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FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022



Match Report

Giroud and Mbappe take ruthless France into last 8

'THERE IS NO RECIPE TO STOP MBAPPE IN THE FORM THAT HE IS IN RIGHT NOW'

AFP
Doha

Kylian Mbappe set up a history-making goal for Olivier Giroud and then scored two himself as holders France eased into the World Cup quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Poland yesterday.

Giroud's opening goal a minute before half-time was his 52nd for his country, allowing him to pass Thierry Henry and become France's all-time record marksman.

Match	FRANCE	3	1	POLAND
Shots	16			12
Shots on Target	8			3
Chances Created	11			6
Corners	7			1
Saves	1			5
Possession	54.9%			45.1%
Offsides	3			8
Fouls	10			12
Yellow Cards	0			2
Red Cards	0			0

Mbappe's lethal strike in the 74th minute killed off any prospect of a Poland comeback and he netted again at the death to move to nine goals in just 11 World Cup appearances. At the other end, the threat of Robert Lewandowski was snuffed out by the French defence although the 34-year-old Poland captain did get the consolation of scoring a stoppage-time penalty.

France march on to the quarter-finals and are on course to become the first team to successfully defend the World Cup since Brazil 60 years ago.

"It wasn't easy because Poland were well organised and tried to counter us," France coach Didier Deschamps told broadcaster TF1.

"Then there is Kylian with his ability to resolve all sorts of problems, and that's just as well for us.



France's forward Kylian Mbappe (also right) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's second goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 match against Poland at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

"This team has been united from the beginning and obviously a result like this one confirms that. The joy is shared among everyone."

France were overwhelming favourites against a Poland side who limped through the group stage and who had not won a World Cup knockout tie since 1982. "We got out of the group stage for the first time since 1986. That was our main objective," said Poland coach Czeslaw Michniewicz. But he added: "There is no recipe to stop Mbappe in the form that he is in right now."

Mbappe returned as one of nine changes following their inconsequential

defeat by Tunisia, with goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris also coming back to win his 142nd cap. That saw him equal the record for most France appearances, held by Lilian Thuram, whose son Marcus came off the bench here.

It was a history-making occasion for France but what Deschamps wanted above all was a routine victory and progression to the last eight. The sky should be the limit for a French side led by Mbappe, but it is not just him.

Ousmane Dembele and Antoine Griezmann were lively in a strong start at a hushed atmosphere at Al Thumama Stadium. The fans were happy

to sit back and be thrilled as the big screen at one point showed Mbappe had reached a top speed of 35 kilometres (21 miles) per hour.

France's pace and pressing was too much for Poland as Przemyslaw Frankowski gave possession away, leading to Dembele crossing to the back post for Giroud to put the ball wide.

Poland recovered from a tentative start to almost go ahead in the 38th minute when Lloris blocked Piotr Zielinski's shot and Jakub Kaminski's follow-up was stopped on the line by Raphael Varane. Those misses proved crucial as France seized the



lead a minute before half-time. Patient build-up play ended with Mbappe having a glance as he received the ball just outside the box before playing in Giroud, who took a touch and finished into the far corner.

Poland were left to chase the game in the second half and they sent on Juventus striker Arkadiusz Milik to support Lewandowski for the final half-hour. However, their attack was no match for France, who picked off Poland to make it 2-0. A Griezmann clearance was brought down by Giroud and he released Dembele, whose ball into the middle was controlled before being blasted home by Mbappe.

It was an emphatic finish and was followed by another of a similar calibre from a Thuram assist in stoppage time.

Only just Fontaine, who scored 13 in 1958, has scored more World Cup goals for France than Mbappe. Lewandowski pulled one back right at the end, converting a retaken penalty that was awarded for handball by Dayot Upamecano.



A dejected Robert Lewandowski of Poland after the match. (AFP)

Spotlight

World Cup is my obsession, says Mbappe

AFP
Doha

Kylian Mbappe said yesterday he dreamed of winning the World Cup for a second time after his brace helped France to a 3-1 win over Poland which advanced the holders to the quarter-finals in Qatar.

"Of course, this World Cup is an obsession for me, it's the competition of my dreams," said the 23-year-old who burst onto the global stage by starring when France won the title in Russia four years ago. "I have built my season around this competition and around being ready both physically and mentally for it.

"I wanted to come here ready and so far things are going well, but we are still a long way from the objective we set and that I set."

The Paris Saint-Germain su-

LEADING SCORERS

- 5 goals:** Kylian Mbappe (France)
- 3 goals:** Enner Valencia (Ecuador), Cody Gakpo (Netherlands), Marcus Rashford (England), Alvaro Morata (Spain), Lionel Messi (Argentina), Olivier Giroud (France), Bukayo Saka (England)
- 2 goals:** Bruno Fernandes (Portugal), Mehdi Taremi (Iran), Cho Gue-sung (South Korea), Andrej Kramaric (Croatia), Mohamed Kudus (Ghana), Richarlison (Brazil), Ferran Torres (Spain), Ritsu Doan (Japan), Vincent Aboubakar (Cameroon), Salem al-Dawsari (Saudi Arabia), Aleksandar Mitrovic (Serbia), Niclas Füllkrug (Germany), Kai Havertz (Germany), Breel Embolo (Switzerland), Giorgian de Arrascaeta (Uruguay), Julian Alvarez (Argentina), Robert Lewandowski (Poland)

perstar now has five goals in just four games at the tournament and is already France's second-top scorer ever at the World Cup with nine goals in 11 appearances overall. Only just Fontaine, who scored an incredible 13 times at the 1958 tournament in Sweden, has more World Cup goals for France.

However Mbappe insisted he was not bothered about the prospect of winning the Golden Ball

for the tournament's best player. "The only objective for me is to win the World Cup which means now to win the quarter-final," said Mbappe, who also set up the opening goal against Poland for Olivier Giroud. "That is what I am dreaming of. I didn't come here to win the Golden Ball. That is not why I am here. I am here to win and help the French national team."

While the veteran Giroud netted his 52nd international goal to move past Thierry Henry and become France's all-time top scorer, Mbappe was once again France's outstanding player. He had been named man of the match in France's opening two wins over Australia and Denmark only to shun his post-match media duties, exposing the French Football Federation to a fine from FIFA as a result. However, this time he showed up to speak to reporters. "There were lots of people wondering why I was not speaking but it was nothing personal against the journalists," he said.

"I just needed to concentrate on my competition and when I need to focus it needs to be at 100 percent. I can't lose energy on other things. That is why I didn't speak before. I have learnt that the federation is going to get a fine but I have promised personally to pay it."



France's forward Kylian Mbappe (right) celebrates their win with teammate Olivier Giroud yesterday. (AFP)



Pre__view

Brazil coach says Neymar fit to face South Korea

'MY PREFERENCE IS ALWAYS TO PLAY MY BEST PLAYERS FROM THE START'

Reuters
Doha

Brazil forward Neymar is set to play for the five-times champions in their World Cup last-16 match against South Korea today after recovering from an ankle injury, coach Tite said.

Neymar suffered the injury in Brazil's opening 2-0 win over Serbia, which ruled him out of their 1-0 win over Switzerland and the shock defeat by Cameroon, one of a series of injury problems within the squad.

Full back Danilo was also cleared by the medical staff for the game against South Korea.

"Neymar will train today in the afternoon and if he trains well he will play," Tite told a news conference.

Neymar has suffered many issues with his right foot and underwent surgery four years ago for a fractured metatarsal.

The news of his return to the starting lineup came after Thiago Silva was asked during a news conference if Neymar would play and Tite took hold of the microphone and said "yes".

It will be warmly welcomed in a squad beset by fitness woes with Danilo also hurting his ankle against Serbia and Alex Sandro suffering a hip injury against the Swiss. Alex Telles and forward Gabriel Jesus, who sustained a knee injury against Cameroon, were ruled out for the rest of the tournament on Saturday.

Tite said Danilo was also fit to return against South Korea today but Sandro was out.

"He still can't play. Still recovering. Danilo and Neymar are back," he said. Tite stressed that Neymar's return was with the full backing of the team's medical staff and the player's physical health was the priority.

"If he plays, it's because he is in full health and ready to start, to play from the beginning and the entire game with no limitations," Tite said.

"My preference is always to play my best players from the start."

With Neymar back, Tite said there will be no changes in the forward line from the team that started against Serbia, with Lucas Paqueta behind Neymar, Vinicius Jr, Raphinha and Richarlison. The biggest question mark is who will play left back with Sandro and Telles ruled out.

Marquinhos replaced the Sevilla defender after he sustained the injury against Cameroon, but right back Danilo and midfielder Everton Ribeiro are also options.

"Alex Sandro's replacement will be a player that have already played in that position in his club. Make your research and you will find out who he is," Tite said.



Brazil's players pose with kids during a training session at the Al Arabi SC Stadium in Doha yesterday, on the eve of the Qatar 2022 World Cup match against South Korea. (AFP)

'One match, one chance' - unfazed South Korea eye Brazil upset

Wild cards South Korea say they have nothing to fear and nothing to lose when they take on five-times champions Brazil today, with their sights set on another giant-killing feat in a World Cup where big names have taken a beating. After an extraordinary group phase that saw former winners Brazil and Argentina defeated by low-ranked opponents, plus Belgium and Germany eliminated, South Korea see this World Cup as their best chance in decades to make their mark.

"Every match, every minute is very valuable and precious. The entire team has great morale, great teamwork," said wingback Kim Jin-su.

"We all have truly wanted to get this far and we are all really thirsty for this."

South Korea have pedigree, having dumped former champions Germany out of the group stages in the 2018 World Cup. As co-hosts with Japan in 2002, they reached the semi-finals, knocking out Italy and Spain



South Korea's defender Kim Jin-su (left) and South Korea's coach Paulo Bento arrives ahead of a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday, on the eve of the Qatar 2022 World Cup match against Brazil. (AFP)

along the way. Known for lethal counter-attacking and indomitable spirit, South Korea looked to be heading for elimination but delivered a surprise stoppage-time winner in Al Rayyan on Friday to beat Portugal and reach the last 16. Today's match against injury-hit Brazil is their first in the knockout rounds since 2010 and only their third overall. Kim said there were a few injury concerns among the South Korean squad, but the team were well prepared, capable and confident. "Of course tomorrow will be a very challenging match. We really want to

show everyone what we've got and show what we've been waiting 12 years for," Kim said.

"Our fighting spirit will be important and we have to sacrifice ourselves for the team."

South Korea's Portuguese coach Paulo Bento accompanied about a gap of just 72 hours between matches and said his team had physical and emotional fatigue, compared to a Brazil who had a squad with enough depth to rest players.

He said he was expecting Brazil to take the game to South Korea but was confident his players could keep them at bay.

"We're up against world-class players we are not intimidated," he said. "In our squad we have world-class players."

"One match it's not an entire tournament, we have one chance... Most important is we show we are a team that wants to win, wants to compete and fight until the last whistle," he said. "Based on that, everything is a victory."

Fact Box

BRAZIL vs SOUTH KOREA

When: Today, 10pm
Where: Stadium 974, Doha
Capacity: 44,089

Key stats:

- ◆ Brazil go into the knockout stage after group-stage wins over Serbia and Switzerland but they lost 1-0 to Cameroon on Friday when the South Americans were already qualified for the next round and rested most of their regular starters
- ◆ South Korea staged a dramatic come-back 2-1 win over Portugal on Friday, with an added-time goal by Hwang Hee-chan, to make it into the last 16. They had won only one of their previous 11 World Cup matches
- ◆ Brazil forward Neymar remains a doubt for today's match as he tries to recover from an ankle injury
- ◆ Brazil, unbeaten in qualifying for Qatar, have won the World Cup a record five times and are favourites to do it again at the tournament in 2022.
- ◆ Brazil have played in every World Cup since 1930 but have not reached the final since they last won the title in 2002.
- ◆ South Korea are the only Asian country to have reached the semi-finals of the World Cup, when they were co-hosts in 2002. On the other occasion they made it out of the group stage, they lost in the Round of 16 to Uruguay 2-1 in 2010.

Previous meetings: The two sides have met seven times previously, but never at a World Cup, with Brazil winning on six occasions and South Korea once, in a friendly in 1999. In a friendly in June this year played in Seoul, Brazil won 5-1.

Foc__us

Worried fans keep vigil outside Brazil clinic of Pele

AFP
Sao Paulo

Fans of football superstar Pele congregated yesterday outside the Sao Paulo hospital where the 82-year-old Brazilian icon is being treated for a respiratory infection.

More than 100 devotees prayed for the recovery of the man widely regarded as the greatest footballer of all time. The three-time world champion had been hospitalized on Tuesday amid ongoing treatments for colon cancer, a condition first diagnosed in September 2021.

"We are a spiritual force" praying for the sporting idol as he wages "one of the toughest battles of his life," one fan, Marcos Bispo dos Santos, told AFP.

Doctors at Sao Paulo's Albert

Einstein Hospital said Saturday that Pele - born Edson Arantes do Nascimento - remained "stable."

Pele "has had a good response to care without any worsening in the clinical picture in the last 24 hours," they said in a statement.

The star later struck an optimistic note in an Instagram post, saying, "My friends, I want to keep everyone calm and positive. I'm strong, with a lot of hope and I follow my treatment as usual."

Yesterday, his fans stood mostly in silence outside the clinic in the Morumbi neighbourhood of western Sao Paulo, holding a banner bearing an image of a youthful Pele and marked "Torcida Joven" ("Young Fans").

"Long live the king!" said several posters pasted on walls near entrances to the hospital.

Around noon, the fans formed

a circle and held hands as they recited an "Our Father."

On Saturday, the daily *Folha de S.Paulo* reported that Pele was no longer responding to chemotherapy and was now receiving only "palliative care," as ESPN Brazil had reported days earlier. The hospital and Pele's family have not confirmed this.

But amid the reports about the alleged deterioration of the star's health, concern was growing both in Brazil's football world and among ordinary Brazilians.

"We are here to give him strength, so that the king of football can recover," said Maicon Peterson who, along with his two-year-old son, was part of the vigil outside the hospital.

"We are suffering a lot, but God willing, he will make it through this."



Fans of Santos place a flag with the image of Brazilian football legend Pele during a vigil outside the Albert Einstein Israelite Hospital entrance, where he is hospitalised in Sao Paulo yesterday. (AFP)

'Pray for Pele', says Brazil assistant coach

Brazil's assistant coach Cesar Sampaio yesterday asked the footballing world to send its prayers to Pele as the icon receives treatment in hospital for a respiratory infection.

"Regardless of your religion, we ask you to say a prayer or do whatever you do to send him your good vibes," Sampaio told reporters at the World Cup on the eve of Brazil's last-16 clash with South Korea.

Head coach Tite also spoke about the esteem with which Pele is held in his homeland. "He is possibly the only person with whom I was shaking when I met him," said Tite.

"I was shaking, my hands were sweating, my heart skipped a beat and I thought, 'Wow, I'm going to meet Pele!'"

Focus

I always believed in myself to make World Cup: Soler

'I thought that the work I had been doing in the national team was good, and that what I did on the pitch was going to be good'

AFP Doha

Carlos Soler has no regrets about his move to Paris Saint-Germain from Valencia in the summer and said he never feared missing the World Cup with Spain as a result.

The 25-year-old midfielder struggled for minutes after his switch but was still called up by Spain coach Luis Enrique despite strong competition for places.

"He's not used to being a starter," said PSG teammate Kylian Mbappe, after they beat Juventus in the Champions League in November, in an apparent dig.

However Soler says that before the World Cup started he was finally finding his groove in Paris.

"I thought a lot about the decision obviously, because it's not easy to leave your home, where you've been all your life," Soler said in an interview yesterday.

"But I wanted to go, take a step up to a huge club, at the top level in Europe, try to fight for titles, play as much as possible and I am very happy now because I have gone through a learning phase there.

"The first month, the second month, but I think this last month went very well, I played more, I helped the team and that is what I want."

Asked if he worried his limited appearances would reduce

his chances of being part of the squad for the World Cup, Soler said he always had faith.

"No, maybe it's something that goes through your head, it's inevitable and people are telling you it. My friends, people close to me, but in the end I believed in myself.

"I thought that the work I had been doing in the national team was good, and that what I did on the pitch was going to be good," he explained.

"In the end, that's what it's about. Having confidence in yourself and thinking you are important, and in that sense I felt important here with the national team and thought I would come."

Soler subbed on to score in Spain's opening 7-0 romp over Costa Rica but has yet to reappear in Qatar, not used in the 1-1 draw with Germany or the 2-1 defeat by Japan.

In midfield Luis Enrique seems set on the Barcelona trio of Sergio Busquets, Pedri and Gavi, but Soler is waiting for his chance and hailed coach Luis Enrique.

"For me, he is one of the best coaches I've ever had, that's the truth, he's a coach who convinces you," said Soler.

"And he doesn't convince you just because he's Luis Enrique, but he convinces you because he gives you the reasoning, and later you see it on video, he convinces you with reasoning.

"We're with Luis Enrique on everything, we will go with his

plan until the end and for now, it's not going badly."

WEAR THEM DOWN

Soler may not be likely to start against Morocco but he has been keeping an eye on them, keenly watching other World Cup games as well as playing darts and table tennis during his spare time.

"Morocco have had a magnificent group phase, beating Belgium and drawing with Croatia. The only goal they let in was against Canada in the last game, so it will be a really tough match," said Soler. "I'm sure they will tighten up and sit back, and maybe they will press us, I don't know, but I am sure that against us they will sit back in numbers.

"We will have to try and wear them down, moving the ball quickly from side to side, and maybe a little more vertically when we get the chance, and try and get ourselves into the quarter-finals.

"Morocco have a strong team with very good players, (Achraf) Hakimi, (Hakim) Ziyech, (Youssef) En-Nesyri, Bono, a lot of very good players, (but) I think they prize the collective above the individual."

Hakimi is a teammate of Soler's at PSG, and they could go head-to-head tomorrow.

"It's true that before the World Cup we joked in the last 16 we were going to cross paths, and look what's happened now," he added.



Spain's midfielder Carlos Soler (right) and Pedri attend a training session at the base camp of Qatar University in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

Socceroos say surprise run puts Australian football on the map

AFP Doha

Australia's World Cup heroes hope their surprise run to the last 16 will transform football at home after they went down fighting in a 2-1 defeat to a Lionel Messi-inspired Argentina.

It was only the second time that the Socceroos had got this far at the tournament and there was a sense of pride after being edged out in Qatar on Saturday to one of the pre-World Cup favourites.

Attacking midfielder Riley McGree, who plays in England with second-tier Middlesbrough said: "Just be proud, hold our heads high with what we've done here and hopefully inspired generations to come."

"To do what we've done, you could say it's groundbreaking and moving forward it's only going to be good for the sport in the country," the 24-year-old added.

Graham Arnold's squad matched the "golden generation" from the 2006 World Cup of Harry Kewell and Mark Viduka in reaching the last 16.

Their 1-0 group stage wins over Tunisia and European semi-finalists Denmark were the first time Australia had won successive games at a World Cup.

Messi scored the opener and then a defensive blunder put Argentina 2-0 up, but an Australia team strong on togetherness and hard work pegged them back with a deflected shot by Craig Goodwin 13 minutes from time.

The Socceroos then had chances to equalise late on, with Aziz Behich bursting from full-back on a mazy run which took him deep into the Argentina area before a last-gasp Lisandro Martinez challenge.

Teenager Garang Kuol also had a golden chance in the remaining seconds. Goodwin admitted to "mixed emotions".



Argentina's Lionel Messi controls the ball as he is challenged by Australia's Riley McGree during their Round of 16 match at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, Al Rayyan, on Saturday. (Reuters)

"Disappointed to go out at this stage but to push Argentina to the very end... we gave it everything we've got and we had a couple of chances with Aziz and Garang and could have taken it into extra time.

"But we're proud of what we've done and everything we've achieved.

"The biggest thing for us

is we hope we've inspired the next generation of Australian boys and girls to do even better than what we've achieved here. Hopefully what we've achieved can put Australian football on the map and help the game grow," Goodwin added.

The 30-year-old scored nine minutes into Australia's World Cup opener to stun France, before the holders roared back to win 4-1.

The Socceroos then recovered to reach the last 16, their combination of hard work, unity and defensive nous, together with some moments of quality, pushing Argentina to the very end.

"We have the Aussie DNA, the Aussie spirit," said Goodwin.

"If we can produce the same level of technical ability and level of tactical ability as some European nations and South American nations and then have the Aussie DNA, we have a real chance to do something special."



Australia's midfielder Craig Goodwin (left) applauds supporters after his team lost the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 football match against Argentina at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan on Saturday. (AFP)

Spotlight

Spain warned over 'collapse' ahead of Morocco clash



Spain's midfielder Rodri addresses a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Center in Doha, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP Doha

Spain's Rodri says his country have been warned about suffering another "collapse" when they face Morocco in the World Cup last 16 tomorrow.

La Roja fell to a shock 2-1 defeat by Japan on Thursday and finished second in Group E as a result, with the Samurai Blue netting two goals in a dramatic period at the start of the second half.

Manchester City midfielder Rodri, playing at centre-back for Spain, said his team would not renounce their style of football but had to avoid unnecessary risks.

"There were 10 minutes of collapse, and we've been warned now that a goal can put you out," Rodri told a press conference yesterday. "We know it, the coach was clear, and now we're training with happiness and determination."

For a short period during their last group game Spain face elimination, when Costa Rica were ahead against Germany, but Hansi Flick's side recovered to win to save La Roja.

Spain trained yesterday with defender Cesar Azpilicueta working on an exercise bike apart from

the main group, after suffering a knock against Japan, but he should be fit to face Morocco.

Rodri believes Spain have recovered from their Japan defeat after reflecting on the game and are now ready to move on.

"We have totally recovered, it's true that it was an intense moment in all senses," he added.

"The team went out to win, with ambition. We had a good first half, it's a game which got away from us in 10 minutes.

"We had a day of reflection, which suited us well, now the team is recovered and training with maximum joy and maximum hope."

Spain, in search of a second World Cup trophy after their triumph in 2010, have a clearly defined way of playing.

It is marked by a high press, a thirst for possession and a near-refusal to clear their lines in desperation, preferring to seek out a pass.

"We have a philosophy which never changes, whatever team we are playing against," said Rodri.

"We analysed and corrected our errors, but changing our way of playing does not suit Spain.

"Details will make the difference. Playing without taking risks, but keeping a cool head, that's always been our game."







Spotlight

Ronaldo draws focus, but Fernandes proves to be Portugal's heartbeat

Bruno Fernandes is emerging as the team's true creative leader, as Portugal qualified for the last 16 with a game to spare

AFP
Doha

Cristiano Ronaldo's shadow looms large over Portugal at the World Cup, but away from the flash of camera phones and rolling headlines, Bruno Fernandes has taken the reins.

Fernando Santos' team are synonymous with their leading man, a black hole for media attention and fan admiration, reducing his colleagues to a supporting cast, inadvertently or not.

However in Qatar, playmaker Fernandes is emerging as the team's true creative leader, sealing qualification for the last 16 with a game to spare.

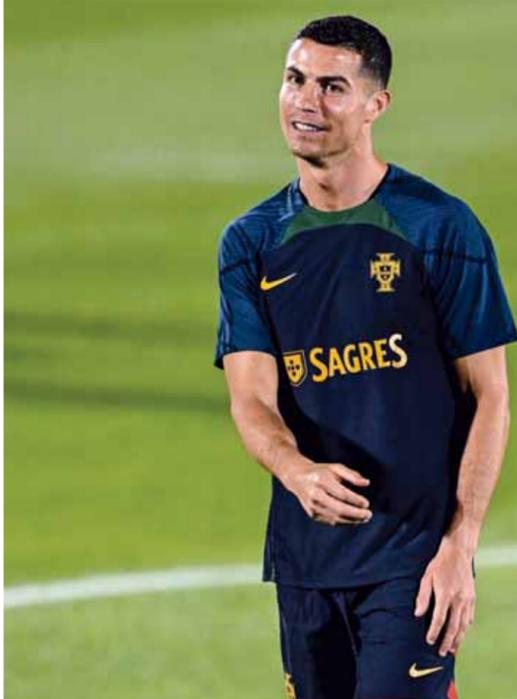
With several changes but Ronaldo still leading the side, Portugal fell to a 2-1 defeat by South Korea on Friday but finished top of their group and face Switzerland.

Fernandes was rested, wrapped in cotton wool, and without him Portugal failed to create many clear chances.

Still, supporters swooned over veteran striker Ronaldo — save some Korea fans who instead chanted for “Messi” — even as the all-time record international goalscorer floundered up front.

Instead it is Fernandes, no longer a club teammate of Ronaldo after his dramatic departure by mutual consent ahead of the World Cup, who has been the beating heart of the side this year.

It was Fernandes who picked up the pieces in Portugal's press conference ahead of their open-



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (left) and Bruno Fernandes take part in a training session at Al Shahaniya Sports Club yesterday. (AFP, Reuters)



ing game against Ghana, fielding questions on the Ronaldo drama.

Then on the pitch he was a quiet mastermind, providing two assists in the 3-2 win, even as Ronaldo basked in the limelight after winning a soft penalty and dispatching it to open the scoring.

The former Real Madrid forward became the first man to score in five separate World Cups, at 37 years old. It's an age where most players would have retired by, but Ronaldo chugs on, having pledged to play until 40, at least.

So that shadow stretches fur-

ther, but under it, Portugal have a lot of younger, dynamic talent, itching for a chance to break through.

FIGUREHEAD FERNANDES

Rafael Leao, Andre Silva and Goncalo Ramos are all interesting, young attacking options but

started on the bench against Korea, with Ronaldo failing to make an impact.

Manchester City midfielder Bernardo Silva is another underrated, smooth presence but at the 2022 World Cup it is Fernandes who has taken on the role of floor manager, the

man running the show at the tip of the midfield.

In Portugal's 2-0 win over Uruguay, Fernandes' brace clinched qualification, with only the post denying him a hat-trick.

Even when Ronaldo is not involved, he still creeps in, ap-

pearing to claim a goal against Uruguay which was ultimately given to Fernandes.

The 28-year-old, like Ronaldo a former Sporting Lisbon player, is set to return to the side against Switzerland tomorrow, and Portugal should look more like themselves again after their Korea blip.

Fernandes is an established star, but still young enough to take on the role of creator-in-chief, and as a figurehead is a different prospect to Ronaldo — where all roads end, the man who applies the finishing touch.

Even on that front, Fernandes is ahead in 2022, with seven goals for his country in 11 games, to Ronaldo's three in 10.

The Manchester United playmaker is also capable of providing them, unselfishly saying he thought Ronaldo had headed home his cross against Uruguay which found the net.

“I celebrated as if it had been Cristiano's goal,” he explained. “It seemed to me that he had touched the ball. My aim was to cross the ball for him. We are happy with the victory regardless of who scored.”

Fernandes has often been diplomatic when speaking to the media, even when repeatedly questioned about Ronaldo. “It was a dream to play with him,” he said, of their days together at Manchester United. “But nothing lasts.”

Wise, measured responses, issued like the kind of perfectly weighted passes Fernandes aims to deliver Ronaldo and co, as Portugal set their sights on a first World Cup trophy.

Focus

Pragmatic style pays off for Van Gaal's Netherlands

Netherlands' coach Louis van Gaal speaks with defender Jurrien Timber as the team takes part in a training session at Qatar University in Doha yesterday. (AFP)



AFP
Doha

Louis van Gaal's Netherlands have been repeatedly criticised for being “too boring” but a clinical counter-attacking display on Saturday saw them pick off the United States to reach the quarter-finals of the World Cup.

The veteran coach suggested a reporter should “go home” if he thought the Dutch were not entertaining enough after a 2-0 win over Qatar in the group stage.

The Netherlands' 3-1 victory on Saturday will silence some of the critics, with many of van Gaal's big decisions paying off.

His side sat back in the first half against the USA and cut through them with a wonderful move of 20 passes to score the opening goal through Memphis Depay, exposing the wide spaces left in behind the American defence.

“It was a great goal...It was the perfect goal I think,” said

midfielder Davy Klaassen.

When Daley Blind swept home their second shot on target on the stroke of half-time, the United States had a mountain to climb. Haji Wright pulled one back late on, but the Netherlands, who did not qualify in 2018 but have only conceded six goals in 11 World Cup games under van Gaal, secured progression through Denzel Dumfries.

In truth, a comeback was never likely against the well organised Netherlands, traditionally known for expansive football.

“Of course we want to (play in a ‘Dutch style’), but in the end you want to win and this is the most important (thing),” added Klaassen.

Van Gaal took over for a third time last year to lead the Netherlands until the end of this tournament and remains unbeaten excluding penalties at World Cups.

He earned plenty of praise in 2014 when his team finished third, beating hosts Brazil after losing on penalties to Argen-

tina in the semi-finals.

That side kept clean sheets in both those matches and the quarter-final shootout victory over Costa Rica was led by van Gaal who moved to Manchester United after the World Cup.

“We're unbeaten with him so definitely big credit to him,” said captain Virgil van Dijk.

“He's been very good for Dutch football.”

The 71-year-old has been under pressure in Qatar, though, since declaring the Oranje are targeting becoming world champions for the first time. One reporter put it to van Gaal that fans were “grinding their teeth” on social media about perceived drab performances. “That's your opinion but I don't think your opinion is the correct opinion,” he replied.

Marshalled by van Dijk and Nathan Ake, the Dutch have been hard to break down.

Giant goalkeeper Andries Noppert has impressed when called upon since being given his international debut by van

Gaal in the opening win over Senegal. “I get enough appreciation from the people surrounding me, I know what the media will say about me — they don't always report in a positive way. That's a given in football,” said van Gaal.

With Depay fit to start after only being used as a substitute in the first two matches, the Netherlands appear primed to go even further ahead of their last-eight tie against Argentina next Friday at Lusail Stadium. The USA enjoyed the majority of possession at Khalifa International Stadium but always struggled to create chances more than their opponents. The comfortable nature of the victory even allowed van Gaal to rest Depay and Ake late on in a day when almost everything went right for him.

“He's Louis van Gaal and he never changes. What you see is what you get,” said wing-back Daley Blind.

“He's a great personality and we're very happy that he's with us.”

Familiar US shortcomings exposed but best yet to come

A fresh-faced United States squad arrived in Qatar with modest expectations and although they may leave with a sense of disappointment after another last-16 exit, their performances offered hope of a longer run when they co-host the 2026 tournament.

After an encouraging group campaign, a young team brimming with confidence entered the knockout phase believing they could deliver another plot twist in a tournament where underdogs have consistently punched above their weight. The US largely outplayed Wales in their opener but let victory slip after conceding a late penalty, and went toe-to-toe with heavy favourites England in a scoreless stalemate.

Needing a win over Iran to advance, Gregg Berhalter's side delivered, surviving nervous moments at the end to earn the first victory of their campaign. The US frustrated opponents with their excellent pressing style as well as an organised and disciplined defence in those games, offsetting their profligacy in front of goal and poor set-piece delivery.

Those shortcomings caught up with them against the Netherlands on Saturday when the US, the only team not to concede from open play during the group stage, found themselves trailing for the first time in the campaign.

Their three defensive lapses were punished as the Dutch scored on each occasion, with Denzel Dumfries the architect of their demise in a Netherlands side whose attack strung together one-touch passes like clockwork to carve open the American midfield.

Christian Pulisic spurned a gilt-edged early chance before a vintage Dutch build-up that included 20 uninterrupted passes,

helped along by an uncharacteristic error from US captain Tyler Adams, was rounded off by Memphis Depay's crisp finish.

“We don't have a Memphis Depay,” Berhalter said.

“Their first attack was basically a goal. They were clinical with their opportunities in the first half. Other than that, there wasn't a ton separating the two teams.”

Daley Blind's goal, scored just before the break in almost identical fashion, was a true gut-punch and although Haji Wright fortuitously gave the Americans a lifeline with a deflected shot, Dumfries soon restored his team's two-goal cushion.

The American campaign may have ended in disappointingly familiar fashion — they have exited in the first knockout round in their last three appearances — but their next World Cup match will be on home soil when key players in the current squad should be in their prime.

On their return to the world stage after eight years, the US fielded four of the five youngest line-ups of the competition and were the second youngest of the 32 squads with an average age of 25 years 214 days when the tournament began.

Pulisic, Adams, Weston McKennie, Yunus Musah, Tim Weah and Sergino Dest were among 19 players making their World Cup debuts. The previous record for the US team stood at 16, set in the 1990 tournament when they bowed out in the group stage.

The quality of the squad combined with their progress during the tournament sparked discussions about the next American golden generation. Berhalter was reluctant to place that burden on his players but this time it does not feel like promotional bluster. (Reuters)



US coach Gregg Berhalter and player Christian Pulisic look dejected after the match as United States are eliminated from the World Cup after their loss to Netherlands at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha on Saturday. (Reuters)



Pre__view

Japan keen to show 'Samurai spirit' against Croatia today

Japan have reached the last 16 at three previous World Cups but they have yet to make it as far as the quarter-finals

AFP
Doha

Japan will "fight like samurai" in today's World Cup last-16 clash with Croatia as they battle to reach the quarter-finals for the first time, defender Yuto Nagatomo said.

Japan reached the knockout round after stunning Germany and Spain to top Group E but they are not satisfied with what they have achieved so far in Qatar.

Veteran Nagatomo is appearing at his fourth World Cup and urged his teammates to "show the Samurai spirit to the world" against Croatia.

"Before battle, the Samurai would polish their weapons and refine their technique, but if they were scared in battle, all that would count for nothing," the former Inter Milan left-back said yesterday.

"It's the same as football. Of course tactics and technique are important, but if we're scared, it doesn't matter how much we've trained over the past four years because our technique will be no use.

"The most important thing is to have courage," the 36-year-old added.

Japan have reached the last 16 at three previous World Cups but they have yet to make it as far as the quarter-finals.

They were eliminated in the first knockout round four years

Fact__Box

Japan vs Croatia

When: Today, 6pm
Where: Al Janoub Stadium
Capacity: 44,325

Key stats:

- ◆ Croatia are undefeated in nine of their last 10 World Cup matches, their only loss in that run coming in the 2018 final against France when they were beaten 4-2. They finished runners-up in Group F in Qatar with five points from their three games.
- ◆ Japan were winners of Group E with six points from a possible nine, having beaten Spain and Germany but surprisingly lost to Costa Rica. They have never been past the last 16 of World Cup after falling at this hurdle in 2002, 2010 and 2018.
- ◆ Croatia have never lost in the last 16. They beat Romania 1-0 in 1998 and Denmark on penalties after a 1-1 draw four years ago in their two previous visits to this stage of the tournament.
- ◆ Japan will be without centre-back Kou Itakura, who is suspended having picked up two yellow cards in the group stage. He is one of three players who has featured in every minute of the campaign so far for them.

Previous meetings:

- ◆ Japan have played Croatia 3 times since 1997, two of those at the World Cup. Japan won a friendly clash 4-3 in their first meeting, but Croatia claimed a 1-0 group stage success at the 1998 World Cup.



Japan's coach Hajime Moriyasu attends a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Center in Doha. (Reuters)

ago in Russia when they threw away a two-goal lead to lose 3-2 to Belgium with the last kick of the game.

Nagatomo said the defeat had been on his mind for the past four years and he is ready to wipe away the memory against Croatia.

"The past four years have been tough for me but I think we have all overcome that and improved as players," he said.

"I have been playing for Japan for almost 15 years and as far as I can see, this is the strongest team we've ever had at the World Cup."

FOUR YEARS OF SACRIFICE

Japan had to come from behind to beat both Germany and Spain, and were forced to defend for long periods against opponents who dominated possession.

Coach Hajime Moriyasu wants his players to have more of the ball against Croatia but urged them to show "resilience"

whatever the situation.

"The players showed their ability against Germany and Spain, they were united as a team and dug in and fought until the end," he said. "They have proved that when they play like that, it brings results."

"Of course it's important to think about our opponents but

first of all I want our players to show what they can do."

Japan will be playing in the knockout phase of the World Cup in successive tournaments for the first time.

Captain Maya Yoshida said the players have had to "sacrifice a lot over the past four years" and urged them to make it worth the

effort. "For Japanese football to move up a level, we have to become the kind of team that can consistently get through to the knockout rounds at the World Cup," he said.

"We can't be satisfied with what we've achieved - we have to write a new chapter in our history"

Foc__us

Croatia ready for Japan

Reuters
Doha

Croatia have performed wonders to punch above their weight for so long in international football and are determined to keep their reputation going against Japan in their last-16 match at the World Cup yesterday, coach Zlatko Dalic said.

"The population of Croatia is 4 million and the results we have achieved on the world stage are miraculous," said Dalic, whose nation were runners-up at the last World Cup and are unbeaten in three games in Qatar. "We are continually present in tournaments and World Cups, and that itself is a great success. We have become a world football force."

The 12th-ranked Croatians are favourites to beat 24th-ranked Japan, but the Samurai Blue astounded expectations to defeat two powerhouses and former World Cup winners, Spain and Germany, at the group stage in comebacks.

"They will apply the Samurai warrior philosophy. So will we. If we want to go further, we must apply that same attitude, do



our best and never underestimate anyone," Dalic told reporters, noting Japan's scant possession statistics in both those wins.

"Japan have the least ball possession in the world, but they make great transition. This is the most perseverant, persistent opponent. They simply do not give up. We have a similar mentality, Japan and Croatia. We stand on equal ground."

The coach said Croatia would fight to match or even better their performance in

Russia. "Everyone has their right to dream. In 2018, we demonstrated that dreams can come true," he said.

"In the last 20 years, Croatia have played magnificent matches. If you look at the countries in the round of 16, we are the country with the smallest population. We are here against the odds."

Dalic singled out Croatia's captain Luka Modric, who has again played outstandingly despite being in the twilight of his career at 37.

"I cannot compliment him enough on his performance. This will not be the last tournament he will play for Croatia. His professionalism, his good shape, his training, his working on self-improvement is unprecedented," he said.

"We will need Luka for some time more in the future."

Defender Borna Sosa faced fitness checks later yesterday and remains a doubt for the Japan game.

"If he's not up to the challenge tomorrow, we won't take any risks. We need fully prepared players," Dalic said.

Young defender Josko Gvardiol said he knew Japan's spirit well from their presence in the Bundesliga where he plays.

WORLD CUP NOT MODRIC'S SWANSONG, SAYS CROATIA COACH DALIC

Luka Modric will continue playing for Croatia beyond the World Cup, coach Zlatko Dalic said, as the 2018 finalists prepare to face Japan in the last 16 today.

Real Madrid schemer Modric will win his 159th cap for his country if he plays against Japan and is still making Croatia tick at the age of 37.

Modric has now appeared in four World Cups and four European Championships and Dalic said his captain is not ready to retire from international duty just yet.

"This will not be the last tournament he will play for Croatia," Dalic said yesterday.

"He is professional and in good shape, you can see how he is in training, working to improve himself. It's unprecedented." "We will need Luka for some time more in the future," he added.

Modric started all three of Croatia's first-round games in Qatar as they finished second in Group F behind Morocco.

He is one of several players remaining from the team that was beaten by France in the final in Russia four years ago.

Defender Josko Gvardiol, who is making his World Cup debut, said he hoped Modric would stick around for future campaigns.

"When you come to a national (team) where (Mateo) Kovacic, (Marcelo) Brozovic and Luka Modric are the midfielders, half of your problems are solved already," said the 20-year-old yesterday.

"You have a lot less on your mind, and I really do hope this is not his last World Cup." Croatia conceded only one goal during the group stage and now face a Japan team that stunned Germany and Spain to top Group E.

Dalic said his team would show Japan "the utmost respect" and would not fall into the same trap as Germany and Spain. "Spain and Germany dominated Japan - they might have been overconfident and Japan punished them for that," he said.

"We have experience and we must not relax, even for a second. They will not surrender and neither must we. "We have to have maximum concentration after we lose the ball."



Bottom__Line

I lost five years of my life watching Croatia against Belgium, says Rakitic

www.fifa.com
Zurich

Ivan Rakitic had no idea it would be this stressful. Nor did his neighbours.

On Wednesday afternoon, he paced his living room, jumping up and down, gesticulating wildly, screaming at the TV. He'd been through it all as a footballer - demoralising injuries, a crushing defeat in a FIFA World Cup final - but this was torture.

Croatia's Qatar 2022 life was hanging in the balance. Romelu Lukaku was getting chance after chance. After the longest 90 minutes of Rakitic's life, however, he was celebrating as hard as he'd celebrated any victory on the pitch. And then, finally, his neighbours could get some peace.

FIFA+ caught up with Rakitic to hear if he considered coming out of international retirement to go to this World

Cup, the class of Luka Modric, his former teammates Dani Alves and Neymar, and a last-16 showdown between Japan and Croatia.

FIFA+: Ivan, did you consider coming out of international retirement to play at Qatar 2022?

Ivan Rakitic: (laughs) I think that it's very, very hard to say your international career is over. It's a huge decision, one you give a lot of thought to. I think I did it at the right moment. Of course, it's very hard for me now, with the World Cup on. I'm supporting the guys, really pleased with what they are doing, very, very proud, but of course it's hard for me personally. It's heart-breaking. But I made my decision and I have to stick with it.

How do you feel watching the games from home?

It's much, much harder to watch the games than to play in them. Believe me. I think in the game against Belgium I lost five years of my life! (laughs). I was

so, so nervous and jumpy. I was in the squad for so many years. I'm in touch with the players and coaches before and after every game. In my heart I'm still a part of it. I wish them the best of luck and hopefully they can go a very long way.

What do you think of Luka Modric's performances so far at this tournament?

Luka is Luka - he's played this way for the last 10 years for the national team and Madrid. He's an amazing player, the most important player for us and one of the best players in the world. I think Luka understands football differently to other great players. The other players benefit a lot from playing with him, following his rhythm, his movement.

Which other Croatians have impressed you at Qatar 2022?

I think the number one is quite clear: Josko Gvardiol. I'd heard so many great things about him, but I think what he

did in the first three games was on another level. He was outstanding. I hope he'll be an important player for us for the next 10, 15 years. I'm certain he's destined to play at the very top at club level.

Next up is Japan, who beat Germany and Spain and won Group E. What do you think of the Samurai Blue?

I think everyone was really surprised that Japan won the group, and that Germany are out. But when you watch them play, you understand why it happened. They have a lot of individual and team qualities. It will be very hard to play against them. We'll need to be at 100 per cent against Japan.

You played alongside Dani Alves at Barcelona. What do you think of him playing in the World Cup as a 39-year-old?

There's only one Dani Alves. He's absolutely amazing. For me he would always be in my team - if he's 22, 39 or 45.

He's still really good on the pitch and I think Tite knows how important it is having him in the squad.

Which players have most impressed you at Qatar 2022?

I like the young guys, Pedri and Gavi, for Spain. I really like the football they play. (Cody) Gakpo has been really good too. But I think it gets interesting now. Now the games are really tough. Teams really need their big players. Let's see who can step up.

Who do you think will win the tournament, and how far can Croatia go?

It's hard to say. I think the favourites are still the same as they were before the tournament: Brazil, Argentina, Spain, England, France.

But what I would say is that I think there are some more surprises coming. I hope Croatia can go as far as they did at the last World Cup, but we have to take in step by step like we did four years ago.





Match Report

England outclass Senegal 3-0, set quarters date with France

Jordan Henderson, Harry Kane and Bukayo Saka score the goals for the 1966 FIFA World Cup champions

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

England yesterday crushed Senegal 3-0 to reach their second successive FIFA World Cup quarter-finals.

Goals from Jordan Henderson (38), Harry Kane (45 +3) and Bukayo Saka (57) saw England complete a resounding victory at Al Bayt Stadium.

Trophyless since 1966, England found their players in scoring form to set up a quarter-finals date with defending champions France who beat Poland 3-1 at Al Thumama Stadium yesterday.

The first few minutes easily belonged to England, who were playing with 4-1-2-3 formation as Southgate took charge of his 11th World Cup match as a coach. Southgate's counterpart Aliou Cisse, who was running a temperature the last couple of days, was back in the saddle and watched the initial action of the knockout clash from the dugout.

In the fifth minute, Senegal's Boulaye Dia charged into the England box but he was well chased and eventually tackled by Harry Maguire as goalkeeper Jordan Pickford collected the ball. Krepin Diatta brought down Jude Bellingham with a tackle from the back resulting in a free kick 20 yards away from the Senegal box. Shortly afterwards Declan Rice, on the edge of the box, slipped in a lob to Maguire who could not jump high enough for a deflection after Kane decided to take the indirect free kick in the 8th minute.

Bellingham, close to the flag post, slipped in a cross but Saka was tad behind pace as the ball slipped away without causing any damage.

In the 13th minute, Saka outran his marker and slipped in a ball but none of the white shirts were present to take the cross. Seconds later, Kane delivered a near-perfect cross from close to the corner flag but Saka didn't have the pace to meet the ball for a header from inside the six-yard box. England won the first corner in the 20th minute but Phil Foden's kick was deflected wayward by John Stones who couldn't time his jump well from close range.

Senegal missed a good chance to score in the 23rd minute when Maguire's poor cross was intercepted by Diatta near the England box. Dia tried to flick the ball from close to the penalty spot but his shot bounced off Stones' knee and onto his forearm. Sarr picked up the ball and fired a wayward shot from close range. A VAR check showed Stones' handball was not deliberate.

Soon after the half-hour mark, Ismaila Sarr cut into the box and instead of shooting quickly played a back pass to Dia. Dia fired a shot that was blocked by 'keeper Pickford by sticking out his left arm. Dia was unable to grab the rebound as Senegal wasted their second chance in quick time.

In the 38th minute, Henderson opened the scoring for Eng-



England's Harry Kane scores his team's second goal against Senegal during their Round of 16 FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 match at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor yesterday. (Reuters)

Match Stats			
	3		0
ENGLAND		SENEGAL	
8	Shots	10	
4	Shots on Target	1	
8	Chances Created	6	
3	Corners	3	
1	Saves	1	
61.3%	Possession	38.7%	
0	Offsides	0	
16	Fouls	12	
0	Yellow Cards	1	
0	Red Cards	0	

Really chuffed, you know. Knockout games are never easy. We've showed great maturity through the tournament. It's 3-0 against a really good side. Credit to the boys. Their mentality was top from the beginning, and we took our chances when they came. We feel good. We've got good runners. Good players. We're solid at the back. Three clean sheets in a row is really important. A really good day for us. We have a great mixture of youth and experience. Another knockout win. It was a very good night. We'll enjoy this one, but our focus turns to France. It'll be a really tough game, they're reigning champions, it'll be a good battle. We'll recover nicely and get ready for the game.

— Harry Kane

land. Kane found Bellingham on the left flank with a short cross. Bellingham charged into the Senegal box where he rolled a pass to Liverpool star Henderson who easily deflected the ball in the net with a left-footed flick past 'keeper Edouard Mendy.

England doubled the lead on the last kick before the first-half whistle on Kane's deadly strike. Bellingham stole the ball in the Senegal half before he charged ahead. A few metres later, he slipped a cross for Foden who found Kane unmarked down the inside right. With thousands of British fans anticipating a goal, Kane entered the Senegal box - under pressure from marker Abdou Diallo - and fired a bullet past Mendy's right hand as

the ball hit the net at high speed. It was Kane's first goal of World Cup Qatar 2022. It was Kane's 52nd career goal, one shy of Wayne Rooney's tally of record 53 goals for England.

Soon after the resumption of play, substitute Pape Matar Sarr attempted a long-range drive but mistimed his shot that bounced away to the left of Pickford. In the 54th minute, Kane picked out Saka on the right. Saka charged ahead with the ball before unleashing a powerful shot that sailed away from the Senegalese goalmouth as England started taking better control of the match. Kane produced a rasping shot from long range but the ball - which dipped at the last second - was smartly

blocked by Mendy. In the 57th minute, England jumped to a 3-0 lead after Arsenal midfielder Saka - on a brilliant cross from Foden - smartly clipped the ball into the net from close range. Foden, who picked up a loose ball after a fumble by Kane, charged towards the Senegal box.

With Senegal skipper and defender Kalidou Koulibaly threatening a charge, Foden fired a low cross as Saka arrived with perfect timing for the deflection with his left foot near the six-yard box. It was Saka's third goal of the tournament, having scored a double against Iran in the opening clash. Both Saka and Foden were benched by manager Southgate soon afterwards as England looked to give the substitutes some much-needed match practice.

Marcus Rashford and Jack Grealish replaced Saka and Foden. In the 74th minute, Pape Sarr curled in a right-footed free-kick from outside the England box but the ball swung to the left of 'keeper Pickford.

When Koulibaly was slapped with a yellow card for his reckless tackle on English skipper Kane in the 75th minute, it pretty much summed up Senegal's dismal performance.



England's Bukayo Saka celebrates scoring their third goal against Senegal during their Round of 16 FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 match at Al Bayt Stadium. (Reuters)

Bottom Line

Football legends Desailly and Toure savour the atmosphere at Qatar 2022



Marcel Desailly

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Legendary former players Marcel Desailly and Yaya Toure have praised every aspect of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 - including the exciting action on the pitch, family-friendly atmosphere and vast array of entertainment options.

Desailly, a FIFA World Cup winner with France in 1998, said the compact nature of the event was proving a huge benefit for fans and players.

"In the group stage, we had four matches almost every day and it was amazing - fans were going to two games a day and really enjoying the atmosphere and the fact everything is close by. I'm very pleased by what I've seen so far - the intensity of games has been high and the organi-

sation has been superb. It's going to be the best World Cup ever," said Desailly, who won 116 caps for France.

Toure, who played in three editions of the FIFA World Cup for the Ivory Coast, said Saudi Arabia's upset win over Argentina was his stand-out moment so far.

"It was an unbelievable game. My ex-coach, Hervé Renard, from my time with the national team, produced something special with Saudi Arabia," said Toure. "Every tournament, you always have an underdog that comes in and makes a big impression, so I'm pleased that Saudi Arabia achieved that as a team from the Arab world."

Desailly also praised the FIFA Fan Festival at Al Bidda Park, which has been hosting up to 40,000 supporters daily throughout the tournament.

"I was there for the official opening of the festival and there was a lot of joy among the fans in attendance," said Desailly.



Yaya Toure