



# The tree of dreams

ATIQUE ANAM FROM DOHA

Close to a hundred years after Uruguay hosted the first FIFA World Cup in 1930, the South American nations have united in their bid to bring the Greatest Show on Earth back to its birthplace to mark the centenary edition.

Uruguay and Argentina, the finalists of that inaugural edition, jointly presented the bid to co-host the quadrennial event in 2017, the case promoted by Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez among many football stars. And the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) is firmly behind that bid, ensuring all it can to promote the bid.

Part of the promotion is the CONMEBOL – Tree of Dreams, located at Sikkat Al Wadi in Msheireb Downtown Doha, which is drawing crowds in droves from the South American nations and the rest of the world.

Fans can take a tour through how South American football evolved throughout the years, and play interactive games that will put their football knowledge and skill to the test.

Among many visitors to the exhibition on Friday afternoon were Mahmoud and his son Hussain, from Morocco. Hussain, an aspiring footballer and a self-confessed Cristiano Ronaldo fan, was looking forward to seeing his country take on Ronaldo's Portugal on Saturday. But before that he was happy to immerse himself in the history of South American football.

"The museum and the galleries are amazing. Since I'm a footballer myself, seeing these antique items and replica trophies and the statues of Maradona and Pele will surely motivate me to become a good footballer one day," said the youngster.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is a tree, described as the energy of South America. "Feel the energy of the continent pulsing through the tree, feeding the passion and instinct of South American football's past, present and future," says the inscription on the tree – 6.1 metres in height and engraved with member associations, great names of the sport in South America.

The exhibition is divided into three segments: The Best Players, Home of the Icons and Best Tournaments.

The legends of South American football are displayed in the Best Players gallery. Fans can select "The dream team," a perfect squad featuring their favourite players on interactive displays. It also features three different games: Golazo Metre to test visitors' football kicking skills, Fastest Ginga to test the agility, and Conmebol corner to test one's sharpshooting skills.

Home of the icons is where the fans can connect with two of South America's greatest sons – Maradona and Pele, life-size sculptures of both with opportunities for visitors to take photos. It also features historical items from the very first World Cup: The Jules Rimet Trophy, Tiento Football, both from Uruguay World Cup 1930 and Obdulio Varela's ankle boots, Brazil World Cup 1950.

Hasnain, a migrant worker from the Indian state of Kerala, was delighted to be at the exhibition on the holiday. Flanked by two of his colleagues, Arshad was taking photos with the two legends of football.

"We will never get to see these football legends in our lives, but coming here taking photos with their sculptures makes me feel as if I'm with them," Arshad said.



**Youssef En-Nesyri created a moment of history at the Qatar World Cup on Saturday as his fine header gave Morocco a nervy 1-0 win over Portugal to see his country become the first African nation to make it to the semifinal of the Greatest Show on Earth.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'This World Cup's Rocky Balboa' make history

AFP, Doha

Morocco coach Walid Regragui said his side are "the Rocky Balboa of this World Cup" after the Atlas Lions became the first African team ever to reach the semi-finals with a stunning victory over Portugal on Saturday.

The injury-hit North Africans held on for a 1-0 victory at Al Thumama Stadium to set up a last-four clash against either England or France, after Youssef En-Nesyri's headed goal late in the first half.

The win over Portugal came after knocking out Spain in the last 16 on penalties and beating the world's second-ranked team Belgium in the group stage.

"When you watch Rocky, you want to support Rocky Balboa because of his hard work and commitment and I think we're the Rocky Balboa of this World Cup," Regragui told reporters.

"We're becoming the team that everyone loves at this World Cup, because we're showing that even if you don't have as much talent, if you show that desire, heart and belief, you can achieve.

"I'm sure many of you will say this is a miracle, but we've won without conceding against Belgium, Spain, Portugal and that's the result of hard work."

Morocco will play the semifinal with the chance to become the first nation from outside Europe or South America to reach the final.

"We can dream, why shouldn't we dream about winning the World Cup?" added Regragui, who only took over as coach in August.

"It doesn't cost you anything to have dreams. European countries have been used to winning the World Cup..."

"We've played some really top sides, but so far we

haven't achieved anything.

"Anyone who plays us now will have to be at the top of their game to beat us, it won't be easy for them, that's the message I'm trying to send out."

Morocco had already surpassed expectations by becoming only the fourth African country and first Arab nation to reach the quarter-finals.

But they managed to go one step further than Cameroon in 1990, Senegal's 2002 side and the Ghana team of 2010.

"We came up against a really great Portugal team. We're drawing on all we have, we still have guys injured. We have a mindset," Regragui told France's TFI.

"I told the guys before the match we had to write history for Africa. I'm very, very happy."

Regragui, a France-born former Morocco international, had already made history of his own as the first African coach to take a team into the World Cup quarter-finals. Morocco were without injured defenders Noussair Mazraoui and Nayef Aguerd on Saturday, while captain Romain Saiss was stretchered off early in the second half. "We're very proud because the players who did come in did a fantastic job," said Regragui. "We're a 26-man squad and to get far in this tournament we'll need all of them."

Morocco still have the best defensive record in the World Cup. The only time they have conceded in five matches was an own goal against Canada.

"It's crazy. We're living a dream and we don't want to wake up. I have goosebumps," said winger Sofiane Boufal. "Everything we have, we deserve. We work hard. It's not over. There's still the semi-final and god willing, the final."



## Tearful Ronaldo departs with dream in tatters

DOHA, Qatar



Cristiano Ronaldo left the World Cup in tears on Saturday, walking off down the tunnel with his dreams of winning the trophy in tatters.

Morocco earned a shock 1-0 quarter-final victory over Portugal, the north Africans' joy the stark opposite of Ronaldo's misery.

The Portuguese forward, 37, may never have another chance to win the game's biggest trophy, and his World Cup exit was especially bitter as he started the game as a substitute.

With another result Ronaldo might have celebrated levelling the all-time men's international appearance record with his 196th Portugal cap, but his final minutes were desperate.

As soon as the final whistle blew, Ronaldo left, heading down the tunnel with tears streaming down his face, ignoring the Morocco players rushing to their fans to celebrate.

"If you take two people that are the most upset perhaps it was Cristiano Ronaldo and myself," said Portugal coach Fernando Santos.

"Of course we are upset, of course it affects us, that's part of the game, that's part of the job."

Ronaldo won Euro 2016 with his country, albeit



## Tigers upbeat despite Kishan special

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite a heavy defeat in the third and final ODI in Chattogram after a record-breaking double-hundred from Ishan Kishan, Bangladesh remained upbeat about the fact that they had secured a memorable series win against India.

The Tigers clinched the series after two hard-fought wins in the first two ODIs in Dhaka as man of the series Mehedi Hasan Miraz led the way for only a second-ever bilateral series win against India. Miraz had a terrific series with both bat and ball, smashing his maiden hundred in the second ODI as the hosts held their nerves in yet another nail-biter.

The 25-year-old, who got his first player of the series award in the 50-over format, was hopeful that the Tigers could improve ahead of the ODI World Cup next year.

"This is the first time I'm getting a man of the series award in ODIs. It's a start for our team. We have a World Cup coming up and I hope we can get better. We have lots of senior guys talking to us. I just keep thinking positively," Miraz said during the post-match presentation ceremony yesterday.

It was also a memorable series for skipper Liton Das, who was handed the role at the last moment after regular ODI captain Tamim Iqbal was ruled out with a groin injury.

However, it was Kishan who stole the limelight as the visitors made a strong comeback and sealed a



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

comprehensive 227-run win. Virat Kohli also smashed his 72nd international century and added a record 290-run second-wicket partnership with Kishan as India posted a mammoth 409 for eight before bundling Bangladesh out for 182.

"Ishan and Virat batted really well. Hats off to Ishan. We tried our best, but we didn't find any solutions. If the score would have been 330-340, it would have been a different ball game. They are a good side, and we played good cricket for two games," Liton said.

Kishan, who struck the fastest double-hundred in ODI cricket off just 126 balls with 26 fours and 10 sixes, said that he was enjoying his time in the middle and was focusing on hitting loose deliveries when offered.

"On the international stage, you try to get a lot when you get a few. I got a lot of help from the support staff. I was just picking the ball and the bowlers. Things went my way. After looking at the wicket, I knew it was going to play well. I was trying to smash loose balls," Kishan said.

being taken off injured during the win over France in the final and watching from the sidelines as Eder became his country's hero.

The World Cup remained a dream for both Ronaldo and his country but they fell short against surprise package Morocco.

In a surprise decision, Ronaldo had been relegated to the bench against Switzerland as Portugal romped to a 6-1 victory in the last 16 and Santos maintained that plan.

However, shortly after half-time, with his team trailing to Youssef En-Nesyri's goal, Santos threw on Ronaldo and Joao Cancelo, looking to their all-time leading scorer to bail them out.

Ronaldo struggled to get involved in the game, with Morocco swarming him whenever the ball was close.

The striker had only one sniff at goal, but Moroccan stopper Yassine Bounou got down quickly to deny him.

Asked if he regretted starting with Ronaldo on the bench, the coach maintained he was content with his choice.

"I have no regrets, I think this was a team that played very well against Switzerland," added Santos.

"Cristiano is a great player, he came in when I thought that was necessary, so no, I have no regrets."

After picking himself up from World Cup disappointment, Ronaldo will have to decide his future in the game at club level.

The forward and Manchester United parted ways with a bitter divorce at the start of the tournament and Ronaldo is currently without a club.