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Russia hope for World Cup miracle after Messi, Ronaldo exit

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Russia are hoping for a World Cup miracle on Sunday as the host nation take on 2010 winners Spain for a place in the quarter-finals following the exit of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

The other last-16 match pits a talented Croatia team led by Luka Modric against Denmark, but the sides in action will struggle to emulate the drama of Saturday's first two last-16 matches.

Russia came into the tournament derided by their own supporters after a string of defeats in warm-up matches but they thrashed Saudi Arabia 5-0 in their opener and then swept aside Egypt 3-1, making even their own sceptical public believe.

A comprehensive defeat to Uruguay provided a reality check but Russia and midfielder Denis Cheryshev will be roared on by much of the 80,000-crowd in the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow and they see no reason to fear Andres Iniesta, Isco and Diego Costa.

- Farewell Messi, Ronaldo -

The World Cup is now missing its two biggest stars after Ronaldo and Messi bowed out, leaving the competition for possibly the last time.

Ronaldo will be 37 by the time the next World Cup is played in Qatar, but he would not be drawn on whether he planned to extend his international career after Portugal lost 2-1 to Uruguay, courtesy of two goals from Edinson Cavani.

"Now is not the time to talk about the future of players and coaches," said Ronaldo, who, like Messi, leaves the World Cup having never scored a goal in the knockout rounds.

Saturday's dramatic last-16 openers, which featured 10 goals, marked a handing on of the torch to a new generation, with French teenager Kylian Mbappe announcing himself on the world stage.

France beat Messi's Argentina 4-3 in a World Cup classic as Mbappe scored twice to send the two-time winners packing.

Mbappe, 19, became the first teenager to score twice in a World Cup match since a 17-year-old Pele in the 1958 final. The Brazilian legend tweeted to the Frenchman: "Congratulations, @KMbappe, 2 goals in a World Cup so young puts you in great company."

Messi though was unable to find the net, leaving Russia with a single goal, and at 31 the Barcelona great has probably seen any chance of winning the World Cup evaporate.

- Russia believes -

Russia's Cheryshev said the side are confident they can beat any opposition despite being the lowest-ranked team at the tournament.

"I think that we can win against anybody. We can always win and that's what we need to believe, just think about victory," he said.

Spain midfielder David Silva said his side will be treating the match "as if we were playing against Brazil".

Spain have a terrible record against host nations at major finals -- they have never won in eight attempts and coach Fernando Hierro was on the receiving end of a stunning defeat by minnows South Korea on penalties as a player in 2002.

"Statistics are made to be broken," Hierro said. "Why are we always looking backwards? We've had three games here but we're going to look at what happened 10 or 15 years ago? It's about what happens at 5:00 pm tomorrow."

Denmark coach Age Hareide said his side's match against Croatia could boil down to the midfield battle between Tottenham powerhouse Christian Eriksen and Modric.

The Danes failed to set pulses racing in the opening round but advanced second behind France in Group C.

By contrast, Croatia stormed through Group D, winning all three games and put in arguably the best performance of the first stage, a 3-0 thumping of Argentina, in Nizhny Novgorod, where they will also play Denmark.

Hareide said his team would show far more thrust on Sunday.

"I think you will see a different Denmark from what you have seen so far and the type of game we have played," Hareide said. "Yes, we need to defend but we need to attack more."

Colombia said forward James Rodriguez has "minor bruising" in a calf muscle but no decision has been taken on whether he will play against England on Tuesday.

An MRI scan showed he has "minor bruising without any tear in the muscle fibres", the Colombian football federation said.