

Adams says US seeks breakthrough vs elite teams before World Cup

BY RONALD BLUM
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEWCASTLE, England — Tyler Adams had just finished helping Bournemouth extend its Premier League unbeaten streak to 13 on a typically English afternoon where rain fell at the same time the sun was shining at St. James' Park.

The 27-year-old midfielder had entered midway through the second half of 2-1 win at Newcastle, his second appearance following an injury, as his fourth season in the Premier League winds down. Up next for Adams is his second World Cup, where the co-host Americans will be in the brightest of spotlights amid questions about their readiness.

Group D for the U.S. includes Paraguay, Australia and Turkey. The stark truth is the Americans have lost eight straight games against European opponents, including losses to Belgium and Portugal in March friendlies that Adams missed.

"Maybe a little bit of a wake-up call but we'll get there in the end," he said.

Adams was the U.S. captain at the 2022 World Cup and he is well aware of the underdog status, The U.S. is ranked 16th and is a 40-1 long shot to win the World Cup.

Adams says the goal is to "go as far as any team has before." The U.S. reached the semifinals of the initial World Cup in 1930 and the quarterfinals in 2002.

"That's the one that obviously everyone remembers," he said. "If we can match that and continue to improve — but for us, we need to obviously continue to try and find a way to navigate playing against big teams."

PICKING THE U.S. ROSTER

Coach Mauricio Pochettino announces his World Cup roster May 26, and the U.S. has pre-tournament friendlies against Senegal and Germany before starting the first round against Paraguay on June 12.

Adams has 52 international appearances and he played every minute at the 2022 World Cup but has struggled to maintain fitness since.

He tore his right hamstring in training with Leeds in March 2023 and reinjured the leg in his Bournemouth debut that September, requiring



Julio Cortez | Associated Press

United States' Tyler Adams runs with the ball during a CONCACAF Nations League championship soccer match between Mexico and the United States on March 24, 2024, in Arlington, Texas.

a second operation. He returned in March 2024 but was slowed by back spasms and played just three league matches in his first season with the Cherries.

Back surgery after the 2024 Copa America delayed his 2024-25 debut until late October. His current season was interrupted by layoffs after he collided heads with teammate Adam Smith in November and a tore his left MCL against Manchester United on Dec. 15.

He missed 12 of 15 league matches before entering in 70th minute of

a stirring 2-1 win at Arsenal on April 11 and then came on in the 65th minute last weekend.

"I wouldn't say anybody's a sure lock for the World Cup," Adams said. "That's one thing Mauricio's harped on since the first day he's come in, is that everyone needs to continue to play well with their clubs to have an opportunity to play with the national team."

Preparing for 2022 was far different because the Americans had to navigate 14 grueling World Cup qualifiers.

"Anyone that knows

what it was like to go through that qualifying process for '22 knows how enduring it was and at the end, the reward was playing in the World Cup," Adams said. "Whereas I feel like we've known we were going to play in this World Cup now for years and it's just — I don't want to say it's taken its toll, but playing friendly after friendly, it feels strange."

A FAMILIAR GROUP

Adams, Christian Pulisic, Weston McKennie and Tim Weah form an emotional center of a player pool that has been

together for more than a decade, going back to youth national teams.

"Tim has played with Tyler since he was, I don't know, 11," McKennie said. "A group of guys that you can count on to get along. Got on to sacrifice for each other, to put in work for each other."

For Adams, performing as a group is key to a successful tournament.

"I think it's that cohesiveness," he said. "We can't go away from the tactics and the structure and the way that we want to play and just think that, oh, I'm going to go out there and try and

have an amazing World Cup individually because it doesn't work like that. So I think it's the collective structure at the day, but individual performances play a big part."

Pochettino took over from Gregg Berhalter in October 2024 and has set a tone with relationships as much as tactics.

"It's less about the football when you're in camp, and more about how he can help you grow as a person," Adams said, "because he knows that if you're relatable, if you are personable, if you are a good person in and around the camp, you're going to perform well."

Adams said he thought Pochettino's experiments with a three central-defender formation have benefitted the team.

"In the beginning, maybe we were giving up chances easily. It didn't matter the opposition," he said. "Whereas now playing with three in the back everyone seemed comfortable. A lot of the guys in our team play with three in the back at their club so it felt almost seamless."

Adams, who is from Wappinger Falls, New York, less than 100 miles north of New York City, hasn't played for the U.S. since September. He missed the October friendlies to remain home for the birth of a son, Myles, who joined sister Quinn, then was sidelined by injuries in November and March.

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