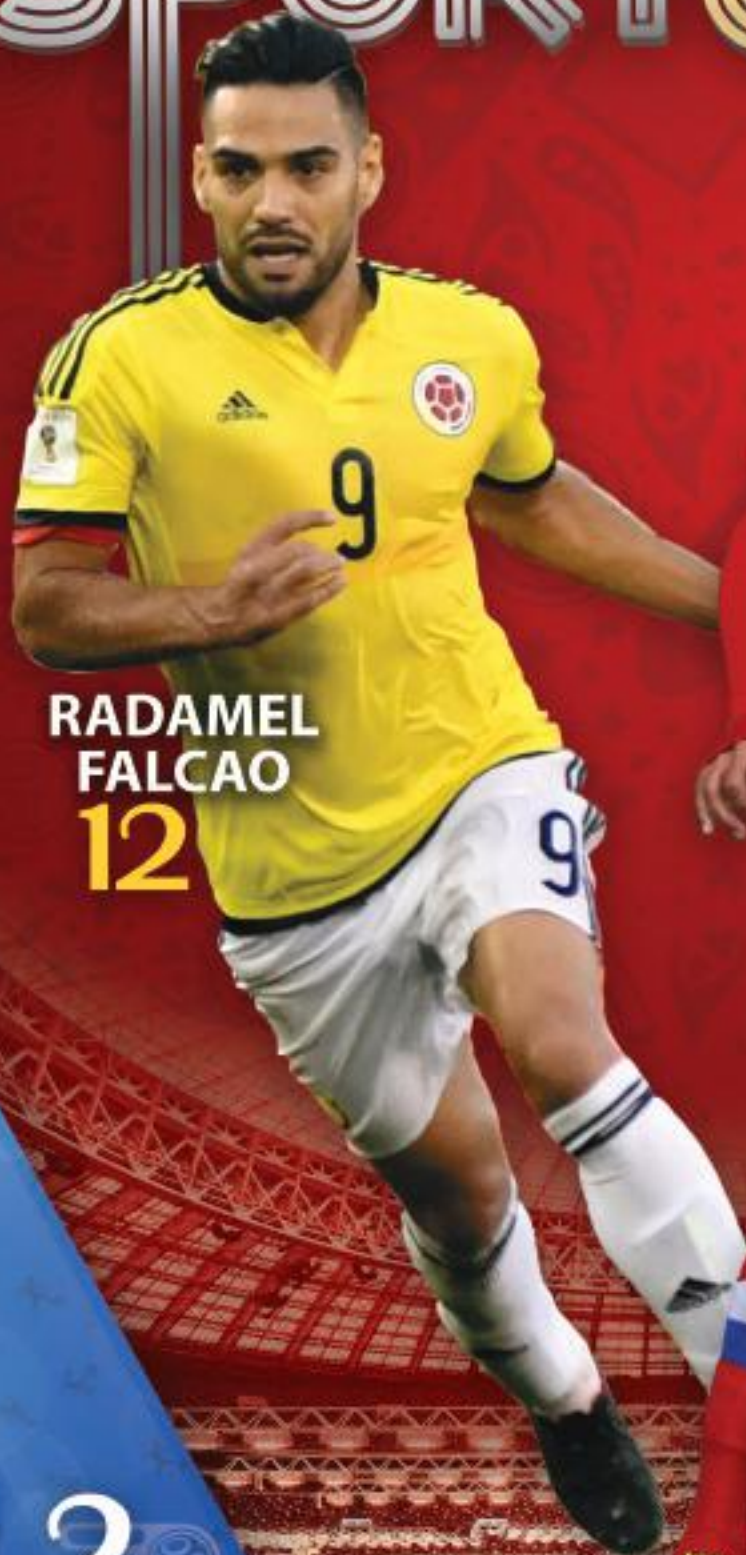
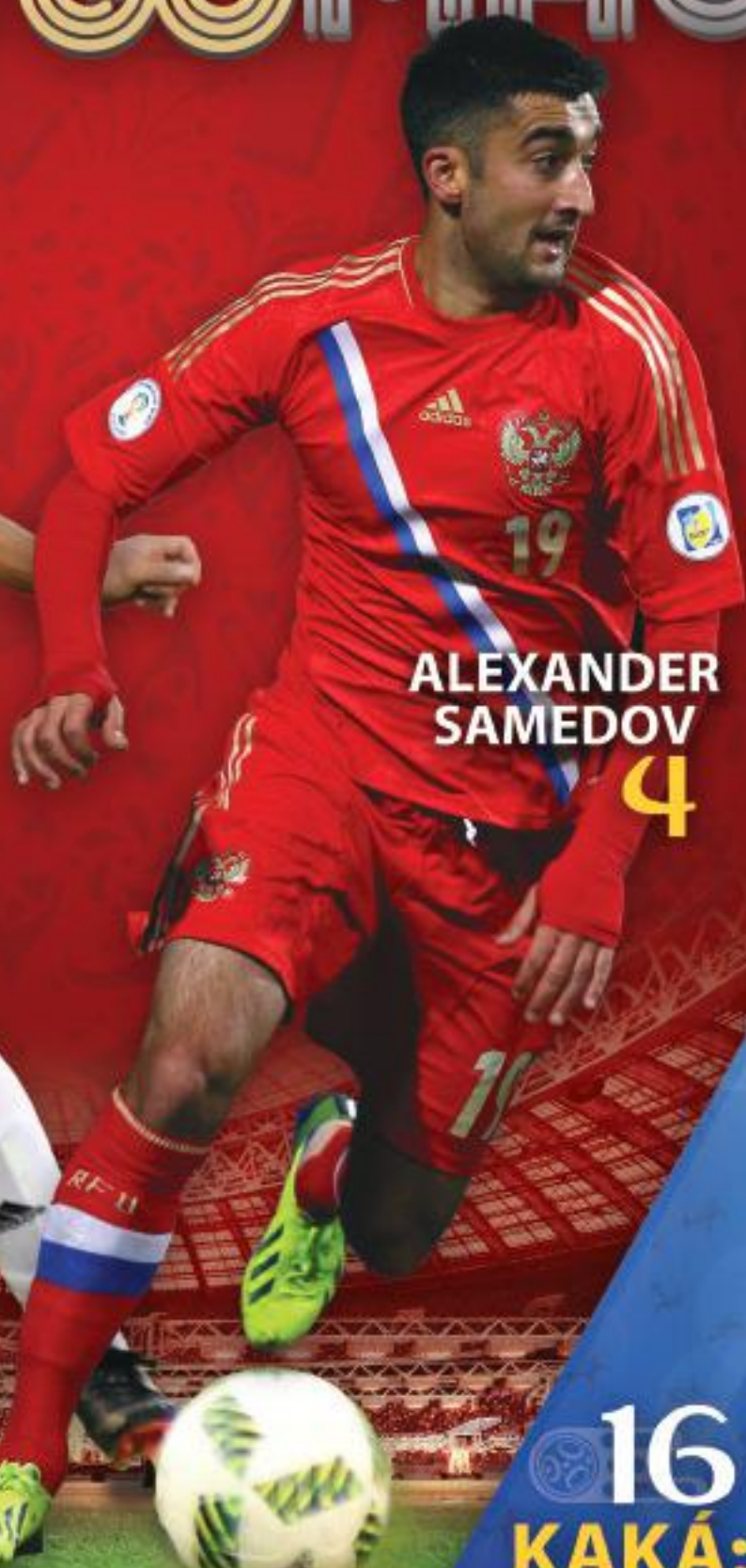


# SPORTGOMAG



**RADAMEL  
FALCAO**

**12**



**ALEXANDER  
SAMEDOV**

**4**

**2**  
**WORLD  
CUP STATS**

**16**  
**KAKÁ:  
BREAKING  
THE MOLD**



*"I press on toward  
the goal to win  
the prize for which  
God has called me  
heavenward in  
Christ Jesus."*

*— Philippians 3:14*





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LUZHNIKI STADIUM

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# WORLD CUP BY THE NUMBERS

## WORLD CUP WINNERS

1930 Uruguay - Uruguay  
1934 Italy - Italy\*  
1938 France - Italy  
1950 Brazil - Uruguay  
1954 Switzerland - West Germany  
1958 Sweden - Brazil  
1962 Chile - Brazil  
1966 England - England  
1970 Mexico - Brazil  
1974 Germany - Germany  
1978 Argentina - Argentina\*  
1982 Spain - Italy  
1986 Mexico - Argentina  
1990 Italy - West Germany  
1994 United States - Brazil\*\*  
1998 France - France  
2002 Japan & South Korea - Brazil  
2006 Germany - Italy\*\*  
2010 South Africa - Spain\*  
2014 Brazil - Germany\*

\*won in extra time

\*\*won on penalty kicks


## COUNTRIES WITH MOST CHAMPIONSHIPS

 *Brazil - 5*

 *Italy - 4*

 *Germany - 4*

## COUNTRIES WITH MOST CHAMPIONSHIPS

 *Pele, Brazil - 3 (1958, 1962, 1970)*

## MOST WORLD CUP APPEARANCES


 *Brazil - 20*

## MOST WORLD CUP MATCHES

 *Germany - 106*

## PLAYERS WITH MOST WORLD CUP APPEARANCES

 *Antonio Carbajal, Mexico - 5 (1950-66)*

 *Lothar Matthaeus, Germany - 5 (1982-98)*

 *Gianluigi Buffon, Italy - 5 (1998-2014)*

## PLAYER WITH MOST WORLD CUP MATCHES

 *Lothar Matthaeus, Germany - 25*





# WORLD CUP BY THE NUMBERS

## MOST WORLD CUP GOALS



Miroslav Klose, Germany - 16



Ronaldo, Brazil - 15



Gerd Mueller, Germany - 14



Just Fontaine, France - 13



Pele, Brazil - 12

## MOST GOALS SCORED IN SINGLE WORLD



13 - Just Fontaine,  
France (1958, 6 Matches)

## MOST TOTAL GOALS SCORED 171 - (1998, 2014)

## FEWEST TOTAL GOALS SCORED 70 - (1930, 1934)

## MATCH WITH THE MOST GOALS 12 - Austria 7, Switzerland 5 (1954 World Cup)

## HIGHEST AVERAGE PER MATCH 5.4 - 1954

## MOST GOALS SCORED IN WORLD CUP FINAL



Geoff Hurst, England - 3 (1966)

## YOUNGEST PLAYER



Norman Whiteside,  
Northern Ireland - 17 years,  
1 month, 10 days in 1982

## OLDEST PLAYER



Faryd Mondragon,  
Colombia - 43 years old in 2014

## NUMBER OF TEAMS IN FIRST WORLD CUP

13 (1930)

## NUMBER OF TEAMS IN CURRENT WORLD CUPS 32 (since 1998)



Miroslav Klose



# GROUP A

## URUGUAY

17  
WORLD  
RANKING

Luis Suarez is Uruguay's all-time leading scorer with 50 goals. He's tied for third in his country with five career goals in World Cup matches.

## EGYPT

46  
WORLD  
RANKING

Egypt will appear in its first World Cup since 1990 after forward Mohamed Salah converted a stoppage-time penalty to give it a 2-1 win over Congo.

## RUSSIA

66  
WORLD  
RANKING

With a title, Russia would become the seventh host team to win the World Cup. The last was France in 1998.

## SAUDI ARABIA

70  
WORLD  
RANKING

Saudi Arabia makes its first World Cup appearance since 2006 behind the scoring of Mohammad Al-Shlawi, who scored 16 goals in World Cup qualifying.

## ALEXANDER SAMEDOV

# BREATH OF LIFE

Growing up in a family split in their faith backgrounds, Alexander Samedov decided he would live his life in his own way.

Until trouble came and he was left searching for answers.

Samedov, who has represented Russia internationally on the U-21 and senior national teams and also played on several top Russian club teams, started having trouble in his football career and in his life. That's when the questions started, first in his mind and then verbally.



"Going back to the very beginning, I grew up between two camps, so to speak," Samedov shared in a television interview. "I didn't really go in either direction. I lived my life in my own way. But a time came when I began to have problems in my career, in my life. I had already reached the age to be thinking about those things. And then I met my wife, Yulia. She was a believer; she went to church. Seeing my problems, she simply said to me, 'Sasha, such and such...' I came to church once, twice, and I understood. My life began to change."

Though Samedov admitted to not reading much while growing up, he has loved reading the Bible since becoming a follower of Christ.

"I didn't read much at all. I hardly had any free time," Samedov says. "Because I went to a sports school, it didn't really work out for me to combine academics and sports. I paid more attention to sports, and reading wasn't the most important thing for me."

But reading the Bible has been different. A welcome change from the arduous reading of lifeless words from the pages of a school textbook, or any book for that matter.

"I don't look at reading the Bible like reading other books, because the Bible is something spiritual; it's about faith," he says. "The Bible teaches us. It provides direction for our lives."

Part of that direction has guided him in his career. Samedov debuted with Spartak Moscow when he was 16 years old. Five years later he moved to Lokomotiv Moscow for four years before joining FC Moscow for two seasons. After succeeding there, he went to a bigger club, Dynamo Moscow, for three seasons while also making his first senior national team appearance.

That success landed him back at Lokomotiv the following season when he began excelling even more and became a regular starter and a fan favorite. He has since made 45 more national team appearances. Later, Samedov returned to Spartak Moscow.

The questions he had about life had been answered, and the way he handled success and failure had now changed.

He looked to God, who spoke to him and guided him as Samedov read the Bible. God has used Samedov's wife to show him the right path.

"It worked out that way," he says. "Through her, I made it."

# WORLD CUP





# GROUP B

## PORTUGAL

4

WORLD  
RANKING

The highest-ranked team in this group is headlined by Cristiano Ronaldo, winner of the Ballon d'Or (best male player) four out of the last five years, and five times total.

## SPAIN

8

WORLD  
RANKING

Spain, champion of the 2010 World Cup, advanced to the 2018 World Cup with a goal differential of plus-33 in World Cup qualifying.

## IRAN

36

WORLD  
RANKING

Iran qualified for the World Cup without losing any of its qualifying matches. The team is led by Sardar Azmoun, who scored 11 goals in World Cup qualifying.

## MOROCCO

42

WORLD  
RANKING

Morocco qualified for the World Cup for the first time in 20 years by winning its group in the final round of African qualifying without losing a match or conceding a single goal.

## MARCOS SENNA

# A GRACIOUS PEACE

With four knee injuries in his career, it would be understandable if Marcos Senna was disappointed with football. But it's quite the opposite.

"I have had four knee injuries, but with God's help, I think I have coped with them well, and even experienced joy in the midst of them ... I give thanks, honor, and glory to God for the strength He has given me.

"I am at peace. I know God has a purpose in our lives. If I am injured, it is for a reason that I am injured and I understand that I will get better in time. I understand that God ... will keep looking after me. And for that reason I am very calm."

Senna, who was born into poverty in Brazil and began playing football in the streets at age 6, became a Spanish citizen



after Luis Aragonés, Senna's Villarreal CF coach, asked him to play for the Spanish national team.

"I was not going to give up my nationality by birth — Brazilian," Senna said. "At that time, I thought it was the best move and a privilege to have dual nationality and the opportunity to play for Spain, one of the best teams in the world. The truth is that it has changed my life. It has been extraordinary."

Senna played in the World Cup and also helped Spain win the Euro Cup, beating Germany 1-0. Several publications named Senna player of the tournament after he helped Spain go unbeaten in the Euro Cup.

He also helped Spain win or tie 35 consecutive matches, tying the mark held by Brazil, and helped Spain win a record 15 straight games during that span. That sent Spain to No. 1 in the world rankings for the first time in the nation's history.

"Winning the European Championship was a highlight of my career and a wonderful celebration," he says. "We eventually won on penalties. I knew that I would be one of the penalty-takers. We practiced penalties the day before, but on game day we had played 90 minutes plus 30 minutes in extra time. I was exhausted and had cramps everywhere. Yet, when the time came, I was calm and felt God's Spirit come on me, giving me peace and clarity. With His help, I was able to shoot confidently, score, and help Spain to victory. I knew God was in charge and had a plan for me to honor Him with this accomplishment."

"On the day of the final, I was completely focused on the match. It was a great day, especially with all of Spain sharing in the celebration. When we won, it was a time of great joy for all the players. Our lives will never be the same because of being part of winning the championship. More importantly, my life has never been the same because of my relationship with Jesus."

That relationship with Jesus began in Brazil, and it has made all the difference in his life.

"At that stage I did not know much about the Bible," Senna said. "I had been to church with my mother, but as I grew up I stopped going for some reason. I was not baptized or anything, but I knew some things from my mother and grandmother, they invited me to a meeting. I liked it and I kept on going. Then eight months after I became a follower of Christ, Villarreal signed me and I joined a church in Villarreal where I was baptized."

Senna said that fame, money and other material things aren't enough to satisfy anyone.

"If you are worried about anything," Senna says. "But God's Spirit is above all things. God can give you happiness, peace and joy. Just talking about it makes me smile. This has made me very happy and changed my life in every way. It is the best decision that anyone can make in their lives."

# WORLD CUP





# GROUP C

## FRANCE



Didier Deschamps helped France win its only World Cup title in 1998 as a player and captain of the team. He's now the head coach.

## PERU



Peru won a two-leg playoff over New Zealand to secure the last spot in the World Cup, the nation's first appearance since 1982. It is led by winger Jefferson Farfan.

## DENMARK



Midfielder Christian Eriksen scored 11 goals in World Cup qualifying, including a hat trick against Ireland that booked Denmark's spot in the World Cup.

## AUSTRALIA



Tim Cahill is looking to become one of the few players to score a goal in four World Cups. He's also second in World Cup history with five cards.

# ALBERTO RODRIGUEZ

# BANNER FOR CHRIST

Alberto Rodriguez has made more than 70 international appearances as a defender for the Peruvian national football team. In many of those matches, he was the team captain. He has also played more than 15 years for professional teams in Peru, Portugal and Colombia.

However, having a successful football career is not what Rodriguez wants people to know most about him.

"As a follower of Christ, this platform makes people see not just the football player, but a person that God has made and put in this position," Rodriguez says. "This is what God wants. The Bible says we are an open book; the world looks at what we do. I want to be a good reference, a model for young people and adults to follow, not just an athlete, but a person who follows Christ."



Rodriguez became a follower of Christ when he was around 18 years old through a friend he played football with. His friend invited him to church, Rodriguez liked it and continued to go. Before long, he had a personal encounter with God, who transformed Rodriguez's life and also that of his girlfriend, who is now his wife and mother of their three children.

"I know without God I can't do anything. We are nothing without Him. Today as a national football player, [that] has all happened with God's help. When Christ came into my life it was a very, very beautiful, important and amazing moment," Rodriguez says.

Being a follower of Christ in the world of professional sports isn't always easy. Rodriguez has experienced that, but knows God is for him.

"There is always adversity in all areas of our lives; as a football player there are adversities in training, in the games," he says. "Things don't always turn out good. As a professional football player, and a follower of Christ, my banner is Christ. I realize that the Lord is always fighting for me, guarding me, strengthening me, even in complicated situations."

But being a follower of Christ in the world of professional sports allows Rodriguez to reach people he might not otherwise.

"We are an instrument in the hands of God to be able to share the Good News, His Word. This is a motivation. If He has put me in this position as a professional football player, it is to be light in the middle of darkness. This is an opportunity God has given me," Rodriguez says.

As he leads his Peruvian teammates on the field and around the world, Rodriguez strives to make clear who he stands for.

"I always want to be better. I want to leave a legacy, an example for the youth that come behind me, so football in Peru continues to develop and grow," he says. "It is important that the motivation I have is transmitted to others, so they can see not just me Alberto Rodriguez, who I am and what is inside Alberto Rodriguez. But that when they see me, they see God. They see a reflection of what God is doing in my life. This is the biggest joy for any follower of Christ."

# WORLD CUP





# GROUP D

## ARGENTINA

5

WORLD  
RANKING

Lionel Messi is one of the best footballers in history. The nation's captain and all-time leading goal scorer aims to lead Argentina back to the final after placing second in 2014.

## CROATIA

18

WORLD  
RANKING

The Croatian team is led by midfielder Luka Modric, who has been named the Croatian Footballer of the Year six times, tied for the most ever.

## ICELAND

22

WORLD  
RANKING

Star midfielder Gylfi Sigurdsson — a two-time Icelandic Sportsman of the Year — leads Iceland to its first ever appearance in the World Cup.

## NIGERIA

47

WORLD  
RANKING

John Obi Mikel leads the Nigeria Super Eagles to the World Cup for the sixth time. They were the first African country to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

## VINCENT ENYEAMA

# IN GOAL TO GLORIFY GOD

Just as Vincent Enyeama's football career was beginning to rise, he nearly died.

Two years after playing in his first World Cup as a 20-year-old, the Nigerian goalie was involved in a car crash that left two motorbike passengers dead and the car's driver in critical condition. Enyeama walked away with only bruises, even though the car flipped twice as it swerved to avoid a motorbike.

"I'm lucky to be alive," he said in an interview following the accident.

God's plan for his life included much more. There was more football to be played, and many people to influence.

"I believe in God, I believe in the Bible, which says He chooses who He chooses," Enyeama said.

Enyeama went on to play professionally in Nigeria (where he has been honored as the best player in the African



Champions League), Israel and France. And after making his World Cup debut by holding England scoreless, he became a beloved member of the Nigerian national team, also known as the Super Eagles. He played as the country's top goalie in two more World Cups, one of only a few Nigerians to appear in three World Cups. Enyeama later became Nigeria's most-capped player, with 101 matches for the national team.

One of Enyeama's most well-known performances came in a later World Cup against Argentina. He made four incredible saves against the legendary Lionel Messi, who said Enyeama's performance was "phenomenal."

Enyeama prepared for that match by studying video of dozens of Messi's games, but he credited God after the match. "My secret lies with God," he said. "Thanks to Him I was able to do what I did today as He allowed me to stay calm under pressure."

Enyeama has led the Super Eagles to third-place finishes three times at the Africa Cup of Nations tournament. And he was later the team's captain when they won the tournament, thanks to a crucial save by Enyeama in the final. After the match, he was asked by the media how he was able to make the stop.

"The angels of God helped me and they made sure that my hands were in the right place to stop the ball," he said.

A married man with three children, Enyeama loves God, his family and his country. "I want to give all thanks to God for all these things," Enyeama said after being voted Nigeria's goalkeeper of the year. "I wish I can give more to Nigeria, I really wish. I really desire to do more."

Enyeama never hid his faith in Christ while playing with the Super Eagles. His teammates gave him the nickname "The Pastor" because he was the team's spiritual leader on and off the field. He would often lead the whole team in prayer before meals, practices and games.

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven."

— Matthew 5:16\*

*\* These references come from the Bible, which, includes the essential details on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible is divided into books, which are further divided into chapters and verses. For example, John 3:16 refers to the Book of John, the third chapter and sixteenth verse.*

# WORLD CUP



# THE TIGER PERSEVERES FOR GOD



**RADAMEL  
FALCAO**



Born into a family of talented athletes, named after a football legend, Colombian striker Radamel Falcao has gained an elite reputation for himself within the world of sport. Falcao is currently the captain and top scorer for both the Colombian national team and his AS Monaco club team.

Though he has become known as a one of the world's top football competitors, Falcao is quick to admit that his satisfaction does not rest in his athletic performance alone.

"We can have everything but if we're not satisfied spiritually, then it's as if we had nothing and we feel empty," Falcao said. "With Jesus Christ, we can be assured that He will never leave us. He'll always be there. This is something that I have experienced in my own life through His faithfulness and love and through Him showing me that He paid a price for our lives, which was that of His Son, Jesus."

Having grown up going to church with his family, Falcao made a decision to place his trust in God at an early age. Falcao says it was at this turning point

that his desires and outlook on his own career changed.

"I understood that He has a plan, which I simply needed to obey because He would go on to fulfill the promises that He had made for my life," he said. "Players and fans alike enjoy a special moment in football, which is triggered by a goal. I feel truly blessed to have the opportunity to do this."

He has this opportunity often. His recent 30 goals led AS Monaco, and his 29 goals for Colombia are tops among the team's active roster.

Falcao began his youth football career at age 15, and in his first year he was labeled "El Tigre" (The Tiger) after a particularly intense game. This is only one of the many nicknames he holds to this day, "King of the Europa League" being another.

Overcoming many obstacles in his career as a professional athlete — including major knee injuries twice — Falcao has persevered and drawn strength from the Bible.

"It's a manual full of teaching about what God put in place so that

we could live vigilantly and be blessed here on earth," he said. "God is always there to help me. I don't think there is any situation that can't be overcome, however testing it may be."

Falcao began his professional career on home turf in Colombia before moving to Argentina, then to Portugal, where he won his first European title with FC Porto.

"I believe that God used this time for my growth," Falcao said. "As a professional player, I was able to learn a great deal."

Falcao once scored 17 goals in 14 games for Porto, setting a new record in the UEFA Europa League for goals scored in a single season. "El Tigre" puts his best foot forward for every competition, entering each game and practice with a prayerful heart.

"I pray for God to take control and as I am part of a team, a workforce made up of many players," he said. "I also pray for them, for God to look after us, protect us from injuries and other problems. ... I try to put all the different areas that make up my life into God's hands."



***“God knows the dream of my heart, of being able to play and leave a lasting impact for the future. I would like others to see what God can do in the life of a man who has accepted Jesus Christ into his heart. I want others to see the power of God at work in my life and recognize that this is possible for them too.”***

Eager to play in his first World Cup, Falcao saw his childhood dream of competing in the event unfolding — until a serious knee injury ruled him out. Now, four years later, the opportunity to compete in the world's biggest football competition has once again resurfaced. When Colombia qualified for this World Cup, no one was more emotional than Falcao, who has been working toward this goal for so long.

But his aim for making a lasting impact is not limited to his participation on the field, he applies this to his everyday life.

“God knows the dream of my heart, of being able to play and leave a lasting impact for the future,” he said. “I would like others to see what God can do in the life of a man who has accepted Jesus Christ into his heart. I want others to see the power of God at work in my life and recognize that this is possible for them too.”

Apart from his life on the football field, Falcao is a devoted husband and father of two daughters. In his own home, Falcao aims to love his family and put their needs before his own.

“I think it's similar to the love that God has for us, loving us just as we are, He created us and wants to be in relationship with us. He expects nothing in return,” Falcao said.

Falcao's family has been behind him every step of the way in his football career. Falcao married the Argentinean singer, Lorelei Taron. This young couple seeks to use both of their professional platforms to share their faith in Christ.

“My wife and I share the same principles of wanting to love, obey and please God,” Falcao said. “This means that we can grow together and walk towards

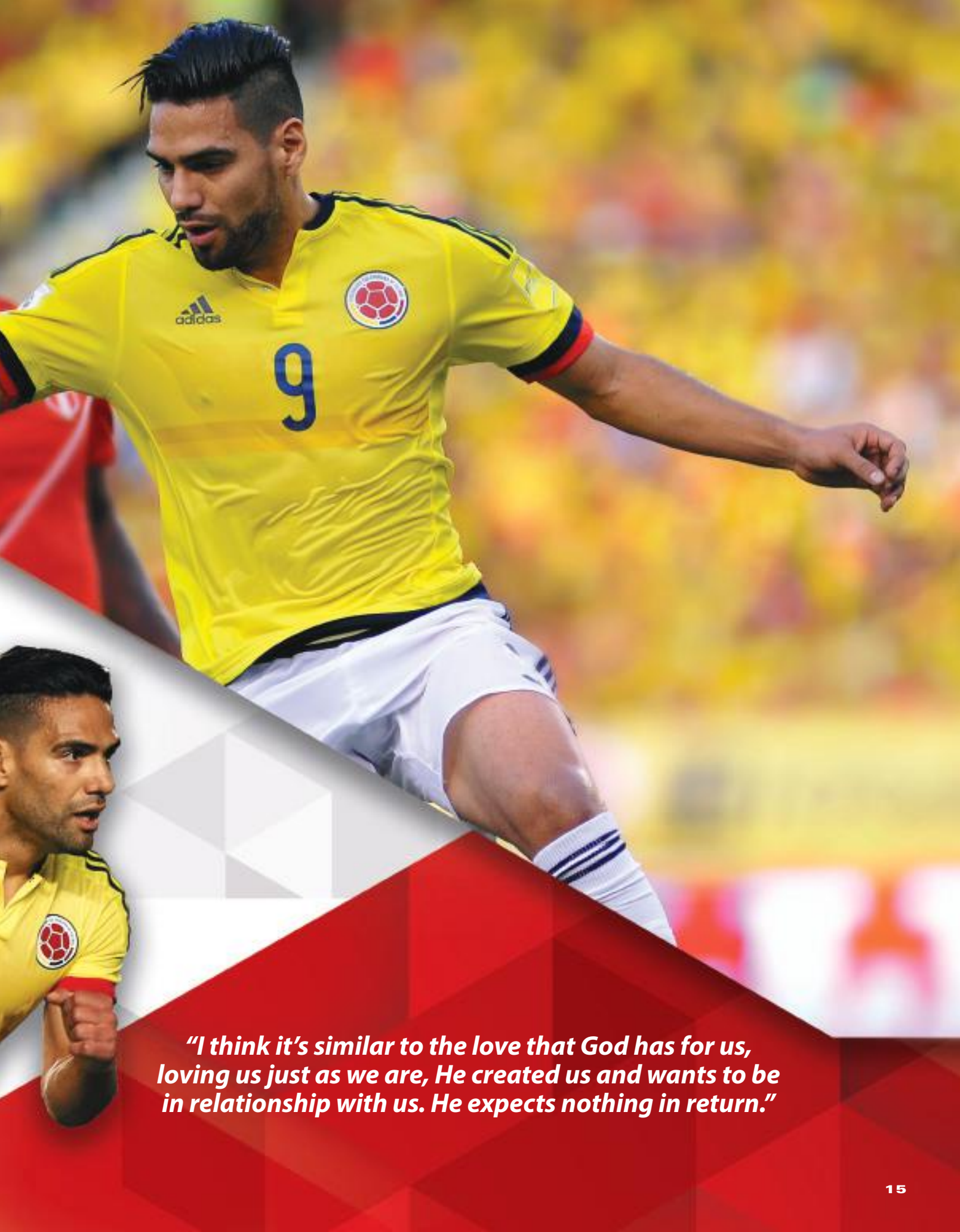
the same goal rather than different ones, which is to please God in all that we do.”

Falcao is passionate about sharing his love for the game and love for God with others. Using the international platform of the world's favorite sport, he continues to impact athletes and fans with his positive outlook on life.

“We have the opportunity to make a difference and show others what Christ has done in our lives,” Falcao said, “which He no doubt wants to do in the lives of others.”







*"I think it's similar to the love that God has for us, loving us just as we are, He created us and wants to be in relationship with us. He expects nothing in return."*



# GROUP E

## BRAZIL



The first nation to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, Brazil has won the most World Cup titles of any country with five.

## SWITZERLAND



Granit Xhaka, Switzerland's reigning Player of the Year, is looking to lead the country to the quarterfinals of the World Cup for the first time since 1954.

## COSTA RICA



Captain Bryan Ruiz was a key striker in Costa Rica's quarterfinal run in 2014, and he now leads the team in scoring and international appearances.

## SERBIA



Serbia's coach, Mladen Krstajic, was a leading defender for Serbia and Montenegro in the 2006 World Cup, and took over coaching the Serbian squad in October 2017.

# KAKÁ

# BREAKING THE MOLD

Lying in bed for two months with a broken neck, 18-year-old Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite made a list of 10 goals. Nevermind the fact that he was uncertain to ever play football again after fracturing his sixth vertebra at the bottom of a waterslide.

And forget cautious optimism. These were remarkable dreams even for a boy raised on the football mania of Brazil — especially one who had needed a medical program and who had yet to make the starting lineup of the junior squad of São Paulo Football Club. The list began with "Return to football" and continued upward to finish with "Compete in the World Cup" and "Transfer to a big club in Italy or Germany."

About two weeks after returning to football, he was called up to São Paulo's professional team. With 10 minutes remaining, he was subbed into the finals of the prestigious Rio-São Paulo Tournament. São Paulo trailed Botafogo 1-0 when the



midfielder received a high, looping pass, flipped it behind the back of a defender and fired a low shot beneath the diving goalkeeper. Two minutes later he netted another low rocket to clinch the championship as TV announcers shouted "Goooooooooooooooooal!"

Brazil had met Kaká. (The nickname, pronounced Ka-kah', came when his older brother couldn't pronounce his name.) He claimed his starting spot for São Paulo and within two years could cross off the entire list of goals, including playing for Brazil's World Cup champions. Soon, Kaká stood at the top of world football, sweeping its highest individual honors: the Ballon d'Or for best in the world and the FIFA World Player of the Year.

"I have been very blessed with success ... It may seem that I have everything. Due to my wealth and fame, some people ask why or if I still need Jesus," he said. "The answer is simple: I need Jesus every day of my life. His Word, the Bible, tells me that without Him, I can't do anything. I really believe that. The ability I have to play football and all that has resulted from it are gifts from God."

Kaká's popularity continued higher and higher in football-mad Brazil following his breakout game. The press loved reporting on him, and he was an instant hero. After the initial shock, Kaká developed a warm accessibility with the press and fans, but he avoided the limelight and temptations of the nightclubs and paparazzi scene. As had always been the case, his family and faith were his anchor.

"Many people think that I became a follower of Christ after the [waterslide] accident, but that is not true," Kaká says. "My parents always taught me the Bible and its values, and also about Jesus Christ and faith."

Being baptized at 12 was an important milestone for Kaká and one that had a profound effect on his young spiritual life. "Little by little, I stopped simply hearing people talk about the Jesus my parents taught me," he says. "There came a time when I wanted to live my own experiences with God."

Kaká's accomplishments on the field obviously brought him worldwide prominence but his personal reputation has also drawn widespread attention as a novelty among international sports stars. Pick a professional athlete stereotype and Kaká contradicts it.

For example, Kaká and his wife, Caroline, famously married as virgins and have talked about it openly in the press.

"It was one of the greatest challenges in my life because we made a choice which wasn't easy," Kaká says. "We spent a lot of time praying and walking closely with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It was a great challenge, but it was really good to have waited. Sex is a great blessing from God for the pleasure of both husband and wife after marriage, and it is not the trivial or casual thing it has become nowadays."

After playing in four elite professional leagues and 92 appearances with the Brazilian national team, Kaká leaves little doubt that he is all about Jesus.

# WORLD CUP





# GROUP F

## GERMANY



The No. 1 team in the world, Germany won the 2014 World Cup, its fourth title. With another championship, the Germans would tie Brazil for the most World Cup titles.

## MEXICO



Hirving Lozano's header in qualifying play helped Mexico to a 1-0 win over Panama to advance to its seventh straight World Cup.

## SWEDEN



Striker Marcus Berg scored eight goals in World Cup qualifying play, including four in one match. He has filled the void left by the retirement of Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

## SOUTH KOREA



Ki Sung-Yueng leads South Korea, which has advanced to every World Cup since 1986. The team's best finish was fourth place in 2002.

# LEE YOUNG-PYO

# OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S CALL BRINGS NEW LIFE

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come." — 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Growing up in Korea, I really had no religion. The idea of God was a fairytale to me. Then, some friends who were followers of Christ shared their faith. I still had doubts, but was eager to learn more. I felt that God needed to reveal Himself to me.

When I honestly searched for the truth through reading and close friends, I was amazed. God showed me that He



did exist, and my heart was changed forever. I wanted Him in my life. After that, I began to study the Bible and have grown to know Him more and more.

Now everything in my life is different, even my thinking. With mental anguish, I sought answers on the problem of my sinful nature; and God answered those questions with the only possible solution — Jesus.

He is the one who takes away our sins! Before Christ, I struggled with fear and worried about death. Now, I understand that Jesus died for my sins, and I am free from worry and fear.

My life has completely changed. Because people know I am a believer, many ask, “How much does your belief in God help you in football?” My answer is, “Playing football is helpful to my belief in God, rather than God helping me play football.” God is the most important thing to me — not football. Football is only one of many ways I can glorify and serve my Lord.

Winning or losing can mean everything in football. All I can do is prepare and play my best. And when my efforts are given for Him, I can accept the results joyfully, for I believe that He is in control.

There is a man in the Bible named Matthew, who was a tax collector and had little outward appearance of a religious life. But Jesus changed that. While Matthew was at work one day, Jesus called out to him, “Follow Me!” So he got up and followed Him (Matthew 9:9).

Matthew’s life changed forever when he was obedient to God’s call, even to the point of receiving a new name and career. From Levi the tax collector, he became Matthew, one of the 12 disciples.

Read the full powerful story of Matthew’s obedience to God and becoming one of the biggest difference-makers known for Christ! Take time to read the Book of Matthew.

For more on obedience, read in the book called Romans (chapter 6, verse 4) and 1 Peter (chapter 1, verse 3).

*Written by Lee Young-Pyo, a defender for South Korea who played for FC Seoul, PSV Eindhoven, Tottenham Hotspur, Borussia Dortmund, Al-Hilal and the Vancouver Whitecaps, in addition to 127 caps for South Korea.*

*\* These references come from the Bible, which, includes the essential details on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible is divided into books, which are further divided into chapters and verses. For example, John 3:16 refers to the Book of John, the third chapter and sixteenth verse.*

# WORLD CUP





# GROUP G

## BELGIUM

3

WORLD  
RANKING

The young trio of Eden Hazard, Romelu Lukaku and Kevin de Bruyne has Belgium in the World Cup for a second consecutive time after failing to qualify in 2006 and 2010.

## ENGLAND

13

WORLD  
RANKING

England hasn't lost a World Cup qualifier in the last eight years (38 games). But its worst World Cup performance came in 2014, when it lost its first two pool matches.

## TUNISIA

14

WORLD  
RANKING

Tunisia is in the World Cup for the first time in 12 years led by goalie Aymen Mathlouthi, who leads his team in international appearances.

## PANAMA

55

WORLD  
RANKING

Panama will be making its first appearance in the World Cup after Roman Torres knocked home a winner against Costa Rica in qualifying play.

## BRIAN KIDD



# KEEPING A GODLY PERSPECTIVE

*"Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth." — Colossians 3:2\**

I have spent a lifetime in football, beginning my career at 17 years old with Manchester United. Two years later, I had the privilege of helping Manchester United win the European Cup as the winning goal scorer. It was truly a great honor. From there, I went on to Manchester City, Arsenal and other British and various American teams before becoming a coach and finally, an assistant manager.

Being a coach is a lovely job. I didn't originally plan to take on that role, but I have really enjoyed it. It requires great enthusiasm and a lot of hard work. I have had the pleasure of coaching at both Manchester United and Manchester City, where I formerly played.



Football has evolved since my days as a player. The Premier League is now seen all over the world and has become a big business. It's quite exciting, but with all that money comes a lot of pressure and demands on teams. It is easy to let winning and losing become more important than the love of the game. How one deals with winning and losing is what's important.

My faith helps me keep perspective and reminds me that there are more important things than football and winning. As I deal with pressure, I often find myself praying, "Thy will be done," and then hand things over to God. I may not get answers right away, but over time, God's plan becomes more clear.

As a young boy, my family attended church faithfully. Today, I still go to church weekly, and more if time permits. It provides much-needed time of tranquility, reflection and prayer. A lot of today's generation has no religion, and I find that to be very sad. It is comforting to believe in the Almighty God. He provides the perspective and stability needed to deal with life's ups and downs, as well as the pressure of professional sports.

In Colossians 3:2, the Apostle Paul encourages us to, "Set [our] minds on what is above, not on what is on the Earth." Paul was repeatedly persecuted and jailed for his faith, yet was able to look past his difficult earthly circumstances to focus on God's promises.

His words are an encouraging and appropriate reminder that focusing on Christ will give us the strength to deal with the stress and pressure we may experience in life.

*Written by Brian Kidd, an assistant coach for Manchester City. He has also coached Manchester United and the England national team. As a player he played for Manchester United, Arsenal, Manchester City and Everton, among others.*

*\* These references come from the Bible, which, includes the essential details on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible is divided into books, which are further divided into chapters and verses. For example, John 3:16 refers to the Book of John, the third chapter and sixteenth verse.*





# GROUP H

## POLAND

10

WORLD  
RANKING

Poland captain Robert Lewandowski scored 16 goals in World Cup qualifying matches, setting a European record for most goals in one qualifying campaign.

## COLOMBIA

16

WORLD  
RANKING

James Rodriguez netted six goals in five games and won the Golden Boot award at the 2014 World Cup, where Colombia advanced to the quarterfinals for the first time.

## SENEGAL

28

WORLD  
RANKING

Senegal coach Aliou Cisse was the captain of Senegal's 2002 World Cup team, which reached the quarterfinals in its only other World Cup appearance.

## JAPAN

60

WORLD  
RANKING

Just two months before the World Cup, Japan fired coach Vahid Halilhodzic and replaced him with Akira Nishino, the Japanese soccer association's technical director.

# JUN MARQUES DAVIDSON

## WHEN FOOTBALL BECOMES AN AVENUE

To Japanese footballer Jun Marques Davidson, religion always seemed far too complicated. The rules. The regulations. The structure.

Raised in Tokyo, Japan, he had little interest in Christ, even though his mother was a follower of Christ. Instead, he had his sights set on one thing: football.

There were early signs he could be special, and at 15 years old he left Japan to play football at an international school in England. Success, money and fame became his primary drive in life. But it was in England, while he was alone, barely able to communicate, that he realized there may be more to life than football.

"It was tough to be alone in another country," Davidson said. "But it was there that I began to understand my own



need for God. I started attending church on my own and learned more about what it meant to be a follower of Christ. I committed my life to Him and found a peace and confidence I had not felt before. My purpose for going to England had been for football, but His purpose was to shape me for my future."

After England, Davidson and his family moved to California, where he was surrounded by other strong believers on the team. It was as if God was bringing him to maturation after the start of faith he had in England.

"Again, God was shaping me by providing Godly friends, fellowship and encouragement," Davidson said.

Following schooling, Davidson moved back to Japan to play professional football — and it was a clash of two worlds. When he left Japan four years prior, his heart and mind were in a completely different state. He was selfishly driven. When he returned four years later, he was becoming more of a selfless person, and he wanted football to be an opportunity to impact others who had hardly heard of Jesus Christ.

"I think God created me as a football player to do something greater, to serve God," Davidson shared. "There are not many followers of Christ in Japan, so it is very hard to follow and study and have the solid faith in Christ. I believe God took me to England and to California to put me in a situation and environment where I saw a lot of followers of Christ and people with great faith. And so that helped me inside as a person to grow and learn more about God."

His return home made him realize how much he had changed, how much work God had done in him, and how much God wanted to do something through him.

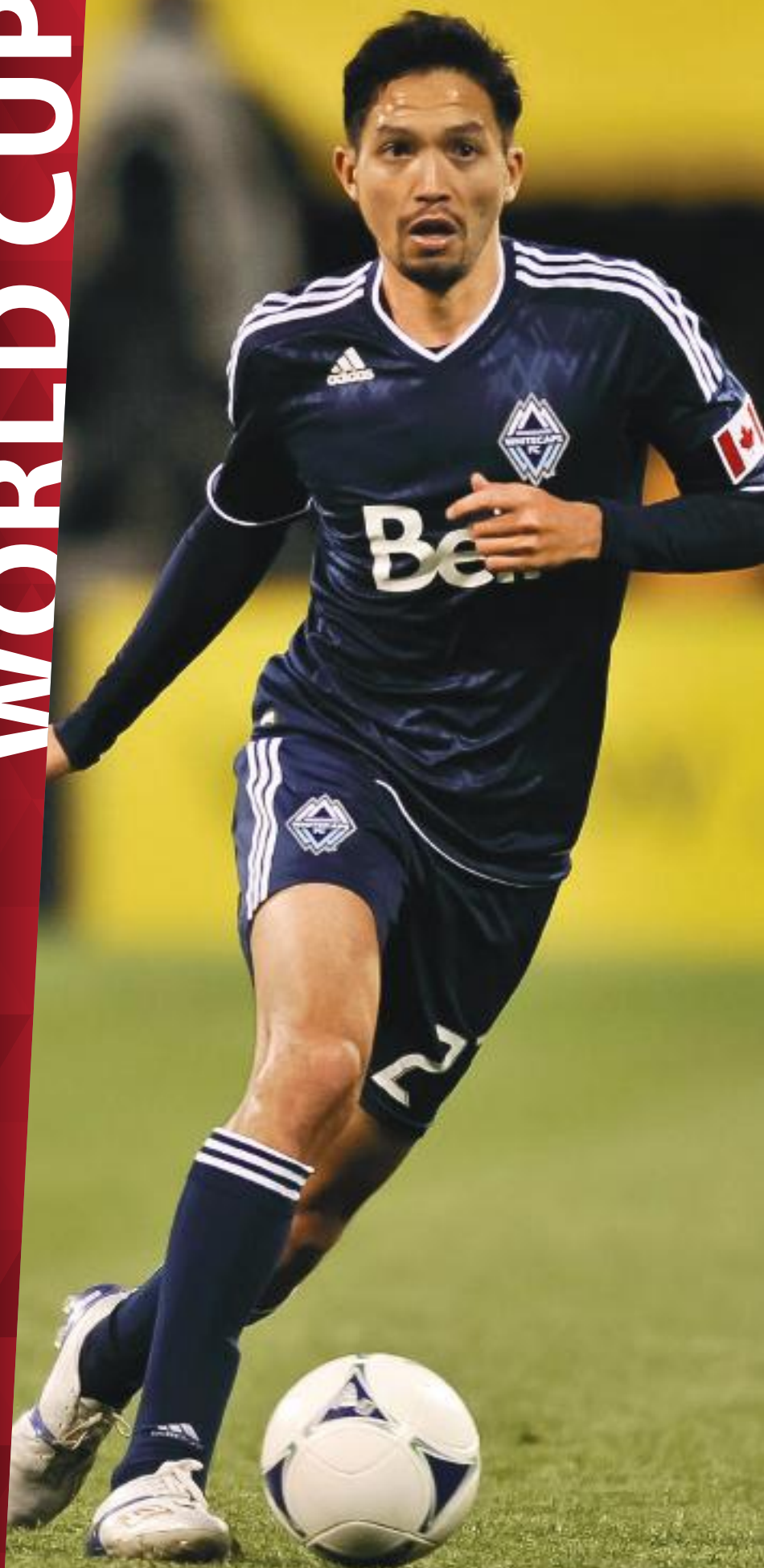
"Since giving my life to God, my perspective has changed," Davidson said. "I began to think about how I could use my role to share my faith in Christ. God was showing me that my career was less about me and all about Him."

Once he moved back to Japan, the defensive midfielder's performance was steady. He spent his next few seasons playing in Japan, followed by playing in Canada and the United States, then a season in Thailand, then back to the United States.

"Serving God through sport is important to me," he said. "I try to share the Gospel, serve others, and be an example. It's not always easy when the competition gets tough, but even then I seek forgiveness and pray God will use me. My career is in His hands and I seek to follow Him wherever that may lead me."

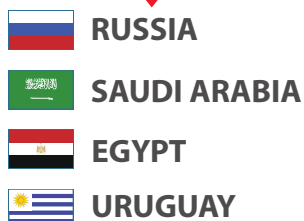
Davidson's surrender to a much better Author of his story has led to both purpose and peace.

# WORLD CUP



# WORLD CUP GROUPS

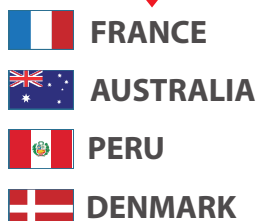
## GROUP A



## GROUP B



## GROUP C



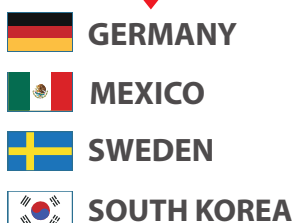
## GROUP D



## GROUP E



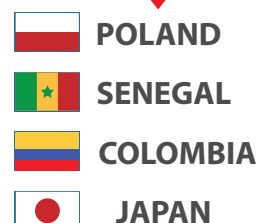
## GROUP F



## GROUP G



## GROUP H



# KNOCKOUT STAGE





# OUR PROBLEM, GOD'S SOLUTION

## OUR YOU CAN KNOW CHRIST PERSONALLY

1. "God created mankind in His own image ... God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:27, 31).  
God made human beings with personal and relational qualities like His own (Genesis 1:26). But something went terribly wrong.
2. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).  
Our sins against a good and holy God have broken our relationship with Him (Isaiah 59:2).
3. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).  
When humankind chose to rebel against God, sin poisoned the world. People lost their relationship with God, and with it their happiness. But God loved us so much He sent us Jesus, fully God and fully man, to deliver us from death and give us life (John 3:16).
4. "God demonstrates His own love toward us ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).  
Jesus went to the cross to pay the price for our sins. He rose from the grave, conquering sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
5. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).  
God's greatest gift is a restored relationship with Himself, delivering us from hell and granting us entry into Heaven (John 3:36). This gift depends not on our merit but solely on Christ's work of grace for us on the cross (Titus 3:5).
6. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).  
We must admit our wrongdoing, and ask God's forgiveness: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Then we are to affirm to others that the resurrected Jesus is our Lord.
7. "Whoever hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24).  
The life we long for is freely offered to us in Christ. We can believe His promise and call on Him to save us, humbly accepting His gift of eternal life: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

*If you believe Jesus Christ loves you, and would like to ask Him to forgive you and receive salvation, pray this prayer with me. It's as simple as A-B-C: Admit, Believe, Confess.*

*"Dear God, I ADMIT that I'm a sinner and the penalty of my sin is death. I BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that He died and rose from the dead for my sin. And I CONFESS Jesus as my Savior. Please forgive me. I repent of my sin and surrender my life to You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."*

# ALEXANDER SAMEDOV 19

