Dream Bigger



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From relegation to table topper: Ramsdale relishes 'pinch yourself moment'

'I'M HERE NOW BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING. I HAVE TO GET MY HEAD DOWN TO TRY AND GET INTO THE TEAM'

By Sahan Bidappa

till only 24, Aaron Ramsdale has seen it all. The goalkeeper suffered back-to-back relegations from the Premier League with Bournemouth and Sheffield United, but a switch to Arsenal in 2021 has turned things around for him.

Ramsdale has gone on to become first-choice goalkeeper for Arsenal, with the Gunners enjoying a fivepoint advantage at the top in the English first division this season.

His seven clean sheets - on level with England teammate Nick Pope for Newcastle - have also helped Arsenal concede just 11 goals in 14 matches, propelling Ramsdale into starting XI contention when England open their World Cup campaign against Iran on Monday at the Khalifa International

Three years ago though, a World Cup appearance looked like a long distant dream with Sheffield sending him on loan to AFC Wimbledon. Before that he had a short spell with Chesterfield in 2018 when the club were relegated from the fourth tier as Ramsdale watched England make it to their first World Cup semi-final since 1990 at a bar in Spain.

"There are times when it is a pinch yourself moment," he said at the Al Wakrah Sports Complex yesterday, perhaps still reminiscing the difficult moments he has had in his short ca-

"I speak to my parents or my wife and I'm in a really good place, especially after the first few years of my career learning my trade in difficult



situations. It is really enjoyable at the moment and that hard work - you reap vour rewards. I'm here now but that does not mean anything. I have to get my head down to try and get into the team," he added.

Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford has been Gareth Southgate's No I choice for the last two years and is still the favourite to start against Iran on Monday, but Ramsdale knows he is not far off from taking that spot. "Fair. I see as it is,' he said, when asked

about competition for places among the England goalkeepers.

"Jordan (Pickford) has done extremely well for England and he is in fine form for Everton. And so is Popey (Nick Pope) with Newcastle. I'm not the only one racking up the clean sheets. We have a great bond between the goalkeepers and Martyn Margetson (goalkeeping coach) looks after us really well. You need three goalkeepers to train properly to get the No 1 to his best. We are all training as a No. 1 and it will be difficult for the other two to flip the switch. But it is something me, Popey and to a lesser extent Jordan have done before. So whoever gets that first game will have our full support. But you never know with tournament football. You always have to

be ready to be called upon," he noted. Ramsdale was part of England squad at the delayed Euro 2020 last year, where they lost to Italy in the on penalties although not play a single minute at the tournament. He has only made three appearances for Three Lions, making his debut in the 10-0 win over San Marino in November. He has since made two appearances in the UEFA Nations League, playing in the goalless draw with Italy in June before conceding

four to Hungary three days later. Ramsdale's family - especially his father – have had a huge imprint in his development with the goalkeeper joking that his dad "might have a heart attack" if he starts for the Three Lions at the World Cup.

"There were definitely a few tears shed from him," said Ramsdale, when asked how his dad reacted to his World Cup call-up. "If I actually make it on the pitch he might not return home. He might have a heart-attack! It's special for my family and especially my parents who have driven me up and down the country and around the world. He won't have any nails left," he chuckled.

Argentina being labelled as favourites. Southgate's men have quality all over the pitch but their recent performances have been underwhelming as they are going into the football's grandest stage having not won any of their past six games and were relegated to the Nations League second tier for the first time following defeat by

Italy in September. Ramsdale said England's poor recent reve not damaged their confidence. "No, confidence has not been affected. If anything, it's given us extra motivation. We have added motivation to turn our form around and put those results behind us. We're going into this full of confidence knowing how good we are," he

England's Aaron Ramsdale (also left) during a press conference at the Al Wakrah Sports yesterday (Reuters)



Spotligh.

Qatar opt for closed door training ahead of historic debut

By Sahan Bidappa

th the spotlight firmly on them ahead of tomorrow's World Cup opener against Ecuador, it wasn't a surprise Qatar chose to have a closed door training session yesterday.

A wise move, considering players and coach Felix Sanchez are bracing up for the biggest moment of their lives at the grandest stage of all.

One would think the mood in the Qatar camp would be filled with anxiety, but the pictures released by Qatar Football Association on social media painted a different picture - that of

The players seemed to be in high spirits at training as they enjoyed practising with each other, which bodes well ahead of their historic World Cup debut. If anything, Qatar would need to play as a team as they seek avoid the fate of South Africa, who remain the only host country in 2010 to be eliminated in the group stage.

Experienced midfielder Ismaeel Mohamed said the team is focused and ready to give his 100 percent.

"We have been preparing over the years. The last few months we had very



Qatar players during a training session at the Aspire Academy yesterday.

good preparation for the World Cup. Every member of the team is focused and ready to give his 100 percent. We want to win against Ecuador to make history," the 32-year-old said.

The Qatar squad arrived back home only on Monday after a month-long training camp in Spain. The Asian Champions have notched five successive wins - albeit against lowly-ranked



teams Albania, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama in Marbella.

"These victories before the World Cup are important. They were good sides and importantly these last few games helped us to prepare for Ecuador better," said Ismaeel, who plays for Al Duhail in the Qatar Stars League. "We will take one match at a time. The team will play every match to win so we can march into the knockout stage. We are well prepared and I think we have the ability to reach Round of 16.

Ismaeel called on the fans to get behind the team. "Our fans are like a key player of the team. They helped us claim third position in the FIFA Arab Cup and we will wait for them in our matches. Their support will be the key to us," he said.

Italian Orsato to referee Oatar 2022 opener



Italy's Daniele Orsato has been selected as the referee for the opening match of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 between Oatar and Ecuador at the Al Bayt Stadium tomorrow.

At 46 years of age, he is one of Europe's most experienced referees, having been officiating the game since 2010. He was a video assistant referee at the 2018 edition of the FIFA World Cup.

"The feeling cannot be described in words. It's like a dream come true, playing the first-ever World Cup to be held in the Middle East and the Arab world. I am looking forward to playing my part in getting desired results," the midfielder added.

Qatar will play their second match against Senegal on November 25 at Al Thumama Stadium and will return to Al Bayt Stadium to face the Netherlands in their last group match four

Focu___s

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'Football has power to create a better world'



www.fifa.com

Football is about moments of shared enjoyment, of joy, and of great emotion. It's the only sport that can bring together so many people."

We are living in uncertain times filled with conflicts and global crises. The world is divided. The FIFA World Cup, through the power of football will bring people together to cross borders, unite and celebrate together.

Football Unites the World will be a global movement to inspire, unite and develop through football.

FIFA Legends have shared their stories of how football united their respective countries during uncertain times. With the muchanticipated kick-off to Qatar

2022 just around the corner, we took a trip down memory lane with France's **Blaise Matuidi**.

Relatively few footballers throughout history have had the privilege of appearing at a FIFA World Cup. It goes without saying that those who have competed at two tournaments are even rarer, and if one of those adventures happened to include a victory in the Final, it would put them in a very elite club indeed.

Matuidi., who was a key component in the France teams that lost in the quarter-finals of Brazil 2014 and lifted the trophy at Russia 2018, is a member of that club, although sometimes he has to pinch himself to verify it really happened.

"I had dreamed of things like that, but I had never dared to think that those dreams might come true one day," said the combative midfielder. "It was amazing to share such an incredible experience with my family, friends and team-mates. It was just pure joy for the entire tournament."

The Frenchman's love affair with the World Cup had begun two decades earlier.

In 1998, Les Bleus, featuring stars such as Zinedine Zidane, Didier Deschamps and Lilian Thuram, made quite an impression on an 11-year-old Matuidi, as they lifted the trophy on home soil.

"That's my first World Cup memory," he said.

"I was young, and I would dream about that France team – that was an incredible generation.

"I lived in a council estate in Paris. We were surrounded by large blocks of flats, and each time there was a goal, we would all go out onto our balconies. We'd get out pots and pans and bang on them; it would echo round the whole neighbourhood. We were united, the neighbourhood was united, and France was united – all by the same passion, football."

Matuidi's life, in which he went from enthusiastic fan to World Cup winner, may have undergone great transformation in 20 years, but the impact that the tournament has on people around the world has certainly not changed.

"During the 2018 World Cup, my team-mates and I were also able to see the spirit of togetherness that was taking hold back home after each game," he said. "Match after match, we could feel it growing. It was magical."

He concluded: "Football has the power to create a better world in the way that it brings towns, regions and countries together. It can even unite the entire world!"

Spotligh___t

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Lewandowski not sure if Qatar World Cup will be his last

'I REALISE THAT I WILL STILL BE ABLE TO PLAY IN FOUR YEARS' TIME'

Reuters Doha

oland talisman Robert Lewandowski said he is preparing for the upcoming World Cup in Qatar as if it could be his last, but the 34-year-old added that he would still be physically fit to play at the next edition in

Poland's record goal scorer Lewandowski has been in terrific form for his La Liga club Barcelona this season, having scored 18 times in 19 games across all competitions.

Poland are in Group C at the World Cup and begin their campaign against Mexico on Tuesday. They also face Argentina and Saudi Arabia.

"Is this my last World Cup? I don't know," Lewandowski told reporters in Doha yesterday.

"I'm preparing as if it could be my last World Cup, but I'm not saying yes, I'm not saying no. I realise that I will still be able to play in four years' time."

Lewandowski said that opponents are likely to focus on marking him in attack during games - a move which Poland will try to take advantage of.

"I believe the other players will take

advantage of the fact that sometimes I can go down the side taking two players and the space will free up elsewhere," he explained.

Asked about playing in the high tem-

Asked about playing in the high temperatures in Qatar, Lewandowski said: "I've been to Doha many times before, I knew what to expect. It's easier and more pleasant for me when I came here.

"In Sochi (at the 2018 World Cup) it was different, strange, not really comfortable. I don't feel that here."

Poland, who Lewandowski said are not favourites in their group, won 1-0 against Chile in Warsaw in a warm-up friendly on Wednesday before making the trip to Doha. Head coach Czeslaw Michniewicz opted to leave out some of his key players including goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny,



Poland's Robert Lewandowski during a team training session at Al Kharaitiyat Stadium in Umm Salal yesterday. (Reuters)

playmaker Piotr Zielinski and Lewandowski for that game.

"Those who played in the match against Chile will be considered for Mexico," Michniewicz said.

"The decision will be made on Tuesday, but that doesn't mean that if someone played 90 minutes against Chile they won't play against Mexico."

Meanwhile Lewandowski said yesterday that Poland's World Cup squad had been left in shock earlier this week after the missile strike in his homeland that left two people dead. A missile hit the Polish

village of Przewodow near the Ukrainian border on Tuesday, killing two people.

Lewandowski and his teammates were in Warsaw at the time of the attack preparing for a friendly the next day against Chile ahead of the Qatar extravaganza.

"It was not an easy moment, everyone was waiting for explanations, for some information," said the Barcelona forward, speaking from Poland's training base in Doha. "Unfortunately it hit people who died. This is definitely a very difficult cityation."

tuation."
Poland expect goal-machine Lewand-

owski, who has scored 76 goals in 134 matches for the national team, to be a marked man in Doha but the striker says this could work to the team's advantage.

"I'm ready for opponents to be more focused on me. In the game defenders will stick to me," said Lewandowski.

"Other players will use the fact that I go

"Other players will use the fact that I go to the side and take two players with me. There will be more free space for them to enter." He added: "This might also be our strength, to be able to use those free areas on the pitch created by opponents being too focused on me."

SPAIN REPLACE INJURED GAYA WITH BARCA'S BALDE FOR WORLD CUP

Doha: Spain dropped injured left-back Jose Gaya from their World Cup squad yesterday, with teenager Alejandro Balde replacing him. The Valencia defender sprained his ankle in training on Wednesday and coach Luis Enrique had said he would make a decision on the situation on Friday, after the team arrived in Doha.

"The full-back leaves Qatar with the love, respect and recognition of his team-mates and the RFEF (Spanish FA)," said the RFEF in a statement.

"The RFEF's message for Gaya is filled with affection, he had won his place in the Spain squad at the World Cup after four years playing for the national team at the top level."

Gaya, 27, has enjoyed a strong start to the season with Valencia and was set to play at his first World Cup.

Nineteen-year-old Barcelona full-back Balde has burst into the limelight this season at Camp Nou with impressive performances on

both the left and the right of defence.

Spain beat Jordan 3-1 in a friendly on Thursday with Aymeric
Laporte starting at left-back, while Barcelona defender Jordi Alba,
expected to be first choice during the tournament, featured as a

La Roja open their campaign against Costa Rica on November 23, before facing Germany and Japan.

Commen___t

Son 'will play in Korea's Cup opener'

AFP

on Heung-min will defy a nasty facial injury to play in South Korea's opening match at the World Cup, a former international team-mate said yesterday.

South Korea's talisman and captain had surgery after suffering a fracture around his left eye while playing for Tottenham in the Champions League earlier this month.

The 30-year-old forward trained yesterday in a black face mask.

Son was seen readjusting the

mask several times as he went through drills with the rest of the South Korea squad in Qatar. South Korea play their open-

ing match against Uruguay on November 24. Former captain Koo Ja-cheol

Former captain Koo Ja-cheol said: "Everybody knows about him, he always plays with passion, he's really a passionate guy, he never wants to stop.

"He joined (also) yesterday with the team training session, of course without heading, so I think he will push himself - as far as I know him - so I expect he will start.

"When someone has an injury like Sonny right now, even one of the biggest players can be scared,



but it cannot stop him, as I know

Midfielder Koo, who captained his country at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, added: "Of course with a mask it's uncomfortable to play, it will not be 100 percent the same for him, but we need him to score for us to win."

Koo, 33, who is in Qatar for South Korean television, said: "He always says to people that it's an honour to play for the country,"

"He will make something special for Korea."

South Korea's other opponents in Group H are Portugal and Ghana.

Bottomlin____e

Belgium beaten in final World Cup warm-up

Reuters Kuwait City

elgium were beaten 2-1 by Egypt in a friendly international yesterday in a sobering defeat that belied their status as one of the fancied teams for the

World Cup in Qatar.

An error by Kevin De Bruyne and an inspired pass from Mohamed Salah ensured goals for Egypt, who narrowly missed out on World Cup qualification in March, as they posted victory in a

stop-start affair in Kuwait City yesterday.

Mostafa Mohamed scored in the 33rd minute with a rasping short ball after De Bruyne had lost possession just outside his own penalty area to give Egypt a halftime lead.

a halftime lead.

This was doubled straight from the second half kick-off as Salah's clever pass caught out Belgium's static defence and Mahmoud Trezeguet finished off with his left foot on the counter-at-

Lois Openda pulled back a goal with 14 minutes to play, set up by Yannick Carrasco, who then almost had an equaliser four minutes later.

But Egypt held out for the win with Salah close to getting a goal of his own right at the end.

Belgium, who are second in the FIFA rankings and were semi-finalists at the last World Cup, made several switches but showed little rhythm and cohesion with captain Eden Hazard looking out of sorts.

They were able to get in some game minutes for veteran defender Jan Vertonghen, who had been an injury concern over recent weeks. He came on for the final 20 minutes of the match.

Yesterday's match marked the end of pre-World Cup warm-ups ahead of tournament start set to take place tomorrow. Belgium meet Canada in their first Group F game on Wednesday.

Belgium's midfielder Yannick Carrasco (left) and Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah vie for the ball during the friendly match at Jaber Al Ahmad Stadium in Kuwait City yesterday. (AFP)







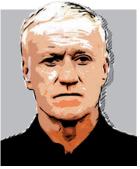




















Coaches set for big-stage bow

There will be 17 coaches making their first FIFA World Cup appearance at Qatar 2022, and FIFA.com recounts the fascinating stories of how five of them - Scaloni, Song, Herdman, Flick and Sanchez got to where they are today





the greatest aspirations a football coach can have. All coaches dream of experiencing the sensation at some stage, from those starting out at their local club to internationally-renowned tacticians working in high-profile In Qatar later this year, the men in charge of 17 of the 29 sides that have already qualified will be fulfilling their role on football's greatest stage for the very first

> FIFA has picked out five of these coaches' stories, as they prepare to take the world by storm in November.

eading a team out at the FIFA World Cup is one

Sanchez spurs Qatar

The host nation's ambitious plans have developed in conjunction with the gradual rise of Felix Sanchez, who came to Qatar in 2006 to work at Aspire Academy, where he helped to usher through the gifted generation of players that now forms the spine of the Qatari national team, including two of their biggest stars, Akram Afif and Almoez Ali.

After seven years at Aspire, Sanchez was handed the reins of Qatar's U-19 team and achieved almost instant success, guiding the talented teenagers to the AFC U-19 Championship 2014 title, with Afif and Ali scoring seven goals during the tournament. There was a repeat of that formula in 2019, when the astute Spaniard, by this time coach of the national senior side after replacing Uruhistoric AFC Asian Cup triumph that was wrapped up via an impressive win over a formidablelooking Japan team in the final.

The former Barcelona youth coach has been keen to put his players under scrutiny in different environments, signing them up for the Copa America 2019, where they secured a draw with Paraguay, and helping them reach the semi-finals of both the Concacaf Gold Cup and the FIFA Arab Cup™ in 2021. The latter event, held on home soil, also served as a test for

Qatar's stadiums and facilities ahead of the more illustrious gathering that kicks off on 21 November. With 15 years of solid preparatory work under his belt, the upcoming World Cup will represent the culmination of a long and fruitful journey for Sanchez.

Scaloni oversees

armband.

Argentinian resurgence When Maxi Rodriguez dispatched an unforgettable leftfooted volley into the Mexico net to give Argentina a 2-1 extra-time lead in the Round of 16 at Germany 2006, the first team-mate that Lionel Messi embraced in celebration was Lionel Scaloni. While the gifted youngster was just beginning to show his magical skills, his elder compatriot was a reliable wing-back in Jose Pekerman's squad. Sixteen years later, the two Lionels will find themselves working together at a World Cup again, but this time in very different roles, with Scaloni at the helm and Messi wearing the captain's

Scaloni took up the reins of the national team in the wake of their disappointing Russia 2018 performance that saw La Albiceleste struggle in the group stage and lose in the Round of 16. He was Jorge Sampaoli's assistant during that campaign, and when his frustrated mentor left the job, Scaloni agreed to fill the position on an interim basis. At that stage, few football figures were willing to take on the challenge of coaching a team estranged from the home faithful that had gone almost 30 years without claiming a major international title.

Scaloni, who had never been in sole charge of a team before, proved up to the task, steering his players to Copa America 2021 as the second-best team in South America, and going on a 31-game unbeaten run. In Asia, the Santa Fe native will be aiming to help Argentina lift the World Cup for the first time in 36 years.

Cameroon's uninspiring per-

before the

Indomitable Lions' World Cup play-off against Algeria. In need of an urgent solution, the national legend turned to an old friend and team-mate, entrusting the daunting task to Rigobert Song.

😵 Seventeen men are set for their FIFA World Cup coaching debuts 😵 FIFA shines the spotlight on five of them 😵 Four former champions are led by first-timers

No-one has pulled on the Cameroon jersey as often as Song, who earned 137 caps in an impressive international career that ran from 1993 to 2010. An imposing defender who represented Liverpool and West Ham at club level, he was a reassuring presence in the backline of a team that were crowned African champions twice during his time as captain.

His charges' dramatic qualification against Algeria secured him a World Cup coaching debut in Qatar, but as a player he was well versed with the tournament's challenges, participating at USA 1994, France 1998, Korea/Japan 2002 and South Africa 2010. With nine matches on his CV, Song is third on Cameroon's all-time World Cup appearances' list, just behind Roger Milla (10) and Francois Omam-Biyik (11).

While he will be fully focused on attempting to replicate Cameroon's memorable run to the quarter-finals at Italy 1990, Qatar 2022 will also constitute something of a joyous celebration for Song, who was hospitalised in October 2016 after suffering a stroke. Despite spending two days in a coma which had doctors extremely concerned, the former Metz centre-back made a remarkable recovery.

Herdman's unusual path

Englishman John Herdman became enamoured with the beautiful game during Mexico 1986, despite watching Diego Maradona almost single-handedly knock out the team he was supporting. "I remember watching Diego against England with my dad," he said. "That's when I fell in love with football."

Although his footballing career only ever amounted to a few appearances in the semi-professional Northern League, the pull of the sport was strong, and Herdman tried his hand at coaching from the tender age of 16. After spending time in Brazil learning new training methods, he returned to his hometown of Consett and set up

a football school that

lish third tier.

sions and to the Women's Olympic Football Tournament Beijing 2008. In 2011 the nomadic Englishman was hired as coach of the Canadian women's national team that had lost all of its games at the Women's World Cup in 2011. Following a considerably more productive campaign in 2015, when they hosted the tournament and reached the quarter-finals, Herdman was asked to make the switch to Canada's men's team.

Although his appointment was met with some scepticism at the outset, Herdman simply set about achieving his lofty objective of revolutionising football in Canada, the first step of which involved qualifying for Qatar 2022, an aim about which even his own employers expressed doubts. Undeterred, the man from County Durham began building a talented team, one that could tactically adapt to different opponents, boasted real strength in depth, and - most importantly - that was capable of topping the Concacaf qualifying table ahead of Mexico and USA.

Having earned hero status, Herdman no longer has to prove himself to anyone, as he prepares to become the first coach in footballing history to take charge of teams at both a men's and women's World Cup. With Canada's qualification guaranteed for 2026 as one of the host nations, he and his players will be looking to lay further foundations for success in

Hansi Flick's eventful coaching career began while he was still a player: In 1996, when his days on the pitch were drawing to a close at Victoria Bammental, the midfielder was offered the role of player-coach. Hoffenheim, then languishing in the regional leagues, subsequently took a chance on him, and together they paved the way for the club's even-

After he and Hoffenheim parted ways in November 2005, Flick briefly worked as an assistant coach at Red Bull Salzburg before joining Germany's backroom

same role under Joachim Low. It would prove to be a fruitful partnership, as Die Nationalelf emerged victorious

Two years later, he returned to the assistant role under Niko Kovac at Bayern Munich. However, Kovac was let go in November 2019 and Flick was promoted in his stead, initially on an interim basis and then permanently following some strong performances by his players. His time on the bench was incredibly successful, with the Bavarian giants winning no fewer than seven trophies during one of the most prolific ten-

ures in modern football. harboured a strong desire to return to the German national setup, but this time as the man in charge. Low's departure after the UEFA EURO last year, following on from the huge disappointment of Russia 2018, provided the ideal circumstances for him to take over. Flick seamlessly translated his club results to Die Nationalmannschaft, steering them to Qatar 2022 and winning eight of the nine matches he has overseen so far. In his maiden tournament at the helm of Germany, the Heidelberg native will attempt to make history and emulate Jupp Derwall, the last Germany coach to win a major competition at the first at-

RINGMASTERS

GROUP A

Qatar: Félix Sánchez

Senegal: Aliou Cissé

Iran: Carlos Querioz

Wales: Rob Page

GROUP C

Martino

GROUP D

GROUP E

Suárez

GROUP F

Brazil: Tite

GROUP H

Netherlands: Louis van Gaal

England: Gareth Southgate

Argentina: Lionel Scaloni

Mexico: Gerardo "Tata"

Saudi Arabia: Hervé Renard

Poland: Czesław Michniewicz

France: Didier Deschamps

Australia: Graham Arnold

Costa Rica: Luis Fernando

Japan: Hajime Moriyasu

Belgium: Roberto Martínez

Canada: John Herdman

Croatia: Zlatko Dalid

Morocco: Walid Regragui

Serbia: Dragan Stojković

Switzerland: Murat Yakin

Cameroon: Rigobert Song

Portugal: Fernando Santos

Uruguay: Diego Alonso

South Korea: Paulo Bento

Ghana: Otto Addo

Tunisia: Jalel Kadri

Spain: Luis Enrique

Germany: Hansi Flick

Denmark: Kasper Hjulmand

United States: Gregg Berhalter























attended

academy

by a number of

Sunderland's

players. The relationship,

fostered over time, eventually

resulted in a job offer to become

a development coach at the club,

who currently operate in the Eng-

In 2001 he took a step further

on his unorthodox football jour-

nev when he moved to New Zealand, where he initially worked for

the country's football association.

After getting the opportunity to

coach the women's national team

in 2006, he proceeded to lead the

Football Ferns to the FIFA Wom-

en's World Cup on two occa-







Design: Jitendra Patel





formances and semi-final exit at the recent CAF Africa Cup of Nations, a tournament they hosted, cost Portuguese

coach Toni Conceicao his job. It was the Cameroonian Football Federation's President, Samuel Eto'o, who ultimately made that difficult decision, just a month



tual ascent to the Bundesliga.

perform the

at Brazil 2014, after which he switched roles to become sporting director at the German Football Association, a post he held until January 2017.

Despite these triumphs, which led to him being named UEFA Men's Coach of the Year, Flick

THE SUPER EIGHT

Al Bayt Stadium Capacity: 60,000 Location: Al Khor City, 35km north of Doha

I Bayt Stadium's role as host for the FIFA World Cup 2022 ning match was assured from its first design sketch. Oatar turned to the rich fabric of its culture to welcome the world - inviting guests to enjoy the traditional comfort custom has demanded in this region for centuries. nspired by the bayt al sha'ar of Qatar's nomadic people the stadium's magnificent tent structure envelopes an

Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM

A shuttle bus service (Service Number S950) will run to/from Lusail ONB Metro Station (Red line). Allow a nimum of 25 minutes for the bus journey. From the rop-off area, it is a minimum of a 15-minute walk to th stadium. The bus service starts 4 hours before kick-off



arena's distinctive exterior, as are the vibrant sadu patter that greet fans once inside. Sustainability was paramount in Al Bayt Stadium's develop ment and the upper tier was designed to be removed after

stadium! This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Ex Al Bayt Stadium, bringing fans a minimum of a 20-minute walk from the stadium. Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and stop 1.5 hours after the final whistle. The last bus before the match will depart the Bus Hub 1 hour before kick-of

Souq Waqif - North FIFA Fan Festival

Lusail QNB Metro Station (Red line) is a minimum of a 20-minute walk from the stadium.

> • Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM Friday: 9 AM - 3 AM

to Qatar 2022

ub location

Residents and locals are encouraged to drive to the stadiums. Parking space is located close to the stadium Car parks open 4 hours before kick-off and close 1.5 hour after the final whistle. Accessible parking options will be available. Please arrive early, because car parks will fill

the Arab and Islamic world during the rise of civilisation,

while interplays of light mirror the fanar lanterns of the

Lusail Stadium Capacity: 80,000 Location: Lusail City, 20km north of centra Final - an event that will secure its place in football and fade replicating aged metal handicrafts to create a venue architectural history. Immense yet exquisite, the scale and splendour of this arena are a wonder, built to lie in harmony On December 18 2022, 80,000 fans will come together here for the World Cup Final. Afterwards, and in keeping with Oatar's dedication to sustainable development, Lusa

> schools, shops, cafes, sporting facilities and health clinics **Stadium Express Buses:** This is the fastest way to get to the stadium! This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Ex press Bus Hubs and bring fans a minimum of a 30-minute walk from the stadium. Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and cease operations 1.5 hours after the final whistle.

The last bus before the match will depart the bus hub 1 hour

Stadium will be transformed into a community space of

Service No. Min. Journey Tim 35 minutes Soug Wagif - North 30 minutes 35 minutes Barwa Barahat Al Janoub Use the Hayya to Qatar 2022 app to find bus hub locations

Qatar will host the FIFA World Cup 2022 at eight stadiums spread across the country - none more than an hour away from one another. The iconic Khalifa International Stadium has been refurbished completely, while seven new stadiums have been designed in tribute to the region's rich culture, heritage and traditions - with features reflecting Qatar's commitment to sustainability and innovation. Every stadium offers a unique world of discovery - find out more below.



staged the Arabian Gulf Cup, the FIFA Club World Cup and

Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM

5 hours after the final whistle. Accessible parking

stadium! This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Exfrom the stadium. Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and cease operations 1.5 hours after the final whistle





Al Thumama Stadium Capacity: 40,000 Location: Al Thumama 12km south of central Doha

celebrates local culture and traditions just as much as it future and a realisation of dreams, it is a fitting inspiration does a new era for stadium design. This particular venue Fans' first glimpse of Al Thumama may come from above, also has a significance that is close to the hearts of locals and resonates across the region. Its bold, circular form as many international flights descend over the venue. Its brilliant white exterior stands out amid its lush green reflects the gahfiva - the traditional woven cap adorned by men and boys all across the Arab world. An integral part of surroundings - areas for play and relaxation. Al Thumama family life and central to traditions, the gahfiya symbolises Stadium brings a vision beyond its inspiration and purpose the coming of age for youth. A time of emerging selfmarking a coming of age for the beautiful game.

Free Zone Metro Station (Red line) is the closest metro station to Al Thumama Stadium.

Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM Friday: 9 AM - 3 AM A shuttle bus service (Service Number S980) will run to/ from Free Zone Metro Station. Allow a minimum of 20 minutes

Stadium Express Buses: This is the fastest way to get to the stadiums! This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Ex press Bus Hubs and bring fans a minimum of a 35-minute walk from the stadium. Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and stop 1.5 hours after the final whistle. The last bus before the match will depart the bus hub 1 hour before kick-o

for this bus journey. From the drop-off point, it is a minimum of a 35-minute walk to the stadium. The bus service starts 4 nours before kick-off and ends 15 hours after the final whistle West Bay Expect busy metro carriages before and after matches.

Barwa Madinatna Soug Wagif - North 30 minutes FIFA Fan Festival™ S983 35 minutes 40 minutes Barwa Barahat Al Janoub



Al Janoub Stadium **Capacity: 60,000**

Location: Al Wakra, 22km south of central

history but with its sights set on a new horizon - the future of football. As the FIFA World Cup 2022 plays out, the world will be invited into some of the most unique stadiums ever built for the beautiful game - Al Janoub Stadium sits firmly The stadium's captivating design reflects the wind-filled

of Qatar's oldest continuously inhabited areas. A city rich in

sails of Qatar's traditional dhow boats - in tribute to Al Wakra's fishing and pearl diving past. For centuries these

station to Al Janoub Stadium.

A shuttle bus service (Service Number S920) will run to/from Al Wakra Metro Station, Allow a minimum of 15 minutes for this bus journey. From the drop-off point, it is a minimum of a 15-minute walk to the stadium. The bus service starts 4 hours before kick-off and ends 1.5 hours after the final whistle.

Expect busy metro carriages before and after matches.

Al Wakra Metro Station (Red line) is the closest metro **Stadium Express Buses:** This is the fastest way to get to the stadium! This service will operate from dedicated Stadiu Express Bus Hubs and bring fans a minimum of a 15-minute walk from the stadium. Buses start running 4 hours before Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM match kick-off and stop 1.5 hours after the final whistle. The last Friday: 9 AM - 3 AM bus before the match will depart the bus hub 1 hour before kick-off.

Al Janoub Stadium lies in the southern city of Al Wakra, one 👚 beautiful crafts have sailed through Gulf waters and far

Departure Bus Hub Barwa Madinatna Soug Wagif - North 40 minutes FIFA Fan Festival S923 40 minutes Barwa Barahat Al Janoub

beyond, returning laden with the sea's bounty.

Al Wakrah SC matches.

is bright for this wonderful arena.

After the tournament, Al Janoub's capacity will be reduced.

with seats donated to other sporting projects around the

world. This will also guarantee an electric atmosphere for

Beyond football, the venue's is surrounded by luscious

parkland featuring sport and leisure facilities which will

benefit the whole community for years to come. The future



of Qatar's most historic cities and home to the famous Al flora and fauna, as well as local and international trade. It is the Rayyan SC. It is located right on the edge of the desert, the perfect home for Al Rayyan SC when the tournament ends. scene of many Qatari tales that live close to the hearts of the More than 80% of the construction material came from the locals - a welcoming people who love their football as much original stadium that previously occupied the site, while existing trees were also carefully retained. When fans visit, they will be able to travel via an environ-The stadium's design, and that of its surrounding buildings, nirrors aspects of the local culture and traditions. The intricate mentally friendly new Doha Metro system - complementing facade reflects the undulations of sand dunes while intricate a truly sustainable venue experience.

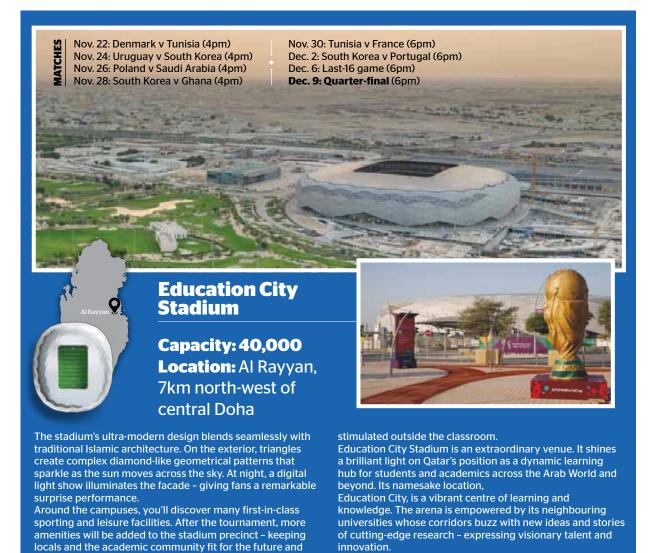
Stadium Express Buses: This is the fastest way to get to the stadium! I Riffa Mall of Oatar This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Express Bus Hubs and bring fans a minimum of a 20-minute walk from the stadium. letro Station (Green Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and stop 1.5 hours hub 1 hour before kick-off.

riday: 9 AM - 3 AM FIFA Fan Festival™ (pect busy metro Barwa Barahat Al Janoub

after the final whistle. The last bus before the match will depart the bus Soug Wagif - North 50 minutes

S963





Education City Metro Station (Green line) is a minimum of a 15-minute walk from the stadium.

Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM Friday: 9 AM - 3 AM

ournament-time operating hours:

Expect metro carriages to be busy before and after

Stadium Express Buses: This is the fastest way to get to the stadium! This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Express Bus Hubs and bring fans a minimum of a 25-minute walk from the stadium. Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and stop 1.5 hours after the final whistle. The last bus before the match will depart the bus hub 1 hour before kick-off

Departure Bus Hub Service No. Min. Journey Time Barwa Madinatna S931 45 minutes Souq Waqif - North FIFA Fan Festival™ S932 35 minutes S933 S934 30 minutes Barwa Barahat Al Janoub S935



Stadium 974

Capacity: 40,000 **Location:** Ras Abu Aboud 10km east of central Doha



Stadium 974 made history even before its first match. Situated in the portside area and in sight of Doha's coastal cityscape, fans at Stadium 974 will feel the cool breeze as it onstructed entirely from shipping containers and moduar steel, it is the first fully demountable covered football stadium - showing Qatar's commitment to cost-effective ustainability and daring design. This unique venue pays tribute to Qatar's long-standing facilities for the local community will spring to life, as well as a dynamic hub for business. This new concept in venue tradition of worldwide trade and seafaring. Not only is 974 the international dialling code for Qatar, but it is also the development ensures that while Stadium 974's physical presexact number of shipping containers used in construction. ence may be temporary, its legacy will be everlasting.

Ras Bu Abboud Metro Station (Gold line) is a minimum of a 30-minute walk from the stadium.

Saturday to Thursday: 6 AM - 3 AM Friday: 9 AM - 3 AM

Tournament-time operating hours:

Expect busy metro carriages before and after matches

Stadium Express Buses: This is the fastest way to get to the stadium! This service will operate from dedicated Stadium Express Bus Hubs. It is a minimum of a 15-minute walk to the stadium from the drop-off location. Buses start running 4 hours before match kick-off and stop 1.5 hours after the final whistle. The last bus before the match will depart the bus hub 1 hour **Departure Bus Hub** Service No. Min. Journey Time

After the tournament, the containers and super-structure

will be reused. A waterfront development boasting fabulou

rolls in from the Arabian Gulf.

Barwa Madinatna 20 minutes S971 S972 Soug Wagif - North 35 minutes FIFA Fan Festival" S973 S974 West Bay 35 minutes Barwa Barahat Al Janoub S975 30 minutes



Six possible breakout stars of the World Cup

he World Cup always provides a stage for young players to make a name for themselves and the younger generation will be eagerly awaiting tomorrow's start of the 2022 edition. AFP Sport takes a look at six of the possible breakout stars of the tournament in Qatar hoping to follow in the footsteps of Pele

and Kylian Mbappe. **Moises Caicedo (Ecuador)** Much of the focus of the opening match will be on hosts Qatar but Caicedo will be aiming to run the game from Ecuador's midfield. The 21-year-old has been a key

player for Brighton in the

team last season. He has

Premier League since

breaking into the first

been linked with a potential move to several big clubs, most notably Liverpool. Caicedo has already made 25 international appearances, including 15 starts in Ecuador's successful World Cup qualifying campaign. He is part of a Brighton trio in Ecuador's squad alongside Pervis Estupinan and Jeremy Sarmiento.

Jude Bellingham (England)

Madrid and Liverpool are among The Borussia Dortmund midfielder is the teams reportfast becoming a global star and is still edly chasing his only 19 years old. He signature and he member of the En could further bolster squad that reac European Cha gland's 56-year wait for a ship final las year but wa cond World Cup title. behind De-Cody Gakpo (Netherlands) clan Rice

Jamal Musiala

order. Bellingham is now a feature far more heavily in Qatar. sure starter for Gareth Southgate after a fine 12 months, capped by four goals in this season's Champions League group stage. Real Gio Reyna ny possible transfer e by helping to end

and Kalvin Phillips in the pecking

The 23-year-old

one brief sub-

stitute appear

winger only made

Gakpo has already netted 13 goals for PSV Eindhoven in all competitions this season, just seven fewer than his total tally last term. With Memphis Depay having been out of action since September due to injury, Gakpo could start the Netherlands' first outing against Senegal on Monday.

ance at Euro 2020 but is expected to

Gio Reyna (United States) Reyna has always drawn praise for his performances for Dortmund despite struggling with injuries in his short career so far. He made

his league debut for

Dortmund in January 2020 aged 17, becoming the youngest American to play in the Bundesliga, taking now international teammate Christian Pulisic's record. Reyna, now 20, is likely to be competing with Lille forward Timothy Weah and Leeds'

Brenden Aaronson for a spot in the United States' starting line-up. Jamal Musiala (Germany)

The 19-year-old has enjoyed a brilliant start to the campaign with Bayern Munich, scoring 12 goals and creating nine more. Musiala, who also played for England's youth teams before declaring for Germany, could start for Hansi Flick's men, even at the expense of

veteran Thomas

Mueller, Germa-

ny may need

Musiala to fire

if they are to seal a record-equalling fifth World Cup, with the possibility Flick will play without an out-and-out striker following an injury to Timo

Mohamed Kudus (Ghana) Kudus was still playing for Ajax's vouth team as recently as last year. before making an impact on the big

stage with four goals in this season's Champions League. The 22-year-old from Accra has already made his mark for Ghana with five goals in 18 appearances.



THE KEEPERS



Jude Bellingham

Spirit of the Euros still present for Danes: Coach

enmark coach Kasper Hjulmand believes the wave of emotive support that helped propel his side to the European Championship semi-finals 18 months ago is still present and hopes to use it for the World Cup in Qatar.

Denmark bounced back from the shock of seeing midfielder Christian Eriksen suffer a heart attack in their opening game to reach the final four of the Euros, willed on by sympathetic support and a determined spirit.

"I think definitely it's still here," he told Reuters in a interview vesterday as Denmark prepared for their opening Group D game against Tunisia on Tuesdav. "When we went back after the Euros and started the World Cup qualification games, we didn't know if it was only Euro football fever in Denmark. But it turned it was just football fever and it's been crazy in Denmark

Hjulmund said the team had played even better in the World Cup qualifiers which came after the Euros, and where Denmark won nine of 10 matches and were among the first teams to qualify for Qatar.

"I think we're in a good position but you cannot just go on emotions and play. We will need to have quality on the pitch. I think that the football quality is there and we're ready."

But the coach does not believe his side are among the favourites, even after rising to 10th place in the FIFA rankings.

"The team is very, very good, but I don't really think that we are up there with the very best. And it's a quality thing in our team. We also saw at Wembley (in the Euros semi-final), where we played well but I think England were better," he said.

"We have been discussing that a lot with the players and asking how can we try to get there? We've tried to make sure we are proactive and make sure that we have the right mindset



Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand speaks to the media in Doha vesterday. (Reuters)

and the toughness needed." Hjulmund agreed that underrated Tunisia could prove a

tricky opponent. "It's a very difficult match. I have great respect for that

match. They're a very passion-

ate team and they will have the whole crowd with them. We have to show professionalism otherwise we have problems, he warned.

Denmark also meet France and Australia in their group.

FIFA WORLD CUP Qat_ar2022

World Cup refs to crack down on dangerous play: Collina

'We don't want to have some challenges that may really endanger the safety of the player'

orld Cup referees have been ordered to crack down on foul play in a bid to protect players from injury, FIFA referees chief Pierluigi Collina revealed yesterday.

Collina said that all 32 teams at the World Cup had been warned that match officials in Qatar have been instructed to take a hardline against any player endangering an opponent.

"The World Cup is the most important tournament on earth in our sport with the best players in the world," Collina said.

"It would be a shame if some of these players wouldn't be able to play due to an injury caused by an opponent. So the first message to our referees is to protect the players safety," the Italian

Collina, widely regarded as the greatest referee of all time, said FIFA refereeing officials had visited World Cup teams in Qatar to inform them of the directive. "We don't want to have some challenges that may really endanger the safety of the player," the 62-year-old said.

"Whenever there is something that may endanger the safety of players, coaches should expect the strongest discipli-



FIFA referees committee chairman Pierluigi Collina addresses a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Center in Doha, yesterday. (AFP)

nary sanction which is a red card." Collina's warning comes four years after the total number of red cards issued at the 2018 World Cup in Russia plummeted to just four - the lowest total at

the finals since 1978. A total of 10 red cards were shown at the 2014 finals in Brazil. 17 at the 2010 tournament in South Africa and a whopping 28

at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Collina used video footage to illustrate the kind of challenges referees would be on the lookout for in Qatar.

They included a wild studsup challenge showing a player crashing into an opponent's shin, while another showed a player raising his foot dangerously high.

"It is irrelevant that the player didn't want to hit the opponent - simply by making this intervention it puts the opponent in a very, very risky position," Colli-

"Again this is unacceptable if we want to protect the safety of an opponent."

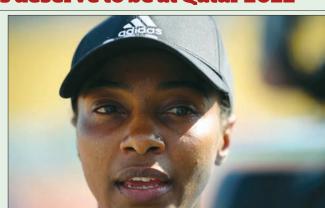
Collina added that referees would also come down hard on

'Female referees deserve to be at Qatar 2022'

Salima Mukansanga, one of the three female referees who will officiate at a men's World Cup for the first time said they have been chosen for the tournament in Oatar not simply based on their gender but because they deserve the chance, Reuters

Rwanda's Mukansanga, Yamashita Yoshimi of Japan and Frenchwoman Stephanie Frappart along with three female assistant referees have been selected for the World Cup, which begins

We are here because we deserve to be here. Back at our confederation, or back at home it is another level, so this is the biggest level of football," Mukansanga told reporters in Doha yesterday. 'So being here means we



Referee Salima Mukansanga of Rwanda attends a media day event at the Qatar Sports Club Stadium in Doha, yesterday. (AFP)

deserve to be here, it's not a change or because we are women." Assistant referee Kathryn Nesbitt of the United

States said they feel welcome. "We feel like we are one referee team here, no difference man or woman," she said.

any player swinging an elbow into an opponent's face, describing such challenges as "absolutely unacceptable."

Collina meanwhile said the three women referees who will make history at the tournament - France's Stephanie Frappart, Salima Mukansanga of Rwanda and Japan's Yamashita Yoshimi would be treated as equals in

Asked if cultural sensitivities would prevent them being appointed to officiate in matches involving Islamic nations such as Iran, Saudi Arabia or Qatar, Collina replied: "For us they are referees. This is the message I gave them...vou are not here because you are women, you are here because you are FIFA match

"They are here as FIFA World

Cup 2022 officials and they are ready to officiate any kind of match." This year's tournament, which kicks off tomorrow with hosts Qatar taking on Ecuador, will also see semi-automated offside technology used at the finals for the first time. The system has already been deployed in the UEFA Champions League.

Collina said the system would help speed up offside decisions.

Injured Mane a 'big loss' for Senegal: Diouf

Former Senegal star El Hadji Diouf said the team had suffered a "big loss" with African player of the year Sadio Mane ruled out of the World Cup. Team chiefs confirmed on Thursday that the forward would miss the tournament in Oatar after undergoing surgery on his lower right leg following an injury sustained while playing for Bayern Munich last week, AFP reported from Doha. "We're going to miss Sadio because he's a differdor who was part of the Senegal side that reached the quarter-finals of the 2002 World Cup. "But don't forget we've been very strong because

we also have (Edouard) Mendy, (Kalidou) Koulibaly, a great team." Mane scored the decisive penalty in a shootout as

Senegal beat Egypt to win their first Africa Cup of Nations title in February He did the same against Egypt a month later in

their World Cup play-off. The 30-year-old former Liverpool star also finished

second in this year's Ballon d'Or voting behind Karim Benzema. "It's true the absence of Sadio Mane is a big loss for

us, our leader isn't here," said Diouf. "Mane had a lot to do with this team getting here. "But this team is a family, don't forget that." He added: "We've got to work without him -

Senegal have to show the whole world what the



Senegal's former player El Hadji Diouf takes part in a training session in Doha, yesterday. (AFP)

African champions can do.

"Some teams don't want to play Senegal because we have a good team with experienced players." Diouf, a two-time African footballer of the year like Mane, said the Bayern forward would call his teammates before their games and possibly even fly out to Qatar to support them.

Senegal begin their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands on Monday.

They will also face hosts Qatar and Ecuador in

Star Playe____i

World Cup poorer without Mane, says former Liverpool teammate Van Dijk

Reuters Doha

etherlands captain Virgil van Dijk says the World Cup will be poorer without his former clubmate Sadio Mane, even though the Dutch now face a weaker Senegal side in their Group A opener on Monday.

Senegal's talisman Mane was ruled out of the tournament in Qatar late on Thursday after his team's doctors re-examined a latest batch of scans of his knee injury, suffered playing in the Bundesliga for new club Bayern Munich earlier this month, and said his recovery could take several months.

Mane was Van Dijk's teammate at Liverpool up to the end of last season and the pair were set for an on-field reunion as the Netherlands and Senegal kick off their World Cup campaigns at the Al Thumama

"I am very sorry that Sadio misses the



Netherlands defender Virgil van Dijk takes a break during a training session at Oatar University training site in Doha, yesterday.

match against us because this World Cup simply deserves the best players, Sadio is one of them," said Van Dijk. "Sadio is world

class, he is my friend and I will miss him." Van Dijk also echoed coach Louis van Gaal's sentiment from earlier in the week that the Dutch could be strong competitors at the tournament. "For me, Argentina,

Brazil and France are the favourite countries." he told reporters. "The Brazilians are always there. The

a great selection. We have a good group, we have a very experienced trainer, but above all we have team spirit."

SENEGAL NOT TO BE UNDERESTIMATED: AKE

The absence of Sadio Mane does not mean the Netherlands are going to underestimate African champions Senegal when the two sides clash in their World Cup Group A opener in Doha, Dutch defender Nathan Ake said. But Ake said it will not diminish the threat they will face at the Al Thumama Stadium on Monday.

"It's going to be very tough," he told a news conference. "Senegal has good players and very strong strikers, even without Mane. Missing the World Cup due to an injury is very annoying, not only

FIFA+: Redefining the digital fan experience

■IFA+, the official digital destination of football fandom that launched earlier this year, is now set to redefine the way in which fans - all over the world - enjoy the FIFA World Cup, as it rolls out its full tournament offering in 11 languages ahead of kick off tomorrow.

Throughout the global event, FIFA+ will become the official companion experience of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, with a reimagined global FIFA app and web platform, available across select connected devices, and becoming the all-in-one destination for FIFA World Cup fans. Built to ensure fans have a complete tournament experience, FIFA+ will also compliment the tournament's broadcasters - helping fans find their favourite team's live games through the 'Where to Watch' feature and sharing behind-thescenes and Original content created throughout.

The completely free platform, which launched with a slate of Original content, in-depth archive, and extensive live coverage, is transforming ahead of the tournament to welcome a host of new, immersive, and engaging features that will provide a truly game-changing experience for fans around the world.

AMONG THEM

FULL TOURNAMENT COVERAGE FIFA+ will be capturing the tournament in full across its channels, with an industry-leading live blog running non-stop, capturing the sights, sounds, atmosphere and energy of the world's biggest football celebration. The FIFA+ editorial team will be on hand to bring photos and video from every match, the FIFA Fan Festival, around Qatar and beyond, while the platform will be the source of all official stats and data throughout.

OFFICIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout the FIFA World Cup, FIFA+ will be FIFA's official home of highlights, with each and every match recapped within minutes of the final whistle and all the thrills, drama and emotion available to fans in every corner of the globe - with a version available to watch in sign language as well.

FIFA+ STADIUM EXPERIENCE

For those in Qatar, the groundbreaking FIFA+ Stadium Experience will revolutionise how fans enjoy the beautiful game. Available on the app for fans attending the match in the stadium, the function allows FIFA+ users to experience the action like never before - with a live augmented reality overlay of stats, heatmaps, insights, different camera angles, VAR replays as on TV, and much more. The all new viewing experience is designed specifically to complement and enhance how those in the ground celebrate and support.

FIFA+ FANTASY, PANINI, AND MORE GAMES

One for both casual and core gaming fans, FIFA+ will be the official home of FIFA World Cup Fantasy throughout the tournament. Fans can lead their team to glory with Fantasy Classic,



Daily, both of which are complemented by other FIFA+ Play Zone favourites such as the digital Panini Album, Daily Predictor and World Cup Trivia game.

THE FIFA WORLD CUP DAILY, BY HISENSE

Meanwhile, FIFA+'s commitment to high-quality content will continue apace with The FIFA World Cup Daily, By Hisense, brought to fans live every day direct from the FIFA Fan Festival, bringing celebrities, creators, influencers and

legends together to recap the

FIFA+ COLLECT

FIFA+ Collect, FIFA+'s official digital collectables marketplace, will also go from strength to strength during the tournament, with a special World Cup drop set to launch ahead of kick-off.

FIFA STORE

The newly launched FIFA Store will be available on FIFA+. Fans can enjoy product lines from the 32 qualified nations as well as wider FIFA Member Asso-

ciations, merchandise, memorabilia and accessories. It will also home a new line of 'FIFA' products featuring artwork and designs inspired by storytelling from FIFA's biggest events.

ARCHIVE, ORIGINALS AND LIVE

Outside of the FIFA World Cup. FIFA+ remains the home of 40,000 live regional matches every year, an existing extensive archive featuring every men's and women's FIFA World Cup match ever produced, and a slate of Original programming – including the landmark docuseries Captains which intimately goes behind-thescenes with 6 leading global icons (among them Luka Modric and Thiago Silva) on their journey to qualify for Qatar.

PERSONALISATION AND FIFA ID

All of the above is underpinned by a personalised experience and a rich notifications integration, where fans can register for free, choose their favourite World Cup team, and enjoy a bespoke journey through the FIFA World Cup, with news, highlights, insights and analysis relevant to them specifically. The same login is then used across FIFA+ Fantasy, FIFA+ Collect, and a range of other digital FIFA features.

FIFA Director of Strategy, Digital and FIFA+, Charlotte Burr, said: "This is a significant moment, as we welcome the entire world to FIFA+ during the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. FIFA+ is set to truly change the game by providing a new blueprint for how fans enjoy their World Cup on FIFA's channels for years to come. "FIFA+ is set to become the official companion experience for the tournament, giving fans around the world a unique and personal experience and reshaping how they enjoy sport's biggest tournament now

and in to the future." This all comes following the initial launch of FIFA+ in early 2022. The world-class digital destination for football fandom is available for free on app or web, and across select connected TVs and devices. (Fifa.com)

'World Cup is source of pride for the entire region'

atar football legends Ahmad Khalil and Ibrahim Khalfan believe the upcoming FIFA World Cup™ will be an historic event and are predicting Arab teams to spring a surprise during the tournament.

Four teams from the region have qualified for the first World Cup in the Middle East and Arab

Hosts Qatar will be joined by Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Morocco for the showpiece event, which will kick off at the magnificent Al Bayt Stadium on 20 November.

"Many teams have a shot at this World Cup - with Brazil the leading favourites," said Khalil, who helped Qatar claim their first Arabian Gulf Cup in 1992.

"Argentina, Brazil, Germany and France are also strong teams. There are also some dark horses, like Serbia, who have a very talented squad, but I am certain a



team from the region will surprise everyone."

He added: "As for the Qatar team, they are well prepared after taking part in the Copa America, Gold Cup and European qualifying matches. They have talent all over the pitch and a good result against Ecuador in the opening match should put them in a great position to get through to the last

Khalfan, meanwhile, believes Qatar's success in recent years will boost their confidence, particularly the 2019 AFC Asian Cup

Ibrahim Khalfan

"All the Qatar players are talented in their own right but there are three players who can make a difference on the day: Akram Afif,

Hassan al-Haydos and Boualem Khoukhi.

Al-Haydos is the captain and leader, Afif is a talented player with attacking prowess and Khoukhi is a versatile player who acts as a safety valve defensively," said Khalfan, who led Qatar to second place in the 1981 FIFA

World Youth Championship. "With all due respect to Ecuador, I believe we will beat them - and that will put us in a great position to make it to the second round. Ecuador have a strong team but we are capable of beat-

ing them." For Khalil and Khalfan, both Qatar Legacy Ambassadors, the tournament holds tremendous significance.

"This will be the most remarkable World Cup," said Khalil. "The infrastructure that has been put in place, the compact nature of the tournament, the vast transportation network and the state-of-the-art stadiums are all exceptional.

"The tournament will be a source of pride for the entire region, and will impress the entire world."

Khalfan added: "I share the pride that all Arabs are feeling at this historic moment. It is the first World Cup in our region and Qatar made it a reality for all of us to celebrate. After 12 years of preparation, we are ready to host a tournament that will create memories for a lifetime."

Spotligh___t

Tite's call-up of Alves is right, says

Retired midfielder says it is right to have an experienced player in the Brazil squad

Reuters

razil's former midfielder Ze Roberto said criticism of Dani Alves' call-up for the World Cup in Oatar was due to a cultural taboo on veterans that was still present in Brazilian football, something that he experienced in his last finals in 2006.

local media after calling on Alves, 39, who last played in September and recently recovered from a knee injury.

"This issue of age is cultural. I experienced it first-hand when I returned to Brazil after the 2006 World Cup," Ze Roberto told Brazilian website UOL.

"It's difficult to change this mentality, because it's part of the culture of the Brazilian fans, of the press.

"In my case, I had to kind of face a taboo. From what I see, this taboo hasn't been broken yet, it exists to this day."

Ze Roberto went to the 2006 World Cup in Germany aged 32 after returning to Brazil following a long career in Europe, something that also sparked criticism in his home country.

The now 48-year-old added that Alves' experience will be of great value to a team who are among the favourites to lift the trophy in Qatar.

"Daniel Alves's experience is crucial for the group. New players have emerged, who are excelling in Europe but will be playing in their first World Cup," Ze Roberto said.

"You need players with experience to back you up. He's been called up because of the great results he's had in his career and because he can still add to the World Cup, both playing and out."

Brazil will be start their campaign for a record-extending sixth World Cup ti-



tle on Thursday against Serbia. They also take on Switzerland and Cameroon in

BRAZIL WILL ONLY PICK TITE SUCCESSOR IN JANUARY: CBF

Brazil will only choose the next coach of their national team in January, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said yesterday, denying rumours of talks with the likes of Pep Guardiola to replace outgoing boss Tite.

Tite, who has coached the "Selecao" since 2016, has announced he will leave the post after the World Cup, leading to a flurry of speculation in Brazil on who

But the CBF "is 100-percent focused on winning a sixth World Cup under Tite's command," it said in a statement yesterday.

CBF president Ednaldo Rodrigues, who took office in March, "has never spoken with any football director about the coaching job after the World Cup," it said. "Any news to the contrary is a lie." Ro-

drigues said in the statement. "That issue will only be addressed in January."

The statement came after rumours this week that ex-national team coach Mano Menezes (2010-2012), currently at Brazilian league runners-up Internacional, could return to the job.

Other names floated include Dorival Junior, of Copa Libertadores champs Flamengo, and Manchester City boss Guardiola - though the latter would reportedly demand too high a price for the CBF.

Tite, 61, surprised the football world in February with the announcement he would leave the job after Qatar.

He has posted an impressive record since taking over from Dunga in 2016: 57 wins, 14 draws and five losses, winning the 2019 Copa America on home soil.

His Brazil side crashed out of the 2018 World Cup in the quarter-finals, losing to

But they head to Qatar as favourites after an undefeated qualifying campaign.

Commen___t

World champions France 'only human', says Australia's Mabil

ustralia winger Awer Mabil said yesterday that France were only human as the underdogs prepared for their daunting World Cup opener against the defending champions.

Graham Arnold's team face a tough task getting out of Group D, which also contains Tunisia and dark horses Denmark.

But Mabil, who plays for Cadiz in La Liga, said the Australians would not be overawed when they face one of the tournament favourites on Tuesday.

"They're human just like us," he said.

"Obviously they play at a high level but you can't go to the game thinking, you know, giving them so much respect, because then

"You've just got to go out there and do your thing and do it to the best of your ability. If it's your day it's your day. If it's not your day then OK, but I'm not scared of facing anybody. That's my mentality."

Australia have not escaped from the World Cup group stage since 2006 in Germany and last won a match at a finals four years

The golden generation of Mark Viduka, Harry Kewell and Tim Cahill is a distant memory and they only reached the tournament in Qatar after beating Peru in a play-off penalty shootout.

"We have the motivation to try to shock the world in our style," said Mabil, who scored the crucial spot-kick against Peru.

"We're really excited about the group, especially for the Denmark game as my girlfriend is from there and it would be nice to get one over her."

Mabil, 27, moved to Australia as a 10-year-old after being raised in a Kenyan refugee camp by parents who had fled conflict in Sudan. He shared yesterday's press conference with fellow former refugees Thomas Deng and 18-year-old attacker Garang Kuol, who was recently signed by Newcastle United.

ence for me, obviously I've been watching the Socceroos for a long time. This is where I want to prove myself," said Kuol, who will join the Magpies from A-League side Central Coast Mariners in January.

"I wouldn't say it was intimidating - rather I find it more exciting to see what I can do against players of that calibre."



Australia's Mitchell Duke (right) jokes with his teammate Awer Mabil (left) as they pose for the official team group photograph at the Aspire Academy in Doha. (AFP)

PORTUGAL, GHANA ARRIVE IN QATAR







Portugal's players including Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (center) arrive at the Hamad International Airport in Doha ahead of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Right: Portugal's coach Fernando Santos gestures upon arrival in Doha yesterday. (AFP)



Ghana's Alidu Seidu and his teammates arrive in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)