



# Ecuador stun Germany to reach World Cup knockout rounds

**E**cuator produced one of the biggest shocks of the FIFA World Cup 2026 group stage, defeating Germany 2-1 in their final Group E match on Friday to secure their place in the Round of 32 as one of the tournament's best third-placed teams.

The South Americans finished third in the group on four points, two behind Germany and Ivory Coast, who claimed the automatic qualification places after a 2-0 victory over Curaçao in the group's other fixture. Ecuador's famous win ultimately proved enough to send Sebastián Beccacece's side through to the knockout rounds as one of the eight best third-placed nations.

Despite having already guaranteed top spot in the group, Germany named a strong starting XI and dominated possession during the opening exchanges.



Gonzalo Plata scored to give Ecuador a crucial lead

Ecuador, however, remained disciplined defensively and looked dangerous whenever they broke forward.

Their approach paid off in

the 27th minute when Moisés Caicedo won possession in midfield before releasing Peris Estupiñán down the left. The full-back's low cross found

captain Enner Valencia, who calmly steered his finish beyond Marc-André ter Stegen to hand Ecuador a deserved lead.

Germany emerged with great

urgency after the restart and gradually began to impose themselves. Their equaliser arrived in the 58th minute when Florian Wirtz threaded a perfectly weighted pass into the path of Jamal Musiala, who skipped beyond his marker before firing into the bottom corner.

The goal swung the momentum firmly in Germany's favour, with Julian Nagelsmann's side pushing for a winner that would preserve their perfect group-stage record. Niclas Füllkrug and Kai Havertz both went close as Ecuador were forced deeper into their own half.

But with 15 minutes remaining, Ecuador struck decisively.

Substitute Kendry Páez ignited a rapid counter-attack before slipping the ball into the path of Gonzalo Plata. The winger cut inside onto his favoured left foot and curled a superb finish

beyond Ter Stegen and into the far corner, sending the Ecuadorian supporters into wild celebrations.

Germany pressed relentlessly in the closing stages and thought they had salvaged a point deep into stoppage time when Havertz headed home from Joshua Kimmich's cross, only for the assistant referee's flag to rule the goal out for offside.

Ecuador survived six nervy minutes of added time to record a famous victory, completing an impressive turnaround after opening the tournament with defeat to Ivory Coast before being held to a goalless draw by Curaçao.

The result sealed Ecuador's place in the Round of 32 as one of the World Cup's best third-placed teams, keeping alive their hopes of another memorable run on football's biggest stage.

## Must-Win Night Looms for Senegal and Iraq

**S**enegal were widely tipped as a side capable of going deep at the World Cup, but successive defeats have left them on the brink of elimination, and now in need of a convincing victory over Iraq tonight. Kick-off is at 10pm Bahrain time at Toronto Stadium.

Iraq, meanwhile, have also endured a difficult return to the global stage after a 40-year absence from World Cup qualification; the Lions of Mesopotamia also face a must-win scenario following back-to-back defeats. They opened with a 4-1 loss to Norway — a match defined by a clinical Erling Haaland on his World Cup debut — before falling 3-0 to last year's finalists France. The Arab nation sits

bottom of Group I, with their hopes of progression hanging by a thread.

France and Norway have already secured the top two spots in the group and booked their places in the last 32, leaving Senegal and Iraq scrambling to stay in contention for one of the eight best third-placed finishes across the 12 groups. Even victory in Canada may not be enough for either side. Both teams are likely to face an anxious wait until the end of the group stage later this weekend to discover whether three points will be sufficient to reach the knockout rounds.

Senegal opened their campaign with a 3-1 defeat to France before a 3-2 loss to Norway deepened the pressure on the



African side. The Lions of Teranga arrived with high expectations, fuelled in part by memories of their famous 2002 World

Cup victory over France, when they stunned the then-holders in one of the tournament's defining early shocks.

Coach Papa Thiaw's side have struggled to live up to that legacy so far, though belief remains within the camp despite a campaign undermined by defensive lapses.

For Iraq, Aymen Hussein's involvement is in doubt after the forward went off before the half-hour mark against Norway. His potential absence would be a significant blow, given he scored

eight times in qualifying and remains their leading scorer at these finals.

It also opens the door for a possible first World Cup start for Mohanad Ali under Graham Arnold. The Iraq coach may be forced into a reshuffle, with Ali's 27 international goals making him the second-most prolific scorer in the squad behind Hussein's 34.

### World Cup Schedule

Today			
Time	Match	Group	Venue
10:00 PM	Norway vs France	I	Boston Stadium
10:00 PM	Senegal vs Iraq	I	Toronto Stadium

## Haaland vs Mbappé headlines Norway-France Group Finale

TDT | Manama

**N**orway face France at Boston Stadium tonight in the final round of Group I fixtures at the 2026 FIFA World Cup, with kick-off set for 10pm (Bahrain time).

Both sides have already secured qualification for the knockout stages following Norway's 3-2 win over Senegal and France's 3-0 victory over Iraq. However, top spot in the group remains to be decided, with France currently ahead on goal difference.

The Vikings have been one of the tournament's most entertaining attacking sides on their return to the World Cup, producing a high-tempo, high-scoring group-stage campaign. They opened with a dominant 4-1 win over Iraq, where Erling Haaland scored twice to set the tone, before following it up with another



Erling Haaland, 25, after scoring in Norway's previous match

intense 3-2 victory over Senegal to maintain their perfect start.

France, meanwhile, arrive in excellent shape as two-time world champions and remain among the favourites for the title. Les Bleus began their cam-

paign with a 3-1 win over Senegal before a controlled 3-0 victory over Iraq kept their flawless record intact and placed them top of Group I.

Kylian Mbappé has once again been the talisman, scoring four



Kylian Mbappé, 27, after finding the net in France's World Cup opener

goals already to take his World Cup tally to 16, reinforcing his status as one of the defining players of the era.

Didier Deschamps' side only need a draw to finish first but will target a third straight win to

complete a perfect group stage. France also defeated Norway 4-0 in their last meeting in 2014, with goals from Loïc Rémy, Paul Pogba and Olivier Giroud.

Attention then turns to Haaland and Mbappé, with

a subtle Golden Boot subplot building between the two forwards. When asked about the significance of the match, the Manchester City striker played it down, saying: "Honestly, I don't care much. We're through, we manage



France's recent World Cup match against Iraq lasted 4 hours due to a thunderstorm interruption