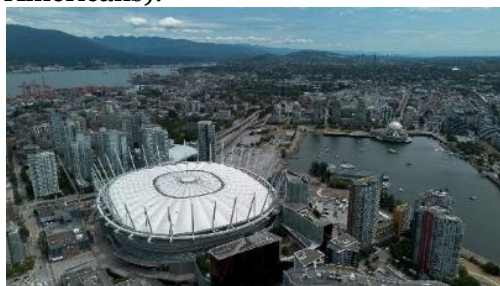


2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

V is for

Valverde, Federico – Attacking midfielder for Uruguay. At present he is also a Real Madrid player but, following his recent punch up with teammate Aurelien Tchouameni (where Federico came off worse, as he needed stitches to a head injury) he might be playing elsewhere after the World Cup. That contretemps cost him and Tchouameni a cool €500 000 club fine – each!! Not the sort of behaviour one hopes from the team vice-captain of Uruguay (though it does demonstrate the dubious temperament of South Americans).

Vancouver – seven World Cup games will be played in the picturesque Canadian city of Vancouver. The BC Stadium was built in 1983 and originally had an air-supported roof (!) but this has since been swapped for a conventional retractable roof – so weather will not be an issue for matches played here. The stadium – the home of Vancouver Whitecaps FC - holds 54 500.



Vanishing Spray – also known as **vanishing foam** this is the official name of the stuff that referees use to mark temporarily the location of free-kicks and defensive walls.



Oh, how we laughed when some genius proposed that referees should have a can of shaving cream which he should use to temporarily mark the exact location of free kicks, together with the exact distance that defenders must stand away from the ball. Six years later everybody accepts this as normal. A rare example of technology improving sport.

The spray can contains water (~80%), butane gas (~17%), a “surface active agent” or surfactant (i.e. the white stuff you see) (~1%), and other ingredients including vegetable oil (~2%). It works as follows:

The liquefied butane expands when the product is ejected from the can. The butane evaporates instantly, forming bubbles of gas in the water/surfactant mixture. The surfactant causes the bubbles to have stability and hence a gas-in-liquid colloid (foam) forms. The bubbles eventually collapse and the foam disappears, leaving only water and surfactant residue on the ground.

I bet you didn't know that! (*ed: nor did I want to know it*).

Van Dijk, Virgil – Liverpool's talismanic Dutch central defender Virgil van Dijk is the captain for Holland.

Two years ago he was probably the best central defender in Europe and in 2019 he finished runner up (to Lionel Messi) in the 2019 “Ballon d'Or” – the first defensive player to do so since Buffon in 2006.

However, his superpowers have waned dramatically this season and, at age 34, he is looking past it. It thus remains to be seen if he will be able to raise his game for the World Cup, or whether his decline is permanent (which will not bode well for Holland at this tournament).



Van Persie, Shaqueel – Robin van Persie was a star player for Holland. He even helped Manchester United win their last league title many seasons ago. His son has now begun a promising football career, playing for Feyenoord. We do hope that he is selected for the Holland squad as it will be the first opportunity for many of us to see the only white person to be named Shaqueel. We assume that he was named after famous basketball player Shaquille O'Neal – if so, it's a shame that his dad didn't spell the name correctly. Footballers, eh.....



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Vegetarians – If you need another reason to dislike Thomas Tuchel or Julian Nagelsmann then you should know that they are vegetarians. In contrast, Didier Deschamps, Luis de la Fuente and Pep Guardiola are all voracious consumers of cuddly animal meat and endangered sea creatures, whilst Sir Alex Ferguson eats raw meat and Paolo Conte eats babies

Venezuela – Venezuela is the only one of the ten CONMEBOL (*ed: South American*) countries never to have qualified for a World Cup finals. Probably as well that they didn't qualify for USA2026 as Donald would probably have shot down the team plane.

They'll definitely be one of the countries voting for the World Cup to be expanded to 64 teams....

Venues – There will be a total of sixteen cities spread across three countries as host venues for games at this World Cup – two in Canada, three in Mexico and eleven in the USA. Only the three grounds in Mexico are dedicated football stadiums.

Interestingly, although the USA hosted the World Cup in 1994 none of the nine venues used for that tournament will be used this time.

US gridiron football is played on a pitch that is 48.7m wide. Since this is considerably less than the 68m for international football matches (plus significant additional space on the touchline in order to get in those all-important advertising boards) this means that in the eight US stadia that normally host gridiron football grounds their pitches needed to be widened and, consequently, seats have been removed: in some cases up to ten rows.

Just as importantly, those venues that have artificial grass surfaces will have to replace them with real grass in advance of the World Cup, giving it adequate time to grow naturally.

VAR (Video Assistant Referee) – The three worst words in the English language are “rail replacement bus” (*ed: we look forward to you ranting about this*). But a close second is “Video Assistant Referee”. The idea of having someone watching slow motion replays in order to eliminate errors made by the referee sounded good when first used at the 2019 World Cup. But it has been a disaster. Why?

First and foremost, it has not eliminated errors but, instead, has generated lots of anger and frustration through lack of consistency in its use and interpretation of incidents – a ball hitting a player's hand when seen in super slow motion can look far more sinister than when it happens in real time.



Secondly, for something that is supposed to spot “clear and obvious” errors it often takes several minutes for the Video Assistant Referee to make a decision. Not only is this extremely frustrating for fans in the stadium who are not shown the images under review but it contradicts the spirit of the rule: something that is clear and obvious should not need five minutes of adjudication, obviously.....

But VAR is here to stay. FIFA President Infantile himself says “*rather than taking anything away VAR adds another layer to the game*” - there speaks the voice of somebody who is not a real football fan : waiting five minutes to learn if one can celebrate a goal only “adds a layer” if you are watching the game in your VIP box and can watch the replays on the screen whilst sipping wine. For the rest of the fans in the stadium it is killing football as a spectator sport.

Vini Jr - Vinícius José Paixão de Oliveira Júnior is something of a mouthful, so it is not surprising that the Brazilian winger chooses to have Vini Jr on his shirt!! Sadly, the Real Madrid star is becoming as famous for incidents of racial abuse against him as for his football. And since I've never been the subject of racist slurs I cannot judge how hurtful these can be (*ed: please do not send in slurs*) so it would be trite to simply suggest that he turns the other cheek and ignores them. Fortunately for Vini the World Cup is being played in a country where racism was resolved in 1865.



Vini – a man who happily dishes out abuse, but is less keen to receive it.....

Focussing on his footballing skills Vini is an exciting winger. Surprisingly, for Brazil he does not score many goals – having only got 8 in 45 international appearances.

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Von der Leyen, Ursula – For those of you who are not experts on EU politics Ursula von der Leyen (abbreviated to UvdL or, to use her wrestling name: “the **Undividual**”) is the President of the European Commission – the senior ‘unelected Brussels bureaucrat’ or the Greatest Woman in Europe (depending on your personal opinions).

Little is known of Ursula’s footballing loyalties. There are no photos of her in a football kit, or even receiving a football shirt from a celebrity visitor. Not even the slimeball Gianni Infantile appears to have visited her. However, we can deduce that as somebody who made her political career in Niedersachsen (that’s Lower Saxony to the rest of us) she cannot possibly support Bayern München, as that is based in enemy territory. Equally clear, she is an intelligent woman – and so won’t be a fan of the largest town in the county, Hannover 96 (or Hannover 69 as I prefer to think of them). The most successful team in Niedersachsen is FC Wolfsburg - though they just got relegated. Even worse, since they are the VW works team, supporting them would require that she drives a VW (a problem that Nicklas Bendtner faced when he played for them!) and no EU Commissioner would be seen dead in anything other than a Mercedes.

A clue to her actual football loyalties may be found in the names of UVdL’s seven children – they are all named after players from Borussia Mönchengladbach’s successful squad of the 1970s (Berti, Rainer, Uli, Jupp, Allan, Gunter and Hennes). She is undoubtedly a foal (which is not a sexist comment, but the nickname of Gladbach fans).

Voodoo – Unter the letter ‘H’ we suggested that the nickname of the Haitian team is ‘the voodoo boys’ (it is, in fact, the Grenadiers) but voodoo did come up during qualification for this World Cup - though in Africa, not Haiti. In November 2025 after Nigeria lost to the Democratic Republic of Congo on penalties in a play-off game Nigeria’s coach Eric Chelle alleged that DR Congo’s players were practicing “voodoo” during their penalty shootout victory.

We all know that this is ridiculous since such actions would be detected by VAR. How would you get the sacrificial chickens undetected onto the pitch? Nonetheless, we await Mikel Arteta to use voodoo as an excuse for an Arsenal defeat.....

VVV – Amongst the footballing giants of Europe we have VVV (*ok, they’re not that great, but we are struggling to fill the letter “v”!*). Venlose Voetbal Vereniging to give them their full name (and not to be confused with Vrije Vrouwen Vereniging) are the hometown team of that Dutch footballing hotbed of Venlo. The club was established in 1903 and has some true Dutch icons like Jan Klaassens, Faas Wilkes, Stan Valckx and Jos Luhukay. (*ed; who?*).

VVV plays at the De Koel stadium, named because it is built on the slagheap of a former coal mine. Green eco-warriors are now demanding that the ground be renamed “the eco-friendly biodegradable stadium”.