



FIFA World Cup QATAR 2022



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NEWSDAY

Supplement

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2022

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Last shot for veteran stars

DAVID SCARLETT

EVERY footballer dreams of representing their country at the world's most prestigious event – the FIFA World Cup. The World Cup has proven to be a platform for young players to gain recognition, for small nations to play against the elites, and for passion to be expressed in the way football lovers know best. Not many players can boast about their participation on the world stage. Some, like the members of the 2006 TT team, have appeared in just one World Cup.

There are some players who are not satisfied with World Cup appearances, but are eyeing the big prize.

Newsday is highlighting five stars who will be in possibly their last World Cup, but are yet to lift the coveted trophy.

CRISTIANO RONALDO

One of the greatest players the world has ever seen, Portuguese icon Cristiano Ronaldo is set to make his final appearance at a FIFA World Cup this year. Ronaldo, 37, made his World Cup debut for Portugal at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. He played his first game against Angola in the group stage, with his only contribution to the match report being a yellow card in the 26th minute, before being substituted at the hour mark. He returned on the second match day with his first World Cup goal – a penalty against Iran in the 80th minute – to lead Portugal to a 2-0 victory.

That made Ronaldo the youngest Portuguese player to score at the FIFA World Cup, aged 21 years 132 days.

Ronaldo has scored seven goals in 17 matches across four World Cup tournaments – Germany 2006, South Africa 2010, Brazil 2014 and Russia 2018 – and has scored at every World Cup that he played in. His most recent highlight was a hat-trick against Spain in 2018.

If he scores in Qatar, he will be the first player in history to score in five FIFA World Cup campaigns.

Also, Ronaldo needs just three more goals to surpass the Portuguese World Cup record of nine goals, held by the legendary



Croatia star Luka Modric won the Golden Ball at World Cup 2018.

Eusebio.

Ronaldo may be past his prime, but his hunger for goals and glory remains insatiable. He will be hoping Portugal can replicate the grit they showed to win the 2016 European Championship.

LIONEL MESSI

Argentina legend Lionel Messi, similar to his rival Ronaldo, is arguably the greatest ever. However, he too is yet to get his hands on the golden trophy, despite reaching the 2014 final. Messi also debuted at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. He scored his first World Cup goal in his second match of the tournament against Serbia and Montenegro, and was henceforth labelled the next Maradona. However, he made just one knockout appearance at that tournament, coming on as a substitute in the 84th minute against Mexico in the round of 16. He was an unused substitute in the quarterfinal penalty shootout loss against Germany. Messi drew a blank at the 2010

World Cup in South Africa, scoring no goals and registering just one assist, before crashing out 4-0 to Germany.

The 35-year-old made up for his poor goal-scoring form in the next two tournaments, but fell short at the final hurdle against Germany in 2018. He now has six World Cup goals in 19 matches.

Only three players from Argentina have scored more goals than Messi at World Cups. Gabriel Batistuta (ten goals in 12 matches), Diego Maradona (eight goals in 21 matches) and Guillermo Stabile (eight goals in four matches).

NEYMAR JR

Neymar da Silva Santos Junior has been a superstar for the past ten years. His Brazilian flair on the pitch and marketing power off it has helped him to win the hearts of many fans across the globe.

However, his love for partying and theatrics on the field have made him an anti-hero.

Neymar, 30, played at both the 2014 and 2018 World Cups without winning the trophy craved by all Brazilians.

Compatriots such as Pele, Ronaldo Nazario, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho all retired from the national team around 30. Neymar himself has hinted that this may be his final World Cup.

He made his World Cup debut at home in 2014, scoring four goals. He was the poster boy for Brazilian football, and carried the weight of expectation on his back, which was later dented by the knee of Colombian Juan Zuniga in the quarterfinal. Neymar's injury severely affected the Brazil team, which went on to get hammered 7-1 by Germany in the semis.

Despite scoring two goals in 2018, Neymar's image was tainted by exaggerated rolls after he was fouled. Brazil crashed out to Belgium in the quarters. But with six goals to his name, Neymar is one behind Ronaldo and level with Messi, having played half the matches.

This year, Brazil boasts its strongest squad since 2014 and Neymar will again be entrusted to lead the attack

LUKA MODRIC

Being the first player to break the Ronaldo-Messi monopoly at the top, Luka Modric has been engraved in Croatian history as a legend and icon.

The midfield maestro, despite being 37, is ageing like wine. Modric was instrumental in Croatia's road to the final at Russia 2018 and crucial in Real Madrid's coronation in last season's UEFA Champions League.

He is set to make his fourth appearance at the FIFA World Cup having previously played in 2006, 2014 and 2018.

After his performances in 2018, he was awarded the Golden Ball for best player of the World Cup, the UEFA Men's Player of the Year, World Soccer Player of the Year, The Best FIFA Men's Player and the Ballon D'Or.

Modric will now aim to lead Croatia to glory, having fallen just short in Russia – their best performance in five appearances.

KARIM BENZEMA

Honoured as the second player not named Ronaldo or Messi to win the Ballon D'Or in the past 15 years, France's Karim Benzema is set to grace the world stage yet again.

Despite being one of Les Bleus' best-ever strikers, the 34-year-old will be making only his second World Cup appearance. Benzema was a key player in France's World Cup qualification campaign for South Africa 2010, but a sex scandal involving an underage prostitute kept him out of the final squad.

Four years later, Benzema made his World Cup debut in Brazil and netted two goals in his first match against Honduras, which France won 3-0. France were eventually eliminated in the quarterfinals.

Another scandal, this time involving the blackmailing of a France teammate, derailed Benzema's chances of making it to the 2018 World Cup. Now back in the squad for Qatar, Benzema will be keen to add to his three World Cup goals and help make France the first team to retain the World Cup title in the modern era.



Young talents' time to shine

JONATHAN
RAMNANANSINGH

The FIFA World Cup is the globe's most anticipated sporting event.

It features the world's top football talents in a 36-nation tournament, all in pursuit of the sport's prestigious quadrennial crown. Renowned stars such as Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar Jr, Karim Benzema and David De Gea are just some of the excellent – but ageing – talents who will represent their respective nations in Qatar.

However, among the stars is an array of young, surging footballers eager to drape themselves in national colours on the sport's biggest stage. Newsday takes a look at five of these youngsters who are expected to perform their best at the highest level, under the pressure of a nation, coach, team and millions of passionate fans.

BUKAYO SAKA (England/ Arsenal)

Saka, 21, is one of England's brightest young prospects, alongside Phil Foden (Manchester City) and Jude Bellingham (Borussia Dortmund). Saka's vision and swift feet in front of the goal are a couple of the key contributors to Arsenal's pole position in the English Premier League standings. He, Foden and Bellingham, are assets needed by the Three Lions if they are ever to bring the cup "home" this year. Saka has won the English FA Cup and Community Shield with the Gunners. However, in the 2021 Euro final against Italy,



England midfielder Bukayo Saka

he was given the responsibility of taking England's fifth and title-deciding penalty kick, after a 1-1 result after regulation time.

He missed, Italy won the shootout and Saka then received racist abuse online for the miss.

However, Saka has matured and is expected to be an attacking threat in Qatar.

PABLO GAVIRA, AKA GAVI (Spain/ Barcelona)

Spain have a wealth of youth talent in their team and Gavi, 18, gets the nod ahead of his club-mate Pedri, 19, and Ansu Fati, 20, this time, owing to his recent capture of France Football's Kopa Trophy – presented to the best performing player under the age of 21 – and the Golden Boy award – given by sports journalists to a young footballer playing in Europe



Spain's Pablo Gavira



Argentina's Lisandro Martinez (L) and Brazil's Vinicius Junior vie for the ball during their South American qualification match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 at the San Juan del Bicentenario stadium in San Juan, Argentina, on November 16, 2021. AFP PHOTO



France midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni takes part in a training session at the team's training camp in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines, south of Paris, on Monday, six days ahead of the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup. AFP PHOTO

perceived to have been the most impressive during a calendar year. Pedri won the Golden Boy award in 2021. Gavi is a raw, attacking midfielder who is goal-oriented but also insistent on maintaining possession. He bravely challenges players, is a physical athlete and is unafraid to stand up to players much larger and older than him. He can draw a few yellow cards over time, but Gavi is a youngster all teams will be keeping their eyes on. He's an all-round threat.

VINICIUS JUNIOR (Brazil/ Real Madrid)

Vinicius, 22, is a defender's nightmare and plays a key role, alongside club-mate Rodrygo, 21, and 22-year-old Antony Matheus dos Santos (Manchester United) and club in possibly returning the trophy to South America after two

decades. Over the past four years at Real Madrid, the forward helped the club win the last season's La Liga title and scored the winning goal against Liverpool in this year's UEFA Champions League final. Vinicius is a quick and aggressive forward who is not shy of "samba-ing" his way through defenders to find the back of the net. He is currently one of the most feared forwards in world football. Playing alongside a galaxy of stars such as Neymar Jr, Gabriel Jesus, Thiago Silva, Marquinhos, Raphinha, Richarlison and top flight goalkeepers Ederson and Allison, among others, "Vini" could help make the stars align for a historic sixth FIFA World Cup title.

AURELIEN TCHOUAMENI (France/Real Madrid)

Tchouameni is a defensive

midfielder who basically replaced Casemiro after the Brazilian's move to Manchester United during the summer transfer window.

The 22-year-old has shown good form in this big role and serves as a game-changer for the defending champions. Alongside talismanic forward Kylian Mbappe, 23, 19-year-old standout club-mate Eduardo Camavinga and a host of other top talents, Tchouameni serves as a midfield engine and will have the likes of Mbappe, Ballon D'Or winner Karim Benzema and Ousmane Dembele at his disposal.

Tchouameni is a brave, strong player and much is expected of the young star at the World Cup.

JAMAL MUSIALA (Germany/ Bayern Munich)

Musiala, 19, is a gifted midfielder, but also a versatile attacker. He remains a staple in the Munich team and has crucial roles in generating victories for the Bundesliga club.

Musiala was edged out of the Golden Boy and Kopa trophies by Gavi, but his keen contention for the awards proves he's a clear-cut above the rest.

He is also the youngest player to play a match for Munich and was part of the squad that won the 2019/2020 UEFA Champions League, although he did not make any appearances in the tournament.

Musiala scored his first UEFA Champions League goal against Spanish giants Barcelona in December last year and is an asset for the Germans heading to Qatar.

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GROUP A

Sun 20 Nov 14:12 pm | Al Bayt Stadium
QAT - ECU

Mon 21 Nov 12:00 pm | Al Thumama Stadium
SEN - NET

Fri 25 Nov 9:00 am | Al Thumama Stadium
QAT - SEN

Fri 25 Nov 12:00 pm | Khalifa International Stadium
NET - ECU

Tue 29 Nov 11:00 am | Khalifa International Stadium
ECU - SEN

Tue 29 Nov 11:00 am | Al Bayt Stadium
NET - QAT

GROUP B

Mon 21 Nov 9:00 am | Khalifa International Stadium
ENG - IRN

Mon 21 Nov 13:00 pm | Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium
USA - WAL

Fri 25 Nov 16:00 am | Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium
WAL - IRN

Fri 25 Nov 13:00 pm | Al Bayt Stadium
ENG - USA

Tue 29 Nov 13:00 pm | Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium
WAL - ENG

Tue 29 Nov 13:00 pm | Al Thumama Stadium
IRN - USA

GROUP C

Tue 22 Nov 16:00 am | Lusail Stadium
ARG - SAU

Tue 22 Nov 12:00 pm | Stadium 974
MEX - POL

Sat 26 Nov 19:00 am | Education City Stadium
POL - SAU

Sat 26 Nov 13:00 pm | Lusail Stadium
ARG - MEX

Wed 30 Nov 13:00 pm | Stadium 974
POL - ARG

Wed 30 Nov 13:00 pm | Lusail Stadium
SAU - MEX

GROUP D

Tue 22 Nov 9:00 am | Education City Stadium
DEN - TUN

Tue 22 Nov 13:00 pm | Al Janoub Stadium
FRA - AUS

Sat 26 Nov 16:00 am | Al Janoub Stadium
TUN - AUS

Sat 26 Nov 12:00 pm | Stadium 974
FRA - DEN

Wed 30 Nov 11:00 am | Al Janoub Stadium
AUS - DEN

Wed 30 Nov 11:00 am | Education City Stadium
TUN - FRA

GROUP A

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

ROUND OF 16

R16-1 Sat 3 Dec 11 am
WINNER (A)

RUNNER-UP (B)

Khalifa International Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-2 Sat 3 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (C)

RUNNER-UP (D)

Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-5 Mon 5 Dec 11 am
WINNER (E)

RUNNER-UP (F)

Al Janoub Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-6 Mon 5 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (G)

RUNNER-UP (H)

Stadium 974

GROUP B

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

GROUP F

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

GROUP C

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

GROUP G

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

GROUP D

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

GROUP H

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

GROUP E

W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS

ROUND OF 16

R16-7 Tue 6 Dec 11 am
WINNER (I)

RUNNER-UP (J)

Education City Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-8 Tue 6 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (K)

RUNNER-UP (L)

Lusail Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-3 Sun 4 Dec 11 am
WINNER (M)

RUNNER-UP (N)

Al Thumama Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-4 Sun 4 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (O)

RUNNER-UP (P)

Al Bayt Stadium

GROUP E

Wed 23 Nov 9:00 am | Khalifa International Stadium
GER - JAP

Wed 23 Nov 12:00 pm | Al Thumama Stadium
SPA - CRC

Sun 27 Nov 16:00 am | Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium
JAP - CRC

Sun 27 Nov 13:00 pm | Al Bayt Stadium
SPA - GER

Thu 1 Dec 13:00 pm | Khalifa International Stadium
JAP - SPA

Thu 1 Dec 13:00 pm | Al Bayt Stadium
CRC - GER

GROUP F

Wed 23 Nov 16:00 am | Al Bayt Stadium
MOR - CRO

Wed 23 Nov 13:00 pm | Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium
BEL - CAN

Sun 27 Nov 9:00 am | Al Thumama Stadium
BEL - MDR

Sun 27 Nov 12:00 pm | Khalifa International Stadium
CRO - CAN

Thu 1 Dec 11:00 am | Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium
CRO - BEL

Thu 1 Dec 11:00 am | Al Thumama Stadium
CAN - MOR

GROUP G

Thu 24 Nov 16:00 am | Al Janoub Stadium
SUI - CAM

Thu 24 Nov 13:00 pm | Lusail Stadium
BRA - SER

Mon 28 Nov 16:00 am | Al Janoub Stadium
CAM - SER

Mon 28 Nov 12:00 pm | Stadium 974
BRA - SUI

Fri 2 Dec 13:00 pm | Stadium 974
SER - SUI

Fri 2 Dec 13:00 pm | Lusail Stadium
CAM - BRA

GROUP H

Thu 24 Nov 9:00 am | Education City Stadium
URU - KOR

Thu 24 Nov 12:00 pm | Stadium 974
POR - GHA

Mon 28 Nov 9:00 am | Education City Stadium
KOR - GHA

Mon 28 Nov 13:00 pm | Lusail Stadium
POR - URU

Fri 2 Dec 11:00 am | Al Janoub Stadium
GHA - URU

Fri 2 Dec 11:00 am | Education City Stadium
KOR - POR

FIFA World Cup QATAR 2022

November 20 - December 18

ALL TIMES SHOWN ARE TT TIMES



FINAL

Sun 18 Dec 11 am
WINNER (SF1)

WINNER (SF2)

Lusail Stadium

3RD PLACE PLAY-OFF

Sat 17 Dec 11 am
LOSER (SF1)

LOSER (SF2)

Khalifa International Stadium

QUARTER-FINALS

QF1 Fri 9 Dec 11 am
WINNER (R16-5)

WINNER (R16-6)

Education City Stadium

QUARTER-FINALS

QF2 Fri 9 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (R16-1)

WINNER (R16-2)

Lusail Stadium

SEMI-FINALS

SF1 Tue 13 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (QF2)

WINNER (QF1)

Lusail Stadium

SEMI-FINALS

SF2 Wed 14 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (QF4)

WINNER (QF3)

Al Bayt Stadium

QUARTER-FINALS

QF3 Sat 10 Dec 11 am
WINNER (R16-7)

WINNER (R16-8)

Al Thumama Stadium

QUARTER-FINALS

QF4 Sat 10 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (R16-3)

WINNER (R16-4)

Al Bayt Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-8 Tue 6 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (H)

RUNNER-UP (G)

Lusail Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-3 Sun 4 Dec 11 am
WINNER (D)

RUNNER-UP (C)

Al Thumama Stadium

ROUND OF 16

R16-4 Sun 4 Dec 13 pm
WINNER (B)

RUNNER-UP (A)

Al Bayt Stadium

TRINIDAD and TOBAGO
NEWSDAY



ANDREW GIOANNETTI

GROUP A**Qatar, Senegal, the Netherlands and Ecuador**

HOSTS Qatar are not tournament favourites or even tipped to advance from their group, but the Gulf minnows are determined to make a global statement when they kick off group-stage matches against Ecuador on Sunday.

No other country has kept their core group of players together and active in the run up to the World Cup as consistently as Qatar, who have managed to sneak in four friendly matches in just over a month – closing with a respectable 2-2 draw against Chile.

Having never qualified for the World Cup and the global scrutiny on the country's human rights record, there is undeniable pressure on the Qataris to progress out of the group – especially since only one host nation, South Africa, has failed to do so in the history of the tournament.

Qatar enter the tournament ranked 50th in the FIFA world rankings, the lowest in Group A.

Ecuador are ranked 44th but are by no means strangers to the World Cup, having qualified three times since the turn of the millennium, although they missed the past two editions.

The Netherlands and Senegal, seated in eighth and 18th in the rankings, respectively, are undisputed favourites to progress from the group

The Dutch have never lifted the trophy and are desperate to go one step further from their 2010 runners-up finish. The Oranje are led by vastly experienced head coach Louis van Gaal, who will fancy the top spot in Group A as they anticipate more daunting opposition in the knock-out phase.

But if any team can upstage the Netherlands, look no further than 2021 African champions, Senegal.

One of the world's top shot-stoppers, Edouard Mendy, and Chelsea FC's rock-solid defender Kalidou Koulibaly will be keen to ensure Senegal's defence stands firm. It is unclear how much Senegal will be able to rely on superstar forward Sadio Mane, who was injured while playing for Bayern Munich just over a week ago. The talismanic forward's dribbling ability, speed and energy can tip the scale in any game. If he is unfit, it would be a big blow to Senegal.

GROUP B**England, Wales, Iran and USA**

Too much talent can lead to selection headaches, as is the case of England and head coach Gareth Southgate, who has come in for stinging criticism from all quarters for his decision to leave home several top players.

The questions of harmony among the squad and negative media attention hardly bode well for the Three Lions, whose fans will once again accept nothing but an outright tournament win to consider the campaign a success.

If world rankings are anything to go by, England, placed fifth, will ease their way out of the group, ahead of Wales, USA and Iran.



England captain and forward Harry Kane, centre, will lead the English in their quest for glory at the World Cup.

Powerhouses battle in Groups A to D

Wales are ranked 19th in the world and qualified the hard way – through a play-off against a heavily favoured Ukraine. Main man Gareth Bale can take any match by the scruff of its neck to eke out results in a winnable group.

USA, ranked 16th in the world, had a surprisingly difficult qualifying campaign, placing third in Concacaf.

USA finished behind Concacaf group winners Canada, for only the second time in World Cup qualifying history, and also trailed Mexico. They were not far off from the sluggish form which saw them fail to qualify for the 2018 tournament.

Iran qualified easily for the World Cup, but the pedigree of the Asian confederation makes it difficult to gauge what to expect from the Persians.

Iran are ranked 20th in the world, which is impressive, but is the lowest of the group. Carlos Queiroz's men saw an early exit from the 2018 tournament, but left with dignity after holding Portugal to a 1-1 draw and losing 1-0 to Spain.

GROUP C**Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Poland**

Argentina believe their time is now, and all indicators point to that being the case. La Albiceleste and their star man, Lionel Messi, see the tournament as a must-win with the legendary attacker at the twilight of his stellar career. It's a now-or-never scenario.

After a disastrous 2018 World Cup, Argentina captured the Copa America in 2021, before finishing second in the Conmebol World Cup qualifiers, sealing 11 wins from 17 matches.

Argentina, twice World Cup champions, are ranked third in the world and boast immense quality across the pitch, more so than any other teams in the group. Poland, however, should never be underestimated. Having qualified for back-to-back World Cup tournaments, Poland are led by one of Europe's top strikers in Robert Lewandowski, who, at age 34, seems to age like wine.

Napoli midfielder Piotr Zielinski and forward Arkadiusz Milik of Juventus will need to provide exceptional support to see the Polish out of their group for the first time since 1986.

Perpetual underachievers Mexico never seem to have an issue qualifying out of their group. But that's usually where their campaign derails. With 16 World Cup appearances – among the best in the world – Mexico have qualified for their eighth consecutive tournament, and have bowed out at each of their last seven at the round-of-16.

El Tri and Poland are expected to vie for second spot in the group.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, need a bit more than a miracle to stand a chance of advancing but having finished top of their qualifying group, ahead of Japan and Australia, The Falcons are flying high.

GROUP D**France, Australia, Denmark and Tunisia**

As defending champions, and loaded with attacking flair, France are once again among the very favourites to lift the trophy. Fourth in the Fifa world rankings, they might have been outright favourites to win the tournament but for their disappointing round-of-16 exit at Euro 2020, losing to Switzerland.

Les Bleus' 2022 Ballon d'Or winner, Karim Benzema, and PSG magician, Kylian Mbappe, both up top, will likely have any defence scrambling throughout the tournament.

If France should take top spot in the group, Denmark are favourites for second.

Ranked tenth in the world, Denmark boast perhaps their strongest ever squad, with nearly each of their starting 11 currently employed at Europe's elite clubs, and midfield maestro, Manchester United's Christian Eriksen, in inspired form.

Denmark enter the tournament having won nine of their ten Uefa qualifying matches, an impressive run to take note of.

Australia defeated Peru in the inter-confederation play-off to qualify for their sixth World Cup. It will take a minor miracle to see them qualify out of the group, though, with the football minnows ranked 38th, eight spots below Tunisia, who also boast five previous World Cup appearances.

Australia last qualified for the round-of-16 at the 2006 tournament but have been less than impressive in successive editions.

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JELANI BECKLES

GROUP E

Germany, Japan, Spain, Costa Rica

GROUP E of the World Cup draw provides a marquee match-up between four-time World Cup champions Germany (1954, 1974, 1990, 2014) and 2010 winners Spain. Both Germany and Spain will be favourites to advance in a group including Japan and Costa Rica, who are no pushovers. Germany and Spain may not be boast the household names of the past, but certainly still have tremendous quality.

Mats Hummels, Sami Khedira, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Mesut Ozil, Lukas Podolski, Miroslav Klose and Philipp Lahm are some of the core players who steered Germany to the 2014 title. All of them are not in the 2022 squad as most of have retired.

There are a few surviving members from the 2014 squad including goal-keeper Manuel Neuer, Thomas Muller and Mario Gotze.

Leroy Sane, Kai Havertz, Joshua Kimmich and Antonio Rudiger are expected to show their pedigree in the tournament.

Similar to Germany, Spain are in a transition period. Familiar faces like Andres Iniesta, Xavi, Iker Casillas, Carles Puyol and Fernando Torres have all retired. The players on the 2022 squad will be eager to make a name for themselves with veteran Sergio Busquets adding his leadership.

There is no doubt Spain are still contenders. The Barcelona pair of Pedri and Gavi in the midfield remind many of stalwarts Iniesta and Xavi.

Costa Rica and Japan have both had their moments at the World Cup.

This will be Costa Rica's sixth appearance at the tournament with their best performance a quarter-final showing at the 2014 edition.

Japan will have a team at the World Cup for the seventh consecutive time since qualifying for the first time in 1998. Japan made it to the round of 16 in 2002, 2010 and 2018.

GROUP F

Belgium, Canada, Morocco, Croatia

This group will feature two of the top three teams at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Croatia, surprise finalists in 2018, will fancy their chances again with Luka Modric, 37, the player steering the ship in the midfield. Modric was the player of the tournament in 2018 and Croatia will bank on his ability.

Tottenham's Ivan Perisic is another player to watch on the Croatia squad. Perisic showed in 2018 that the lights are not too bright scoring in the World Cup final against France.

Belgium, ranked second in the FIFA rankings, are expected to progress in the group alongside Croatia.

Despite their high ranking, many believe Belgium's best chance to lift the title would have been in 2014 or 2018 with players

Thrills expected in Groups E to H



Spain's goalkeeper David Raya, top, Jordi Alba, left, and Sergio Busquets take part in a training session in Las Rozas, just outside Madrid, Spain, on Monday. The team will travel to Jordan for a friendly match on Thursday and then onto Qatar to participate in the World Cup.
AP PHOTO

like Vincent Kompany, goal-keeper Thibaut Courtois, Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne and Romelo Lukaku in the team. All those players are in the 2022 squad except for Kompany (retired), but Hazard has struggled to find his touch since the last World Cup and Lukaku has had injury problems. Midfielder De Bruyne and

Courtois are still among the best at their position.

This will only be Canada's second time competing at the World Cup after making their debut in 1986. Canada were the first CONCACAF team to seal a spot in Qatar in the qualifying stage.

This will be Morocco's sixth time competing at the tournament, but only their second appearance since 1998. Morocco will hope for a better showing after finishing last in Group B four years ago, with one point.

GROUP G

Brazil, Serbia, Switzerland, Cameroon

Five-time champions (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002) Brazil are always one of the favourites for the title.

Many believe this is Brazil's chance to end their 20-year drought without a World Cup crown with the talent

available. Neymar will once again prove crucial to

Brazil. In the past, Brazil have been relying on Neymar, but with exciting attacking players like Vinicius Jnr, Raphinha, Antony, Richarlison and Gabriel Jesus, he has the support for the South Americans to possibly lift the title which has eluded them since 2002.

Brazil's defence has been impressive in qualifying with Thiago Silva, Marquinhos and defensive midfielder Casemiro all making it tough for attackers. For Brazil coach Tite, his most difficult task may be deciding a starting XI with a loaded roster.

Brazil will tackle some familiar opponents in Group G. Serbia and Switzerland both played in the same group as Brazil at the 2018 World Cup.

Switzerland proved they were no pushovers holding Brazil to a 1-1 draw four years ago. Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri are two of their seasoned campaigners who will lead from the front for the Swiss.

Switzerland have been a handful against quality opposition in recent years getting past defending World Cup champions France in the round of 16 at the 2020 European Championships.

Switzerland have competed in every World Cup since 2006.

Serbia will aim to make amends after not advancing past the group stage in 2018. Brazil were made to work for a 2-0 win over Serbia at the 2018 edition.

Cameroon, making their eighth appearance, are considered underdogs in the group and will be eyeing an upset over their more favoured opponents.

Cameroon lost 4-1 to Brazil when the teams squared off in the group phase at the 2014 World Cup.

GROUP H

Portugal, Ghana, Uruguay, Korea Republic

Group H is not as easy to predict as some of the other groups. This will more than likely be Cristiano Ronaldo's last World Cup for Portugal. Can one of the greatest players of all time, now 37, end his World Cup career by leading Portugal to their first title? Ronaldo's form has dipped in 2022, but certainly he will be keen to sign off on a winning note.

Playing in his fifth World Cup, Ronaldo has scored seven goals in 17 World Cup matches.

Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva will add firepower to the line-up.

Uruguay, winners of the World Cup in 1930 and 1950, have qualified for every World Cup since 2010.

Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani, the backbone of the team for the past decade, are now past their prime.

Real Madrid player Federico Valverde is an emerging star and eyes will be on the midfielder.

With less household names compared to Uruguay and Portugal, Ghana and Korea Republic will both be trying to create an upset.

Korea's best showing at the World Cup was a fourth-place finish at the 2002 edition as joint hosts with Japan.

Ghana will aim to replicate their showing at the 2010 World Cup when the Black Caps made it to the quarter-finals.



Uruguay forward Luis Suarez



A man takes a selfie in front a "Fifa World Cup, Qatar 2022" sign at the corniche in Doha, Qatar, last Friday. AP PHOTO

Anti-LGBT Laws, migrant deaths, corruption allegations

Controversy follows Qatar's hosting

NICHOLAS MARAJ

THE 2022 FIFA World Cup kicks off on Monday in Qatar, but there still remains a lot of controversy surrounding its hosting. Western countries have criticised Qatar's human rights record, its attitude towards LGBT rights and the treatment of migrant workers and questioned the legality of its hosting bid.

The tournament was awarded to the Persian Gulf state in 2010 by FIFA – football's world governing body.

Last week, former Fifa president Sepp Blatter, said the decision to award the 2022 World Cup to Qatar was a "mistake."

He said, "It is too small of a country. Football and the World Cup are too big for it."

However, Blatter, whose FIFA tenure was plagued by allegations of corruption, said in 2010: "The Middle East and the Arabic world have been waiting for a long time so I'm a happy president when we talk about the development of football. We go to new lands."

The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, has pushed back at the critics, saying his nation "has been subject to an unprecedented campaign that no host country has ever faced."

About Qatar

Qatar is a Muslim nation, with laws, customs and practices rooted in Islam. It has a population of three million, with some 300,000 Qatari and the rest immigrants and expatriates. The call to prayer is announced on loudspeakers five times daily. Qatar recently faced a three-year blockade by Arab nations over allegations of state-sponsored terrorism.

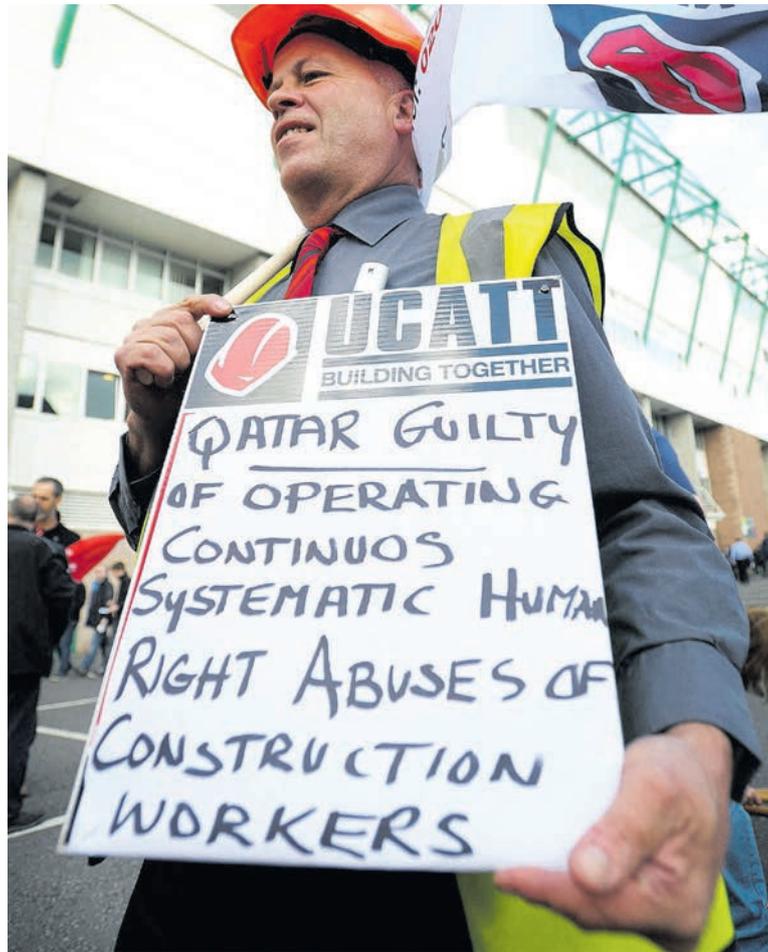
Most Qatari women wear the headscarf, known as hijab, and long black robes, known as abayas. Men wear loose white robes known as thoub. Alcohol is permitted at hotel restaurants and bars, but its public consumption is illegal. Homosexuality is punishable by death. Cross-dressing is also a crime under Qatari law. Public displays of affection, by anyone, are frowned upon.

LGBTQI+ and women's rights

Qatar World Cup chief Nasser Al Khater said, "We always said everyone is welcome, including LGBTQ fans, but visitors should respect the nation's culture. Regardless, everybody will feel safe here."

Asked if that included gay fans holding hands in public Al Khater said, "Yes."

He told a male Sky News



A demonstrator holds a placard critical of Qatar's policies regarding the working conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf state ahead of the international friendly football match between Scotland and Qatar at Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh, 2015. AFP PHOTO

reporter, "If I held you hand and walked through the streets, for hours and hours, nobody would say anything to us."

Just last week, Qatar World Cup ambassador Khalid Salman referred to homosexuality as "damage in the mind" during an interview with a German broadcaster, stoking an already tense situation.

Abdullah Al Nasari, head of security at the World Cup, said recently, "If you want to express your views on the LGBT cause, do so in a society where it will be accepted. Do not come and insult an entire society. We will not change the religion for 28 days.

"If a fan raises a rainbow flag in a stadium and it is taken away, it will not be because we want to offend him, but to protect him."

Exploitation of migrant workers

In 2021, the UK Guardian reported that 6,500 migrant workers had died in the lead-up to the World Cup. The conditions were likened to modern slavery. The France 24 TV network reported 400,000 migrants, mostly from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sudan and Kenya, worked on construction for the Qatari World Cup, but the nation hosts in excess of 1.5 million. Workers interviewed said they laboured for 18 hours a day, powered by energy drinks and poor-quality water. They worked

in extreme heat, lived in cramped conditions without privacy, and fellow co-workers died from exhaustion or accidents.

Qatar said the figures were misleading, because not all migrant deaths were World Cup-related. It said many people had worked in Qatar for several years, and may have died from old age or other natural causes. Total migrant deaths, as a fraction of total migrant labour, were around 1.6 per cent.

In May this year, Fifa's president Gianni Infantino downplayed the exploitation of migrant workers. He said, "Workers would feel proud at being given the chance to construct stadiums for this year's tournament in the Gulf nation, earning a living rather than being given charity."

But the socialist mayor of the French city of Lille, Martine Aubry, said the Qatar World Cup was "nonsense in terms of human rights, the environment and sport."

Denmark said its team will wear "toned-down" shirts to protest against Qatar's human-rights record and its treatment of migrant workers.

In response, Fifa's president Gianni Infantino wrote to competing nations asking them to "focus on the football."

European League conflict

Because of the summer heat in the Middle-East, when temperatures soar to 42 C, a

decision was taken to host the World Cup from November 20-December 18, when it is cooler. Blatter initially announced it would take place in the summer, but had to reverse the decision.

A winter World Cup is in direct conflict with the European leagues, played around the same time annually.

The English Premier League paused after last weekend's (November 12-13) matches and will resume fixtures on Boxing Day. Spain, Italy, Germany, France and other major leagues have also had to pause to facilitate the World Cup.

Players will have a week to prepare with their national teams before heading to the tournament.

The balancing of club duties a week before the World Cup is certainly not ideal, and has left some players injured and out of the World Cup.

Bribery and corruption

From the time of its announcement, accusations of bribery and corruption were rife. However, Qatar was cleared of accusations that it bought votes, in June 2017, but not before then-president Blatter and 16 other Fifa executives, including TT's Jack Warner, were sanctioned. Blatter was banned from all football-related activity for eight years; UEFA president Michel Platini for four years; and Warner and Chuck Blazer for life.

In 2014, it was alleged a firm connected to the Qatari bid had paid Warner US\$1.2 million. Since 2015, Swiss prosecutors and the US Department of Justice have been investigating.

Blatter said Fifa's executive committee had initially decided the 2022 World Cup would be played in the US, as a peace gesture, following Russia's hosting in 2018. The US lost in the fourth round of voting. Qatari and former Asian Football Confederation president Mohammed bin Hammam has also been banned by FIFA for life. There have been allegations of corruption involving bin Hammam but a FIFA report said payments made by him were for his personal interests and were not connected to Qatar's bid.

And now

Despite the controversies, about 1.2 million international visitors are expected to visit the tiny emirate during the tournament, with ticket sales approaching three million for the 64 games. After the years of tumult, the 2026 World Cup will be jointly hosted by the US, Canada and Mexico.



FIFA World Cup records and stats

The 2022 FIFA World Cup kicks off in Qatar on November 20 with the host nation taking on Ecuador in the tournament opener. The final is set for December 18 and fans are eager to see which team will win the prestigious cup. Some of the biggest names in the world will be battling for glory with their respective countries. Records are likely to be broken along the way. Below is a list of World Cup records and statistics held by some of the game's legends such as Pele, Gerd Muller, Gianluigi Buffon, and others.

SMALLEST COUNTRY TO QUALIFY

Iceland (2018, population – 334,000)
Trinidad and Tobago (2006, population – 1.3 million)
Northern Ireland (1958, population – 1.4 million)

MOST GOALS (INDIVIDUAL)

Miroslav Klose (Germany, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014 – 16 goals)
Ronaldo (Brazil, 1994 (no games), 1998, 2002, 2006 – 15 goals)
Gerd Muller (West Germany, 1970, 1974 – 14 goals)
Just Fontaine (France, 1958 – 13 goals)
Pele (Brazil, 1958, 1962, 1966, 1970 – 12 goals)

MOST TITLES (INDIVIDUAL)

Pele (Brazil) - 1959, 1962, 1970

MOST APPEARANCES

Antonio Carbajal (Mexico, 1950, 1954, 1958, 1962, 1966)
Lothar Matthäus (Germany, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998)
Rafael Márquez (Mexico, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018)

YOUNGEST PLAYER

Norman Whiteside (Northern Ireland) vs Yugoslavia, 17 June, 1982
Age: 17 years, 41 days

OLDEST PLAYER

Essam El-Hadary (Egypt) vs Saudi Arabia, 25 June, 2018
Age: 45 years, 161 days

MOST GOALS IN A MATCH (INDIVIDUAL)

Oleg Salenko (Russia) scores five vs Cameroon, 1994

MOST HAT-TRICKS (TWO)

Sándor Kocsis (Hungary, 1954)



Brazil football legend Pele

Just Fontaine (France, 1958)
Gerd Müller (West Germany, 1970)
Gabriel Batistuta (Argentina, 1994 & 1998)

FASTEST HAT-TRICK

László Kiss (Hungary) scored at 69th, 72nd and 76th vs El Salvador, 1982.

LONGEST PERIOD BETWEEN GOALS

Michael Laudrup (Denmark, 1986–1998, 12 years)
Ivica Olic (Croatia, 2002–2014, 12 years)

YOUNGEST SCORER

Pelé (Brazil) vs Wales, 19 June, 1958
Age: 17 years, 239 days

OLDEST SCORER

Roger Milla (Cameroon) vs Russia, 28 June, 1994
Age: 42 years, 39 days

MOST TITLES (TEAM)

Brazil – 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002.

BIGGEST MARGIN OF VICTORY

Hungary 9-0 vs South Korea, 1954
Yugoslavia 9-0 vs Zaire, 1974
Hungary 10-1 vs El Salvador, 1982

MOST GOALS IN A FINAL (TEAM)

Brazil, 1958 – five goals

BIGGEST DEFICIT OVERTURNED TO WIN A FINAL

West Germany, 1954 (came from 0–2 down



Former Italy goalie Gianluigi Buffon

to win 3-2 vs Hungary)

MOST GOALS IN A TOURNAMENT (TEAM)

Hungary, 1954 – 27 goals

MOST CLEAN SHEETS (GOALIE)

Peter Shilton (England, 1982–1990, ten shut outs)
Fabien Barthez (France, 1998–2006, ten shut outs)

FEWEST GOALS CONCEDED AS CHAMPS

Fabien Barthez - France, 1998, two goals
Gianluigi Buffon - Italy, 2006, two goals
Iker Casillas - Spain, 2010, two goals

MOST CONSECUTIVE MINUTES WITHOUT CONCEDED (GOALIE)

Walter Zenga (Italy, 1990) – 517 mins (5 shut outs)

MOST SAVES IN A MATCH

Tim Howard (United States) vs Belgium, 2014 – 16 saves

FASTEST RED CARD

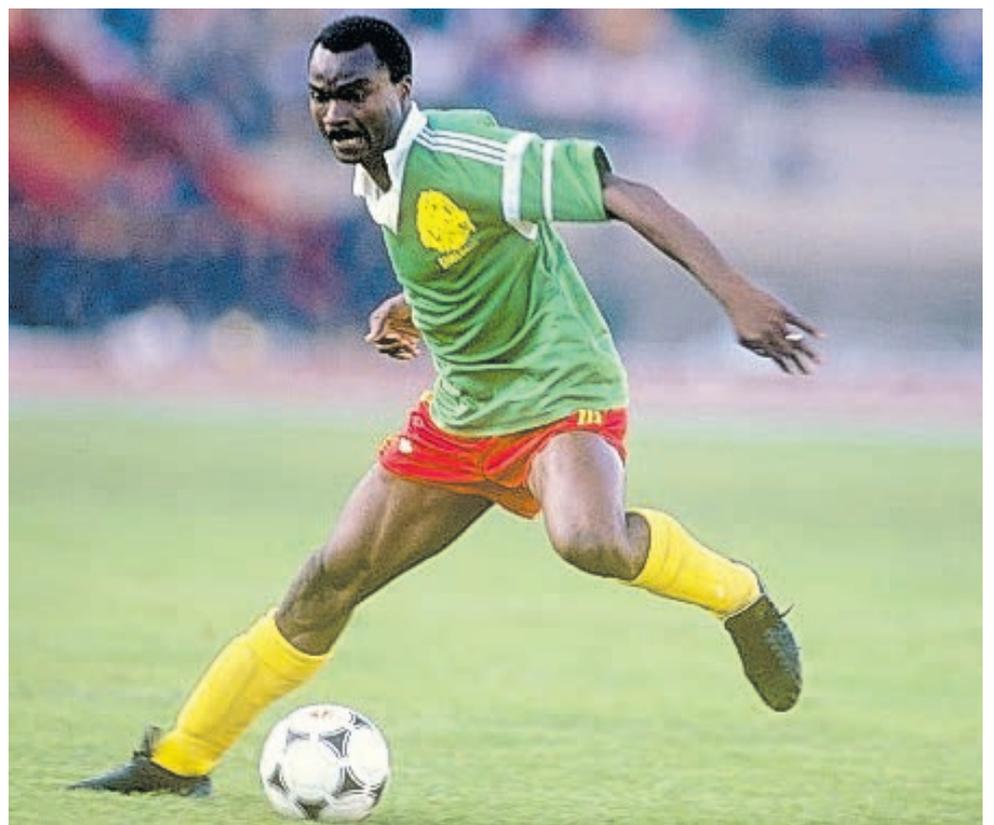
56 seconds, José Batista (Uruguay) vs Scotland, 1986

MOST RED CARDS

Rigobert Song (Cameroon, 1994 and 1998, twice)
Zinedine Zidane (France, 1998 and 2006, twice)



Germany's Gerd Muller



Ex-Cameroon football star Roger Milla