



England vs DR Congo: Three Lions Face History-Making Leopards In World Cup 2026 Round of 32

Description

The **England vs DR Congo World Cup 2026** Round of 32 clash at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Wednesday 1 July could hardly carry a more dramatic backdrop. Thomas Tuchel's Three Lions arrive as Group L winners, unbeaten through four competitive fixtures this summer, while DR Congo the Leopards step into their first-ever FIFA World Cup knockout stage match. History, on both sides, is on the line.



Source: England Football official website (englandfootball.com)

England's Unbeaten Path To The Last 32

Tuchel's men have been imperious in reaching this point. Two wins – a [4-2 thriller against Croatia](#) and a routine defeat of Panama – bookended a frustrating [goalless draw with Ghana](#) in Group L. That draw cost Harry Kane a scoring record, but his overall World Cup tally still climbed to 11 goals – an England record at the tournament. Against DR Congo, Kane has another chance to move level with Geoff Hurst's four knockout-stage goals for the Three Lions, with only Gary Lineker (six) ahead of him in the all-time England knockout list.

It is not just Kane who has impressed. Elliot Anderson has been a revelation in midfield, leading all England players for line-breaking passes (30), possession won (20) and duels won (24) across the group stage. The Newcastle midfielder has been Tuchel's unsung engine, and if England are to dismember DR Congo's deep defensive shape, Anderson's ability to break lines will be crucial.

England's possession stats have been equally dominant. They ranked third globally in the group stage for average ball retention at 65.3%, suggesting a side comfortable controlling tempo. Against an African side happy to sit deep and counter, that control will need to be converted into early goals to

prevent the match from becoming a nervy, edge-of-the-seat affair.

DR Congo: The Leopards Who Shocked The World Cup With Their Presence

Let nobody underestimate what DR Congo's presence in this round means. The Leopards came through Group K - arguably one of the tournament's toughest - finishing third behind Colombia and Portugal, yet progressing as one of the eight best third-placed sides. Their draw against [World Cup 2026 favourites Portugal](#), where Yoane Wissa scored one of the tournament's finest individual goals, announced them as a team nobody wants to face.



Source: England Football official website (englandfootball.com)

Wissa is the danger man. The Newcastle United striker has scored three of DR Congo's four World Cup goals - an astonishing 75% of their total output - averaging a goal every 90 minutes in the tournament. For context, that is more goals than he managed in the entire 2025-26 club season for the Magpies. England's defence will need to be alert to his movement and clinical finishing if they are to keep a clean sheet.

Coach SÃ©bastien Desabre has drilled his side into a disciplined, low-block unit with devastating counter-attack potential. Brian Cipenga on the wing completed six dribbles against Uzbekistan on matchday three â?? a tournament high for that round â?? and offers pace and directness that will test Englandâ??s full-backs. Chancel Mbemba marshals the defence with experience and physicality. DR Congo will not simply roll over.

Key Battles And What To Expect In Atlanta

The tactical key will be Englandâ??s ability to break down a compact defence without leaving themselves exposed on the counter. Tuchel is likely to deploy a fluid front three with Kane as the focal point, but DR Congoâ??s deep shape could limit the spaces his team have exploited in previous rounds.

England are statistically superior in almost every measurable category â?? possession, chance creation, defensive solidity â?? and have a goalkeeper in Jordan Pickford who has made high-profile stops when called upon. The Three Lions have also played two matches against African opposition at this World Cup, following Ghana in the group stage, so there will be no element of surprise about the Leopardsâ?? approach.

History does offer DR Congo one thread of hope: Africa has beaten a former World Cup champion in a knockout stage before, most memorably when Morocco defeated Spain on penalties in Qatar 2022. But Englandâ??s depth, leadership and [place among the pre-tournament favourites](#) make them strong favourites to advance.

Kick-off is at 5pm BST (midnight Singapore time) on Wednesday 1 July, live on BBC One in the UK. Expect England to win, but do not expect it to be entirely comfortable â?? Yoane Wissa and the Leopards will make sure of that.

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