

Cheers and tears as bleary-eyed fans are caught up in the moment

CAPITAL CELEBRATIONS

By Chris Dutton

A Spanish fiesta erupted in Narrabundah yesterday morning as Spain's champion soccer team claimed its inaugural World Cup.

Nerves turned to ecstasy when Spain secured an extra-time win over the Netherlands 1-0 at Johannesburg in South Africa.

It took 116 minutes before Andres Iniesta scored the match-winning goal. But it was worth the wait and, despite being half a world away from the match, a deafening roar from fans in the Spanish Australian Club of Canberra echoed across the still-sleeping suburb.

Bleary-eyed Spanish supporters sang, danced and chanted when the referee called full-time. Jose Lopera couldn't contain his emotions. "We're winners of the world, world champions," Mr Lopera, of Conder, shouted.

"You have to [cry], I turn 41 next week, this is my birthday present."

"That's the best feeling in the world, unbelievable."

"It's just one big party now, we're European champions, World Cup champions – there's nothing stopping us now."

"Fernando Alonso will win the Formula One, Rafael Nadal is the No 1 [tennis player] in the world, Spain, baby – No 1."

It was a fitting end to the world's biggest sporting event.

More than 250 Spanish supporters packed into the club for the 4.30am kick-off and the party spilled into the streets at the end of the match as the fans basked in their new world-champion status.

But there were moments during the match when they felt the trophy might go to the defiant Netherlands.

For just the second time in a World Cup final, neither team could manage a goal in regulation time.

It set the stage for a tense finish, with nervous fans riding every pass



EMOTIONAL: Nick Proestos, of Florey, left, and Josh Barrera, of Kambah, celebrate in Narrabundah; while Dutch ambassador Willem Andreae watches the match in O'Connor.

and shot as if they were on the field. Every time the Netherlands went on the attack, there were cries of anguish from the agitated Spanish crowd.

When Iniesta put his shot past Dutch goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg four minutes before the match would have been forced into a penalty shoot-out, the atmosphere at the club exploded with excitement.

They danced on tables, chanted "Viva Espana" and "Ole, ole, ole" and embraced each other.

The dreaded vuvuzela made an appearance, but its unmistakable sound was greeted with cheers.

Margaret Bernal, mother of former Socceroo Andrew Bernal, was the first to jump on top of the tables and rev up the crowd.



"I love it," Mrs Bernal said. "I get so bloody nervous watching this, I could not wait for them to score a goal."

"I've been following soccer since my son was four-years-old, he's 44 now."

"Can't you see I'm exploding? 'I'm bloody exploding, I'm loving every minute of this, I was so nervous

and now I'm so excited I won't be able to talk tomorrow."

Across town at All Bar Nunn in O'Connor it was a much more sombre occasion.

Optimistic Dutch fans piled in before kick-off and created a sea of orange.

While Spain dominated for most of the match, the Netherlands also had

their chances to claim their first World Cup.

But despite having a number of opportunities to take the lead, it wasn't to be.

It was the first time the Netherlands had lost in 25 matches but the third time they had been beaten in the final of soccer's pinnacle event.

Marjo Vanden Neuenhijzen has seen them all and he didn't know how to react when Spain scored the only goal of an intense final.

"It's very disappointing," Mr Vanden Neuenhijzen, of Gungahlin, said.

"We knew there wasn't enough time to get another goal, it was tough."

"Now I guess we try and move on. We made consecutive World Cup finals in 1974 and 1978, hopefully we can do it again."

"But it's going to be a long day at work."

But until the 2014 World Cup in Brazil begins, Spaniards all over the world will be celebrating.