

Celebrities, concerts, and football

What transformation did American culture make in FIFA World Cup?



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INTERVIEW

With the conclusion of the 2026 World Cup, the dossier of the first 48-team edition of this competition has likewise been closed; a tournament that, in addition to technical matters, from the perspective of organizational modality, executive management, and economic approach, constitutes one of the more distinctive editions in men's World Cup history.

In this World Cup edition, the United States, as the principal host, endeavored, by reliance upon its expansive infrastructures, technologies, and economic capacities, to present an image of its managerial capability and power in hosting the globe's biggest football event. Nevertheless, alongside this ostentatious exhibition, pronounced marks of American culture were conspicuously observable in the conduct of the matches; from the extensive presence of cinema and music celebrities and performative programs added to the contests, to the emphasis upon revenue generation, television broadcasting rights, unprecedented ticket prices, and the transformation of the World Cup into an event transcending a merely athletic competition.

However, this edition of the tournament was not limited solely to executive and entertainment dimensions. Simultaneously, certain decisions and controversies, particularly in the method of engagement with the Iranian national team, raised questions concerning the degree of the organizers' adherence to the principle of neutrality and the separation of sport from politics. From the logistical difficulties and restrictions imposed upon the Iranian delegation, to the criticisms made by experts and diverse media vis-à-vis unfair treatment of certain teams, it demonstrated that the organization of a global event, in addition to executive capacity, necessitates the observance of justice and uniform treatment of all participants.

Iran Daily, in the ensuing exclusive interview with Masoud Moeini, a football expert and veteran and a former member of the technical committee of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has endeavored, while evaluating the performance of FIFA and the United States in hosting the 2026 World Cup, to address the various dimensions of this event, including the quality of infrastructures, the influence of American culture upon the atmosphere of the matches, the commercialization of football, the controversies pertaining to the Iranian national team, the future outlook of the world's paramount football event, and other related subjects. The full text of this interview follows:



Dancers perform during a ceremony for the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group D match between USA and Paraguay.
● GETTY IMAGES

IRAN DAILY: With the conclusion of the 2026 World Cup, we intend to adopt a comprehensive view of this event from executive, technical, and social perspectives. Initially, please articulate your general assessment of the level of organization of the matches in the United States.

MOEINI: As you have indicated, this subject must be examined from diverse perspectives. In the domain of infrastructures, namely the stadiums, team accommodations, and additional facilities, the organization of the matches transpired at an almost unparalleled level. One might contend that, in terms of hardware amenities, few prior World Cup editions have exhibited such opulence, magnitude, and facilities. It must be acknowledged that the United States, as one of the hosts, exploited all its material capacities for the most splendid possible organization of this event. Another point that should not be neglected is the augmentation of the number of teams from 32 to 48. FIFA, with this decision, furnished a golden opportunity for a greater number of teams, particularly in Asia and Africa,

Masoud Moeini



to experience participation in the World Cup. These teams, although unable in this edition to deliver a brilliant performance, nevertheless acquired an experience that will constitute a valuable asset for their footballing future. It is natural that the populations of these nations, likewise, experience satisfaction and delight from their national team's presence in the world's paramount football event. Alongside these points, one must also reference the fact that the American rulers and the incumbent Republican Party, by exploiting the colossal financial resources of this country, endeavored to display an image of their superiority and capability. Unfortunately, however, when this supremacism transgresses the boundaries of sport and political matters encroach upon the arena of competition, not only does this image become distorted, but it also engenders serious anxieties in global public opinion. Notwithstand-

ing these controversies, it must be conceded that the organization of the matches, from a technical and executive standpoint, was acceptable.

Many analysts maintain that the United States adopted an unprofessional behavior toward the Iranian national team and imposed difficulties and non-football-related issues upon this team. What is your evaluation of this matter?

Permit me to speak candidly; I have been present in football for more than four decades and have traveled to various countries with diverse teams, yet I have never before witnessed such treatment of a sports team. In this edition, the Iranian national team encountered difficulties unprecedented in prior editions. For example, in previous World Cups, teams were typically stationed in proximity to the match venues to afford sufficient opportunity for rest and recovery; however, in this edition, the Iranian team was compelled to traverse lengthy distances by bus or airplane and arrive at the stadium merely hours before the match.



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This procedure was criticized not only by Iranians but also by numerous international commentators and experts as one of the major deficiencies of this edition. It was expected that the host would treat all 48 teams uniformly; unfortunately, however, that did not occur, and this treatment cast a heavy shadow upon the sporting reputation of this event.

One of the salient characteristics of this edition was the predominance of American entertainment culture over the atmosphere of the matches. The extensive presence of celebrities, performative programs during halftime, and even a 25-minute concert and program during the halftime of the final match, generated the impression that the World Cup had been converted into a commercial spectacle. In your opinion, did this approach contribute to the matches' appeal, or did it impair the authenticity of football?

If we examine Qatar's experience in the previous World Cup, we observe that that country, likewise, with the expenditure of millions of dollars, employed celebrities and renowned figures to introduce itself to the world. This behavior is rooted in a natural reality; every nation that hosts such a colossal event tries to exploit this opportunity to display its capabilities and advancements. The World Cup is the world's largest football festival, and approximately two billion individuals watched the final match. It is therefore natural that the host nation wishes to present the most favorable possible image of itself. Of course, a distinction must be made between legitimate exploitation of this opportunity and excess in commercialization. There's a supremacist attitude among certain American officials, who strive to present their country as the world's greatest power. Although it is not necessarily congruent with the dispositions of ordinary American citizens, politicians exploit such an event to convey the same message in practice. Concerning the final match, although the halftime programs, including the concert performances by singers, extended to 25 minutes, in my opinion, these programs do not per se disrupt the footballing process because the final is always an exceptional match, and special programs are customarily arranged for it.



Iranian players arrive for the World Cup soccer tournament in Tijuana, Mexico, on June 7, 2026, while all of their games were scheduled to take place in the United States.
● GREGORY BULL/AP