

## Football God 491

Chapter 491: FIFA World Cup 2026 [22]

A goal and an assist.

What a performance.

In his 2nd consecutive FIFA World Cup game, the first World Cup of his 4-year career, Sam claimed the man of the match award.

He wasn't playing like a 20-year-old at all.

Rather, he played like a veteran footballer stuck in the body of a youth in his physical prime. Sam was unreal.

And with that performance, once again, he put his name forward among conversations of the very best footballers in the world this season.

He was now alongside truly illustrious company in the World Cup.

After Nigeria's 2nd game against Saudi Arabia, Sam and Victor Osimhen pushed themselves firmly into the Golden Boot race with 2 goals and 3 goals apiece, while Sam's name was already firmly entrenched in the Golden Ball race.

In the Golden Ball race, Sam's name sat alongside other illustrious names like Vinicius Jnr, Kylian Mbappe, Rodri, and Pedri.

All of them were outstanding for their respective countries in 2 games so far.

The FIFA World Cup didn't stop after Nigeria's win over Saudi Arabia though. The FIFA World Cup in North America continued the next day.

...

(GROUP F:)

(Iran vs New Zealand)

(Venue: Lumen Field, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

25th June, 2026...

Footballing fans from Iran and New Zealand filled Lumen Field in USA to the brim, all bubbling with energy to support their country in hopes of bolstering their chances of qualifying for the knockout stages of the FIFA World Cup.

Iran vs New Zealand was a pretty chaotic affair, a game that attracted 5 different yellow cards from the referee.

And yet, it was not even the conduct of the players that drew the most attention, neither was it the trigger-happy hand of the referee to give out cards.

Rather, what drew the most attention was the confusing nature of the game.

The first half was a drab affair between both teams, neither team deeming it worth it to take risks in attack as they played a basic defensive game.

It was boring, truly an eye sore, but both fanbases persevered, roaring their respective countries on to get the victory.

The 2nd half didn't exactly follow a different script as it also followed the same boring script for most of the game, till after the 75th minute.

After the 75th minute, both countries erupted.

It was almost as if both sides came to a tacit agreement, saying, 'f\*ck it! What's there to lose? Let's rumble!'

Because they did rumble.

The final 15 minutes of the game was an absolute thriller.

Both sides seemingly abandoned defense in favor of reckless attack, putting all their energy into breaking the opposition down.

New Zealand got to the promised land first, their striker lashing into a cross with an incredible instinctive backheel touch that nudged the ball towards the top right corner, away from the goalkeeper's grasp.

It was almost funny, but it was a goal.

"GOALLLL...!" New Zealand fans erupted.

The goal came in the 81st minute.

But 7 minutes later, in the 88th minute of the game, Iran broke New Zealand hearts around the world with a stunner from their star midfielder from almost the halfway line as he spotted the goalkeeper slightly out of his lines.

And just like that, 1-1.

Neither clubs had anymore idea after the 88th minute. And so, once again, the game reverted to a drab and boring affair, both countries passing it around hopelessly till the final whistle blew.

1-1.

What a strange and confusing game of contrast it was.

....

(GROUP F:)

(Italy vs Spain)

(Venue: NRG Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

On the same 25th of June in USA, Italy took on Spain.

Italy historically boasted one of the best defenses in a national football team, and this year's Italy squad was no different.

Their defense was stacked, but it was not enough against Luis De La Fuente's Spanish side as they ran rampant tirelessly.

For large swathes of the game, Italy showcased their defensive excellence to the world, holding Spain for a long time, ending the first half in a goalless draw even as they got a few chances of their own through counterattacks.

But then in the 2nd half, Spain changed the narrative with 2 lightning-fast goals, stunning Italy.

The first came from Rodri, the Spanish talisman bursting into the 18-yard box only to direct a placement shot towards the bottom right corner, tearing Italy's elite defense open to score the first goal of the game.

**BOOM!**

The NRG Stadium in USA exploded even as Rodri slid on his knees in celebration, sending Spanish fans all around the world into a frenzy.

The first goal entered in the 56th minute.

But just 2 minutes later, the Spanish wonderkid, Lamine Yamal struck again in dominant fashion, reminding the world of his talent and just how good he was.

Playing alongside Sam dampened his shine a bit this season, forgetting just how good he was. But Yamal was still just as good, Sam was simply a monster.

And tonight, Yamal showed exactly what he was capable of, receiving the ball in the right before running through half of the Italian defense before poking the ball into the bottom right corner away from the goalkeeper's feet as he charged out to meet him.

0-2. Just like that.

Italy didn't stay quiet though.

After Spain's 58th minute goal, they finally seemed to wake up from their slumber and a few minutes of Italian brilliance followed, culminated by a 63rd minute Nicollo Barella strike.

Receiving the ball inside the box, Barella showed his elite ball control, spinning with the ball, going in between 3 players before slotting the ball past Unai Simon and into the net.

1-2.

Game on. Or so Italian fans thought.

With Rodri in the center of the pitch breaking attack, Italy could not build on their sudden momentum after their first goal.

Rodri was not a destroyer in the center of the pitch.

He was an elite tactician with a brain packed full of defending genius and anticipation, and he helped Spain stay in the game.

In the 84th minute, Rodri raised the ball above Italy's defense, catching them out for Nico Williams to run into before slotting past the goalkeeper.

1-3.

That was the score line at the end of the game.

Rodri won the man of the match award.

Chapter 492: FIFA World Cup 2026 [23]

The next day after Spain tore Italy's famed defense apart at the NRG Stadium in USA, helped massively by a brilliant Rodri, Colombia took on Iraq at the Mercedes Benz Stadium in USA.

(GROUP G:)

(Colombia vs Iraq)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 26th, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

Having lost their first group stage game against a rampant Germany side, despite Luis Diaz's brilliant 2-goal performance, Colombia was out with a mission this time, and the fury of their determination was directed at Iraq.

Iraq were no weak team by any means, but faced against this spirited Colombia side, they could not do much to weather the storm.

Colombia started as early as the 6th minute of the game, and it was Luis Diaz again, taking the ball from the left before dribbling through the middle in his first meaningful contribution of the game.

And that first contribution ended up being the first goal as Luis Diaz dribbled through 4 players before playing the ball in between the legs of the goalkeeper to make it 1-0 to Colombia.

The Colombian national football team took a cue from their star player, taking the baton from where he stopped and riding aggressively.

Luis Diaz was involved throughout as Colombia threatened.

In the 23rd minute, after another electric dribble down the right side of the pitch, Luis Diaz cut it back for James Rodriguez who rolled back the years with a stunning volley shot that tore through Iraq's defense like a hot knife through butter.

The goalkeeper stood no chance, diving hopelessly as the ball shot past him and into the net like a missile.

2-0.

It was still not over yet.

Luis Diaz completed an electric first half display by passing to Lerman, the Colombian midfielder who decided to try his luck, shooting a long range shot from outside the box that connected perfectly, maybe a bit too perfectly to his boot.

POW!

The sound of the ball being hit was too sweet.

It flew like a missile, straight towards the acute angle of the top left corner before nestling into the net where it belonged.

3-0.

The Mercedes Benz Stadium was a cauldron of noise as excited Colombian fans celebrated exuberantly, too excited to tone the noise down.

The first half came to an end with the game 3-0 in Colombia's favor.

Iraq was down and out.

During halftime, the Colombian national team coach told his players to take it easy so as to avoid injuries. He told them to simply enjoy themselves on the pitch.

The 2nd half started and Colombia did just that.

It was not like a FIFA World Cup game anymore. Rather, it seemed like a Colombian talent show as from Luis Diaz and James Rodriguez to the least Colombian national team player, they all enjoyed themselves with the ball, dribbling, nutmegging players, compiling highlight reels on the pitch.

At some point, Iraq was just pitiful.

They had zero shots on target in the first half, and in the 2nd, they had only 1 shot on target.

In the 82nd minute, Lucumi, one of the Colombian center backs rose highest to a corner kick, heading the ball past the goalkeeper to make it 4-0 to Colombia.

Colombia won the game comfortably, getting the much coveted 3 points.

Luis Diaz got the man of the match with his vintage performance.

And he became the first player in this FIFA World Cup to receive a 10/10 performance rating by reputable channels this World Cup.

He was unplayable on the pitch.

...

That same day, hours later, Honduras took on Germany.

(GROUP G:)

(Honduras vs Germany)

(Venue: AT&T Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 26th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Against Honduras, the Germany national football coach, Julian Nagelsmann decided to do some experiments, heavily rotating his team, starting the likes of Rudiger and Jamal Musiala all in the bench.

It resulted in a shocking 2-0 Honduras lead by the 21st minute of the game.

Florian Wirtz later pulled one back in the 43rd minute, making it 1-2 but Germany were trailing by halftime.

During the second half though, Julian Nagelsmann finally pulled the plug, unleashing his talents that were on the bench.

Antonio Rudiger got the equalizer in the 66th minute, rising highest from a corner to head past the goalkeeper and into the net.

In the 75th minute, Jamal Musiala did it, dribbling through 3 players with blistering pace and skill before scoring to give Germany the lead.

What a comeback!

And yet, Germany were not done yet.

Leroy Sane was introduced into the game in the 78th minute and in the 83rd minute, he received the ball before bursting into the box with pace and curling a finesse shot past the goalkeeper into the top right corner.

2-4 to Germany.

And just like that, Germany were back.

The game ended 2-4 in Germany's favor.

...

(GROUP H:)

(Algeria vs USA)

(Venue: Estadio BBVA, Mexico)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

The next day after Germany's comeback against Honduras, Algeria took on USA in a must win game for the United State's national football team.

With pressure on their shoulders, the captain of the United State's national football team performed in the big stage, Christian Pulisic stealing the headlines with a scintillating 2-goal display for USA.

His first goal came in the 32nd minute and his 2nd came in the 48th minute, scattered in between an Algerian equalizer in the 39th minute of the game.

The game didn't really have that special something, that moment that would make fans rise to their feet in awe, but both countries played their best football.

The dying stages of the game was especially tense and cagey for the Americans as the Algerian players fought tooth and nail for the equalizer.

They bruised, harried, and bashed the American football players with their physicality, making them fight for every ball, sweat in every duel.

In the end, when the final whistle sounded, a few American players collapsed on the pitch as they were exhausted after such a grueling game.

USA won by a narrow 1-2 victory.

Chapter 493: FIFA World Cup 2024 [24]

(GROUP H:)

(Slovenia vs England)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

5 hours after Algeria vs USA, on the same day but in a different stadium at the Metlife Stadium in USA, Slovenia took on England.

Against a nation that they struggled against at the 2024 Euros, requiring a last-minute goal from Jude Bellingham to barely escape the fate of being eliminated, Thomas Tuchel's England proved their credentials as an entirely different team at the Metlife Stadium.

Thomas Tuchel held nothing back, giving his team the go ahead to let loose.

And letting loose was exactly what the players did.

With the likes of Bukayo Saka, Anthony Gordon, Cole Palmer, and Harry Kane all available in the team in attack, England was unstoppable.

During the first 10 minutes of the game, England struggled to do much with the ball, losing possession easily to Slovenia's high-press but once their midfield figured their opponent's rhythm out, England exploded.

The first goal came from a Harry Kane header in the 18th minute, Cole Palmer burst through traffic into space with a silky touch and some electric tight-space dribbling before raising the ball for his captain to power into the net from a header.

Harry Kane's goal set the MetLife ablaze as tens of thousands of English fans watching live in the stadium exploded in cheers and roars of ecstasy.

18 minutes, 0-1 to England.

In the 24th minute, Bukayo Saka doubled England's lead, receiving the ball in the right before dribbling through 3 Slovenia players, a crazy run which ended with a curled shot that beat the goalkeeper, nestling into the top left corner of the net.

"MY GOD! What a goal!" The commentators raved.

"England are on!"

"Thomas Tuchel's team is unstoppable tonight!"

The commentators were right, England was unstoppable tonight because 2 goal were clearly not enough for them in a dominant first half display.

Declan Rice burst into the 18-yard box in the 36th minute after sustained England pressure offensively, resulting in the space opening up for him to tap into the net from a Bukayo Saka pass.

The first half came to an end 0-3 in England's favor.

The second half started with the same script; England dominating, while Slovenia held on for dear life.

It continued like this until a stunner in the 61st minute.

Benjamin Sesko, Slovenia's striker received a cross just outside the 18-yard box and instead of trying anything fancy like trapping the ball, the already frustrated striker tried his luck from 20 yards out, rifling the ball on a volley.

POW!

The ball flew like a missile, beating Dean Henderson with its tremendous pace as it tore its way into the top right corner.

61 minutes, 1-3.

That goal gave Slovenia some much-needed moment of respite, hopes of a comeback, but England snuffed that hope out ruthlessly.

In the 68th minute, Anthony Gordon ran through the Slovenia defense with an electric dribble before squaring the ball for Harry Kane to tap into the net, making it 1-4 to England.

Thomas Tuchel made a few changes after the 70th minute of the game, one of them was introducing Eberechi Eze to the pitch in place of Anthony Gordon.

It took just 6 minutes after Eberechi came on to make his mark, dribbling through multiple players in the 77th minute before scoring an insane solo goal to make it 1-5 to England.

No way back for Slovenia.

It was a vintage England performance, a performance that gave English fans hope and belief that they could go all the way to win the World Cup this time.

The game came to an end 1-5 and Bukayo Saka won the man of the match award after a brilliant display from the right.

...

(GROUP I:)

(China vs Ukraine)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 28th, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

China vs Ukraine the next day was a tightly contested affair.

Both countries played their hearts out on the pitch in an end to end game. Both created numerous chances, but their finishing let them down, ending the first half of the game in a 0-0 draw.

The first half followed the same script, chances being created in abundance but with both nations lacking a lethal finisher to finish the chances that they created, until Zinchenko in the 79th minute.

Just when people thought the game would end in a draw, Zinchenko took the ball from deep, ate dozens of meters of space with his pace, exchanged a quick one-two with his left winger before bursting into the box and curling a shot past China's goalkeeper to make it 0-1.

That sole goal was the winner.

China increased their intensity as soon as they started trailing 0-1, but it was not enough against a dogged Ukraine defensive performance in the final minutes of the game.

The game ended 0-1.

Oleksandr Zinchenko won the man of the match award.

...

(GROUP I:)

(Tunisia vs Netherlands)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 28th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Tunisia vs Netherlands was a thriller.

Playing against a superior national side in Netherlands, Tunisia did not rollover, exposing their bellies in surrender, rather, they dug in and played the best game of their lives in a desperate drive to attain the 3 points of the game.

The first half was end to end, full of tension and drama.

Tunisia held Netherlands, defending doggedly against them while threatening occasionally with their counterattacking breaks.

But none of those counterattacks bore substantial result as the Virgil Van Dijk-led Netherlands defense held strong and firm.

The first half ended in a 0-0 draw, Tunisia playing a solid game but when second half started, the Tunisian players finally gassed out.

And taking advantage of their tiredness, Netherlands ran riot.

The game ended in a 0-4 thrashing.

Memphis Depay got a brace, scoring in the 56th and 63rd minute of the game. Xavi Simons got the first goal of the game to break the deadlock in the 51st minute, a stunner from range.

And then Virgil Van Dijk got the final Netherlands goal in the 78th minute to complete a dominant Netherlands second half performance.

Virgil Van Dijk won the man of the match award.

Chapter 494: FIFA World Cup 2026 [25]

(GROUP J:)

(Senegal vs Czech Republic)

(Venue: NRG Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 29th, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

The next day after Netherlands ripped Tunisia apart, Senegal took on Czech Republic in another high-stakes FIFA World Cup group stage game.

It was poised to be a tough game between 2 capable teams, both desperate to get all 3 points from the game to keep their World Cup dreams alive.

Senegal started in a 4-3-3 formation, Edouard Mendy in between the posts, while ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Diouf, Niakhate, Koulibaly, and Diatta. Their midfield trio comprised Camara, Idrissa Gueye, and Diarra.

Senegal's front trio comprised Ismaila Sarr in left wing, Nicolas Jackson through the middle as the striker, and Ndiaye as the right winger.

As for Czech Republic, they started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Kovar in between the posts, and a defensive quadruple of Coufal, Holes, Krejci, and Zeleny. Their midfield comprised Soucek and Cerv, while in attack there was Cerny in right wing, Hlozek in left wing, Sulc in attacking midfield, and Patrick Shick leading the line as the striker of the team.

It was another FIFA World Cup thriller that ended in a close score line.

Czech Republic held possession more than Senegal, but the Senegalese were the more threatening team in attack.

It was as much a clash of footballing philosophies and strategy as it was a clash of players and coach playing styles.

Czech Republic stunned Senegal, breaking the deadlock in the 23rd minute of the game as Hlozek, the left winger burst into the 18-yard box after a rampaging dribble down the left hand side of the pitch.

He exchanged a one-two pass with Sulc, the attacking midfielder, before eventually flicking the ball to Patrick Schick who took just 2 touches of the ball.

One touch to control it, a loose control that made the ball rise too high for him, and his second touch was a daring improvised bicycle kick.

BAM!

Patrick Schick's move caught the Senegalese defense off-guard, including their goalkeeper as the ball entered the net while the goalkeeper was still rooted to one spot.

"GOALLLLL...!!!" The commentators roared.

"Patrick Schick, you boy!"

"What a goal!!!!"

"Senegal has been torn open!"

Lost in a trance due to the euphoria of scoring the first goal of the game to give his country the lead in a FIFA World Cup game, Patrick Schick charged towards the corner flag, sliding on his knees in celebration even as tens of thousands of Czech Republic fans rose to their feet, cheering and chanting excitedly.

23 minutes, 0-1 to Czech Republic.

And suddenly, Senegal were under pressure.

That goal changed the game, turning it more physical, more intense, and most importantly turning it into a do or die game filled with fouls.

The referee handed 3 yellow cards out before the first half came to an end.

But the first half didn't end like that, not before Senegal could make their mark. And Senegal did just that in the 40th minute of the game.

In the 40th minute, Ismaila Sarr burst to life, rounding down the right side of the pitch just like Hlozek did and unlike the Czech Republic left winger, he decided to go himself, unleashing a perfect curled shot that beat the goalkeeper, finding its way to the top right corner of the net.

It was a stunning golazo.

**BOOM!**

The NRG Stadium in USA roared to life as Senegalese fans erupted in loud roars of ecstasy, celebrating the equalizer.

What a game. What a first half.

The first half of the game came to an end 1-1.

The 2nd half of the game started with even more urgency, pushing the players to go well and beyond their usual limits.

And this time, Senegal was the team who broke the deadlock first, Diarra, the Senegalese midfielder striking this time as he unleashed a piledriver shot from 20 yards out, stunning Czech Republic and giving them the lead for the first time this game.

The celebrations among the Senegalese fans could not be curbed.

They expressed their joy, turning the stadium into a cauldron of noise.

And yet, it was not over yet.

The game was still far from being over.

Just 3 minutes after Senegal scored in the 62nd minute of the game, Czech Republic stroke a second time this game.

And this time, it was their star striker, Patrick Schick.

It came from a corner kick routine.

The striker rose highest in the box, beating all the Senegalese defenders with his height and physicality before heading home to make it 2-2.

BOOM!

The NRG Stadium exploded again as Czech Republic fans came back to life.

The atmosphere in the stadium was crazy, explosive.

What a game.

And yet, it was not over yet.

Czech Republic equalized the game in the 65th minute, setting it up for one of the most tense final 15 minutes of this FIFA World Cup.

Senegal introduced the Liverpool legend and Senegalese veteran, Sadio Mane to the game after the 75th minute, adding an entirely new dimension to the game as it became even more tense and filled with action.

None of the 2 countries even entertained the thought of playing defensive football.

All that rang in their mind was...

'Win!' 'Win!' 'Win!'

'Attack!' 'Attack!' 'Attack!'

And they did just that, attack, fueled by the motivations of their coach.

Their coaches fidgeted in the sidelines, tense as they watched their players run themselves to the ground in a desperate search for the 3 points.

Senegal attacked. Czech Republic attacked.

Czech Republic defended. Senegal defended.

The tension in the stadium hit a fever pitch, reaching boiling temperature.

70th minute, no goal...

80th minute, no goal...

85th minute, no goal...

90th minute, no goal...

And then, in the 90th plus 3rd minute, magic happened.

Ismaila Sarr played Sadio Mane on, playing a clever pass that cut Czech Republic's defense open, sending the Liverpool legend on his way towards goal.

Sadio Mane didn't miss his moment, running with pace and composure, arriving before the goalkeeper before pushing the ball in between his legs.

**BOOM!**

The RNG Stadium in USA exploded.

In the final minute of the game, Sadio Mane got Senegal the winner.

All the Czech Republic players collapsed on the pitch.

The game ended 3-2 to Senegal, and Ismaila Sarr won the man of the match award.

What a game.

Chapter 495: FIFA World Cup 2026 [26]

4 hours later...

(GROUP J:)

(Iraq vs Portugal)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 29th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

After the thriller between Senegal and Czech Republic, it was finally Portugal's turn to go, aiming for 6 points with a second consecutive World Cup win.

As expected, both clubs approached the game with their best starting XI, though Portugal's elicited a bit of doubt if it was actually the best Portugal lineup.

Portugal started in their regular 4-3-3 lineup, Diogo Costa manning the posts, while in front of him sat a defensive quadruple of Joao Neves, Ruben Dias, Goncalo Inacio, and Nuno Mendes.

In midfield was the power trio of Bruno Fernandes, Vitorinha, and Bernardo Silva. Bernardo may be out of his prime, but Bruno Fernandes and Vitorinha were comfortably one of the best midfielders in world football.

The front trio?

It was the controversial aspect of Portugal's lineup because unlike in their first group stage game when the front trio comprised Joao Felix in right wing, Rafael Leao down the left, and Diogo Jota leading the line as the striker, this time, Cristiano Ronaldo started as the striker, benching Diogo Jota.

Nobody could question the coach's decision though, and thankfully, no one thought to do so.

After all, it was just Iraq, so Portugal thought.

And so the game started.

FWEEEE!

The game started well, following an expected script of Portugal dominance, as the Portuguese team dictated the game's tempo, hoarding possession.

For the first 20 minutes, Iraq were just defending till Bernardo Silva suddenly ghosted into space just outside the 18-yard box where he received a needle pass from Bruno Fernandes.

A player closed Bernardo Silva down immediately but keeping his composure and wriggling his way through, he quickly found himself one on one with the goalkeeper.

The goalkeeper rushed, but Bernardo Silva simply nutmegged him, scoring the first goal of the game as Portugal fans in the stadium celebrated.

22 minutes, 0-1 to Portugal.

That goal gave Portugal more momentum to cause havoc through the Iraq backline, the midfielders dictating the play as they created chances left, right, and center, and yet Iraq refused to let a second ball pass into their net.

They defended doggedly as a team, barely hanging on as Portugal dominated the game.

The first half ended 0-1 in Portugal's favor.

The 2nd half started, following the same script of Portugal dominance as they kept on creating chances, but then... a plot twist happened.

Bruno Fernandes lost the ball just outside the Iraq 18-yard box.

Instead of rushing to win it back, he instead looked at the referee, throwing his arms in protest. The referee didn't pay attention to him though, ignoring him as he waved the Iraq players on.

Portugal reacted just a fraction of a second too late, and then...

Bam!

The player who won back the ball spotted a run and hit it quickly, playing a lobbed pass above Portugal's defense.

Whoosh!

Jasim, Iraq's left winger erupted, blazing past Joao Neves with speed as he took the ball in his strides, rushing towards the goal.

Jasim didn't wait for Diogo Costa to rush out before making his move, aiming at the top right corner before blasting the ball with tremendous power.

BAM!

The ball flew like a missile, beating a fully stretched Diogo Costa with sheer pace as it tore its way into the net; the top right corner.

"GOALLLLLLLLLLLLLLL!"

Iraq fans in the stadium exploded in celebrations.

As they celebrated with their players, Bruno Fernandes approached the referee again, voicing his complaints.

He got a yellow card for his troubles. The referee was a no-nonsense official.

And just like that... 1-1.

The game continued, and it was clear that Portugal was rattled by that equalizer having struggled since to establish their lead.

They played with urgency, striving hard to get the leading goal again.

And that was when they were stunned.

In the 62nd minute, Jasim scored the equalizer.

In the 69th minute, Jasim received the ball in the left, ran past Joao Neves again with a deft touch and an eruption of speed.

But Joao Neves caught up with his pace, forcing Jasim to slow down.

But Jasim didn't stop though.

Bam! Bam!

He hit the ball, exchanging a one-two with Doski, the Iraq fullback who went on an overlapping run, quickly hitting the ball back in his path.

Whoosh!

Ruben Dias went in on a sliding tackle to defend the ball.

But Jasim reacted fast, skipping past the sliding Ruben Dias with a deft touch, then he took another touch to properly orient himself, and then...

POW!

He unleashed a piledriver from outside the 18-yard box, tearing its way towards the same top right corner.

Diogo Costa was rooted to one spot.

"...!" Portugal was stunned.

"COME ON!!!" Jasim roared, charging towards the corner flag as he slid on his knees in celebration to the roars of tens of thousands of Iraqi fans.

And just like that, Iraq was leading.

Under pressure now, Roberto Martinez finally made changes, taking off Joao Felix and introducing Francisco Conceicao.

The coach's decision paid dividends almost immediately as 4 minutes after he entered the game, in the 74th minute, Conceicao went on a rampaging run down his right, burning his man with a sick dribble before crossing it accurately into the box, where Cristiano Ronaldo lurked.

Ronaldo was 41, but it didn't matter. He rose into the air like an express airline, suspending himself long enough to connect to the ball with his head.

Bam!

The ball flew towards the bottom right corner.

Iraq's goalkeeper went on a desperate dive, his gloves touching the ball, but it was not enough to keep it out.

BOOM!

The Estadio Azteca in Mexico exploded.

2-2.

Portugal supporters went haywire, roaring at the top of their lungs as they celebrated the equalizer. But they were greedy, they were not satisfied yet.

They wanted more, and so they cheered their team on.

Cristiano Ronaldo just scored, and yet, Roberto Martinez made a gutsy change, taking him off and introducing Diogo Jota.

It was a gamble on his part.

He decided to bet on youth for the final minutes of the game.

Did his decision pay off?

Chapter 496: FIFA World Cup 2026 [27]

In the 74th minute, Cristiano Ronaldo scored.

Just a minute later, in the 75th minute, Roberto Martinez made the gutsy decision of taking him out and introducing Diogo Jota.

Did the decision pay off?

Yes.

It didn't just pay off, it paid off with interest.

2-4.

That was the final scoreline of the game at the end.

Portugal exploded as soon as Diogo Jota came on, the striker eager to prove himself to the coach, showing exactly what he was capable of.

Mere minutes after coming on, Diogo Jota almost caused a penalty due to his tight-space dribbling. He was tripped in the box. Portugal fans raised a storm, but the referee judged that the touch was too weak.

But then, a few more minutes later, in the 83rd minute, Diogo Jota finally did it, receiving the ball from Bruno Fernandes, dribbling into the box, about to shoot and just as multiple defenders moved to block, he flicked the ball back towards the spot where Bruno Fernandes arrived.

The Manchester United skipper's leg swung on instinct, striking the ball with immense power, sending it on a crazy velocity journey.

It rose high, towards the top left corner this time, leaving the goalkeeper no chance to react.

2-3 to Portugal!

Portugal fans celebrated exuberantly, Bruno Fernandes running to the corner flag before celebrating with Cristiano Ronaldo's suiii celebration.

And yet, Portugal was not done. Not yet.

In the 89th minute, Jota said. 'Fine, I'll do it myself'.

Trigger-happy, he received the ball just outside the 18-yard box, flicked to his left leg before unleashing another piledriver from inside the box.

The goalkeeper got a hand to it, but once again, it squirmed past his grasp.

The goalkeeper cursed, punching the pitch in frustration.

But the deed was already done.

2-4 to Portugal.

And with that, Portugal's points in the group stage rose to 6 points.

...

(GROUP K:)

(DR Congo vs Switzerland)

(Venue: Estadio Guadalajara, Mexico)

(Date: June 30th, 2026)

(Time: 14:00)

The next day, DR Congo, another African country took on Switzerland.

Both nations entered the game with their best starting XI, and they played their hearts out on the pitch.

DR Congo was the more physical side, but what Switzerland lacked in physicality, they more than made up for it with their superior technical skills.

The full game took place in the first half, a thrilling 2-2 draw as DR Congo drew first blood in the 24th minute only to double the scoreline in the 28th minute, making it 2-0.

All DR Congo had to win was defend their lead, but they failed at it.

Switzerland struck back as the momentum of the game swung, switching hands. The first Switzerland goal came in the 41st minute, making it 2-1, and the second came in the 45th plus 2 minute, making it 2-2.

The second half was intense, but no goal.

The game came to an end 2-2.

...

(GROUP K:)

(Costa Rica vs Uruguay)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial Field, USA)

(Date: June 30th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Costa Rica vs Uruguay was pretty one-sided.

The only well-known star in the Costa Rican side was Keylor Navas, their goalkeeper, but the man was old and long past his prime already.

This Uruguayan side though; led by Real Madrid's Federico Valverde, with the likes of Ronald Araujo, and Darwin Nunez all in the side, they were a force to be reckoned with in the international stage.

Costa Rica lost 0-3 convincingly to Uruguay.

Darwin Nunez scored a brace, once again solidifying the argument that he was an entirely different player when playing for his country than his club.

Despite not getting a goal in the game, due to his all-round performance in the middle of the park, Federico Valverde won the man of the match award.

...

And then...

(GROUP L:)

(Sweden vs Belgium)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: July 1st, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

Another FIFA World Cup fixture that promised a classic.

On paper and historically, Belgium was the stronger national side but Sweden were not to be messed with either.

Besides, Sweden of today had two of the best strikers in the world plying their trade for them, both already in their prime in Victor Gyokeres and Alexander Isak.

It was a clash of European heavyweights.

Sweden started in their regular 3-4-1-2 formation, with Johansson starting in between the posts, and the 3-man defense comprising Starfelt, Gudmundsson, and Sema. The midfield quadruple comprised Ayari, Karlstrom, Saletros, and Nanasi.

Kulusevski played the no. 10 role, or the attacking midfield role, while ahead of him were the 2-man double threat, Victor Gyokeres and Alexander Isak.

It was a lineup that would strike fear into most nations in the World Cup.

Belgium though, their squad was equally stacked.

Starting in their regular 4-2-3-1 formation, Sels started in between the posts, with a quadruple defense of Meunier, Debat, Faes, and De Cuyper sitting ahead of him. The midfield duo was Amadou Onana and Youri Tielemans.

As for the offense which had always been the strongest point of each Belgian squad of the past decade?

It comprised Jeremy Doku in right wing, Kevin De Bruyne through the middle as the attacking midfielder, and Leandro Trossard through the left as the left winger, while Romelu Lukaku led the line as the striker.

It was a lineup that met Sweden's lineup aura for aura, maybe even bested it.

But at this stage of the FIFA World Cup, writings on paper didn't really mean much anymore, what mattered was which country's players arrived in the right state of mind and played their best football.

In a few dozen minutes, football fans around the world would know exactly which of the 2 country's players showed up for this FIFA World Cup group game.

The 2 captains met the referee where they did the coin toss, deciding which team was to kickoff first.

Sweden was to start kickoff.

After that, the captains separated, going back to their respective positions in the pitch.

And then...

FWEEEE!

The game started.

Chapter 497: FIFA World Cup 2026 [28]

FWEEEE!

The game started.

And immediately, both nations sought to assert dominance.

On paper, Belgium had the stronger midfield but Sweden approached this game with only one objective in mind... to win.

They would not make it easy for the Belgian players.

This was why despite the fact that Belgium had the likes of Amadou Onana, Youri Tielemans, and Kevin De Bruyne all in midfield, Belgium failed to assert early dominance over this game, even just the midfield battle.

Sweden met them man to man, showing exactly what they were capable of as the Swedish players abused their physicality to slow down Belgium's game.

For the first 10 minutes of the game, Kevin De Bruyne was marked and isolated, hassled by 2 players who prevented him from settling down long enough on the ball to throw his trademark deadly passes.

And with Kevin De Bruyne marked out of the game, Belgium struggled.

From the right, Belgium tried to create with Jeremy Doku, Leandro Trossard also causing some trouble down the left but the Swedish defenders dug in, marking the players so tightly like their life was on the line.

Belgium was suffocated, their game plan strangled.

10 minutes passed.

And then, they lost cohesion.

Whoosh!

Karlstrom, one of the Swedish midfielders slid in from the side, stealing the ball from De Bruyne before quickly pouncing back to his feet, rushing after the ball and hitting it forward.

It was literally Sweden's first meaningful attack of the game, but you could feel the trepidation among the rapidly back-pedaling Belgian players.

Karlstorm hit the ball towards the left side, towards Alexander Isak.

Meunier, the Belgian right back tried to close the striker down but with a drop of his shoulder, Isak deftly evaded the right back, before kicking the ball forward and exploding forward with speed.

Thud! Thud!

His boots hit the pitch, eating yards of space like they were not there with his pace as he approached the 18-yard box from the left.

There, he met Debast, the Belgian center back and Amadou Onana who was approaching from the right.

Alexander Isak slowed down, and then...

His legs went haywire!

BZZZ!

His legs exploded, rapidly stepping over the ball in silky smooth step overs.

Debast staggered.

That was Isak's cue to move.

He moved!

He kicked the ball forward, past Debast and towards the goalkick where he intercepted it. But before Isak could run into the 18-yard box, he saw Debast again who already recovered despite being dribbled past already.

Besides, Amadou Onana was now closer than ever before.

Isak didn't think though.

As soon as Debast approached, he hit the ball, nutmegging the center back.

Gasps erupted around the stadium, but then...

Whoosh!

Amadou Onana slid in for the killer tackle.

Isak noticed it too late.

'I can't pass,' he realized immediately and then he improvised, flicking the ball to the right even as he fell down.

It was supposed to be a penalty, but the referee didn't blow.

Why?

Advantage.

Isak's flick was not a desperate play, rather, it was a calculated pass towards an onrushing teammate... Dejan Kulusevski.

Kulusevski didn't slow down, rushing at the ball with the same speed, even as he swung his leg with power, and then...

POW!

Inside the 18-yard box, he struck the ball with killer power and speed.

Sels reacted, swinging his arms, but it was a helpless movement as the ball tore past him with speed, tearing its way into the net.

"GOALLLLLLL...!"

The Mercedes Benz Stadium in USA erupted as Swedish fans celebrated.

Kulusevski ran towards the corner flag, celebrating exuberantly, swinging his arms wildly.

12 minutes, 1-0 to Sweden.

But the lead didn't last.

Just 2 minutes after the goal, Kevin De Bruyne finally forced a pass through Sweden's defense to the right where Jeremy Doku received it behind the defense.

The rapid winger exploded with the ball, eating yards of space with his pace and his ball control.

As soon as he entered the 18-yard box, Sema, one of the Swedish center backs stuck out his leg. Doku reacted at the last moment, kicking the ball away, but Sema's leg caught him, and immediately, Doku fell in the 18-yard box, screaming.

FWEEEE!

Penalty!

"Wow! What a crazy game!"

"Penalty just after Sweden scored!"

Romelu Lukaku stepped up to take the penalty. He didn't miss a beat, sending the goalkeeper the wrong way before burying it in the right corner of the net to make it 1-1.

Belgium was not done yet though.

Those 2 goals ignited the game. Lukaku scored the penalty in the 15th minute of the game, and then in the 19th minute, Belgium exploded again.

This time, Lukaku was the creator, playing his holding 9 role to perfection as he cut the ball back for Youri Tielemans to rifle into the net with power.

POW!

Another piledriver this game.

Sweden's goalkeeper could not save the ball despite going on a full stretch dive.

19 minutes, 1-2 to Belgium.

In the 26th minute, Sweden raised their defiant head again, and this time, it was Victor Gyokeres.

Gyokeres received an Isak pass in the box, held his markers off with his incredible physicality, and once the space opened, he unleashed the shot.

Bam!

He squeezed it through, towards the bottom left corner.

GOAL!

26 minutes, 2-2.

What a game it was already.

And yet, the action was not over yet. Not close.

In the 30th minute, Jeremy Doku exploded to life, stinging 2 Swedish players with his rapid dribbling, cutting through the middle before curling a shot with his left foot straight into the top left corner, leaving the goalkeeper no chance.

Golazo! The stadium exploded again.

30 minutes, 2-3 to Belgium.

But 7 minutes later, in the 37th minute of the game, Victor Gyokeres struck again, this time from a corner kick.

He rose highest in the Belgium box, powering a header towards the top right corner, leaving the goalkeeper no chance.

**GOAL!**

The Mercedes Benz Stadium was ignited for the umpteenth time this game.

3-3!

Chapter 498: FIFA World Cup 2026 [29]

"What a game of offensive football we're bearing witness to!"

"3-3! What a scoreline!"

"We can't really say defense are on top of their game this afternoon, there's been some atrocious defending from both sides!"

"But that takes nothing from the performance of the attackers this afternoon. They've been brilliant".

"What a game".

"Can anything separate these 2 nations?"

Well, not this first half at least.

The first half came to an end 3-3.

It was one of the most thrilling encounters of this World Cup already, and yet, it was still just first half that was played.

There was another half of this game yet to be played.

During halftime, the 2 coaches had a talk with their respective players, and then after 10 minutes, they sent them back to the pitch.

Surely, after such a thrilling first half, both sides were tired right?

They could not keep it up, right? Sike.

Yes, both sides were tired after that incredible first half encounter, but it was just their physical bodies. Mentally, their wills still blazed like a burning furnace.

Both countries kept the intensity up, attacking, push each of their defenses to the limit with their different style of playing.

The question was, which defense would succumb first?

Which offense would prevail first?

Well, Belgium's defense was the one that cracked first.

In the 58th minute of the game, Sweden's attacking duo exploded to life.

It was defense to attack, then goal, all in a jiffy.

Johansson, Sweden's goalkeeper played the ball upfield, aiming at Victor Gyokeres who was being tightly marked after his first half display.

Despite being tightly marked though, Gyokeres managed to rise highest, getting to the ball and he calmly headed it towards Alexander Isak, his partner in crime who was by his right.

As the ball floated towards Isak, the nearest Belgian players erupted.

But Isak didn't wait for the ball to come towards him though.

Rather, he rushed towards the ball with speed, taking it with a deft touch to bring it under control, and then... a la croqueta.

**BZZZZ!**

Alexander Isak cut through 2 players with one move like they were not there and when the third player charged in, he nutmegged the poor fellow.

And just like that, the angle opened up for him to shoot from just outside the 18-yard box. But Isak didn't shoot.

This was because, desperate already, the rest of Belgian's defense reacted like moths to flame, swarming towards him to block the potential shot. Even the goalkeeper was at full alert, focused on him.

In the state of flow for a while already, Isak took all this in, and then he swung his leg.

He didn't shoot though. It was a fake shot.

Rather, he kicked the ball towards his right where his partner in crime, Victor Gyokeres lurked, now unmarked since all the attention focused on him in that moment.

No one expected him to pass.

No one saw this coming, not the spectators, not even Victor Gyokeres himself, but Gyokeres was an elite striker.

His body reacted before his brain could.

"My GOD!" The commentators screamed. "What ingenuity from Isak!"

"99% of us didn't see that pass at all!"

"What unselfishness!"

The ball almost rolled past Gyokeres but in a moment of ultra-instinct, the lethal striker stuck his leg out, still with the presence of mind to direct his shot, a lethal placement shot towards the top right corner.

The goalkeeper sprinted back and dived, going full stretch, but it was not enough. He was not fast enough.

The ball entered the net, then...

BOOM!

The Mercedes Benz Stadium exploded for the umpteenth time this game.

Victor Gyokeres charged towards the corner flag to celebrate, pumping a fist in celebration before pointing towards Isak.

The commentators screamed in a shrill voice.

"GOLAZO!"

"GOLAZO!"

"GOLAZOOOOO!"

"Victor Gyokeres with the hattrick, and Alexander Isak with a hattrick of assists!"

"What a lethal striker combination!"

"And just like that, Belgium are trailing again!"

"Can Sweden be stopped?"

Well, only Belgium had the answer to that question at this moment.

Belgium had just 30 minutes tops to save the game, and trust them, they put everything into that final 30 minutes, running themselves to the ground.

Belgium went all-out attack!

To neutral fans, what a game!

To fans of both nations though, the tension was palpable. Watching the game was not advisable to fans with high blood pressure.

Belgium attacked and attacked, Sweden counterattacked.

Sweden didn't let the tempo up after gaining the lead for the first time this game. Instead, they did what they did best, to keep on attacking.

60 minutes, no goal...

65 minutes, no goal...

70 minutes, no goal...

75 minutes, no goal...

80 minutes, no goal...

85 minutes, no goal...

88th minute, when thousands of Belgian fans already lost hope, some even breaking down in tears, their captain did what he did best, stealing the show when his team needed him the most.

Kevin De Bruyne received a pass in the center of the pitch, and then, he switched on, deciding to go on a solo run.

He started slow, using his physicality, skill, and ball control to progress with the ball, evading challenges.

And then, suddenly, he accelerated.

He kicked the ball once to set himself up, he approached it, swinging his right leg, muscles tense and taut, and then...

POW!

From 30 yards out, Kevin De Bruyne rolled back the years with a trademark shot from range.

The ball tore its way through the pitch, rising like a missile, straight towards the top left corner, narrowly missing the goalkeeper's outstretched palm.

It tore into the net.

For a moment, silence, and then...

BOOM!

The Mercedes Benz Stadium in USA exploded again for the umpteenth time this afternoon.

What a game!

Kevin De Bruyne charged towards the corner flag, looking at the fans, nodding his head even as they roared his name like he was a King, or a god.

The game came to an end 4-4.

What a game it was.

Alexander Isak won the man of the match award.

Chapter 499: FIFA World Cup 2026 [30]

[Post-Match Panel – FIFA World Cup 2026: Sweden 4-4 Belgium]

The Host of the Show was James Caldwell, a well-known footballing personality covering the FIFA World Cup in North America.

"Ladies and gentlemen, what on earth have we just witnessed?! Sweden and Belgium have just produced an instant World Cup classic".

"Eight goals, a hat trick, a hat trick of assists from Alexander Isak, a last-minute De Bruyne equalizer... this was football at its absolute chaotic best. I mean... I'm speechless, what a game!"

The first pundit, Alex Scott chipped in. "James, I'm still trying to catch my breath. That was madness. Absolute madness".

"I don't think even either bench knew what was going to happen next. And Gyokeres, what a performance. A World Cup hat trick? Against Belgium? That's legendary stuff. But let's not forget Isak. He didn't score, but the man was orchestrating carnage every time he touched the ball".

"He's a deserving winner of the man of the match award".

Thierry Henry smiled. "Look, when a game ends 4-4, you expect some defensive errors, yes, but this? This was high octane, intelligent football".

"Kulusevski's opener, Lukaku's penalty and assist, Tielemans' strike, every one of them was precise, all clinical. But what Doku did in the 30th minute? That dribble? Vintage winger stuff. You could frame that and hang it in a museum".

The other pundits laughed, then Micah Richards chipped in. "I know you guys have talked about him already, but guys, Isak again".

"That run in the 58th minute, my God, I was on my feet! ON MY FEET! He just glided through the Belgian midfield like they weren't there. The composure to fake a shot and then square it for Gyokeres for his third? Chef's kiss! Sweden thought they had it. We all thought they had it. But... De Bruyne".

"Yeah, that's the thing," Alex Scott joined the conversation again. "You forget Belgium still had that man. De Bruyne. He's getting old, but he's still got it".

"88th minute. Nothing in the build-up. Then bam. Out of nowhere; touch, turn, goal. Just like that. It's why he's one of the greatest midfielders to ever do it".

The Host, James Caldwell finally joined the conversation again.

"This had it all. Drama. Skill. Goals. Personality. From Kulusevski's early rocket to Lukaku's commanding presence, Doku's flair, Gyokeres going supernova, and then KDB reminding the world: 'I'm still here'. This might be the match of the tournament, and we're still in the group stage!"

Micah Richards chuckled. "If this is the level we're starting with, the rest of the world needs to buckle up. This is shaping up to be a historic World Cup".

"It's the first of its kind after all, 48 nations," Thierry Henry chipped in with a smile.

"Sweden 3. Belgium 4," James Caldwell added. "A footballing rollercoaster we'll be talking about for years to come".

Before the post-match panel show came to an end, they focused on the cue highlight reel of the game again.

And of course, it was the man himself at the center of it, Alexander Isak.

They showed Isak dancing past defenders with the ball, Gyokeres celebrating with the corner flag, Lukaku rallying the Belgians, and De Bruyne standing tall with that quiet, devastating brilliance.

It was a truly brilliant FIFA World Cup game.

...

5 hours later, that same day, time came for the final game of Matchday 2 of the FIFA World Cup group stage.

This time, it was Paraguay taking on Ecuador.

(GROUP L:)

(Paraguay vs Ecuador)

(Venue: Estadio BBVA, Mexico)

(Date: July 1st, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

Both nations were caught in a tense and exciting battle in their group with knockout stage qualification as the main goal.

To boost their chances of qualifying to the knockout stage of the FIFA World Cup, they had to win this game.

Both nations poured their best on the pitch.

For Ecuador, they started in a 4-4-2 formation with Valle in between the posts, and a defensive quadruple of Estupinian, Hincapie, Pacho, and Ordonez sitting in front of him.

The midfield quadruple comprised Angulo, Vite, Franco, and Moises Caicedo. While up top in attack was Rodriguez and Yeboah.

For Paraguay, they started in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Fernandez in between the posts, and a defensive quadruple of Alonso, Alderete, Gomez, and Caceres sitting ahead of him as his protective shield.

The duo in midfield was Villasanti and Cubas, while the forward four comprised Miguel Almiron in left wing, Enciso through the middle as the attacking midfielder, Diego Gomez in right wing, and Sanabria leading the line as the striker.

Both were capable lineups full of danger men.

And they would clash on the night, putting everything and leaving it there on the pitch in a bid to get all 3 points out of the game.

FWEEE!

As soon as the referee's whistle sounded, Ecuador kicked off the game and immediately, it was clear that they had the early edge.

They were more physical, more rapid, more forward in attack.

With Moises Caicedo pushing the attack, and being a defensive wall in the middle, Ecuador was dynamic, bravely taking the game to their opponents. For the first 20 minutes of the game, Moises Caicedo had a near perfect game.

Paraguay? They were forced to defend, barely hanging on to the game.

But then, against the run of play, Ecuador were stunned in the 28th minute of the game, a defensive mistake allowing Sanabria, the striker to pounce on the ball before poking it past Valle, the Ecuadorian goalkeeper.

And just like that, Ecuador started trailing.

That goal gave Paraguay momentum for the first time this game, and at the same time, it set ablaze the fiery flames of desperation in Ecuadorian hearts, both in the stadium stands and on the pitch.

After that goal, it was no longer just Ecuador, Paraguay started playing their game finally, hoarding possession for long periods but Ecuador was still extremely threatening anytime they got the ball.

They could not equalize though, at least not in the first half.

Second half started, and it followed the same script as the first.

Paraguay defended for their lives. Ecuador could not score, leaving the Ecuadorian players frustrated and in agony.

The game came to an end 1-0 to Paraguay.

And with that, matchday 2 of the group stage came to an end.

Chapter 500: FIFA World Cup 2026 [31]

With the end of Matchday 2 of the FIFA World Cup, naturally, with it the tables for each group in the World Cup was updated, sealing the fate of the countries in printable format.

[FIFA World Cup 2026:]

[Group A:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Ghana: 2/1/1/0/4]

[Poland: 2/0/2/0/2]

[Japan: 2/0/2/0/2]

[Mexico: 2/0/1/1/1]

...

[Group B:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[France: 2/2/0/0/6]

[South Korea: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Morocco: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Peru: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group C:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Brazil: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Egypt: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Australia: 2/0/1/1/1]

[Serbia: 2/0/1/1/1]

...

[Group D:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Argentina: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Norway: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Chile: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Qatar: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group E:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Nigeria: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Canada: 2/1/1/0/4]

[Croatia: 2/0/1/1/1]

[Saudi Arabia: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group F:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Spain: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Italy: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Iran: 2/0/1/1/1]

[New Zealand: 2/0/1/1/1]

...

[Group G:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Germany: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Colombia: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Honduras: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Iraq: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group H:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[England: 2/2/0/0/6]

[USA: 2/1/1/0/3]

[Slovenia: 2/0/1/1/1]

[Algeria: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group I:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Netherlands: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Ukraine: 2/1/1/0/4]

[Tunisia: 2/0/1/1/1]

[China: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group J:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Portugal: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Czech Republic: 2/1/1/0/4]

[Iraq: 2/0/1/1/1]

[Senegal: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group K:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Uruguay: 2/2/0/0/6]

[Switzerland: 2/1/1/0/4]

[DR Congo: 2/0/1/1/1]

[Costa Rica: 2/0/0/2/0]

...

[Group L:]

[Team: P/W/D/L/PTS]

[Belgium: 2/1/1/0/4]

[Sweden: 2/1/1/0/4]

[Paraguay: 2/1/0/1/3]

[Ecuador: 2/0/0/1/0]

This was how the 12 different groups of the 2026 FIFA World Cup looked like after 2 of the most exciting group stage matchdays in World Cup history.

So much happened between the 2 matchdays.

Group A was far from a forgone conclusion, as the top 3 clubs, no, all 4 clubs in the group were still engaged in a tight battle for qualification.

With Ghana at 4 points, their chances of qualification were highest, most definitely secured already but for Poland, Japan, and even Mexico, their fate was still up in the air, depending on the result of their final group stage game.

If Mexico won their final group stage game, they would jump all the way from 1 to 4 points, putting them in prime position for knockout stage qualification. This was if their rivals in the group blundered in their final group stage game.

As for Poland and Japan, both were currently tied on 2 points apiece. It all depended on their performance on matchday 3, and the performance of their immediate rival to determine if they would secure qualification.

Matchday 3 for Group A would be filled with tension and excitement.

As for Group B, France's qualification was a forgone conclusion already. With their 6 points, it would take a divine miracle to deprive them of qualification to the knockout stage of the FIFA World Cup.

The true battle for qualification in Group B was between South Korea and Morocco. The result of their matchday 3 encounter would determine their fate.

As for Group C, just like in Group B, Brazil already secured automatic qualification after 6 points in 2 games.

Egypt were in prime position for qualification too with their 3 points considering that their nearest rivals, Australia and Serbia were both at 1 point each.

And considering that they played Brazil already, the hegemon of their group, they had a decent chance of securing knockout stage qualification.

Australia and Serbia though, they would need a miracle to qualify.

In Group D, the reigning World Cup champions, Argentina were already leaving a mark in this World Cup with 6 points in 2 games alongside the very best sides this World Cup.

Norway was a close second with 3 points, their fearsome attacking duo firing them to victory, but Chile was right behind them, also at 3 points.

Chile was perhaps Norway's only threat at qualification.

Matchday 3 would decide.

As for Qatar, at no point were they ever in the race for knockout stage qualification. They just tagged along to experience what it felt like to play.

In Group E stood the singular most shocking underdog of the FIFA World Cup this time around... Nigeria.

Just a few months ago, Nigeria were struggling to secure qualification to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Fast-forward to now, here they were, dominating illustrious World Cup nations like Canada and Croatia, leading their group with 6 points.

Nobody saw this coming, not even the staunchest of Barca fans.

The question was, did Nigeria have more in store for this World Cup?

Still in Group E, with Croatia trailing at just a point after 2 games, Canada had a decent chance of qualifying to the knockout stage alongside Nigeria with their 4 points after 2 games.

In Group F, Spain were imperious, tearing their opponents apart. Like the very best teams, they've secured 6 points in 2 games.

Italy was right behind them with 3 points in 2 games, making them primed for knockout stage qualification as their rivals, Iran and New Zealand were simply not up to par with their 1 point apiece.

Unless something crazy happened on matchday 3, Italy should qualify to the knockout stage of the FIFA World Cup.

In Group G, Germany dominated in 2 games, also at 6 points. They were the hegemon of Group G, and right behind them was a tight race for qualification between Colombia and Honduras, both at 3 points.

Matchday 3 would be filled with tension and excitement as the 2 nations, Colombia and Honduras fight for qualification.

With 0 point after 3 games, Iraq was more or less already disqualified.

In Group H, England dominated with 6 points after 2 games, USA right on their heels with their 4 points. Slovenia and Algeria were more or less passengers in the group with 1 point and 0 point each.

In Group I, Netherlands also dominated imperiously with 6 points in 2 games, followed by Ukraine with 4 points.

Both nations were guaranteed qualification already from the look of things.

In Group J, Portugal was imperious with 6 points in 2 games, Czech Republic right behind them with 4 points. The shocker in matchday 3 was Senegal who was yet to get a point in 2 games.

It was safe to say that they were having a disappointing World Cup outing.

In Group K, Uruguay led with 6 points, followed by Switzerland with 4 points. If nothing significant happened, both nations would qualify to the knockout stage.

And then, in Group L, Belgium and Sweden were locked in arguably the most exciting battle of the group stage, both at 4 points.

Matchday 3 would determine which country would top the group.

All in all, it was an exciting matchday.

And now, fans, pundits, and players finally focused on the fixtures of Matchday 3 of the FIFA World Cup group stage.