

'All the way': Egypt dare to dream after gritty Belgium draw

AFP | Cairo

When Egypt took the lead against Belgium in their opening World Cup match on Monday, decades of doubt gave way to belief for 62-year-old Bahgat Abbas.

Standing beneath the historic arcades near the Basilica in Cairo's eastern Heliopolis district, Abbas leapt with the crowd as cups rattled across tables and the roar from television screens spilled into the street.

"I remember watching Egypt in 1990," Abbas told AFP, waving an Egyptian flag as car horns blared around him.

"Back then, just being at the World Cup felt special. Tonight feels different. Tonight feels like we can actually achieve something."

Egypt were ultimately held to a 1-1 draw by one of Europe's most respected footballing nations, but the performance lifted spirits across the country and renewed belief that a near-century wait for a World Cup breakthrough may finally be within reach.

Much of that hope has centred on Mohamed Salah, Egypt's tal-



A popular Egyptian World Cup commercial features Mohamed Salah enduring pharaoh-themed dad jokes from a local comedian, who quips that Egypt will play so well foreigners will ask, "What Isis?"

isman who turned 34 on Monday and may be playing his final World Cup.

"When we scored, I thought maybe this was finally our night," Abbas said, smiling. "Maybe next time. We've got a good team around Salah."

Seven-time Africa Cup of Nations champions Egypt have never won a World Cup game.

This is their fourth appearance at the tournament and, with Group G fixtures still to



Emam Ashour #8 of Egypt celebrates with teammates after scoring

come against Iran and New Zealand, they will hope to break that hoodoo in North America.

'We'll go all the way'

At the final whistle, there was little sign of disappointment.

In Cairo's densely populated

Sharabiya district, Taha Omar said it was the first time at a World Cup he had seen Egypt do more than "just defend".

"We played positively, against a team like Belgium, with big-name players."

During the match, heads

snapped towards the screen with every Egyptian break, hands lifting, then dropping with groans or applause. Each tackle drew claps, each near-miss a sharp intake of breath.

For Egyptian fans, the World Cup has long represented both

hope and frustration.

Egypt were the first African and Arab nation to appear at the tournament in 1934, but exited early.

It then took 56 years to return, leaving Italy 1990 without a win. Their most recent appearance, in Russia in 2018, ended with three group-stage defeats.

Many fans arrived at this tournament carrying familiar fears.

Yet in the weeks leading up to the opening match, television screens were filled with advertisements urging supporters to dream bigger.

One of the most widely shared commercials featured Salah on a video call with a comedian firing off pharaoh-themed dad jokes.

In one scene, he quips that Egypt should play so well foreigners will ask: "What Isis?" -- a reference to the ancient Egyptian goddess.

Another campaign showed Egypt players predicting a run beyond the group stage under the slogan: "To all the doubters, this time we'll go all the way."

In Sharabiya, fans held on to that optimism.

"We'll keep going until the end," Mohamed El-Gendy said.

Tunisia replace coach Lamouchi with Renard after one World Cup game

AFP | Los Angeles

Tunisia have responded to their 5-1 World Cup thrashing by Sweden by sacking coach Sabri Lamouchi and replacing him with Frenchman Herve Renard, the federation announced on national TV on Monday.

Lamouchi is the first coach in World Cup history to be sacked after just one game.

Renard guided Saudi Arabia



Sabri Lamouchi

to a shock win against eventual winners Argentina at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and has since coached the France women's team.

"The president of the Tunisian Football Federation, Moez Nassari, announced that an official agreement had been reached with French coach Herve Renard for him to take charge of the national football team until the end of the 2026 World Cup," the Tunisian public

broadcaster announced.

Lamouchi, 54, had only been in charge since January.

The former French international player won just one of his five games in charge, a 1-0 victory over Haiti.

The heavy defeat by Sweden on Sunday leaves Tunisia with a tough task to reach the knockout round.

They face Japan in their next Group F match on Saturday before taking on the Netherlands.

No panic, says De la Fuente after Spain held by Cape Verde



Spain coach Luis de la Fuente looks on

AFP | Atlanta

Spain boss Luis de la Fuente said he is still convinced La Roja will go far at the World Cup despite failing to break down debutants Cape Verde in a 0-0 draw to open their tournament.

The European champions badly missed the spark of Lamine Yamal, who was deemed only fit enough for a second-half cameo on his return from injury, as they struggled to even create chances against a side ranked 67th in the world.

"We are completely calm, convinced that there is a long way to go. As we see it, we have seven games left," said De la Fuente.

"We lacked freshness and precision."

Spain are now 32 competitive games unbeaten, stretching back to March 2023.

But the lacklustre nature of the performance brought back painful memories of their meek exits to Russia and Mo-

rocco on penalties at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups when they dominated possession but failed to score.

"Tomorrow I'll bring up that magic number," added De la Fuente of his side's long unbeaten run.

"We have to stick to our philosophy and get key players back that will play a crucial role as the tournament progresses."

Yamal's introduction immediately injected life into the Spain attack and lifted the majority of the nearly 70,000 crowd who were desperate to see the Barcelona superstar.

Yet, even he was snuffed out as Cape Verde doubled and at times even trebled up on the 18-year-old.

After an injury-plagued season at Athletic Bilbao, Nico Williams was also kept in reserve until the 87th minute.

"They are two game-changing players, but the ones we've had on the pitch are too. They bring different qualities to the table," said De la Fuente.

Bahrain Special Olympics Team Heads to Tunisia

The Bahrain Special Olympics delegation departs today for Sousse, Tunisia, where it will compete in the triathlon event at the Regional Beach Games, part of the 10th Special Olympics Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Games.

The Games adopt a new, innovative year-long format hosted across five countries, with competitions staged in multiple cities rather than a single centralized event. The 2026 edition features 19 sports spanning beach, athletics, racket, team, and performance disciplines, aiming to strengthen inclusion, sustainability, and competitive opportunities throughout the region.

The sports included in the 10th MENA Regional Games are: beach volleyball, open water swimming, and triathlon; athletics, cycling, swimming, and MATP (Motor Activity Training



The Kingdom's representatives at the Regional Beach Games

Program); table tennis, tennis, badminton, and golf; football, basketball, volleyball, and bocce; as well as equestrian, powerlifting, artistic gymnastics, and rhythmic gymnastics.

The Bahrain delegation is led

by Special Olympics Bahrain Sports Director Redha Sabt, with coach Mubarak Mohammed serving as part of the technical staff. The athlete lineup includes Mahmood Mohsen and Sayed Ali Hussein, along

with unified partner athlete Al Baraa Mohammed, all of whom will compete in the triathlon event.

In addition, Hussain Al Maadoob will serve on the championship's technical committee.