

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

L is for

Laces – the things that you tie up your football boots with. The word ‘laces’ is used surprisingly often in English football commentaries due to the phrase *[player’s name] really put his laces through that shot*. The explanation (for non-footballers) is that the optimal way to kick a ball both hard and accurately is to have one’s foot at a tangent to the back of the ball – i.e. so that the laces of the boot are in contact with the ball when kicking it.



For those of you wishing to improve your English an alternative phrase to “putting his laces through the ball” is “he really leathered it”. And if you really want to broaden your English language vocabulary, then you will be interested to learn that there is a specific word to describe the plastic tip on each end of a lace (to make the threading of laces easier): it is called an “aglet”!



Rainbow laces have been an integral part of the actions (or is it the only actions) by the football authorities to stamp out homophobia in football. The fact that no footballer in a major team has yet ‘come out’ would seem to suggest that tackling the issue via laces is not the solution. And does it mean that footballers with laceless boots are homophobic....?

Lamouchi, Sabri – Mr L is the coach of Tunisia. French-born to Tunisian parents he had a respectable playing career which included spells at Inter Milan, Marseilles, Parma and Marseilles, and won 12 caps for France.



As coach his first job was with Ivory Coast. There then followed a series of average clubs (Rennes, Nottingham Forest, Cardiff City). He was appointed the boss of Tunisia after AFCON in January 2026. Known as ‘coochie coochie’ to his close friends.

Current record as coach of Tunisia: W21 D8 L8

Langenus, John - the referee of the first World Cup Final back in 1930 (Uruguay v Argentina) was a Belgian called John Langenus. Can you imagine the fans today singing “there’s only one long anus”?!



Langenus failed his refereeing exam the first time around when he wrongly answered a question posed by examiners. The question asked of him was: "What is the correct procedure if the ball strikes a low-flying plane?"!! Langenus did not answer and was failed! (The correct answer is, of course: “wait for VAR to check what happened”).

Legia Warsaw – In a desperate attempt to pander to Polish sweepstakers we have to mention the goings-on this season in the Ekstraklasa, which all discerning football fans will know is the top division in Poland. Not only was the league led for most of the season by an unfavoured club – Zablebie Lubin – but the most successful team in Poland, 15-time Ekstraklasa winner Legia Warsaw has spent most of the season in the relegation zone. What made this even more remarkable is that Legia has never been relegated from the top division!

Sadly for lovers of upsets, a run of five defeats in six games have seen the wheels fall of Zablebie’s title hopes, with established club Lech Poznan currently in top spot. And whilst not yet safe a run of eleven games unbeaten has seen Legia claw themselves out of the bottom 3.

Laurent, Lucien – Lucien Laurent deserves a spot in the alphabet for this French forward can proudly claim the record of having scored the first ever World Cup goal (France v Mexico, 1930). Felicitations!



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Laws of the game – many sports are governed by rules. Important sports (i.e. those invented by the English) have laws, rather than rules. Football has laws.

The extant Laws date back to 1863 where a ruleset was formally adopted by the newly formed Football Association. Over time, the Laws have been amended, and since 1886 they have been maintained by the International Football Association Board (IFAB).

Football is a simple game made unnecessarily complicated. Proof of this is that there are, in fact, only 17 Laws of the Game. Sadly, this is still about 10 too many for the average referee to remember and understand fully...

Leeds Season – Leeds Season is, surprisingly, an expression used in South Korea to describe a player who makes a transfer to a big club but then fails to perform. Its origin is the transfer of Leeds United player Alan Smith from Leeds to Manchester United in 2004.

Quite why South Koreans were so interested in either Manchester United or Alan Smith cannot be explained.....

Libero - libero is the term used to describe a defensive player who plays behind the defenders thus giving an extra layer of defensive protection. The libero's job is to "sweep up", hence the position also being known as "sweeper" in English.

Ligaments - ligaments are bits of the knee that footballers dread injuring. To be more technical the ligaments are the tissues connecting the bones. In the knee there are four: the anterior cruciate- and posterior cruciate, and the lateral collateral- and medial collateral ligaments. Together, it is they that make the knee-joint flex.

Ligaments either get bruised or, in severe cases, snap. Once a snapped ligament meant that a footballer's career was over. Today modern surgical procedures (involving rebuilding the damaged ligament) mean that a player can make a full recovery – though it takes around 12 months.

Lineker, Gary – TV pundit and crisp seller who was also a quite good footballer once (and famed for never having a yellow card throughout his career). Played for Leicester City (his home town), Everton, Barcelona and Tottenham and, until surpassed by Wayne Rooney, was the record goalscorer for England.



He devised the famous quote:

"Soccer is a game for 22 people that run around, play the ball, and one referee who makes a slew of mistakes, and in the end Germany always wins."

Certainly the most intelligent thing ever said by a professional footballer. Sadly, his strong left-leaning political views meant that you will no longer see him on the BBC.

Linesmen – What we used to call the two blokes who run along the touchline carrying flags, before FIFA decided that they are "assistant referees". With the advent of VAR the 'lino' now has precisely nothing to do – if he gives offside VAR can overturn it, and vice versa. The only reason for linesmen to exist today is so that the referee can have a couple of mates to share his drink with at half-time. It is only a matter of time before they are completely replaced.....

Linguistics – I know that many of you are cunning linguists so here's a question that has been puzzling Sweepstake HQ: why does FIFA call Turkey 'Türkiye' and the Ivory Coast 'Côte d'Ivoire' yet Sweden is not 'Sverige' or Austria 'Österreich' etc? And why is the lettering on the back of shirts only in the latin alphabet – surely Japan's players names should be in kanji, Egypt's names in Arabic (or hieroglyphs), etc? FIFA clearly pander to certain teams and not others.

Well, you will be reassured (or offended) to know that there's none of that political correctness nonsense in this sweepstake! Good old-fashioned English spellings will prevail throughout! (ed: Wunderbar!)

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Lopetuigi, Julen – Basque/Spaniard Julen Lopetuigi is the coach of Qatar.

As a player he was a goalkeeper and won one cap for Spain. His managerial career has been colourful. After a modest record in 2016 he nearly became manager of Wolverhampton Wanderers – only to be offered the job of manager of Spain (!) following the retirement of the legendary Vicente del Bosque. Under him Spain qualified easily for the 2018 World Cup but just before the tournament news leaked that he had agreed to take over at Real Madrid after the World Cup, so he was sacked before the tournament. However, he lasted only 14 games in charge of Real before being sacked there, too!



After a relatively successful time rebuilding his reputation at Sevilla, he was finally tempted to move to Wolverhampton (*ed: that is a phrase you rarely see!!*) where he was rubbish. That prompted a move to West Ham United where he was also rubbish – and so he was an obvious choice (?!) to become manager of Qatar.

He has thus taken a most bizarre route (though, presumably, financially very lucrative!) from the 2018 World Cup with Spain to the 2026 World Cup with Qatar. Perhaps this time he might even manage a game at the World Cup....!

Current record as coach of Qatar: W2 D2 L4

Lorenzo, Nestor – Nestor is the Argentinian coach of Colombia. His cv is remarkably thin – his first job was manager of a Peruvian club team then, after only one season, he was offered the Colombia job. He has been in the post for four years and is doing something right for, under him, Colombia went on a 28 game unbeaten run and got to the final of the Copa America for the first time.



Whilst he is unlikely to get to the World Cup final with Colombia Nestor can boast that he has been there and done that, having played for Argentina in the 1990 Final. But the undoubted highlight of his playing career was the 20 appearances he made for Swindon Town in the 1990s....

Record as coach of Colombia: W26 D11 L5

Los Angeles – for the 1994 World Cup matches in LA were played at the Rose Bowl – not the world's largest vase, but a vast athletics stadium built in 1922. For the 2026 World Cup the venue in LA could not be more different: the SoFi Stadium. Home of both of the city's NFL teams, the LA Rams and the LA Chargers, the stadium is the most expensive ever built, costing an obscene \$5.5 billion. The stadium's (non-FIFA approved) name of SoFi is that of a "financial services" company (*ed: no, I don't know what that means either*) who pay \$30 million a year for the privilege.



Opened in 2020 it holds 70 000 and, like most new American football stadia, is fully enclosed. And since it is located in south LA (close to the main airport) it is not going to be affected by woodland fires.

Its normal pitch is too narrow for football, so it requires that several rows of seats are removed in order to come up to FIFA standards. Assuming that this work is done satisfactorily, it will host eight matches, including USA's opening game of the World Cup, vs the mighty Paraguay on 12 June.

Lottery, it's a - the phrase "it's a lottery" is often used by commentators whenever a game is decided by penalty shoot-out. Odd phrase, since a lottery is a game of pure luck with only a very small chance of an individual winning, whereas a penalty shoot-out is when a group of multi-millionaires are asked to do something they should practice every day and where there is a 50% chance of victory. Mind you, when it involves England a penalty shootout usually is a lottery i.e. with little likelihood of winning the big prize.

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Low block – a piece of footballing jargon now used to describe boring defensive teams. The meaning is very simple: the ‘block’ part refers to the ranks of players doing the defending and the ‘low’ bit tells us they are doing it deep in their own territory.

It’s simply a more pretentious way of saying that the team “parked the bus” because the term is used by people who never travel on a bus.

Lucescu, Mircea – Spare a thought for Romania’s boss Mircea Lucescu. Had Romania won their playoff game vs Turkey then he could have been the oldest ever manager at a World Cup. Instead, the team lost, and the 80-year-old had a heart attack and died.

Ludgorets – Bulgaria will not be present at the World Cup. Indeed, they only won one game in their qualifying group. However, it is appropriate that Bulgarian team PFK Ludgorets 1945 (or Професионален Футболен Клуб „Лудогорец 1945 to give them their proper name) gets a mention. For Ludgorets holds the record for most consecutive league titles. The team – based in the small northern Bulgarian town of Razgrad – was bought by a Bulgarian billionaire in 2010 and they were subsequently promoted to the top division in 2011. Since then they have won the league title every season – a total of 14 consecutive seasons!!

Other European teams that have won their leagues ten or more times in a row include Bayern München, Red Bull Salzburg, Rosenborg, Dinamo Zagreb, Dinamo Tbilisi and (infamously) the stasi-supported Dynamo Berlin (*ed: that’s a lot of energy produced by dynamos*).

But this season Ludgorets finally have been toppled with historic club Levski Spartak of Sofia winning the league. All good things must come to an end!

Lukaku, Romelu – Now aged 33 it will be interesting to see if Romelu Lukaku will be a first choice player for Belgium at this World Cup. Currently playing his club football for Napoli (when he is not injured) with 89 goals he is by far the record goalscorer for Belgium. However, he is probably also the record holder for missing the most games through injury.

Lumumba, Patrice – As all scholars of Belgo-African history will know Patrice Lumumba was the first Prime Minister of independent Congo until he was overthrown and murdered by a Belgian/CIA-led coup.

During the recent AFCON tournament one devout Congo fan resurrected Lumumba’s memory by dressing like him and spending each entire match frozen in an iconic presidential pose! (*ed: pity the poor bloke who had the seat behind him*).

We await to see if “Patrice” turns up at Congo’s games in the USA – or if he is assassinated by the CIA in a bizarre repeat of history.

