



Messi's Argentina stun England in comeback to reach World Cup final

Lautaro Martinez scored a 92nd minute winner as Lionel Messi inspired World Cup holders Argentina to a stunning comeback, beating England 2-1 and setting up a final with European champions Spain.

England had been on course to reach their first World Cup final since 1966 after Anthony Gordon fired them into the lead 10 minutes after half-time in the semi-final in front of 68,239 fans in Atlanta.

But the great rivalry between these nations has produced several memorable contests on the World Cup stage over the years and this will be remembered as the stuff of legends in Argentina as the South Americans denied England with two late sucker punches.

Messi set up Enzo Fernandez to fire in an 85th-minute equaliser and then, with extra time looming, crossed for substitute Lautaro Martinez to head in the winner in the second minute of stoppage time.

It was perhaps not quite up there with Diego Maradona's legendary display in putting England to the sword in 1986, but the goals this time brought Argentina back from the dead and kept alive their hopes of winning back-to-back World Cups.

No team has retained the tro-



England's forward #09 Harry Kane and teammates greet fans after losing the semi-final match

phy since Brazil in 1962, and now Messi will become just the second player after Brazilian great Cafu to appear in three World Cup finals.

The game will take place at the MetLife Stadium on Sunday in New Jersey, as the first 48-team World Cup boils down to a confrontation between the reigning champions of Europe and South America.

Messi had waited until the age of 39 to get the

chance to play against England, and now he will face Spain for the first time in a competitive game.

His career appeared to be complete when he dragged Argentina to glory in 2022 in Qatar, but he is

clearly not done yet.

England, though, will have huge regrets as they head to Miami to play France in Saturday's third-place play-off, a game neither team will want to contest.

The prospect of a first World Cup final appearance since their sole triumph 60 years ago was a momentous one, and they were so close, but will live to re-

gret sitting back after Gordon's opener.

The key men for Thomas Tuchel's side during this campaign—Jude Bellingham and captain Harry Kane—failed to deliver on this occasion, and England's players slumped to the turf at full time.

Lautaro winner

Given the deep-rooted rivalry between these nations, this was always likely to be a game with an edge and there was a tangible feeling of tension in the Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Argentina's players were clearly fired up, partly by a determination to hold onto their World Cup crown but also by a sense of what this fixture means.

Argentina's midfielder #24 Enzo Fernandez celebrates scoring his team's first goal

That translated into a niggly contest pockmarked by fouls in the first half, including Elliott Anderson being booked for scything down Messi.

There were no real chances to speak of in the first half, but England struck in the 55th minute.

Kane was involved in the build-up as the ball eventually came to Morgan Rogers on the right, and he whipped in a low cross towards the back post where Gordon stole in front of Nahuel Molina to score.

But this was the stadium where Argentina produced a stunning comeback from 2-0 down to beat Egypt in the last 16, and they were not done.

They threw everything at their opponents, as Jordan Pickford made a great save from a Nico Gonzalez header, and Alexis Mac Allister was then denied by the post in the 76th minute.

Fernandez was denied from range by Pickford, but moments later he equalised, controlling a Messi pass on the edge of the area and letting fly past the goalkeeper.

Argentina smelled blood, and Mac Allister again hit the post before England failed to clear and Lautaro Martinez headed in the winner from an exquisite Messi cross to spark chaotic scenes of celebration and leave England completely deflated.

'Immense disappointment': Mbappe rues end of dream

Kylian Mbappe rued the end of France's World Cup dream, blaming tactical and technical blunders for his side's defeat.

Mbappe had emerged as one of the stars of the tournament during France's run to the last four, rattling in eight goals at the tip of a free-scoring attack that delighted fans worldwide.

But the 27-year-old French captain's dreams of a third straight World Cup final appearance ended abruptly as Spain outplayed Les Bleus.

Mbappe told French broadcaster M6 that the loss had been a "huge disappointment" for the French squad.

"I don't think we played the match we wanted to play -- whether tactically, technically, or in terms of our overall performance level," Mbappe said.

"And when you don't do what you're supposed to do in a World Cup semi-final,

Kylian Mbappe



you don't win," the Real Madrid star added.

"Our goal was to press them high up the pitch to prevent them from settling into that slow, controlled rhythm -- because when it comes to controlling the game, they are better than us. We failed to do that."

Mbappe pinpointed the crux of the problem in midfield, where France's duo of Adrien Rabiot and Aurelien Tchouameni rapidly found themselves over-run by Spain's triumvirate of Rodri, Dani Olmo and Fabian Ruiz.

"We kept finding ourselves outnumbered 3-on-2 in midfield," Mbappe said. "And against Spain, that's a real problem... When you put it all together, the result is a defeat. It's a huge disappointment."

Waerenskjold wins fastest ever Tour de France stage

AFP | Nevers

Norwegian Soren Waerenskjold launched a long-range sprint to claim victory at the Tour de France yesterday in the fastest stage in the race's history.

Dutchman Olav Kooij took second ahead of Belgian Jasper Philipsen at the end of the 161km 11th stage from Vichy to Nevers.

At an average speed of 50.91kph, it was the fastest ever road stage in the 113 editions of the Tour.

Once again, there was a fairly disjointed sprint finish with none of the teams able to organise a sprint train to set up their fast man.

Kooij's lead-out rider Cees Bol launched off the front as the main sprinters hesitated, but Waerenskjold was the first to chase after the Dutchman.

He instantly put several bike lengths of daylight between himself and the rest and although both Kooij and Philipsen caught him by the line, they did not have enough strength to edge past Waerenskjold.

It was the second Tour stage



Uno-X Mobility team's Norwegian rider Soren Waerenskjold cycles to the finish line to win the 11th stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race

victory for the Norwegian Uno-X Mobility team, which is in its first year as a World Tour outfit, after Jonas Abrahamson succeeded once last year.

The team also held the yellow jersey for two stages this year with Torstein Traaen before he crashed out with a concussion

and broken ribs.

Reigning champion Tadej Pogacar finished safely in the pack to retain his overall lead of more than three and a half minutes to two-time former winner Jonas Vingegaard.

Spain's Porro says 'dream come true' to reach World Cup final

AFP | Arlington

Pedro Porro, who scored Spain's second goal in the 2-0 defeat of favourites France on Tuesday, said reaching the World Cup final was "a dream come true".

"(I am) very happy with the team's attitude from start to finish. I think we played a great match, we did everything we had to do today to reach the final," said the Tottenham defender.

"It's a dream come true... We knew (France) was a very, very tough team, one that had been doing things really well, and honestly, this is the team's achievement, not mine at all," he added.

The 26-year-old said Spain had played a "fantastic match" to beat the two-time world champions.



Pedro Porro

Chairperson & Managing Director **P Unnikrishnan** | Editor-in-Chief **Mahmood Al Mahmood**

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