



2-1, 90+2'
(Lautaro)
1-1, 85'
(Fernandez)
0-1, 55'
(Gordon)

They wobble, but never fall over

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Atlanta: Lionel Messi found it crazy. Lionel Scaloni was at a loss for words.

But it didn't happen just like that. The never-say-die attitude, an astute tactician in coach Scaloni, the courage to take chances and, of course, a magician called Messi — it's the sum total of all that.

On Wednesday at the Atlanta Stadium, Scaloni once again showed why he is regarded as one of the best managers in world football.

A few minutes after Anthony Gordon gave England the lead, Scaloni brought in Nicolas Gonzalez in place of Leandro Paredes. And in the 71st minute, he went for a triple substitution. In came Rodrigo De Paul, Nicolas Otamendi and Gonzalo Montiel.

That's how it was after Argentina scripted yet another dramatic comeback — their fourth in as many knockout matches in the ongoing World Cup.

It is as if some divine power which is driving this team on. Cape Verde, Egypt, Switzerland, England — they all had Argentina in a chokehold, and yet the indomitable Argentines wriggled out of it.

As a reward, they have a berth in a World Cup final for the second consecutive time. They play Spain on Sunday at MetLife Stadium, in what will be the fifth final Messi and his men will be playing since 2021.

If Gonzalez's introduction gave more meaning to Argentinian attacks, the trio's presence took the wind out of the English sails.

Argentina were also helped by England coach Thomas Tuchel's brain fade as the German went defensive with a back five. Against Norway, it had paid off. But here he was dealing with Argentina, who have Messi.

The passivity that engulfed England and their reluctance to go forward courageously led to their downfall.

In the 85th minute, the equaliser came, thanks to the Messi-Enzo Fernandez combination, and then two minutes into injury time came the win-

7 Number of times Argentina have made the World Cup final, second-most after Germany (8)

2 Argentina have reached consecutive World Cup finals for the second time (previously 1986 & 1990)



Enzo Fernandez celebrates after scoring Argentina's equaliser in the 85th minute of their World Cup semi-final against England in Atlanta on Wednesday. (Reuters)

ner. This time Messi teamed up with Lautaro Martinez.

At the same venue last week, Lautaro's measured cross had found Fernandez, who had headed in the winner against Egypt. This time, the Inter Milan forward himself was the scorer.

"To the fans, I say the same thing I said in Qatar: Enjoy it. This team will never let you down. This World Cup has been absolutely crazy, and reaching another World Cup final is incredible. Even though it was a football match, from the moment the national anthem started, we experienced something special. This

wasn't just another victory, the Argentine people desperately wanted it," Messi, playing against England for the first time, said after yet another Man of the Match trophy.

Scaloni, the mastermind from the dugout, got emotional. "I can't find the words, I truly can't find the words. This is a joy for our country and for our people. I said a few days ago that this team never ceases to amaze me, and that is the absolute truth. I say this honestly... we will try to win, and we will give everything we have, but after everything that has happened, it has become very difficult for

people to truly understand what these players are giving. It is simply incredible," the coach said.

Argentina were pedestrian in the first half as England dictated the terms. But in the second half, after the Gordon goal, the team switched gears.

Some close chances could not be converted, but the intent was clear. Argentina did not want to travel to Miami for Saturday's third-place match. And the perseverance and persistence paid off handsomely.

"There are no words to describe what we are experiencing. How can I explain it? We are an exceptional team, truly, not out of arrogance, but straight from the heart. We are exceptional," Scaloni said.

Critics say Argentina have been lucky with the draw. But the four close games have proved there are no easy matches in a World Cup.

England's propensity to look down upon their rivals backfires most of the time. In Qatar, before the England versus France match, France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris was bombarded with questions about his frailties under the bar.

RESULT

ENGLAND	ARGENTINA
1	2

Lloris was at his brilliant best the next day and England booked an early flight home.

This year, apart from the Hand of God and Falklands War reference, there were some harsh words about Cristian Romero and Lisandro Martinez. "It pumped us up," Romero said.

For England, it was the same old sinking feeling. The fear of losing once again let them down.

Gareth Southgate or Tuchel, England have not changed.

TALES OF TURNAROUNDS

Remontada, that's what a come-from-behind victory is called in Spanish. In this World Cup, Argentina have already scripted two mind-boggling comebacks, first in the Round of 16 against Egypt and then again on Wednesday in the semi-finals versus England. But in their long World Cup history, Argentina have had just four such comeback wins before the 2026 World Cup.

Argentina 3-1 Northern Ireland 1958, Sweden (Group stage)

In Halmstad, Northern Ireland struck as early as the 3rd minute. Down by a goal, Argentina equalised in the 38th minute from a penalty by Oreste Corbatta. Then Norberto Menendez and Ludovico Avila each struck in the space of four minutes to give Argentina the victory. Despite the win, Argentina finished below Northern Ireland in their group.



Oreste Corbatta (left) with teammates in 1958. (X)



Argentina players celebrate their 1978 win over Hungary. (Getty Images)

Argentina 2-1 Hungary 1978, Argentina (Group stage)

Playing at home, Argentina were shocked at the Estadio Monumental when Karoly Csapo gave Hungary the lead. But the Argentines quickly regrouped to equalise 5 minutes later through Leopoldo Luque. Daniel Bertoni scored in the 83rd minute to give the hosts an opening victory.

Argentina 2-1 Nigeria 1994, USA (Group stage)

Samson Siasia struck from outside the area to give Nigeria a stunning lead. But Claudio Caniggia took it upon himself to restore order as he scored in the 22nd and 28th minutes to give Argentina the victory.



Claudio Caniggia and Diego Maradona during the game. (Getty Images)



Argentina players celebrate after the win in Leipzig. (Getty Images)

Argentina 2-1 Mexico 2006, Germany (Round of 16)

In Leipzig, Rafael Marquez shocked Argentina in just the 5th minute to put Mexico in charge. Argentina refused to be pegged back and got the equaliser 4 minutes later from Hernan Crespo. Then, Maxi Rodriguez's stunning volley from the edge of the box in the 89th minute sealed the deal.

Lionel Messi reacts in Atlanta on Wednesday as Argentina reach the final. (Reuters)