

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

G is for

Gabriel – It is unusual to suggest that the most important player for Brazil is a defender (and I am sure that Vinicius Jr would disagree!!) but the defensive prowess of Gabriel dos Santos Magalhães (aka Gabriel) may be the key to Brazil actually doing well at this tournament.

He is physically commanding, particularly in the air. This is not only in defence – he has scored 18 goals for Arsenal from set-pieces.

Curiously, his excellent club form has not translated into consistent international appearances. Gabriel, now 27, has only 17 caps for Brazil, and this will be his first World Cup. But 10 of those caps have come in the last two years, a sign of how Brazil's current manager Carlo Ancelotti likes physical central defenders, and his defensive quality will provide Brazil with a reliable anchor at the back.

But he's a pantomime villain – if Gabriel is playing against a team you support you'll be booing him every time he jostles, tugs or grabs a player!! And believe me, he jostles, tugs and grabs more than a teenager on his first date!

Garcia, Rudi – Frenchman Rudi Garcia is the manager of Belgium. His playing career was with lower level French clubs and his management history – largely in France – is unexceptional, other than leading Lille to the league title back in 2010-11. It can only be assumed that the main qualification for him getting the Belgium job, which he got in 2024 after Belgium's underwhelming performance at the Euros, is that he is cheap!



In language-sensitive Belgium it is a bold move for the Belgian FA to have selected a francophone boss but perhaps he has the steel to keep Courtois and de Bruyne in their place and keep Lukaku away from the all-you-can-eat hotel buffets.....

Record as coach of Belgium: W6 D3 L1

Gattuso, Gennaro – the man not leading Italy to the World Cup! In fact, since Italy's failure to qualify (again, and again!!) GG is not doing anything as he quit being boss of Italy before they could sack him!



Gegenpressing – 1) a type of trouser press that one used to find in hotels

2) a posh form of organic fruit juice



Der Gegenpresskönig

3) a footballing style (literal translation “counter-pressing”) invented in Germany by Ralf Rangnick (*cf*) and perfected by Jürgen Klopp whereby a team, after losing possession, immediately attempts to win back possession, rather than falling back to regroup.



The positive element of Gegenpressing is that, for spectators, it can be exciting to watch. However, it requires players that are very fit and that are willing and able to run hard for the full 90 minutes. And it must be practised by all of the team – so it is not suitable for teams containing a player who likes a breather when the opposition has the ball (eg Cristiano Ronaldo).

As well as potentially upsetting certain players the other negative element of Gegenpressing is that, at its worse, the football degenerates into the sort of headless rushing around that one can see if watching an under-10s game.

Not surprisingly, given its German origin, the main disciples of Gegenpressing have been German coaches: Thomas Tuchel, Jürgen Klopp, Olivier Glasner and Rangnick himself.

Thanks to Herr Klopp introducing this manic style of football to the Premier League ‘Gegenpressing’ has entered the English language. What Schadenfreude.....

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Germany – the favourite team of all neutrals ‘*die Towel Boys*’ selected their team base in Florida back in November, and they’ve already got the sun loungers reserved.

The decline in the performance of the German team has been so great in recent years that they are no longer a ‘*Tourniermannschaft*’ and we are now dangerously close to suggesting that their women’s team may be better than the men’s team. For whilst on paper it looks as if they qualified easily for the finals this was not the case. After many international retirements (Manuel Neuer, Toni Kroos, Thomas Müller, Ilkay Gündogan) their squad looks very inexperienced – indeed, Germany without Toni Kroos looks like, er, Real Madrid without Toni Kroos.



The team is now so weakened that the star in the squad is the coach Julian Nagelsmann – and we all know what happens when a German Führer thinks he is bigger than the team he leads.....

A FIFA ranking of 9th seems very generous. Their saving grace may be the emergence of a genuine goalscorer in Nick Woltemade – though he went off the boil by playing for Newcastle United.

World Cup record: Played 112 W68 D21 L23

Current FIFA World Ranking: 9th

Star Player: Nick Woltemade (Newcastle United) (I didn’t know the name of any German women players....)

Ghalenoiei, Amir – Mr G is the coach of the Iranian team. He was the most successful coach in the Iranian Pro League before being appointed national coach in 2022. However, this is his second go at the job – having being unsuccessful in 2006.

It remains to be seen if Amir can survive assassination by Mossad and make it to the World Cup.



Current record as coach of Iran: W28 D8 L4

Ghana - With the exception of 2018, Ghana have now qualified for every World Cup from 2006 onwards. Their best showing, in 2010, saw them agonisingly knocked out by Uruguay in the last eight after a penalty shootout which followed Luis “the racist rodent” Suarez’s goal-line handball. The team’s nickname is ‘*the Black Stars*’ – not something Luis Suarez would have called them.....

However, they are a long way from when, back in 2008, they were ranked 14th in the world by FIFA – indeed, today they are only ranked the 14th best team in Africa. But they did qualify for the finals easily, losing only one game in ten. However, since qualifying their form has been so bad that they sacked coach Otto Addo and replaced him with World Cup veteran Carlos Queiroz. Can he get the “Black Stars” back on track? – they’ve got a tough set of games.

World Cup record: Played 15 W5 D3 L7

Current FIFA World Ranking: 72nd

Star Player: Antoine Semenyo (Bournemouth)

Gijon – the Spanish city hosted matches at the 1982 World Cup and the most memorable was the infamous “non-aggression pact of Gijón”. West Germany played Austria in the group stage and both teams knew that if Germany won 1-0 then both teams would qualify, whereas any other result would eliminate one of them and allow Algeria through. After 10 minutes Horst Hrubesch scored for Germany and what then followed was an 80 minute kickabout, worthy of any park on a Sunday. Needless to say, FIFA saw nothing wrong with it, but the one positive effect (other than to make Germany even less popular, if that were possible) was that ever since World Cup groups now contain an even number of teams to ensure that all teams play their final matches simultaneously.

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44 years later, on June 27, Austria and Algeria will meet in the final game of Group J, with one of them likely to be in contention for qualification for the next round. Will there be any bad blood? I'm sure of it....!!

Giuliani, Andrew – Andrew Giuliani is son of legendary former mayor of New York and lawyer for Donald Trump, Rudolph Giuliani. He features in this alphabet because he is the “*executive director of the White House Task Force on the FIFA World Cup 2026*”. I am sure he got the job on merit in an open competition.

His job lies within the Department of Homeland Security so presumably he will be the one deciding the rules on which Mexican/Iranian/Haitian/Scottish fans are allowed into the country, and which are not.....

Gnabry, Serge – One player who should have been at the World Cup, but who sadly won't be going is Serge Gnabry. The Bayern München winger tore an adductor muscle in his thigh and so will be absent for a lengthy period.

Gnabry's absence is a huge loss for Germany. He has scored 26 goals for them in 59 appearances, making him the leading scorer for “die Towel Boys” of current players.

Goal celebrations – to use a nice Newcastle expression, there's nothing that boils my piss more than the way that footballers now celebrate goals. Whether it is performing somersaults or dance routines it's annoying and we certainly won't publicise any of them. However, here's one that went wrong.....

<https://x.com/AtlasBrazalete/status/1998120399096463582?s=20>

Goal horny – another phrase from our Norwegian-English footballing phrasebook. Pretty obvious what it means (and why it is suddenly popular in parts of England). Never been used to describe Kai Havertz.

Goals – If you've not already submitted your sweepstake entry it may assist your sweepstake forecasting to know that the average number of goals at the last World Cup was 2.66. You have to go back to 1970 for the average to be up to 3 goals per game. The best World Cup for goals was 1958 when there were an average of 5.38 per game.

Goals, the – the object of the game of football is to put the ball in the goals (though some coaches seem to have forgotten this!). The dimensions of the goals are 7.32 metres wide and 2.44 metres high (as measured from the inside). The thickness of the goalposts – which may be square, elliptical or round and made of wood or metal – shall not exceed 12cm.



If 7.32m and 2.44m seem odd numbers, it is because (as all Brexit nations know) they translate into 8 yards (or 24 feet) and 8 feet, respectively, in real money.

Until 1866 there was no crossbar – so a goal could be scored at any height provided that the ball passed between the posts (like in rugby or gaelic football). In 1866 a tape was added at the height of 8 feet. Only in 1883 was a solid crossbar introduced.

Goals, top scorer – the top goalscorer at World Cups is Germany's Miroslav Klose with 16 goals (spread over four tournaments), second is Brazil's Ronaldo (the goofy one – also scored at four tournaments) with 15 and third is “*Der Bomber*” Gerd Müller with 14 (scored at only two World Cups). Lionel Messi (13) and Kylian Mbappe (12) will no doubt be hoping to have a good World Cup and overtake Klose....

(If you are wondering how many the other (pretty) Ronaldo has scored, it is a mere 8 in 22 games)

Goalkeepers – Each squad is now allowed to have three goalkeepers and, uniquely, goalkeepers can be ‘replaced’ in a squad at any time – i.e. you can bring into the squad as many goalies as you like! The only conditions are that the dropped player must be injured (but since ‘having COVID’ counts as an injury then that should be easy enough to fake!) and once dropped they cannot return to the squad.

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As with every position a never-ending pub discussion is “who was the best goalkeeper ever?”. Statistically, the best World Cup goalkeepers are Peter Shilton (England) and Fabian Barthez (France), since they each have kept clean sheets in 10 World Cup games. The goalkeeper who has played the greatest number of World Cup games is another Frenchman, Hugo Lloris (20 games).

Goalies and Pep Guardiola – He may be the greatest coach of the 21st century but Pep Guardiola has not yet coached a national team. However, his influence will be seen at this World Cup in the way that goalkeepers play.

In the past football had ten skilful players plus a goalkeeper – that’s why in school playgrounds around the world the kid that is most useless at playing football gets put into the goals! When Guardiola became manager of Bayern München he discovered he had a goalkeeper – Manuel Neuer – who could actually play football with his feet. So Pep encouraged him to do so, by devising a style of football where the goalie would pass the ball like an outfield player. Thus was born the “sweeper keeper”. When he moved to England Pep brought the style with him – and the next thing you know every goalie is obliged to play football.

Compared to the primitive actions of goalies even ten years ago this is great - provided that the goalie is capable of playing football. Sadly, most coaches now seem to think that it is obligatory to play this way. But this is what can happen when your goalie cannot play football:

[how not to sweeper-keep](#)

Goal kick – a lesser known law of football is that, until 1997, it was forbidden to score a goal directly from a goal-kick. Apart from the obvious fact that it is a freakishly difficult feat to achieve, what is odd is that the goalie was allowed to score when kicking out of their hands (and several goalies have achieved this).

In 1997, the laws were amended, so now it is possible to score directly from a goal-kick - but only against the opposing team! Why did they need to add those last six words? Which retarded goalie is expected to shoot a goal kick into their own net???!!

Goalline technology – after the Germans cheated their way to victory against England in the 2010 World Cup by having Frank Lampard’s goal disallowed (*ed: we’ll conveniently forget that the final score was 1-4*) (see picture, right) FIFA introduced goalline technology.

The system works thanks to an array of up to 14 cameras placed around the goal that can detect whether or not the ball has completely passed over the line – and, if it does, a message is sent to the referee via his watch.



The equipment costs up to €500 000 (!) so you won’t be seeing it at your local Sunday league games anytime soon. Interestingly, those crooks at FIFA charge €20 000 per club to have the equipment “certified”!!!

In contrast to VAR, goalline technology is welcomed – for the simple reason that the referee gets the relevant information (Goal/no goal) in a matter of seconds.

Golden Boot – The top scorer at each World Cup tournament wins “the Golden Boot” (*ed: presumably an Adidas boot*).

France’s Jus Fontaine holds the record for the most goals at the World Cup, bagging 13 goals at the 1958 Finals, whilst Hungary’s Sandor Kocsis scored 11 in 1954. Gerd Müller is the last to score 10 goals, back in 1970. In contrast, the top scorer at the 1962 finals got only 4 goals!

Only twice in the last 11 World Cups has the top scorer got more than six goals –this includes the 2022 World Cup where Kylian Mbappe won the Golden Boot with 8 goals.

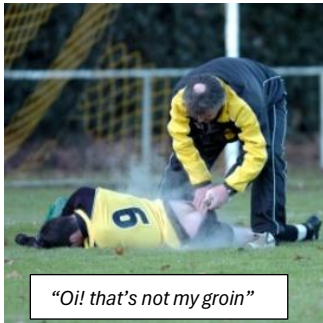


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Golden Goal – remember the Golden Goal? It was one of Sepp Blatter’s brilliant innovations to improve football and was practiced at the Euros and World Cups between 1996 and 2002. If a game went into extra time, rather than play 30 minutes, the game would end whenever a team scored. This rule – known as “next goal wins” has been practiced for millennia by kids who have to go home for their tea and needed to end a game urgently. But the flaw in Mr Blatter’s brilliant idea was that, unlike hungry schoolboys, professional footballers are deeply concerned about not losing (rather than winning) so extra time became 30 minutes of sterile sideways passing as players worried about making a mistake and conceding the winning goal.

The Golden Goal was quietly dropped in 2003. Sadly Mr Blatter stayed on for much longer....

Greta – What has happened to the world’s favourite Swedish child prodigy? Is she at this moment sailing on a raft across the Atlantic in order to cheer on the *Blagult*, while US ICE snipers are waiting for her arrival? We need to know.....



Groin – mysterious part of the anatomy that is prone to being strained by footballers.

Nobody is quite sure where the groin actually is, but it lies somewhere between the knee and the stomach. Some even believe that the groin is fictional or a misspelling of loin – after all you never see ‘groin of lamb’ or ‘pork groin’ served at a restaurant.....

Guadalajara Stadium - The Estadio Akron, as it is usually known, was built in 2010 so it did not host matches at previous World Cups in Mexico. Its design is supposed to resemble a volcano. With a capacity of 48 000 it is the second-smallest ground at this World Cup. It will host four 1st round games, including one match of Mexico.

Guadalajara has an altitude of 1700m and a subtropical climate – so it could be 30°C, humid or wet and hard to breath. A perfect venue for playing football (if you are a FIFA official sat in an air-conditioned VIP lounge).

The city was disturbingly close to major unrest in February when warring drug gangs battled it out. Consequently, do not expect to see President Infantino at any games in Guadalajara (not that it is dangerous here, of course.....)



Gulf – Nothing to do with the Gulf of Arabia or the Gulf of Mexico (sorry Gulf of America). The word ‘gulf’ is always used to describe when there is a large gap in quality between two teams: “eg there is a gulf in class between Brazil and Scotland”. Apparently (and bizarrely) the word originates from the Greek word *kolpos* for bosom.....