

FIFA World Cup 2026: “The beautiful game” in grip of Trump and financial oligarchy

Andrea Lobo
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The 2026 FIFA World Cup opened last week across the United States, Mexico and Canada with a spectacle designed to project an image of continental unity and economic power. What the world actually witnessed was something else entirely: a tournament seized at every level—organizational, financial and political—by the American financial oligarchy and its political leadership, the Trump administration.

From the moment FIFA President Gianni Infantino awarded Donald Trump the “FIFA Peace Prize” last December, prostrating the world governing body of football before a would-be American Führer, the character of this World Cup has been unmistakable. The most popular sporting event worldwide has been taken hostage.

The inauguration of the event made this reality impossible to ignore. In Mexico City, where the opening match was played on June 11, an estimated 50,000 people took to the streets—teachers demanding an end to the privatized pension system, collectives searching for Mexico’s tens of thousands of disappeared, transportation workers, indigenous and farming communities and youth who see in the tournament not a celebration but a squandering of massive resources. Riot police met demonstrators attempting to approach the Azteca Stadium with violence.

Inside SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles a day later, the US team defeated Paraguay 4–1 before a crowd in which billionaires, celebrities and tech moguls—including Bill Gates—occupied luxury suites that sold on the secondary market for tens of thousands of dollars. Meanwhile, around 2,000 food service and concessions workers had voted 96 percent to authorize a strike over stalled contracts and fears that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) thugs would be deployed at the matches. The Unite Here union, however, rammed through a last-minute settlement whose details were not even revealed to the membership. Hospitality workers in Seattle and Philadelphia also threatened to strike.

Trump appointed himself chair of the World Cup organizing task force, headquartered in the Trump Tower. While receiving a replica of his “peace” trophy in the Oval Office, he threatened co-host Mexico with military strikes for its failure to deal with drug cartels. While the opening match was played in Mexico City, FIFA made a massive concession to Washington by assigning all quarterfinals, semifinals, and the final to US venues, along with seven of eight round-of-sixteen matches.

The ticket prices complete the portrait. For the first time in World Cup history, pricing is governed by a “dynamic” market

model—costs floating to whatever the wealthy will pay. Final tickets on official resale platforms begin at \$10,990; others exceed \$32,000; one has reportedly been listed at \$2.3 million. The average price for a given match was nearly \$600, according to Ticketdata.com.

Boston’s MBTA, New Jersey Transit and Manhattan-to-MetLife tickets were all raised to exorbitant levels. These prices are set not for working class football supporters but for the billionaires and millionaires.

That FIFA quietly slashed prices for all 104 matches and returned 70 percent of its blocked hotel rooms weeks before kickoff—but still failed to fill tens of thousands of seats so far—only highlights the injustice in a sport with hundreds of millions of avid fans.

However, the greatest outrage staining the tournament has been its transformation into a platform for imperialist arrogance, militarism and anti-immigrant chauvinism by the Trump administration, without protest by FIFA and its co-hosts.

The most substantial single act of discrimination has been the treatment of Iran. The Iranian national team has arrived at this World Cup under conditions no other nation faces: their country was being subjected to a US-Israeli bombing campaign and threatened with a kind of annihilation that can only be called genocidal. The athletes came anyway, to compete in a country that launched an illegal war of aggression against their own.

The United States rewarded this by barring Iran’s team from spending so much as a single night on US soil, despite all scheduled matches taking place in US venues. Compelled to set up their training base in Tijuana, across the border in Mexico, they must cross the border, play, and return the same day—treated not as guests but as security threats all along. Moreover, fifteen members of Iran’s technical staff, including senior federation officials, were denied US entry visas entirely, and a blanket prohibition was imposed on Iranian fans. Tijuana has given the Iranian players a heroes’ welcome, in defiance of Washington’s abuses.

In another unspeakable act of imperialist arrogance, FIFA ordered the Haitian national team—making only its second World Cup appearance—to remove from its kit a symbol commemorating the Battle of Vertières, fought on November 18, 1803, where Jean-Jacques Dessalines’s slave revolutionary army crushed Napoleon’s forces, which had been dispatched expressly to reimpose slavery.

A ruling aristocracy intent on recolonizing the hemisphere and

the world is naturally hostile to the historical memory of the Haitian Revolution, the only successful slave revolution in human history that established the first independent black republic in 1804. FIFA deemed the portrayal as too “political;” this from a corrupt bureaucracy that has turned the Cup into a promotional vehicle for Donald Trump.

The censorship of its kit was accompanied by a US travel ban for Haitian fans, an insult to the history of US sport itself: Joe Gaetjens, an undocumented Haitian dishwasher in New York, scored the goal that defeated England for the United States at the 1950 World Cup in one of its most historic victories to date.

The catalogue of humiliations by US authorities can only be partially listed:

•US immigration officers carried out body-searches of Senegalese and Uzbek players on the airport tarmac as if they were terrorism suspects.

•Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan—the first Somali ever appointed to a World Cup—was detained for eleven hours at Miami airport despite holding a valid visa and diplomatic passport, then expelled from the country. When asked about it, Infantino told supporters to “chill.”

•Swiss striker Breel Embolo, born in Cameroon, had his travel authorization revoked hours before his team’s flight.

•Iraqi player Aymen Hussein was interrogated for nearly seven hours at O’Hare; the Iraqi team’s photographer was denied entry outright.

•Fans from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Morocco and Iran also faced blanket visa denials.

•Countless African and Iranian journalists received single-entry US visas that prevent them from following their teams across all three host countries.

•The head of the Palestinian Football Association has been denied a visa entirely.

A comparison to the 1936 Berlin Olympics—already invoked by critics of the 1978 Argentina World Cup, where political prisoners in the military junta’s torture chambers could hear the fans cheering in the stadium—is not hyperbole or rhetorical. The Trump administration today wages an active war of aggression against Iran, arms a genocide in Gaza, detains immigrant workers in concentration camps and mass deports them, kills peaceful protesters, and kidnaps foreign heads of state, all while hosting what FIFA calls a celebration of “unity.”

With Trump himself a student of Hitler, the chauvinism today against foreign players, referees, fans and journalists from predominantly black nations today mirror the Nazi vilification of “inferior” races, even as the tournament like the Berlin Olympics is staged behind militarized policing approaching a state of “total war.”

The \$11 billion in expected revenue measures the extent to which the fusion of sport, state violence, oligarchic plunder and the turn to fascism has reached its logical endpoint under capitalism. Governing bodies like FIFA have become, as the WSWs has written of the International Olympic Committee, “little more than a direct tool of imperialism.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not share the ruling class’s contempt for sport. Football, at its most elemental, is a magnificent

expression of collective human creativity, skill, movement and dedication. The working class invented the game in its modern form and has driven its culture for more than a century.

As we wrote of the 2012 London Olympics, the apparently superhuman character of athletic achievement is in reality proof of “the tremendous potentialities of the human race.”

The hundreds of millions who want to enjoy that mastery deserve to do so without it being turned into an instrument of nationalist poison and oligarchic enrichment. From de Coubertin’s Olympics—designed in part to better prepare French men to “fight and win wars”—to the Nazi Games of 1936 and the Cold War boycotts of 1980 and 1984, international sport has always been refracted through nationalism and political reaction.

What is new is the ever more malevolent fusion of nationalism and commercialism at an unprecedented scale, while the organizations of the labor movement that once gave workers the collective means to resist and find genuine means of international class solidarity have been systematically destroyed or subordinated to capital.

The antidote to nationalist poison is not indifference to sport, nor contempt for fans—that posture belongs to the liberal intelligentsia, not the socialist movement. The antidote is political class consciousness: the recognition that a Mexican worker, an American worker, an Iranian worker and a Haitian worker share common material interests that no flag-waving can dissolve. Sport belongs to everyone.

The teachers and workers who took to the streets outside the Azteca Stadium; the service workers at SoFi who pushed back against poverty wages and ICE threats; the athletes, journalists, fans and federation officials subjected to the humiliations of the Trump immigration machine—all express a single underlying contradiction. The financial aristocracy has seized a sport that belongs to humanity and turned it into a vehicle for its own enrichment, imperialist geopolitics and fascism.

Under capitalism it is appropriated by the ruling elite, denied to those who cannot pay, and degraded in the process. The expropriation of the oligarchy—of FIFA, of the media conglomerates, of the financial institutions that have colonized every arena of public life—is the precondition for reclaiming sport, alongside healthcare, education and housing, as a public and democratic good accessible to all.



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