



What to WATCH

BTV, GTV & T SPORTS
FIFA World Cup Final
Argentina vs France
Live from 09:00 pm
T SPORTS, GTV &

SONY SIX
Bangladesh vs India
1st Test, Day 05
Live from 09:30 am
TEN 2
Australia vs South Africa

1st Test, Day 2
Live from 09:00 am
Pakistan vs England
3rd Test, Day 2
Live from 01:30 pm
Rangpur vs Sylhet, SICS

'Argentina will win WC for their fans in Palestine'

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Doha

Ihab Abu Alkheir was only eight years old when he, along with his family members in Gaza, Palestine, watched as Diego Maradona wept after losing the final of the 1990 World Cup final against Germany.

It was a close contest – Ihab recalls – one that was decided by a 50-50 penalty decision, converted by Andres Brehme, as Maradona and Argentina's four-year reign as world champions came to a cruel end.

Ihab remembers how everyone in his family was left saddened by the defeat to Argentina, loved in Palestine as much as anywhere else in the world.

The now 40-year-old journalist never had the chance to see the late Argentina icon from close-up, but now he has the opportunity to watch Maradona's successor, Lionel Messi, lift the trophy.

Ihab got a phone call from his mother back in Gaza two days ago. She told her son that Messi will definitely win the World Cup for the Argentina fans back in Palestine and beyond when Argentina take on defending champions France in the final on Sunday.

Ihab is excited as he speaks about the globally revered footballer from Rosario.

"It's not just in Palestine that Messi is revered. I think people all over the world love him for the way he plays, the way he behaves and the way he carries himself on and off the pitch. He's achieved everything in football except for the World Cup. He deserves it and he should win," Ihab says, during a chat with this reporter at the Host Country Media Centre in Doha yesterday.

Ihab is one of around 20 journalists from Palestine who took the long and winding trip to Qatar to watch the World Cup. The radio journalist had to cross to Rifla and then take a long bus journey to Cairo before taking a flight to Doha. But the World Cup has been worth the hassle for Ihab and the group of Palestinian journalists.

He says that amid the difficult political and economic situation back home, people get a respite and joy in the month of the World Cup, and that he is happy to relay the stories of the global sporting extravaganza to his people.

Although FIFA statutes govern that no political messages or symbols be shown at World Cup venues, the Qatar World Cup has seen a divergence from that strict position, with many Palestinian flags waved around the galleries and on the streets by Arabs and non-Arabs alike.

"What makes us most happy is when we see people from across the Arab world and many from beyond showing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for an independent state.

"I was so moved when the Moroccan players called their teammates and families from the stands, and they celebrated with the Palestinian flag," Ihab says.

His World Cup experience will, Ihab feels, be fulfilled when he watches Messi hold aloft the trophy at the Lusail Iconic Stadium tonight.



CONTRASTING BACKGROUND but similar passion to win

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Doha

When defending champions France take on Argentina in the World Cup final tonight, all the focus will certainly be on the likes of Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe. However, two men on the pitch will perhaps play as important a role, if not more, than these two – Hugo Lloris and Emiliano Martinez.

Lloris and Martinez – the two goalkeepers who will stand between the sticks at either end, often play the crucial role in deciding outcomes for club and country, but they hardly ever get the deserving credit.

Martinez knows all too well about being ignored and the hurt of not getting the proper recognition.

After spending two seasons at the Arsenal youth team, the Mar del Plata-born goalkeeper was loaned to all sorts of lower-league sides across England before finally getting the opportunity to showcase his talent as Aston Villa's number one goalkeeper in 2020. It was his exploits at Villa which helped him earn a place in the Argentina senior team, and Martinez grabbed the opportunity with both hands, leading the Albiceleste to the Copa America title with some brilliant performances last year.

The Argentina No. 1 did not hide his emotions when asked about the tough road he had to take to the top at the pre-final press conference on Saturday.

"It is difficult not to think of how hard the road is," Martinez said. "I've always been a fighter. I left home when I was 17. People in Argentina didn't even know me. It will be difficult for me to not remember everything that I've been through," Martinez said as he stands a win away from becoming a world champion.

Martinez recalled how he cried, while having a barbecue with friends, when Argentina were beaten by Germany in the 2014 World Cup final. He remembered he was just a fanboy four years before the World Cup, taking selfies with his brother in the gallery as Argentina made an early exit from the World Cup in Russia four years ago. Now Argentina are in the final and Martinez is very much a key component of the team, he can definitely dream of lifting the coveted trophy.

"I am a dreamer. I always dream big. I always fight for my dream," Martinez said.

France keeper Lloris, on the other hand, has already one World Cup to his name to go with a UEFA Nations League title and a runners-up medal in the Euros. He has been a constant fixture for Tottenham Hotspur and for France over the last decade, earning a record 144 caps for Les Bleus. Despite all that, when it comes to the talk of the best keepers in the world, Lloris is often overlooked.

That doesn't faze him though. Lloris is proving doubters wrong with fine performances in this World Cup, having not conceded a goal from open play since the second game of the group stage against Denmark. Back in 2019, Lloris was asked to reflect on what it was like to captain a World Cup-winning team. "I don't want to say that I've forgotten about the World Cup but, for me, it belongs to the past," he replied, as he was, as the captain of the team, looking for more glory.

Born in a completely different background to that of Martinez, Lloris has vastly different characteristics in his goalkeeping and leadership, but the passion to win is the same for the Spurs keeper as it is for the Aston Villa shot-stopper.

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THE LATERAL VIEW

Can Messi keep balancing his Marciniak memories?

IRESH ZAKER

If it wasn't obvious before, I think the match between Argentina and the Netherlands laid to rest all doubts about the importance of the referee in a football match.

Last heard, the chief official of that match, Mateu Lahoz, was on his way home to Spain, booking luggage handlers, ticketing agents and, if rumors are to be believed, all babies that were crying on the flight on the way. Apparently, he thought that they looked like De Paul. I am joking, of course. He thought they all looked like Dumfries. I am joking again.

But yes, referees are important. So let us look at the man who will officiate the final between La Albiceleste and Les Bleus. His name is Szymon Marciniak, 41, from Poland. He began his officiating career in Poland in 2009, and became a FIFA enlisted referee in 2013. His resume includes multiple high profile Champions League encounters, and two matches in this World Cup.

In this World Cup, he has booked five players and has not sent any off. All in all, a man of solid credentials, and good news for those looking forward to a well officiated match.

Except maybe for Argentina fans. You see, at



Zakir's debut ton one of perseverance

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Zakir Hasan became the fourth batter from Bangladesh to score a century in their debut Test, a feat he achieved on the fourth day of the first Test against India at Chattogram yesterday.

Zakir's longer-version performances in the domestic circuit and then against India A recently paved the way for his inclusion following a journey that began with a T20I debut four years ago and has seen him overcome that tag of T20 specialist.

Thus he waited his turn, hoping to maintain his process and playing a big number of domestic games before opener Tamim Iqbal's injury saw the Test side's door open for him. But does sitting on the national team's periphery for four years following that T20I debut and then making a case with a debut ton in Tests signal that this is his time?

"Actually you can't say something like that with certainty," the 24-year-old said at press conference yesterday. Zakir had made his case with a 173-run knock against India A, a game where he was included due to injury to regular opener Towhid Hridoy.



what happened in the past. I think about what I have in my hands, what I can do. I am trying to hold on to this process," he added on his return.

"That innings (173 against India A) provided me with a lot of

confidence. I was trying to follow the same process of that innings. A big score leading into a national call-up is certainly a turning point," he pointed out on his innings of patience and application.

Zakir played 69 first-class games and in the recent NCL, where a majority struggled against the seam and swing of the Dukes ball, he was the highest run-getter. "I think I held on to my temperament because I

played so much first-class cricket. I have a number of big innings in that format. The Dukes ball swung for almost 80 overs in this season's conditions. Kookaburra usually swings for less time so I think it was slightly easier for me [at Chattogram]."

Zakir, who became just the second opener since the West Indies' Leonard Baichan to hit a ton in the fourth innings of debut Test, fell to Ravinchandran Ashwin after a 224-ball 100 after a 315-minute knock. Although congratulated by the likes of Virat Kohli and India coach Rahul Dravid, Zakir was disappointed, remarking: "I wanted to bat a little longer for the team."

He said he modelled himself after Mominul Haque, adding: "We are left-handers of roughly the same height. I was always inspired by his batting and discipline."

He said he remained hopeful that Shakib Al Hasan and Mehedi Miraz could still pull off a miracle on the final day. About his own knock, he remained pretty down to earth. "I feel good scoring a hundred. I didn't have expectations. I wanted to bat long," he said, knowing that confidence had been shown in his perseverance.



club level, Lionel Messi has not previously had very good luck when Marciniak was officiating. He was in charge when Leo's Barcelona suffered a horrific 4-0 defeat at the hands of PSG in the 2016/17 Champions League's round of 16. The Blaugrana, of course, managed to overturn that deficit in the Camp Nou return with a famous 6-1 victory, but Marciniak did not officiate that game.

Messi and Szymon again took the field together during the quarter-finals of the same tournament, when Barcelona took on Juventus in Turin. The Catalans lost 3-0 to *I Bianconeri*, a deficit that they were unable to overcome in the second leg, crashing out of the Champions League after a limp 0-0 draw.

As bright as Marciniak's star is at this moment, it seems that he augurs some dark clouds for the little magician from Rosario. However, earlier in Qatar, Messi had somewhat balanced his personal record with the Pole when La Albiceleste overcame the Aussies in their last 16 clash.

But do not fret too much Argentina fans. Messi's latest run seems more about the perfection of faith than the vagaries of fate. As long as the fans and players keep heart, all should be close to fine. Just try not to harass the referee too much. Even faith has its limits when it comes to overcoming bad karma.

