

Argentina secure 2026 WC spot

Messi-less team dominates arch rivals Brazil as fans rejoice in Buenos Aires

AP, BUENOS AIRES (Argentina): Defending champion Argentina celebrated throughout Tuesday as the team secured its place at the 2026 World Cup hours before an historic 4-1 win over archrival Brazil.

Bolivia's failure to beat Uruguay meant Argentina had enough cushion in South American qualifying to secure one of the continent's six direct spots for the 48-team World Cup set to be co-hosted next year by the US, Canada and Mexico.

After Bolivia's 0-0 draw with Uruguay at El Alto, about 85,000 raucous Argentine fans kicked off the festivities at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium despite the absence of Lionel Messi. They were chanting into the night in Buenos Aires, now more confident their team can defend the World Cup title.

For Brazil, its worst deficit in South American World Cup qualifying history compounded pressure



Argentina's midfielders Rodrigo De Paul, Enzo Fernandez, Exequiel Palacios, Thiago Almada, Leandro Paredes and defender Cristian Romero celebrate their victory against Brazil

on coach Dorival Junior.

Brazil is in fourth place in South American qualifying with 21 points, 10 behind Argentina but only two behind second-place Ecuador, which was held to

a 0-0 draw by Chile. Third-place Uruguay and fifth-place Paraguay also have 21 points, and Colombia is one point behind them in sixth. Seventh-place Venezuela has 15 points after a 1-0

win over 9th-place Peru.

Brazil was missing three regular starters goalkeeper Alisson, defender Gabriel Magalhães and midfielder Bruno Guimaraes and wasn't really competitive from

start to finish.

It's the first time Argentina has won both matches against Brazil in a World Cup qualifying tournament. The home victory was also Argentina's first against the Brazilians since qualifying for the 2006 World Cup.

Argentina has led South American qualifying from the start, with few hiccups and major away wins at Brazil and Uruguay. But coach Lionel Scaloni has not fielded 37-year-old Messi in several games, which still raises doubts on whether the star will play at the World Cup next year.

Messi has an injury to his adductor and was not included in Argentina's squad for the two latest matches.

Argentina scored its two first goals in only 12 minutes of play, both thanks to accurate passing and some clumsy Brazilian defending.

Alvarez netted the first in the 4th minute after Marquinhos, Murillo and

Guilherme Arana failed to reach the ball. The Argentine striker shot between the legs of goalkeeper Bento from close range.

Argentina scored again eight minutes later with Enzo Fernandez, once again from close range after a low cross by Gonzalo Molina.

Brazil got one back via Matheus Cunha in the 26th after a mistake by Cristian Romero, who lost the ball to the Brazilian by the edge of the box. Enzo Fernandez found Alexis Mac Allister bursting into the penalty box unmarked 11 minutes later to make it 3-1 to Argentina.

During the break, Brazil sought to get some grip by boosting its presence in the midfield with Joao Gomes and the substitution of Murillo and striker Rodrygo. But it was to no avail, with Giuliano Simeone scoring for Argentina in the 71st after four Brazilian defenders failed to block a low cross in front of their goal.

Messi and Argentine team to visit India for exhibition match

PTI, NEW DELHI: Football fans in India will have another glimpse of Lionel Messi and his Argentine team in an exhibition match in Kerala in October, 14 years after the World Cup-winning captain first visited the country.

In November last year, Kerala Sports Minister V Abdurrahman had announced the news of Argentina visiting the southern state and playing two friendly matches in Kochi.

On Wednesday, HSBC India became the official partner of the Argentine team to collaborate and promote football in India, and announced that the match will be held in October.

"Under this partnership, the Argentina national

football team, including legendary player Lionel Messi, will visit India for an international exhibition match in October 2025," a release from HSBC India said.

"The Argentine Football Association (AFA) and HSBC have today announced the signing of a new one-year partnership for India and Singapore, covering the competitive season in 2025 ahead of the 2026 World Cup qualification final matches."

Messi's first visit to India was to play a World Cup qualifying round match against Venezuela in Kolkata in September 2011. Argentina won that match 1-0 at Salt Lake Stadium.

Fatorda Veterans move ahead

RAIA: Fatorda Veterans defeated Verna Veterans, 2-0, and moved into the next round of the 21st Flame of Unity Veterans football tournament, at Mabai ground, Per Seraulim, on Wednesday. Fatorda Veterans netted two goals through Rosario Carvalho.

Navelim VU secure victory over St Anthony's Club

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RAIA: Navelim Villagers Union emerged victorious in a nail-biting 7-6 tie-breaker win against St Anthony's Club, Colva, in the 17th London Trophy inter-village football tournament 2025. The match, organised by Goa Velha Sports Club, witnessed an intense battle between the two sides before being decided by penalties.



Velington Almeida receives man-of-the-match award from Jose Silva

lead at half-time.

St Anthony's Club responded strongly in the second half, pressing forward in search of an equaliser. Their persistence paid off when Clayton Fernandes found the back of the net, beating Navelim goalkeeper Selvin Gomes to level the scoreline. With neither team able to break the deadlock in regulation time, the match proceeded to a penalty shootout.

through Beavan Goes, Cain Fernandes, Samson Gomes, Kabir Khan, and Shawn Thattazhi. However, the decisive moment came when Calburn Fernandes' effort was saved by Navelim keeper Selvin Gomes, sealing a 7-6 victory for Navelim Villagers Union.

Velington Almeida was awarded the man-of-the-match by Jose Silva, a member of Goa Velha Sports Club.

Areal overcome Guardian Angel

RAIA: Sao Jose de Areal Sports Club staged a remarkable fightback to defeat Guardian Angel SC, Curchorem, 4-2, and storm into the quarterfinals of United Trophy, organised by the UC Telaulim, at the Rosary Church ground, Navelim.

Guardian Angel made took the lead in the 6th minute through Regan Costa and doubled in the 26th minute through Pravin Almeida.

Despite Areal managed to pull a goal back before the break through when Bersal Viegas to make it 2-1 at half-time.

Areal levelled the score in the 35th minute of the second half when Mohammad Mansoori found the back of the net. Four minutes later, Stalen Oliveira struck in the 39th minute. Darryl Costa then sealed the victory with a decisive strike in the 42nd minute.

Areal's Rayman Fernandes was awarded the man-of-the-match, by Sandip Tuyenkar.

Coelho Siblings and Keona set for championship glory

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MORJIM: The All India Windsurfing and Kitesurfing Championship 2025 kicks off on Thursday

at Vithaldasvaddo, Morjim Beach, with Goa's top talents, siblings Katya and Dwayne Coelho, looking to reaffirm their dominance in the IQ Class, while Keona Rajani seeks to reclaim her kitesurfing title. The championship will begin from 10 am.

striving to maintain her superiority in her class. Meanwhile, her brother Dwayne faces stiff competition from Mumbai and Goa.

On the kitesurfing front, Keona



Katya Coelho all set for the championship starting from today at Vithaldasvaddo, Morjim Beach

Rajani, who lost her title to Kira Zucher last year, is determined to reclaim her crown. "I am confident of myself. Despite having taken ill a while back, I am sure I will not only enjoy the races but also win the title," said an optimistic Keona.

Adding to the excitement is Goa's seasoned windsurfer Derrick Menezes, who, despite his years, remains a formidable contender. "For me, it's always about camaraderie first and winning next," said Derrick, who has delivered surprise performances in previous championships.

Brison Fernandes: Goa's rising star ready for ISL playoff glory

As FC Goa prepare for their Indian Super League (ISL) semi-final clash on April 2, one name stands out among their ranks—Brison Fernandes. The 23-year-old midfielder has been in scintillating form throughout the 2024-25 campaign, setting new records and emerging as a key player for the Gaurs.

Brison has contributed seven goals and two assists, the highest tally by an Indian player for FC Goa in a single ISL season. His exceptional performances have also earned him a maiden call-up to the Indian national team, where he made his debut in the 2027 AFC Asian Cup Qualifier against Bangladesh. Currently, he is the second-highest Indian goal scorer in the league, only behind Sunil Chhetri (12 goals).

Head coach Manolo Marquez has played a pivotal role in Brison's rise, praising the youngster's technical ability, intelligence, and fearless playing style.

"Brison is a typical Goan player. He enjoys playing football. He has passed the situation that he underwent last season, where there was an air of uncertainty around his football. He is enjoying every minute of the game, and this is very important," Marquez remarked.

Marquez, known for his



pact is evident from him becoming the first Indian player to bag a brace in consecutive ISL matches, finding the back of the net twice each against Mohun Bagan Super Giant on December 20, 2024 and Odisha FC on January 4, 2025. He has donned a lively presence in the final third, averaging 17 passes per game at 75% accuracy, producing 26 goal-scoring opportunities, making 17 suc-

BREAKING RECORDS AND MAKING HISTORY

Brison's performances this season have been nothing short of spectacular. He became the first Indian player to score a brace in consecutive ISL matches, netting twice against Mohun Bagan Super Giant (20th December 2024) and Odisha FC (4th January 2025).

cessful dribbles, alongside rounding off 70 recoveries and emerging victorious in 73 duels too.

Brison's relentless work ethic has been instrumental in his breakthrough season, something that Marquez has closely monitored. "Work done in training sessions reflects on the field," the Spaniard stated, crediting Fernandes' hard work in training as a key factor in his success.

The ISL playoffs are set to kick off on March 29, with FC Goa set to begin their semi-final campaign on April 2.

ATTACKING INFLUENCE

- 17 passes per game at 75% accuracy
- 26 goal-scoring opportunities created
- 17 successful dribbles
- 70 recoveries
- 73 duels won

commitment to developing young talent, has given Brison the confidence and platform to shine. "Some players mature at 18, and others at 23, but obviously

the players need chances. However, when they get chances, they need to show that they are ready," he said.

Brison's on-field im-

Calangute Veterans edge past Black Arrow

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TALEIGAO: Calangute Veterans secured a 1-0 victory over Black Arrow Veterans in a closely contested match, at the Panjim Veterans football tournament, held at Taleigao Ground.

The match remained deadlocked at 0-0 at half-time, with Black Arrow Veterans displaying attacking intent and testing Calangute goalkeeper Gabriel Fernandes. However, despite their efforts, they were unable to convert

their chances into goals.

In the second half, Vijay Parsekar broke the deadlock with a stunning long-range strike, beating Black Arrow goalkeeper Nelson Fernandes to put Calangute Veterans ahead.

Despite Black Arrow's attempts to find an equaliser, Calangute Veterans held firm to secure a 1-0 win and advance further in the competition.

Rafik of Black Arrow Veterans was named man-of-the-match and received the award from Vishal & Natasha Lobo.

TODAY'S SPORTS

Goa Professional League (Super League): Clube de Salgaocar vs Goa Police SC, Dempo Sports Academy ground, Ella, at 4 pm

Goa Professional League (Relegation League): Panjim Footballers vs Vasco SC, at Nagoa ground, at 4 pm

GFA U-17 Division I League: Sesa FA vs Dempo SC, at Sirsaam ground, at 4 pm

GFA First Division League (Group A): St Savio SC vs Mandopa SC, at Poriat ground, at 4 pm; CSM de Taleigao vs Youth Club of Manora, at Santa Cruz ground, at 4 pm; Cuncolim Union vs Santa Cruz Club of Cavelossim, at Benaullim ground, at 4 pm

21st Flame of Unity Veterans football tournament: Varca Veterans vs Vasco Veterans, at Mabai ground, Per Seraulim, at 4.30 pm

17th London Trophy inter-village football tournament: Saligao United vs Parish Youth, Nuvem, at Goa Velha Sports Club ground, at 4.30 pm

All Goa United Trophy inter-village football tournament: Curtorim Gymkhana vs Carmona Sports club, at Rosary Church ground, Navelim, at 4.30 pm

Panjim Veterans soccer: Goa Police Veterans vs Arsenal Veterans, at Taleigao ground, at 5 pm

All India Windsurfing and Kiteboarding Championship Goa: at Vithaldasvaddo, Morjim Beach, from 10 am

Sporting snatch 1-0 win

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MARGAO: In a nail-biting Goa Professional League match at Nagoa ground, Sporting Clube de Goa snatched a 1-0 victory against Cortalim Villagers SWSC in the dying moments of the game. Mark Carvalho's 90+3' minute goal proved the decisive moment in a match marred by tensions and yellow cards.

Alister Fernandes was sent off after receiving two yellow cards, reducing Cortalim to 10 men in the closing stages.

The win solidifies Sporting Clube's top-of-the-table position, with 38 points from 15 games. They maintain a slender lead over second-placed Dempo Sports Club, who have 28 points from 17 matches.

In a separate relegation league match at Benaullim, Churchill Brothers and Guardian Angel SC played out a goalless draw.

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