

A fan wears handmade glasses to mark the FIFA World Cup's 1,000th match before the Group F fixture between Tunisia and Japan at Monterrey Stadium in Guadalupe, Mexico, yesterday.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

CHAMPIONS MEET CHAOS

STAR SPORTS DESK

The defending champions Argentina are rolling, the goals are flowing and Lionel Messi is hunting history once again. Argentina arrive in Dallas on Monday knowing victory over Austria could secure top spot in Group J, while their captain stands on the verge of becoming the top scorer in the tournament's history. Standing in their way is an Austrian side energised by Ralf Rangnick's demanding philosophy, one built on intensity, pressing and chaos. Whether that is enough to unsettle the tournament favourites remains the question.

- Lionel Messi is one goal away from surpassing Germany's Miroslav Klose (16 goals) to become the men's FIFA World Cup all-time leading goalscorer. Scoring would also make him only the third player ever to net in six consecutive World Cup matches.
- Argentina could become only the seventh nation to score three or more goals in four consecutive World Cup matches, a feat last achieved by Spain between 1998 and 2002.
- Austria are incredibly lethal from dead-ball situations; seven of their last 10 World Cup goals have originated from set-pieces.
- For the first time since 1982, Austria can secure qualification for the knockout stage with a positive result from this match.
- Argentina have won eight consecutive matches under Lionel Scaloni, keeping clean sheets in five of their last eight competitive internationals.

- Defeating Austria would be Argentina's eighth consecutive World Cup win, making it the second-longest winning streak in tournament history, behind only Brazil's 11. They will also become the second reigning champions to open their title defence with back-to-back wins, matching France's 2022 start, putting to bed the infamous "champion's curse".
- Argentina have not conceded a single goal in group-stage football at the World Cup since their shock 2-1 opening-match defeat to Saudi Arabia in Qatar four years ago, keeping three consecutive group-stage clean sheets since.
- This is the first-ever competitive fixture between the two nations at a major international tournament. Their only two previous meetings were friendlies played in Austria, featuring a 5-1 win for an inspired Diego Maradona-led Argentina in 1980 and a 1-1 draw in 1990.

Ragnick's calculated trap to stifle the champions

Ralf Rangnick has engineered a system designed to rattle the champions by combining clever spatial traps with a relentless ticking clock. Instead of chasing the ball, Austria compress the game by funneling opposition build-up toward the flanks. An attacker executes a curved recovery run to block central escape routes, using the touchline as an extra defender to trap the ball-carrier. Once the trap is sprung, Austria trigger a fierce eight-second blitz. The nearest unit swarms the opponent to reclaim possession high up the pitch, only dropping into a defensive block if they fail to win it within that strict timeframe.



"We know what kind of opponent we're up against, what kind of quality they have in their ranks, even besides Messi, but also what they're capable of as a team."

Austria captain David Alaba

"We know how good Argentina are...We respect them, but we are confident in our strengths. If we bring our qualities to the pitch, we will pose problems for any team."

Austria midfielder Paul Wanner

"Austria is a very tough team, as we're seeing with the vast majority of the teams participating in this World Cup."

Argentina assistant coach Pablo Aimar

Dutch find new No. 9 in Brobbey

AGENCIES

Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman faced criticism for his substitutions after the Dutch were held to a 2-2 draw by Japan in their opening World Cup match. A week later, however, his selection decisions were hailed after a commanding 5-1 victory over Sweden. Koeman admitted following the draw in Dallas that his changes had failed to produce the desired impact. But there was no questioning his decision to hand Brian Brobbey the central striking role for the Group F clash. The 24-year-old repaid that faith in emphatic fashion, scoring twice inside the opening 17 minutes to set the Netherlands on their way to an impressive win that lifted them to the top of the group. Brobbey has largely been a peripheral figure for the national team in recent years. He was overlooked during World Cup qualifying and



only returned to the squad in March after a year-long absence. Now, he appears well placed to establish himself as the Netherlands' first-choice striker and potentially succeed Memphis Depay as the focal point of the attack. A strong season with Sunderland in the Premier League has helped elevate his game and boosted his confidence. With creative talents such as Cody Gakpo, Denzel Dumfries and Crysencio Summerville supplying ammunition, opportunities are likely to come for whoever leads the Dutch front line. Against Sweden, Brobbey showed he has both the movement and finishing ability to thrive on the biggest stage. Just as importantly, he displayed a sharpness that Depay, still working his way back from a lengthy injury lay-off, has yet to fully regain. If Koeman was searching for a reliable leading man, Brobbey may have provided the answer.

Super sub Undav delivers for ambitious Germany

AGENCIES

Julian Nagelsmann welcomed Germany's dramatic 2-1 comeback victory over Ivory Coast on Saturday, but the coach insisted reaching the World Cup knockout stage for the first time since 2014 was only another step towards a much bigger objective. "We have high ambitions," Nagelsmann said when asked by AFP if securing qualification for the next round was something to celebrate. "The most important topic for us is to focus on the next step." Germany's progression ends a run of bitter World Cup disappointments after group-stage exits in both Russia in 2018 and Qatar four years later. Saturday's



- Undav has been directly involved in five goals as a substitute in this World Cup (3 goals, 2 assists) -- the joint most at a single edition of the competition since 1966 (alongside Roger Milla in 1990).
- Undav is the first player to score in both of his first two World Cup matches for Germany since Miroslav Klose in 2002.
- Germany have won both of their opening two matches for the first time at the FIFA World Cup since 2006, having failed to do so in each of the previous four editions.

victory, secured by substitute Deniz Undav's 94th-minute winner, guaranteed Die Mannschaft a place in the knockout rounds and left the normally composed Nagelsmann visibly animated at the final whistle. "This is exactly what we hoped for and I'm very happy for my team," the 38-year-old said. Germany were pushed hard by an impressive Ivory Coast side, who took the lead through Franck Kessie in the first half and continued to trouble the four-time world champions after the restart. Nagelsmann later admitted he was unhappy with both Germany's opening spell and the first 10 minutes of the second

half. He made a triple substitution on the hour, introducing Undav and Nadiem Amiri among the changes, which proved to be decisive. Eight minutes later, Amiri and Undav combined for Germany's equaliser before the Stuttgart forward struck again deep into stoppage time, producing a superb turn and finish to complete the comeback. Undav's impact has become one of the stories of Germany's campaign. After scoring twice as a substitute against Curacao, he once again changed the game from the bench and now has five goal involvements as a substitute at this World Cup, having also provided two assists against Curacao. His performances have inevitably raised questions over a possible start in Germany's final Group E match against Ecuador. "I could have him in the starting lineup," Nagelsmann said. "I think every player would love to be in the starting lineup, but I think he's very happy as it is right now." "When the game opens up, he's really great at moving around," Nagelsmann added. "Deniz is nobody who needs to be prepared; he can jump in right away." Germany are now assured of a top-two finish in Group E and will secure first place if Ecuador fail to win either of their remaining matches. Meanwhile, Ivory Coast could also book a historic first-ever World Cup knockout berth with victory over Curacao next week.

'The results have been unpredictable'

The FIFA World Cup fever has swept across Bangladesh, and Bangladesh women's football defender Afeida Khandokar is no exception. A passionate Brazil supporter, Afeida has been closely following the World Cup with her parents and sisters in Sathkira. In a detailed interview with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman, the 20-year-old spoke about her passion and analysis of the greatest show on earth, Brazil's performances, her football idols, and Bangladesh's women's football. She believes results at this World Cup has been quite unpredictable and exciting, even though Brazil have failed to impress her compared to previous times. Visit The Daily Star's website for the full interview.



No Room to score

STAR SPORTS DESK



Curacao goalkeeper Eloy Room delivered one of the most remarkable performances in World Cup history on Saturday, producing a record 15 saves in a 0-0 Group E draw against Ecuador. His heroics secured the first-ever World Cup point for Curacao, the smallest nation to compete in the tournament, with a population of approximately 156,000. The 37-year-old veteran set the

tone within two minutes by denying Ecuador captain Enner Valencia from close range. Room continued to frustrate the South Americans throughout the match, stopping a long-range strike from John Yeboah and later producing another crucial save from Valencia's second-half header. His 15 saves established a World Cup record for a regulation-time match, surpassed only by Tim Howard, who made 16 saves against Belgium after extra time in 2014.

Reflecting on the achievement, Room said: "I was not thinking about that during the game," while jokingly expressing disappointment at not matching Howard's mark. Ecuador goalkeeper Hernan Galindez described it as "the game of his life." Born in the Netherlands near the German border, Room chose to represent Curacao through his father after being approached in 2015 by former national team coach Patrick Kluivert. He previously

stated that playing in a World Cup for Curacao was a childhood dream. The result carried symbolic importance for the Caribbean nation, an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The match was attended by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, who celebrated with the team afterward. "This is history!" shouted a Curacao journalist after the final whistle -- an apt summary of a night when one goalkeeper transformed a dream into a national milestone.