

Macron asks team to greet fans

President Emmanuel Macron intervened to ask France's footballers to greet fans after their defeat in the World Cup final. France's players initially wanted to head straight home Monday after their loss on penalties to Argentina, the head of the French Football Federation, Noel Le Graet, said. "Under the weight of the disappointment, the sadness and such strong emotions, I understood this choice and I respected it. The situation changed around 10:00 am (on Monday) after an exchange with the president, who wanted a moment of communion. Naturally I accepted along with the team," he added.



AFP

Focus shifts to club football

AGENCIES

The curtains closed on the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar on Sunday with the Lionel Messi-led Argentina clinching their third title by beating France in the final, but with barely very little time for the fans to let the euphoria sink in, the focus has promptly shifted back to club football.

English clubs like Wolves, New Castle, Bournemouth and Leicester City have already resumed the season on Wednesday with the standout fixture involving Manchester City and rivals Liverpool in the round of 16 of the EFL Cup at the Etihad Stadium on Friday.

Before that, Manchester United will welcome Burnley at Old Trafford on Thursday in the EFL Cup.

The World Cup was played in winter and the middle of the club football season for the first time, resulting in several teams missing regular starters in the showpiece event. But with the almost a month-long World Cup coming to its culmination, squads of most clubs have been restored with the return of injured players.

But teams may not get full-strength squads for some of their early fixtures after the restart as the return of players may depend on how far they made it in the World Cup.

For Liverpool's away fixture, Jurgen Klopp will have the likes of Mohammad Salah, Thiago Alcantara, and Roberto Firmino available as they did not participate in Qatar but might miss Ibrahima Konate, Alisson Becker, Jordan Henderson, and Fabinho, all of whom exited the competition from the quarterfinals.

Ahead of the marquee clash, Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher said that the Reds were raring to get going.



"Obviously, it has been a long break now for all of us – so we're obviously itching to get back," Kelleher told Liverpoolfc.com.

"We can't wait to start the cup game against City now. We had a good time out in Dubai so we're well prepared and all raring to go."

On the other hand, City will boast the services of Erling Haaland, Ilkay Gundogan, Riyad Mahrez and Kevin De Bruyne to start the match but might also get Brazilian goalkeeper Ederson to start as he only played one match for the Selecao in the World Cup.

Argentine striker Julian Alvarez is set to miss the contest as he played in the World Cup final on Sunday.

Expectedly, France and Argentina players are set to miss a handful of games as they will be the last to join their respective clubs due to celebrations in their countries, rest and recovery.

The Premier League starts on December 26 with Liverpool, Arsenal, and Tottenham all playing.

La Liga will resume proceedings with Girona taking on Rayo Vallecano on December 29, while Ligue 1, Serie A, and the Bundesliga will restart on December 28, January 4 and 20 respectively.

Lionel Messi-led Argentina on Tuesday arrived with the World Cup in Buenos Aires where millions gathered to catch a glimpse of their adored players, who ended the Albiceleste's 36-year wait for the most coveted trophy. The following morning, magician Messi posted a photo of him cuddling with the trophy. The craze in Argentina was such that a young fan was seen adorning a replica of the trophy while waiting for team's arrival.

PHOTO: REUTERS



MESSI'S CORONATION rounds up dramatic year for football

REUTERS

Lionel Messi's World Cup fairytale lit up the year in football as heroics and heartbreak at the finals captivated fans and highlighted the growth of the world's most popular sport despite the criticism of host country Qatar's human rights record.

European leagues have long dictated the global football calendar but world governing body FIFA's decision to hold the tournament in the Middle East for the first time resulted in a mid-season pause and shook up the domestic club game.

With matches played in air-conditioned stadiums to cope with the heat of the desert state and no beer on tap in stadiums, spectators experienced a World Cup like never before.

But that did not kill the party mood as the finals repeatedly delivered exciting moments and concluded with Messi kissing the golden trophy, the missing piece in his vast collection, as Argentina defeated France on penalties.

Playing in a fifth World Cup for Argentina, the incomparable Messi once again left everyone in awe of his magical powers on the field as he smashed records and delivered on the hopes of a nation, bringing the World Cup home after 36 years.

The illustrious achievement, which will dominate discussions over the coming weeks, finally brought the diminutive forward out of the shadow of the late great Diego Maradona and reignited the debate about the greatest of all time (GOAT).

Though Argentina triumphed in the final, they were also one of the many heavyweights who suffered an upset in Qatar.

The South American giants were handed a shock defeat by Saudi Arabia in their first group game, which statisticians Gracenote credited as the biggest upset in World Cup history.

SHOCK RESULTS

Shock results were a theme as Japan finished on top of a group that included former winners Spain and Germany, while South Korea also went through at the expense of Uruguay.

With every continent represented in the World Cup last 16, the most diverse knockout stage in the tournament's history was evidence of the sport's expanding reach.

Underdogs Morocco injected new energy into African football as Walid Regragui's team conquered hearts with their never-say-die attitude, becoming the first African

and Arab country to reach the semifinals.

France striker Kylian Mbappe returned from Qatar with the top scorer's Golden Boot, after netting a hat-trick in the final, reminding the world of his calibre before he turned 24 on Tuesday.

Cristiano Ronaldo also made headlines, albeit for different reasons, the Portugal international walking off in tears after they were knocked out in the quarter-finals, just weeks after he left Manchester United in a bitter farewell.

On the domestic scene, a few months before the World Cup club football in Europe saw Manchester City and Bayern Munich retain their titles, while Paris St Germain, Real Madrid and AC Milan prevailed after losing their grip the previous season.

While men's football enjoyed an entertaining year, on and off the field, the women's game also had its fair share of memorable moments as England won the European Championship.

The 2022 Euros were the most watched edition of the tournament and the Lionesses were frequently seen on TV screens and in the newspapers after the victory, earning the recognition and visibility that female players have long fought for.

MSC, Sk Jamal get winning starts

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Mohammedan SC and Sheikh Jamal DC got winning starts to their Federation Cup campaign on Monday.

10-time champions Mohammedan beat Rahmatganj MFS at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj while three-time tournament winners Sheikh Jamal blanked newcomers Azampur FC Uttar 3-0 at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj.

After a goalless first half, Malian forward Souleymane Diabate, availing a long ball from midfielder Muzaffar Muzaffarov, struck the decisive goal from inside the box through a clever placing shot over advancing goalkeeper Mamun Aliif.

In Gopalganj, Sheikh Jamal DC took just a minute to take the lead when Uzbek forward Otabek Jonov converted from the spot after Azampur FC defender Salahuddin Rubel brought down national discard Mehedi Hasan Ridoy inside the box.

Azampur FC then responded well to keep their superior opponents at bay. However, a major setback in the form of the sending off of goalkeeper Mohammad Razib three mber one goalkeeper Mohammad Razib was sent off three dashed their hopes of a comeback.

Razib came out of the box to handle a goal-bound shot from Cornelius Stewart, forcing his side to play the rest of the game with 10 men. Sheikh Jamal did not fail to take advantage of the situation, scoring two more goals in a span of two minutes.

The replaced goalkeeper of Azampur, Jahid Hasan Rabbi, managed to stop a close-range header from Paraguayan Luis Mirada but failed to stop a rebounder from Koushik Barua in the 76 th minute. Minutes later, a Mannaf Rabbi strike sealed the game for Sheikh Jamal.



Bangladesh Test and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan did not hesitate to show off his well-known love for Lionel Messi and Argentina as he donned the iconic number 10 Argentina shirt during the Tigers' training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Tuesday. The ace all-rounder, on Sunday evening, was also seen celebrating from his car in the Dhaka University area after Argentina beat France in the World Cup final.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Can Tigers end the year as they started?

SPORTS REPORTER

For Bangladesh, the year had begun with a historic Test win over hosts New Zealand at Mount Maunganui. That win gave a lot of hope as it was thought to be setting Bangladesh cricket into a new direction in the longest format of the game with a renewed approach.

But since then, Bangladesh went on to lose seven out of eight Tests this year that once again reflected the Tigers' vulnerability in the longest format.

Following a 188-run thrashing in the first Test against India in Chattogram, Shakib Al Hasan and his troops will be looking to wrap up the year on a positive note when they take on India in the second and final Test in Mirpur tomorrow.

For that, however, the Tigers will have to come up with a much better approach.

Bangladesh's batting in the longest format, especially in the first innings, has been the prime reason behind many of their defeats in the format over the years. In reply to India's mammoth 404-run total, the hosts were bundled out for a mere 150 in their first innings. And that eventually proved to be the

turning point of the game as the visitors capitalised on that to post a huge target of 513 runs.

One of the main reasons behind the Tigers' recurring top-order meltdown could be narrowed down to the team management's inability to find a settled number three in the batting order. Bangladesh opted for new comer Yasir Ali in the crucial position in the first Test but the right-hander failed to make any impact.

The 26 year old, who batted at number six and seven positions in his first five Tests, failed to adjust to the new role, scoring just 4 and 5 in the two innings, respectively, against a quality Indian bowling attack.

Even though Yasir showed good skills since making his Test debut last year, it seems as if the Tigers' think tank failed to realise the extra pressure that would be thrust upon the inexperienced batter when he is made to bat at such a crucial position all of a sudden.

With Yasir failing to shine in his new role, it is certain that the Tigers' team management might need to come up with an alternative plan for the second Test if they are to end the year just the way they had started.