

Lionel Messi saves Argentina from Copa America elimination

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Lionel Messi saved Argentina from elimination at the 2019 Copa America with a penalty kick score in the 57th minute of a draw with Paraguay.

Argentina still sits at the bottom of Group B, despite the 1-1 draw Wednesday in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Paraguay drew first blood in the 37th minute after attacking midfielder Miguel Almiron dribbled through the box and fired a pass to Richard Sanchez. The Paraguay midfielder buried a shot into the left side of the net, beating Argentina keeper Franco Armani.

Paraguay held the 1-0 lead through the halftime whistle. A handball from Paraguay's Ivan Piris led to Messi's second half equalizer. Piris' infraction in the box was spotted by VAR. The right back got his hand on a shot by Argentina's Lautaro Martinez.

Messi lined up for the attempt and struck the ball with his left boot, beating Paraguay keeper Gatito Fernandez into the right corner of the net.

"It's a little frustrating not being able to get the win we need to take the next step," Messi told reporters. "We knew this would be difficult, we're still looking for the best group, for the best performance, to keep growing."

Argentina can advance into the final eight with a win in its final Group B match. Messi's squad battles Qatar at 3 p.m. Sunday in Porto Alegre, Brazil.