



The biggest international stars missing from the 2026 World Cup

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Although the 2026 World Cup will [go down in history as the biggest edition ever](#) featuring 48 teams and co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, the tournament's expanded format has not been enough to guarantee the presence of all the world's football stars.

Whilst fans prepare to follow an unprecedented edition in terms of the number of teams and matches, qualifiers, injuries and tactical choices have shaped another side of the World Cup: the absence of names that have played a significant part in the game's landscape in recent years.

Whilst the tournament has opened its doors to new teams and rising stars, it has closed the door on a number of stars who were hoping to write a new chapter in their international careers, or perhaps make a final appearance on the world's biggest football stage.

World Cup: stars on the outs

Absence from the World Cup is not down to a single reason: some have paid the price for their national team's failure to qualify, despite their status among the world's elite players; others have been sidelined by injury at a particularly cruel time; whilst still others find themselves left out due to technical decisions dictated by competition for the limited places in the final squads.

But the outcome remains the same: big stars will be watching the World Cup from the sidelines.

Lewandowski: a last chance lost

At the forefront of the names missing from the finals is Poland's Robert Lewandowski, the Barcelona striker and one of the most prolific goalscorers of his generation.

The 2026 World Cup represented a precious opportunity for the veteran player to embark on a new global stage, perhaps the last of his international career, but Poland's failure to reach the finals ended that dream prematurely.

Kvaratskhelia and Szoboszlai: the absence of a new generation

The absences will not be limited to veteran stars, as the World Cup will also miss one of the most exciting players in Europe in recent years, the Georgian Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, after his national team failed to secure a place.

Hungary's Dominik Szoboszlai, captain of the Hungarian national team and a Liverpool star, will also be absent, meaning the World Cup will lose one of the most prominent midfielders of his generation, a player whose influence in European football has been on the rise.

Italy: the open wound

Perhaps the most painful story remains linked to Cristiano Ronaldo, who continues to be absent from the World Cup finals, a situation that is hard to fathom given the Azzurri's status and standing among the game's elite.

Italy's absence means a host of star names will be missing from the tournament, led by goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, one of the world's finest keepers, thus continuing the crisis of a team that has won the World Cup four times but now finds itself once again on the sidelines.

Nigeria Deprives the World Cup of a Formidable Striking Duo

On the African continent, Nigeria's failure to qualify has left a clear mark on the list of absentees.

The World Cup will take place without Victor Osimhen, one of the most effective strikers in European football, as well as Ademola Lookman, who has established himself in recent seasons as one of the continent's leading attacking players.

Their absence deprives the tournament of a duo possessing speed, decisiveness and the ability to make a difference, whilst adding a new chapter to the disappointment of Nigerian fans, who are accustomed to seeing their national team feature regularly at the World Cup.

When injury decides the fate of a dream

The list of absentees was not limited to those who missed out in the qualifiers, as injuries proved a decisive factor in preventing a number of players from taking part in the tournament.

Al-Kanari had previously highlighted in [a report a list of stars who would be denied a place at the 2026 World Cup due to injury](#), including Brazil's Rodrigo, Germany's Serge Gnabry, the

Netherlandsâ?? Xavi Simons, and Frenchman Hugo Ekitike, alongside other names who have faced the harshest scenario a footballer can encounter just a few months before the start of the global event.

These cases confirm that the road to the World Cup does not end with qualification alone, but may be decided by minor physical details capable of ending a dream a player has waited years to realise.

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