



England World Cup 2026 Group L: Three Lions Hunt Glory Against Croatia, Ghana And Panama

Description

When the World Cup draw placed England in Group L alongside Croatia, Ghana and Panama, most pundits exhaled. On paper, it looks manageable â?? perhaps even kind. But as anyone who has followed the Three Lions over the decades knows, nothing is ever straightforward where England are concerned.

Thomas Tuchelâ??s side arrives in North America having swept through qualifying unbeaten â?? eight wins from eight, eight clean sheets from eight. That perfect defensive record has raised expectations to heights not seen since Gareth Southgateâ??s surprise 2018 run to the semi-finals. This time, though, the squad looks deeper, the tactics more varied, and the belief more grounded. Could this finally be Englandâ??s year?



Harry Kane battles for possession against Croatia – England’s first Group L opponents on 17 June. Source: England Football official website (englandfootball.com)

Group L Fixtures

England will play all three group-stage matches across the United States:

- **Matchday 1:** England vs Croatia – Wednesday, 17 June | AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas
- **Matchday 2:** England vs Ghana – Monday, 23 June | Gillette Stadium, Foxborough, Massachusetts

- **Matchday 3:** England vs Panama â?? Friday, 27 June | MetLife Stadium, East Rutherford, New Jersey

The Opposition: Croatia

Luka Modric will be 40 years old when England face Croatia on 17 June. That the former Real Madrid maestro is still pulling the strings for the *Vatreni* at this stage is a testament to his extraordinary longevity â?? though questions about his legs in the American summer heat are entirely legitimate.

Croatia remain a disciplined, tactically astute side. Josko Gvardiol has grown into one of Europeâ??s most complete centre-backs at Manchester City, while Mateo Kovacic provides craft and intensity in midfield. The 2018 World Cup finalists and 2022 semi-finalists know how to win tight tournament games â?? and they will not be rolling over for anyone in Group L.

History adds spice to this fixture. England beat Croatia 1-0 in the 2018 group stage before suffering heartbreak in the Nations League final that same year. At Euro 2020, a Saka-assisted Raheem Sterling goal finally sealed a 1-0 England win. This latest chapter promises to be every bit as compelling.

The Opposition: Ghana

The Black Stars arrive without their most dangerous weapon. Mohammed Kudus â?? the West Ham winger who tormented Premier League defences last season â?? has been ruled out through injury, a significant blow to Ghanaâ??s attacking ambitions. In his absence, Antoine Semenyo of Manchester City steps forward as the primary threat.

Thomas Partey (Arsenal) remains the heartbeat of the Ghanaian midfield when fit, with Jordan Ayew providing experience in attack. There is emerging talent too, in the form of Kobbie Mainoo and Brandon Thomas-Asante of newly promoted Coventry City. Without Kudus, however, Ghana will need a collective effort to trouble Englandâ??s well-organised backline.

The nations last met at the [2010 World Cup in South Africa](#), where England ran out 2-0 winners. Much has changed since then, but England will once again start as clear favourites.



Gary Cahill in action for England against Ghana at the 2010 World Cup – the last time these sides met. Source: England Football official website (englandfootball.com)

The Opposition: Panama

Panama return to the World Cup for just their second time, their debut having been Russia 2018 – where they were beaten 6-1 by England in one of the most lopsided group-stage results of that tournament. Head coach Thomas Christiansen has worked to make this side more organised and difficult to break down, but the quality gap remains considerable.

Their squad is built around MLS players and Central American professionals. Panama will defend deep, look to frustrate, and hope to nick something on the counter. England’s challenge will be patience: breaking through a packed backline without conceding on the break.

England’s Key Players

Harry Kane – England’s all-time leading scorer arrives fresh from another Bundesliga title with Bayern Munich. At 32, Kane’s movement, finishing and aerial prowess remain elite. A World Cup

goal or a Golden Boot is the last major honour missing from his remarkable résumé, and he will be desperate to fill that gap in America.

Jude Bellingham The Real Madrid midfielder is England's most complete footballer, capable of arriving late into the box, driving from deep and creating from nothing. In a talented squad, Bellingham is the one opposition sides fear most.

Bukayo Saka The Arsenal winger has become one of international football's most dependable performers. Two-footed, resilient and tactically intelligent, Saka provides the creative spark on England's right flank and will relish the space on offer across American pitches.

Prediction

England should win this group comfortably. The quality gap between them and all three opponents is meaningful, and eight consecutive clean sheets in qualifying speaks to a defensive organisation that has been absent from previous England generations.

Croatia are the only side capable of causing a real upset, but with Modric at 40 and the *Vatreni* an ageing squad, England at full strength should be too strong. Panama will be a straightforward three points. Ghana, without Kudus, are less dangerous than their ranking suggests.

Predicted Group L standings: England 1st (9 pts) | Croatia 2nd (6 pts) | Ghana 3rd (3 pts) | Panama 4th (0 pts).

For more World Cup group previews, see our look at [France's path through Group I](#) and our [Group A breakdown featuring Mexico and South Africa](#).

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