



Curacao midfielder Juninho Bacuna has some lighthearted conversation with children during a practice session at the FAU Stadium in Florida on Friday. The Caribbean island nation, with a population of 156,000, will be making their debut tonight when they face four-times champion Germany at the NRG Stadium in Houston.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Advocaat’s Curacao brace for Germany

AGENCIES

The latest country to make their World Cup debut will also have the oldest coach ever in the tournament when Curacao play traditional powerhouse Germany in a Group E match in Houston tonight.

The match kicks off at 11:00 pm Bangladesh time.

At 78, Dutch-born Dick Advocaat will become the oldest on the bench and will end the musical chairs of record-holders already in the early stages of this World Cup.

No other coach in the World Cup is older than Advocaat, who took over the Curacao in January 2024 and coached them to 28 goals in 10 qualifying matches, the most among all CONCACAF teams.

Curacao is the smallest country by population (about 156,000) to qualify for the World Cup.

“I consider qualifying the smallest country in the world for the World Cup one of the highlights of my career,” Advocaat said. “I’m proud of my players, staff and the board members who believed in us.”

It will be a tough task playing the four-time World Cup champions.

“We are not the favorites, we know



this when we start,” Advocaat told The Guardian. “But people who aren’t favorites can surprise. Today, you can even go on (to the next round) with two or three points.”

The Germans are not one of the favorites in this World Cup, either, but

have won nine matches in a row with an eye on regaining glory.

Since winning the 2014 World Cup, they have not gotten out of their group, with just two wins since the title run in Brazil. In Russia in 2018 they finished last in their group and four years later

in Qatar they finished third.

“We are ready,” Germany’s 38-year-old coach Julian Nagelsmann said. “I don’t know if it’s my job to create euphoria ahead of the tournament. My job is to create the moments that lead to that joy.”

USA DAZZLE in ‘collective’ effort

AGENCIES

USA coach Mauricio Pochettino insisted that the 4-1 victory over Paraguay in their World Cup opener was built on collective effort rather than individual brilliance, after a commanding display in Los Angeles.

The result marked the first time the US have scored four goals in a World Cup match, with forward Folarin Balogun netting a brace to become the first American since 1930 to score twice in a single tournament game.

Support also came from Christian Pulisic and Weston McKennie while Gio Reyna added late flair, as the



hosts overwhelmed Paraguay.

Despite the emphatic scoreline, Pochettino said he would not single out players, stressing the importance of unity and squad depth. “It is about the collective, about everyone on and off the pitch,” he said, praising the energy of the fans in Los Angeles.

However, concern lingered over Pulisic after he was substituted at half-time with a minor calf knock. The coach added that a longer training camp had helped build cohesion ahead of Group D matches against Turkey and Australia, urging focus on the bigger tournament picture.

Pochettino said the extended preparation window allowed coaching staff to work on tactical structure rather than last-minute selection, a luxury rarely available in international football. He noted that the team absorbed the crowd atmosphere and used it as momentum throughout the match, particularly in a dominant second half where Paraguay struggled to respond.

While the win places the US in a strong position in Group D, Pochettino cautioned that it was only the opening step on the road ahead.

TOUCHLINE

England hit by training kit theft

England have suffered a theft of training equipment ahead of their arrival in Kansas City, local police said, after a vehicle transporting the gear to their World Cup base was broken into.

The incident occurred while equipment was being transferred from England’s pre-tournament base in Florida to Swope Soccer Village, where it was due to be in place before the squad begin training after their arrival in Kansas City on Saturday.

Balls and boots were among the items believed to have been stolen, according to British media reports.

Scotland’s Tartan Army digs deep into pockets

Scotland’s raucous Tartan Army of supporters massed in downtown Boston on Friday, with fans saying they had no qualms about the thousands of dollars they are spending to see their team return to the World Cup after a 28-year absence.

***Read full stories on The Daily Star’s website*

‘You could see the passion’

AGENCIES

Toronto Stadium pulsed in crimson and white as Canada opened their FIFA World Cup 2026 campaign with a 1-1 draw against Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a match defined as much by the stands as the pitch.

From dawn, fans flooded the city, turning it into a river of red. By kick-off, the atmosphere had reached fever pitch, and it rarely dipped even after Canada fell behind to a set-piece goal. The response, however, was relentless pressure, near misses, and a belief fuelled by the crowd’s roar.

“You could see the passion, the emotion through the fans,” said Ismaël Kone, who was later named Superior Player of the Match. “Everything. Everything! I think we never experienced something like this. It was really like a magical afternoon, and I can see we’re creating something here.”

Canada came close to turning the tide, spurning two clear first-half chances and seeing two efforts cleared off the line after the break. Yet Bosnia’s disciplined defending held firm, frustrating the hosts in the closing stages.

Defender Luc de Fougerolles called the result “bittersweet,” pointing to the missed opportunities but praising the reaction after going behind.

Head coach Jesse Marsch, meanwhile, looked ahead to Vancouver, where Canada will seek their elusive first World Cup win. “How awesome was that sea of red?” he said. “Vancouver will do the same—push us, give us confidence, make it feel like home.”



TIGERS AIM FOR AUSTRALIA WHITEWASH

Bangladesh fast bowlers were all smiles during Saturday’s training session ahead of the third and final ODI against Australia at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. The Tigers are aiming for a historic series sweep over Australia - who haven’t been whitewashed in ODIs since 2020 against South Africa - after already clinching the series. Regular ODI skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz is doubtful for the match after suffering a head injury and has been kept under observation. All-rounder Mahedi Hasan has been called to the squad. Najmul Hossain Shanto is likely to lead the team.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigresses look to ‘bring A-game’ in WC opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will aim to open their ICC Women’s T20 World Cup campaign on a positive note when they face debutants Netherlands in their Group A opener at Edgbaston, Birmingham, today.

However, the challenge is expected to be stern, with the Tigresses hoping their batters can rise to the occasion in a tournament that has already seen high scores, while also putting behind a few disappointing results in the build-up.

Since arriving last month, Bangladesh have endured defeats against Scotland and the Netherlands in a tri-series, followed by losses to New Zealand and Ireland in warm-up matches, exposing batting inconsistencies. Despite that, skipper Nigar Sultana Joty remains confident about starting the tournament strongly.

“We played against them and they are very good in these conditions, so we really want to bring our A-game,” Joty told reporters in Birmingham on Saturday.

Bangladesh, drawn in a tough Group A alongside Australia, India, Pakistan, and South Africa, will look to make it past the group stage for the first time.

Early statements and crucial battles await

AGENCIES

The FIFA World Cup rolls into another pivotal day on Monday, with three intriguing contests carrying significant implications for the race to the knockout stages. In Group F, tournament dark horses Japan begin life after Wataru Endo against a formidable Dutch side, while Sweden’s celebrated strike duo face a stern examination from Tunisia’s resolute defence. Meanwhile, in Group E, Ecuador’s remarkable unbeaten run meets perhaps its toughest challenge yet against an ambitious Ivory Coast side eager to make a statement on their return to football’s biggest stage.

Japan begin new midfield era as Dutch test awaits

Japan face an immediate test of their World Cup credentials when they take on the Netherlands, with coach Hajime Moriyasu forced to reshuffle his midfield following the retirement of long-time captain Wataru Endo. The experienced midfielder’s withdrawal leaves a sizeable void at the heart of Japan’s engine room, placing greater responsibility on players such as Ao Tanaka, Kaishu Sano and Daichi Kamada. Against a Dutch side packed with technical quality and tournament pedigree, Japan will need to quickly adapt and show that

their renowned organisation and discipline can overcome the loss of one of their most influential figures.

Swedish firepower meets Tunisia’s defensive wall

One of the most fascinating tactical battles of the day will unfold when Sweden’s attacking stars Alexander Isak and Viktor Gyokeres come up against a Tunisia side that did not concede a single goal during qualifying.

While Sweden possess one of the tournament’s most dangerous strike partnerships, Tunisia arrive with a reputation for defensive resilience and discipline. With both teams viewing this fixture as a vital opportunity to gain an early advantage in a highly competitive Group F, expect a contest where fine margins and moments of individual brilliance could prove decisive.

Unbeaten Ecuador face ambitious Ivory Coast in Group E showdown

A compelling clash of contrasting strengths awaits in Philadelphia as Ecuador’s miserly defence takes on an Ivory Coast attack brimming with pace, flair and confidence. Ecuador arrive unbeaten in 19 matches and backed by one of the most reliable defensive units in international football, led by Moises Caicedo and a battle-hardened backline.

