

CONCACAF Gold Cup 2019: Group A Preview

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The 2019 CONCACAF [Gold Cup](#) kicks off with two North American and two Caribbean teams in Group A. [Mexico](#) is the clear favorite, but the other three teams should not be overlooked. Will Cuba and Martinique break through to the quarterfinal or will Canada finally deliver on their long-promised resurgence?

SCHEDULE

Canada vs Martinique, 7:30 PM ET

Mexico vs Cuba, 10:00 PM ET

Cuba vs Martinique, 8:00 PM ET

Mexico vs Canada, 10:30 PM ET

Canada vs Cuba, 6:00 PM ET

Martinique vs Mexico, 8:30 PM ET

Cuba

FIFA Rank/Elo Rating: 174/129

Odds of winning: Dark Horse

Cuba has enjoyed relative success at the Gold Cup, reaching the quarterfinal round three times (2003, 2013, and 2015). After not qualifying in 2017, the finished in sixth place in CONCACAF Nations League qualifying with impressive wins over the Dominican Republic and Grenada. The last two Cuban Gold Cup squads were solely comprised of domestic players, making this

year's team a bit of an outlier; eight of the 23 players are on the rosters of clubs in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Panama. Cuba is led by young attacker Luis Paradela (Universidad SC) who has five goals in six international appearances, while maintaining a similar strike rate at the club level in Guatemala's Liga [Nacional](#). Sandy Sánchez (Don Bosco-Jarabacoa) will be the likely number one at goalkeeper, having earned 13 caps. Thirty-one-year-old midfielder-defender Yasmany López (Ciego de Ávila) provides a veteran presence on the squad with 29 caps.

Cuba plays Mexico in its first match, which gets the hardest test out of the way early. The defense has struggled to prevent dynamic dribblers from slaloming through their compact final third (particularly against Haiti), but most teams would find it difficult to stop 's attackers. Manager Raúl Mederos' side will head into the second match confidently in control of their own destiny or harshly subdued on the heels of a demoralizing loss.

Martinique

FIFA Rank/Elo Rating: /89

Odds of winning: Dark Horse

earned a spot in the Gold Cup by finishing CONCACAF Nations League qualifying in third place. The country's best finish in six competition appearances is a 2002 quarterfinal showing.

Martinique is not eligible to qualify for the [World Cup](#), as they are not a member of FIFA, so the Gold Cup is essentially their biggest competition.

The bulk of the roster is comprised of players from the two dominant sides in the Martinique Championnat National (top division), Club Franciscain and Golden Lion FC, with an infusion of talent playing abroad. Defenders Jordy Delem ([Seattle Sounders](#)), Jean-Sylvain Babin ([Sporting Gijón](#)), and Samuel Camille (Tenerife) comprise a very serviceable defensive line. Domestic striker Kévin Parsemain has 34 goals in 51 caps, and will be expected to be the attacking linchpin; he finished as one of co-leading goal scorers at the 2017 Gold Cup with three tallies. There's also the trio of players based in [France](#) – Wesley Jobello (Gazélec Ajaccio), Joris Marveaux (Gazélec Ajaccio), and Kévin Fortuné (Troyes) – who are still integrating into the squad, but could make an impact.

Martinique's mission is to advance out of the group, which will likely require at least four points. If they're able to secure a draw against Canada in the tournament's opening match, it would set the tone for a brutal fight for second place.

Mexico

FIFA Rank/Elo Rating: 18/17

Odds of winning: Favorite

Mexico centers the tournament as the top seed, under the leadership of newly hired manager Gerardo "Tata" Martino. has won a record seven Gold Cup competitions, most recently triumphing in 2015, and routinely enjoys strong fan support with a decided home field advantage. The program – having once again failed to advance past the Round of 16 at the World Cup – is in a state of flux, caught between relying on the serviceable old guard and integrating young talent. This isn't the strongest Mexican side, but the expectations have been and will always be winning the Gold Cup.

As one would expect, the roster is comprised of talented players from Liga MX and abroad. Experienced mainstay veterans will carry the side through the group stage; physical striker Raúl Jiménez ([Wolverhampton Wanderers](#)), Jonathan dos Santos ([LA Galaxy](#)), captain Andrés Guardado ([Real Betis](#)), and Héctor Moreno ([Real Sociedad](#)) are included in the 23-player roster. However, Mexico was hit with the injury bug and will be without the services of dynamic attacker Hirving "Chucky" Lozano ([PSV Eindhoven](#)) and midfielder Marco Fabián ([Philadelphia Union](#)). Additionally, [Carlos Vela](#) (Los Angeles FC), Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez (West Ham), and Jesus Corona (Porto) are also skipping the tournament for various reasons. Martino is unperturbed, [telling ESPN](#), "The important absences that we have... opened the door to see

some young players that we wanted to see.”

Despite worries about the tenacity and fluidity of the attack, Mexico looks primed and ready for the Gold Cup. They defeated Venezuela, 3-1, and [Ecuador](#), 3-2, in pre-tournament friendlies, with Rodolfo Pizarro (Monterrey), [Carlos Rodriguez](#) (Monterrey), and Roberto Alvarado (Cruz Azul) looking ready to be serious contributors.

Canada

FIFA Rank/Elo Rating: 78/66

Odds of winning: In the Running

John Herdman’s squad stormed through Nations League qualifying with a 4-0 record, easily reaching the Gold Cup. Canada remains the only nation other than Mexico or the [United States](#) to capture the tournament, triumphing in 2000. While this is probably not their year to return to the winner’s circle, don’t be surprised if make a push for the semi-finals and springboard into a strong showing in World Cup qualifying.

Canada can rely on a few different players to score goals and won’t be locked into any specific playing style. Lucas Cavallini (Puebla), [Junior Hoilett](#) ([Cardiff City](#)), [Alphonso Davies](#) ([Bayern Munich](#)), and 19-year-old talent Jonathan David (Gent) can keep pace with dynamic CONCACAF attacks, whether through possession or Route 1 counter attacking; if caught on the right day, Be?ikta? striker [Cyle Larin](#) can add target man abilities off the bench. The defensive group is less reliable and relatively inexperienced, with MLS defenders Doneil Henry and Mark-Anthony Kaye playing key roles. Goalkeeper is a mild question mark, with

noting that number one Milan Borjan (Red Star Belgrade) will likely split time with the rapidly improving Max Crépeau ([Vancouver Whitecaps](#)).

This is a team that absolutely should advance, but Canada has a history of failing to meet expectations in a most dismal fashion. They have the benefit of playing Cuba in their third group play match, which could require three points. Avoiding Mexico in what could possibly be a must-win scenario is in every CONCACAF team’s best interest, so look for this side to pull off four-to-six points and advance from the group.
