

What to WATCH BTV, GTV, T Sports FIFA World Cup 2022 Morocco vs Portugal Live from 09:00 pm England vs France Live from 01:00 am (Sunday)

Sony LIV
West Indies tour of
Australia
2nd Test, Day 3
Live from 10:00 am
Ten 5
England vs Pakistan

2nd Test, Day 2 Live from 11:00 am T SPORTS, GTV Bangladesh v India 3rd ODI Live from 12:00 pm

Regragui looks to give back to Morocco

CENCIES

After springing the latest World Cup upset in a tournament which has had its fair share, Morocco will look to extend their fairytale run under the tutelage of Walid Regragui, who himself broke new ground by becoming the first ever African coach to take a team into the World Cup quarterfinals when his side beat Spain on penalties in the last 16.

Regragui was appointed before the tournament with Moroccan football in turmoil after previous coach Vahid Halilhodzic was sacked over "differences of opinion" with the country's football federation.

But in seven matches since then, the Atlas Lions have been unbeaten, conceding only once — an own goal in their final group game against already-eliminated Canada.

In just five months since leaving Wydad Casablanca, Regragui has become an international coach for the first time and made his home nation the first ever North African or Arab country to reach the last eight of the World Cup.

One more win against Portugal on Saturday would make Morocco the first African team to reach the semifinals -- surpassing the 1990 Cameroon side, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana's 2010 vintage.

"If you can do it, you can, if not, not," the 47-year-old said of breaking new ground for an African or Arab coach. "It has nothing to do with being Arab or not. I fought



for it. Maybe when I'm old, I'll be proud of it, but for the moment, I am mainly proud for my country.

Morocco refused to be hypnotised by their opponents' extraordinary 1,019 passes and denied the Spaniards a goal in two hours of energy-sapping action as they secured a 0-0 draw before edging into the last eight on penalties.

"We had agreed not to take possession [against Spain], not out of fear," he said. "Nobody had managed to steal the ball from them, so

I accepted not having the ball, I'm not a magician. We worked for four days on this gameplan."

Regragui would likely have not even been at the tournament if much-travelled previous boss Halilhodzic had not sidelined star players Hakim Ziyech and Noussair Mazraoui over disciplinary issues.

his playing career there, although he did win 45 caps for Morocco.

Regragui was born in France and spent the majority of

"I passed my diplomas in France, but it is my country of origin which gave me a chance," Regragui said.

"I had to give back to the federation what they gave me, the confidence... to be able to grow in Morocco as a coach."







Kyle Walker, who was willing to give France's Kylian Mbappe the 'respect he deserves, but not too much', has been tipped by English pundits to have what it takes to cope with the blistering pace of the 23-year-old winger. The winner of the duel could very well determine the outcome of the mouthwatering England-France quarterfinal at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor today.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Will England's depth blunt Mbappe's edge?

INFO ZONE

FRANCE VS ENGLAND

Kylian Mbappe

(France)

Caps 63

PLAYERS TO WATCH

REUTERS, Doha

All eyes will be on Kylian Mbappe once again as France take on England in a mouthwatering World Cup quarterfinal clash but the defending champions must hope their lack of options from the bench will not be exposed on Saturday.

Les Bleus, who are looking to become the first team to retain the title since Brazil in 1958-1962, were hit

Made from

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Matches 33

England 19

France 9

LME GRADE-

hard by injuries ahead of the tournament with midfielders Paul Pogba and Ngolo Kante, and forward Karim Benzema all ruled out.

Mbappe has been on fire in Qatar, with five goals and two assists, while Olivier Giroud has provided three goals, but they have yet to come up against a world-class team.

After wins over Australia and Denmark in their first two matches, France's fringe players did not cover themselves in glory in a 1-0 defeat to Tunisia to round out the group.

Didier Deschamps's starting 11 features some fearsome firepower up front with Mbappe, Giroud and Ousmane Dembele, while Adrien

England's attacks.

Rabiot and Aurelien Tchouameni have proved extremely reliable in midfield.

Antoine Griezmann has been the perfect link

Antoine Griezmann has been the perfect link between the lines.

At the back, however, France have issues.

Jules Kounde is not a natural right back and left back. Theo Hernandez is more forward-minded,

which could present problems if he is pegged back by

Rabiot is well aware of England's danger in wide areas but predicted they may be more cautious than in previous games.

"They have players who are fast on the wings, fullbacks who are very offensive," he added.

"They won't take all the risks because we can also hurt them on the flanks."

One of the strengths that has emerged through the tournament is England's depth.

powering

Jude Bellingham

ern," he said.

HEAD-TO-

HEAD

Matches 2

Portugal 1

Morocco 1

(England)

Caps 21

Goals 1

with safety

Manager Gareth
Southgate has been able
to shuffle his midfield
and wide attackers
more than in previous
tournaments and just
about all of them have

delivered.

Their tally of 12 goals

equalling their World
Cup best set from three
more matches in 2018

has been achieved via

eight players.

Harry Kane scored only one in Qatar but has been more of a provider. Jude Bellingham has established himself as a driving force in midfield while Marcus Rashford, Jack Grealish and Raheem Sterling pose challenge to opponents often coming from bench.

The key battle, however, could be

however, could be between one of the fastest defenders in the tournament and the fastest attacker - Kyle Walker v Mbappe.

The Frenchman has been in full flow in Qatar, while Walker is seemingly edging his way back to sharpness after undergoing surgery on a groin injury in October.

One thing that should be a given is that England will not be overawed by the occasion after their recent runs to the last four of the 2018 World Cup and final of Euro 2020.

and many players at Chelsea, PSG, Bay

"This [Morocco] is a very strong team,

even in offensive positions. To think this

is going to be an easy match for Portu-

gal, it won't be," Santos added.

INFO ZONE

PORTUGAL VS MOROCCO

Goncalo Ramos

(Portugal)

Caps 4

Goals 4

bat, also carrying injuries.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Romain Saiss

(Morocco)

Caps 70

Goals 2

Buoyant Portugal in way of Morocco's history

AGENCIES

Morocco head into Saturday's last-eight clash with Portugal knowing they are only one step away from making history as Africa's first World Cup semifinalists, but they face a buoyant opposition fresh from scoring six goals against Switzerland.

Spain struggled to create any clear-cut chances against Morocco in a game that the dogged North Africans won on penalties, but Portugal will be a different proposition after a fluid attacking display against the Swiss.

Portugal coach Fernando Santos took the big decision to drop Cristiano Ronaldo to the bench, but it paid dividends as the superstar striker's replacement Goncalo Ramos scored a hat-trick in the 6-1 rout.





Portugal are in the World Cup quarterfinals for the first time since 2006, when they beat England on penalties before being knocked out by France. The 21-year-old Ramos stole the headlines, while Bernardo Silva, Bruno Fernandes and Joao Felix all impressed. Coach Santos said Ronaldo did have reservations about being benched against Switzerland but he never threatened to

leave the team's camp, as it was reported in the media. "They are an extremely well-organised Portugal played Morocco at the 2018 team with high quality and potential,

World Cup when Ronaldo scored in a 1-0 win and Santos said he remembered how they had to "suffer" to seal victory. Santos, who said Ronaldo showed his commitment to the team by celebrating Portugal's goals and leading the players

commitment to the team by celebrating Portugal's goals and leading the players to applaud the fans, also hinted that he might bring the 37-year-old back into the team to face Morocco on Saturday, saying the north African side would provide a different challenge from Switzerland. "They are an extremely well-organised

Walid Regragui's Moroccans are in uncharted territory as there has still never been a country from outside Europe or South America in a World Cup final, but Morocco want to put that right

Morocco want to put that right. "We have already achieved great things but we feel it's not enough, we want to go further," Regragui told a news conference on Friday. Morocco have issues to deal with as key defender Nayef Aguerd remains a doubt for Saturday's game after a hamstring injury and other key players, like skipper Romain Saiss and midfield workhorse Sofyan Amra-

'Leave Ronaldo alone'

REUTERS, Al Rayyan

Cristiano Ronaldo was upset when he was left out of Portugal's starting lineup against Switzerland but the conversation to drop him was completely normal and it is high time the world stopped focusing on the matter, coach Fernando Santos said on Friday.

Ronaldo was benched as Portugal thrashed Switzerland 6-1 in the last 16. Later, the country's football federation had to publicly deny reports that their skipper had threatened to leave during the tournament after talking with Santos.

"He (Ronaldo) has never told me he wanted to leave our national team. It's high time we stopped talking about this conversation... It's high time to leave Ronaldo alone and acknowledge what he has done for Portuguese football," Santos said.

"Yes, we did have a conversation... It needed to happen, it's part of our basis. I don't do that with all my players but he's the captain of our squad. You know what he represents for Portuguese football, the Portuguese people and national team.

"I invited him to my office (on matchday) and told him, 'Listen, you're not going to be one of the starters. In terms of strategy it's better if you are not on the field.' We expected the game to be difficult and I'd save him for the second half."

Ronaldo, the country's all-time top scorer, came on as a substitute and, though he did not score, Santos said he had been professional throughout by warming up with his team mates and celebrating each goal.

"Cristiano obviously wasn't very happy about it (being benched) because he's always been a starter ... and he asked me if it's a good idea," Santos added.



"But we had a normal conversation where I explained my viewpoints and, of course, he accepted. We had a frank and normal conversation."

Joao Felix was one of the players who came into his own in the match against Switzerland, grabbing two assists as the Atletico Madrid forward pulled the strings and unlocked the Swiss defence

The 23-year-old denied reports that the players were instructed to pass to Ronaldo whenever he was on the pitch and implored the Portuguese people and press not to create a hostile environment for the team.

"We pass to the best player available. Everyone has opinions, they can interpret the match as they wish, but in my opinion we don't always have to pass to Cristiano," Felix said.

"The team always evolves well and it's not because he's on or off the pitch that the team plays better or worse."