

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

U is for

UEFA – The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) are the bunch of tossers based in a village in Switzerland who are destroying the game in Europe by simultaneously letting rich teams in a few countries dominate leagues and also letting every small country in Europe decide the format of the European Championships in a way that maximises the number of games they play.

It takes a incompetence of the highest ability to achieve these two, seemingly opposite, bad things simultaneously.

Ugarte, Manuel – One of the key players for Uruguay will be Manuel Ugarte. A defensive midfielder, the 25-year old is also a salutary lesson in how a player can look great for one team but not for another. When Manchester United signed him from PSG for €50 million he looked like a world-beater. However, in the Premier League he has looked more like Manuel from Fawlty Towers. Decent performances by him at the World Cup will guarantee that United will sell him.

Ujpest Dosza – the Hungarian team, from Budapest (the Pest bit, as you might have guessed from the name) are, to the best of my knowledge, the most successful club side with a name beginning with the letter “U”. They have won the Hungarian title 20 times (though not since they changed their name to Ujpest FC in 1998) and appeared in a European final – the Inter City Fairs Cup in 1969 where they have the dubious honour of having lost to Newcastle United.

Umbrellas - we commented earlier about the lack of suitable rainwear for managers. However, it is completely unacceptable to use an umbrella. One manager who defied this rule was Steve McClaren when he was England manager. When the team lost the result was newspaper headlines calling him “the wally with a broly”. After that no manager in England has ever dared to come near to a football ground with an umbrella....



Umbro - Once a classic brand of football kit, the company was founded in 1924 in Manchester by the Humphries brothers: the name being a portmanteau of um (from Humphries) and bro (brothers).

The England team wore Umbro kit when it won the World Cup in 1966: In fact, of the 16 teams that competed at that World Cup, 15 wore kit manufactured by Umbro, the only exception being the USSR (ed: how did Adidas allow that?!).

Sadly, Umbro lost the ‘kit wars’ to Nike, Adidas and Puma a long time ago. So for this World Cup the only team wearing umbro kits will be Congo.

Undecided games – it is common for football matches to end as draws. Equally, teams can finish level in a league. However, in a knockout tournament a draw or tied teams is not good! Until the 1962 World Cup there would be replays to resolve undecided games.

It was then agreed that, for the 1962 World Cup ties would be decided by the drawing of lots (ie a posh way of tossing a coin) to pick a winner. This changed to penalty shootouts in 1970.

No matches at either the 1962 or 1966 were actually decided by the drawing of lots – however, it has featured twice in World Cup history. In the qualifying stage of the 1954 World Cup UEFA had a European group that contained only two teams: Turkey and Spain. They played each other twice and both teams won once. Thus the group was decided by drawing lots. Turkey won. (ed: plucking a turkey might have been more appropriate).

The second time lots were drawn was at the 1990 World Cup in Italy. In the Group Stage Holland and Ireland finished with an identical record. Both teams had qualified but it was necessary to rank them for deciding who they would play in the next round.

Surely there must be a more objective way of taking decisions – beer pong perhaps? Or what about selecting the team that paid the fewest bribes to FIFA??

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Underlap – We mentioned previously the ‘overlap’, when a full-back overtakes a winger. In recent years we have seen the creation of the term ‘underlap’ to describe when a full-back runs inside a winger who is in possession. In part, the underlap is a result of the modern trend of having players playing on their ‘wrong’ side (left footed players playing right back and vice versa) which means that they prefer to cut inside when attacking. Whatever happened to two-footed players?.....

Ungentlemanly conduct – Once upon a time footballers were gentlemen. They opened doors for ladies, doffed their hats to their superiors, never displayed tattoos and would never spit in public. In such an era the rulemakers of football defined certain types of infringement as ‘ungentlemanly conduct’, the basic premise being that a gentleman simply wouldn’t foul an opponent or cheat in order to win.

The concept of ‘ungentlemanly conduct’ disappeared around the time that football was introduced into Italy – or, indeed, when UEFA and FIFA were taken over by people who were not gentlemen. However, it took the boys in the FIFA Bunker until 1997 to abolish the term and replace it with *Unsporting Behaviour*. (see below).

Union Berlin – “the Iron Ones” (*die Eisernen*) feature here by being the first club in a “big” league to appoint a female coach. The lucky lady is Marie Louise Eta (no relation to the Basque terrorist organisation). She was given the job in April after the relegation-threatened team sacked their coach.

She had already been appointed coach of Union’s women’s team for next season so it will be interesting to see if she keeps both jobs (and thus proving that women can multi-task better than men....). Stop press: the answer is “no”! For next season she will revert back to being in charge of the women.

United – the suffix of miserable teams who, like Marlon Brando in “On the Waterfront”, think they could be contenders e.g. Leeds United, Newcastle United, West Ham United.

The most famous United (Manchester) is called that because, in its original incarnation as Newton Heath Football Club – the works team of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway depot at Newton Heath, Manchester – the club went bankrupt in 1902 and five businessmen united to save the club. In recognition of their generous gesture the club was renamed Manchester United. At this juncture the team also changed its colours from its original green and yellow to the now-familiar red and white. (By a strange quirk of fate United’s original ground was just a close distance from where City’s Etihad stadium now stands).

Rumours that the current club intends to rename itself FC Glazers to recognise the financial generosity of the current owners can be dismissed.....

Unsporting behaviour – the term includes extravagant celebration, such as covering one’s head with one’s jersey or removing it, and simulating actions intended to deceive the referee, such as diving; a caution for a poor challenge or tackle is also classified thus. However, purists would say that FIFA need to go further. Other examples of unsporting behaviour should include the wearing of gloves or alic bands on a football field, the wearing of boots in day-glo colours, applauding offside decisions of linesmen, hanging towels in the back of the net, and (especially) stupid goal scoring celebrations.

Still, if referees did apply strictly controls on unsporting behaviour it is doubtful if any team would finish a match will eleven players: just watch the ridiculous conduct of players at any corner...

Urine tests – Urine tests are the most common way of testing footballers to see if they are using illegal substances. However, football does not have a great record in finding culprits using performance-enhancing drugs. Don’t expect any drug cheats to be found out during the World Cup.....



Unsporting behaviour, or merely ridiculous?

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USA - It may come as a surprise to football fans, but this will be the 12th World Cup that the USA has appeared at – that’s the same number as Holland and more than Hungary or Portugal or Poland! And in 1930 they even finished third!!

Their nickname is “the Trumpettes” and they are another country who has the stigma of having a women’s team better than the men’s team.

As co-hosts the USA has not needed to qualify, so coach Mauricio Pochettino has had two years of friendly matches with which to build a squad. The results have been very mixed, to put it mildly, though they do seem to be finally getting their act together. So it is fair to say that they are unlikely to achieve third place this time around. But will they dare to fail with “the Donald” watching? (One immediately thinks of Hitler watching the 1936 Olympics.....)

World Cup record: P1 37 W9 D8 L20

Current FIFA World Ranking: 14th (*ed: really? The Donald has had some words with Mr Infantino*)

Star Player: Christian Pulisic (AC Milan)

Uruguay – Uruguay have qualified for their 15th World Cup and, lest we forget, they have won it twice (including the first one, which was held in, er, Uruguay). As with most South American teams, you never really know what you will get from *la Celeste* (the Sky Blues): in the qualifying group they finished only 4th (6 out of 10 go through) and only managed one away win in 9 games – but that was against top team Argentina!

They are led by the irascible Argie (*ed: aren’t they all?*) Marcelo Bielsa which simply adds an extra level of unpredictability to them.....

World Cup record: Played 59 W 25 D13 L21

Current FIFA World Ranking: 16th

Star Player: Darwin Núñez (Al-Hilal)

Uzbekistan – another “new boy” at the World Cup is Uzbekistan. They thus become only the second former Soviet republic (excluding Russia) to qualify for a World Cup (the first being Ukraine).

Led by Italian legend Fabio Cannavaro, we do not know what to expect from them – indeed, we wouldn’t be surprised if they enter the stadium riding wild horses and beheading the referee (hopefully it is Anthony Taylor). After all, their nickname is “the white wolves” (*ed: that could be a tribute to famous Wolverhampton MP Enoch Powell*).

Current FIFA World Ranking: 50th

Star Player (in fact the only one we’ve heard of): Abdukodir Khusanov (Manchester City) – though team captain Eldor Shomurodov (Istanbul Başakşehir) is the nation’s record goalscorer, which makes him the Usbek Ronaldo....