Star SPORT
DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 17, 2026, ASHAR 3, 1433 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS, NAGORIK TV
Australia vs Bangladesh
1st T20I
Live from 2:00 pm

STAR SPORTS NETWORK
Women's T20 World Cup
Australia vs Bangladesh
Live from 3:30 pm

India vs Netherlands
Live from 7:30 pm
Pakistan vs South Africa
Live from 11:30 pm

BTV, T SPORTS, SOMOY TV
FIFA World Cup
Portugal vs Congo
Live from 11:00 pm

England vs Croatia
Live from 2:00 am (Thursday)
Ghana vs Panama
Live from 5:00 am (Thursday)
Uzbekistan vs Colombia
Live from 8:00 am (Thursday)

England's WC dream begins with stern Croatia test

STAR SPORTS DESK

Thomas Tuchel's England begin their World Cup campaign in Texas with a heavyweight Group L opener against Croatia. The Three Lions arrive among the tournament favourites after a perfect qualifying campaign, winning all their matches without conceding a goal, though underwhelming recent friendlies have slightly tempered expectations. Croatia, meanwhile, remain one of the most battle-hardened tournament sides. With memories of their 2018 World Cup semifinal still vivid, this opening clash could shape the trajectory of Group L.

- This will be the 12th meeting between the two teams. England lead the head-to-head record with six wins to Croatia's three, alongside two draws. Their only World Cup meeting came in 2018, when Croatia secured a 2-1 semifinal victory.
- Both sides were dominant in qualifying. England were one of only two UEFA nations to win every match, while Croatia also impressed, going unbeaten with seven wins from eight games.
- England have a strong record in tournament openers, losing just one of their last eight (W3, D4). Croatia, however, have struggled in early fixtures, winning only one of their last five World Cup openers.

- Since their 1966 triumph, England have reached the World Cup semifinals just twice, finishing fourth in both 1990 and 2018.
- Captain Harry Kane arrives with eight World Cup goals across previous tournaments and needs two more to match Gary Lineker's England record of 10. Only Kylian Mbappe (12) has scored more across the last two World Cups.
- While attention also turns to Luka Modric's likely farewell tournament, Ivan Perisic remains Croatia's key big-game influence. He has been directly involved in 18 goals (10 goals, 8 assists) in major tournaments and is one of only three players -- alongside Lionel Messi and Neymar -- to both score and assist in each of the last three World Cups.

CR7's Portugal eye strong start

REUTERS, *Houston*

Portugal begin their latest World Cup campaign in Houston on Wednesday against the Democratic Republic of Congo in a Group K opener that pairs a European heavyweight chasing long-awaited glory with a side returning to the tournament after 52 years.

DR Congo, who competed as Zaire in 1974, endured a difficult debut at the time, losing all three matches without scoring and conceding 14 goals. This time, they arrive with a more experienced squad largely based in Europe and a stronger competitive profile.

Portugal, meanwhile, are again among the contenders, led by 41-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo, still seeking one of the few major honours missing from his decorated career. Their best World Cup finish remains third place in 1966, and they were eliminated in the quarterfinals in 2022 by Morocco.

A strong start is crucial in a group that also includes Colombia and Uzbekistan. Portugal have lost only two of their last 15 World Cup group-stage matches, though one of those defeats came against South Korea in 2022. They have also been solid against African opposition in recent tournaments, going unbeaten in their last five group-stage meetings.

Defender Matheus Nunes stressed the need for focus, saying "every match must be treated like a final" because underdogs can be dangerous over 90 minutes. Portugal may have a concern over defender Ruben Dias, who trained separately from the squad on Monday due to undisclosed reasons.

DR Congo's preparations were disrupted by an Ebola outbreak at home, forcing players into a 21-day isolation period across Belgium and Spain before traveling to the United States. Despite that, they have settled well in Houston, drawing 0-0 with Denmark and losing narrowly 2-1 to Chile in warm-up matches.

Coach Sebastien Desabre said his team "adapted to difficult circumstances" and are now focused on delivering a strong performance on the big stage.

A night that belonged to THE KEEPERS

STAR SPORTS DESK

Monday's World Cup matches proved that the spotlight does not always need to fall on record-breaking forwards, even when the most compelling stories unfold inside the penalty area.

In games where few expected the goalkeepers to take center stage, Cape Verde's Vozinha and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Al-Owais rose as national heroes. Their performances helped World Cup debutants Cape Verde hold 2010 champions Spain to a goalless draw, while Saudi Arabia secured a 1-1 draw against two-time champions Uruguay.

Vozinha's journey to this moment was anything but smooth. He battled visa issues that nearly derailed his World Cup dream, but the 40-year-old veteran turned that frustration into a display of remarkable composure. His calm presence anchored the Cape Verde defense, and his seven-save performance kept them firmly in the contest under relentless pressure.

On the other side, Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Al-Owais redefined what it means to be a "heroic goalkeeper." In a high-stakes clash against Uruguay, he faced a constant barrage of attacks yet stood firm, producing an extraordinary nine saves to secure a crucial draw.

Together, the two keepers became defining symbols of their teams. They reminded the world that, in football, a reliable pair of hands can sometimes be worth more than the most expensive strikers.

Vozinha's presence allowed Cape Verde's defenders to play with greater confidence and aggression, knowing they had a dependable last line of resistance behind them. Similarly, Al-Owais instilled belief in Saudi Arabia's compact defensive system, enabling them to withstand sustained pressure from one of the world's most possession-dominant sides.

Their willingness to throw themselves in front of every shot, to absorb pressure without hesitation, turned what looked like uphill battles into unforgettable results.

In the decisive moments of a tournament, a single inspired performance can change everything. Through grit, reflexes, and unwavering focus, these two goalkeepers ensured that the story of this World Cup will be remembered not only for goals scored, but also for those denied.

TOUCHLINE

Battle of speed and structure

STAR SPORTS DESK

The World Cup group stage is heating up as two pivotal clashes on Wednesday see Ghana take on Panama in Group L, while tournament debutants Uzbekistan face a stern test against Colombia in Group K.

Both Ghana and Panama will be eager to take an early advantage, while the Group K encounter promises a tactical battle of contrasting styles between Fabio Cannavaro-led Uzbekistan and Colombia.

Ghana enter their World Cup opener in Toronto aiming to erase memories of past tournament heartbreaks. Under their recent tactical setup, they have begun blending traditional physicality with a more disciplined approach to transitional play. In a group that also features heavyweights England and Croatia, Ghana will be targeting valuable early points against Panama, who were thrashed 6-2 by five-time world champions Brazil in a pre-World Cup friendly just days ago.

Panama, however, will look to shrug off that defeat and draw confidence from their historic qualification run and a well-drilled defensive structure.

Meanwhile, Colombia -- known for their flair and high-pressing intensity -- arrive at the World Cup as a popular pick for a deep run. In Mexico City, they face an Uzbekistan side that has earned a reputation as "giant-killers" within Asian football.

Known for rapid counter-attacks and tactical flexibility, Uzbekistan will be looking to make a statement against a Colombian team that can occasionally struggle against opponents who transition at high speed.

ASHOUR UNLEASHES

After 30 appearances for Egypt, Emam Ashour finally found the net in national colours -- and he did it at the World Cup. The 23-year-old midfielder put the Pharaohs ahead in yesterday's 1-1 draw against Belgium in Seattle, latching onto a Mohamed Salah pass before unleashing a 20-yard, right-footed thunderbolt past Thibaut Courtois. PHOTO: AFP

Juairiya targets attacking approach against Australia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh face six-time champions Australia in their second Women's T20 World Cup fixture on Wednesday, a clash that opener Juairiya Ferdous views as an exciting prospect. The right-hander is keen to replicate the aggressive mindset that defined her performance in the opening Group 1 victory over the Netherlands, where her quick-fire half-century gave the Tigresses the edge.

"Against Australia, I will try to maintain the same approach. My focus will be on making the best use of the Powerplay," Juairiya said on Tuesday.

The match takes place at Headingley at 3:30pm Bangladesh Time.

Bangladesh skipper Litton Das and Australia skipper Mitchell Marsh pose with the trophy ahead of the first T20I of their three-match series, which begins today at the Bir Sreshtho Shaheed Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram. Having secured a historic 2-1 victory over Australia in the preceding ODI series, the Tigers will look to carry their momentum into the shortest format. Australia, however, have been boosted by the return of Marsh and Tim David, both of whom did not feature in the ODI series. Meanwhile, Bangladesh have named Soumya Sarkar in the squad at the last minute, with injury concerns lingering over Litton and opener Parvez Hossain Emon. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN