

THE PERFECT GAME PLAN



English edition

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Our Daily Bread
Ministries®

Answers to the World Cup trivia can be found on page 47.

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English ODB Edition

INTRODUCTION

It's that time on the FIFA calendar when football fever reigns again! You would be forgiven for thinking a behavior-changing epidemic has broken out across the globe. In some places, whole nations come to a standstill, and frenzied supporters, forsaking sleep and downing tools, urge their nation or favorite team to victory.

Welcome to the World Cup finals! For a month, 32 nations vie for football supremacy, parading the cream of football talent before the world. Years of planning, disciplined training, and intense competition finally boil down to this one event where the world champions for the next four years will be crowned. With bated breath, a quarter of the world's population watches.

Most teams, having come this far, are closely matched. To gain that extra edge, coaches strive to devise the perfect game plan, using the right players and strategy. Victory or defeat is often decided not on the pitch, but off it.

The World Cup resonates with many today because it mirrors their own struggle for significance and success. Like a window to the soul, the epic battle on the pitch also reminds us of our daily struggle against sin, temptation, selfishness, and death. Do you have a game plan in place? The stories in the following pages can point you to victory, not just for the next four years but for eternity. 

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPETITION

Time and time again, we wonder at the stories of competitors who rose from the depths of their previous defeats, overcame great disadvantages, and achieved success. In competition, every person can experience that sense of confidence and overcoming, no matter if it is in sports, in life, or within themselves.

Competing with confidence

When it is based in the wisdom and character of our Creator, fair competition in daily experience is more than just following simple rules, and our well-being doesn't just depend on whether we win or lose.

Rather, when our goal in a discussion, a game, or even a contract is rooted in God's unlimited ability to take care of us, even in the small things, we can compete with confidence, not only for our own benefit, but also for the well-being of our adversaries.



Competing with honor

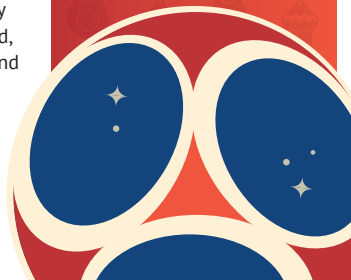
Believing in what we do and doing our best to triumph, while having good will, honor, and confidence—no matter what the final outcome —is what should occupy our mind and motivate our attitude. Without faith it is impossible to please God; and when competitors give everything they have to win in games and in life, they must seek their strength in the presence of the Lord of their lives. When we practice faith, even in competition, we honor God. Even though winning is not everything in the life of competitors, it reflects the result of their efforts. There is honor in victory, not only for the winning competitor, but also for all of those who surround him.

Running to succeed. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, the apostle Paul used an image that was probably familiar to his readers, taken directly from the Olympic event of his time, known then as the Isthmian Games. With that competitive image in mind, he wrote: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

When the athletes participating in the Isthmian Games trained diligently to win the races, they knew two things: first, only one would take the first prize; and second, that prize would eventually deteriorate and lose its value.

*Do you not know
that those who run
in a race all run,
but one receives
the prize? Run in
such a way that you
may obtain it.*

(1 CORINTHIANS 9:24 NKJV)




BEATING TEMPTATION

Addiction to drugs, alcohol, sex, or gambling has plagued the life of many sports people. Sometimes we wonder why talented footballers could so easily get snared, jeopardizing their career and family. Experts believe their stronger compulsive and obsessive personality traits, which they need to help them succeed, make footballers more inclined to addiction than most other people. The glamour and attention their star status attracts, as well as their youthfulness, contribute to the problem. Add in lots of money and free time, and you have a situation ripe for the picking.

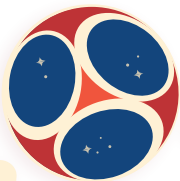
Are you caught in a crippling addiction? If you are, then you are not alone. Everyone struggles with temptations, including the apostle Paul whose writings form part of the New Testament of the Bible. He wrote, “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do

When we blame others, we give up the hope of real transformation.

what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate” (ROMANS 7:15). The real problem according to him is internal, not external: “It is sin living in me” (verse 17). We need to stop blaming external factors and deal with our sinful nature that exposes us to temptations. But “who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?” (verse 24). The solution is “in Jesus Christ our Lord”! (verse 25). Jesus came to give us victory over sin. Have you experienced it? 

to the goal ▶ *I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't.*

I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. (ROMANS 7:15-25)



world cup trivia

1. Which World Cup had the coldest weather ever?


IMPORTANT QUESTION

Claude Makéléle, one of the world's best defensive midfielders, was once a virtual unknown. At 1.7 meters and weighing 70 kilos, he was not exactly the tallest or the biggest in the park. But he was the engine that drove his team forward. His role was to break up the opponent's advances, do a quick attacking forward pass and pin the opponent back. He was so successful in this capacity that people began to ask: "Who is that player?"

Opinions about Jesus vary. Many who do not rate Him highly dismiss Him as deluded. For claiming to be the Son of God, they in derision call Him "the man who walked on water." Although a few find some of His teachings interesting, they reject His assertion that He is Savior of the world. Most, however, seeing no current relevance, simply ignore Him.

**Truth is unlocked
by asking the
right question.**

Yet there are those who beg to differ, pointing to their own changed life. Some who have lost everything are grateful they were pulled back from the brink. They all testify to the reality and importance of Jesus in their life.

But at the end of the day, it is not what others say for or against Jesus that matters. Who do you say Jesus is? 

to the goal ▶ *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." Then He asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being."* (MATTHEW 16:13-17)



world cup trivia

2. Which World Cup had the most injuries?
3. What was the fastest goal scored in a World Cup?

Did you know . . . Uruguay's Juan Eduardo Hohberg fainted on the pitch after scoring the second of his two goals in the match between Uruguay and Hungary in the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland? He received medical care and recovered at the hospital.

OWN GOAL

Reaching to block a cross, the Colombian defender Andrés Escobar watched in horror as the ball deflected off his leg and cannoned into his own net. That costly mistake helped eliminate the powerful Colombian team from the 1994 Cup. Ten days later, Escobar was shot dead in his hometown. His tragic death is one of the saddest stories in the annals of World Cup history.

In life we are often able to redeem ourselves and recover from our errors, but not all of us will have that opportunity. The biggest mistake we can ever make is rejecting God's Son, Jesus Christ. His death on the cross makes it possible for those who believe in Him to receive God's full pardon for their sins. Whether we reject or accept Jesus determines where we will be spending eternity.

Mistakes are inevitable, but inaction is unpardonable.

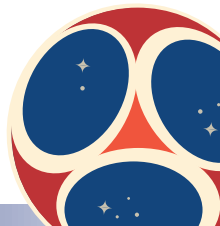
Escobar was known to say, "Life doesn't end here." We are wise to consider where it does end. The Bible admonishes us that "today when you hear His [God's] voice, don't harden your hearts" (HEBREWS 3:15). Unbelief in God will lead to certain judgment. We need to acknowledge Jesus before facing God one day. Avoid scoring the ultimate "own goal" for which there is no second chance. ⚽

to the goal ► *Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. Remember what it says: “Today when you hear His voice, don’t harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled.” And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard His voice? Wasn’t it the people Moses led out of Egypt? And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn’t it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when He took an oath that they would never enter His rest? Wasn’t it the people who disobeyed Him? So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter His rest.* (HEBREWS 3:12-19)

world cup trivia

4. Which national team has collected the most red cards throughout the World Cup tournaments so far?
5. Which was the first African national team to win a World Cup match?

Did you know . . . In the 1938 World Cup in France, Brazilian footballer Leônidas da Silva scored a goal while playing barefoot? It happened when Brazil played Poland, with Brazil winning 6-5.



PREMATURE CELEBRATION

It was a fight for promotion and, with the full-time scores level at 4-4, Italian teams Termeno and Dro went to penalties to decide the outcome.

Up stepped Michael Palma for the spot-kick that would keep Termeno in the contest. But his powerful shot cannoned off the bar! In shock, Palma sank to the ground while the Dro keeper Loris Angeli ran off celebrating wildly. But it wasn't over yet. The ball was hit with such force that it spun back towards goal when it landed and slowly trickled over the line!

As someone once said, it ain't over till it's over. Angeli celebrated too soon.

He who thinks he's got life all figured out, needs to think again.

Luke 12:15-21 is about someone who celebrated prematurely. Most of us could identify with the rich man's retirement plan. Thinking that he had done enough to guarantee a comfortable future, he decided to celebrate and "take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry" (verse 19). But Jesus points out the folly of believing that material possessions alone can set us up for life, because "life is not measured by how much you own" (verse 15). Instead, He tells us never to disregard God who holds the key to our future (verse 20).

Don't celebrate your life too soon, for it ain't over yet. The rich fool found out too late. ⚽

to the goal ▶ Then He said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." Then He told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, 'My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!'" "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." (LUKE 12:15-21)

world cup trivia


6. What was the biggest thrashing in World Cup history?
7. When were yellow and red cards first introduced to the World Cup?



TRUE PLAYMAKER

As a creative player, the playmaker's role is to influence the attacking aspect of his team's game. Spraying killer passes to the wingers or the strikers upfront, he initiates his team's attacks and tries to unlock the opponents' defense. His intuition and ability to read the game enable him to put perfectly placed balls through to his teammates. Possessing amazing dribbling and passing skills, the playmaker can quickly turn defense into offence for his side.

Sometimes we wish the same thing would work in real life, thinking if only there were a "playmaker," things would be different. Unfortunately, even those who specialize in solving problems for others are not without problems themselves, being hemmed in by sin and limited by their own finiteness.

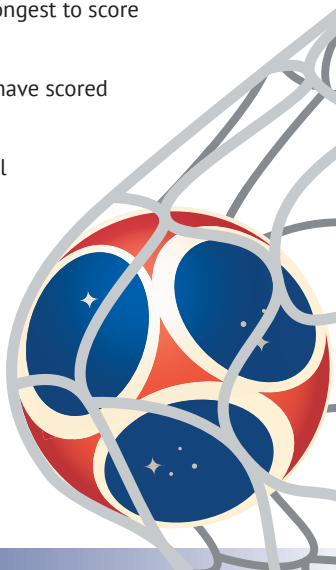
But there is One who is the original Creator. He did marvelous things for us that "no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has imagined" (1 CORINTHIANS 2:9). In one fell swoop God turned things around, dealing conclusively with the problem of sin and death for us. To those who believe in His Son, Jesus, He gave them His Spirit who guides them daily in their journey with Him and ultimately towards the glorious life of living with the Creator forever. 

**A true playmaker makes
an ordinary player feel
he is a winner.**

to the goal ▶ *Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—His plan that was previously hidden, even though He made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.” But it was to us that God revealed these things by His Spirit. For His Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets.* (1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-10)

world cup trivia

8. Which goalkeeper did it take the longest to score against in World Cup history?
9. Who is the youngest footballer to have scored a goal in a World Cup?
10. What is the most controversial goal in World Cup history?



TRANSFERRED

In 2009, Cristiano Ronaldo moved from Manchester United to Real Madrid for a whopping £80 million! Increasingly these days, it seems that clubs are willing to splash out the cash for prized players who could help them challenge for silverware, pull in the crowd, and pump up the gate receipts.


While mortals like us may gulp at such astronomical figures, high transfer fees are hardly limited to football. In fact, the highest ever made was for folks like you and me. No, you didn't hear wrong; someone paid an astronomically high price for us.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that we need not be “somebody” for God to notice us. He has always loved us and demonstrated it when He “did not spare

**It's great to discover
that someone has
already paid your
bills in full.**

even His own Son but gave Him up for us all” (ROMANS 8:32). For our sake, Jesus came and paid the ultimate price, dying in our place, so that we don't need to face God's judgment for our sins anymore.

God promises that those who believe in who Jesus is and what He did for us can now be “transferred” from a world of sin and death to God's kingdom of love and life, where a close and lasting relationship with Him is a distinct possibility.

The price has been paid, but are you “transferred” yet? 

to the goal ▶ *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (ROMANS 5:6-8)*



world cup trivia

11. Why weren't any World Cups held between 1942-1946?
12. Which national team has appeared in the most World Cup finals?
13. Who's scored the most World Cup goals?

TRUE VALUE

The football world was in an uproar when the Jules Rimet trophy was stolen in London while on exhibition as a build-up to the 1966 World Cup. Chairman of the exhibition Cecil Richardson was surprised that the thief only went after the £3,000 trophy, leaving the surrounding stamp exhibits valued at £3 million untouched. It appeared


that the trophy's iconic appeal motivated the thief to steal the less valuable prize.

All standards are relative until the real one shows up.

Jesus told two stories in Matthew 13:44-46 to illustrate how valuable the kingdom of heaven is. Like the

priceless pearl and the hidden treasure that cause a man and a merchant to part with everything they possess, the kingdom of heaven when properly assessed will effect a radical reaction in the life of the seeker as well.

Unfortunately, not everyone sees it that way. The superficial glitter of earthly treasures easily blinds many to the true value of things that are spiritually discerned. Only those who see and understand the difference between passing fancy and eternal reality can shake off that deception.

The thief thought he saw more value in the Jules Rimet trophy than in the stamps, but when it comes to the kingdom of heaven against the wealth of the world the conclusion is a no-brainer. Which are you choosing today? 

to the goal ► *the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!* (MATTHEW 13:44-46)

world cup trivia

14. Who's managed the most World Cup matches?
15. Which player holds the record for the fastest red card received in a World Cup match?
16. What's the difference between the Golden Boot and the Golden Ball awards?



WHAT ARE YOU WORTH?

How do you determine the transfer value of a football player? Pricing a player is quite complex. Owners, clubs, and managers factor in the athlete's age, skill level, iconic status, pitch position, and the league in which he is currently playing to arrive at a price. But that is only the quoted worth. The real value lies in what others think and are willing to pay.

How do we value ourselves? What is our true worth? For most of us, our sense of self-worth comes mainly through how others think of us—our parents, spouse, children, siblings, friends, neighbors, colleagues, superiors, and even subordinates. Their opinions matter, regardless of how much we may pretend that we can do without them.


If the estimation of imperfect human beings can so deeply affect us, how much more the assessment of someone who has a perfect knowledge of us, someone to

whom all mankind is ultimately accountable! Have we ever considered how much God the righteous Judge values us? Despite our sins and imperfection,


Titus 2:14 declares that He “gave His life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.”

To all who acknowledge Him, He gives them the valuation that really counts—the right to become the children of God. 🌐

**All we need is
one evaluation of
worth in life.**



to the goal ► *This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of His great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; He alone is God. Amen.* (1 TIMOTHY 1:15-17)



world cup trivia

17. What is the Fair Play award?
18. Which national team is the only one to have appeared in every World Cups?

TRUE REST

Matthias Sindelar, voted as the greatest center-forward ever in the history of Austrian football, was part of the celebrated Austrian national team that enjoyed a period of unprecedented success during the 1930s, which pundits nicknamed the “Wunderteam.” Sindelar’s dazzling skills often left bewildered defenders in his wake as he waltzed his way to the goal. Equally astounding was his unyielding loyalty. As an Austrian patriot, he refused to play for Germany when his homeland was annexed and the Wunderteam disbanded in 1938. One wintry morning the following January, his lifeless body was discovered in bed. He was aged 35.

While many instinctively admire people like Sindelar who, at great personal risk, take a stand and refuse to give in to wrong, few actually take that option for themselves. “Better a live coward than a dead hero” is the life maxim of most.

People are not quite ready to pay the price for doing what is right. But let us not kid ourselves; compromising does not come cheap either. Guilt, shame, regret, and self-loathing are powerful emotions that can bring life to a standstill.

**Nothing beats
a relieved
conscience!**

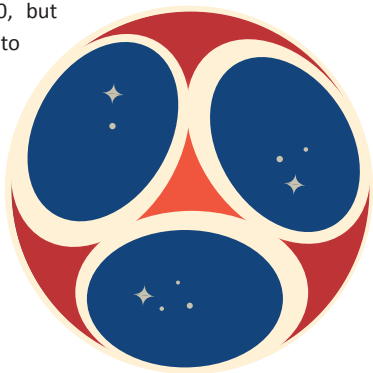
Are you feeling the weight of a troubled conscience? Then come to Jesus. His invitation to all who are weary and burdened is this: “I will give you rest” (MATTHEW 11:28). True forgiveness and restoration begin with Him who does right all the time. 🌐

to the goal ▶ *And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting Him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.* (HEBREWS 10:21-23)

world cup trivia

19. What is the name of the official mascot for the 2018 World Cup in Russia?
20. What is the name of the official match ball for the 2018 World Cup in Russia?

Did you know . . . In the 1974 World Cup there was a match between East Germany and West Germany? East Germany won the match 1-0, but were later eliminated by losses to the Netherlands and Brazil.



A GLORIOUS DAY



Appearing on football's biggest stage can be quite daunting. With dozens of television cameras training on you and through them countless millions of pairs of eyes watching your every movement, you can be forgiven if you feel a little nervous. Then there are the pundits reporting "live" in every major tongue, analyzing your every pass, shot, and tackle. Of course, the 100,000 screaming, flag-waving fans watching from the stands cannot be ignored either. For icing, you get the dignitaries—presidents, heads of state, prime ministers—and even kings and queens gracing the occasion.

In short, you are the focus of global attention, watched by wide-eyed barefoot kids in slums as well as splendidly attired royalties in VIP boxes.

It seems there is no comparable occasion today that could rival this quadrennial event. The entire world is on the same page, watching with bated breath.

But the Bible tells of a coming day that will surpass this event by far. It is the day God has set aside for the revealing of His children. On that day, every creature great or small in the entire creation will gather together to witness the spectacular presentation. Nervous? You bet!

Before that mind-boggling day hits, make sure you are among the children of God (ROMANS 8:19). 🏆

If you aren't celebrating, it's because you are looking in from the outside.

to the goal ▶ *Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)* (ROMANS 8:18-25)

world cup trivia

21. *How many national teams are going to compete in the group phase of the tournament?*
22. *Which national teams are participating at the 2018 World Cup for the first time?*



TAKING CHANCES



It was 1994 and the first ever World Cup final to be decided by a penalty shootout.

Italian captain Baresi began poorly by shooting over the bar. Next, Brazilian Santos' weak shot was saved before Albertini fired the Italians into the lead. Romario then leveled it for Brazil, and Evani slotted it past the keeper. But Branco restored parity, sending the keeper the wrong way. Up stepped Massaro, but his shot was brilliantly blocked. Then Dunga, Brazil's swaggering captain, put the ball beyond the keeper. All hopes were now on Baggio, Italy's last taker. He went for broke and skied his shot. Brazil lifted the golden trophy for the fourth time in World Cup history.

Some people dislike penalty shootouts, pointing out that they are like gambling. There is little teamwork involved, and skill takes a backseat to chance.

Certainty makes taking chances redundant.

Unfortunately, many people will take a chance before God's judgment seat one day, hoping to fall back on the accumulated merits they possess. But the Bible warns that relying on human effort won't do. "God saved you by His grace when you believed" says the Bible. "[It's] not a reward for the good things we have done" (EPHESIANS 2:8-9).

However, what we cannot do, God did for us. He guarantees that all who come to Jesus Christ will be forgiven and shall live with Him forever.

Who wants to be a penalty taker? Why take chances with your eternal destiny when faith in Christ brings sure victory? 🍷



to the goal ► *Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of His grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago. (EPHESIANS 2:1-10)*

world cup trivia

23. Which national team was the only one not to concede a goal in the 2006 World Cup in Germany?

Did you know . . . The FIFA World Cup Trophy base only has space to engrave the names of the winning countries up to the 2038 tournament?

TALENT SCOUT



I think I've found you a genius." Those were talent scout Bob Bishop's famous words in a telegram to Manchester United boss Matt Busby in 1961. The genius? Football legend George Best. At that time, little did the skinny 15-year-old Ulster lad know that those words had set him on course to football stardom one day, paving the way for him to become Manchester United winger, Northern Ireland national team player, and European Footballer of the Year.

Superstars do not just burst onto the scene. Many owe their illustrious careers to some keen-eyed scout who spotted them when they were just scrawny kids and gave them the ticket to fame and glory.

There is another Scout who is always out looking for people He can turn into saints and send on the road to glory in heaven. Despite our present loathsome selfish nature, He aims to transform anyone who is willing into a perfect being (2 CORINTHIANS 3:18). Even angels will pale in comparison!

Our Scout is God, and the ticket to glory is His Son Jesus. When you choose to believe in Jesus Christ, you are not on your way to some transient fame but to glory everlasting.

Nothing beats the message, "I think I've found you a willing candidate for glory." ⚽

**Like clay on a
potter's wheel,
the human heart
waits to be
molded.**

to the goal ► *Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. God has now revealed to us His mysterious plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill His own good pleasure. And this is the plan: At the right time He will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for He chose us in advance, and He makes everything work out according to His plan.*

(EPHESIANS 1:4-11)

world cup trivia

24. Who was the first player to get caught in an anti-doping test?

Did you know . . . In the 1994 World Cup in the USA, Mexican defender Marcelino Bernal broke the crossbar of his own goal while trying to defend it? This happened when Mexico faced Bulgaria.




ALMOST

The sad image of Bayern Munich defender Samuel Kuffour repeatedly beating the ground in utter frustration after his team's loss to Manchester United in the 1999 UEFA Champions League final remains deeply etched in the memory of many football fans. Bayern was leading 1-nil at the end of 90 minutes, when referee Pierluigi Collina signaled three minutes of stoppage time. Then somehow, against all odds, United managed to come back to put two past the German team with only seconds to spare. By any account, it was a heart-wrenching moment for Bayern's players and supporters because they were so close to winning.

That moment mirrors the painful disappointment of those who will almost make it to heaven on judgment day, a warning to all who persist in rejecting Jesus.

Are you persuaded to believe in Jesus? Then stop delaying and acknowledge Him while you may. Don't follow King Agrippa who, although he was deeply moved by the apostle Paul's challenge to believe in Christ, decided not to do so (ACTS 26:28).

"Almost" will never be good enough on judgment day. In fact, it will make matters worse, knowing you once had an opportunity to trust in Christ but decided against it.

The weeping and teeth-gnashing on the last day will be over more than a piece of transient silverware. It will be over the eternal demise of your soul. 

**"Almost" can
turn out to
be the most
disappointing
word in life.**

to the goal ▶ *“And so, King Agrippa, I obeyed that vision from heaven. I preached . . . that all must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do. . . . God has protected me right up to this present time so I can testify to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God’s light to Jews and Gentiles alike.” . . . “And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak boldly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner! King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do—” Agrippa interrupted him. “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?” Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains.” (ACTS 26:19-29)*

world cup trivia

25. Who were the teams, and what was the final score, of the World Cup match with the most ever goals?
26. Which national team has the highest average World Cup goals per match?



CHANGE OF TACTICS

The match proceeded at a furious pace as both teams went at it hammer and tongs, fighting hard to control the mid-field. No quarter was given nor was any asked.

Midfield control is crucial to the modern game because that is where attacks are usually orchestrated. But there was a time when the midfield was nonexistent. Teams played 4 or 5 defenders and up to 6 strikers. Those were the days of hoof-and-chase, where defenders pumped long hopeful balls upfield and strikers chased them down. It would be suicidal to insist on playing that way today because the game has changed and moved on.

The apostle Peter highlights that there would be scoffers who refuse to believe in Jesus and consequently laugh at His promised return to judge the world one day. They foolishly think that since from the beginning of creation nothing has changed, life will go on as usual (2 PETER 3:4).

But the game plan *has* changed ever since Jesus came and died for us. God has now made Him the basis on which He will judge mankind (JOHN 3:18). Unless we believe in Jesus, we will not be let off. Anyone insisting on playing by the old rules will be left behind. Now that we know what is coming, what kind of people ought we to be? ⚽

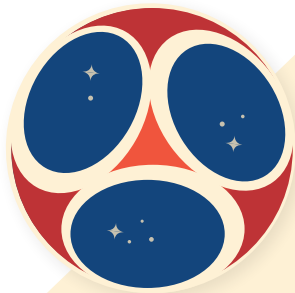
**He who rejects
change is the
architect of
decay.**

—Harold Wilson

to the goal ▶ *Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created." They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of His command, and He brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. Then He used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed. But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about His promise, as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. (2 PETER 3:3-10)*

world cup trivia

27. In which World Cup was the current squad numbering system first used?




DISAPPOINTMENT

Although they put up a brave front, you could see it in their eyes and hear it in their voices. Each had paid a high price to play in the World Cup. The rigorous training aside, some had uprooted their family and taken a pay cut in order to play for a club that they believed could enhance their selection chances. But when at last they were selected, the unthinkable happened—a serious injury forced them to withdraw! What a terrible blow and doubly so if the games had been their last hurrah!

We are all affected when realities do not match our expectations. But how deeply we are affected depends on what has happened. A temporary setback may cause just a passing distress, but a permanent loss can crush and shadow us for years.

In Psalm 73, we see someone struggling with disappointment. Because of the circumstances and people in his life, Asaph nearly lost his foothold (verse 2) and wondered why he was living righteously (verse 13). But when he sought God for an answer and carefully reexamined the focus of his life, he snapped back into perspective again, declaring, “Whom have I in heaven but [God]? I desire You more than anything on earth” (verse 25).

Are you troubled by disappointment? Then let God, not your expectations, be the focus of your life. 

**Disappointment
is a tough cookie.
You need a real
focus to beat it.**

to the goal ► *Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked. Truly, You put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. When You arise, O Lord, You will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning. Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to You. Yet I still belong to You; You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. Whom have I in heaven but You? I desire You more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever.* (PSALM 73:17-26)

world cup trivia

28. Which World Cup tournament didn't have a single player sent off?
29. Can you name the manager who also refereed during the 1930 World Cup in Uruguay?
30. What was the first official World Cup song?

Did you know . . . In the 1930 World Cup in Uruguay, Uruguayan footballer Héctor Castro had an amputated right forearm? Even with his physical disability, his skill on the ball earned him the nickname, “El divino manco” (The maimed god).



A STUNNING VICTORY




No one gave the Americans, the 500-1 rank outsiders of the tournament, a chance. How could a team consisting mostly of part-timers possibly beat England, the king of football? While the latter boasted world-class players, the former could only put together a ragtag team comprised of postmen, dishwashers, schoolteachers, and a hearse driver.

But in the summer of 1950, the first World Cup after the Second World War, the Americans sprang one of the biggest upsets in football history, stunning the English with a 1-nil victory. It was dubbed “The Miracle on Grass.”

A far more stunning victory happened some 2,000 years ago that turned the human race’s battle against death on its head. Until then, death had remained unbeaten in every encounter.

When Jesus took on death, nobody expected any difference, but the improbable happened in that defining match, deeply affecting all of humanity.

Single-handedly He took on the might of secular and religious human authorities, the manipulating spiritual powers behind them, and even death itself. Although everyone, friend or foe, wrote Him off, He turned apparent defeat into victory that irreversibly broke the back of sin and death and subjugated all authorities in heaven and on earth (1 CORINTHIANS 15:24-25). His ignominious death became the very symbol of love, grace, forgiveness, life, and hope. He did all this for you and me. 

**Victory is sweetest
after everyone has
written you off.**

to the goal ► *But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when He comes back. After that the end will come, when He will turn the kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. For Christ must reign until He humbles all His enemies beneath His feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.* (1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-26)

world cup trivia

31. Which match was played in the hottest temperature ever registered during a World Cup?
32. What was the total number of World Cup matches played at the end of the 2014 tournament?



SLIDE TACKLE



Football fans know the slide tackle is executed by a defender who usually comes in from the side, goes to ground, and slides in with a leading foot to try and take the ball off the feet of an attacking player. Because of the way it is carried out, contact is unavoidable and the attacking player invariably falls over the defender. Some see that as dangerous, citing statistics that slide tackles are responsible for a quarter of all football injuries. But others argue that, when done properly, it is one of the most effective ways in stopping an attack.

From the very beginning, sin has dominated mankind. Exploiting our desires, it brought untold sufferings and eventual death to all (“when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death” —James 1:15). But two millennia ago, heaven, in a high-stakes maneuver, did a “slide tackle” on sin, rendering it powerless to condemn us to death. God’s Son, Jesus, went to “ground” literally, leaving heaven for earth to do His Father’s will. Becoming a man, the Son of God took our place and died on the cross. Our debt of sin is paid in full by the death of One without sin.

The fuse of joy is lit by the match of timely help.

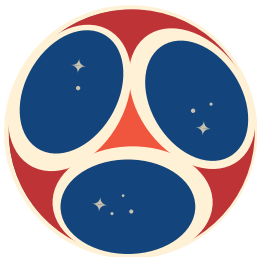
To those who believe, death no longer threatens. Jesus has set them free, giving them eternal life. What a perfect “slide tackle” that stopped sin in its tracks! ⚽

to the goal ▶ Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now He offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day." Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty. But you haven't believed in Me even though you have seen Me. However, those the Father has given Me will come to Me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent Me, not to do My own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those He has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is My Father's will that all who see His Son and believe in Him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day."

(JOHN 6:32-40)

world cup trivia

33. What was the total number of World Cup goals scored at the end of the 2014 tournament?
34. Which national team has conceded the most goals throughout the World Cups?
35. Which team has scored the most World Cup goals so far?




POWDER KEG

Over the years, FIFA has experienced its fair share of violence when organizing World Cup matches. Brawls involving players and officials from opposing teams, as well as fights among rival fans and supporters, have broken out, resulting in serious injuries, property destruction, and even deaths.

An emotionally charged match can quickly transfer the battle from the pitch to the terraces and beyond the stadium's wall. National pride, envy, or perceived bias can goad a frenzied crowd into mindless violence. Nations have even

gone to war over a football game. Sometimes the match is just an excuse to vent simmering enmity, frustration, or deep-seated anger.

The apostle Paul understood how unbridled anger can quickly escalate—the perfect tool our enemy is looking to exploit. He urged us to deny the devil that opportunity by setting a limit to our anger: “Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry” (EPHESIANS 4:26). We have to quickly deal with it before anger controls us.

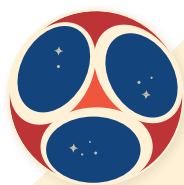
Aristotle once famously said: “Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way, that is not within everybody’s power; that is not easy.” Only a complete change by God can help us (EPHESIANS 4:20-24). 

**Unresolved anger
is double the
burden and twice
the work.**

to the goal ► *But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from Him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.* (EPHESIANS 4:20-32)

world cup trivia

36. Which national team has won the most World Cup matches so far?



COMING OFF THE LINE

With just minutes to go, the Stags went for broke, throwing everyone forward, including the goalkeeper, in order to keep their hopes alive. Shoving and tugging, the players fought to position themselves for the corner kick.

The Rhino goalkeeper came for the ball, then changed his mind and started retreating as players rose to meet it. But it managed to evade them all and fell to Fathi Sunny, the smallest man on the pitch, who sneaked in behind the struggling bodies and thumped in an unstoppable header past the stranded keeper.

Changing your mind after coming off the line can be disastrous. The rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-23 found that out when he looked for Jesus, seeking to inherit eternal life. He had lived a moral life and believed

his wealth was a sign of God's approval (vv. 19-20). He thought all he needed to do was just a little more good and heaven would be assured. Could Jesus help?

But he was challenged by Jesus to give away the symbol of his confidence—his wealth (verse 21).

Human efforts can never satisfy God and earn us eternal life. That is why life everlasting is a gift from God. The young ruler needed to follow Jesus.

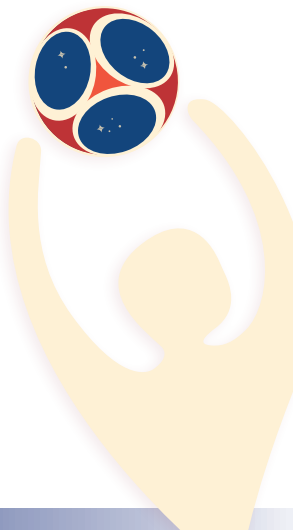
Sadly, he “came off his line” to meet Jesus but left empty-handed. How would you respond? ⚽

**A half-hearted
commitment is
no commitment.**

to the goal ▶ *As Jesus was starting out on His way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to Him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," He told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (MARK 10:17-23)*

world cup trivia

37. Which national team did not take part in the 1950 World Cup because FIFA would not allow the players to play barefoot?
38. In 1994, 42 year old Roger Milla was the oldest player to score a goal in World Cup history. Which national team did he play for?



UNSUNG HEROES



Collecting the ball in his own half, he ran up the pitch and swapped passes with a teammate in the opponents' box. Deftly dribbling past a defender, he cut back to the lurking Tardelli just outside the D. Despite a clumsy first touch, Tardelli managed to strike the ball across goal into the far corner of the net. History was made as Italy won the World Cup against Germany in 1982.

That was Gaetano Scirea the *libero* (sweeper), a player who could defend as well as attack. "Gai" was a quiet man who shunned publicity even though he had won for club and country every major football

**Heaven's heroes
are usually
unknown on earth.**

trophy in his day. It was only after his retirement that his genius was widely recognized. Like all unsung heroes, his focus was on doing what is right.

The Bible records an account of four unknown lepers who did the right thing. Outcasts from their besieged city, they discovered a deserted enemy camp. Rather than keeping it a secret and eating their fill of rations, they decided to "go back and tell the people at the palace" (2 KINGS 7:9). These outcasts actually saved the inhabitants of Samaria from dying of starvation.

Anyone can be an unsung hero. When we choose to live by God's standards and acknowledge Him, we begin to make better choices and put the needs of others before our own. ⚽

to the goal ► Now there were four men with leprosy sitting at the entrance of the city gates. “Why should we sit here waiting to die?” they asked each other. “We will starve if we stay here, but with the famine in the city, we will starve if we go back there. So we might as well go out and surrender to the Aramean army. If they let us live, so much the better. But if they kill us, we would have died anyway.” So at twilight they set out for the camp of the Arameans. But when they came to the edge of the camp, no one was there! For the Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the clatter of speeding chariots and the galloping of horses and the sounds of a great army approaching. “The king of Israel has hired the Hittites and Egyptians to attack us!” they cried to one another. So they panicked and ran into the night, abandoning their tents, horses, donkeys, and everything else, as they fled for their lives. When the lepers arrived at the edge of the camp, they went into one tent after another, eating and drinking wine; and they carried off silver and gold and clothing and hid it. Finally, they said to each other, “This is not right. This is a day of good news, and we aren’t sharing it with anyone! If we wait until morning, some calamity will certainly fall upon us. Come on, let’s go back and tell the people at the palace.” So they went back to the city and told the gatekeepers what had happened. “We went out to the Aramean camp,” they said, “and no one was there! The horses and donkeys were tethered and the tents were all in order, but there wasn’t a single person around!” Then the gatekeepers shouted the news to the people in the palace. (2 KINGS 7:3-11)

world cup trivia

39. In 1950, Maracanã Stadium recorded the highest attendance in all World Cup history. How many people were in the stadium?



WINNING THE GAME

There are many lessons we can take from the World Cup. What did you learn? Perhaps you glimpsed something that struck a chord with you, stirring a hunger for true glory, honor, and permanence that this world cannot satisfy. As you ponder over the stories in this booklet and watch the battle on the pitch, perhaps you sense your own reflected fears and aspirations and want to do something about your life. We invite you to seriously consider what the Bible says about God's perfect game plan for you.

Nations and individuals have to pay dearly for the world's recognition, but gaining God's approval costs even more. The barrier of sin that separates us from Him must first be overcome. Unfortunately, we are so oblivious to the enormity of our shame and guilt that we cannot even begin to grieve over the darkness of our soul.

This appalling ignorance renders us incapable of breaking through. We desperately need God's help. If you are feeling that way right now, it is God working in you. Don't delay but accept God's perfect plan of bringing you to Himself in Jesus Christ. We invite you to use the following prayer:

*Dear God, I know that I have not lived my life
trusting in You, and I am deeply sorry for that.
Thank You for loving me. Thank You for sending Jesus
to die on the cross to pay the penalty for my rebellion.
With Your help I will now put my faith in You
and trust in Jesus as my Rescuer. Please help me to stop
living by my own ways, and instead
let You take control of my life.*

If these words express your heart's desire, you have entered into a personal relationship with God!

We encourage you to start attending a church and let them know of your decision. 🏈

ANSWERS TO THE WORLD CUP TRIVIA

1. The 2010 World Cup in South Africa was the coldest one. The temperature registered during Brazil vs. North Korea was -1°C.
2. The 1962 World Cup was one of the most violent of all times. In the first five days of matches, around 50 players were injured due to fouls.
3. In the 2002 World Cup in Japan/South Korea, Turkish player Hakan Sükür scored a goal after just 11 seconds against South Korea.
4. Brazil has collected the most red cards (11) across the World Cups.
5. Tunisia. They won 3-1 against Mexico in Argentina (1978).
6. Hungary 10-1 El Salvador, in Spain (1982).
7. The 1970 World Cup in Mexico.
8. Walter Zenga. It took 517 minutes for the Italian goalkeeper to be beaten in the 1990 World Cup.
9. Pelé, 17 years old and 239 days in 1958.
10. Maradona, when he scored with his hand against England in 1986.
11. Because of World War II.
12. Germany, who have made it to the finals eight times.
13. Miroslav Klose (Poland-born German footballer) is the top World Cup goal scorer (16).
14. German coach Helmut Schön. He led the German national team between the 1966 and 1978 World Cups.
15. The Uruguayan footballer José Batista was expelled after 56 seconds in 1986 in Mexico.
16. The Golden Boot is given to the top goalscorer; the Golden Ball is given to the best player in a World Cup. Both awards are given at the end of the tournament.
17. FIFA's Fair Play Trophy has been given to the team with the best spirit of fair play on and off the pitch since the 1978 World Cup.
18. Brazil (21 appearances, including the 2018 World Cup).
19. Zabivaka, the "the one who scores".
20. Telstar 18.
21. 32: 14 national teams from Europe, 5 from Asia, 5 from Africa and 8 from the Americas.
22. Iceland and Panama.
23. Switzerland.
24. Haitian defender Ernest Jean Joseph, who was banned from playing the rest of the tournament.
25. Austria 7-5 Switzerland (1954).
26. Hungary, with 2.72 goals per match.
27. The 1950 World Cup. The numbering system went from 1 to 11 according to the players' positions.
28. The 1950 World Cup.
29. Bolivian coach Ulises Saucedo was also a referee for the match between Argentina and Mexico (6-3).
30. "El Rock del Mundial" by the Chilean group Los Ramblers, in the 1962 World Cup.
31. Germany vs. South Korea in the 1994 World Cup in the USA. The temperature reached 46°C.
32. 836 matches.
33. 2,379 goals.
34. Germany, who have conceded 121 goals.
35. Germany, who have scored 224 goals.
36. Brazil, with 70 wins.
37. India.
38. The Cameroon national team.
39. 199,854 people.

WORLD CUP STADIUMS, RUSSIA 2018



KALININGRAD
Kaliningrad Stadium



SAINT PETERSBURG
Saint Petersburg Stadium



MOSCOW
Lujniki and Spartak Stadiums



NIZHNY NOVGOROD
Nizhny Novgorod Stadium



KAZAN
Kazan Arena



SARANSK
Mordovia Arena



YEKATERINBURG
Ekaterinburg Arena



ROSTOV ON DON
Rostov Arena



SAMARA
Samara Arena



VOLGOGRAD
Volgograd Arena



SOCHI
Fisht Olympic Stadium