

THE 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

I is for

IFAB – The International Football Association Board (IFAB) is the body that determines the Laws of the Game of association football. IFAB was founded in 1886 to agree standardised laws (not rules!) for international competition, and has since acted as the "guardian" of the internationally used laws.

It is a separate body from FIFA, though FIFA is represented on the board and holds 50% of the voting power. The other 50% of the votes are held by "the Home Nations" (i.e. where the home of football is), namely the FAs of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This means that Johnny Foreigner cannot mess up football's rules too much (e.g. Septic Bladder's idea that women footballers should wear skimpy kits).

In Acres – A good 'Ronglish' phrase that can once again be used in the UK after Brexit (since it is based on a non-metric unit of measurement). When a player is not being marked adequately and thus has plenty of space to play in he is described as being "in acres". It originates from the Imperial unit of land measurement. Doesn't really work in Metric – "in hectares" doesn't have the same ring, whilst "in ares" is just plain silly. Given that a football field is approximately 2 acres in size the plural nature of the phrase is incorrect, as the most a player could hope for is to be in one acre of space.

Injury time – what 'added time' used to be called. If you are nostalgic for injury time, linesmen; referees wearing black kits, players wearing black boots, black and white footballs and black and white tv pictures then you are old (but wise).

International Federation of Football History & Statistics (IFFHS), an autonomous football federation working without the investment or support of FIFA or UEFA, which means that they are objective and trustworthy.

Since 1996 they have given an annual award of 'Coach of the Year'. Jose Mourinho and Carlo Ancelotti have won it 4 times, Pep Guardiola 3 times. Their "all time" ranking for the period 1996-2024 places Alex Ferguson 1st, Jose Mourinho 2nd and Pep Guardiola 3rd.

Infantino, Gianni – Where do we begin in writing about the the current (and 9th) head of FIFA, the Footballführer Gianni Infantino?

Swiss from the Italian bit of the country, he has been bald since birth after his mother was startled by an unusually large piece of Toblerone when pregnant with little Gianni.



He started his rise to football domination at UEFA in 2000, working as "mini-me" alongside the legendary Sepp Blatter (aka "the Blattmeister"). Infantino stuck around when Michel Platini inherited the top job at UEFA and when corruption scandals brought down both Platini and Blatter in 2015 he played a key role in operating the shredding machine as they cleared out the Plattini files in the UEFA bunker shortly before it was liberated. In 2016 Gianni was elected President of FIFA – and it's been downhill for football all the way since then.

Given that he got the job because Mr Bladder had to resign over corruption allegations it was ironic that Infantino was mentioned in the 2015 Panama Papers regarding deals that UEFA had done with shady characters. In fact, it is amazing that the serial networker and professional schmoozer's name has not appeared in the Epstein files (*ed: so far.....*).

For the record Mr Infantile's annual salary is 2.6 million CHF, but last year he "earned" a bonus of 2.2 million plus as many Adidas Stan Smith shoes that he could carry to his car. His daughter's school fees in Miami are also paid by FIFA. Remember that when you are paying \$100 to park your car at this World Cup.....

When looking at his highlights reel of appalling decisions – selling the World Cup tournament to awful countries, creating a bloated Club World Cup tournament, the FIFA Peace Prize, becoming a member of Trump's "Board of Peace", to name just a few – it is hard to select which

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was the worst. But undoubtedly the most embarrassing was his legendary speech in Qatar when he “came out” for one day and revealed that he was gay (and disabled and black):

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/vNCWOhq4akw?feature=share>

(Interestingly, you will notice that he has scripted this speech and refers to his notes so as not to forget any group!).

Yet, despite such magnanimity poor Gianni was not offered the FIFA World Peace Prize. Disgusting behaviour from FIFA, I say. Surely he deserves to be made a saint.

As well as being Swiss, Gianni also has Lebanese citizenship (together with a Lebanese wife), and has a second home in Qatar. Mr Infantile is allegedly an Inter Milan fan, though there is no evidence to show that he has ever paid to attend a football match.

Infanti - adjective to describe the corrupt actions of a football executive e.g. “After paying money the Saudis had an infantinessimal chance of being awarded the World Cup”

Infanti Nobel Peace Prize - he might want to call it the FIFA peace Prize but - let us be perfectly clear - this was a gift from Mr Infantile to the Donald. No-one else in FIFA had a vote - indeed, the terms of reference for this “prize” have never been published. It would be too embarrassing to tell the world that it is awarded at the whim of one man (no matter how big his cranium).

But what is the point of being a President if you cannot do what you want unilaterally?!

The tasteful trophy symbolises the hands of four FIFA officials reaching upwards to grasp bribes as they are shower down on them from FIFA HQ.

Intensity - a new word in the footballing dictionary that you hear in almost all football-related analysis these days. “It was not a problem of formation, but of energy and of intensity,” said former Manchester United manager Ralf Rangnick after his side drew 1-1.

But what exactly is intensity in football? And what does it look like on the pitch? Is it purely about effort and energy expenditure? In short, it’s a meaningless word....

Injuries – in the good old days players simply did not get injured. It was not allowed. There existed generations of footballers for whom the words metatarsal injury meant nothing. Indeed, it was not until the 1960s that the concept of substitutions was even allowed – up until then you just got up and played on (or, like racehorses, if the injury was serious players were shot *in situ*).



When a footballer was injured during a game the medical treatment comprised of the physio bringing on a bucket of water and a sponge, or at best a bandage. And after application of the cold sponge the player would be expected to get up and play on. The extreme example being Man City goalie Bert Trautmann who broke his neck in the 1956 FA Cup Final but played on! (The severity of his injury was not even diagnosed for several days!!).

Today, players collapse on the pitch injured for the slightest of contacts – and sometimes even for tactical reasons (to allow the rest of the team to have a talk with the manager).

Of course, every minute that the game is stopped is supposed to be added on at the end of the half – added time (which was originally called ‘injury time’).

If a player is injured and the physio comes onto the pitch to treat him then the current rule is that, once treated, the player must then leave the pitch and wait for 30 seconds before he may re-enter the game. This does not apply if the injury was the result of being fouled and the player



Jürgen Klopp demonstrates intensity – or is it simply constipation?

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who did the foul received a yellow or red card. It also does not apply to goalkeepers – so you can guarantee that one will see during the World Cup a goalie going down ‘injured’ in a close game - my bet would be on Martinez of Argentina.

Iran – The team that most people are talking about at this World Cup, albeit for non-footballing reasons, is Iran. And, despite the wishes of some, they will be at the tournament because President Infantino has said so!

Disappointingly the nickname for the national team is ‘team melli’ which translates as ‘the national team’. One so expected a name like ‘the Persian Lions’ or ‘the mighty warriors of Ayatollah Khomeini’ (*ed: that’s rather long to fit onto a scarf, even a Persian one*).

The team qualified easily for the finals, losing only one of their 16 group matches. Their coach is Amir Ghalenoeei.

Iran’s chances of making any impression at this World Cup will depend on whether President Trump grants visas to any of the Iranian team: it may be the case of the first 11 Iranian supporters who turns up at the ground get to play!! (*ed: I wouldn’t want to be behind the Iranian team at passport control at JFK Airport*)

Notwithstanding their 2-1 victory over “the Great Satan” at the 1998 World Cup the highpoint of Iranian World Cup football – for Englishmen at least! – was their 1-1 draw against mighty Scotland at the 1978 World Cup. Here is a hyperlink to the highlights of that match:

[Scotland - Iran • World Cup 1978](#)

(*ed: the match seems to have been played in front of a crowd of 500 and the highlights contain more fouls than goal chances!!*)

Team Melli has played at six previous World Cups but their record is poor, winning only 3 of 18 games played and never progressing from the group stage. (*ed: Melli’s record is smelly!*) Currently ranked as high as 20th in the world by FIFA perhaps this Iranian team will finally do something at a World Cup – as they are in a group containing Belgium, Egypt and New Zealand then they have a great chance of getting to the Second Round.

World Cup record: Pl18 W3 D4 L11

Current FIFA World Ranking: 20th

Star player: Mehdi Taremi (Olympiacos)

Iraq – The short story is that Iraq made it to the World Cup after beating Bolivia (!) in a playoff game. The long story is that Iraq has played a total of 21 World Cup qualifying games (winning 13 games, drawing 5, losing 3) to get here – so they have certainly earned their place!

Their nickname is the impressive “Lions of Mesopotamia” and they are led by an Aussie coach, Arnold, Graham.

This is the Lions second appearance at the finals, previously having been there in 1986 when they lost all of their games. No, I don’t remember them either. This time around Iraq is in the same group as France, Norway and Senegal so anything higher than 4th place will be a miracle....

World Cup record: Played 3 Wo Do L3

Current FIFA World Ranking: 57th

Star Player: Not a clue!

Isotonic drinks – the sporting man’s equivalent to homeopathic medicine (i.e. a load of bollocks). During World Cup matches expect to see lots of plastic bottles bearing the name ‘Gatorade’, ‘Lucozade’, ‘Poweraid’ or some other brand of sugary water being lined up along the edge of the pitch and being swigged at regular intervals by players in the insane belief that a mouthful of this magic water will help them play like a superstar.

It is what it is – a now-common phrase used in post-match interviews by managers or players as a means of explaining away something negative that happened. As a philosophical concept it is hardly Nietzsche or Descartes but for a footballer’s brain it is rather profound.

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Italy - More than 20% of the world's current population were not alive when, on 14 June 2014, Italy last won a game at the World Cup! Yes, this will be the third consecutive World Cup that they have failed to qualify for! (*ed: stop laughing*).



Their football team might be rubbish but Italy did beat USA at baseball in March!! I hear cries of “fake news” from Washington..... Given that their rugby team also defeated England this year and they also performed well in the Winter Olympics, perhaps Italy should give up playing football and stick to other sports?

Ivory Coast – There can't be many football teams nicknamed ‘the elephants’ (*ed: the “Everton Elephants” sounds so much better than “the toffeemen”!*), but the Ivory Coast is one of them. This is very ironic given that there are 37 countries in the world with more elephants than the Ivory Coast. And that's excluding the human elephants found grazing (incessantly) in the USA.....

This will be the Elephants first World Cup in 12 years and only their fourth in total – a small number for one of Africa's traditionally strong teams. Even when they've made it to the finals they have thusfar only won one game per tournament.

On the plus side they won the 2024 African Cup of Nations and in qualifying for this World Cup they were unbeaten in ten games and did not concede a goal! Yet FIFA only ranks them as the seventh best team in Africa. Their coach is Emerson Faé.

World Cup record: Played 9 W3 D1 L5

Current FIFA World Ranking: 42nd

Star Player: Frank Kessié (Al-Ahli, Saudi Arabia)