

Germany win the World Cup

Germany became the first European side to win the World Cup on South American soil with a dramatic late goal in a 1-0 victory that prevented Argentina claiming victory in the spiritual home of their biggest rivals.

A drained looking Angela Merkel leapt to her feet as Germany's substitutes poured on to the pitch after Mario Götze chested down an Andre Schürrle cross deep into extra time and stroked it past Sergio Romero for the winner.

The Bayern Munich player, 22, who came on as a substitute, delivered a worthy strike to secure his exciting side their fourth World Cup and their first major tournament victory since 1996. Their urbane coach Joachim Löw had been under pressure to deliver silverware with his golden generation of players and victory sparked wild celebrations when captain Philippe Lahm thrust the trophy into the night sky. A Brazilian World Cup that started amid fears over protests and corruption but became a paean to the best of international football concluded with a tense final and a dramatic denouement. Brazilians among the 74,738 fans inside the rebuilt Maracanã backed Löw's side, hoping neighbours Argentina would not lift the ultimate prize on one of their sacred football sites. "Whether we have the best individual players or whatever does not matter, you have to have the best team," said Lahm, after the match. "And at the end you stand there as world champions – an unbelievable feeling." Argentina's Lionel Messi, who looked exhausted and crushed despite being the surprise winner of the player of the tournament award, was unable to seize the moment to match the watching Pelé on the biggest football stage. And with Germany unable to hit their earlier heights, of the semi-final in particular, it took a moment of quality to break the deadlock and in the process equal the largest number of goals ever scored at a World Cup finals with 171. Germany, so impressive in beating Brazil 7-1 in the semis to plunge the hosts into depression, found Argentina a much tougher proposition. The resolute Abiceleste could have won it in normal time. Striker Gonzalo Higuain missed a glorious chance and Messi placed a shot just wide from a good position. An absorbing first half degenerated into an attritional but entertaining clash, with injuries and bookings amid flying elbows and questionable tackles. Before the final many had already dubbed the 2014 tournament the greatest of all time, living up to the boast of the organisers that it would be the "Copa das Copas". It was not the final the watching Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff, or 200 million Brazilians had dreamed of. Indeed, as gloating Argentinians poured into Rio, they feared it could become their worst nightmare. Instead it was the Argentinian players and their 100,000 fans who were in tears at the final whistle. "The players are very sad. We had a huge dream, to win this final, but to be perfect we needed to be more efficient," said Argentinian coach Alejandro Sabella of his "wonderful group". Winger Schürrle, who plays for Premier League side Chelsea said winning the cup was the best moment of his life. "I had to cry because I was so overcome. We are so looking forward to celebrating with our fans in Berlin," he said. Beyond the stadium, Rio felt like a militarised zone as 25,000 police and soldiers flooded the city and outriders sped heads of state including Merkel and the Russian president Vladimir Putin through the traffic. As they handed over the trophy, Dilma was barracked by obscene chants ahead of this year's elections and Fifa president Sepp Blatter was, naturally, roundly booed. After the stodgy, often controversial fare served up in South Africa four years ago, Fifa and the organisers desperately needed the action on the pitch to live up to some very high expectations. The players more than delivered, serving up a series of dramatic matches, stunning goals and explosive storylines. Colombia's James Rodriguez, Brazil's Neymar, Costa Rica's Keylor Navas, Holland's Arjen Robben and Germany's Toni Kroos lived up to their reputations or forged new ones.

Teams such as Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile and Algeria blew fresh air through the stale halls of international football's establishment with their teamwork and counter attacking flair. Luis Suárez's incisors provided the requisite disciplinary controversy. By contrast some of the biggest European sides – Italy, Spain and England – left the party early, going out in the group stages. All that was even before Luiz Felipe Scolari's highly strung and Neymar-less Brazilian side took the country on an emotional rollercoaster that eventually careered off the rails. From the sweltering heat of the Amazon rainforest to the chillier climes of Porto Alegre, fans and players have traversed huge distances and been welcomed with open arms. Despite continuing unease about Fifa's modus operandi, the long term future of the stadiums and whether promised infrastructure upgrades will ever be delivered to justify the \$13.5bn World Cup bill, the host cities flung open their doors. There were numerous small protests, including one in Rio yesterday. But, partly due to controversial pre-emptive action by police, the numbers did not come close to the million-plus who protested this time last year. Colourful fans from Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica created a party atmosphere. But at the end of a month long celebration of the best of football and Brazil, it was the Germans who were revelling in spoiling South America's party. Source: theguardian.com