

# Morata misses out on Spain WC squad

Alvaro Morata has scored only three times in 22 games since the turn of the year

● Two more Chelsea players also missed out as Marcos Alonso and Cesc Fabregas were not included in the 23-man group

AFP | London

Chelsea striker Alvaro Morata was left out of Spain's World Cup squad, announced yesterday.

Morata paid the price for a disappointing debut season in the Premier League as Spain coach Julen Lopetegui picked Iago Aspas and Rodrigo Moreno up front, along with Atletico Madrid's Diego Costa.

"The decision is always difficult because of the talent of the players we have," Lopetegui said. "We have opted for three other players who had different assets and including four players up front was not something we wanted to do."

Two more Chelsea players also missed out as Marcos Alonso and Cesc Fabregas were not included in the 23-man group.

Morata's absence was the stand-out decision, however, even if it was not an entirely surprising one given the 25-year-old's dramatic dip in form.

After scoring seven goals in his first seven games for Chel-



Alvaro Morata



FIFA WORLD CUP  
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23 days to go.....

"I'm not going to name anybody, but there are players who had to find out from me that they were not going to be on the list."

In contrast, Aspas and Moreno have been in excellent form for Celta Vigo and Valencia respectively, with Aspas the top Spanish scorer in La Liga on 22 goals. Costa is expected to start when Spain open up against Portugal in Group B on June 15 but Aspas, with his speed and direct running, remains an attractive option.

Alonso only made his debut in a friendly against Argentina in March and lost out to Arsenal's Nacho Monreal. Fabregas

fell behind Spain's impressive wealth of options in midfield, which will include Sergio Busquets, Saul Niguez, Koke, Thiago Alcantara, Andres Iniesta, David Silva, Isco, Marco Asensio and Lucas Vazquez.

Manchester United's David de Gea was included as expected, along with fellow goalkeepers Pepe Reina and Kepa Arrizabalaga.

Chelsea defender Cesar Azpilicueta did make it in, as did Monreal. Dani Carvajal, Alvaro Odriozola, Gerard Pique, Sergio Ramos, Nacho and Jordi Alba complete Spain's group of defenders.

sea, a back injury seemed to affect his confidence. Morata has scored only three times in 22 games since the turn of the year. "I've talked to the players I had to talk to," Lopetegui said.

## Belgium leave out Radja Nainggolan

AFP | London

Belgium have left midfielder creator Radja Nainggolan out of their World Cup squad, coach Roberto Martinez said yesterday.

The absence of Nainggolan, who scored twice for Roma in the second league of the Champions League semi-final against Liverpool this month, was the biggest surprise in the 28-player list that will be reduced to 23 before the tournament.

Belgium face England, Panama and Tunisia in Group G at the World Cup.

The heavily tattooed 30-year-old Nainggolan has played 30 times for his country and is popular with supporters, but his relationship with Martinez has often been strained.

The Spanish former Everton manager said: "It was a sad and difficult decision. He is a player with a lot of class and he was voted Roma's best player, but I've made my decision for purely tactical reasons."

"I have put in place a specific system that works. I can't use Radja in a secondary role."

Roberto Martinez said he had travelled to Rome to explain his choice to the player.

# Egypt's hopes hinge on Salah's lethal finishing

Reuters | London

Egypt forward Mohamed Salah heads to the World Cup with the reputation of being one of the most lethal finishers in the game, and his country's hopes of making it to the knockout stages rest overwhelmingly on his shoulders.

Few would have guessed what was to come when Salah moved from Italy's AS Roma to Liverpool for a club-record fee at the start of the season, but the 25-year-old's prolific campaign earned him a sweep of top individual awards.

A return of 44 goals and 16 assists has helped to fire Liverpool to the Champions League final and Salah was named African player of the year as well as the top player in England by the PFA and Football Writers' Association. He is already being compared to Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo and will have a shot at breaking that daunting duo's stranglehold on the Ballon d'Or if he can lead Egypt out of Group A and into the knockout stages in Russia.

Salah's pace and eye for goal make him a formidable opponent and he is adored in his



Mohamed Salah

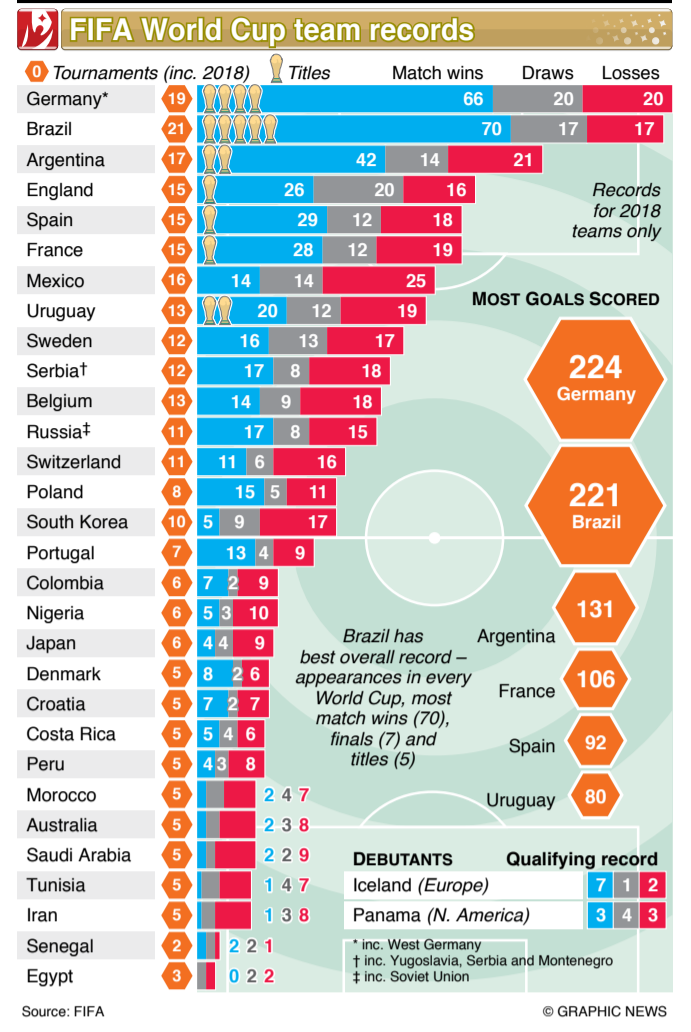
country, with every game he plays for Liverpool watched by thousands of fans in Cairo.

Egypt would not be heading to the World Cup without Salah -- his two goals against Congo secured their qualification for the tournament.

Salah's dramatic stoppage-time penalty that sent Egypt through to their first World Cup appearance in 28 years was celebrated wildly in the streets by millions of fans and he is hailed as a hero in the country. Egypt are set up to get the best out of their talisman, defending deep and looking to get the ball to his feet as quickly as possible.



Mohamed Salah was named African player of the year as well as the top player in England by the PFA and Football Writers' Association



## Icardi left out of Argentina squad

BBC | London

Inter Milan striker Mauro Icardi, the joint-leading scorer in Italy this season, was a notable omission from Argentina's 23-man World Cup squad named by coach Jorge Sampaoli on Monday.



Mauro Icardi

Icardi scored his 29th Serie A goal of the season on Sunday as Inter pipped Lazio to a Champions League place, but he was one of 12 players cut from a provisional 35-man squad revealed last week.

The 25-year-old made his Argentina debut in October 2013 but spent four years in international exile before he was recalled last September for the final four World Cup qualifiers. Two-time champions Argentina reached the final in Brazil in 2014, losing to Germany 1-0 after extra time, and will again look to Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi for inspiration in what may well be his last World Cup.

The five-time Ballon d'Or

recipient heads a potent attacking line-up that includes Juventus pair Paulo Dybala and Gonzalo Higuain, as well as Manchester City's Sergio Agüero.

"The goal is to have a great World Cup. We're going to be very competitive. We're going to bank on an attacking game," Sampaoli told a press conference at the national team's training base in Ezeiza, near Buenos Aires.

Argentina needed a hat-trick from Messi in their final qualifier, a 3-1 victory away to Ecuador, to clinch their place at the finals.

### PLAYER OF THE DAY



## Neymar

A FIFA Confederations Cup winner and Olympic gold medalist, Neymar is set to make his second appearance at a World Cup. The Paris Saint-Germain star also won the 2015 FIFA Club World Cup title with former club Barcelona.