

“Honestly, it’s incredible – it’s the first brace of my career, and at the World Cup on top of that.”

Switzerland’s Johan Manzambi said after his Player of the Match performance helped Switzerland to a 4-1 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina in a Group B clash in Los Angeles on Friday.





PHOTOS: REUTERS/X

GERMANY FACE FIRST

real test against Ivory Coast

STAR SPORTS DESK

Germany will look to continue their impressive march towards the knockout stage when they face Ivory Coast in a Group E clash at Toronto Stadium on Saturday.

The four-time world champions produced the most emphatic result of the opening round, dismantling World Cup debutants Curacao 7-1 to extend their winning streak to 10 matches in all competitions. It is Germany’s longest run of victories since Josef Derwall’s side won 12 consecutive games between May 1979 and June 1980.

Germany forward Kai Havertz, who struck a brace against Curacao, is now the only player to score for Germany at each of the last four major tournaments – Euro 2020, the 2022 World Cup, Euro 2024 and the 2026 World Cup. His eight goals across those competitions are twice as many as any of his Germany teammates, with Jamal Musiala and Niclas Fullkrug next on four.



Yet Germany’s biggest challenge may come from a player who knows the Bundesliga as well as they do.

Ivory Coast winger Yan Diomande has emerged as one of world football’s fastest-rising stars. The 19-year-old scored his first professional goal just 13 months ago while playing for Leganes in Spain before earning a move to RB Leipzig in July 2025. He responded with 12 Bundesliga goals and eight assists in his debut campaign, helping Leipzig secure third place and a Champions League berth.

His performances have attracted Europe’s elite, with reports suggesting Liverpool have already seen a €100 million bid rejected.

“He has had a brutal development. A year ago hardly anyone knew him,” Germany captain Joshua Kimmich said.

“He just had an outstanding season even though Leipzig had some problems. He was consistent and very spectacular. His dribbling is exceptional with this start-stop dribbling, with extreme acceleration. Amazing speed. A very good player.”

Diomande’s pace and creativity inspired Ivory Coast to a dramatic 1-0 victory over Ecuador in their opener, with Amad Diallo scoring a 90th-minute winner in a classic smash-and-grab success. The Elephants, however, have never won more than one match at a single World Cup.

Germany, meanwhile, have their own target. Not since the 2006 World Cup on home soil, when they defeated Costa Rica and Poland, have they won their opening two matches at the tournament.

There is one area of concern for Nagelsmann. Germany have gone seven consecutive World Cup matches without keeping a clean sheet.

Saturday’s encounter will be only the second meeting between the two nations and the first in competitive football. Their only previous clash ended in a 2-2 friendly draw in November 2009.

A SWEET STRIKER dilemma for Argentina

STAR SPORTS DESK

It’s all been very much positive for defending champions Argentina so far in this World Cup, with Lionel Messi’s incredible hat-trick setting them on the right title-defence track through a 3-0 win over Algeria in their opening Group J game.

As they prepare for their next game against Austria on Monday, even head coach Lionel Scaloni now deals with a sweet dilemma: whom to start among two imposing strikers – Julian Alvarez or Lautaro Martinez.

For most coaches, having to choose between two high-quality centre-forwards would be a headache. For Scaloni and Argentina, however, it is the kind of problem that reflects the enviable depth of a side chasing back-to-back World Cup titles.

Martinez got the nod to lead the line against Algeria and put in what Scaloni later described as “incredible physical work” before making way for Alvarez in the 55th minute. The selection debate has since gathered pace, with many in the Argentine media expecting Alvarez to return to the starting XI against Austria.

The choice is intriguing because both forwards bring different strengths to an already formidable attack spearheaded by Messi.



Martinez is the more traditional number nine, a striker who thrives inside the penalty area and remains one of the most lethal finishers when chances fall his way. His movement and instincts in the box make him a constant threat.

Alvarez, meanwhile, offers plenty more than goals. The Atletico Madrid forward has been in exceptional form and combines clinical finishing with relentless work rate. In an Argentina side where Messi is understandably spared much of the defensive graft, Alvarez helps fill that gap with his pressing, ball-winning ability, and willingness to track back. He also provides greater fluidity in the final third through his link-up play, often knitting attacks together while still carrying a significant goal threat.

Having both options at his disposal makes it a genuinely sweet dilemma for Scaloni, who must decide which profile best complements Messi and gives Argentina the strongest platform to continue their title defence.

Former Boca Juniors goalkeeper Carlos Navarro Montoya perhaps summed it up best when he described the situation as “blessed doubts and blessed competition” – a reflection of the quality available to the reigning champions.



Goals, glory and growing records

STAR SPORTS DESK

Mexico became the first nation to secure a place in the Round of 32 of the 2026 FIFA World Cup as the second round of group-stage fixtures began on Thursday night, while fellow co-hosts Canada produced one of the most emphatic results of the tournament with a record-breaking 6-0 victory over Qatar. Elsewhere, Switzerland reignited their campaign in style, South Africa kept their hopes alive, and several longstanding World Cup records either fell or came under threat.

6 goals scored by Canada against Qatar, the most ever by a CONCACAF nation in a World Cup match, besting the four goals scored by Mexico (El Salvador in 1970) and the US (Paraguay, 2026), and the highest tally by any team from outside Europe or South America.

2 CONCACAF players to score a World Cup hat-trick after Jonathan David joined Bert Patenaude of the USA (1930) on the exclusive list.

1 direct free-kick goal at the tournament so far, scored by Canada’s Nathan Saliba against Qatar.

2 red cards shown to Qatar, making them the first Asian side to receive two dismissals in a single World Cup match.



20 years and 247 days was the age of Switzerland’s Johan Manzambi, the youngest substitute in World Cup history to score twice in a match.

4 goals scored by substitutes in Switzerland’s 4-1 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina, only the second World Cup match ever to feature four such goals.

4 goals conceded by Bosnia after the 70th minute, making them just the third team in World Cup history to concede as many late goals in a single match.

2 consecutive matches in which Czechia scored first but failed to win, a feat not seen at a World Cup since Tunisia in 2006.

ECUADOR VS CURACAO

Desperate for vital points

AGENCIES

In Group E, Ecuador and Curacao meet in Kansas City on Sunday morning, both desperate to ignite their World Cup 2026 campaigns after suffering disappointing opening-day defeats.

Ecuador are headed into the tournament riding the wave of an impressive 19-match unbeaten streak. However, their momentum hit a brick wall in a 1-0 loss to the Ivory Coast. Despite bright attacking sparks from John Yeboah and Alan Minda, Sebastian Beccacece’s side lacked the clinical edge required to convert their territorial dominance into goals.

Anchored by a sturdy defense featuring PSG’s Willian Pacheco and Arsenal’s Piero Hincapié, alongside the midfield control of Chelsea’s Moises Caicedo, Ecuador have the opportunity to bounce back. Veteran striker and captain Enner Valencia leads the attack, knowing that maximum points are an absolute necessity before a daunting final group-stage clash against Germany.

For tournament debutants Curacao, the global stage has provided a harsh but historic reality check. The tiny Caribbean nation – the smallest ever to reach the finals – put up a brave fight against four-time champions Germany, with Livano Comenencia netting a famous equaliser before the European heavyweights pulled away to secure a 7-1 victory.

While Dick Advocaat’s charges will look to stay organised in a compact defensive block and spring counter-attacks, the pressure sits squarely on Ecuador’s shoulders to turn possession into a convincing, high-scoring victory to keep their knockout dreams alive.



‘TO HAVE MY MOTHER HERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR ME’

Ana Candida Evora poses for a photograph with her grandson Marvin Junior and granddaughter Lais Sofia before departing Cape Verde for the United States on Thursday -- a journey that means far more than crossing continents. When Cape Verde goalkeeper Vozinha broke down in tears after his Player of the Match performance against Spain, it was not only the emotion of a dream World Cup debut; it was also the pain of knowing his mother could not be there to witness it. Raised by his grandparents, who have since passed away, the 40-year-old dedicated his remarkable rise to the family that shaped him. After his emotional plea captured hearts around the world, US authorities stepped in, waiving a fee of up to \$15,000 that citizens of dozens of countries were required to pay for a visa. They helped facilitate travel documents for Evora, allowing her to fly to Miami and watch her son play against Uruguay from the stands on Monday. “For me, this is very important,” Vozinha said. “To have her here, for me, it’s something special.”

PHOTO: REUTERS

