



All your insurance.
One powerful app.

Available on the
App Store

GET IT ON
Google Play


DOWNLOAD NOW


الإسلامية للتأمين
Islamic Insurance

Lopetegui names 28-player Qatar squad ahead of pre-World Cup friendly against Ireland

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Veteran Sebastian Soria and experienced defender Tarek Salman were among the notable omissions as Qatar head coach Julen Lopetegui trimmed his preliminary squad to 28 players, who will travel to Dublin for a pre-World Cup friendly against Ireland.

Lopetegui's initial 35-man squad had undergone a two-week training camp at home before the selection was reduced ahead of the trip. The team will depart for Dublin, where they face the hosts at the Aviva Stadium on Thursday.

The head coach will then announce his final 26-man World Cup squad after the friendly, ahead of FIFA's June 2 deadline for final submissions.

Qatar SC

forward Soria, 42, had been included in the preliminary list, while Salman's omission – having featured in Al Annabi's World Cup debut four years ago – came as a surprise. Bassam Al Rawi, Mohammed Waad, Mubarak Shanan, Niall Mason and goalkeeper Fahad Younus were also left out.

Teenager Tahsin Mohammed Jamshid, 19, retained his place, along with Mohammed Muntari. Veteran Hassan Al Haydos remains part of the attacking unit, alongside influential playmaker Akram Afif and striker Almoez Ali, who is back to full fitness.

At the back, experienced figures Lucas Mendez and Pedro Miguel continue to provide stability, while the goalkeeping department features Mahmoud Abunada,

Meshaal Barsham, Salah Zakaria and Shehab Ellethy.

The Ireland fixture will offer Lopetegui another opportunity to assess combinations and fitness levels, ahead of Qatar's final warm-up match against El Salvador on June 6 in preparation for the World Cup.

The 2026 edition will be staged jointly by the United States, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19. Two-time Asian champions Qatar have been drawn in Group B and will open their campaign against Switzerland on June 13 at the San Francisco Bay Area Stadium, before facing co-hosts Canada in Vancouver on June 19 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle on June 24.

After debuting as World Cup hosts four years ago, Qatar have now reached the tournament again – this time by earning qualification through the competitive route. Their passage was secured late last year with victories over Oman and the UAE.

Qatar have set a clear objective of reaching the knockout stage.

"The first target is to clear the group. We have a

chance to qualify for the knockout stage and we are ready. We will give everything to qualify. We just have to fight until the end. After we qualify, we will take one match at a time," Miguel said on Sunday during an open training session.

"All the players are excited. All the players are giving 100% in training to be in the best shape for the first game."

Qatar exited early after losing all their matches in the previous edition, but Al Annabi are determined to deliver a stronger showing this time.

"Our goal in this tournament is to perform better than in the previous one," said Homam Al-Amin.

"There won't be any easy matches; all the teams in our group are tough. We, as the Qatari national team, have to focus on ourselves."



Qatar players during a training session.

Qatar head coach Julen Lopetegui

QATAR SQUAD
Mahmoud Abunada, Meshaal Barsham, Salah Zakaria, Shehab Ellethy (goalkeepers); Abdulaziz Hatem, Ahmed Al Janehi, Ahmed Alaaeldin, Ahmed Fathy, Akram Afif, Alhashmi Alhussain, Almoez Ali, Assim Madibo, Ayoub Al Oui, Boualem Khoukhi, Emilson Junior, Hassan Al Haydos, Homam Al Amin, Issa Laye, Jassim Gaber, Karim Boudiaf, Lucas Mendis, Mohammed Mannai, Mohammed Muntari, Pedro Miguel, Rayyan Al Ali, Sultan Al Brake, Tahsin Mohammed, Yusuf Abdurisag

Record eight Arab teams set for World Cup

ABDULRAHMAN BACHIR
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The FIFA World Cup 2026 will usher in a new era in international football as it becomes the first edition to feature 48 teams, expanded from the traditional 32-team format. Co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada, the tournament will run from June 11 to July 19 across 16 host cities in North America.

The expanded format has significantly increased global participation, particularly from Asia and Africa, creating a historic milestone for Arab football.

For the first time, eight Arab nations – Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan will feature at the World Cup finals.

The group-stage draw has placed Arab teams across multiple sections of the tournament, setting up a wide range of high-profile encounters against traditional football powerhouses from Europe, South America, Africa and Asia.

From established heavyweights like Morocco and Saudi Arabia to debutants such as Jordan, the Arab presence in 2026 reflects both depth and development across Asian and African football systems.

The 2026 World Cup draw

has produced a challenging but exciting path for Arab teams, with several placed in groups containing former world champions and top-ranked European sides.

Morocco will rely on their established core led by Achraf Hakimi, one of Europe's most dynamic full-backs, while Youssef En-Nesyri remains a key attacking threat.

Saudi Arabia's hopes will be shaped by experienced midfielder Salem Al-Dawsari, a standout performer from their famous win over Argentina at World Cup 2022.

Egypt will once again look to Mohamed Salah, their talisman and one of the Premier League's most consistent forwards, to lead their campaign.

Algeria continues to depend on creative influence from players such as Riyad Mahrez.

For Qatar, home-grown talents

such as Akram Afif remain central to their attacking plans, while Iraq and Jordan bring emerging regional stars looking to make their mark on football's biggest stage.

Qatar (Group B)
Two-time Asian champions Qatar return to the World Cup after their 2022 debut as hosts. They will compete in Group B alongside Canada, Switzerland, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their campaign will test a developing side against experienced European opposition.

Saudi Arabia (Group H)
Saudi Arabia enter their seventh World Cup appearance and are drawn in Group H with Spain, Uruguay, and Cape Verde. The group presents one of the toughest challenges, particularly against two former champions.

Morocco (Group C)
Morocco continue their strong World Cup presence in Group C alongside

Brazil, Scotland, and Haiti. After their historic semi-final run in 2022, they remain one of Africa's most competitive sides. It will be the seventh World Cup appearance for the North Africans.

Tunisia (Group F)
Tunisia are placed in Group F with the Netherlands, Japan, and Sweden. Known for their defensive organisation, they face a demanding group featuring top-ranked European and Asian teams.

Algeria (Group J)
Algeria will compete in Group J alongside Argentina, Austria, and Jordan. The group includes a historic Arab clash between Algeria and Jordan.

Egypt (Group G)
Egypt are drawn in Group G with Belgium, Iran and New Zealand. Led by Mohamed Salah, they will aim to progress against strong European and Asian opposition.

Iraq (Group I)
Iraq return to the World Cup in Group I with France, Norway, and Senegal. It is one of the most challenging groups, featuring two recent World Cup semi-final sides.

Jordan (Group J)
Jordan make their historic World Cup debut in Group J alongside Algeria, Argentina, and Austria. Their opening appearance comes against world champions Argentina in a high-profile group.



FROM LEFT: Saudi Arabia's Salem Al-Dawsari, Egypt's Mohamed Salah, Qatar's Akram Afif, Morocco's Achraf Hakimi and Algeria's Riyad Mahrez.

Qatar to host Lebanon vs Yemen Asian Cup qualifier

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Local Organising Committee for Football Events (LOC) has announced that the Lebanon vs Yemen AFC Asian Cup 2027 Qualifier will take place on June 4 at Grand Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar.

Originally scheduled for March 31 in Beirut, Lebanon will now play their home match on neutral soil in Qatar, where they face Yemen's Al-Yaman as-Sa'eedin this decisive fixture jointly staged by the LOC and the Lebanese Football Association (LFA).

Starting May 31, fans in Qatar and across the region can purchase tickets for the much-anticipated qualifier at www.roadtoqatar.qa.

Upon purchase, tickets will be made immediately available on Road to Qatar, the official ticketing app for the match.

Grand Hamad Stadium will host Lebanon for the second time during their AFC Asian Cup 2027 qualifying campaign, where they previously claimed a 2-0 win over Bhutan on October 9, 2025.

Yamal headlines Spain squad, Merino recalled

MADRID: Lamine Yamal is the star name in Spain's squad for the 2026 World Cup named by coach Luis de la Fuente yesterday, which also included Arsenal midfielder Mikel Merino after his recent return from injury.

For the first time at a World Cup, the Spain Squad will not feature a Real Madrid player with Dean Huijsen dropped and veteran Dani Carvajal also excluded after struggling through an injury-hit campaign.

Merino, a favourite of coach De la Fuente, appeared as a substitute for the Gunners against Crystal Palace on Sunday in their final Premier League match, for his first appearance since January after a foot fracture.

De La Fuente also called up defenders Eric Garcia and Marc Pubill after impressive seasons with Barcelona and Atletico Madrid respectively, deciding to leave out Huijsen and Atletico's Robin Le Normand.

Along with 18-year-old Barca star Yamal, Athletic Bilbao's Nico Williams played a key role as Spain won Euro 2024 and he is in the Squad despite a season badly disrupted by fitness issues.

Yamal is a doubt for the first matches of the tournament after suffering a hamstring injury with Barca which has kept him out since late April.

The winger is one of eight Barca players in the Squad, along with midfielders Gavi, Pedri and goalkeeper Joan Garcia.

"We're coordinating with the medical departments of all the clubs," De la

Goalkeepers: Unai Simon (Athletic Bilbao), David Raya (Arsenal/ENG), Joan Garcia (Barcelona)

Defenders: Marcos Llorente, Marc Pubill (Atletico Madrid), Pedro Porro (Tottenham/ENG), Aymeric Laporte (Athletic Bilbao), Eric Garcia, Pau Cubarsi (Barcelona), Marc Cucurella (Chelsea/ENG), Alejandro Grimaldo (Bayer Leverkusen/GER)

Midfielders: Rodri (Manchester City/ENG), Martin Zubimendi, Mikel Merino (Arsenal/ENG), Pedri, Gavi (Barcelona), Fabian Ruiz (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Alex Baena (Atletico Madrid)

Forwards: Yeremy Pino (Crystal Palace/ENG), Victor Munoz (Osasuna), Mikel Oyarzabal (Real Sociedad), Ferran Torres, Lamine Yamal, Dani Olmo (Barcelona), Nico Williams (Athletic Bilbao), Borja Iglesias (Celta Vigo)

Fuente told reporters.

"The reports that we have say all the players will be ready for the first game or the second."

Gavi returned from a long absence in March after a severe knee injury and has impressed with Barcelona in the final weeks of the season.

Yamal posted a video on social media of Gavi's emotional reaction to the Squad announcement, celebrating wildly during a gym session with Barca.

Spain open their World Cup campaign on June 15 against Cape Verde in Group H, before facing Saudi Arabia and Uruguay. — AFP



Lamine Yamal

QOA announces diverse line-up of June courses and programmes

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Olympic Academy (QOA) has launched its agenda of courses and programs for June.

The agenda features a comprehensive package of specialised training programs targeting leaders, professionals, and practitioners in the sports sector, aimed at enhancing their efficiency and strengthening their capabilities in line with the

latest international standards.

Through these programs, the Academy continues its pivotal role as a leading educational platform in the region, combining academic qualification with practical training, and focusing on global trends such as digital transformation, sports institution management, and human resource development.

This reflects its commitment to the vision of the Qatar

Olympic Committee in building qualified human capital capable of steering the sports sector toward a sustainable future.

The Academy will open its June program with a distinctive course titled “Generative AI for Leaders in Sports”, held on June 3–4 in collaboration with Google Cloud.

Participants will also be prepared to sit for Google’s “Generative AI for Leaders” certification exam, a prestigious

international credential that adds significant value to the career paths of professionals in leadership, management, and innovation, giving them a competitive edge in the evolving sports labor market.

The course is expected to attract leading figures from the Qatar Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, private academies, clubs, federations, and technology enthusiasts—particularly as the global

trend accelerates toward harnessing AI in sports performance, management, and marketing.

From June 7–11, the Academy will organise a course titled “Principles of the Olympic Movement in the Sports System – Management 1”, in collaboration with Olympic Solidarity of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Delivered by Dr. Suleiman Al Balushi, academic and sports

management expert from Oman, the five day intensive program will cover foundational topics essential to understanding the Olympic Movement.

The Academy will conclude its June program with the third module of the Diploma in Sports and Olympic Institution Management, held June 22–25, under the title “Human Resource Management in Sports and Olympic Institutions.”

Canada eyeing a World Cup first in Group B campaign

PARIS: After a decade-long march up the FIFA rankings, co-hosts Canada are hoping to crown their rise by claiming a piece of World Cup history in Group B -- a first ever win.

In two previous appearances at the World Cup -- the 1986 finals in Mexico and the 2022 tournament in Qatar -- Canada have a perfect record of six defeats from six matches.

The co-hosts are aiming to buck that trend in a first round group that includes Bosnia-Herzegovina, Qatar and Switzerland.

Canada’s American coach Jesse Marsch insists his team, which includes the likes of Bayern Munich’s Alphonso Davies and Juventus’s Jonathan David, have set their sights high.

“We want to win the World Cup,” Marsch said last year.

“That may sound ridiculous, but why would we go into any tournament at any time and think, ‘Yeah, let’s see how we do, and maybe we get one win. Or can we score a goal?’”

While outright victory remains monumentally unlikely, Canada’s results under Marsch suggest that winning a



Alphonso Davies of Canada celebrates with head coach Jesse Marsch after the CONMEBOL Copa America 2024 quarter-final match on July 05, 2024.

first World Cup game is well within reach.

The Canadians surprised many by reaching the semi-finals of the Copa America in 2024, where they only narrowly lost on penalties to Uruguay in the third-place playoff.

The biggest challenge to Canada’s group campaign is likely to come from Switzerland, who are returning for their sixth straight World Cup.

The Swiss have a consistent record of navigating the group stages -- reaching the second rounds in 2022, 2018 and 2014

-- but have never won a World Cup knockout game.

They fared better at the 2024 Euros, eliminating defending champions Italy in the last 16 before suffering a penalty shoot-out defeat to England.

The Swiss possess attacking threat in forward Breel Embolo, who is likely to be flanked by Nottingham Forest’s Dan Ndoye and Sevilla winger Ruben Vargas.

Sunderland’s Granit Xhaka returns to anchor the midfield in what is likely to be his fourth and final World Cup.

Dzeko defies age

Bosnia meanwhile will feature another player gracing the World Cup stage for the final time, the 40-year-old striker Edin Dzeko returning to the tournament 12 years after his only other appearance at the 2014 finals in Brazil.

That campaign in 2014 marked the only other time Bosnia have played in a major championships. Dzeko played a key role in their journey to the 2026 finals, scoring the equalizer in a dramatic playoff win over Wales in Cardiff before the team went on to stun four-time world champions Italy.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Bosnia will look to PSV Eindhoven’s 21-year-old Esmir Bajraktarevic and 18-year-old Kerim Alajbegovic for goals.

Like Canada, Qatar are also chasing a first World Cup win, four years after losing all three group games on home soil in 2022.

Qatar’s campaign will be overseen by former Spain, Real Madrid and West Ham United boss Julen Lopetegui. — **AFP**

Co-hosts Mexico dream of quarter-final repeat

PARIS: If history is any guide, co-hosts Mexico will kick off the World Cup with every reason to be confident of comfortably advancing into the knockout rounds from Group A.

Mexico, the only country to host three World Cups, reached the quarter-finals on the two previous occasions the tournament was played on home soil, in 1970 and 1986.

The co-hosts get the tournament under way against South Africa at the Estadio Azteca on June 11 before later first round games against South Korea and the Czech Republic.

With a consistent record of reaching the last 16 in the seven World Cups spanning 1994 and 2018, Mexico have enough tournament pedigree to suggest that qualification from Group A should be straightforward.

While the 2022 tournament bucked that trend -- Mexico exited in the first round after a dismal campaign -- recent results have suggested a return to form.

Veteran coach Javier Aguirre, who led Mexico at the 2002 and 2010 World Cups, returned for a third spell in charge in 2024 and led ‘El Tri’ to victories in last

year’s CONCACAF Nations League and CONCACAF Gold Cups.

Veteran striker Raul Jimenez provides a reliable goalscoring cutting edge in attack, while 17-year-old midfielder Gilberto Mora could also emerge as one of the most talented young players of the tournament.

Mexico’s biggest challenge in Group A is likely to come from South Korea, who enter the tournament on the back of an unbeaten 16-game qualifying campaign.

An ever-present at the World Cup since qualifying for the 1986 finals in Mexico, South Korea reached the last 16 in Qatar and will fancy their chances of charting a path to the knockout rounds once again.

The Czech Republic are the lone European team in the group, and have everything to prove after a haphazard qualifying campaign that included a seismic 2-1 defeat to the Faroe Islands that led to the dismissal of coach Ivan Hasek last October. South Africa meanwhile are making only their fourth appearance at the World Cup and their first since hosting the 2010 tournament. — **AFP**

AC Milan sack coach Allegri after Champions League failure

ROME: AC Milan announced yesterday they had sacked coach Massimiliano Allegri (pictured) and a host of senior club management after missing out on next season’s Champions League.



The 19-time Serie A winners lost 2-1 at home to Cagliari on Sunday in the final game of the league game season denying them a return to European football’s leading competition.

Allegri was appointed last May, returning to the northern club 11 years following his first tenure ended, after they also failed to qualify for the Champions League.

“After the disappointment of last year, the mandate ownership set for the club was to return to the Champions League and to establish a foundation for winning consistently at the top of Serie A,” AC Milan’s owners RedBird capital said.

“It is now time for change and a comprehensive reorganisation of football operations.

“Effective immediately, we are parting ways with CEO Giorgio Furlani, sporting director Igli Tare, head coach Massimiliano Allegri and technical director Geoffrey Moncada.

“We thank each one for their hard work and dedication to AC Milan during their respective tenures.

“Further announcements regarding the next appointments will be made in due course - with the goal to be ready and well prepared for the next season,” they added. — **AFP**

Swiatek, Rybakina cruise at Roland Garros

PARIS: Four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek and second seed Elena Rybakina both eased into the second round with comfortable wins at a sweltering Roland Garros yesterday, as Stan Wawrinka bade an emotional farewell to the tournament.

Swiatek, playing at a Grand Slam event for the first time since linking up with Rafael Nadal’s former coach Francisco Roig, made short work of seeing off Australian teenager Emerson Jones 6-1, 6-2 in just 60 minutes.

The Pole is looking to regain the trophy she won at Roland Garros in three successive years from 2022-24 before losing to Aryna Sabalenka in the semi-finals 12 months ago.

Swiatek will take on Czech Sara Bejlek for a place in the last 32 tomorrow.

The third seed is among the favourites for the title after finding some form by reaching the Italian Open semi-finals earlier this month.

“I’m really happy with the way I played. It was a solid match from the beginning to the end. I technically knew how to play,” said Swiatek.

Rybakina also wasted



Poland's Iga Swiatek plays a forehand return to Australia's Emerson Jones.

little time in swatting aside Slovenian Veronika Erjavec 6-2, 6-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Rybakina, who won the Australian Open earlier this year, plays Ukraine’s Yuliia Starodubtseva next.

Elena Svitolina survived a serious scare against Hungary’s Anna Bondar on Court Suzanne Lenglen, fighting back from 3-1 down in a deciding set to win 3-6, 6-1, 7-6 (10/3). The Ukrainian, who ended an eight-year wait for a fifth WTA 1000 title in Rome earlier this month, has still never lost in the French Open first round in 13 appearances.

She failed to serve out the match when leading 5-4

in the third, but rediscovered her composure in the tie-break.

Former runner-up Jasmine Paolini was a 7-5, 6-3 winner over Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine.

China’s Zheng Qinwen, who won Olympic gold at Roland Garros two years ago, crashed out in the first round for the first time with a 6-4, 6-0 loss to Poland’s Maja Chwalinska. Zheng has slipped to 56th in the WTA rankings after a long injury absence, which forced her to miss last year’s US Open and the Australian Open in January.

Former champion Wawrinka’s final Roland Garros ended in disappointment as the 41-year-old

was beaten 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 by Dutch lucky loser Jesper de Jong.

Wawrinka, who beat Novak Djokovic in the 2015 final, is retiring at the end of the season. He enjoyed a fairytale run to the third round of his last Australian Open but could not repeat the feat in the Paris heat, despite being backed by a packed crowd on Court Simonne Mathieu.

The Swiss had originally been slated to meet Arthur Fils, but the in-form French number one pulled out of the tournament with injury and was replaced in the draw by De Jong.

Spanish teenager Rafael Jodar enjoyed a winning

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS (SELECTED)

Men (1st Round)

Matteo Berrettini (ITA) bt Marton Fucsovics (HUN) 6-7 (2/7), 7-5, 6-1, 6-2
Frances Tiafoe (USA x19) bt Eliot Spizzirri (USA) 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-3
Brandon Nakashima (USA x31) bt Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP) 6-2, 7-5, 6-2
Alex de Minaur (AUS x8) bt Toby Samuel (GBR) 6-4, 6-4, 6-2
Pablo Carreno Busta (ESP) bt Jiri Lehecka (CZE x12) 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3
Jesper de Jong (NED) bt Stan Wawrinka (SUI) 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4
Ugo Humbert (FRA x32) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3

Women (1st Round)

Daria Kasatkina (AUS) bt Zeynep Sonmez (TUR) 6-4, 6-4
Maja Chwalinska (POL) bt Zheng Qinwen (CHN) 6-4, 6-0
Elise Mertens (BEL x23) bt Tatjana Maria (GER) 7-5, 6-0
Amanda Anisimova (USA x6) bt Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah (FRA) 6-3, 6-1
Elena Svitolina (UKR x7) bt Anna Bondar (HUN) 3-6, 6-1, 7-6 (10/3)
Iga Swiatek (POL x3) bt Emerson Jones (AUS) 6-1, 6-2
Jil Teichmann (SUI) bt Liudmila Samsonova (RUS x20) 6-4, 6-4
Jasmine Paolini (ITA x13) bt Dayana Yastremska (UKR) 7-5, 6-3
Elena Rybakina (KAZ x2) bt Veronika Erjavec (SLO) 6-2, 6-2

French Open debut with a 6-1, 6-0, 6-4 dismantling of American Aleksandar Kovacevic. — **AFP**



Race winner Andrea Kimi Antonelli (second left) celebrates with second placed Lewis Hamilton (left) and third placed Max Verstappen.

Canadian Grand Prix: Antonelli regrets Russell retirement but happy with F1 lead

MONTREAL: Kimi Antonelli said he regretted the power unit failure that took teammate and title rival George Russell out of Sunday’s Canadian Grand Prix.

Antonelli described it as “a shame” to end their thrilling on-track battle, but added he was happy to grab his fourth straight triumph to open a 43-point lead ahead of his Mercedes team-mate, who led the most laps before pulling out of the race.

“It was a really fun battle, to be fair, with George,” said

the Italian teenager. “We were pretty much on the limit. It was not easy today, with the wind. It was very gusty and Turn 10 is very difficult.

“One lap, I think, he locked up and I went in front -- and then I locked up, so it was very close and it was a shame for him to have a failure because it would have been a very cool battle.

“But, we will take it. Another win. I’m very happy and massive thanks to the team.”

Antonelli said he had been

so absorbed with his battle for the lead with Russell, which enthralled the crowd at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, that he had to refocus once in the lead alone.

“When I was on my own, I was trying to really manage the tyres because I started to have some graining on the front-left tyre,” he said.

“It was just a weird feeling. The tyre was not really biting, but at the end we had the good pace when the temperature was coming in... And now, we’re looking

forward to the next one in Monaco.”

Luckless Russell, who won Saturday’s sprint race after a bruising clash with Antonelli and claimed pole for the Grand Prix, lost all power on lap 30.

Russell said he had enjoyed his battle with Antonelli and compared it to his early days in motor racing.

“I thought it was great,” he said. “I loved it. I really enjoyed it. It felt like karting days. We didn’t make any contact. It was close...” — **AFP**