

Messi breaks World Cup scoring record as Argentina beat Austria

June 23, 2026

Online Desk : Lionel Messi became the leading scorer in World Cup history as the captain struck twice to give Argentina a 2-0 win over Austria on Monday and send the champions into the last 32. The player widely regarded as the greatest of all time pounced late in the first half in Texas with a trademark left-footed finish after neat build-up play. The predatory goal added to his hat-trick in Argentina's opening match to make it a record 17 in total at the World Cup.

The 38-year-old then sealed the match deep in second-half injury time as he outfoxed four defenders who lined up to keep the ball out. It should have been even better for Messi, who missed a penalty early on, stunning a fiercely pro-Argentina 70,649 crowd at the air-conditioned home of the Dallas Cowboys. "Very happy for the victory, it was very important, hard, hard, hard, and it gives us peace of mind for what is to come," Messi, at his sixth World Cup, told broadcasters. "The match was even, intense and we are happy to get six points." Messi's name rang out along the concourses of the stadium after another virtuoso display. "There is not much to say about Leo. More than 20 years being the best in the world, he is the best in history," said striker Julian Alvarez.

Penalty woe. With both sides knowing a win would put them into the knockout rounds with a game to spare, Lautaro Martinez was brought down in the box, sandwiched by two Austrian players.

Referee Amin Mohamed gave a penalty after a VAR intervention, and a wall of noise went up as Messi stepped forward on nine minutes. But his run-up was slow and his weak effort off target, dragging it wide. For all his brilliance, Messi — who turns 39 on Wednesday — is surprisingly poor from the penalty spot by his standards. He also saw his spot-kick saved by Wojciech Szczesny in a 2-0 win over Poland at the 2022 World Cup, where Argentina went on to be champions, and missed at the 2018 tournament. In the 19th minute Messi had a clear sniff at goal, only for Austria captain David Alaba to steal the ball off his toes at the last moment as he danced through.

Alaba denied Messi again just after the half-hour mark, blocking his goalbound shot with goalkeeper Alexander Schlager stranded. Ralf Rangnick's Austria, who beat debutants Jordan 3-1 in their opener, were content to sit back. They did not have a shot on target in the first half. History made. And then came the big moment, Messi sweeping in on 38 minutes after being set up by Facundo Medina, with Thiago Almada cleverly letting the ball run through his legs to leave. Argentina's talisman all on his own and the goal gaping. The Argentina fans, who greatly outnumbered their Austrian counterparts, rose to acclaim their hero.

Messi had equalled Miroslav Klose's all-time mark of 16 World Cup goals when hitting a hat-trick in a 3-0 win over Algeria in the holders' opening game. Messi was tearful after his first goal against Algeria, and it later emerged that his father is recovering from an unspecified health issue. Inter Miami attacker Messi had not even committed to playing the tournament in North America until the last moment. The former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain wizard dragged his country to World Cup glory four years ago, and the lure of representing his nation once again on the biggest stage proved irresistible.

Lionel Scaloni's side failed to build on their lead, and the second half drifted, neither side creating much. If anything, Austria threatened slightly more, but Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was only once seriously troubled. And then up popped Messi to have the last word at the death. "We knew that he is on a level of his own, and Lionel Messi showed us today that he's the best," said Rangnick.