



**What to WATCH**

**BTV, GTV & T SPORTS**  
**FIFA WORLD CUP**  
 Croatia vs Brazil  
 Live from 09:00 pm  
 Netherlands vs Argentina  
 Live from 01:00 am (Saturday)



Having played the central role in Argentina's path to quarters in Qatar so far, Lionel Messi will not only be main man for the Albiceleste once again today but also the prime target of the Netherlands when the two sides battle it out at the Lusail Stadium to progress into the semis in the World Cup. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Van Dijk focuses on Netherlands-Argentina, not Messi

REUTERS, Doha

Virgil van Dijk deflected several questions about his looming confrontation with Lionel Messi but admitted the Netherlands would be cautious in their approach against Argentina in Friday's World Cup quarter-final.

The Dutch skipper stuck to the same line in fielding a flurry of enquiries about how he and his team mates will deal with the threat of Messi at the Lusail Stadium.

"It's not about me, or the Netherlands, against Messi, it's about the Netherlands against Argentina," he repeated several times at a news conference on Wednesday.

In response to a question about how worried they might be about the threat of the seven-times Ballon d'Or winner, Van Dijk said: "Worried no, but cautious of what Argentina can bring to the game."

"They are a fantastic team with fantastic players, and we are going to have to do well in all departments of the match."

He agreed that his side could have played better in Qatar, despite not losing a game and winning their group, but diplomatically dodged a question



## Blind stands tall again

REUTERS, Doha

Netherlands defender Daley Blind would be quite entitled to pinch himself in disbelief when he walks out against Argentina in Friday's World Cup quarter-final.

Not because it will be his 99th international, and a second meeting with Messi and Argentina after the 2014 semi-final in Brazil, but more that he has been able to continue playing despite twice suffering cardiac incidents on the field. Blind, 32, has an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) in his chest to detect an irregular heart beat and deliver a life-saving shock in the event of sudden cardiac arrest. It is the same device that allowed Christian Eriksen to resume his career after the horrific drama of his cardiac arrest playing for Denmark at last year's European Championship.

Blind, who spent four years at Manchester United in between spells with Ajax Amsterdam, had a suspected heart attack in a Champions League game for Ajax against Valencia in 2019, feeling dizzy and quickly being taken off for treatment.

Doctors diagnosed a heart rhythm disorder and initially suggested his professional career was over.

"You saw everyone looking at me with fear," Blind recalls in an emotive documentary called 'Never Again Standing Still' about dealing with the condition, which was released just before the World Cup kicked off.

His former Ajax team mate Eriksen also appears in the film and Blind tells of how the reaction of his father Danny, also a Dutch international and now Louis van Gaal's assistant at the World Cup, gave him the drive to continue. "Something that has always stayed with me was my father's reaction. He remained so stoic. He did not give up, he kept asking the doctor if there were any other options. His sober vision gave me hope."



## 'Another difficult one' on Messi's way to glory

REUTERS, Doha

Lionel Messi's hopes of winning an elusive World Cup will come up against the tactical scheming of veteran coach Louis van Gaal as Argentina face the Netherlands in Friday's quarter-final at Lusail.

Messi, 35, once again carries his nation's hopes on his shoulders as he looks to crown an extraordinary career that includes seven Ballon d'Or awards and multiple club titles, but only one Copa America to show for his efforts with Argentina.

Messi can expect little in the way of sympathy from the 71-year-old Van Gaal, who is determined to give the Dutch their first World Cup title after runners-up finishes in 1974, 1978 and 2010.

The coach's planning will largely focus on containing Messi and catching Argentina on the break, as Van Gaal thumbs his nose at his critics by playing a brand of football at odds with the usual attacking Dutch approach.

The tactical plan is key to his side's hopes of winning on Friday as the Dutch look to take revenge for their semifinal defeat in 2014 when Argentina beat them in a shootout.

"We can surprise teams with our plan. We were also the better team then and Messi didn't see much of



MESSI AT THE 2022 WORLD CUP	
Goals	3
Assists	1
Attempts at goal	19 (2nd overall)
Attempts on target	10 (1st)
Chances created	13 (2nd)
Dribbles completed	9 (5th)
Touches in opposition box	30 (3rd)

the ball," the coach told reporters this week.

He can also point to a run of form that has seen the Dutch go 19 games without defeat since he returned to the hot seat for a third spell 15 months ago.

Messi spoke briefly about the Dutch threat after Argentina's 2-1 win over Australia in the round of 16, where he marked his 1,000th career appearance by scoring and being named Man of the Match.

"Another difficult one is coming," he said. Messi can expect vocal support from Argentine fans in Qatar, who are set to vastly outnumber their orange-clad Dutch counterparts.

On the losing side against Germany in the 2014 final, where Argentina failed to add to World Cup triumphs in 1978 and 1986, Messi was

grateful for the support.

"These are incredible moments. We want to thank all the people who are here. The whole of Argentina would love to be here," he said.

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni is still sweating on the fitness of Angel di Maria, who missed the Australia game due to a left thigh injury but returned to training on Tuesday.



The Bangladesh cricket team reached Chattogram yesterday to play the third and final ODI and the first Test of the two-match series at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. All-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz wears a smile upon his arrival in the port city as he will be looking forward to finish the job in style on Saturday after guiding his side to clinch the ODI series with one match in hand. PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

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