

Spain stars lap up adulation of estimated two million on parade

Players, fans and national leaders unite for jubilant celebrations across Madrid

● Millions line Madrid streets

● King and PM greet returning squad

● Parade ends at Cibeles square

AFP | Madrid

New World Cup champions Spain enjoyed a vibrant night of celebrations after an open-top bus parade through the streets of Madrid in front of a jubilant crowd of an estimated two million people.

The players enjoyed drinks on their procession under a blazing sun, along the main arteries in the city centre where a sea of fans in red and yellow were waiting, before arriving at Cibeles square where they took to the stage and partied into the night.

The squad and coach Luis de la Fuente were introduced one by one to the fans, each with their own choice of music that they sung along to, wearing "We are champions" shirts.

"(Spain) showed the world what it is to work together, with one mind and one heart," said pop superstar Shakira in a video message played to the team and crowd.

De la Fuente offered a similar message, hailing his players as the "best in the world" and telling fans not to forget that "together we are stronger".

The players and staff posed for a photo before Rodri raised the trophy again, just as he had done on Sunday night after Spain beat Argentina 1-0 in extra-time in New Jersey to be crowned champions.

After flying back from the



Spain's players parade onboard an open-top bus through the streets of Madrid



Rodri holds their trophy as Spain's players parade through the streets of Madrid

"very joyful," said Hector Molar, a 14-year-old student, who said he was able to see Torres, teen star Lamine Yamal and Arsenal's Mikel Merino as the bus parade passed him.

It is "very different" to live a day like today than to have someone tell you about it, Hector added.

Match-winner Torres joked he was "flying, literally" after the team returned from the United States after beating Argentina in New Jersey.

Cibeles party

Spain's World Cup winners bus parade started at the Prime Minister's residence Moncloa before heading towards Cibeles square, a traditional celebration point for the team, where hordes of fans had reserved their spots hours in advance.

Players lifted coach De la Fuente into the air towards the end of a night of pure joy for La Roja.

Spain's women's side also won the World Cup in 2023, meaning

for the first time a country has both trophies at the same time.

In 2030, Spain's men's side will defend their crown on home soil, as one of the World Cup hosts along with Portugal and Morocco.

"It's two for two," said Prime Minister Sanchez, of Spain's record in World Cup finals. "Why not dream of a third in 2030, especially with Spain as hosts?"

Argentina, despite the presence of all-time great Lionel Messi, failed to create clear chances against Spain's well-organised and more positive side in Sunday's final.

Messi had a sensational World Cup but drifted through the final like a ghost, shedding tears at the end.

"The pain is immense, and it's going to be hard for this wound to heal," wrote Messi on Instagram, going on to congratulate La Roja.

In Madrid, tears also flowed on Monday night, but they were tears of joy.



Spain become the first country to hold both the men's and women's World Cup trophies simultaneously after their 2023 women's win and 2026 men's success

"Kings of the world" ran the words on the front of their vehicle, with fans chanting "champions" to their heroes.

Rodri held the World Cup tro-

phy aloft at the top of the stairs as he descended from the Iberia plane that flew the team home after clinching their second star.

The Manchester City midfielder said this was the crowning achievement of his career.

"I've always said it, winning with your country is the most beautiful thing there is, above all a World Cup," said Rodri.

"This generation grew up watching (Iker) Casillas and (Andres) Iniesta lift the cup and that we can do it today is the biggest thing you can do in football."

Many younger supporters were not yet born when Iniesta's extra-time goal against the Netherlands secured Spain's first World Cup in South Africa 16 years ago.

"I'm really happy about the second star" Spain has earned,

Evenepoel wins 'special' Tour de France individual time-trial

AFP | Thonon-les-Bains

Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel stormed to victory in yesterday's 26.1km individual time-trial at the Tour de France to shave valuable seconds off Tadej Pogacar's overall lead.

Belgian Evenepoel, 26, blasted over the stage 16 course along the shores of Lake Geneva 28 seconds quicker than reigning champion Pogacar in second.

Everyone else finished more than a minute back, with Dane Mattias Skjelmose taking third at 1min 04sec.

That performance by the world and Olympic time-trial champion -- on Belgium's national holiday -- cut four-time Tour winner Pogacar's overall lead to 4min 32sec.

"It's amazing, it was a very nice TT (time-trial), a lot of peo-



Red Bull - BORA - hansgrohe team's Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel cycles during the 16th stage

ple on the side of the road," said Evenepoel.

"My whole family from both sides being here, my parents

came just today. My wife is here with her parents and the siblings as well.

"And also on the Belgian na-

tional day is pretty special -- I read this morning it's been a while since Belgium won on National Day, so I'm proud to be the one."

It was Evenepoel's second successive stage victory after he triumphed on Sunday's mountainous 15th stage.

It was his fourth Tour stage victory overall, and his third in time-trials.

He also extended the gap to third-placed Isaac del Toro to more than two minutes.

But it was a miserable day for Evenepoel's Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe team-mate Florian Lipowitz.

Two days after two-time former winner Jonas Vingegaard crashed out of the Tour while sitting second overall, German Lipowitz went down hard on a bend and was forced out of



Evenepoel said winning on Belgium's national holiday, with family watching on the roadside, made the victory especially meaningful

the race.

He had been fifth overall until that point and had set the fourth fastest time in the three intermediate time-checks.

But several minutes after he crashed, Lipowitz was escorted

to a medical vehicle holding his left arm.

"That's very unfortunate, it's like a bittersweet pill to swallow with this victory, so I wish him all the best and I hope it's not too bad," Evenepoel said of his team-mate.

Both Pogacar and Del Toro had a scare going through the same bend where Lipowitz fell but managed to stay upright.

From the moment Evenepoel began his time-trial, it was clear he was on course to do something special.

Once the top 10 contenders began their races against the clock, Skjelmose set the fastest time, well ahead of the best of the rest.

Lipowitz, Del Toro and French teenage prodigy Paul Seixas were only a handful of seconds behind at the three time-checks.

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