

# Hakimi up against country of his birth

REUTERS, DOHA

Achraf Hakimi was born in Madrid but will have little hesitation plotting the downfall of Spain when he and his Moroccan teammates take on the 2010 World Cup winners on Tuesday.

The flying wingback is one of the key players in the north African outfit whose last-16 match in the Qatar World Cup against Spain, at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan, gives them a chance to reach the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time.

Hakimi could even have been on the opposite side, as he was called up when still a teenager for Spain's junior team.

"I felt it was not the right place for me, I did not feel at home. It was not for anything in particular, but it was not how I lived at home, which is the Arab culture, being Moroccan," he told Spain's Marca newspaper in the build-up to Tuesday's clash.

Hakimi's father was a vendor on the streets of Madrid and his mother cleaned houses.

Their son was signed by Real Madrid at the age of seven, broke through to the first team, went to Borussia Dortmund on loan, won the Serie A title with Inter Milan and is now playing alongside Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe at Paris St Germain.

And he is still only 24 years old.

It will not be the first time he plays against Spain. Hakimi was in the side that almost beat them in Kaliningrad in 2018, giving up an injury time equaliser in a 2-2 draw at the last World Cup in Russia.

"Four years of experience since have meant I've come with a more mature mentality," he said.

Morocco secured their last-16 spot with a key 2-0 win over Belgium in the first round and then followed it up by beating Canada to win Group F with Croatia second.

"It is something unique, playing for your country. And especially now that we are making history. It's incredible to see how people are living it with us, and that energy transmits a lot to us and gives us strength to continue and look to do great things," Hakimi added.



Spain will look to avoid lapses in concentration, which they experienced against Japan, as Morocco are ready to play another "final" to upset the 2010 champions, 36 years after their last appearance at this stage of the World Cup. The Maghreb side advanced top of their group by beating Canada and Belgium, and drawing with Croatia, reaching the last 16 for the first time since 1986.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

# Spain aim to spoil plots of Morocco's 'avocado head'

REUTERS

Spain will be favourites to beat Morocco in the World Cup last 16 on Tuesday but the teams' experiences in the group phase were a reminder of the unpredictability of tournament football.

Spain, who humbled Costa Rica 7-0 in their opening game, finished second in Group E behind Japan while Morocco defied the odds to win Group F ahead of Croatia and Belgium.

The Spanish lost their last group match to Japan and face a difficult test from a Moroccan side growing in confidence under coach Walid Regragui.

Ultimately, Germany did Spain a favour by beating Costa Rica but Rodri Hernandez admitted those three difficult minutes unnecessarily complicated their own match before they sealed progress to the last 16.

"Now a new competition is beginning. There is always analysis on what we can improve on, even after the games when we've played well," Rodri told reporters ahead of Tuesday's game against Morocco.

"The other day there weren't that many things to improve on because it was a 10-minute collapse and this is what we have to do better. We've been warned that this cannot happen again.

"The coach has been clear, the players have assumed responsibility and we're training happily, wanting to be in the next round and knowing that we can get there."

After Morocco had beaten Canada 2-1 to reach the



powering with safety

Category Cables (Cat 5, Cat 6)

HIGH SPEED DATA TRANSMISSION



MOROCCO VS SPAIN			
HEAD-TO-HEAD		PLAYERS TO WATCH	
Matches 3		Achraf Hakimi (Morocco)	Dani Olmo (Spain)
Morocco 0		Caps 57	Caps 28
Spain 2		Goals 8	Goals 5
Draw 1			

last 16 for only the second time and first since 1986, FIFA posted a photo of Regragui holding an avocado with a soccer ball inside it and pointing his finger at his head in a defiant message to his critics.

The goal they conceded to Canada was their first in six matches under Regragui and during the victory celebrations, the players gathered around the coach touching his head.

"They like to hit me on the head. Perhaps this will be lucky omen for them," Regragui told reporters.

Morocco are happy to sit back and look to punish opponents on

the counter-attack.

Spain drew 1-1 with Germany following their rout of Costa Rica and after the loss to Japan coach Luis Enrique was critical of his team.

Luis Enrique's Tiki-Taka style of play relies on the Barcelona midfield trio of Sergio Busquets, Pedri and Gavi.

"Spain are a top five team and always come to the World Cup to win. But our coach has also taught us to have a winning mentality; it doesn't matter who we are up against. We are going to try to play our way and try to beat them," said Achraf Hakimi.

"We finished first in the group and I think we deserve a little respect. I think that Spain knows that and that they have to be a little afraid of us. And why can't we pull off a surprise again?", he wondered out loud.



## Zico the King of Independence Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings added another feather to their glittering crown by regaining the title of the Independence Cup with a 4-1 win on penalties over Sheikh Russel in the final in Cumilla yesterday.

Kings, who won a third straight BPL title last season but failed to win either Independence Cup or the Federation Cup, started this season with the Independence Cup title, which they had first won in their debut 2018-19 season.

It proved to be difficult task for the domestic powerhouse against a spirited Sheikh Russel side, who kept the game 2-2 in regulation and extra time before Kings goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico stood tall between the sticks during the penalty shootout.

Zico dived to his left to deny Sheikh Russel's Sohel Rana and Khalekurzaman from the spot, only failing to stop Hemanta Vincent Biswas's attempt. The national No. 1 then

stepped up to convert the winning spot kick. There was a surprise as Sheikh Russel's four foreign recruits – all proven penalty takers – were not used for the tiebreaker.

Brazilian duo Robson Da Silva, Dorielson Gomes and Iranian Reza Khanzadeh converted the first three shots before man-of-the-final Zico himself converted the fourth.

All four goals had come in the first half with Miguel Ferreira and Robson scoring for Kings while Mfon Sunday Udoh and Charles Didier Coast netted for former champions Sheikh Russel.



# Ronaldo's Portugal primed for Switzerland test

AGENCIES

Portugal and Switzerland will lock horns in their World Cup last-16 match at the Lusail Stadium Tuesday.

Portugal have only made it to the quarter-finals of a World Cup once since 1966. They finished as the toppers in Group H, winning two and losing one of their three games.

Fernando Santos' men scored six goals in the group stage and their dynamic attackers will once again need to produce the goods on Tuesday.

Portugal fell 2-1 to South Korea in their final group stage game. But Santos rested some of their starters after already sealing a berth in the knockout stages prior to their final group stage game.

Captain Cristiano Ronaldo will bid again to equal the record of World Cup goals scored for Portugal held by Eusebio, who racked up nine in 1966 in England but his form in front of goal will be a cause for concern for his side.

Santos, however, has been boosted by news that key midfielder Otavio should be fully fit and ready to play against Switzerland.

Portugal may have beaten Switzerland 4-0 in June but midfielder William Carvalho says his side will be laser-focused on the details when they meet again on Tuesday for a place in the quarter-finals.

The Portuguese ran riot against the

Swiss when they met in the Nations League in Lisbon, but they lost 1-0 in the return fixture a week later.

"I'm sure we'll face a Swiss team with a lot of possession and we are ready for that. There have been surprises (at this World Cup), that's a fact, we need to be focused from the first minute to the last so that things go our way, and not the other way," Carvalho told reporters.

"For me it is gonna be totally different, because there is no friendly game, this is no Nations League, the pressure is high, and so now it's important how the players deal with this pressure," said Xherdan Shaqiri.

The Swiss quietly finished second in their group behind Brazil, victories over Cameroon and Serbia earning their place in the last 16.

Shaqiri believes Switzerland have all the tools they need to make it to the World



Cup quarter-finals, but they will need to work together if they are to beat Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in the last 16 on Tuesday.

"We need a special performance. Portugal to be honest, they are a good team and for me also the favourite in this game, but we know our qualities too. We will try to have a good, special performance and try to cause them a lot of problem in the game."

Shaqiri's goal against Serbia in the group stage meant he has found the net in more

## PORTUGAL VS SWITZERLAND

### HEAD-TO-HEAD

Matches 25

Portugal 9

Switzerland 11

Draw 5

### PLAYERS TO WATCH

**Bruno Fernandes (Portugal)**

Caps 51

Goals 13

**Granit Khaka (Switzerland)**

Caps 110

Goals 12

World Cup tournaments than any other Swiss player, having also scored in 2014 and 2018.

He is one goal away from matching the most World Cup goals scored by a Switzerland player - six, by Sepp Hugel all in 1954.