

## E is for

**Early doors** - A wonderful piece of football jargon that was invented by ex-manager Ron Atkinson. It is used when the word 'early' is, on its own, insufficient to describe the earliness of the situation. For example, 'Germany are 1-0 down after five minutes but it's still early doors in the game'.

'Early Doors' can also be used for non-footballing situations, such as 'let's get to the swimming pool early doors in order to put down some towels and reserve some beds' Indeed, Germans use the phrase 'Die Early Doors', since the translation 'die frühen Türen' simply does not work....). It is believed that Shakespeare also used a variant of the phrase 'early doors' in his play 'Much Ado About a Dodgy Offside'.

Use of the phrase "Early doors" should not be confused with music critics discussing the work of Jim Morrison. (*ed: Anybody discussing "the Doors" should be avoided at all costs*).

**Eagles** – No, we are not going to write about the decrepit US pop band. Rather, several teams have the nickname "the Eagles" – Crystal Palace, Benfica, Besiktas, Eintracht Frankfurt and Lazio, to name a few. And it is to Lazio we go, for they sacked their official club falconer (pictured here) after he went on Instagram to share with his followers the results of successful operation - to having a prosthesis fitted to his penis in order to 'improve performance'! Lazio were horrified at the publicity – somewhat ironic given their reputation of being supported by fascists – and sacked him. A real cock up, in fact.



**Ecuador** – this will be the fifth time that Ecuador– or 'La Tricolor' as they are colourfully known – at the World Cup.

In their previous appearances they've only once got beyond the group stage and, as with most South American teams, you never really know what you will get from them. However, they may be one of the surprise packages at this World Cup since they qualified very impressively, finishing second in the South America Group, losing only 2 of 18 games – even after starting on minus three points due to fielding an ineligible player in the 2022 qualifiers. Even more impressive was that in the 18 games they conceded only 5 goals! So, if they go into their final group game (against Germany) needing only a 0-0 draw then my money is on them!

They are coached by an Argentinian, Sebastian Beccacece.

*World Cup record:* Played 13 W5 D2 L6

*Current FIFA World Ranking:* 23rd

*Star Player:* Moises Caicedo (Chelsea)

**Egels-Popens** – It's the first time we've mentioned an amateur German football team in the alphabet but a tale involving SG Egels-Popens - an amateur club from Aurich in the north-west of the Vaterland - has to be told as a warning to the world about the evils of automation.

To keep costs down the club decided to replace their groundsman with an automated lawnmower – until one November night the lawnmower went berserk, ruining their first-team pitch and making it unplayable. Seven games had to be postponed as a result.

Nobody is quite sure how it happened, only that the mower – "Robby" – experienced some kind of sensory issue, preventing it from returning to its housing and leaving it, instead, to endlessly loop around the pitch, churning up the grass to such an extent that it will now have to be re-laid. (*ed: Robby probably drank too many Jägerbombs*).

Here is the photographic evidence:



## THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

We will resist making any remarks about Germans and the lack of sensory issues. Instead, I blame Elon Musk and AI – or perhaps it was the unemployed former groundsman who vandalised the pitch and made it look like poor old Robby did it.....

**Eight and a half** – A term now popular amongst some football analysts a player may be called ‘and eight and a half’ if he plays in a position somewhere between a No 8 and a No 10 (but not a No 9, as might seem numerically logical). Translated, this means somebody who is a moderately attacking midfield player.

Alternatively, 8 ½ could be the player’s boot size (in UK measurements) or the commentator reviewing Fellini’s film of that name (*ed: not to confused with ex-Belgian international Fellaini....*)

**Environmental concerns** – For the 2022 World Cup some people raised environmental concerns about playing a tournament in Qatar. Strangely, no-one has shown the courage to question the gun-loving USA about the environmental consequences of their World Cup. Where’s Greta when you need someone to make a futile gesture?

**Egypt** – Egypt is a giant of African football, having won the African Nations Cup a record seven times. But they have never brought that success to the World Cup. This will only be their fourth World Cup appearance and they’ve never progressed beyond the Group stage. In fact, they’ve never even won a game at the World Cup! Their 0-0 draw vs Ireland at Italia 1990 was possibly the most turgid competitive game in the history of the tournament.

A bizarre fact is that Egypt had to withdraw from the inaugural World Cup in 1930 after missing their boat to Uruguay as a result of a storm in the Mediterranean.

The Pharaohs – as they are nicknamed (*ed: Mummy’s Boys would have been better!*) are led by coach Hossam Hassan. He also holds the all-time goalscoring record for Egypt, but his record is under threat from star player Mohamed Salah. Perhaps there might be some substitutions to preserve his record.....?!

*World Cup record:* Played 7 W0 D2 L5

*Current FIFA World Ranking:* 34th

*Star Player:* Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)

**Embarrassing scratching** – Yes, I know it is ten years ago and at the Euros, but it is still amusing to see the moment that Germany boss Yogi Löw could not resist any longer that irritating tickle he was feeling inside his trousers, and just had to scratch it. Sadly for him it was televised.....



**Endrick** – a Brazilian with Yorkshire parents (otherwise he’d be called Hendrick). Not to be confused with former Derbyshire and England cricketer Mike Hendrick.

**England** – Nicknamed ‘the home of football’ this will be England’s 17<sup>th</sup> World Cup appearance, and 15 of them have been hugely disappointing. As usual they breezed their way through qualification – you have to go back to 1994 for the last time they messed that up (under Graham ‘the Turnip’ Taylor).

In the spirit of post-Brexit détente the English chose a dour German – Thomas Tuchel – to lead them. With the players at his disposal England should be matching their World Ranking and, at the very least, make it to the last 4. But how many times have such optimistic words been said about England teams.....?!!

*World Cup record:* Played 74 W32 D22 L20

*Current FIFA World Ranking:* 4th

*Star Player:* ‘Arry Kane (Bayern München) – though Jude Bellingham thinks he’s the star....

**Eritrea** – one country definitely not at the World Cup is Eritrea. This is because they withdrew from the African section of qualification. The reason? They would not play any away matches as they were too afraid that their players would seek asylum. Indeed, they stopped playing away matches back in 2019 and FIFA even stopped ranking them.



## THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

However, in March the Red Sea Camels – yes, that is their official nickname! – actually played two AFCON Cup qualifying games against mighty Eswatini (*ed: that's Swaziland in old money*). On the plus side they won both matches, not only ensuring that they will be in the first round proper of AFCON, but this gave them a FIFA World Ranking of 184<sup>th</sup> (out of 211 !).

On the minus side, seven of the Eritrean team defected whilst in Eswatini, so it remains to be seen if the Eritrean government will reintroduce the away match ban.....

**European Commission** – The European Commission promotes sport in the EU by:

- developing a European sport model that integrates the economic, social, and educational value of sport
- supporting EU countries in coordinating their national sport policies, in line with the European Union Work Plan for Sport (2024-2027)
- providing funding opportunities for sport projects and initiatives through programmes such as Erasmus+
- promoting benefits of sport and physical activity through EU-wide campaigns such as the European Week of Sport or the #BeActive EU Sport Awards
- creating spaces for dialogue and sharing good practices among sport stakeholders, through initiatives like the EU Sport Forum or the SHARE 2.0 initiative

Sounds very impressive. But, in reality, it is just one unit – so about 20 people – with zero legislative power. In 2025 they spent €67 million on 350 projects. Depending on your point of view that is either a large amount of taxpayers money, or money being spread very thinly on token projects.

In addition, DG Research gives away money on football research.

Perhaps somebody from DG EAC or RTD could share details with us on what has been achieved to date e.g. a footballing example of a success story?

**Eusebio** – Many people will have heard for the first time of Eusebio when Jose Mourinho shamefully invoked his name during his defence of Benfica's racist footballer.

Forget Cristiano Ronaldo, forget Luis Figo, forget Nani (*ed.: who?*): the greatest Portuguese footballer ever was Eusebio da Silva Ferreira. Born in Mozambique he was known for his speed, technique, athleticism and his ferocious, accurate right-footed shot, making him an outstandingly prolific goalscorer and one of the greatest free-kick takers in history.

He played most of his career for Benfica, scoring 317 goals in 301 games. For Portugal he scored 41 goals in only 64 games. He led Portugal to 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 1966 World Cup and won the "Golden Boot" for being top scorer. Some say Portugal would even have won the World Cup that year, but for Eusebio being kicked into submission by England's Nobby Stiles. He also was instrumental in helping Benfica beat Real Madrid in the 1962 European Cup Final, ending Real's dominance of the tournament.

Following Eusebio's death in 2014 the Portuguese government declared three national days of mourning – how many other European footballers have been honoured thus?

**Expansion** – 1) If you think that there are too many matches at this World Cup then beware: the South American teams are trying to expand the World Cup from 48 to 64 teams for the 2030 World Cup. FIFA says it has a duty to consider ideas presented, and El Presidente Infantino stated "*every idea is a good idea*". Really?!!

Here's an idea, Gianni: Rather than expanding to 64 teams, let's just jump to 128 teams and skip all the boring qualifying tournament.

2) what my waistline is likely to do having to watch all those football matches on the tv whilst consuming beer and chips.....



Eusebio even made it onto an Ajmani stamp – how famous is that?!  
(*ed: where the hell is Ajman?*)