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GULF TIMES

SPORT



FIFA WORLD CUP
Qatar 2022





Spotlight

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Nerves caused Qatar’s defeat to Ecuador, says coach Sanchez

‘We will try to learn from this loss. I’m completely sure we will make people feel happier with our performance’

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar head coach Felix Sanchez admitted his side suffered from stage fright as the FIFA World Cup 2022 hosts were handed a 2-0 defeat by Ecuador in their Group A clash at Al Bayt Stadium on Sunday.

Enner Valencia’s first-half double earned the South Americans a deserved win to leave the reigning Asian champions needing to win against Senegal on Friday to reignite their hopes of a place in the next phase of the competition. Defeat means Qatar are the first host country in the tournament’s 92-year history to lose their opening game.

“There’s no excuse, we want to congratulate our opponents, they deserved to win,” Sanchez said after the match. “There is a lot of room for improvement. Maybe the responsibility and nerves got the best of us. We didn’t start well. It was a terrible start, actually. Our nerves betrayed us.

“We were unable to string together four passes in a row. Also, many defensive gaps. The team was not balanced and that hurt us a lot. When you play against a team of this level...you pay for it,” the Spaniard added.

Valencia gave Ecuador the lead from the penalty spot in the 16th minute after he had been brought down by Qatar goalkeeper Saad al-Sheeb and the Fenerbahce forward was on target again 15 minutes later when he headed home Angelo Praceido’s cross from the right.

With Almoez Ali failing to take a gilt-edged opportunity in first half injury time, Qatar went into the break trailing by two goals and, as a result, some fans within the 67,372 crowd left the stadium before the final whistle.

Sanchez said his team “felt supported” even though thousands of fans left early.

“We felt backed and supported and we hope for the next game, people will feel prouder and keep supporting us to the end of the tournament,” he said of the fans.

“The atmosphere was great; people were very much looking forward to this game. We knew (defeat) could happen and the result can sometimes be difficult. We will try to learn from this loss. I’m completely sure we will make people feel happier with our performance. People know that we can give more.”

Despite the disappointment, the 46-year-old was already turning his focus to the game against the Senegal. “We need to sit down and analyse our performance, draw some conclusions

and plan for the next game, try to be effective and competitive. It won’t be easy as all teams are looking for points,” he said. The Qatar coach defended the team’s preparations, where they spent six month in Europe training.

“Our preparations were adequate, we trained and played many friendlies in Europe. It was much more demanding than what they would have experienced had they stayed back at home. Plus, the conditions were not ideal for training during that time in Qatar,” he said

After their match against Senegal at the Al Thumama Stadium on Friday, the host face the Netherlands in their final Group A game next Tuesday (November 29) at Al Bayt Stadium.

Ecuador’s two-goal hero Valencia was delighted with his team’s performance against the hosts.

“We knew it was going to be a tough game, however, we managed to get a good result quickly,” said the former West Ham United and Everton striker. “We managed to score a couple of quick goals which helped us to get control of the game and take the three points.

“I dreamt so many times about winning this opening match and it was a dream that I managed to score. We have to keep dreaming because it is only going to get tougher.”



Qatar’s Spanish coach Felix Sanchez watches his players from the touchline during the FIFA World Cup Group A match against Ecuador at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor on Sunday. (AFP)

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Spotlight

Messi ‘feels very good’ in his last World Cup hurrah



Argentina's Lionel Messi at a press conference in Doha. (Reuters)

‘It’s most likely my last World Cup and the last opportunity to make my dream a reality. I’m really happy and really excited and I want to try to enjoy this World Cup’

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

On Saturday, a rumour had swirled around the Qatar University ground over Lionel Messi's fitness as the Argentina captain missed the start of the team's training session. At the World Cup in Qatar, the football governing body FIFA allows the world's media only 15 minutes to watch a team's training session. There was a collective gasp by those present as Messi did not turn up for training, even as his teammates practised. Post that, it was anybody's guess whether Messi had trained or not. Yesterday, though, the superstar striker dismissed 'rumours' about his fitness as he announced himself to be ready for Argentina's opening match against Saudi Arabia at the Lusail Stadium. The pictures from yesterday's training session too later confirmed Messi indeed would be in action today. The 35-year-old will be playing in his fifth and last World Cup, with Messi confirming yesterday that he is unlikely to appear in the United States, Canada and Mexico in 2026. It would be a travesty, if the Paris Saint-Germain forward had to miss out due to injury. Messi had arrived in Qatar carrying a niggle in his Achilles tendon, which he seemed to have picked up during a friendly against the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi last week. "I'm feeling well," Messi told reporters yesterday. "I am very well physically and I feel in good condition. I think I come here in really good form, both personally and physically. There are no issues whatsoever. I heard there were rumours of having to miss part of training or be away from the team because of a blow but it's nothing out of the ordinary," he added. There is a lot riding for Messi in Qatar, with his greatest-ever-to-play-the-game tag hinging on his ability to fill the glaring gap in his resume and win



Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (centre) and teammates take part in a training session at the Qatar University Training Site yesterday. (AFP)

MESSI FOR ARGENTINA	
CAPS	165
GOALS	91
WORLD CUP TOURNAMENTS, INCLUDING 2022	5
WORLD CUP GAMES	19
WORLD CUP GOALS	6

a World Cup title. Along with perennial favourites Brazil, Argentina are tipped for the title by the pundits and Messi would be hoping he would return to Lusail on November 18 for the final. The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner has had a strong start with PSG this season and like he has done in the past decade carries Argentina's hopes of first World Cup title since 1986. "I'm aware it's a very special moment," Messi said, reiterating it will be the last time he will feature at a World Cup. "It's most likely my last World Cup and the last opportunity to make my dream a reality. I'm really happy and really excited and I want to try to enjoy this World Cup. I think age as well makes you see things differently. Maybe now I give more importance to small details because before I didn't do it. I'll try now to focus more on the details and today enjoying it is more important," he added. Having endured a heartbreaking loss to Germany in the 2014 World Cup final in Brazil, Messi finally lifted his first trophy with Argentina at the 2021 Copa America title. It was Albiceleste's first trophy in 28 years and since then they have gone on an unbeaten World Cup qualifying campaign, which many suggest is what makes them title contenders in Qatar. The 2014 run aside, Messi has had a disappointing time at the World Cup with Argentina crashing out in the 2002 group stage, 2006 and 2010 quarter-finals and 2018 round of 16. Messi knows this

could very well be his best chance at securing his legacy, which many in his home country believes pales in comparison to the late Diego Maradona, who led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup. Messi said the burden of winning a trophy for Argentina has reduced after the Copa America title, but said the similarities between current squad and the 2014 one gives him a hope of triumphant last hurrah on the global stage. "Having won decompresses you a lot, it gives you peace of mind," said Messi. "This allows the people to be less anxious and fretting over results. I'm not sure we feel better (than before other World Cups) but we just won a competition and that is very reassuring. It helps you work in a different way and you don't feel as anxious. You don't put as much pressure on yourself so we focus on enjoying ourselves. The squad reminds me of 2014, very united and clear about what we have to do on the pitch and the way we have to play. It's great to be here in good form because it gives you so much confidence," he noted. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's French coach Herve Renard is looking forward to testing his team against Messi having led Morocco against Portugal and Ronaldo at the last World Cup in Russia. "It's an honour to come up against the best players on the planet. Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi are football legends and thanks to them, football has changed," said the much-travelled 54-year-old, an Africa Cup of Nations winner with both Zambia and Ivory Coast. "It's an honour to be here and an honour to play against them but when you compete you have to put all your energy and motivation into trying to topple the best, that's what's beautiful about sport, sometimes you get surprises."

Focus

Australia's Arnold not focusing on faceless France

AFP
Doha

Coach **Graham Arnold** said yesterday he refuses to even mention the word France, let alone any of their players, as outsiders Australia prepare for their World Cup opener against the reigning champions in Qatar. Even without Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema, midfielders Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante and centre-back Presnel Kimpembe, France are full of global stars, led by Kylian Mbappe. But Arnold doesn't want his players to get overawed by illustrious opponents and has tried to present the French as faceless positions with specific strengths and attributes rather than star individuals. "It's not being disrespectful at all but I've hardly mentioned the word France and I've hardly mentioned any players' names," said the Socceroos coach. "They all play in positions, the players know who they are but it's about identifying those players' strengths and it's one against one. There's 10 blue shirts against 10 yellow shirts and it's a fight." Captain and goalkeeper Mathew Ryan said it was about finding the right balance in their approach. "The biggest focus for us has been the mentality and the boys have grasped the mentality: we go into every game, whoever we're facing, with the right amount of respect," he said. "We don't underestimate anybody and we don't over-respect anyone and that's a real challenge." French centre-back Ibrahima Konate admitted last week that he does not even know the names of any of Australia's play-



ers, and Arnold is determined to change that by full time. "It's our job to go out there tomorrow to show them who we are as a nation," said Arnold of the Group D clash. "The players have that stage, it's their stage and this is an opportunity in life that can change your life even more than what they have now." Arnold pointed to the example of winger Martin Boyle, who was ruled out of the World Cup on Sunday with a knee injury, as a reason for his players to grasp this opportunity. "A lot of players don't even get one chance. All I'd say is every player needs to look at Martin Boyle today and realise how fortunate they are to be here and run off the back of that." Running hard is the bare minimum Arnold expects from his players. "I've banned the word 'fatigued' and I've banned the words 'in pain'," he added. "This is the World Cup, there's no such thing as being tired after a game or fatigued or having a bit of pain and stiffness: recover quickly and get on with it!" One problem Australia will not have to deal with is Ballon d'Or winner Benzema, who has been ruled out due to a thigh problem. But Arnold said he would have rather seen the prolific Real Madrid forward lining up in Qatar.

Preview

France place World Cup hopes in Mbappe after Benzema injury

AFP
Doha

World Cup holders France will need Kylian Mbappe at his best in Qatar following the loss of Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema to injury, coach Didier Deschamps said yesterday. France begin their defence against Australia today as they look to move on from a troubled build-up which saw several key players pull out injured. Benzema was then forced to withdraw over the weekend. The Real Madrid striker succumbed to a left thigh injury, although he played no part in France's 2018 triumph in Russia when Mbappe burst onto the world stage. The Paris Saint-Germain striker was just 19 but scored four goals during that World Cup, including

one in the 4-2 final win over Croatia. "He is still a young player, just a bit less than four years ago, but he already did very important things four years ago," Deschamps told reporters yesterday. "Since then he has become more mature and there is now even more recognition for him around the world. He doesn't have any more responsibility within the squad than he did

before, but he has always had the ability to make the difference and we will need that. He has the ability to be decisive at any moment, unlike many other players." Mbappe, who turns 24 next month, will lead a French attack in which Olivier Giroud is now expected to start in the absence of Benzema. If four years ago in Russia Mbappe was still a teenager, he is now an established world-class talent and one of the best-paid athletes on the planet after turning down Real Madrid and agreeing a highly lucrative new contract to stay in Paris earlier this year. Yet his last major tournament was disappointing, with Mbappe failing to score at Euro 2020 and missing the crucial penalty as France lost to Switzerland in a shoot-out in the last 16. However, France

captain Hugo Lloris insisted: "It is hard to say just how good he can be. He seems focused but also relaxed and he is eager to play well and help the team." France also began their 2018 campaign against Australia and needed a late own goal to secure a 2-1 win. The Socceroos come into this tournament among the rank outsiders after needing a penalty shoot-out to beat Peru in a play-off to qualify. Graham Arnold's team is lacking players who are established at leading European clubs and today's game looks a mismatch, on paper at least. "Above all else I think they are a competitive team and they will have grown in confidence since beating Peru on penalties. In general that is the kind of thing that brings a team together," said Lloris. Deschamps confirmed that Manchester United centre-back Raphael Varane is fit to feature after recovering a leg injury.



France's Kylian Mbappe trains at the Al Sadd Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

Saudi's Renard not worried by lack of playing time of 'keepers

Doha: Saudi Arabia coach Herve Renard is not worried by two of the squad's goalkeepers' lack of playing time this season ahead of their match against Argentina in the World Cup today. "The goalkeeper who will play tomorrow's match has played 17 World Cup qualifiers so there is absolutely no problem," the Frenchman yesterday. Renard did not announce the name of the goalkeeper who will lead the Green Falcons' starting line-up, but Mohamed al-Owais has played 42 times for the national team, compared to just seven internationals for Mohamed al-Yami. The third goalkeeper in the squad, Nawaf al-Aqidi, is still waiting for his debut with the national team. Renard also stood by his decision to exclude veteran custodian Abdullah al-Mayouf, who announced his retirement in 2019 before reversing his decision and saying he was available for selection. Renard kept his starting line-up close to his chest but said midfielder and team captain Salman al-Faraj trained normally. Footage from training showed al-Faraj putting his hand on an injured shoulder that had kept him from training with the team for several days after returning to Saudi Arabia after facing Iceland. The 54-year-old coach said his team is eager to start the tournament after fighting for the last two years to reach the finals. Saudi Arabia have never won their first game in a World Cup since they took part for the first time in 1994. Their best result was a 2-2 draw to Tunisia in 2006.

Poland coach Czeslaw Michniewicz denied Mexico were the more fancied team in their World Cup Group C opener today

Rochet, however, says the defence is also of a high calibre as the two-time champions plot a deep run, saying: "We are all at a very good level, and whoever has to play will do so in the best way." **(FIFA.com)**



Spotlight

Ronaldo says row with United ‘won’t shake’ Portugal team

‘I don’t have to worry about what others think, I talk when I want to. Everybody in the team knows who I am, what I believe in’

AFP
Doha

Cristiano Ronaldo insisted yesterday that his explosive row with Manchester United would not impact Portugal's chances at the World Cup as they prepare for their opening match in Qatar with Ghana on Thursday.

Last week superstar Ronaldo lashed out at Premier League club United and the team's coach Erik ten Hag in a TV interview after being relegated to a peripheral role this season.

"I have no doubt that this recent episode, that interview, and other episodes with other players that happen sometimes, can sometimes shake the player but won't shake the team," Ronaldo said at a press conference at the Portugal camp at Shahaniya Sports Club yesterday.

Ronaldo, who is set to start his fifth and likely final World Cup, was suspended for the Premier League club's 1-1 draw at Chelsea after refusing to come on as a substitute against Tottenham last month.

The 37-year-old claimed during the interview that he felt "provoked" into that reaction by Ten Hag and yesterday was unrepentant about giving the interview. "I don't have to worry about what others think, I talk when I want to," he said. "Everybody in the team knows who I am, what I believe in."

The Portugal captain said that he is not worried about how his actions will impact the squad, adding that he feels great about their chances of winning the World Cup. "In my life, the best timing is always my timing," Ronaldo said.

"I don't have to think about what other people think. The players know me really well for many years and know the type of person I am. It's an ambitious group that is hungry and focused.



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (left) takes part in a training session at the Shahaniya Sports Club yesterday. (AFP)

So I'm sure it (the interview) won't shake the changing room's concentration and focus."

Ronaldo said frosty interaction with his teammate for club and country Bruno Fernandes, along with images of him grabbing Manchester City's Joao

Cancelo by the head, had been being overblown by the media. "In these final stages of competitions there's always those type of moments," said Ronaldo.

"We were just playing around, I have a great relationship with him (Fernandes). I was asking him, because his

plane was late, I asked him if he came by boat. The same thing happened with Cancelo, he was a bit sad during training and I grabbed him by the neck and told him 'Come on, you've got this,' that's what I said. And then it became another controversy at your end. The

whole atmosphere is excellent, it's bulletproof and iron clad. The next player who comes here, you don't have to ask about that, don't talk about me, you don't have to talk about Cristiano Ronaldo... help them out, ask them about the World Cup."

Portugal open their Group H campaign against Ghana on Thursday before facing Uruguay and South Korea. After missing a friendly with a stomach bug last week, Ronaldo says he is in perfect shape to play.

"I feel great, I have recovered my best shape, we've had good training sessions, the team and myself, I'm ready to start the World Cup in the best possible way," Ronaldo added.

Ronaldo, who made his Portugal debut in 2003, is poised to appear at his fifth World Cup. He is the all-time top goalscorer in men's international football with 117 strikes in 191 games.

The forward recently appeared in a Louis Vuitton advert alongside longtime rival, Argentina striker Lionel Messi, where the pair were pictured playing a game of chess.

"I would like to be the player to checkmate Messi, it happened in the chess game and in football it would be magic," Ronaldo said with a smile.

Messi has won seven Ballon d'Or awards and many consider him to be the best player of all-time. "Even if I win the World Cup that debate will continue," said Ronaldo.

"Some people like me more, some people like me less. The World Cup will always be a showcase. But if you tell me you won't win any more tournaments in your career, I would still be happy, given all I have achieved."

Ronaldo also said he had nothing to prove by winning the World Cup as he had "nothing missing in my life."

"If I had to prove something at 37 years and eight months [old]... After what I've already done and won, it would be a surprise for me," Ronaldo added.

"I am an ambitious player. I would love to win t his World Cup. It would be magical, it would be spectacular, a dream. I'm very proud of what I've achieved so far... Thanks to God, I have nothing missing in my life."

Focus

Gavi, from Andalusia dust to World Cup

AFP
Madrid

Gavi has only just turned 18, but his journey from the dusty playing fields of Andalusia to Barcelona star and now the World Cup with Spain bears all the hallmarks of a potential great.

"He still thinks he's in the schoolyard," joked his father Pablo Paez when asked about the irresistible rise of a boy playing with his laces undone and tongue pressed firmly inside his cheek. A combative, urgent presence on the pitch, Gavi snaps into challenges with the work-rate of a midfield hatchet-man, but on the ball offers the creativity the world demands from a Barcelona playmaker. "Nobody can say they don't like Gavi," said Spain coach Luis Enrique, who fast-tracked the teenager's international career.

The youngster who climbed on the stage of the Chatelet theatre in Paris to receive the Kopa Trophy for the best young player in the world in October is the same player his first coach remembers. At La Liar Balompie sports club 30 kilometres south of Seville, Manuel Basco, known as Batalla, remembers a boy who was "reserved, introverted, but a joker" who "already had this habit with his tongue. That I believe that Pablo will



This picture taken during the 2010/2011 season shows Gavi holding a ball. (AFP)



Spain's Gavi (right), Ansu Fati (centre) and Nico Williams train at the Qatar University training site yesterday. (Reuters)

never lose," he said.

While rummaging through his phone and poring over the yellowed photos of Gavi, Batalla, now 64, has squinted eyes and pinched lips.

"He stayed with us for two years, from six to eight years old. Then (Real) Betis saw him play, and boom, they took him," recalled the coach, who continued to follow his prodigy while he stayed in Seville.

But he was not able to follow the starlet's progress for long. In 2013, while Betis were playing in a tournament in the Algarve, recruiters Barca spotted an 11-year-old Gavi, who was voted best player of the tournament and whisked off to Catalonia.

"At a young age, he wasn't always the most extraordinary player on the pitch, but he was always very consistent. He was rarely worth nine out of 10, but always eight out of 10," a scout based in Spain for a Premier League club said. Even his own parents were struggling to

keep up with his rapid rise to fame. His father, who ran a bar in the village of Los Palacios y Villafranca, was hired as a handyman at Betis when his son was recruited there.

Then they decided to move to Barcelona at the start of their son's journey to La Masia, a gamble for an 11-year-old boy, but one who was already very confident.

"Don't worry. I will already be signed up by a big club by the time I am 12," Batalla says he told his parents. His former Barca youth coach Franc Artiga, currently coaching the United Arab Emirates U20s, said that as a teen, Gavi's competitive spirit was such that defeats drove him to tears.

"The competition motivates him more than anything," Julien Guerrero, coach of the Spanish under-17 team, said. "When the pitch was small, bumpy, the match intense and rough, most players struggled. Gavi, he loved it," said Guerrero.

Even today, he has difficulty sleeping

before and after matches. But despite these flashes of anxiety, Gavi has kept a close link with La Masia. When he started in the first team and in the national team at 17, he still lived in the same small room provided by Barca.

However, his daily life has changed. He extended his Barca deal until 2026 with an astronomical release clause of one billion euros and is driven to training by his teammates in luxury vehicles.

But he often stops for the fans and returns regularly to see his former teammates' progress with Barcelona's second string.

Gavi is just beginning but his career has accelerated in the space of a few months, to a dizzying extent. His professional debut, La Liga, the Champions League. Then the Spanish national team, where he became the youngest player to score for his country. And now he is one of their main heroes and great hopes at the Qatar World Cup.

Bottomline

Brazil will play attacking game no matter who starts, says Raphinha

Reuters
Doha

Brazil will attack against Serbia in their opening World Cup match regardless of who starts, forward **Raphinha** said yesterday, with the biggest question mark surrounding Vinicius Jr. Coach Tite has given no clues about his team selection as he prepares the favourites with Vinicius Jr yet to be guaranteed a place in the lineup for the five-time World Cup winners. "We're an attacking team and having more players up front helps us because of our DNA," Raphinha said.

Tite is keeping under wraps whether he will pair Fred with his Manchester United team mate Casemiro to strengthen the midfield or unleash Vinicius alongside Neymar, Richarlison and Raphinha, with Lucas Paqueta able to play as a second or third man in midfield depending on the system.

"With Vinicius we have a more vertical and fast team that can run the channels but having Paqueta in a more attacking role makes us a more dangerous team from the middle," Raphinha said.

Brazil opened the first 20 minutes of their training session to the media yesterday but kept under wraps the system and players Tite will use in their first match, offering no sight of the 11-on-11 practice match which was held behind closed doors.

Forward Richarlison agreed with his team mate about Brazil's approach and made clear what he would prefer his coach to do.

"For me, I would play with as many players up front as we could," Richarlison told a news conference. "With more forwards, the ball would get more often to me and I would score more goals. That is what I want, being Brazil number 9."

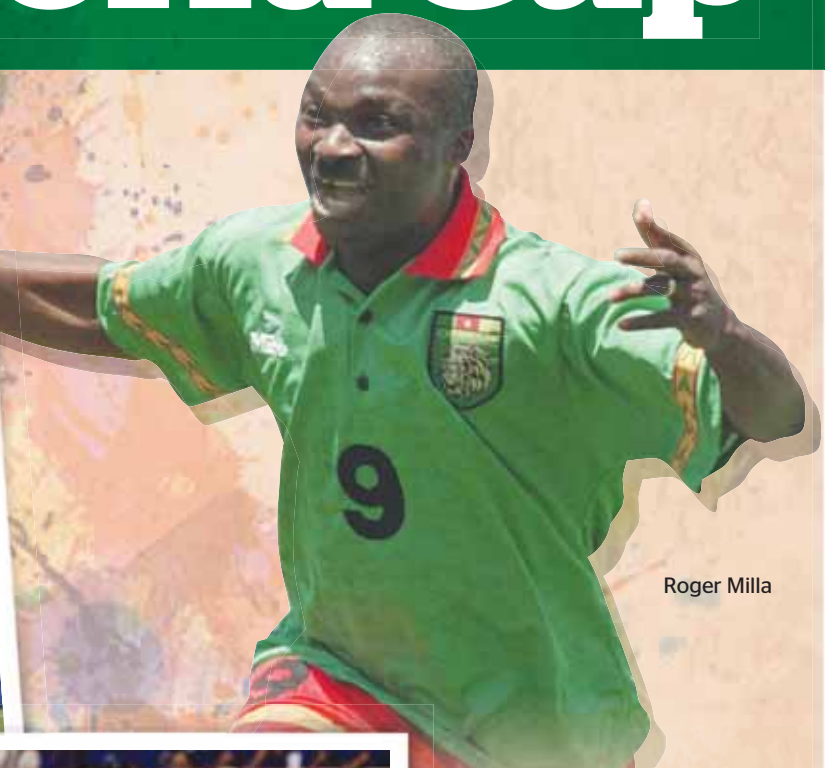
Brazil begin their Group G campaign against Serbia on Thursday before facing Switzerland and Cameroon.



With memorable moments, trivia and stats, we look at African teams' rich history in the FIFA World Cup

African nations at the FIFA World Cup

Memorable moments



Roger Milla



Africa's maiden triumph

Nobody gave Tunisia, who didn't even qualify for the 1976 AFCON, a shot at seizing Africa's solitary place at Argentina 1978. When The Eagles of Carthage stunned the likes of Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria and Egypt to claim that spot, however, they were determined to make the most of their opportunity. Trailing to Mexico in their opener, goals from unlikely sources – centre-back Ali Kaabi, defensive midfielder Nejib Ghommidh and right-back Mokhtar Dhoubieb – snatched Tunisia a 3-1 success and Africa's first-ever World Cup victory.

A green day in Gijón

"We will dedicate our seventh goal to our wives and the eighth to our dogs," said one West Germany player before their Group 2 opener at Spain 1982. Those WAGs and Dobermanns had no place in an Algerian fairy tale. Les Verts' devastating one-touch football harrowed Paul Breitner, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Co from the outset, and goals from Lakhdar Belloumi and Rabah Madjer completed a seismic 2-1 upset.

When Roger met Rene

Cameroon stunned defending champions Argentina 1-0 in USA 1994's curtain-raiser en route to

reaching the Round of 16, where they encountered Colombia. The intriguing clash would ultimately belong to substitute Roger Milla, who had been coaxed out of retirement for the tournament. The 38-year-old netted a fine opener and an iconic second, famously robbing goalkeeper Rene Higuita of possession before slotting it into an empty net, to secure the Indomitable Lions a 2-1 win that made them the first Africans to reach the World Cup quarter-finals.

The Super Eagles' grand entrance

"That was like watching the great Brazilian sides," said John

Fashanu after Nigeria's World Cup debut: a 3-0 win over Bulgaria. The former England striker may have been biased given his Nigerian descendancy, but that 90-minute exhibition at the Cotton Bowl nonetheless wowed the world. Finidi George, Emmanuel Amunike, Daniel Amokachi and Rashidi Yekini blended individual magic with indecipherable teamwork in a demolition of an iconic, Hristo Stoichkov-led team who went on to reach the USA 1994 semi-finals. The Super Eagles were eliminated in an extra-time loss to Italy in the Round of 16, but their thrilling campaign continues to be remembered.

Senegal shake Seoul

France landed in the Far East being championed as a meliorated model of the side that claimed the trophy in 1998, with Patrick Vieira, Thierry Henry and David Trezeguet having evolved into some of the best players in the world in their positions. In a volcanic, 16-1 upset, however, they were stunned in Korea/Japan 2002's opening match by tournament debutants Senegal, whose squad comprised players based in the French lower leagues and Africa. El Hadji Diouf terrorised Les Bleus throughout, while Papa Bouba Diop got the only goal as the Lions of Teranga won 1-0 in probably the greatest opening-match upset in World Cup history. Bruno Metsu's men went on to become the second African side to reach the quarter-finals.

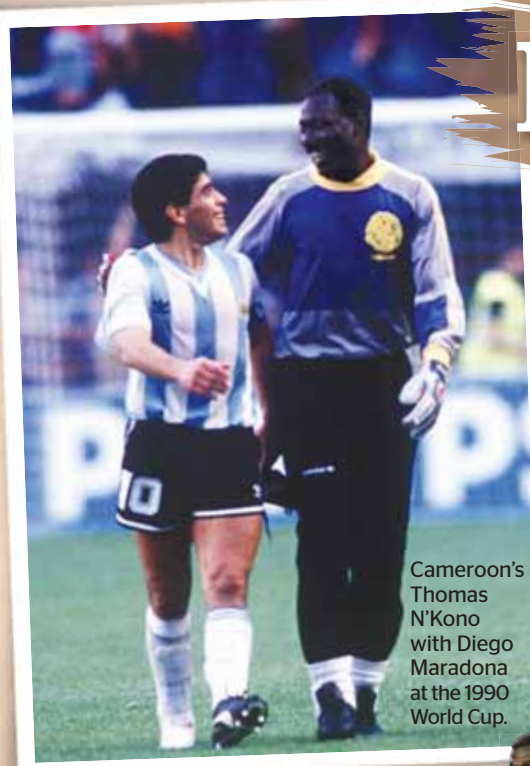
It's time for Africa

South Africa, afforded Pot 1 status as hosts, went into the final draw for the 2010 finals hopeful of being given a shot at making a nation proud. When Mexico, Uruguay and France were made their company in Group A, the consensus was that they'd be whipping boys. After a pulsating yet goalless first half against El Tri in their opener, however, Siphiwe Tshabalala produced a sensational strike to spark hysteric scenes at Soccer City.

13

African nations have participated in the FIFA World Cup (Including Qatar 2022)

- Cameroon (8)
- Morocco (6)
- Nigeria (6)
- Tunisia (5)
- Algeria (4)
- Ghana (4)
- Côte d'Ivoire (3)
- Egypt (3)
- Senegal (3)
- South Africa (3)
- Angola (1)
- Congo DR (1)
- Togo (1)



Cameroon's Thomas N'Kono with Diego Maradona at the 1990 World Cup.

Did you know?

✪ Egypt became the first African country to play in the World Cup in 1934. It was another 36 years before the continent was next represented in the competition, through Morocco in Mexico.

✪ Cameroon remain the only side in history to top a World Cup group with a negative goal difference. At USA 1990, one-goal victories over Argentina and Romania preceded a 4-0 loss to Soviet Union.

✪ Gigi Buffon was a 12-year-old aspiring midfielder until watching Cameroonian Thomas N'Kono at the 1990 World Cup made him dream of becoming a goalkeeper. The Italy legend named his first son Louis Thomas in honour of his idol.

✪ There was over 24 years between 17-year-old Rigobert Song and Roger Milla, 42, at USA 1994 – the biggest age gap between two teammates in the tournament's history.

✪ Tunisia sacked their coach during France 1998. After Henryk Kasprczak oversaw losses to England and Colombia, he was replaced by Ali Selmi, who led them to a 1-1 draw with Romania.

✪ When African qualifying for Korea/Japan 2002 began, Senegal were 79th on the world ranking, beneath the likes of Thailand, Cuba and Haiti. The Lions of Teranga went on to reach the last eight of that World Cup.

✪ Four England squad members – David Seaman, Teddy Sheringham, Martin Keown and Nigel Martyn – were older than the combined age of Nigerians Femi Opaunmi and Bartholomew Ogbeche, both 17, when they met at the 2002 finals.

✪ In their Group C game at Germany 2006, a 39cm (1ft 3ins) height difference existed between Côte d'Ivoire's Bakary

Kone and Serbia and Montenegro giant Nikola Zigic.

✪ When they played Iran at the 2006 finals, Angola's 23 squad members had scored 40 fewer international goals between them than opponent Ali Daei.

✪ At South Africa 2010, Ghana's Kevin-Prince Boateng and Jerome Boateng of Germany became the first brothers to play against each other in the competition.

✪ Cameroonians Jacques Songo'o, Rigobert Song and Samuel Eto'o are the only Africans to go to four World Cups. Song and Eto'o made appearances in all four and are among only nine men to go to World Cups 16 years apart along with Antonio Carbajal (Mexico), Elias Figueroa (Chile), Hugo Sanchez (Mexico), Beppe Bergomi (Italy), Lothar Matthaus (West Germany/Germany), Faryd Mondragon (Colombia) and Rafael Marquez (Mexico).

Champions and icons from Africa

Five World Cup winners were born in Africa:

Claudio Gentile (Libya), Patrick Vieira (Senegal), Marcel Desailly (Ghana), Steve Mandanda (Congo DR), and Samuel Umtiti (Cameroon). So, too, were two Golden Boot winners in Just Fontaine (French Morocco, now part of Morocco) and Eusebio (Mozambique).

Other notable World Cup players who were born on the continent include: Mario Coluna (Mozambique), Jean Tigana (French Sudan, now part of Mali), Mbo Mpenza (Zaire, now Congo DR), Claude Makelele (Zaire, now Congo DR), Emmanuel Olisadebe (Nigeria), Abel Xavier (Mozambique), Patrice Evra (Senegal), Gelson Fernandes (Cabo Verde), Danilo (Guinea-Bissau) and Breel Embolo (Cameroon).

Highest-scoring Africans in World Cup history

Asamoah Gyan (6 goals in 11 games)
Roger Milla (5 in 10)
Ahmed Musa (4 in 7)
Papa Bouba Diop (3 in 5)
Samuel Eto'o (3 in 10)

Daniel Amokachi (2 in 5)
Shaun Bartlett (2 in 3)
Henri Camara (2 in 4)
Aruna Dindane (2 in 6)
Didier Drogba (2 in 8)
Patrick M'Boma (2 in 4)



Spotlight

After long journey Canada's Herdman has arrived

"To upset some teams, I get out of bed for that"



Canada's English coach John Herdman (also right) leads a training session at the Umm Slal SC training facilities in Doha.

Reuters
Doha

Back in the World Cup for just the second time and first in 36 years, Canada arrive in Qatar as the designated underdog – a role coach John Herdman knows all too well having played the part his entire career.

At the 1986 World Cup, Canada failed to score a single goal and there are some betting that the 500/1 longshots, who are grouped with the second ranked Belgium, 2018 finalists Croatia and Morocco, might not find the back of the net again in Qatar.

But then few would have bet on the boy from the hard streets of Consett in England's industrial northeast finding his way onto soccer's most glamorous stage.

Herdman has plenty of respect for the challenge ahead but is itching for the fight.

"I think for the first time in a long time I have come to the place where I wanted to be as a coach and I know my players this is the moment they want to be in as well," said Herdman, who will send his men out to face Belgium tomorrow.

"They feel we can genuinely get in and have a right fight with these teams and be that team that overachieved and find our X-factor.

"To upset some teams, I get out of bed for that."

The career path of a soccer coach is often a nomadic one but Herdman's journey has taken



him to some of sports more remote outposts.

From Invercargill near the southernmost tip of New Zealand to snowy Edmonton in Canada's Great White North Herdman has coached kids, women and men, methodically building a reputation as an innovator and master motivator.

Such a road would have left many weary or jaded but Herdman remains in a perpetual state of wonder.

"I still have moments I am

pinching myself when we arrived in Doha here," said Herdman."This will be my first World Cup with the men's team, my fifth World Cup in total, it's going to be a hell of a ride.

"I'm going to learn a lot, I'm going to be rubbing shoulders with world class coaches like (Belgium coach) Roberto Martinez and for me that's where I want to be on that razor's edge and let people from Consett County Durham know that anything is possible."

COACHING PASSION

Herdman grew up dreaming of playing professional soccer but reality soon struck for the 5-foot, 6-inch (1.70m) battler.

His love for the game, however, was not dimmed and he directed that passion into coaching.

Still a teenager, he would secure his coaching certificate and by the time he was in university was operating his own Brazilian style soccer school franchise.

That would lead to a posi-

tion at the Sunderland academy where he was confronted by the old world coaching establishment.

"It was an ex-England player and he said, 'yeah, you are a great teacher, coach, just a shame that you'll never coach at that highest level because you have never experienced standing out there in a centre circle in front of 50,000,'" Herdman told Sportsnet.

"It was like a pat on the back and a slap in the face at the same time and reminding you of your place in the game.

"And I was like, 'nah I'm not having this'"

Herdman charted a new course that took him to New Zealand and a string of coaching successes guiding the country's under-20 and senior women's teams twice each to World Cups.

Canada Soccer was impressed enough to hire him to fix a dysfunctional Canadian women's team, taking a squad that lost all three games at the 2011 World Cup and steered them to back-to-back Olympic bronze at the 2012 and 2016 Summer Games.

A return to England had been on the cards for Herdman when Soccer Canada in 2018 made the bold decision to offer him the chance to lead an underachieving men's team and has them back in the World Cup for the first time in 36 years.

"I think this country never believed in us because we've given them nothing to believe in," said Herdman, after Canada beat Jamaica in March to qualify for Qatar.

"They believe now."

Focus

Laid-back Musiala 'playing with freedom' in Germany's Cup pursuit

AFP
Al Shamal, Qatar

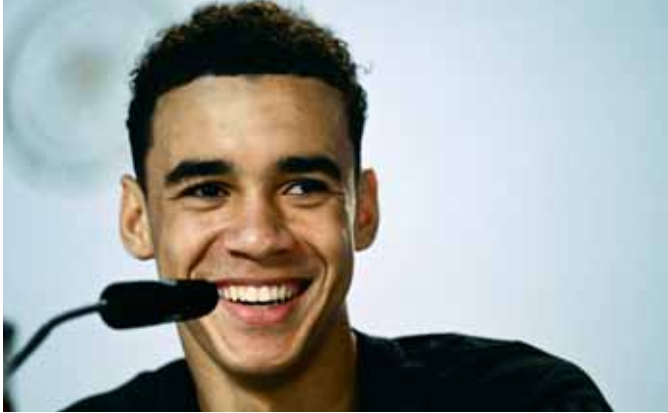
When Mario Goetze scored in extra-time against Argentina to win the 2014 World Cup for Germany, an 11-year-old Jamal Musiala watched from his couch alongside his parents in London.

Eight years later and still three months shy of his 20th birthday, the former Chelsea youth star has established himself as an essential part of Hansi Flick's XI in Qatar.

The Bayern Munich forward, nicknamed "Bambi" for his youthful appearance, opened yesterday's Germany press conference by reiterating the need to keep his cool.

Germany begin their latest World Cup title charge tomorrow against Japan in the Doha heat.

"I feel it's important to bring a bit of looseness, not to put too much pressure on yourself and to have a bit of fun, and then it'll go well," said Musiala, whose calm on the ball is crucial in Germany's high-octane attack.



Germany's Jamal Musiala attends a press conference at Al Shamal Stadium, north of Doha, yesterday.

"Jamal is a laid-back guy," teammate Niklas Suele, 27, said while sitting alongside the teenager, who has been showered with praise after a stunning domestic season in which he has scored nine goals and had six assists in 15 league games with Bayern.

German legend Lothar Matthaeus says that Musiala is so good that he compares him with Lionel Messi.

"Being compared to Messi, it's a little difficult," Musiala said

yesterday at Germany's isolated training camp in Al Shamal, northern Qatar.

"I am focused on myself and what I can do better as Jamal."

Musiala's form has been so strong that Bayern have hardly noticed the absence of talisman Thomas Mueller, who has missed much of the season so far with injury.

PLAY WITH FREEDOM

Born in Stuttgart, Musiala moved to England at the age of

seven. He returned to Germany in 2019 after spending eight years in the Chelsea youth set-up. Musiala represented England throughout his teenage years but in February 2021 opted to swap allegiance to Germany, despite Gareth Southgate's attempts to keep him.

Former Bayern and England midfielder Owen Hargreaves has called Musiala "one of a kind" and says he "had something that England doesn't have."

Musiala remains good friends with several current English stars, including 19-year-old Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham. Musiala said his decade in England armed him with skills that he may not have picked up in Germany.

"In the England youth set-up you learn different things than you do in Germany. I have taken a real lot from (that time), like quality playing as an individual and in one-on-one situations," he said.

"A saying they often repeated was 'play with freedom', which I have tried to implement throughout my career (and which) will always be a part of me."

Ecuador's 'Superman' Valencia should be fit for Netherlands game

Enner Valencia (pictured), Ecuador's all-time top scorer and hero of their opening game win over World Cup hosts Qatar, should be fit for their second Group A game against the Netherlands on Friday, according to his coach.

The 33-year-old, who lived up to fans' nickname of "Superman" with both goals in the South Americans' 2-0 win on Sunday night, limped off in the second half, triggering fears his tournament might be over despite the blistering start, Reuters reported.

"I have some discomfort in my knee and ankle. The doctors will assess and see how serious it is," Valencia said, applying ice but then looking comfortable as he walked onto the pitch at the end to celebrate with the team and their fans.

"I hope to play in the second game against Holland."

Coach Gustavo Alfaro was full of praise for his main man



and was sure he would be fine for their next group game against three-time finalists the Netherlands.

"Enner will play against the Netherlands - there is no doubt about that," he told reporters.

SERENADED BY FANS

Ecuador punched their way out of arguably the world's toughest qualifying group, taking the fourth automatic berth for South America.

As well as their veteran captain, they have plenty of young talent including silky midfielder Moises Caicedo.

But it is Valencia whom they rely on for goals.

The man who sometimes went hungry as a youth and sold cows' milk to pay for his boots has now netted the nation's last five World Cup goals. He could well have had a hat-trick against Qatar had an early header not been ruled out for a marginal offside by a teammate.

"I thought it was a goal," Alfaro said, relieved that it did not matter in the end. "I think Michael Estrada needs to do something about his toenails because it was very tight."

Valencia's double was the fourth time in the last five World Cups that a player has scored twice in the opening game of the tournament after Germany's Miroslav Klose (2006), Brazil's Neymar (2014) and Russia's Denis Cheryshev (2018).

"He has gone through tough times," Alfaro said.

"He was questioned at times in Ecuador, but now we can see all that he gives us."

Star Player

Croatia prepared for cool conditions at 'fiery' World Cup: Kramaric

Reuters
Doha

Croatia's Andrej Kramaric said he was pleasantly surprised by the conditions in Qatar and welcomed the prospect of playing the World Cup in winter as players would arrive for the tournament at their peak.

Croatia play their Group F opener against Morocco at the Al Bayt Stadium tomorrow but are aware that the 1pm local time kickoff under the blazing sun and

searing heat will not be a problem with air conditioning keeping the arena cool.

"The conditions here have been better than I expected, the conditions are a little bit windy. And considering the air conditioning in the stadiums, it will even get cold during the games," Kramaric said yesterday.

"Regarding the tournament's timing, a winter World Cup, it's great actually, we're not tired and it's not the end of the season.

"So I think we will see a burst of energy from a physical standpoint during this World Cup,

which I think is going to be fiery!"

His teammate Borna Sosa echoed his sentiments about a mid-season World Cup being ideal for players except for those with injuries who did not have enough time to recover.

"For most players it's better to play right now," the VfB Stuttgart wing back said.

"The only downside I see is that minor injuries won't give you time to prepare for the World Cup in time."

Sosa is playing in his first World Cup but there was a time last year when he nearly made the switch

to play for Germany.

However he was deemed ineligible and the 24-year-old was forced to issue an apology.

"For me my emotions for Croatia have always been very high since I was playing for the Under-17 teams at the World Cup and Euros," Sosa said.

"It's a special tournament with a lot of emotion, it's a dream come true to play for the national team."

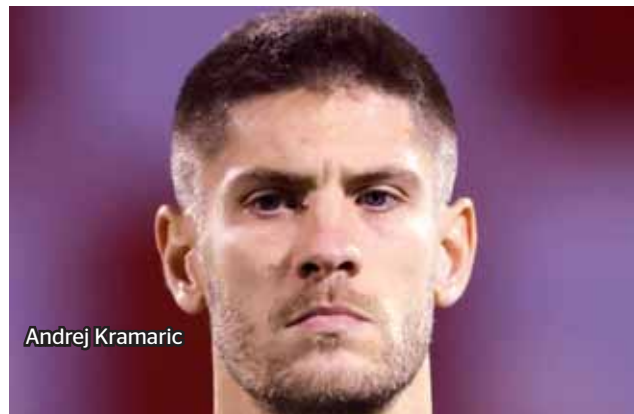
Although Croatia reached the 2018 final, where they lost to France, they are far behind favourites Brazil and Argentina to

lift the trophy according to betting odds.

Kramaric admitted he would like Argentina's Lionel Messi to finish his international career by adding a World Cup trophy to his glittering cabinet, but he expects Brazil to win a record-extending sixth title.

"I think 95% of players would agree Messi is the greatest player to ever play this game, I don't think we'll see a player like Messi again," Kramaric said.

"So I'm cheering in that regard for Argentina, but I think Brazil will win."



Andrej Kramaric



Match_____report

Gakpo, Klaassen goals lead Netherlands to Senegal win

Van Gaal must have been a relieved man after watching his Dutch side struggle against Senegal in the first half

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

The Netherlands, who missed the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, have returned to the big stage with a bang. A three-time runners-up in World Cup history, the Dutch yesterday beat Senegal 2-0 with a confidence-boosting performance at Al Thumama Stadium.

Cody Gakpo yesterday produced a stunning header late in the second half before substitute Davy Klaassen added one more in injury time to lift Netherlands to win in their opening match at Qatar 2022.

Gakpo, the 23-year-old PSV Eindhoven forward, sent the ball into the net in the 84th minute from close range following a slick cross from Frenkie de Jong to score the first goal in the Group A clash. In added time, Klaassen picked up a rebound inside the Senegal box to score his team's second goal with an easy shot into the net.

With three points in the bag, Dutch coach Louis van Gaal must have been a relieved man after watching his side struggle against the African giants - who are missing Sadio Mane in Qatar - for most of the match.

Dutch skipper Virgil van Dijk said the 2010 runners-up needed to perform better. "We won but we also know that we can and must do better," Van Dijk, who got his 50th cap, said yesterday.

"Going forward we sometimes tried to force things, and we too often left ourselves exposed to Senegal's counter-attacks," he told Dutch broadcaster NOS. "That is an area in which we will need to improve because it is an art that our next opponents, Ecuador, are very good at. But I am optimistic because I feel we are going to get better."

The Dutch have now extended their unbeaten streak to 16 matches. Senegal, who were on a four-match unbeaten streak in the warm-ups prior to the World Cup, could not score against debutant goalkeeper Andries Noppert, the tallest player at the World Cup in Qatar at 6'8".

With Noppert marshaling his team from the goaline, the match got off to a steady start though both teams adopted measured moves early on. Watford star



Netherlands' forward Cody Gakpo (centre) scores even as Senegal's goalkeeper Edouard Mendy attempts to stop him in vain during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

Ismaila Sarr charged into the box Dutch but his shot was blocked in the second minute of the match. Soon afterwards, the Dutch nearly almost scored but Steven Berghuis failed to deflect on a low Gakpo cross from the right of box.

Continuing with early game surge, striker Sarr in the 9th minute swivelled and produced a left-footed drive but the shot sailed above the Dutch crossbar. In the 16th minute, Daley Blind found momentum to jump above Sen-

egal's Youssef Sabaly on a Gakpo cross but the headed deflection bounced away from the goalpost.

A minute later, Gakpo provided a loopy cross but Vincent Janssen's header missed the goalpost right to Senegalese goalkeeper Edouard Mendy. In probably the best chance to score, midfielder Frankie de Jong took long to shoot as the Senegalese defence quickly thwarted the dangerous move from inside their own box in the 21st minute.

A corner kick close to the half-hour mark by Gapko was tad off the mark but Van Dijk still laboured for a header that sailed away from the goalmouth after the Dutch skipper was crowded by Senegalese defenders.

Midfielder Berghuis went solo with a left-footed drive but the shot sailed above the Senegalese crossbar in the 39th minute. Four minutes from the break, Sarr found pace on his shot from the edge of the box but Nathan Ake

stood solid to kill the move.

With no substitutions made by either side in the first half, defender Denzel Dumfries charged into the Senegal box with the ball but Abdou Diallo was alert to mark him in his own box to force a corner. In the 52nd minute Van Dijk jumped over Idrissa Gana Gueye inside the box but the Dutch skipper's headed deflection narrowly missed the Senegal crossbar from close range.

In another wasted opportunity to

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022			
MATCH STATS			
Senegal		Netherlands	
15	Shots	10	
4	Shots on Target	3	
13	Chances Created	8	
6	Corners	7	
1	Saves	4	
46.7%	Possession	53.3%	
2	Offsides	1	
13	Fouls	13	
2	Yellow Cards	1	
0	Red Cards	0	

score, Senegal's Krepin Diatta failed to deflect home on a cross from close range in the 57th minute. Soon after the hour-mark, Senegal's Boulaye Dia - inside the Dutch box - slipped a low shot past Van Dijk but keeper Noppert dived to his left to flick the shot away.

Noppert once again stood like a wall when in the 71st minute as he blocked a fierce shot by midfielder Gueye who was standing unguarded on the edge of the Dutch box. Sarr, despite losing his balance in the 81st minute, managed another close range header but his deflection went above the crossbar.

In a sudden twist to the match, Netherlands scored. Gakpo beat keeper Mendy with a high jump to head home from close range for his side's first goal on a perfect De Jong cross from outside the box. Gakpo tad blindsided but he still managed to score in the 84th minute.

A minute later, Dutch keeper Norries ensured his team's lead was intact when he dived to his left on a powerful long-range shot from substitute Gueye.

In injury time that saw the referee add eight minutes, Deepay fired a shot that was initially blocked by keeper Mendy but the ball bounced off his hands and landed at the feet of Klaassen who had no trouble in scoring the second goal for Netherlands in the dying moments of the game. "It was a boyhood dream for me to play at a World Cup but I never thought it would be possible," Noppertsaid. "It was really special when the goalkeeping coach Frans Hoek told me that I was going to play. The closer the game got, the more tense I became, but it was a healthy tension."

Spot_____light

England run riot to hit Iran for six in opener

By Yash Mudgal
Doha

To the joy of thousands of English fans at the Khalifa International Stadium and millions back home, England started their World Cup campaign in thoroughly convincing fashion yesterday.

The Three Lions, one of the title contenders, outclassed Iran 6-2 in an incident-packed Group B opener. "To win by that margin, to play as we did for the majority of the game, we've got to be really happy," said England manager Gareth Southgate.

Arsenal star Bukayo Saka scored a brace while teenager Jude Bellingham also found the net in their team's strongest-ever start to a major tournament, while Raheem Sterling, Marcus Rashford and Jack Grealish also added their name to the score sheet in a superb performance.

England came into the tournament without a win in six games, but a brilliant opening 45 minutes set up the second-half stroll for them.

The rout began when 19-year-old wonderkid Bellingham, who became the second teenager in history to score in a World Cup for England, after Michael Owen in 1998, leaped to nod a Luke Shaw cross home in the 46th minute. Minutes later Saka smashed home a left foot shot off the crossbar. And then Sterling blasted in a volley following a cross from captain Harry Kane, effectively winning the game before halftime.

In the second-half, Saka grabbed his second with an hour on the clock. He passed the ball into the net after a mazy run to become the youngest England player to score two at a World Cup game. "We haven't played the best coming into the tournament. There was a lot of talk and speculation about our form but we showed everyone how much quality



England's forward Bukayo Saka (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring England's fourth goal during the FIFA World Cup Group B match at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

we have and what we can do," said Saka. However, Southgate's side would not be able to boast a clean sheet as Iran striker Mehdi Taremi pegged England back with a fierce strike past goalkeeper Jordan Pickford. Iran were awarded a penalty kick via VAR into stoppage-time, which they converted, but it mattered little. "It's a great start. I've got to keep the team on the right track and we'll have to be better," Southgate said.

"The players dealt with the game really well. Our press was really good, our movement was really good. I've got to

be really happy. But we shouldn't be conceding two goals at that stage of the game. We'll have to be right on our game. It's a great start, but we'll have to be better," England manger added.

Iran had barely threatened the rivals after suffering the early setback of losing goalkeeper Beiranvand to suspected concussion but this was never going to change the course of the game given the chasm in class between the two teams.

"My view is simple and very pragmatic. The game finished in the first half at 3-0 down. The only goal then was to

enjoy the game and be part of one moment," said Iran manager Carlos Queiroz after the match.

"At the beginning it was clear the difference between high level competitive football and our players unfortunately they don't have the same experience. But we win or we learn. We are privileged to learn a lot from the English team and are better prepared to play Wales," he added.

This was only the second time England have scored six goals in a major tournament (England beat Panama 6-1

FA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022			
MATCH STATS			
England		Iran	
13	Shots	8	
7	Shots on Target	3	
10	Chances Created	7	
8	Corners	0	
1	Saves	2	
78.1%	Possession	21.9%	
2	Offsides	2	
9	Fouls	14	
0	Yellow Cards	2	
0	Red Cards	0	

in Russia World Cup), but it will get harder for England as they now face the United States and passionate Wales, but this was the perfect start. Iran, meanwhile, run into Wales on Friday desperate to keep their last 16 hopes alive.

GREALISH KEEPS PROMISE TO YOUNG FAN WITH CELEBRATION

Jack Grealish kept his promise to a young fan who has cerebral palsy with his celebration after scoring his first World Cup goal for England against Iran. Grealish tapped home the final goal from close range in a 6-2 win and marked the moment with a broad smile and stretched his arms out to the side, rolling them in waves.

The Manchester City midfielder was keeping a pledge he made to 11-year-old Finlay, who met his favourite player after writing a letter to Grealish, whose sister Holly also has cerebral palsy.

"I wish there were more people in the world just like you who treat people with disabilities the same as anyone else," Finlay had written. Grealish, 27, followed up with a letter of his own and also made a surprise visit to meet Finlay at a football session run by City's charity programme. It was there that he pledged to dedicate his next goal to the boy with the arm gesture Grealish recreated

Bale to the rescue as Wales snatch US draw

Al Rayyan: Gareth Bale rescued Wales with a late penalty to snatch a 1-1 draw with the United States in their World Cup Group B clash yesterday at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. Welsh skipper Bale lashed home an 82nd-minute spot kick after earning the penalty moments earlier when defender Walker Zimmerman crashed into the former Real Madrid star.

It cancelled out Tim Weah's superb first-half goal for the Americans which had threatened to ruin Wales's return to the World Cup after a 64-year absence. Bale's equaliser triggered roars from a large and raucous contingent of Wales fans in a crowd of 43,418 fans.

Until that moment it looked as if Wales were heading for a defeat, struggling to break down a skillful and energetic US squad that is the second youngest at the tournament. Wales were outplayed for long periods of the first half, with manager Rob Page's decision not to start towering centre-forward Kieffer Moore depriving them of an attacking outlet.

Instead it was the US who made all the early running, with Chelsea's Christian Pulisic a constant darting menace. The positive early play almost resulted in a goal after just nine minutes when Sergino Dest played in Weah down the right.

Wales face Iran on Friday in their second Group B game while the United States face a tough game against England, 6-2 winners over the Iranians earlier yesterday.