

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

T is for

Tattoos – In previous years we have featured footballers tattoos. But, like the bad graffiti one sees along railway lines, it is now simply an eyesore. The more one publicises it the worse it gets. So for this sweepstake we won't show what some juvenile overpaid people have had done to their skins.

Tabarez, Oscar – Amongst elite International managers the name Oscar Tabarez is not well known in Europe. Perhaps it is because he looked like Herman Munster/Dick van Dyke. Yet Óscar Washington Tabárez Silva – aka *El Maestro* (The Teacher) – deserves mention in any World Cup alphabet. For he took Uruguay to four World Cup finals (1990, 2010, 2014, 2018) and, in two spells, was in charge for a 228 games – a record with a single country - totalling 18 years in the post.



Team Mascots – given FIFA's obsession with marketing it is perhaps surprising that they have not yet got into the habit of having each team accompanied by team mascots. And the Americans do love a mascot – the picture shows actual mascots of US college football teams, though not the aggressive Notre Dame "Fighting Irish" mascot!!

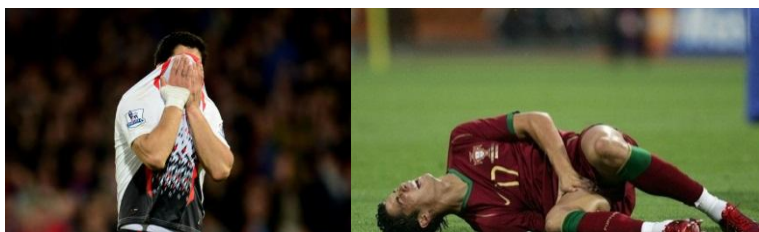


Wouldn't you just love to see Algeria / Ivory Coast / Tunisia led out by someone dressed up as a fennec fox / elephant / eagle? (*ed: no!*).

Tears – 1) the wet stuff that rolls down your eyes, which has no place in football. Crying should result in a minimum five-match ban.

– 2) the pulling apart of muscles – A common footballing injury and acceptable on the football field.

So don't get your tears and your tears mixed up. (At this stage all non-English speakers will be totally confused).



Unacceptable tears

acceptable tear- but no tears, please

Technical Area – another one of the stupid ideas dreamed up by FIFA. In an attempt to rein in on errant coaches running up and down the touchline abusing the ref the powers-that-be created a zone, known as the technical area, within whose boundaries the coach and his entourage are corralled. Unfortunately, the technical areas at major grounds are now big enough to land an aircraft in. Worse, managers now seem to think that it is obligatory for them to spend the match standing in their technical area (which can be amusing when it is pelting down with rain and they are in Gucci loafers). So we are left with the scene of coaches skulking around, like lions in a zoo cage that is too small for them....



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Teeth – just as baldy footballers have disappeared today’s footballers all possess a full set of pearly-white teeth (often purchased in Turkey). Once upon a time the sign of a true no 9 was the absence of front teeth. A battle scar from (literally) “putting your head where it hurts” in order to get a goal. Today, all the players have Hollywood smiles.

The days when the centre-forward or centre-half’s toothless grin was a warning to opponents that he was fearless have gone. And as for Juergen Klopp and his toothy grin.....



(Whilst the traditional no 9 would have missing front teeth the traditional no 5 would have missing teeth AND a broken nose, proving that defenders are more stupid than attackers).

Tendonitis – like the metatarsal, tendonitis is a mythical injury created in the 1990s by workshy footballers. The sporting equivalent of taking time off work because of ‘stress’.

Terraces – Once upon a time, football was the spectator sport of the working man. He would work until Saturday lunchtime then in the afternoon he would seek entertainment at the football ground. Hard working men did not need to sit down or even have roofs to protect them from the rain. Rather, football grounds comprised of large areas of concrete steps, known as terraces. Terraces represented the democratisation of football: whoever arrived first got best choice of where to stand and prices were cheap, allowing access for all (particularly schoolboys). You could smoke and drink and – importantly – you congregated where you wished: so, if there was a nutter behind you then you could freely move elsewhere.

Interestingly, many of the large terraced stands in the UK were named after a South African hill, as their steepness reminded Victorians of the Spion Kop – a hill outside Ladysmith that was the site of a bloody battle in the Boer War. The largest ‘kop’ in England was not the famous one at Anfield, but the Holte End at Villa Park (the home of Aston Villa) which once had a capacity of 30 000. And the demise of the terraces was due in part to the ease at which bloody battles of hooligans could take place in the 1970s and 80s. Today, the largest terrace in Europe is the *Südtribune* at Borussia Dortmund’s stadium which holds 24 500.



Terrorism – thankfully, there has never been a terrorist incident at the World Cup. However, there was a plot to target the 1998 World Cup in France – The plot involved terrorists infiltrating the Stade Vélodrome in Marseille as stadium crew, in order to attack English players and spectators during the England–Tunisia match. Terrorists had reportedly planned to blow up the England substitute bench (targeting David Beckham and Michael Owen), shoot English players and throw grenades into the stands. Other terrorists were then to storm the United States national team’s hotel in Paris and attack American players watching the game there. Thankfully, the French police foiled this plot and 88 people were arrested (though in the end only 8 people were convicted).

The first recorded terrorist incident at a football ground happened in England. As part of the campaign to get the right to vote for women suffragettes carried out a series of bombings and arson attacks in 1913. Amongst the targets were football grounds. Attempts to set fire to the grounds of Blackburn Rovers and Preston North End were unsuccessful, but the Arsenal ground was actually burned down (which facilitated their move from south- to north London).

Thiaw, Pape – Before the AFCON Finals you probably had never heard of Pape Thiaw, the manager of Senegal. But after telling his team to walk off in the final (when a penalty was harshly awarded in the last minute against Senegal) he has become famous for the wrong reason. For that incident he has received a five-match ban – but it won’t affect his presence at the World Cup since the ban only applies to CAF games (ie those in Africa).



He had a nomadic playing career, playing for 12 European clubs in only 10 seasons. He was a member of Senegal’s 2002 World Cup team that got to the Quarter Finals. The Senegal post is his first in senior management, but he is doing well so far, leading the “Taraanga Lions” to victory at AFCON.

Record as coach of Senegal: W17 D3 L1

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Third placed teams – because the boneheads at FIFA have, for the first time, allowed 48 teams and placed them in twelve groups of four this means that they have devised a way to allow 8 of the 12 third placed teams to qualify to the knockout stage. It is as follows:

Points will be used to decide which third-placed teams go through, along with goal difference and goals scored. If two or more teams are still level then “team conduct scores” will be used. A yellow card means minus one point, a red card after two yellows is minus three points, and a straight red card means minus four.

And if two teams are ranked equal after all those steps then the deciding factor will be the team’s FIFA ranking!!

This system means that, if yellow cards are a criterion for success, referees have the potential to determine which teams qualify! Teams will be praying to have Michael Oliver as a ref, since he never gives any cards in the first half of games.....!!!

It may shock you (or simply bore you) to learn that there are 495 possible permutations of how the eight 3rd placed teams could feature in the last 32 draw! If you don’t believe me you can find the permutations listed on this Wikipedia page:

[2026 FIFA World Cup - Wikipedia](#)

Third Kits – if there is one thing that exemplifies the greed in football today it is the advent of the third kit. All teams need to have a second kit (or change kit, or away kit) in case they play a team with similar colours. However, it is a relatively easy task for clubs to select a design of second kit that will ensure that it and the home kit does not clash with the design of any other the opponents a team is likely to meet in a normal season. But that would only allow clubs to sell two sets of replica kits to fans. Why, you ask do they do this? Because by inventing a third kit the clubs triple the possibilities for selling replica shirts! And all the major teams do it. Bayern München have an incredible five kits for next season.....

Throw ins – continuing our history of footballing rules, the throw in only became mandatory in 1895. Prior to that date the ball could be either thrown or kicked back into play.

The rule requiring the throw in to pass behind and over the head of the thrower only entered into force in 1965. Given that it is a rule that is rarely enforced today they may as well scrap it. As early as 1895 the thrower has been obliged to face the way of the throw – thus preventing the ball being launched potentially long distances over the shoulder.

And, for the record, it has never been permitted to score a goal directly from a throw in.

Thunderstorms - One thing that is likely to affect this World Cup is thunderstorms. In Europe we generally do not think twice about an occasional summer storm. In America they take them much more seriously. It is not so much the rain as the impressive electrical storms that puts the fear of God up Americans. It is not unusual for flights in the US to be delayed by several hours whilst storms pass (I speak from experience) and outdoor sporting events are also regularly suspended whenever lightening is around. Let us just hope that a thunderstorm does not disrupt the plans of President Infantino travelling to a game.....

Ticket Prices – This will be, by far, the most expensive World Cup to watch live.

The reasons for this are twofold (threefold, if you also count FIFAs lack of interest in the setting of ticket prices – they’ll be sat in the VIP boxes anyway). Firstly, US sporting fans are already willing to pay exorbitant prices to attend big games: even an ordinary MLS “soccer” match can cost \$150 for tickets. So the high prices will not deter local sports fans from attending – and if you’ve already committed to buying transatlantic plane tickets then you’ll simply have to pay the going rate.



Secondly, in the USA it is perfectly legal to resell tickets for a profit. Thus it is a ‘no-brainer’ for people to buy as many tickets as possible with the intention to resell them – thus pushing up the prices. FIFA does require that tickets are resold via their official website – but will then help to push up prices further by adding a 15% fee to those selling tickets PLUS a 15% fee to the new buyers. Yes, you’ve read that correctly, FIFA will be making 30% from every resold ticket!! So, rather than being concerned about pricing ordinary fans out of the market, FIFA actually have an incentive for tickets to be resold at higher prices!!!

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Tiki-taka – a pair of words used to describe when a team’s style involves lots of short passing. It’s intended aim is to control possession of the ball – the principle being that if you have the ball then the opponent cannot score with it!

However, tiki-taka is also largely fruitless since it is usually performed a long way from goal and allows the opposing team to get back into a defensive position. Consequently, it is generally considered to be a slur and has most often been used against Pep Guardiola – the disciple of possession football. However, he is on record as saying “*I hate tiki-taka. Tiki-taka means passing the ball for the sake of it, with no clear intention, and it’s pointless*”. So there!



Not to be confused with a popular type of mint when sold in Japan.

Tifo – a tifo is the big mural that fans sometimes unfurl at the start of games. It originates from the Italian word ‘tifosi’, meaning fans – yet Italians do not use the word ‘tifo’ to describe, er, tifos.

You won’t see any tifos at the World Cup since they are developed by fans and FIFA will not allow anything in the stadia that is not controlled (and franchised) by them. It would be amusing if fans unveiled a large banner telling Mr Infantino what they think of him.....



At Sweepstake HQ we do not approve of Tifos, preferring the nostalgia of windswept half-empty terraces. And surely grown men shouldn’t be wasting their time making stuff like this? But we will share with you a videoclip of a spectacular TIFO, from Union Berlin:

[Union Berlin tifo](#)

Toilet rolls –Football grounds of the 1970s had little need for toilet rolls in the toilets, as there was scarcely a cubicle in which to sit! Thus, a standard scene at football grounds in that era was to see toilet rolls thrown by fans onto the pitch. This was not a social comment on what they were seeing on the pitch but a form of art as the loo roll made a graceful parabolic loop through the air and unfurled like a white rainbow all-too-briefly shining over the pitch, encapsulating the symbiosis between art and football. And if the loo roll hit the ref or opposition goalie on the head, then so much the better. Sadly, this art seems to have disappeared.



Surely, there is a market opening for brand-sponsored toilet rolls that could be tossed onto the pitch revealing the name Hyundai/Coke/McDonalds?

And, for all of you that still have huge stockpiles of toilet rolls after panic buying at the start of the COVID Lockdown (anybody willing to admit that they’ve still got surplus rolls in the cellar?!), the World Cup can be the opportunity to use up those extra rolls by throwing them at your TV/over your balcony/in the pub during a match.....

Top Bins – Top bins is the expression that is now used to describe a shot which goes into the top corner of the goal. No idea of the origin of this bizarre term, which seems to have been first used in the 1990s – it is allegedly also called ‘the postage stamp’ in English, though I’ve never heard that used.

In Brazil a shot into the top corner is described as “where the owls sleep”, which is very poetic, whilst Czechs say ‘the gallows’ which is visually accurate, if rather gloomy.

Top Scorer – see “Golden Boot”

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Toronto – There will be six World Cup games played in Toronto. The venue, BMO Field, has a normal capacity of only 30 000 but will get an additional 15 000 temporary seats, though this still leaves it the smallest stadium in use at the 2026 World Cup.



BMO Field is the home of Toronto FC and is thus one of the few natural football stadia in use.

By the time of the World Cup the final snow should have melted (in fact the temperature will be in the mid to high 20°s)

Total football - the Dutch are famous for inventing many things: cheese, clogs, windmills, cheese, rusty bicycles, Cannabis cafés, more bloody cheese - but their greatest invention was "total football". Total football is the concept that every player could interchange with each other and not be bound to any single position – defenders could attack and their place covered by attackers, etc. - which allows a very fluid style of football. Rinus Michels was the creator of total football, first with the great Ajax Amsterdam team of the 1970s (which won 3 consecutive European Cups) and then as coach of Holland. The 1974 Holland team was probably the best team not to have won the World Cup. Of course, for total football to work one needs players who are both multi-skilled and have intelligent footballing brains – a feat which appears to only have ever happened in Holland in the early 1970s.

The antithesis of total football is "**total crap football**" which has been pioneered in Scotland.

Towels – Who would have expected the World Cup alphabet to have a piece about towels? The practice of goalkeepers having a towel next to the goal – presumably to be the first into the showers after the match – has never been a talking point. And then came the AFCON Final this year and this happened:

[the towel thief part 1](#)

[the towel thief part 2](#)

Now, many people have suggested that the Moroccan ballboys were being unsporting in trying to steal the Senegal goalie's towel. However, that is a grossly insulting thought since Moroccans are noted for the kind, gentlemanly behaviour. Rather, what you see is the perfectly understandable wish of the poor Moroccan ballboys to have a towel made from the finest Senegalese cotton.

Such scenes will not be repeated at the World Cup, as ICE has a "shoot to kill" policy should any brown or black people commit felonies within stadia.

Transitions – now a word commonly used by football pundits the term 'transitions' never existed before the mid-2000s. Indeed, we are not really sure why the word even exists. Someone may talk about a team "transitioning from defence to attack" which just means that a team that was defending is now attacking.

Not to be confused with the T-word in LGBTABC+++ - to date there has been no professional footballer who has (openly) transitioned.....

Travel bans – fans wishing to visit the USA for the World Cup may have problems if they are supporters of Haiti, Senegal, Ivory Coast and (of course) Iran since these are four countries that currently have a blanket ban for their citizens to visit the USA.

As part of the terms of granting the World Cup FIFA will have negotiated exemptions for all World Cup players, teams and immediate relatives of players – and probably FIFA 'prawn sandwich brigade' executives too – so there is no risk that any player will be blocked from entering the USA (though it only takes one over-enthusiastic Border Control official.....).

It is obvious why the USA doesn't like Iranians, but the reason the USA dislikes visits by people from Haiti, Senegal and Ivory Coast is because of "overstays". According to the US Department of Homeland Security 31% of Haitian visitors did not leave the USA when their visas expired.....! (*Ed: that figure is probably 50% for Irish visitors!!*)

Congolese fans might also be banned because of Ebola fears.....

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Travel Tie-ins – For the World Cup there is no on-shirt advertising (since FIFA does not allow anything that it cannot monetise itself) but elsewhere one of the more bizarre trends has been countries advertising themselves. Because whenever I'm watching a football match I often think 'I wish I was elsewhere on holiday rather than watching this crap'.

This trend came to general attention when Arsenal accepted sponsorship from Rwanda on its shirts (Bayern München subsequently also accepted Rwandan blood money).

Today two premiership teams have deals with Florida resort towns: Wolverhampton – the tourism capital of the West Midlands – are sponsored by Lauderdale and Brighton by Kissimmee.

In contrast, Leeds United have a sponsorship deal with FlamingoLand but this is not somewhere tropical but merely a crappy zoo in Yorkshire!

Cardiff City's Malaysian owner has them wearing "Visit Malaysia" adverts – though it is doubtful how many Welshmen get from Tiger Bay to Kuala Lumpur. Rather more bizarrely Burnley have (and I quote) "*a groundbreaking partnership with Visit Detroit, making them the Official US Destination Partner of the Clarets*". Having been to both Burnley and Detroit all I can say is that both deserve each other. (The town of Burnley is officially twinned with 'the land that time forgot').



But without doubt the most interesting travel sponsorship deal is Fulham FC who have a sponsorship deal with Mongolia! Clearly, the Mongolian Tourist Board has calculated that anyone daft enough to watch Fulham is also probably bonkers enough to holiday in Ulan Bator.....

Trionda – no, he's not a Spanish winger. Trionda is the stupid name that Adidas has given to the official World Cup ball – allegedly it means "three waves", which is possibly a tribute to Donald T's hairstyle.

Dolly Parton once said, "*it costs a lot to look this cheap*": she could have been talking about the Trionda as it looks like the sort of ball that one buys at the beach for a five-year old child. As Ultravox once sang "*it means nothing to me, trionda*"



Trump, Donald – Beautiful guy. The bestest, most beautiful leader ever. He has promised to make Team USA great again – sorry, he has promised again to make Team USA great. This will be achieved by the defense (sic) building big beautiful walls at free kicks, midfield will charge tariffs to enter the center (sic) circle, whilst the offense (yet more sic) will attack using drones and AI (and probably Mossad).



If necessary he will use ICE to ensure that referees make the correct decisions and do not show liberal bias towards non-white players.

To his credit even he criticised FIFA's ticket pricing regime!

Tuchel, Thomas – Thomas the Tank Engine is the German Führer of ze England team.



Due to injury TT had only a short playing career. He began his coaching career as youth team coach at VfB Stuttgart where he was an underling to Ralf Rangnick but, despite winning the U-19 league, the club did not renew his contract as they found him "too abrasive". This personality trait thus explains why Tuchel has rarely lasted more than two seasons at any of the clubs that has employed him as boss.

Older British sweepstakers may notice the similarity between Tuchel and 60s tv star Albert Steptoe. And he is second only to Yassir Arafat in maintaining a permanent 6-day stubble – Tuchel's inability to grow a beard is due to his vegetarianism (which has disastrous consequences for testosterone levels in men).



So, is he the perfect person to give England the impetus it has lacked for so many years, or is Tuchel such an annoying person that the team will mutiny when he claims the best sunlounger and forbids the players from playing computer games? Only time will tell (but the English FA

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has already extended his contract to EURO2028 so he won't even care about the results at this World Cup.....)

Record as coach of England: W9 D0 L1

Tunisia – the “Eagles of Carthage” (*ed: seriously?*) will be going to their 7th World Cup finals and their third in a row. And they qualified for the finals in style, winning their African group and remaining undefeated.

However, they will be hoping to improve on previous form as they have never got past of the group stage – indeed they have managed to win only three games in total at those six World Cups.

Following their poor performance at AFCON coach Sami Trabelsi was sacked and replaced with Sabri Lamouchi.

World Cup record: Played 18 W3 D5 L10

Current FIFA World Ranking: 40th

Star Player: Hannibal Mejbri (Burnley)



Turkey - For such a football-mad nation surprisingly this will be only the third time that the “Crescent Stars” have made it to the World Cup, and the first time for 24 years! That last appearance, back in 2002, Turkey finished 3rd.

Turkey are another side that qualified via the back door of the playoffs, having finished runners up to Spain in their qualifying group. Their coach is an Italian, Vincenzo Montella.

Predicting how Turkey will perform is an impossible task, since you never know what Turkish team will turn up – one that wants to play skilful football, or one that prefers tantrums on the pitch. However, they are in a group containing USA, Paraguay and Australia and I see no reason why they could not even top that group.

World Cup record: Played 10 W5 D1 L4

Current FIFA World Ranking: 22nd

Star Player: both Arda Güler of Real Madrid and Juventus's Kenan Yildiz will claim that they are the stars.

Two-footed – Those of you who are not familiar with football might think that all professional footballers have two feet since you do not see anyone hopping on one leg. However, the term ‘two footed’ refers to players who are capable of passing and shooting with both feet. Surprisingly, there are very few players today who can be considered to be two-footed – and you can guarantee that, during the World Cup, we will see glaring misses in front of goal because a player tries to score with his ‘good’ foot rather than his weaker one when it was easier to score with his weaker foot.

Two-footed tackle – a tackle performed where the player lunges in with both boots flying, usually resembling either Bob Beamon or Bruce Lee.

When football was still a man's game the two-footed tackle was the hallmark of a quality defender. Centre-forwards would have legs resembling dominos after being clattered by studs.

Today the two-footed tackle is considered to be Satan's work that is destroying the moral fibre of society, plus contributing to a melting of the polar icecaps and footballers caught performing two-footed tackles are treated worse than rapists.



You won't find this in the coaching manuals

The term 'two-footed tackle' should not be confused with the term 'wedding tackle'.

Tyson, Mike – Remember the heavyweight boxer's immortal quote: “*Everybody has a plan - until they get punched in the face....*”. It is just as relevant to football.