

# Somali referee axed after being denied entry to US

AFP | Los Angeles

Award-winning Somali referee Omar Artan has been dropped from officiating at the World Cup after being barred from entering the United States, world football's governing body FIFA said on Monday.

A FIFA spokesperson confirmed in a statement that Artan, who was refused entry to the US after arriving at Miami International Airport on Saturday, would play no part in the World Cup.

Artan would have been the first Somali to referee at a World Cup.

"FIFA can confirm that match official Omar Abdulkadir Artan will be unable to train and officiate at the FIFA World Cup 2026 after he was denied entry into the United States," the spokesperson told AFP.

FIFA emphasized that it was powerless to influence the decision, which it said was the sole preserve of tournament co-hosts the United States.

"FIFA is not involved in host country immigration processes, including visa adjudications, and has been informed by authorities that Mr Artan's status will not be changed at present," the spokesperson said.

"In line with previous FIFA events, a host government ultimately determines who receives a visa and who is admitted into



Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan during a match (file photo)

their country."

A spokesperson for United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said Artan was denied entry following a routine inspection.

"During processing, the traveler underwent additional inspection, a routine part of CBP's inspection process when officers need to verify information or determine admissibility," the CBP spokesperson said.

"Following inspection, the traveler, a referee for the FIFA World Cup, was determined to be inadmissible due to vetting concerns and was denied entry."

Somalia is one of several countries on a travel ban list introduced by President Don-

ald Trump's administration as part of a broader immigration crackdown.

In a statement to AFP, Artan said he wanted to concentrate on the future.

"Despite the circumstances I am in a positive mood and I am focused on the next challenges in my refereeing career," he said.

"I want to thank the football family for their messages and wish my colleagues all the best success during the World Cup and I look forward to joining them again in future competitions."

## 'Inspiration'

A government adviser in Mogadishu told AFP earlier Monday



that Artan had a valid visa for the US.

The tournament kicks off on Thursday.

"Omar Artan is among Africa's most respected referees and deserves the support of the entire football community," Ciise Aden Abshir, a senior adviser to Somalia's Ministry of Youth and Sports and a former national team captain, said.

Abshir said Artan flew back to Istanbul after being refused entry in Miami.

"Denying him entry to the United States and preventing him from officiating scheduled matches harms not only him personally but also undermines football's commitment to fairness, merit, and the spirit of fair play," Abshir added.

# Brazil's Neymar 'recovering well' after injury ahead of opener



Brazil's forward Neymar acknowledges fans at the end of the international friendly football match between Brazil and Panama

AFP | Morristown

Neymar is "recovering well" from the calf injury that has made him a doubt for the start of Brazil's World Cup campaign, the team said in a statement on Monday.

Brazil's all-time record scorer underwent an MRI scan on Monday which showed he is "making good progress in his treatment" amid hopes that he will be able to play a part for Carlo Ancelotti's side in the United States.

"He will continue to follow the recovery schedule and fitness programme as planned by the Brazil team medical staff," the Brazilian Football Confederation said.

Neymar was diagnosed with a calf injury late last month and has since been in a race to recover fitness for the tournament, with Brazil kicking off

their campaign against Morocco at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on Saturday.

He did not take to the field with his teammates for Monday's workout at Brazil's base, the new training ground of MLS outfit New York Red Bulls, around 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Manhattan.

Instead he stayed inside to work in the gym.

Now 34, the former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain superstar has been an integral part of Brazil's last three World Cup campaigns but there was some surprise at his inclusion this time as injuries have prevented him from playing for his country at all since 2023.

He has played in just half of his club's games in the Brazilian league, cup and Copa Sudamericana this year due to various fitness issues.

# Iran says US revoked World Cup ticket allocation for supporters



Members of Mexico's National Guard record with their mobile phones the arrival of the bus transporting Iran's national football team at the Caliente Stadium for a training session in Tijuana

AFP | Tehran

Iran's football federation yesterday said the United States has revoked its allocation of tickets for its World Cup group games, accusing the co-host of obstructing the attendance of Iranian supporters under the shadow of a bitter diplomatic row.

The US has presented a number of bureaucratic hurdles for Iran at the global football spectacle, including refusing to issue visas for some of its support staff, as the two countries remain at war after the US and Israel attacked the country in late February.

"With less than three days remaining until the start of the 2026 World Cup... the United

States has once again acted to obstruct the presence of Iranian supporters at the stadiums hosting the national team's three group stage matches," the federation said in a statement.

The Iranian football body said FIFA regulations dictate that it should be allocated eight percent of tickets for each match, which are given to participating federations for distribution to their supporters through official channels.

According to the statement, Iran had already begun ticket sales for group stage matches against New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt -- all to be held in the US -- after receiving its quota, with some fans having already made necessary arrangements.

# Jota will be in Scotland skipper Robertson's 'heart' at World Cup, says widow

AFP | Paris

Diogo Jota's widow said in a letter to Scotland captain Andy Robertson she is sure her late husband will be in his "heart" when he leads the side out for their opening match in the World Cup on Saturday.

Jota and Robertson became close friends during their time at Liverpool before the former's spell there was cruelly cut short when he died, aged 28, in a car crash last July.

Robertson, who ended a trophy-laden nine year spell with Liverpool when he signed for Tottenham Hotspur last Friday, had paid tribute to Jota after the Scots secured their place at the finals for the first time since 1998.

"We spoke so much about going to the World Cup because he missed the last one with Portugal and I did with Scotland," Robertson said last November after the play-off win over Denmark.

"I know he'll be smiling over me today."

Rute Cardoso, the mother of Jota's three children, said in her letter -- which FIFA published along with a video of Robertson reading it -- his words that night had touched her deeply.

"When I heard your words and learnt what you felt on that day when Scotland qualified for the World Cup, after so many



Liverpool's Portuguese striker Diogo Jota (2nd L) celebrates scoring his team's second goal with Liverpool's Scottish defender Andrew Robertson (L) and Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Roberto Firmino (R)

years of waiting, I realised that Diogo never truly left the pitch," wrote Cardoso, who married Jota days before he died alongside his brother Andre Silva.

"By achieving that moment and securing your place at the World Cup, you won't be going alone.

## 'Full of emotion'

"You'll be taking his dream with you too. And when you step on to the pitch, I know it

won't just be you walking out. Diogo will be with you in your thoughts, in your steps, in your heart.

"So today, I want to thank you. Thank you for not forgetting him.

"Thank you for taking him with you. Thank you for turning the pain of loss into strength and into something so beautiful.

"That's how we do it here at home too. Every day. He would be, and is, incredibly proud of

"I'll carry him in my heart and I know he'll be with me come the first game, come the second game, come the third game and hopefully beyond that

ANDREW ROBERTSON

you.

"Cherish that dream, Andy. Live it for yourself and for him." Robertson said Cardoso's letter would stay with him for a "very long time".

"I'll carry him in my heart and I know he'll be with me come the first game, come the second game, come the third game and hopefully beyond that," said Robertson.

"He's always there. The memories are always something that we bring up and sometimes laugh, sometimes cry.

"And that will be no different, especially going into a tournament which is full of emotion. I know he'll be right at the front of my mind.

"I'm not only just playing for me. I'm playing for both of us."

Robertson will hope to honour the memory of Jota by becoming the first Scotland skipper to lead the side into the knock-out stages of the finals at the ninth attempt.