



Washington State: Preparing for the 2026 FIFA World Cup

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Understanding FIFA

Core Functions & Authority

- Organizes premier competitions including World Cups and continental championships
- Establishes and enforces Laws of the Game in partnership with IFAB
- Regulates international player transfers and maintains global rankings
- Manages multi-billion dollar commercial rights and broadcasting agreements
- Oversees development programs across all confederations

This expansive authority creates complex cybersecurity implications for host nations, requiring coordination across multiple governmental and commercial stakeholders.

Organizational Foundation

Established in 1904 in Paris, FIFA now operates from its Zürich headquarters as the supreme governing body for international football. With 211 member associations—exceeding UN membership—FIFA wields unprecedented global influence in sports governance and commercial operations.



FIFA World Cup: A Century of Global Impact

1930: Uruguay

First tournament with just 13 teams, establishing the foundation for the world's most watched sporting event

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2026: North America

Historic expansion to 48 teams across three nations, creating unprecedented logistical and security challenges

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1998: France

Expansion to 32 teams, marking the modern era of global participation and commercial sophistication

The FIFA Men's World Cup represents the pinnacle of international sporting events, surpassing even the Olympics in global viewership and cultural impact. Since 1930, this quadrennial tournament has evolved from a modest 13-team competition to a massive 48-team spectacle generating billions in economic activity. The tournament serves as a catalyst for infrastructure development, technological advancement, and national branding for host countries. Past champions include Brazil with five titles, Germany and Italy with four each, and Argentina with three, including their dramatic 2022 victory. For cybersecurity professionals, understanding this historical growth pattern is crucial—each expansion has brought exponentially greater digital vulnerabilities and attack surfaces.

2026 FIFA World Cup: Unprecedented Scale and Complexity



Historic Tri-Nation Host

June 11 – July 19, 2026

First World Cup jointly hosted by three nations: United States, Canada, and Mexico, creating complex cross-border security coordination requirements

Massive Format Expansion

48 Teams, 104 Matches

60% increase in matches compared to previous tournaments, with 12 groups of 4 teams and expanded knockout rounds

Seattle's Strategic Role

6 Matches at Lumen Field

Renamed Seattle Stadium for the event, hosting critical group stage and knockout matches with massive regional impact

The 2026 tournament represents a quantum leap in scale and complexity. With 16 host cities spanning three countries—11 in the United States, 2 in Canada, and 3 in Mexico—the event will welcome over 5 million in-stadium fans and billions of global viewers.

2026 FIFA World Cup Qualification Status: 23 of 48 Teams Qualified

As of October 15, 2025

AFC (Asia)

8 + 1 playoff slots

8 teams qualified: Australia, IR Iran, Japan, South Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Jordan

Remaining slots to be determined through ongoing qualifiers and playoff matches.

CAF (Africa)

9 + 1 playoff slots

6 teams qualified: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, Cape Verde

3 direct spots and 1 playoff spot remain to be claimed.

CONCACAF (N. America & Caribbean)

6 + 2 playoff slots

3 teams qualified: USA, Canada, Mexico (hosts)

3 direct spots and 2 playoff spots are still up for grabs.

CONMEBOL (South America)

6 + 1 playoff slots

6 teams qualified: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay

1 inter-confederation playoff spot is available for the region.

OFC (Oceania)

1 + 1 playoff slots

1 team qualified: New Zealand

One additional playoff spot is pending for Oceania.

UEFA (Europe)

16 slots

1 team qualified: England

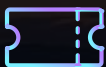
15 direct qualification spots are yet to be secured by European nations.

Washington State's Tournament Infrastructure



Lumen Field Match Venue

- Match 16 | Group Stage | Monday, 15 June
- Match 32 | Group Stage (USMNTs 2nd Match) | Friday, 19 June
- Match 52 | Group Stage | Wednesday, 24 June
- Match 63 | Group Stage | Friday, 26 June
- Match 82 | Round of 32 | Wednesday, 1 July
- Match 94 | Round of 16 | Monday, 6 July



Seattle Center Fan Festival

Primary fan gathering hub requiring extensive crowd management systems, payment processing security, and integrated emergency communication networks with city-wide coordination capabilities.



Team Accommodations

Potential Base Camps:

- Gonzaga University
- Sounders FC Center at Longacres

Team Hotels:

- Hyatt Regency Seattle
- Northern Quest Resort

All subject to team selection and requiring specialized security protocols.

Washington will host 9 Fan Zone locations from Bellingham to Yakima. Confirmed locations include Portal Container Village (Bellingham), Quincy Square (Bremerton), Boxcar Park (Everett), Port of Olympia, Pasco Sporting Complex (Tri-Cities), and Yakima Fairgrounds. Additional sites in Tacoma, Spokane, and Vancouver remain under development.

Regional Tournament Ecosystem

Western Region Host Cities

Seattle operates within a four-city Western Region cluster alongside Vancouver (BC), San Francisco, and Los Angeles. This regional structure creates interdependent security relationships requiring cross-border information sharing and coordinated threat response capabilities.

Vancouver Partnership

BC Place: 7 matches including Canadian opening fixtures. Training facilities at Killarney Park and UBC Vancouver campus create shared regional security perimeters and communication protocols.

Extended Base Camp Network

Potential additional facilities include Boise State University and University of Portland, expanding the security footprint beyond Washington state boundaries and requiring multi-state coordination frameworks.



- 📄 **Cross-Border Considerations:** US-Canada coordination requires harmonized cybersecurity protocols, shared threat intelligence, and compatible incident response procedures across federal, state, and provincial jurisdictions.

Critical Planning Assumptions

Multi-Agency Coordination

Unified operations across local, tribal, state, federal, private, and nongovernmental partners requiring clear command structures

Massive Attendance

Hundreds of thousands of visitors including international travelers placing extraordinary demands on infrastructure and services

Elevated Security Risk

Heightened concerns regarding terrorism, cybersecurity threats, civil unrest, and other safety issues due to global profile

Resource Strain

Local jurisdictions may exhaust available public safety, medical, and public health resources requiring extensive mutual aid

Infrastructure Stress

Increased demands on transit, roadways, airports, and utilities potentially leading to congestion and service disruptions

Health Challenges

Increased risk of communicable disease spread, heat-related illness, and other public health concerns in dense gatherings

Environmental Hazards

Potential for excessive heat, wildfire smoke, or severe summer storms affecting outdoor events and air quality

Concurrent Events

Tournament coincides with peak season for regional events including Independence Day celebrations and festivals

Lessons from Previous Major Sporting Events

2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar:

- 25 million cyber incidents reported during the tournament
- Massive fraud and phishing campaigns targeting fans
- 174 malicious domains identified by December
- 634.6 million authentication attempts processed by Microsoft security systems

2020 Tokyo Olympics:

- 450 million attempted cyberattacks
- 2.5 times more attacks than the 2012 London Olympics
- Attacks continued despite no audience due to COVID-19 restrictions

2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics:

- 12 million cyberattacks per day (600 million total)
- "Olympic Destroyer" malware disrupted opening ceremony operations
- Russian state-sponsored groups APT28 and Sandworm orchestrated attacks
- Malware designed to knock computers offline by deleting critical system files

2012 London Olympics:

- 165 million cybersecurity-related events logged
- 97 incidents required intervention
- 6 major cyberattacks elevated to CIO level
- Credible threat to electrical infrastructure during opening ceremony
- Power restoration capabilities tested 5 times due to attack concerns

Common Cyber Threat Types in Major Sporting Events

State-sponsored attacks for espionage and disruption

Financial crime syndicates targeting payment systems

Phishing campaigns exploiting fan enthusiasm

Infrastructure attacks on power grids and communications

Data breaches exposing sensitive information

Supply chain vulnerabilities in tournament technology

What can You or Your Agency do to be Ready?

1 Individual Protection Measures

Enable multi-factor authentication on all accounts. Update software immediately when patches are available. Use strong, unique passwords with password managers. Verify sensitive information requests through independent channels.

2 Organizational Security Protocols

Conduct security awareness training and establish response procedures with clear escalation paths.

3 Threat Reporting Mechanisms

"See Something, Say Something" applies to cyber threats. Report suspicious emails, unusual system behavior, or security incidents immediately to your IT security team. Document everything for investigation.

Spectrum Cyclone: Multi-Agency Communications Training

From July 14-18, 2025, Seattle will host "Spectrum Cyclone," a critical multi-agency communications training exercise. This groundbreaking event, the first of its kind in Washington state, will bring together emergency response agencies from across North America, including representatives from all 11 U.S. host states and a Canadian delegation.

The exercise is designed to test and enhance capabilities in key areas such as mass-crowd coordination, mitigating RF interference, and responding to sophisticated cybersecurity attacks. A highlight of the training will be the use of innovative Virtual Reality (VR) technology, allowing participants to visualize complex spectrum activity in real-time.

According to Jon Lee, a key organizer, "Spectrum Cyclone is an essential step in our preparedness, particularly as we look towards major upcoming events like the World Cup. It's crucial that our communication systems are robust and adaptable under pressure, and this exercise delivers real-world scenario drills to ensure just that." The training places strong emphasis on fostering interoperability among diverse agencies, ensuring seamless communication and coordinated response during critical incidents.



How to Stay Informed?



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Virtual via MS Teams

First Wednesday of each month

Email emd.worldcup@mil.wa.gov for invitation



**Washington
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