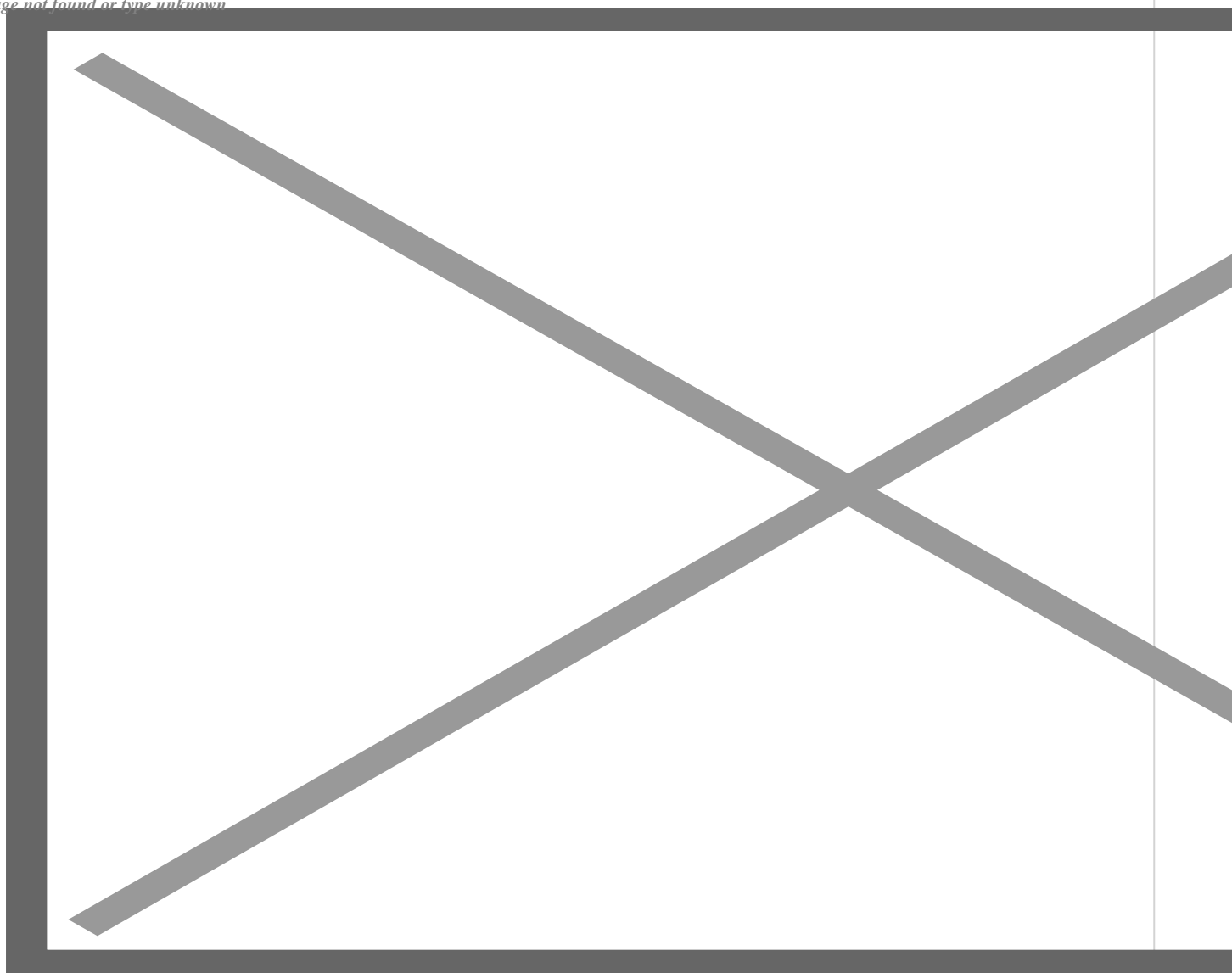


Messi leads the Scaloneta to the quarterfinals

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Messi leads the Scaloneta to the quarterfinals

By Orlando González Cruz

Havana, December 4 (RHC) The Argentinean national soccer team hung on the prodigious left foot of Lionel Messi and disposed of Australia today two goals to one, qualifying to the quarterfinals of the World Cup hosted by Qatar.

Messi led an omnipresent Albiceleste side, who dominated the early stages of the game. Throughout the first half, they exerted a high pressure that did not let the island-continent side get out of their half-court. Precisely, the Rosario star opened the scoring (35') with a shot that went through a sea of Australian legs and slipped close to the far post, guarded by Mathew Ryan.

In the second half, the "Scalóneta" marched at full speed towards the next round, and continued colonizing the ball without much work for goalkeeper Emiliano "Dibu" Martínez (except for a mistake in Otamendi's delivery, which could have cost the opponent's equalizer). The second goal for the South Americans was scored by Julián Álvarez (57'), beating the Oceania goalkeeper after a schoolboy error. For his part, the Gaucho captain continued to be in fine form and gave several individual gems reminiscent of his best days. His teammates were no less impressive and continued to delight their fans, who thronged the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium.

Just when it seemed that Graham Arnold's disciples would not find the key to an equalizer, an own goal by Enzo Fernández (77' GEC) deflected a shot that left the Argentine goalkeeper stranded to make it two for one.

Then, the Australians pressed and came very close to the equalizer after a great play by MacLaren, intercepted just at the right moment by the Argentine defense. The last minutes of the game turned out to be "heart-stopping" and Argentina could have scored three and four goals, as well as Australia's second, because in the penultimate action of the game, "Dibu", with a tremendous save, stifled the goal cry of his opponents. In the end, the score remained unchanged and Scalóni's team booked their ticket to the quarterfinals.

In the next round, the Albiceleste will face the Netherlands, who defeated the United States 3-1 earlier in the day.

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