

## 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

### R is for

**Racism** – football has been there and solved that problem. It's amazing what a few decals stuck on shirt sleeves or a bit of knee-bending can do, apparently.....



**Rangnick, Ralf** – Herr Rangnick is the German-born manager of Austria. His playing career was relatively brief and at low level German clubs and went into coaching at age 25. He has managed several Bundesliga clubs – even taking perennial failures Schalke to the semi-finals of the Champions League! – before switching to the role of Director of Football at RB Leipzig. Somewhat bizarrely, he became interim manager at Manchester United for a year and attempted to sort out that madhouse, with little success (hence the nickname “Wreck-it Ralf”). He took over the top job with Austria in 2022.



Rangnick was one of the first coaches to publicly talk about tactics, which got him the nickname of “the professor”. He is credited with inventing “*gegenpressing*” (see separate article). His credibility in the game is such that he is among the few coaches who can- and will follow his own line without fear. If he were the Portugal boss then CR7 would not be playing!!!

*Record as coach of Austria: W25 D8 L10*

**Raincoats** - what is it about football coaches and their reluctance to wear raincoats on wet days? Is it a macho thing to stand the technical area getting soaking wet? Or is it a conspiracy by Nike, Adidas and Puma not to offer managers free merchandise that has a hood? Once upon a time managers like Helmut Schoen or Jack Charlton wore caps to keep their heads dry.



**Rappan, Karl** - an obscure name from football history is Austrian Karl Rappan. His claim to fame is that he is the coach who, in the 1930s whilst managing Servette of Geneva, is credited with inventing the concept of collective, organised defences. His system was nicknamed “*le verrou*” or “the bolt” -as in locking a door with a bolt - and subsequently evolved into the Italian *catenaccio* defensive style.

Rappan was a successful coach, managing his adopted country of Switzerland on four separate occasions (!) and is still the record holder for most games in charge of the Toblerone Boys.

**Rashford, Marcus** – If a player has had an up-and-down career it is Marcus Rashford. In 2022-23 as a Manchester United player he could do no wrong. By 2024 he was being loaned out and no longer selected for England. Now he's a regular for Barcelona and (at the time of writing) possibly back in the England squad. It's a funny old game....

**Raumdeuter** – A magnificent German compound noun. There was not an adequate word to describe the footballing skills of Bayern Munich's Thomas Müller – tall and gangly, he was not a no 9, nor a 10, nor a winger, but had the ability to be “in the right place at the right time” in the attacking 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the pitch.

Those chaps in the Audi laboratory (“*Vorsprung durch Technik*” and all that) put their heads together and decided to combine the words Raum (which translates as “Space”) and “Deuter” (“interpreter”) and christened Müller as *ein Raumdeuter*.



Frank Lampard could also have been described as a Raumdeuter, except that he was a cockney.

**Real Madrid** – They might be the biggest club in Europe and they'll have over a dozen players at the World Cup but there will likely be only two Real Madrid players (Dean Huijsen and Danny Carvajal) in the Spain World Cup squad – the same number as Villarreal and Valencia!! That must hurt Spanish Real fans.....

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**Record Score** – Hungary can proudly boast having made the top two record scores at the World Cup. Their great side of the 1950s beat South Korea 9-0 in the 1954 World Cup, but this was surpassed by their 10-1 win vs El Salvador in 1982.

Yugoslavia are the only other team to win a World Cup game 9-0, against Zaire in 1974.

The most goals in a single game, however, was Austria v Switzerland in 1954. The match ended 7-5 to Austria – and at one stage they were losing 0-3!!

*(ed: we'll give a special prize to any sweepstaker that correctly tips any whacky score like these!)*

**Red** - Some psychologists have tried to prove that teams wearing kits of the colour red have a greater likelihood to win. Red is the Chinese lucky colour (*ed: what the hell is a 'lucky colour'??*) and when Malaysian businessman Vincent Tan took over Cardiff City he changed their kit from its traditional blue to red for this reason. Not only was the colour change ironic, given that the club's nickname is "the bluebirds" but they finished rock bottom of the Premier League. So it wasn't that lucky!!



However, only one team has won the World Cup in a red kit (England 1966) – when Spain were champions in 2010 they wore black in the final.

**Red Card** - The referee's ultimate sanction is to send off a player – signalled by his brandishing of the red card. The red card is given out by the match referee for serious foul play (including stopping a clear goal scoring opportunity) or for the accumulation of two yellow cards in the same game.

In fact, the red card itself only appeared for the first time at the 1970 World Cup – prior to that players would receive a telegram informing their agent that they had been sent off.

As with all of the great things in the world, the red card was invented by a Briton – referee Ken Aston. During the 1966 World Cup the England v Argentina match was particularly dirty but it was unclear to spectators which players the referee had booked. This incident started Aston thinking about ways to make a referee's decisions clearer to both players and spectators. He realised that a colour-coding scheme based on the same principle used on traffic lights (yellow - caution, red - stop) would traverse language barriers and clarify whether a player had been cautioned or expelled. Hence the birth of the yellow and red cards for the following World Cup.

The record for most red cards in a World Cup game is four, which were given in the Holland v Portugal game in 2006 – the so-called 'Battle of Nuremberg':

### [the Battle of Nuremberg](#)

As well as four red cards the Russian referee gave 16 yellow cards, which is also a record.

If we expand the topic to include all sending offs at the World Cup i.e. including those that happened before the invention of the red card then, surprisingly, the country that has received the most red cards at World Cup finals is not Italy or Argentina but ... Brazil! They have had 11 players sent off in their illustrious career. But the dirtiest team has to be Cameroon – in only 26 World Cup matches they've racked up 9 red cards!!! And Cameroon's Rigobert Song together with Zinedine Zidane have the dubious honour of being the only players to have twice been given red cards at the World Cup. Naughty boys.

However, four cards in a game is nothing compared to a match earlier this season when the Brazilian teams of Cruzeiro and Atlético Mineiro decided to stop playing football and instead have a mass fight, which resulted in 23 red cards. Sadly we do not see the referee actually waving the card around.....

### [CRUZEIRO v ATLÉTICO-Fight club](#)

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**Red Bull** – One red that is a winner is Red Bull. Yet if there are two words that are guaranteed to infuriate fans of Bundesliga teams they are also Red Bull. The purchase by Austrian billionaire (and owner of the energy drink company Red Bull) Dietrich Mateschitz of a lower division team and rebranding it into Red Bull Leipzig (with an appropriate cash injection), propelling up the leagues into the top division, infuriated fans of ‘traditional’ (i.e. penniless) teams. (They had the same reaction a decade earlier when Dietmar Hopp, founder of software company SAP did the same thing in Germany with FC Hoffenheim).

Strangely, few people had any complaints when Mateschitz had previously bought his hometown club of Austria Salzburg and rebranded them into Red Bull Salzburg (and made them champions of Austria 14 times, including for eleven consecutive seasons).

It may be coincidental, but following the death of Mateschitz and Red Bull’s recruitment of Jürgen “Turkey teeth” Klopp, the form of both Salzburg and Leipzig have dipped.

There is also a Red Bull New York, but who cares about American soccerball....?

**Red Devils** - nickname of the Belgian national team (and also Manchester United). But why RED Devils? Surely, the nickname ‘the devils’ would be sufficient? Is there any alternative colour for devils?

**Red Duvels** – what Belgian fans will be drinking in large quantities when they are playing New Zealand at 05:00 Belgian time.....

**Regragui, Walid** – Walid became a legend in Morocco when he led the team to the semi-finals at the Qatar World Cup. Not surprisingly, he is still in the job four years later. Born in France, where he spent his playing career, he was capped 44 times for Morocco. He coached at club level in Morocco. When he led Wydad to the league title in his first season there Walid was adjudged by the International Federation of Football History & Statistics to be the third best coach of 2022! In four years in charge of Morocco he has lost only five times, which is pretty impressive – but one of those losses was the AFCON Final in Morocco, which greatly tarnished his reputation!



*Record as coach of Morocco: W35 D10 L5*

**Remontada** – It simply means ‘comeback’ in Spanish but it is trendy for ‘the prawn sandwich brigade’ to use e.g. when Barcelona overturned a 4-0 first-leg defeat to Paris Saint-Germain with a 6-1 second-leg win. (*ed: can one use a Spanish word to describe a Catalan team?*)

**Renard, Hervé** – Frenchman Foxy Renard is the manager of Saudi Arabia. He had an insignificant playing career for smaller French clubs and when he retired as a player he started his own cleaning business, before becoming a football coach. As well as spells with various small clubs he has coached four African teams – being the first coach to win the African Cup of Nations with two separate countries. (*ed: he is also the first person to have coached both Cambridge United and Zambia!*).

After leading Morocco to the 2018 World Cup he became boss of Saudi Arabia for the first time in 2019 and was in charge for Saudi Arabia’s memorable 2-1 victory over Argentina at the 2022 World Cup. He stepped down in 2023 in order to become the coach of the French women’s team (!!!) but that didn’t last long and when Saudi Arabia sacked Roberto Mancini in 2024 they happily took Renard back.



Renard has taken the sartorial challenge left by the retirement of Yogi Löw to be the World Cup manager who will wear a formal collared shirt, but with no tie or jacket. Bold!

*Current record as coach of Saudi Arabia: W10D5 L7*

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**Reyna, Giovanni** – Gio Reyna is the bad boy of US football. A member of the 2022 World Cup squad he played only 52 minutes in four games. The then-coach condemned an anonymous player for his bad attitude – and Reyna bizarrely then came forward and said it was him! To make it worse Reyna’s mum then complained to the US football authorities about the coach!!

As well as a lousy attitude Reyna has a terrible injury record. Apart from that he is a dream player and will be a key member of Team USA.

**Rice, Declan** - defensive midfield player for Arsenal and England. Possibly the key player for England since he is the team ‘workhorse’. Consequently, if he gets injured (or, as is more likely, ends the arduous English season carrying an injury) then England’s chances look even slimmer.

Irish sweepstakers will be shouting that he shouldn’t even be playing for England as Rice played 3 times for Ireland before suddenly realising he was English.....

**Rodrigues, James** – James (pronounced Hammies – *ed: not in my household!*) Rodrigues is the definition of the “mercurial” player. He came to the attention of the world at the 2014 World Cup. At that tournament he won both the Golden Boot for being the top scorer with 6 goals and the FIFA Puskas Award for the best goal of the tournament:

### [James Rodriguez goal vs Uruguay](#)

His World Cup exploits earned him a big money transfer to Real Madrid – and his career went downhill after that. His standing dropped so quickly that within 6 years he was at Everton – and he didn’t succeed there, either.

Yet Hammy is still playing at age 34, having just got signed by Minnesota United – the Bournemouth of MLS . Even more remarkably, he is still playing for Colombia. Perhaps, if he scores a good goal at this World Cup Real Madrid might sign him again. (*Ed: his age makes him more suitable for Barcelona!*)

**Ronaldo** – Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima, was once the most famous Ronaldo in football. Brazilian, he played for PSV, Barcelona, Real Madrid, both Milan teams and won the Ballon d’Or and FIFA player of the year.



Ronaldo entered the 1998 FIFA World Cup billed as the world's greatest player by reporters in the sport and helped Brazil to get to the final. However, in the Final itself Ronaldo sleepwalked through the game. Without his contribution, Brazil deservedly lost to France and many blamed Ronaldo personally for the defeat.

However, after that humiliation he bounced back at the 2002 Finals and helped Brazil to victory in that tournament, being the top scorer in the tournament with eight goals – the best since 1970 (to this day).

In total Ronaldo scored 15 goals at three World Cups (in only 19 games) – a record only surpassed by Miroslav Klose. He can also boast one of the most ridiculous haircuts ever seen at the World Cup!

He is now known as ‘fat goofy Ronaldo’, in order to differentiate him from the pretty CR7.

**Ronaldo, Cristiano** – Now 41 (making him half the age of Donald Trump), the record breaking Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro (or CR7<sup>®</sup>, to use his copyrighted name) will take to football’s grandest stage for one last time hoping to add a World Cup winners medal to his heaving trophy cabinet.



He currently stands fourth in the all-time list of ‘most games played at World Cups’ with 22 matches and needs to be selected in three games to jump to second place. However, the leader – and CR7’s nemesis – is Lionel Messi, who

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is four games ahead of him, so it is hard to see Cristiano overtaking him unless Messi gets a mysterious injury/illness.....

However, one record Cristiano holds that is unlikely to be beaten by Messi is the number of international caps. He currently has 226 over an international career spanning 23 years. Possibly even more impressive is that he has the world record for an outfield player for most professional games played – a whopping 1324 games! He also has the record for most international goals scored, namely 143.

In 2025 he also became the first footballer to be officially worth \$1 billion (much to the disgust of “Sir” David Beckham). That’s what a salary of \$200 million a year will do. He is also (probably) the only footballer to own 42 cars. (*ed: I bet he has problems finding his car keys when he wants to pop down to the shops!!*). CR7 is also the only known person to have gone on strike in Saudi Arabia and survived without even a beating (and he “earned” around \$5million in wages whilst on strike!!). And he is probably the only player at this World Cup to have an airport named after him - (Cristiano Ronaldo International Airport, Madeira) – which is appropriate, as he always wanted to be an airline steward.

But some question whether he should be playing in the World Cup – at least in the opening games. For he was red-carded in Portugal’s final qualifying game v Ireland and for normal players this would result in an automatic 2 match ban, which would mean him missing some of the World Cup. But no, President Infantino commuted the punishment from ban to a suspended ban – a punishment that had previously never existed. Admittedly it was CR7s first red card for Portugal in 225 games - though he has clocked up a further 12 red cards at club level, so he is hardly an angel.

More pertinently, is he still good enough at this level? Many think not..... And he has never really performed well at any previous World Cup. But does his Portugal team boss Roberto Martinez have the *cojones* to drop him? In addition, he is a friend of Donald Trump which gives him the right to do whatever he goddam likes at this World Cup....

After the World Cup expect him to return to Sporting Lisbon – his first club – where he will continue his quest to become the first professional footballer to score 1000 goals in his career. (The team he has played against but failed to score against the most times is Benfica!). And you would not bet against him doing it.



Two old gits get together for a coffee and a moan about 'the good old days'

**Rondo** – The rondo is a musical form that contains a principal theme which alternates with one or more contrasting themes.

It is also a trendy term for a football training session manoeuvre what otherwise would be called “piggy-in-the-middle” – when the players stand in a circle and pass a ball between each other whilst one or more within the circle try to get the ball.

Presumably, the Spanish or Italian coach who introduced this into training did not know the Spanish/Italian for “piggy-in-the-middle” (and we hate to think how that translates into German....)

**Royalty** – Celebrity watchers will be looking keenly to see which members of royal families (and we don’t mean the Beckhams or Trumps or Emperor Infantino) turn up at the World Cup. On the one hand football is a game for the unwashed plebs. On the other hand a free meal is a free meal.

With Belgium, Holland, Spain, Norway and the UK at the finals we could even have a sweepstake on the first ‘royal’ to be spotted by tv cameras at a game. The con-artist formerly



Aston Villa-supporting Prince William spots a Birmingham City fan in the VIP seats.....

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known as Fergie would love the chance to hobnob with celebs (though her ex-husband Andrew will probably never wish to visit the USA ever again).

I am betting that we will see Princess Meghan Markle and Harry showing up at a game in Los Angeles, probably bringing their own tv crew as part of a Netflix special.

**Rüdiger, Antonio** – as well as football heroes you also need the occasional football villain. Usually South American (Luis Suarez, Diego Simeone, Diego Costa) or Italian (Marco Materazzi, Claudio Gentile) players meet this role, but for the World Cup 2026 Antonio Rüdiger is guaranteed to raise the blood pressure levels of all lovers of football with the “uncompromising” way that he plays. Such is his love of holding opponents he should consider participating at the next Olympics as a wrestler. Oh, and he’s German too.



**Rules of Football** – as with most things in the civilised world, the rules of football were devised in England, specifically in Cambridge. In 1579, one match between townspeople and University students ended in a violent brawl that led the Vice-Chancellor to issue a decree forbidding them to play "footeball" outside of college grounds.

The “Cambridge Rules” were several formulations of the rules of football made at the University of Cambridge during the nineteenth century. One of these codes, dating from 1863 led to the creation of the original Laws of the Game of the Football Association.

**Russia** – since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 Russia has been banned from playing in international football tournaments. However, lovable FIFA President Infantino wishes to see the ban lifted because according to him “*this ban has not achieved anything, it has just created more frustration and hatred*”. I think the additional frustration and hatred that he refers to is his own, because of the inability to visit his old pal Putin in Moscow.

He added that FIFA should look into changing its rules and “*enshrine in our statutes that we should actually never ban any country from playing football because of the acts of their political leaders*”. Well, that should get a majority vote at FIFA from all the African and South & Central American countries run by cronies of Mr I.