



DEUX-CHAMP: France coach Didier Deschamps became the third manager to lift the World Cup both as a player and coach after Germany's Franz Beckenbauer and Brazil's Mario Zagallo. PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT THEY SAID

It is really beautiful. It is marvellous. We did not play a great match but we showed a strong mental quality. We also scored four goals. We merit it. I am very happy for this team. We are coming from very far and it has not always been easy, but thanks to hard work, they are here and are on top of the world for the next four years.

FRANCE COACH DIDIER DESCHAMPS

"I don't know where I am, it is great... Very happy. It was a difficult match. Croatia play a great game. We started timidly. We knew it was a World Cup Final. We got into the game and on counter attacks, we made the difference. Very happy. We look forward to lifting the cup and taking it to France."

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN, SCORER OF A PENALTY

We have been celebrating with everyone and my teammates in the locker room. The president (Macron) was here, likewise President Putin and the Croatian president, who congratulated us.

STRIKER OLIVIER GIROUD

I'm very happy. I was able to show my ambitions and our collective ambition, which was to win. It was a long road, but it was worth while and we are world champions and very proud. It is the life that we wanted, we are proud to make French people happy.

KYLIAN MBAPPE, 19-YEAR-OLD STRIKER AND GOAL SCORER

"It is a dream since I was a young boy. I hope we have made you proud. What did you tell your teammates before the game? I told everyone that we are 90 minutes away from realising our dream, we are 90 minutes from entering into history books for life, and we were 90 minutes away from making France rock, even children and their children will know about this. So guys, we can do this. There are two teams and a Cup and we are not going to let another team take this Cup. That is all I told them."

FRANCE MIDFIELDER PAUL POGBA

Young France promise even more

REUTERS, Moscow

Energetic, disciplined and clinical, France won the World Cup on Sunday with a 4-2 victory over Croatia that, even in such a moment of achievement, still left the feeling there may be much more to come from Didier Deschamps' outstanding young team.

With key talent Kylian Mbappe just 19 years old and the second youngest squad in the tournament, this triumph could be the start of a memorable era for French football. Deschamps was lambasted for being over-functional, even boring, two years ago when France lost to Portugal in the Euro 2016 final in Paris but his critics will be silent now. While he has remained a coach who focuses on creating a solid organisational structure, this time he had the additional threat of Mbappe's pace and skill to go with the cleverness of Antoine Griezmann and the physical presence and positional awareness of Olivier Giroud.

European champions with the creative genius of Michel Platini and Jean Tigana and it is a less expressive team than the 1998 World Cup winners dominated by the brilliance of Zinedine Zidane.

It is, however, a thoroughly modern team, with technically accomplished young players, a distinct identity and no obvious weak points.

"We did not play a huge game but we showed mental quality. And we scored four goals anyway. They deserved to win," Deschamps said and it was hard to argue.

Their triumph is indeed fully deserved -- there simply was no better all-round team than France in this tournament.

Having topped their group, they revealed their counter-attacking flair and the thrill of Mbappe in beating Argentina 4-3 but games which truly showed their character were the expertly-managed quarter-final and semi-final victories over Uruguay and an excellent Belgian team.

France were not at their best in the final, with Croatia enjoying the better of the

possession for long stretches and their defence struggled at times against the directness and speed of winger Ivan Perisic.

It was an own goal and a harshly-awarded penalty, after video review, that put Deschamps' side in front but once Paul Pogba had driven in the third and Mbappe added a superbly-taken fourth, the title was in their grasp.

Impressively, they won the final without a major contribution from Ngolo Kante, their defensive anchor and the best protector of a back-line in the game, who has formed such an excellent partnership with Pogba in the centre of the field.

Kante was booked in the 27th minute and wasn't his normal self afterwards but the strength in depth available to Deschamps was evident when he was able to bring on the always reliable Steven Nzonzi in the 55th minute.

With Nzonzi dominating central midfield France were stronger and their last two goals coming after that switch. As he has done throughout this tourna-

ment, Pogba played with great tactical discipline in a largely defensive role but still managed to pop up with the crucial goal to make it 3-1 in the final.

But the player who captures the imagination in this team is without doubt Mbappe, whose terrifying pace sometimes masks his excellent touch and skill.

With experience, his decision-making will improve and he should be an even bigger threat in the 202 European Championship.

The relative youth of the France side is no guarantee of improvement and they will need to show they same kind of hunger and desire that Croatia have shown throughout the tournament.

But it is hard not to feel that Deschamps' side have another gear available to them and are capable of something really special if they need to.

Argentina and Croatia both pushed France hard and both ended up conceding four goals. That truly is the stuff of champions.



Croatia were beaten but did not lose heart after a dream run to the World Cup final in Moscow which saw them beat a host of illustrious opponents along the way. PHOTO: REUTERS

Modric, Mbappe scoop awards

AFP, Moscow

Croatia captain Luka Modric won the Golden Ball award for the World Cup's best player despite being on the losing side to France in a thrilling final in Moscow on Sunday.

Modric was named man-of-the-match three times in Croatia's seven games in Russia, but even the Real Madrid midfielder was powerless to stop France's firepower and the rise of 19-year-old Kylian Mbappe, who scored a stunning goal to become the first teenager since Pele to score in a World Cup final.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward won the young player of the tournament award after scoring his fourth goal of the competition in the final, which France won 4-2.

Belgium captain Eden Hazard finished second in the running for the Golden Ball, with France's Antoine Griezmann, who also scored his fourth goal of the tournament in the final, coming third.

Belgium's Thibaut Courtois won the Golden Glove award for the best goalkeeper.

Despite Griezmann and Mbappe getting on the score-sheet, England's Harry Kane claimed the Golden Boot for his six goals.



Luka Modric forlornly poses with the Golden Ball after losing the World Cup final. PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT THEY SAID

"First of all I want to congratulate France. We are sad but proud at the same time. We played well but the penalty knocked the wind out of us and after that it was very difficult. I just want to say one sentence about that penalty: You don't give a penalty like that in a World Cup final. We wanted to win the World Cup so much but that's football. The French did not surprise us, we let in two soft goals coupled with an own goal and a penalty. What we had in terms of luck in this tournament, we lacked today. When you concede four goals you cannot expect to win the game."

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic

"We have no regrets because we were the better team for much of the game. Unfortunately, some clumsy goals swung it their way. They will be celebrating but we can hold our heads high. When the emotions settle, we will be able to analyse more clearly. I am proud of the (best player) award. The incredible fan support makes me even happier. You know that despite the defeat you've achieved something big, but it's hard when you come so close and fall short."

Croatia captain Luka Modric

"We played our hearts out and have no regrets. I hope our fans felt it too. I think what we have

accomplished will be remembered forever and we can be proud of ourselves. That includes our overall conduct, our performances and our fans who represented the country in the best possible way along with ourselves."

Croatia full back Sime Vrsaljko

"Emotion, emotion, big emotion. Looking at the score now after the game, I think that it's justice. We need to say congrats to the French players, coach. I think the best team won today."

Davor Suker, president of the Croatian Football Federation

France goes wild

REUTERS, Moscow

Millions of French fans were overwhelmed with joy on Sunday as France beat Croatia 4-2 to win the World Cup in a pulsating final in Moscow, sparking ecstatic scenes of celebration from Paris to Marseille, from Lyon to Lille.

In the capital, where 90,000 people watched the match on vast TV screens next to the Eiffel tower, there were choruses of the Marseillaise and hundreds of thousands of red, white and blue flags fluttering on the breeze.

The boom of fireworks and firecrackers filled the air, while drivers honked their horns incessantly to celebrate France's second world title after their triumph on home soil in 1998.

A chorus of "We are the champions, We are the champions" rang out from the Sacre Coeur in the north of the city to the Sorbonne on the Left Bank.



Even before the final whistle, crowds streamed on to the Champs Elysees, the traditional gathering place for celebration.

"It's just astonishing what they've done," said Josh, who travelled from Brittany to Paris to watch the match. "Pogba, Mbappe, Grizou -- they're on top of the world," he said. "We're the

champions of the world! It's phenomenal, just phenomenal."

More than 250,000 people were expected to descend on the Champs Elysees and the Place de la Concorde, yet the atmosphere was warm.

"To get a second star after 20 years, it's just brilliant," said Tommy Hamon, 23, who was working a bar.