

## 2026 WORLD CUP ALPHABET

### O is for

**Offside** – The offside rule was introduced (in 1863) to stop an attacking player getting an unfair advantage. And why would we want that? Good question indeed! Well, offside does stop what is referred to in school playground football as “goal hanging” – people standing close to the goals waiting for the ball to be kicked to them.

Law XI of the Rules of Association Football covers offside. It says:

*A player is in an offside position if:*

- *any part of the head, body or feet is in the opponents’ half (excluding the halfway line) and*
- *any part of the head, body or feet is nearer to the opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second-last opponent*

*The hands and arms of all players, including the goalkeepers, are not considered. For the purposes of determining offside, the upper boundary of the arm is in line with the bottom of the armpit.*

*A player is not in an offside position if level with the:*

- *second-last opponent or*
- *last two opponents*

It then goes on to explain what an “offside offence” is:

*A player in an offside position at the moment the ball is played or touched by a team-mate is only penalised on becoming involved in active play by:*

- *interfering with play by playing or touching a ball passed or touched by a team-mate or*
- *interfering with an opponent by:*
  - *preventing an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent’s line of vision or*
  - *challenging an opponent for the ball or*
  - *clearly attempting to play a ball which is close when this action impacts on an opponent or*
  - *making an obvious action which clearly impacts on the ability of an opponent to play the ball*

*or gaining an advantage by playing the ball or interfering with an opponent when it has:*

- *rebounded or been deflected off the goalpost, crossbar or an opponent*
- *been deliberately saved by any opponent*

*A player in an offside position receiving the ball from an opponent who deliberately plays the ball, including by deliberate handball, is not considered to have gained an advantage, unless it was a deliberate save by any opponent.*

*There is no offside offence if a player receives the ball directly from:*

- *a goal kick*
- *a throw-in*
- *a corner kick*



*Who said women don't understand the offside rule?*

Blimey! Is it any wonder that nobody understands the offside rule! And people say that the European Commission writes complicated rules!! (*ed: I think it is time for a referendum for football to break away from FIFA and rewrite the football laws. We shall use the slogan: “take back control”*).

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**Official Brand** – yes, there is one. Following on from Qatar 2022's snappy “No one died building our stadia” (*ed: are you sure about that?*) the official WC2026 slogan is “**we are 26**” (pictured right in Los Angeles railway station) – which was the less successful follow up single by Sister Sledge to “*we are family*”.

The fact that there are 48 teams, and not 26, at the World Cup did not seem to influence the geniuses at the FIFA Bunker who approved this slogan.

**Old Firm Derby** – the Old Firm Derby is the name given to the match between the two Glasgow teams of Celtic and Rangers. It is the world's oldest professional ‘derby’ match – the two teams having first played each other in 1891 and (including cup games) having met a whopping 451 times in professional games. Perhaps fittingly the current record stands as Celtic 171 wins, Rangers 172 wins and 108 draws.

Due to the appalling religious bigotry that still exists in Scotland the Old Firm Derby is also one of the most dangerous football matches as regards crowd violence.

(The second oldest football derby is also in Scotland, between the Edinburgh clubs of Heart of Midlothian and Hibernian. That has been going since 1895 and in the 344 games to date Hearts lead 151 to 90. Sadly, as in Glasgow, these two clubs are also blighted by sectarian hatred).

**Oldest World Cup Coach** – the record for the oldest coach at a World Cup is currently held by Otto Rehhagel who was 71 when he took Greece to the 2010 World Cup. But we are now living in the era of the ‘old master’ and Rehhagel's record is doomed to be broken.

Firstly there was Dick Advocaat (Age 78) who has led Curaçao to their first ever World Cup, but decided to quit for family reasons in February. Then there was Mircea Lucescu. The 80 year old (!) succeeded in taking Romania as far as the World Cup playoffs only for them to be eliminated (and, sadly, for him to be die).

But Rehhagel's record will be broken! Firstly, the good news is that Advocaat (aka “the Little General”) is back! Dick has officially retaken charge of Curaçao - hopefully because his ill daughter is now better and not simply because he fancies two weeks in the US. And even if he drops out again there have been two other elderly coaches recently appointed: Miroslav Koubek is the 74-year old boss of the Czech Republic and Ghana's coach, Carlos Queiroz is a spritely 73. Either way Otto's record looks destined for the dustbin.....

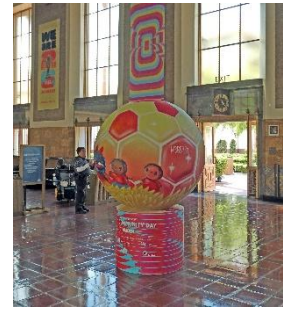
**Oldest World Cup Player** – At the time of writing the squads are just being announced, but it quite likely that the oldest player at this tournament is the babyfaced Cristiano Ronaldo, age 41, followed by Luka Modric and Edin Dzeko, both a youthful 40.

However, CR7 is not even close to being the oldest ever player at a World Cup finals. Ossem El-Hadery of Egypt was 45 when he played at the 2018 finals. Ossem was a goalie. The oldest outfield player at the finals was Cameroon's Roger Milla who was aged 42 at the 1994 World Cup. And when he scored v Russia he became, at 42 years and 39 days, the oldest player to score at a finals. And the oldest World Cup winner is Italy's Dino Zoff who was 40 when Italy won the trophy in 1982 (*ed: remember the days when Italy was at the World Cup.....!*)

CR7 does however, does hold one age-related record: for being the oldest player to score a hat trick at the World Cup – aged 33 years and 131 days for Portugal v Spain, 2018.

**Olimpico** –According to Wikipedia the term “Olimpico” or “Olympic Goal” are commonly used terms to describe a goal scored directly from a corner kick – but I've watched football for 50 years and have never heard it used once.

Scoring directly from a corner only became legal in 1924 and the first team to score this way in a professional match were Argentina (versus Uruguay) who had just won the Olympic football title which is possibly the reason that someone, somewhere uses this term.



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**Olise, Michael** – Possibly the hottest player in European football this season is Michael Olise. The 24 year old attacking midfielder has had an outstanding season with Bayern München, both scoring and creating goals (22 goals and 26 assists!). Not bad for a former Reading player! Born in London to a British-Nigerian father and Franco-Algerian mother he was thus eligible to play for four countries (*ed: surely he must also have an Irish grandparent?!*) and opted for France. Yet, he is still very much a fringe player for France so it will be interesting to see if he can get into *les bleus* starting XI.

**Olsson, Jan** – Sometimes people do things that make them famous. Other times, they just happen to be in the right place at the right time when something special happens. This was certainly the case for Jan Olsson. For he was the Swedish defender who was humiliated by Johan Cruyff when he did his “Cruyff turn” on the world stage. To give him his due when commenting on the recent death of Cruyff Olsson said that the day Cruyff made fans laugh at him is a memory that he will always relish. One cannot imagine an Argentinean defender being so good natured!

To relive Olsson’s moment of fame open the hyperlink:

[cruyff turn](#)

**Olympic Games** – football has been played at almost every Summer Olympics (*ed: it’d be more fun if they played it on frozen pitches at the Winter Olympics!*) with only the 1896 (inaugural) and 1932 Olympics being football-free.

For the average fan football at the Olympics is only marginally more interesting than women’s football – and as for women’s football at the Olympics (which has existed since 1996) the less said the better.....



For the record the teams that have won the Olympic gold medal for football the most times are Hungary and Great Britain, each with 3 victories.

**One nil** – At the risk of providing assistance to rivals in the sweepstake, the most common scoreline in football is 1-0 (or 0-1). Approximately 20% of professional matches have a single goal. For teams managed by Jose Mourinho, or Arsenal in the 1980s, this rises to around 50% of matches.

After 1-0/0-1, the next most likely scoreline is 2-1/1-2, with 1-1 and 2-0/0-2 tied for third place. Consequently, the most likely scenario is that there will be two goals scored in a game.

**One of those** – a lazy phrase now used to describe a 50-50 challenge when two players challenge for the same ball with no obvious aggressor or victim and yet one of them is left on the ground. Was it a foul, or not? ‘*It’s just one of those.....*’.

Not to be confused with ‘one of them’ - a now outlawed phrase from the 1970s that was used to identify LGBTQRS+++ persons: “*you know that he’s one of them....*”

**Onion Bag** – A simile used by football cognoscenti to refer to the goals, as in the phrase: “the lad buried the ball in the onion bag”. The descriptive noun is based on the principle that onions are sold in string net bags – thus it is a word construct that does not exist in France, where onions are sold around the necks of men on bicycles with stripy shirts and berets. (*ed: How do you buy onions off a man who is cycling??*). Onion bag also does not translate well – ‘*Zwiebelsack*’ doesn’t have the same ring to it...



**On-line abuse** – a very real problem faced by footballers today is on-line abuse. The three English black players who missed penalties in the Euro2020 final suffered horrific on-line abuse. However, no real action is being taken against this social problem. And a counterpoint to the issue of on-line abuse is the amount of money that many players make from being on-line influencers.

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**Opening ceremony** – Why do organisers of sporting tournaments feel the need to have opening ceremonies? The genuine sports fans don't care for them, whilst those who do like them are hardly likely to be converted to watching the rest of the World Cup because of a pantomime at the start.

And for the 2026 World Cup we will be blessed with not one, but three opening ceremonies – one each for the opening matches in USA, Canada and Mexico. (*ed: please no*). Each will last around 15 minutes but I am sure it will feel much longer.

The main star (in the loosest sense of the word) at the US event will be Katy Perry. Mexico's event will be led by multi-Grammy-award winning Mexican rock band Mana (no, I've never heard of them either) whilst Canada has both Michael Bubl  and Alanis Morissette – now isn't that ironic?!!

Those are three matches that I won't be switching on the tv early.....

**Orange** – With the presence of Holland at the World Cup there will be the inevitable outpouring of orange tat from Chinese factories for Dutch fans to wear.

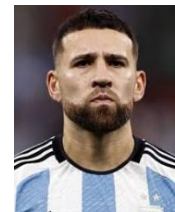
However, we prefer to remember orange as the official mascot for the 1982 World Cup in Spain. Christened “*Naranjito*” he bears a striking resemblance to the FIFA World Peace Prize winner.....



**Order of Merit** – The Order of Merit is the highest honour awarded by FIFA. (Seriously!). It is normally awarded to people who are considered to have made “a significant contribution to football”, though they do not have to be directly involved with football to receive it. So, whilst there have been 121 inductees into the FIFA Order of Merit, only 32 of them were players, and you will not be surprised to learn that FIFA has given the award more often to football administrators as well as an eclectic mix of others. Recipients thus include Henry Kissinger, Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan and, er, Udo J rgens. I'm sure they were all wonderful people (*ed: except Kissinger!*) but did they really make a “significant contribution” to football?!!!



**Otamendi, Nicolas** – He may not be a familiar name but Nicolas Otamendi already has a World Cup winners medal. Now aged 38, the Argentina and Benfica centre-half is what some would describe as “uncompromising”, others might prefer to call a carthorse. His nickname is Bison Head (meant affectionately, of course).



**Overlap** – when a team is attacking down the wing and the player with the ball is overtaken by a teammate who is looking for a pass.

**O'Werner, Tim** – In a controversial move the German striker Timo Werner ‘transitioned’ into Irish international Tim O'Werner in the hope of getting to the World Cup (since he had zero chance of getting into Germany's team). However, his plan failed when President Trump issued a decree banning all Trans people from attending the World Cup.



**Own goals** – the ultimate embarrassment for a player is when he scores against his own team. There has been a total of 54 own goals scored at the World Cup finals in 964 games played. Given that there will be 104 games at the 2026 World Cup then, statistically, one would expect 5.8 own goals in the tournament.

And, though it pains me to watch it, here is a classic own goal (by the aptly named Jamie Pollock.....)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAc8JooS3MY>