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SPORT



FIFA WORLD CUP
Qatar 2022





Match Report

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Tunisia out of World Cup despite shock France win

THE HARD-FOUGHT WIN YESTERDAY WAS TUNISIA'S FIRST AGAINST A EUROPEAN TEAM IN A WORLD CUP

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

For Tunisia, it was a day of delight and disappointment. Captain Wahbi Khazri produced a second-half stunner as Tunisia shocked defending champions France 1-0 in the last group stage match of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

The hard-fought victory at Education City Stadium, however, was not enough for Tunisia to reach the last 16 of the tournament following Australia's upset of Denmark 1-0 in yesterday's other Group D clash.

Yesterday's win was Tunisia's first against a European team in a World Cup.

France, who rested seven of the players from their 2-1 win over Denmark in their previous game, looked sluggish for the first hour of the match until PSG star Kylian Mbappe was brought in as a substitute by coach Didier Deschamps. The first half and a bit of the second belonged to Tunisia. The real France only turned up in the last half hour of the Group D clash watched by 43,671 fans.

In the third minute, Eduardo Camavinga clipped hard on Khazri's shin causing a short stoppage near the French touchline. Ibrahima Konate of France did well at the backline twice in the first five minutes as Tunisia won their first corner which was wasted.

Randal Kolo Muani, who charged into the Tunisian box, was beaten to the ball by 'keeper Aymen Dahmen. Nader Ghandri, on a beautiful cross by captain Khazri, deflected the ball into the French net but the Tunisian euphoria lasted only a moment as the linesman declared the goal offside in the 8th minute.

Tunisia, clearly looking far more energetic, continued playing with challenging pace in the first 10 minutes as the boys in blue looked ragged. Wajdi Kachrida clipped a cross from the flag post but France's Axel Disasi headed the ball for a corner.

Khazri, moments later, charged into the French box and tripped rather pitifully. The referee saw no foul play in the move and refused Tunisian pleas for a penalty. France managed their first corner in the 16th minute which was followed immediately by another but both wasted by the defending champions. Tunisia's Anis Ben Slimane, close to the six-yard box, overbalanced and missed the chance to shoot under pressure from France's Raphael Varane in the 17th minute.

With plenty of short passing and runs down the flank, the Tunisian side showed poise and purpose in the first 24 minutes of the fast-paced match.

Moments later, France wasted a golden opportunity to score when Kingsley Coman - fed by Youssouf Fofana - drilled a left-footed drive that was tad wayward from close to the six-yard box. Shortly afterwards Kechrida was slapped with a yellow for a rough tackle on Camavinga.

Ben Slimane managed a snap-header from close range - after a cross by Khazri - but his deflection from close

Tunisia were right up for it while we were timid, late into the challenges and made too many errors, even if we did do better at the end when some more experienced players came on. This result means we haven't met all our objectives but the most important one was to be in the last 16

— Didier Deschamps, France coach

range lacked pace as French 'keeper Steve Mandanda collected the ball with ease. In the 33rd minute, Ghandri glided into the French box on a cross but Camavinga smartly headed the ball for a corner.

Ben Slimane picked out Khazri with a neat cross close to the first-half whistle. Khazri charged into the French box and slipped in a low cross but none of the Tunisian players were in position to deflect the ball home. In the last kick before the players trudged off, Khazri went long-range but his shot sailed above the French crossbar.

With FIFA president Gianni Infantino

Of course we are disappointed to be going out because we didn't do enough in the first two matches so we are left with a bit of a bitter taste but I think we have made the Tunisian people proud. They still had top-class players out there but we were superb and I think the result is down to us.

— Wahbi Khazri, Tunisia captain



Match



Stats


	1		0
TUNISIA		FRANCE	
5	Shots	10	
3	Shots on Target	3	
4	Chances Created	7	
7	Corners	8	
3	Saves	2	
34.3%	Possession	65.7%	
3	Offsides	2	
14	Fouls	6	
1	Yellow Cards	0	
0	Red Cards	0	

France's forward Kylian Mbappe stretches for the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group D match against Tunisia at the Education City Stadium. (AFP)



Tunisia's Wahbi Khazri celebrates scoring their first goal against France in their Group D clash at Education City Stadium in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)


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Pre__view ◆◆◆◆◆

Croatia coach to ignore woes of Belgium

‘Belgium are a top team, they have De Bruyne and Hazard and we will not be fooled by media stories and some rumours’

Reuters
Al Rayyan

Rumours of Belgium's demise are greatly exaggerated, Croatia's head coach Zlatko Dalic said as he prepares his side for today's decisive Group F showdown.

Croatia, who beat Belgium in the 2018 semi-finals, need just a point to guarantee progress to the last 16 while FIFA second-ranked side Belgium almost certainly need to win.

A shock 2-0 defeat by Morocco on Sunday was followed by talk of rifts in the Belgium camp, with playmaker Kevin de Bruyne and defender Jan Vertonghen reportedly at loggerheads.

De Bruyne was also reported to have said that Belgium's so-called Golden Generation is now too old to win the World Cup, but Dalic was having none of it when asked yesterday.

"We are playing against the second-best football team in the world and they were number one," he told reporters. "They are a great team and if we could choose we would not have selected this match to be the decisive one. "We will not fool ourselves in the last two games."

Croatia drew with Tunisia in their opener but hit top form in a 4-1 defeat of Canada, leaving them in good shape going in to the clash at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. Dalic has ruled out any notion that Croatia would be happy to play for a draw.

"We will play as we did against Canada, high quality, high tempo. It's going to be a difficult game," he said. "Belgium are a top team, they have De Bruyne and Hazard and we will not be fooled by media stories and some rumours. We are expecting the best of Belgium, a top-notch national team.

"They haven't become bad football players overnight. I am not focussed on any other aspects, we are just focussed on their strength and quality."



Croatia players take part in a training session at the Al Erssal training site in Doha yesterday.



Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic.

Belgium have so far been without their powerhouse striker Romelu Lukaku but he is expected to be back today which could spell bad news for Croatia's defence.

"We are preparing for him to start and that changes the Belgium game," Dalic said."He is great in the air and is a great attacker. But if we plan well we will have half our work done and the other half will be on the pitch."

Lukaku's former Chelsea teammate Mateo Kovacic had some simple advice for his teammates on how to deal with Lukaku. "I will leave that to the coach but I will say 'just don't fight him.'"

CROATIA vs BELGIUM

When: Today, 6pm

Capacity: 45,032

Where: Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, Al Rayyan

Key stats:

- ◆ A draw for Croatia will be enough to see them into the last 16, while Belgium will then be relying on Canada defeating Morocco by three goals to stand a chance of a knockout place.
- ◆ A win for Belgium will see them finish above Croatia in Group F.
- ◆ Michy Batshuayi is the only player to score for Belgium at the 2022 World Cup so far, but Romelu Lukaku has returned to fitness and could start in his place. Midfielder Amadou Onana is suspended having picked up two yellow cards.
- ◆ Croatia's 4-1 win over Canada in their previous game was the second time they have netted four goals in a World Cup fixture.They also beat Cameroon 4-0 in 2014.
- ◆ Croatia reached the semi-finals in their debut at the World Cup finals in 1998. They featured in the final at the last edition of the tournament in 2018 but fell to France 4-2.
- ◆ To reach the 2018 final, Croatia were the first team at a World Cup to come from behind in three successive knockout round matches, all of which went to extra time.

Previous meetings:

- ◆ Croatia and Belgium have met on eight occasions since their first clash in 2000. The head-to-head record is even with three wins each and two draws.
- ◆ Their previous fixture was a 1-0 friendly win for Belgium in June last year. This is their first meeting at the World Cup finals.

Pre__view ◆◆◆◆◆

Morocco ‘ready to fly African flag high

Reuters
Al Rayyan

Morocco will play to win against eliminated Canada in their final World Cup Group F match today to fly the African flag high even though a draw would be enough to send them through, coach Walid Regragui said yesterday.

The North Africans are seeking to reach the knockout stage of the World Cup for the first time in nearly four decades.

"It will be like playing a final," Regragui told a news conference. "Canada have nothing to lose. They are already out and it is up to them to hold their heads high. We also have a lot to get out of the game and a lot to lose."

After snatching a goalless draw against 2018 World Cup finalists Croatia, Morocco sealed their first World Cup win in 24 years with a 2-0 victory over Belgium 2-0 on Sunday.

Today's opponents Canada are already out of the tournament after losing their two first games, but they will want to leave on a high and record their first ever World Cup victory.

"We are motivated and we know that as long as the referee does not blow the whistle we



Morocco's coach Walid Regragui attends a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday.

have not qualified or achieved anything," Regragui said.

"The most important thing is after the game to move to the next round. We hope to fly the flag of African football high."

A win or draw would make sure Morocco advance to the Round of 16 for the first time since 1986.

If Canada prevail, Morocco will need Belgium to beat Croatia in the other Group F match, with the goal difference determining if they or Croatia advance.

"What we wanted is to be ambassadors of our own destiny and not rely on other results," the coach said."Either a win or a draw, this is what we need.

I don't care what Canada need. They want to make their

own history. Now it is our role to demonstrate that we are worthy of advancing."

"It would be an error to go in and give it 20 or 30%. We face a team who want to win it. We are there to win as well. Looking for the draw would be a mistake."

Their victory over Belgium sparked euphoria among players, wild celebrations among fans – and even riots in Brussels. Regragui called on Morocco fans

in Europe to celebrate the result with respect for the country they live in.

"I think it is very difficult to see people doing that," he said."They need to respect the country they were born in and where they live."

"But these (rioters) are not Moroccan people. You need to respect everyone. You can have a party but need to be respectful. I don't like what happened."

CANADA vs MOROCCO

When: Today, 6pm

Capacity: 44,400

Where: Al Thumama Stadium, Doha

Key stats:

- ◆ Alphonso Davies scored Canada's first ever goal at a men's World Cup in a 4-1 Group F loss to Croatia.
- ◆ Back in the World Cup after their only previous appearance in 1986, Canada head into their meeting with Morocco still seeking a maiden win.
- ◆ Canada topped the CONCACAF qualifying table, scoring more and conceding fewer goals than any other team.
- ◆ Morocco became the first African team to advance out of the group stage of a World Cup in 1986.
- ◆ Morocco's 2-0 Group F win over Belgium marked their first World Cup victory since they beat Scotland in 1998.

Previous meetings:

Canada and Morocco have met three times, all international friendlies, with the North Africans winning two and the other match ending in a draw.

Under-pressure Belgium not ‘in crisis mode,’ says Castagne

AFP
Doha

Belgium are not in "crisis mode" ahead of their crucial World Cup match against Croatia despite rumours of infighting and division in the squad, full-back Timothy Castagne said yesterday.

The world's second-ranked side have to win at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium today to be sure of reaching the last 16 after a surprising 2-0 loss to Morocco.

Belgium have reached at least the quarter-finals at each of the past four major tournaments but have struggled in Qatar, labouring to a 1-0 win over Canada in their opener.

However, Leicester defender Castagne said spirits in the camp were high.

"Our confidence isn't as low as people think," he said. "We know that we have our destiny in our own hands. It's true we didn't play so well in the first two matches but we're not in crisis mode like some people are saying in the press."

Belgium will have to push for the win as a draw would leave them needing Morocco to lose heavily to Canada in

order for the Belgians to go through.

Morocco, like Croatia, can secure their place in the knockout phase by avoiding defeat. Kevin De Bruyne said before the Morocco game that Belgium were "too old" to win the tournament, a comment Jan Vertonghen appeared to refer to in an angry post-match interview.

Seven of Belgium's starting XI against Morocco are in their 30s, while 10 of the 14 players who featured in the 2018 semi-final loss to eventual winners France are still in the squad.

Players held clear-the-air talks for over an hour after the defeat by the north African team.

"I don't think Kevin meant anything bad by what he said and we know Italy won the Euros with (Leonardo) Bonucci and (Giorgio) Chiellini at the back, so age isn't always a factor," said Castagne.

"I don't think we should be targeting one or two players who have not been playing to the best of their ability. We're all in this together...I don't think age is a key factor and I don't think we played badly because Kevin said that."

'FAKE NEWS'
Goalkeeper Thibaut Cour-

tois had already hit out at "invented stories" about the Belgian players and coach Roberto Martinez criticised "fake news" yesterday.

"Some people are quite happy to jump on fake news, which is quite astonishing," said the Spaniard.

"It shows you that maybe there is more desire to find negative news about the team rather than enjoy the best generation of talent that we've ever had in Belgian football.

"Whoever's come up with it (the rumours of an altercation) has scored a great goal, an own goal for Belgium...Whoever's done it, is genius."

Martinez defended his players, who have given Belgium an unprecedented period of success.

Six members of the current squad have won 100 caps or more, with Courtois set to join that club today.

"This generation is the golden generation of Belgian football, there is no doubt," said Martinez.

"They got a bronze medal at the 2018 World Cup and kept the national team at the top of the world rankings for four years....Leaving a legacy goes a lot further than winning a tournament."



From left: Belgium's assistant coach Thomas Vermaelen, defender Timothy Castagne, forward Eden Hazard, forward Romelu Lukaku and midfielder Kevin De Bruyne take part in a training session at the Salwa Training Site, southwest of Doha, yesterday.

Canada's campaign nearly over but new journey set to begin

Reuters
Al Rayyan

For Canada an early exit from the Qatar World Cup will not mark the end but a beginning, the first step for a young group on the road to the 2026 soccer showcase that they will co-host with the United States and Mexico.

With straight losses to Belgium and Croatia, the Canadians enter their final Group F match against Morocco today knowing they are headed home no matter the result.

But coach John Herdman made it clear his men still have plenty to play for with one more shot at a historic maiden win.

Appearing at the World Cup for just the second time, Canada came to Qatar with a long to do list after failing to win a game or even find the back of the net in Mexico 36 years ago. Some of those objectives have been achieved, including a first goal from talisman Alphonso Davies in a 4-1 loss to Croatia.

But a first World Cup win against Morocco, who are in a fight for top spot in the group, would be the highlight of the tournament for the Canadi-



Canada players during a training session at the Umm Slal SC training facilities, yesterday.

ans and provide the perfect launchpad for 2026.

"The team set clear goals coming in here," Herdman told reporters yesterday. "First team to score a goal, first team to show up fearless, first team to keep a clean sheet, first team to get a result, first team to get a win.

"We've missed out on being the first team to get out of the group stage.

"But we believe those goals are still available, there's a desire and a hunger and all the players have bought in."

After finishing top of CONCACAF qualifying ahead of regional powerhouses the United States and Mexico, Canada arrived at the World

Cup with high expectations.

They were applauded for their appealing attacking flair, but Qatar has been an eye-opener as the team often appeared overwhelmed on sport's biggest stage.

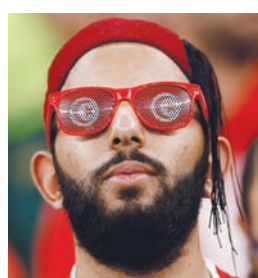
In the end Qatar turned into a learning experience and there were hard lessons, even for Herdman. It was a more humble and reflective Herdman fielding questions yesterday, heaping praise on Morocco and on his own men.

"We had great moments against Belgium and Croatia, football moments we can be proud," said Herdman. "Tomorrow is a real opportunity for our country, our players to keep stepping forward."

The Socceroos progressed to the knockouts behind holders France in Group D and will play winners of Group C

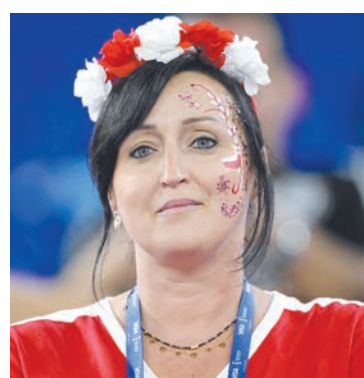
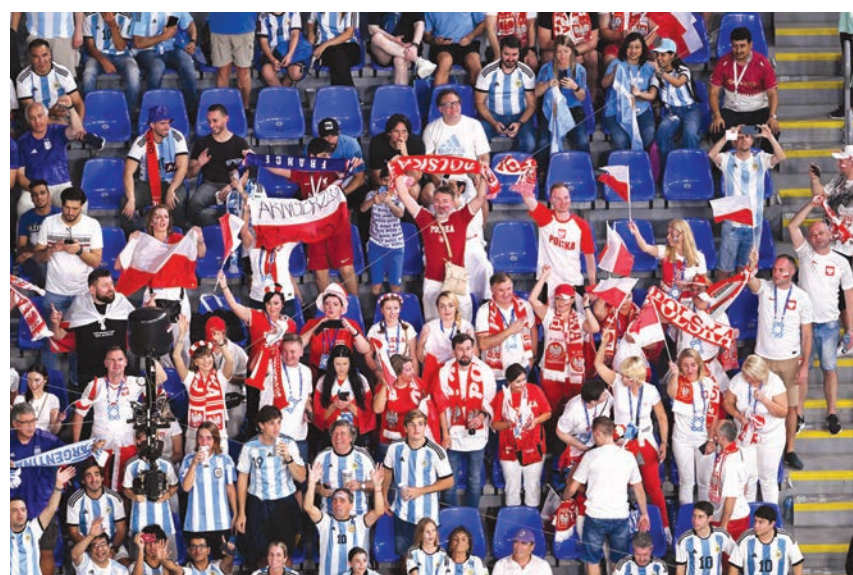
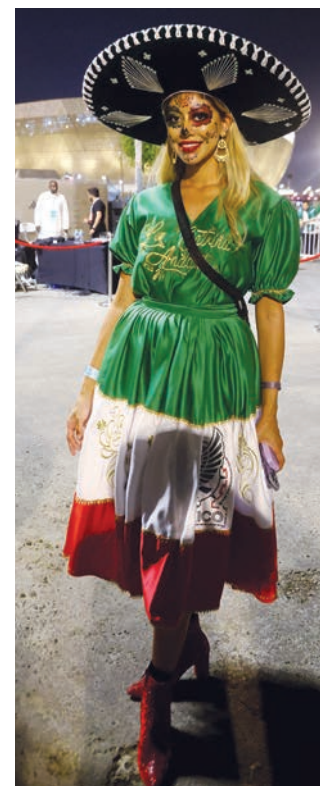
"I would hope it's the team with the best players that wins it, because I think in any World Cup, you want those Maradona moments. Maybe Messi can do that with the current Argentina squad," he said.

GLIMPSSES OF QATAR 2022



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Spotlight

‘Qatar 2022 is an achievement for the entire Arab world’

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 is in full swing and fans across the globe are enjoying a festival of football at eight state-of-the-art stadiums. For Qatar Legacy ambassadors Ahmad Khalil, Ibrahim Khalifan and Adel Khamis, the tournament is proving a huge success for the entire Middle East and Arab world.

“Everyone who has made their way to Qatar has been amazed by this once-in-a-lifetime festival. From beautiful stadiums to wonderful cultural experiences, fans are able to immerse themselves in our signature hospitality and enjoy world-class football,” said Khamis, a former attacking midfielder for the Qatar national team.

Many of the incredible venues showcase local culture, including the magnificent Al Bayt Stadium, with its structure inspired by the tents used by nomadic peoples.



“The FIFA World Cup in Qatar is an achievement for the entire Arab world. It gives us the opportunity to celebrate our culture, while showing off our football pedigree. For far too long, this region has been stereotyped without us having the opportunity to show the world that we are talented, determined and peace-loving people. This World Cup has given the opportunity to change all that,” said Khalifan, considered to be one of Qatar’s greatest wingers of all time.

A total of four Arab teams are taking part in the tournament, with hosts Qatar competing in a World Cup for the first time. The Maroons were drawn in Group A alongside the Netherlands, Ecuador and Senegal. And although they were knocked out in the group stage, Khalil sees the tournament as an important milestone for local football.



“Even though Qatar’s results were not what we hoped for, the World Cup will be yet another milestone for the sport’s growth in the country. It will be a memorable experience that will motivate a new generation of players to play on the biggest football stage in the world. Qatar’s footballing future is bright – and this tournament will be a huge catalyst for further success,” said Khalil, who led Qatar to the Arabian Gulf Cup in 1992.

He added: “What we have achieved goes beyond football. It’s an achievement that brought together our talent and determination, and embodies our vision to build a modern nation that celebrates humanity and excellence.”



He added: “What we have achieved goes beyond football. It’s an achievement that brought together our talent and determination, and embodies our vision to build a modern nation that celebrates humanity and excellence.”

Star Player

Rashford ‘belongs’ on World Cup stage: Maguire

‘I can’t speak highly enough of Marcus. He’s a wonderful man and he’s a great player’

AFP
Doha

Marcus Rashford’s eye-catching performance in England’s 3-0 win against Wales shows he “belongs” on the World Cup stage, according to Manchester United and international teammate Harry Maguire.

The 25-year-old forward played a starring role as Gareth Southgate’s men wrapped up their Group B campaign in style on Tuesday to progress to the last 16, where they will play Senegal.

Rashford opened the scoring with a brilliant free-kick and was instrumental in the second goal, scored by Phil Foden, before delivering the knockout blow in the 68th minute after a rampaging run down the right.

Defender Maguire said he was delighted to see his clubmate back in top form after a tough year in which he slipped out of the international picture due to fitness issues and a loss of form.

“I’m really pleased for Marcus,” said Maguire.

“Over the last year or so obviously he’s been out of the England team and England set-up. I think he’s really found his form again this season for Man-

chester United. He’s a massive player for our club.”

Rashford had not kicked a ball for England since missing a penalty in the Euro 2020 final shoot-out against Italy last year when he arrived in Qatar.

He endured a difficult season for United following the defeat at Wembley, making just 13 Premier League starts in 2021/22 and scoring just four times in the top flight. But he forced his way back into Gareth Southgate’s squad after impressing for United this season.

And Rashford has made up for lost time in Qatar, scoring a goal as a substitute in England’s opening 6-2 win against Iran before his two strikes on Tuesday.

“Throughout a long career you’re always going to have ups and you’re always going to have downs and it’s all about how you bounce back from when you’re out of form and keep working hard and he’s done that tirelessly,” said Maguire.

“I can’t speak highly enough of Marcus. He’s a wonderful man and he’s a great player. I think tonight again he’s shown that he belongs on this stage.”

Maguire, who is struggling to command a first-team spot at Old Trafford, said he had tried to help Rashford rebuild his confidence.

“I speak to Marcus a lot,” said the United club captain. “I try to give him as much belief as I can. Marcus is a fantastic player who has had a great career up until now.”

“I think the last year or so has been difficult for him. All good players rise to the top again and I think if he keeps his head down, he keeps working hard, first and foremost for his club, he’ll get opportunities for his country.”

“When he gets that opportunity, with the confidence that he has, he’s a threat to anyone.”

Luke Shaw, who is also a teammate of Rashford’s at United, praised his man-of-the-match performance against Wales.

“The talent he’s got, he can be unplayable and I think tonight he showed that,” said the left-back.

“He needs to deliver that every single game he plays because he’s got the quality that can make the difference. He’s an unbelievable player.”

“He took his chance tonight,” he added. “It was his time to start.”

Rashford was vilified by a section of England’s fanbase after missing a spot-kick in last year’s penalty shoot-out defeat against Italy in the European Championship final.

The Manchester United star, one of three England players

who failed to score their penalty in that agonising shoot-out, received racist abuse on social media in the immediate aftermath of the Wembley loss.

Rashford’s form for United dipped dramatically last season and for a while it seemed he could be sold.

But United manager Erik ten Hag has revitalised Rashford since taking charge in the close-season and his club form had been impressive heading into the World Cup.

“It’s been a challenge for him. I went and saw him in the summer. I had a long chat with him,” Southgate said.

“He had some clear ideas on things that he needed to think about. You can see with his club there has been happiness in his performances.”

“You can see that in training with us. We have got a completely different player than we had at the Euros last year. It’s great for him and great for us.”



England’s Marcus Rashford celebrates scoring his team’s first goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B match against Wales at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan. (AFP)

Focus

We deserve to be here, says Berhalter after US sink Iran

AFP
Doha

United States coach Gregg Berhalter said his team belonged in the last 16 of the World Cup on Tuesday after defeating Iran 1-0 to set up a second round showdown with the Netherlands.

Five years after the Americans suffered the shock of failing to qualify for the 2018 finals in Russia, Berhalter has led a youthful US team into knockout rounds of the tournament. Draws against Wales and England were followed by Tuesday’s nailbiting 1-0 win over arch-rivals Iran to seal qualification.

But while Sunday’s last 16 clash with the Netherlands promises to be a step up in class, Berhalter said his team would have no trace of an inferiority complex.

“It’s a great opportunity, but it’s not something that we’re going into it thinking it’s an honour,” Berhalter said.

“We deserve to be in the position we’re in. And we want to keep going. We don’t want to be going home next Wednesday.”

“So for us it’s how we recover from this game, and how to play a very good Dutch team. We have to come up with an idea of how to beat them.”

Asked how far the United States could go in Qatar, Berhalter replied: “Coming into the tournament we had two goals, the first was to advance through the group stage.”

“And from here anything can happen. All we need to do is play one game at a time. There’s no need to even project how far this team can go.”

The former US international defender expressed particular satisfaction that his team held the line despite a second half onslaught by Iran. The Americans finished the group phase with only one goal conceded – a penalty against Wales – and back-to-back clean sheets.

“That’s the first time in 92 years that we’ve got two shut-outs at a World Cup so the boys are doing something right,” Berhalter said.

“The end of the game is really what I’m most proud of because it was the mark of determination, an extreme amount of effort and a lot of resiliency to hang in there and get the win and not buckle.”

The win avenged America’s defeat to Iran at the 1998 World Cup. Berhalter spoke before the game about his dismay at that loss, complaining that Iran’s team had been more motivated 24 years ago.

“I talked yesterday in the press conference about the 1998 game and the guys not having the appropriate intensity to compete against Iran – and today we had it,” Berhalter said. “It was clear from the opening whistle.”

Berhalter added that Tuesday’s result was the sort of performance that would make US sports fans take the team to its heart.

“We’ve talked about defining this group, and it starts to take shape based on these performances,” he said.

“You see how resilient this group is, you see how unified this group is, and what type of energy they put into every single game.”

“And along the way there’s some pretty good soccer. That’s the American spirit the way this group plays.”



USA’s coach Gregg Berhalter reacts after the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group B match against Iran at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

Bottom Line



First female referee is positive step, says Costa Rica coach Suarez

Reuters
Al Rayyan

Stephanie Frappart’s appointment as match referee for today’s crunch World Cup clash between Germany and Costa Rica is a step forward for women in a “sexist sport,” according to Costa Rica manager Luis Fernando Suarez.

Frenchwoman Frappart will make history as she leads the first all-female refereeing team at a men’s World Cup in the Group E match which Germany must win to keep alive their hopes of progressing to the last 16.

Suarez said it “spoke volumes” for Frappart’s commitment to reach the top level in a profession dominated by men.

“I am a great admirer of every women have conquered and I like the fact they want to keep on conquering things,” the 62-year-old Colombian told reporters.

“This is another step forward. This speaks volumes for this woman, of her commitment, especially in this sport which is a very sexist one. It’s very difficult to reach the point that she has reached, I think it’s good for football and a positive step for football, to show that it’s opening up for everyone.”

The 38-year-old Frappart will be joined by Brazil’s Neuza Back and Mexico’s Karen Diaz as she puts down another marker for female officials having also been the first woman to referee a men’s World Cup qualifier in March.

Last week, she became the first female official at a men’s World Cup when she was fourth official for the Poland v Mexico Group C tie, but today she will be more in the spotlight.

Costa Rica’s midfielder Celso Borges also welcomed her appointment for such a high-profile game. “I think it’s great and it’s a huge achievement for women globally,” Borges, who is playing in his third World Cup for the

Costa Ricans, told reporters. “If she is there it’s because she has all the capabilities to perform on this stage. She has done it before in big matches so I don’t see why tomorrow should be an exception.”

“I just hope she has a good match and that we can help her make it an easy match.”

Her appointment was also backed by Germany manager Hansi Flick who said he had “100% confidence” in Frappart.

“She deserves to be here based on her performance. I hope she is equally looking forward to the game just like we are, and I hope she can deliver a good performance,” he said. Germany defender Lukas Klostermann also welcomed the move, which he described as “the most normal thing in the game.”

“I have never looked prior to the game if it is a man or a woman that will be with the whistle, and I hope it will remain a normality,” he said.



Match Report

Argentina through despite Messi miss, Poland squeeze in

Saudi Arabia score late against Mexico to help losers Poland also qualify for the next round along with Argentina



Argentina's Julian Alvarez (second right) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Poland during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 match at Stadium 974 in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

‘Messi, Messi’ chant reverberated around Stadium 974 as the Argentine captain stepped up to take a penalty in the 39th minute. The left-footed spot kick was, however, saved expertly by Poland goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny, but the Messi chant only got louder. The Argentina fans had turned Doha into Buenos Aires with their rhythmic chant, occasionally banging their feet into the shipping containers, of which the Stadium 974 is made of.

After the opening game debacle against Saudi Arabia, the Group C game against Poland was a must-win for Argentina and one must have thought the

fans of the two-time champions would have been nervous. On the contrary, there was an extra spring in their step. Their confidence was justified as Messi and his teammates reserved their best performance when they needed it the most. Messi’s penalty miss was the only negative mark in their comfortable 2-0 win over Poland as the Albiceleste sealed a last 16 clash against Australia thanks to second-half goals from Alexis Mac Allister and Julian Alvarez.

Their six points from two wins – they also beat Mexico – ensured they topped the group and avoided Group D toppers and 2018 world champions France. Poland, who barely laid a glove on their opponents yesterday, also went through not before facing some anxious moments. Poland were hanging on for

their lives as Mexico had taken a 2-0 lead in another Group C game at the Lusail Stadium, with another Argentine goal sending them home.

They were only ahead of Mexico on FIFA fair play rules for having fewer yellow cards.

While Argentina came close on many occasions, Mexico themselves conceded in the closing stages as Polish players waited on the pitch to know their fate. Once the result was out, there was a huge sigh of relief from players even as a small pocket of Polish fans celebrated in the stadium.

Based on yesterday’s performance they would know they did not merit a place in the last 16 and with France coming next, Poland need to up their game.

It was all Argentina yesterday from the first minute as Messi

Match

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pulled the strings. The 35-year-old, playing his fifth and most likely his last World Cup, was livewire as usual in his 22nd appearance at the football show-

piece, which got past great Diego Maradona’s 21-game tally.

Messi went close in the first 15 minutes, forcing Szczesny into a couple of saves. The one shot from the left angle, where he beat a couple of Polish defenders with ease, showed Messi was in the mood today.

Argentina was awarded a penalty when Messi was adjudged to have brought down by Szczesny, while going for a header. The decision – after the referee looked at the pitch-side VAR monitor – looked harsh and

justice was served when Szczesny guessed his right and blocked Messi’s kick. Lionel Scaloni’s men didn’t have to wait long for a breakthrough when the second half resumed. With just one minute in, Mac Allister’s feeble connection off Nahuel Molina’s cross trickled into the net as Szczesny was finally beaten.

With their noses in front, Argentina grew in confidence as they camped in Poland half. The second goal came not far away with Enzo Fernandez’s perfect pass finding Alvarez, who smashed it into the top corner.

“We went out there thinking we had to win,” said Messi after the game. “The game against Australia will be difficult – anyone can beat anyone. It’s very even, we have to prepare for the game in the best way, as always. I’m angry at missing that pen-

ty but the team came out strong-er after my mistake,” he said.

Poland’s lynchpin Robert Lewandowski, who has 18 goals in 19 games for Barca this season, was left frustrated throughout the game as he did not have a single attempt on goal as his team sat back from the first whistle and rarely tested Argentine goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez.

If not for, Poland would have been gone home as Juventus keeper made couple of fines and take his team into the last-16 for the first time since 1986.

“It was not a match for a striker but I knew it would be like this,” Lewandowski said. “For me, for the Poland team, given the possibilities we have, it was a success. “No-one will remember what this match was like – we will just be getting ready for France.”

Bottom Line

Mexico exit on goal difference after late fight for World Cup survival

Reuters
Lusail

Mexico scored twice in five second-half minutes in a thrilling last-ditch effort to stay in the World Cup yesterday, beating Saudi Arabia 2-1 but agonisingly missing out on the last 16 on goal difference.

Goals from Henry Martin and Luis Chavez soon after the interval catapulted Mexico back into contention, but a string of superb saves by Saudi keeper Mohamed al-Owais and two disallowed efforts denied the South Americans the elusive goal they needed to advance.

The match went right down to the wire and at one point looked like Mexico would miss out to Group C rivals Poland by virtue of having accrued more yellow cards, but Saudi striker Salem al-Dawsari netted in stoppage time to make goal difference the decider.

Mexico’s exit ended a run of seven successive last-16 appearances at the World Cup and the defeat for Saudi Arabia killed off what had looked to be a realistic chance of advancing from the group stages for the first time in 28 years.

Having failed to score in their opening two Group C matches, Mexico’s chances of progressing had looked slim going into the match,

hinging on the outcome of the game between Argentina and Poland which Argentina won 2-0 to top the group.

Urgently needing to beef up their goal difference, Mexico took the game to Saudi Arabia from the start and never stopped running, peppering the goal with long-range efforts in a desperate bid to wrest control of their own fate.

Orbelin Pineda and Chavez were the engines in a high-octane match that the Saudis struggled to get into, defending with desperation.

Mexico broke the deadlock two minutes after half-time, when Cesar Montes’s deft back-heel from a corner found Martin who bundled the ball

over the line in a crowded goalmouth.

They doubled their lead on 52 minutes in the tense clash when Chavez’s powerful free kick 20 metres out sailed into the corner of the goal beyond the reach of al-Owais, sparking wild Mexican celebrations on the field.

Lozano found the net but his goal was disallowed and Mexico battled hard to get the decisive third but were denied constantly by the reflexes of al-Owais in the Saudi goal.

Substitute Uriel Antuna had a stunning late effort disallowed for offside four minutes from time before al-Dawsari shattered Mexican hopes when he grabbed a Saudi consolation goal deep into stoppage time.



Poland's Grzegorz Krychowiak and Wojciech Szczesny (right) celebrate after the match as they qualified for the knockout stages. (Reuters)

STANDINGS
GROUP STAGE

Group A								Group B								Group C								Group D							
Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS	Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS	Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS	Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Netherlands (Q)	3	2	1	0	+4	7	1	England (Q)	3	2	1	0	+7	7	1	Argentina (Q)	3	2	0	1	+5	6	1	France (Q)	3	2	0	1	+3	6
2	Senegal (Q)	3	2	0	1	1	6	2	USA (Q)	3	1	2	0	+1	5	2	Poland (Q)	3	1	1	1	0	4	2	Australia (Q)	3	2	0	1	-1	6
3	Ecuador	3	1	1	1	1	4	3	Iran	3	1	0	2	-3	3	3	Mexico	3	1	1	1	-1	4	3	Tunisia	3	1	1	1	0	4
4	Qatar	3	0	0	3	-6	0	4	Wales	3	0	1	2	-5	1	4	Saudi Arabia	3	1	0	2	-2	3	4	Denmark	3	0	1	2	-2	1
Group E								Group F								Group G								Group H							
Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS	Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS	Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS	Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Spain	2	1	1	0	+7	4	1	Croatia	2	1	1	0	3	4	1	Brazil	2	2	0	0	+3	6	1	Portugal	2	2	0	0	+3	6
2	Japan	2	1	0	1	0	3	2	Morocco	2	1	1	0	2	4	2	Switzerland	2	1	0	1	0	3	2	Ghana	2	1	0	1	0	3
3	Costa Rica	2	1	0	1	-6	3	3	Belgium	2	1	0	1	-1	3	3	Cameroon	2	0	1	1	-1	1	3	South Korea	2	0	1	1	-1	1
4	Germany	2	0	1	1	-1	1	4	Canada	2	0	0	2	-4	0	4	Serbia	2	0	1	1	-2	1	4	Uruguay	2	0	1	1	-2	1

P- Played • W- Won • D-Draw • L-Loss • GD- Goal Difference • PTS- Points • Q- Qualified into last 16