

Football God 521

Chapter 521: Round of 32; Germany vs Czech Republic

The group stage of the FIFA World Cup was filled with upsets and crazy underdog stories, underdogs like Nigeria rising to the occasion, announcing themselves in the international stage to the world.

The group stage was the stage of the underdogs.

The knockout stage though... the Round of 32, it was the stage where the favourites asserted their dominance and stake to the biggest trophy in football, the World Cup trophy.

Majority of the Round of 32 games were close and exciting thrillers, the underdogs making themselves known, but none of them managed to get the win over the favourites yet.

The big footballing nations were making a statement to the world.

And now, it was Germany's turn to dance to the tune of scrutiny that assaulted every Round of 32 game so far.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 8: Germany vs Czech Republic]

[Venue: Levi's Stadium, Santa Clara, California]

[Date: July 3rd, 2026] Note: Check MVLEMPYR for any corrections.

[Kick-off: 20:00 local time]

[Referee: Daniele Orsato (Italy)]

There were over 69,000 fans at Levi's Stadium in California.

The stadium was packed to the brim on the night.

The weather? There was a cool night breeze in the Bay Area, ideal for a tactical showdown.

And tonight, a ruthless German machine met a defiant wall, a wall of the Japanese kind. The only question was if the wall was strong enough to witness the force of the German machine.

Germany came into this match with the ferocity of champions in the making. They had a perfect group stage, winning all of their games. Their squad had flawless depth, and it was a strong and balanced squad.

The Czech Republic? This was a gritty team that had fought tooth and nail to emerge from a tough group. They were forged through fire, but many thought that this time, maybe the fire was a bit too hot for them to survive.

Few gave them a chance against the German machines, but for the next hour and some, they wanted to prove the world wrong and give Germany nightmares.

They were determined. This was not going to be a routine win for the Germans. If they eventually won, it won't be easy, it would be a hard-fought siege.

Under Julian Nagelsmann, Germany started in a 4-2-3-1 with Marc Andre Ter Stegen in goal, while ahead of him stood a defensive quadruple of Joshua Kimmich, Antonio Rudiger, Nico Schlotterbeck, and Raum.

In midfield was the duo of Leon Goretzka and Jamal Musiala, while the creative attackers were Florian Wirtz, Kai Havertz, and Leroy Sane.

Niclas Fullkrug led the line as the striker.

Czech Republic started in a 4-1-4-1 formation with Jindrich Stanek in goal, a defensive quadruple of Coufal, Zima, Krejci, and Hlozek ahead of him, and a midfield comprising Soucek, Sadilek, Provod, Cerny, and Barak.

Patrick Schick led the line as the striker.

FWEEE!

The game started and like expected, the German machines dictated the game early, showing their efficiency and ruthless brilliance in the game.

The first half was all Germany.

Germany dominated possession, over 68% possession in the opening 45 minutes, but it was sterile.

The Czechs turned into a back five when defending to curb the German aggression in attack.

Everything Germany went on the attack, the back 5 dropped deep and compact, forcing Germany to shoot from range or swing in ineffective crosses since they simply couldn't penetrate the solid defensive block.

Stanek made his first save of the game in the 18th minute.

Musiala danced through two men and fired low. The Czech keeper got down fast. Germany were finding cracks, but they weren't breaking through.

In the 36th minute of the game, Soucek got a yellow card for persistent fouling on Wirtz. The Germans were getting frustrated.

And in a shocking event for the football universe, the first half of this game came to an end with a bamboozling 0-0 score line.

The crowd was getting tense. The Czechs were defending heroically. Germany were dominant but blunt.

When second half started, the pressure mounted.

Germany turned it up under their coach's orders. Sane and Musiala switched flanks. Havertz dropped deeper to link play. Fullkrug stayed as the target man.

In the 54th minute of the game, Czech Republic were forced into making a goal line clearance through Zima to keep themselves in the game.

Sane whipped in a cross which Wirtz volleyed on goal. Stanek was beaten comfortably, but Zima slid in, somehow clearing off the line.

Germany couldn't believe it.

In the 67th minute of the game, Germany finally made a sub, taking off Goretzka to introduce fresh legs for control.

Besides, time was ticking.

Germany needed a stimulant, a catalyst to kick them to life.

They found it in the 75th minute of the game, their breakthrough, and it was Niclas Fullkrug.

It came from persistence. Raum overlapped and swung in the 19th cross of the game. Fullkrug, bruised, battered and battling rose above Krejci and hammered a header in.

Germany 1-0 Czech Republic.

Finally.

The dam had broken. And now the flood threatened.

The final minutes of the game was absolute cinema.

It was Czech heart vs German steel.

The Czechs pushed forward. Schick had a sniff in the 89th minute, but the volley only hit the bar.

A long ball in stoppage time caused chaos, but Rudiger stood tall, booting it into the sky.

Germany weathered the storm.

They survived.

[FULL-TIME: Germany 1-0 Czech Republic]

It was a performance of maturity and grind from the Germans. Not their flashiest, but maybe their most important.

Niclas Fullkrug won the man of the match award with his 1 goal, 7 aerial duels won, and 3 shots.

Like the commentator said:

"Not every hero glides. Some bulldoze their way to glory".

Under fire despite the fact that his nation qualified, Julian Nagelsmann faced the media.

"Games like these make you stronger. The Czechs fought like lions. We found our moment. That's tournament football".

The Czech Republic coach also had a few words.

"We left everything out there. One moment, that's the difference at this level".

Chapter 522: Round of 32; Uruguay vs Canada

Germany progressed.

Czech Republic was out.

And the FIFA World Cup continued.

After another exciting day of FIFA World Cup games, the fans had a brief respite of a few hours to properly savor the outcomes before the next day.

And in a blink... it was D-day again.

This time, it was Uruguay vs Canada.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32:]

[Match 10: Uruguay vs Canada]

[Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico City, Mexico]

[Date: July 4th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 16:00 local time]

[Referee: Andres Matonte (Uruguay, replaced for neutrality: new ref – Facundo Tello, Argentina)]

The weather at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City was warm and dry, altitude heavy. The air itself was a battleground.

And the first shots of the epic clash were already fired in the act of the officiating referee for the game being changed at the last moment.

The Canadians protested the decision to let an Uruguayan referee officiate the game, and under pressure, FIFA had no choice but to replace the referee.

And so, here it was, the moment of truth.

Over 87,000 fans filled the stadium, buzzing with South American fire.

It was dubbed a clash of Fire and Fearlessness, Uruguay's grit vs Canada's spirit.

Canada had written their own beautiful script in this tournament; high energy, technical precision, and fearless play led by the electric Alphonso Davies who was also the Canadian captain.

But going up against Uruguay in the coliseum of football that is the Azteca, they were facing something older, tougher, more primal; a team of warriors forged in chaos.

The starting lineups of both nations were released an hour before time.

Uruguay started in a 4-3-1-2 formation with Sergio Rochet in goal, Varela, Ronald Araujo, Gimenez, and Olivera in defense.

In midfield was the trio of Ferderico Valverde, Manuel Ugarte, and De La Cruz. Giorgian de Arrascaeta was the sole attacking midfielder on the night, while the 2 starting strikers were Aguirre and Darwin Nunez.

As for the Canadians, starting in a 3-4-3, they had Milan Borjan in goal, while ahead of him stood the defensive trio of Johnston, Cornelius, and Kennedy.

In midfield was the quadruple of Laryea, Eustaquio, Kone, and Alphonso Davies, who pushed upward from his normal left back position, while the forward trio comprised Buchanan, Jonathan David as the striker, and Hoilett.

FWEEE!

The game started and right from the start, Uruguay dictated tempo with that signature Bielsa press and intensity.

It didn't take long for them to get the first result of the game, an early one.

Bam!

Uruguay struck, and it was through one of their strikers, Darwin Nunez in the 10th minute of the game.

Canada's high line got punished. Valverde won the ball in midfield, and quickly sent a diagonal into Darwin Nunez's path. The striker sprinted past Cornelius and slotted low past Borjan.

1-0 Uruguay.

Fast. Ruthless. Efficient.

Canada looked shaken. Uruguay were like sharks that smelled blood as they piled on the pressure.

In the 18th minute, Aguirre came close with a thunderous half-volley from 25 yards grazing the top of the net. Uruguay were purring and raring for the 2nd goal.

But then, against the run of play, Canada finally found breath.

34th minute. The moment the world was waiting for.

Alphonso Davies, the Canadian captain was the orchestrator. He started from deep, beat two men with a darting run down the left, did a one-two with Jonathan David, and then...

POW!

Davies blasted one low to the far corner.

1-1.

Canada roared. Uruguay didn't blink.

And suddenly, life was infused in this game again.

The game became a bit more even after that equalizer as both nations hassled and harried. But then, in the 41st minute, Uruguay showed their superiority again through their second striker, Aguirre.

Arrascaeta swung in a wicked low cross and Aguirre got across his man for a classic near-post finish.

2-1 Uruguay.

And just like that, the lead returned. The perfect response.

The first half came to an end 2-1 in Uruguay's favor.

The second half was a game of fight and fire.

Canada adjusted, bringing on Ismael Kone to reinforce the midfield. Buchanan and Davies switched flanks. And then, they pushed hard.

58th minute, SAVE!

A looping header from Jonathan David looked goal-bound, only for Rochet to tip it over with his fingertips, as fans groaned and gasped.

A match-saving stop.

In the 63rd minute of the game, Uruguay made a sub, bringing on Pellistri for De La Cruz. Uruguay needed legs.

And then, in the 70th minute, they sealed the game.

BAM!

A rocket from range. Who else? Federico Valverde!

It was fitting that the engine of this team had his moment. From 30 yards, a cannonball strike rose like a missile and flew past Borjan.

3-1.

"FEDERICO VALVERDE...!" The commentator screamed in a shrill voice.

"Monster!"

The Azteca erupted. The Celeste fans sang in unison.

Canada threw the kitchen sink; Davies ran until his legs gave out, David pressed like a man possessed, seeking the equalizer, but they never found it.

Uruguay's shield wall held.

FWEEEE!

The final whistle sounded, bringing the game to an end.

[FULL-TIME: Uruguay 3-1 Canada]

A beautiful journey ended for Canada. Read ahead and get updates at [M*V*L*E*M*P*Y*R](#).

Uruguay, with fire in their veins and scars on their armor, marched forward. It was a story of victory and defeat.

Federico Valverde won the man of the match award after his imperious performance in the middle of the park, with 1 goal, a 94% pass accuracy, 8 ball recoveries, and 3 tackles won.

The commentators raved at the end of the game.

"If this team has a soul, Valverde is its beating heart".

Marcelo Bielsa, Uruguay's coach, ecstatic after his team's victory, had a few words for the media at the end of the game.

"We suffer, but we know how to win through suffering. This is Uruguay".

Alphonso Davies also addressed the media at the end of the game.

"I'm proud of this team. We gave everything. Uruguay were just... different".

Valverde, the Uruguayan coach also faced the media.

He grinned. "We're not done yet. And they'll remember our names".

Uruguay matched on to the Round of 16.

Chapter 523: Round of 32; Netherlands vs Poland

Next in the FIFA World Cup Round of 32 stage was a blockbuster encounter between 2 European nations, Netherlands and Poland.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 11: Netherlands vs Poland]

[Venue: Lincoln Financial Field, Philadelphia, USA]

[Date: July 4th, 2026]

[Referee: Michael Oliver (England)]

The weather at the Lincoln Financial in Philadelphia, USA was perfect. A cool night air, perfect pitch. The conditions were ripe for drama.

There were over 67,000 football fans at the Lincoln Financial.

The Netherlands came into this match as one of the tournament's most stylish and fluid teams.

Poland, gritty and led by the eternal Robert Lewandowski, were a different beast: direct, physical, and dangerous on the break.

The game was destined to become an unforgettable war of willpower and pressure between 2 European nations with fire in their veins.

The starting lineups for both nations were released an hour before the game.

Netherlands started in a 3-4-1-2, with Justin Bijlow in goal, while sitting ahead of him was the defensive trio of Van Dijk, De Ligt, and Nathan Ake. In midfield was the quadruple of Dumfries, Frankie de Jong, Koopmeiners, and Tyrell Malacia.

Xavi Simons started as the sole attacking midfielder, while the two strikers were Cody Gakpo and Memphis Depay.

For Poland, it was a 4-4-2 with Wojciech Szczesny back in goal after his brief stint with retirement. Ahead of him in defense were the defensive quadruple of Cash, Bednarek, Kiwior, and Bereszynski.

In midfield was the quadruple of Zielinski, Moder, Szymanski, and Frankowski, while the 2 strikers were Lewandowski and Swiderski.

From the kickoff, one thing was clear, Poland were not here to sit back.

They were here to play the game of their lives.

Like they say, as soon as knockout stages start, every game is a final. Poland played the game as if it was a final.

Poland? They stunned the Dutch early, as early as the 10th minute.

After a sloppy pass from De Ligt, Zielinski pounced and released Swiderski, who finished low past Bijlow, leaving the Dutch goalkeeper fuming at his defenders.

1-0 Poland.

Shock in the stands.

The Polish players celebrated their goal exuberantly, but then, after a few more minutes, Netherlands finally settled into their rhythm.

And then, they dictated the game.

Dumfries repeatedly bombed forward. Simons grew into the game.

And then...

GOAL! Memphis Depay, in the 30th minute of the game.

Xavi Simons threaded a perfectly weighted pass. Memphis, through on goal, calmly slotted past Szczesny.

1-1. Balance restored.

From there on, Netherlands rode the bus and never looked back. Poland defended valiantly, keeping attack after attack from the Dutch at bay.

But then, in the 42nd minute, Lewandowski almost stunned them again.

The veteran striker turned Van Dijk with a burst and let fly... but Bijlow tipped it wide. The threat was real.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

Many were surprised. Nobody expected Poland to really pose much of a threat against Netherlands, but here they were, doing the impossible.

The second half was a game of tension wrapped in silk.

The Dutch started to turn the screws. Cody Gakpo and Tyrell Malacia stretched the flanks, while Frankie De Jong dictated tempo.

And then, in the 63rd minute, the Dutch found their breakthrough.

A move out of textbook "Total Football". Koopmeiners to Simons, Simons to Dumfries, a low cross, and then Cody Gakpo sliding in.

Wojciech stood no chance.

2-1 Netherlands. Orange flares lit up the stands.

But Poland never say die.

They fought tooth and nail to get their equalizer, Lewandowski especially playing like a man on a mission, his age notwithstanding.

And then, in the 76th minute, they finally forced it.

De Ligt clipped Lewandowski in the box after a VAR check. Lewandowski stepped in.

FWEEEE!

PENALTY!

There was no denying it even as De Ligt protested in vain, attracting a yellow card on top for his troubles.

The Dutch fans filling the stadium whistled and booed the referee, showing their displeasure at the decision.

A few minutes later, Lewandowski stepped up to take the penalty after the commotion died down.

In the 78th minute, Lewandowski buried it in vintage fashion.

Ice cold. Stutter-step. Bottom corner.

2-2.

BOOM!

The Lincoln Financial exploded with the roar of ten thousand Polish fans.

Poland weren't leaving quietly.

For the final 10 minutes, Netherlands pushed with intensity, chasing the lead again but this time, the Polish players defended for their life.

Even Lewandowski dropped back to defend.

It was tense and full of drama.

In the end...

FWEEE!

The first 90 minutes came to an end. Over to extra time.

The game soon started and once again, both sides pushed. It was more a battle of willpower than ever before now.

Netherlands had the better chances.

In the 97th minute, Xavi Simons hit the bar.

In the 113rd minute, Szczesny saved from Memphis point-blank, raising the tension in the stadium to boiling levels.

And then in the 119th minute, Zienliski took a shot, the last of the game, sending tens of thousands of fans to their feet only for it to fly just wide of the post.

"Ahhh...!" The Polish midfielder roared in frustration.

And then...

FWEEE!

Extra time came to an end. No winner.

Now, penalties.

The tension in the stadium was palpable, finally hitting a climax. Some fans were unable to watch as they covered their faces in the preparation for the penultimate end of this game.

The penalty shootout was a pressure cooker throughout.

Netherlands went first. Memphis Depay took his shot, scored.

1-0 Netherlands.

Lewandowski went for Poland. Shot, scored.

1-1.

Xavi Simons went up next for Netherlands. He took his shot and also scored.

2-1 Netherlands.

Zielinski went up next for Poland. He didn't try anything fancy, shooting straight down the middle but in a nightmarish moment for the Polish midfielder, he was horrified as Bijlow's leg just saved the ball.

"And BIJLOW SAVES!" The commentator screamed.

A nightmare for the Polish!

Content first released on M_VLEM_PYR.

Zielinski grabbed his head with his hands in disbelief. With drooped shoulders, he turned and walked away. Lewandowski consoled him.

Cody Gakpo went up next for the Netherlands. And in a display of guts and a will made of steel, just like Zielinsky, Gakpo also shot down the middle, and scored.

"COME ON!" He screamed at the fans, eliciting wild reactions from them.

3-1 Netherlands.

Szymanski went up for Poland next. He shot, and scored.

3-2.

Then, Tyrell Malacia followed for the Netherlands. And this was when Wojciech Szczesny rolled back the years, diving the right way and pulling off an incredible save to deny Malacia.

BOOM!

The stadium literally melted from the roar of the Polish fans.

Malacia kicked in frustration and walked off.

3-2 to Netherlands still.

Now, it was up to Poland's next penalty taker to level the score.

It was the most pivotal penalty kick of the night, and the pressure was at a crazy level. Bednarek, the defender came up to take the penalty for Poland.

Bednarek looked away from the goalkeeper, rubbed his face, took a deep breath, and then as soon as the whistle rang, he ran slowly, looking straight at the goalkeeper's eyes.

And then...

Bam!

He hit the ball, left, leaving Bijlow rooted to one spot as he was about diving in the opposite direction.

The ball flew, towards goal, but then it veered slightly, then...

Bam!

It hit the post!

"HE HITS THE POST!"

"MY GOD! IT'S OVER FOR POLAND!"

"IT'S A DUTCH VICTORY, ON PENALTIES!"

"NETHERLANDS ARE THROUGH!"

Netherlands won 4-3 on penalties, and Bijlow was the hero.

The Dutch survived. Poland sank to their knees; brave, brilliant, but beaten.

Justin Bijlow won the man of the match award for his 5 saves in regular time, and his all-important save in the shootout.

Like the commentator said:

"They say goalkeepers win your tournaments. Tonight, he proved it".

Chapter 524: Round of 32; USA vs Australia

On the 4th of July, Netherlands scraped through a tough Polish challenge, pushing on to the Round of 16 of the FIFA World Cup.

But Netherlands vs Poland was not the final game of July 4th.

For July 4th, the FIFA World Cup officials made a special tweak, bringing the first fixture originally scheduled for July 5th back to July 4th, and it was the epic Round of 32 clash between USA and Australia.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 12: USA vs Australia]

[Venue: BC Place, Vancouver, Canada]

[Date: July 4th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 18:00 local time]

[Referee: Raphael Claus (Brazil)]

The game was tagged the Independence Day Showdown.

It was a mild summer evening at the BC Place in Canada, electric under the roof of the stadium.

The United States, playing in Canada and on the biggest national holiday of the year for them, walked onto the pitch with pressure pulsing in every heartbeat.

Australia, fearless and efficient throughout the group stage, had no interest in being background dancers in America's party.

The seers already had their say.

This game would become a contest of endurance, emotion, and edge-of-your-seat suspense.

A Nailbiter on Independence Day.

For USA, they started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Matt Turner in goal, while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Sergino Dest, Richards, Ream, and Fulham's Antonee Robinson.

In midfield was the duo of Tyler Adams and Weston McKennie, while the creative forwards were Giovanni Reyna, Musah, and Christian Pulisic, who was also Captain America for the night.

Leading the line for the Americans was Ricardo Pepi as the striker.

For Australia, starting in a 4-4-2, they had Matthew Ryan in goal, while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Atkinson, Souttar, Rowles, and Behich.

In midfield was another quadruple comprising Baccus, Mooy, Irvine, and Boyle, while the 2 strikers were Mabil and Duke.

FWEEE!

The game started and right from the onset, the fireworks started early as Australia got their first yellow card of the game as early as the 3rd minute when their midfielder, Booy pulled down Weston McKennie, stopping a potentially dangerous American counterattack.

But that was only the prelude.

Because in less than 10 minutes after that cryptic foul, USA tore the deadlock apart with the first goal of the game in the 13th minute.

Who else? Christian Pulisic. The Captain America script wrote itself.

Giovanni Reyna slalomed through midfield and released Pulisic with a slicing through ball. One touch. One rocket. Top corner.

The goalkeeper stood no chance.

1-0 USA.

BC Place erupted. It felt like destiny.

But Australia didn't blink, already locked into the game.

For a while after USA took the lead, it seemed like it was the first of an American slaughter on the night, but the Australian defense held for dear life.

Australia's situation turned from bad to worse when Mabil, one of their 2 starting strikers suffered a knock, forcing him out of the game.

Craig Goodwin came in for Mabil.

For the Australians, it felt like a curse, but the curse became the blessing.

In the 27th minute...

BOOM!

Australia got their equalizer through the substitute striker, Craig Goodwin.

Mooy sent a long diagonal pass. Goodwin controlled beautifully, drifted past Dest with agile movement, and curled one low past Turner.

1-1.

Just like that. And the tension was restored.

All of a sudden, the American domination of the game evaporated as the proceedings on the pitch became even once again.

In the 39th minute of the game, Giovanni Reyna came close for USA, his shot from 25 yards out smacking the bar.

USA were pressing still, but Australia were defending with everything.

And for some reason, it felt like their defense would never be broken again, at least not by this American attack.

They held.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

A few minutes later, the second half began. It was a game of grit, tactics, and desperation for both teams.

Pochettino brought on Leon Balogun for Pepi, switching to a more aggressive 4-4-2 diamond in a desperate quest to break the deadlock a second time.

In the 60th minute, Australia's Mat Ryan made a terrific save.

Pulisic hit a volley from the edge of the box; Ryan at full stretch tipped it wide, eliciting wild cheers from the Australian fans.

Heroics from the Aussie goalkeeper.

And then just 6 minutes later, Australia got a chance, Duke snatching the ball at a rebound in the box before quickly unleashing a shot.

It veered off the post by mere inches.

You could hear hearts racing in the stadium.

The game teetered, neither side breaking. Extra time loomed.

But then, in the 82nd minute of the game, the breakthrough came.

GOAL! USA.

Yunus Musah was the star.

Adamns won the ball back just outside Australia's 18-yard box, and slipped it to Musah, who surged into space. Then, he fired from the top of the box; the ball took a wicked deflection and wrong-footed Ryan.

2-1 USA.

BOOM!

American fans in the stadium exploded, going haywire in celebrations.

Relief, bedlam, celebration.

The crowd erupted like it was July 4th fireworks all over again.

In the final minutes of the game, it was survival mode for USA as Australia refused to die.

Mooy and Boyle flooded forward. Set pieces rained in. Turner made two stunning saves, including a bullet header from Souttar in the 94th minute.

But then...

FWEEE!

The game came to an end.

[FULL-TIME: USA 2-1 Australia]

The Americans held on. Barely. But hold on they did.

Christian Pulisic won the man of the match award with his 1 goal, 4 chances created, and 7 successful dribbles.

"He's the face of this team for a reason," the commentator said. "And tonight, he was its heartbeat".

The post-match reactions to the game were just as crazy as the other games.

Pulisic faced the media and said his bit.

"We knew it wasn't going to be a party, but we gave the fans something to celebrate. Proud of the fight".

Graham Arnold, the Australian coach also had a few words for the media.

"They were just that bit sharper. We'll be back stronger".

Matt Turner? The goalkeeper on top of the world also said his piece.

"Those final saves... that's what dreams are made of".

The United States advanced to the Round of 16.

Chapter 525: Round of 32; Sweden vs Morocco

The next day...

With USA vs Australia already played on July 4th, Sweden vs Morocco became the only game scheduled for July 5th.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 13: Sweden vs Morocco]

[Venue: MetLife Stadium, New Jersey, USA]

[Date: July 5th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 20:00 local time]

[Referee: Clement Turpin (France)]

There were over 75,000 fans present at the MetLife in New Jersey, USA to watch the showdown between Sweden and Morocco.

Blue and yellow clashed with red and green in a carnival of culture.

The weather? It was cool and breezy on the night, perfect for 90 minutes of high-stakes action.

The game was never going to be normal.

Sweden had scored 8 goals in the group stage; 4 of them by the brilliant Viktor Gyokeres, their breakout hero.

Morocco? The resilient semifinalists of 2022, back with vengeance and structure, powered by a midfield trio made of steel and silk remained a firm contender with fair chances of going deep in the tournament.

What unfolded at the MetLife was a war of wits, waves of emotion, and a final act for the ages.

Sweden started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Robin Olsen in goal, while ahead of him stood the defensive quadruple of Krafth, Lindelof who captained the Swedish side, Hien, and Augustinsson.

In midfield was the duo of Cajuste and Svanberg, while the creative attackers were Kulusevski, Forsberg, and Alexander Isak.

Leading the line for the Swedish players was Viktor Gyokeres as the striker.

As for Morocco, they started in a classic 4-3-3, Yassin Bounou starting in goal while ahead of him was the defensive quadruple of Achraf Hakimi, Saiss, Aguerd, and Mazraoui.

In midfield was the tenacious trio of Sofyat Amrabat, Ounahi, and Amallah, while the forward trio comprised Hakim Ziyech, En-Nesyri, and Boufal.

FWEEEE!

The game started and both teams made a statement in the game immediately.

Both teams came out roaring.

Then... as early as the 6th minute, Morocco broke the deadlock through Hakim Ziyech, their creative attacker.

From nothing, Morocco struck.

Ziyech curled a worldie into the top corner from 25 yards out, leaving the MetLife stunned. Silence from Swedish fans, roars from the red wall.

1-0 Morocco.

Sweden responded by pinning Morocco deeper to defend.

Kulusevski and Alexander Isak overloaded the right, running the opposition left back ragged, linking up like childhood friends.

And then...

BOOM!

Sweden struck through Viktor Gyokeres in the 22nd minute.

It Forsberg corner... A monstrous leap... then Bang! Bullet header into the roof of the net.

1-1.

The crowd was now fully alive.

But the drama was not yet over.

In the 38th minute of the game, Sofiane Boufal turned it around for the Moroccans, giving them the lead for the second time in the game.

It was absolute magic as the left winger weaved between two defenders, dropped a shoulder, and curled it past Olsen's fingertips.

2-1 Morocco.

The halftime whistle couldn't come fast enough for Sweden.

The tension only increased during halftime. When the players came out of the tunnel for the 2nd half, the tension in the stadium climbed to a climax.

And then, it started.

FWEEE!

The battle between both nations continued.

Sweden worked and hustled like desperate men.

Their hard work paid off. They didn't have to wait too long as in the 53rd minute of the game, Alexander Isak wrote his name on the scoresheet.

It was brilliant footwork from the Newcastle United man as he received the ball from Kulusevski, beat Siass, and toe-poked under Bounou.

2-2.

The stadium literally melted.

This game refused to bow down.

That goal only made the tension rise between both nations and fanbases.

The situation on the pitch also became tighter.

In the 66th minute, Yassine Bounou made an incredible double save. First, he stopped a Forsberg curler, then reacted immediately to deny Gyokeres on the rebound, preventing him from getting his brace.

Elite from the Moroccan goalkeeper.

In the 75th minute, a penalty shout by Morocco was denied.

Ziyech went down under contact from Augustinsson, but VAR said no. The bench exploded.

And then in the 83rd minute, Sweden came close again through Kulusevski. His rocket from outside the box rattled the frame. It looked destined.

Then came stoppage time...

The tension was a pressure cooker now in the stadium as both nations prepared for extra time.

And yet, this was when he singlehandedly turned the game on its head.

The golden boy delivered again! Viktor Gyokeres, with his brace, and a stunning GOAL to give Sweden the all-important lead again.

Isak found him with a perfect cutback. Gyokeres took one touch to orient himself and simply blasted into the roof of the net without looking back.

BAM!

3-2 Sweden.

BOOM!

Madness... chaos... euphoria in the stadium.

Swedish fans went mad in celebrations, turning the stadium into a cauldron of noise as they expressed their joy.

They were leading in stoppage time. Surely it was over now.

But Morocco flung everything forward, even Bounou on a corner, showing just how desperate they was. But it all ended in heartbreak.

A desperate Morocco failed to get the equalizer that they so desperately needed.

FWEEE!

The game came to an end, leading to an explosion of contrasting emotions in the stadium as Swedish fans celebrated excitedly while lots of Moroccan fans broke down in tears, unable to deal with the game result.

[FULL-TIME: Sweden 3-2 Morocco]

Sweden, through fire and fury, punched their ticket to the Round of 16.

Morocco, brave and brilliant, bowed out with heads held high.

And of course, with his incredible all-round performance and his clutch moment in front of goal, resulting in a haul of 2 goals and 1 assist, including 6 shots, Viktor Gyokeres won the man of the match award.

"He's not just in form," the commentator said, raving about him. "He's writing his own legend".

By the end of the game, Janne Anderson, the Sweden coach said his mind.

"We don't flinch. That's Sweden. That's Viktor".

Gyokeres also faced the media in the post-match interview.

"It's not just about goals. It's about moments. I live for these".

Walid Regragui, the Moroccan coach also said his piece before the media.

"One moment decided the game. But this team made our people proud again, I believe".

Chapter 526: Round of 32; Colombia vs Egypt

Morocco, a semifinalist of the last FIFA World Cup in 2022 just got eliminated in the Round of 32 stage!

The world of football buzzed with excitement.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup in USA, Canada, and Mexico was producing bangers, all-time classics and fans would do everything they could to savor them.

Morocco was out, Sweden progressed. The match continued.

...

The next day...

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 14: Colombia vs Italy]

[Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta, USA]

[Date: July 5th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 17:00 local time]

[Referee: Jesus Valenzuela (Venezuela)]

The evening was perfect for a game dubbed the clash of titans.

It was a game between 2 nations with legendary and illustrious histories in the FIFA World Cup, a game destined to be another all-time classic in this World Cup no matter the result at the end of the game.

The weather didn't matter because the Mercedes-Benz is an indoors stadium with perfect conditions, just right for football.

But the tension was thick in the air.

Two proud footballing nations. Two explosive squads.

One prize: a ticket to the Round of 16.

Colombia, powered by youth, speed, and fearlessness, came in as group-stage juggernauts.

Italy, the four-time world champions, brought their defensive pedigree and tournament DNA to USA.

The result?

A firecracker of a match that had everything; goals, drama, heartbreak, and heroics from superstars.

The starting lineup for both nations was released an hour before the game.

Colombia started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Camilo Vargas in between the posts, while ahead of him in defense was the defensive quadruple of Munoz, Cuesta, Lucumi, and Mojica.

In midfield was the duo of Lerma and Uribe, while the 3 creative players up field for the Colombians were Luis Diaz on the left, James Rodriguez captaining the side through the middle as the attacking midfielder, and Jorge Carrascal in right wing.

Jhon Duran led the line as the striker.

As for Italy, they started in a 3-5-2 with Gianguigi Donnarumma in goal, and a strong defensive trio of Alessandro Bastoni, Acerbi, and Scalvini ahead of him.

In midfield was the pentagonal lineup of Italian players, Di Lorenzo, Nicolo Barella, Jorginho, Frattesi, and Federico Dimarco all starting.

The two strikers were Raspadori and Scamacca.

The referee wasted no time in starting the game.

FWEEE!

And immediately after the game started, Colombia wasted no time asserting their authority and grip firmly on the game.

It didn't take them long to break the deadlock.

In the 8th minute of the game, Luis Diaz broke the deadlock for the Colombians.

Straight from a turnover, the resurgent James Rodriguez split the defense with a perfect ball through to Luis Diaz who chopped inside Di Lorenzo with perfect skill and curled it past Donnarumma.

1-0 Colombia.

BOOM!

The Mercedes-Benz exploded from the roar of Colombian fans.

The Colombian crowd erupted. Atlanta trembled.

But Italy didn't stay idle, they responded like a real OG of the FIFA World Cup that they were... like champions.

They responded in the 19th minute of the game through Davide Frattesi.

It started from a quick build-up from Nicolo Barella and Jorginho. Frattesi arrived late in the box, took one touch, and drilled it into the bottom corner.

1-1.

Frattesi did the calma calma celebration but the stadium was far from calm as Italian fans started their own madness.

The game was level, but far from calm.

In the 32nd minute of the game, Colombia's Scamacca powered a header on target, forcing Vargas to parry it with lightning reflexes.

Colombia pressed, and like vintage Italy, the Italians defended.

But this time, their defense was not air-tight for 90 minutes. This was a stalwart and proven Italian defense, but it was not the Italian defense of the 90s and the early 2000s with the likes of Paulo Maldini, Nesta, and the others.

Colombia penetrated them for the 2nd time in the first half.

Jhon Duran, the Colombian striker was the hero.

Out of nowhere! Mojica crossed from deep, triggering Duran who jumped and bullied Acerbi in the air before smashing a header past Donnarumma.

2-1 Colombia.

BOOM!

The Mercedes-Benz exploded again.

The energy of the Colombian fans was unmatched.

The first half came to an end 2-1 in Colombia's favor.

When second half started, Italy turned the game into a war, raising the intensity to crazy levels.

Italy pushed hard. Colombia refused to be pinned, but then...

In the 58th minute, GOAL! Italy. Scamacca.

Frattesi again made the difference, slipping Scamacca through. The big striker shrugged off Lucumi with minimal effort and slotted it calmly.

2-2.

Pure grit from the Italians.

But then came the moment of magic.

Who? James Rodriguez.

A vintage James goal in the 71st minute of the game.

Carrascal drew defenders with his dribbling, and then laid it off, allowing Rodriguez to whip a first-time shot into the far top corner from 20 yards.

GOAL!!!

The Mercedes-Benz melted in excitement.

3-2 Colombia.

One of the goals of the tournament. The stadium went ballistic.

The only trouble for Colombia now was holding on for the final stretch of the game. Like expected, Italy threw in everything.

Italy threw on Chiesa and Pellegrini. Then they buzzed. Di Lorenzo fired over. Donnarumma even came up for a late corner. Chaos reigned.

And then, in the 94th minute, additional time.

Chiesa got the last chance of the game as the ball fell to him in the box...

"...!"

Breaths were held, time seemed to freeze, and then...

BAM!

Chiesa blasted over.

Italian fans cursed and groaned in frustration.

That was it.

FWEEEE!

The referee's final whistle reverberated.

[FULL-TIME: Colombia 3-2 Italy]

A World Cup classic like promised.

Colombia progressed into the Round of 16 with belief and brilliance.

Italy? They bowed out bitterly, but nobly.

James Rodriguez, the Colombian captain won the man of the match again with his 1 goal, a worldie, 1 assist, and a stunning 89% pass accuracy in such a tight and high-stakes game.

Like the commentator said:

"He may be older, but he is still Colombia's beating creative heart".

At the end of the game, James Rodriguez faced the media.

"They doubted me. Colombia never did".

Chapter 527: Round of 32; Egypt vs Chile

Italy was out. Colombia matched on.

And now, on the same day, it was Egypt and Chile's turn to tussle and fight for the Round of 16 spot that was at stake on the night.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 15: Egypt vs Chile]

[Venue: NRG Stadium, Houston, USA]

[Date: July 6th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 21:00 local time]

[Referee: Wilton Sampaio (Brazil)]

It was a clash of Africa vs South America.

The fans dubbed it the Pharaohs vs the Red Tide, an Underdog Epic.

Both nations weren't supposed to make it this far.

Both Egypt and Chile had fought tooth and nail as third-placed teams in their respective groups. Now, only one of them would walk away with a historic quarterfinal ticket.

This match was a slow burn; but when the fire came, it was blistering.

Egypt started in a 4-3-3 with Mohamed El Shenawy in goal, while ahead of him stood the defensive quadruple of Hegazi, Abdelmonem, Gaber, and Mohamed Hamdy.

In midfield was the trio of Elneny, Trezeguet, and Fathy, while the attacking trio comprised Mohamed Salah who was also the leader of the team, the captain, then Mostafa Mohamed, and then Omar Marmoush as the striker.

As for Chile, starting in a 4-2-3-1, Gabriel Arias stood in goal while ahead of him sat the defensive quadruple of Isla, Medel who captained this Chilean side, Maripan, and Suazo.

The midfield duo comprised Pulgar and Aranguiz, while the creative players upfront were Sanchez, Marcelino Nunez, and Brereton Diaz.

Eduardo Vargas led the line as the striker.

The first half was a game of tactics, tension, and a bit of magic.

FWEEE!

The game started as both teams played cagey football early on, cautious and methodical, unwilling to make any mistakes.

The slow burn started.

To neutral fans, it was a boring game but to the supporters of both nations in the stadium, it was not boring at all considering what was at stake as they roared their team on, cheering every good play from their players, and jeering any bold play from their opponents.

It was as much a clash between the players on the pitch just as it was a clash between the fans in the stadium stands.

And then, in the 23rd minute of the game, the deadlock was finally broken.

Who? Chile. Eduardo Vargas.

It came from nowhere. A long ball from the Chilean midfielder, Pulgar was misjudged by Abdelmonem, and Vargas pounced on it like a shark who smelled blood, drilling low into the far corner.

1-0 Chile.

The veteran striker was still delivering.

Chile was on the lead, but Egypt was not out yet as they pushed back with their talisman on the right.

1 goal behind now, Mohamed Salah finally let loose.

He buzzed on the right side of the pitch, torching his man with darting runs and crazy dribbles.

And then, in the 31st minute, he came close, a curling effort from outside the box whistling just wide.

Thousands of fans who rose up to their feet, almost celebrating already could only groan in frustration.

But you could feel something building.

And then, in the 45th minute, when the Chilean fans were already pressuring the referee to end the first half as soon as possible, BOOM, Egypt struck.

Mohamed Salah wrote his script and pasted it to the game.

A moment of magic. He picked the ball up on the right, danced through two defenders, and curled one into the side netting.

1-1.

The Pharaoh had spoken.

When Salah celebrated, the stadium literally melted in excitement from the Egyptian fans.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

The second half eventually started, and the pressure continued building.

Chile looked to slow the pace. But no, Egypt sped it up.

In the 52nd minute, a bullet header from Mostafa Mohamed forced a reflex stop from Chile's goalkeeper, Arias.

Chile were creaking.

And then, in the 64th minute, Egypt started a counterattack that saw Brereton unleash a rocket.

The ball smashed the post and bounced wide.

More fans groaned in frustration, hyperactive from the tension.

And then in the 70th minute, Egypt went again only to attract a corner flag this time.

It was from the corner that Egypt found their breakthrough.

A corner from Trezeguet found Zizo ghosting in at the far post, who side-footed home with calm precision.

2-1 Egypt!

BOOM!

The stadium exploded as Egypt finally turned the tide, their fans roaring in excitement as the players celebrated.

Chile were angry and frustrated now.

In the 78th minute, adding salt to their injury, the referee showed a second yellow card of the game to Gary Medel after a reckless lunge on Salah.

Chile were down to 10 men. The frustration was boiling over.

In the final minutes, all Egypt had to do was hold the line but it was a tough task as even with just 10 men, Chile threw everyone forward, even the goalkeeper Arias on the final corner.

In the 90th plus 4 minutes, Hegazi made an incredible save after Sanchez cut in and fired.

Hegazi dove across and blocked it with his chest. Heroic. It triggered roars of energy and adoration from the Egyptian fans.

Then...

FWEEE!

The final whistle sounded.

[FULL-TIME: Egypt 2-1 Chile]

The Pharaohs rise. From third-place underdogs to the Round of 16, Egypt's fairy tale continued.

Mohamed Salah won the man of the match award for his 1 goal, 1 assist, 5 dribbles, and 8 fouls drawn.

The commentator was spittin' bars when he said this.

"When Egypt needed a god, Salah answered like one".

The post-match reactions to this game were exciting, both on social media and right there on the ground in USA.

Rui Vitoria, the Egyptian coach was all smiles when he faced the media.

"They called us underdogs. That's fine. Now, they'll call us contenders". He grinned.

He was aura farming.

Salah, still panting and filled with sweat, smiled at the cameras.

"This is for Egypt. For our children. For the ones who believe".

Gary Medel, Chile's captain who got the red card also faced the media.

"We fought. But Salah was unplayable".

Chapter 528: Round of 32; Croatia vs Paraguay

After 15 games since the knockout stage started, 15 games that stole the hearts of the footballing universe, giving back to back bangers on a daily basis, finally, it was the final Round of 32 game of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 16: Croatia vs Paraguay]

[Venue: BMO Field, Toronto, Canada]

[Date: July 7th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 18:00 local time]

[Referee: Daniele Orsato (Italy)]

It was the final Round of 32 game.

The atmosphere in Toronto, Canada was breezy and cool, but the tension in the stadium could be cut with a knife.

This was no ordinary match.

This was the last dance of Luka Modric, Croatia's eternal heartbeat. At 40 years old, he still led his nation, still set the tempo, still dreamed.

But Paraguay, full of muscle, momentum and youthful fire, didn't come to watch history; they came to rewrite it.

What followed was a clash of nostalgia vs ambition.

Croatia started in a 4-3-3, with Dominik Livakovic in goal, while ahead of him was the defensive quadruple of Stanisic, Sutalo, Gvardiol, and Sosa.

In midfield was the dynamic midfield trio of Marcelo Brozovic, Luka Modric who potentially captained his nation for the last time, and Majer.

In attack was the trio of Perisic, Petkovic, and Kramaric.

For Paraguay, starting in a 4-4-2 formation, Antony Silva stood in goal while ahead of him was the defensive quadruple of Espinola, Balbuena, Alderete, and Arzamendia as the defensive stalwarts.

In midfield was the trio of Miguel Almiron, Cubas, Villasanti, and Jose Enciso, while the 2 strikers were Romero and Gonzalez.

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle blew, kick starting the game.

And like expected, Croatia's dynamic midfield quickly took control.

Even at the prime old age of 40, Luka Modric showed his timely brilliance on the pitch with the ball as he pinged the ball around with unerring accuracy, shuffling left, right, and center through the midfield, breaking press with effortless control.

Croatia controlled the tempo early, classic Modric orchestrating with grace.

Paraguay absolved the pressure, but then...

BAM!

Croatia scored.

A vintage moment in the 18th minute of the game. It came from a free kick from 25 yards out, whipped into the top corner with surgical precision.

Who?

Luka Modric!

1-0 Croatia.

Modric was launched in, and the world saw the brilliance of a 40-year old.

The bench rose. So did half the world.

But Paraguay responded.

In the 33rd minute, Paraguay struck back through a blistering counterattack.

Jose Enciso slipped Miguel Almiron through, who burst past Brozovic with blistering pace and curled it past a helpless Livakovic.

1-1.

Silence from the Croatian fans. Respect from all.

And the game was level again. Game on.

That goal gave Paraguay momentum, and for the next dozen minutes of the game, they fought with Croatia for midfield and total domination of the game.

Jose Enciso and Miguel Almiron buzzed on different sides of the pitch, threatening the Croatian defense anytime they had the ball.

But then, in the 41st minute, Croatia's Kramaric took a shot. A rocket from distance... but it only clattered the woodwork.

They were inches from reclaiming the lead.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

If the first half was a game of midfield dominance and moments of magic, the second half surrendered to a grueling physical game.

FWEEE!

The game restarted and immediately, Paraguay turned on the switch.

Croatia was old. Most of their best players were old and past their prime. They were supposed to be retired, but they were not tired. Not yet.

But Paraguay's coach didn't think so though. He thought otherwise.

The Paraguay coach expected the Croatian midfield dominance in the first half. That was why he told his players to be ready to suffer, and run themselves to the ground to keep Croatia's highly technical players from wreaking havoc.

His strategy for the second half?

He reckoned that after 45 minutes, Croatia's old legs would be tired already, so his strategy was run them to the ground!

Paraguay turned on the switch, raised the tempo of the game up a notch.

Paraguay started winning the duels. They made it ugly they made it tough.

And yet, somehow, Croatia still managed to play their game despite the aggressive press of their opponents.

Even more crazy was how, somehow, Luka Modric still kept on going, doing his thing in the middle of the pitch no matter how many times his opponents clattered against him.

In the 58th minute, Perisic's header was goal bound, but Paraguay's Antony Silva sprawled to his left and clawed it out. A heroic stop.

The tension in the stadium was rising.

The voices of the Paraguayan fans were rising higher.

But then...

BAM!

Croatia struck again in the 67th minute.

The cause? Peak technicality, patient build-up.

From Modric to Sosa, and then Sosa's low cross found Kramaric free at the back post who made no mistake, poking the ball into an empty net.

Technicality cut Paraguay's defense open like a hot knife through butter.

2-1 Croatia.

Back in front. Barely.

In the final stretch of the game, Croatia switched to desperate defense.

Paraguay launched everything.

Romero and Enciso tested Livakovic. A penalty shout in the 88th minute of the game was waved off after VAR check. Gvardiol was everywhere, snuffing out challenges with imperious efficiency.

In the 94th minute, Villasanti had Paraguay's last chance, a volley from a corner... but it was deflected wide by Sutalo.

The Croatian fans roared in celebration.

The final whistle followed seconds later.

Paraguay heartbreak.

[FULL-TIME: Croatia 2-1 Paraguay]

Croatia advanced to the Round of 16.

Modric walked off the pitch to a standing ovation. Paraguay, bold and brave, exited with heads high but hearts broken.

And Luka Modric added another man of the match award to his collection with 1 goal, a freekick, an assist, and a stunning 94% pass accuracy.

Like the commentator said:

"He played like time stood still. One last masterpiece from a living legend of the game".

At the end of the game, the Croatian head coach faced the media.

"We told Luka: 'You carry us one more time'. He smiled. And did it".

Chapter 529: Round of 32; Portugal vs Mexico

Croatia vs Paraguay was supposed to be the final clash of the Round of 32 of the FIFA World Cup, but Portugal and Mexico were yet to play their game.

Due to weather reasons, the initial date for the Portugal vs Mexico game was postponed, and now, it was about to be played at the SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles.

The game was played hours after Croatia and Paraguay played.

[FIFA World Cup 2026 – Round of 32]

[Match 16: Croatia vs Paraguay]

[Venue: SoFi Stadium, Los Angeles, USA]

[Date: July 7th, 2026]

[Kick-off: 21:00 local time]

[Referee: Michael Oliver (England)]

It was a classic European vs South American clash.

Portugal, one of the favorites to go all the way to win the tournament vs Mexico, a quietly brilliant side with a more than good record in the FIFA World Cup.

These 2 nations prepared to clash in a blockbuster game in Los Angeles.

The weather in the stadium was cool and breezy, perfect for peak football.

The stadium was filled to the brim, more than half of the fans in the stadium being Portugal supporters, specifically Cristiano Ronaldo supporters as they came out for the Portuguese G.O.A.T in numbers.

It was just like Messi fans did for their G.O.A.T in the Argentinian game.

Cristiano Ronaldo started on the bench though.

Portugal started in their classic 4-3-3 formation with Diogo Costa in goal, while ahead of him was the defensive quadruple of Joao Cancelo, Ruben Dias, Antonio Silva, and Nuno Mendes.

In midfield was Joao Palhinha, Vitinha, and Bruno Fernandes, while further ahead in attack was Bernardo Silva on the right, Goncalo Ramos through the middle, and Rafael Leao on the left.

At this knockout stage, Roberto Martinez went for an overhaul of his team, trusting more on experience than youth.

As for the Mexican starting XI, they played in a 4-2-3- formation with the legend, Guillermo Ochoa in goal.

Ahead of the goalkeeper was the defensive quadruple of Jorge Sanchez, Cesar Montes, Johan Vasquez, and Gallardo, while the duo in midfield comprised Edson Alvarez and Luis Chavez.

The creators in chief for the Mexicans were Uriel Antuna, Carlos Rodriguez, and Hirving Lozano down the left, while Santiago Gimenez led the line for Mexico as the striker.

FWEEE!

The game started and all hell broke loose.

Mexico came into this game with the will and desire to fight an uphill and tight battle against one of the tournament favorites.

They knew they were not as good as the Portuguese, and so they were ready and determined to dig in, get themselves dirty, and do anything by the book to get the result.

Portugal? They came into the match with control and composure.

And for the first few dozen minutes, it showed as they did just that, dominating possession and controlling the game.

With their dynamic midfield trio buzzing behind the attack, they kept hold of the ball for long swathes of the game, forcing Mexico to chase.

Bruno Fernandes and PSG's Vitinha set the tempo with intelligent distribution, while Rafael Leao tormented Sanchez down the left flank.

And then... BAM!

In the 18th minute of the game, Portugal opened it up.

Leao repaid the faith of his coach with a vintage moment of magic, dancing past two defenders before squaring it across the six-yard box for Goncalo Ramos, who tapped in with a simple finish.

BOOM!

The Portuguese fans in the stadium erupted.

Mexico were behind now, but they didn't fold. Rather, they dug in and fought.

Their best moment of the first half came in the 35th minute when Chavez unleashed a long-range rocket, but Diogo Costa parried it brilliantly.

The first half came to an end 1-0 with Portugal leading.

During halftime, Jaime Lozano, the Mexican coach seemed to have spit frightening bars to motivate his players because they came out of the tunnel with fire.

They returned with burning rage and energy, and immediately, Lozano's mazy runs began to trouble the Portuguese backline.

In the 59th minute, Mexico were finally rewarded for their efforts.

After a turnover in midfield, Edson Alvarez picked out Lozano, who broke the high line and slotted it past Diogo Costa with a cool finish.

1-1. Game on.

That goal set Portugal's ass on fire.

The match began to open up, end to end.

Portugal ran riot, pushing Mexico all the way and confining them to their half.

Joao Cancelo had a goal disallowed for offside in the 66th minute, and Ramos struck the post from close range just 2 minutes later.

By then, fans in the stadium were already clamoring.

"Ronaldo!" "Ronaldo!" "Ronaldo!"

And finally, in the 72nd minute of the game, the Portugal coach finally made the much awaited change, bringing on Cristiano Ronaldo for Ramos.

It was as if fate dictated it.

It felt like a script written in heaven.

Because just 10 minutes after entering the pitch, Cristiano Ronaldo wrote the script for his moment of brilliance.

Cristiano Ronaldo, on his final World Cup run, curled a stunning free-kick over the wall and into the top corner from 25 yards, in the 82nd minute!

Vintage Ronaldo!

Ronaldo celebrated, the full stadium celebrated...

"SUIIIII...!"

2-1 to Portugal.

During the final minutes of the game, Mexico pushed hard for the equalizer, desperate for a goal, but Portugal's defense held firm like a wall.

Mexico tried, but they couldn't penetrate.

Portugal held.

FWEEE!

The referee's final whistle blew, bringing the game to an end.

[FULL-TIME: Portugal 2-1 Mexico]

The man of the match award recipient?

Cristiano Ronaldo won it. He came off the bench in the 72nd minute, changed the tempo, and delivered a game-winning masterpiece.

CR7 fans would tango all night.

And just like that, Portugal was on their way to the Round of 16.

The post-match reactions were crazy.

Roberto Martinez, the Portugal coach was all smiles at the end of the game.

"We brought Ronaldo on because we believed he could still make the difference. Tonight, he reminded the world who he is. He is timeless".

Cristiano Ronaldo also faced the media.

"It's not about proving people wrong. It's about believing in myself and fighting for this shirt. We go again in the Round of 16".

Jaime Lozano, the Mexican coach kept his smile as he also faced the media at the end of the game.

"My boys gave everything. We fell to a legend's moment of brilliance. No shame in that. We'll be back stronger".