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FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022



Match Report

# Magnificent Morocco make history



Morocco players throw coach Walid Regragui in the air as they celebrate their win over Spain at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday. (AFP)

**Match Stats**

MOROCCO		SPAIN
0 (3)		0 (0)
Morocco win 3-0 on penalties		
6	Shots	13
2	Shots on Target	1
3	Chances Created	9
0	Corners	8
1	Saves	2
23.2%	Possession	76.8%
5	Offsides	4
15	Fouls	14
1	Yellow Cards	1
0	Red Cards	0

The Atlas Lions reach Qatar 2022 quarter-finals for first time after 3-0 win on penalties against former world champions

AFP  
Doha

Achraf Hakimi struck the decisive penalty in a shootout to send Morocco into the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time yesterday as the African side stunned Spain after a goalless draw. Spain coach Luis Enrique had claimed he set his players the "homework" of taking 1,000 penalties each.

But Pablo Sarabia, Carlos Soler and Sergio Busquets all missed from the spot before Madrid-born Hakimi dinked his home as Morocco won the shootout 3-0, to the delight of their raucous support.

Walid Regragui's side will face Portugal in quarter-finals in what is uncharted territory for them - their previous best run at a World Cup was a last-16 exit in 1986. Spain had been hoping they could repeat their 2010 World Cup triumph after reaching the semi-finals of Euro 2020, where they were also beaten on penalties by Italy.

Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bounou had other ideas and saved brilliantly from Soler and Busquets, while Sarabia hit the post from the spot.

"The penalties cost us but I am proud of my team," said Luis Enrique.

"I take all the responsibility because I chose the first three takers



and the players decided the rest - we didn't get to the fourth.

"Bounou is a great goalkeeper when it comes to penalties and today he was superb."

The teams were closely matched throughout a tense game, with Spain having more of the ball but Morocco creating the better openings, few though they were.

Luis Enrique trialled his third right-back of the tournament in Marcos Llorente, and benched the team's top scorer Alvaro Morata for Marco Asensio, after the shock defeat by Japan.

Spain monopolised the ball, with Morocco's fans furiously whistling when their side were out of possession.

Morocco, who are the last African and Arab side left standing at the first World Cup held in an Arab country, were intensely backed and their fans greatly outnumbered Spain's.

With La Roja playing in a pale blue second strip, they resembled the away team on hostile territory.

Gavi, who at 18 years and 123 days old became the youngest player to start a World Cup knock-

**Toothless Spain**

Sofiane Boufal, who bypassed Llorente with ease early on, carved the best chance of the half for Nayef Aguerd, who headed inches over.

Bounou pummelled away a Dani Olmo strike from an angle as the tension cranked up after the break.

Luis Enrique withdrew the dogged and muddled Gavi for Soler.

He threw Morata on too, giving Spain a focal point in attack, but they struggled to supply him as Morocco sat deeper and deeper.

Bounou made a fine save from Olmo's free-kick, with Spain finally creating clear chances in the moments before extra-time.

Morocco found their feet again in extra-time, testing Simon, who made a fine save with his legs to deny Walid Cheddira after he broke down Spain's left flank.

Despite pressure from Spain in the final moments before penalties, they could not find a winner.

Having been sent on for the shoot-out, Sarabia struck the post from Spain's first penalty, after Abdelhamid Sabiri put Morocco ahead.

Soler and Busquets were foiled by Bounou, while Hakim Ziyech scored and Simon denied Badr Benoun, before Hakimi netted a Panenka penalty against the country of his birth to ignite wild celebrations.

"We're devastated because we wanted more, we had the team to do it, but are proud of what we have done," said Llorente.

"It happened to us in the Euros, and today it happened to us again."



Spain coach Luis Enrique (left) with Sergio Busquets as their team is eliminated from the World Cup yesterday. (Reuters)

out game since Brazil great Pele in 1958, rose to the occasion.

Regragui's side sat deep defensively, frustrating Spain, and threatened on the counter themselves, with Unai Simon beating away a long range effort from Noussair Mazraoui.

Morocco players celebrate qualifying for the quarter-finals as Spain players looks dejected. (Reuters)

## Bounou says penalty heroics partly down to 'luck'



Morocco's goalkeeper Yassine Bounou deflects penalty kicks from Spain's Sergio Busquets (above) and Carlos Soler yesterday. (AFP)



Morocco's Yassine Bounou put his World Cup penalty-saving heroics against Spain yesterday down to a mixture of luck and intuition.

The Sevilla stopper saved two of Spain's penalties in the 3-0 shootout triumph as his side reached the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time in their history.

The match had finished goalless after extra-time.

"You know penalties, it's a little bit of intuition, a little bit of luck," Bounou told beIN Sports.

"We won, that's the most important thing. Hats off to the whole team, they did the job, it was incredible. "It's not easy to stay focused for 120 minutes, against a Spanish team that dominates the ball well, who has possession.

"When you live moments like this, sometimes it's hard to realise it. We will try to avoid the noise around us, stay focused on ourselves, on our job, our recovery," Morocco, the last African side and

only remaining Arab team left in the tournament, will face Portugal in the quarter-finals in Qatar.

"I'm so happy for the team - they did a great job all through the game," said Bounou.

"We understood (how to play) the game from the start, so I'm so happy for this win."

Morocco fans packed Education City Stadium and vastly outnumbered Spain supporters, creating an intimidating and impressive atmosphere.

Bounou was also grateful for the support from home.

"We felt the support of our fans in Morocco and elsewhere, and that gave us momentum in the stadium," the goalkeeper told reporters.

"On behalf of all the players, I want to thank the fans who helped us in this task.

"I congratulate all the players and I offer this gift to all the Moroccan people."



Morocco players throw goalkeeper Yassine Bounou in the air as they celebrates winning the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 match against Spain at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday. (AFP)



Spotlight

# Lautaro is out of form but Argentina thrive in Qatar



Argentina's forward Lautaro Martinez (left) fights for the ball with Australia's midfielder Jackson Irvine during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 match at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday. (AFP)

'LAUTARO IS A HUGE IMPORTANT PLAYER FOR US, HE'S A FORWARD, HE LIVES FOR GOALS'

AFP  
Doha

Argentina have gradually found their feet at the World Cup, improving with every game, but striker Lautaro Martinez has been going in the other direction.

For most of the past four years, the Inter Milan player has been a starter for the national team, usually alongside Lionel Messi and Angel Di Maria in a daunting three-pronged attack.

The 25-year-old, who has 21 goals in 44 internationals, was on the teamsheet for Argentina's first two group games in Qatar.

But things have unravelled quickly for him, to the point that he found himself the subject of jokes online following Argentina's 2-1 last-16 win over Australia.

Towards the end of the game, after Lautaro was introduced as a substitute, many fans felt Messi repeatedly tried to set up his teammate to score his first World Cup goal.

After one dazzling run, Messi passed to his fellow forward inside the 18-yard box with only the goalkeeper to beat, but Lautaro skied his effort.

It could have been so different for Lautaro, who twice put the ball in the net against Saudi Arabia in Argentina's opening Group C encounter.

Both times, though, he was denied by an offside flag.

Argentina then toiled to create anything against Mexico in their next match, until Lautaro was taken off.

Moments later, Messi opened the scoring.

For the final group game against Poland, Lautaro lost his place to youngster Julian Alvarez, who has rewarded his coach's faith by scoring in each of his two starts.

After replacing the 22-year-old with 20 minutes left against Australia, Lautaro fluffed three presentable chances to kill the game.

It has led to a succession of memes and jokes flooding social media at his expense.

Some have even compared him to compatriot Gonzalo Higuain, who missed a chance in the 2014 World Cup final against Germany - which Argentina lost 1-0 - when played through one-on-one with the goalkeeper.

**MESSI DEFENDS LAUTARO**

Both coach Lionel Scaloni and captain Messi have been quick to defend the forward.

"Lautaro is a hugely important player for us, he's a forward, he lives for goals," said Messi.

He may well have been mindful of that as he seemingly tried desperately to tee up his strike partner against Australia.

"Lautaro has saved us many times, I don't want to talk about these details - that would be unfair on Lautaro, who has given us and will keep giving us so much joy," said Scaloni, when asked about the striker's misses against Australia.

Alvarez will likely keep his place against Netherlands for Friday's World Cup quarter-final.

"It's perfect that Julian is scoring and Lautaro will also score," said Scaloni.



Lionel Messi

It is a different story for the two players at club level.

While Lautaro is a certain starter at Inter, Alvarez has started just three Premier League matches at Manchester City, though he has scored three times so far.

With Messi dazzling and proving once again the inspiration for Argentina, fans will not mind who else gets on the scoresheet, as long as the team keep winning.

But it is turning into a bittersweet experience for Lautaro and perhaps the making of Alvarez.

Focus

# We have to come up with a good plan, says Van Dijk

Reuters  
Doha

Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk remains wary about the threat Lionel Messi poses when the Dutch go up against Argentina in Friday's World Cup quarter-finals, even though he came out on the winning side the last time they met in club football.

Van Dijk called Messi the best player he had played against after his side Liverpool came back from a three-goal first-leg deficit to beat Barcelona on their way to winning the 2019 Champions League and has repeated the tribute in Qatar after the Dutch booked their last-eight spot.

"It is an honour to play against him," said Van Dijk before deflecting any one-on-one comparisons ahead of the meeting at the Lusail Stadium. "It is not me against him, or the Netherlands against him, but the Netherlands against Argentina. No one can do it on his own, we will have to come up with a good plan."

That was certainly the case at the 2014 World Cup when Dutch coach Louis van Gaal had to prepare for the threat of Messi in the semi-final in Brazil, although they still ended on the losing side. What they learnt, however, was that defending against Messi is a collective task.

Then Messi had more of a playmaker role but had a centre back assigned to man-mark him, plus also received special attention from Daley Blind, who was playing in central midfield and successfully cut off much of the Argentine's line of supply.

The South Americans won through though, progressing to the final following a penalty



Netherlands' Virgil van Dijk (second right) and teammates during training at Qatar University Training Site 6 in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)

shootout after a goalless draw. Blind is the only survivor in the Dutch team eight years on, but now plays as a left wingback while the 35-year-old Messi has a different wandering striker role in a new-look Argentina side.

**SUCKER PUNCH**

Van Dijk will add his own lessons from 2019, when Messi had sucker punched Liverpool with two quick goals as Barcelona beat them 3-0 in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final, although the first goal was a rebound and the second a sumptuous free kick.

Van Dijk and his teammates had the last laugh though, winning 4-0 at Anfield in the return and going on to beat Tottenham

Hotspur in the final. But Messi still left a strong impression on the Dutch centre back.

"The difficult thing about him is when we are attacking, he is chilling somewhere in a corner or something," remembered Van Dijk. "You have to be so very sharp in terms of defensive organisation. They always looked for him to try to make it difficult for us on the counter."

This Dutch squad, however, is very much united as they gear up to face Messi and company.

"The vibes are good, we have a lot of fun times with the team, the communication with the trainers and the staff is very good. So yeah, the feeling is great," defender Jurrien Timber told reporters yesterday.

Defender Nathan Ake said the players felt very much together.

"We know when to relax and get our heads a little bit out of the football, but we know when to focus as well, and that time is coming very soon," he added.

Barring the path to the last four is an Argentina team powered by Messi, who is trying to win the one major prize to elude him in his glittering career.

Ake, who works with Messi's former coach Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, has not asked his boss how to stop the Argentine maestro.

"No, I haven't spoken to him, but if I did I'm sure he would tell me it will be pretty tough. It will be a good battle for sure," Ake said.

## Dutch flier Dumfries dazzles ahead of Argentina World Cup showdown

Doha: Jed Court Denzel Dumfries had a slow start at the World Cup but the Netherlands wing-back hit his stride in spectacular style in the last-16 match against the United States. The Inter Milan defender - one of the breakout stars at last year's Euro 2020 - provided two assists and scored the third goal in a 3-1 win to help set up Friday's quarter-final clash with Argentina.

The Dutch will need to find a way of stopping Lionel Messi as the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner continues his quest for a maiden World Cup title. But coach Louis van Gaal will be hoping that his side can expose gaps behind the Argentina defence on the counter-attack, for which Dumfries and fellow wing-back Daley Blind will be crucial.

The pair assisted each other's goals in the victory over the Americans as van Gaal's 3-4-1-2 formation paid dividends. "He is (important). He got a lot of criticism in the first games but we know what he can do and he showed it today," midfielder Davy Klaassen said after the last-16 tie.

"In this system the wing-backs are really important and if you see them assisting each other today, this is what you want."

Kylian Mbappe is the tournament's leading scorer with five goals, while other wingers to impress include England pair Marcus Rashford and Bukayo Saka and Brazil's Vinicius Junior.

Wide players have been more important than usual in Qatar, according to Arsene Wenger, now FIFA's football development chief.

"The sides with the best wingers are those who have the best chances to win because the game is changing towards the wings," said Wenger.

"Teams are blocking the centre, and attacks are going towards both sides." The Netherlands' width comes from Blind and Dumfries, with Memphis Depay and Cody Gakpo starting in a narrower front two ahead of Klaassen.

The positives of that system were best shown by their opening goal when a sweeping 20-pass move was finished off by Depay from Dumfries' cut-back.

"In that goal you see all the facets of the

system that we play," said Dumfries. "We really attack the spaces and change sides really well. It was a fantastic team goal. This is where you see the core of the system being executed." The Netherlands laboured at times in the first round but still finished top of Group A after wins over hosts Qatar and Senegal and a draw with Ecuador.

"We knew before that we could play better. In the group stage we didn't lose but we felt that we could play better," said Dumfries. The three-time runners-up are hoping to peak at the right time in their bid to win the title for the first time.

"We're growing in the tournament, we're improving every game and this was another step," said captain Virgil van Dijk.

"We came here with one goal and that's to become world champions and we have to win every game and that's what we're trying to do."



Netherlands' defender Denzel Dumfries (left) and forward Cody Gakpo take part in a training session at Qatar University in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

Dumfries, who is named after US film star Denzel Washington, impressed at the Euros with his first two international goals in the group stage.

Those performances helped him earn a move from PSV Eindhoven to Inter Milan and he has often been linked with a switch to the Premier League. "I play for a very beautiful club in Italy and I'm very proud that I can play for Inter," said Dumfries. "I'm not focused on anything other than the national team."



Spotlight



# Bento steps down as South Korea coach after exit

'I believe we can be very proud of what we have done at this World Cup...'

AFP  
Doha

Paulo Bento announced he would not be staying on as coach of South Korea after they were eliminated from the World Cup with a 4-1 defeat at the hands of Brazil on Monday.

"Now I need to think about the future, but I will not be with the Korea team. I am going to rest and then see," the 53-year-old former Portugal coach said after the loss in the last 16.

"I have just told the players and the president of the national federation.

"This is a decision which I took in September. It was set in stone and today I confirmed it. I have to thank them and am very proud to have been their manager."

Bento took over following the 2018 World Cup, succeeding Shin Tae-yong.

In Qatar, he led South Korea to the knockout round for the first time since 2010 with a last-gasp win over Portugal in their final group game.

However, they were outclassed by Brazil as they found themselves four goals down before half-time at Doha's Stadium 974, although they did pull one back late on through substitute Paik Seung-ho.

"I believe we can be very proud of what we have done at this World Cup, and what we have done over the last four years to get here," said Bento,



South Korea coach Paulo Bento shakes hands with Hong Chul after the round of 16 match against Brazil as South Korea are eliminated from the World Cup at Stadium 974, Doha, on Monday. (Reuters)

who coached his home country at the 2014 tournament in Brazil.

A Korean side captained by Son Heung-min got to Qatar by finishing second in their quali-

fying group behind Iran but their last-16 exit means they have still never won a World Cup knockout tie outside of their home country.

"I think we did really well in the group stage although I think we could have picked up more points as we should have beaten Ghana," Bento said.

"But I think we can be very proud and I am proud with what we have done over the last four years."

## Captain Son issues apology after South Korea's defeat



South Korea's midfielder Son Heung-min applauds supporters after his team lost the Qatar 2022 World Cup round of 16 football match against Brazil at Stadium 974 in Doha on Monday. (AFP)

AFP  
Doha

Son Heung-min apologised after his South Korean side exited the World Cup following a sobering 4-1 defeat to favourites Brazil in the last 16 in Qatar.

The captain and talisman was powerless as Brazil scored four times in the first half on Monday, before Paik Seung-ho netted a 76th-minute consolation for the outclassed Koreans.

South Korea have still never won a World Cup knockout tie outside of their home country.

"I can only apologise to our fans for not living up to their expectations," said the 30-year-old Tottenham forward, who played in a mask in Qatar following facial surgery last month.

"We did our best but I think we played a very difficult game," he told TV reporters.

"Still, there is no doubt that all the players battled

proudly, devoted themselves and worked hard to get this far.

"The players and staff really did their best to prepare for this match, so I hope you understand."

South Korea coach Paulo Bento announced in the immediate aftermath of the heavy defeat that he would not be staying on, a decision he said was made in September.

Son, who failed to score at the tournament and showed only fleeting glimpses of his best form, said he was sorry to see the boss go.

"I never once had any doubt about the style of football he pursued," Son told Korean media in a reference to critics, who said Bento was too cautious at times.

"A lot of people had reservations about it but they all cheered for us when we played well at the World Cup here. We were able to execute things we'd worked on for the last four years."

"It's really sad to see him go," Son added.

Bottom Line



## Eto'o sorry for fan altercation but slams 'relentless provocation'

AFP  
Doha

Former Cameroon star Samuel Eto'o apologised yesterday for kneeling an Algeria supporter in the face but insisted he was the target of "relentless provocation" by the North African state's supporters since a controversial World Cup qualifier this year.

The 41-year-old Cameroon federation president and ambassador for the Qatar World Cup flew into a rage after being approached as he left Brazil's 4-1 win over South Korea in Doha on Monday night.

A video widely shown on social media showed the four-time African player of the year breaking free from people seeking to restrain him and kneeling the face of a blogger named as Sadouni SM. The man fell back after being struck but has not reported any serious injury.

Eto'o released a statement in which he admitted being involved in a "violent altercation". "I would like to apologise for losing my temper and reacting in a way that does not match my personality," said the former Barcelona, Inter Milan and Chelsea striker.

Eto'o only addressed his apology to "the public" however and made no gesture to the fan.

Eto'o lashed out at Algeria's supporters for their behaviour since Cameroon beat Algeria on away goals in a World Cup qualifying playoff in March.

Algeria later complained to FIFA about the referee and initially demanded a replay.

"I pledge to continue to resist the relentless provocation and daily harassment of some Alge-



rian supporters," Eto'o said. "I have been the target of insults and allegations of cheating without any evidence," he added. He said Cameroon fans at the World Cup had also been "harassed and pestered" by Algerians.

"The scenario of Algeria's defeat was cruel but perfectly in line with the rules and ethics of our sport," Eto'o insisted.

All of Algeria's appeals have been rejected and Eto'o said that Algerian authorities must now act to halt "this unhealthy climate before a more serious tragedy occurs."

The African football legend was surrounded as soon as he left the 974 Stadium where the round of 16 match was played.

Wearing a blue baseball cap, he is seen allowing selfies with some fans before he was approached by the Algerian.

Eto'o handed his mobile phone to a man before surging

at the blogger to deliver the blow with his knee.

Sadouni SM said in a video posted online yesterday that his camera and microphone had been "smashed" in the incident. "He hit me," the man adds, pointing to his chin.

"I did all that for Algeria," Sadouni SM says in the video. "I am at the police station now for the inquiry."

"This video must be shared. As Eto'o is a celebrity I am afraid they will cover up the inquiry, but I trust the police," he added.

The World Cup organising committee has not commented on the incident.

Eto'o toured Senegal, Cameroon and Ghana in August to promote the World Cup.

The former international has a history of fiery outbursts, receiving a three-match ban in 2010 for headbutting an opponent while playing for Inter.

Focus



# Germany team director Bierhoff quits after debacle

Reuters  
Doha

Germany team director Oliver Bierhoff has become the first casualty of their first-round World Cup exit in Qatar after agreeing to leave his post two years before his contract ends, the DFB said yesterday.

Former Germany international Bierhoff, who had been in his post as team director for the last 18 years, was widely criticised following their second consecutive shock group-stage exit at a World Cup.

"Oliver Bierhoff has won a lot of merits for the DFB," said DFB President Bernd Neundorff in a statement. "Even if the last few tournaments lagged behind the sporting goals that had been set, he will be associated with big moments."

Bierhoff played a part in helping Germany win the last of their four World Cup titles in 2014 and Neundorff said his



Oliver Bierhoff: first casualty

efforts would not be forgotten. "He will always be linked with the World Cup success in Brazil," he added. "Even in turbulent times he always followed goals and visions."

Germany crashed out of the tournament in Qatar after losing to Japan, drawing with

Spain and beating Costa Rica in the last Group E match. Spain and Japan advanced from that group.

The Germans had also tumbled out of the 2018 World Cup at the same stage - at the time their earliest exit in 80 years. They also failed to advance

past the round of 16 at Euro 2020 last year.

Germany coach Hansi Flick, who took over after last year's Euros said Bierhoff's departure was a big blow.

"It is difficult for my coaching staff and me to imagine how the gap that is created by Oliver's departure can be filled on both a sporting and a personal level," Flick said in a statement.

"Our co-operation was always marked by loyalty, team spirit and reliability. Solidarity was the DNA of the team." Flick had also worked with Bierhoff in the past when he was assistant Germany coach to predecessor Joachim Loew from 2006-2014 and during a brief spell as the DFB's sporting director after that.

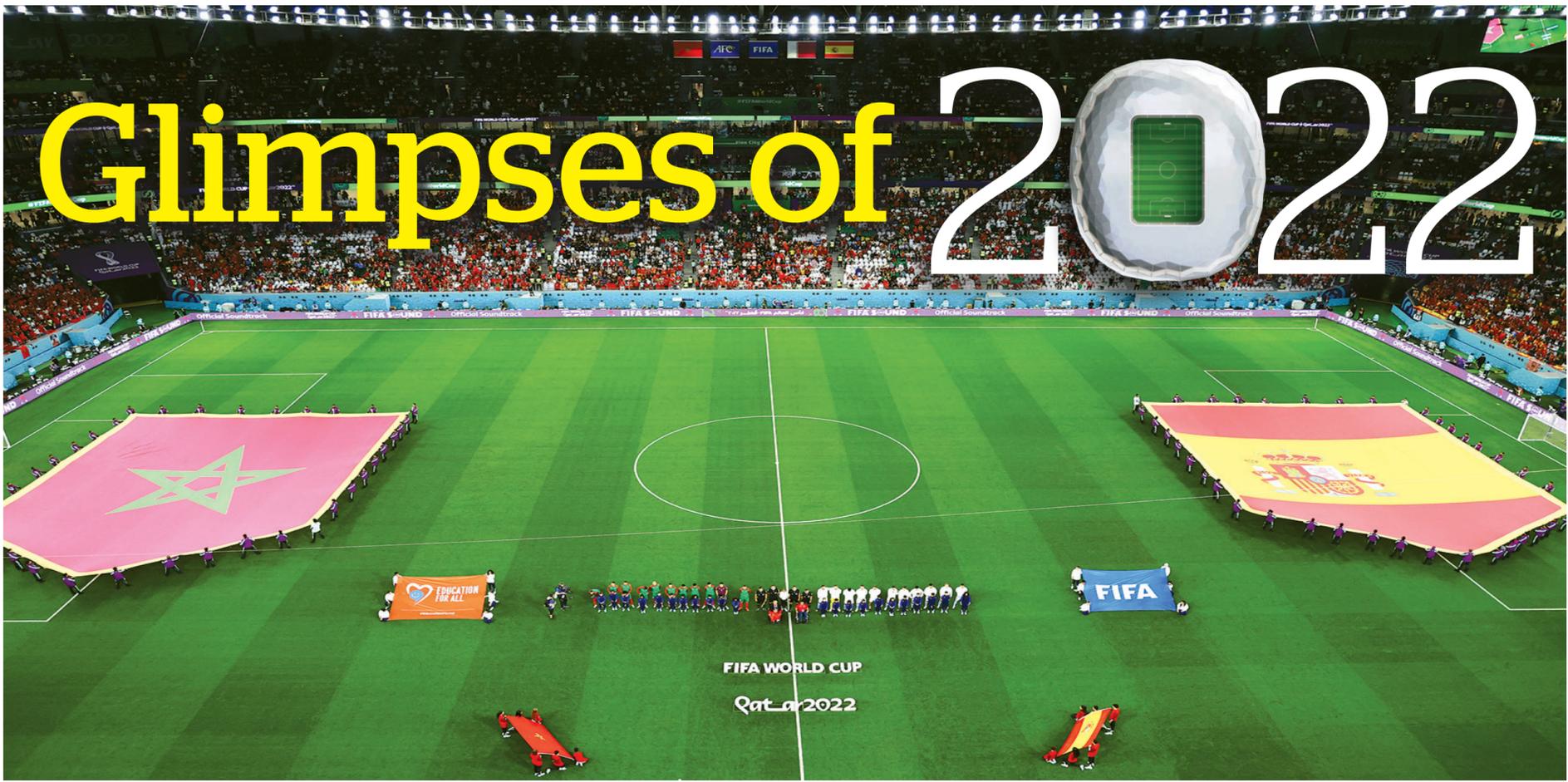
Germany football bosses will hold their first meeting today to analyse their recent tournament performances and to plan improvements ahead of Euro 2024, which the country will host.

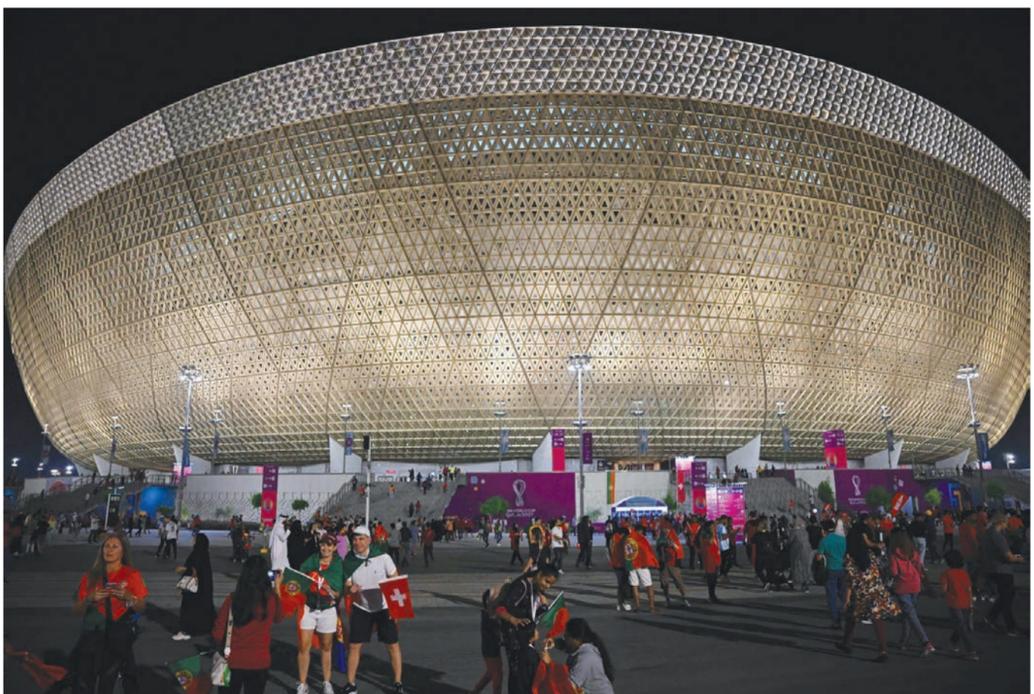
## Australia's Devlin unused at contest scores Messi's shirt

Australia midfielder Cameron Devlin did not play a minute of the World Cup but left Qatar with one of its biggest prizes after exchanging jerseys with Argentina's Lionel Messi after their round of 16 match. Devlin, who plays for Heart of Midlothian in the Scottish top flight, swooped after the Soccereros were knocked out 2-1, with Argentine talisman Messi scoring a goal in his 1,000th match. "I went on (to the pitch) and consoled all the boys first and then shook Messi's hand,"

Devlin told reporters at Sydney airport after arriving back from Qatar. "No one had said anything so I just tried my luck and he said, 'I'll see you inside,' and that's what happened." Video shared online shows a shirtless Messi handing his jersey to Devlin and embracing the fringe Soccerero. "(I wanted) one of the other boys to have the opportunity first, but no one took it, so I thought why not?" said the 24-year-old Devlin.

"I don't know if (mine) will be on his wall at home or maybe still on the ground in that changing room but I'm not fussed - it's more that I got his...I was surprised he even took mine. "He definitely wouldn't know who I am, but he's a nice enough bloke and a humble enough bloke to still show that respect." Devlin said he would keep Messi's jersey at home and his father was looking after it for him. "I don't think he'll let me touch it anymore," he added. (Reuters)







Spotlight

# Asian teams 'getting closer' despite knockout blows

Australia, Japan and South Korea – three of the six Asian Football Confederation teams – reached the last 16



Japan's players stand together at the start of the penalty shootout during the Qatar 2022 World Cup round of 16 football match against Croatia at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakra on Monday. (AFP)

AFP  
Doha

Asian teams came crashing back down to earth in the World Cup last 16 but the region still enjoyed its best-ever tournament to suggest it is closing the gap on the global elite.

The continent's finest will be back in Qatar for the 2023 Asian Cup and, if the World Cup is anything to go by, it could be the finest yet.

Australia, Japan and South Korea – three of the six Asian Football Confederation teams

at the World Cup – reached the first knockout stage.

It was the first time three AFC sides had got to the last 16, even if South Korea in particular suffered a sobering defeat, going down 4-1 to highly fancied Brazil.

There would be no repeat of 2002, when South Korea reached the semi-finals as co-hosts, still the best World Cup showing by an Asian side.

The Koreans did though defeat Portugal in the group phase in Qatar.

Saudi Arabia, also part of the AFC, pulled off the biggest shock of the tournament in coming

from behind to defeat Lionel Messi's Argentina 2-1 in the group stage. Japan also roared back to stun former champions Spain and Germany and top Group E, before suffering a heartbreaking defeat to 2018 finalists Croatia on penalties.

Speaking ahead of the game, defender Kou Itakura said: "I feel that Asia is getting closer to Europe."

Hajime Moriyasu's side boasts a growing number of players in top European leagues.

Eight of his 26-man World Cup squad play in Germany's Bundesliga and Moriyasu said Japan's success was good for all

of Asia. "In order for Japan to win the World Cup we have been nurturing our young players and trying to create an environment where we can produce good players," said Moriyasu.

"At the same time, the JFA (Japan Football Association) also has a target of contributing to Asian football and has been sending Japanese coaches to many countries in the region to try to improve their level."

He added that the standard of Asian football would have to improve further if teams were to have a chance of becoming world champions.

Expectations had been low in

Australia before the tournament in Qatar, with concerns that the supply line that produced Harry Kewell, Tim Cahill and Mark Viduka is no longer producing such quality players.

The Socceroos proved the doubters wrong by beating Tunisia and Euro 2020 semi-finalists Denmark to reach the last 16, equaling their best World Cup performance.

They then pushed a Messi-inspired Argentina all the way before going down fighting in a 2-1 defeat.

But coach Graham Arnold, concerned about the future of football in Australia, wants more



Australia's defender Harry Souttar (top) heads the ball during the Qatar 2022 World Cup round of 16 football match against Argentina at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan, on Saturday. (AFP)

government investment.

"Asia is throwing a lot of money into football and we need to catch up," he warned.

Arnold, whose future as coach is uncertain, said Asian football was going from strength to strength.

"People can sit back at home and their opinion is maybe Saudi Arabia is not that good, or Japan. Look at what they have done," he said.

It was not all good news for AFC teams.

Qatar will be hosts and hold-

ers at the 2023 Asian Cup, which was moved out of China because of Covid rules, and will need to improve fast if they want to defend their title.

There are no firm dates yet for the tournament but it could be moved to early 2024.

Qatar lost all three games at the World Cup and scored just once, the worst performance in history by a host team.

"You can use statistics how you want but we need to make our own assessments," said coach Felix Sanchez.

Focus

## Japan confident of bright future despite heartbreak

AFP  
Doha

Japan failed to reach the World Cup quarter-finals once again but stunning wins over Germany and Spain and more players moving to Europe suggest the Blue Samurai will return stronger.

Japan were eliminated by Croatia in the last 16 on Monday in Qatar, going out on penalties after a nerve-jangling 1-1 draw with the 2018 finalists.

It was the fourth time Japan had exited at the first knock-out stage and denied them a much-coveted quarter-final debut in their seventh straight World Cup appearance.

But the four-times Asian champions showed that they can compete with the world's best in Qatar, beating both Germany and Spain – two former champions – to point towards brighter times ahead.

Coach Hajime Moriyasu said it was not possible to "turn into Superman overnight" but he believes Japan are on the right path.

"We weren't able to overcome this hurdle of losing in the last 16 and you might say that we didn't achieve anything new," he said.

"But the players have shown us something that we haven't seen before by beating former champions like Germany and Spain."

The number of European-based players in Japan's World Cup squads has steadily increased since they made their tournament debut in 1998



Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu speaks to his players after the round of 16 match against Croatia at the Al Janoub Stadium, Al Wakra, on Monday. (Reuters)

with an entirely domestic-based selection.

Moriyasu picked 19 European-based players in his 26-man squad for Qatar, including eight who ply their trade in Germany's Bundesliga.

Japan had six players in the group stages of this season's Champions League and Daiichi Kamada won last season's Europa League with Eintracht Frankfurt.

Midfielder Wataru Endo, who

captains Stuttgart in the Bundesliga, said he wants to see Japan have enough European-based players "to fill two teams".

"The quality of the Japan players is improving – we have more players at European clubs and that is good experience for us," he said.

"We need to have more players playing with European clubs – we need 20 or 30.

"We are improving but we weren't good enough to get to

the quarter-finals."

### GRASS-ROOTS SUPPORT

Japan's player exodus to Europe has come at the expense of the domestic J-League.

Only seven home-based players were named in Moriyasu's squad and fans of local clubs now find opportunities to watch national team stars few and far between.

Japan defender Yuto Nagatomo, who plays for FC Tokyo,

urged Japanese fans to support their local J-League club for the benefit of the national team.

"Most of the players in the squad came up through the J-League and now they play overseas," said Nagatomo, who returned to FC Tokyo last year after an 11-year stint in Europe.

"There will be a J-League team in most people's local area. We need to support them.

"If we get excited about the J-League it will help the players grow and give them motivation, then they'll go overseas and help the national team."

Japan's next immediate challenge is to win the Asian Cup, which will be held in Qatar, likely in early 2024.

It remains to be seen if Moriyasu will still be in charge, with the Japan Football Association set to decide his fate when the team return home.

Veterans like Nagatomo and captain Maya Yoshida are likely to make way for a younger generation, with emerging stars such as Ritsu Doan and Kaoru Mitoma set to take centre stage.

Goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima, who was named in the squad as a back-up after playing at the previous three World Cups, said Japan's 2022 team was their "best ever" at the tournament.

He backed the young players to take on a leading role and use their heartbreak to make Japan stronger.

"We have a lot of young players and this experience will be massive for the team," said the 39-year-old. "The game is just finished but I want the players, particularly the young players, to lead us forward."

## Players back coach Arnold to continue after best performance

Australia players have endorsed Graham Arnold to continue as coach after the Socceroos' best World Cup performance in Qatar.

Unfancied Australia won two matches for the first time at a World Cup finals before bowing out in the round of 16 against Argentina.

Arnold was contracted through to the end of Australia's Qatar campaign but captain Mat Ryan said he hoped the 59-year-old would remain in charge.

"I think results speak for themselves and he's become the most successful Australian manager ever with the results that he's gotten and he's been riding a real wave of success and momentum," the goalkeeper told reporters after arriving in Sydney.

"Obviously I have faith in the organisation to make that decision and Arnie himself has to be wanting and willing to continue as well.

"For us it would be great if we could continue to have him there with us."

While Football Australia congratulated Arnold on Sunday, the governing body has not commented publicly on the coaching question and said it would undertake a thorough review of the World Cup.

Arnold has said he will consider his options after a "good break", while his agent told Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*



multiple clubs and international federations had shown interest in Arnold's services.

Defender Harry Souttar said the man known simply as 'Arnie' in Australia had an excellent relationship with the players.

"I think the biggest compliment I could pay to him is I think every one of the lads would go out there and run through a brick wall for him he's that type of manager," the Scotland-born centre back said.

"I think he's the best manager I've worked under and he just gets the feeling of the players and as a group of players we all love to play for him." (Reuters)

Star Player

# Unsung Henderson earns respect with crucial role

'WHEN WE WERE PLAYING AGAINST THE USA WE WERE HAVING SOME TACTICAL PROBLEMS THAT HE HELPED TO SOLVE'

AFP  
 Doha

After starting the World Cup in the shadows, Jordan Henderson has emerged as England's unsung hero ahead of their heavy-weight quarter-final clash with France on Saturday.

While England captain Harry Kane and teenage sensation Jude Bellingham are expected to deliver the headline moments against France, Henderson will provide the foundation for his more high-profile team-mates to flourish at the Al Bayt Stadium.

Henderson has been a divisive figure among England fans, who have often preferred to see more glamorous options in the midfield engine room.

But critics of the Liverpool captain's international form have been forced to eat their words over the last two weeks.

Although Henderson was among the substitutes for England's opening two games in Qatar, Three Lions boss Gareth Southgate has turned to the midfielder in a move that continues to pay dividends.

With Declan Rice and Jude Bellingham struggling to impose themselves against the United States in the second Group B match, Southgate felt Henderson's vocal presence and wealth of experience would steady the ship.

The 32-year-old was sent on in the 69th minute and immediately made his pres-

ence felt, cajoling his team-mates to press higher and harder.

Although the United States match ended in a goalless stalemate, Henderson's leadership and work-rate had made enough of an impact to earn a place in the starting line-up for the final group match against Wales.

Henderson's role alongside Rice as twin pivots in front of the England defence gave Bellingham the freedom to express himself as Southgate's men cantered to a 3-0 victory over Wales.

"When we were playing against the USA we were having some tactical problems that he helped to solve. He has had an outstanding influence on the group," Southgate said.

SO UNDER-RATED

It was a similar story in Sunday's 3-0 win against Senegal in last 16 as Bellingham took the spotlight with a masterful performance made possible by Henderson's selfless contribution.

Fittingly, Bellingham returned the favour by providing the assist for Henderson to put England ahead.

The 19-year-old also made a stirring plea for any remaining doubters to give Henderson some long overdue credit.

"A brilliant performance from Jordan. I see some of the rubbish that was said about him playing. It's ridiculous," Bellingham said.

"He's so under-rated technically and he delivered again in a big game with a

massive goal so I think it is about time he got some respect."

Southgate made sure to salute Henderson's assured role in helping England see off Senegal after a nervous start.

"Jude and Hendo, when we were out of possession, they really got us back into the game. Hendo's influence is allowing Jude more freedom positionally and he responded to that remarkably well," Southgate said.

Henderson's next test will be his toughest yet against France.

The world champions have a formidable midfield comprised of Aurelien Tchouameni and Adrien Rabiot, with Antoine Griezmann playing just in front of them.

Stopping the supply line to red-hot France forward Kylian Mbappe is essential if England are to reach the semi-finals and Henderson will shoulder much of that responsibility.

Southgate has no doubt he can rise to the challenge after watching Henderson develop into a Premier League and Champions League winner under Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp.

"With Jordan, this is probably the best version of him we have seen with us," Southgate said.

"He's not renowned for his goals so it's brilliant he scored. He's a forward-thinking midfielder. Sometimes we aren't the quickest to get the ball forward and he's had influence in passing forwards."



England's midfielder Jordan Henderson (left) fights for the ball with Senegal's midfielder Nampalys Mendy during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 match at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha, on Sunday. (AFP)

Spotlight

## Croatia coach Dalic says Brazil Cup squad 'scary'

AFP  
 Doha

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic called Brazil's squad "scary" but says his team are not big underdogs in Friday's quarter-final against the World Cup favourites.

Dalic's side, runners-up at the 2018 World Cup, beat Japan on penalties on Monday to guarantee at least their third best finish at the tournament. The coach said yesterday he was proud of his team for showing the character and mentality to get this far in Qatar, but knows that Brazil will be a whole different proposition.

"Brazil has (over) 200 million people, we only have four million, so we're a bit like the suburb of a city in Brazil," Dalic said. "It will be a different game than against anyone we have played so far because Brazil likes to play football. If we are looking at it realistically, Brazil is the best team at the tournament, they have a great choice of players, a great squad, it's scary, so it's a great test for us."

Dalic said "it doesn't get better" than playing Brazil at a World Cup.

"Maybe we'd rather it was in the final than the quarter-final though," he added.

"We want to give maximum effort - we won't surrender before the game. We want to counter Brazil's quality with our own and we want to play football against them."

Croatia have refreshed their squad in the four years since the last World Cup, with only a handful of veterans remaining, including captain Luka Modric and winger

Ivan Perisic. Dalic said this generation should not be compared to the team beaten by France in the final in Russia because they largely included players sprinkled across elite club sides.

"We have already earned a historic result after getting silver in 2018 and bronze in 1998, this is our third best Croatian result at a World Cup," said Dalic. "I wouldn't draw comparisons to the team from 2018, when you look at our players then, they played for clubs like Barcelona, Inter (Milan), Juventus, Liverpool, Real Madrid of course."

"When you compare it to today, we have six players from the Croatian first division, it's a different team."

"But I take my hat off to this generation, because they are playing great."

Brazil thrashed South Korea 4-1 on Monday with one of the best performances of the tournament so far, but Dalic thinks that his team can fight their corner against the five-time World Cup winners.

"Brazil are favourites, you can tell they have a great atmosphere in the team, they have top world-class players, Neymar is back from injury," added Dalic.

"We have to be very smart in our approach. We can't open up too much against Brazil, but we also can't sit back."

"It's not 50-50, but we are not some big underdogs."



Croatia's coach Zlatko Dalic (centre) celebrates with players and staff members winning after penalty shoot-outs at the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 match against Japan at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakra, south of Doha, on Monday. (AFP)

Focus

## Doha named to host ITTF Worlds 2025

www.ittf.com  
 Amman, Jordan

The 2025 ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals is set to be staged in Doha, Qatar, following a vote from Member Associations yesterday at the Annual General Meeting, during the ITTF summit in Amman, Jordan.

Doha won 57 votes against 39 for the other candidate city, Alicante, Spain.

Doha is located on the country's eastern coast and is a destination city for tourists and major sporting events alike.

Yesterday's announcement continues Doha's longstanding association as one of the most established cities in global table tennis.

Having been hotspot for major events for almost three decades, the Qatari capital has recently proved itself a key location and launchpad for a new era in table tennis.

The WTT Middle East Hub in 2021 marked the first official events of World Table Tennis, successfully holding back-to-back Contender and Star Contender events in March last year. Qatar's commitment to staging premium blockbuster events



guarantees more historic memories will be made when the World Championships Finals lands in Doha in 2025.

The last World Championships Finals were staged in Houston, USA in 2021 and was broadcasted in more than 200 territories to over 500 million fans.

As momentum builds on the global table tennis calendar, all eyes will be on Doha to host an event that continues ITTF's mission to stage entertainment driven events while maintaining the tradition and history of the championships for both players and fans.

Doha will mark the 59th edition of the World Championships.

Meanwhile three days of meetings concluded in Amman, Jordan, the International Table Tennis Federation is celebrating a successful inaugural ITTF Summit by confirming the event will return in 2023.

"I want to thank our Jordanian Hosts for such an amazing Summit, there is so much to take away from our discussions and I cannot wait to implement many of the ideas discussed," Petra Sorling, ITTF President, said.

"I cannot wait for this event to return in 2023; we will fine-tune our programme to have even more interactions with our Member Associations."

Bottom Line

## 2026 World Cup host countries may look to South America for competition

AFP  
 New York

North America's trio of 2026 World Cup hosts are being urged to head south to play in the next Copa America in a bid to improve on disappointing results in Qatar.

The United States, Mexico and Canada will jointly host the next World Cup in less than four years and as co-hosts they will qualify automatically for the expanded 48-team tournament, leaving plenty of space in their schedule and a shortage of competitive games with no qualifi-

ing cycle. The United States were the only team from CONCACAF to make it out of the group stage and they lost their round of 16 match against the Netherlands 3-1.

Canada, playing in their first World Cup since 1986, lost all three of their matches in Qatar while Mexico ended a run of seven straight World Cups where they reached the knockout stage, prompting a major inquest in the country. Central Americans Costa Rica, CONCACAF's other representative in Qatar, finished bottom of their group.

While the need for improvement is evident, finding games against top international opposition has become more difficult since the drastic

reduction in European friendly match opportunities that has accompanied the creation of the UEFA Nations League.

CONCACAF will hold the finals of its own Nations League competition in June next year, followed by the biennial 16-team Gold Cup but in those competitions the toughest opponents the 2026 hosts will face is likely to be each other.

Former United States international striker Taylor Twellman, now a leading television analyst with ESPN, said that the trio needed to spread their wings and take on South America's top teams.

"In order for CONCACAF to compete at the highest of levels at the World Cup they have

to find better competition. The UEFA Nations League killed the friendly circuit for the United States, Canada and Mexico. I'd love to see them compete in Copa America and having done so myself it's such a tougher spot to play than the Gold Cup," he said.

Mexico goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa, who has featured in the last five World Cups, has made a similar call and also suggested his country might also want to feature in the Asian Cup. "We can't just play friendlies in the US," he said.

Such moves would require the agreement of CONCACAF, which governs North and Central America and the Caribbean and would also need to be signed off by FIFA. CONCACAF declined

to comment. The next Copa America is scheduled for 2024 although no venue has yet been set after Ecuador declined their turn to host.

Unlike the European Championships which is strictly for UEFA member nations, the Copa America has in the past involved nine different 'invited' countries from outside of CONMEBOL. Mexico has taken part on nine occasions and the United States three times but Canada has yet to feature.

A more ambitious plan could be for a repeat of the special centenary edition of the tournament, held in the United States in 2016, which featured six CONCACAF teams alongside all ten CONMEBOL nations.



Match Report

# Portugal reach quarters with 6-1 demolition of Switzerland



Portugal's forward Goncalo Ramos celebrates scoring his team's fifth goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Round of 16 match against Switzerland at Lusail Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

Portugal's Ramos nets first hat-trick of Qatar 2022, becomes youngest player to strike three times in a WC knockout match since Pele in 1958



Portugal's Goncalo Ramos scores their third goal during the Qatar 2022 Round of 16 match against Switzerland at Lusail Stadium in Lusail yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP  
Doha

**G**oncalo Ramos justified the shock decision to drop Cristiano Ronaldo by scoring a hat-trick on his full debut as Portugal demolished Switzerland 6-1 yesterday to power into the World Cup quarter-finals.

The 21-year-old Ramos, who started instead of Ronaldo, became the youngest player to strike three times in a World Cup knockout match since Pele in 1958.

Pepe, Raphael Guerreiro and Rafael Leao were also on target for a rampant Portugal, who booked a showdown with Morocco on Saturday for a place in the last four in Qatar.

Ronaldo, 37 and now without a club after his departure from Manchester United, has hogged the headlines during the tournament while looking a shadow of his former self.

The only man to score at five World Cups, Ronaldo was left out by coach Fernando Santos against the Swiss following his angry response to being substituted in the last group game.

It was a bold call to omit a player with a record 118 international goals in favour of giving a full debut to Ramos, the Benfica striker who had played just 33 minutes across three previous appearances.

But it took just 17 minutes for Ramos to reward Santos' faith, and to achieve something Ronaldo has never done - score in a World Cup knockout game.

Joao Felix clipped delicately into the feet of Ramos, who quickly swivelled past Fabian Schaer and rifled into the roof of the net past a stunned



**Match Stats**

PORTUGAL	6	1	SWITZERLAND
14	Shots	10	
9	Shots on Target	3	
11	Chances Created	6	
6	Corners	6	
1	Saves	3	
47.8%	Possession	52.2%	
3	Offsides	3	
12	Fouls	10	
0	Yellow Cards	2	
0	Red Cards	0	

Portugal's Pepe (left) with Cristiano Ronaldo during the Qatar 2022 Round of 16 match against Switzerland at Lusail Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

Yann Sommer.

Otavio, who returned to the Portugal midfield after injury in their opening match, shot straight at Sommer before Ramos did likewise moments later.

Xherdan Shaqiri drew a fingertip stop from Diogo Costa with a dipping free-kick from distance, but Portu-

gal soon had their second.

Bruno Fernandes whipped in a corner and the 39-year-old Pepe towered above the Swiss defence to powerfully head home.

Diogo Dalot hacked Remo Freuler's header off the line after Diogo Costa failed to properly deal with a cross, but the Swiss simply had no answers

against an irresistible Portugal.

Ramos turned in his second from close range six minutes into the second half from Dalot's cross down the right.

He then turned provider by playing in Guerreiro to lash in another just four minutes later as the Swiss defence was ruthlessly ripped apart.

It was also Ramos who inadvertently glanced a corner towards Manuel Akanji at the far post as the Manchester City centre-back pulled one back for Switzerland.

Ramos completed his treble after more outstanding work from Felix, nonchalantly dinking over Sommer with one of his final touches before making way for Ronaldo.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner's introduction elicited the biggest roar of the night. Ronaldo did have the ball in the back of the net but it was ruled out for a clear offside.

Leao capped off a sensational Portugal performance with a terrific curling strike in stoppage time.

Spotlight

## 'Arab teams can be proud of their performances at Qatar 2022'

**W**ith the exciting knockout rounds underway, football legends from the Arab world have praised the success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 so far.

Former Oman goalkeeper Ali al-Habsi and former Egypt centre-back Wael Gomaa see the tournament - which will culminate with the final at Lusail Stadium on 18 December - as an historic milestone for the Middle East and Arab world.

"Seeing fans from across the globe here in Qatar will go a long way towards breaking down barriers between the region and the rest of the world," said Gomaa, who led Egypt to three African Cup of Nations titles.

"Qatar 2022 has proved to the world that we are capable of organising world-class events while showcasing our culture and tradi-

tions," added Gomaa, who is a Qatar Legacy Ambassador.

Qatar 2022 is the first mega-event to be held in the region. Matches are being played at eight state-of-the-art stadiums, with the longest distance between venues just 75km. Thanks to the compact nature of the tournament, fans have been attending more than one match a day and players have had the luxury of staying in one accommodation for the duration of the competition.

"For the first time in a modern World Cup, fans have been attending two, three or even four matches a day. This has created an unbelievable atmosphere all across the country - a melting pot of cultures and football traditions," said al-Habsi, who enjoyed a stellar career in Europe with the likes of Bolton Wanderers, Wigan Athletic and Reading.

"It's been fantastic for the play-

ers, who have stayed in one accommodation and enjoyed plenty of rest between matches. We have seen the effect this has had on the football, with the tournament delivering so many exciting matches and quite a few upsets," added al-Habsi, who is also a Qatar Legacy Ambassador.

"Having the World Cup in the middle of the domestic season for most players has meant them coming into the event at peak fitness levels. It has helped us to see some very competitive fixtures, which has been a delight for fans and players alike," said Gomaa.

Al-Habsi also praised the impact of Arab nations at the competition. Hosts Qatar made their debut in the tournament, while Saudi Arabia produced a major upset by defeating Lionel Messi's

Argentina in their opening group game. Tunisia beat defending champions France while Morocco topped a difficult group to make it through to the last 16 and defeated former champions Spain to enter quarter-finals yesterday.

"The performances we have seen from Arab teams have been remarkable and testament to the strength of the sport in the region. We are all hoping Morocco can continue to fly the flag for the Arab world in the knockout rounds," said al-Habsi, who was the first Arab player to win the English FA Cup.

He added: "Even though Qatar exited at the group stage, this experience will undoubtedly be a turning point for the growth of the national team. The future is bright for Qatar and all the teams in the region, who will be motivated by this remarkable World Cup to qualify for future tournaments." qatar2022.qa

