

THE WORLD CUP ALPHABET

CORRIGENDUM AND ADDENDUM

Advocaat, Dick – In our opening day of the alphabet we wrote off Dick as the Curacao manager stepped down to nurse his sick daughter. Well something positive has happened – hopefully his daughter got better – for he has “unresigned” (*ed: is there such a word?*) and is once again back in charge of lowly Curacao. This will make him, at 78 years of age, the oldest ever coach at a World Cup (and almost old enough to be eligible to be US President).



Nicknamed ‘the Little General’ this will be the Dutchman’s third World Cup. After previously leading Holland (way back in 1994) and South Korea he has taken lowly Curacao through the qualification stages to get them to the World Cup for the first time in their history.

A protégé of the great Dutch coach Rinus Michels Advocaat managed no fewer than eight national teams: Curacao, United Arab Emirates, Serbia, Russia, Belgium, South Korea, Iraq and Holland (who he led three times!). As a club manager his greatest success was with Glasgow Rangers where he won the league twice plus three cups. (*ed: hardly the most glowing recommendation in a cv*).

His record as coach of Curacao is an impressive: P121 W11 D6 L3

Alexander-Arnold, Trent – I hinted in the Alphabet that Trent (as the media love to call him) might not be in England coach Thomas Tuchel’s selection. On this I was right. He joins Phil Foden, Adam Wharton, Cole Palmer, Morgan Gibbs-White, Harry Maguire and Calvin Phillips (*ed: surely some mistake*) as star players who were not selected for the England squad.

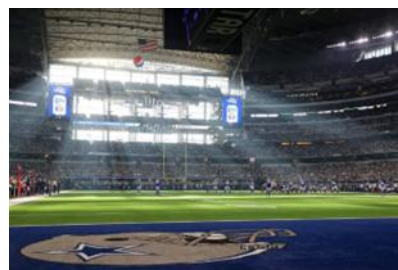
Antony – I had expected the sourpuss striker Antony to be called up by Brazil as he has been doing well with his current club Real Betis (of Sevilla). But I was wrong.

Also omitted from the Brazil squad was Richarlison: another player who permanently has a facial expression so sour that it could curdle milk. Brazil boss Carlo Ancelotti clearly didn’t want anybody that might spoil the team photographs. (Scotland boss Steve Clarke has no chance to do the same, otherwise he’d only have five players).

Barcelona – we all thought they were bankrupt. Yet they have just spent €80 million on Newcastle and England attacker Anthony Gordon and are reputedly lining up a €100 million move for Argentinian striker Julian Alvarez from Atletico Madrid. Where has the money come from?? Has club President Joan Laporta finally decided to spend his Communion money? Or has someone discovered cash down the back of a sofa in the Old Nou Camp?

Baumann, Oliver – when we wrote the alphabet the Hoffenheim goalie was first choice for Germany’s number 1 shirt, having played in all of the qualifying games. However, Manuel Neuer suddenly decided to ‘unretire’ and poor Olly is now left in charge of the poolside towels and half-time oranges.

Curtains - I never expected that the World Cup alphabet would have to include a feature on household furnishings, but first we had towels and now we need to mention curtains. Why? - because they will be required for a World Cup game in Dallas! The west side of the AT&T Stadium comprises of windows and when the sun is at a certain position it shines blindingly onto the pitch. Thus for the Japan v Sweden game – and that game only! - curtains will be put up to eliminate the problem. (Apparently the kick off times of the other games to played there means that sunlight should not be a problem).



An overreaction perhaps? After all, it’s not that one team will get an advantage from this. And what about shining sun (or wind or rain) at any of the outdoor stadia? I’m just disappointed that el Presidente Infantino or the Donald are not controlling the weather during the World Cup.....

Gabriel – We covered Arsenal and Brazil defender Gabriel dos Santos Magalhães in the alphabet, but we can now add to his cv the boast that he became the first player for an English team to lose a CL final on penalties to a non-English team. Well done!

Ghana – see **Queiroz, Carlos**, below.

Gordon, Anthony – Exciting fast winger who will hopefully play up front alongside ‘Arry Kane for England (though with Thomas Tuchel you never know where he might play him). Gordon has just been transferred from Newcastle to Barcelona for €80 million. When speaking at a press conference he revealed two unlikely facts: firstly that he is fluent in Spanish – surprising, given that he is not even fluent in English (Spanish with a Liverpool accent will be something to behold!!).



Secondly, he said that he had always wanted to play for Barcelona “since the age of 3”. Really?!! So many players say that “I always wanted to play for this club” when they sign for a new team, but this is a new level of exaggeration. What next: “ever since I was in my mother’s womb I knew I would play for you...”?!!

Greta – still no news about what Ms Thunberg plans to do for the World Cup. My guess is that she has kayaked to Canada and is currently smuggling herself across the border into the USA disguised as a moose.

Haaland, Erling – A factoid that we omitted from his pen picture is that Erling Haaland is to star in a (non-footballing) film, where he will play – yes, you’ve guessed it – a viking!! Called “Viqueens” it is due for release around Christmas. The good news is that it is animated film, so you won’t have to look at Erling’s ugly mug!

Henderson, Jordan – We did not feature Brentford midfielder Jordan Henderson in the original alphabet since we hoped, nay prayed, that he would not be going to the World Cup. But sadly Thomas Tuchel has picked him ahead of at least half a dozen more exciting players.



Why? According to Tuchel Henderson will bring “professionalism” and “leadership” to the squad. Given that he is 35 years of age and has played only four full 90 minute games this year, much of this “leadership” is going to be in the hotel swimming pool or at the card table – or has he been saving his energy for a mighty series of performances at the World Cup? England fans very much doubt it.....

Iran – It seems insane that a country at war with another could host them for a sporting tournament (there was a reason why the 1940 Olympic Games in Tokyo was cancelled). Yet, at this moment Iran are due to play two matches in Los Angeles and one in Seattle. The Iran team have shifted their base from the US to Mexico, so expect fun with DHS border officials when they fly into LA airport for their first game.....

Jesus, Gabriel – We said that the Arsenal striker might struggle to get into the Brazil squad. Indeed, he’s been left out. He couldn’t even get a few minutes as sub in the Champions League final. The other Brazilian Jesus – Nottingham Forest’s Igor Jesus – also did not make the cut. Jesus wept - twice.

Joao Pedro - I had tipped Joao Pedro as the Brazilian player to watch at these finals - but then Carlo Ancelotti decided not to pick the Chelsea striker! Clearly, Carlo spotted the early onset MS symptoms that Pedro has: during the FA Cup Final he fell over whenever an opponent came anywhere close to him. Very sad.

Juventus – we mentioned the decline of Juventus. This is exemplified by there being only four Juve players at the World Cup: Weston McKinnie (with team USA), Jonathan David(Canada) Kenan Yildiz (Turkey) and Teun Koopmeiners (Holland). Surely there cannot have been a World Cup with fewer Juventus players?

Leathering it – Under ‘laces’ we mentioned the term ‘putting your laces through it’ as an expression for kicking the ball hard. An alternative is “leathering it” – seldom used by commentators but common amongst fans. The term “twatting it” is also sometimes uttered, but never on tv.

Kane, Harry – We mentioned the phenomenal form Harry Kane was showing in Germany for Bayern München. Well, he ended the season with 61 goals in only 51 games for Bayern! This included 36 goals in the league, which meant that he won ‘the Golden Boot’ for being the top scorer in all of the main leagues in Europe. And he’s going to the World Cup fit, too!

Maguire, Harry – if Jordan Henderson was a surprise addition to the England squad then the omission of defender Harry Maguire was a surprise omission. He was a major reason why Manchester United had a successful second half of the season and finished 3rd. A World Cup sans Slab Head will be one poorer for jokes.

Neuer, Manuel – We said that Manuel Neuer would not be at this World Cup as a player. How wrong we were! Manuel was the first-choice goalkeeper for Germany for 14 years from 2010 before he chose to retire from international football after Euro2024, a total of 124 caps. However, in May he ‘came out of retirement’ and was selected for the Germany World Cup squad. The 40 year old Bayern München goalkeeper now will be on the sunloungers with the rest of the German team. He needs to play two games to break the record for most World Cup games by a goalie (20) and seven more caps to become third highest capped player for Germany.



Neymar – Our prediction that Neymar might be in the Brazil squad proved right! Now very injury prone, it is hard to imagine Neymar playing a full 90 minutes – and logic would suggest that boss Ancelotti will use him as an impact substitute. However, we await with interest to see if Neymar’s ego can handle being a substitute. And with an Instagram following of 230 million he won’t remain silent. This could end explosively.....!!!

Oldest World Cup Coach – So far, Dick Advocaat (coach of Curaçao, age 78), Miro Koubek (Czechia, 74) and Carlos Queiroz (Ghana, 73) are all still hanging on to both life and their jobs, so at least one of them should break the current record for Oldest World Cup Coach set by 71-year old Otto Rehagel.

Paris St-Germain – As well as being European Champions PSG, together with Bayern München, can boast that they have the most players of any club at this World Cup. No fewer than 17 PSG players have been selected. Ditto Bayern. There are 15 from each of Barcelona and Manchester City, 14 from Arsenal, 13 Liverpool and 11 Manchester United and Real Madrid players. That list shows where the money in football is today.

Ouahbi, Mohamed – a major corrigendum concerns Morocco. Despite possibly winning the AFCON competition in January (the jury is still out on deciding whether or not Senegal are disqualified) the performance of Morocco on home soil was heavily criticised, resulting in coach Walid Regragui quitting after 4 years in charge. With only a couple of months to go before the World Cup the Moroccan FA thus acted pragmatically and promoted the Under 23 manager Mohamed Ouahbi to the job.



Ouahbi is a Belgian-Moroccan (born and bred in Schaerbeek) and took up coaching at the age of 21 without ever playing professionally. He coached at Anderlecht at all youth levels before in 2022 taking charge of the Morocco Under 20s team and later the U23 team.

By the time the World Cup starts he will have had just five friendly matches in charge of the Atlas Lions before his first competitive match at the World Cup Versus Brazil!

His record so far in charge of Morocco: P13 W2 D1 L0

Oldest player – With Scotland’s selection of him goalie Craig Gordon, age 43, has overtaken CR7 as the oldest player at this World Cup. In fact, at age 43 Gordon is the oldest recorded Scotsman ever, since the average life expectancy of a Scottish male is 37.

Another surprise ‘oldie’ going to the USA, Germany’s Manuel Neuer, is a ‘spring chicken’ at the age of 40. (*ed: if Neuer is a spring chicken does that make Gordon an old cock?*)

Pochettino, Mauricio – we suggested that a good World Cup could see “Poch” being offered the Real Madrid job. Sadly for him that job vacancy is now filled. However, it seems that the US owners of AC Milan (who have just fired Massimiliano Allegri after the team’s failure to qualify for the Champions League) are talking with Pochettino. Watch this space.....

Queiroz, Carlos – Another late appointment to a World Cup job is the much-travelled Carlos Queiroz. In March Ghana suddenly decided to sack coach Otto Addo and turned to the 73-year old Portuguese. He certainly has a World Cup pedigree, as this will be his sixth World Cup – equalling the record of Carlos Perreira – having been there with Portugal, South Africa and Iran (three times). However he has only two friendly matches to familiarise himself with the team before the World Cup starts.....

Quadruple, the – Something that Arsenal were going to do this season (i.e. win four trophies). Well, 1 out of 4 is close.

Quinones, Julian – An omission from the letter Q was Julian Quinones. Who, you may ask? He's only the top scorer in the Saudi league, playing for unfancied al-Qadsiah. (*Ed: all Saudi clubs are unfancied, by football fans at least*). He'll also be at the World Cup for Mexico.

Quansah, Jarell - we didn't include Jarell under Q as no-one seriously expected the Bayer Leverkusen defender to be in England's World Cup squad. But Herr Tuchel fancies the Liverpool reject - either that or Tuchel has devised a cunning plan to ensure England don't win the World Cup (*ed: England don't need a German coach for that to happen*). Through the notorious 'grandparents rule' Jarell could have chosen to play for Scotland, Ghana, and Barbados instead of England.

Rashford, Marcus – as we suspected Manchester United reject Marcus Rashford has rebuilt his reputation on loan at Barcelona sufficiently to get a recall to the England squad. But will Barça, now seemingly flush with money, pay the piddling €30 million to keep him permanently? It looks unlikely.....

Real Madrid – Whilst there will be 11 Real Madrid players at the World Cup amazingly not a single one is in the 'la roja' (Spain) squad! This must be the first time this has happened.

In contrast, there are 8 of the Spain squad from Barcelona, 3 from Athletic Bilbao and even players from Real Sociedad and Osasuna (i.e. Basques). Franco will be turning in his grave.

Richarlison – Yet another Brazilian who didn't make Brazil's World Cup squad. Clearly boss Ancelotti didn't want Richarlison's sourpuss face spoiling the team photos when Brazil wins the tournament.

Sporrans – we mentioned that FIFA will allow kilt-wearing Scotsmen to bring their sporrans into the grounds. Apparently US police has now required that they must be muzzled at all times, kept on leashes and their droppings picked up in a hygienic bag. And the same applies to the sporrans.

Sterling, Raheem – In the alphabet we lamented the demise of Raheem Sterling. Well, his depressing tale has taken another sad turn in recent days. He was stopped by UK police after his Lamborghini hit the central barriers of a motorway and he has been charged with driving whilst under the influence of drugs.

Whilst not a drastic decline as the truly gifted Paul Pogba it is still sad to see the 31-year old Sterling not even getting a regular game of football, let alone competing for a World Cup place.

Stuttgart – we said that there might be as many as six VfB Stuttgart players in the Germany squad. In the end Julian Nagelsmann selected four, the same as from Dortmund and more than from any other team other than Bayern München (7). Pretty respectable!

Stuttgart's next task is to hold on to coach Sebastian Hoeness, as English Premier League clubs are circling. (If you do lose him Oliver Glasner is now available).

Suarez, Luis – the good news is that Uruguay boss Marcelo Bielsa ignored Luis Suarez's 'unretirement' and has not selected him for the World Cup squad. He won't be missed by all decent football lovers.



Thiaw, Pape – As if the Senegal coach has not had enough headlines following the pitch walk-off by the "Lions of Teranga" during the AFCON Final. The latest story, hotly denied by the Senegal FA, was that Thiaw refused to board the team plane to fly to the USA until his contract, which had expired in February, was renewed! With team spirit like that I think I need to revise my Senegal forecasts downward.

Turnip – When England lost to Sweden at Euro 92 it produced one of the all-time great newspaper headlines.



Consequently, when England failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup the turnip image resurfaced as the press (successfully) campaigned to get England manager Graham Taylor sacked.



Seldom has a vegetable been used to such a powerful effect.

Zohran Mamdani – A surprise addition to the alphabet is mayor of New York Zohran Mamdani. It turns out that he is a genuine football fan, supporting Arsenal – he has even appeared in public in an Arsenal tracksuit top! (see pic, right). He also negotiated 1000 tickets for every WC match at the New Jersey stadium to be made available to New York City residents at only \$50 !!! Respect to Zohran!

