

## Debut delight as Cape Verde reach World Cup last 32



Scenes of celebration after Cape Verde's stalemate with Saudi Arabia

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Cape Verde's fairytale continued in improbable fashion as they reached the knockout stage of the World Cup after a 0-0 draw with Saudi Arabia at Houston Stadium, sealing second place in Group H on their tournament debut.

The African side finished on three points, a total that proved enough to send them through after Uruguay were beaten by European champions Spain, confirming Cape Verde's place in the round of 32. In doing so, they became the smallest country by population, with approximately 525,000 inhabitants, to ever reach the knockout stage of a men's World Cup. They will now face reigning world champions Argentina in their next fixture, scheduled for July 4 at Iam Bahrain time at Miami Stadium.

Their run has been built on resilience from the outset, beginning with a goalless draw against Spain before a dramat-

ic 2-2 comeback against Uruguay that kept them in contention heading into the final matchday.

Needing only a point against the Gulf side, Cape Verde produced another defensive masterclass to secure qualification, with clear chances at a premium as both sides struggled to break through.

The result completed a remarkable series of milestones. Cape Verde became the first debutant nation to reach the knockout rounds since Slovakia in 2010 and the first African debutants to do so since Ghana in 2006.

They also became the first debutants to go unbeaten in a World Cup group stage since Senegal in 2002 (W1, D2, L0), while Saudi Arabia exited after failing to progress beyond the group stage for the sixth consecutive time.

Veteran goalkeeper Vozinha also wrote his own piece of history, becoming only the third goalkeeper aged over 40 to register multiple World Cup clean sheets.

# Russell grabs Austria pole, Antonelli fourth

Russell edges Leclerc and Hamilton after stewards clear controversial final lap

● Verstappen crashes late

AFP | Spielberg

George Russell produced a dramatic late and contentious fastest lap in his Mercedes yesterday to claim pole position ahead of the two Ferraris for Sunday's Austrian Grand Prix.

The 28-year-old Briton, who had struggled to outpace his team-mate championship leader Kimi Antonelli in Friday's practice, swept into the prime grid position with a lap in one minute and 06.113 seconds – including a need to lift through a section of waved yellow flags.

His lap took him 0.236 seconds clear of Charles Leclerc and 0.295 ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in a sensational conclusion to a closely-fought qualifying session.

Italian teenager Antonelli qualified fourth after seeing and obeying the double waved yellow flags on his late flying lap by slowing down after four-time champion Max Verstappen crashed in his Red Bull.

"I feel incredible, it was such an amazing lap," said Russell. "I saw the yellow and did a big lift into the corner. It was a single yellow (flag) so it should be okay."

Russell's assessment was con-



Mercedes' British driver George Russell celebrates his Pole position

firmed when the stewards announced no further action was to be taken against Russell.

Despite his crash, Verstappen wound up fifth ahead of defending world champion Lando Norris and his McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri, Red Bull's Isack Hadjar and the two Racing Bulls

of Liam Lawson and impressive British rookie Arvid Lindblad.

"I'm relatively happy about today," said Leclerc. "The last few weekends have been quite tough so I just wanted a clean weekend and qualifying. Second is a good place to start."

Hamilton said: "To have the



Qualifying took place in extreme conditions, with track temperatures reaching 54°C, prompting Formula One's "heat hazard" protocol allowing drivers to wear cooling vests

two Ferraris in second and third is fantastic and a reflection of the amazing work back at the factory. They've brought small bits here, they've worked hard to upgrade our engine. I'm just really proud of everybody."

The session began with Esteban Ocon leading the way in torrid heat with a track temperature of 54 degrees and the air at 34, conditions that led to the event being declared a 'heat hazard' race that permits drivers to wear cooling vests under their race-suits.

Leclerc congratulated Russell as investigations began and it emerged that Antonelli, who was faster still, had backed off after seeing the signals which, in his case were 'double' waved yellows while Russell had seen single yellows.

# Iran stunned as VAR rules out 93rd-minute winner

Egypt Reach World Cup Knockout Stage for the First Time

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Iran were left to rue a dramatic late intervention as Shoja Khalilzadeh's stoppage-time strike was ruled out in a 1-1 draw with Egypt at Seattle Stadium in Group G.

A tense finale erupted into chaos in the 93rd minute when Khalilzadeh bundled the ball home, triggering wild celebrations among Iran supporters who believed they had snatched victory and second place in the group. However, VAR intervened to disallow the goal, ruling the defender marginally offside with part of his boot beyond the last man in the build-up.

The result leaves Iran on three points and still waiting to discover whether they will progress to the round of 32, while Egypt had already secured qualification but missed the chance to top Group G.

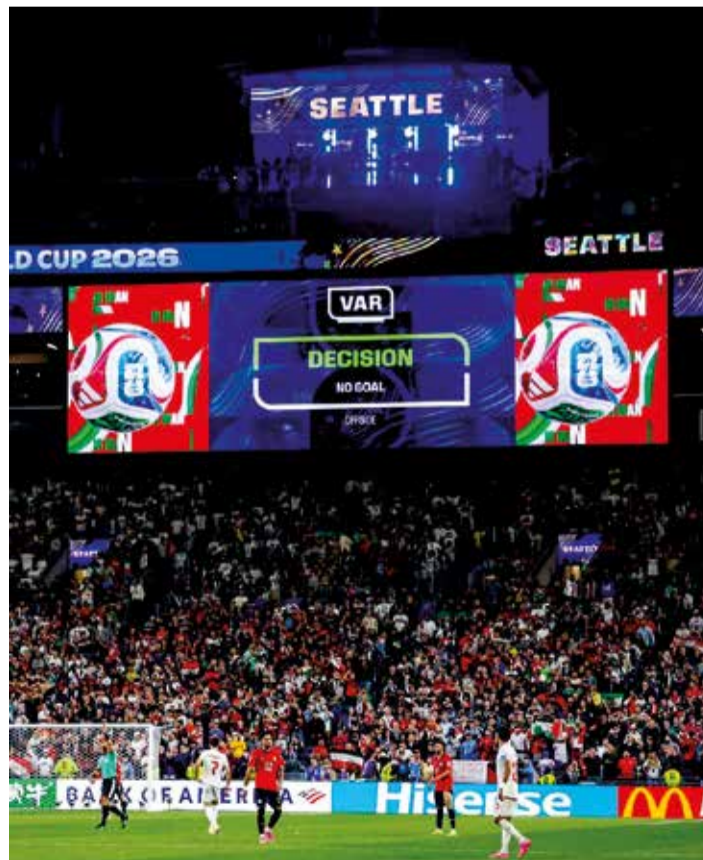
The African giants struck first inside five minutes when Mahmoud Saber's low effort squeezed through the grasp of Alireza Beiranvand. Iran responded swiftly and were soon handed a golden opportunity to level when Mohamed Abdel-



Khalilzadeh celebrates a late strike that was later ruled out for offside

monem brought down Mehdi Taremi in the box. Taremi stepped up, but Egypt

goalkeeper Mostafa Shobeir guessed correctly and produced a strong save to deny the Iran



Iran's goal is chalked off against Egypt at Seattle Stadium

captain. Iran did not have to wait long for their equaliser. In the 14th

minute, Ramin Rezaeian drilled home from a tight angle after Shobeir had initially kept out

Milad Mohammadi's effort.

Chances flowed at both ends in a lively first half, with Taremi later heading against the post. The Pharaohs, meanwhile, were dealt a blow shortly before the hour mark when Mohamed Salah was withdrawn after appearing to struggle with a knock.

As the game opened up, the Asian side piled forward in search of a winner. Saeid Ezatollahi saw a header crash off the crossbar, while Egypt were forced ever deeper under sustained pressure.

The decisive moment appeared to have arrived in stoppage time when Shobeir misjudged a clearance and Khalilzadeh converted from close range, only for VAR to intervene and rule out what would have been a stunning late turnaround.

There was still time for one final twist, as Ezatollahi again went close with another header against the woodwork, leaving Iran frustrated at the final whistle.

Egypt will now face Australia in the round of 32 on July 3 at 9pm Bahrain time, while Iran's wait continues – unbeaten, but uncertain.