



## USA vs Paraguay: World Cup 2026 Group D Preview – Captain America Opens At SoFi Stadium

### Description

The USA vs Paraguay World Cup 2026 Group D opener kicks off tonight at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles – the host nation’s moment of truth in front of their home crowd. Christian Pulisic leads Mauricio Pochettino’s side in what promises to be an electric atmosphere under the Friday night lights in Inglewood, California, as America hosts the biggest sporting event on the planet.

With 13 players from the 2022 Qatar squad returning, and the memory of that 3-1 Round of 16 defeat to the Netherlands still fresh, this USMNT has motivation in abundance. “We’ve gained some experience, especially last World Cup, and now we have an opportunity to prove it,” Pulisic said in the build-up. Tonight is the first step.



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## Pochettino's Blueprint: High Press, Technical Demands, Home Crowd

Mauricio Pochettino's identity is built on high-pressing, technically demanding football. His 26-man squad draws from 10 different countries in its club representation – a remarkable breadth of experience for a national team. Pulisic (AC Milan), Tyler Adams (Bournemouth), Weston McKennie (Juventus), Gio Reyna (Borussia Mönchengladbach), and Folarin Balogun (Monaco) form the spine of a side that is genuinely world-class from top to bottom.

The tactical approach will be familiar to those who followed Pochettino's club sides: press high, win the ball back quickly, and transition with pace. In a 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1 shape, Pulisic roams from the left or through the middle, Balogun occupies the penalty area, and the wide players stretch defences. Adams is the engine – his pressing, defensive intelligence, and distribution are the glue that holds the system together.

“Now, you have a group of Americans playing together at a high level,” Adams said. “Let's show everyone what we're capable of doing.” Home advantage is real. With two of their three group games at SoFi, the crowd factor is enormous. Players like Haji Wright and Cristian Roldan grew up in the Los Angeles area and will feed off the energy of one of the biggest nights in American football history.

You can get context on the tournament's first five days in our [FIFA World Cup 2026 Opening Match Guide](#) – a full breakdown of what to watch across the opening round of Group Stage fixtures.

## Paraguay: The CONMEBOL Surprise Package

Do not underestimate Paraguay. Under coach Gustavo Alfaro, the Paraguayans went unbeaten in their final eight CONMEBOL qualifying matches, including wins over Brazil (1-0), Argentina (2-1), and Uruguay. They conceded just 10 goals in 18 qualifying matches – one of the best defensive records in South American qualifying. These are not numbers that a side built purely to park the bus can produce.

Their approach is built on a disciplined mid-block, sharp transitions, and set-piece threat. Striker Antonio Sanabria (Cremonese) leads the line, while Diego Gomez (Brighton & Hove Albion) provides creativity and technical quality from midfield. Julio Enciso (Strasbourg), if fully fit after a muscle complaint, would add another dangerous attacking option who showed his quality during his time in the Premier League with Brighton.

Paraguay are not here to make up the numbers – and they have already beaten this USA team. A 2-1 victory over the USMNT as recently as November 2025 in a pre-tournament warm-up will give them every confidence that Pochettino's side are beatable. The Americans responded with better results in subsequent friendlies, but that result lingers.



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## Key Battles To Watch

**Christian Pulisic vs Gustavo GÃ³mez (Palmeiras)** â?? Americaâ??s 86-cap captain against one of South Americaâ??s most battle-hardened centre-backs. Pulisicâ??s ability to find space between the lines, ghost behind the defensive block, and convert in high-pressure moments will be the most watched individual duel on the pitch. If he produces his AC Milan best, the USA have a match-winner. If Paraguay neutralise him, the home side will need goals from elsewhere.

**Tyler Adams vs Paraguayâ??s midfield structure** â?? Adamsâ?? engine â?? his pressing intensity, recovery pace, and distribution accuracy â?? is the heartbeat of Pochettinoâ??s system. When Adams

is dominant in the middle, the USA flow. When he is crowded out or forced into errors, the team stalls. Paraguay's defensive midfield organisation will be designed specifically to limit his influence.

As a wider context, [England face a similarly difficult opening group assignment](#) in Group L - another heavyweight home nation feeling the weight of expectation at this expanded 48-team tournament.

## How Far Can The USA Go?

This is America's most anticipated football moment in a generation. The expanded 48-team format opens the door to the Round of 32 for three of the four sides in Group D - but Pochettino and the players are not thinking in those terms. The furthest the USA have gone in the modern era is the 2002 quarterfinals in South Korea and Japan, and there is genuine belief in this squad that they can match or surpass that.

"Any World Cup game is a huge opportunity for us," Pulisic said. "We have three really good games to show everyone what we're all about." The first test is tonight. Get to SoFi early - this one is going to be loud, and it is going to matter.

**Match details:** USA vs Paraguay | Group D | FIFA World Cup 2026 | Friday, 12 June 2026 | 6pm PT / 9pm ET | SoFi Stadium, Inglewood, Los Angeles | Live on FOX and Telemundo (USA).

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