

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

F is for

Fabio - Fábio Deivson Lopes Maciel is a Brazilian goalkeeper who holds the record of having played the most professional matches. His current total stands at over 1400 games. He started playing professionally in 1997 and today, age 45, he is still playing (currently for Fluminense).

We hope that Fabio continues to play, not only since it is a 'feel good' story in itself, but because he has played around 100 games more than Cristiano Ronaldo and whilst he continues to play this is a record that CR7 cannot beat!!!!

Faé, Emerson – Mr Faé is the coach of Ivory Coast. Born in France, he played his club football there (apart from an 8 match spell with Reading) and was a French U-21 international before switching his allegiance to Ivory Coast, for whom he played at the 2006 World Cup.



The Ivory Coast job is his first as a manager, which he was given in 2024 midway through the African Cup of Nations tournament. Amazingly for such a mid-tournament upheaval he led the team to tournament victory! This is a man who has luck on his side, so Germany beware!!

Record as coach of Ivory Coast: W15 D5 L4

Faecal Plug – Yes, this is a footballing alphabet, not a medical almanac. Apparently, Finnish football fans refer to a defensive holding midfielder as “*pihkatappi*” which translates as faecal plug. The origin of the expression comes from nature: when a bear hibernates, a large mass of hardened matter gathers in its colon – this is called a faecal plug. Thus, Finns – being familiar with hibernating bears – compare someone who blocks the way to a faecal plug.

Many Manchester United fans would consider their holding midfielder Manuel Ugarte to be a faecal plug, but not in a complementary way.

False nine – In the good old days before marketing took over football, footballers had numbers 1 to 11 on their shirts. Traditionally, the no 9 shirt was for the team's central striker who would usually also be the team's top scorer.

The concept of the number 9 shirt being reserved for the best goalscorer still exists. But what happens if your team doesn't have a good single goalscorer? Well, if the manager can build a winning team by having his midfield players scoring lots of goals then it is described as playing with a “false nine”.

Of course, if a team has no goalscorer and the team plays badly then the term “false nine” is replaced by swearwords.....

Fanmeile (or Fanzone) – It is hard to believe that before 2006 the concept of the 'fanzone' – a place where fans could congregate to watch the game on giant screens and toss lots of beer in the air when their team scores – did not exist. Then came the World Cup in Germany. Who'd have thought that the Germans could invent something so fun? It thus feels appropriate that we should continue calling them “Fanmeile”.



Of course, FIFA has now started to mess up the concept – for at this World Cup people will have to pay to enter them..... Capitalism at its best! They plan to have a fanzone in Kansas City that holds 25 000 people. It is doubtful that there are 25 000 people in the state of Kansas who even know what the World Cup is, so this looks suspiciously like an ICE detention camp for Hispanic football fans.....

However, no one has ever satisfactorily answered the question as to why they were called “Fanmeile” and not “Fankilometer”? It would seem to breach an EU law that decrees the use of metric units of measurements. Those Germans are such rule breakers.....

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Fantasy football – can anybody explain what is the fun of Fantasy Football? It is the 21st Century equivalent of “Dungeons and Dragons” i.e. a complete waste of time.....

Farke, Daniel – We’ve included Daniel Farke partly to cheer up any sweepstakers who are fans of Leeds United, Norwich City or SV Lippstadt (?), but mainly because he has the worst haircut of any manager in football. What’s the point in getting a huge salary as a Premier League manager if you are going to look like a student on your interrail holiday? A centre parting with long straight hair that looks like it is washed once a week. We realise that 1970s fashions have probably just reached Leeds but he’s over 50 and should know better. What’s that? - he’s German. Ah, that explains it - in fact it is surprising that he doesn’t have a mullet and back perm..... (ed: *apparently, he’s also very fond of strong scent, possibly to disguise his avoidance of taking showers.....*)



Farmers league – a derogatory term used by fans of the Premier League, La Liga, Serie A or Bundesliga to describe other leagues, in particular to question the quality of players ranked as good there eg “Viktor Gyokeres has scored a lot of goals for Sporting but he’s playing in a farmers league”.

Female referees - Female referees will again officiate matches at this year's World Cup – 2 main referees and 4 assistant refs. I’m sure there’ll be the equivalent number of male referees at the Womens World Cup.....

Fernandez, Enzo - excessively tattooed thug who runs around in midfield for Argentina and Chelsea. During last year’s Club World Cup in the USA he was an advocate for hydration breaks saying he felt dizzy playing in the heat. Of course, the dizziness might have been caused when asked to use his four brain cells (which he forgot to use when caught singing a racist song on the flight home.....).



Together with his Chelsea teammate Moses Caicedo, Fernandez is a good bet to be involved in the tournament’s first red card.....

FIFA - stands for *Federation Internationale de Football Association*, the world governing body of football (though many could think of alternative words beginning with F). It comprises of 211 national football associations (which is greater than the number of countries that exist in the world!).

FIFA's supreme body is the FIFA Congress, an assembly of representatives from each affiliated member association. Each national football association has one vote, regardless of size or footballing strength. Consequently, every tinpot Pacific island or African dictatorship has a vote that can be bought.....

Based in Zurich (for reasons of “tax efficiency”) the FIFA HQ is in a bunker that is designed to withstand shame or attacks of guilt. It’s current president – the 9th in its 122 year history – is Gianni Infantino (ed: *a name you will hear a lot of during this alphabet!*).

The official slogan of FIFA is “*For the game, for the world*”. Rumours that President Infantino wishes to add the words “for my pocket, for my ego” cannot be confirmed.

FIFA Ethics Committee - Like the Loch Ness Monster, Atlantis and a credible Scottish World Cup bid the FIFA Ethics Committee is something that many people believe exists, but most rational people know to be a myth.

FIFA Order of Merit - The FIFA Order of Merit is the highest honour awarded by FIFA. (ed: *I dare you to tell Mr Trump that it is higher than the FIFA Peace Prize!*). It is given to people who are “considered to have made a significant contribution to association football”. However, as recipients have also included Thabo Mbeki, Udo Jurgens, Henry Kissinger and Thaksin Shinawatra, plus numerous referees, it can be safely said that ex-President Sepp

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Blatter had a rather liberal interpretation of what “significant contribution” to football actually means!! The only surprising fact is that Mr Blatter didn’t award the Order of Merit to himself.

Interestingly/bizarrely, FIFA has not awarded anybody the award since 2012! At Sweepstake HQ we wait optimistically for the announcement that we are the next recipients

FIFA Peace Prize – As the whole world knows, the inaugural winner of the FIFA Peace Prize in 2025 was a Mr Donald Trump.



Trump 'taking the peace' from FIFA (and is also awarded a \$50 Amazon gift certificate)

The aim of the prize is, according to FIFA: “to reward individuals who have taken exceptional and extraordinary actions for peace and by doing so have united people across the world”. Who could possibly disagree that the Donald is just such an individual?

The design of the trophy perfectly sums up President Infantino’s relationship with President Trump – orange hands grabbing his balls.

50p head – A specifically British piece of fan abuse to describe a player whose attempted header’s trajectory is at least 45 degrees off its intended course. Named, of course, after the 7-sided British 50p coin.



Final appearances – A total of 13 countries have played in World Cup finals (ten European, 3 South American), with eight having won it (5 European, 3 South American). The team that has made it to the greatest number of World Cup finals is Germany/West Germany with 8, followed by Brazil (7) and Italy (6).

Holland holds the proud record of having played in the most finals without ever winning – they have lost the big game 3 times: in 1974, 1978 and 2010.

Whilst Pele is the only player to have three winners medals he actually missed the 1962 final. Only one player has played in three finals– Brazil’s Cafu. This is a record that both Kylian Mbappe and Lionel Messi will be hoping to equal in the USA.

Finishers – a now-trendy way of describing substitutes. It is a result of teams now being allowed up to eleven players to sit on the bench, thus meaning that you have a “starting 11” and a “team of finishers” awaiting to come on.

Floodgates - When a team has been defending for a long time but then concedes not one but several goals, it is described as “the floodgates opened”. Given the sensitivity of flooding in Holland and Bangladesh we wonder if the term is used there?

Flurry - The collective noun for a lot of goals in quick succession is a “flurry” e.g. “Celtic scored a flurry of goals in the second half”. Can be used in combination with floodgates “the floodgates opened and Haaland scored a flurry of goals”. The only other known use of flurry in the English language is to describe a lot of snow.....

Football – who could have predicted the consequences when, on a fateful day in 1813 during a game of basketball a pupil of Rugby School called Horatio Football dropped the ball and proceeded to kick the ball up the basketball court, thus inventing football. (ed.: I think that you have got your facts muddled up.....)

Footballing family – A wonderful euphemism used by FIFA to justify why fans get less than 50% of the stadium tickets: it’s because “the footballing family” gets an entitlement (of the best seats). This means all of the tinpot bureaucrats in the various footballing associations get a wad of tickets, most of which then appears on the black market for fans to buy at extortionate prices. Well, I suppose that we all have horrible, money-grabbing relatives in our families, too.....

Forest - the collective noun for a lot of legs e.g. “there was a forest of legs inside the goalmouth”.

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Fouls – according to FIFA there are seven types of foul that should be penalised by direct free kicks (i.e. those which permit a direct shot at goal) and a further eight types of foul that shall be punished by indirect free kicks (i.e. where a direct shot at goal is not permitted). A fun family quiz question is to ask your partner (or any qualified refs that you know) to name all fifteen types of foul during the half-time break in a match....

A foul and misconduct are different things. For more on this, see **misconduct**.

Fourth Official, the – Those of you unfamiliar with football may hear the phrase ‘the Fourth Official’ and think that he or she (for football does occasionally trust women to do more than wash the football kits) is a sinister character out of a Cold War thriller, akin to ‘the Third Man’ or ‘the 39 Steps’, or a new story from Dan Brown. In fact, the 4th official was another of the bonkers ideas dreamed up by FIFA, seemingly as a way of solving the world crisis of unemployed referees. For a day’s pay this man’s job is to stand on the touchline playing with an electronic board: a couple of times during the game he holds up the board to show, in glorious LCD images, the numbers of the substitutions and announce the amount of ‘added time’ to be played (which is always 1 or 2 minutes in the 1st half, and 3 in the 2nd half – we wouldn’t want to disturb the tv schedules by having games overrunning). To think that football survived 150 years without the use of such technology.

The 4th official is also supposed to control the two managers as they prowl like caged tigers in their ‘technical areas’, but it's not exactly a task on a par with UN peacekeeping missions. In any case the 4th official is unarmed so there’s not much he can do to stop encroachments or if a melee between the dugouts breaks out. Now arming the 4th official with a taser would be fun.....

So, to use an EC work analogy, the Fourth Official is a bit like the SecGen: another level of annoying control that thinks it is important but is of little actual added value.

Footballs – the football to be used at this World Cup is, yet again, from Adidas. In fact, we have so much to say on the subject of footballs that we have made a complete separate document that you can read on the subject.

Fox in the box – a term to describe an attacking player who is particularly good at scoring goals at short range ie within the 6-yard/5-metre box (e.g. Gerd Muller). The French equivalent is ‘*renard de surface*’. The Spanish translation “*zorro en la caja*” sounds less like a football term and more something you would find on a menu in Zaragoza.



France – Together with Spain “les Frogs” have been Europe’s hottest team this century. Not surprisingly they qualified easily for the finals, only drawing one game in their group.

With 73 games played at 17 World Cups France lie fifth in the “all time World Cup appearances” list. Twice winners (1998 and 2018) France are seeking to become the third country to make it to three consecutive finals. Ironically, it is not either of their two finals wins but their 4-3 defeat to Argentina in 2022 that will be remembered most fondly by neutrals as it was probably the greatest final ever.

Their coach continues to be Didier Deschamps – originally appointed by Napoleon in 1812 and the finest water carrier in the game – but this will be his last hurrah before he joins an MLS club/Real Madrid/Chelsea.

Ranked no 3 in the world France still has to be one of the favourites to win this World Cup, provided that they can survive the food in the USA. Where do you get snails in Kansas?

World Cup record: Played 73 W39 D14 L20

Current FIFA World Ranking: 3rd

Star Player: Kylian Mbappé (Real Madrid)

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Free 8s – Back in the good old days when footballers only wore numbers 1 to 11 the no 8 shirt was traditionally given to the midfield player who would link defence and attack (the no 6 would be a defensive midfielder, and the no 10 an attacking midfielder). Obviously, there would only be one no 8 on the pitch.

When Pep Guardiola arrived at Manchester City, he redeployed Kevin De Bruyne and David Silva as dual ‘No 8s’. Both were given the licence to push on from central midfield into the channels and make runs behind the opposition’s defence. This was christened “Free 8s” and, just as *Raumdeuter* would be automatically associated with Thomas Müller the prime exponent of the Free 8 is the man for whom the phrase was coined, namely KdB.

Of course, no sane football fan ever uses the term “Free 8”, only tv pundits.

Frustration – sport can be frustrating. As a fan, you can be screaming at the telly when your team is losing yet continuing to pass the ball sideways instead of attacking.

Similarly, as a player it can be frustrating when things are not going well for you. And it is doubly frustrating when your teammates will not pass to you. But few top league players react in the way that St Mirren striker Dan Nlundulu did in a match this season:

[a very frustrated footballer](#)

Fuente, Luis de la – LdlF is the coach of Spain. After a solid career as a player at Bilbao and Sevilla he had a brief and unsuccessful spell as a club coach before joining the national team, initially the U19 team. He is thus the model “insider” who has worked his way up the ranks, being offered the top job when Luis Enrique quit after not winning the 2022 World Cup.



As a consequence of his background he has worked with most of the squad since they were young players and this must have contributed to his phenomenal record as Spain boss – losing only 2 of 38 games in charge. (Amazingly, one of those defeats – admittedly only his 2nd game in charge - was to Scotland!)

Record as coach of Spain : W29 D7 L2

Full back – For the uninitiated the full backs are the two defensive players who play on the sides. Full back is the easiest position to play in, provided the player is disciplined (i.e. is willing to focus first and foremost on defending) and can tackle. Unfortunately, today the trend is to have full-backs who are great at attacking but cannot not defend or tackle.

It is also currently trendy for “intellectual” coaches to try and play with no fullbacks and instead have three centre-backs and two “wing backs”, which are like fullbacks who do not know how to defend. This tactic always ends in tears, as Ruben Amorim’s spell at Manchester United proved