

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

P is for

Pacific Football fish – Yes, there is actually a fish named after football! The Pacific football fish (*Himantolophus sagamius*) is a member of the angler fish family. It is the only known type of football that is not made by adidas.



The males of the football fish have evolved into “sexual parasites.” Using well-developed olfactory organs, they find and fuse themselves to females, eventually losing their eyes, internal organs, and everything else but the testes. The male becomes a permanent appendage that draws nutrition from its female host and serves as an easily accessible source of sperm. (ed.: ladies – does the description ‘a permanent appendage that draws nutrition from its female host’ sound familiar to you....??!!!)

Panama – their nickname is *Los Canaleros* aka the Canal Men (ed: if the letter C falls off their nickname then they could be in trouble in San Francisco....). They were undefeated in ten games in qualifying for this World Cup, which may explain why they are ranked surprisingly high by FIFA. (ed: their ranking has absolutely no connection to the Panama Papers)

Led by a Danish coach, Thomas Christiansen, this will be their 2nd appearance at the finals and they will hope to improve on 2018 when they lost all three of their matches. However, as they are in a group with England, Croatia and Ghana this may not be possible.....

World Cup record: Played 3 Wo Do L3

Current FIFA World Ranking: 30th

Star Player: none

Panama Papers – with Panama at the World Cup and FIFA run by a bunch of crooks then it is appropriate to mention the Panama Papers. Leaked to the world’s press in 2016 these were some 11.5 million documents showing how many firms and wealthy people were using offshore accounts and shell companies to avoid tax and do other nefarious activities

Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Pep Guardiola, Jose Mourinho were amongst the many named in the Panama Papers as having ‘interesting’ tax arrangements, and then there was the head of FIFA’s Ethics Committee (!!), Michel Platini (of course) and, inevitably, Gianni Infantino. In fact the only major surprise was that Sepp Blatter’s name did not feature – good old Straight Sepp, we always said he was an honest bloke!

Paraguay – A team that rarely features when discussing South American football it is perhaps surprising to learn that Paraguay has been at the World Cup eight times already (though admittedly the last time was in 2010). Their nickname is ‘*Los Guaranies*’ which is a reference to the indigenous peoples of Paraguay (ed: as opposed to all those Paraguayans with Nazi ethnicity).

As with most South American teams, you never really know what you will get and most of the players are unknown in Europe. Their coach is Gustavo Alfaro (ed: never heard of him either).

World Cup record: Played 27 W7 D10 L10

Current FIFA World Ranking: 39th

Star Player: Miguel Almiron (Atlanta United, formerly of Newcastle United)

Parking the bus – nothing to do with the way that teams are delivered to the ground, this phrase is used to describe when a team effectively plays so defensively that all of its players are in the defensive third of the field and are not looking to score themselves.



The phrase is most closely associated with “the chosen one” Jose Mourinho whose belief in results ahead of entertainment meant that he would willingly have his team ‘park the bus’ if he felt the

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

game justified it. Ironically, he first used the phrase in England to complain about an opposing team doing it vs Chelsea!

If you are young and/or trendy then you will not use the phrase ‘parking the bus’ (probably since you have never used a bus). Rather, you will talk about a ‘low block’.

Parreira, Carlos Alberto – the Brazilian former football manager holds the record for attending the most World Cup final tournaments as manager with six appearances. He led Kuwait in 1982, United Arab Emirates in 1990, Brazil in 1994 and 2006, Saudi Arabia in 1998 and South Africa in 2010. Moreover, he led the 1994 Brazil team to victory.

No relation to the Carlos Alberto who played in the 1970 final for Brazil, nor ex-King Juan Carlos.

Partey, Thomas – Ghanaian midfielder who plays his club football in Spain for Villarreal.

With several rape charges hanging over his head (for almost three years....) it will be interesting to see a) if Ghana selects him for their World Cup squad and b) if the US authorities will grant him a visa.



Of course, he is completely innocent until proven guilty – something Arsenal said whilst they continued to select him to play in a city where the alleged rapes took place.

Part Ways – In the world of PR a club never sacks its manager/coach. Instead they ‘part ways’, which always gives the misleading image of Moses parting the Red Sea. (*ed: was Moses sacked by Jim Radcliffe?*)



Ruben Amorim leaves Old Trafford

Patenaude, Bert – A player who deserves to be remembered in any World Cup alphabet is Bert Patenaude. He played for the USA and has the proud claim to have been the first player to score a hat trick at the finals - he scored all the goals in the USA’s 3-0 victory v Paraguay on 17 July 1930. (*ed: you mean there was football before Messi and Ronaldo??*)

Panenka, Antonin – Antonin Panenka is both the most famous Czechoslovak footballer of all time, and responsible for the most memorable event in a Euro final. The final of EURO76 was between Czechoslovakia and West Germany. The match ended 2-2 and went to penalties. West Germany’s Uli Hoeness (he who subsequently had “certain difficulties” regarding the payment of taxes) shot his penalty – the 4th -high over the bar. This meant that the taker of the fifth penalty for Czechoslovakia would win the game – and tournament – if he scored. Up stepped Bohemians Prague midfielder Antonin Panenka. Would he hit the penalty to his left, to his right, hard up the middle? He did none of these – he calculated that goalie Sepp Maier would dive in one direction and thus delicately chipped the ball up the middle of the goal as Maier effectively dived out of the way!! The uniqueness and audacity of this act led this style of penalty kick to be dubbed ‘the panenka’. Just think, if it had been one of his teammates that had tried it, this type of penalty might instead be known as an “Ondrus” or a “Jurkemik”...!

[The original Panenka Penalty, 1976](#)

There are two problems with taking a Panenka penalty. Firstly, your opponents (and possibly your teammates) will hate you for being flash. And secondly, if it goes wrong then you look really stupid!! Just ask Brahim Diaz who tried to win AFCON26 this way:

[Brahim Díaz AFCON Final Panenka Penalty](#)

Panini – Brand of football stickers collected by little boys during football tournaments. The sort of thing you stop collecting once you reach the age of 16 (sweepstakers, please note)

No World Cup would be complete without the Panini trying to screw the maximum amount of pocket money out of football loving boys. Interestingly, they now sell the “Adrenalyn XL Omni Set” which is a box containing all 630 cards for the bargain price of €400 ! Surely the whole point of football cards/stickers was the fun of collecting them.... (*ed: as a child I also loved the bubble gum you got with football cards!!*)

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Parrot, sick as a – when a team has lost unluckily, the classic quote from the manager or players used to be for them to say that they were “as sick as a parrot”. However, in the woke, vegan, animal rights, tree-hugging LGBTQRST++++ days that we now live in the term ‘sick as a parrot’ is now prohibited since using it is regarded as both cultural appropriation and a hate crime.

Peace, Board of – the Board of Peace is the wonderful new organisation created by President Trump that will bring peace to countries (sometimes after the USA has bombed them).

Why is it in the Alphabet? Because FIFA has a formal partnership with the Board of Peace and announced a three-stage plan to support the regeneration of Gaza, which it claimed will include 50 FIFA Arena mini-pitches located near schools and residential areas within three to six months, five full-size pitches across multiple districts for professional use within 12 months, and a state-of-the-art FIFA Academy and a new 20,000-seat national stadium within eighteen months and three years. (*ed: if that is three years’ work as defined by the Council in my commune then it’ll be at least ten years before it is finished!!!*). FIFA did not say where the money would come from or how the money would be raised. It also did not say whether the Palestine Football Association had been consulted.



Hungary's ex-President Orbán is nauseous at Mr Infantino's presence at the Board of Peace meeting.

President Infantino attended the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace and proudly wore a Trump MAGA cap. He said that it is not only necessary to rebuild houses, hospitals and schools but also rebuild “people, emotion, hope and this is what football, my sport, is about.”

Peach of a cross – we mentioned earlier how commentators describing crosses use many adjectives. The most bizarre is the term ‘a peach of a cross’, used to denote a perfect (*ed: ‘inch-perfect’*) cross. But when did a peach become the fruit of choice for top-quality crosses? In Singapore the durian is considered the king of fruits – so why not ‘a durian of a cross’?! Indeed, why even a fruit? Why not a potato of a cross, or a penguin of a cross, or a Ferrari of a cross? We need to know, otherwise I may become very cross. (*ed: I think you need to go and lie down as you are overthinking this.....*)

Pele - This will be the first World Cup to be played since the death of Pele (whose real name, as all quiz fans will know, was Edson Arantes do Nascimento). For most sweepstakers of a certain age his name is inextricably linked with the 1970 World Cup but he first played at the 1958 finals - where he became the youngest goalscorer at that time - as well as the subsequent three.

A striker who was two-footed he spent virtually all of his career playing for Brazilian club Santos where in 659 games he scored an unbelievable 643 goals! (He retired to play a further three seasons for New York Cosmos). In addition, for Brazil he scored 77 goals in 92 games.



He may have been the greatest player of all time (though FIFA peevishly made him only joint “player of the century” with Diego Maradona): what is certainly true is that he was the first worldwide football superstar - and certainly the most famous Brazilian ever. Not bad for someone who never played his football outside of America.

Penalty – originally penalties were only awarded for handballs that prevented goals. Penalties for all sorts of fouls were introduced in 1891.

Interestingly, the penalty area and the penalty spot (from where the penalty must be taken) only appeared in 1902 – up until then there was a line drawn 12 yards (11m) from the goals within which a penalty was given. The penalty kick would also be taken from this line – but the ball could be placed anywhere on it, not necessarily in the centre of the goal.

Since 11m is the distance of today’s penalty spot this meant that the ‘penalty area’ was much smaller. I’m sure it is only a matter of time before somebody proposes that again.....

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Penalty shoot outs - The time honoured tie-breaker is the penalty shoot out - Except that they have only existed at the World Cup since 1982! The first took place to decide the 1982 semi-final game between West Germany and France – the infamous ‘Schumacher (non)foul game’. (See under *S*). It was won, of course, by Germany.

To date 35 World Cup games have been decided by penalty shoot outs, including three finals – in 1994 (Brazil defeating Italy), 2006 (Italy defeating France) and 2026 (Argentina defeating France).

Argentina has won the most games on penalties – 6 (out of 7), whilst the most efficient shootout experts are, needless to say, Germany: 4 penalty shoot outs, 4 victories. Total penalties taken 18, total goals 17 (*ed: We shall name the German that failed under the letter “S”!*)

Spain has the worst record in penalty shoot outs, having lost 4 times.

Interestingly, only twice in the 35 penalty shoot outs have they gone beyond five penalty kicks – presumably showing how nerve-racking they can be.

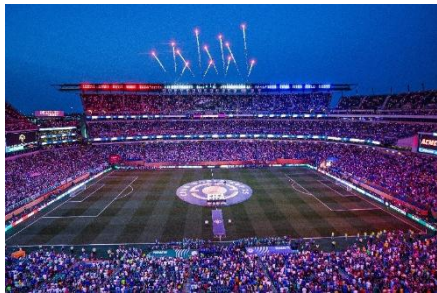
Petkovic, Vladimir – Vlad the Trainer is the boss of Algeria, a job he took over in 2024.

His playing career was spent in Yugoslavia and Switzerland, where he made his permanent home. Most of his managerial career has been there, both with clubs and with the Switzerland national team who he led at the 2018 World Cup.



Current record as coach of Algeria: W20 D6 L2

Philadelphia – six World Cup matches will be played in Philadelphia, at Lincoln Financial Field (*ed: that is possibly the most boring name of any sports stadium!!*).



Opened in 2003 the stadium has a capacity of 69 000. It has no roof so could be hot in July.

Philly is one of America’s older cities and so is interesting for tourists with an interest in history. It is also a very ‘blue collar’ place and the fans of all of its sports teams are infamous for their ‘passion’ (i.e. aggression). Whether this spills over to the World Cup remains to be seen.

Pickles the dog – the most famous dog with a World Cup link (in fact, the only dog with a World Cup link if we disregard Striker – the mascot for the 1994 World Cup in the USA).

Back in 1966 when the World Cup was held in England the World Cup trophy was on public display as pre-tournament publicity. On 20 March 1966 someone stole it and demanded £15 000 ransom – the equivalent of £250k today. Seven days later Pickles the dog was out walking in south London with his owner when he stifled out the trophy lying under a car. Pickles became a national hero, being voted “UK Dog of the Year” and winning a year’s supply of dog food. His owner also received a £5000 reward.



The story ends sadly however. Only a year later Pickles died by strangling when his chain got caught whilst he was chasing at cat. And the trophy was stolen again in 1983 from the Brazilian Football Federation and, since Brazilian dogs are not as smart as English ones, it was never found.

Pinching – Football is supposed to be a man’s game. That does not mean that women cannot play, rather that one should expect a certain amount of physical contact when playing. What the founders of the game would not have expected was footballers pinching opponents – after spitting at an opponent it is probably the most cowardly and childish way of behaviour on a football field.

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET



Not surprisingly an Italian defender made the headlines for pinching when Erling Haaland accused Gianluca Mancini of pinching his arse several times in the World Cup qualifying game between Norway and Italy. (*Ed: he wasn't even wearing rainbow laces*). Haaland had the last laugh as he was so fired up by Mancini's sexual harassment that he scored twice and probably also called Mancini "a big girl's blouse" (*Ed: sweepstakers are invited to share with us what is the Norwegian for "big girl's blouse"*)

Plan B - What you do if plan A doesn't work. i.e. If you are a coach and your team is struggling then you need a radical alternative strategy to change the game.

The classic example of Plan B is moving a central defender to play as striker: it reeks of desperation, is not pretty, but often can be very effective.

When you send your goalkeeper up for a corner in the 89th minute, that is not Plan B but Plan Z.....

Playmaker – Term used to describe a midfield player who can actually pass the ball to his teammates (it's surprising how many cannot).

Pochettino, Mauricio – Mo is the coach of USA. An Argentinian, born in the unlikely-named town of Murphy, he had a respectable playing career in Argentina (Newells Old Boys), Spain (Espanyol) and France (PSG) and was capped 20 times by his country.

His first managerial job was with Espanyol. Then in 2013 he moved to the Premier League. For five years, first at Southampton and then at Tottenham Hotspur "Poch" was a golden boy who could do nothing wrong as coach. However, he failed to actually win anything at Spurs so, much to the sadness of all his fans in the press, he was sacked and moved to PSG. There he did win the league, but failed to manage the big egos and failed in the Champions League so was let go after one season. This brought him to Chelsea – that destroyer of reputations – where failure was inevitable. This meant that by 2024 the only job he could get in football was manager of USA. Even Manchester United did not want him.



If Team USA does well at this World Cup, is a job at Real Madrid awaiting? Conversely, if they do badly expect "Poch" to be back in charge of a Premier League team next season (after being taken to the airport by ICE....).

Current record as coach of USA: W11 D2 L7

Pocket of space - a pocket is a unit of measurement for space that a player has on a football field. It is somewhere between "half a yard of space" and "an acre of space"

Pogba, Paul – he's still only 32 and so should be a kingpin in the France team. Instead, Paul Pogba features high on the list of washed up players who wasted their talents.

Pogba has earned a lot of money from football but he could have done so much more and have a much bigger trophy cabinet at home. In short he is just like his English equivalent Paul Gascoigne, but without the alcohol addiction.

Why? Because he was distracted by the bright lights of celebrity – being one of the first players of the 'Instagram' generation – spending more time posting texts or being in the hairdresser's chair than on the training pitch. Add to this his inability to break links with bad influences from his rough upbringing in the banlieue of Paris, which culminated in a witchcraft blackmail threat (!) from his brother (*ed: nice family!*).



He was last seen playing very occasionally for Monaco (and owning a camel racing team in Arabia!) and you sense that the final chapter in the Paul Pogba story will not be a happy one.

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Popcorn man – This is a lovely turn of phrase used by Brazilians to describe a player who fails to perform in a big game (e.g. Ronaldo in the 1998 World Cup final). The significance of the term is that the bloke selling popcorn always comes to the big matches but doesn't do much more than stand there. Clever, eh!

Popes – Given that the Roman Catholic Church is based in Italy (*ed: it's in the Vatican*) it is perhaps not surprising that football plays an important part in the church. The last three Popes were all big football fans. The stories of Pope John Paul II being a budding goalkeeper are well known (*ed: please no jokes about his going from saving shots to saving souls*).



'Who wants to join me for a kickabout in the Square?'

Pope Francis was a passionate football fan, supporting the Buenos Aires team of San Lorenzo, and regularly organised kickarounds in St Peters Square with cardinals vestments for goals. His funeral was even attended by Gianni Infantino (*ed: he was applying for the vacant post*).

Less well known is that the German pope Roland Rat was such a big Bayern München fan that he had a large tattoo of Gerd Müller scoring against England in 1970 on his back.

Sadly, the current Pope Robert is a yank and so knows nothing about soccerball, preferring baseball: his team being the Chicago White Sox – and not, disappointingly, the San Diego Padres.

Popovic, Tony – Tony is the boss of Australia. He had a lengthy playing career, most notably at Crystal Palace and won 58 international caps. His managerial cv includes spells in charge of both Turkish and Greek teams – not many people can boast that! – and became boss of the Socceroos in 2024



Record as coach of Australia: W6 D3 L2

Portugal - the *Seleção das Quinas* - as Cristiano's Lads are affectionately known as – are one of the top ranked teams at the World Cup. However, they are very much a 21st Century phenomenon. Whilst they have been “ever present” since 2002 prior to that date they were at only two World Cups. Consequently, this will be only their 9th World Cup.

Currently led by Spanish-born smooth talker and serial underachiever Roberto Martinez Portugal's renaissance began just before the appearance of CR7 on the international scene (he won his first international cap in 2003) but it is fair to say that the team has been inextricably linked with him for the last 10-15 years. Thus the big question will be how manager Roberto Martinez handles him. Will he have the courage to drop him if needed? (*ed: no*).

Portugal have to be one of the favourites to win the tournament, but one always has a sneaky feeling that they could implode in a frenzy of recrimination whilst Martinez watches on helplessly, like a supply teacher trying to handle a classroom of unruly kids.

World Cup record: Played 35 W17 D6 L12

Current FIFA World Ranking: 6th

Star Player: Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United) – but don't tell CR7 that!!

Poznan, the – fans of Polish team Lech Poznan have the unique honour of having a fan celebration named after them. Subsequently adopted by Manchester City fans (following a match vs Lech Poznan). For those not familiar, it involves fans turning their back on the match, linking arms, then jumping up and down:

[the original Poznan](#)

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Prawn sandwich brigade – a legendary phrase that refers to those attending football matches without actually having any interest in the game. It was coined by then Manchester United captain Roy Keane in 2000 in a rant about his club's home support.

“Some people come to Old Trafford and I don't think they can spell football, let alone understand it. At the end of the day, they need to get behind the team. Away from home, our fans are fantastic; I'd call them the hardcore fans. But at home, they have a few drinks and probably the prawn sandwiches, and they don't realise what's going on out on the pitch.”

Sadly, I have never experienced corporate hospitality (I am always open to offers...) so I cannot say if prawn sandwiches are on offer in the posh seats at football – though I definitely would avoid eating anything contain prawns at Mexican grounds!!

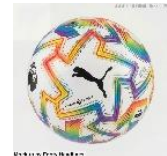
Pride (1) – Remember all the kerfuffle about pride armbands at the Qatar World Cup, which turned out to be a non-story since no team actually decided to do anything of note? Well, the equivalent story for the 2026 World Cup will revolve around 26 June. On that day Egypt plays Iran in Seattle. However, it will coincide with the city's annual “Pride” festivities which take place around that weekend. Already LGBTQRS+++ activists have been demanding that there should be something done to commemorate Pride at the match, knowing full well that neither Egypt nor Iran will welcome such action.

It will be interesting to see what happens. On the one hand President Trump hates muslims and Iranians in particular, so would enjoy the chance to upset them. But, on the other hand, MAGA supporters are hardly the sort of people of welcome Pride events, and Trump hates the ‘Commies’ who run Seattle.

The solution is likely to be Mr Infantile declaring, once again, that ‘today I am gay’ – but out of earshot of the Egyptian and Iranian VIPs. In case you have forgotten it here, once again, is that legendary speech:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/vNCWOHQ4akw?feature=share>

Pride (2) – in order to encourage more gay players in the men's game (there is no need for action in the women's game) there have been initiatives involving rainbow laces, rainbow armbands and rainbow logos on shirts. Next season the English Premier League will have rainbow footballs for some games.



Noting the number of openly gay professional players today these initiatives are proving to be rip-roaring successes.....

Prosenicki, Robert – RP gets a mention in the alphabet as he is the only player to score goals at the World Cup for two different countries (and we don't mean own goals). At the 1990 WC he scored for Yugoslavia, whilst at the 1998 WC he was playing and scoring for Croatia.

Prize Money – it seems strange to think, but there is actual prize money for teams participating in the World Cup. There is a total prize money pot of \$727 million and all the teams are guaranteed a minimum of \$10.5 million. Naturally, the prize money increases the further a team progresses, with the World Cup winners picking up a cheque for \$50.5 million.

A lot of money, but peanuts when one considers that FIFA expect this World Cup to generate revenue of \$11 billion.....

Pubalgia – No, it's not a nostalgia for pubs, it's a type of footballing injury. In fact, it is the “obscure injury of the year”, in the same way that broken metatarsals were a few years back.

To be more precise pubalgia is a generic term that covers several types of groin injury. (*Ed: so why not simply say groin injury?*). Yamine Lamal, Cole Palmer and Nico Williams have all been pubalgia sufferers this season.

2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

Puskas, Ferenc - Hungarian legend of the 1950s who captained the team that reached the final of the 1954 World Cup. He was described as short, stocky, barrel-chested, overweight, (see picture, right) couldn't head and only used one foot – and was still better than all of his peers!

In 84 internationals he scored 83 goals!!! He moved from Honved of Budapest (where he had scored 428 goals in 397 games) to the legendary Real Madrid team in 1959 and was in three of their European Cup-winning teams (and scored 242 goals in 262 games!) - and was capped a further four times for Spain! Clearly General Franco was not strict on the checking of passports.

