



Qatar snatch historic first World Cup point against wasteful Switzerland

Hussain Almaskati

Qatar produced a dramatic late equaliser yesterday to earn a 1-1 draw against Switzerland in their FIFA World Cup 2026 Group B opener at the San Francisco Bay Area Stadium in Santa Clara, California. After hosting the 2022 edition and exiting winless from the group stage, the Gulf side were adamant they were not in this campaign to make up the numbers under coach Lopetegui.

Switzerland started on the front foot and were rewarded in the 17th minute when Brel Embolo calmly converted from the penalty spot after a VAR review ruled that Remo Freuler had been fouled in the box. The decision followed a chaotic scramble involving Qatar goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada, who lunged out with a flying fist that struck Freuler, leading to the spot-kick.

From that point, Switzerland controlled long stretches of the match, dominating possession and territory under Murat Yakin. They carved out a steady stream of chances but were repeatedly denied by wasteful finishing and inspired goalkeeping.



Qatar players swarm Boualem Khoukhi after his late equaliser

Dan Ndoye and Ruben Vargas both went close, while Denis Zakaria tested Abunada from distance as Switzerland pushed for a second goal.

Despite the early setback,

Abunada grew into the game and produced a series of crucial saves. He reacted sharply to deny Ndoye from close range and later stood firm after Switzerland pounced on a loose ball

inside the area. Michel Aebischer also somehow failed to convert at the back post after Embolo squared across goal, summing up Switzerland's wastefulness.

Qatar offered little in open play, with Almoz Ali — the country's all-time leading goalscorer with 60 international goals — left on the bench for much of the match, while Akram Afif remained their main outlet on the rare occasions they broke forward.

Just as Switzerland looked set to see out a deserved victory, Qatar struck in stoppage time. Homam Ahmed delivered a superb cross from the left, and Boualem Khoukhi rose above the defence to power a header beyond Gregor Kobel, sparking jubilant celebrations on the Qatar bench.

The result followed the earlier 1-1 draw between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Canada, leaving all four teams level on points after the opening round in a tightly balanced Group B.

The match drew an official attendance of roughly 67,000, though the figure raised eyebrows, with empty seats clearly visible in several sections of the stadium.

Russell back in 'the groove' as he takes pole for Barcelona Grand Prix



Mercedes' British driver George Russell celebrates pole position with British driver Lewis Hamilton and team-mate Kimi Antonelli

AFP | Barcelona

10th pole.

George Russell of Mercedes claimed pole position for the Barcelona-Catalunya Grand Prix after a thrilling end to the qualifying session on Saturday.

The Briton clinched his third pole of the season by finishing just 0.064 seconds ahead of Lewis Hamilton in his upgraded Ferrari, who bumped championship leader Kimi Antonelli in the other Mercedes on to the second row for Sunday's race.

After a difficult outing in Monaco last weekend and a disappointing start to the campaign for the pre-season title favourite, Russell said it was good to "feel the groove" again as he secured a career

Antonelli has won the last five races and is aiming for a sixth on Sunday, but he will have to start from third after a superb late run from Hamilton.

The seven-time champion had endured a tough weekend but looked far quicker in qualifying and came extremely close to claiming pole himself.

It will be the first all-British front row in Barcelona.

"It's been a great weekend so far, I'm always fighting. I came into this weekend with a clean slate, felt good and it is great to be on pole," said Russell.

"It will be an interesting race tomorrow, Lewis did a great job to get up there so I'm sure there will be a fight. Tomorrow will not be easy."

US beat Paraguay 4-1 in dream start for World Cup co-hosts

AFP | Los Angeles

The United States could scarcely have scripted a better start to their World Cup as a Folarin Balogun brace and Gio Reyna curler fired the co-hosts to a 4-1 drubbing of Paraguay in front of Hollywood royalty in Los Angeles on Friday.

The hosts took the lead in the

tournament's first game on US soil within seven minutes thanks to an own goal, and by the end of an utterly dominant half the home fans were in dreamland, their side up by three.

Tom Cruise, Leonardo DiCaprio and Paris Hilton were among a sold-out 70,492 crowd as the US -- co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada -- piled wave after wave of attacks on the South Americans, with Reyna polishing off the win late in stoppage time after Mauricio had pulled one back.

The win and emphatic scoreline puts the US in a favorable position already to progress from Group D, which also contains Australia and Turkey.

The night's only potential sour note was the half-time withdrawal of Christian Pulisic, the US attacking talisman who is carrying the hopes of the nation as they attempt a deep run into the World Cup knockouts for the first time since their quarter-final appearance in 2002.

But the Monaco striker had Folarin Balogun #20 celebrates with Chris Richards #3



US midfielder #07 Giovanni Reyna (2nd R) scores his team's fourth goal

Paraguay could not have been more obliging guests from kick-off. In the seventh minute, Weston McKennie picked up the ball in the center circle and drove upfield, finding Pulisic.

Pulisic darted between two defenders and returned the ball to McKennie, whose pass to striker Balogun was bundled into his own net by a hapless Damian Bobadilla.

The stadium erupted, and a US onslaught began.

The hosts oozed confidence. Both McKennie and Tillman played backheel through balls into the area, while captain Tim Ream sprayed out passes from the heart of defense.

Balogun had a goal ruled out in the 28th minute. He had strayed offside, as had Pulisic in the buildup.

But the Monaco striker had

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The flashy opening ceremony featured Katy Perry and a massive trophy displayed in gold lettering favored by US President Donald Trump, who called the team with well-wishes before kickoff

the ball in the net again three minutes later, thanks to a superb ball down the left flank by An-



Artists perform during the opening ceremony of the 2026 World Cup football tournament ahead of the Group D football match between USA and Paraguay at the Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood US midfielder #07 Giovanni Reyna (2nd R) scores his team's fourth goal

tonee Robinson to Pulisic, whose cross to Balogun took a slight fortuitous deflection.

The US added a third on the cup of half-time. Tillman found Balogun down the right, who evaded Omar Alderete's challenge, skipped inside Gustavo Gomez and curled his shot perfectly into the top left corner.

It could have been four or five, with Chris Richards -- returning from injury -- flashing a header barely an inch wide. The US had 75 percent possession in the first half.

Now without the dangerous Pulisic, the hosts sat back slightly in the second half.

Paraguay finally offered a threat. Their dangerous forward Julio Enciso, who started despite

a hamstring injury, picked up the ball on the edge of the area and fed in Brazil-born substitute Mauricio, who pulled one back. Reyna scored a superb fourth with the outside of his right foot that curled just inside the far post.

The game had been preceded by a Tinseltown-style opening ceremony. Katy Perry delivered the headline performance, accompanied by singers Future, Tyla, Anitta and K-pop star Lisa.

Performers danced around a giant World Cup trophy beneath enormous "FIFA" letters in the gold favored by US President Donald Trump -- who did not attend, instead wishing the team luck via phone before kickoff.