



Three Matches from Glory

As the 2026 World Cup reaches its quarter-finals, giants have fallen and Europe now rules the road to the last four.

The 2026 World Cup, held across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, has reached its most exciting moment. The quarter-finals are here, and the road to this point has been full of shocks. Some of football's biggest names went home much earlier than anyone expected.

The first great surprise was Brazil. Many fans believed the Brazilians would lift the trophy, but Norway beat them 2-1 in the last sixteen. Brazil could not break through the strong Norwegian defence, and quick counter-attacks ended their dream. Germany also left early. The German team could not pass the wall that Morocco built in front of goal, and a 1-0 result sent them home for a third World Cup in a row. Italy, the European champions, lost 1-0 to Switzerland with a goal in extra time. Their old problem, finding the net, hurt them once again.

Two teams have already booked their place in the semi-finals, and both walked a difficult [path](#)¹ to get there. France looked calm and [confident](#)² throughout. In the last sixteen, they won an early final against Portugal, 2-1. Then, in the quarter-final on the 9th of July, they ended Morocco's [fairy tale](#)³ with a clear 2-0 win. France play like a real tournament team. They seem happy to give the ball away, but they punish opponents at incredible speed. Their experience gives them a huge advantage.

Spain also reached the last four with an [impressive](#)⁴ display. They knocked the host nation, the United States, out of the

cup with an easy 3-0 result. On the 10th of July, they beat Belgium 2-1 in a tight game. Spain no longer play the old slow passing style. Today they move the ball forward quickly and aim straight for goal. Their energy in midfield gives their rivals no time to breathe.

The other two quarter-finals will decide tonight who joins them. First, Norway face England at midnight. England beat Uruguay 2-0 in the last sixteen and look in excellent form. Norway, of course, arrive after their [historic](#)⁵ victory over Brazil. England have a hard defence and dangerous wing play, but Norway, led by their brave and skilful stars, could give the English a serious test. Many people now call Norway the most dangerous team left in the competition.

In the second match, Argentina face Switzerland in the early hours. Argentina beat Mexico 3-1 and looked powerful. Switzerland, however, have become giant-killers. They defend as a team, and every player works hard. If Argentina cannot score early, Switzerland may take the game to penalties.

Across the tournament, European teams clearly rule the stage. Argentina remain the only South American side still standing. The winners of tonight's games will meet on the 15th of July, while France play Spain in the first semi-final on the 14th. The great final waits on the 19th of July in New Jersey. For every proud nation still fighting, the biggest prize in world football is now just three matches away. They still hope to [win](#)⁶ it all.

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VOCABULARY — KEY WORDS FROM THE STORY

#	WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1	path <i>noun</i>	the way or series of steps that someone takes to reach a goal	"Hard work is the only path to success in sport."
2	confident <i>adjective</i>	feeling sure that you can do something well or that something good will happen	"She felt confident before the big exam because she had studied hard."
3	fairy tale <i>noun</i>	a story with a magical, perfect, or very happy ending; often used for a surprising success	"The small team's run to the final was a real fairy tale."
4	impressive <i>adjective</i>	so good that people admire it	"The young player gave an impressive performance in his first match."
5	historic <i>adjective</i>	important in history because it is special or will be remembered	"The team celebrated a historic win against the champions."
6	win <i>verb</i>	to be the best or first in a game, race, or competition	"If they play well, they could win the tournament this year."

COMPREHENSION — ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

Why does the writer describe Brazil's exit as 'the first great surprise'?

- A-) Because Brazil had never played in a World Cup before
- B-) Because many fans expected Brazil to win the trophy
- C-) Because Brazil beat Norway 2-1
- D-) Because Brazil scored no goals in the tournament

QUESTION 2 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

What does the report suggest about how France play their matches?

- A-) They keep the ball for most of the game
- B-) They give the ball away and then attack very fast
- C-) They score many goals in the first minutes
- D-) They depend on young, inexperienced players

QUESTION 3 — SHORT ANSWER

Switzerland are called 'giant-killers'. Using details from the text, explain what this nickname means and why it fits them.

COMPREHENSION ANSWERS

My score today ___ / 3

Q1 Because many fans expected Brazil to win the trophy ✓ Correct (B)

The text says 'Many fans believed the Brazilians would lift the trophy, but Norway beat them 2-1'. The word 'but' shows the result went against what people expected, which is why it was a surprise.

Q2 They give the ball away and then attack very fast ✓ Correct (B)

The text states 'They seem happy to give the ball away, but they punish opponents at incredible speed.' This shows France let the other team have the ball and then attack quickly.

Q3 **Answer:** A 'giant-killer' is a smaller or less famous team that beats stronger, more famous teams. The name fits Switzerland because they knocked out Italy, the European champions, in extra time, and they may also trouble Argentina. The text explains that they succeed because 'they defend as a team, and every player works hard', so their teamwork lets them beat bigger names.

Explanation: A good answer must define 'giant-killer' as a weaker side that beats a stronger one, give at least one example from the text (beating Italy), and connect their success to the reason given in the text (strong team defence and hard work).

VOCABULARY — TRANSLATION & NOTES

path

Often used figuratively: 'the path to victory', 'a difficult path'. It can also mean a small track to walk on.

confident

Use 'confident about' or 'confident of'. Do not confuse it with the noun 'confidence'.

fairy tale

In sport it describes a surprising, almost magical success. Also written 'fairy tale' as an adjective.

impressive

Common collocations: 'an impressive display', 'impressive results'. The verb is 'impress' and the noun is 'impression'.

historic

Do not confuse 'historic' (very important) with 'historical' (connected to the past).

win

Irregular verb: win, won, won. You win a game or a prize, but you beat a person or team.

YOUR TURN — SENTENCE BUILDING

Mastery comes from practice. Write original sentences using today's target vocabulary.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

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