



France Outlast Senegal After Second-Half Fireworks

Hussain Almaskati

France were made to work hard before edging Senegal 3-1 in their opening match of the 2026 FIFA World Cup at MetLife Stadium. The result puts the two-time world champions top of Group I, which also includes Iraq and Norway.

Senegal were the brighter side throughout a dominant first half but were left frustrated by missed chances, including a shot off the post from Nicolas Jackson and a glaring opportunity for Ismaila Sarr just before the break. France, meanwhile, struggled to impose themselves and went into half-time level at 0-0 having offered little in attack.

The second half, however, delivered a complete shift in momentum. Ten minutes after the restart, Didier Deschamps' side were rocked by VAR controversy when a potential penalty for Kylian Mbappé was overturned after a foul by Sadio Mané in the box.

Mbappé then broke the deadlock in the 66th minute when he latched onto a perfectly weighted pass from Michael Olise and finished clinically to make it 1-0.



Mbappé celebrates his second goal, becoming France's all-time top scorer

Senegal thought they had equalised immediately afterwards when Nicolas Jackson found the net with a powerful finish, but the goal was ruled out for offside, denying them a quick response.

Substitute Bradley Barcola added a second in the 82nd minute, producing a composed lobbed finish after an excellent assist from Adrien Rabiot,

giving Les Bleus control of the contest.

Senegal refused to fold and pulled one back deep into stoppage time when Ibrahim Mbaye produced a brilliant solo effort to make it 2-1, setting up a tense finish. However, Mbappé immediately responded in spectacular fashion, smashing home a long-range strike to complete his brace and seal a 3-1 victory

for France. The goal saw him become France's all-time leading goalscorer with 58 international goals, surpassing Olivier Giroud.

France now turn their attention to Iraq, whom they face on June 23 at 12am in Philadelphia, while Senegal meet Norway later that day at 3am, again at MetLife Stadium. Both times are Bahrain time.

England begin World Cup campaign against familiar opponents Croatia



Harry Kane battles former Spurs teammate Luka Modric during 2018 World Cup in Russia

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England begin their 2026 FIFA World Cup campaign tonight when they face Croatia in their Group L opener at Dallas Stadium, with kick-off scheduled for 11pm Bahrain time.

It is a heavyweight opening fixture for both sides, with England aiming to launch their tournament with authority and Croatia once again looking to underline their reputation as one of international football's most battle-tested sides.

This marks England's 17th World Cup appearance and their eighth in succession, continuing their longest uninterrupted run since missing the 1994 edition when the tournament was last held in the United States.

Thomas Tuchel's side arrive after a near-perfect qualifying campaign. They were one of only two UEFA nations to win all eight matches, and the only team to do so without conceding a single goal.

However, the challenge now is translating qualifying dominance into tournament success. Since winning the World Cup in 1966, the Three Lions have reached the semi-finals only twice, finishing fourth in both 1990 and 2018.

One encouraging trend is their strong record in opening matches, losing just one of their last eight World Cup curtain-raisers (W3 D4), a 2-1 defeat to Italy in 2014.

Leading the line once again is Harry Kane, who remains England's focal point in attack. The captain continues to set scoring benchmarks on the international stage and will make his 30th appearance in a major tournament tonight, more than any other England player.

Croatia arrive with a proven tournament pedigree and a reputation for thriving under pressure. Competing at their seventh World Cup, they remain a constant presence among international football's elite under Zlatko Dalic.

Their World Cup record is strikingly inconsistent yet impressive: three group-stage exits balanced by three podium finishes across their last six appearances, including runners-up in 2018 and third place in 2022. Only France have matched their consistency in reaching the semi-finals in successive tournaments.

Croatia have, however, struggled in openers, winning just one of their last five World Cup first matches (D1 L3). Still, they arrive in solid form after an unbeaten qualifying campaign featuring seven wins from eight games.

Creative responsibility will again fall on Luka Modric and Ivan Perišić, whose experience remains central to Croatia's ambitions on the global stage.

The last World Cup meeting between the sides remains iconic: Croatia's dramatic 2-1 extra-time victory over England in the 2018 semi-final.

Portugal seek winning start against returning DR Congo

Doubts remain over Cristiano Ronaldo's role as a starter at the 2026 World Cup

● Group K also includes Columbia and Uzebeskitan

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Portugal begin their 2026 FIFA World Cup campaign today when they face DR Congo in their Group K opener at Houston Stadium, with Roberto Martínez's side aiming for a strong start against a nation making its first World Cup appearance in 52 years.

Kick-off is scheduled for 8pm Bahrain time.

Portugal arrive in the United States under

significant expectations after another impressive qualifying campaign. One of only a handful of European nations to feature at every World Cup since 2002, they have reached the knockout stages in four of the last five editions and sealed qualification with 20 goals in six matches.

As ever, the focus will fall on Cristiano Ronaldo. The 41-year-old captain is set to become the first outfield player in history to appear at six World Cups, further extending one of football's most extraordinary international careers.

Martínez himself brings a strong tournament pedigree, having previously guided both Belgium and Portugal on the international stage. Yet history shows that converting promise into deep World Cup progress has often eluded Portugal. Their best finish remains third place in 1966, with just one semi-final appearance since then coming in 2006.

Opposing them are one of the tournament's most compelling

He also remains the only player to have scored in five separate World Cup tournaments and finished as Portugal's top scorer in qualifying.

Despite ongoing debate over whether his inclusion strengthens or limits the team, Ronaldo continues to lead a Portugal side that has scored in 10 of their last 11 World Cup matches. The only exception was the 1-0 defeat to Morocco in Qatar four years ago, a result that ended their quarter-final run.

Around him, Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva, João Neves and Rafael Leão give Martínez a wealth of attacking options, while recent warm-up wins over the United States, Chile and Nigeria have further strengthened confidence in the squad.

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Opposing them are one of the tournament's most compelling

stories.

DR Congo are back on football's biggest stage for the first time since 1974, when they competed as Zaire. Their return follows a dramatic qualification journey that saw them finish behind Gabon in the second round of African qualifying before eliminating Cameroon and Nigeria to reach an intercontinental play-off against Jamaica. Axel Tuanzebe's extra-time winner secured a 1-0 victory and ended a 52-year wait for a World Cup appearance.

The Leopards carry attacking threat through Cédric Bakambu and Yoane Wissa, who combined for 12 goal contributions during qualification, and both will be eager to score DR Congo's first-ever World Cup goal.

Their matches are typically tight and competitive: 10 of their 13 qualifiers were decided by a single goal or less, underlining a disciplined side capable of frustrating more favoured opponents.

This will be the first-ever meeting between Portugal and DR Congo, adding further intrigue to a clash between an established World Cup contender and a side determined to announce themselves on the global stage.



Ronaldo scored only once at the 2022 World Cup – a penalty against Ghana in Portugal's opener

Ronaldo in training ahead of Portugal's Group K opener

World Cup Schedule

Today			
Time	Match	Group	Venue
8PM	Portugal vs DR Congo	K,	Houston Stadium
11PM	England vs Croatia	L,	Dallas Stadium
Tomorrow			
2AM	Ghana vs Panama	L,	Toronto Stadium
5AM	Uzbekistan vs Columbia	K,	Mexico City Stadium
7PM	Czechia vs South Africa	A	Atlanta Stadium
10PM	Switzerland vs Bosnia and Herzegovina	B,	Los Angeles Stadium

(All games in Bahrain time)