



Croatians across Zagreb and the rest of the country went berserk as they celebrated their team's qualification for a first-ever World Cup final. Flares and fireworks dominated the skyline while roars could be heard long into Thursday morning.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Croatia fans in paradise

REUTERS, Zagreb/Moscow

Jubilant Croatian fans honked their car horns and let off fireworks after their soccer team came from behind to beat England 2-1 in extra-time on Wednesday to clinch a place in the World Cup final against France.

Mario Mandzukic put Croatia ahead after scoring in Moscow's Luzhniki stadium, giving the Balkan nation its first ever place in the finals in history.

"We had hoped [for this] and we believed in our team, but the feeling when we finally entered the finals cannot be compared to anything," said Ivan Kecerin, 41.

The country of around 4 million people came to a standstill as Croatians watched the game on screens in squares and cafes. In Zagreb, the capital, more than 10,000 people gathered in the central square to watch the match despite rain.

Loud cheers rang out after each goal, fans waved the red, white and blue national flag, and after the final whistle Croatian TV showed wild celebrations in towns and cities.

When Ivan Perisic's equaliser hit the back of the net primal roars of triumph rang from the cafe terraces and through the open windows. The sound was eclipsed only by the joy that greeted Mandzukic's extra-time winner and the impromptu fireworks celebration in the wake of the final whistle.

In Moscow, Croatia fans said they were taken aback by their side's win.

"We were planning to leave, but now we have to stay until Monday," said Sinisa Pavlek as he emerged from the stadium with a broad smile on his face.

Asked if Croatia could beat France in the final on Sunday, his girlfriend Marina said: "Of course. We beat England."



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# England hailed as heroes We left it all out there: Southgate

REUTERS

Gareth Southgate's England team were hailed as heroes by British media, who acclaimed their achievement rather than dwelled on disappointment after their World Cup exit on Wednesday.

England's hopes of reaching only their second ever World Cup final were dashed by Croatia, as Mario Mandzukic scored the deciding goal in a 2-1 extra-time win for Zlatko Dalic's side on Wednesday.

Despite failing to make the most of arguably their best chance of reaching the final since 1966, British media hailed the team as heroes with Mirror Sport declaring them "National Treasures", while the Daily Mail saluted their efforts.

The Telegraph's front page called for England to "Hold your heads high" while the Guardian captured supporters' mood with the headline "The hurt goes on".

The widespread optimism is a far cry from the reaction England received following their Euro 2016 exit, when the team and then manager Roy Hodgson were criticised heavily for their underwhelming performance in the competition.

England's valiant effort also drew praise from Britain's Prince William, who said the team's performance gave fans "something to believe in".

The team were backed by various pundits,



celebrities and former players, including Gary Neville, Jamie Carragher and Jermain Defoe.

"This team have taken us to a place we never thought we'd ever imagine we'd get. England had never overachieved, but this team have in reaching the semifinal...", Neville, a pundit on ITV, said.

"Three weeks ago, there wasn't even a connection with the England football team. People looked upon it with some sort of despair. Now, everyone has loved the last three weeks and everyone can be proud of that."

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho also praised the England team.

"It's a young team, the majority of the play-

ers will play in the next World Cup with more experience at club level," the Portuguese boss told RT.

"If I was in charge of the FA there would be no doubt that I would keep Gareth Southgate and Steve Holland and give them the chance to take the team to the next Euros and the next World Cup."

England forward Marcus Rashford offered heartfelt praise to manager Southgate.

"You've brought belief and the love of football back. Thank you boss from the whole nation," the 20-year-old said on Twitter with a picture of himself embracing the England manager.

AFP, Moscow

Manager Gareth Southgate said England "left everything out there" after falling to an extra-time defeat by Croatia in the World Cup semifinal on Wednesday.

"I think in the first half we were really good and maybe we could have got another goal," Southgate told ITV.

"I can't ask for more from the players. I think knockout football is about fine margins and when you have good spells against fine sides you need to take your chances."

"Tonight we weren't quite there but we will learn from that. We left everything out there."

Southgate said the players were deeply disappointed, but that his young team could achieve great things in the years to come, with the European Championship just two years away.

"It's impossible to say anything to make the players feel better at this moment in time," he said. "We have to be proud of what we've achieved. I don't think anyone could have given any more."

"Players had run out of steam but that's

partly their age -- they're still physically maturing. Croatia have hardened warriors whose understanding of big matches at times came to the fore.


"The players have to go through big matches and experiences to become a team that can win. They have to use this experience for benefit and I know that what's happened over the last few weeks will make them a stronger team."

Harry Kane looks set to claim the Golden Boot as the World Cup's leading scorer, but the Tottenham star rarely looked like adding to his six goals against Croatia.

"I think he's given absolutely everything for the team," Southgate said of the 24-year-old England captain. "He's captained the team brilliantly over the tournament and I can't ask for more from him."

"I think now is the time for us to be strong as a group and take the time to reflect on the performance a little bit over the next couple of days."

"We all feel the pain of the defeat. Did we expect to be in this position? I don't think realistically any of us did," he said.



The Daily Star

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## Stay away Jagger!

AGENCIES, Moscow

If there's anything English fans attending the World Cup wanted besides a win, it was for Mick Jagger to keep his infamous curse as far away from Moscow as possible.

The British rock legend has a notorious history of being a jinx on any national team he supports at the World Cup.

But you can't always have what you want and on Wednesday Jagger sat in attendance as England suffered a 2-1 loss against Croatia.

Jagger was especially a beast of burden to national teams during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, tweeting good luck to the English team twice, and the Three Lions would go on to

lose both games.

Most notably, he chose to attend the now-historic match between Germany and Brazil and support the Brazilians. Predictably, the curse was in full effect as the Germans let it

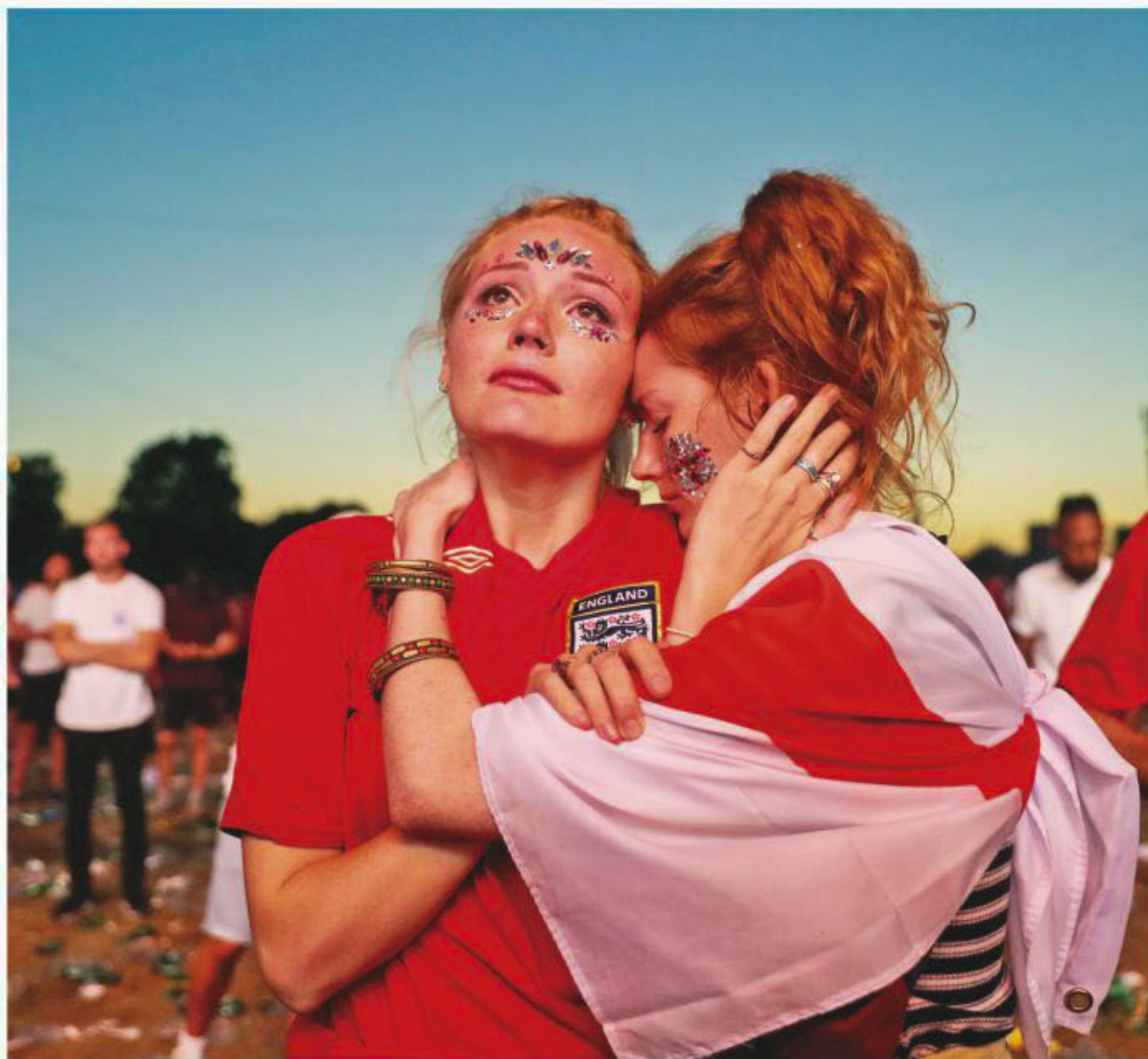


bleed, driving the score up 7-1 against a Brazilian team which just couldn't get started up.

The curse originates from the 2010 World Cup, when Jagger attended a match between Ghana and the USA as Bill Clinton's guest, choosing to support the doomed American side.

There was no sympathy for the

Rolling Stones frontman on Twitter Wednesday, as fans blamed Jagger for derailing the English team's best chances to win the World Cup since 1966 and urging him to 'stay away'.



Tens of thousands of fans flocked to Hyde Park in London in high spirits to watch England's World Cup semifinal against Croatia, but by the end of the night those feelings were replaced with dejection and grief.

PHOTO: REUTERS