



FIFA World Cup 2026

FIFA to award first-ever championship rings to winners

NEW YORK, JULY 17: The winners of the FIFA World Cup 2026 final will receive "be-spoke championship rings" in addition to the iconic trophy and gold medals, marking the first time such an honour will be presented at a FIFA competition, according to FIFA website.

Inspired by a long-standing American sporting tradition, the customised rings will be awarded to the tournament champions following the final between Spain and Argentina at New York New Jersey Stadium on Sunday, July 19 (local time).

A total of 2,026 individually numbered rings will be produced to commemorate the tournament. Of these, 30 rings will be reserved for members of the winning team, while the remaining 1,996 will be made available to fans worldwide as an official licensed product.

The design of each ring will feature the FIFA World Cup trophy on one side, while the other side will be customised to reflect the identity of the champion team. Every ring will be individually numbered, custom-fitted and accompanied by a certificate of authenticity.

Immediately after the final, the winning team's captain and head coach will receive temporary championship rings during the celebrations. The final ver-



sions of the 30 winners' rings will later be custom-made and officially presented to ensure a personalised fit, creating a lasting memento of their World Cup triumph.

Defending champions Argentina secured a thrilling 2-1 comeback win over England in the semifinal, overturning a first-half deficit with Enzo Fernandez scoring the equaliser before Lautaro Martinez netted the stoppage-time winner to send the defending champions into the title clash against

Spain. The win over England sent Argentina into the World Cup 2026 final, while England's hopes of reaching their first World Cup final since 1966 came to a heartbreaking end.

Spain, on the other hand, secured a place in the FIFA World Cup final for the first time since their 2010 triumph after defeating France 2-0 with a composed performance. Lamine Yamal played a key role in the win, winning a penalty after disposing Lucas Digne, which Mikel Oyarzabal converted in

the 22nd minute to give Spain the lead.

Pedro Porro doubled Spain's advantage after the break following a fine move with Dani Olmo, while France struggled to create clear chances. Yamal had a goal ruled out for offside, and despite late efforts from Kylian Mbappe and Aurelien Tchouameni, Spain's defence held firm to secure their sixth clean sheet in seven tournament matches.

The victory booked Spain's second-ever World Cup final appearance.

DC Samba reviews preparations for Inter-Block District-Level Volleyball Tournament

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS
JAMMU, JULY 17

Deputy Commissioner Samba Ayushi Sudan today chaired a meeting under the Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyan at the Conference Hall of the DC Office to review the preparations for the Inter-Block District-Level Volleyball Tournament being organised as part of the ongoing anti-drug awareness campaign.

The meeting was attended by the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, General Manager District Industries Centre, Chief Education Officer, Chief Medical Officer and other district officers.

During the meeting, the



Deputy Commissioner conducted a detailed review of the arrangements for the Inter-Block District-Level Volleyball Tournament, scheduled to commence on July 20, 2026.

She directed the concerned officers to ensure the timely completion of all necessary arrangements, in-

cluding venue preparedness, coordination with participating teams, security, medical assistance, transportation and other logistical requirements to facilitate the smooth and successful conduct of the tournament.

Emphasising the objectives of the Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir Ab-

hiyan, the DC stressed the importance of active inter-departmental coordination and directed all concerned departments to work in close coordination to ensure the successful conduct of the tournament while promoting the message of a drug-free and healthy society among the youth.

UTT season 7: Ayhika hands Sofia Polcanova first defeat as HVR Kolkata ThunderBlades beat Ahmedabad APL Pipers 9-6

PANAJI (GOA), JULY 17 (ANI): Asian Games medallist Ayhika Mukherjee became the first player to defeat Sofia Polcanova in Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) season 7 as HVR Kolkata ThunderBlades registered their second win of the campaign with a 9-6 victory over Ahmedabad APL Pipers on Friday. Ayhika's impressive triumph over the Austrian star capped another strong all-round display from Kolkata, who climbed further into playoff contention.<

The tie swung decisively in Kolkata's favour through the middle matches after Ankur Bhattacharjee and Ayhika delivered a commanding mixed doubles victory. Eduard Ionescu, then, produced a clinical straight-games win over Payas Jain before Ayhika completed the job in style.

Staged under the aegis of the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI), UTT season 7 features 42 players from around the world, including 14 Olympians, while continuing to strengthen the Indian table tennis ecosystem through elite competition



and year-round development initiatives.

Ahmedabad struck first through Adrien Rassenfosse, who edged Ankur Bhattacharjee in a dramatic contest, winning the final two games on Golden Point after dropping the opener. Manika Batra doubled the advantage by overcoming Zeng Jian in another three-game battle, sealing the decider 11-10 after Jian had forced the contest into a final game.

Kolkata responded emphatically in the mixed doubles as Ankur and Ayhika dominated Payas and Polcanova across the opening two games to reduce the

deficit before Ionescu levelled the tie with a commanding straight-games victory over Payas. That left Ayhika needing to overcome the previously unbeaten Polcanova, and, after conceding the first game, the Indian international raised her level superbly to win the next two, including an emphatic 11-3 finish, completing a memorable comeback and securing the tie for the ThunderBlades.

Ionescu was named both the Player and Foreign Player of the Tie while Ayhika claimed Indian Player of the Tie honours. Manika earned the Shot of the Tie.

Earlier, Dream UTT Ju-

niors, Butterfly UTT's grassroots competition running alongside Season 7, saw Dabang Delhi TTC defeat PBG Pune Jaguars 6-3 to seal their place in the semifinals. The result confirmed the final four lineup, with Delhi joining UP Prometheans, U Mumba TT and Dempo Goa Challengers in the knockout stage.

Later today, Dabang Delhi TTC will take on Dempo Goa Challengers in a rematch of the 2024 final, also serving as a clash between two former winners. All Butterfly UTT Season 7 matches will be live on Star Sports Khel (Hindi), Star Sports Tamil 2 HD and Star Sports Tamil 3 HD, and streamed live on JioHotstar in Hindi, Tamil and English.

Final Score
HVR Kolkata ThunderBlades beat Ahmedabad APL Pipers 9-6

Ankur Bhattacharjee lost to Adrien Rassenfosse 1-2 (11-10, 10-11, 10-11)

Zeng Jian lost to Manika Batra 1-2 (7-11, 11-6, 10-11)

Ankur Bhattacharjee/Ayhika Mukherjee beat Payas Jain/Sofia Polcanova 2-1 (11-9, 11-3, 4-11)

Ludhiana-based couple battles odds in quest for Paralympic badminton spots

LUDHIANA, JULY 17: For Ashwani Kumar and Shabana, para badminton is more than just a sport. It is a shared journey shaped by perseverance, financial struggles and an unwavering determination to compete at the highest level despite limited resources.

The Ludhiana-based couple, both wheelchair para badminton players and international medallists, have become familiar names in Punjab's para sports circuit. Their achievements, however, have come against



considerable odds.

For several years, the cou-

ple competed using ordi-

nary basketball wheelchairs

because they could not afford specialised para badminton sports wheelchairs, each costing around Rs 75,000. Despite this disadvantage, they continued to participate in national and international tournaments, steadily building an impressive record.

Among their notable achievements are a gold medal at the Para Masters National Games in 2022, a bronze medal at the 5th National Para Badminton Championship in 2023, and multiple meda-

Ranked world No. 10, Sindhu will next take on world No. 4 Chen Yufei of China, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic gold medallist, in the women's singles semi-finals.

Sindhu booked her place in the final eight after defeating world No. 5 Han Yue of China earlier in the tournament, according to Olympics.com.

The Indian, however, faces a stern challenge

against Chen, who holds an 8-6 head-to-head advantage. Sindhu has lost her last four meetings against the Chinese shuttler, with her most recent victory coming at the 2019 BWF World Championships, where she went on to claim the gold medal. Chen has also enjoyed an impressive 2026 season, reaching at least the semi-finals in all nine of her BWF World Tour appearances and winning the Indonesia Masters in January.

The match will mark Sindhu's third semi-final appearance on the BWF World Tour this year after the Malaysia Open and Australia Open. She is yet to reach a final this season, with her last World Tour title coming at the 2024 Syed Modi International.

Sindhu is the lone Indian remaining in the tourna-



ment after Lakshya Sen and Ayush Shetty exited in the opening round, while the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty retired hurt during their first-round match. India's doubles campaign had earlier ended in the pre-quarterfinals following Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto's exit from the mixed doubles event. (ANI)

Ridhima leads by two shots in 10th Leg of Women's Pro Tour

KOLAR (KARNATAKA), JULY 17: Ridhima Dilawari got over a late double bogey to extend her overnight lead from one to two shots after two rounds at the tenth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Zion Hills Golf County. Ridhima, a three-time winner this season, had five birdies against two bogeys and a double bogey on the Par-17th. The birdie on the closing hole eased the pain as she carded a 1-under 71 after a first-round 68.

At 5-under 139, Ridhima is two shots clear of Aman-deep Drall (69-72) and Vidhatri Urs (69-72).

Vani Kapoor, winner last week, dropped as many as four bogeys, including back-to-back lapses on the eighth and the ninth, as she shot 1-over 73 and is sole fourth.

Young Saanvi Somu, armed with the experience of playing on the Ladies Access Tour in Europe, had a great start with four birdies in the first six holes. However, she lost that momentum as there were no more birdies and instead, she had



two double bogeys on the Par-3 seventh and the Par-4 12th. She parred the rest and is even par 144 with cards of 71-73.

Ridhima has been in good form this season, though she was some way off from the wins in the last two starts. The Order of Merit leader had two early birdies on the second and the fourth but gave away a shot on the eighth to turn in 1-under. A bogey on the 12th brought her to even par but

back-to-back birdies on the 14th and the 15th restored some order before she ran into a double bogey on the Par-4 17th. A closing birdie on the 18th was a soothing balm.

Young stars Kashika Misra (72-73), Mannat Brar (73-74) and Riya Jadon (73-75) were sixth, seventh and eighth respectively while five players, Ananya Datar (72-77), Jasmine Shekar (74-75), Anvvi Dahiya (76-73), Karishma Govind (76-

73) and Anvitha Narender (78-71) were tied ninth at 5-over 149.

Local star Ananti Vivek (74-76), who trains at Zion Hills, was the top amateur alongside Heena Kang (76-74) and Shreshtha Shukla (78-72). They were 6-over 150. The cut fell at 155 with 34 players advancing to the third and final round. Prominent names missing the cut included Seher Atwal, Shweta Mansingh and Durga Nitpur.