



## FIFA World Cup 2026 winners to get \$50m

AFP, Paris

The winners of the 2026 World Cup will receive \$50 million in prize money as part of a record financial distribution announced by FIFA on Wednesday.

The total World Cup prize fund will be \$655 million, an increase of almost 50 percent from the \$440 million at the 2022 tournament in Qatar.

The 2026 World Cup, to be held in the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19, will be the first edition to feature 48 teams, up from 32 in 2022.

Argentina received \$42 million in prize money in 2022 after lifting their third title in Qatar.

France earned \$30 million as runners-up. At the 2026 tournament, the beaten finalists will receive \$33 million, while the third place team will earn \$29 million and the losing semi-finalists \$27 million.

Teams eliminated in the group stage will receive \$9 million, and all 48 participating nations will be paid an additional \$1.5 million to cover "preparation costs".

## JUNIOR TIGERS SET UP ASIA CUP SEMIFINAL CLASH WITH PAKISTAN

Bangladesh pacer Iqbal Hossain Emon celebrates after dismissing Sri Lanka's Viran Chamuditha during their final Group B match of the ACC U-19 Asia Cup at the ICC Academy in Dubai yesterday. Bangladesh, sent in to bat first, were bowled out for 225 but bounced back with a disciplined bowling performance to dismiss Sri Lanka for 186 in 49.1 overs, sealing a 39-run victory. The win marked Bangladesh's third consecutive victory in the group stage, making them unbeaten group champions and setting up a semifinal clash with Group A runners-up Pakistan tomorrow.

PHOTO: BCB



## Bangladesh's Gourab defies 207-rank gap

SPORTS REPORTER

Three-time national champion Gourab Singha stood out among Bangladesh shuttlers at the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh International Challenge, advancing to the round of 32 with a convincing win over higher-ranked Australian Pushkal Irumulla in Dhaka yesterday.

World No. 676 Gourab beat Irumulla (469) 21-12, 21-11 on an otherwise disappointing day for the hosts at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium.

Top local players, including current national champion Khandokar Abdus Soad (353), Shafi Ching Mong Marma (534) and Sifat Ullah (633), were eliminated in their opening main-draw matches.

"It is always pleasant to win an international match, and I want to carry this momentum forward as I will also be playing the men's doubles," said Gourab, who clinched National Badminton Championship titles from 2020

to 2022.

The 23-year-old credited his recent exposure on the international circuit for the upset, having played four tournaments in Australia and Thailand.

"We could compete well against overseas opponents... but we often failed to earn the last four or five points. This has been an old weakness for us, either due to lack of stamina or technique."

"But training for the South Asian Games under foreign and local coaches helped improve our fitness and technique. We have also finished matches better in recent international tournaments in Australia and Thailand. [Al-Amin] Jumar even reached the semifinals of the Canadian International Series because of improved finishing," he said.

Gourab admitted Bangladeshi shuttlers still lag behind overseas opponents in speed, experience and training quality, but felt individual adaptation also played

a role in results.

"It's not possible for everyone to perform well every time. It also depends on how players adapt what they learned during South Asian Games training and how effectively they apply it."

Since 2011, the Bangladesh Badminton Federation (BBF) has hosted 12 Yonex Sunrise-sponsored international events to improve exposure, an initiative driven by former general secretary Mahabubur Rob.

However, preparation support for local shuttlers remains limited, with some players reportedly competing after playing paid exhibition matches outside Dhaka. Gourab informed they often rely on these matches to fund equipment and travel, with a top player needing at least Tk 2 lakh a year and overseas tournaments costing even more. He spent nearly Tk 4 lakh on four recent overseas events, with the federation only assisting with visas.

Looking ahead, Gourab believes with better prize money, more ranking tournaments at home, and financial support for overseas events, Bangladesh will flourish on the international stage.

## 'Special skill creates that demand'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

There is a long-standing perception that Mustafizur Rahman has not been the same since undergoing a shoulder surgery in 2016.

The left-armed bowler bamboozled one and all in his first year in international cricket, but once the novelty wore off and the surgery curtailed his unique skill, his effectiveness reduced considerably.

However, Mustafizur, now 30, still remains the most sought after Bangladeshi cricketer in franchise leagues across the world as just this Tuesday, Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) bought him for a whopping INR 9.2 crore, the highest ever bid for a Bangladeshi in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Six more Bangladeshi cricketers were listed in this year's mini auction, including Rishad Hossain, the Tigers' highest wicket-taker in T20Is in the last 12 months, who is currently playing for the Hobart Hurricanes in his maiden season in the Big Bash League.

Pacer Taskin Ahmed was also in the mix, who took three more wickets than Mustafizur during this period and had a significantly better strike rate, 11.6, compared to the left-armed, 17.3.

Still, only Mustafizur attracted interest in the auction. What then separates him from the rest?

According to Bangladesh batting coach Mohammad Ashraful, it's his unique abilities – slowlers and cutters – and proven record on IPL wickets that fetched him the big bucks from KKR.

"He has a special skill, obviously, which creates the demand. He is different and you can say that there is no other bowler in the world like him," Ashraful told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I used to play [Muttiah] Muralitharan, a right-arm off-spinner, and although Mustafizur is a



fast bowler, he produces a lot of revolutions on the ball like Murali... Playing him is a difficult prospect and if there is help in the wicket, it's even more challenging since it grips," he added.

Mustafizur, who made his IPL debut in 2016, has played for five different franchises across eight seasons in the league. In the last five seasons, he has claimed 41 wickets in 36 matches.

His economy rate in T20Is in the last 12 months is only 6.09, and in his three outings for the Delhi Capitals in the previous IPL season, he went for less than eight runs per over.

"Since the games are played on Indian surfaces, we see high-scoring games, scores of 280, which again are being chased down at times. In those kinds of games, Mustafizur often turns out to be the difference maker.

"In 14 matches in a season, at least 5-6 matches take place on a surface where Mustafizur can beat

a team all on his own. So, when a player can do that, he will always be in demand," he said.

Mustafizur, however, won't get a full NOC from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for the IPL as according to statements from cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, he would have to return to Bangladesh for 8-10 days between the stint for a home series against New Zealand.

Ashraful felt that the board should give Mustafizur substantial opportunity to shine in the IPL and he also rued how players with unique skills, like Mustafizur, fall through the cracks in Bangladesh cricket.

"We have players who are different but you can't just develop them through practice sessions, they aren't playing enough matches. When you play in Chattogram, you see many varieties in the nets but they aren't playing and I still don't know how these talents can come through," he said.

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An emotional Alex Carey enjoyed a 'special moment', Usman Khawaja seized an unexpected opportunity, a technological glitch worked in Carey's favour, and Australia mounted a comeback after a stutter against England -- the opening day of the third Ashes Test in Adelaide produced several talking points.

After Australia were reduced to 94 for four, with Jofra Archer removing Marnus Labuschagne and Cameron Green in the first over after lunch, Carey took charge. He shared crucial partnerships with Khawaja, Josh Inglis, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc on his way to a 143-ball 106.

It was Carey's third Test hundred and his first in the Ashes. He raised his bat and looked to the sky in tribute to his father, who died of leukaemia in September, in front of family, friends and 56,298 fans at his home ground -- the largest cricket crowd ever at the Adelaide Oval.

Carey survived a caught-behind decision on 72 after a glitch in the review technology. He later admitted he may have "feathered" the ball, but the noise detected by Snicko did not align with the ball passing the bat. The Snicko operator also later took "full responsibility for the error".

Khawaja, who missed the Brisbane Test due to back spasms sustained in Perth and had been overlooked as opener in favour of Travis Head and Jake Weatherald, was drafted into the XI only after Steve Smith withdrew minutes before the start because of illness.

Khawaja made the most of his chance, despite being dropped once, with a stoic 82 off 126 balls and a vital 91-run stand with Carey, helping Australia recover to reach 326 for eight at stumps.

Australia lead the five-Test series 2-0 and will retain the Ashes with a win or draw.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Alcaraz parts ways with longtime coach

AFP, Paris

Men's tennis world number one Carlos Alcaraz announced on Wednesday that he has split from coach Juan Carlos Ferrero after seven highly successful years together.

Under the guidance of fellow Spaniard Ferrero, Alcaraz won six Grand Slam titles among his 24 tour-level crowns, including this year's French Open and US Open. The 22-year-old ends the season as world number one after claiming eight titles, highlighted by his dramatic victory over Jannik Sinner in Paris.

"It is very difficult to write this post," Alcaraz said on social media, sharing photos of the pair embracing. "After more than seven years together, 'Juank' and I have decided to end our story as coach and player."

Alcaraz began working with former world number one Ferrero, 45, in August 2018 while still a teenager. He has never gone beyond the Australian Open quarterfinals, with next year's tournament starting on January 18.

Alcaraz did not name a successor, though Spanish media reported assistant coach Samuel Lopez will take over.

