

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

D is for

Dalic, Zlatko – see under “Z” (as we are short of entries under “Z”!!)

Dallas – the urban sprawl of Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington will be hosting nine matches, including a semifinal at the AT&T Stadium. Built in 2007 and home to the Dallas Cowboys the stadium has a retractable roof which is essential in June/July as the outside temperature will be 30°C+ ! With it's 94 000 capacity it will be the largest stadium in use at this World Cup.



Apart from the intense heat fans attending matches in Dallas will have to cope with intense boredom as this city is not a tourist centre. The most notable thing to see there is the spot where JFK was shot (there's an x painted on the road!). After that, next on the sightseeing list is the “George W Bush Presidential Library” – seriously!!

Dassler, Adolf and Rudolf – A pair of Bavarian cobblers Adolf and Rudolf Dassler saw in 1930 a market for sports shoes. However, a bitter family feud (fuelled by their wives, of course) saw the two brothers split acrimoniously and set up rival sports shoe companies. Thus was born the brands Adidas and Puma (and the Bavarian town of Herzogenaurach became the world capital for sports equipment, with the Adidas and Puma factories at opposite ends of the town).

In case you hadn't guessed the word “Adidas” is short for Adi Dassler – can you imagine if he'd chosen to call his brand “Adolf” instead?! Puma, of course, was named after the type of mountain lion that is native to northern Bavaria.

Adidas has always had suspiciously close links with UEFA and FIFA (for example Adidas has supplied the official World Cup ball since 1974). The company also has a 9% share of Bayern München, as well as a sausage factory in Herzogenaurach into which the leather offcuts from the Adidas shoe factory are recycled.

Debastre, Sebastian – Sebby is the coach of Congo. A Frenchman, his managerial career has largely been in Africa, with club sides in Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Angola, Egypt and Morocco, as well as the national team of Uganda. He took charge of the Congo team way back in 2022, thus making him the longest-serving person in power in Congo since President Mobutu.....



Record as boss of Congo:Pl48 W29 D8 L11

Dembele, Ousmane - The Paris Saint-Germain and France forward is the reigning Ballon d'Or winner.

For years a story of unfulfilled potential - partly through lots of injuries - his career was transformed when PSG boss Luis Enrique moved him into the No 9 role. From there, his blend of clever movement, mesmerising dribbling and clinical finishing has catapulted him to the summit of the game.

He will be keen to improve on the 2022 World Cup when, in the final, he both conceded a penalty and was substituted at half-time.

Denmark – Several Danish sweepstakers have asked if there is an error in the sweepstake since they cannot find the Danish team. The only reply is: Scotland 4 Denmark 2 - If you cannot beat the “sweaty socks” (i.e. Jocks, i.e. Scots) then you don't deserve to be at the World Cup.....

PS And your bacon is not very good either.....

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Deschamps, Didier – France’s manager Didier Deschamps is one of only three people who have won the World Cup as both player and manager (Mario Zagalo and Frank Beckenbauer being the others).

In an illustrious playing career with Marseilles, Chelsea and Juventus Deedee was the youngest captain to lift the Champions League trophy (aged 25 for Marseilles) and was capped 103 times, for France, leading them to victory in the 1998 World Cup and Euro2000.

He has been in his current role since 2012 making him by far the longest-serving boss at this World Cup. He has been around so long that he can remember when Gianni Infantino was carrying Sepp Bladder’s bags (and changing his colostomy bags, hence the nickname Septic Bladder).



The smile of a contented man

He has announced he will be stepping down after the tournament (which no doubt has cheered up Zinedine Zidane) so an illustrious career at West Ham / Nottingham Forest / Tottenham beckons.....

Record as coach of France: W112 D35 L28

Death, Group of – During every tournament there is usually one group having a disproportionate number of good teams where an early defeat for a ‘big’ team will leave them fighting to qualify. With typical hyperbole journalists always name such a group ‘the group of death’. However, at this World Cup since eight of the twelve teams finishing third in their group will also qualify (thus completely devaluing the group stage) then one cannot seriously say that there is any group where a ‘big’ team runs the risk of elimination. (Not that I am cynically suggesting that FIFA wants all of the ‘big’ teams to go through.....).

De Bruyne, Kevin – see *Harry, ex-Prince*

Defeats, Most – the team that has lost the greatest number of games at World Cup finals is Mexico. They have lost 28 times, albeit out of 60 games played.

No fewer than twelve teams have lost all the games they have played at the finals with El Salvador and Canada each having lost six out of six games played over two World Cups. Can the Canadians extend their unwanted record at this World Cup.....?

Delauney, Henri – Delauney was a French football administrator who, as FIFA board member, worked closely with Jules Rimet to create the World Cup tournament. He was also the first Secretary General of UEFA (in the good old days when it wasn’t corrupt). The European Championship trophy is named after him (at least until they sell it to a sponsor).

Diallo, Amad - one of the few successes at Old Trafford in recent years is Amad Diallo. The attacking midfielder was born in the Ivory Coast but was trafficked to Italy aged 8 and joined the youth team of Atalanta, before being sold to Manchester.

Amad has an Italian passport, though plays for the Ivory Coast. His club owner, Jim Radcliffe, has complained in public about the number of foreigners “colonising” the UK.....

Diaz, Brahim – Fringe Real Madrid player who became famous when playing for Morocco in the AFCON Final in January. Not only did he miss a potential match-winning penalty but he did it by performing an awful “Panenka”. Given that the penalty was very dubious resulted in opponents Senegal walking off the pitch - and had been won by Diaz himself by moaning at the referee - some kindly suggested that he had deliberately hit the penalty gently to the goalkeeper as a form of fair play. Nah – he’s Moroccan, and they don’t do “fair play”. It was just a crap penalty. Judge for yourself:

[Brahim Diaz Horrible Penalty Miss for Morocco vs Senegal](#)

Diaz, Luis – Striker Luis Diaz is undoubtedly the star play for Colombia. Since his summer transfer from Liverpool Luis has blossomed at Bayern Munich. He was the driving attacking force in his country’s qualification, scoring seven goals.

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Diaz's obvious skill is complemented by a relentless tenacity off the ball, constantly hounding the opposition defence.

Dimensions of the pitch – it may come as a surprise to some (*ed: not to those who read your Alphabet two years ago!*) but there is no fixed size for a football pitch. Rather, there is a minimum and maximum size. The minimum width is 45m and the minimum length is 90m. The maximum width is 90m and maximum length is 120m. Thus, simple arithmetic tells us that the area of a football pitch can vary between 4050m² and 10 800m²! It is also permissible to have a square pitch with dimensions of 90m x 90m (though I have never ever seen that)!!

The dimensions for pitches to be used for international matches are now more restrictive – between 100m and 110m in length and 64 to 75m in width, with FIFA 'recommending' 105m x 68m. Since the width of an American Football pitch is only 48.8m this led to necessary redesign of some of the stadia in the USA in order to fit a wider football field.

At the 1930 World Cup in Uruguay some of the pitches were 90m x 125m in size and when USA lost to Argentina in the semi-finals (!) the pitch was blamed, as a contemporary American press report stated: *“The game started with a bang, and while play appeared most even it could be noticed that our long wing-passes were falling short and the usually long kicks of our backs, that generally crossed the half-way mark, were dropping in our own half of the field. The immense size of the playing pitch was treating us badly.”*

Whilst the size of the pitch may vary, the size of the penalty area is fixed at 5.5 x 18.2m and the size of the goals is always 7.32 x 2.44m.

Doping – the use of performance-enhancing drugs by athletes of whatever sport (*ed: even darts and snooker*) is reprehensible. Football is notoriously lax on drug testing. So it was interesting when in April 2025 standard drug tests after a match between Norwegian women's teams Valerenga and LSK Kvinner found that eight players involved in the fixture had tested positive for 1,3-dimethylbutylamine (DMBA), with one Valerenga player exceeding the threshold set by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

An investigation was subsequently launched by both clubs and Norway Anti-Doping (ADNO) and it was eventually established that the cause was the pitch!! The match had been played on an artificial pitch which had a rubber crumb base. Rubber crumb is the name given to shredded and recycled rubber (often from tyres) and it was this that contained the banned stimulant. It can appear when the tyre granulate is broken down. This is what the players had ingested whilst playing!

The good news for all of you who are worried about getting high or growing breasts from playing on plastic pitches is that the European Union will officially ban the sale of rubber crumb and any polymeric infill from October 2031.

Draught excluder – Until the 2020-21 season, few people had ever thought to put a player lying 'underneath' a jumping wall at a free kick. Then, suddenly, everyone was doing it. And therefore it needed a name. English football went for 'draught excluder' after the objects placed under doors to stop cold air getting in. Other countries, which seemingly have properly insulated houses, have less requirement for such devices and went for 'crocodile' or 'railway barrier'.



Dropped ball – since 1914 the rules of football allow the referee to restart the game after a temporary suspension of play by a drop ball. (Prior to that the ref had tossed the ball up, basketball-style). The rule worked well for over 100 years. But the meddlers decided in 2019 to abolish “the contested dropped ball”.

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Since then the dropped ball still takes place, but is awarded to:

- the goalkeeper of the defending team, if the ball was in the penalty area when play was stopped, of the ball was last touched in the penalty area, or
- a player of the team that last touched the ball, in all other cases.

This leads to the obvious question: if the dropped ball is uncontested, why the need to drop it? Surely one can just place it on the ground??

Scoring a goal directly from a dropped ball is forbidden - if the dropped ball is kicked directly into the goal, a goal-kick or corner-kick is awarded instead.

Not to be confused with the term 'dropped bollock'.

See also '**technical area**'.

Dryness – It is not unusual to blame the weather when you lose a football match. Playing in torrential rain, on muddy pitches, baking sun or strong winds can all seriously affect a team's performance. However, when Arsenal lost against Bournemouth this season striker (?) Viktor Gyökeres came up with a new climatic excuse when blamed the result on the pitch being "too dry"!! So, Swedish fans, you had better hope that the World Cup pitches are well watered if you expect your star striker to perform well. (*ed: Perhaps he was simply demonstrating a dry sense of humour?!*)

Dumfries, Denzel – Denzel is our favourite Dutchman. With a name like that he should be playing for Jamaica or Scotland, rather than Holland. We have been unable to discover if Denzil has ever actually been to Dumfries (though a black man in rural Scotland would be noticed...).

Denzel plays his club football for Inter Milan, so he'll be able to tell his Italian teammates what a World Cup tournament looks like....

Dundee United – Apparently, the term 'Dundee United' is used in the Yoruba-speaking parts of Nigeria to describe a team that is shit. This originates from a 1972 pre-season tour by Dundee United in Nigeria when they were shit!! (*ed: taking Scotsmen to a hot African country in Summer that also is the world's largest consumer of Guinness, and then asking them to run around for 90 minutes is not a good idea!!*).

We would welcome any Yoruba-speaking sweepstakers, or members of the EU Delegation in Abuja to confirm this story.

Dzeko, Edin – It's always nice to see a hard-working journeyman rewarded with a place at the World Cup, and Edin Dzeko definitely falls into that category. Now 40 years of age the captain of Bosnia is playing with Schalke his ninth club. Bosnia's greatest player he, not surprisingly, holds the record for most-capped player (148), all-time top scorer (73 goals), and has passed 1000 games in professional football.

Dybala, Paulo – An enigmatic player, rated by many but so often failing to catch the eye on the biggest stages, is Argentinian striker Paulo Dybala. Currently a player for Roma he has played most of his professional career in Italy. Nicknamed 'the jewel' he averages almost one goal per two games for his clubs, yet in 40 international games for Argentina he has scored only 4 goals. He is thus one of many players who have been great players for their clubs but who just did not quite make it at the top level.

At the last World Cup he was a member of the winning Argentina team – coming on as sub in the final in the 121st minute!!

