

I am very sorry that Sadio misses the match against us [and the World Cup] because this World Cup simply deserves the best players, Sadio is one of them. Sadio is world class, he is my friend and I will miss him.

Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk about Liverpool teammate Sadio Mane



FIFA WORLD CUP FIXTURES (GROUP STAGE)

DATE	MATCH	GROUP	TIME (BST)	VENUE
20 November	Qatar-Ecuador	A	10:00 pm	Al Khor
21 November	England-Iran	B	7:00 pm	Al Rayyan
21 November	Senegal-Netherlands	A	10:00 pm	Doha
22 November	USA-Wales	B	1:00 am	Al Rayyan
22 November	Argentina-Saudi Arabia	C	4:00 pm	Lusail
22 November	Denmark-Tunisia	D	7:00 pm	Al Rayyan
22 November	Mexico-Poland	C	10:00 pm	Doha
23 November	France-Australia	D	1:00 am	Al Rayyan
23 November	Morocco-Croatia	F	4:00 pm	Al Khor
23 November	Germany-Japan	E	7:00 pm	Al Rayyan
23 November	Spain-Costa Rica	E	10:00 pm	Doha
24 November	Belgium-Canada	F	1:00 am	Al Rayyan
24 November	Switzerland-Cameroon	G	4:00 pm	Al Wakrah
24 November	Uruguay-South Korea	H	7:00 pm	Al Rayyan
24 November	Portugal-Ghana	H	10:00 pm	Doha
25 November	Brazil-Serbia	G	1:00 am	Lusail
25 November	Wales-Iran	B	4:00 pm	Al Rayyan
25 November	Qatar-Senegal	A	7:00 pm	Doha
25 November	Netherlands-Ecuador	A	10:00 pm	Al Rayyan
26 November	England-USA	B	1:00 am	Al Khor
26 November	Tunisia-Australia	D	4:00 pm	Al Wakrah
26 November	Poland-Saudi Arabia	C	7:00 pm	Al Rayyan
26 November	France-Denmark	D	10:00 pm	Doha
27 November	Argentina-Mexico	C	1:00 am	Lusail
27 November	Japan-Costa Rica	E	4:00 pm	Al Rayyan
27 November	Belgium-Morocco	F	7:00 pm	Doha
27 November	Croatia-Canada	F	10:00 pm	Al Rayyan
28 November	Spain-Germany	E	1:00 am	Al Khor
28 November	Cameroon-Serbia	G	4:00 pm	Al Wakrah
28 November	South Korea-Ghana	H	7:00 pm	Al Rayyan
28 November	Brazil-Switzerland	G	10:00 pm	Doha
29 November	Portugal-Uruguay	H	1:00 am	Lusail
29 November	Ecuador-Senegal	A	9:00 pm	Al Rayyan
29 November	Netherlands-Qatar	A	9:00 pm	Al Khor
30 November	Wales-England	B	1:00 am	Al Rayyan
30 November	Iran-USA	B	1:00 am	Doha
30 November	Tunisia-France	D	9:00 pm	Al Rayyan
30 November	Australia-Denmark	D	9:00 pm	Al Wakrah
1 December	Argentina-Poland	C	1:00 am	Doha
1 December	Mexico-Saudi Arabia	C	1:00 am	Lusail
1 December	Croatia-Belgium	F	9:00 pm	Al Rayyan
1 December	Canada-Morocco	F	9:00 pm	Doha
2 December	Japan-Spain	E	1:00 am	Al Rayyan
2 December	Germany-Costa Rica	E	1:00 am	Al Khor
2 December	South Korea-Portugal	H	9:00 pm	Al Rayyan
2 December	Ghana-Uruguay	H	9:00 pm	Al Wakrah
3 December	Serbia-Switzerland	G	1:00 am	Doha
3 December	Cameroon-Brazil	G	1:00 am	Lusail

GROUP A Qatar, Ecuador, Senegal, Netherlands	GROUP E Germany, Spain, Costa Rica, Japan
GROUP B England, Wales, USA, Iran	GROUP F Belgium, Croatia, Morocco, Canada
GROUP C Argentina, Mexico, Poland, Saudi Arabia	GROUP G Brazil, Serbia, Switzerland, Cameroon
GROUP D France, Australia, Denmark, Tunisia	GROUP H Portugal, Uruguay, South Korea, Ghana



Croatia, the losing finalists of the 2018 World Cup, arrived in Qatar appearing to be in good spirits, led out of the team plane by captain and lynchpin Luka Modric. With just two days to go until kick-off, Spain had also arrived on Friday. (Inset) On the same day, the Poles were led out by their talisman, Robert Lewandowski.

PHOTO: AFP/TWITTER

Ronaldo set to jet in to Qatar

AFP, Doha

Ronaldo is set to become the latest global superstar to land in Qatar after his explosive tirade against his club Manchester United.

The Portugal forward, who has dominated global football for the past 15 years alongside Argentina's Lionel Messi, will be playing in his fifth and likely final World Cup.

The 37-year-old, who has a world-record 117 international goals, is aiming to become the first man to score in five World Cups.

But his arrival in Doha will be overshadowed by an astonishing outburst against United, in which he said he felt "betrayed" by the club and had no respect for manager Erik ten Hag.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner missed Portugal's 4-0 demolition of Nigeria in a friendly on Thursday with illness but will hope to be fit for their opening match against Ghana in Qatar on November 24.

The Euro 2016 champions will also face Uruguay and South Korea in Qatar.

WORLD CUP TRIVIA

FIFA World Cup 2022 will be the shortest ever -- only 28 days.

Qatar emblem depicts no. 8, representing total stadiums and also depicts infinity.

Mexico qualified without winning the World Cup tournaments more than any other country (16 times). They've even been the host country twice in 1970 and 1986.

Iceland is the country with the smallest population to ever compete in the FIFA World Cup. (population: 334,000 approx)

Germany and Brazil played the most World Cup matches (109). However, Germany have appeared in the most finals (8), semifinals (13), and quarterfinals (16).

Brazil are the only team to appear in every edition of the World Cup. This will be the Selecao's 22nd appearance in the mega event.

New Zealand are the only team to go unbeaten in the World Cup as they drew all 3 of their group stage games in 2010.

Switzerland are the only team to be eliminated from the World Cup without conceding a goal. In 2006, they exited the tournament from the last-16 after losing in penalties against Ukraine.

The last nation to win the FIFA World Cup as the host was France in 1998.

France were also the first team to not win a World Cup in their first

go as hosts. Uruguay and Italy had won the 1930 and 1934 editions, respectively, as hosts.

The host country has won six of the 21 World Cups.

The only host country not to have reached the second round is South Africa in 2010.

Qatar is spending around a staggering \$220 billion on the projects undertaken for the World Cup, making it the most expensive World Cup.

There are only eight stadiums being used for the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. This is the lowest number of stadiums for the World Cup since the 1978 edition in the host country of Argentina. They only used six stadiums.

France's Just Fontaine holds the record for the most goals scored in a single World Cup, with his 13 goals in 1958.

Between 2002 and 2014, Germany's Miroslav Klose scored 16 World Cup goals -- most by any player.

Thomas Muller of Germany is the only one to be playing in the Qatar World Cup who comes close to Klose's record. Muller has scored 10 World Cup goals.

At 42 years and 39 days, Cameroon's Roger Milla became the oldest player to score a World Cup goal in June 1994 in a game against Russia in the United States.

Northern Ireland's Norman



Whiteside became the youngest player, at 17 years and 41 days, ever to play in the FIFA World Cup in a game against Yugoslavia in 1982.

FIFA and Qatar banned beer sales around the eight World Cup stadiums in a stunning policy u-turn just two days before the start of the tournament.

The fastest substitute from the start of the game was Italian Alessandro Nesta. He was replaced by Giuseppe Bergomi after only four minutes in a match against Austria in 1998.

WHAT'S NEW IN QATAR?

This is the first time that the FIFA World Cup is being held in the winter. Breaking the tradition of being held from mid-June to mid-July, the World Cup in Qatar will be held from mid-November to mid-December.

Qatar is the first Middle Eastern country and the third Asian country to hold the FIFA World Cup. Japan and South Korea jointly hosted it in 2002.

For the first time in World Cups, teams can substitute five players in a game. Those five substitutions can be made in a maximum of three windows across the 90 minutes. Previously, three substitutions were allowed.

FIFA has introduced female referees for the first time in the Men's Football World Cup. Yamashita Yoshimi, Salima Mukansanga and Stephanie Frappart are three women referees who have all been named among the 36 referees selected.

The matches will feature semi-automated offside technology. The World Cup ball will have a sensor inside of it letting the referee know the position of the ball during the play with respect to the players' body. These technologies have been successfully trialled at numerous test events and live at FIFA tournaments, including the FIFA Arab Cup 2021 and the FIFA Club World Cup 2021.

This is the first time that the host country will hold the World Cup matches in fully air-conditioned stadiums.



FIFA, Qatar perform beer u-turn

AFP, Doha

FIFA and Qatar on Friday banned beer sales around the eight World Cup stadiums in a stunning policy u-turn just two days before the start of the tournament.

Football's world body said the decision was taken following "discussions" with World Cup hosts Qatar, an Islamic state which severely restricts alcohol consumption.

It gave no reason for the surprise decision, however.

A FIFA statement said alcohol would be focused on fan zones, "removing sales points of beer from Qatar's FIFA World Cup 2022 stadium perimeters."

Dozens of beer tents had already been set up at stadiums ahead of the first game on Sunday between Qatar and Ecuador.

Beer will remain available in VIP suites in stadiums.



Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk stated that players were "not blind or deaf" to concerns about migrant workers after the Dutch contingent met around 20 workers at the end of Thursday's training session in Doha, signing autographs and playing small-sided games of football with them. Here, Frenkie de Jong is pictured during a kick-about with the lucky few.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Doha's heat gets to Wales

AGENCIES, Doha

The Welsh team were forced to reschedule their World Cup training plans due to the excessive Doha heat.

Robert Page's squad had been due to start daily training sessions at 1:30pm local time in Qatar ahead of their tournament opener with the United States on Monday.

But, even though it is mid-November, early-afternoon temperatures have been above average at over 30 degrees Celsius, meaning the team shifted their sessions to 4:00pm local time. It is likely that all future training sessions will now be held later in the day.

All eight stadiums hosting World Cup games will be air-conditioned, but Page questioned whether players would feel the benefit of that after visiting the Gulf state in July.

Page, whose side's second group game with Iran kicks off at 1pm local time, said: "They've done their best to accommodate that (the heat). I went to the stadium where we play our three games and it is exceptional.

"They've put air conditioning units all around the pitch, I could feel it from where I was stood. I'm not so sure the players will feel it from the middle of the pitch, and certainly our supporters won't from the top of the stand."

Wales forward Mark Harris was shocked by the temperatures. "We were sweating just walking around the hotel," said "Obviously, we are not too used to heat like this. But I would not say it is daunting or anything. It is just about getting ready for the occasion now."