

USA secure knockout place with win over Australia

Hussain Almaskati

Co-hosts United States booked their place in the FIFA World Cup 2026 knockout stages with a composed 2-0 victory over Australia in Seattle. Mauricio Pochettino's side followed up their opening 4-1 win over Paraguay in Los Angeles to become the second team, after Mexico, to reach the round of 32.

An 11th-minute own goal from Cameron Burgess and a first-half header from Alex Freeman proved decisive, as the USA dominated possession and restricted Australia to only brief attacking moments at Lumen Field.

The opening goal came when Folarin Balogun drove into the box and delivered a dangerous cut-back that Burgess inadvertently turned into his own net. The early breakthrough reflected the USA's aggressive start and immediately forced Australia onto the back foot.

From there, the Americans controlled the game with sustained possession and territorial dominance. With over 70% of the ball in the first half, Pochettino's side used Sergiño Dest and Antonee Robinson to stretch Australia wide, while Tyler Adams dictated play from midfield.

Australia attempted to respond but struggled to progress through the American press, with their attacks largely limited to isolated transitions. The



Alex Freeman celebrates the United States' second goal



The result marks the United States' eighth qualification for the knockout stages

USA, meanwhile, continued to create chances, with Folarin Balogun going close to extending the lead.

The second goal arrived in the 43rd minute after Sergiño Dest's effort from a set piece was deflected into the air. Alex Freeman reacted quickest to nod the ball over the line. The goal was initially ruled out for offside but was awarded after a VAR review confirmed the decision.

Australia made changes at half-time in an attempt to shift momentum, but the USA remained organised and largely untroubled. Goalkeeper Matt Freese was rarely tested as the visitors struggled to generate clear openings.

The second half became more fragmented, with Australia enjoying brief spells of pressure

through substitutes Cristian Volpato and Connor Metcalfe, but neither was able to find a breakthrough. Balogun also spurned a chance to make it 3-0, firing wide in a one-on-one situation.

Despite six minutes of added time, the United States comfortably saw out the match to secure another clean sheet and confirm qualification for the knockout rounds.

The result leaves the USA in strong form at the top of Group D, while Australia's hopes now hinge on their final group fixture against Paraguay on Friday (5am Bahrain time) in Santa Clara.

Germany bring goal blitz into Ivory Coast clash



Kai Havertz (#7) celebrates his brace in Germany's opening-match demolition

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The top two sides in Group E go head-to-head tonight as Germany face Ivory Coast, with both teams aiming to take a step closer to the knockout stage at the 2026 World Cup. Kick-off is scheduled for 11 PM Bahrain time.

Germany arrive in Toronto full of confidence after producing the biggest win of the tournament so far, a stunning 7-1 victory over Curacao on matchday one. Felix Nmecha gave Die Mannschaft an early lead inside six minutes before Curacao briefly levelled in a historic moment for the tournament debutants.

However, Germany quickly reasserted control in ruthless fashion. Kai Havertz struck twice, while Nico Schlotterbeck, Jamal Musiala, Nathaniel Brown, and Deniz Undav all added their names to the scoresheet in a dominant display under Julian Nagelsmann. That result reinforced their reputation as one of the most dangerous attacking sides in world football, with only a handful of World Cup matches this century producing seven-goal performances — and Germany responsible for multiple entries on that list.

They now have the chance to secure top spot in Group E early, depending on other results, while extending a remarkable 10-match winning streak across all competitions dating back to September 2025. However, concerns remain at the back, with Germany conceding in four of their last five matches and failing to keep a World Cup clean sheet since the 2014 final.

Ivory Coast, meanwhile, arrive with momentum after

grinding out a 1-0 win over Ecuador in their opening match. Despite being under pressure for long spells and seeing Ecuador strike the woodwork three times, they held firm before substitute Amad Diallo delivered a superb 90th-minute winner to seal all three points.

The result extended the 'Elephants' impressive World Cup record of winning at least once in every tournament they've played, while ending Ecuador's unbeaten run of nearly two years.

Emerse Fae's side are now in a strong position to push toward the knockout rounds, needing at least a point from their remaining group games to move closer to qualification history. They also arrive in fine form overall, having won four straight matches across all competitions, including a notable friendly victory over France.

However, their record against European opposition at World Cups remains a concern, with just one win in their last four such encounters.

Germany, by contrast, have historically dominated African opposition on the World Cup stage, losing only once in seven meetings.



Amad Diallo savours Cote d'Ivoire's stoppage-time winner on Matchday 1

World Cup pressure mounts as Netherlands meet in-form Sweden



Van Dijk celebrates after opening the scoring in the Netherlands' opener

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The Netherlands face Sweden in Houston tonight in Group F, with both sides still needing points to secure progression to the Round of 32 at the 2026 World Cup. Kick-off is scheduled for 8 PM Bahrain time.

Sweden arrive as group leaders after an emphatic 5-1 victory over Tunisia in their opening match, while the Netherlands were held to a dramatic 2-2 draw by Japan, leaving Ronald

Koeman's side under pressure heading into this crucial fixture.

In that opener, the Netherlands twice took the lead but were unable to see the game out. Virgil van Dijk opened the scoring in the 51st minute with a header from a Ryan Gravenberch cross, before Keito Nakamura quickly equalised for Japan. Crysencio Summerville restored the Dutch advantage in the 64th minute with a fine curling finish, but Daichi Kamada struck late in the 89th minute to rescue a draw for Japan.



Isak celebrates Sweden's second goal during their opening rout

Despite dropping points, the Dutch remain confident after an unbeaten qualifying campaign. However, defensive lapses in their opener highlighted areas they must tighten against a dangerous Swedish attack.

Sweden, meanwhile, have looked sharp and clinical. Yasin Ayari starred with a brace against Tunisia, while Alexander Isak, Mattias Svanberg, and Viktor Gyökeres also got on the scoresheet in a dominant display that showcased their attacking depth and confidence.

The Netherlands still car-

ry significant firepower, with Memphis Depay, Cody Gakpo, and Donyell Malen offering pace and creativity in the final third. However, Sweden's counterattacking threat, led by Isak and Gyökeres, poses a serious test for the Dutch back line.

Historically, these two sides have met 25 times, with the Netherlands holding a slight edge. The Dutch have won 12 of those encounters, Sweden 8, while 5 matches have ended in draws, reflecting how evenly matched this fixture has been over the years.

World Cup Schedule

Today			
Time	Match	Group	Venue
8:00 PM	Netherlands vs Sweden	F	Houston Stadium
11:00 PM	Germany vs Ivory Coast	E	Toronto Stadium
Tomorrow			
3:00 AM	Ecuador vs Curacao	E	Kansas City Stadium
7:00 AM	Tunisia vs Japan	F	Monterrey Stadium
7:00 PM	Spain vs Saudi Arabia	H	Atlanta Stadium
10:00 PM	Belgium vs Iran	G	Los Angeles Stadium

(All games in Bahrain time)