

From a technical perspective, how do you evaluate the final match? Many experts maintain that Spain smartly neutralized Argentina and was deserving of the championship.

The final match is a contest in which no team is willing to suffer defeat. For this reason, both teams, above all, endeavor not to concede a goal and then devise their strategy for victory. An interesting point about this edition was the low risk-taking propensity of teams in the first half because any goal conceded in the first half compels the team in the second half to assume greater risk and alter its playing style. Regarding the final, however, Spain demonstrated itself to be an extremely powerful, technically proficient team with exceedingly high tactical intelligence. Messi's role in Argentina's preceding matches, as a coordinator and creative manager, was highly pronounced, and the other players exhibited substantial dependence upon him. Spain, with meticulous planning, neutralized this strength. Throughout the match, wherever Messi was present, at least three Spanish players encircled him and prevented him from receiving the ball. Statistics, likewise, corroborate this point, and Argentina did not manage a single shot on target throughout the 90 minutes of regulation time. Spain, with this strategy, effectively removed Messi from the flow of the game in both halves and succeeded in scoring during extra time; a goal that proved exceedingly difficult for Argentina to compensate. In my opinion, Argentina's weakest performance in this entire World Cup occurred precisely in the final match.

The scheduling of certain matches around noon, including at 11:30 AM, generated numerous questions among audiences. On what basis was this decision made, and to what extent did it affect the quality of the matches?

This decision was adopted by FIFA. FIFA's primary objective was the maximization of revenue from the sale of television broadcasting rights. Given the considerable time difference between the United States and other continents, including approximately a 10-hour difference with Iran, FIFA endeavored to schedule matches at hours when the maximum number of viewers in Asia, Africa, and Europe could watch them live. Although this timing was not ideal for the players, the teams were informed of the match timing at least one week in advance and possessed sufficient opportunity to adapt to the conditions. Fortunately, the temperature inside the stadiums was controlled, and the principal challenge remained the players' adaptation to their biological clocks, the management of which was the responsibility of the technical staffs.

The exceedingly high ticket prices in this edition, especially in the final match, and likewise the emptiness of certain seats, engendered the concern that football has become a sport for the rich and that World Cup attendance has become inaccessible to the general public. What is your opinion? Stadiums possess various sections with disparate prices. Ticket prices in the World Cup commenced at approximately \$100 to \$500 and extended to exceedingly high figures, and as you indicated, it was reported in the news that tickets were sold for prices around \$81,000. I myself witnessed at the Australian Open tennis tournament that tickets for certain matches, particularly the match in which Rafael Nadal participated, were sold for as much as \$15,000. On the other hand, certain spectators, likewise, procure their tickets from the black market and are willing to pay extraordinarily large sums. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that, among the more than 80,000 spectators present at the final, the number of those capable of paying such costs is limited. The vacant seats,

US actor and producer Tom Cruise delivers a speech on an elevated platform ahead of the 2026 World Cup football tournament final match between Spain and Argentina at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on July 19, 2026.

● ODD ANDERSEN/AFP



Concerning offside, however, I believe that excessively meticulous scrutiny, even for a fingertip or a body part that has no effect on the flow of play, not only does not appear fair but also diminishes football's appeal. In the past, referees were advised that if they were doubtful about an offside, they should allow play to continue, to render football more fluid and high-scoring. Today, however, we witness that a legitimate goal is occasionally disallowed merely due to a few centimeters of offside in the upper body.

This official illustration shows how Iran's Mehdi Taremi (white) was found marginally ahead of Belgium's Alexis Saelemaekers by the VAR system when the ball was played in.

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likewise, were predominantly situated in the more remote sections of the stadium, and certain individuals, due to the high costs, abstained from attending the stadium.

In principle, football should remain a popular sport, and FIFA should adopt measures to enable lower-income groups, likewise, to benefit from these events. However, FIFA's priority is revenue generation, and the augmentation of the number of teams to 48 constitutes one of its strategies for attracting new audiences and increasing substantial revenues.

The "Cooling Break" intervals, or hydration breaks, were implemented during the World Cup matches. What effect did these intervals have upon the flow of the games?

FIFA, prior to the commencement of the matches, announced that, due to intense heat, 3-minute breaks would be scheduled around the 25th minute of the first half and the 65th minute of the second half. Although this duration is brief, it may disrupt the momentum of a team that has dominated the flow of the game, removing it from the peak of its attacks, and conversely, may afford the opposing team an opportunity to alter the rhythm of the game and regain composure. FIFA typically tests such schemes initially in junior categories and, upon success, extends them to higher-level competitions. Given global warming, which is perceptible today in many parts of the world, including Europe and even Tehran, the implementation of this program in the American heat appeared necessary. Of course, FIFA should carefully

examine the feedback from this idea in future tournaments and implement necessary modifications if required.

The video assistant referee (VAR) system played a highly pronounced role in this edition and even altered certain results. Has this technology contributed to justice, or has it diminished football's excitement? What is your opinion, particularly concerning offside calls of a few centimeters that resulted in the disallowance of certain goals?

The VAR system typically intervenes in critical situations such as penalties, offsides, and on-field confrontations. For instance, I myself witnessed a scene where the referee initially did not award a penalty, but upon review of images from various angles, VAR demonstrated that a foul had occurred, and the referee correctly amended his decision. This demonstrates that VAR can play an effective role in the realization of justice. Concerning offside, however, I believe that excessively meticulous scrutiny, even for a fingertip or a body part that has no effect on the flow of play, not only does not appear fair but also diminishes football's appeal. In the past, referees were advised that if they were doubtful about an offside, they should allow play to continue, to render football more fluid and high-scoring. Today, however, we witness that a legitimate goal is occasionally disallowed merely due to a few centimeters of offside in the upper body. In my opinion, the principal criterion for offside determination should be the feet because the player's balance

and movement are grounded upon the feet, and other body parts do not play a determinative role in this matter. Furthermore, just as the complete crossing of the ball over the goal line serves as the criterion for goal-line decisions, a specific margin of tolerance could be established for offside as well, to prevent excessive strictness and preserve the beauty and excitement of football. Of course, these are my personal perspectives, and I hope that FIFA will, in the future, undertake a serious reconsideration of the offside regulations. Nevertheless, VAR, despite all its controversies, is an efficient instrument for the establishment of justice and must be properly managed.

Concerning Mehdi Taremi's disallowed goal, if the criterion for offside determination were the position of the feet, in your opinion would that goal have been accepted?

Without doubt, yes. In that scene, Taremi's foot was not in an offside position, but his upper body was a few centimeters ahead of the opposing defender, and this very fact caused the goal's disallowance, whereas, in my opinion, this cannot constitute a logical justification for disallowing the goal. If the criterion were the position of the feet or even the head, which typically plays a direct role in the scoring of goals, this goal would have been readily accepted. I hope that overly strict regulations will gradually yield to more logical regulations, so that we may witness more fluid, more appealing, and more exciting football, and that this sport does not distance itself from its inherent appeal.

