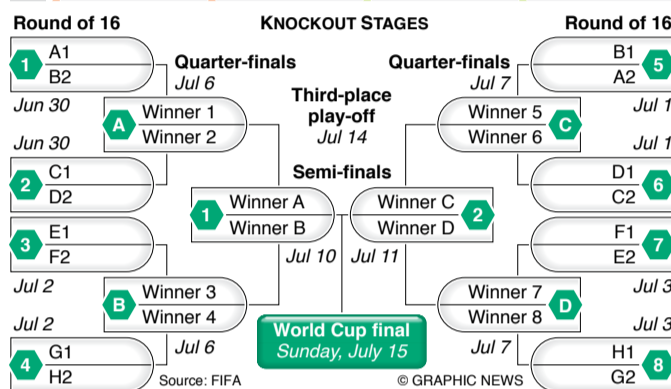


FIFA World Cup 2018 match schedule

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
Russia Saudi Arabia Egypt Uruguay	Portugal Spain Morocco Iran	France Australia Peru Denmark	Argentina Iceland Croatia Nigeria
GROUP E	GROUP F	GROUP G	GROUP H
Brazil Switzerland Costa Rica Serbia	Germany Mexico Sweden South Korea	Belgium Panama Tunisia England	Poland Senegal Colombia Japan

Match	Group Stage	All dates: June
14 Russia - Saudi Arabia	Morocco - Iran	Portugal - Spain
15 Egypt - Uruguay	France - Australia	Peru - Denmark
16 France - Australia	Argentina - Iceland	Croatia - Nigeria
17 Costa Rica - Serbia	Brazil - Switzerland	Germany - Mexico
18 Sweden - South Korea	Poland - Senegal	Tunisia - England
19 Colombia - Japan	Portugal - Morocco	Russia - Egypt
20 Uruguay - Saudi Arabia	France - Peru	Iran - Spain
21 Denmark - Australia	Brazil - Costa Rica	Argentina - Croatia
22 Nigeria - Iceland	Germany - Sweden	Serbia - Switzerland
23 South Korea - Mexico	Japan - Senegal	Belgium - Tunisia
24 England - Panama	Iran - Portugal	Poland - Colombia
25 Uruguay - Russia	S. Arabia - Egypt	Spain - Morocco
26 Denmark - France	Australia - Peru	Nigeria - Argentina
27 Serbia - Brazil	Switz. - Costa Rica	Mexico - Sweden
28 Panama - Tunisia	England - Belgium	Japan - Poland
		Senegal - Colombia



James Rodriguez eyes better WC run

IAN S | London

Star midfielder James Rodriguez has extremely high expectations for Colombia heading into the 2018 World Cup in Russia, saying he hopes the team can top what it achieved four years ago and reach the semi-finals or championship match.

"We all want more. When you do great things, you always want more. And I hope that can be the semis or a nice final," James told reporters after an emotional send-off celebration Friday night at El Campin Stadium in Bogota reports Efe.

Referring to the farewell game/party, which featured a performance by Colombian reggaeton singer Maluma and a match involving two sides of national-team players, the Bayern Munich star said he appreciated "being near all the people." "I think it's nice that they see we also feel a lot of affection for them," James said.



James Rodriguez

The midfielder, who has spent three seasons at Real Madrid and one at Bayern since Colombia achieved its first-ever World Cup quarter-final berth at the tournament's 2014 edition in Brazil, said he and his teammates had more experience now than they did four years ago. Colombia reached the final

eight in Brazil despite having to make do without injured striker Radamel Falcao Garcia, then the country's biggest-named player. Falcao, the national team's all-time top scorer with 29 goals, earned a 2017 Ballon d'Or nomination for his recent strong play at French club Monaco and now is looking forward to his first

World Cup at age 32. "It's an opportunity to be here four years after not having been able to compete at the World Cup in Brazil. The story's different now. I'm making the most of every moment with my teammates, getting us ready for this World Cup that we're very excited about," Falcao said.



Colombia reached the final eight in Brazil despite having to make do without injured striker Radamel Falcao Garcia, then the country's biggest-named player

Salah 'confident' of playing for Egypt

● Egypt play their first game of the World Cup in Russia on 15 June against Uruguay in Yekaterinburg

BBC | Kiev



Mohamed Salah grimaces on the ground

Liverpool and Egypt forward Mohamed Salah says he is "confident" of playing in the World Cup after suffering a shoulder injury in the Champions League final defeat by Real Madrid. Salah, 25, left the pitch in Kiev in tears after a first-half challenge with Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos. "Your love and support will

give me the strength I need," said Salah. Egypt play their first game of the World Cup in Russia on 15 June against Uruguay in Yekaterinburg. After the game in Kiev, Reds boss Jurgen Klopp described the injury as "really

serious" and it did not "look good" on the Liverpool website. But the Egyptian FA tweeted that Salah's X-ray showed he had a "sprain in the shoulder ligaments" and that it was "optimistic" he would be fit for Russia.

Arab world represented by unprecedented four teams

Albawaba | Moscow

The FIFA World Cup this summer for the first time will feature four teams from the Arab world. Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia all qualified for the 32-team tournament, set for June 14-July 15 in Russia.

The qualification of four Arab teams means the eyes of the world will be on Arab men as empowered athletes and not as negative stereotypes. It is hoped that images of Arab stars such as Liverpool's Mohamed Salah and Juventus's Medhi Benatia will be an inspiration for Arab youth in search for role models.

Saudi Arabia is marking its return to the World Cup after a 12-year absence. The Saudis have sought to bolster their



Medhi Benatia

al-Muwallad. The 23-year-old forward expects to lead the line for his country at the World Cup after subbing on for the final 10 minutes of a 3-0 victory for his loan club Levantes.

The historic appearance by a star of Saudi football could spur hopes the Saudis, under Argentina-born manager Juan Antonio Pizzi, could advance out of a tough group that includes Egypt, Russia and Uruguay.

The Moroccans are led by Benatia, who was born in France but chose to represent the country of his parents. Moroccan legend Mustapha Hadji told the Guardian of the importance a World Cup appearance has to Moroccans and how as an assistant coach with the current team he's helped integrate foreign-born players, such as Benatia.

chances at success in Russia by striking a deal with Spain's top flight La Liga, sending nine Saudi players on loan to clubs in Spain. Of the nine, the most successful player was Fahad

PLAYER OF THE DAY

Neuer will be number one if fit

● Manuel Neuer has been out of action for Germany and Bayern Munich since September

Foxsportsasia | Munich

Germany manager Joachim Löw says Manuel Neuer will be his number one at the World Cup should he prove his fitness and be named in the final 23-man squad.

Neuer, who is recovering from a broken foot, has been out of action for Germany and Bayern Munich since September.

However, he has recently resumed full training and was named in Die Mannschaft's pro-

visional 27-man squad for the tournament during June and July. The 32-year-old shot-stopper is expected to feature in the next preparation match against Austria, before the final 23-man squad is named.

Should he be selected, the keeper would also likely start against Saudi Arabia on 8 June.

Speaking to German broadcaster Sportschau on Saturday, Löw said: "If he travels with us, he'll be number one.

"He'll go either as fully fit or not at all. It won't be that he goes with us as a captain who just sits on the bench."

The reigning world champions begin the defence of their crown on 17 June at the tournament with a clash against Mexico in Moscow.



Manuel Neuer



Tim Cahill

The evergreen Australian forward is seemingly getting better with age, having netted 11 goals on the road to Russia. Scorer of one of the most spectacular goals of Brazil 2014, Cahill could become one of the few players to score at four World Cups.