

France's World Cup win has former Knights celebrating



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On July 15, the French national soccer team beat Croatia in the finals of the World Cup. It was the culmination of a month of intense fandom and intrigue, and it sent all of France into euphoric celebration, including two former McCallum foreign exchange students and soccer players, Vincent McKenna and Antony de Bataille.

“Just about everyone in France was watching the French team in the World Cup and and just about everyone watched the final match,” de Bataille said via email.

De Bataille, like most of France, was fully invested in the national team's World Cup journey even before the final match against Croatia.

“My favorite moment of the World Cup was probably the [opening-round playoff] game against Argentina,” de Bataille said. “It was so intense and such a good game overall. The victory was one of the most satisfying moments in my life.”

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– Antony de Bataille

The celebrations that took place after each game France won were a testament to how much the French people cared about

France's World Cup success.

"When France won their games against Uruguay [in the quarterfinals] and Belgium [semifinals] everybody was going crazy and celebrating as though we had already won the World Cup," said. "People in Paris were chanting, singing, celebrating and acting crazy."

France's win over Belgium in the semifinals set them up for a game against Croatia that would determine which country had the best team in the world. De Bataille was always confident that France would come out of the tournament as the champions.

"

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– Vincent McKenna

"I had no doubt that France would win," de Bataille said. "I was so confident when my American friends asked me if I thought France could actually win it that I always answered that I knew they would."

McKenna, on the other hand, wasn't so sure that France would win as Les Bleus had struggled in the finals of big tournaments before. France lost to Italy in the World Cup Finals in 2006 and lost to Portugal in the finals of the European Championships in 2016.

"During the game I was really stressed and anxious because the two previous finals that France played that I can remember, France lost both," McKenna said.

France took the lead early against Croatia when they scored on an own goal. Croatia tied the score at 1-1 with a goal in the 28th minute of the game, but France soon regained the lead after Antoine Griezmann converted a penalty kick. This time

France kept the lead for the rest of the game, beating Croatia 4-2 to win the World Cup for the first time since 1998. Below is a live reaction video of McKenna as he watched the game with his twin brother Liam and their family and friends.

After the game De Bataille celebrated the win on Champs Elysees Avenue.

“In Paris, streets were full of supporters and multiple fan zones were out of control,” de Bataille said. “I was at the Champs Elysees after the game, and it was mad and so much fun. People from older generations told me that it was reminiscent of when France won the World Cup back in 1998.”



French soccer fans celebrate France's World Cup Championship at the Champs Elysees in Paris on July 15. France beat Croatia 4-2 in the finals to win the trophy. Photo courtesy of Antony de Bataille.

McKenna, who celebrated France's victory at Champs Elysees as well, but also at the Eiffel Tower, says that the celebration that followed France's win in the final was his favorite part of the whole tournament because of what the moment meant for France.

"The best part was the celebration of being World Champions,

McKenna said. "Seeing all of the French people celebrating together was sensational and captivating to experience. It felt like a dream you don't want to wake up from. I really hope to experience the same situation sometime in the future; the atmosphere and the vibe were just magic. This victory will have a huge impact for the French society during the next few years."

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