

# Germany target winning start against World Cup debutants Curacao



Germany's national team train ahead of their opening match

**Hussain Almaskati**  
TDT | Manama

Four-time world champions Germany begin their FIFA World Cup 2026 campaign tonight when they face tournament debutants Curacao in a Group E clash at Houston Stadium. Kick-off is scheduled for 8pm Bahrain time.

Germany arrive at the tournament determined to reassert

themselves on the global stage after disappointing group-stage exits at both the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. While they are not among the leading favourites for the title, Julian Nagelsmann's side have their sights firmly set on a fifth world crown and head into the competition in impressive form.

The Germans are currently riding a nine-match winning streak, highlighted by a 4-0 vic-



Curacao players and fans celebrate after a goalless draw away to Jamaica secured World Cup qualification

tory over Finland and a 2-1 triumph over co-hosts the United States in their final warm-up matches before the tournament. National team director Rudi Völler has underlined the importance of making a strong start in a group that also features Ecuador and Ivory Coast.

"We are here and want to be a team that is difficult to beat," Völler said. "Our goal is to finish

top of the group and then make our mark in the knockout stages."

Germany's squad is packed with experience and quality, led by stars such as Kai Havertz, Florian Wirtz and veteran goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, who could add another milestone to his distinguished international career during the tournament.

For Curacao, meanwhile, the

## World Cup Schedule

### Today

Time	Match	Group	Venue
8:00 PM	Germany vs Curacao	E	Houston Stadium
11:00 PM	Netherlands vs Japan	F	Dallas Stadium

### Tomorrow

2:00 AM	Ivory Coast vs Ecuador	E	Philadelphia Stadium
5:00 AM	Sweden vs Tunisia	F	Monterrey Stadium
7:00 PM	Spain vs Cape Verde	H	Atlanta Stadium
10:00 PM	Belgium vs Egypt	G	Seattle Stadium

(All games in Bahrain time)

match marks a historic occasion. The Caribbean nation is making its first-ever World Cup appearance after becoming the smallest country, both by population and land area, to qualify for the finals.

Guided by veteran Dutch coach Dick Advocaat, Curacao enter the tournament as clear underdogs. At 78, Advocaat is set to become the oldest coach in World Cup history when he takes charge of his side tonight.

"Germany are, of course,

clear favourites in the group," Advocaat said. "They remain a major football nation. Starting our World Cup journey against Germany is fantastic because we will immediately find out where we stand."

While Curacao will be hoping to spring a memorable surprise on their World Cup debut, Germany will view anything less than three points as an early setback in their quest to return to football's elite and challenge for the sport's biggest prize.

## Netherlands face in-form Japan in Group F opener in Dallas

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The Netherlands and Japan begin their FIFA World Cup 2026 Group F campaigns tonight when they meet at Dallas Stadium, with kick-off scheduled for 11pm Bahrain time.

Both sides are drawn into a competitive group that also includes Sweden and Tunisia, where a top-two finish is required to secure progression to the knockout stages.

The Netherlands arrive with high expectations as they pursue a first World Cup title, having finished runners-up three times in 1974, 1978 and 2010.

This marks their 12th appearance at the tournament, and they remain unbeaten in 16 World Cup group-stage matches dating back to 1994.

Ronald Koeman's side enjoyed a strong recent tournament cycle, reaching the semi-finals of Euro 2024 and the quarter-finals of both the 2022 World Cup and 2025 Nations League.

However, preparations have been mixed, including a defeat to Algeria and a narrow behind-closed-doors win over Uzbekistan, decided by two Cody Gakpo penalties.

Japan, meanwhile, arrive in excellent form and high on confidence after six consecutive wins, including statement friendly victories over Brazil and England.

Hajime Moriyasu's team also dominated Asian qualifying, scoring 54 goals and conceding just three as they became the first non-host nation to secure a World Cup place.



Netherlands in training ahead of their opening fixture



Japan continue preparations for their World Cup opener

The Samurai Blue are making their eighth straight World Cup appearance but are still chasing a first quarter-final, having fallen in the round of 16 on every occasion, including a penalty shootout defeat to Croatia in 2022 after memorable group-

stage wins over Germany and Spain.

The two sides last met at a World Cup in 2010, when the Netherlands won 1-0. Both enter tonight's clash in strong form and will view the opener as a key early test in Group F.

## Najma face final outing after elimination from Asian campaign



Al Najma head coach Abdulrahman Mohamed

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Bahrain's Al Najma conclude their 28th Asian Men's Club League Handball Championship campaign tonight when they face Saudi Arabia's Khaleej Club at 8pm Bahrain time in Sabah Al Salem, Kuwait.

The match comes after Najma were mathematically eliminated from semi-final contention following a 24-28 defeat to Kuwait's Burgan Sports Club in their penultimate fixture on Friday, a result that confirmed they could no longer finish inside the top four of the seven-team preliminary standings.

Najma remained in contention deep into a closely fought encounter; Mohammed Habib Ahmed converted a penalty to level the scores at 23-23 in the closing stages. However, Bur-



Al Najma player Uros Mitrovic

gan responded with a late surge to seal the win and end the Bahraini side's hopes of progression.

Their record now stands at one win, one draw and three defeats, a campaign that also ended their chances of qualifying for the 19th IHF Men's Handball Club World Championship in Egypt later this year.

The tournament has unfolded under newly appointed head coach Abdulrahman Mohamed, who took charge ahead of the competition.

Tonight's fixture against Khaleej carries no impact on qualification, with the preliminary phase concluding today before the top four teams advance to the semi-finals, which begin tomorrow.

The medal matches are then scheduled for Wednesday. Burgan Sports Club currently lead the standings on nine points, with Al Khaleej second on the

same tally but behind on goal difference. The two Qatari sides, Al Arabi and Al Duhail, sit third and fourth respectively on five points, separated only by goal difference.

Khaleej will also feature familiar Bahrain-linked names, including internationals Hussain Al Sayyad and Mohammed Habib Naser, both former Najma players.

Across the tournament, Najma showed spells of competitiveness but struggled to turn close games into consistent results, a pattern also reflected in their recent domestic league semi-final exit earlier this month.

This evening's match therefore brings the curtain down on a season that ends without silverware; attention now shifts toward rebuilding for future domestic and continental challenges.