# The New Generation of Football Stars

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*Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.*

## Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. crop
2. flaw
3. sharpness
4. assigned
5. composure
6. trials
7. came to nothing
8. relentlessly
9. striking
10. pin down
11. drifts
12. surges
13. elite
14. workload

## Word Partners

**Part A.** 1 d 2 a 3 h 4 e 5 g 6 c 7 f 8 b

Phrases: a fatal flaw; lose your composure; be assigned to a task; a striking resemblance; at the elite level; take a heavy toll; reduce a player's workload; work relentlessly.

**Part B.** 1 composed 2 flawless 3 strikingly 4 assignment 5 relentless 6 sharp

## Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

**1.** *When and where was Lamine Yamal born, and how old was he when he first played for the first team?*
He was born near Barcelona in 2007, and he played for the first team at 15.

**2.** *What record did Yamal set at the 2024 European Championship?*
He became the youngest player ever to score at the tournament.

**3.** *What weakness do even Yamal's admirers mention?*
His work without the ball, when the team needs him to chase opponents and help defend.

**4.** *Yamal scored only once at the 2026 World Cup. How did he still help Spain?*
Opponents often sent two defenders to mark him, so every defender assigned to him left more space for his teammates.

**5.** *Why did Estêvão miss the 2026 World Cup?*
He had a serious hamstring injury in April 2026.

**6.** *What do many people praise about the way Estêvão plays?*
His composure: he seems to know when to dribble and when to pass.

**7.** *Describe Yan Diomande's route from Abidjan to Real Madrid.*
He grew up in Abidjan, moved to an academy in Florida at 15, had trials in Europe that came to nothing, signed for a small Spanish club, moved to RB Leipzig a year later, and joined Real Madrid in August 2026.

**8.** *What did Melchie Dumornay do for Haiti in 2023, and why is she hard to pin down?*
She scored both goals against Chile that sent Haiti to its first Women's World Cup. She is hard to pin down because she drifts between midfield and attack.

**9.** *Why might early success take a toll on young players? Use the reading and your own ideas.*
Open answer. A strong answer mentions the injuries to two of the players in 2026 and FIFPRO's warning about workload, and may add ideas such as pressure from fans, little time to rest, or bodies that are still developing.

10. *True, False, or Not Given: "Melchie Dumornay has won the Women's Champions League with Lyon." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Not Given. The reading says Dumornay joined Lyon and won individual awards, but it does not say whether she has won the Women's Champions League.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer suggests that a heavy workload may be a risk for young players." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Yes. The writer says that early success can take a toll and that FIFPRO has warned the workload is too heavy for young players.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the writer mention FIFPRO? Is it (a) to show that the players' own union is worried about workload, (b) to explain how much players are paid, or (c) to name the organization that runs the World Cup?*
    (a) To show that the players' own union is worried about workload. FIFPRO is described as the global players' union.

## True or False

1. **T.** He joined the academy as a child and played for the first team at 15.
2. **F.** Spain went on to win it.
3. **F.** He plays on the right wing but prefers his left foot.
4. **T.** Estêvão was born the same year, 2007.
5. **F.** A hamstring injury kept him out of the World Cup.
6. **T.** At 15 he moved to a sports academy in Florida.
7. **F.** They all came to nothing.
8. **T.** The reading gives a reported fee of about 140 million euros.
9. **F.** She was born in 2003, so she is a few years older.
10. **T.** Her two goals against Chile sent Haiti to its first Women's World Cup.

## Language Focus: Superlatives and Ordinals with the To-Infinitive

*Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.*

1. The first person in my family to go to university was my older sister.
2. In my home, the last person to go to bed is usually my father.
3. The only place in my town to watch live football is the stadium by the river.
4. For me, the easiest way to learn new words is to use them in short messages.
5. The best time of day to study is early in the morning.
6. My friend Dan was the first person in our class to get a smartphone.
7. The best place to meet friends is the park near the station.
8. My cousin was the last person to send me a message today.
9. The most useful thing to bring on a long trip is a phone charger.
10. My grandfather is the oldest person I know to still play tennis.

Accept relative-clause answers in Part B only if the student can also say the to-infinitive version. Accept any true completion that keeps the pattern.

## Notes on the Evidence

Yamal: born 13 July 2007; first-team debut at 15 (2023). Youngest scorer in European Championship history (semi-final against France, July 2024). First player to win the Kopa Trophy twice (2024 and 2025; Gulf News, SI). He finished second to Ousmane Dembélé in the 2025 Ballon d'Or, not mentioned in the reading. 2026 World Cup: hamstring injury in late April against Celta Vigo, about eight weeks out (FootballTransfers, July 2026); one goal (4-0 against Saudi Arabia, MyKhel). Spain beat Argentina 1-0 in the final on 19 July 2026, Ferran Torres scoring in extra time (106th minute, foot-africa). Sources disagree on his dribbling figures (35 dribbles in one report, 22 successful of 49 attempted in another), so the reading gives

none. The double marking is from FootballTransfers. The point about defenders assigned to him is the writer's reasoning, not a statistic.

Estêvão: born 24 April 2007 in Franca; Palmeiras debut 7 December 2023; Chelsea from summer 2025; late winner against Liverpool on 4 October 2025; first Brazil goal on 4 September 2025 against Chile (Wikipedia). The claim that he was the youngest to score in a competitive game for Brazil since Pelé comes from Sports Illustrated, so the reading says "according to reports". Hamstring injury on 18 April 2026 against Manchester United, described as a grade 4 tear; he said he chose not to have surgery (SI). He scored in his first game back, a preseason friendly against Tottenham (Lance, 1 August 2026). Note: the full reading says "hamstring tear"; the quick reading says "hamstring injury".

Diomande: born in Abidjan; DME Academy, Daytona Beach, Florida, at 15; failed trials in England and elsewhere; Leganés at 18; RB Leipzig in 2025 for a reported 20 million euros; 12 goals and 8 assists in the 2025-26 Bundesliga, Young Player of the Season (Al Jazeera); second-youngest Bundesliga hat trick, against Eintracht Frankfurt, and 118 take-ons, second only to Yamal in Europe's top five leagues (SI). Real Madrid signing announced 6 August 2026; Madrid did not disclose the fee; Spanish media reported 140 million euros including bonuses; contract to 30 June 2033 (Al Jazeera). "Most expensive African player" depends on the reported fee, so the reading hedges it.

Dumornay: born 17 August 2003 in Mirebalais; both goals in the 2-1 playoff win over Chile (February 2023); joined Lyon (now OL Lyonnes) in July 2023; Women's Champions League Young Player of the Season 2023-24 and 2024-25 (Wikipedia); UNFP best player of the Première Ligue, 11 May 2026 (Le Nouvelliste). Lyon lost the 2026 Women's Champions League final 4-0 to Barcelona, which is why the IELTS item about the competition is Not Given. Style description follows UEFA's technical observers (tactical analysis, March 2025).

Workload: FIFPRO statements, March 2026 (International Sports Convention) and the annual workload reports, which warn about the calendar and the load on younger players and track individual players' minutes. The Kopa Trophy 2026 will be announced on 26 October 2026; Yamal is again on the shortlist. All facts checked by search on 19 October 2026.