

Hat-trick hero Dembele fires France past Norway

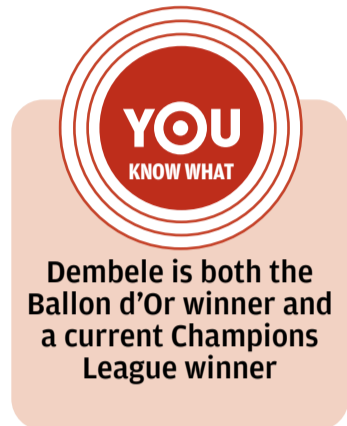
France completed a flawless FIFA World Cup 2026 group-stage campaign with a 4-1 victory over Norway at Boston Stadium yesterday, sealing top spot in Group I with a perfect record from three matches.

The result, combined with Senegal's win over Iraq in the other group fixture, left France on nine points, Norway second on six, while Senegal finished third and will now await confirmation of whether they progress to the Round of 32 as one of the best third-placed teams.

Didier Deschamps' side reinforced their status as tournament favourites with a scintillating attacking display led by Ousmane Dembele, who stole the show with a first-half hat-trick before Desire Doue added a late fourth.

Les Bleus nearly made a dream start inside the opening minute when Kylian Mbappe raced through on goal and smashed a powerful effort against the underside of the crossbar.

The breakthrough came in the seventh minute. Mbappe



Dembele is both the Ballon d'Or winner and a current Champions League winner

switched play brilliantly to Dembele, who cut inside from the right, skipped past two defenders and rifled an unstoppable finish across goalkeeper Egil Selvik into the far corner.

France doubled their advantage in the 20th minute after Leo Ostigard tugged Mbappe's shirt, but the referee allowed play to continue. Dembele collected the loose ball, drove forward and curled a superb 20-yard strike into the left side of the net.

The Vikings responded instantly from the restart. Thelo Aasgaard finished a neat move



Ousmane Dembele celebrates his third goal against the Norwegians

involving Oscar Bobb and Andreas Schjelderup to briefly re-

duce the deficit and bring Norway back into the contest. However, any hopes of a comeback were quickly extin-

guished as Dembele completed his hat-trick in the 32nd minute. Aurelien Tchouameni threaded a pass into his path, and the winger once again toyed with the Norwegian defence before bending another finish into the bottom-left corner.

Norway were handed a lifeline early in the second half when Theo Hernandez brought down Bobb inside the penalty area. But Jorgen Strand Larsen failed to convert, his tame effort comfortably saved by Mike Maignan.

With qualification already secured, Norway coach Stale Solbakken opted to leave Erling Haaland on the bench throughout the match as his side struggled to regain control.

France then added further gloss to the scoreline deep into stoppage time. Desire Doue put the cherry on top for Les Bleus, as Barcola impressed down the left flank, checked back, and clipped a delicate ball into the box. Doue met it with a cushioned header into the top-right corner to make it 4-1 and complete a commanding French performance.

Bahrain see off Aussies to reach AVC Cup last four

Defending champions Bahrain booked their place in the semi-finals of the AVC Men's Cup 2026 in Ahmedabad, India, with a 3-1 victory over Australia in their final Pool A match on Friday.

After taking the opening set comfortably and recovering from a narrow second-set setback, the Kingdom's national men's volleyball team sealed a 25-18, 26-28, 25-19, 25-21 win at the Veer Savarkar Sports Complex in front of 1,021 spectators. The victory completed a four-from-five group-stage record and secured second place in Pool A behind hosts India.

Outside hitter Sayed Hashem Ali led Bahrain's attack with 24 points, while Abdulla Ebrahim and Hasan Haider added 11 points apiece. Mahmood Salman contributed seven, and middle blocker Hasan Al Warqaa chipped in with six.

Australia relied heavily on Ky Landers, who finished with 14 points, while Sam Flowerday and William D'Arcy added 13 and 12 respectively.

The victory followed Bahrain's earlier 3-1 comeback win over Kazakhstan, a result that had already secured their progression to the knockout stage ahead of their final group outing.

Under head coach Ivan Jok-



Ali Ebrahim rises at the net to attack against Kazakhstan

simovic, Bahrain carry strong momentum into the semi-finals, where they will face Pool B winners South Korea today at 1pm (Bahrain time). The other semi-final sees India take on Indonesia at 4:30pm.

Elsewhere in the classification matches, New Zealand face Oman for ninth and 10th place, Chinese Taipei play Qatar for seventh and eighth, while Kazakhstan meet Thailand for fifth and sixth.

The tournament concludes tomorrow, with the bronze medal match scheduled for 1pm Bahrain time and the final at 4:30pm.

Bahrain remain the reigning AVC Men's Cup champions, having lifted their first continental title on home soil last year. That breakthrough also secured qualification for the AVC Men's Continental Championship 2026 in Fukuoka, Japan, scheduled for September 4-13.

Gueye double keeps Senegal's World Cup hopes alive

Senegal became the first African side to score five goals in a World Cup match, Pape Gueye's stunning double inspired them to a 5-0 win over 10-man Iraq in their final Group I match on Friday.

Senegal also boosted their chances of progressing to the last 32 as one of the eight best third-placed teams -- they have the best goal difference among the teams on three points.

Iraq go home without a point after a hugely disappointing campaign following an arduous qualification route.

Senegal struck early when Habib Diarra got the slightest touch on Abdoulaye Seck's header from a corner, scoring his first international goal since he netted in a friendly against England last year.

Iraq's already slim hopes suffered a hammerblow a few minutes later.

Defender Rebin Sulaka, brought into the starting lineup by Iraq coach Graham Arnold, saw his contribution last only 13 minutes.

English referee Anthony Taylor red-carded him after consulting the VAR screen for fouling Sadio Mane when the Senegal talisman was clear on goal.

It was the earliest red card of the nine so far in the World Cup, the fourth fastest in the



Iraq's midfielder #19 Kevin Yakob and Senegal's midfielder #26 Pape Gueye fight for the ball during the match

tournament's history.

Senegal came out for the second-half bristling with intent.

Iraq had been further destabilised as they had to replace goalkeeper Ahmed Basil, who had taken a knock in the first-half, with Jalal Hassan at the break.

Hassan survived the early wave of attacks but was helpless when Senegal finally got into their stride.

Ismaila Sarr tapped in during the 56th minute for his third goal of the tournament after a dreadful error by former Manchester United player Zidane Iqbal deep inside his own half gifted Senegal possession.

The relief of the second goal

had Sarr lying prone on his back pumping his fists with joy.

Then came the Gueye show, which had the fans off their seats.

Within 89 seconds of coming on as a substitute he let rip from outside the box with a sublime curling effort that gave Hassan no chance for 3-0 in the 59th minute.

The Villarreal midfielder possibly outdid that effort with a vicious half volley 12 minutes later that flew past the keeper.

Arnold was reduced to leaning on the dugout and ruefully shaking his head, and could only watch as Iliman Ndiaye scored with another screamer eight minutes from time.