

Scotland return to World Cup stage after 28 years

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Scotland will make their long-awaited return to the FIFA World Cup finals when they face Haiti in their opening Group C fixture at Boston Stadium tomorrow at 4am (Bahrain time). It is their first appearance in 28 years on football's biggest stage.

Their last outing came at France 1998, and since then the Scots have carried the weight of repeated frustration, failing to progress beyond the group stage in each of their previous eight World Cup appearances. This time they arrive in North America hoping to rewrite that pattern rather than repeat it.

Steve Clarke's side secured qualification automatically without the need for a play-off, although the margin of success only became clear late on. Two stoppage-time goals delivered



Scots celebrate their World Cup qualification

a dramatic 4-2 win over Denmark, a result that lifted Scotland above their rivals and confirmed their place at the finals in striking fashion.

Their opening opponents, Haiti, may be labelled outsiders but earned their place through a disciplined qualifying campaign. The Caribbean side fin-

ished runners-up to Curaçao in the first round of CONCACAF qualifying before going on to top a second-round group that included both Honduras and Costa Rica.

Scotland will still enter the match as favourites, yet their World Cup history ensures caution rather than comfort. Past

campaigns have often promised more than they delivered, none more painfully than 1978 in Argentina, when dropped points against Peru and Iran left them needing a near-impossible result against the Netherlands. They did beat the Dutch 3-2, but still exited at the group stage.

Haiti's own World Cup history is brief but memorable. Their only ever appearance came in 1974, coincidentally in the same tournament as Scotland. The Caribbean side briefly threatened one of the greatest upsets in World Cup history when they took the lead against Italy before eventually losing 3-1. Heavy defeats to Poland and Argentina followed, and Haiti have not returned to the finals until now.

Elsewhere in Group C, attention also turns to a heavyweight encounter at MetLife Stadium, where Morocco, semi-finalists in 2022, face five-time champions Brazil at 1am tomorrow.

Today's Matches

MATCH	VENUE	KICK-OFF (BAHRAIN TIME)
HOSTS USA vs PARAGUAY	LOS ANGELES STADIUM	4:00 AM
QATAR vs SWITZERLAND	SAN FRANCISCO STADIUM	10:00 PM

Tomorrow's Matches

MATCH	KICK-OFF (BAHRAIN TIME)	VENUE
BRAZIL v MOROCCO	01:00 AM	MetLife Stadium East Rutherford, New Jersey
HAITI v SCOTLAND	04:00 AM	Gillette Stadium Foxborough, Massachusetts
AUSTRALIA v TÜRKİYE	07:00 AM	BC Place Vancouver, Canada
GERMANY v CURAÇAO	08:00 PM	NRG Stadium Houston, Texas, USA
NETHERLANDS v JAPAN	11:00 PM	AT&T Stadium Arlington, Texas, USA

Ronaldo 'very positive' as Portugal head for World Cup



Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during a match

AFP | Lisbon

Cristiano Ronaldo said yesterday that he was feeling "very positive" before flying out of Lisbon with the Portuguese team to their World Cup base camp in Palm Beach, Florida.

"We're approaching this competition with a lot of hope," said the five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

"The preparation has been very good, tiring, because we have worked hard," continued the veteran Portugal captain who insisted he was "physically good".

"I am very positive, I believe things will go well and that we will put in a good performance."

"It's a very good generation... which will bring a lot of joy to the Portuguese people," the forward said of the squad around him.

"The most important thing is to start well, with the first match, then follow up with the second and third... finish top of the group and from there, take it one match at a time," he added.

Portugal open their World Cup campaign on June 17 in Houston against the Demo-

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CRISTIANO RONALDO

cratic Republic of Congo, before facing Uzbekistan and Colombia in Group K.

At 41, Ronaldo will be heading to his record sixth World Cup, but there are concerns in some quarters that his presence will prevent Roberto Martinez's strong side from flourishing.

Portugal played two friendly matches in recent days against Chile and Nigeria, winning both 2-1, but Ronaldo failed to score.

Portugal finished third in the 1966 World Cup and reached the quarter-finals four years ago in Qatar.

Qatar look to right the wrongs of 2022

Hussain Almaskati

Qatar begin their 2026 FIFA World Cup campaign tonight at 10pm Bahrain time against Switzerland at the San Francisco Bay Area Stadium in Santa Clara. The Group B opener is the first-ever competitive meeting between the two sides.

Qatar arrive hoping to rebound from a disappointing 2022 World Cup on home soil, where they became the first host nation to exit at the group stage without a point. They return to the finals through qualification for the first time, ranked 56th in the world but under pressure after a difficult run of form, with no wins in their last six matches and just one goal scored.

Their route to the tournament included 10 wins, five defeats and three draws from 18 Asian qualifiers, scoring 37 and conceding 28. Since taking charge in May 2025, head coach Julen Lopetegui has recorded only four wins, with attacking consistency remaining a concern.

Key responsibility will fall



Qatar players in training ahead of their World Cup opener against Switzerland

on Akram Afif, who led Asian qualifiers in goal contributions with 10 assists, alongside striker Almoez Ali, Qatar's top scorer with 12 goals in qualifying.

Switzerland come into the tournament in much stronger form, ranked 19th in the world after an unbeaten European qualifying campaign. Murat Yakin's side topped their group

with four wins and two draws, conceding just two goals and keeping four clean sheets.

Captain Granit Xhaka, with 146 international caps, provides leadership and experience, while defenders Manuel Akanji and Nico Elvedi anchored a disciplined back line throughout qualifying. In attack, Switzerland have strong depth, with

Breel Embolo, Dan Ndoye, Ruben Vargas and Noah Okafor competing for places in a flexible frontline.

Switzerland's defensive record and unbeaten qualification run make them clear favourites heading into the Group B opener, though Qatar will hope their attacking leaders can spark an upset in Santa Clara.

Thomas Partey denied Canada entry, ruled out of Ghana World Cup opener

Hussain Almaskati

Ghana midfielder Thomas Partey will miss his country's World Cup Group L opener against Panama after being denied entry into Canada.

The former Arsenal and Villarreal midfielder was scheduled to travel with the squad from their base in Boston to Toronto for Wednesday's match at BMO Field, but his visa application was refused by Canadian authorities.

FIFA confirmed the situation, stating that Partey would not be permitted to travel for the fix-



Partey in action for his national team during a previous appearance.

ture, while also noting that immigration decisions remain the responsibility of host nations.

Partey, who now plays club football in Spain with Villarreal,

of rape and one count of sexual assault relating to alleged incidents between 2020 and 2022. He denies all charges and is on bail pending a trial scheduled for June 2027.

Despite the charges, Partey has continued to play professionally for Villarreal and has made appearances for the Spanish club since the allegations were brought.

Ghana begin their World Cup campaign against Panama in Toronto before facing England in their second Group L match in Boston on June 23.