

## WHO ARE YOU??

Most sweepstakers will be familiar with the names of the big football clubs in Europe – Manchester United, Real Madrid, Bayern München, Leyton Orient etc. But the World Cup gives the opportunity to discover more obscure teams around the globe. Here are some of the more interesting names that we, at Sweepstake HQ, came across when preparing the Alphabet.



**Modern Sport FC** (نادي مودرن سيورت لكرة القدم). These lads play in the Egyptian Premier League. Based in Cairo they were founded in 2011 by the Egyptian branch of Coca Cola and until 2021 were known as Coca Cola FC. Under the new name of Future FC they won promotion to the Premier League and the following season won the League Cup, before renaming themselves Modern Future FC (*ed: this was to avoid confusion with “Modern Past” and “Modern Present”??*)



In June 2024 they changed their name for the fourth time, to their current incarnation as Modern Sport FC.

Modern Sport should not be confused with Modern Romance – a truly awful British pop band of the 1980s.

(Another interestingly named team in the Egyptian Premier League is Pyramids FC!)



**Danubio FC** – You would expect a team called Danubio to be playing in central Europe. In fact they are based thousands of km away as they are in the Uruguayan Primera Division!

Danubio was founded by the Bulgarian-born brothers Mihail (Miguel) and Ivan (Juan) Lazaroff on 1 March 1932 together with other youths from the "Republica de Nicaragua" school in Montevideo. The club's name was proposed by Mihail and Ivan's mother, María Mincheff de Lazaroff. Initially, she suggested the club be named after a different river in Bulgaria – Maritsa. However, the proposal was not approved, as the name was viewed as too feminine, so they opted for the much more masculine name of Danubio. Based in Montevideo the club, in 2017, renamed its stadium after Ms Lazaroff thus making it the first football stadium in Uruguay to be named after a woman. (*ed: I cannot think of any in Europe being named after women....*)



Danubio has won the Primera Division four times – most recently in 2013-14 – and can boast Diego Forlan and Edinson Cavani as former players.

(Another river-themed Uruguayan team seemingly far from home is Boston River FC).



**Tractor Cultural Sports Club** (باشگاه فرهنگی ورزشی تراکتور) is an Iranian team playing in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Founded in 1969 in Tabriz by the Tractor Manufacturing Company the team originally called Tractor Sazi (*ed: it sounds like the sister of Kaiser Soze!*). And their biggest rivals in Tabriz were Machine Sazi!



The team was bought in 2018 by a Iranian billionaire who appointed John Toshack (!) as manager. Not surprisingly Toshack did not last long but the owner has put money into the team and in 2024 they won the Persian Gulf Pro League for the first time in their history.

It remains to be seen if Tractor Cultural SC are renamed John Deere SC by the USA.



**Pohang Steelers** – The name seems more appropriate for a basketball or gridiron football team (*ed: or a gang of thieves*) but the Pohang Steelers are a football team in the K League 1, which is the top division in South Korea.



Founded in 1973 the team was originally called the Pohang Iron & Steel Company FC. When the Korean Super League was created in 1983 they changed their name to Pohang Iron & Steel Dolphins and became the first Korean club to have foreign players.

After only one season, perhaps realising that dolphins and steel are incompatible, the club renamed itself the Pohang Iron & Steel Atoms and they won their first of five league titles in 1986.

Their current incarnation, as the Pohang Steelers came about in 1997.



Who would have thought that there would be a club playing the Bolivian Primera División called “**The Strongest**”?!?!

Founded in 1908, the club is the oldest active football club in Bolivia and the only team to have played continuously in the country's top division for longer than a century.



The Strongest are the second most successful team in Bolivia, having won the league 16 times. They play most of their games at Bolivia's national ground (capacity: 42,000).

What I do not understand – and any Bolivian sweepstakers can perhaps help me – is why the team has an English name. Surely those macho Bolivians would prefer their team to be called “El mas Fuerte”??

(Other interestingly-named teams with English names in the Bolivian first division are “Blooming” and “Always Ready” !)



From South America to South Africa. **Marumo Gallants FC** play in the South African Betway Premiership. The club, which plays in Bloemfontein, was only founded in 2020.



Personally, I find it hard to consider a team being called gallant when its crest is a pair of spears in a clenched fist.....



One of the better known football teams with an exotic name is the Norwegian club **Viking FK** of Stavanger. Founded in 1899 it holds the record for most matches played in the top division (Eliteserien), and has won the Norwegian league nine times.



I was expecting the logo to be a ferocious viking symbol (like US NFL team the Minnesota Vikings) so I was most surprised to see that their crest is a felled oak tree! I guess the vikings must have chopped down the tree to build a longboat.....



From Vikings to a nicer person. Not a spoof but a genuine team, **FC Santa Claus** is a football club from Rovaniemi in northern Finland. Founded in 1992 they took their name from the fact that Rovaniemi is reputedly the home of Santa Claus (*ed: we all know he now lives at an Amazon warehouse*).



They currently play in the sixth tier of the Finnish football league system but have made it as high as the 3<sup>rd</sup> division. However, it is difficult to have a good team when you give away your best players every 25 December!



All the above have been interesting names. There are also some ugly ones.

For a long time the ugliest name of a team was in the League of Wales (or Cymru Premier). In 1997 Llansantffraid (no that's not a spelling mistake) were given sponsorship by a local computer company (*ed: they have computers in Wales?*) which resulted in them being renamed **Total Network Solutions FC**. It's a name so boring that one could imagine it being a team full of accountants – assuming of course that accountants play any sport other than golf.

The sponsorship gave Total Network Solutions money. Consequently, they have won the Cymru Premier league a record 18 times, and have never been out of the top three since 2001. This resulted them in qualifying for Europe but UEFA's rules on sponsorship meant that they became known as TNS.

However, Total Network Solutions FC are no more. In 2006 the computer company was taken over, so the sponsorship money stopped and the football club had to change its name. However, it liked the initials TNS so much that they changed to The New Saints FC, which is the name they now play under, whilst still being also known as TNS. Readers may be puzzled to learn that TNS play their home games in the town of Oswestry which is in England, not Wales – yet when they play in European games UEFA rules require that the visiting team must stay overnight in Wales!!



With the disappearance of Total Network Solutions my nomination for the ugliest-named team in Europe is one that plays in the Austrian Bundesliga. The football team from the small town of Wolfsberg in Kärnten was for most of its existence known as WAC (Wolfsberger AC). However, in 2014 they got themselves a sponsor and henceforth they are now known as **RZ Pellets WAC** (or, to give them their full title *Riegler & Zechmeister Pellets Wolfsberger Athletik Club!!*). It's hard to imagine fans singing “up the Pellets”...!



As the photo of their kit shows Austrian football has a rather liberal attitude to sponsorship, especially shirt (and short) advertising! Even the rear of the shorts contain adverts!!

And just in case you are curious to know what RZ pellets make:



Apparently you burn them.



Finally, (and especially for our Genovese sweepstakers!) we have Genoa's football team (well, one of them). Not the most unusual name for a football club by the standards of this article, but an interesting one – since they are not called FC Genova. Rather, the official name of the Serie A team is “**the Genoa Cricket and Football Club**”.



The explanation is that they were established by English expats in 1893 and are the oldest football team in Italy. Indeed, until 1896 Italians were not even allowed to join the club!

Genoa has won the Italian league nine times – but six of those were before 1905 (i.e. when the English influence still existed in the club).

This season Genoa's 2<sup>nd</sup> kit has a very English feel to it! (Admittedly, the flag of St George is also the official crest of the city). The club nickname is '*il Grifone*' – the griffins: again, taken from the city's coat of arms.

For the record, Genova does have another football team – FC Sampdoria. They may be better known, having been the club of Roberto Mancini and Gianluca Vialli (and even made it to a European Cup final in 1992), but they are currently languishing in the bowels of Serie B....

So I hope you enjoyed this little voyage around the footballing world – perhaps you might even feel inspired to support one of these teams. But don't spend €100+ on a replica shirt!

