

The 26 Cup: *Fifty* Things to Remember

• 11 Jun – 19 Jul 2026 • United States · Canada · Mexico • 48 Teams · 104 Matches

The biggest tournament football has ever staged — **three host nations, sixteen cities, and a format rebuilt from the ground up.** Here is what makes it historic, and what to keep an eye on.

What Makes It Historic

01 — 08

01 First-ever three-nation World Cup

Co-hosted by the **USA, Canada and Mexico.** No men's World Cup has ever spread across three countries.

02 Expanded to 48 teams

Up from 32 — the largest field in the tournament's history.

03 104 matches in all

A leap from 64. More games than any World Cup ever played.

04 Mexico hosts for a third time

The first country ever to stage the World Cup **three times** — 1970, 1986 and 2026.

05 Estadio Azteca makes history

The first stadium to host matches at **three** different World Cups — and it stages the opening match.

06 The longest World Cup ever

Running roughly **39 days**, from 11 June to 19 July 2026.

07 Canada's first men's World Cup

Canadian soil hosts World Cup matches for the very first time.

08 USA back as lead host

First time since **1994** — now with the most matches and the final.

09 **12 groups of 4**
A brand-new structure replacing the old eight groups of four.

10 **A knockout round that never existed**
Top two per group **plus the 8 best third-placed teams** advance to a 32-team Round of 32.

11 **16 host cities**
Spread across the three nations — the widest footprint in World Cup history.

12 **The final at MetLife Stadium**
East Rutherford, New Jersey — the New York / New Jersey metro.

13 **Up to 8 matches to lift it**
One more than before — a longer, harder road to the trophy.

The 16 Host Cities

THREE NATIONS

 **UNITED STATES**

11 cities

New York/NJ · Los Angeles · Dallas · SF Bay Area · Miami · Atlanta · Seattle · Houston · Philadelphia · Kansas City · Boston

 **MEXICO**

3 cities

Mexico City · Guadalajara · Monterrey

 **CANADA**

2 cities

Toronto · Vancouver

14 **More spots for every confederation**
Africa, Asia and CONCACAF all gain places — expect **debutant nations** at their first World Cup.

15 **Three automatic host berths**
USA, Canada and Mexico all qualify automatically — the first time three nations get host spots.

16 **Stadiums built for spectacle**
Many are NFL venues with **retractable roofs and air conditioning** — with real debate over summer heat.

17 **Argentina defend the crown**
The 2022 winners return — potentially **Lionel Messi's final** World Cup, the tournament's biggest storyline.

18 **A truly continental logistics test**
Teams and fans crossing borders and time zones like no World Cup before it.

19 **Record attendance in sight**
Huge American stadiums put the all-time World Cup crowd records within reach.

20 **The last of its kind, then bigger still**
The blueprint for every World Cup to come — modern football's new template starts here.

Figures marked *projected* are pre-tournament estimates; the confirmed benchmark is **Qatar 2022**. FIFA has signalled a record rise for 2026.

- 21

A record prize pot

Qatar 2022 paid out **\$440 million** in prize money. For 2026, with 48 teams and 104 games, the pool is *projected to climb toward \$900M–\$1 billion*.
- 22

What the winners take home

The champions of Qatar 2022 (Argentina) earned **\$42 million**. The 2026 winners are *projected* to bank **well over \$50M** as the top prize.
- 23

The runners-up cheque

Second place in 2022 took **\$30 million**; third **\$27M**, fourth **\$25M** — every step of the knockout ladder pays.
- 24

Just showing up pays

Every one of the 32 teams in 2022 received a guaranteed **~\$9 million** minimum, plus **\$1.5M** preparation money. With 48 teams, more federations share the windfall.
- 25

What each player actually gets

Prize money is paid to the **federation**, not directly to players. Each association then pays squad bonuses — so a winning player's cut **varies wildly by country**, often *\$500k to \$1M+* per man for the champions.
- 26

FIFA's record revenue cycle

FIFA targeted **~\$11 billion** in revenue for the 2023–2026 cycle — its biggest ever — with 2026 the centrepiece.
- 27

Broadcast rights are the engine

TV and streaming deals are FIFA's largest income source — a global World Cup audience runs into the **billions** of viewers across the month.
- 28

Sponsorship's heavy hitters

Top-tier FIFA Partners include **Adidas, Coca-Cola, Visa, Hyundai-Kia, Qatar Airways, Lego and Aramco** — each paying tens of millions a year.
- 29

A continental economic jolt

Host-nation studies *project tens of billions* in economic activity across the US, Canada and Mexico, with the **United States capturing the largest share** as lead host.
- 30

Who earns most?

Three winners stand out: **FIFA** (record revenue), the **US host economy** (most matches & cities), and the **global sponsors & broadcasters** reaching a record audience.

31 Dynamic pricing — a World Cup first

FIFA introduced **demand-based pricing** for 2026: ticket prices move up and down with demand, like airline seats. Never done before at a World Cup.

32 The cheapest way in

Entry-level group-stage tickets started around **\$60** (reported) — though dynamic pricing pushed popular games far higher.

33 The most expensive seat

Top-category **final** tickets were reported near **\$6,700** at face value — and premium **hospitality packages** ran into the **tens of thousands** of dollars.

34 What an "average" ticket costs

There is no single average under dynamic pricing, but typical group-stage seats landed in the **~\$100–\$300** band, climbing steeply through the knockouts. *(Reported ranges — final prices vary by match and demand.)*

35 Record ticket revenue in sight

104 matches in huge American stadiums put **total attendance and ticket income** on track to smash every previous World Cup.

36 Two broadcasters, one country

In the US, **Fox** (English) and **Telemundo** (Spanish) split the airwaves — the Spanish-language audience in North America is enormous.

37 Advertising's biggest stage

A month-long, 48-team tournament across prime North American time zones is a **marketer's dream** — expect record ad spend around matches and highlights.

38 The stadium isn't the only billboard

Between social clips, fan festivals in 16 cities and streaming, brands reach audiences **far beyond the 3.5+ million** who attend in person.

#	STADIUM	CITY	COUNTRY	CAPACITY*
1	MetLife Stadium FINAL	East Rutherford (NY/NJ)		82,500
2	AT&T Stadium	Arlington (Dallas)		80,000
3	NRG Stadium	Houston		72,000
4	Mercedes-Benz Stadium	Atlanta		71,000
5	SoFi Stadium	Inglewood (Los Angeles)		70,000
6	Lumen Field	Seattle		69,000
7	Lincoln Financial Field	Philadelphia		69,000
8	Levi's Stadium	Santa Clara (SF Bay)		68,500
9	GEHA Field at Arrowhead	Kansas City		76,000
10	Hard Rock Stadium	Miami Gardens		65,000
11	Gillette Stadium	Foxborough (Boston)		65,000
12	Estadio Azteca OPENER	Mexico City		87,000
13	Estadio BBVA	Monterrey		53,500
14	Estadio Akron	Guadalajara		48,000
15	BC Place	Vancouver		54,500
16	BMO Field	Toronto		45,000

*Approximate World Cup capacities. FIFA uses neutral names during the tournament (e.g. "New York New Jersey Stadium," "Dallas Stadium") because of sponsorship rules.

- 39

Lionel Messi — Argentina
The reigning champion and 2022 Golden Ball winner, **almost certainly playing his final World Cup**. The tournament's emotional centrepiece.
- 40

Kylian Mbappé — France
The 2022 Golden Boot winner and captain of France — the man most likely to inherit the "best on the planet" crown.
- 41

Lamine Yamal — Spain
The teenage sensation who lit up Euro 2024. His **first World Cup** at the peak of hype.
- 42

Jude Bellingham — England
Real Madrid's midfield engine and England's talisman — carrying a nation's hopes of ending its long wait.
- 43

Vinícius Júnior — Brazil
Brazil's electric winger, chasing the Seleção's first title since 2002 on North American soil.
- 44

Cristiano Ronaldo — Portugal
If he features, it would be a record-extending appearance and **near-certain final** World Cup for the all-time great, at 41.
- 45

Erling Haaland — Norway
Should Norway qualify, football finally gets its **most feared goalscorer** on the World Cup stage for the first time.
- 46

The German engine — Musiala & Wirtz
Jamal Musiala and Florian Wirtz headline a young, dangerous Germany hungry to rebound.

- 47

Three time zones, one trophy
Matches span from the US East Coast to the Pacific and down into Mexico — the **widest geographic spread** of any World Cup.
- 48

Air-conditioned, roofed venues
Several stadiums close their roofs and **cool the air** — a modern answer to the North American summer heat.
- 49

The template for the future
The 48-team, 104-match model becomes the **blueprint** every future World Cup is measured against.
- 50

A billion-dollar month
Between prize money, broadcast, sponsorship and tickets, WC 2026 is set to be the **most commercially valuable** football event ever staged.



Bigger isn't automatically better

Expanding to 48 teams tests **logistics, travel and player fatigue** like never before — the lesson from every past expansion is that scale must be matched by planning.



Heat and scheduling matter

After Qatar 2022 moved to winter, 2026's **North American summer** revives the debate on kickoff times, roofs and cooling for player welfare.



Host economics are often over-promised

Past tournaments teach caution: headline "economic impact" numbers rarely fully materialise — **legacy and infrastructure use** matter more than the one-month bump.



Technology keeps reshaping the game

From goal-line tech to VAR and semi-automated offside, each World Cup is a **proving ground** — 2026 will push officiating tech further still.



Inclusion grows the game

More qualifying places mean **new nations, new fans and new markets** — the clearest lesson is that access expands football's global footprint.

Where is the next World Cup?

2030 — The Centenary World Cup. A history-making six-nation event: mainly hosted by **Spain, Portugal and Morocco** (Europe + Africa), with three celebration matches in **Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay** to mark 100 years since the first World Cup in Uruguay (1930).

2034 — Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom will host for the first time, taking the World Cup back to the Gulf and the Asian confederation.