

CALM CONQUERS CHAOS



Fabian Ruiz and teammates celebrate Spain's second World Cup title during an open-top bus parade in Madrid on Monday. The champions (picture right) first visited the royal family at the Zarzuela Palace upon arriving home earlier in the day. (Pictures: Reuters & X)



Second star for La Roja no accident

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Spain join West Germany (1972-74), France (1998-2000) and their own golden generation as only the fourth side to hold the World Cup and European Championship titles simultaneously. Coach Luis de la Fuente, 65, has now won every honour put in front of him: the European Under-19 and Under-21 titles, the Nations League, Euro 2024, and now the World Cup. He has lost just twice since replacing Luis Enrique in 2022.

That success is no accident of one golden cycle but the product of a pipeline. Unai Simon, Rodri and Mikel Merino were part of De la Fuente's Under-19 champions in 2015; Simon, Merino, Fabian Ruiz, Dani Olmo and Mikel Oyarzabal followed him to Under-21 glory four years later. It is the kind of coordinated development, as former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger once observed of international football's usual "fast food" approach, that most nations talk about but rarely build. Spain's current dominance of club dugouts — Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique among Europe's elite, five Spaniards managing Premier League sides, including Mikel Arteta of champions Arsenal — is the same philosophy exported.

Individually, almost every key figure arrived in North America with something to prove. Rodri returned from an anterior cruciate ligament tear to win the Golden Ball without a single goal or assist, controlling matches from deep with the kind of anonymity that only elite midfielders can afford. Lamine Yamal came back from injury to remain the closest thing this Spain side has to a rock star. Pedro Porro had just avoided relegation with Tottenham; Alex Baena endured a rough year at Atlet-

ico. Torres had spent months being mocked for his inconsistency at Barcelona. Cubarsi, just 19, was quietly imperious throughout, finishing the final with 121 successful passes at 96 per cent accuracy and six clearances, and walked away with the Young Player award ahead of his own Barcelona teammate Yamal.

"I'm so proud of this generation of footballers who have grown up with this philosophy, remained true to it, made it even better," De la Fuente said afterwards, adding that none of it would have been possible without "the knowledge of the raw materials and the way Spanish players play and compete".

Argentina's night ended in bitterness rather than grace. As Spain's bench poured onto the pitch, Leandro Paredes shoved Eric Garcia to the ground, then wrestled Gavi down and appeared to lash out with his feet, earning the Boca Juniors midfielder a red card and likely further sanction. It was an ugly coda to the champions' first final defeat since July 2021, and a reminder that Messi's extraordinary individual legacy — one shot on target all night, marked out of the game by Rodri — could carry his teammates only so far.

For Spain, the future looks luminous. Yamal and Cubarsi, both still teenagers, already own World Cup, European and Olympic medals. Pedri, 23, was left out of the starting XI from the quarter-finals onward and still altered games in 20-minute cameo. Gavi turns 22 next month. Nico Williams turned 24 this month. This is a squad deep enough to bench two of its most gifted players and still crush the world's best.

Sixteen years after Iniesta's strike in Johannesburg, La Roja have their second star. Given the age of this dressing room, it may not be the last.

Coach upholds 'values' of Class of 2026

East Rutherford: Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said a team-first mentality powered his players as they beat Argentina 1-0 on Sunday to win the World Cup for the second time and establish themselves as international football's dominant side.

ation of footballers who have grown up with this philosophy, remained true to it, made it even better, and set an example as a team and a family — they're excellent, world-class footballers with exceptional talent," De la Fuente said.

"I'm very moved. Looking back and thinking about them, we've won everything, absolutely everything, with this generation of players."

RESULT	
SPAIN	ARGENTINA
1	0
After extra time	

Asked whether he was considering staying on for the 2030 tournament, De la Fuente said he would take time to decide his future. "We are where we want to be, we are privileged with our players," he said. "We are not in a hurry, we must enjoy this, maybe we're thinking about September and the next few matches, but this is something historic, let's take it one game at a time."

Matchwinner Torres said his goal belonged to the whole of Spain and expressed his relief at finally delivering for the team after criticism of his performances in the tournament.

"It was a goal scored by 47 million people. It was destined to happen; it was meant to be a winner," he said. "Whilst all finals are tough, when you're up against (Argentina's Lionel) Messi, you do get a bit nervous. We played better football."

The coach also praised the 19-year-old Lamine Yamal for his contribution to the team's cause. "He's played great football, a football that will help him to mature and be even a greater footballer than what he is," de la Fuente said. "He's really sacrificed for the collective good, and this is very important in our squad."

With inputs from Reuters

FINAL IN NUMBERS

Spain	Argentina
65 Possession	35
20 Shots at goal	2
12 Shots on target	0
101 Final third entries	37
789 Passes completed	375
24 Crosses	9

HOW SPAIN WON IT

As the match statistics show, Spain could spread their wings with their possession-based football in the final. They had more than double the number of completed passes than Argentina, had more shots on goal and much more final third entries. They recovered possession quickly and allowed Argentina less time on the ball. In fact, they suffocated the Argentines for space. Not just control, the understanding and cohesion between the players were also exemplary. With multiple players, like Unai Simon, Mikel Merino, Fabian Ruiz, Dani Olmo, Mikel Oyarzabal and Rodri, playing together since their age-group days, it definitely had an impact on Spain's team bonding.

WHERE ARGENTINA ERRED

The Argentines were confined to a small pocket of space in the field of play. With more backpasses than forward movement, goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez took 21 touches in his six-yard box after goal kicks. That in turn meant that they underutilised their best bet, Lionel Messi, for most of the match. Not enough balls were sent Messi's way. They also lacked a counter-press, allowing Spain a free hand. In regulation time, Argentina had zero shots on goal and only 39 touches in the attacking third. It seemed coach Lionel Scaloni wasn't interested in addressing it as he kept Lautaro Martinez out of action. Maybe Scaloni was limiting himself, thinking of a possible Hebraeaker, but Enzo Fernandez's late red card upset his plans.

SPAIN'S CUP

38 Spain's unbeaten streak, a record. The last time they lost was the 0-1 defeat to Colombia in March 2024

14 Goals scored by Spain. They had scored 8 in their title-winning campaign in 2010

7 Clean sheets kept by Unai Simon in eight matches — the most ever registered in a single World Cup

1 Spain conceded just one goal — the fewest ever during a World Cup-winning campaign

790 The number of passes completed by Rodri at this World Cup. That's 152 more than what he did at Qatar 2022

750 Minutes played by Spain defenders Marc Cucurella and Pau Cubarsi — the joint-most among outfield players alongside Argentina midfielder Alexis Mac Allister

58 Turnovers forced by Mikel Oyarzabal

305 Defensive pressures applied by Dani Olmo

35 Dribbles completed by Lamine Yamal, the most at the 2026 Cup. France's Kylian Mbappe had 28 completed dribbles, while Argentina's Lionel Messi had 25

10 Number of saves Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon made across the entire tournament. Argentina's Emiliano Martinez had to make 11 saves in the final

0 Spain never trailed at any point during the 2026 World Cup



Lamine Yamal after Spain's World Cup triumph on Sunday. Picture courtesy FIFA



(From left) Spain's Pau Cubarsi (Fifa Young Player), captain Rodri (Golden Ball winner) and goalkeeper Unai Simon (Golden Glove winner) at the presentation ceremony following the World Cup final in New Jersey on Sunday. The Netherlands (not in picture) were awarded the FIFA Fair Play trophy. (Reuters picture)

Coach Luis De La Fuente lifts the World Cup trophy. (Reuters)

De la Fuente, who at 65 became the oldest coach to guide a team to a World Cup triumph, led Spain to the Euro 2024 title and his team are now unbeaten in 38 matches in all competitions — a record for any team from Europe or South America.

"In the past people were surprised about footballers being talented and skilled and being good people," he told reporters. "We are the most united team and that is thanks to having people with solidarity, values."

Spain beat the defending champions 1-0 after extra time, with the winner coming from substitute Ferran Torres in a testament to the group mentality that has propelled them through the tournament.

"I'm so proud of this gener-