



Morocco advance as first Arab nation in knockouts



Yassine celebrates after scoring Morocco's fourth vs Haiti at Atlanta Stadium

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The Atlas Lions finished level on seven points with Brazil, who defeated Scotland 3-0 in the group's other fixture, but had to settle for second place on goal difference. The result sends the Moroccans into the Round of 32, where they will face the winners of Group F.

Despite already being eliminated, Haiti produced one of the performances of their tournament and twice took the lead in an entertaining contest that featured four first-half goals.

The Caribbean side struck first after 10 minutes when Josue Casimir held up the ball before releasing Jean-Kevin Duverne down the flank. His cross into the penalty area

was met by Lenny Joseph, whose clever backheel found the net via an unfortunate deflection off goalkeeper Yassine Bounou.

Morocco dominated possession and created a number of chances, but veteran Haiti goalkeeper Johny Placide, making the final international appearance of a career spanning 15 years, repeatedly frustrated the North Africans with a string of impressive saves.

The pressure finally paid off in the 39th minute. Bilal El Khannouss delivered a dangerous ball into the box, and after Placide could only parry it away, captain Achraf Hakimi reacted quickest to force home the equaliser.

Haiti restored their lead just minutes later. Duverne again turned provider, finding Wil-

son Isidor, who unleashed a powerful long-range effort that stunned the Moroccan supporters and put Sebastien Migne's side back in front.

The advantage lasted only until the closing moments of the first half. Sofyan Amrabat released Hakimi down the right and the captain's cut-back was calmly converted by Ismael Saibari, who netted his third goal in as many World Cup appearances to make it 2-2 at the break.

As the second half wore on, Morocco's sustained pressure began to take its toll. The breakthrough arrived in the 78th minute when a poorly cleared corner fell kindly to substitute Soufiane Rahimi, who made no mistake from close range to give Mohamed Ouahbi's side the lead for the

first time.

The result was sealed deep into stoppage time, though not without controversy. Haiti's defenders paused, believing the ball had crossed the byline, but Rahimi kept the move alive before squaring for 20-year-old Gessime Yassine to tap into an empty net. A lengthy VAR review followed before officials confirmed the ball had remained in play, allowing the goal to stand and making Yassine Morocco's youngest ever World Cup goalscorer.

Morocco will now look to build on their remarkable run in the previous 2022 campaign in Qatar, where they became the first Arab and African nation to advance to the World Cup semi-finals.

Bafana Bafana shock South Korea to seal historic knockout berth

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

South Africa stunned South Korea 1-0 on Thursday morning to reach the FIFA World Cup 2026 knockout rounds for the first time in their history, completing an extraordinary turnaround in Group A and securing a place in the round of 32.

Bafana Bafana, returning to the tournament for the first time since hosting in 2010, had opened with a 2-0 defeat to group winners Mexico but responded with a draw against the Czech Republic to set up a decisive meeting with South Korea.

The breakthrough came in the 63rd minute when Tshepang Moremi delivered a precise cross and Thapelo Maseko finished calmly inside the near post to secure victory at Monterrey Stadium.

Coach Myung-bo Hong's decision to leave captain Son Heung-min on the bench raised eyebrows, and although he was introduced at half-time, South Korea struggled to take control of the contest.

As news filtered through that Mexico were leading the Czech Republic, ten-

sion mounted, but South Africa held their composure and struck when it mattered most.

Post-match, South Korean media questioned their side's lack of intensity and speculated about possible food poisoning. Coach Hong Myung-bo quickly dismissed any medical issues and accepted responsibility, acknowledging that his tactical approach involving Son had backfired.

Mexico topped Group A with nine points, while South Africa finished second on goal difference, ahead of South Korea and the Czech Republic. Bafana Bafana will face co-hosts Canada in Los Angeles on Sunday at 10pm Bahrain time, while South Korea must rely on the remaining group-stage results to secure one of the eight best third-placed spots and progress to the round of 32.

Maseko scores South Africa's winning goal in the second half



Vinicius fires Brazil past Tartan Army to top Group C

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The five-time champions finished level on seven points with Morocco but topped the group on goal difference, while Steve Clarke's Scotland ended third with three points and remain in contention as one of the best third-placed teams.

Vinicius Júnior struck twice at Miami Stadium to lead Brazil into the knockout rounds.

The breakthrough

came in the seventh minute after Scott McKenna's mistake allowed Rayan to intercept and square for Vinicius, who finished calmly from close range. Brazil thought they had doubled their lead when Vinicius struck again following a turnover involving Jack Hendry, but the effort was ruled out by VAR for a foul in the build-up.

Just before half-time, Bruno Guimarães delivered a dangerous cross that goalkeeper Angus Gunn failed to deal with, leaving

Vinicius a simple header into an empty net. Matheus Cunha added the third in the 60th minute, finishing off a slick move created by Guimarães.

Vinicius Júnior's brace took his tally to four goals at the tournament, placing him alongside Ronaldo (2002), Neymar (2014), and Jairzinho (1970) as Brazilians to score at least four goals in a single World Cup group stage. Guimarães also enjoyed a standout evening, registering as-

sists for Brazil's second and third goals. Since 2000, only two Brazilians have recorded multiple assists in a single World Cup match — Kaká and Guimarães.

Carlo Ancelotti's side will now face the Group F runner-up on Monday at 8pm Bahrain time at Houston Stadium.



Brazil's Vinicius Junior celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Scotland

Mexico cruise past Czechia to top Group A with perfect record

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Co-hosts Mexico produced a commanding second-half display to beat Czechia 3-0 at a packed Azteca Stadium on Thursday morning, securing top spot in Group A and a place in the Round of 32 at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The result completed a perfect group stage "El Tri", who finished with three wins from three for the first time in their World Cup history. The Czech Republic, meanwhile, were eliminated at the bottom of the group after finishing with just one point.

After a slow first half in which Mexico struggled for midfield control and attacking rhythm, the hosts broke the game open with three second-half goals in

a six-minute spell.

Mateo Chávez opened the scoring in the 55th minute, finishing a sweeping counter-attack. The move began with Luis Romo shrugging off pressure from three Czechia midfielders in central areas before driving forward and releasing Chávez in space. The 22-year-old carried his run into the box and placed a composed finish beyond goalkeeper Matej Kovar for his first international goal.

Julián Quiñones doubled the lead in the 61st minute after Mexico capitalised on defensive confusion inside the penalty area. A loose sequence following a low cross saw the ball fall kindly to Quiñones, who reacted quickest to steer his finish past the scrambling Czechia back

line from close range.

Álvaro Fidalgo added a third in stoppage time to complete the win. The goal came from a long, driven clearance by goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa, who had come on late in the match. The ball was launched into space, catching Czechia stretched at the back, and Fidalgo broke through before finishing calmly to seal the result and

spark the final celebrations.

With the result secured, Ochoa replaced Raúl Rangel late on to a standing ovation from the 80,000-plus crowd at Azteca Stadium. The 40-year-old, making his sixth World Cup appearance, was handed the captain's armband as fans chanted his name throughout his brief cameo.

He saluted supporters at full-time and kissed the goalposts before being lifted into the air by teammates in an emotional post-match celebration.

"It was a fitting tribute; he's a legend," Mexico coach Javier Aguirre said. "I felt

Memo should play, even if only for a few minutes. It was his night." The only blemish on Mexico's night came in the first half, when sections of the crowd were heard chanting slurs despite repeated FIFA sanctions aimed at eliminating discriminatory behaviour.

Mexico goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa, top, celebrates with teammates



Mateo Chavez celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Czechia