

Three Lions at World Cup 2026: Tuchelâ??s Ruthless Cuts and Why England Might Actually Win This Thing

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Part of the Little Big Red Dot World Cup 2026 Series

I will be honest with you. I have been watching England at World Cups since Italia 90, and for most of those years, I watched with a mixture of hope and dread â?? the kind of feeling you get when you order chicken rice at a new stall. Looks good, smells promising, then somehow always disappoints. But something feels different in 2026. Maybe it is Thomas Tuchel. Maybe it is the squad he has built. Or maybe I have just been burned enough times that Iâ??ve stopped expecting anything â?? which, paradoxically, makes me think they might actually do it.

England head to the United States, Canada and Mexico in Group L, where they face Croatia, Ghana and Panama. On paper, a very manageable group. The real question is what happens when the knockout rounds begin. And for once, I think the answer might surprise us all.


NIKE AEROWTRAC
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The Ruthless Selections â?? And the Brutal Omissions

Thomas Tuchel named his 26-man squad on 22 May, and he did not blink. The biggest shocks? Phil Foden and Cole Palmer â?? two of the most technically gifted players in the Premier League â?? are both out. Trent Alexander-Arnold, who has been one of Liverpoolâ??s most influential players for years, also misses out. Harry Maguire, a mainstay under Southgate, is nowhere to be seen.

The speculation around these omissions has been intense. Foden has had a difficult season at Manchester City â?? injuries and inconsistency have cost him. Palmerâ??s situation is more surprising given his form at Chelsea, but Tuchel reportedly felt his tactical fit in a high-press system was not quite right. Alexander-Arnold, meanwhile, has looked slightly off-colour in his new midfield role at Real Madrid, and Tuchel apparently prefers pure fullbacks who will run channels. Maguireâ??s omission is the least controversial â?? at 33, with Tuchel preferring a high defensive line that demands pace, his time has passed.

The more eyebrow-raising inclusion is Ivan Toney, who returns to the squad after an extended absence. The Brentford man has rediscovered his best form, and Tuchel clearly values a physical, link-up striker as an option off the bench behind Harry Kane.

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The Full 26-Man Squad

Goalkeepers: Jordan Pickford, James Trafford, Dean Henderson.

Defenders: Reece James, Tino Livramento, Djed Spence, Dan Burn, Marc GuÃ©hi, Ezri Konsa, Jarell Quansah, John Stones.

Midfielders: Declan Rice, Jude Bellingham, Kobbie Mainoo, Elliot Anderson, Nico Oâ??Reilly, Morgan Rogers.

Forwards: Bukayo Saka, Anthony Gordon, Noni Madueke, Eberechi Eze, Marcus Rashford, Ollie Watkins, Ivan Toney, Harry Kane.



How They Will Play

Tuchel has brought a genuine tactical revolution to England. Under Gareth Southgate, England were organised and hard to beat, but often passive and predictable. Tuchel is the opposite. His England

press aggressively, dominate possession â?? they maintained over 70% in all eight qualifying matches â?? and transition at pace.

The base shape is a 4-2-3-1, but it morphs into a 3-2-5 in possession. The fullbacks invert into midfield, the centre-backs spread wide to form a back three, and five players flood the final third. Declan Rice is given licence to break lines and arrive late into the box. Elliot Anderson, the less celebrated of the midfield pair, is the disciplined pivot who makes it all work â?? cleaning up possession and recycling cleanly.

Harry Kane drops deep to link play, creating space for Bellingham to arrive from the No.10 position. The width is provided by Saka on the right and whoever Tuchel selects on the left â?? likely Gordon or Rashford.

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The Key Players

Jude Bellingham. At 22, he is already one of the three best players in the world. His timing of runs, his technical quality, his leadership â?? if England go deep in this tournament, it will be because Bellingham has dragged them there. I remember watching him at the 2022 World Cup as a teenager and being amazed. Now he is the main man.



Bukayo Saka has been Arsenalâ??s best player for three consecutive seasons. His ability to cut inside, his delivery, his work rate â?? Tuchel will build much of Englandâ??s right-sided attacks around him.

Harry Kane. Still the captain. Still, arguably, the most complete centre-forward in the world. He may never win the Premier League with Totteham, but a World Cup winnersâ?? medal at 32 would be some consolation.



The Surprise Package

Keep your eye on **Eberechi Eze**. The Arsenal forward has had the season of his life, and Tuchel clearly rates him highly enough to include him ahead of Palmer and Foden. His ability to carry the ball into tight spaces and his left foot could unlock defences that sit deep against England. **Noni Madueke** is another one â?? raw, direct, and genuinely quick. At a World Cup where space opens up in knockout rounds, he could be devastating off the bench.



Morgan Rogers is perhaps the wildcard of all wildcards â?? the Aston Villa man has had a breakout season, and his versatility (he can play as a No.8, a No.10, or a wide forward) gives Tuchel real flexibility.

My Take

I play football myself â?? admittedly at a level that is roughly 47 steps below international standard â?? and even I can see that this England team moves differently from its recent predecessors. There is a clarity to what Tuchel wants. The players look confident in the system. The omissions, as harsh as they are, suggest a manager who is picking for his way of playing rather than for reputation.

England have been written off and hyped up in equal measure for decades. This time, quietly, without quite believing it myself, I think they might go very far. Group L is kind. The squad has depth. The manager has nerve. Do not be surprised if Three Lions flags end up flying somewhere unexpected at the end of this World Cup.


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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