

# Argentina humiliated

Argentina, Messi on brink of World Cup exit after Croatia drubbing



Argentina's forward Lionel Messi reacts during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group D football match between Argentina and Croatia

AFP | Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

Lionel Messi's World Cup dream was left hanging by a thread as Croatia powered into the last 16 with a 3-0 rout of Argentina yesterday.

Second-half goals from Ante Rebic, Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic sealed a deserved victory as a poor Argentina were left on the brink of a humiliating first round exit.

The Group D defeat means Argentina have just one point from two games, meaning they will probably have to beat Nigeria in their last game and hope other results go their way to avoid elimination.

The result left Argentinian fans in tears inside the Nizhny Novgorod stadium, while Diego Maradona watched from the stands in stunned disbelief.

Croatia took the lead after a horrendous blunder by Argentine goalkeeper Willy Caballero in the 53rd minute, the stopper chipping a clearance straight to Rebic who lashed home a thunderous volley.

Real Madrid star Modric then produced an electrifying 80th-minute goal before Messi's Barcelona team-mate Rakitic completed the scoring after Croatia sliced apart Argentina's hapless defence in injury time.

The defeat leaves the Argentinians facing an ignominious repeat of their 2002 campaign when they also went out at the group stage after being tipped as possible World Cup winners.

All the attention after the 3-0 defeat will focus on Argentina and Messi but it was also the result of a fine performance by Croatia.

A curiously lifeless and uninspired Argentine display was capped off by Caballero's mistake when he somehow managed to chip the ball just a few yards to Croatia's Rebic, fol-



Croatia's midfielder Ivan Rakitic (C) vies with Argentina's midfielder Enzo Perez (R) with Argentina's forward Sergio Aguero in background during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group D football match between Argentina and Croatia

ARGENTINA	0	3	CROATIA
Rebic		53'	
Modric		80'	
Rakitic		90' + 1'	
Possession			
58%		42%	
10	Shots	15	
3	On target	5	
15	Fouls	23	

lowing a Gabriel Mercado backpass.

Rebic volleyed home with aplomb but veteran Caballero will have nightmares for the rest of his days at his mistake -- likely to feature in any list of worst goalkeeping blunders for some time.

And throughout it all Messi, arguably the world's best player, remained a peripheral and largely ponderous figure, briefly flashing to life on too few occasions.

The 30-year-old's dream of winning the World Cup now look remote.

With all the pre-match attention on Messi it was his Real Madrid counter-

part Luka Modric who provided the game's true flashes of genius.

The Croatian was the one player to find space and time in a bruising encounter and it was his moment of magic in the second half which settled the encounter.

Picking the ball up some 25 yards outside the Argentina area, Modric had the option of at least two passes but chose to bide his time before planting a fantastic shot past a hapless Caballero.

Rakitic added a third when the game was up for Argentina.

## Kylian Mbappe sends France through

France seal World Cup last-16 spot after knocking out Peru with Mbappe's 34th minute goal

Reuters | Yekaterinburg, Russia

France beat Peru 1-0 with a goal from Kylian Mbappe yesterday to book their place in the last 16 of the World Cup and crush the South Americans' hopes of progressing in their first appearance at the tournament for 36 years.

Mbappe's 34th minute goal made him France's youngest scorer in the competition, at 19 years of age - beating the record of David Trezeguet (20) - and took them to two wins from two games in Group C.

When Olivier Giroud's shot took a deflection off a defender and looped over



France's forward Kylian Mbappe (L) tries to score against Peru's goalkeeper Pedro Gallese during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group C football match between France and Peru at the Ekaterinburg Arena in Ekaterinburg

goalkeeper Pedro Gallese, the teenager was on hand to tap in a simple chance.

But Les Bleus failed to convert several other first-half chances and rarely threatened their opponents' goal after the break, as they struggled for the second game running to justify their status as one of the pre-tournament favourites.

Coach Didier Deschamps responded testily "there's always an opponent" when asked by reporters about France's failure to dominate and also about the strong pressure the Peruvians exerted in the second half.

"I wasn't nervous but I wasn't totally satisfied. We had 25 minutes when we

defended too much, certainly, although we did it well. It's something we have to improve."

Goalkeeper-captain Hugo Lloris said after winning his 100th cap: "It's very satisfying because we've reached our objective."

"We need to hold onto first place by not losing against Denmark. Peru pressed right till the end, but we managed to stay solid and disciplined."

The result leaves France on six points and Denmark and Australia on four and one respectively after their 1-1 draw earlier in the day.

Peru have yet to win a point but they have won numerous hearts in Russia, thanks to their industrious style of play and the passion of their supporters, a remarkable 15,000 of whom made the journey to roar on their team in Yekaterinburg.

"These people are incredible. There was this huge mass of people following us. We are sorry we could not give them a better tournament," said coach Ricardo Gareca.

"People will be surprised by their passion for the game and their love for the team. We will do all we can in the last match to win so we can finish better and the fans can celebrate one win in this World Cup," he added, looking ahead to the Incas' final game against Australia.



Let's not be euphoric or get ahead of ourselves. Of course this win will boost our confidence for the next game, and we have shown we can create opportunities, but let's keep our feet firmly on the ground

CROATIA'S LUKA MODRIC



From day one I've trusted my team. I didn't believe we would be through after the second game, but I believed we would be through eventually

CROATIA COACH ZLATKO DALIC

FRANCE	1	0	PERU
34'	Mbappé		
Possession			
44%		56%	
12	Shots	10	
4	On target	2	
12	Fouls	14	