



France's national football team players celebrate on the roof of a bus as they parade down the Champs-Elysee avenue in Paris.

# Party begins in Paris

AFP | Paris, France

The World Cup-winning French team returned home to a heroes' welcome yesterday as hundreds of thousands packed the Champs Elysees for their victory parade ahead of a presidential reception in the evening.

France overcame a determined Croatia team to win 4-2 in Sunday's final, with teenager Kylian Mbappe applying the coup de grace and cementing his place as a new global superstar at the age of just 19.

Millions of fans in France celebrated into the night, honking car horns and flying the tricolour flag while the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe were lit up in the national colours of blue, white and red.

Crowds began converging early Monday on the Champs Elysees, the gathering point for all national celebrations, for a parade by the team atop an electric bus expected to start in the early evening.

"We're so proud of this team, they have truly become our players," said Priscilla Lagneaux, 28, who was waiting



France's fans greet France's national football team players as they celebrate on the roof of a bus

with friends under a wilting sun on the avenue. "We had to see them, and also the Cup."

The players arrived to a raucous welcome at Charles De Gaulle airport northeast of Paris, including a "water salute" by the fire brigade which sprayed arcs of water over the Air France jet as it taxied to the gate.

Captain Hugo Lloris, flanked by coach Didier Deschamps, was the first to emerge from the aircraft, raising the famed golden trophy before heading down the stairs and onto a freshly laid red carpet.

After the parade France's newest idols will be welcomed at the Elysee Palace by Emmanuel Macron, whose office has already promised the Legion of Honour for the victors' "exceptional services" to the country.

## 'Champions of the world' -

In Paris, the metro system temporarily renamed six of its stations in honour of the key players, with the Victor Hugo stop -- named after the famed 19th-century writer -- becoming Victor Hugo Lloris after the team's goalkeeper.

Two stations were rebaptised in tribute to Deschamps, who captained the national side to its first World Cup victory, won on home soil in 1998.

Alongside Mario Zagallo and Franz Beckenbauer, he has become only the third man to win the World Cup both as a player and coach.

The team will have a private meeting with Macron and his wife Brigitte, and then they will enter the palace's gardens where Macron is expected to make a speech.

Afterwards guests will be treated to the beats of DJ Snake, who has worked with pop stars including Lady Gaga and is part of the Pardon My French collective of French DJs.

Macron had already celebrated with the team on Sunday -- even doing "dab" dance moves with players in a video that has gone viral -- after attending the final in Moscow.

Some analysts believe the 40-year-old centrist will benefit from the feel-good factor sweeping France, with Macron able to show a common touch after months of criticism from his opponents that he is distant and elitist.

## 'Bravo Vatreni': Croatians give heroes' welcome to WC squad

AFP | Zagreb, Croatia

Tens of thousands of Croatians gave a heroes' welcome to their team in Zagreb yesterday after the squad returned from Russia following their World Cup final defeat.

A crowd estimated at more than 100,000 thronged the capital's main square to see the players, led by captain and World Cup Golden Ball winner Luka Modric, parade through the streets on an open-top bus.

Cheering fans, many waving flags and wearing the famous red and white shirt of Croatia, held up banners celebrating the runners-up after their gallant 4-2 defeat by France.

"This is how Croatia is loved," read one banner. Another said: "We are few, but we believed and that is enough".

Many even skipped work to



**Croatia was unbeaten in the FIFA World Cup 2018 before the final against France**



Croatian national football team members step out from their Airbus 319 airplane in Zagreb International Airport

celebrate the team reaching their first ever World Cup final.

"I closed my office to welcome our heroes. I put a sign up reading 'Today, July 16, 2018', office closed due to our Vatreni ('the Fiery Ones' in Croatian)," doctor Sanja Klajic told AFP.

Earlier noisy fans awaited their side's appearance by singing a popular song "Play on my Croatia, when I see you my heart is on fire!" while watching the plane carrying the team progress to the capital on a giant TV screen. When the plane, accompanied by military jets and emblazoned with the logo "Bravo Vatreni" (good fire) flew overhead the crowd cheered and chanted "Hands up, hands up!"