

WORLD CUP 2026: UNPACKED

WHAT SIX WEEKS OF THE WORLD CUP REVEALED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF LIVE EVENTS.

WORLD CUP 2026 DECODED

Six weeks that reshaped football, culture and the future of live events.

From the first match to the final whistle and beyond, here's how 48 teams, 16 host cities and billions of fans created the most culturally expansive World Cup in history.

- GAME & LEGACY
- FANDOM & HOST CULTURE
- MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT
- POLITICS & ACCOUNTABILITY
- STYLE & SPECTACLE

2026

JUN 11
OPENING DAY

JUN 12-19
GROUP STAGE

JUN 20-27
GROUP STAGE

JUN 28 - JUL 3
ROUND OF 16

JULY 4 - JUL 9
QUARTERFINALS

JULY 10 - JUL 14
SEMIFINALS

JULY 15 - JUL 19
THE FINAL

JULY 20+
THE AFTERMATH

THE GAME

The matches.
The rivalries.
The moments
that changed
the tournament.

1

Mexico opens the World Cup at the Azteca, a stadium now spanning three editions

U.S. takes control early, defeating Paraguay 4-1 in World Cup opener

Cape Verde stuns Spain with a 0-0 draw in World Cup debut

Messi begins a possible final dance with an opening hat trick

Lamine Yamal scores his first World Cup goal and moves the future firmly into the present

Nine of ten African teams reach the knockouts.

Germany crashes out, falling to Paraguay

Modrić's farewell

Brazil/Japan 2-1

Cape Verde captures the internet's heart. Vozinha too

Mexico ends four decades of waiting

Brazil goes home

England escapes Mexico, 3 to 2

One last dance.

Spain removes France and begins to look inevitable

England ends Norway's run, but the team leaves with its cultural momentum intact

Argentina breaks England late in another painful chapter of a historic rivalry

England wins a 10-goal thriller and secures its best finish since 1966

Spain wins the World Cup and completes a dominant title run

Mbappé becomes World Cup's leading scorer and claims another Golden Boot

Messi and Yamal complete the circle as one image captures football's generational handoff

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WHAT COMES NEXT?
As we look toward 2030, 4 big questions remain.

1. ACCESS

Can football's biggest stage stay accessible as demand keeps growing?

2. 48 TEAMS

Was expansion a success, or is the tournament becoming too big?

3. POLITICS

Will future hosts face even greater pressure to address global issues?

4. COMMERCIALIZATION

How will brands earn relevance beyond official sponsorship?

THE WORLD AROUND IT

The fans.
The culture.
The conversation
that made this
more than a
tournament.

3 host nations open the World Cup as kickoff becomes a shared North American spectacle

World Cup moves outside as cities, bars, and fan parks become the stage

Gaza keeps watching through makeshift screenings amid war and destruction

Pink cleats become the tournament's signature style

Scotland is back, and the Tartan Army takes America after its first World Cup win in 36 years

Norwegian supporter Viking Row Times Sq. takeover

Egypt carries Palestine onto the pitch through public appeals, flags, and solidarity

Lumumba Vea's silent vigil turns fandom into history, memory, and identity

A red card becomes a political crisis as Trump, FIFA, and U.S. defeat collide

Haaland becomes the internet's boyfriend through goals, fits, memes, and main character energy

International fans embrace everyday America, from ranch to Waffle House, Walmart and Buc ee's.

German Fan Freddy turns America into football's biggest road trip

Officiating becomes conspiracy culture through VAR claims, fake clips, and artificial intelligence misinformation

The first fan red card enters creator lore after a spectator stunt makes history

Hey Jude takes over

Louis Vuitton unveiled its 2026 FIFA World Cup Trophy Trunk

The final becomes a global variety show where football and entertainment collide at scale

Politics occupies the podium and becomes part of Spain's defining celebration image

Nico Williams honors his mom with World Cup medal after family's unimaginable journey to Spain

The trophy doesn't end the argument as politics, conduct, and power shape the tournament's afterlife

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THE STORY

Six weeks when football left the pitch, took over cities and feeds, and passed the game to a new generation.

FOOTBALL BECAME A CITY EXPERIENCE
Streets, neighborhoods, bars, fan parks and heritage communities created thousands of local World Cups.

CREATORS BECAME THE SECOND BROADCAST
Watchalongs, reactions, memes and personality-led commentary changed how billions followed the tournament.

POLITICS BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE
Politics shaped everything from visas and protests to podiums and global identity.

A NEW GENERATION TOOK THE GAME
Yamal, Bellingham, Haaland, Mora and others rose as Messi, Ronaldo, Modric and Neymar reached the end of their chapters.

WHAT WE'LL REMEMBER

The fans in the streets. The breakthroughs. The goodbyes. The politics. The beauty. The pain. One tournament. A thousand World Cups lived at once.

HAVAS Play

THE BIGGEST WORLD CUP YET

RECORD AUDIENCES MET AN INTERNET MOVING EVEN FASTER

BROADCAST SCALE

38.9M

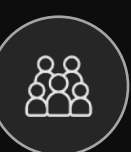
watched the Final on FOX

The most watched soccer telecast in U.S. history, peaking at 51.7 million.

 **7.7M**

average viewers across the tournament on FOX, FS1 and Tubi

Up 116% from 2022 across all 104 matches.

 **11**

matches cleared 15 million viewers on FOX

9 surpassed the previous U.S. record for a men's World Cup telecast.



6.3M

average Spanish language audience

Most watched World Cup in U.S. Spanish language media history, up 143% from 2022.

DIGITAL & SOCIAL SCALE

17.2B

FOX Sports digital and social content views

The most digitally viewed event in network history.

 **16.5B**

FOX Sports social impressions

More than 2,500 World Cup videos surpassed one million views.

 **54M**

new followers across FIFA platforms

Including 23 million new TikTok followers during the tournament.

 **7B**

engagements across global news and social coverage

Generated by 42 million stories and posts between June 9 and July 7.

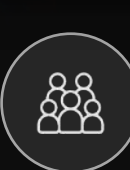
 **31M**

mentions in the closing stretch (July 4-19)

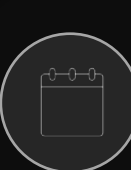
1.6B engagements. Peak conversation as the tournament reached its end.

 **BEYOND THE NUMBERS**

The World Cup did not only concentrate attention in one place. It multiplied it. Broadcast created the shared moment, while creators, social platforms, fan communities, watch parties, and city culture gave people different ways into the same event. The result was fragmentation that created even greater scale, not fragmentation *instead of* scale.

 **104 MATCHES**

Across 16 host cities in 3 countries.

 **42 DAYS OF NONSTOP ACTION**

The longest World Cup in history.

 **5B+ PEOPLE REACHED**

Around the world across platforms.

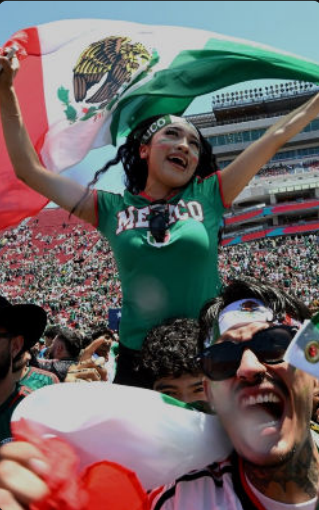
 **7.7M FAN FESTIVAL VISITS**

Worldwide.

WHAT FUTURE EVENTS SHOULD TAKE FORWARD

WHAT SIX WEEKS OF WORLD CUP OBSERVATION MEAN FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF LIVE EVENTS.

Across six weeks of matches, conversation and culture, a handful of patterns emerged that reach well beyond football.



01 THE STREETS BECAME PART OF THE TOURNAMENT.

Fan parks, bars and city streets became just as memorable as the stadiums, expanding the tournament far beyond the official footprint.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Plan for where people gather, not just where they watch.

WATCH FOR

- LA28
- Women's World Cup
- Super Bowl
- Formula 1



02 SOME OF THE BIGGEST STORIES NEVER HAPPENED ON THE PITCH.

Creators, communities and brands all found ways to shape the tournament. The biggest moments often happened around the match.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Official sponsorship no longer guarantees cultural relevance. The brands that moved fastest often earned as much attention as the brands that owned the rights.

WATCH FOR

- NBA Finals
- Award Shows
- F1 Grand Prix
- Club World Cup



03 THE TOURNAMENT REWARDED CURIOSITY.

Unexpected teams, breakout players and unlikely cultural moments consistently captured the most attention.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

The biggest stories rarely follow the original plan.

WATCH FOR

- Olympics
- March Madness
- Euro. Champs.
- Grammy Awards



04 HERITAGE SHOWED UP.

People brought heritage, local pride and community into every host city, making identity part of the experience.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

The strongest connections come from local relevance, not one size fits all messaging.

WATCH FOR

- LA28
- Women's World Cup
- World Series
- Travel & Tourism



05 WATCHING WASN'T ENOUGH.

Predicting, reacting, traveling and participating became just as important as watching the match itself.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

People remember the moments they helped create.

WATCH FOR

- Super Bowl
- Coachella
- Esports Events
- Music Tours



06 EVERYONE WATCHED DIFFERENTLY

People followed the same tournament through different screens, communities and rituals while still sharing one cultural moment.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Different audiences create different paths through the same moment.

WATCH FOR

- U.S. Open
- NBA Finals
- LA28
- FIFA Club World Cup



THE BIGGER PICTURE

World Cup 2026 stretched beyond the pitch. It unfolded across cities, communities, creators and culture, proving the biggest events are shaped as much by what happens around them as what happens on them.

CARRYING IT FORWARD

The next generation of events will be remembered less for what happened on the schedule than for everything people built around it.