

Croatia beat Morocco 2-1 in thrilling third-place match

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Croatia have secured a third-place victory at this year's FIFA World Cup in Qatar, beating Morocco 2-1 on Saturday evening, reports Euronews with AP. The goals all came in the first half when Joško Gvardiol scored for Croatia in the 7th minute with Morocco answering back just two minutes later when Achraf Dari put the ball in the net — setting up a high-octane start to the game. Both sides had their chances but it was Croatia who scored next, with Mislav Oršić getting his side's second goal in the 42nd minute.

Morocco, the fairytale side of this year's tournament as the first African and first Arab team to make it to the semi-final, fought hard during the second half with some attacking football. But Croatia were able to gain increasingly more amounts of possession, and even when they had a penalty claim disallowed in the last ten minutes of the match did not let Morocco get another goal to level the score. To some, the third-place play-off game is little more than a meaningless exhibition match. To others, it's a chance to become "immortal."

Ahead of the fixture Morocco's coach Walid Regragui said it was "like the booby prize," and after such a wild ride in the competition it was understandable that he sounded so flat. It was also a measure of his own ambition that he ends an unforgettable tournament with a sense of disappointment after being beaten by defending champion France 2-0. The atmosphere from the Croatian side was more upbeat going into Saturday's game. The runners-up from the last World Cup in Russia lost to Argentina 3-0 in their semifinal match, but their players had spoken of the importance of winning another medal.

Forward Andrej Kramarić described it as the chance to "become an immortal hero in your country." "Eight of us from (the tournament in) Russia understand that feeling of winning a medal at the World Cup and we have a lot of players who haven't experienced that and would love to do that because it's something that will stay with you for the rest of their life," Kramarić said. Luka Modrić, who is likely playing in his last World Cup, had similar thoughts. "We need to leave everything to win the bronze medal and let our fans celebrate one more time," he said. And after Saturday's final whistle, securing second and third places at back-to-back World Cups burnishes the legacy of a golden generation for Croatian football.