

From Rocafonda to the World Cup: Lamine Yamal's meteoric rise

Spanish teenage prodigy prepares for a historic debut on the world stage

● **Rocafonda celebrates local hero**

● **Barcelona spotted talent early**

● **Euro 2024 elevated global profile**

AFP | Mataró

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo will play at a record sixth World Cup in 2026, but years from now the tournament may instead be remembered as Lamine Yamal's first.

From the concrete square in Mataró the Spanish 18-year-old used to play in, to the biggest stages in world football, his rise has been dazzling.

His uncle Abdul Nasraoui used to keep a small replica World Cup trophy in his bakery in the humble neighbourhood of Rocafonda, a 20-mile (32-kilometre) crawl up the Catalan coast from Barcelona, telling people it was for when his nephew wins it.

Abdul had the trophy before Yamal even debuted for Spain, because he knew something special was coming. Many claim they did, in Rocafonda, but importantly for Barca it was Jordi Roura who got there first.

Alerted to Yamal by a scout, Barcelona's then youth football chief Roura and close colleague Aureli Altimira pounced. In the chaos of a trial match, Lamine stood out.

"We were there with Aureli and at the beginning we saw him and he looked a bit odd, kind of scrawny, he moved a bit strangely, and we said, 'hmm let's see...'" Roura tells AFP.

15 years old was Lamine Yamal's age when he made his professional debut, beginning one of football's most remarkable rises

"Then once they start playing, it's difficult, right? Because imagine 20 kids of seven, eight years old, all chasing the ball.

"Even so, Lamine would sometimes do something where you'd go, 'Damn!'. Instead of just running after the ball, sometimes he would find space, wait, look for his left foot, execute really quickly."

One attribute, honed on the square where if your feet aren't fast enough to swerve defenders you can end up on the concrete, marked out little Lamine.

"Dribbling might be the most innate technical action, right?" says Roura. "It's hard to train a dribbler. He had that. He would feint, do things which made you say 'wow'.

"We thought this kid had something special, even if he looked a bit slight, and decided to sign him."

Negotiations were quick with Lamine's father Mounir Nasraoui from Morocco,

and his mother Sheila Ebana, from Equatorial Guinea.

He was a quiet, even shy child, who loved to play football and spent a lot of time with his paternal grandmother, Fatima.

She was the first of the family to move to

Spain, arriving on a ferry from Tangier in 1990 and slowly bringing across her children in the following years.

Fatima settled in Rocafonda and remains there, although Mounir, after being stabbed during an altercation in 2024, has since relocated to the upmarket Barcelona neighbourhood of Sarria.

After Lamine's parents split up when he was three, he also lived with his mother in Roca del Valles, north of Mataró, but Rocafonda was always home.

It is represented in his goal celebration, using his hands to show the numbers 304, the last digits of the neighbourhood's postcode.

Now even in the more well-to-do parts of Mataró the number appears. Rocafonda is north-east of the elegant centre, a neighbourhood with a negative reputation for crime and poverty,

although now it is famous for being where Lamine came from.

Lamine Yamal

Glance down the right street and you can catch a narrow glimpse of sweet Mediterranean blue.

The winger and his father are spotted less frequently there now, but the games go on, with players duking it out in front of a mural of Lamine, painted in 2025.

"With all these great players... they're capable of doing the same, or more than they did when they were children, and that's very difficult, very rare, and that's why they're the chosen ones," said Roura.

"(Lamine) enjoys playing, and I think that even when he was very little, when the challenge was harder, when a game was harder, that's when he liked it the most, you know?"

'No limits'

Not everyone has the accuracy of the neighbourhood's "idol" and an "example" as youngsters sitting and waiting for a chance to play describe him.

The ball is lashed high over the fence that divides the concrete pitch from the road, to howls of frustration.

The kids call to a passer-by, before one player zips past on an electric scooter to retrieve it.

But for the interception, it may have rolled down the road and past the bar run by Lamine's uncle, 'Familia LY 304', since he gave up his bakery.

Over the past three years Abdul has answered plenty of questions about Lamine, but with concerns over the winger's fitness heading into the World Cup, he doesn't feel like speaking for now.

On a shelf behind the bar, sits his replica trophy. Abdul's dream, just three years after Lamine made his professional

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Lamine Yamal honors his roots by flashing the number 304 during goal celebrations, representing the last digits of the postcode for Rocafonda, the humble neighbourhood where he grew up playing street football

debut aged just 15, could come true remarkably quickly.

"When you see the resume he already has at 18, it's scary, so what this kid can achieve has no limits," added Roura.

Yamal was still studying for his exams during Spain's run to Euro 2024 glory, where he captured the world's attention with a sensational strike against France.

That moment is memorialised on one wall of the bar, along with others from the winger's short yet glittering career for club and country, along with two framed shirts.

Nearly three decades after arriving from Morocco, Abdul is still happy working. He sits and eats a few mouthfuls of vegetables before a shout comes from the kitchen and he is on his feet again, bringing dishes, olive oil and bread to customers.

"Ojala -- I hope -- ojala," he says on the prospect of Lamine bringing the real thing back to Rocafonda. "If we win the World Cup, then I'll talk."

NBA star Curry signs 10-year deal with China's Li-Ning



Stephen Curry reacts during a game (file photo)

AFP | San Francisco

Four-time NBA champion Stephen Curry ended his sneaker free agency on Monday, announcing a 10-year deal with Chinese company Li-Ning after leaving Under Armour last November.

Curry, 38, revealed the deal on social media and called it "the partnership of a lifetime" that will include global expansion of his Curry Brand, basketball products, a golf line, leisure clothing and the ability to sign other athletes to his

brand.

"This is bigger than a show deal, bigger than a signature series," Curry said in a video, saying Li-Ning will deliver "sneakers that I believe in that will continue to deliver at the highest level."

Other Li-Ning athletes with their shoes include Dwyane Wade and Jimmy Butler, Curry's Golden State Warriors teammate. Curry had been a partner with Under Armour for 13 years before the split and had worn various brands through the NBA season.

BRAVE Hearts initiative and 3DB events join forces to strengthen business communities through strategic collaboration

Manama

BRAVE Combat Federation™ (BRAVE CF), the world's fastest-growing and most global mixed martial arts organization, proudly announces that BRAVE Hearts has officially signed a strategic partnership agreement with 3DB Events, marking a significant milestone in its mission to deliver tangible relief and high-quality event experiences to the business community.

The agreement was formally signed by Matt Dale, General Manager of 3DB Events, and Jabran Zakariya, Director of BRAVE Hearts, reinforcing a shared commitment to empowering organizations through meaningful collaboration and practical support.

Jabran Zakariya, Director of BRAVE Hearts, stated: "Partnerships such as this are essential to expanding the impact of BRAVE Hearts. By bringing together complementary expertise and a shared vision, we can provide stronger support systems for businesses and communities seeking growth, stability, and opportunity."

Under this new alliance, 3DB



Events aligns with the Initiative's core pillars: Empowerment, Resilience, and Community. Created to address critical corporate challenges with real and actionable solutions, the initiative provides specialized assistance across four essential areas: Technology, Marketing, Finance, and Business Development.

Through this collaboration, BRAVE Hearts will further strengthen its ability to deliver outstanding technical event production and ensure operational

continuity, helping organizations navigate challenges with greater confidence and stability. By combining expertise and resources, both organizations aim to create lasting value for businesses while encouraging a culture rooted in compassion, innovation, and sustainable economic progress.

Established in 2003 and headquartered in Dubai, 3DB Events is a premier technical event production company operating throughout the GCC region. Serving as the crucial

bridge between traditional event agencies and technical production houses, the company delivers comprehensive 360-degree solutions tailored to a wide range of requirements.

Its expertise includes world-class audio-visual services, immersive experience design, creative staging, and meticulous technical management that ensure seamless event execution.

On the other hand, BRAVE Hearts remains dedicated to fostering empowerment, resilience, and community by connecting pressing corporate needs with practical assistance. Through its focus on Technology, Marketing, Finance, and Business Development, the initiative continues to help organizations overcome challenges, unlock opportunities, and build stronger foundations for long-term success.

Together, BRAVE Hearts and 3DB Events are setting a new benchmark for purpose-driven collaboration, demonstrating how strategic partnerships can create meaningful impact while supporting business continuity, growth, and collective prosperity.