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Coach Lopetegui urges Al Annabi to ‘fight until the end’ Do-or-die for Qatar as Bosnia await in Seattle

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Julen Lopetegui has called on his players to embrace one final opportunity and fight for Qatar's World Cup dream as Al Annabi meet Bosnia-Herzegovina in a must-win Group B clash in Seattle today.

For Qatar, the equation is straightforward as they must secure three points in their final game to keep their chances alive for a place in the knockout stage.

After collecting their first-ever FIFA World Cup point in an encouraging 1-1 draw against Switzerland, Qatar's campaign suffered a major setback with a crushing 6-0 defeat to Canada. Yet with the expanded 48-team tournament offering places for the eight best third-placed sides in the Round of 32, their qualification chances exist.

A win over Bosnia would secure at least third place in Group B and keep alive hopes of advancing beyond the group stage for the first time in Qatar's history.

“We achieved one big dream to be here,” Lopetegui said ahead of the crucial match which will kick off at 10pm, Qatar time.

“Now I think that we are working really well from this last month with many problems, but I think that we have a very good spirit to be able to be the most competitive possible.

“To go ahead is going to be very difficult, but we have the right to compete and to fight for this incredible goal, to achieve qualification.”

The Spaniard has spent the past few days trying to lift his squad after a painful afternoon against Canada, where Qatar's hopes were derailed by a pair

of red cards and a ruthless display from the co-hosts.

Homam Al Amin's dismissal in the first half opened the door for Canada before Assim Madibo was also sent off later in the match, leaving Al Annabi badly exposed and ultimately condemned to their heaviest World Cup defeat.

Both Homam and Madibo will miss today's clash through suspension, forcing Lopetegui into changes for a contest that has effectively become a knockout match.

The coach has been putting the finishing touches to his preparations in Seattle, focusing on restoring confidence while refining a game plan capable of overcoming a Bosnia side facing a similar situation.

“The message for the players is that they have to enjoy being competitive, to enjoy being in one strong group,” Lopetegui said.

“And now we have one last crucial match in the group against Bosnia. They are a big team too, so we are talking players that are playing in the top level in Europe.



To go ahead is going to be very difficult, but we have the right to compete and to fight for this incredible goal, to achieve qualification.
Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui



“We have to try to compete and to be able at least to have this last dance, to be able to fight until the end.”

Sergej Barbarez's Bosnia also arrive with one point from two matches after drawing 1-1 with Canada before suffering a 4-1 defeat to Switzerland.

“Of course, the loss against Swiss is too heavy. We've always said Switzerland are a good team. This isn't over. We know which matches we're playing, and that's how we'll prepare and try to beat Qatar. There's no surrender,” said Barbarez.

Bosnia sit one place above Qatar only on goal difference and know that a draw is unlikely to be enough for either side, setting the stage for an encounter in which both teams must chase victory.

“It won't be easy against Qatar. We'll try to rest, prepare well, and attempt to win. The defeat against Swiss definitely hurts today because goal difference can also be decisive,” said Bosnia's Edin Dzeko.

Bosnia's squad features several players competing in Europe's top leagues and their physical style, aerial strength and direct attacking approach will present a different challenge from the one Qatar faced against Canada.

However, they too have selection concerns as defender Tarik Muharemovic will miss the match after being sent off in the defeat to Switzerland.

While Bosnia may carry greater European pedigree, they have also shown defensive vulnerabilities during the tournament, conceding four goals against the Swiss after holding firm for more than an hour.

That offers encouragement for Qatar, who produced one of the standout moments of their campaign when they battled back to snatch a late draw against Switzerland in their opening match.

Despite not being able to make much of an impact in the first two matches, a lot will depend on Akram Afif, whose creativity and ability to unlock defences remains Qatar's greatest attacking weapon.

There is also growing anticipation over whether Lopetegui will call upon striker Almoez Ali, who is yet to feature in the tournament but could provide an experienced attacking option as Qatar search for the goals required to keep their campaign alive.

The Spanish coach has also been studying Bosnia closely in recent days, seeking ways to exploit spaces while ensuring Qatar remain organised against an opponent equally desperate to avoid elimination.

Elsewhere in the group, Switzerland and Canada, both on four points, will meet simultaneously in Vancouver to decide top spot.

However, for Qatar, there is little value in looking elsewhere.

The focus is entirely on Seattle, where a first-ever World Cup victory would not only erase some of the pain of the Canada defeat but could also keep alive hopes of reaching the Round of 32 and extending a journey that appeared in danger of ending just a few days ago.



Qatar players in action during a training session. (AFP)



Benjamin Asare (left) of Ghana makes a save.

England left frustrated by Ghana in 0-0 draw

FOXBOROUGH, UNITED STATES: England suffered a World Cup setback yesterday as Thomas Tuchel's side were held to a frustrating 0-0 draw by Ghana, leaving them with work still to do as they bid to progress to the knockout stage as Group L winners.

Nico O'Reilly came closest to scoring with a late header for England that hit the bar, but after the promise of their opening 4-2 win over Croatia, this was a performance that will

opponents' two, yet rarely looked like scoring past Ghana's stand-in goalkeeper Benjamin Asare in a match watched by 63,983 fans at the Gillette Stadium near Boston.

Both teams have four points with one game still to play in Group L, with progression to the next round all but assured but their final positions still in the balance.

In damp, cool conditions, England delivered a stodgy performance that echoed some of their faltering displays during Euro 2024. However, there are no dramatic consequences, as England take a step closer to the last 32. All they need do now is safely negotiate their final group fixture against Panama at the MetLife Stadium on Saturday, and they will be able to turn their attentions to the knockout rounds.

England have still never lost to African opposition at the World Cup, and that record was rarely at risk of ending here.

Ghana nevertheless battled brilliantly, as the nation ranked 73rd in the world -- 69 places behind England -- put up a determined defensive display.

The late decision by the Black Stars to appoint Carlos Queiroz as coach is looking increasingly justified, with this result following their opening 1-0 win over Panama. The 2010 quarter-finalists face Croatia next in Philadelphia.

Asare of local side Hearts of Oak started in goal for the Ghanaians after coming on

for the injured Lawrence Ati Zigi against Panama.

England's inability to regularly test him will be a source of concern, as Harry Kane was kept quiet and failed to add to his 10 World Cup goals -- he remains level with Gary Lineker for now as their all-time top scorer at the tournament.

Noni Madueke and Anthony Gordon were unable to make the difference on the wings and their substitutes could not this time have a decisive impact.

Jude Bellingham won his 50th cap as Marc Guehi and Djed Spence replaced John Stones and O'Reilly in the defence.

A Declan Rice free-kick that sailed just over was about as close as England came in the opening half. In fact it took almost an hour for Asare to make a notable save, but it was a comfortable one to deny Gordon.

Ghana may feel Jordan Pickford should have been punished for charging out of his box and crashing into Prince Adu without touching the ball -- but instead the goalkeeper was given a free-kick.

There was also panic for England when substitute Adu ran through into the area but could not get a shot away.

Then the pressure was turned up a notch in the closing minutes, as Asare denied Bukayo Saka with a good stop low to his left before O'Reilly headed off the woodwork from close range and Kane blazed over. —AFP

RESULTS	
GROUP I	Norway 3-2 Senegal
France 3-0 Iraq	GROUP J
Jordan 1-2 Algeria	GROUP K
Portugal 5-0 Uzbekistan	GROUP L
England 0-0 Ghana	



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Ronaldo scores at sixth FIFA World Cup as Portugal run riot

HOUSTON: Cristiano Ronaldo became the first player to score in six World Cup campaigns and silenced his critics as the Portugal captain struck twice in a 5-0 annihilation of Uzbekistan yesterday.

The big win in Houston put Portugal on the brink of the knockout rounds and was a resounding response to the 41-year-old's doubters.

Ronaldo's goal after six minutes made history -- trumping even Lionel Messi -- by scoring at six World Cups stretching back to 2006.

The former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus ace pulled out his trademark "Siu" celebration and let out a throaty roar in front of 68,777 fans.

After Nuno Mendes made it 2-0, Ronaldo neatly got his second with a cool finish six minutes before the break.

That took him to 10 World Cup goals, more than any other Portuguese player including the great Eusebio.

Ronaldo came into the group encounter against tournament debutants Uzbekistan with 143 goals, the most in international men's football.

But once widely regarded as a competitor to Messi for the unofficial title of best player, his powers have been on the wane at the highest level.

He had limited service in the disappointing 1-1 draw with the Democratic Republic of Congo to start Portugal's World Cup title bid.

But when he did have two chances he missed the target, igniting calls for coach Roberto Martinez to drop him.

His travails in front of goal were in glaring contrast to the likes of Messi, Kylian Mbappe, Erling Haaland and Harry Kane, who all made lightning starts to the World Cup.

But Martinez has stuck defiantly by his skipper, who was given a rapturous reception when he came out to warm up at Houston Stadium, and again each time he appeared on the big screens.

Ronaldo nearly pounced after just three minutes, narrowly failing to make contact at the far post after a cross by Mendes. Ronaldo slapped the turf in frustration.

He did not have to wait long for his goal, swivelling on the six-yard box to meet a cross first time from Joao Cancelo and smash the ball beyond goalkeeper Abduravohid Nematov.

The outclassed Uzbeks, coached by the Italian 2006 World Cup winner Fabio Cannavaro, were perfect opponents for Ronaldo to rediscover his scoring boots.

It was 2-0 on 17 minutes when Mendes curled in a free-kick.

The Uzbeks thought they had pulled one back, after a screamer by Azizjon Ganiev, but the goal was ruled out after a VAR intervention for a foul on Cancelo.



Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) reacts as he scores Portugal's third goal against Uzbekistan.

It was Ronaldo's day, and he rolled in a third with only the goalkeeper to beat with a smart, controlled finish.

He might have had a third following an intricate freekick routine, but Nematov denied him, clattering into the veteran attacker in the process.

From the resulting corner it was 4-0, with Ronaldo in the thick of it again before the ball went in off Nematov for an own goal.

Substitute Rafael Leao scored an emphatic fifth in the 87th minute.

Before this, the evidence

against Ronaldo was beginning to stack up.

In the previous 10 games at major competitions (World Cup and Euros) before the Uzbekistan match, he had zero goals and one assist. He did though have a successful season with Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia, scoring 28 goals in 30 league games.

Portugal's final group match is on Saturday against Colombia, who beat the Uzbeks 3-1.

Colombia me DR Congo later yesterday in Group K knowing a win will propel them into the last 32. — **AFP**

RONALDO'S GOALS AT WORLD CUPS

Cristiano Ronaldo became the first man to score in six different World Cup campaigns when he struck against Uzbekistan in Houston. Ronaldo's goal after six minutes made history - trumping even Lionel Messi - by scoring at six World Cups stretching back to 2006.

2006	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 2-0 Iran	1 GOAL
2010	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 7-0 North Korea	1 GOAL
2014	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 2-1 Ghana	1 GOAL
2018	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 3-3 Spain	3 GOALS
2018	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 1-0 Morocco	1 GOAL
2022	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 3-2 Ghana	1 GOAL
2026	MATCH RESULT	GOALS SCORED
	Portugal 3-0 Uzbekistan	2 GOALS

Spain's Oyarzabal happy to play through pain

CHATTANOOGA: Mikel Oyarzabal said a minor knee injury will not put his World Cup at risk after kickstarting Spain's challenge by scoring twice in a 4-0 win over Saudi Arabia.

Oyarzabal also set up La Roja's opening goal for Barcelona superstar Lamine Yamal as the European champions made amends for a disappointing 0-0 draw against Cape Verde in their first match in North America.

Spain boss Luis de la Fuente revealed after the match that the Real Sociedad forward had been struggling with a knee problem, but insisted he was fit to start.

"I'm dealing with a niggle, but I think that's true for everyone here. Everyone has something that needs taking care of," Oyarzabal told a press conference yesterday.

"I'm fine. The other day, admittedly, there was a moment of uncertainty, not knowing exactly what the situation was or if I'd have the



Mikel Oyarzabal of Spain speaks during a press conference.

chance to play. Fortunately, it turned out well, and I'm happy."

Since scoring the winner against England

in the Euro 2024 final, Oyarzabal has become Spain's undoubted first choice up front.

The 29-year-old has 14 goals in his last 13 international appearances.

But having never moved from Sociedad, there has been a perception that Oyarzabal is not as highly rated outside of Spain as he is by De la Fuente and his teammates.

"I'm actually tired of answering this question; I don't dwell on it," he added.

"What matters to me is what my teammates, my coach, the staff, and the people whose opinions actually count have to say.

"We know how football works these days, and it's normal for people to talk, but I don't let it bother me."

Spain next face Uruguay in Guadalajara on Friday.

A draw is enough to secure top spot in Group H as long as Cape Verde do not beat Saudi Arabia by four or more goals. — **AFP**

Messi-Mbappe duel pushes World Cup boundaries again

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Something changed on Planet Football on December 18, 2022. Whilst that date will forever be remembered as the day Argentina won their third FIFA World Cup, it also marked a turning point for two of the greatest footballers in the history of the competition, for on that night in Lusail, Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe took their rivalry to a whole new level.

Before the showpiece, which the Albiceleste won 4-2 on penalties, Messi was eighth in the competition's all-time scoring charts on 11 goals, alongside Hungary's Sandor Kocsis and Germany's Jurgen Klinsmann. Mbappe was not even in the top ten.

By the end of one of the greatest finals of all time, the Argentinian had scored a brace, to which the Frenchman responded with an unforgettable hat-trick. The world looked on in wonder as the two men wrote a major chapter in the history of the tournament. But no one realised that this was, in fact, only the beginning.

"Mbappe already has the peace of mind that comes from having won it," Messi said after that spectacular final. "As for me, I experienced things differently. Even though what he did in the final was incredible, and not winning

the World Cup must have been hard to take, I've been there too. Reaching the final in 2014 and not winning it was torture."

Four years on, the two continue to push the boundaries of their sport. Their first two matches at the FIFA World Cup 2026 have seen them continue their rise up the all-time scoring charts. A hat-trick in a 3-0 win over Algeria, followed by a brace in a 2-0 victory against Austria, saw Messi overtake Miroslav Klose (16 goals) to become the competition's all-time leading goalscorer with 18 goals on Monday.

When asked about his new record and his favourite World Cup goal, the man from Rosario chose to put the team's achievement into perspective, as is

his custom: "Honestly, I don't know. I don't really even remember them. I'm tired, I don't have much energy left and I'm finding it hard to think straight. I'm just going to enjoy this moment and celebrate it with my team-mates."

"I'm making the most of the moment and I want to see how far we can go together. Today, there was that [missed] penalty, but perhaps I

wouldn't have scored the other goals if it had gone in."

If, after a well-deserved rest, Messi does take the time to look back, he won't just see Klose. Although it will come as no surprise to him, he will also see Kylian Mbappe.

For whilst the 38-year-old Argentine has made a dazzling start to the tournament, his former Paris Saint-Germain team-mate is not being outdone.

Having scored consecutive braces in France's 3-1 and 3-0 wins over Senegal and Iraq, respectively, the French captain has already equalled Klose's tally of 16 World Cup goals, despite playing in three fewer editions than the German legend.

"I already knew Leo was going to score goals - he's Leo Messi, he always scores, Mbappe said in response to his former PSG team-mate's hat-trick. "He's the one who holds the record; I'm behind him. I'm going to keep trying to score to help my team get as far as possible. Of course, by scoring goals, you get closer to that sort of record. But the

most important thing for me is to take my team as far as possible."

The admiration between the two men is clearly mutual, and their rivalry lends a special flavour to this race to break records. Whether it was when they were team-mates in the French capital or today, Mbappe has never hidden his admiration for the Argentinian legend.

"Lionel Messi is the best player in the world alongside Cristiano [Ronaldo]," said the Frenchman on the eve of the match against Iraq, after being asked to name who he thinks deserves that mantle. "Over 15 years, he has demonstrated his incredible qualities. As for me, I'm simply trying to do my best and show what I'm capable of on the biggest stage. I'm trying to help my team win the World Cup."

Four years on from that legendary clash in Lusail, the story remains, ultimately, the same. Even though the world thought he had already achieved everything, Messi continues to make history, whilst Mbappe seems determined to rewrite it. Remarkably, should France and Argentina meet again in the final in New York New Jersey on 19 July, it would mean that the two legends still have six matches left to add to their tallies. So perhaps the records haven't finished falling just yet. (FIFA)



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Brazil eye top spot as Scotland aim to shake Group C

GODWIN ISAAC K
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Brazil face Scotland in a decisive Group C clash in Miami with top spot still to be decided as the race for the knockouts reaches its final stage.

With Brazil level on points with Morocco, and Morocco facing already-eliminated Haiti, the battle for first place could go down to goal difference, adding extra importance to a match where nothing less than victory may be enough for the five-time champions.

Scotland arrive knowing their fate is still in their own hands despite a 1-0 defeat to Morocco in their previous outing, a result that left them frustrated after failing to pick up any points. A win over Brazil would guarantee a top-two finish, while even a draw could be enough to secure next round as one of the best third-placed sides



Brazil's Neymar attends a training session. PICS: AFP

across the groups, depending on other results.

Selecao appear to be finding rhythm at the right time after a convincing 3-0 win over Haiti that revived their campaign following a mixed start. However, concerns remain with Raphinha ruled out of the tournament due to a hamstring injury, although there is better news for Carlo Ancelotti's side with Neymar back in training and expected to feature.

Vinicius Junior has been one of the stand out



Brazil's Vinicius Junior takes part in a team's training session in Morristown, New Jersey.

players for Brazil in the tournament so far, scoring twice and constantly stretching opposition defences with his pace. Matheus Cunha has also impressed with two goals of his own, offering Brazil a reliable presence in the final third. Between them, they have carried much of Brazil's attacking threat.

Scotland will again rely on organisation and discipline to

frustrate Brazil. Their attack has struggled for consistency, scoring just once in two games, but their defensive shape has kept them competitive in a tight group. Manager Steve Clarke will hope his side can stay compact and take any chances that come on the break or from set-pieces.

One of the key battles is expected to come down the



Scotland's defender John Souttar controls the ball during a training session at Inter Miami Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida yesterday.

flanks, where Brazil's wide forwards will look to isolate Scotland's full-backs and deliver crosses into the box.

There is also history between the two nations. When they last met at a World Cup in France 1998, Brazil edged a tight encounter 2-1, a match remembered for a late Scotland push that fell just short. Twenty-eight years later, they meet again with

far greater stakes on the line.

Brazil will top the group with victory if Morocco drop points or on goal difference if results go their way, while Scotland know that anything from this match could shape their progression. With tension building and margins fine, Miami is set for a decisive night in Group C.

The match will kick off at 1am, Qatar time on Thursday.

Two-goal Haaland fires Norway into last 32

EAST RUTHERFORD: Erling Haaland scored his second World Cup brace in a row as Norway beat Senegal 3-2 to punch their ticket to the last 32.

Norway substitute Marcus Holmgren Pedersen struck late in the first half in New Jersey before Haaland doubled the lead shortly after the break.

Ismaila Sarr cut the deficit for Senegal, only for Haaland to punish more slack defending as Norway moved through to the knockout rounds with a game to spare despite a late consolation from Sarr.

Manchester City forward Haaland now has four goals in two games at the tournament, hot on the heels of Lionel Messi's double earlier in the day which carried him to a record 18 World Cup goals. Not to be outdone, Kylian Mbappe scored another brace too as France beat Iraq 3-0.

Norway have lost only



Norway's Erling Haaland scores his team's third goal during match against Senegal.

once in their last 18 matches and will take on France in a compelling battle for top spot in the group in Boston on Friday.

Senegal must beat Iraq, who are also without a point, in their final game to stand a chance of avoiding an early exit.

Led by the unstoppable Haaland, who increased his astonishing international goals tally to 59 in 52 games, Norway recorded back-to-back wins at the World Cup for the first time.

They added weight to the belief they can do serious damage at these finals with a dominant display against a Senegal side that paid heavily for their errors.

Norway quickly set the tone as Kristoffer Ajer's header forced Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy into a terrific save with his legs at a corner, but they lost full-back Julian Ryerson to injury early on.

Captain Martin Odegaard skied over an inviting cut-back from the right for Norway, as Nicolas Jackson looked Senegal's most dangerous threat.

Mendy again came to Senegal's rescue with a superb block to deny Odegaard after Haaland cushioned down Antonio Nusa's chipped cross into the box.

But Mendy allowed Pedersen's low drive to creep under him after a dreadful mistake from skipper Kalidou Koulibaly gave the ball to the replacement right-back on the edge of

the box. Haaland rolled against the post from a tight angle after Mendy got in a tangle, but he made amends three minutes into the second half as Norway sliced Senegal apart on the counter-attack.

Odegaard surged upfield and slid a pass through to Haaland, who buried an emphatic finish past Mendy to add to the two goals he scored in Norway's opening 4-1 victory over Iraq.

Senegal clawed their way back as Sarr showed great composure to poke home after tumbling to the ground following a clever flick into the area by Sadio Mane.

However, Koulibaly was at fault once more, failing to clear as Haaland steered a volley in off the crossbar from Patrick Berg's cross, delighting Norwegian fans who provided a colourful backdrop with their viral rowing chant.

Mory Diaw came on for the injured Mendy in goal, but only a headed goalline clearance from Pathe Ciss prevented Oscar Bobb from netting Norway's fourth.

Sarr's second of the night set up a tense finish, but Norway held on to join France in the next round and leave Senegal's hopes hanging by a thread.

— AFP

Alvarez says 'best for everyone' if he leaves Atletico

ARLINGTON: Argentina forward Julian Alvarez said on Monday that he wants to leave Atletico Madrid in a move that would be "best for everyone", with Real Madrid and Barcelona competing for his signature.

Atletico rejected an offer of 150 million euros (\$173m) from Real earlier this month, while Barcelona are hopeful of winning the race to sign the 26-year-old.

Alvarez spoke about his future for the first time after playing in Argentina's 2-0 group win over Austria at the World Cup on Monday, as the defending champions secured their place in the last 32.

"This is not the time to talk about this, but I also don't want to hide. I try to be an honest person," Alvarez told reporters in Texas.

"I spoke with the people at the club, with those I needed to talk to, and I think the best thing for everyone is a transfer. I want to fulfil my dream," he said, without specifying his preferred destination.

Last week, Atletico president Enrique Cerezo said he had no indication that Alvarez wanted to leave the club after two trophyless seasons.

He also spoke out against the attempts of rival clubs to prise the striker away and said Alvarez would only leave if his 500-million-euro release clause was met.

Real appear to have turned their attention to other targets after their bid was dismissed, but Barcelona are reportedly preparing a new offer as they seek a replacement for the departing Robert Lewandowski.

— AFP

Batting star Sooryavanshi receives first India jersey

NEW DELHI: Fifteen-year-old cricket sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi donned his first official India jersey yesterday and said he had long dreamed of the moment.

Sooryavanshi was named in India's T20 squad for the tours to Ireland and England, as well as the Asian Games, after sweeping the batting honours in this year's Indian Premier League.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) released a video of the moment on Tuesday when the blue jersey was delivered to him, calling it "the moment the nation has been waiting for".

"Ever since I first held a bat and walked onto a cricket field to practise, I dreamed of this moment... I cannot

explain this feeling in words," Sooryavanshi said in the BCCI video.

He was shown unpacking the shirt, with his name on the back above the number 03.

Sooryavanshi is line to become India's youngest international player, surpassing Sachin Tendulkar, the batting great who made his Test debut aged 16 years and 205 days in 1989.

The spotlight has been on Sooryavanshi since his batting exploits in the IPL, where he amassed 776 runs for Rajasthan Royals to finish as the tournament's leading run scorer.

He struck one century and five half-centuries during the season to pick up the Orange Cap for the leading run-getter.

— AFP

Barcelona sign Egypt teenager Abdelkarim

MADRID: Barcelona officially announced yesterday the permanent signing of teenage Egyptian striker Hamza Abdelkarim (pictured), after exercising their option to buy.

On loan from Al Ahly, his formative club, Abdelkarim arrived at Barca in the last January transfer window, playing the final stretch of the season with the club's Juvenil A side (under-16 to under-18 category).

He scored six goals in 11 matches, a level of

performance that finally convinced the club to trigger the purchase option, with a contract running until 2029.

The club has not disclosed the fee, but several Spanish media outlets report that it was closed for 1.5m euros (\$1.7m) plus add-ons.

Currently at the World Cup with the Pharaohs, the 18-year-old Abdelkarim has seen playing time in both of his national team's matches, against Belgium and New Zealand. — AFP



Marc Marquez extends Ducati contract until 2028



MILAN: Reigning MotoGP champion Marc Marquez has extended his contract with Ducati until the end of the 2028 season, the Italian manufacturer announced yesterday.

Last year Marquez won his seventh world championship in motorcycling racing's elite class, drawing level with great rival Valentino Rossi in his first season

for Ducati's factory team. The 33-year-old racked up a record-breaking 545 points in 2025 with 11 Grand Prix victories and 14 wins in the sprint races.

"I continue to race because I love this sport and I want to reach even bigger goals. I am convinced that this is where I can achieve them," Marquez said in a statement.

He trails current championship leader Marco Bezecchi by 40 points after winning the Czech MotoGP on Sunday, his second consecutive win after sitting out two GPs with a broken foot.

His renewal comes at a pivotal moment for the sport, which is about to enter a new era with revised technical regulations starting in 2027. — AFP

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