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Joy and relief for Lewandowski

REUTERS, Al Rayyan

The tears welling in the eyes of Robert Lewandowski after he struck the goal that sealed Poland's victory over Saudi Arabia on Saturday showed the immense weight on his shoulders from having never scored in a World Cup.

After dispossessing Abdulrahman Al-Malki and slotting home eight minutes from the end for an unexpected 2-0 win, Poland's most prolific marksman dived to the ground and team mates piled on top of him as they all celebrated Lewandowski finally breaking his World Cup duck.

The pressure was always on for the Barcelona forward after failing to score in Poland's three matches in the 2018 World Cup and Tuesday's opening draw against Mexico. Aged 34, and with Poland's patchy World Cup qualifying record, Qatar might have been his last chance.

But of all the games, this was the one that mattered most.

Poland needed at least a draw to stand any real chance of getting to the last 16 for the first time since 1986 and with Argentina left to play, few would fancy their chances.

It looked like Saturday's Group C match was not going to go Poland's way, with their opponents riding on a wave of their historic defeat of Argentina earlier this week and while also being gifted a string of favourable refereeing decisions.

Lewandowski was pivotal in both of Poland's goals and most their attacks and worked magic in the 39th minute when he lifted the ball over the keeper and somehow kept



France forward Kylian Mbappe gestures like a boxer after scoring the second of his two goals in defending champions France's 2-1 win against Denmark in their World Cup Group D fixture at Stadium 974 in Doha yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Mbappe brace takes France into last 16

AFP, Doha

Kylian Mbappe scored twice, including a late winner, as holders France edged Denmark 2-1 on Saturday to become the first team to reach the last 16 of the World Cup.

A potent French side knew a second victory in as many Group D outings would take them through to the knockout phase and they were well worth the lead that Mbappe gave them when he opened the scoring at Stadium 974 just after the hour mark.

However, Andreas Christensen soon equalised for the Danes and Les Bleus needed Mbappe to deliver again in the 86th minute as he turned in Antoine Griezmann's cross to puncture the Danish resistance once and for all. Having scored four during France's victorious 2018 campaign and one against Australia, Mbappe now has seven goals in nine World Cup appearances.

Didier Deschamps's side now have the luxury of going into their final group game against Tunisia knowing a draw will guarantee them top spot, and even a defeat may not prevent them finishing first.

France were reigning champions when a defeat to the Danes knocked them out of the 2002 World Cup, while the sides played out the only goalless draw in 2018.

More recently Kasper Hjulmand's side beat France home and away in this year's Nations League, and it seemed that Deschamps had learned lessons from those two encounters.

If France were a shadow of their usual selves in

Copenhagen in September, they were much better in this match, played in a pop-up stadium made of shipping containers on Doha's waterfront.

Deschamps changed three of his back four, with Theo Hernandez at left-back in place of his injured elder brother Lucas and Raphael Varane coming in for his first game in over a month.

But the French attack was untouched from the Australia game.

If Olivier Giroud took the headlines then, here Ousmane Dembele was electric at times on the right, Griezmann excelled in an advanced midfield role, and Mbappe made the difference.

France's pace, power and passing were all too sharp for the Euro 2020 semi-finalists who were lucky to go in level at half-time.

His shot was turned behind by Kasper Schmeichel, and Griezmann then wasted a great chance shortly after, but in the 61st minute Mbappe did score.

The Paris Saint-Germain superstar linked up brilliantly with Hernandez on the left and met his teammate's cutback with a shot that beat Schmeichel thanks to a deflection off Christensen.

Denmark had offered little but suddenly they were level midway through the second half as Andersen nodded down a corner and his fellow defender Christensen headed home.

But Mbappe was not to be denied as he stole in front of Rasmus Kristensen at the back post with four minutes left to meet Griezmann's cross with his thigh for his 31st international goal.



it in play and cut back to Piotr Zielinski to blast into the roof of the net.

"I think the older I get, the more emotional I get, and I'm aware that when it comes to the World Cup, it might be my last World Cup actually," Lewandowski said after scoring his 77th international goal.

"The result of the team was most important... There's another day and we need to get ready for the next match because we don't know what's going to happen next. We need to do all we can."



'Old Aussie way' shines through in Tunisia win

AFP, Doha

Coach Graham Arnold said "the old Aussie way" helped his side beat Tunisia 1-0 on Saturday to keep their World Cup alive but warned his players they had achieved nothing yet.

A Mitch Duke header in the first half combined with some dogged defending in the second revived the Socceroos' hopes of reaching the last 16 for only a second time.

They face Denmark in their last group game in Qatar with their fate in their own hands. "Our fight, our grit, our determination -- the old Aussie way was very important tonight and very, very proud of the boys," said Arnold, whose side were thumped 4-1 by holders France in their opener.

The Group D clash with Tunisia was beamed on primetime television back home and Arnold said he expects there will be "a few hangovers in the morning".

"The fans back at home -- it's a moment they'll remember for the rest of their lives," said Arnold, 59. "I said to the boys before the game: let's put a smile on the nation's face."

The fans may be feeling it in the morning, but Arnold has ordered his players to stay focused.

"That one game is done. I don't want any emotion from the players, I don't want them up all night looking at social media and all that stuff," he said.

"I've just said to them, no doubt that the nation is extremely proud.

"But we've done nothing. We've achieved something we can talk about after the tournament but we are here to go as far as we can go.

"I don't want any celebrations. Just enjoy this couple of minutes with the fans and then get yourself in the dressing room, recover and get ready for the next one."

US find no reward for dominance

REUTERS, Doha

The United States shut out a European side at the World Cup for the first time since 1950 but left the tent-like Al Bayt Stadium without a win after Friday's tense goalless stalemate against England, a contest where they were superior for long periods.

England had crushed Iran 6-2 in their Group B opener to justify their status as one of the tournament favourites, but they were fortunate to come away with a point against Gregg Berhalter's young and energetic team.

The U.S., back at soccer's showpiece tournament after eight years, looked set to make a winning return in their first match with Wales. They dominated large chunks of play and were unlucky not to go into the break with a bigger advantage.

Their inspired play went for naught as Wales snatched a 1-1 draw and although they again struggled in the final third of the pitch against England, the clash was always going to be the measuring stick -- and the Americans showed they are more than capable of competing on the same stage.

Berhalter, coaching the second-youngest squad at this tournament, made several tactical tweaks that blunted the threat posed by England. His well-drilled team maintained a targeted press while venturing forward and unexpectedly switched to 4-4-2 while defending.

Tim Weah teamed up with surprise starter Haji Wright up front, Tyler Adams and Yunus Musah played centrally, and Weston McKennie flared out to one flank while Christian Pulisic



manned the other.

"Obviously it worked," McKennie said. "We had the ball often, they weren't able to really break through so many times.

"I don't think we gave them a lot of chances to get in behind and to get goal-scoring opportunities. And it worked for us as well, we were able to break them down, have space out wide."

The draw left them with a winner-takes-all contest on Tuesday against Iran, whose two stoppage-time stunners against Wales earlier

on Friday re-ignited their campaign and set up a nail-biting Group B finale.

The U.S. team's lack of consistent goalscoring threat has been a worry since their qualifying campaign and is the final key they need to find to unlock the potential of an otherwise exuberant and confident side.

"There was one thing missing -- putting the ball in the net," McKennie added. "The final passes were there. It was unlucky. But we take away the point and it is in our hands."

Swiss defender Elvedi says Brazil are beatable

AFP, Doha

Switzerland centre-back Nico Elvedi said on Saturday his side would not be awed by the might of Brazil, saying they had enough quality to push the tournament favourites.

"Every team in this world is beatable," the Borussia Moenchengladbach defender said ahead of Monday's game against the five-time champions.

"We know the challenge, but we are not going to hide away. We know our quality and what we are able to show."

A second-half goal from Elvedi's former Gladbach teammate Brel Embolo helped Switzerland to a 1-0 win over Cameroon in their opening fixture.

Elvedi said that win "did us good" and "gave us a lot of trust".

Switzerland have qualified for the knockout stage in four of their last five World Cup appearances.

Avoiding defeat against Brazil would put the side in a strong position to reach the last 16 ahead of what will likely be a crucial final group stage clash with Serbia.

Elvedi said the Swiss could draw little hope from the likely absence of

Brazil talisman Neymar, who will miss the match with an ankle injury.

"It won't change much for us," he added. "They have enough top players who can play in that position.

"I will sleep exactly the same as always. I won't be sleeping better because Neymar isn't playing."

Switzerland trail Brazil on goal difference in the early Group G standings.



Elvedi said his team would relish the chance to "measure ourselves against the best".

"We know that this is a really difficult opponent... Brazil is one of the favourites but we are looking forward. We are hot for this game."