

# THE GEO-SAMPLER

As our favorite sunny season comes to a close – and we're winding up our back-to-school shoe shopping – we here in the lab are taking a moment to reflect on the excitement that swept the nation this year. No, not the Canadian Wildfires. The World Cup! Spoiler alert: Spain took home the grand prize trophy. So, let's take a moment and reminisce about our favorite bits on and off the pitch and, perhaps, extoll the virtues of the beautiful game.

## THE SUMMER OF SOCCER

FIFA World Cup 2026 was historic for many reasons. First, it marked the first time the tournament was hosted by three nations (Canada, Mexico and United States), jointly spread across 16 cities. It was a first for Canada (Oh, Canada) to be host, and Mexico became the first country to hold it three times (tres, for those of you speaking Spanish) – 1970, 1986 and 2026.

Also, it was the first time the global soccer community got a look at the expanded 48-team format, which resulted in a record-breaking 104 matches. Updates came in fast and furious over those 39 days. Previous World Cups featured 32 teams; the recent 2026 edition included a first-ever 'Round of 32' stage.

But enough about the facts. Let's get to the highs and lows – the drama and debates – that make this global event one we'll never forget.

**Tartan takeover of Boston.** If we hadn't seen it televised, we'd never believe that 50,000 Scotland supporters, many wearing kilts, would invade Beantown. Fans flooded local bars, draining many watering holes of lager, and thousands marched to the delicate tunes of bagpipes to Fenway Park following Scotland's historic victory over Haiti. They continued their celebration by

singing "Yes sir, I can boogie" (aka the unofficial national anthem of the Scottish national football team) during the seventh-inning stretch.

**Row, row, row, the Norway way.** The Viking row (or *Viking-roing*) became the viral craze of the summer.

The celebration features fans sitting in lines, chanting "Ro!" (the Norwegian word for 'row') in unison, moving their arms back and forth to mimic rowing a Viking longship. Turns out, the move was created by fan organizer Ole Frøystad (known as Mr. Row Row) and adopted by the supporter group Oljeberget. It symbolizes the

team and fans going into "battle" on the pitch, honoring Norway's deep historical ties to sea exploration and coastal rowing. During the World Cup, it was performed in Times Square, at baseball games, the Norwegian Parliament, and, we must sheepishly admit, our labs.

**John Denver having a moment.** When the United States bested Australia in Seattle during the group stage, the entire 67,000 fans in attendance erupted into song, belting out "Country Roads, Take Me Home." The 1971 classic became the unofficial U.S. Men's National Team anthem, creating a powerful symbol of national unity and home-soil pride as the team advance



*Genuinely, all these tweets of World Cup visitors getting to experience the best of Small Town, USA fills me with a national pride that I've been missing.*



### Speaking Soccer

#### Nutmeg (Megs)

Passing the ball through an opponent's legs.

#### Worldie

An extraordinary, beautiful goal scored with high skill.

#### Panenka

A penalty kick where the player gently chips the ball straight down the middle while the goalie dives.

#### Rabona

A trick kick where a player wraps their kicking leg behind their standing leg to strike the ball.

#### Hospital ball

A weak or dangerous pass that invites an opponent to smash into your teammate.

#### Squeaky bum time

The tense final minutes of a close game when everyone is nervous.

#### Hairdryer treatment

A manager shouting furiously at players face-to-face in the locker room.

#### WAGs

An acronym for the wives and girlfriends of soccer players.



**NQA-1**  
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to the knockout stage. Midfielder Weston McKennie crooning the tune quickly garnered millions of views online and, more than once, we found ourselves singing along “to the place I belong.”

**The stars were shining.** The biggest names in the game were on point for the tournament and fans were treated to matches that showed off their skills. Kylian Mbappe of France topped the charts with a massive ten goals and four assists, earning the tournament’s “Golden Boot.” Legendary Lionel Messi led Argentina to the final match, netting eight goals and four assists, and in the process became the first male player in soccer history to start in three separate World Cup finals (2014, 2022, 2026). Still, many others captured the national stage, including Jude Bellingham (England), Erling Haaland (man, can that Norwegian player shoot – and Ro!) and Spain’s young Lamine Yamal. Keep your eye on him; we know we will.

**Hydration, er commercial, breaks.** Soccer, or football/futbol as it is called everywhere but here, is famous for its non-stop action. A 90-minute match is typically played in two 45-minute halves with minimal interruption, save for goals, fouls, injuries and the occasional ‘dive’ by a player made to emulate injury. But the 2026 FIFA World Cup featured mandatory hydration breaks in each half, sparking controversy among players, coaches, fans, and even the guys in our breakroom. The argument is that the universal stoppages disrupted match momentum, acted as tactical timeouts, and provided unnecessary commercial breaks in the



broadcast. Some likely appreciated the opportunity to hit the ‘loo,’ while others felt they’d seen just about enough of David Beckham shilling products.

**The VAR factor.** VAR stands for Video Assistant Referee. It is a match official system used to review game-changing decisions via video replay, aiming to correct “clear and obvious errors,” including goals, offsides, fouls, handballs, penalties, red cards, etc. There is perhaps no more controversial topic in soccer today than VAR and simply not enough space in this *GeoSampler* to fully address it. Lucky you.

**What now?** Alas, the summer of soccer is behind us. So where do we go from here? Fortunately, we’ve got lots of soccer ahead of us. In Pittsburgh, we can see the Riverhounds defend their national title, as they won the USL Championship in November of 2025. For our Raleigh family, NC Courage is a top-tier women’s professional team (NWSL) playing at WakeMed Soccer Park. The MLS expanded in 2020 to include Nashville Soccer Club, playing home matches at Geodis Park, the largest soccer-specific stadium in North America. St. Louis has long been known as America’s soccer capital where locals enjoy the MLS team St. Louis City SC. And our newest location, Lakeland, Florida, boasts Lakeland United Football Club of USL League 2.

Thanks for reliving the Summer of Soccer with us. We’ve got four years to prepare for the next World Cup. We have a feeling we’ll be ready.

**Thank you.**

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