

## THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

### J is for

**Japan** – Japan is the top-ranked Asian team and this will be the ‘Samurai Blues’ eighth appearance at a World Cup final – they’ve been a regular participant since 1998. Remember how they gave a fright to Belgium in the knockout stage of the 2018 World Cup?! And at the 2022 World Cup they topped their group ahead of Spain and Germany!

This time around Japan was the first team to qualify for the 2026 World Cup, winning the Asia qualification group back in March 2025, so they’ve had plenty of time to pack their suitcases.

Thusfar they’ve never got beyond the Round of 16, so perhaps, under the tutelage of coach Hajime Moriyasu, this will be the tournament where they progress further?

*World Cup record:* P125 W7 D6 L12

*Current FIFA World Ranking:* 18th

*Star player:* Ayase Ueda (Feyenoord)

**Jesus, Gabriel** – what a difference 4 years makes. At the last World Cup Gabriel Jesus was the no 9 for both Brazil and league champions Manchester City. Now he is a fringe player for Arsenal with a terrible injury record and without a goal for Brazil in almost four years! In fact he’ll have to pray hard to Jesus to be selected for the Brazil squad!!



Like many footballers Mr J is obsessed with tattoos – including one on his arm of his mother.....

**Jesus, Igor** - there are probably several Jesus’s at this World Cup - but definitely only one also called Igor who may be playing for Brazil! In fact there is another professional footballer called Igor Jesus in the USA, playing for Los Angeles FC but the one at the World Cup plays as a striker for Nottingham Forest.

His full name is Igor Jesus Maciel da Cruz and he currently plays his club football with Nottingham Forest. This may explain why he is another of the not-so-merry band of Brazilians who plays with a scowl on his face. Oh Pele where art thou?

Given that there is also the Brazilian and Brentford striker Igor Thiago who may also be in the Brazilian squad one must wonder about the Russian influence amongst Brazilian women at the turn of the century.....

**João Pedro** – We could have chosen any one of several Joãos from the Portugal squad (Cancelo, Neves, Felix) to write about, but the João that we think will most likely catch the eye at this World Cup is Brazil’s striker João Pedro. The 24 year old – whose full name is João Pedro Junqueira de Jesus - plays for Chelsea, being one of many of their players who they signed from Brighton. He has been one of their few bright spots this season, averaging a goal every other game.

Although he has been picked only 8 times so far by the *Seleção* his last appearance saw him wear the coveted no9 jersey and, given that this is a problem position for Brazil, he could well be solution to Carlo Ancelotti’s lack of a goalscoring centre forward.

He has a fiery personality so expect to see him in the thick of any on-field trouble – a trait he perhaps inherited from his father (also a professional footballer) who was jailed for being an accessory to murder. Referees beware.....

**Jordan** – Plucky Jordan will be making their World Cup debut this summer. Their nickname is *Al Nashama*, which translates as “The Chivalrous Ones”. (*ed: I am certain that their players will cheat and moan just as much as any other professional footballers*).

Almost all of their players play for Jordanian teams. There is little to say about them that does not involve camels or sheep, other to note that they were surprise runners up at the 2023 AFC Asian Cup.

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The current boss of Jordan is Jamal Sellami. Previous incumbents of the job include Ray Wilkins and Harry Redknapp!

*Current FIFA World Ranking:* 66th

*Star player:* Ali Olwan (Al-Karma)

**Jules Rimet** - A Frenchman, Rimet was the President of FIFA from 1921 and the creator of the World Cup – the first taking place in Uruguay in 1930. (*ed: It thus took FIFA only 26 years from its founding in 1904 to actually organise a World Cup!*)

In recognition of Rimet being the only FIFA President to actually earn his money the original World Cup trophy was renamed the Jules Rimet Trophy. The Trophy was given to Brazil in 1970 for permanent possession after their third victory, but in 1983 it was stolen and has never been seen since. It is believed now to be in a house in Liverpool.



the Jules Rimet Trophy – can we have it back, please?

**Juventus** –Juventus, one of the two football teams of Turin, is affectionately known as “The Old Lady”. This is ironic as the name comes from the latin word for ‘youth’ – *iuventūs* !

However, like the Italian national team the Old Lady is not in good shape. After winning the league for nine consecutive seasons (and 36 times in total) for the past six seasons they haven’t been close to being top. It is almost as if their dominance of Serie A let to complacency, both at Juventus and in Italian football as a whole.