

Superb Spain **worthy** winners

La Roja combine resilience and teamwork to secure a second World Cup triumph

● Spain concede only one tournament goal

● Rodri named player of the tournament

● Yamal contributes despite struggles

AFP | East Rutherford

It was a World Cup in which football's biggest names sprinkled stardust over the tournament, yet in the end the trophy deservedly went to a formidable if unspectacular Spain side who were simply too strong, even without Lamine Yamal being at his thrilling best.

The 19-year-old winger was the focus of so much attention, but he initially struggled to find full fitness and finished with just one goal, in a

group-stage win over Saudi Arabia.

This World Cup, the first to feature 48 teams, had an average of 2.96 goals per game, making it the most prolific since 1970.

Spain scored only 14 times in eight games, but they take the trophy home after silencing Lionel Messi and defeating a disappointing Argentina 1-0 at the end of extra time at the MetLife Stadium.

La Roja completely outplayed the defending champions, but needed a Ferran Torres goal in the 106th minute to become world champions for the second time.

The key to their success was a remarkable defence which conceded only once in the whole competition, against Belgium in the

quarter-finals.

Protecting that defence as brilliantly as ever was the captain Rodri, and it was telling that he was named player of the tournament rather than Messi, Kylian Mbappe or any of the other attacking superstars on display.

There were echoes of 2010 in South Africa, when Spain won their first World Cup with a fantastic side whose success was also built around a watertight back line.

"When you don't concede I think it is much easier to win," said Marc Cucurella, the floppy-haired full-back who recently signed for Real Madrid from Chelsea.

"We attack together and defend together, and that is one of the

key things about this team."

Rodri outshines Messi

Messi and Argentina did not muster a single shot on target as their attempts to become the first team to successfully defend the World Cup since 1962 fell flat.

In the semi-finals, Spain had also shut out France's remarkable attack, including Mbappe who still ended the tournament as the top scorer with 10 goals.

"If you could speak to all the gloves I have worn in this World Cup, I think they would tell you they didn't have much work to do," joked goalkeeper Unai Simon.

Behind Mbappe and Messi, who got eight goals, in the race for the golden boot were Jude Bellingham, Erling

BETTER YOU KNOW

Teenagers Lamine Yamal and Pau Cubarsi joined an elite group of only ten players ever to win the World Cup as teenagers, even though Yamal finished with just one goal

Haaland, reigning Ballon d'Or Ousmane Dembele, and Harry Kane.

Some of the most recognisable faces of this World Cup, but their teams could not match Spain, who are the first country to be world and European champions at the same time since they did the double themselves in 2008 and 2010.

The future looks just as bright -- Yamal and fellow 19-year-old Pau Cubarsi are now part of an elite group of only 10 players ever to have won the World Cup as teenagers.

Hosts in 2030

Coach Luis de la Fuente, who took over following the disappointing last-16 exit at the 2022

World Cup, is a veteran at 65 but has achieved astonishing results and has a contract until Euro 2028.

Before the tournament, so much attention was on the big-name coaches who came into interna-

tional football with huge reputations.

Carlo Ancelotti and Thomas Tuchel failed to live up to the expectations of Brazil and England respectively, while Mauricio Pochettino could only lead the United States to the last 16 and Julian Nagelsmann's Germany disappointed.

"These players are exceptionally talented and it is an honour to accompany them," said De la Fuente, happy to stand back and let them bask in the glory.

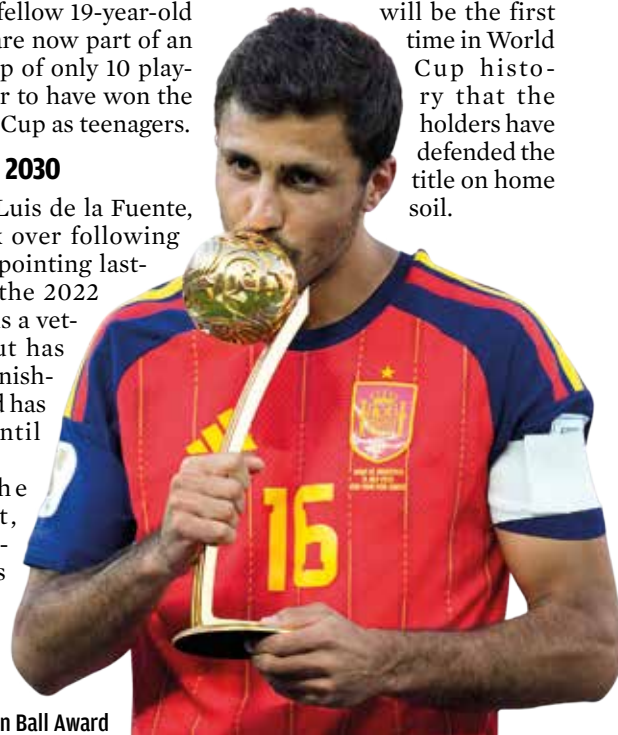
The last two decades have seen Spain firmly shake off their reputation as international football's great underachievers, and they have now won two World Cups and three European Championships since 2008, as well as one UEFA Nations League.

They will be back in action in just two months with Nations League games against England and Croatia.

For now, though, they can enjoy being world champions again, and think about the tantalising prospect of defending the trophy in 2030 -- that will be the first time in World Cup history that the holders have defended the title on home soil.



Spain's players celebrate with the trophy



Rodri kisses the Golden Ball Award

Cucurella praises 'incredible' defence

AFP | East Rutherford

Marc Cucurella hailed Spain's "incredible" defence after they won their second World Cup with a 1-0 victory against Argentina.

Coach Luis de la Fuente's team conceded just one goal in their eight games at the 2026 tournament -- the fewest by any side in a World Cup-winning campaign.

Belgium were the only team to breach their defence, in the quarter-finals in Los Angeles.

"When you don't concede, I think it's much easier to win," said Cucurella, who has recently sealed a transfer from Chelsea to Real Madrid.

"We've done an incredible job in that regard all tournament, and not just the defenders and the goalkeeper, because I think it's a team effort.

"Ultimately it's about everyone making sacrifices. We attack together and defend to-



Marc Cucurella celebrates with the trophy

gether. That's one of the keys to this team."

The 27-year-old left-back said Spain, who also won the World Cup in 2010, could at last switch off.

"Now it's time to celebrate," he said. "We came here with a goal, spent 50 days, or nearly 50, in camp, and now it's time to be together, enjoy every moment, reminisce, and above all, switch off.

"I think we deserve a good party."

Trump lingers on stage to lap up spotlight

AFP | New York

US President Donald Trump grabbed a share of the spotlight at the World Cup final, staying on stage with winners Spain as they lifted the trophy after beating Argentina.

Despite being met by resounding boos as he walked on to the pitch with FIFA president Gianni Infantino, Trump basked in the attention at the end of a tournament he has called "the most successful sporting event maybe in the history of the world."

Trump briefly lingered on stage as Infantino tried to lead him away while the Spanish team held the trophy aloft in celebration.

The 80-year-old US leader even did a quick version of his trademark "Trump dance" in front of the Spanish players.

Trump had arrived on his Marine One helicopter at the



Spain celebrate World Cup triumph as FIFA President Gianni Infantino (R) tries to lead US President Donald Trump (2R) away from the stage

New York-New Jersey stadium to watch Spain and Argentina battle it out for the trophy.

During the game, he sat next to Infantino and First Lady Melania Trump, and stood and saluted for the US national an-

them.

Trump said before kick-off that he thought superstar Lionel Messi would give Argentina the edge and talked about his own close ties with Argentina's right wing President Javier Milei.

But he told reporters afterward that he "wasn't sad" Argentina had lost. "I would say Spain played better, really," Trump said.

The game also provided a chance for some diplomacy.

Trump said he had spoken to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney -- whose country co-hosted the tournament with the United States and Mexico -- about wildfires that have sent smoke over the US northeast.

The US leader said he had a "good relationship" with Carney "but maybe they should pay us some damages or something, or we should do some tariffs." The smoke had at one point threatened to disrupt the final.

Trump said he also spoke to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, insisting there was "no tension" despite recently lashing out at Madrid for failing to help with the Iran war and falling short on NATO spending.