



Match 1 (Group stage), Argentina lose 2-1 vs. Saudi Arabia: Messi, who had scored from the spot, stands in total dejection after Argentina lost to Saudi Arabia to suffer one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history. After match, the Argentina captain had urged their supporters to keep believing in the team.



Match 2 (Group stage), Argentina win 2-0 vs. Mexico: Messi celebrates as he breaks the all-important deadlock, with a left-footed strike unleashed from 35 yards, in what was a do-or-die affair for the Albiceleste.



Match 3 (Group stage), Argentina win 2-0 vs. Poland: Messi had missed a penalty in their final group-stage match but had marshalled his troops on the field to completely outclass their opposition, a result that ensured Argentina qualify as group-winners and, most importantly, avoid France in the next round.



Match 4 (Round of 16), Argentina win 2-1 vs. Australia: Messi again gave his side the lead, this time by driving a grounded left-footed shot in between a crowded space to find the bottom far corner, somehow making it look easy as he often does.



Match 5 (Quarterfinal), Argentina win in tiebreakers vs. Netherlands after extra-time ended 2-2: Messi celebrates one of his side's shootout goal after the maestro produced an assist for the ages, through the legs of his marker from a near-impossible angle, before netting from the spot to give his side a better cushion.

MESSI

solves the Argentina puzzle

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Prior to the Qatar World Cup, Lionel Andres Messi had all but conquered everything for his country and the clubs he represented – prestigious titles, individual awards, accolades from teammates, opponents, and critics alike.

Going back to 2021, right after he led Argentina to end a 28-year Copa America title drought, in unfortunate circumstances, in a move that was beyond his control, he had to leave his comfort zone and boyhood club Barcelona in tears.

The move to Paris, where he struggled to find his footing in the first season, was seen as a lesser stage for a player of his calibre since the French League is not regarded on the same level as the



outclassed on the night.

The Copa America and Finalissima wins indicated that Messi had remained fixated on his World Cup dream and had left the disappointment of Russia 2018 far behind.

Then commenced the Qatar World Cup where Argentina arrived as one of the favourites but suffered a shock loss to Saudi Arabia in the campaign opener. Things appeared to have spiralled out of control for the sky blue and white but Messi stepped up and led from the front in all of the games that followed, showing every aspect of the impact a player and captain can create.

26 games, 2,314 minutes in the span of 17 years. That's the extent of perseverance Messi had to show to get his hands on the most coveted trophy

in sports, the one that got away at Brazil 2014.

He was in his prime years back then, at 27, and won the Golden Ball – given to the best player of the tournament – and it was quite unthinkable that even someone as brilliant as Messi could conjure what it takes to come so close again to taste the ultimate glory, if not go all the way.

Ultimately, unbridled perseverance had prevailed, and Argentina lifted their third World title. En route, Messi had broken all sorts of World Cup records – surpassing the likes of Maradona, Pele, Juergen Klinsmann, Gabriel Batistuta, Lothar Matthaus and more.

It seems the cup found its way at the hands of the righteous. Messi now stands in a league of his own.



Spanish, English or Italian leagues.

His status as the greatest Barcelona player in history and as one of the greatest players of all time was never in question. The way he developed facets of his game and conducted himself on and off the pitch made him an unanimously loved player all over the world.

However, when it came to the Argentines, Messi had always received a mixed bag, largely due to the fact that the Albiceleste had not won the FIFA World Cup since 1986 – one that had immortalised Diego Maradona – and thus the burden to acquire the third star in the sky blue and white shirt was passed to Messi after a star-

studded Argentina side fell short in 2006 World Cup, where he made his debut at the Greatest Show on Earth.

Moreover, Maradona's shadow had casted such a massive one on whoever tried to lead the Argentina team, the burden had appeared greater for Messi, whose leadership personality was contrary to the norms due to his reserved nature.

Until the evolution took place in 2021. It resulted in Argentina being the South American champions by dethroning Brazil, after which the reigning European champions Italy came in the way in a Finalissima and they were



Match 6 (Semifinal), Argentina win 3-0 vs. Croatia: Messi orchestrates a memorable move deep from the right touchline to bamboozle one of the best defenders this edition in Josko Gvardiol before presenting a pass on a silver platter for Julian Alvarez to tap in home and seal the game.



Match 7 (Final), Argentina win in tiebreakers vs. France after extra-time ended 3-3: Having had lost momentum late in the match, Messi scores his team's third goal, what seemed to be the winner in extra time. This goal was wedged between two spot kicks he coolly converted, the latter was Argentina's opener in shootout.

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