

Netherlands vs Japan World Cup 2026 Group F: Injury-Hit Oranje Open Against Resilient Samurai Blue In Dallas

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The FIFA World Cup 2026 is already several days old, but for the Netherlands, the real adventure begins today. Ronald Koemanâ??s Oranje open their Group F campaign against Japan at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas â?? a match that carries the weight of expectation for a Dutch side short of key players yet brimming with Premier League quality.

A Squad Reshaped By Injury

Netherlands fans would have preferred a fuller selection. Xavi Simons, the Tottenham Hotspur playmaker who had been one of Europeâ??s brightest midfielders, ruptured his ACL in April and sits out what might have been his coming-of-age World Cup. JurriÃ«n Timber, Arsenalâ??s outstanding right back, suffered a setback in the final weeks of preparation and officially withdrew from the squad on 8 June, ending his hopes of featuring at a first senior World Cup.

Their absences are significant. Simons had been Koemanâ??s creative catalyst through the qualifiers, while Timber had provided attacking width and defensive reliability in a back four that must now be reorganised. Their loss is compounded by the fact that the Netherlands already entered the tournament without Jerdy Schouten, another important midfield option who did not make Koemanâ??s final 26.



Koemanâ??s 26-man Netherlands squad for the World Cup, announced 27 May 2026. Image: KNVB Media

Yet the Dutch remain formidable. Virgil van Dijk leads the side at 34, in what could be his final World Cup, and the Liverpool captain cuts a determined figure. Frenkie de Jong offers midfield control from Barcelona, Ryan Gravenberch brings energy and range from Liverpool, and Tijjani Reijnders â?? who enjoyed a superb season with Manchester City â?? provides the creative link between the lines. Up front, Cody Gakpoâ??s pace and movement will trouble any defence, while Memphis Depay, who recovered from a thigh injury to earn his spot at Corinthians, plays in his third World Cup and carries enormous experience.

Koemanâ??s warm-up results painted a mixed picture. A 3-0 win over Algeria at De Kuip boosted confidence, but Netherlands struggled in their final pre-tournament friendly against fellow World Cup participant Uzbekistan in New York on 8 June, with Koeman himself noting post-match that â??the positive is that you create chancesâ?• â?? hardly a ringing endorsement. Nevertheless, history shows that Dutch sides often find their form under tournament pressure.

Japanâ??s Quiet Threat

Japan arrive as familiar World Cup protagonists. The Samurai Blue have qualified for nine consecutive World Cups and are no longer a team any opponent takes lightly â?? as Germany, Spain and Belgium have discovered to their cost in recent tournaments. Japanâ??s ability to compress space, defend resolutely and then exploit transitions with quick, technical players is world-class.

The 2026 edition does see Japan without two cornerstone figures. Wataru Endo, who retired from international football after a distinguished career anchoring the midfield, leaves a void that will be difficult to fill. Kaoru Mitoma, Brightonâ??s electric left-winger and one of the most dangerous attackers in the Premier League, is absent through injury â?? removing Japanâ??s most direct and creative offensive weapon.

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Head Coach Hajime Moriyasu will nonetheless field a well-organised, high-energy side. Japanâ??s compact defensive block â?? honed through years of World Cup experience â?? will look to frustrate Oranje, absorb the Dutchâ??s directness, and then transition quickly through midfielders who are comfortable at the highest level of European club football.



Oranje face Japan, Sweden and Tunisia in Group F. Image: KNVB Media

Group F And The Bigger Picture

Group F also features Sweden â?? who secured their World Cup berth by winning the European play-off Route B â?? and Tunisia. Netherlands face Sweden on 20 June in Houston, before the group concludes against Tunisia on 26 June in Kansas City. On paper, this is an achievable group for Koemanâ??s side, but Japan and Sweden will both demand respect.

Elsewhere at this World Cup, Group E has seen Germany hit the ground running, while Brazil and Morocco produced a tense Group C opener. The tournamentâ??s expanded format â?? 48 teams for the first time, with the top two from each group plus the best eight third-placed sides advancing â??

means even a point today keeps Netherlandsâ?? options open. But a winning start would set the tone.

It is worth remembering that Germany were amongst the pre-tournament favourites in Group E, yet even the heavyweights of world football have found this World Cupâ??s opening round a serious test. Japanâ??s tactical discipline could make this a cagey affair.

Key Battles To Watch

The midfield battle is where this match could be won or lost. De Jong versus Japanâ??s defensive midfield â?? likely a younger, high-energy pressing unit â?? will dictate the pace of the game. If Netherlands can win that battle and get the ball to Gakpo or Reijnders in space, Koemanâ??s side should create enough to win.

Defensively, without Timberâ??s overlapping presence on the right flank, Denzel Dumfries will need to carry even more attacking responsibility from right back. His energy and directness are crucial to stretching Japanâ??s defensive shape. Van Dijk, meanwhile, will need to command his area and prevent any Japanese counter-attacks from finding the goal they will inevitably search for.

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Japanâ??s front runners will probe for the moment of quality that has repeatedly shocked major nations. Moriyasuâ??s side respect no reputations, and on a warm Texas evening at AT&T Stadium, they will believe they can produce one more surprise.

For Van Dijk, De Jong and Depay â?? veterans all â?? this World Cup opening match represents far more than three points. It is the first step in what they hope will be a deep run in the biggest tournament of them all.

Netherlands vs Japan â?? FIFA World Cup 2026 Group F
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas | Sunday 14 June 2026

Date Created
14/06/2026
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