

## Football God 471

Chapter 471: FIFA World Cup 2026 [2]

(2026 FIFA World Cup fixtures:)

(Group Stage:)

(GROUP A:)

(Mexico - Ghana)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 11, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

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(GROUP A:)

(Japan - Poland)

(Venue: BMO Field, Canada)

(Date: June 11, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP B:)

(France - Morocco)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 12, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

...

(GROUP B:)

(South Korea - Peru)

(Venue: NRG Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 12, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

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(GROUP C:)

(Brazil - Serbia)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 13, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

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(GROUP C:)

(Australia - Egypt)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial, USA)

(Date: June 13, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

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(GROUP D:)

(Argentina - Qatar)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz, USA)

(Date: June 13, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP D:)

(Norway - Chile)

(Venue: BMO Field, Canada)

(Date: June 14, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP E:)

(Nigeria vs Croatia)

(Venue: Estadio BBVA, Mexico)

(Date: June 14, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

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(GROUP E:)

(Canada vs Saudi Arabia )

(Venue: Estadio Guadalajara, Mexico)

(Date: June 14, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP F:)

(Spain vs Iran)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

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(GROUP F:)

(New Zealand vs Italy)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP G:)

(Germany vs Colombia)

(Venue: Lumen Field, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

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(GROUP G:)

(Iraq vs Honduras)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP H:)

(England vs Algeria)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 16, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

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(GROUP H:)

(USA vs Slovenia)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 16, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

...

(GROUP I:)

(Netherlands vs China)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial, USA)

(Date: June 16, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP I:)

(Ukraine vs Tunisia)

(Venue: Estadio Monterrey, Mexico)

(Date: June 17, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP J:)

(Portugal vs Senegal)

(Venue: AT&T Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 17, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP J:)

(Czech Republic vs Iraq)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz, USA)

(Date: June 18, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

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(GROUP K:)

(Uruguay vs DR Congo)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 18, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

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(GROUP K:)

(Switzerland vs Costa Rica)

(Venue: Estadio Monterrey, Mexico)

(Date: June 18, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP L:)

(Belgium vs Paraguay)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 19, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

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(GROUP L:)

(Ecuador vs Sweden)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 19, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Matchday 1 of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

This is the complicated fixture table for the biggest competition in football, expanded from the previous 32-team format to a new 48-team format.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is the first edition to feature 48 teams and is jointly hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada, hence the distribution of matches between the 3 countries.

The tournament will comprise 104 matches held across 16 cities in the three host countries.

The group stage will feature 12 groups as shown, from GROUP A to L with four teams in each group.

Each team will play three matches like in every other World Cup, and the top two teams from each group, along with the eight best third-placed teams will advance to the knockout rounds, first to the newly introduced Round of 32.

After the Round of 32, 16 teams will be eliminated, the best 16 advancing to the Round of 16 where 8 more countries will be eliminated.

The best 8 would advance to the Quarterfinals where 4 more would be eliminated. The best 4 would advance to the Semifinals where 2 more will be eliminated. And then, the final 2 will play in the Final scheduled for July 19, 2026 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, USA.

The FIFA World Cup was set, and so were the competing teams and countries.

In the buildup to the opening game of the tournament, media coverage, training sessions, and locking in sessions dominated headlines.

A lot of players avoided the media distraction, while some relished in it as part of psychological warfare against their first opponents.

The Nigerian National Team also focused on their preparations.

Every day, they trained like mad men under Eric Chelle.

Time moved fast and in a blink, it was D-day.

It was the day for the opening game of the tournament.

...

June 11, 2026...

Mexico and Ghana opened the world tournament.

Both were no pushovers, 2 countries with illustrious histories in the FIFA World Cup and tonight, they clashed in the first encounter of the tournament.

They clashed at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico.

Both teams started with their strongest lineups. For Mexico, the likes of Raul Jimenez, Sam's former teammate in Fulham and other stars started.

While for Ghana, big names like Thomas Partey, Mohammed Kudus, and Jordan Ayew all showed up for their country, representing them in the big stage.

And then...

FWEEE!

The game started.

It was an intense encounter between 2 countries with clear footballing philosophies. Without surprise, it was a similar footballing philosophy.

South American and African footballing countries had something in common, the physicality to their footballing style.

And tonight, both nations embodied it in its full glory, playing physical football with some technical bits to spice up the game.

The first half was a slugger, a game of pound to pound football.

Neither country played defensive football, both charging out on the attack in an attempt to score. And yet, both defense stood firm like a wall, keeping the opposition attacks at bay.

The first half was a classic, but it ended goalless.

The second half was even more intense, filled with highlight points and a few players stepping up big for their country.

And still yet, no goal.

It seemed like the first game of the tournament would end in a goalless draw when in the 79th minute, the script was torn apart and rewritten.

During another Ghanaian attacking raid, the center back, Salisu pushed upfield. After receiving a pass from Thomas Partey, the Mexicans marked the midfielder, leaving the center back unmarked.

They looked down on what he could do from that range.

Salisu rarely tried such crazy things, but tonight, in this hour of the game, what else could he lose?

And so he let loose from over 30 yards out.

POW!

The ball flew like a missile, nestling into the top bin to the left.

Mexico's goalkeeper was rooted to one spot.

That was the only goal of the game, the winner.

Ghana won the first game of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, securing 3 points at the expense of their South America opponents.

The World Cup was on.

Chapter 472: FIFA World Cup 2026 [3]

(2026 FIFA World Cup - Group Stage)

(GROUP A:)

(Japan - Poland)

(Venue: BMO Field, Canada)

(Date: June 11, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

AThe second game of the FIFA World Cup took place in Canada, on the same day, separated by mere hours from the first game.

And this time, Japan and Poland took to the pitch.

Both nations fielded their best XI. For Poland, starting in a 3-1-4-2 formation, Skorupski started in between the post for the Polish while their 3-man defense comprised Piatkowski, Bednarek, and Jakub Kiwior.

The sole man in midfield, the holding midfielder was Moder. Ahead of him was the 4-man catalogue of Frankowski, Kaminski, Szymanski, and Boquez, while the 2-man offensive unit comprised Robert Lewandowski and Swiderski.

The ageless Polish legend, Robert Lewandowski may have resolved to leave FC Barcelona after this legendary season but he was still going strong for the Polish national football team.

It was a fearsome Polish XI lineup.

On the other side, lining up in a 3-4-2-1 formation, Japan had Suzuki in between the posts while ahead of him was a 3-man defense of Takai, Itakura, and Ito. In midfield was the quadruple of Sugawara, Wataru Endo, Tanaka, and Nakamura.

The striker of the night was Maeda, while slightly behind him to his left and right respectively were Tite Kubo and Kamada.

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded and all hell broke loose in Canada.

This was not just any game, this was a tournament game. And not just any tournament either, it was the FIFA World Cup.

There was something fundamentally different about it when you play for your country, not just representing a club but a nation, your nation. That emotion, the patriotism, it makes you feel like giving your life for the badge.

That is why FIFA World Cups are always so exciting, it was a fight to the death.

And tonight, it was Poland and Japan's turn to sing the lullaby of death.

For the first few minutes of the game, it was even till Poland suddenly gained control of the game. Immediately after they took control of the game, they capitulated on the advantage and ran away with it.

The first Polish shot came in the 36th minute, Lewandowski winning an aerial duel, heading the ball towards an unmarked Frankowski who wriggled into the box with the ball before sneaking a shot into the bottom right corner.

The Japanese goalkeeper was beaten.

**BOOM!**

The stadium erupted.

0-1 to Poland.

The 1-nil lead didn't last... because Poland added to it.

In the 39th minute, mere 3 minutes after assisting the first goal, Lewandowski struck from outside the box, sending the ball towards the edge, stretching the goalkeeper and scoring an outrageous goal with the effort.

Poland celebrated exuberantly.

The first half came to an end with Poland leading 0-2.

Nobody knew what the Japanese coach told or gave his players in halftime, because they came out with Blue Lock energy.

Crazy things happened on the pitch in the second half.

Japan ran themselves to the ground, playing with passion and heart. In the 72nd minute, their efforts was finally rewarded with a goal, Wataru Endo scoring a banger from outside the box.

And then, when all hope seemed lost, in the 89th minute, Nakamura cut in from the left before curling a stunner past Skorupski.

The stadium was stunned. Poland was stunned.

The game ended 2-2.

It was a thriller.

It was a legendary Japanese comeback.

Both teams shared the spoils, 1 point a piece.

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The next day, the first of Group B took to the pitch.

(GROUP B:)

(France - Morocco)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 12, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

This time, it was 2 heavyweights of world football; France, 2-time World Champions and finalists in the last world cup and Morocco, a semifinalist in the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Both teams fielded their strongest lineups, with the likes of Amrabat, En-Nesyri, Brahim Diaz, and Achraf Hakimi all starting for Morocco.

For France, big names, some of the biggest in football entered the pitch wearing the dark blue of the French national football team. The likes of Kylian Mbappe, Ousmane Dembele, Dayot Upamecano, Saliba, Kounde, and Marcus Thuram all lined up on the pitch.

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded, and a FIFA World Cup classic began.

The fans who got tickets and were in attendance in Canada did not regret their choice because France and Morocco played pure football, simple, straight to the point and exciting.

And of course, France dominated.

Kylian Mbappe opened the scoring, bursting into the stage in the 28th minute of this game as he wriggled past 2 players before curling a shot into the top right corner out of the Moroccan goalkeeper's grasp.

Yassine Bono stood no chance before that shot.

Morocco responded almost immediately through Sofyan Amrabat, who leaped highest from a corner kick, connecting to the ball with his head and sending it past Maignan and into the net.

The first half ended in a 1-1 draw.

But when the second half started, France ran away with the game.

Ousmane Dembele erupted into the scene with his speed and crazy dribbling, wriggling through players like they were not there. He fed Kylian Mbappe the ball, who cut back for him to tap into a suddenly empty net.

"GOALLLLLLL...!!!"

French fans in the stadium erupted.

Ousmane Dembele scored in the 66th minute.

In the 74th minute, Marcus Thuram and Dembele were taken out of the game, introducing the youngsters, Desire Doue and Bradley Barcola.

Their introduction brought renewed energy to the team, and with it came electric dribbling and excitement.

And both youngsters created the final goal of the game.

After a rampaging dribble from the right, Desire Doue played Bradley Barcola in who calmly rounded the goalkeeper before tapping into an empty net.

And just like that, France scored its 3rd goal of the game.

Morocco tried for the remaining minutes of the game, but they never came close to scoring a 2nd goal not to talk of an equalizer.

The game came to an end 3-1 to France.

3 points for the French.

Chapter 473: FIFA World Cup 2026 [4]

(2026 FIFA World Cup- Group Stage:)

(GROUP B:)

(South Korea - Peru)

(Venue: NRG Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 12, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

It was a cool evening in the U.S.A.

This time, it was the South Korean national team taking on the Peru national team in the NRG Stadium in the U.S.

Both teams started with their strongest XI.

Peru lined up in a 4-3-3 formation, Gallese manning the posts for them, while their 4-man defense comprised Lopez, Garces, Zambrana, and Advincula. Their midfield trio comprised Carrillo, Tapia, and Aquino.

As for their forward line, they were Reyna, Guerrero, and Polo.

As for South Korea, they lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Cho in between the posts and a quadruple defense of Seol, Cho, Kwon, and Lee ahead of him. The midfield duo comprised HWANG and Park.

Ahead was D. Lee, J. Lee, and Hwang, while the Tottenham legend Heung Min Son played up top for the Koreans.

FWEEE!

The game started and Korean and Peru fans witnessed a thriller.

No team saw themselves as the underdog which meant neither team played defensive football. They all came out to show their might, and it resulted in one of the most exciting games since the World Cup Started.

The first half seemed to be drawing to a goalless conclusion when in the last minute of additional time, Peru's striker scored a banger, lashing into the ball on a volley to score the only goal of the first half.

Peru fans around the stadium celebrated exuberantly.

In the second half, South Korea tried hard to play catchup. They played the game of their lives, putting everything out there on the pitch, pressuring Peru's defense and yet the defense held for over an hour, and then it crumbled.

In the 78th minute, Heung Min Son received the ball over the defense and outrunning all the defenders despite his age, he rounded the goalkeeper to score the much sought equalizer.

South Korean fans in the stadium went mad in joy and celebrations.

And yet, they were not done. Peru were clearly content with a draw, but South Korea was not, and so they dug in.

Son did it again, striking in the 85th minute.

This time, he received a pass inside the box and simply tapped it in from close range, sending the stadium into a frenzy.

2-1 to South Korea! Just like that.

Peru tried everything, and yet they never came back into the game.

South Korea won.

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(Brazil - Serbia)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 13, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

The next day rolled over so fast that it didn't feel like a day at all, rather it felt like the freely rolling stages of a book.

And today, one of the giants of International football took the stage in the U.S, Carlo Ancelotti's Brazil running riot against Serbia.

Against the mighty Brazilians led by a resurgent Neymar Jnr, the Serbians could not play anything as playing and dribbling freely, Brazil cruised to a crazy 8-1 score line in their first game of the tournament.

Neymar got the man of the match award with a dominant performance, scoring a brace and giving 3 assists in the game.

Vinicius Jnr. and Raphinha got a brace of goals each.

It was a statement Brazil performance under their new coach, Carlo Ancelotti who took the Brazil job after leaving his Real Madrid head coach post.

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(Australia - Egypt)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial, USA)

(Date: June 13, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

At the same time that Brazil crushed Serbia in one part of the U.S, Australia also took on Egypt in another part of U.S.A, this time the Lincoln Financial.

It was a vintage Egypt performance.

Mohamed Salah ran riot, being the man of the night as he provided 2 assists to lead Egypt to a dominant 0-2 win over Australia.

Omar Marmoush got his first goal of the tournament right out of the bat in Egypt's first game, scoring a banger from a Mohamed Salah pass.

It was a dominant performance from the Pharaohs of Egypt.

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(Argentina - Qatar)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz, USA)

(Date: June 13, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

And then, it was time for the main men, the villains of the World Cup tournament; it was time for the reigning World Champions to take to the pitch.

Argentina started with a classic Argentina lineup.

Starting in a 4-1-3-2 formation, Dibu Martinez started in between the posts for this Argentine side, protected by a defensive quadruple of Nahuel Molina, Christian Romero, Nicolas Otamendi, and Nicolas Tagliafico.

In defensive midfield was Leandro Paredes, while ahead of him was a dynamic trio of the tireless Rodrigo De Paul, the midfield maestro Alexis Mac Allister, and Enzo Fernandez.

Ahead in attack were 2 faces of Argentine football, the 2 different but dynamic strikers, Julian Alvarez and Lautaro Martinez.

Lionel Messi, the figurehead of this Argentine side didn't start the game. He was restricted to the bench.

From the beginning, in an interview, Lionel Messi already said that he would be taking on a reduced role this World Cup. He would be coming up for the La Albiceleste in this FIFA World Cup tournament as an impact sub.

As for the Qatar side that lined up against this great Argentine team? They were not worth mentioning at the end of the game.

Argentina drubbed Qatar 6-0 in truly dominating fashion.

The first half came to an end 4-0, Lautaro Martinez scoring a brace, and Julian Alvarez getting a goal and assist. Enzo Fernandez scored the 4th Argentine goal in the first half, dooming Qatar to defeat.

In the second half, Lionel Scaloni made changes, resting some players and making his team lessen the tempo. And yet, Qatar stood no chance.

Nicolas Otamendi scored the 5th goal of the game in the 74th minute from a corner kick, heading the ball past the goalkeeper.

Just a minute later, Lionel Messi was introduced into the game.

And then, in the 81st minute, the Argentine G.O.A.T got his name on the scoresheet, rifling a shot into the top bin from just outside the box.

Lionel Messi may be old, but he still got it.

Just like Brazil, Argentina put out a statement display in the big stage.

Chapter 474: FIFA World Cup 2026 [5]

(Norway - Chile)

(Venue: BMO Field, Canada)

(Date: June 14, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

It was 14th of June, and today, another World Cup fixture dominated the highlights that promised exciting football.

The Vikings of Norway were taking on the South American giants, Chile.

Both teams started with their strongest starting XIs.

For Norway, they started in a 4-4-2 formation with Nyland in between the posts, with a defensive quadruple of Wolfe, Heggem, Ajer, and Ryerson ahead of him. In midfield was the stalwart quadruple of Schjelderup, Berg, Berge, and the Arsenal skipper, Martin Odegaard.

Leading the line for the Vikings were two true Vikings, two no-nonsense, elite and lethal strikers in Erling Haaland and Alexander Sorloth.

And yet, they were not up against just any team.

They were up against the Chilean national football team.

Chile started in a 4-3-3 formation with Cortes in between the posts, and ahead of him standing a defensive quadruple of Loyola, Maripan, Diaz, and Suazo.

In midfield was the trio of Arturo Vidal, Echeverria, and Pizarro.

Yes, Arturo Vidal was still playing professional football and representing his country in the biggest stage.

The once Inter Milan legend, ex FC Barcelona and Bayern Munich midfielder wrote his legend in Europe's top 5 leagues long ago. He's left the highest tier leagues long ago, and yet, he was still going strong for his country.

Chile's offensive trio comprised Osorio, Vargas, and Valdes.

FWEEE!

The game started.

And immediately, it was clear that both countries came with only one thing in mind, to win the game and win it convincingly.

Norway and Chile played physical and offensive football.

Both had playstyles that were straightforward and direct to the point. For Norway, it was win back the ball, pass to Odegaard and let the Arsenal skipper do his magic with the ball at his feet. If not, simply feed the ball to either of the 2 strikers, Erling Haaland and Alexander Sorloth.

Both were lethal strikers in front of goal and absolute behemoths up field.

They could stand their ground against the most imposing of defenders, rattle them enough and hold possession to open up space for their teammates.

For Chile, it was more grounded, South American style team football.

Chile had no superstar in their team, and so they played as a team. Each and every player was equal, and they all had roles that they gave their all to execute as best as they could on the pitch.

Chile got the first goal of the game from a corner.

Vargas rose highest in the opposition box, planting a firm header past their goalkeeper to score the first goal of the game in the 32nd minute.

2 minutes later, the Vikings of Norway equalized in terrifying fashion.

Erling Haaland rose high to bring down a long Odegaard pass, winning the aerial duel and as he was swarmed, he kicked the ball to his side where his partner in crime, Alexander Sorloth lurked.

Loyola, the Chilean right back tried to hold him back but Sorloth simply shrugged him off with a shoulder bash, sending the defender sprawling to the ground.

Then, righting his center of gravity, he swung his right leg in a volley.

POW!

The power behind that shot was pure evil.

Chile's goalkeeper only saw a flash of light and air pressure, and the next moment, the ball was already inside his shaking net.

Alexander Sorloth jumped and pumped his fist in celebration.

Those rapid 2 goals set the game aflame, and Chile and Norway flexed their muscles, playing grounded and old-school style football.

And then, in the 41st minute of the game, the 3rd goal was scored.

This time, the Vikings struck first.

And this time, it was the Norwegian captain who got the goal for his team, Martin Odegaard provided the goods from outside the box.

Receiving a pass, with a simple ball shuffle and body movement, he escaped his man, pushed the ball forward a bit to set himself up before unleashing an absolute pile driver from outside the box.

The ball rolled through the field like a literal missile, shredding grass in its path before tearing its way into the bottom left corner of the net.

Martin Odegaard celebrated with passion.

Surely, Norway had won this first half, right? Right?

Well, reality said no.

In the 45th minute, Arturo Vidal rolled back the years with a vintage strike, hitting the ball powerfully with a knuckle ball shot, sending it high in the air before it dipped and entered the top right corner with pure power and speed.

2-2!

What a game!

The second half ended with both sides even, 2-2.

During halftime, the 2 national team coaches did their best to rile up their players to claim the win. And when second half started, both teams left everything on the pitch in a classic FIFA World Cup game.

Chile played like warriors, Norway played like true Vikings.

In the 66th minute, Erling Haaland scored only for the goal to be ruled out for a foul involved in the buildup.

In the 79th minute, Chile thought they claimed the victory already when Vargas scored only for it to be ruled out for an offside call.

What a game it was!

The game was poised to end in a draw, and at its end, it would surely take the spot of the most intense game of the tournament so far.

And yet, this game was not out of drama yet.

In the 90th minute of the game, crazy things happened.

The old geezer struck again... Arturo Vidal scored the winning goal in the last minute of the game!

After a late run from midfield, he arrived just in time to run into the path of the goalkeeper's rebound after a Chilean shot. One of the Norwegian defenders tried to clear the ball.

Vidal saw the striking leg. He knew the danger, and yet, he bravely dived after the ball with his head. The leg struck the side of his head, cutting his face as blood flowed and yet he managed to push the ball in with his head.

GOALLLLLLL...!!!

The BMO Field in Canada exploded.

The commentators went haywire with their commentary.

What a game it was!

Chile narrowly won the game 2-3.

Chapter 475: FIFA World Cup 2026 [6]

Norway and Chile created an all-time classic FIFA World Cup game at the BMO Field in Canada.

It was without doubt the most exciting game of the tournament so far.

Both countries deserved a win after such a valiant performance, and yet the Vikings of Norway were doomed to defeat by a single veteran, Arturo Vidal.

The Inter Milan legend won the man of the match award.

The Norwegian and Chilean encounter was an all-time classic, and yet it was not the only exciting game that took place on 14th June.

The game barely came to an end when another took its place.

(2026 FIFA World Cup- Group Stage:)

(GROUP E:)

(Nigeria vs Croatia)

(Venue: Estadio BBVA, Mexico)

(Date: June 14, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

After what felt like a lifetime of waiting for the supporters of the Super Eagles, the players in green and white took to the pitch for the first time in the FIFA World Cup tournament, 3 days after the tournament's first game.

And they were not taking on just any team, they were taking on Luka Modric's Croatia.

Croatia is a small country, one of the smallest to ever play in a World Cup but their team was anything but small.

In the past 2 FIFA World Cups, the small country Croatia created history, making it all the way to the final of the World Cup in 2018 where they lost to France, and to the semifinals in 2022 where they lost to Argentina, the eventual winners.

In the FIFA World Cup, Croatia is a big country with a lot of history.

And yet, this was no longer the same Croatia.

Back in 2018, Croatia and Nigeria were also drawn in the same group, also with Argentina and the Croatians went to create massive upsets against both countries to make it to the knockout stage.

But back then, Croatia had a vibrant and younger, raring Luka Modric.

Not just him, Croatia had the likes of a prime Ivan Rakitic, Mateo Kovacic, Mandzukic, and others of that great Croatian side.

But now, most of those veterans were retired.

Yes, Croatia still had Luka Modric but this was a 40 year old Luka Modric who already called his legendary Real Madrid career to an end last season.

This was a changed Croatian side, and it was what made Nigerians dream.

Besides, even if this was prime Croatia, Nigerian fans would have still bragged and supported their country with gusto simply because of a single individual, the King, the best player in the world... Samuel Moses.

The time approached and the official lineups were dropped.

For Croatia, Livakovic was the final man in a 4-2-3-1 formation fielding a backline of Josko Gvardiol, D. Caleta-Car, Sutalo, and Stanisic. In midfield was the duo of Mateo Kovacic and Vlastic.

Further ahead in attack was the trio of Sucic, Ivan Perisic, and Kramaric, with Ante Budimir leading the line as the striker.

For the Nigerian squad, they started in the Eric Chelle 4-2-3-1 formation.

Stanley Nwabali returned his position in between the posts for the Super Eagles, while ahead of him was a quadruple defensive unit comprising Osayi Samuel, William Troost Ekong, Calvin Basey, and Ola Aina.

In midfield was the duo of Wilfrid Ndidi and Alex Iwobi, and further ahead of them were the dynamic trio of Moses Simon on the right, Ademola Lookman on the left, and Samuel Moses as the attacking midfielder of the team.

Leading the line was a familiar face, Victor Osimhen.

Walking out from the tunnel and into the pitch alongside his international teammates, Sam felt surreal. He could feel his heartbeat accelerating already.

He felt like he was standing in the podium of history.

Just 4 years ago, he was in Nigeria, in the NPFL, hustling out a career with Enyimba FC and yet here he was now, in the biggest stage of football.

At this moment, Sam's brain was blank and all that he felt was... gratitude.

Gratitude to God for everything.

When the Nigerian national anthem sounded, he felt goosebumps creeping under his skin. The atmosphere of the moment was getting to him.

After both national anthems, the players of both countries shook hands and lined up on the pitch.

Then, it began.

FWEEEE!

As soon as that whistle sounded, the world in the stadium exploded.

Nigeria and Croatia clashed at loggerheads, kick-starting history.

During the first few minutes of the game, both countries struggled to settle into the game and despite the tightness of the game, one player made his mark immediately, Samuel Moses.

It's been long since he felt it but Sam felt anxious. He could feel himself literally hyperventilating, but it didn't reduce his performance.

Rather, it only made him fall deeper into the embrace of adrenaline.

He abused his stamina, helping Osimhen to lead the press from the front. Croatia tried to calm the game repeated, but Nigeria tried to up the tempo.

It was a clash of footballing philosophies.

At some point, Croatia started having minor success till Sam erupted, jumping on a sliding tackle after tracking back as he intercepted a dangerous Croatian pass from Kovacic.

The loose ball fell to Alex Iwobi, and immediately, the Fulham star threaded a through pass through the middle of the pitch, slicing the Croatian defense open.

Alex Iwobi set Victor Osimhen up one on one with the Croatian goalkeeper.

The Lagos-born striker did not hesitate, taking one touch of the ball before rifling it into the roof of the net in the 25th minute of the game.

GOALLLLLLLL...!

Nigerian fans around the stadium erupted, waving flags, jerseys, and roaring at the top of their voices.

1-0

Nigeria led. And yet, Croatia still didn't change their playstyle.

Their coach kept on believing.

The first half came to an end 1-0 in Nigeria's favor. Second half started the same way with Croatia seemingly having more attacking success now, and yet they could not breach the Nigerian defense yet, till one counterattacking chance split them open again.

Once again, Sam was the one who won the ball back and this time, he led the attack himself, threading a pass to the left where Ademola Lookman lurked.

Lookman stung his man with a solid display of skill before crossing the ball into the 18-yard box where Victor Osimhen lurked.

The Croatian defenders jumped to defend the dangerous ball, but Victor Osimhen jumped higher, and then...

Bam!

His head connected to the ball, then...

BOOM!

The Estadio BBVA in Mexico exploded.

Chapter 476: FIFA World Cup 2026 [7]

2-0 to Nigeria.

Croatia was stunned.

"VICTOR OSIMHENNNN!!!" The commentator screamed.

"What a striker!"

"Oh, Nigeria! What a blessed country, to have two attacking talents like Osimhen and Sam on the same thing is just a blessing!"

"What a powerful header from Osimhen, and what a pass from Lookman!"

"What of that Sam interception?" The assistant commentator asked.

"OHHH!" The commentator exclaimed. "The timing on that tackle was diabolical. Croatia's compact midfield slightly stifled Sam's attacking performance this game, but his work rate is immense".

"The boy is everywhere!"

"What a player!"

"He still feels slightly rusty. I heard he got married recently, but still, Sam is Sam. What a baller!"

That goal secured Nigeria's lead in this FIFA World Cup game.

Victor Osimhen scored his second goal in the 73rd minute, and with it, Nigeria's victory was assured.

And yet, that was when the Croatian coach finally made the change.

Luka Modric was introduced into the game.

The warm-up of the Croatian legend alone induced a thunderous roar from the stadium stands occupied by Croatian fans.

Luka Modric entered the game in the 74th minute, and then all hell broke loose.

Luka Modric was 40, he was old now, and yet, old habits die hard.

Even at the ripe old age of 40, Luka Modric was still a capable agent of chaos in a football pitch. And tonight, he embodied that maestro spirit again.

Luka Modric entered the game and changed it.

Instantly, with his impact, Croatia stole superiority in the tight midfield battle, now dominating the Super Eagles' players.

The Croatian suffocated Alex Iwobi and Wilfried Ndidi with his unpredictable movement, impressive passing range, and vision.

Luka Modric was like a magician with his wand on the field in midfield.

Anywhere he swung his wand towards, chaos erupted. The Nigerian defense that had been stalwart for over 70 minutes was no longer as imperious.

His passes cut the defense open again and again, putting Nigeria under pressure and forcing them to defend. Nigeria defended and for some time, it was effective till the 86th minute of the game.

Modric received a pass just outside the 18-yard box and immediately, he swung his right leg for a first-time outside the box shot.

Wilfried Ndidi reacted, jumping on a sliding tackle to block the shot angle.

And yet, it was just a feint.

With a subtle touch, Luka Modric sent the Nigerian midfielder sliding one way before cutting back. The direction he cut towards already had an obstacle there though in another Nigerian player, and yet Modric didn't hesitate.

In one fluid motion, he moved.

Bzzz!

His legs rapidly touched the ball twice, switching between both legs as he cut through the new opposition with a la croqueta.

And just as Calvin Bassey charged out to clutter into him, he passed, kicking it with the outside of his right boot and pushing it into Perisic's path.

The Croatian didn't miss a bit, Perisic swinging his right leg with power as he connected to the ball with a first-time effort.

BAM!

Stanley Nwabali reacted but there was very little that he could do as the powerful shot flashed past him and into the net.

2-!

Perisic didn't celebrate, simply charging into the net, picking the ball and running back to the halfway line quickly kickoff and continue the game.

The game continued, and with it, the Croatian dominance continued.

Modric, the agent of chaos did wonders with his hex wand.

He weaved through the Nigerian players like a drunk warlord who could not be stopped, Croatia pushing more men forward minute. And yet, in their zeal to attack and equalize, they forgot their back and that was when Sam pounced.

Whoosh!

Another pass from Modric that sent panic through the Super Eagles' defense but having read it this time, Sam dived in on another sliding tackle and again, he did it, intercepting the pass.

Modric and the nearest Croatian immediately pounced, eager to rush him and reclaim position but with his spatial awareness, Sam was active.

He knew where his nearest teammate was without even looking.

And so, Sam simply flicked the ball left before jumping past Kovacic's aggressive tackle, equally evading Modric's lunge in the same movement.

"Wilfried!" Sam called loudly.

The Nigerian midfielder did not hesitate, hitting the ball once to Sam as soon as he received the pass, sending it far ahead into space.

The Croatian backline was exposed due to committing too many men to attack. Only D. Caleta-Car remained the man in defense.

The defender reacted immediately after the long pass, but who was he in the face of Sam's sheer blistering pace?

BAM!

Sam dug in, erupting like the flash as he blitzed past the midfielder.

And yet, D. Caleta-Car was not alone.

As soon as the ball was hit long, Livakovic the Croatian goalkeeper also reacted, chasing the ball down. The ball moved towards him, giving him the advantage and yet, he was still not fast enough to get to it first.

Sam arrived to the ball first with blistering pace.

Whoosh!

The goalkeeper slid, trying to take Sam down in a desperate tackle and yet, Sam's reflexes were lightning fast, reacting having predicted his intentions already.

With his right leg, he pushed the ball before quickly jumping over the challenge as the goalkeeper slid beneath him.

The goal was exposed!

And yet, due to the jump sideways with the ball, D. Caleta-Car managed to complete his recovery run, blocking him and intending to jam into him.



Nigerian fans brought the stadium down with noise.

Sam?

With a big smile on his face after getting his first goal of the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the very first game, Sam felt on top of the world as he charged towards the corner flag.

A few celebrations flashed through his mind, but for this iconic moment, for his very first FIFA World Cup goal, only one celebration dominated in his head.

He jumped, swirled in the air, flung his right arm, and then...

"SUIIIII!"

The tens of thousands of Nigerian fans in the stadium responded with him, roaring the iconic sui celebration that belonged to the Portuguese legend, Cristiano Ronaldo. What a moment it was.

"WHAT A GOAL!!!" The commentators raved.

"What a team this Nigerian side is".

"I still can't believe that just last year, this was a national team that was struggling heavily under the previous coach".

"Eric Chelle entered this team as an interim coach previously, but since then, the interim coach has created miracle after miracle".

"Making Sam the face of his team, a lot of people frowned at it the first time".

"He suffered criticism but he faced it all with a brave face".

"Then, it did look like a nonsensical decision, making a mere 19-year old then the face and core of your team. But Sam was not just any 19 year old then, just as he is not just any 20 year old now, he is HIM!"

"What a player!"

"He can run! He can dribble! He can pass! He can score!"

"What can't he do?!"

"And with that it's a wrap!"

"There's no way back for Croatia!"

"3-1 to Nigeria!"

"Victor Osimhen may have scored 2 goals today but Sam's imprint is in every single goal. Add that to his sheer work rate this game and we have a clear favorite for the man of the match award!"

"What a player, Sam!"

"In history, Nigeria have never made it really deep in the FIFA World Cup".

"Nigeria's best performance in the FIFA World Cup history has been reaching the Round of 16, which they achieved in 1994, 1998, and 2014. They have qualified for only six World Cup tournaments out of 21".

"Even the last one in 2022, they failed to qualify".

"Just last year, it seemed like they would miss out on World Cup qualification again till Sam entered the stage".

"Can Sam do it?"

"Can he take his nation past the Round of 16 stage for the first time in their history?"

"History says no, but Sam says yes".

"All we can do is watch this player, watch his brilliance as he write his name and number in the biggest stage of football".

FWEEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded to continue the game but there was nothing much Croatia could do at this stage.

Nigeria simply toyed with them, passing round for fun and keeping possession.

Fulltime elapsed, then additional time.

Additional time elapsed, then...

FWEEE!

The final whistle blew.

The game came to an end.

Nigeria played and won their first game of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and just like the commentators predicted, Sam won the man of the match award after a solid performance in attacking midfield.

...

That same day after Nigeria and Croatia clashed in their group stage encounter, 3 hours later, Canada and Saudi Arabia also came to loggerheads.

(GROUP E:)

(Canada vs Saudi Arabia )

(Venue: Estadio Guadalajara, Mexico)

(Date: June 14, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

This time, it was the Estadio Guadalajara in Mexico.

The Canada vs Saudi Arabia encounter was another FIFA World Cup classic.

Both nations started with their best starting XI lineups.

Canada started in a 4-2-3-1 formation, Clair manning the posts for the Canadian national football team, while sitting in front of him was a defensive quadruple led by Alphonso Davies, then Cornelius, Bombito, and Johnston.

In midfield was the duo of Kone and Choiniere, while further ahead was Ahmed, Buchanan, and Jonathan David who came back a bit from his normal striker spot to play as the attacking midfielder for the team.

Ahead of them and leading the line as the striker was Oluwaseyi.

For Saudi Arabia, they started in a 5-4-1 formation.

Manning the posts for the Saudi Arabians was Alaqidi, while ahead of him in defense was the 5-man stalwart blockade of Boushal, Tambakti, Alawjami, Thakri, and Al Shanawi.

In midfield was a quadruple lineup of Al-Dawsari, the man who shot to fame against Argentina in the 2022 FIFA World Cup, then Al-Ghamdi, Aljuwayr, and Al-Buraikan.

Then, the sole man in attack, Al-Sahafi.

It was a tight game but one man stole the show, Jonathan David.

The game 3-2 in Saudi Arabia's favor.

It was a crazy game in the fact that all 5 goals came in the second half. The first half came to an end 0-0 as Saudi Arabia played a full-on defensive game, and somehow still maintaining their highline that stunned Argentina 4 years ago.

Oluwaseyi was caught 4 times offside in the first half alone.

But in the second half, everything changed.

In the first minute of the 2nd half, Jonathan David received the ball just outside the box and burst into the box, took his time, before unleashing a piledriver that rose, flying with speed before tearing its way into the top left corner.

It was an unstoppable shot.

That goal brought Canadian dominance to the game. Alphonso Davies exploded, turning the game on its head with his crazy runs and dribbles.

In the 66th minute, after a run all the way from the back, he threw in an accurate cross and again, Jonathan David did it, rising above everyone to plant a header into the net. The Saudi Arabian goalkeeper was rooted to one space.

At that point, the games seemed to have ended but in the 70s minutes, Saudi Arabia exploded.

In the 72nd minute, Al-Dawsari erupted, dribbling from the left and curling a ball in that was extremely similar to the one he scored against Argentina.

2-1.

6 minutes later, in the 78th minute of the game, Saudi Arabia equalized from a corner kick as Tambakti, their defender rose highest to plant the ball past the Canadian goalkeeper to score the 2nd Saudi Arabian goal.

The stadium went crazy, the commentators raving, and yet, 4 more minutes later, Jonathan David silenced it all.

He scored his 2nd header of the game. And once again, he scored it from an Alphonso Davies run and cross.

What a goal. What a game.

The game ended 3-2, and Jonathan David won the man of the match award having scored the first hattrick of the World Cup.

Chapter 478: FIFA World Cup 2026 [9]

On the 14th, Nigeria, Croatia, Canada, and Saudi Arabia gave football fans who were watching the World Cup around the world a treat.

Both games were thrillers.

But the excitement didn't die yet because the next day, one of the favorites to win the 2026 FIFA World Cup was to take the stage.

...

15th July, 2026...

The Spanish National Football team took the stage of the FIFA World Cup in SoFi Stadium, USA.

(GROUP F:)

(Spain vs Iran)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

That afternoon, football fans around the world got an eye feast, watching Luis de la Fuente's Spain team wreak havoc in the biggest stage of football, tearing the Iranian national football team apart.

It was a situation of all-stars vs mundane.

The Iranian national team lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Beiranvand in between the posts, and Hardani, Kanaanizadan, Khalilzadeh, and Mohammadi forming the quadruple defensive wall.

In midfield was the duo of Ghoddos and Afagh, Jahanbakhshin right wing, Ghayedi in left wing, Taremi in attacking midfield, and Azmoun leading the line as the striker.

They played against an all-star Spanish team.

The Spanish lined up in a dynamic 4-3-3 formation with Unai Simon manning the posts, while a formidable defensive lineup of Dani Carvajal Robin Le Normand, Pau Cubarsi, and Marc Cucurella stood in front of him as his protectors.

In midfield was the dynamic trio of Pedri, Rodri, and Fabian Ruiz. While ahead in attack was the dynamic attacking trio of Lamine Yamal in right wing, Nico Williams in left wing, and Mikel Oyarzabal leading the line as the striker.

The Spanish went on a rout, tearing the Iranian defense apart.

Within just 20 minutes, Spain were already leading 3-0 as Fabian Ruiz opened the scoring with an absolute screamer from range in the 12th minute, followed by a trademark Lamine Yamal curled goal just 2 minutes later in the 14th minute, and then Robin Le Normand scoring with a header from a corner kick in the 19th minute.

In the 44th minute of the game, Nico Williams completed the first half rout after being sent on his way by a lethal Pedri through pass.

Nico Williams ran behind the Iranian defense, closed down on the goalkeeper before smoothly chipping him to score a cheeky lobbed goal.

The first half came to an end 4-0 to Spain.

In the 2nd half, Iran came out with more energy but it didn't do much for them in front of goal. All they did was manage to stifle Spain's momentum for 20 minutes, but then, lady luck shone on the Iranians.

In the 68th minute, Taremi did it, getting a rare counterattacking chance and he did not miss a beat, curling a shot past Unai Simon to the top right corner.

After that goal though, Spain woke up again.

Rodri scored the 5th goal in the 72nd minute, scoring a precision shot first-time from outside the box as he pushed it towards the top left corner.

5-1 to Spain.

Dani Olmo replaced Mikel Oyarzabal and within just 3 minutes of entering the game, he scored the 6th goal in the 77th minute of the game.

5 minutes later, in the 82nd minute, Lamine Yamal weaved his way through the Iranian defense before scoring a silky solo goal to make it 7-1.

And then, in the 90th minute, having come on for Fabian Ruiz, Vitorinha struck.

POW!

It was a piledriver from outside the box, drilled with so much power and precision that it tore its way in between multiple players, fooling the goalkeeper before finding its way to the bottom left corner of the net.

8-1 to Spain.

What a game. Total Spanish domination.

The game came to an end 8-1, and Rodri won the man of the match award for how he effortlessly controlled and dictated the game from defensive midfield.

...

4 hours later, New Zealand took on Italy in Mexico.

(GROUP F:)

(New Zealand vs Italy)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

It was one of the few bland clashes in the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and yet, Italy got their 3 points through a moment of magic from Nicolo Barella.

It happened in the 54th minute of the game.

He got the ball in midfield, went on a solo run before scoring inside the box as he showed great strength and technique to fend off New Zealand's defenders.

The game ended 0-1 in Italy's favor.

...

Before the 2nd Group F game of the day between New Zealand and Italy, Germany took on Colombia in a Group G encounter.

(GROUP G:)

(Germany vs Colombia)

(Venue: Lumen Field, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

It was another FIFA World Cup thriller.

Luis Diaz stole the show for the Colombia National football team, winning millions of hearts with his 2 goal performance in the thrilling encounter and yet, it was not enough to topple the great Germany.

The German machines held nothing back on the night.

With the likes of Antonio Rudiger and Schlotterbeck behind, the midfield and attacking players had the freedom to express themselves up front, and boy did the young German talents show up in style.

Jamal Musiala won the man of the match award in the end with a head-turning 2 goals and 1 assist performance, his partner in crime Florian Wirtz continuing from where he stopped with a 1 goal and 1 assist performance.

Their combination this game was flawless and untouchable.

The highlight of the night was the goal that gave Germany the lead, Jamal Musiala receiving the ball from deep and wriggling through 3 players like they were not there before playing tiki taka football with Florian Wirtz.

Swift, short passes tore Colombia open like a hot knife through butter and Florian Wirtz played the final pass to Jamal Musiala who dribbled through 3 players, the goalkeeper included before scoring into an empty net.

Lumen Field in the U.S.A exploded in awe of the 2 German wonderkids now turning into legends.

Germany won the game 4-1.

Chapter 479: FIFA World Cup 2026 [10]

(GROUP G:)

(Germany 4-2 Colombia)

(Venue: Lumen Field, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

Germany and Colombia played out a thriller at the Lumen Field in USA, Luis Diaz dazzling with his performance for the Colombian national football team, while Jamal Musiala and Florian Wirtz stole the headlines on the night.

And yet, it was not the last World Cup encounter of the night.

There was still another Group G encounter.

(GROUP G:)

(Iraq vs Honduras)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 15, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Iraq took on Honduras at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in USA.

Both nations held nothing back, eager to give their all to get all 3 points in the game as they started with their best lineup and left it all on the pitch.

Honduras had the advantage early on but against the run of play, Iraq stunned their opponents with a moment of individual brilliance from their striker, Hussein, who did it all from a counter.

1 counterattacking chance was all he needed to beat his man, and keep on running without looking back before slotting past the goalkeeper into the bottom left corner of the goal.

1-0 to Iraq in the 41st minute.

The first half came to an end 1-0.

Second half seemed to be heading towards a goalless draw, gifting the win to Iraq when Honduras exploded in the final minutes of the game.

Honduras scored 3 goals within the final 10 minutes of the game.

Their star player, Alvarez who played in attacking midfield on the night got the important equalizer in the 81st minute of the game, making it 1-1.

Just 3 minutes later, in the 84th minute, their defender, Maldonado rose highest from a corner kick, planting a powerful header that beat the Iraq goalkeeper for the 2nd time in 4 minutes.

And then, in the 90th plus 2 minutes, they rounded it up as Iraq searched desperately for an equalizer, their left winger, Palma going on an incredible solo run after a final counterattacking chance.

He ran almost the full length of the pitch, cut in, before scoring a stunning curler that left the stadium buzzing with excitement.

Honduras completed a legendary World Cup comeback in the final 10 minutes of the game, running away with all 3 points.

...

The next day, another favorite for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in USA took to the pitch. This time, it was the Three Lions of England clashing in an epic Group H encounter against Algeria.

(GROUP H:)

(England vs Algeria)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 16, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

Algeria started in a regular 4-3-3 formation with Guendouz in between the posts, and a quadruple defense of Hadjam, Mandi, Bensebaini, and Ait-Nouri ahead of the goalkeeper. The trio of Boudaoui, Kendouci, and Chaibi manned the midfield.

In attack was the offensive trio of an old Riyad Mahrez, Gouiri, and Amoura.

It was a strong Algeria lineup, but compared to the Three Lions of England, they were lacking a bit.

England started in an intimidating 4-2-3-1 lineup with Jordan Pickford in between the posts, Reece James, Harry Maguire, Marc Guehi, Lewis-Skelly ahead of him in defense, and then Jude Bellingham and Declan Rice in midfield.

Ahead of them was Morgan Rodgers in right wing, Marcus Rashford in right wing, and Cole Palmer in attacking midfield.

Leading the line as the striker was the ageless Harry Kane.

FWEEE!

As soon as the game started, England pushed forward with only one goal in mind... to wreak havoc across the Algerian defense.

But the Algerians didn't make it easy though.

Thomas Tuchel's men flexed their star power, bombing forward with numbers, pressing the Algerians, dominating them, and yet, the Algerians huddled together, played and defended as a team.

They played valiantly, defending for their lives in the first half.

England dominated heavily but they could not score. And then, in the closing stages of the first half, against the run of play, English fans around the world were stunned by a premier league legend rolling back the years with a moment of magic.

It was a counterattacking chance for Algeria.

Kendouci won back the ball before quickly swinging it up field to trigger a counterattack, playing it towards the right where Riyad Mahrez lurked.

Having pushed up in attack, Lewis-Skelly was nowhere to be seen.

But Declan Rice was closeby.

He rushed in but then...

BZZZ!

That touch, that silky smooth first touch that made him a one of a kind player struck again as Riyad Mahrez touched the ball with elegance, smoothly evading Declan Rice's lunge with his first touch.

He pushed towards the England defense and they reacted.

Mark Guehi closed him down but playing a one two with his striker, Gouiri, Mahrez skipped into the box before hitting a shot from outside the box, sending it on a low driven run.

The ball rolled though the pitch, evaded Pickford's outstretched palm, and entered inside the net.

0-1 to Algeria.

The stadium erupted.

The first half came to an end 0-1 and social media went haywire, fans bantering, trolling, piling the pressure on the English footballers.

The second half started with the pressure cooker on.

England played with pressure. They must win.

England fans were already having flashbacks of past failures as the game progressed when the man with the chill struck.

Cole Palmer received a pass from Foden, pivoted on the spot to set himself up before striking the ball towards the top left corner. The goalkeeper stood no chance.

GOALLLLL!

English fans in the stadium roared.

That goal switched the momentum, and England was on.

Cole Palmer scored in the 69th minute and 8 minutes later, in the 77th minute, he assisted Harry Kane for the go-ahead goal, the lethal striker volleying the ball into the net after a cheeky lobbed pass from Palmer.

4 minutes later, in the 81st minute, Rashford went on a mazy run down the left side of the pitch, and then...

WHOM!

A shot, a goal.

3-1 to England now.

What a comeback.

Harry Kane added the nail to the coffin late, scoring from a header to doom Algeria to an eventual 4-1 loss.

Once again, another classic at the FIFA World Cup.

Chapter 480: FIFA World Cup 2026 [11]

On the same day that England orchestrated an iconic and much-needed comeback win for English fans, one of the main hosts of the FIFA World Cup 2026, USA also took to the pitch for the first time.

(GROUP H:)

(USA vs Slovenia)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 16, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

USA took on Slovenia in Canada.

Slovenia started in a 4-3-3 formation with the La Liga legend, Jan Oblak in between the posts while ahead of him was a defensive lineup of Karnicnik, Drkuic, Bijol, and Janza.

In midfield was the trio of Lovric, Cerin, and Elsnik, while the attacking trio comprised Stojanovic, Vipotnik, and Benjamin Sesko leading the line as the striker.

In contrast, USA started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Matt Turner in between the posts and a defensive quadruple of Scally, Carter-Vickers, McKenzie, and Arfsten ahead of him. In midfield was Weston McKennie and Taylor Adams.

Further ahead in attack lined up Luna in right wing, Timothy Weah in left wing, Agyemang leading the line as the striker, and the star of the team, Christian Pulisic pulling strings from attacking midfield.

FWEEE!

The game started with intensity and electric energy.

Both teams were even during the early exchanges, but late in the first half, Slovenia took charge as Benjamin Sesko started showing exactly why he was rated as one of the best strikers in Europe, terrorizing USA's defense and almost putting his name on the score line 3 different times.

He was only thwarted by 2 excellent saves from Matt Turner and an even more impressive goal line clearance from McKenzie.

Towards the end of the first half, USA barely held on but then, Benjamin Sesko got his goal at last, literally forcing it into reality.

He received the ball outside the box and scored an absolute banger with a knuckle ball, sending the stadium into a frenzy.

He scored in the 44th minute of the game.

The first half came to an end 0-1 in Slovenia's favor.

The 2nd half was filled with drama.

Like wolves with fire set on their tails, USA came out in the 2nd half with endless energy, taking the game to their opponents as they were also under pressure to win their first game of the tournament like England.

Christian Pulisic transformed his game this 2nd half, finally showing what he was capable of as he pulled the strings from midfield.

Finally, it paid off.

He played a through pass for Timothy Weah who ran behind Slovenia's defense only to cut the ball back for McKennie who didn't miss a beat, directing a placement shot towards the top right corner of the net.

1-1.

USA fans in the stadium exploded in ecstasy.

Weston McKennie scored the all-important equalizer goal in the 63rd minute of the game, and yet, USA were not satisfied with just that.

They wanted more, and so they kept on pushing.

And then, they got it.

It was a corner kick.

USA played it short, passing to Christian Pulisic who took the ball, took his time despite the Slovenia player rapidly closing him down.

With a feinted cut, he evaded the onrushing player, looked up one last time before floating the ball into the box.

In the 75th minute, Timothy Weah rose highest in the box, planting a powerful header that beat the goalkeeper and into the net.

**GOAL!**

USA now led.

Their fans celebrated wildly.

USA was on course towards winning but in the last minute of the game, a certain striker broke all their fantasies with a ruthless shot reminiscing of a prime Luis Suarez from inside the box.

2-2!

The final whistle blew a few minutes later despite all that USA tried, the game ended in a draw.

It was another FIFA World Cup classic.

...

(GROUP I:)

(Netherlands vs China)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial, USA)

(Date: June 16, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Netherlands vs China was a perfect example of a one-sided game.

The Netherlands' players ran riot, Virgil Van Dijk starting the scoring as early as the 8th minute by scoring from a header.

Frankie De Jong doubled the Netherlands' lead in the 15th minute, before doubling his tally for the game in the 23rd minute.

3-0 to Netherlands in 23 minutes.

Memphis Depay completed the first half trouncing, scoring a brace in the 33rd and 37th minute to make it 5-0 by halftime.

Ronald Koeman made significant changes to his team during halftime, but Netherlands still dominated the 2nd half.

Luuk de Jong scored the 6th goal for the Netherlands in the 59th minute, completing a one-sided affair for the Netherlands.

The Chinese never really as much as a sniff of goal.

...

(GROUP I:)

(Ukraine vs Tunisia)

(Venue: Estadio Monterrey, Mexico)

(Date: June 17, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

Ukraine vs Tunisia the next day was another FIFA World Cup classic.

It was an end to end game for 90 minutes.

Ukraine scored first in the 30th minute, Zinchenko dribbling through the Tunisian defense with criminal ease but the lead didn't last. Just 6 minutes later in the 36th minute, Tunisia's Mastouri, the national team striker rose highest to a crossed ball, heading it into the net.

Both national teams were even for last stretches of the game till the 43rd minute when Ukraine scored again, this time, Mykolenko driving a piledriver from outside the box but just a minute later, Tunisia equalized again.

Right from kickoff, their striker, Mastouri ran down the field only to receive a long pass which he took in his strides, overpowered his opponent physically before rifling the ball into the roof of the net.

2-2.

The first half came to an end even.

The second half was just as exciting, both national teams matching other stride for stride, playing sweet and exciting attacking football.

Then, in the 78th minute, Ukraine took the lead for the 3rd time this game, Sudakov, one of their forwards scoring a curler past Tunisia's goalkeeper.

10 minutes later in the 88th minute, against all odds while Ukraine defended staunchly, Tunisia equalized.

Mastaouri got his hattrick, bulldozing through multiple players in the box with his physicality before sneaking a shot past the goalkeeper.

3-3.

FWEEE!

The referee's final whistle sounded. The game ended 3-3.

What a game.