

## Football God 501

Chapter 501: FIFA World Cup 2026 [32]

(2026 FIFA World Cup fixtures:)

(Group Stage – Matchday 3:)

(GROUP A:)

(Ghana vs Poland)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 21st, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

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(GROUP A:)

(Japan vs Mexico)

(Venue: BMO Field, Canada)

(Date: June 21st, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

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(GROUP B:)

(France vs South Korea)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 22nd, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

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(GROUP B:)

(Morocco vs Peru)

(Venue: NRG Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 22nd, 2026)

(Time: 16:00)

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(GROUP C:)

(Brazil vs Australia)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 23rd, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

...

(GROUP C:)

(Egypt vs Serbia)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial, USA)

(Date: June 23rd, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

...

(GROUP D:)

(Argentina vs Norway)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP D:)

(Chile vs Qatar)

(Venue: BMO Field, Canada)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP E:)

(Nigeria vs Canada)

(Venue: Estadio BBVA, Mexico)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

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(GROUP E:)

(Croatia vs Saudi Arabia)

(Venue: Estadio Guadalajara, Mexico)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

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(GROUP F:)

(Spain vs New Zealand)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP F:)

(Italy vs Iran)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP G:)

(Germany vs Iraq)

(Venue: Lumen Field, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

...

(GROUP G:)

(Colombia vs Honduras)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

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(GROUP H:)

(England vs USA)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, Mexico)

(Date: June 26th, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

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(GROUP H:)

(Algeria vs Slovenia)

(Venue: BC Palace, Canada)

(Date: June 26th, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

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(GROUP I:)

(Netherlands vs Ukraine)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial Field, USA)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

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(GROUP I:)

(Tunisia vs China)

(Venue: Estadio Monterrey, Mexico)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

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(GROUP J:)

(Portugal vs Czech Republic)

(Venue: AT&T Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP J:)

(Senegal vs Iraq)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

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(GROUP K:)

(Uruguay vs Switzerland)

(Venue: Estadio Azteca, Mexico)

(Date: June 28th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP K:)

(DR Congo vs Costa Rica)

(Venue: Estadio Monterrey, Mexico)

(Date: June 28th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

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(GROUP L:)

(Belgium vs Ecuador)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 29th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

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(GROUP L:)

(Paraguay vs Sweden)

(Venue: BC Place, Canada)

(Date: June 29th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

And once again, the stage was set.

It began with a bang.

Ghana and Poland took on each other in the first game of the pivotal matchday 3, the game that would decide their fate in the world cup.

Both nations played an exciting game that ended in a 1-1 draw, goals from Vincent Aboubakar in first half and a Robert Lewandowski equalizer in the second half to make it level.

The goal had just 2 goals, but it was tension-packed throughout.

At the same time that Ghana and Poland played, Japan and Mexico also played a thriller that equally ended in a draw. This time, it was a 2-2 draw.

The first half was a dynamic one as Japan hoarded possession, playing a highly attacking game while Mexico played a defensive and very physical game.

In the 2nd half was when the deadlock broke.

Japan scored first in the 49th minute, going ahead but within 2 minutes, the 55th and 56th minute, Mexico scored twice, stunning their opponents and going ahead.

Japan failed to find the equalizing goal for majority of the second half, the Mexico defense frustrating them till Karou Mitoma turned the stadium on its head with a moment of individual brilliance and footballing magic.

He scored a stunning solo goal in the 81st minute to make it 2-2.

It was another stunning game that ended in a draw.

...

The next day, France and South Korea took the pitch at the same time that Morocco and Peru clashed, playing the game that would decide their World Cup campaign, and would determine if it was successful or not.

Having secured all 6 points in the last 2 group stage games, the French coach finally decided to rotate his team a bit, resting some of his starters.

France played in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Mike Maignan in between the posts, and a defensive quadruple of Digne, Hernandez, William Saliba, and Malo Gusto starting the game, with big names in defense like Ibrahima Konate, Jules Kounde, and Theo Hernandez all dropped to the bench.

In midfield, France started with Adrien Rabiot and Aurelian Tchouameni, while upfront they started with Marcus Thuram in left wing, Ryan Cherki through the middle as the attacking midfielder, Randal Kolo Muani as a makeshift right winger, and Kylian Mbappe as the striker.

As for South Korea, they fielded all their best players in a similar 4-2-3-1 formation as the French.

Lee started in between the posts, with a defensive quadruple of Seol, H.B Lee, Kim, and T.S Lee ahead of him. In midfield was HWANG and Won, while the attack comprised Se-Jin Jeon in right wing, K. Lee as the attacking midfielder, H.M Son in left wing, and H.G Oh as the striker.

FWEEE!

The game started, and it was a thriller.

It was a must-win game for South Korea, that was why they started Heung Min Son from the onset, desperate for a miracle.

France played well below their usual standards, and in the 30th minute, South Korea finally scored, K. Lee, the South Korean attacking midfielder scoring from a rapid counterattack.

Despite how much South Korea tried in the first half, they still couldn't keep France quiet. Kylian Mbappe equalized in the 45th minute of the game.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

In 2nd half, the game followed the same script, both countries suffocating each other in attack as their defense played a great game, till France's coach finally saw enough and made attacking changes, taking off Marcus Thuram, Kolo Muani, and introducing Desire Doue and Bradley Barcola.

Just 2 minutes after the change, in the 67th minute of the game, South Korea scored again, this time Son curling in one from just outside the box to make it 1-2 in his country's favor.

But that goal only ended up igniting France.

In the 70th minute, just 3 minutes after Son's goal, Mbappe assisted Barcola who dribbled past the goalkeeper and scored to make it 2-2.

Mbappe was taken off in the 75th minute, introducing Michael Olise.

Olise assisted Ryan Cherki in the 88th minute, scoring a late goal from outside the box to send South Korean hearts around the world into a pit of despair.

France won 3-2.

Chapter 502: FIFA World Cup 2026 [33]

Morocco vs Peru was a thriller even more exciting than the clash between France and South Korea.

With South Korea having lost their 3rd game against France, Morocco had it on a silver platter to claim the 2nd knockout stage qualifying spot out of the group.

And to claim it, they just had to beat Peru.

That was what Morocco set out to do but in turn, Peru set out to frustrate the hell out of them since by winning against Morocco, they'll get their first 3 points of the group stage, making them, Morocco, and South Korea at 3 points each.

That way, Peru would also have a chance of qualifying to the knockout stages of the FIFA World Cup 2026.

These reasons were why Peru played the game of their lives against Morocco.

During the first half, the footballing world was shocked as Peru proved their credentials as the dominant team, hoarding possession and being the more threatening of the 2 teams in attack.

The first half came to an end 0-0 after much fiery encounters between both teams. The second half almost followed the same script, but a specific player said no and singlehandedly tore the script, writing a new one.

That player was Achraf Hakimi.

In the 77th minute, Hakim carried the ball from back, ran deep, dribbling through multiple Peru players with his pace and dribbling ability, holding on to the ball long enough till the space opened.

He cut the ball back, and then... bam!

Amrabhat hit it once, scoring to finally break the deadlock.

And then, just 2 minutes later, in the 79th minute, Hakimi did it again, running deep with the ball before throwing a cross into the net for En Neysri to pounce on, heading past the goalkeeper to make it 2 nil to Morocco.

And just like that, with 2 goals in rapid fire fashion, Morocco were out.

They blew Peru away and secured their knockout stage qualification spot.

As soon as the France vs South Korea game in BC Place in Canada came to an end, the South Korean players received news of Morocco's game and knowing their fate, they broke down in tears, lamenting their fate.

...

The next day, on Group C, Brazil lined up against Australia in another thrilling FIFA World Cup game, this time at the SoFi Stadium in USA.

Like usual, Brazil ran riot, winning convincingly 3-1.

This time though, Endrick was the hero as Australia were the ones leading 0-1 by halftime, only for the young Brazilian to enter the pitch in the second half and turn the game around.

In the 63rd minute, Endrick unleashed a thunderbolt from way outside the 18-yard box, sending it straight into the top bin with power.

1-1!

"What a strike!" The commentator screamed, bamboozled.

9 minutes later, in the 72nd minute, Raphinha assisted Vinicius Jnr. who ran behind the defense before scoring past the goalkeeper to make it 2-1 to Brazil.

The final minutes were nervy as Australia threatened, but Endrick put a halt to all the tension as he scored another crazy goal in the 86th minute. This time, it was an acrobatic kick.

An overhead kick that left the SoFi Stadium in awe, singing praises of him.

The game ended, and Endrick won his first FIFA World Cup man of the match award.

At the same time that Brazil played against Australia, Egypt also played against Serbia in another epic FIFA World Cup game.

It was another of those tense decider games.

Both nations were in a fragile balance in their group table.

Having drawn and lost 1 game, Serbia had only 1 point. And though Egypt had 3 points compared to their 1, if they managed to win against the Pharaohs of Egypt in their last group stage game, they would rise all the way to 4 points, eclipsing Egypt in the group table.

And since Australia lost against Egypt, taking them out of the race, it was automatic knockout stage qualification for Serbia if they managed to win.

It was a make or break moment.

Serbia approached the game with a crazy mamba mentality, not caring about the names of their opponents on the pitch at all, and they played Egypt football.

It was tense, it was tight. It was action-packed, full of highlights.

Egypt eventually scored early in the second half, in the 47th minute from a Mohamed Salah assist to Omar Marmoush.

That goal sent the stadium into a frenzy as Egyptian fans turned it into a cauldron of noise, but it didn't last till the 90th minute.

In the 74th minute, Serbia did the impossible, scoring the equalizer, literally forcing it from an Egyptian own goal to make it 1-1.

For the final minutes of the game, both nations toiled, fought, searched tooth and nail and yet the 3rd goal of the game failed to materialize.

The game ended 1-1.

Serbia played the game of their lives, but they were left in tears at the end of the game. They couldn't achieve their goal.

By drawing the game, though they did increase their points tally to 2, it meant nothing since Egypt also increased their point tally to 4, granting them automatic qualification to the knockout stages of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

While the round of 32 of the FIFA World Cup loomed, another FIFA World Cup classic took the stage the next day, June 24th.

This time, it was between 2 countries that have already made their mark in this FIFA World Cup with scintillating displays.

This time, it was Argentina vs Norway.

The buildup to the game was one full of tension.

Norway started first, triggering the psychological battle early as they called Argentina a whining team relying on the past glory of their captain. They called Messi washed, finished.

And well, provoked, the introvert captain finally left his shell.

Lionel Messi retaliated in front of the press before the game, calling his opponents out as cowards, that they should bring it to the pitch if they dared.

Well, to neutral fans, fingers crossed.

The drama was the perfect ingredient to an all-time classic FIFA World Cup game between 2 nations in form.

Chapter 503: FIFA World Cup 2026 [34]

(GROUP D:)

(Argentina vs Norway)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

An hour before time, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in USA was filled to the brim with tens of thousands of fans.

There were so many reasons to not mix this game.

Not only was Lionel Messi, the greatest player of all time going to take to the pitch, but Erling Haaland, one of the brightest stars of the new football generation would also be strutting his stuff on the pitch.

The hype behind the game was crazy.

Official lineups were released an hour and 30 minutes before the game. And like expected, both nations lined up with their best starting XI.

Argentina started in a 4-3-3 formation, Emiliano Martinez starting in between the posts, while ahead of him in defense was the power quadruple of Nahuel Molina, Christian Romero, Nicolas Otamendi, and Marcus Acuna.

In midfield was the trio of Rodrigo De Paul, Alexis Mac Allister, and Enzo Fernandez, while further ahead in attack was a front trio of Julian Alvarez down the right, Lautaro Martinez down the middle as the striker, and Thiago Almada in left wing.

Lionel Messi started on the bench, but he was eager and raring to go.

As for Norway, they started in a 4-3-3 formation with Nyland starting in between the posts as the goalkeeper. Ahead of the goalkeeper was the quadruple of Ryerson, Ajer, Heggem, and Wolfe in defense.

The midfield trio comprised Martin Odegaard on the right side, Berge on the middle, and Thorsby on the left.

Alexander Sorloth started in right wing, Erling Haaland leading the line through the middle as the striker, and Nusa in left wing.

Compared to the Argentinian national football team, the Norway team was not as stacked and star-studded but with the likes of Alexander Sorloth, Erling Haaland, and Martin Odegaard starting for the Vikings of Norway, there was no cap to what they could do on a football pitch.

The fans, they came expecting a spark.

They witnessed a miracle.

The Mercedes Benz Stadium was deafening, buzzing with the songs of Argentine fans and the rumble of Norwegian anticipation.

It was Matchday 3, and the stakes were higher than ever before. Due to how good Norway was playing this World Cup, Argentina needed at least a draw to confirm top spot. Norway needed a win to survive.

Not just that, but the stakes were high due to how much Norway taunted and riled up Argentina with their comments before the media.

Lionel Messi was on the bench. The headlines already wrote themselves.

And then...

FWEEE!

The game started.

The first half could be described in a few words... the Norwegian Surge.

Argentina played good, controlling the game, but Norway struck early, and it was Alexander Sorloth who broke the deadlock as early as the 12th minute.

The striker turned winger received the ball in the right, cut in, before unleashing a left-footed curler past Dibu Martinez.

Cold. Ruthless. Norway stunned the Albiceleste early.

But like the media said, it was a game of aura for aura, the old vs the new.

Argentina responded with just as much ferocity, they replied like champions 10 minutes later as Julian Alvarez struck in the 22nd minute of the game to bring the game back level.

Mac Allister found De Paul with a quick pass between the lines. De Paul slipped Alvarez through, and the Atletico Madrid man buried it with a neat finish under Nyland.

The strikers turned wingers were stealing the show.

But Norway was not done.

In the 41st minute of the game, the Vikings of Norway struck again, and this time it was Martin Odegaard, the Arsenal skipper.

After a period of Argentine pressure, Norway countered. Berge to Nusa, a darting run, and a cutback found Odegaard free just outside the box.

One shimmy, one strike, top corner. Martinez had no chance.

41 minutes, 1-2 to Norway.

The first half came to an end with Norway still leading.

Argentina dominated in most parameters of the game in the first half, but Norway got the goals, and hence their lead.

But Argentina was not out yet.

As the second half began, tension rippled through the crowd. Cameras panned to the bench, where Messi stood up, stretching, strapping his boots.

The crowd immediately erupted in cheers.

And then, in the 53rd minute of the game, Lionel Messi entered the field. The decibel level in the stadium more than doubled.

But before his magic could settle in...

**BAM!**

Norway struck again, and this time it was Erling Haaland in the 56th minute.

Absolute heartbreak.

Acuna misjudged a pass, and Thorsby sent a long ball over the top. Haaland shrugged off Otamendi like a paper doll, reminding him of his age and then he blasted it home off the bar.

It was an absolute banger.

56 minutes, 1-3 to Norway.

The stadium froze.

And then, it happened.

Provoked already before the game through the media, and further provoked through the events happening on the pitch, like a supernova, Messi exploded.

He erupted first in the 61st minute, scoring a piledriver from range.

Messi received the ball from Enzo Fernandez, 30 yards out. He drifted past Thorsby, dropped Berge with a feint, and unleashed a vintage left-footed rocket into the top left. Argentina roared back.

But Messi was not done yet.

In the 71st minute, he pulled another moment of magic from his box of magic tricks.

Like a conductor guiding his orchestra, Messi picked up the ball in midfield, paused, then threaded an impossible pass between four defenders.

Alvarez didn't hesitate.

**BAM!**

3-3!

And just like that, Argentina was back in the game.

Now, Norway were crumbling in the weight of the Argentine pressure.

And then, in the 85th minute, Lionel Messi scored again to singlehandedly decide the result of the game.

It was an Argentine corner. Mac Allister played it, and it was cleared. De Paul recycled the ball to Messi on the edge of the box.

There, he flicked it over Berge's foot, juggled twice, and volleyed it home from an impossible angle; left foot, near post, and then... pandemonium.

**BOOM!**

The Mercedes-Benz Stadium exploded.

Norway tried, but they never made it back to the game. The final whistle ended, and the game ended 4-3 in Argentina's favor.

It was a thriller. A war. A reminder of just how good Lionel Messi could still be on his day, especially when provoked.

Chapter 504: FIFA World Cup 2026 [35]

(GROUP D:)

(Argentina 4-3 Norway)

(Venue: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

It was a thriller. A war. A reminder.

Lionel Messi, 38 years old, 10/10 performance.

Two goals. One assist. The game turned by sheer force of genius.

Lionel Messi won the man of the match award for the most singularly spectacular performance in this World Cup so far, by a 38 years old man!

The post-match reactions was crazy.

The internet was melting.

In front of the media, Alexic Mac Allister grinned like an overly excited teenager. "I've seen Messi do amazing things for 15 years. But tonight... tonight was poetry".

Even his opponents could not hide it anymore, even Martin Odegaard accepted defeat in front of the media.

"We played our best game. But when Messi's like that? You just watch".

A BBC Sport Commentator's commentary captured the essence of the game:

"One minute Norway were through. Then Messi stood up, and that was it. The G.O.A.T reminded the world who owns this stage".

And with this win, Argentina topped Group D undefeated.

And despite playing one of the best offensive football in the tournament, Norway's World Cup dream ended early, but not in shame.

And Messi?

He just authored another chapter in his mythos.

...

Chile vs Qatar was a massacre.

The game was played at the same time as Argentina and Norway went at it, this was why fans knew that Norway's World Cup dream was over immediately after the final whistle blew at the Mercedes-Benz in USA.

This was because Chile taught Qatar a brutal footballing lesson, thrashing the Middle Eastern club with a dominant 6-1 performance.

The score line did not accurately reflect the happenings on the pitch.

Chile didn't just outscore Qatar, they thoroughly outplayed them. It was almost like an all-star team playing against a group of upcoming teenagers.

For Qatar fans, it must have been an eyesore.

And with that dominant win, Chile secured qualification to the knockout stages of the 2026 FIFA World Cup ahead of Norway.

After Chile vs Qatar and Argentina vs Norway, the second game being a game where Lionel Messi rolled back the years with a dominant performance, the first 10/10 performance of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, all eyes turned towards the next day's fixture.

All attention went to tomorrow because of one of the countries that would be taking the pitch.

More precisely, it was because of one player playing for one of the countries... Samuel Moses.

After Messi's performance against Norway, no one said it but everyone seemingly agreed that the bar of excellence to claim the position of King of the Spotify Camp Nou was raised again.

And to claim it, Sam had to show that he could do it when the attention of the whole world was on him at the biggest stage of football... the FIFA World Cup.

Well, Sam accepted the challenge, shaking tables by posting on his IG account, the first post on his IG page that came directly from him.

[Samuel Moses – Let's cook!]

It was a single post, but it left the football world boiling with excitement.

Time moved fast, and in a flash, tomorrow was here.

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(GROUP E:)

(Nigeria vs Canada)

(Venue: Estadio BBVA, Mexico)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

Just like in the buildup to Argentina's clash vs Norway, the clash between Nigeria and Canada was also filled with a lot of hype because both nations were also competing for the first spot position in Group E.

Nigeria was currently at 6 points, and Canada was at 4 points. Any of the 2 countries to win the game would secure first position.

Besides, Canada was also under pressure to win or at least draw to boost their knockout stage qualification chances since a Croatian victory against Saudi Arabia would put them right back in the qualification race at 4 points like them.

All these reasons and more hyped the game up as a potential thriller.

Canada already talked the talk, now, they had to walk the walk.

Both nations started with their best starting XI.

Canada started in a 4-2-3-1 formation, D.S Clair starting in between the posts, while sitting ahead of him was a defensive quadruple of Johnston, Bombito, Cornelius, and the Canadian captain, Alphonso Davies.

The midfield duo comprised Eustaquio and Kone, while the 4-man attack comprised Ahmed in right wing, Jonathan David orchestrating play as the attacking midfielder, Osorio in left wing, and Larin leading the line as the striker.

As for Nigeria, they also started in a 4-2-3-1 formation, Stanley Nwabali starting in between the posts, while the defensive quadruple of Osayi Samuel, William Troost Ekong, Calvin Bassey, and Ola Aina sat ahead of him.

The midfield duo comprised Wilfried Ndidi and Alex Iwobi, while the front men comprised Ademola Lookman in right wing, Moses Simon in left wing, Sam through the middle as the attacking midfielder, and Victor Osimhem leading the line as the striker.

The dust had barely settled from Messi's jaw-dropping comeback against Norway when the eyes of the world turned to Monterrey.

The Estadio BBVA in Monterrey, Mexico was filled to the brim with tens of thousands of fans either in the green and white of Nigeria, or in the red and white of the Canadian national team.

Millions tuned in around the world to watch the blockbuster match.

Group E was on a knife's edge; Canada and Nigeria, both in prime position to qualify, collided under the scorching Mexican sun.

Canada came prepared; structured, physical, and packed with MLS-hardened experience.

Nigeria? They were vibrant and unpredictable. They've been the biggest underdog story of the FIFA World Cup so far, and now, they stepped into the pitch again with raw firepower and youth.

And at the center of it all stood Sam, the 20-year old attacking midfielder on the back of a legendary club season, number 10 on his back, destiny in his boots.

There were only 2 things that could happen.

Sam either blossoms, or he cowers, which would it be?

Only time would tell.

FWEEEE!

The game started.

Chapter 505: FIFA World Cup 2026 [36]

FWEEEE!

The game started and immediately, Nigeria tried to leave their imprint on the game with a dominant and imperious presence.

From the start, Sam played like a man possessed.

He started the game with his endless stamina at the fore, leading the press alongside Victor Osimhen as they chased down every loose ball, not giving Canada time on the ball as they asserted their authority over the game.

For the first few minutes, it was hard, chaotic, but due to their relentless and aggressive pressing, Nigeria managed to stifle Canada's game.

They stifled Canada's game, and a few minutes later, they finally settled.

Nigeria finally started playing their football.

And it didn't take long after they took control of the game that the first goal of the game appeared as early as the 11th minute, and it came from the name that media platforms around the world wanted... it was Samuel Moses.

Receiving the ball near the left half-space, Sam turned on a dime, ghosted past two Canadian midfielders with a burst of acceleration, before unleashing a venomous strike from 25 yards that curled into the top right corner.

Dayne St. Clair never moved.

"WHO IS THIS KID?!" The commentators screamed.

"Remember the name... SAMUEL MOSES!"

"MONSTER! THE BOY'S A MONSTER!"

With that goal, Sam singlehandedly turned the game on its head, sending the message to Canada that this was not going to be a work in the park.

And he didn't stop there.

Rather, it was just the beginning.

Sam scored the first goal as early as the 11th minute of the game, and then 11 minutes later in the 22nd minute, he didn't score, but he dazzled the millions of football fans watching around the world with a moment of magic.

Sam had dazzled all season as a striker for FC Barcelona that football fans and pundits around the world already forgot his short stint with Fulham FC, where he stunned the English premier league as a maverick attacking midfielder.

People have literally forgotten that he singlehandedly led Fulham FC to a Carabao Cup title, an FA Cup win, and also winning the English Premier League!

Tonight, Sam reminded the world of exactly what he could do as an attacking midfielder in a team.

It was a run that froze time. From deep, he danced through traffic, nutmegging Eustaquio, spinning past Hutchinson, shrugging off Cornelius, and delivering a cutback that should've been buried by Victor Osimhen.

Sam dribbled past 4 Canadian players!

It was artistry in motion.

When Osimhen missed the chance, frustrated groans from Nigerians erupted round the stadium even as Sam placed his palms on his head in shock.

But then he patted Osimhen, cheering him on to continue playing his game.

After that dribble, the Canadian coach realized something.

Tonight, Sam was in the flow state already!

He realized what that meant, the threat posed by Sam just flew through the roof, and so he made certain tactical changes, tasking one of his midfielders with the unenviable job of man-marking Sam.

It didn't matter though because in the 32nd minute, Sam cut the Canadian defense open again like a hot knife through butter.

This time, it came from a short corner routine.

Sam collected the ball, played a give and go with the right back, and rifled a left-footed shot through traffic into the far post.

Clinical. Confident. Cold.

2-0 to Nigeria.

BOOM!

The stadium exploded, fans of the Nigerian persuasion turning the stadium into a cauldron of noise in their celebrations.

And then...

"Sam!" "Sam!" "Sam!"

The Sam chants started at the Estadio BBVA in Mexico.

Sam celebrated by sliding on his knees, causing even more fans to sing his name even as the commentators waxed lyrical about how unplayable he was on the night.

The first half came to an end 2-0 in Nigeria's favor.

But then, in the second half, Canada came out swinging. And for a brief moment, they struck back.

In the 54th minute of the game, Jonathan David stung a shot through the heart of millions of Nigerian fans around the world.

A well-worked move down the flank saw Ahmed cross into the six-yard box, where David headed home to make it 1-2.

Game on, so Canada thought.

But Sam, ice in his veins, wasn't done writing his legend on the night.

Just 13 minutes after Jonathan David's goal in the 54th minute of the game, in the 67th minute, Sam scored again to make it a hatrick!

It began with a crunching tackle by Ndidi to win the ball in midfield. A quick transition followed.

Sam received the pass at the edge of the 6-yard box having made a late run deep. One look, one fake, and he slotted the ball past the goalkeeper like a veteran striker. Well, he was a lethal striker after all.

This time, no celebration. Just calm defiance from the Nigerian maverick.

Hattrick complete. World awakened.

BOOM!

The Estadio BBVA in Mexico exploded for the umpteenth time this game, paying homage to an all-time great performance at the FIFA World Cup as Sam completely stole the show with his country.

"SAMUEL MOSES!!!"

"SAMUEL MOSES!!!"

"SAMUEL MOSES!!!" The commentators screamed.

"Devil boy, that's what he is!"

"A nightmare for defenders!"

"He's been scoring goals like this for FC Barcelona all season! But tonight, he was supposed to be an attacking midfielder!"

"It's just unfair to opposition defenders to be marking this guy!"

"Heck, he's been man-marked and even that is not enough!"

"Can he even be stopped?!"

"What a boy!"

"What a monster!"

"Remember the name... SAMUEL MOSES!"

"It's been a long time since we last confidently claimed that this player will win the ballon d'Or award at the end of the season".

"But this season, it's not even a debate".

"The ballon d'Or award belongs to Sam!"

And just like that, Sam left his mark in the FIFA World Cup against Canada, singlehandedly winning the game for his country.

The game ended 3-1 in Nigeria's favor.

Samuel Moses, 20 years old.

3 goals, 0 mistakes, 93% pass accuracy, 4 key passes, 4 successful dribbles.

A literal 10/10 performance.

Chapter 506: FIFA World Cup 2026 [37]

(GROUP E:)

(Croatia vs Saudi Arabia)

(Venue: Estadio Guadalajara, Mexico)

(Date: June 24th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

On the same time that Nigeria took on Canada and ripped them apart through Sam's hatrick, Croatia also took on Saudi Arabia in a game that could potentially decide their FIFA World Cup run.

Against Saudi Arabia, the Croatians were ruthless.

They won convincingly 3-0.

After being shackled in so many ways for the first 2 games of his country's FIFA World Cup campaign, Luka Modric finally exploded in their matchday 3, this time against Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia proved stubborn in the first half, a first half where Luka Modric helped his team dominate the midfield battle, but Saudi Arabia's defense held stubbornly, resulting in the first half ending in a goalless draw.

20 minutes into the second half, it was seemingly following the same script as the first half till Luka Modric rolled back the years with a vintage second half performance.

He opened the scoring in the 67th minute of the game, lashing into a loose ball outside the box in a volley, sending it straight towards the top right corner.

The goalkeeper almost caught it, but due to the bend on the ball, it managed to evade his grasp in agonizing fashion, giving Croatia the lead.

Just 3 minutes later, a perfect 28-pass sequence from Croatia resulted in the 2nd goal in the 70th minute to make it 2-0.

It was the perfect team goal.

And then in the 84th minute, Luka Modric rolled back the years again, receiving the ball after stopping a Saudi Arabian counterattack before playing a lethal trivela pass with the outside of his boot, sending it round the defense and in front of the striker to tap home, making it 3-0.

It was a vintage midfield performance.

Luka Modric won the man of the match award.

And with that victory, Croatia rose to 4 points, level with Canada on 3 points. And still yet, it was not enough.

Croatia landed 3rd spot due to goal difference.

It was agonizing, but considering that the first knockout stage game would be in the round of 32, they still had a chance of qualifying with their 4 points if they made it among the best 3rd-placed nations in the group stage.

...

The next day after Croatia vs Saudi Arabia, Spain took on New Zealand in a Group F encounter in USA.

(GROUP F:)

(Spain vs New Zealand)

(Venue: SoFi Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 15:00)

If Nigeria vs Canada was chaos and emotion, and Croatia vs Saudi Arabia was footballing genius from a single veteran midfielder, then this was order.

A lesson in control.

Spain, already high on confidence after back to back wins came into this fixture aiming to cement their dominance in Group F.

New Zealand, bold and physical, had everything to fight for, qualification still mathematically possible.

But from the moment the first whistle blew, it became clear that this was Spain's game.

The first half was control and conviction.

Spain started with ruthless efficiency. Manager Luis De La Fuente's 4-3-3 was crisp and fluid, dictating tempo from the outset.

Pedri and Gavi started, pulling the strings in midfield like seasoned maestros, while Nico Williams and Dani Olmo stretched the field wide.

They got an early goal in the 9th minute of the game.

It was an elegant move beginning deep in Spain's half. Rodri to Gavi, Gavi to Olmo, and then a cutback found Pedri ghosting into the box, where he calmly slid the ball into the bottom right corner.

Pure Spanish poetry on the canvas of the pitch.

9 minutes, 1-0.

New Zealand, to their credit, didn't back down. Chris Wood, their experienced frontman, hustled with determination, drawing fouls and giving his teammates breathing space to attack.

And then, his hard work paid off in the 28th minute.

It came from a corner kick and Spain failed to clear. Winston Reid flicked the ball on, and Chris Wood rose high to nod in the equalizer.

The stadium erupted.

1-1. Game on.

But Spain answered immediately.

Dani Olmo scored in the 35th minute.

It was a lightning-quick response. Pedri played a diagonal switch to Nico Williams, who brought it down with one touch and whipped in a low cross.

Olmo, arriving late, tapped it in to make it 2-1 to Spain.

The first half came to an end 2-1.

Spain emerged for the second half with even more focus. Their one-touch passing began to break down New Zealand's shape. The All Whites dropped deeper with each passing second, too deep.

And then, in the 51st minute of the game, Gavi, the engine of the midfield got his name on the scoresheet.

A slick move saw Lamine Yamal and Pedri combine at the top of the box. Gavi arrived and struck a looping shot that deflected past the goalkeeper, making it 3-1.

The game was slipping away from New Zealand.

Luis De La Fuente rotated late in the game, bringing on Ferran Torres and Mikel Merino. But Spain didn't ease up.

In the 78th minute, Ferran Torres got his name on the scoresheet.

Spain hit on the counter, Williams breaking free on the right. After a delicious run, his cut-back pass found Ferran, who smashed it low into the far corner. Textbook finish.

The game came to an end 4-1 in Spain's favor. It was total Spanish domination.

Spain finished the group stage undefeated, top of Group F.

New Zealand's campaign ended with heart, but outclassed on the day.

Pedri won the man of the match award with his 1 goal and 1 assist display, 92% passing accuracy, 7 progressive passes, and 3 successful take-ons.

He was everywhere. The heartbeat of this Spanish side. The bridge between midfield and attack. The conductor of Spain's tactical symphony.

Spain were pushing themselves out as among the clear favorites for the trophy already.

During the post-match interview, a few important people shared their minds.

Luis De La Fuente was happy in front of the media. "This was not just a win. It was identity. It was Spanish football played the way it should be".

Chris Wood, the New Zealand striker also had a few words to say.

"We gave it all. But Spain... they play a different kind of football. That's the level we aspire to".

The FIFA Analyst Desk also had their say.

"Spain have reminded the world. They are not rebuilding, they are ready".

## Chapter 507: FIFA World Cup 2026 [38]

After Spain's dominant win against New Zealand, claiming a clean sweep in the group stage of the FIFA World Cup, the world took note... La Roja is back.

And as Spain marched on to the Round of 32, looking sharper than ever, Italy and Iran also concluded their bout at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico.

It was vintage Italy in display in Mexico.

Their defense was perfect for all 90 minutes, muting their opponents completely. Italy scored both their goals from set pieces, securing their place in the Round of 32 of the FIFA World Cup.

That same night, Germany also took on Iraq at the Lumen Field in USA.

(GROUP G:)

(Germany vs Iraq)

(Venue: Lumen Field, USA)

(Date: June 25th, 2026)

(Time: 19:00)

It was a ruthless display of German efficiency.

It was billed as a mismatch, a European giant versus an underdog from Asia, but Germany didn't treat it like one.

They arrived on the pitch at Lumen Field with purpose, intensity, and a desire to make a statement. After two solid group performances, this final Group G match was about dominance, momentum, and silencing doubters.

Iraq, brave and spirited, had endured a difficult group stage campaign, and this was their last stand.

But the gap in class, pace, and composure was overwhelming.

The first half was a spectacle of no mercy.

Julian Nagelsmann fielded a rotated but still fearsome XI. Germany lined up in a fluid 4-2-3-1 formation with Ter Stegen in goal, Kimmich, Tah, Schlotterbeck, and Gosens in defense; Goretzka and Musiala pulling the strings from midfield.

And then there was Sane, Wirtz, and Havertz buzzing behind Fullkrug up top in attack.

Iraq, in their 4-4-2 setup, looked compact early on, but they were immediately pinned back as soon as the game started.

Like Spain, Germany started the rout early from a Jamal Musiala goal.

It was a sweeping passive move that involved every outfield German player. Sane burst down the wing, found Wirtz in the pocket, who threaded a pass to Jamal Musiala.

One step, one shimmy, and then a bottom corner finish.

A work of art to make it 1-0.

Germany doubled their lead in the 21st minute from a Kai Havertz goal.

Moments after Iraq almost countered through Bashar Resan, Germany regained the ball and punished them. Gundogan delivered a lofted through ball, and Havertz, perfectly timed, chipped the goalkeeper in a moment of sublime composure.

Germany made it 3-0 in the 32nd minute from a Nico Schlotterbeck header.

It came from a corner, the big center back rising above everyone and thumping home a bullet header. Iraq's defenders could only look at each other, wondering. 'Who was marking him?'

They were played to the point of confusion.

Germany weren't just scoring. They were suffocating them. Iraq couldn't string three passes together.

The second half was not much different from the first. Germany was in cruise control of the game.

The second half saw substitutions, but the pressure didn't drop. Nagelsmann brought on Thomas Muller and Marius Wolf to keep the tempo high.

In the 59th minute, Leroy Sane scored, making it 4-0.

After teasing the Iraqi right back for several minutes, Sane finally cut inside and curled a rocket past the goalkeeper from the edge of the area.

Electric. Unstoppable.

In the 71st minute, Florian Wirtz made it 5-nil.

This one was pure team play. 18 passes, from Ter Stegen to Wirtz. A give and go with Goretzka and a low finish to seal it. Germany were dancing.

Late in the game, Iraq got their one real chance; a long ball found Aymen Hussein behind the line. He struck it sweetly, but Ter Stegen, with a flash of brilliance palmed it away.

The FC Barcelona starter had no intentions of giving up his clean sheet.

The game eventually came to an end 5-nil to Germany.

Germany topped Group G with 9 points in 3 games, 11 goals scored, 1 conceded. An imperious group stage performance.

Iraq exited the World Cup winless, but proud.

Jamal Musiala won the man of the match award with his 1 goal, 1 assist, 5 key passes, 100% take-on success as he ran the Iraqi defense ragged. He was a constant creative threat.

He was Germany's new engine alongside Florian Wirtz. He was just 23, and yet, he was already playing like a legend.

Germany now marched into the Round of 32 as one of the tournament's most complete teams. And for Iraq, the journey ends, but not the pride.

Julian Nagelsmann, the Germany coach had a few words for the media at the end of the game.

"The scoreline was deserved. But it's not about the goals, it's about the statement. Germany are here to win this thing".

...

At the same time that Germany thrashed Iraq at the Lumen Field in USA, Colombia also took on Honduras in another exciting FIFA World Cup game.

Honduras were seemingly on their way to securing a FIFA World Cup classic underdog win, leading 0-2 by halftime when Colombia erupted in the 2nd half, running them ragged, and eventually claiming a 3-2 victory at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in USA.

The next day, the world of football boiled with excitement as tens of thousands of football fans gathered at the Metlife Stadium to watch another blockbuster FIFA World Cup encounter between 2 prominent nations, England and USA.

It was the Group H Decider between the 2 most prominent footballing nations. It was a clash of Titans.

Two titans, one battlefield.

The attendance at the Metlife was over 81,000 fans.

The atmosphere was tension, pride, rivalry, and history all on the line.

It wasn't just a football match, it was a transatlantic clash between two nations with shared history and burning ambition.

England came in with swagger, having steamrolled Slovenia in their previous match. The USA, galvanized by their late win against Algeria entered this final group fixture ready to prove a point on home soil.

Qualification was already secured for both, but top spot was at stake. And neither side wanted second place.

This was a game of men.

A game of ego.

Chapter 508: FIFA World Cup 2026 [39]

(GROUP H:)

(England vs USA)

(Venue: MetLife Stadium, Mexico)

(Date: June 26th, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

Two Titans. One Battlefield.

The MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, USA was filled to the brim with tens of thousands of fans supporting either England or USA.

It wasn't just a football match, it was a transatlantic clash between two nations with shared history and burning ambition.

England came in with swagger, having steamrolled Slovenia in their previous match. The USA, galvanized by their late win against Algeria, entered this final group fixture ready to prove a point on home soil.

Qualification was already secured for both, but top spot was at stake. And neither side wanted second place.

England, under Thomas Tuchel lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation with Jordan Pickford in goal, Arnold, Stones, Guehi, and Shaw at the back, while Declan Rice and Jude Bellingham played as the double pivot.

Saka, Cole Palmer, and Anthony Gordon played behind Harry Kane.

USA went aggressive, Mauricio Pochettino's 4-3-3 featuring Matt Turner in goal, Dest, Ream, Miles Robinson, and Antonee Robinson in defense. The midfield trio comprised Tyler Adams, Weston McKennie, and Gio Reyna in midfield.

In attack was George Weah, Christian Pulisic, and Balogun up front.

FWEEE!

USA kicked off the game.

And from the whistle, the Americans pressed like madmen.

For the first few minutes, they ran more, dove into duels with more zeal and intent. Clearly, they wanted to give out a statement display tonight.

Their early pressure paid dividends early.

In the 13th minute, Christian Pulisic got the breakthrough for USA.

A slick, high-intensity press saw McKennie steal the ball off Rice. Reyna fed Pulisic in stride, who cut inside Trent Alexander Arnold and rifled a low shot past Pickford to make it advantage to the United States.

MetLife exploded.

But it was only for a short time.

This was because England responded after that goal. They finally woke up; slowly, carefully. Their possession started to strangle the game.

And then, in the 31st minute of the game, they got their equalizer, and Bukayo Saka was the star man.

It came from a well-worked move down the left. Shaw overlapped, squared the ball across the box, and Saka ghosted in at the back post to tap it in.

1-1. Game on.

Both sides got more half-chances in the first half, but neither side could bury their chances, bringing the first half to an end with a 1-1 draw.

Thomas Tuchel brought on Jack Grealish for added flair in the second half, while Pochettino introduced Brenden Aaronson to keep the midfield buzzing.

The second half started tense and tight, both sides tussling and harrowing, but then England found their breakthrough from the deadlock.

It came in the 54th minute, buried by Harry Kane.

It was a thing of beauty. Bellingham drove through the center, skipped past two challenges, and slipped Kane into the box. One touch, one finish, clinical.

And just like that, 2-1 to England.

But the Americans never backed down.

And in the 69th minute, they got their own equalizer to bring the game back level. This time, it was their striker, Folarin Balogun who came to the rescue.

It was a thunderous counterattack.

Giovanni Reyna burst through midfield, found Weah, who whipped in a low ball. Balogun got across Guehi and smashed it home.

2-2.

The MetLife Stadium exploded as roars surged across New Jersey.

The final moments of the game was tense and action-packed.

Both sides pushed.

Bellingham struck the post in the 82nd minute. Pulisic forced a fingertip save from Pickford in the 89th minute.

Tensions flared. Every touch screamed urgency.

But the winner never came.

[Fulltime: England 2-2 USA]

Both teams finished the group undefeated.

England topped the group on goal difference. The USA went through as second, battle-tested and feared.

They wanted to prove a point. Well, they did just that after their impressive 2-2 draw against England.

Jude Bellingham won the man of the match award with his 1 assist, 92% pass accuracy, 4 key passes, and 3 tackles won.

Thomas Tuchel, England's coach had a few words for the media at the end of the game.

"We showed resilience. They tested us, but we grew into the game. Jude was immense. This is the kind of match that sharpens champions".

Christian Pulisic, the USA national team captain also had a few words for the media.

"We came to win, but this result proves we belong with the best. We'll be dangerous in the knockouts".

The BBC Commentary was simple and to the point.

"A game of intelligence and intensity, of fire vs finesse. And ultimately, of respect. These two will go far".

The rivalry lived on.

And the World Cup just got a lot more exciting.

...

(GROUP H:)

(Algeria vs Slovenia)

(Venue: BC Palace, Canada)

(Date: June 26th, 2026)

(Time: 18:00)

On the same day and time that England took on USA at the MetLife, Algeria also took on Slovenia in the final Group H game of the FIFA World Cup.

Both nations were more or less out of the World Cup already, but they still had one thing to play for... pride.

And so they entered the pitch in Canada, and gave their all.

With the likes of prominent names like Jan Oblak and Benjamin Sesko in this Slovenian side, they were always a threat, but not tonight.

Tonight, it was all Algeria.

Algeria won with a dominant 3-0 scoreline at the BC Palace in Canada, and a once European big name stole the show, rolling back the years with a vintage performance in the big World Cup Stage.

Riyad Mahrez stole the show with his performance. He buzzed repeatedly in attack, creating left and right, and Amoura was the main beneficiary of his brilliance.

Amoura scored a hatrick, all 3 of Algeria's goals and 2 of them came from assists straight from Mahrez, while the 3rd came from a rebound of Mahrez's shot.

Despite his hatrick, Riyad Mahrez won the man of the match award ahead of his fellow countryman due to how brilliant he was in the game.

And with that, Group H's journey this world cup came to an end.

Chapter 509: FIFA World Cup 2026 [40]

(GROUP I:)

(Netherlands vs Ukraine)

(Venue: Lincoln Financial Field, USA)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

It was a cool, breezy evening at the Lincoln Financial Field in USA, perfect for football.

There were over 69,000 fans in attendance.

Group I had grown into one of the tightest in the tournament. The Netherlands came into this match having already secured 6 points, while Ukraine sat on 4, needing just a draw to confirm progression.

But the Dutch weren't playing for qualification.

They were playing for dominance. For first place. For Van Basten's spirit and Cruyff's legacy.

And the Ukrainians; fearless, fast, and tactically sharp under coach Ronald Koeman were ready for a war at the Lincoln Financial Field.

The Netherlands lined up in a 4-3-3 formation with Verbruggen in goal, Dumfries, De Ligt, Van Dijk, and Nathan Ake across the back.

In midfield was the trio of Frankie De Jong, Reijnders, and Veerman. While up front in attack was Xavi Simons, Memphis Depay, and Liverpool's Cody Gakpo.

In contrast to the Netherland lineup, Ukraine started in a 4-1-4-1 formation, with Trubin between the sticks, and a defensive quadruple of Konoplia, Matviyenko, Zabarnyi, and Mykolenko ahead of him.

Stepanenko played as the solid holding midfielder, while further ahead of him was the quadruple of Mykhailo Mydryk, Malinovskyi, Sudakov, and Tsyhankov as the creative midfielders this game.

Yaremchuk played up top as the striker.

From the whistle, it started aggressively and one thing was clear immediately; it was a chess match with cleats.

The first half was a game of control vs chaos.

The Dutch dominated early possession, classic Oranje football; smooth rotations, and risky diagonals.

Ukraine? They sat deep but were razor sharp on the counter.

And then, in the 18th minute of the game, against the run of play, the Ukrainians stunned the Dutch by getting the first goal of the game through Victor Tsyshankov.

Out of nowhere, Mudryk tore down the left flank, skipped past Dumfries, and pulled the ball back just outside the box. Tsyhankov struck it first-time, a rocket past Verbruggen.

And just like that, Ukraine were leading 0-1.

The Ukrainian fans erupted. They were ahead against the giants.

After that goal, the Netherlands turned up the pressure cooker. Depay dropped deep, Simons drifted centrally, and Gakpo began running riot up front.

It didn't take too long for them to dig in and get what they sought, a goal.

It came in the 34th minute from the rampaging Cody Gakpo.

A sublime triangle; Veerman to Frankie De Jong and then to Cody Gakpo, and the Liverpool forward curled it low beyond Trubin. Classic Dutch geometry.

1-1.

Ukraine tried to respond, but the Dutch kept the ball like a secret they refused to share.

The first half came to an end 1-1.

During the second half, Ukraine's coach adjusted. Malinovskyi dropped deeper, trying to cut Frankie De Jong's influence in the game.

It worked, for a while.

But then, BOOM!

It happened in the 61st minute, Memphis Depay.

Out of nothing, Depay received a long ball, chested it down under pressure, and bent a stunner into the top left corner of the net to make it 2-1.

The Ukrainian goalkeeper stood no chance.

BOOM!

The bench exploded. The fans went gaga in excitement and celebrations. Van Dijk raised both arms amid the celebrations.

Memphis Depay had arrived.

From then on, the Netherlands slowed the tempo to a crawl. Possession, possession, and more possession.

Ukraine tried to push late.

Mudryk repeatedly danced down the wing. Yaremchuk headed just over in the 87th minute. The final touch never came.

[Fulltime: Netherlands 2-1 Ukraine]

And with that win, Netherlands topped Group I with 9 points from 3 games. Ukraine finished 3rd but qualified as one of the best third-placed teams.

The man of the match award went to Memphis Depay. He was a menace all game with his 1 goal, 1 assist, 3 shots, and 3 fouls won.

The online caption?

["Leader. Finisher. Maestro. When the Netherlands needed a hero, Memphis showed up."]

And of course, the Netherlands coach, Ronald Koeman had a few words.

"We started slow, but I'm proud. Memphis and Cody were relentless. This is the rhythm we need for the knockouts".

The Ukrainian coach, Serhiy Rebrov also had a few words.

"We played brave football. We'll qualify, and now that we've faced the best, we're ready for the rest".

...

(GROUP I:)

(Tunisia vs China)

(Venue: Estadio Monterrey, Mexico)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 17:00)

Ukraine finished 3rd in Group I because the result of the Tunisia vs China game first after a crazy game at the Estadio Monterrey in Mexico.

China were more or less out of the FIFA World Cup already since they were unable to secure a single point in 2 games, but though Tunisia was at just 1 point, they had a chance with their final group stage game if they won against China.

Well, the result came, and they did win against China.

It pushed them all the way to 4 points in total, and they topped Ukraine in the group through goal difference, pushing all the way to 2nd position in Group I.

Tunisia pulled out all stops in their final group stage game, erupting with passion and zeal in a bid to secure qualification.

They didn't have any big name in their squad, but they had a team, a team that was desperate and determined to do anything to get the job done.

The first goal of the game came from one of the Tunisian center backs. The towering center back headed home from a corner kick in the 23rd minute to give Tunisia the lead over China.

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

Tunisia came out for the second half with even more venom. Winning by just 1-0, they were not safe, they were far from it even and so they hustled even more.

Their hustle bore results.

Laidouni, the Tunisian center midfielder got the 2nd goal from a stunner from range in the 58th minute, and then Mastouri, the Tunisian striker rounded it up with another headed goal from a cross in the 71st minute.

Tunisia won 3-0 against China, securing knockout stage qualification in the process.

Chapter 510: FIFA World Cup 2026 [41]

(GROUP J:)

(Portugal vs Czech Republic)

(Venue: AT&T Stadium, USA)

(Date: June 27th, 2026)

(Time: 20:00)

It was the Group J finale at the AT&T Stadium in USA.

Over 84,000 were in attendance.

It was always going to be fiery. Group J's final clash wasn't just about positioning, it was about power, pride, and one last throw of the dice.

Portugal had already qualified with two wins, but the Czech Republic needed at least a point to ensure a place in the Round of 32.

And they came at it like lions.

Portugal started in a 4-2-3-1 formation. Diogo Costa started in between the posts as the goalkeeper, while ahead of him was the quadruple of Joao Neves, Ruben Dias, Goncalo Inacio, and Nuno Mendes.

The midfield duo comprised Palhinha and Vitinha, while in attack was Bruno Fernandes through the middle as the attacking midfielder, Rafeal Leao on the left, while Conceicao played through the right.

Cristiano Ronaldo led the line for the Portuguese as the striker.

As for Czech Republic, they started in a 4-1-4-1 formation with Jindrich Stanek in between the posts as their goalkeeper, while standing in front of him was a 4-man defense comprising Coufal, Krejci, Zima, and Jurasek.

The midfield, comprising the sole holding midfielder and the creative midfielders was Soucek who was also the Czech Republic captain, Sevcik, Barak, Hlozek, and Cerny.

Patrik Schick was the leading striker.

FWEEE!

The referee's whistle sounded and the game started.

Portugal began with control and class, stroking the ball across the pitch. Ronaldo looked sharp, dropping deep and doing his bit to try and link up play. But the Czechs had other plans.

In the 14th minute, against the run of play, Portugal was stunned.

It was Patrik Schick, the enigmatic striker.

Soucek won the ball off Vitorinha in midfield. Barak found Hlozek, who whipped in a near-post cross. Schick's glancing header flashed past Diogo Costa, leaving the goalkeeper very little chance to react.

And just like that, 0-1 to Czech Republic.

The stadium was stunned, and then it erupted, Czech fans in full voice.

Portugal pushed back immediately after the restart. Their super talented midfield buzzed, trying to make something happen as the game progressed.

Up field, Rafael Leao and Francisco Conceicao also buzzed down the left and right sides of the pitch as they tried to create something.

Fernandes tried a volley from range. Leao's dribbles caused chaos, and then...

**FWEEE!**

Portugal got it, a penalty!

Nuno Mendes made a bursting overlap and was brought down by Jurasek. The referee immediately pointed to the spot.

It happened in the 33rd minute.

Ronaldo stepped up to take the penalty, cool as ever, and buried it low to the goalkeeper's left.

1-1.

A lifeline. A leader.

A 41 year old Cristiano Ronaldo brought Portugal back level, but the Czechs weren't done.

In the 45th plus 2 minute, Czech Republic stunned Portugal again.

Right before the break, Portugal switched off, and the Czechs punished them. Hlozek again the architect, as his cutback was met with a thunderous low strike by Antonin Barak from the edge of the box.

**BAM!**

The goalkeeper stood no chance.

1-2.

The Portugal players were left bamboozled after that goal as infuriated, Ruben Dias roared at his teammates, pointing a finger at some of them for not covering well during the counterattack.

But it was over. Halftime came.

The first half came to an end with Portugal trailing 1-2.

And then, the second half started.

Roberto Martinez, Portugal's coach made changes in the 2nd half. Joao Felix and Bernardo Silva came on for Leao and Palhinha.

The second half started, and Portugal took control of the game.

They were imperious, hoarding possession, as the Czechs were forced to defend desperately, and then they struck in the 60th minute.

This time, it was Bruno Fernandes.

It was a move straight out of a training ground video. Quick triangle passes between Bernardo, Ronaldo, and Bruno. Bruno Fernandes arrived late and fired across goal into the far post.

2-2.

BOOM!

The AT&T Stadium erupted as tens of thousands of Portuguese fans roared at the top of their lungs, celebrating the goal.

Bruno Fernandes celebrated by sliding on his knees towards the corner flag.

Relief came with that goal.

After that, Portugal pressed. Conceicao hit the post from a tight angle. Joao Felix saw a curling effort tipped over.

But Stanek stood tall. So did Soucek, who covered every blade of grass.

By fulltime, both teams could not be separated.

The game came to an end 2-2.

And with that performance and result, Portugal finished top of Group J with 7 points in total.

Czech Republic, with 5 points, also achieved their main goal and progressed; unbeaten, unafraid, and absolutely earned.

Czech Republic's Antonin Barak won the man of the match award with his 1 goal, 1 assist, 3 key passes, and 2 tackles.

"The midfield commander," his coach praised at the end of the game. "When Czech Republic needed magic, when we needed magic, he delivered".

Cristiano Ronaldo led the post-match reactions in front of the media.

"We wanted to win, of course. But credit to them, they pushed us. It's good. It wakes us up for the knockouts. Better now than in the knockouts".

Tomas Soucek also faced the media.

"We knew we had to fight like wolves. We played for each other. We played for pride, and we're proud".

An ESPN Analyst faced the camera, also joining in on the reactions.

"If you're looking for a team with bite and belief, watch the Czechs in the knockouts. This is not just a feel-good story. It's a warning".

...

With that result, Portugal sailed on, still one of the tournament's big guns. To some, it was outrageous but Portugal were also gunning for the trophy.

But the Czech Republic?

They may not be as big as Portugal and the other favorites, but they've earned their place, and might just spoil a few dreams yet.

They were ready to go all the way and leave it all on the pitch.

