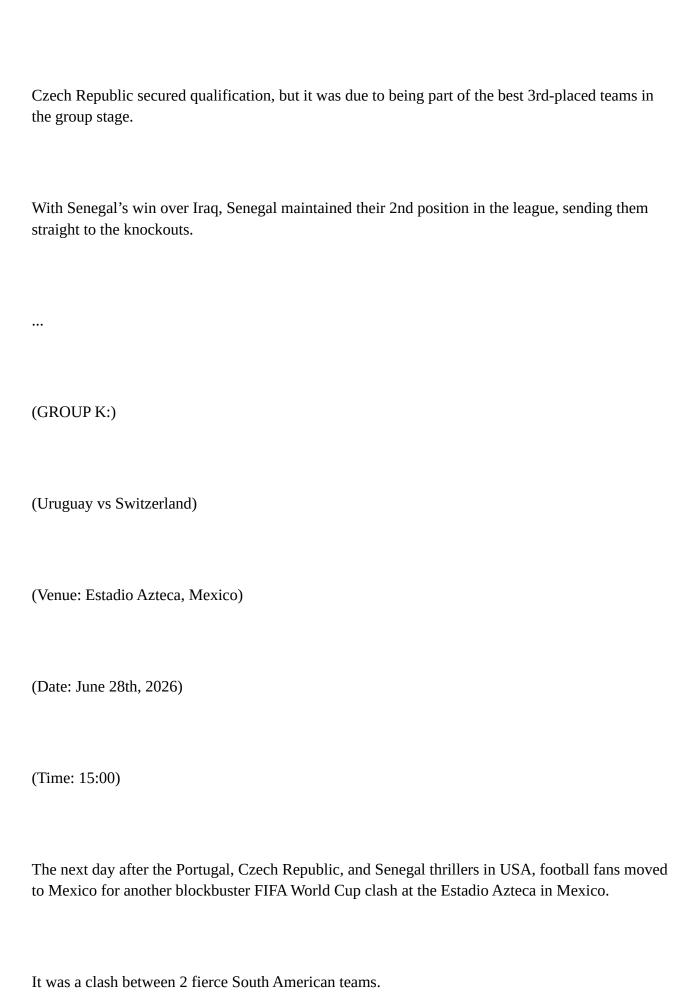
Football God 511

Chapter 511: FIFA World Cup 2026 [42]
At the same time as Portugal took on Czech Republic at the AT&T, Senegal also took on Iraq at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in USA.
(GROUP J:)
(Senegal vs Iraq)
(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)
(Date: June 27th, 2026)
(Time: 20:00)
Senegal vs Iraq was pretty straight forward.
Senegal approached the game with a firm iron hand, and they dominated. The game ended 2-0 in Senegal's favor, the 2 goals coming in the first half, a lead that Senegal held on to till the end of the game.

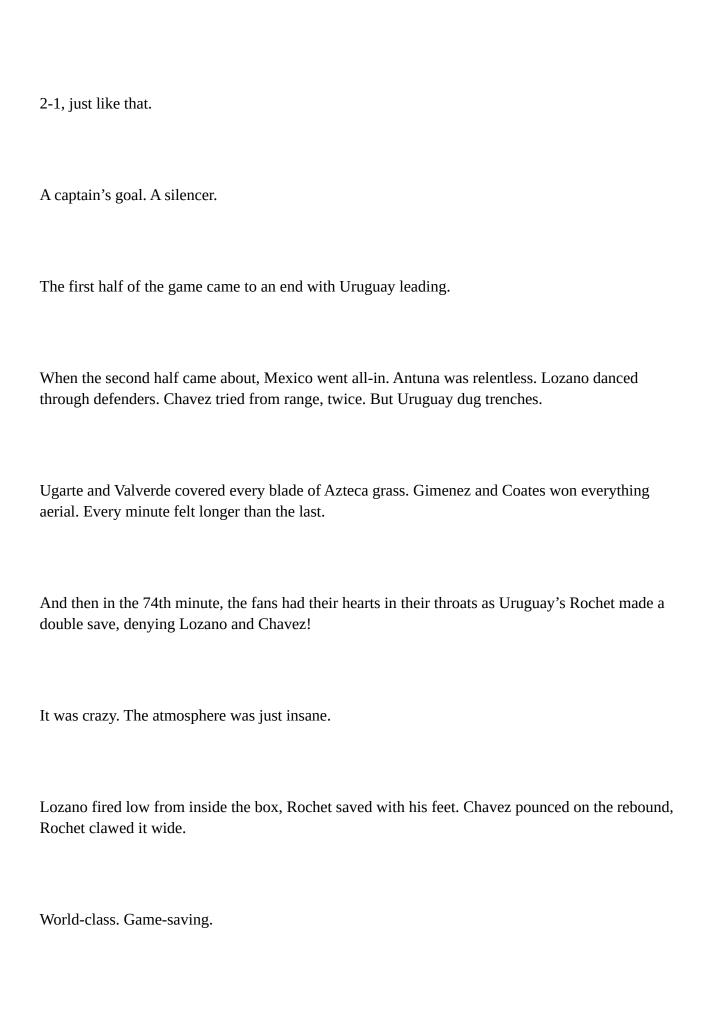
With that result, all the Group J games came to an end.



In high altitude, with the temperature hot and electric, there were over 87,000 fans in attendance at the stadium.
It was a game when giants collide at altitude.
This was more than football, this was a battle of pride in one of the world's most iconic stadiums.
The stakes were monumental: winner tops Group K, loser risks a trickier knockout path. The Azteca was drowning in green; a sea of Mexican support, chanting, hoping.
But Uruguay?
Uruguay came to kill giants quietly. They had one of the most fearsome teams in the World Cup. Their blend of old-school grit and new-age dynamism was ready to test Mexico's fire.
Mexico started in a 4-3-3, Guillermo Ochoa playing another World Cup for Mexico as the captain, with a defensive quadruple of Jorge Sanchez, Cesar Montes, Johan Vasquez, and Gallardo standing in front of him.
In midfield was the trio of Edson Alvarez, Luis Chavez, and Erick Gutierrez, while the attacking trio were Chucky Lozano, Santi Gimenez, and Uriel Antuna.

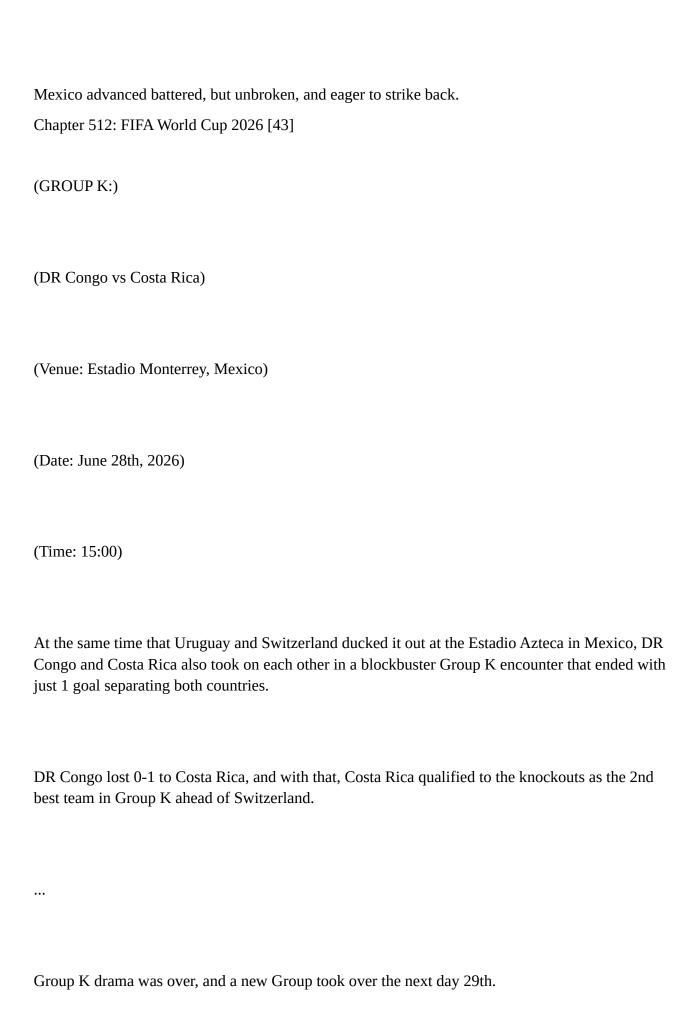
As for Uruguay, they started in a 4-2-3-1 formation. Sergio Rochet started in goal as the goalkeeper, a defensive quadruple of Ronald Araujo, Jose Maria Gimenez, Coates, and Matias Vina sitting ahead of him in defense.
The midfield had Ugarte, Valverde, De La Cruz, Pellistri, and Facundo Torres, while Darwin Nunez led the line as the striker.
The first half was a game of blow for blow.
Mexico roared out of the tunnel like a team possessed. Lozano tore down the flanks, while Edson Alvarez anchored the midfield like a bulldozer.
But Uruguay absorbed. And waited, like patient hunters. Assassins.
And then, they struck early, as early as the 15th minute.
Valverde sprayed a switch to Pellistri, who burned Gallardo and cut the ball low into the six-yard box. Nunez timed his run perfectly and smashed it into the net with a thunderous hit.
Uruguay 1-0 Mexico.
Silence. Then whistles all over the stadium.
Mexico regrouped.

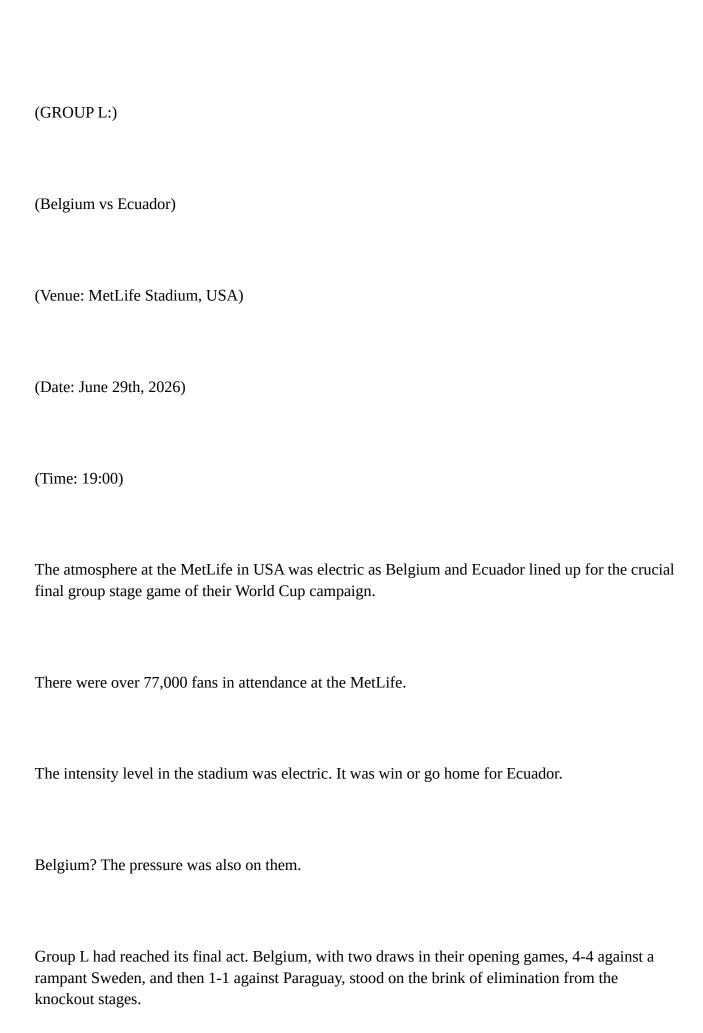
And then, they responded in the 33rd minute from a set piece.
It was a set piece masterpiece. Luis Chavez delivered a floating free kick, and Santi Gimenez rose high to bullet a header past Rochet, setting the stadium aflame in Mexican cheers.
BOOM!
Mexican fans roared at the top of their lungs. Azteca erupted like a volcano.
1-1.
But just as Mexico found rhythm, Uruguay struck again in the 43rd minute of the game.
This time, it was the Uruguayan captain, Federico Valverde.
A half-clearance fell to the Real Madrid man 25 yards out. One touch to control the ball, one look, and then
POW!
A missile into the top corner. Ochoa dived, but he never stood a chance.

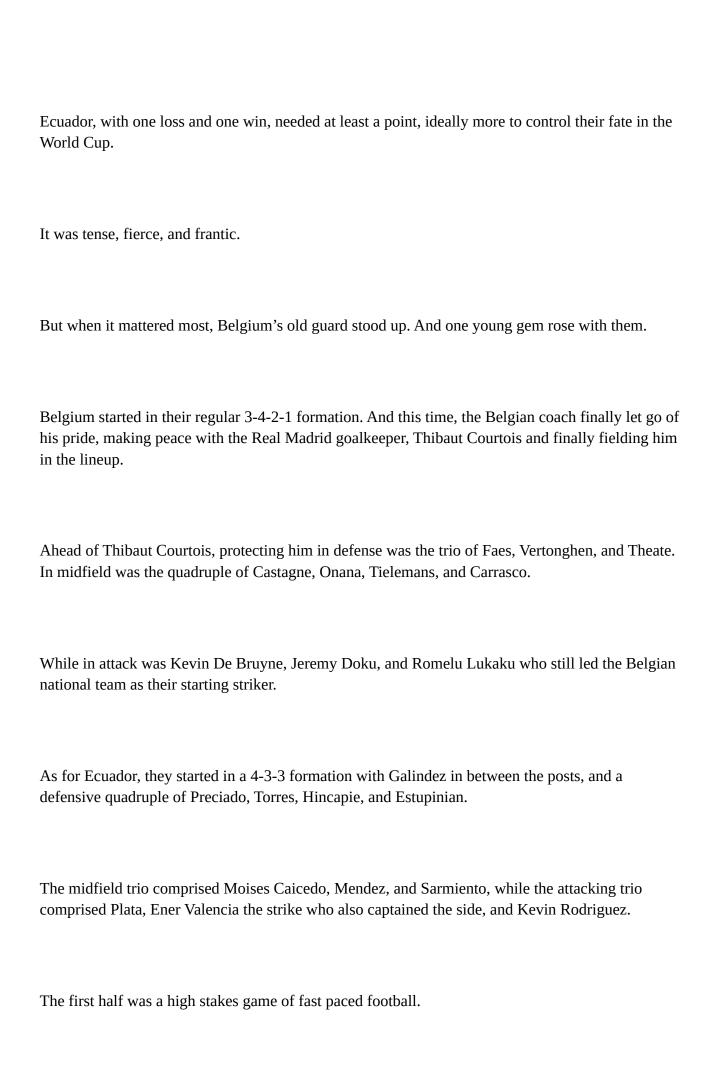


Sergio Rochet could save the f*cking Titanic!
The final minutes were even more action-packed.
Berterame came on for Mexico. So did Orbelin Pineda. Mexico threw everyone forward in a bid to attack and get the equalizer.
And then, in the 90th plus 3 minute, Chavez went down in the box.
Screams! From the players and fans.
But VAR confirmed: it was a clean tackle by Coates. Azteca howled in disbelief and grief as Mexican fans wallowed in regret.
Nothing they did could stop it. Uruguay won the bragging rights battle. The game came to an end 2-1 in Uruguay's favor.
And with that result, Uruguay topped Group K with 9 points. Mexico also finished second with 4 points and advanced to the knockouts.
It was a footballing classic played in one of the sport's great temples.
The man of the match award? Federico Valverde, Uruguay's captain scooped it home with his 1 goal which was a screamer, 4 tackles, 5 ball recoveries, and 2 key passes to round up an imperious midfield performance.









Ecuador started the brighter of the two; energetic, aggressive, and fearless. Caicedo snapped into tackles, Plata darted at Faes repeatedly.
Belgium? They looked briefly rattled.
But then in the 12th minute, Belgium made a mistake.
Estupinian made a bursting overlap, and was clipped by Castagne just inside the box. The referee pointed to the spot immediately.
FWEEE!
Belgium tried to protest the decision but the referee paid them no heed.
Valencia, cool as a bird, buried it with trademark confidence.
0-1 to Ecuador.
But then, after going behind did Belgium respond.
They responded with urgency. Kevin De Bruyne, the Belgian maestro came to life and began

orchestrating chaos, drifting wider to avoid Caicedo's pressure.

Doku, as always, was electric.
And then, in the 24th minute, the Manchester City winger got the equalizer, pulling Belgium out of the abyss.
Tielemans lofted a pass to Doku on the left. He cut inside, waltzed past Preciado and Hincapie, and smashed it low into the bottom corner.
1-1. Belgium was alive.
And with that, momentum shifted.
In the 38th minute, Romelu Lukaku added his name to the scoresheet.
It was a vintage Belgium counter. De Bruyne sprinted through the middle, drew defenders, and slipped it to Lukaku who didn't make a single mistake.
One touch to control the ball, then
POW!
One powerful blast past Galindez.

2-1. MetLife shook.
The first half came to an end 2-1, Belgium holding on after completing a remontada in their final group stage game first half.
When second half started, Ecuador came out fighting.
Estupinian hit the post with a curling free kick in the 52nd minute. Kevin Rodriguez missed a golden header in the 58th. They had Belgium gasping, looking for straws, barely holding on.
Despite it all, Thibaut Courtois proved exactly why he was one of the best in the business, holding strong. And then Belgium struck the dagger.
It came in the 73rd minute, Kevin De Bruyne.
A moment of pure genius. He collected the ball 25 yards out, dipped his shoulder, and curled a left-footed beauty into the top corner.
Experience killed the Ecuadorian dream.
3-1. Game over. The Belgian maestro had spoken.

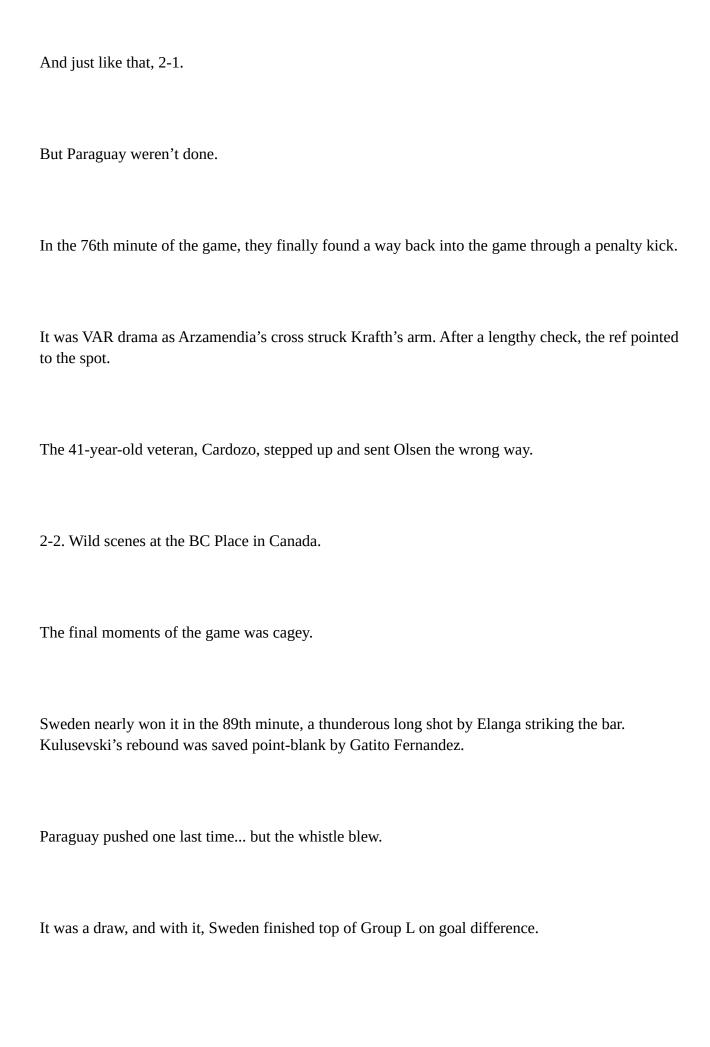
Ecuador had nothing else to do in the game. Of course, they tried, but they got no results. The game came to an end 3-1.
And with that win, Belgium managed to turn their fortunes around, finishing second in Group L with 5 points.
Ecuador, despite a valiant effort were eliminated.
And of course, Kevin De Bruyne won the man of the match award with his electric display of 1 goal, 1 assist, 7 key passes, and 2 successful dribbles.
Like his coach said, raving about his star creator.
"He reads the game like a novel he'd written himself".
Of course, there were post-match reactions, as Kevin De Bruyne was forced to say a piece of his mind in front of the media.
Still sweaty and panting, the Belgian said his piece.
"We were under pressure, sure. But when it mattered, we played like Belgium".
Jeremy Doku also had a piece.

"This was about pride more than anything else. People doubted us after the Sweden game. We answered". This was about pride more than anything else. People doubted us after the Sweden game. We answered". The Ecuadorian captain, Moises Caicedo also faced the media heat. "It hurts, yes, but I'm proud of how we fought. This team has a future. It's unfortunate that our journey here has to come to an end now". Sweden topped Group L on goal difference, Belgium finished second, Ecuador out, Paraguay also out no matter their result against Sweden unless they managed to eclipse Belgium in goals difference. Chapter 513: FIFA World Cup 2026 [44] (GROUP L:) (Paraguay vs Sweden) (Venue: BC Place, Canada) (Date: June 29th, 2026)



The Swedish attack comprised Kulusevski, Victor Gyokeres, and Alexander Isak.
As for Paraguay, lining up in a 4-4-2, they had Gatito Fernandez in front of goal, and a defensive quadruple of Espinoza, Balbuena, Gomez, and Arzamendia.
The midfield quadruple comprised Angel Romero, Cubas, Almiron, and Matias Roja, while the 2-man attack comprised Enciso, and Oscar Cardozo.
The first half was all Sweden, their players playing with a certain swagger that overwhelmed the Paraguayan resistance.
The Swedes started sharply. Kulusevski and Isak played with rhythm, constantly combining on the right. Paraguay looked pinned, boxed in.
And then, BOOM!
Goal in the 11th minute. Victor Gyokeres.
Kulusevski fired a wicked low cross across the face of goal, and Gyokeres smashed it home from close range.
1-0 Sweden.

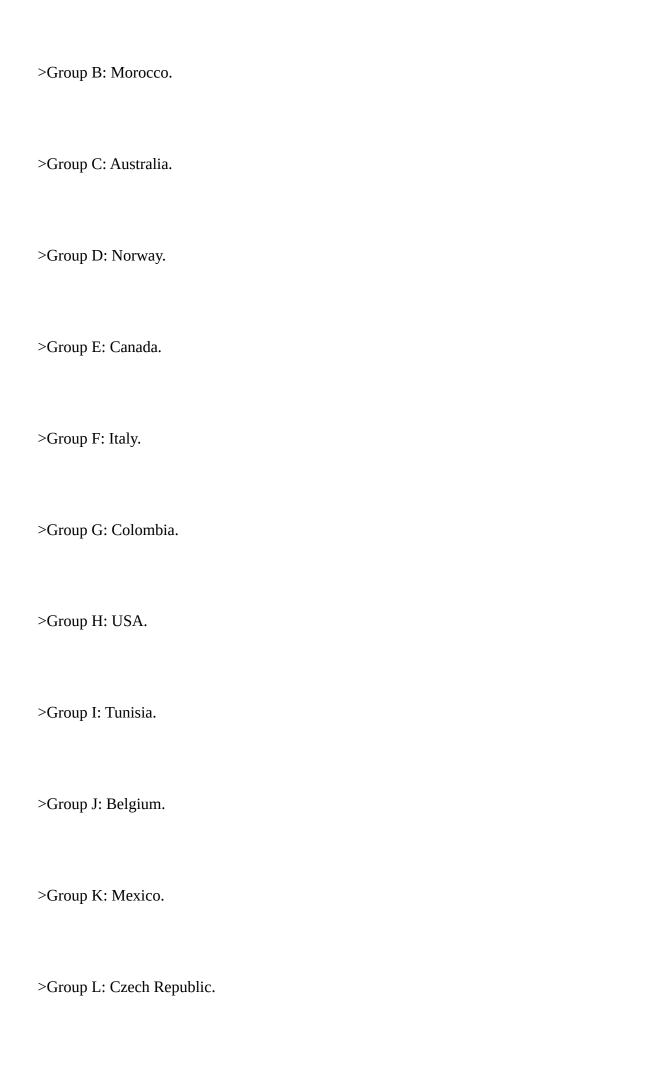
They doubled their lead in the 27th minute through Alexander Isak.
This one was pure class. A cheeky one-two between Isak and Svanberg near the box, before Isak cooly dinked the goalkeeper to make it 2-0.
Sweden looked cruising. Paraguay looked crushed.
But momentum is a fragile thing.
The first half came to an end 2-0, all Sweden, and then, Paraguay made a halftime substitution, bringing on Antonio Sanabria and Derlis Gonzalez. And suddenly energy!
Almiron pushed further forward. Cubas pressed higher. And all of a sudden, Sweden looked rattled.
Paraguay took advantage.
BAM!
They got what they were looking for in the 58th minute, a goal.
Almiron launched a looping cross from deep. Enciso timed his header perfectly and buried it past Olsen, ending a short but silky smooth move.



Paraguay finished last, despite never losing a match.
Miguel Almiron won the man of the match award with his game-changing assist, 5 successful dribbles, 3 key passes, and most importantly, his 100% heart.
He was the spark that turned Paraguay from passengers to predators.
Sweden's coach had a few words to say at the end of the game.
"We started strong, but let them back in. That's dangerous in knockout football. We must learn, quickly".
The Paraguayan coach also faced the media.
"We played for pride. We played for country. That second half was us. I'm proud of the boys".
Sweden survived a late scare, but questions remained about their defense.
Paraguay exited the tournament with heads held high, victims of the fine margins only the World Cup can deliver.

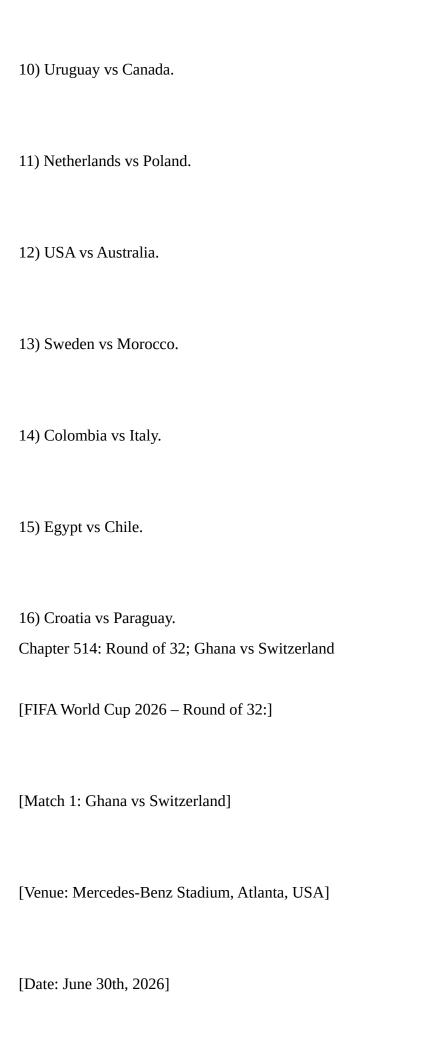
After what felt like a lifetime ago since it started, Sweden vs Paraguay brought an end to the FIFA World Cup group stage.
And now that Matchday 3 is complete and all 48 nations have completed their group stage games, the tournament could finally proceed to the Knockout Stage draws using the new 2026 FIFA World Cup format.
48 teams competed in 12 groups (A to L). the top 2 from each group (24 teams) automatically qualify for the knockouts, plus the 8 best 3rd-placed teams, making a total of 32 teams for the round of 32, the first of it at the FIFA World Cup.
After the Round of 32, then the Round of 16, Quarterfinals, Semifinals, and then the Final of the FIFA World Cup.
[Qualified Teams by Group:]
[Group Winners:]
>Group A: Ghana.
>Group B: France.
>Group C: Brazil.
>Group D: Argentina.

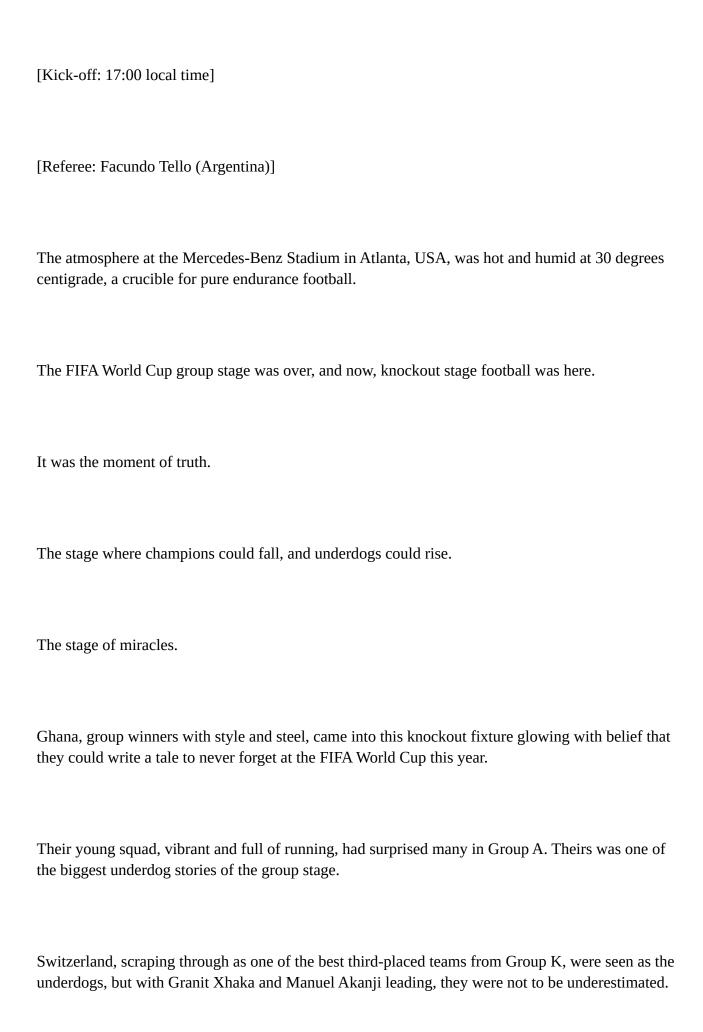




[Best 3rd-Placed Teams (based on points, goal difference, goals scored):]
>Ukraine (Group I).
>Egypt (Group C).
>Switzerland (Group K).
>South Korea (Group B).
>Poland (Group A).
>Chile (Group D).
>Paraguay (Group L).
>Croatia (Group E).
(Note: Some teams qualify as 3rd from the same group where a 2nd-place team also advances.)

[Round of 32 Draw:]
1) Ghana vs Switzerland.
2) Spain vs South Korea.
3) Brazil vs Norway.
4) Argentina vs Tunisia.
5) Nigeria vs Ukraine.
6) England vs Belgium.
7) France vs Japan.
8) Portugal vs Mexico.
9) Germany vs Czech Republic.





What followed in Atlanta was a battle of endurance, belief, and one Ghanaian star seizing his moment.
Both nations started with their best XIs.
Ghana started in a 4-2-3-1 formation, Lawrence Ati-Zigi starting in between the posts for the Africans, while a 4-man defense comprising Tariq Lamptey, Amartey, Salisu, and Gideon Mensah stood in front of the goalkeeper.
In midfield was the solid duo of Thomas Partey and Abdul Samed, while the attacking midfielders were Mohamed Kudus, Inaki Williams, and Sulemana.
Antoine led the line as the striker for the Ghanians.
As for Switzerland, starting in a 4-3-3 formation, they had Yann Sommer in between the posts, a defensive quadruple of Widmer, Akanji, Elvedi, and Ricardo Rodriguez sitting in front of him.
The midfield trio were Granit Xhaka, Freuler, and Sow, while the forward trio comprised Xerdan Shaqiri, Embolo, and Vargas.
On paper, both teams were evenly matched.
And then

FWEEE!
The referee's whistle sounded, kicking off the game.
For the first few minutes of the game, both nations showed intent and grit as they dug in, refusing to roll over for their opponent's pressure as they fought tooth and nail to assert their dominance in the game.
Both sides fought for possession dominance, with neither side yet to dictate it when the first goal came in early in the 11th minute of the game.
Ghana struck, and it was Mohammed Kudus who broke the deadlock in the first Round of 32 game.
It started with a Partey interception in midfield. Kudus took the ball and slalomed through two defenders, burst into the box, and unleashed a thunderous low shot past Sommer.
Ghana 1-0 Switzerland.
Just like that.
BOOM!
The Mercedes-Benz erupted.



In the second half, Murat Yakin, Switzerland's coach made two changes, bringing on Okafor and Ndoye. And Switzerland did start brighter.
They brought fire and energy with them in the second half, and it paid dividends after 10 minutes of intense gameplay.
56th minute, GOAL!
Shaqiri's deep free kick was headed on by Xhaka, and Embolo pounced on a rebound after Ati-Zigi spilled the ball.
Breel Embolo, the Switzerland striker set Swiss fans in the Mercedes-Benz Stadium on fire.
2-1.
The Swiss believed again.
For 20 minutes, it was all Switzerland, as they went on wave after wave of marauding attacks down the wing and through the middle.
Ghana were holding on.

The atmosphere in the stadium was tense, electric.
Akanji had a header cleared off the line. Shaqiri skimmed the post from a tight angle. And amid the chaos, finally came Ghana's answer.
"INAKI WILLIAMS!!!" The commentator screamed.
In the 78th minute, and on the counter, Kudus slipped through a beautiful ball. Inaki Williams burst past Elvedi and chipped Sommer with a sensational first-time lob.
3-1. Game over.
The Mercedes-Benz exploded in Ghanaian euphoria.
[FULL-TIME: Ghana 3-1 Switzerland]
With that result, Ghana advanced to the Round of 16 of the FIFA World Cup for the first time since 2010.
Switzerland were sent home; beaten, but not broken.
At least, they had a goal to show for their efforts.



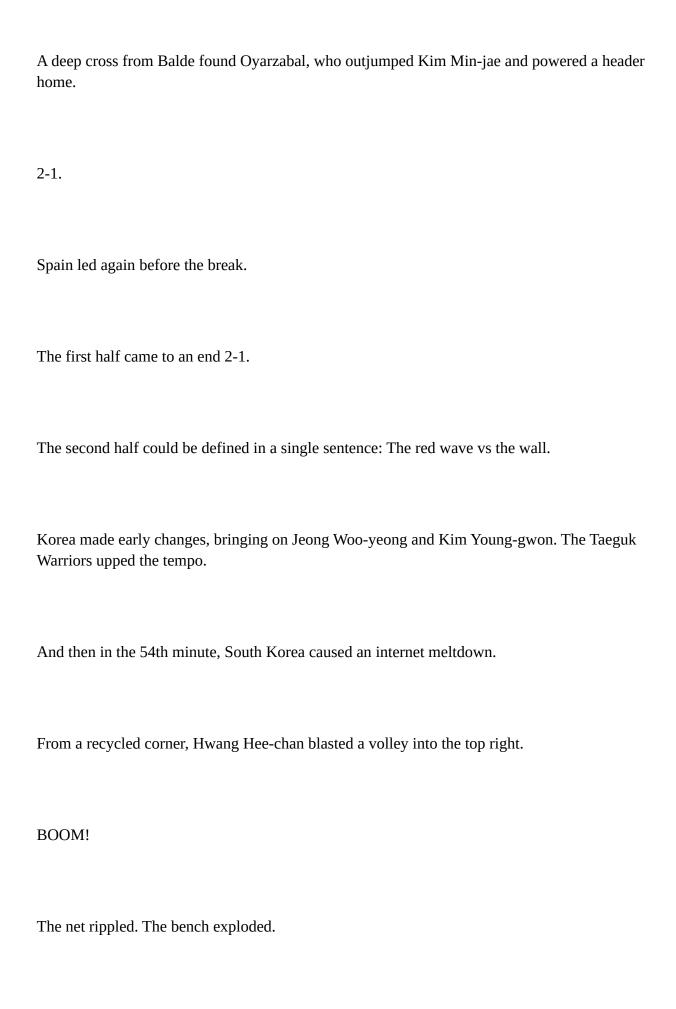
Ghana progressed to the Round of 16, where they would face the winner of Match 15, Egypt or Chile.
The reason why Ghana's win briefly dominated the internet was because another FIFA World Cup epic loomed Spain vs South Korea.
Chapter 515: Round of 32; Spain vs South Korea
[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32:]
[Match 2: Spain vs South Korea]
[Venue: Levi's Stadium, Santa Clara, California, USA]
[Date: June 30th, 2026]
[Kick-off: 20:00 local time]
[Referee: Daniele Orsato (Italy)]
There were over 68,000 fans in attendance at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara.
The weather was stable at 18 degrees centigrade, accentuated by a cool evening breeze, perfect for high-octane football.

This wasn't just a game. This was a cultural clash of tempo and defiance.
Spain, having topped Group F with two commanding wins and a draw, entered with swagger. South Korea, one of the last third-placed teams to qualify, were here to prove that underdogs could bite hard.
From the first minute, this was a rollercoaster, a brilliant tactical battle and a show of elite-level finishing.
And in the middle of it all? Lamine Yamal. The 19 year old prodigy delivered a performance for the ages at the Round of 32.
Both nations started with their best lineups.
Luis de la Fuente started his Spanish side in their regular 4-3-3 formation, Unai Simon in goal, while ahead of him was a solid defensive quadruple of Dani Carvajal, Robin Le Normand, Dean Huijsen, and Alejandro Balde.
In midfield was the power trio of Rodri, Pedri, and Fabian Ruiz.
In attack was Lamine Yamal in left wing, Nico Williams in right wing, and Mikel Oyarzabal leading the line as the striker.
As for South Korea, they started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Kim Seung-gyu starting in between the posts, with a defensive quadruple of Kim Tae-hwan, Kim Min-jae, Jung Seung-hun, and Lee Ki-je starting ahead of him.

In midfield was the duo of Hwang In-beom and Park Yong-woo, while the attacking midfielders were Lee Kang-in, Son Heung-min, and Hwan Hee-chan.
Cho Gue-sung led the line for the South Koreans as the striker.
FWEEE!
The game started and from the first minute, Spain dictated possession.
South Korea came to Levi's Stadium with grand ambitions for an upset. Hours earlier at the Mercedes-Benz, Ghana managed to accomplish their grand ambitions against Switzerland.
This Spain side was a whole other ball game, but still a nation could dream. And so, South Korea dreamed.
But reality was quite different from what the South Koreans expected.
For the first 10 minutes of the game, Spain was imperious, hoarding possession, as they dominated with a 75% possession rate.
Despite the Spanish domination, South Korea were compact and dangerous on the break, for a while till it came crumbling down.

BZZZ!
15 minutes, GOAL!
Lamine Yamal, the boy wonder set the stadium aflame in the 15th minute of the game, breaking the deadlock after early Spain pressure.
From a Pedri backheel at the edge of the box, Yamal cut inside from the right, skipped past one defender, and curled an unstoppable shot into the top left.
Spain 1-0 South Korea.
South Korea was humbled.
Tensions flared.
Pushed to the wall, pride and qualification on the line, the South Korean fans set aside logic and simply roared on their team.
Spain dominated still, but it felt like a mantra rang in the stadium.
'Win!' 'Win!'

The South Korean players dug in. They kept on running, chasing the ball, chasing ghosts, and then
BAM!
Instant response.
When it felt like Spain's momentum could not be stopped, against the run of play, South Korea hit back with a blistering counter.
Lee Kang-in released Son on the left, who rolled back the years with a vintage run, danced around Carvajal and drilled a low finish under Simon.
The Korean fans went wild as the stadium erupted.
Son slid in celebration, setting the stadium ablaze.
The game continued and Spain kept pressing, but Korea's midfield held firm, until another burst of brilliance.
Bam!
Another Spanish bullet went in through Oyarzabal in the 39th minute.



The drama was building to a crescendo.

The whole world expected Spain to blow South Korea out of the water, not this... definitely not a 2-2 draw by this point of the game.

Spain was under the pressure cooker, but Yamal was not done.

After 2-2, the South Koreans were infused with energy, and momentum. They ran themselves to the ground, keeping Spain's fearsome attack at bay.

But then...

In the 68th minute of the game, Lamine Yamal erupted again.

BZZZ!

Receiving the ball in a tight space near the right corner of the box, Yamal nutmegged his marker, then lasered a low shot through three bodies and into the bottom corner.

A moment of magic!
BOOM!
The stadium exploded even as Yamal ran to the corner flag, celebrating wildly with a big smile on his face.
South Korea were behind. And once again, they were under pressure, and forced to do the impossible to save their World Cup bid.
They tried, but
FWEEE!
Penalty to Spain in the 76th minute.
Foul on Nico Williams by Lee Ki-je. The referee checked with VAR, and his decision was supported. The penalty stood.
Oyarzabal stepped up to take the penalty.
In the 77th minute, Mikel Oyarzabal of Spain sent the goalkeeper the wrong way, burying it with cold precision into the corner of the net.



It was an unforgettable battle.
South Korea went home as heroes. Spain? They went through, obviously shaken, but shining.
Lamine Yamal won the man of the match award for his 2 goals, 1 pre-assist, 6 take-ons completed, and 4 chances created.
Like the commentator said.
"A teenager playing like a king. This World Cup may be his stage after all".
In tears, Son Heung-min faced the media.
"We gave everything. I couldn't be prouder. They'll remember Korea".
Luis de la Fuente, the Spain head coach also had a few words.
"We were tested like never before. But this group knows how to suffer, and how to win".
Chapter 516: Round of 32; Brazil vs Norway
[FULL-TIME: Spain 4-3 South Korea]

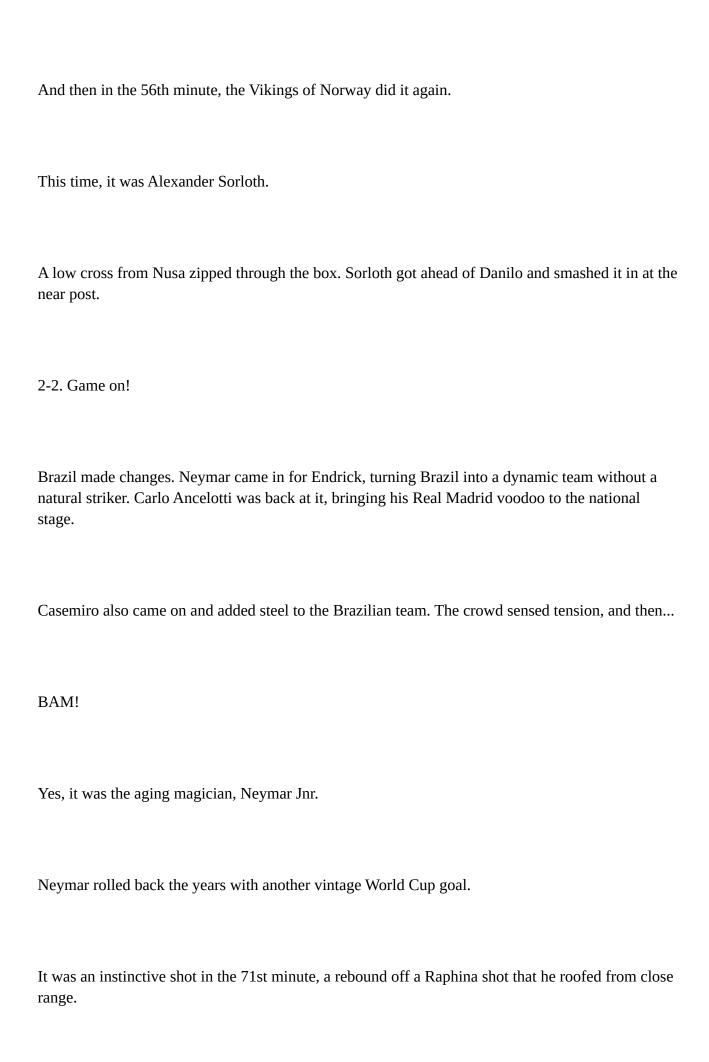
After the thriller at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, USA, the next day, on the first day of July, it was finally time for another of the tournament favorites to take to the pitch for their first knockout stage game Brazil.
[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]
[Match 3: Brazil vs Norway]
[Venue: AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas, USA]
[Date: July 1st, 2026]
[Kick-off: 17:00 local time]
[Referee: Michael Oliver (England)]
The AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas was sold out, with over 82,000 fans in the stadium, turning it into a cauldron of noise.
The weather was dry at 33 degrees centigrade, Texas heat meeting Scandinavian cold steel.
The game forecast looked bright.

This one was marked long before kickoff. On paper, Brazil were the favorites; five-time champions, Group C winners, and boasting a deadly front life.
But Norway? They had Erling Haaland, Martin Odegaard, and the fearlessness of a team with nothing to lose and everything to prove.
Brazil was not just the favorite on paper, they were one of the favorites of the tournament, but Norway was a country that already proved their credentials this World Cup, and showed glimpses of exploding to become the biggest underdog story of the World Cup.
If Spain vs South Korea was a thriller, this was a game of Samba meeting a Viking Storm.
The question was a conundrum? Was it supposed to be weather Brazil could survive the Viking Siege, or if Norway could survive Brazil's Samba?
Only time could tell.
Brazil started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Liverpool's Alisson Becker in goal, while standing in front of him was a quadruple defense of Danilo, Marquinhos, Eder Militao, and Wendell.
In midfield was the duo of Bruno Guimaraes and Joao Gomes, while in attack was Rodrygo in right wing, Raphinha down the middle as the attacking midfielder, Vinicius Junior on the left, and Endrick through the middle as the striker.
Neymar suffered a knock in Brazil's final group stage game, and so he was rested for this game.

As for Norway, they started in a 4-3-3, Nyland in goal, while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Ryerson, Ajer, Hanche-Olsen, and Bjorkan.
In midfield was the trio of Odegaard, Berge, and Thorsby, while in attack was Alexander Sorloth on the right, Erling Haaland leading through the middle as the striker, and Nusa in left wing.
FWEEE!
The game started.
What followed was one of the grittiest, most exhilarating matches of the tournament so far.
Brazil started with flair and tempo, Rodrygo and Vinicius Jnr. combining with frightening pace down the flanks.
Norway, deep and disciplined, were waiting for a moment to strike.
But then, BOOM!
Brazil struck early before the Norwegians could truly settle into the game.
It came in the 9th minute through a moment of individual brilliance from the Real Madrid mainstay, Vinicius Jnr.

A slick one-two between Raphinha and Rodrygo found Vini inside the box. The Real Madrid star faked one, cut inside, and rifled it into the top near post.
Brazil 1-0 Norway.
BOOM!
The yellow wall erupted.
Brazilian fans around the stadium went wild, celebrating, beating drums, even as they lit up the night with a loud noise.
After that goal, it was all Brazil, their Samba terrorizing the Norwegians all over the pitch. Norway barely held on, but then, against the run of play, Norway struck like true Vikings in the 29th minute.
Out of nothing, Odegaard lofted a ball between the center backs. Haaland bullied Militao off it and slammed a volley past Alisson, setting the stadium ablaze.
1-1.
Viking thunder in Texas!

Having been quiet for majority of this game, the fans of the Norwegian Viking charge erupted, making their presence known in the stadium.
After that equalizer, the momentum didn't swing in Norway's direction yet as Brazil kept on dominating the game.
Norway held on, but they could not hold on forever.
In the 42nd minute, Endrick struck.
A chaotic corner saw Norway half-clear. Bruno Guimaraes recycled the ball, chipped into the six-yard box, and somehow, the tiny Endrick found a way to leap to nod home.
2-1 Brazil!
Norway was shocked.
A dramatic end to the first half.
The second half was a battle of nerves.
Norway pressed higher. Odegaard began pulling strings. The Brazilian defense creaked under pressure.

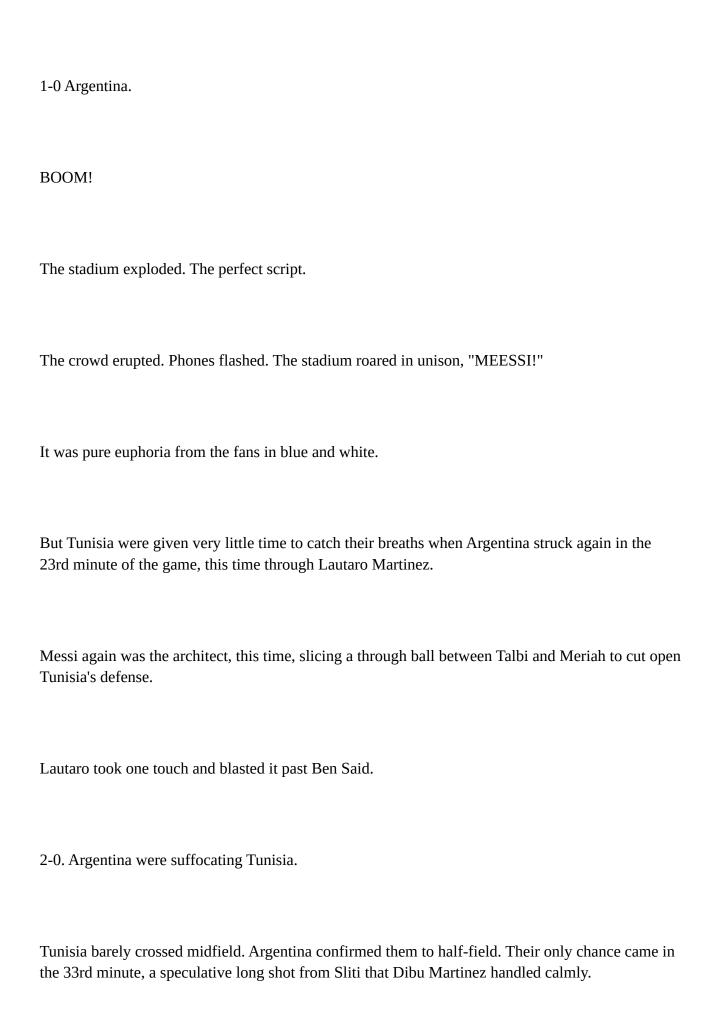




Vinicius Jnr. won the man of the match award with his 1 goal, 1 assist, 4 successful dribbles, and 3 fouls won. It was a vintage performance.
When the heat was rising, he danced through the fire.
Ancelotti faced the media, and like a don, he said:
"We bent, but we didn't break. That's World Cup mentality". Chapter 517: Round of 32; Argentina vs Tunisia
[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]
[Match 4: Argentina vs Tunisia]
[Venue: SoFi Stadium, Los Angeles, USA]
[Date: July 1st, 2026]
[Kick-off: 20:00 local time]
[Referee: Jesus Valenzuela (Venezuela)]

The SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, USA was not just booked up and filled to the brim, it was an overflow crowd, heavily pro-Argentina.
It was the 2 G.O.A.T's last run at the FIFA World Cup.
Messi and Ronaldo had competed at this epic stage of football for 6 times. Messi had touched heaven, Ronaldo was yet to do the same, but their fans still trooped to the World Cup in droves to watch them play the last time.
In the group stage, it was a bit mild, but since it was the knockouts now, Messi fans came out in droves to support their G.O.AT.
It was perfect weather conditions in Los Angeles, mild and cool indoors.
Lionel Messi returned to the starting XI, and Argentina meant business.
The headlines wrote themselves before the game: Lionel Messi, rested against Norway, returns to the starting lineup for the first knockout match.
Tunisia, coming off a miraculous escape from Group I, carried pride and resilience, but Argentina carried destiny.
And from the opening whistle, it was clear: La Albiceleste weren't here to play, they were here to dominate.

Argentina started in a 4-3-3 formation with Emiliano Martinez in goal, while the defensive quadruple comprised Nahuel Molina, Christian Romero, Nicolas Otamendi, and Marcus Acuna.
In midfield was the trio of Enzo Fernandez, Rodrigo De Paul, and Mac Allister, while the attacking trio led by Lionel Messi, the Argentine captain in left wing was completed by Lautaro Martinez through the middle, and Julian Alvarez on the right.
As for Tunisia, they started in a 4-1-4-1 with Bechir Ben Said in goal, and a defensive quadruple of Drager, Talbi, Meriah, and Abdi ahead of them.
Laidouni was the sole holding midfielder, while ahead of him as the creators were Skhiri, Mejbri, Sliti, and Kechrida, while Jaziri led the line as the striker.
FWEEE!
The first half started, and Argentina turned on the magic.
Argentina pressed high, stealing the ball, dominating possession, and playing with imperious superiority, and they got their goal early, as early as the 8th minute from their ageless captain, Lionel Messi.
A foul on Julian Alvarez gave Argentina a free kick at 24 yards out.
Messi stood over it and curled it perfectly into the top left corner.



Their misery soon became worse as Julian Alvarez also added his name to the scoresheet on the 41st minute.
It came from a sweeping counterattack. Mac Allister to De Paul, De Paul to Messi, Messi to Julian Alvarez.
One touch. One shot. One net-buster.
3-0 Argentina.
It was beautiful. It was inevitable.
The first half came to an end all Argentina.
During halftime, of course, the Tunisian coach did his bit to motivate his players, giving them hope that the game was not lost yet.
Well, it was false hope.
The second half started, and it was control, class, and a bit of chaos.
Tunisia tried to regroup, bringing on Msakni and Ghandri to stabilize midfield. They showed more aggression but Argentina were in full control.

And yet, in the 56th minute, Tunisia bought themselves a lifeline.
It came from a rare moment. Tunisia pressed high, won the ball near Argentina's box. Naim Sliti shifted onto his left and curled a shot that took a deflection off Otamendi and beat Dibu Martinez.
3-1. A flicker of hope?
No. Hope extinguished, simply because Lionel Messi was not done yet.
In the 68th minute of the game, the Argentine G.O.A.T struck again.
Enzo Fernandez picked out Messi in the half-space. One trademark feint, one defender left sinning, and a laser-guided finish inside the near post.
4-1.
Another international goal to the collection. A wink to the crowd, a nod to history.
Lionel Messi whirled away in celebration as his teammates swarmed him.
Lionel Scaloni subbed him off to a standing ovation in the 76th minute. Julian Alvarez and Lautaro followed soon after. Argentina coasted home.

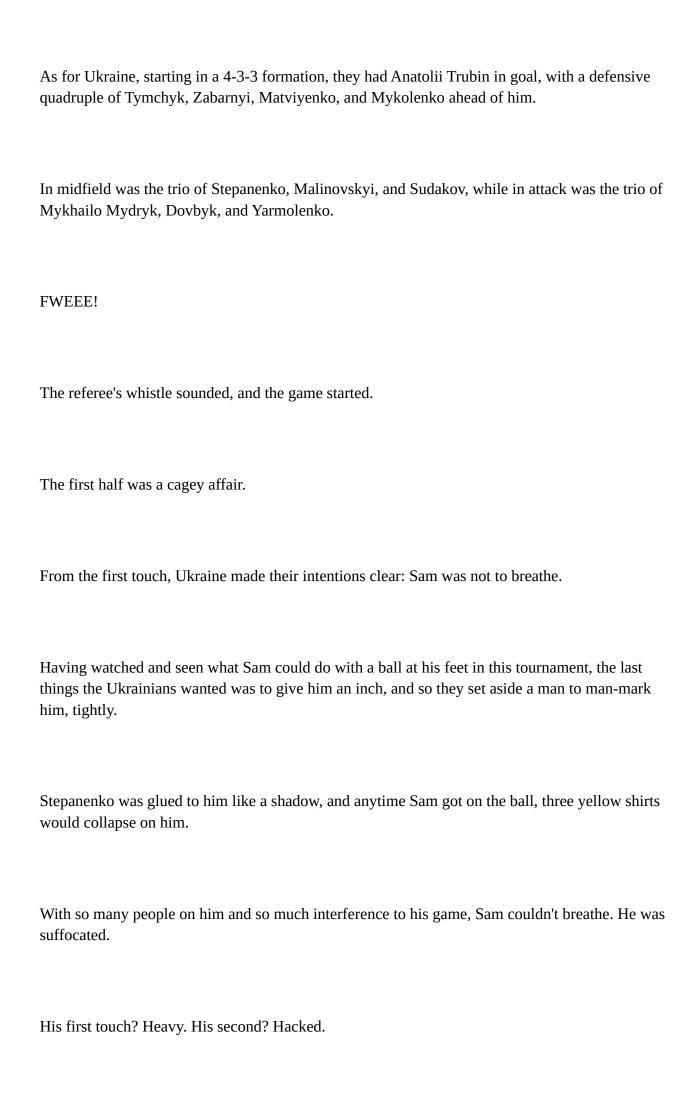
[FULL-TIME: Argentina 4-1 Tunisia]
The defending champions sent a message. They were still very much in the game, and running for champions a 2nd time in 8 years.
Messi dazzled.
Tunisia departed the tournament humbled but proud.
And of course, Messi won the man of the match award with a vintage performance comprising 2 goals, 1 assist, 7 key passes, and a stunning 93% pass accuracy all game despite being with the ball for majority of the game.
Like the commentator said:
"There are artists, and then there is the one who taught them all. This was a footballing masterclass".
Messi played, Messi performed, so of course the post-match reactions were going to be crazy.
There was an internet meltdown immediately after the game.

On the pitch, Messi faced the media.
"We respect Tunisia. They earned their place here. But tonight, we wanted to show what we're made of".
Jalel Kadri, the Tunisian coach also had a few words for the media.
"We lost to greatness tonight. It was an honor to share the pitch with Lionel Messi".
ESPN Commentary also waxed lyrical about Messi.
"You can prepare for Argentina, but you can't prepare for this Messi".
With that win, Argentina moved on to the Round of 16.
Chapter 518: Round of 32; Nigeria vs Ukraine
[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]
[Match 5: Nigeria vs Ukraine]
[Venue: Allegiant Stadium, Las Vegas, USA]
[Date: July 2nd, 2026]

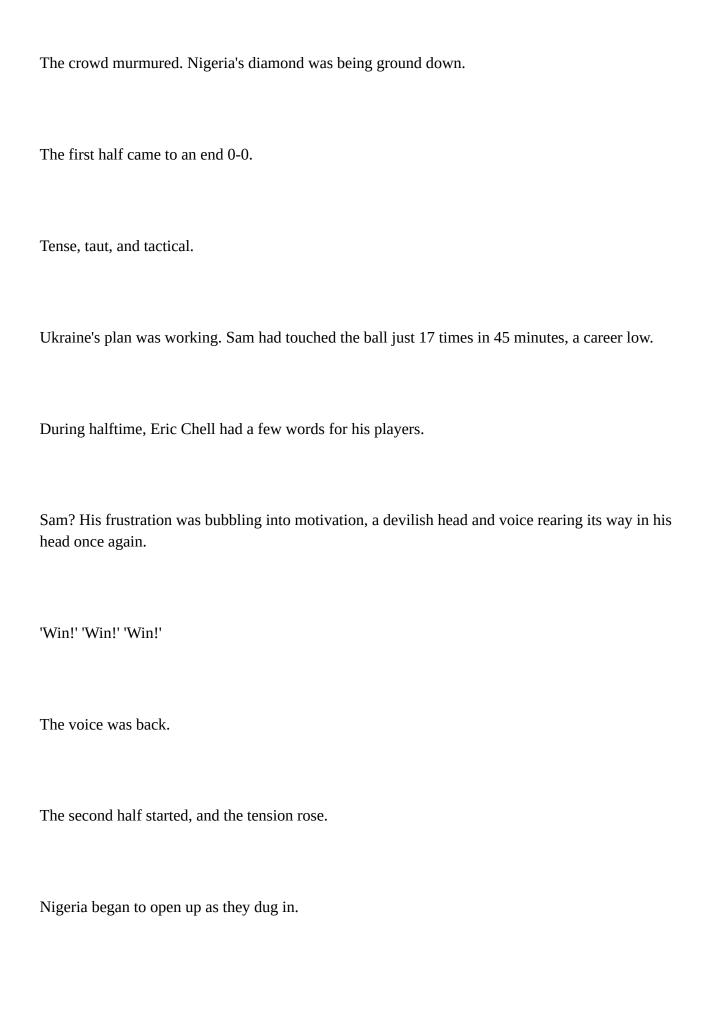




With all the hype surrounding fans after his legendary season with Barcelona to what Nigeria already did in the World Cup so far, the atmosphere in the stadium was electric and filled with tension between both nations.
Nigeria clearly had the media on their side, but Ukraine?
They came into the game sharp, focused, and with one plan: stop the boy who couldn't be stopped.
The only question was could they do it?
Only time would tell.
Both nations started with their best starting XI.
Nigeria started in their regular 4-2-3-1 with Stanley Nwabali in goal, while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Ola Aina, William Troost Ekong, Samuel Ajayi, and Zaidu Sanusi.
In midfield was the duo of Wilfried Ndidi and Frank Onyeka, while the creators in chief for the night were Samuel Chukwueze down the right, Sam down the middle, and Ademola Lookman on the right.
Victor Osimhen played through the middle as the striker.







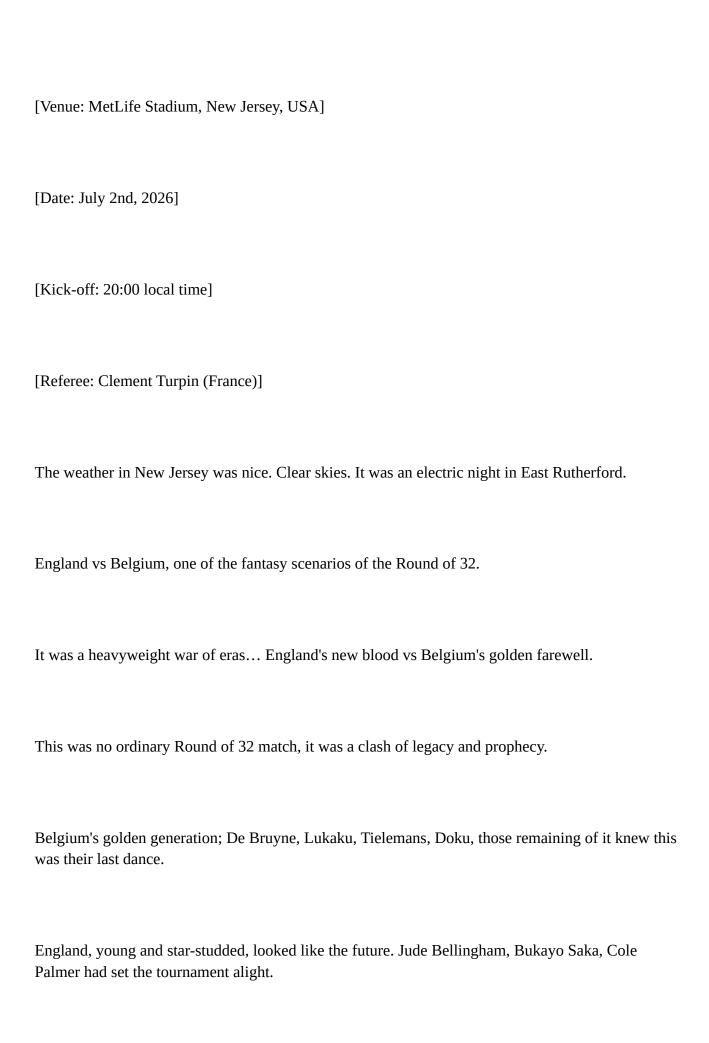
Lookman tucked inside, Ndidi pushed higher. Sam? He began to drift; left, deep, false nine, he was everywhere, trying to break the leash.
In the 54th minute, the fans rose to their feet.
SAVE!
Yarmokenlo fired a low drive from the top of the box. Stanley Nwabali came to the rescue, going on a full stretch to deny.
In the 62nd minute, Sam hit the crossbar!
For the first time, he found space. A one-two with Osimhen, and then, like a demon, he erupted.
He curled one from 25 yards out, only for it to ping off the crossbar.
So close.
The crowd gasped.
"F*CKKKKKK!" Sam screamed, frustrated.

In the 75th minute, Ukraine switched to a 5-4-1.
Having accepted their inability to break Nigeria's defense down, they were playing for penalties now. The wall was set, the door locked.
Extra time seemed inevitable now. Both sides were even.
But then, in the 89th minute
Zaidu Sanusi burst down the left, whipping a desperate, high cross into the penalty area.
Osimhen challenged, but the ball looped high too deep drifting
Until Sam appeared like lightning in the air.
BICYCLE KICK.
Mid-air pirouette. Time slowed. His back to goal, both feet off the ground.
His right boot connected clean.
BAM!

The ball lashed through the air like a missile. Trubin didn't move. It hit the net like a shot from heaven.
GOAL!
Nigeria 1-0 Ukraine.
The world exploded!
BOOM!
The crowd leapt. Nigerian fans cried.
The camera zoomed in: Sam wasn't celebrating wildly. He just stood there, arms outstretched, staring at the sky.
Cold.
He had broken the cage. In the 89th minute of Nigeria's toughest game in the tournament so far, their first knockout game, he wrote his name in World Cup lore.

[FULL-TIME: Nigeria 1-0 Ukraine]

Nigeria went through.
Ukraine fell to their knees; brave, brilliant, but out.
And of course, Sam won the man of the match award with his incredible game winning goal, his 4 chances created, 9 fouls drawn, and 2 yellow cards earned from opponents.
According to the commentators:
"He was hunted. Pressed. Tripled. And still, he rose".
It was one of the toughest games of his career, and still, he did it, he found a way to shine. Chapter 519: Round of 32; England vs Belgium
On the same day that Sam wrote his name in World Cup lore against Ukraine in the Round of 32 clash, England also took on Belgium.
Their game was scheduled to start 3 hours later.
[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]
[Match 6: England vs Belgium]



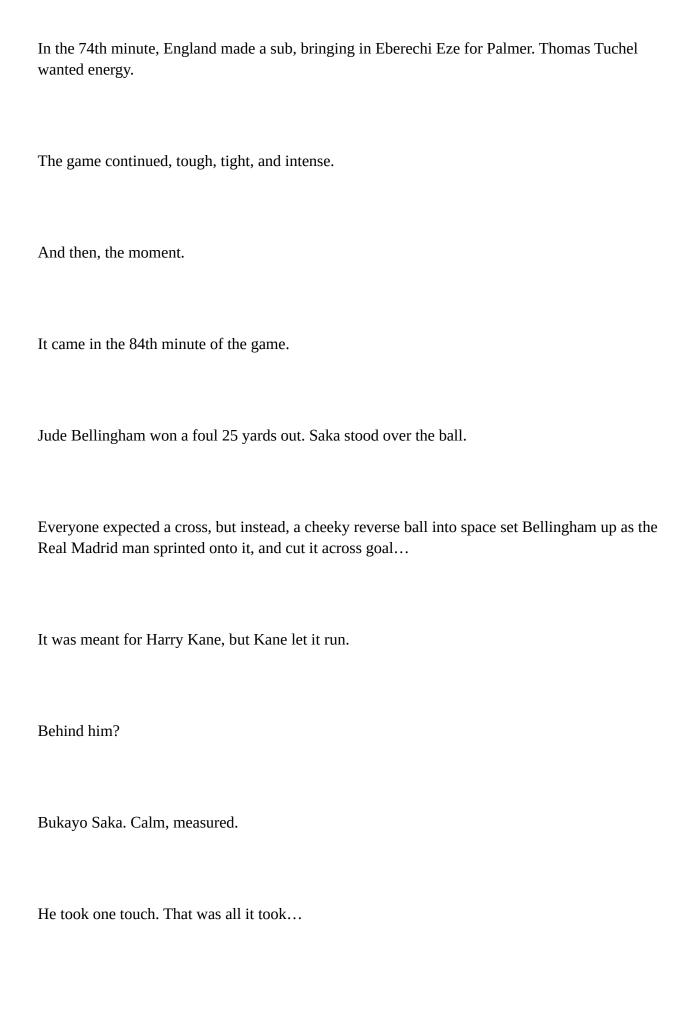
The stage was massive. The match? Even bigger.
England started in a 4-2-3-1 formation under Thomas Tuchel, with Jordan Pickford in goal, and a defensive quadruple of Kyle Walker, John Stones, Marc Guehi, and Luke Shaw ahead of him.
In midfield was the duo of Declan Rice and Bellingham, while the attacking creators were Saka on the right, Cole Palmer down the middle, and Marcus Rashford on the left.
Down the middle was England's captain and striker, Harry Kane.
Belgium? They started in their regular 3-4-2-1, with Thibuat Courtois starting again in goal, while ahead of him was the defensive trio of Faes, Vertonghen, and Theate.
In midfield was the trio of Castagne, Onana, Tielemans, and Carrasco. De Bruyne and Jeremy Doku lined up as the creators in chief.
As for Lukaka? Of course, he led the line as the striker.
The first half was a game of back and forth like thunderclaps.
Both teams went at each other with no caution, no brakes.

Belgium and England had a lot of history over the years already, mostly in the World Cup and in other international football competitions.
It was not exactly a rivalry between both countries, but on this stage, both sides wanted to crush their opponents and use them as stepping stones to progress to the Round of 16 of the tournament.
And so, they played their hearts out on the pitch, running themselves to the ground as they fought to assert dominance over the game.
And then
BAM!
Romelu Lukaku struck for Belgium. He struck early.
In the 12th minute of the game, Doku tore down the left wing, beat Kyle Walker, and squared it for Lukaku who rifled it past Pickford.
Kyle Walker may have started revitalizing his career with AC Milan, but he was no longer that Walker that bombed up and down with imperious dominance during his Manchester City years.
England 0-1 Belgium.
England went behind in the 12th minute, but the response was swift.

England got their equalizer just 7 minutes later in the 19th minute of the game through a Jude Bellingham stunner.
Rashford drew two defenders wide, and slipped it to Bellingham, who dropped Belgium's Youri Tielemans with a fake and curled it into the far corner.
It was vintage Bellingham.
"BELLIGOAL!!!"
"BELLIGOAL!!!"
"BELLIGOAL!!!" The commentators screamed.
1-1.
The roar shook the stadium.
England got their equalizer, and yet, they were not satisfied. Not yet.
The 3 Lions took it a step further as they finally got their lead in the 28th minute of the game. Harry Kane finally got his name on the scoresheet.

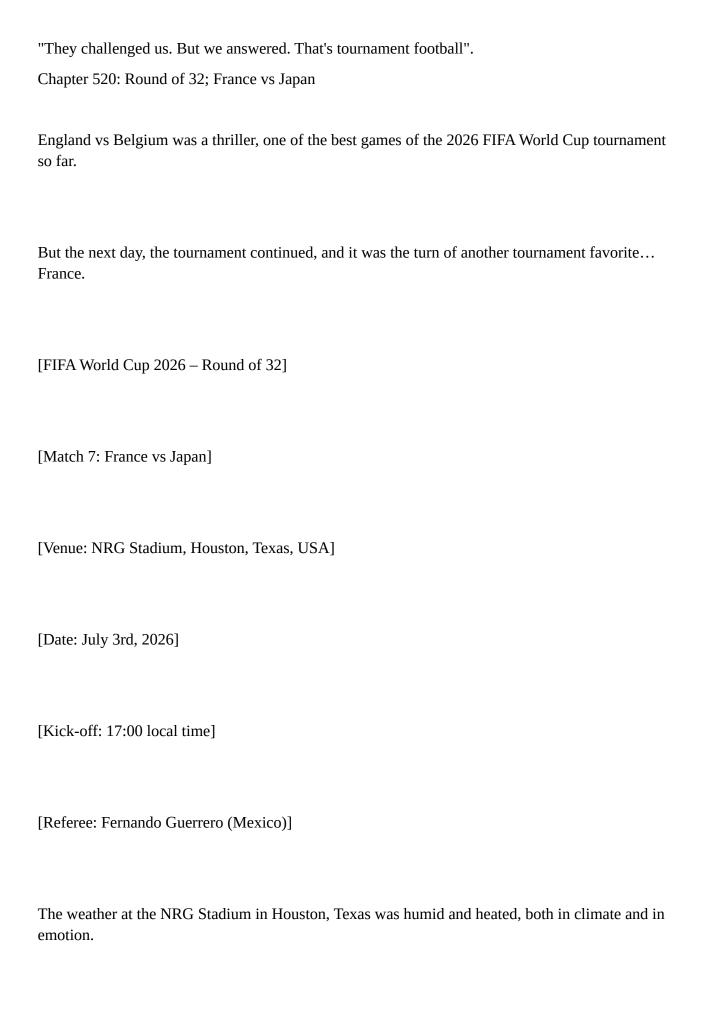


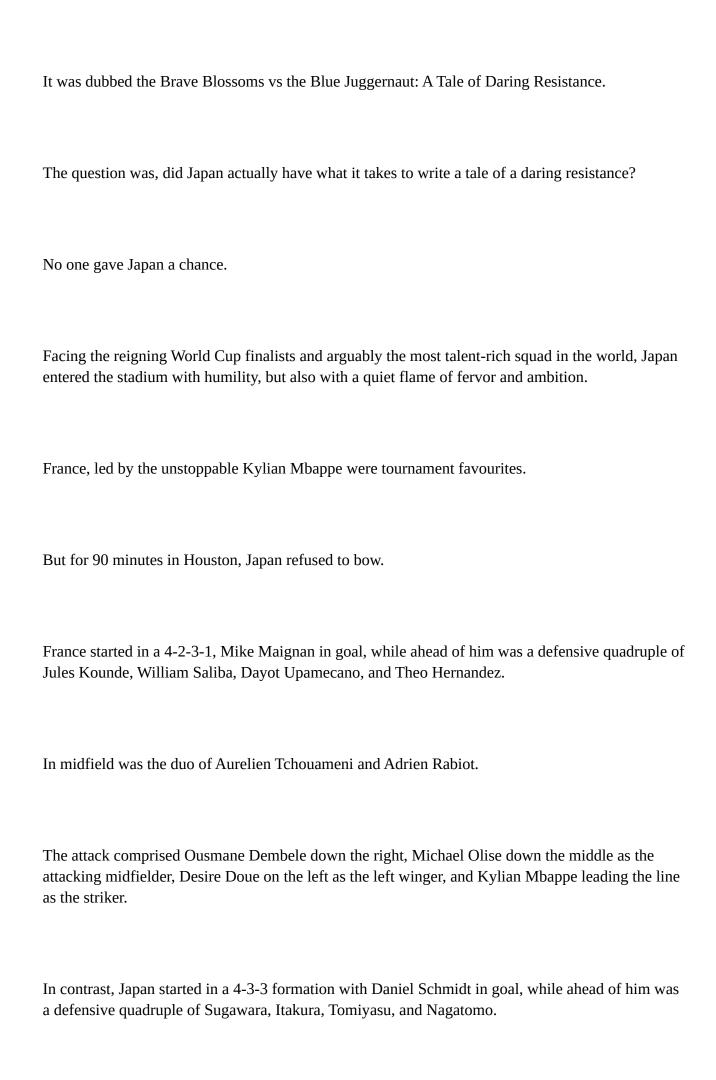
Kevin De Bruyne whirled off away in celebration, bringing the stadium down with him as Belgian fans roared at the top of their lungs.
The first half was pure madness.
It came to an end 2-2.
The second half was chaos on the wings.
It started, and for a time, the game settled slightly. But individual brilliance kept the chaos alive.
In the 56th minute of the game, Doku came close, as he cut inside and curled. It was just wide. Pickford was comfortably beaten.
Belgium was growing.
In the 67th minute, another Harry Kane save!
One-on-one with Casteels after a Rashford flick, Casteels saved with his face, Belgium surviving as their goalkeeper kept them in it.



A tap in.
GOALLLLLLLLL!!!
3-2 England.
For a brief moment, the MetLife came undone as English fans in the stadium turned it into a cauldron of noise with their energetic celebrations.
After that, Belgium pushed desperately.
De Bruyne hit the post in the 90th plus 3 minute. Youri Tielemans had a volley blocked by Declar Rice in the 94th minute.
Belgium tried everything in their playbook, and yet, it was not enough.
And then
FWEEEE!
The game came to an end.







In midfield was the trio of Tanaka, Morita, and Kamada, while in attack was the dynamic trio of Doan, Asano, and Kubo.
It was a fearsome Japanese side.
But in front of the French national football team, they looked like a lion cub shrieking in front of a roaring adult Lion.
FWEEE!
The game started.
The atmosphere was electric as French fans sang at the top of their lungs, dwarfing the little Japanese voices in the stadium.
They were literally bullying the Japanese fans.
The game began with the usual French control, feeding the ego and euphoria of their fans but then, the first jolt.
BAM!

GOAL! Japan, from Ritsu Doan.
It all started from a turnover by Rabiot in midfield.
Tanaka slipped it wide, and Doan cut inside with the ball, curling a beauty past Mike Maignan's fingertips.
France 0-1 Japan.
Just like that.
The stadium gasped.
It took a few seconds for the Japanese fans to respond and realize what just happened, and when they did, the stadium exploded.
BOOM!
It was all Japanese for a few unforgettable seconds.
But then, France responded with power. Kylian Mbappe began to shift gears, leading the French side, and pumping them on to unleash their true potential.

Then
BAM!
They struck.
21st minute, Kylian Mbappe.
He cut through three defenders like paper, then smashed it into the roof of the net in ruthless fashion.
1-1. A King's answer.
But Japan wouldn't fold.
In the 39th minute of the game, they came close, Kubo unleashing a low shot from the edge of the box that stung Maignan's palms.
France were being tested. Loudly.
The knockouts always had this energy that came with them, and tonight was not any different for the French.

The first half came to an end 1-1.
The second half soon started, the tide and the crack.
France turned up the tempo. Michael Olise dropped deep, Hernandez overlapped constantly, and Mbappe began demanding everything.
And then, in the 52nd minute of the game, France finally found the lead they've been seeking all game.
BAM!
Desire Doue struck for the French.
Olise fed him with a no-look pass. The winger's finish was clinical, low and across goal, leaving the goalkeeper no chance.
2-1 France.
And yet, France's lead didn't last.
Japan struck back in the 59th minute of the game, and it was Takefusa Kubo who did it with an incredible shot from range.

Kamada intercepted Tchouameni, ran 30 yards, and slid Kudo in. The winger went near post.
2-2! Spot# an e\$r^r.o!r? V.is⁢ the ori!g\$ina%l p#o#s&t\$ on M\$V+LEM\$P^Y.R@.
BOOM!
The stadium exploded, Japanese fans finding their voice again.
Japan had equalized again.
The French coach sent on Marcus Thuram and Coman. It was time to press the hammer down.
And then, Kylian Mbappe struck again, this time in the 71st minute.
Coman to Olise, and Olise chipped the ball to the back post, where Mbappe lurked. Mbappe leapt, hovered, and headed it across goal and in.
3-2 France.
That was the dagger.



Mbappe had a few words for the media at the end of the game.
"Respect to Japan. They gave us hell, we just didn't see it coming. But we're France. We know how to survive hell".
Hajime Moriyasu, the Japanese coach also faced the media at the end of the game to say his piece.
"We pushed giants to the edge. I'm proud. This is not defeat, it's a beginning".
And of course, the French coach also had a few words.
"That was a war. But wars are won by moments. And we had Mbappe".
France moved on to the Round of 16.