



Zlatko Dalic



Lionel Scaloni



Walid Regragui



Didier Deschamps

## FOUR MASTERMINDS calling the shots

**Four teams from three continents have made the cut into the ongoing semifinals of the World Cup. While the players have hogged the major share of the spotlight for their respective teams, the coaches still remain the key figures as the culmination of the Greatest Show on Earth draws near. Let us look into the four in charge of the semi-finalists:**

### STAR DESK REPORT

#### Argentina – Lionel Scaloni

In his fourth year as Argentina coach, Lionel Scaloni has transformed his side as hot-favourites leading up to the ongoing World Cup. But those aspirations soon took a hit with a shock loss to Saudi Arabia in their opening group-stage fixture, ending Albiceleste's 36-match unbeaten run.

But Scaloni, who led Argentina to their first major trophy in 28 years in the 2021 Copa America, managed to sidestep that setback and guided his team to a World Cup semifinal.

Player-turned-coach, Scaloni, played with Argentine superstar Lionel Messi in the 2006 World Cup. As a coach this time around, the 44-year-old has had to bank on the seven-time Ballon d'Or to prove Argentina's title credentials. While Messi's individual brilliance inevitably came through, Scaloni's flexibility and willingness to change his shape and tactics in order to trump a shrewd Louis Van Gaal in the quarterfinals have to be appreciated.

Faced with another rigid, well-drilled system in the semifinal against Zlatko Dalic's Croatia, Scaloni will once again have to come up with the right answers to put down the 2018 runners-up.

#### Croatia – Zlatko Dalic

The World Cup's knockout stage is nothing new for Zlatko Dalic as the 56-year-old, just one year at the helm, had taken Croatia to the grand final of the Russia World Cup. Despite Croatia not being at their attacking best even after having one of the most accomplished midfielders in the tournaments, a dogged defence and a strong sense of resilience have helped Croatia overcome



one obstacle after another on their path to the final four.

Dalic's men have already put down one South American giant in Brazil and will relish the prospect of being the party spoilers for Messi's Argentina.

While they have lacked the sort of fluidity that their line-up promises, Croatia opportunistically have managed to come alive in small phases in games and capitalised on opposition blunders. They have been hard to beat and now possess the added momentum of having the last laugh in games after consecutive wins in penalty shootouts, similar to last World Cup edition, on their way to the semifinals this time.

#### Morocco – Walid Regragui

The defending champions France will not be thrilled at facing Morocco, who turned in a performance in the quarter-finals that was equal parts streetwise and full of heart to end Cristiano Ronaldo's journey in Qatar and send him away in tears.

Morocco's progress at the World Cup has been built on fearless, no-nonsense defending and they arrive into the semis with the best defensive record, having conceded only once – an own goal against Canada in a group stage game that they still won 2-1.

With a dogged defence and an unending desire to keep opponents at bay, Walid Regragui have had the luxury of the skill, guile, and pace of players – the likes of Achraf Hakimi, Noussair Mazraoui, Amrabat, Hakim Ziyech, and Youssef En-Nesyri – who have made a habit of making limited opportunities count.

The way that Regragui has martialled his troops to rally behind his hard-to-beat mentally has stood out. In his first year in charge, Regragui, who had to come in following the dismissal of Wahid Halilhodzic months before the World Cup, has truly made his mark on the global stage.

#### France – Didier Deschamps

In his 10th year in charge of France, very few would have a better grasp of winning World Cups than Didier Deschamps. The 54-year-old captained France to a World Cup win in 1998 and won the ultimate prize, this time as a coach, in 2018 in Russia.

With another final beckoning, Deschamps, who has guided France impeccably despite being hammered by injuries before the World Cup commenced, has fully managed to spurn the champion's curse as they appear frontrunners to win the coveted trophy.

His playing days saw him initiating offensive transitions as a defensive midfielder, displaying a superior work-rate, vision, and technique. It appears that he instilled every bit of his qualities while managing a team spoiled with a luxury of world-class players.

## Southgate 'will take time' to consider future

AFP, AL KHOR

Gareth Southgate said he would take his time before he makes a decision over his future as England coach after the bitter disappointment of their World Cup quarter-final defeat against France.

Defending champions France won 2-1 at the Al Bayt Stadium, with England captain Harry Kane blazing over from the penalty spot when handed a chance to equalise late in the game, having earlier scored from the spot.

England reached the semi-finals of the World Cup in 2018 and the final of last year's European Championship but their long wait for a major trophy will now stretch beyond 56 years.

Southgate said he would now have to take stock.

"Whenever I've finished these tournaments I've needed time to make correct decisions because emotionally you go through so many different feelings and the energy that it takes through these tournaments is enormous so I want to make the right decision, whenever that is, for the team, for England, for the FA," he said in the early hours of Sunday.

"And I've got to be sure that whatever decision I make is the right one and I think it's right to take a bit of time to do that because I know in the past how my feelings have fluctuated in the immediate aftermath of tournaments."



## Morocco 'here to change mentality'

AFP, Doha

Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou said his team's history-making World Cup campaign can show future generations from his country that they can create miracles.

The stopper produced a man-of-the-match display in Morocco's 1-0 win over Portugal on Saturday to take his team to the semi-finals for the first time.

"We're in the same state as you... pinch me, I think I'm dreaming," Bounou told reporters.

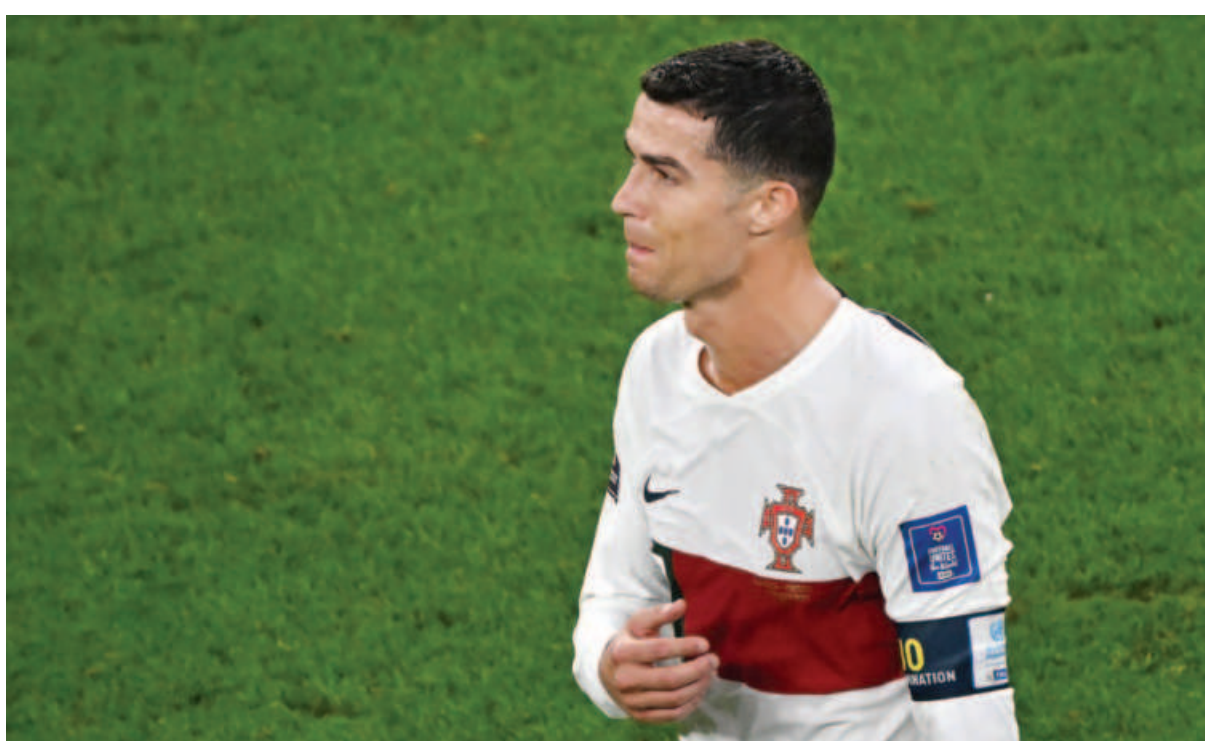
"These moments are great, but we're here to change the mentality. This feeling of inferiority... we have indeed changed this mentality, and the generation coming after us will know that Moroccan players can create miracles."

Morocco became the first African and first Arab side ever to reach the final four of the World Cup, in the first edition ever held in an Arab country.

"It's really, really hard to find the words to describe this moment," he continued.

"I want to thank my teammates for their hard work and our supporters who had our backs."

"Hopefully we can have some rest to prepare for what's coming next."



## Ronaldo the lasting image of Portugal exit

REUTERS

Cristiano Ronaldo running to the tunnel in tears and as desolate as the football world has ever seen him will be the lasting image for Portugal fans looking back on the World Cup in Qatar. Ronaldo, a five-times Ballon D'Or winner, arrived with a mission to prove he could still make a difference. He ended the tournament, however, as a bench player and had no impact as a substitute in his team's 1-0

quarter-final loss to Morocco on Saturday.

It was another tale of hope turned to disappointment, controversy and under-achievement on the biggest stage for Ronaldo, who was playing his fifth World Cup and hoping it would set him up for new opportunities after his departure from Manchester United.

Portugal are used to having Ronaldo as the centre of attention. He is one of the greatest forwards of all time, a figure so big he has raised

the bar and lifted the standard of sport in his country.

Ironically, in a Portugal team full of stand-out players, Ronaldo fell victim to the abundance of options that coach Fernando Santos had at his disposal.

Portugal's all-time leading scorer with 118 goals in 195 appearances, Ronaldo was benched for Tuesday's 6-1 win over Switzerland and the 21-year-old Goncalo Ramos netted a hat-trick in only his fourth game for his country.



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