

Violent clashes mar Brazil v Argentina match



● SERGIO MORAES/REUTERS

REUTERS – Argentina captain Lionel Messi accused the Brazilian police of brutality as the start of their World Cup qualifier against Brazil was delayed by half an hour after clashes between police and visiting fans at Maracana Stadium on Tuesday.

Brazilian and Argentinian fans started fighting behind one of the goals during the national anthems, prompting police to charge at the travelling contingent with night sticks drawn.

Some Argentina fans responded by ripping up and throwing seats at the officers as other fans panicked and came onto the pitch to escape the fighting.

One Argentina fan lay on the pitch with a bloodied face before being taken from the stadium on a stretcher.

The Argentina team, led by Messi, went over to the terraces to try to calm the situation before leaving the pitch and returning to the dressing room.

“It was bad because we saw how they were beating people ... The police, as it already happened in the Libertadores final, were once again repressing the people with night sticks, there were players who had families over there,” Messi said in a pitchside television interview.

“We went to the locker room because it was the best way to calm everything down, it could have ended in tragedy.

“You think about the families, the people who are there, who don’t know what’s going on and we were more concerned about that than playing a match that, at that point, was of secondary importance.”

Brazil captain Marquinhos, who could be seen interacting with Messi and the Argentinian players as they tried to calm the situation, shared the concerns. “We were worried about the families, women and children, that we were seeing in panic up there in the stands,” Marquinhos told reporters.

“Down on the pitch it was hard for us to understand what was going on, it was a very scary situation.”

Argentina won 1-0 with a 63rd-minute headed winner from defender Nicolas Otamendi and celebrated the victory over their fiercest rivals in front of their fans at the same end of the ground where the trouble had occurred.

It was a third straight defeat for five-times World Cup winners Brazil, who had midfielder Joelinton sent off 18 minutes from time.

FIFA U-17 World Cup: Shootout heartbreak sends Iran packing

Sports Desk

Iran’s impressive run at the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Indonesia came to a painful end after a 4-1 shootout defeat against Morocco in the round of 16.

Iran’s Hesam Nafari sent his effort from the spot wide and Kasra Taheri was denied by goalkeeper Taha Benrhazil, while the Moroccans converted all four spot-kicks to head into the last-eight clash against fellow African side Mali, which routed Mexico 5-0 earlier in the day.

The Iranian boys thought they had done enough to go through when Esmail Qolizadeh broke the deadlock with 17 minutes from normal time, only to see his header goal canceled out by Nassim Azaouzi’s superb volley in the fourth minute of the stoppage time.

“It was a game of tears and smiles at the end,” Iran head coach Hossein Abdi said after the game, adding: “My players were clearly exhausted as we had to take an hours-long trip [to reach to Surabaya] and only had one training session before the game, while the Moroccans had been here for five days.”

“I believe we could have won the game if the team had not been tired. I still want to congratulate my players. I should also apologize to the Iranian people for not giving them what they deserved.

“We say goodbye to the under-17 World Cup but we will regroup for another tournament in the near future,” added the Iranian.

The setback against the under-17 Africa Cup of Nations runner-up, boasting players from top-notch European club academies, still takes nothing away from Iran’s brave campaign in Indonesia.

Hossein Abdi’s team pulled off one of the biggest upsets in the history of the competition by coming from two goals down at halftime to beat the defending champion Brazil 3-2 in their group opener.

Iran then went toe to toe with England before a 90th-minute winner from Manchester City academy player Joel Ndala gave the 2017 champions a 2-1 victory.

The 5-0 triumph over New Caledonia saw Abdi’s team finish the group stage equal on six points with the two under-17 heavyweights but settle for the third spot on a goal difference.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Germany defeated USA 3-2 thanks to a Bilal Yalcinkaya’s last-gasp winner and will face Spain – 2-1 winner against Japan on the preceding night – on Friday for a place in the semifinals. Argentina thrashed Venezuela 5-0 to set an all-South American quarterfinal date against Brazil, which had beaten Ecuador 3-1 on Monday.



Iran’s Esmail Qolizadeh (1) is in action against Morocco’s Ayoub Chaikhoun during a last-16 game at the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Surabaya, Indonesia, on November 21, 2023.
● FIFA

Iran ‘will take lessons’ from Uzbekistan draw, head coach Qalenoiei says

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoiei said his players will learn from their mistakes after playing to a 2-2 draw against Uzbekistan in a World Cup qualifier in Tashkent.

It was a game of two halves at the Milliy Stadium as the visiting side went into the break with a two-goal cushion, in what was arguably Iran’s best 45 minutes under Qalenoiei since he took charge in March, but the host delivered a much-improved performance after the break to salvage a point.

Sardar Azmoun, wearing Iran’s armband, found Ramin Rezaeian in the corner of the box with a delicate touch before Sepahan fullback’s effort went in off the keeper’s leg with 14 minutes into the game. Porto striker Mahdi Taremi doubled Iran’s lead with a composed finish in the 38th minute after being played through by Brentford midfielder Saman Qoddous, who was



Uzbekistan skipper Eldor Shomurodov (7) is challenged by Iranian midfielder Saeed Ezzatollahi (1) and center-back Shoja Khalilzadeh in a 2-2 draw in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on November 21, 2023.
● AFC

forced out injured right before the interval. Oston O’runov pulled one back for Uzbekistan seven minutes after the break and then turned provider in the 83rd minute when his cross set up an unmarked Igor

Sergeevto to volley home on the far post. “My players thought the game is over at halftime,” Qalenoiei said in the post-match press conference, adding: “Uzbekistan players played with their

hearts in the second half while we just walked on the pitch.” “It was a big lesson for us before the Asian Cup and we will have to learn from it. Big names do not guarantee the victory and

you have to be passionate to win a football game,” added the Iranian after his team’s 10-game winning streak came to end. The game was Iran’s last outing ahead of January’s AFC Asian Cup in Qa-

tar, but the second-half display on Tuesday was surely a reality check for Qalenoiei, who will be looking to lead the three-time champion to a first trophy since 1976 in the continent’s flagship international event.

“We were in full control in the first half but conceded a bad goal early after the break. The whole stadium was pushing them forward and their support played a massive part [in Uzbekistan getting back into the game]. We lost our rhythm in the second half and Uzbekistan made the most of it,” said Rezaeian, who was involved in on-pitch rows with the host’s players in the closing stages of the contest.

“That is normal in football. Iranian players play with passion and commitment and I just reacted to their provoking behavior.” Iran will next take on Palestine on January 14 in the Asian Cup Group C – also featuring the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong, China.