

FIFA Confirms Canada, Mexico, U.S. Automatically in '26 WCup



The FIFA World Cup trophy is displayed during an event in New York after an announcement related to the staging of the FIFA World Cup 2026, on June 16, 2022.

ZURICH (Reuters) - The U.S., Mexico and Canada, will automatically qualify for the 2026 World Cup.

Cup. The three countries won the right to host the World Cup in a united North American bid. FIFA historically has given host nations the right to play in the World Cup without going through the usual qualification tournaments, though this is the first time FIFA had to set aside three host bids.

The tournament is set to expand from 32 teams to 48 in 2026. Another three berths will be awarded to CONCACAF nations via qualifying.

FIFA released a statement Tuesday saying, "In addition, the FIFA Council confirmed that, in line with the long-standing tradition of having all hosts competing at the FIFA World Cup, as well as sporting and operational considerations, the hosts of the FIFA World Cup 2026, namely Canada, Mexico and the USA, will qualify automatically for the final round of the competition, with their slots therefore being deducted from the overall allocation of six assigned to CONCACAF."

While the U.S. and Mexico tend to qualify for most World Cups, it was good news for Canada, whose men's national team broke a 36-year drought between World Cup appearances when it qualified for Qatar in 2022. Canada lost all three of its group-stage matches.

The FIFA Council also determined its timetable for bidding for the right to host the 2030 World Cup, saying it will make its decision next year.

Alcaraz Eager to Reclaim Top Ranking From Djokovic



Carlos Alcaraz, of Spain, returns a shot to Frances Tiafoe, of the United States, during the semifinals of the US Open tennis championships, Sept 9, 2022, in New York.

PARIS (Reuters) - A near four-month stint on the sidelines saw Carlos Alcaraz lose the world number one ranking to Novak Djokovic and as the Spaniard prepares for his return to the court at the Argentina Open later on Wednesday he says he is determined to get it back.

Alcaraz climbed to the top of the ATP rankings in September after winning his first Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open but a torn abdominal muscle during the Paris Masters in November put the 19-year-old out of action.

After 20 weeks at the top, Alcaraz slipped to number two in January when Djokovic won the Australian Open, an event the Spaniard had to skip due to injury.

"Now it's a goal for me to recover number one and try to do my best in these tournaments to be back on that number. I'm looking for that."

Alcaraz did not want to put too much expectation on himself in his first tournament since November.

"I'm feeling great. I'm getting used to these conditions, to play with the best players, so at the moment I'm feeling well," he said.

"It's tough to play my first tournament after a long time for me, after four months."

"So it's going to be really, really tough to win the tournament or be close to winning. My hope is to feel that I am okay with the injury, with my body and try to play well."

Diaz Gives Milan Slender Advantage Against Tottenham

MILAN (AFP) - AC Milan took a step towards their first Champions League quarterfinal appearance for 11 years as Brahim Diaz gave the Italians a 1-0 win over Tottenham Hotspur in their last-16 first leg at the San Siro on Tuesday.

The Spaniard headed in a rebound in the seventh minute after a superb double save by Tottenham's second-choice keeper Fraser Forster and the seven-time winners kept the Londoners at bay.

Spurs, weakened by injuries and suspensions, responded positively in the first half to dominate possession but were unable to seriously worry the hosts.

Milan should have increased

their advantage after the break with substitute Charles De Ketelaere and defender Malick Thiaw wasting glorious headed chances.

Tottenham sent on Brazil forward Richarlison for the last 20 minutes and, while they were unable to avoid a first-ever defeat by Milan, they will head home still hopeful of turning the tie around and reaching the last eight.

Milan's record against Premier League clubs has been lamentable in recent years with only one win in 17 ahead of their clash with Antonio Conte's Spurs side.

But faced with inconsistent opponents who were without the suspended Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and injured Rodrigo Bentancur in



midfield and sidelined goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, Milan deservedly ended that run with a tenacious display.

The San Siro crowd did not have

to wait long to have something to cheer as Theo Hernandez got the better of Cristian Romero before powering a shot at Forster who saved well.

Bayern Edge PSG in First Leg of Champions League Tie



Paris (AFP) - Kingsley Coman scored the only goal of the game as Bayern Munich beat Paris Saint-Germain 1-0 in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday, with substitute Kylian Mbappe denied a late equaliser by a marginal offside call.

The unmarked Coman swept in an

Alphonso Davies cross eight minutes into the second half at the Parc des Princes, just as Mbappe was preparing to enter the fray on his return from injury after PSG had appeared devoid of ideas without their top scorer.

Mbappe, and the entire stadium, thought he had equalized with eight

minutes remaining when he turned in a Nuno Mendes cutback, but the goal was ruled out because the Portuguese full-back was just ahead of the last defender at the start of the move.

Bayern finished the game with 10 men after Benjamin Pavard was sent off, but it was a frustrating ending for PSG.

The French giants looked much better in the latter stages with Mbappe on the field but also needed fine saves by Gianluigi Donnarumma to prevent a bigger deficit.

PSG must hope they can turn the tie around in the second leg in Munich on March 8.

Coman, who started his career in Paris, did not celebrate his goal but it was a case of history repeating itself -- he had been the matchwinner when Bayern beat the Qatar-owned club in the 2020 final in Lisbon to become

European champions for the sixth time.

Mbappe's fitness had dominated the build-up to the game, with the France superstar initially ruled out because of a thigh injury before making a faster-than-expected return to training and being named in the squad.

He was named among the substitutes, while Warren Zaire-Emery, at 16 years and 343 days old, became the youngest player ever to start a Champions League knockout game.

But Bayern had little to be afraid of in the first half as Mbappe -- scorer of seven goals in six games in the group stage -- watched on, with Lionel Messi and Neymar badly missing his presence.

Instead Bayern, playing with a three-man central defense, controlled the game and restricted PSG to just one attempt in the first half.

Bucks Edge Celtics 131-125 in OT for 11th Straight Win



Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) blocks the shot by Boston Celtics guard Derrick White during an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023, in Milwaukee.

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Jrue Holiday demonstrated just why he's heading to the All-Star Game for the first time in a decade.

Holiday matched a career high with 40 points and made a go-ahead 3-pointer with 25.2 seconds left in overtime as the Milwaukee Bucks edged the short-handed Boston Celtics 131-125 on Tuesday for their 11th consecutive victory.

The 32-year-old Holiday shot 8 of 12 from beyond the arc — including one from behind midcourt that beat the third-quarter buzzer — to set a career high for 3-pointers.

Holiday will join Bucks teammate Giannis Antetokounmpo at Sunday's All-Star Game at Salt Lake City. It's the first time Holiday has been selected since he was playing for Philadelphia in 2013, which marks the longest gap between All-Star appearances in league history.

Antetokounmpo added 36 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists as the Bucks (40-17) moved within a half-game of the Celtics (41-17) in the Eastern Conference standings.

Boston was playing without both its All-Stars — Jayson Tatum (non-COVID illness) and Jaylen Brown (facial fracture) — as well as Marcus Smart (sprained right ankle) and Al Horford (swelling in right knee).

The Celtics still nearly earned their fifth straight win.

Boston's Sam Hauser, a Wisconsin native who had 40 friends and family members in the stands, made a game-tying 3-pointer with three seconds left in regulation to force overtime. Boston's Derrick White then scored the first five points of overtime.

The Celtics still had a five-point lead with two minutes left, but the Bucks scored the final seven points of the game. The game-ending spurt started with Holiday's go-ahead 3-pointer.

Grant Williams lost the ball on Boston's next possession, Grayson Allen got the steal and a clear-path foul was called on the Celtics with 3.2 seconds left.

Antetokounmpo made the ensuing two free throws and capped the scoring with a dunk at the buzzer.

Germany's Schmid, Norway's Tviberg Win World Parallel Golds

MÉRIBEL, (AFP) — Germany's Alexander Schmid and Norway's Maria Therese Tviberg claimed golds in the men and women's individual parallel events at the World Ski Championships on Wednesday.

After eight rapid-fire runs down the Roc de Fer piste in a knockout format, Schmid beat Austrian Dominik Raschner over two legs in the final by 0.50 seconds.

Tviberg, a silver medallist with her country's quartet in Tuesday's mixed-sex parallel team event, was faster than Switzerland's Wendy Holdener by 0.67sec over their two final runs in warm, sunny conditions.

It was Holdener's second individual medal of these worlds after she also claimed silver in last week's alpine combined event.

Norway's Thea Louise Stjernesund, Tviberg's teammate in Tuesday's action, claimed bronze in a race-off against France's Marie Lamure.

The bronze in the men's event also went to a Norwegian, in the shape of Timon Haugen, who got the better of Austrian Adrian Pertl.

French hopes of a medal in the men's event suffered a first blow when defending champion Mathieu Faivre failed to negotiate qualification, a fate that also befell Olympic champion



Germany's Alexander Schmid (BottomL) and Austria's Dominik Raschner

Clement Noel.

Alexis Pinturault, seeking a third medal on home snow after his combined gold and super-G

bronze, was knocked out of the first round by Norway's two-time junior world gold medalist Alexander Steen Olsen.