

Brazil at World Cup 2026: The Neymar Gamble, Vini Jrâ??s Moment, and Why the Selecao Are Never Easy to Write Off

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Part of the Little Big Red Dot World Cup 2026 Series

There are certain things in football that feel inevitable â?? like a Brazilian World Cup squad arriving with drama, controversy, and at least one storyline that has the entire world talking. The 2026 edition is no different. Carlo Ancelottiâ??s Brazil have confirmed their 26-man squad, and before we even get to the tactics or the group stage opponents, we need to talk about the man who has dominated the headlines: Neymar Jr.

According to FIFAâ??s Group C preview, Brazil are in Group C, where they face Morocco, Haiti, and Scotland. Three very different challenges, but on paper, a path through to the knockout rounds is there. The bigger question is whether this squad â?? a fascinating blend of ageing legends, established stars, and exciting youth â?? can go all the way and end Brazilâ??s 24-year wait for a sixth World Cup title.

The Neymar Question

Letâ??s get into it. **Neymar Jr**, now 34 and playing for Santos after his Al-Hilal spell ended in controversy, has been named in the squad despite not having played for the national team since 2023. His return to the Brazil setup â?? and to Santos, the club where he started â?? captured the imagination of the Brazilian public. Ancelotti clearly believes there is still something left in that extraordinary right foot.


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Neymar Jr returns to the Brazil setup at 34. Photo: Balkan Photos / CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

The complication? Reports emerged shortly after the squad announcement that Neymar suffered a minor calf problem in training. His fitness remains a genuine question mark. Ancelotti has been diplomatic, saying they are monitoring the situation day by day. Whether Neymar makes it onto the pitch in the United States remains to be seen. But his mere presence in the squad sends a message â?? this Brazil mean business, and sentiment is not entirely absent from the calculation.

His inclusion also sparked debate. Many felt the place could have gone to a younger, fitter player. Others argued that a healthy Neymar â?? even at 60% of his peak â?? is still a match-winner. I am somewhere in the middle. If he plays and scores, the story writes itself. If he breaks down in the first week, it will be the defining controversy of Brazilâ??s campaign.

The Full 26-Man Squad

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The squad list below has been checked against AgÃªncia Brasilâ??s report from Rio de Janeiro and FIFAâ??s official tournament coverage.

Goalkeepers: Alisson (Liverpool), Ederson (Manchester City), Weverton (Palmeiras).

Defenders: Danilo (Flamengo), Wesley (Roma), LÃ©o Pereira (Flamengo), IbaÃ±ez (Al-Ahli), Marquinhos (PSG), Gabriel MagalhÃ£es (Arsenal), Bremer (Juventus), Alex Sandro (Flamengo), Douglas Santos (Zenit).

Midfielders: Casemiro (Manchester United), Fabinho (Al-Ittihad), Lucas PaquetÃ¡ (Flamengo), Bruno GuimarÃ£es (Newcastle), Danilo Santos (Botafogo).

Forwards: Vinicius JÃºnior (Real Madrid), Raphinha (Barcelona), Neymar (Santos), Gabriel Martinelli (Arsenal), Matheus Cunha (Manchester United), Luiz Henrique (Zenit), Endrick (Lyon), Rayan (Bournemouth), Igor Thiago (Brentford).

Ancelottiâ??s Approach


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Carlo Ancelotti, five-time Champions League-winning manager, now leads Brazil. Photo: Ricardo Stuckert / PR / CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Carlo Ancelotti is one of the most decorated managers in football history â?? five Champions League titles across two different clubs tell you everything about his ability to handle big egos and big occasions. His Brazil are expected to play a fluid 4-3-3, with Vinicius Jr. and Raphinha providing the attacking width, and a technical midfield trio that can adapt depending on the game state.

The midfield is where questions arise. Casemiro, at 34, has had a difficult season at Manchester United. His legs are not what they were. Bruno GuimarÃ£es from Newcastle is the natural heir â?? dynamic, progressive, excellent in both phases of the game â?? and it will be interesting to see how much Ancelotti trusts the younger man when the tournament truly matters.

The Key Players

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Vinicius JÃºnior, Brazilâ??s most dangerous attacker heading into 2026. Photo: Junta de AndalucÃa / CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Vinicius JÃºnior. The Real Madrid forward is, in my view, one of the two or three most dangerous attackers on the planet right now. His pace off the mark is frightening. His dribbling is electric. And he has added goals and consistency to his game in a way that silenced his early critics. If Brazil go deep, Vini Jr. will be the reason.



Raphinhaâ??s breakout season at Barcelona makes him a global force. Photo: Government of Catalonia / Attribution, via Wikimedia Commons

Raphinha has had a season at Barcelona that has turned heads globally. Goals, assists, and a maturity that has made him one of the best wingers in Europe. He and Vinicius on the same team is a terrifying prospect for any fullback in this tournament.

Gabriel MagalhÃ£es, the Arsenal centre-back, has established himself as one of the most reliable defenders in the Premier League. For Brazil, that defensive solidity â?? combined with Marquinhosâ?? experience â?? gives Ancelotti a strong foundation.

The Young Ones to Watch

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Endrick, 19, has been causing chaos in Ligue 1 with Lyon. Photo: Sepguilherme / CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Endrick, now at Lyon after his move from Palmeiras, is 19 years old and already causing chaos in Ligue 1. His movement inside the box is instinctive, his finishing is clinical for someone his age, and he has that rarest of qualities â?? the ability to produce moments of brilliance in big games. He will not start, but he could come off the bench and change a match.

Rayan, who has been excellent at Bournemouth in the Premier League, is another exciting young forward. At 20, this World Cup will be his global introduction. Do not be surprised if he becomes a name everyone knows by the end of the tournament.

My Take

Brazil without drama is not Brazil, and this squad has drama to spare â?? Neymarâ??s fitness, Casemiroâ??s form, the generational question of whether the old guard can perform alongside the new wave. What I do know is that the attacking talent in this squad is extraordinary. On their day, with Vini Jr. running at fullbacks and Raphinha cutting inside, they can take apart any defence in the world.

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Brazil still carries the memory of 2014, when they suffered that unforgettable 7-1 against Germany on home soil. The trophy itself has not returned to Brazilian hands since 2002, and the hunger for redemption runs deep. Ancelotti has the experience and the calm authority to channel that energy into something productive. I would not bet against them reaching the semi-finals at the very least.


2026 WORLD CUP GROUPS
GROUP A
Mexico
South Africa
South Korea
UEFA Playoff D
GROUP B
Canada
UEFA Playoff A
Qatar
Switzerland
GROUP C
Brazil
Morocco
Haiti
Scotland
GROUP D
USA
Paraguay
Australia
UEFA Playoff C
GROUP E
Germany
Curacao
Ivory Coast
Ecuador
GROUP F
Netherlands
Japan
UEFA Playoff B
Tunisia
GROUP G
Belgium
Egypt
Iran
New Zealand
GROUP H
Spain
Cape Verde
Saudi Arabia
Uruguay
GROUP I
France
Senegal
FIFA Playoff 2
Norway
GROUP J
Argentina
Algeria
Austria
Jordan
GROUP K
Portugal
FIFA Playoff 1
Uzbekistan
Colombia
GROUP L
England
Croatia
Ghana
Panama

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