Spain’s hard-fought 1-0 extra-time victory over Argentina on Sunday didn’t just earn them a second star on their jersey, it cemented an unprecedented era of global footballing dominance. With the European Championship, Olympic gold, and the Women’s World Cup already in their possession, La Roja confirmed beyond any lingering debate that the world’s finest football is currently scripted in Spanish.

Luis de la Fuente’s side captured this World Cup through systematic ball mastery, treating possession not as a cosmetic display, but as their primary defensive weapon. By keeping the ball out of reach, Spain effectively starved Lionel Messi of touches, neutralizing Argentina’s deadliest weapon for the vast majority of the 120 minutes.

The statistics back up their control: across eight matches in North America, Spain surrendered a single goal, a solitary Charles De Ketelaere header during their quarterfinal clash with Belgium.

While this squad lacked the bruising, physical center-back profile of Carles Puyol or Gerard Piqué from their 2010 triumph, 19-year-old Pau Cubarsi and Aymeric Laporte compensated with positional intelligence and finesse. Behind them, goalkeeper Unai Simón operated with calm assurance. Simón’s readiness to charge out of his box snuffed out a dangerous sixth-minute run from Messi, repeating a crucial sweeper-keeper intervention he executed against France’s Kylian Mbappé in the semifinals.

Much of the pre-tournament spotlight burned on 19-year-old prodigy Lamine Yamal on the right wing. Yet, while Yamal remained a constant threat, the match shifted decisively through squad depth and tactical leverage.

The key turning point arrived when Cubarsi drew a red card from Argentina’s Enzo Fernández, leaving the World Cup holders a man down through added time and extra time.

Spain capitalized on the numerical advantage with a team sequence: Lamine Yamal laid the ball off to right-back Pedro Porro, then Porro swung a curling, back-post delivery deep into the penalty area. Left-winger Nico Williams, who terrorized Argentine defender Nahuel Molina after coming off the bench, headed the ball down perfectly for Ferran Torres to smash home a left-footed half-volley past Emiliano Martínez.

Cubarsi’s breakout tournament earned him the FIFA Young Player award. At 19.

Football analytics often struggle to capture what makes Rodri the world’s premier central midfielder. His final stat line across eight tournament matches reads zero goals and zero assists, yet his influence on Spain’s triumph was total.

Returning from major knee surgery, the Manchester City anchor struggled initially to match his 2024 Ballon d’Or form, but manager Pep Guardiola’s prediction held true: Rodri hit his stride precisely when the tournament reached its climax. He dictated the tempo, broke up Argentine transitions, and directed traffic until making way for Martín Zubimendi in the 99th minute.

While FIFA President Gianni Infantino hailed the event as the greatest in history, the expanded 48-team, 104-match format stretched over five weeks left a mixed impression.

While lower-ranked nations brought enthusiasm, unheralded storylines have always emerged naturally within a 32-team setup. Furthermore, the spectacle of the final was frequently interrupted by artificial hydration breaks and a commercialized 27-minute halftime show, distractions that halted the match’s natural momentum. High-stakes international football rarely requires superficial entertainment to hold an audience.

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Defending a World Cup title remains one of the most formidable challenges in professional sport. For Argentina, the defeat revived memories of past heartbreak on American soil, reminiscent of their 2016 Copa América Centenario penalty loss to Chile in East Rutherford.

Ultimately, Argentina’s downfall came down to supply. His teammates simply couldn’t deliver the ball into spaces where Messi could manipulate the outcome.

Spain’s collective squeeze proved absolute, bringing a memorable tournament to a fitting, golden end.