesterday, also joined Giroud after taking his tally to four.

TOP SCORERS AT QATAR 2022

5	Lionel Messi (Argentina)
4	Kylian Mbappe (France)
3	Olivier Giroud (France), Julian Alvarez (Argentina)
2	Cody Gakpo (Netherlands), Marcus Rashford (England), Alvaro Morata (Spain), Enner Valencia (Ecuador) and Bukayo Saka (England)
1	Andrey Kramarić (Croatia), Mehdi Taremi (Iran), Bruno Fernandes (Portugal), Mohammed Kudus (Ghana), Cho Gue-Sung (South Korea), Breel Embolo (Switzerland), Salem Al Dawsari (Saudi Arabia), Aleksandar Mitrović (Serbia), Kai Havertz (Germany), Vincent Aboubakar (Cameroon), Niclas Fullkrug (Germany), Ritsu Doan (Japan), Giorgian de Arrascaeta (Uruguay), Robert Lewandowski (Poland), Ferran Torres (Spain), Wout Weghorst (Netherlands), Rafael Leao (Portugal)

Cody Gakpo (Netherlands), Marcus Rashford (England), Alvaro Morata (Spain), Enner Valencia (Ecuador) and Bukayo Saka (England) have scored three goals each, but are already out of contention due to the elimination of their respective teams.

The shoe-shaped award was given away for the first time in 1982 under the name Golden Shoe before being named Golden Boot in 2010. The unique shoe-shaped trophy is made of a brass alloy that is electroplated with gold and weighs about a kilogram.

England's Harry Kane won the award last time in Russia.

No player has won the Golden Boot more than once, but Brazilians hold the record for winning the award the most number of times – on five occasions, with Leonidas (1934), Ademir (1950), Garrincha and Vava (1962) and Ronaldo (2002) grabbing honours as top scorers.

The record for most number of goals at FIFA World Cup tournaments is currently held by France's Just Fontaine, who scored 13 goals in the 1958 edition in Sweden. If more than one player finishes the tournament with the same number of goals, the player who has contributed the most assists gets advantage. If there is still a tie, the award goes to the player who has scored most goals per minute.

The second and third highest scorers receive a silver and bronze boot, respectively.

Qatar to stage decisive ACL 2022 West battles

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has confirmed the Qatar Football Association (QFA) as the host Member Association for the AFC Champions League (ACL) 2022 Round of 16, Quarter-finals and Semi-final centralised matches in the West region.

The West Asian half of the last 16 pairings will see defending champions Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia face off against Shabab Al Ahli Dubai from the United Arab Emirates, while another Saudi side Al Shabab take on FC Nasaf from Uzbekistan. Qatar's Al Duhail meet fellow Qatar League rivals Al Rayyan, while Al Faisaly from Saudi Arabia square off with Foolad Khuzestan from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Earlier, the AFC had confirmed that the Round of 16 (West) will be held on February 19 and 20, with the Quarter-finals to be contested on February 23 before the Semi-final is staged on February 26.

The first leg of the Final will be played on April 29, 2023, at the venue of the finalist from the West Region whilst the second leg of the Final will be held on May 6, 2023, in Saitama, Japan – the venue of the finalist from the East Region – Urawa Red Diamonds.

Lloris urges Kane to 'keep his chin up'

AFP - DOHA

Hugo Lloris has said he spoke to Harry Kane in the aftermath of the England captain's crucial World Cup penalty miss against France in their 2-1 quarter-final loss and has backed his Tottenham teammate to bounce back quickly.

"We had a text after the game. It was not easy to find the words straight after and I think he needed some rest," said Lloris, who has played alongside Kane at Spurs since 2013.

"Top players have missed important penalties in their careers, like Leo Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, like Kylian Mbappe."

"I have no doubt Harry will keep his chin up and he will help Tottenham and the national team to shine."

Legends and workers take to field at FIFA World Cup stadium

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

In front of more than 5,400 friends and colleagues, 24 workers integral to the delivery of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 – who had helped deliver key FIFA World Cup projects overseen by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) – were given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take to the field to play against, and alongside, some of the most iconic names in global football – FIFA Legends – at Al Thumama Stadium in Doha.

The workers had been part of projects related to the eight state-of-the-art stadiums and 42 training sites and were selected based on their passion for football, their involvement

in their community football programmes and their past participation in the Workers' Cup – an annual tournament organised by the SC and Qatar Football Association for all those working in the country.

The FIFA Legends, who included FIFA World Cup winners Marco Materazzi, Roberto Carlos, Cafu, Younis Djorkaeff and Alessandro Del Piero – played two 30-minute halves. Al Thumama Stadium hosted eight matches during the FIFA World Cup.

Former England captain, and two-time FIFA World Cup player John Terry, praised the initiative.

"It's a great idea from FIFA to give back to some of the workers who have put so much hard work into the

fantastic stadiums," he said after the game. "To open the stadium up to other fans to come and see [it] free of charge, as well. It's fantastic. It's just great for them to come and play with us, but also for us to meet them personally, and experience the pitch. As ex-players, it's always nice."

With Minister of Labour H E Dr Ali bin Smaikh Al Marri, FIFA President Gianni Infantino and SC Secretary General Hassan Al Thawadi all in attendance – with Infantino even taking the opportunity to officiate the opening stages – further opportunity was presented to showcase the strong, ongoing and joint commitment in relation to workers' welfare that remains in place beyond the final whistle of the tournament.



Former Brazil player Cafu in action during the match. REUTERS



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We want to win the World Cup: Regragui

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

After a dream run in Qatar, coach Walid Regragui wants Morocco to go all the way to win the World Cup.

As the Atlas Lions meet reigning champions France in tonight's semi-final, Regragui has said his side must seize the opportunity "which may not come again".

Morocco took a tough route to the semis, beating the likes of second-ranked Belgium in the group stage before shocking Spain and Portugal in the knockout phase on their way to becoming the first African and Arab nation to reach the last-four stage.

They now meet Didier Deschamps' side, who are hot favourites to retain their title.

Morocco have not defeated France in their previous five outings but their six-match unbeaten run at the World Cup – their best streak in the finals – has given the North Africans confidence to dream big.

"I have been saying it since the start, our dream is to win the World Cup," Regragui told reporters on the eve of the semi-final to be played at Al Bayt Stadium.

"The more we advance. The closer we approach our dream. We will fight tomorrow to go further."

"It's not just words, we have to go further, maybe we won't have another opportunity. We are not the favourites but we are confident. We're going to fight to move on, for the African nations, for the Arab world."

He said his team will give its best to pull off another upset in the tournament.

"We are playing the world champions with many world-class players and a very good coach. We will show great desire and try to pull off an upset," said Regragui.

The coach, meanwhile, said his team will continue with their strategy

that saw them allowing ball possession to their opponents.

"We are going to play as we know how to do," said Regragui.

"These figures about 60-70% possession, but it is no good if there are only few shots on goal," he said referring to games against Spain and Portugal where the Europeans took only four shots on target, with more than 70% possession.

"The expected goals too...we should have won, we had 4% expected goals.... Well, we are here to win, that's all," he said.

Morocco have conceded only one goal in the tournament so far but their defence faces a stiff challenge in Kylian Mbappe, who is tournament's top scorer with five goals.

Regragui said France possess more dangerous players and his side has no especial plans against the Paris Saint-Germain striker.

"I am not going to try and set up any particular tactical plan to counter Kylian," he said.

"France also has other good

players. (Antoine) Griezmann is on top of his game and playing well between the lines and Ousmane Dembele is also a perfect complement to Mbappe on the other wing."

"If we just focus on Mbappe that will be a mistake. They have world-class players and they will be going for it with all they got. We need to focus on what we can do to cause problems for France."

The coach hoped his injured players to be available with captain Romain Saiss and Nayef Aguerd uncertain for the semi-final.

Morocco capable of hurting France: Deschamps

Meanwhile, French coach Didier Deschamps has warned *Les Bleus* of Morocco's threat, saying

the North Africans are not good in defence only.

"They are good in defence but their entire squad is strong. If not they would not have reached the semi-finals. With quality players in the attack, they can hurt us," he told reporters yesterday.

"I have watched their games and we have taken key notes. We will try to find solution against them."

Deschamps praised Regragui hailing him as a "very strong" coach.

"Walid has done exceptional job. It's a fantastic achievement to lead the team into the semi-finals," he said.



KEY FACTS

- This is France's sixth appearance in the FIFA World Cup semi-finals in their last nine participations in the finals.
- France are the first FIFA World Cup holders to reach the semi-finals since Brazil in 1998.
- France have been successful in 15 of their last 17 FIFA World Cup knockout ties (including one penalty shoot-out win).
- France have won each of their last six FIFA World Cup knockout matches.
- Morocco are only the third nation outside of Europe or South America to reach the semi-finals of the FIFA World Cup, following the USA (1930) and Korea Republic (2002).
- Morocco are the 25th nation to compete in the semi-finals of the FIFA World Cup. They are the only nation in this year's semi-finals who have yet to feature in the semi-finals.
- Morocco are unbeaten in their last six FIFA World Cup matches (W3 D3). This is their best unbeaten streak at the finals.
- Morocco have yet to concede a goal from an opposition player at the tournament. The only goal against them in four games came in their 2-1 win over Canada, when Morocco defender Nayef Aguerd accidentally flicked a cross past his own goalkeeper.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

France and Morocco have met five times in official international fixtures. The first took place in 1988, which France won 2-1, but their history goes back further. They played unofficial games in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. France have never lost an official match against Morocco. The most recent clash was a 2-2 draw in Paris in 2007.



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Morocco coach
Walid Regragui

France coach
Didier Deschamps