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COPPER QUEENS SEEK ADVANTAGE IN UGANDA

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CRESTED CRANES AIM TO MAKE HOME ADVANTAGE COUNT AGAINST ZAMBIA

By Lucky Chama



Uganda's Crested Cranes will look to make home advantage count when they host Zambia's Copper Queens on Thursday in the first leg of the 2028 CAF Women's Olympic Games qualifiers at Hamz Stadium, Nakivubo.

The match is scheduled to kick off at 16:00 local time, with Uganda entering the encounter on the back of a positive build-up and a full squad now assembled in camp.

Assistant coach Ahumuza Collins says the team is satisfied with its preparations and believes the players are ready for the challenge posed by Zambia.

"We have had good preparations and now have the full squad together. The mood in camp is positive, the players are motivated, and we are expecting a good performance tomorrow," Collins said.

With Uganda hosting the opening leg, Collins stressed the importance of using the home crowd to give the team an advantage before the return fixture in Zambia.

"Playing the first leg at home is important for us. We have to make the most of the home advantage and use the support of our fans to give us an extra push," she said.

Collins acknowledged the quality of the Copper Queens but said Uganda has experienced players capable of competing at the highest level.

"We know Zambia is a good team and we respect their quality. However, we also have experienced players who have played at this level before, and we believe they can match the challenge," she added.

The Crested Cranes will also draw confidence from previous encounters with Zambia.

Uganda defeated the Copper Queens 1-0 in the third-place playoff at the 2018 COSAFA Women's Championship before recording a 5-0 victory in an international friendly in Marrakech in 2022.

Goalkeeper Ruth Aturo said the positive atmosphere in camp has further lifted the team ahead of the match.

"The feeling in camp is good. The players are excited, and we are looking forward to giving our best tomorrow," Aturo said.

The Simba Queens goalkeeper also highlighted the unity within the squad, particularly the relationship between experienced players and younger members.

"We are a united group. The experienced players are supporting the younger ones, and we share ideas and learn from each other. That has helped us build a strong bond as a team," she said.

Aturo has also called on Ugandan supporters to turn out in large numbers and provide the team with strong backing.

"We call upon our fans to come in big numbers and support us. We will give our best on the pitch and do everything we can to make the country proud," she said.

The Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA) has confirmed free entrance for fans attending Thursday's fixture, giving supporters an opportunity to rally behind the Crested Cranes ahead of Uganda's Independence Day.

Uganda will then travel to Zambia for the return leg at Levy Mwanawasa Stadium in Ndola on October 13, with the two teams battling for progression to the next round of Olympic qualification.

COPPER QUEENS TARGET THIRD STRAIGHT OLYMPICS IN HONOUR OF MWAPE

By Lucky Chama



The Copper Queens will begin their bid for a third consecutive Olympic appearance with interim head coach Charles Haalubono determined to lead Zambia to qualification for the 2028 Los Angeles Games and honour the legacy of late former coach Bruce Mwape.

Zambia face Uganda in the first leg of the second-round qualifier this afternoon at Hamz Stadium in Kampala, with the match scheduled for 15:00 CAT.

Haalubono says the team is focused on winning and continuing the Olympic qualification record established under Mwape, who guided Zambia to the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, held in 2021, and the 2024 Paris Games.

"We'll try by all means to do the best job for our country and represent our people by winning and qualifying the team to the Olympics," Haalubono said.

"I've been there twice, so we have to continue. And I always say this should be an honour to our late former head coach, Mr Bruce Mwape, who qualified the team twice for the Olympics."

Haalubono has assembled a squad built around players who have spent considerable time together, and believes that familiarity will help the team ahead of the Uganda encounter.

"The players are ready to play. I know most of these players have been with us for such a long time, so I think bonding will not be a problem because we have been together," he said.

The coach acknowledged that the number of professional players available for selection had reduced, with some players recovering from injuries while others have not been getting sufficient playing time at their clubs.

He, however, said the door remains open for players who regain their fitness and form.

"Wherever they will be ready, we will call them. So it's not something to say we have completely sidelined them," Haalubono said.

He challenged the players in camp to fight for their places and give their best for the national team.

"For those who have come, they have to fight for their country, do their best, because it's not about an individual. They have to put in their best for them to be picked. So it's a challenge to everyone," he said.

Haalubono also wants the Copper Queens to produce organised football, emphasising the importance of competing at a high level through good passing and coordination.

"What I can say is we are going to play good football. We are supposed to compete at that level. And for you to be able to compete at that higher level, you must play good football, passing game, well-coordinated football," he said.

Zambia will be seeking a positive result in Kampala before the return leg as they pursue a place at a third successive Olympic Games.

BANDA: COPPER QUEENS TARGET OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

By Lucky Chama



Copper Queens captain Barbra Banda says Zambia's focus is firmly on defeating Uganda and advancing to the next round of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games qualifiers.

The Copper Queens face Uganda this afternoon at Hamz Stadium in Kampala in the first leg of the second-round qualifier, with Banda insisting that the team is not underestimating its opponents.

Banda said the squad had received a warm welcome from the Federation of Uganda and entered camp in high spirits ahead of the crucial encounter.

"Thank you very much. As the coach has already said, we thank the Federation of Uganda for welcoming us here, and the morale is high in camp. We are looking forward to tomorrow's game," Banda said.

She said the Copper Queens have a clear objective of winning the first leg and putting themselves in a strong position to progress.

"As a team, we have one goal, and that is to win, so that we can qualify for the next round, so that we can qualify to go to the Olympics again," she said.

Banda, however, warned against taking Uganda lightly, saying the growth of women's football across the continent has made every match increasingly competitive.

"I would honestly say, we are not underestimating Uganda. It's not that Zambia is ahead of Uganda. Women's football has developed so well in all the countries," she said.

"We know it won't be an easy game, but we are pulling up our stockings because we know what it takes to qualify to the Olympics."

The captain said the team was taking its Olympic qualification campaign one match at a time, with the immediate focus on Uganda before attention shifts to the return leg in Zambia and subsequent rounds.

"We are taking each game at a step. So, this time around, we are focusing on Uganda, before we go further to the team that we are going to meet next," Banda said.

"We are looking forward to tomorrow's game for now, and the return leg in Zambia."

Zambia have qualified for the Olympics on two previous occasions, and Banda says the team is determined to progress further in its latest campaign.

"When we qualify, we are looking forward to go further to the group stage, as we have qualified two times. The third one, at least we need to proceed to the next round of the Olympics," she said.

Banda also played down the idea that the Copper Queens depend on individual stars, saying every player has a role to play and must compete for a place in the team.

"Our team has got no special players. We are all equal," she said.

The captain praised the young players coming through the national team and said their emergence has also challenged the more experienced players to raise their standards.

"Our youngsters are so much talented, I can assure you. And I have to fight for that position because I can't just come in and say I have it all in the team, because we have competition," Banda said.

"The young ones that are coming up, new faces, they are so challenging. So, I need to pull up my stockings, and the experience that I have, I have to bring it to the team."

Banda said the ultimate objective was collective success.

"It has to add value to the team. So, we are all together. We fight together," she said.



CHISHIMBA LEADS ZPL WOMEN'S GOLDEN BOOT RACE

By Lucky Chama



The race for the ZPL Women's Super League Golden Boot has already heated up after just three weeks, with Trident FC striker Elizabeth Chishimba setting the early pace with four goals.

Chishimba has emerged as the leading scorer at the end of Week 3, but faces strong competition from a group of players who are just one goal behind her.

Christine Kabandama of Nchanga Rangers Queens FC, Nowela Mwanza, Blessings Ngonga both from Konkola Blades, Gift Mulenga (Indeni Roses) and Christine Zimba (National Assembly) have each scored three goals, keeping the pressure firmly on the Trident forward.

The five players are separated from the top spot by just one goal, meaning a strong performance in the next round of matches could see any of them move to the top of the scoring charts.

Behind the leading group are Phidah Muzuwa, Cindy Banda, Temwani Lungu and Maylan Mulenga, who have each scored two goals.

The early scoring statistics point to an exciting battle for individual honours, with several players already showing their attacking quality in the opening weeks of the transitional season.

Chishimba's four-goal tally gives her an early advantage, but with the campaign still in its infancy, the Golden Boot race remains wide open.

The Trident striker will now be looking to maintain her scoring form and extend her lead, while the chasing pack will be eager to close the gap.

The competition is expected to intensify as the season progresses, with more matches providing opportunities for the leading scorers to add to their tallies.

For now, Chishimba is the player to catch, but the chasing pack is closing in.



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MALAWI'S SCORCHERS REWARDED K15.9 MILLION

By FT Reporter



The Malawi National Women's Football Team, the Scorchers, have been rewarded with K15.9 million by a group of Malawians living in the United States in recognition of their impressive performance at the Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) and historic qualification for the FIFA Women's World Cup.

The money will be shared among the players and members of the technical panel as a token of appreciation for the team's achievements.

The group brings together Scorchers supporters living in the USA through a WhatsApp platform and has previously supported the national team following its achievements.

The supporters also rewarded the Scorchers after their success at the 2024 COSAFA Women's Championship.

Group spokesperson Tonny Chirwa said the latest gesture was inspired by the pride the team's achievements had brought to Malawians living abroad.

"We are ardent football enthusiasts and we felt so proud of the Scorchers' achievements at AFCON. We felt we should come in and celebrate with them," said Chirwa.

Football Association of Malawi (FAM) Communications Officer Collins Nsunza thanked the group for recognising the efforts and sacrifices of the players and technical panel.

"We are grateful to the Scorchers supporters in the USA for this wonderful gesture. It demonstrates how the achievements of the team have united and inspired Malawians even beyond our borders," said Nsunza.

Nsunza said the support would mean a lot to the players and technical panel as they continue their international commitments.

"Such support means a lot to the players and technical panel because it shows that their hard work and sacrifices are being recognised," he said.

He encouraged other individuals, groups and corporate partners to continue supporting the Scorchers as the team builds on its WAFCON performance and prepares for future international assignments.

VISA HITCH THREATENS KENYA'S WORLD MOUNTAIN CUP HITCH

By The Star

The World Mountain Running Association (WMRA) World Cup could end in an anticlimax this weekend after a visa hitch left several leading Kenyan runners stranded ahead of the Grand Finale in Canada.

Current women's leader Ruth Gitonga, second-placed Joyce Njeru and men's runner-up Richard Atuya are among the Kenyans who have yet to secure Canadian visas for the final in Mont-Sainte-Anne, Quebec.

The 13th edition of the Defi des Couleurs will feature the MSA Vertical, a 5km race on Saturday, followed by the 11km MSA Classic Up and Down on Sunday. "I applied for the visa, and I'm still waiting. I'm crossing my fingers," said Njeru, a two-time World Cup winner.

The visa problems have also affected several Run2gether On Trail athletes, including Michael Saoli, Patrick Kipng'eno and Elijah Kariuki. Men's leader Philemon Ombogo Kiriago is also unlikely to travel for the finale despite holding



a Canadian visa.

Kiriago, the reigning World Mountain and Trail Running (up and down) champion, leads the standings with 304 points, 14 ahead of Atuya. Saoli is third on 223 points, followed by Kipng'eno on 220.

Paul Machoka is fifth with 184 points, Ephantus Njeri seventh on 172, and Kariuki eighth with 169. With Atuya, Saoli, Kipng'eno and Kariuki still waiting for visas, Kiriago is set to retain the World Cup title.

In the women's standings, Gitonga leads on 384 points, with Njeru second on 310 and Great Britain's Kirsty Dickson third on 217. Gitonga and Njeru are expected to retain their positions even if they miss the finale.

FAWUZ LAUNCHES PITCH OF THE MONTH CAMPAIGN

By Lucky Chama



The Footballers and Allied Workers Union of Zambia (FAWUZ) has launched the Pitch of the Month competition aimed at improving playing surfaces and reducing avoidable injuries among footballers.

The initiative, launched in partnership with Zanaco Bank Plc, will see Zambia Premier League (ZPL) captains assess the condition of pitches at away matches and rate them on a scale of one to 10.

Speaking at the launch, FAWUZ General Secretary Joe Kaunda said the initiative was designed to complement the work being done by the Football Association of Zambia (FAZ) and the ZPL in inspecting and improving stadia.

Kaunda said the union's involvement was driven by its responsibility to protect the welfare of footballers, particularly from injuries caused by poor playing surfaces.

"As we take care of players' welfare and ensure that all necessary equipment and facilities required for the players' successful and safe performance on the pitch are available, we have to ensure that players are protected from avoidable injuries due to poor pitch conditions," Kaunda said.

He said the competition would also motivate groundsmen and pitch managers to improve playing surfaces while recognising their contribution to the game.

"We want to motivate the groundsmen and ground managers and ultimately clubs and owners of the facilities to put in extra effort in ensuring improved standards of the pitch — the true office of our players," he said.

Under the competition, visiting team captains will grade the pitch after each match, with scores accumulated throughout the season.

The ground that collects the highest number of points each month will receive a K10,000 prize, which will be awarded to the pitch manager responsible for maintaining the playing surface.

State-owned facilities, including Heroes Stadium and Levy Mwanawasa Stadium, will not participate in the competition due to their access to state funding for pitch maintenance.

At the end of the season, the competition will culminate in the Pitch of the Year award, with K20,000 going to the winner and K10,000 to the runner-up.

Kaunda said the initiative was also intended to recognise groundsmen, who often work behind the scenes but play an important role in ensuring matches are played on quality surfaces.

Meanwhile, ZPL Chief Executive Officer Joseph Chimpampwe, who represented FAZ General Secretary Charles Chakatazya at the launch, welcomed the initiative.

Chimpampwe said the competition would strengthen efforts already being undertaken by the ZPL to improve pitch standards.

"Over the last three seasons, the League has invested in pitch managers through specialised workshops conducted in Chipata, Solwezi and, most recently, Choma, and such programmes are important in equipping pitch managers with the knowledge and skills needed to maintain quality playing surfaces," Chimpampwe said.

He said the FAWUZ initiative would further motivate pitch managers to improve their standards.

The campaign will also recognise media coverage, with K5,000 awards proposed for the best and most consistent coverage in electronic media, print media and social media/blogging, amounting to K15,000 at the end of the season.

Kaunda said FAWUZ would continue working with FAZ and the ZPL on other issues affecting footballers, including insurance and, ultimately, pension schemes for players.


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ZTA STEPS UP COACH DEVELOPMENT WITH PLAY TENNIS COURSE

By Lucky Chama



The Zambia Tennis Association (ZTA) has stepped up efforts to strengthen the country's coaching base after successfully training and assessing coaches through a four-day Play Tennis Course in Lusaka.

Held from October 1 to 4, 2026, the course focused on equipping coaches with the skills needed to introduce players to tennis and deliver effective lessons at grassroots level.

The programme was delivered by World Tennis-certified Play Tennis Tutors Sydney Mateta and Emmanuel Mwenya Chewe, combining theoretical learning with practical coaching activities.

The participants were given opportunities to develop their coaching techniques and learn how to structure lessons for players taking their first steps in the sport.

On the final day, World Tennis Southern Africa Development Officer Tapiwa Masunga assessed the participants as they conducted group lessons.

The practical assessments enabled the coaches to demonstrate their ability to organise and deliver structured sessions while applying the knowledge gained during the four-day programme.

The course is part of ZTA's continued efforts to raise coaching standards and strengthen the player development pathway across Zambia.

The association said investing in coaches was critical to creating a strong foundation for players beginning their tennis journey and ensuring they receive quality instruction from the outset.

A stronger coaching base is also expected to support the broader development of tennis by improving the quality of training available to young and emerging players.

ZTA thanked Mateta, Chewe, Masunga and all the participants for their contribution and commitment to developing the sport.

The association said continued investment in coach education would remain important in building a sustainable tennis development structure across the country.

MUFULIRA LEOPARDS ONE WIN AWAY FROM 2026 NATIONAL LEAGUE TITLE

By Lucky Chama



Mufulira Leopards are one successful hunt away from being crowned 2026 Zambia Rugby Union National League champions, with victory over Kitwe Playing Fields (KPF) on Saturday enough to secure the title.

The Leopards head into the decisive encounter at Kitwe Playing Fields sitting comfortably at the top of the standings with 54 points from 13 matches, having won 11 games and lost just two.

A bonus-point victory over KPF would take Mufulira to 59 points, putting the title beyond the reach of the chasing pack and confirming the Leopards as champions with a game to spare.

The bonus point, awarded for scoring four or more tries, could therefore prove decisive in what has been an impressive campaign for the Mufulira side.

Green Buffaloes and Red Arrows are currently tied on 46 points, although Buffaloes have played 13 matches compared to Arrows' 10. Nkwazi are fourth on 39 points, while Diggers are also on 39.

That means the chasing teams can still influence the final standings, but the Leopards have put themselves in a commanding position by consistently collecting victories throughout the season.

Mufulira's numbers underline their dominance. They have scored 307 points and conceded 155, giving them a healthy +152 points difference.

Their 11 wins are also comfortably the most in the league, while their two defeats remain the fewest alongside Red Arrows, who have also lost twice.

The challenge on Saturday, however, is not simply about securing another victory but completing what has been a remarkable campaign in style.

KPF sit at the bottom of the table with no wins from 12 matches and just six points, but the Leopards will know that league deciders can carry their own pressure, particularly when the opposition has little to lose.

For Mufulira, though, the equation is simple: win with a bonus point and the championship is theirs.

Even a victory without the bonus point would take the Leopards to 58 points and leave the chasing teams needing to rely on their remaining fixtures and results to determine whether the title race stays alive.

The Leopards have already done the hard work, building a sizeable gap at the summit through a combination of victories and attacking production.

Saturday now presents an opportunity to turn that dominance into silverware.

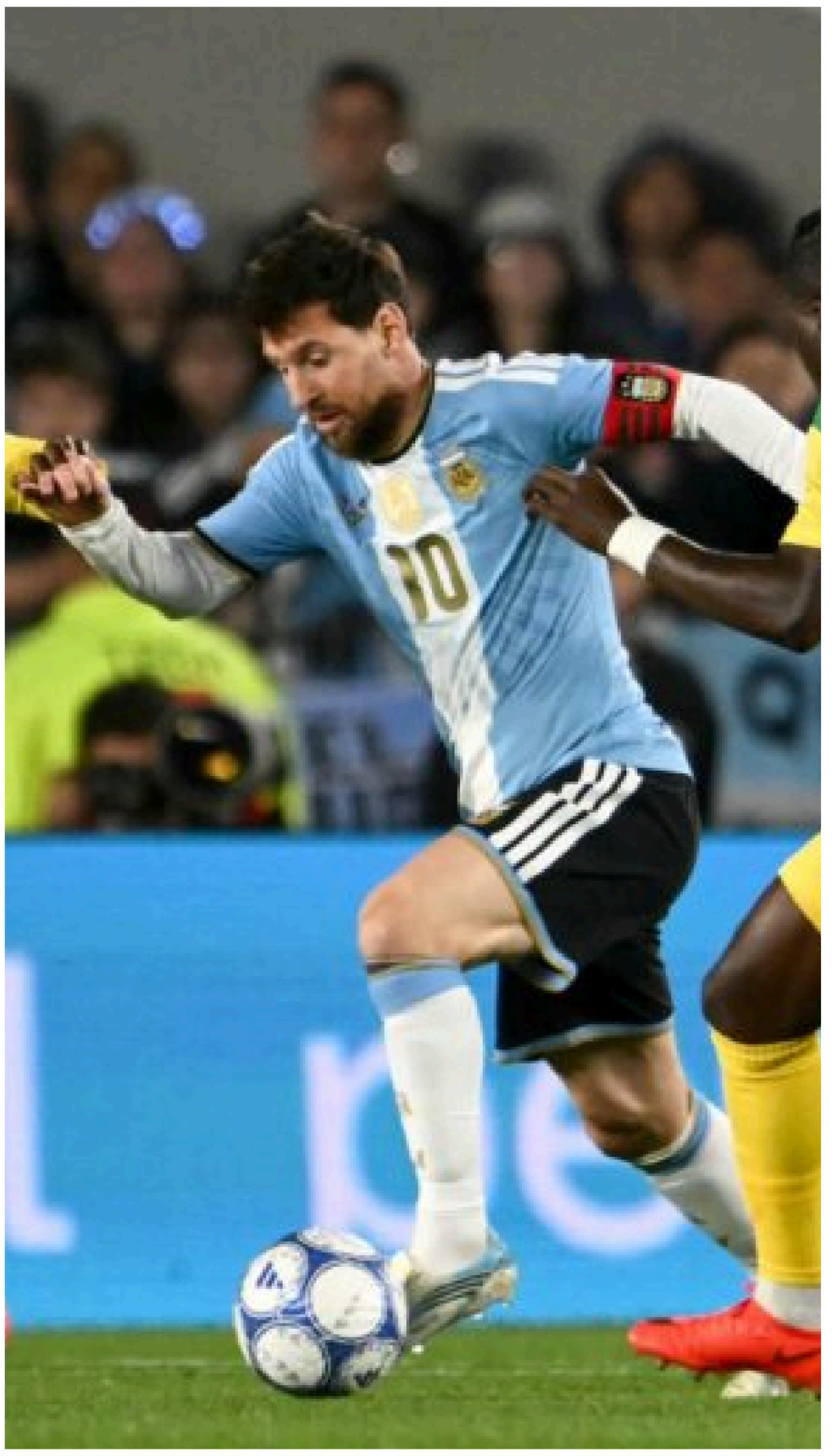
For Green Buffaloes, Red Arrows and the rest of the chasing pack, the Leopards' clash with KPF could effectively become a game for bragging rights if Mufulira complete the required job.

The message from the Leopards camp is therefore clear: one more successful hunt and the pride of Mufulira can finally be crowned 2026 National League champions.

Form is temporary. Class is permanent.

EMOTION, TEARS AS MESSI RETIRES FROM ARGENTINA NATIONAL TEAM

By AFP



Lionel Messi brought the curtain down on his 21-year international career on Tuesday, bidding farewell to adoring Argentina fans in an emotional final appearance for the former world champions in Buenos Aires.

In a perfectly scripted finale, the 39-year-old widely regarded as the greatest football player in history signed off with his 126th international goal in front of 85 000 supporters as Argentina cruised to a 3-0 victory over Benin.

Messi, playing in his record-extending 208th international, also provided the assist for the opening goal scored by veteran Nicolas Otamendi, with Nico Paz also scoring.

But the match was a footnote to the occasion itself, which saw Messi savoring the adulation of the Monumental Stadium crowd one last time for an event which had been billed as 'The Last Tango'.

"It was a huge source of pride for me to defend this jersey for more than 20 years," Messi told fans in a post-match address.

"Not coming anymore is going to be deeply painful. I swear I'd like to play for the rest of my life, because playing for the Argentina national team is the most beautiful thing that can happen to you."

Messi though said he had no regrets about his decision to retire, citing Argentina's gruelling World Cup campaign, which took place as his late father was seriously ill, as a factor.

"Even though I want to be here all my life, I feel that this is the moment. The last World Cup was too much, everything I had to live through," said Messi.

Beforehand, Messi wiped away tears as the bus carrying him and his Argentina team-mates made its way through crowds of well-wishers en route to the stadium.

Messi took the field alongside his three children and received affectionate waves from his wife, Antonela Roccuzzo, and his mother, Celia Cuccittini, who were watching from a VIP box.

Shortly before kick off, a giant Argentina jersey bearing the word "Gracias" (Thank You) above the football superstar's No.10 was laid out on the pitch as the crowd roared their approval.

Messi welled up again as Falklands War veteran Fabio Santana sang the national anthem beside a banner which read — "The Malvinas are Argentine" — the same banner held aloft by players after their 2-1 World Cup semi-final win over England.