

# Football is not the only game being played in Qatar

Mariia Hlyten, Contributing Writer | December 11, 2022

The World Cup is the primary football event in the world, held once every four years. For the first time, a Middle Eastern country hosts a tournament of this level.

Qatar was selected to host the tournament in 2010 after four rounds of voting by the 22-member FIFA executive committee, defeating the United States in the final round 14 votes to 8.



The World Cup's typical calendar has been completely changed for the event to take place in Qatar. The tournament was scheduled for winter instead of summer for the first time in the history of the World Cup, meaning football players had only a week of rest between the professional club season and the World Cup, and there will be no break after the competition before returning to the regular season again.

For Gators, especially those who are into sports, the 2022 World Cup matters. Tighe Raymond, '23, majoring in international studies and French, has played football since he was five years old and now considers it his passion. He was trying to watch as many games as possible this year despite a hectic studying schedule at the end of the semester.

"Some of the professors put the game up on the screen," Raymond said animatedly. "It's crazy."

Qatar's preparation policy toward World Cup holding "seemed a little premature" for Raymond.

"I think it wouldn't be as impactful as it would be if it was during the summer," Raymond said. "Senegal's biggest hero, Sadio Mané got hurt two weeks before the start of the World Cup, and he was ruled out for the whole tournament."

In addition to FIFA changing the tournament for Qatar, Qatar has made many changes in preparation for the tournament. There are many critics of the ensuing forced preparation for the tournament, including the involvement of cheap labor and deaths related to the infrastructure construction.

A few weeks before the start of the World Cup, Time magazine published a lengthy article about the fact that Qatar has built seven stadiums, a new airport, a subway system, new roads and about 100 hotels in 12 years, all in preparation to support the influx of visitors that the World Cup would bring in 2022. Around the largest arena, which will host the opening match and the final, they even built a new city — Lusail.

All these expedient infrastructure projects were built by the hands of 2 million migrant workers, thousands of whom died from the record heat.

“There are hundreds of thousands of people already working there in construction and the oil industry, service industry and there are appalling abuses that have been going on for decades,” said Shanna Kirschner, associate professor and chair of political science. “Issues with the abuse of migrant laborers run throughout the entire Gulf.”

In addition to discrimination against migrant workers, other human rights violations are common in Qatar. Specifically, the rights of women in Qatar are systematically violated — they are not treated as equal to men, although the country’s constitution states the opposite. According to Human Rights Watch, women cannot be guardians of their children at any time. Women in Qatar must obtain permission from male “guardians” — fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands — to exercise many basic rights. The permission to marry, travel, get higher education or drive a car also requires a man’s approval.

Another example of the violation of rights is the attitude toward the LGBT+ community. Recently, the ambassador of the World Cup and ex-player of the Qatar national football team, Khalid Salman, said that homosexuality — which is prohibited by law in the conservative Muslim country — is “damage in the mind.”

In response to this discrimination, the captains of seven European teams were set to wear “OneLove armbands,” rainbow armbands meant to spread a message of LGBT+ inclusivity to a country where their existence is repressed, according to The Guardian. FIFA responded, saying that spreading such a message would get them ejected from the game, banning them from being worn.

The event has been fraught with protest in response, including Germany’s team covering their mouths for a photo to shed light on their forced silence and Wales waving rainbow flags at their training camp.

Iranian domestic politics have leaked into the tournament as well. After the Iranian national team did not sing their anthem in apparent solidarity with widespread unrest in their home country, their families were allegedly threatened with imprisonment and torture if the players did not “behave well.” According to CNN, the players were warned that their families would face “violence and torture” if they joined any political protest against the regime in Tehran or did not sing the national anthem.

World Cup in Spain — is also an event that “gets a lot of attention.” For participants it is “a moment to speak up about something that matters,” Kirschner said. “It took a lot of courage for those athletes to do that since the Iranian government threatened the families of the Iranian with imprisonment and torture ... There’s politics everywhere. I do think that this World Cup has highlighted some issues that are more about FIFA than Qatar specifically.”

Raymond agreed with Kirschner, saying that football should be involved with politics regarding racism, sexism and other challenging topics. He also finds it hard for himself to separate sports and politics.

“When I’m watching some games, I can’t help but think what’s going on behind the scenes,” Raymond said.

Ray Colabawalla, '25, was born in Qatar and lived there for the first nine years of his life. He is critical of all media coverage because he believes “there are some political things that I will not be able to oversee.”

He explained that people should also consider other facts while judging the situation since inequality exists – and is often intentionally maintained — everywhere.

“I don’t think the U.S. is a place to criticize Qatar about the migrant workers,” Colabawalla said. “A lot of those migrant workers were Indian.

“If anybody should be mad, it should be me!”

He remembers watching the World Cup with his brothers as a child and does not betray the tradition. Despite all issues around the 2022 World Cup, he thinks fans are “happy watching games this year.”

According to CNN, there have been fewer incidents of football hooliganism and fewer conflicts between fans due to the ban on drinking in public places in Qatar.

Ultimately, there are many angles to view the World Cup positively and negatively.

Kirschner mentioned “the sort of hypocrisy” when people pay attention to certain countries.

“It’s not that we shouldn’t be making a lot of noise about human rights violations in Qatar, but then we also need to do it with other states’ violations,” Kirschner said. “It is important for the World Cup to be truly a World Cup.”

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