

**25** History beckons for Russia as Cherchesov finds winning formula

**26** Tampa Bay Rays win, end Houston Astros' 12-game winning streak

**27** Ronaldo earns edgy Portugal 1-0 win as Morocco's hopes end



**ROSTOV-ON-DON:** Saudi Arabia's defender Ali Al-Bulaihi (Bottom) tackles Uruguay's forward Luis Suarez during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group A football match between Uruguay and Saudi Arabia at the Rostov Arena in Rostov-On-Don yesterday. — AFP

## Suarez sends Uruguay into last 16

Russia qualify for next stage, Egypt and Saudi eliminated

**ROSTOV-ON-DON:** Uruguay booked their place in the World Cup knockout stage along with Russia yesterday, as Luis Suarez scored the winner on his 100th international appearance in a 1-0 victory over Saudi Arabia in Rostov-on-Don.

The South Americans take on the hosts in their final Group A match on June 25 with top spot on the line, while Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been eliminated after both suffered back-to-back defeats.

The 31-year-old Suarez, whose previous two World Cups both ended in bans after his infamous 2010 handball against Ghana and bite on Italy's Giorgio Chiellini four years later, took advantage of a goalkeeping error by Mohammed Al-Owais to put Uruguay ahead midway through the first half.

Oscar Tabarez's side missed plenty of opportunities to add further goals, but a toothless Saudi outfit never seriously looked like snatching a point.

Uruguay, semi-finalists eight years ago in South Africa, have now reached the knockout stage for the third straight time, while Saudi Arabia will try again in their search for a first World Cup win since 1994 in their final game against Mohamed Salah's Egypt.

Suarez made a bright start, looking to make amends for his poor performance in the opening 1-0 win against Egypt, firing a left-footed volley from Cristian Rodriguez's knockdown which was blocked by Ali Al-Bulaihi.

The Saudis managed to have plenty of early possession, although without looking overly threatening, only

to gift Uruguay a 23rd-minute lead. Al-Owais-winning only his second cap after replacing Abdullah Al-Muaiouf in goal-completely missed a floated Carlos Sanchez corner and Suarez tapped in his 52nd international goal unmarked at the back post.

That strike was Suarez's sixth World Cup goal and made him the first Uruguayan to score in three separate finals. Juan Antonio Pizzi's Saudi Arabia continued to look far more assured on the ball than they did in the 5-0 drubbing by Russia on the opening day of the tournament, with Hatan Bahbri firing a wild volley over shortly after seeing a long-range effort tipped away by Fernando Muslera.

Uruguay began the second period with greater purpose, and Suarez came close to a second when Al-

Owais palmed clear his low free-kick. The three points and a last-16 spot should have been wrapped up just after the hour mark, but Sanchez headed over when unmarked at the back post from a wonderful Edinson Cavani cross. The South Americans continued to be wasteful in front of goal, as Martin Caceres sent a header flying off target from the 33-year-old Sanchez's free-kick.

Paris Saint-Germain striker Cavani came close to emulating Suarez by scoring in a third World Cup, but his low shot was smothered by the onrushing Al-Owais.

Uruguay showed all their know-how and experience, though, as Atletico Madrid defensive pair Jose Gimenez and Diego Godin helped see out the closing moments with ease. — AFP

## Diego Costa on target as Spain beat Iran 1-0

**KAZAN ARENA:** A lucky Diego Costa goal handed World Cup hopefuls Spain their first win of the World Cup although dogged Iran came close to causing a major upset yesterday. The victory in Kazan puts the 2010 winners on course for the last 16.

Costa, who scored twice in a 3-3 opening draw with Portugal in Sochi, courted controversy early in the Group B encounter when he stepped on the toes of Iran 'keeper Ali Beiranvand as he waited to kick the ball out.

His gesture went unpunished, and the Atletico Madrid striker required another stroke of luck on 54 minutes when his shot came off Ramin Rezaeian to beat Beiranvand after he had been sent through by Andres Iniesta. The entire Iranian bench poured onto the pitch when Saeid Ezatolahi fired an equaliser for the Lions of Persia just before the hour. But the thousands of Iranian supporters that filled the stadium with the sound of vuvuzelas throughout were left disappointed when it was ruled out for offside.

Spain coach Fernando Hierro welcomed Real Madrid's Dani Carvajal back into the starting line-up

following his recovery from a hamstring injury suffered in the Champions League final win over Liverpool.

With Lucas Vazquez replacing Atletico Madrid midfielder Koke, it gave La Roja a distinctively Real Madrid feel. By the end of a pulsating opening half in which Iran's defence thwarted the few real chances La Roja were able to create, Hierro's men left the pitch looking rather red-faced.

Costa got so frustrated with Iran's defensive tactics that he approached Beiranvand and provocatively stepped on his toes, leaving the 'keeper in visible pain. It went unpunished by Uruguayan referee Cunha, who had awarded France a historic first VAR-assisted penalty that saw Antoine Griezmann score Les Bleus' opener in a 2-1 win over Australia.

Spain resumed in more positive fashion after the break, Beiranvand forced to produce heroics twice in the space of four minutes. But Iran refused to buckle, Carlos Queiroz's men coming close in the final minutes when midfielder Mehdi Taremi headed just over.

Shortly after the restart an Isco corner was flicked on by Costa to Gerard Pique but his effort was cleared off the line. Sergio Busquets' drive from 20 yards was then parried by Beiranvand, who palmed the rebound away before Lucas Vazquez could pounce.

Some great vision from Iniesta, and a slice of luck, however broke Iranian hearts when Costa spun and latched on to the ball before seeing his shot rebound off Ramin Rezaeian and into the net. Spain, however, were



**KAZAN:** Spain's defender Sergio Ramos (3rd-R) heads the ball during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group B football match between Iran and Spain at the Kazan Arena in Kazan yesterday. — AFP

still flattering to deceive. On a rare counter goalkeeper David De Gea was left irate when Taremi rose to head a metre wide. Moments later, the stadium erupted when Ezatolahi fired through a packed Spain area to beat De Gea but the assistant referee's flag was up.

In the final quarter hour Iran battled for a late equaliser, but after Vahid Amiri showed class to nutmeg Pique deep on the left and fire over an inviting cross, Taremi's thundering header flew just over the bar as a relieved De Gea looked on. — AFP