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Move Over March Madness – Summer Delirium's Around The Corner!

By Paul Mrocza

The World Cup will begin June 9th and end on July 9th, featuring 32 teams from across the globe,

all wanting to earn the honor of being the best in the world. The 2006 tournament, which will provide unsurpassed action created by some of the finest players to ever take a soccer field, will be held in 12 different stadiums across Germany. It's as crazy as March Madness with online sports books offering more action than an Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator movie. The teams are just about set and ready to go. What are some of the ways that you can wager on this world-class event?

This is the most watched sporting event in the world. In 2002, the estimated total viewership of the entire World Cup tournament was 28.8 billion. That same year, an estimated 500 million viewers watched the first match between Senegal and France. Across the world, this event commonly pulls a 60 to 90 percent share. This year the draw, which determines how teams will be grouped, had 300 million viewers. Of course, most of the people who tuned in did not live in the United States where European football is still a distant 6th in popularity as NFL football, baseball, basketball, hockey and NASCAR attract more fans than soccer.

However, the rest of the world is fascinated and fixated on the World Cup. In England alone, it's predicted that over 1 billion pounds (almost 2 billion American dollars) will be wagered on the tournament!

MONEY LINE AND OVER/UNDER:

Wagering on the money line and the over/under is certainly available for this event. Money lines and over/unders have not yet been set for individual matches, however commonly the over/under is 2 ½. For early contests, look for mismatches that can yield higher than usual point totals. Along with considering net minders, take some time to read up on the defense of each team. Some of these clubs are virtually impossible to score against.

In betting on the money line, you'll be given three choices. You may wager on either team to win or you may put your money on the draw line. The money line bet is listed without a point spread, meaning you're wagering on the actual outcome. If you choose to lay money on the draw line, you will only

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collect if the final outcome is a draw. If the game is determined by penalty shots, Golden Goals or there is a disqualification, all draw wagers are declared losers.

A typical soccer money line will look like this:

COSTA RICA +550 2 ½ U.S. –600 Draw +1200

In this example, the United States is favored, Costa Rica is the underdog, and the chance of a tie, by the +1200 money line, is remote. The 2 ½ refers to the over/under. In this case the over is three or more goals and the under is two or less.

As teams are eliminated, goals will be more difficult to come by and the over/under will become more difficult to predict. It's not unusual for a World Cup game to have a total of at least 3 goals. Additionally, top teams such as Brazil, England, Germany, Argentina, Italy, Holland, Spain and France all have

strong scoring potential, especially against weaker teams.

In wagering on the over/under, you may be presented with one money line for over and another for under. Remember, a minus (–) sign will indicate the favorite in a money line bet. In making this wager, you'll be given three choices; you may pick either team to win or a draw.

An interesting twist on the over/under is betting on the correct score. This bet includes the opportunity to wager on games ending in a draw, with those scores ranging from 0–0 to 6–6. Odds in choosing the exact score run from 6 to 1 to 101 to 1.

FUTURES AND PROPS:

Futures and props are offered on the World Cup, including top goal scorer, first round group winners and overall tournament winners. Of the eight groups, four have dominant teams that are heavily favored to win their first rounds. The four teams that received good draws in their group are Germany (Group A), Brazil (Group F), France (Group G) and Spain (Group H). These clubs are all expected to win their groups and to go deep into the 64–game tournament.

Other teams favored to make it to the next round by coming in first in the preliminary contests are England (Group B), Argentina (Group C), Portugal (Group D), and Italy (Group E)

There have been 17 previous World Cups but only 7 countries have ever won the contest. Brazil, the most dominant country in this tournament, has five titles, while Italy has won it three times. Here's another item to remember, in the last six World Cups and 11 of the past 12 the finalists have come from the following countries – Brazil, Italy, Germany and Argentina. Additionally, host countries have done very well – home teams have won six of the 17 cups and the only nation to win the cup outside of its continent is Brazil. Of the last 12 World Cups Brazil has won five and two of the last three, including the 2002 championship in Korea.

Along with picking the top finisher in each group, many online sportsbooks offer the opportunity to

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choose the exacta (first and second place finishers) from Groups A–H. First and second place teams from each group go on to the next round of the contest.

At this point, the most likely one–two finish in each category would be Group A: Germany and Poland, Group B: England and Sweden, Group C: Argentina and Netherlands, Group D: Portugal and Mexico, Group E: Italy and Czech Republic, Group F: Brazil and Croatia, Group G: France and Switzerland, and Group H: Spain and Ukraine.

Also offered are separate odds on each team's chances to qualify for the next round. That means with this wager you're not picking a first place finisher for that first round, but a team that will either come in first or second. Prior to the start of the games, you may also bet on who will make the quarterfinals, semi–finals and finals in the event.

Some online sportsbooks offer bettors the opportunity to wager on when a particular team will be eliminated and from which continent the winning club will come. Europe, the host continent, is the odds on favorite in this final category, with South America being the second choice. If you bet on Oceania and Australia wins it all, you won't know what to do with all the money!

THE GOLDEN BOOT:

There's often a lot of betting on who will be the highest scorer in the tournament. In choosing the winner of the Golden Boot consider the fact that many of the European players have just finished long seasons and final tournaments, including Europe's Champion's League series. Some of the players from these teams – Italy, England, Spain, Germany, France, Portugal, and Holland – will also play in the World Cup and may be tired.

Most of the clubs going after the Cup only play together 10–12 times a year and during that time many players are missing from the national team's roster due to injury, fear of injury, or commitments to club matches. Having not played together very often can affect individual scorers greatly. There are also a lot of adjustments being made on the field due to the fact that these teams are playing against opponents they rarely or have never seen. There's very little time for teams to prepare for individual matches.

There's also the pressure of being in the international spotlight. In most of the world this is the premiere sporting event and millions of people are watching. If a player is new to this stage or intimidated, performance can certainly be compromised. In other words, great scoring during a player's regular season does not necessarily translate into winning the Golden Boot in the World Cup.

If a team has a one–two punch in terms of assists and goals that would be an advantage. Sweden's Henrik Larsson and Zlatan Ibrahimovic are such a tandem. Ibrahimovic is a physically tough player who is a master at setting up goals, and Larsson is a striker capable of multiple goal games.

Larsson, a great player, is a cagey veteran in his mid–thirties, while David Trezeguet, from France, is a youngster who will be on the field with Thierry Henry, another great set–up artist. Trezeguet has younger legs and better health than Larsson; he may very well win the Golden Boot.

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To get the full scoop, these fans will undoubtedly turn to a sports website. Designed for the hardcore followers and the casual observers, a sports website can be as specific or as general as you want it to be. For example, a basketball website may have a special section on March Madness that includes:

- interaction with sports fans around the world through a blog, forums, chats, and messaging
- up-to-date bios of the March Madness stars
- photos of the most heated moments in the tournaments
- histories of the teams
- a schedule of televised games
- March Madness trivia
- stats

One of the best things about a top-notch sports website is that fans can access it before, during, and after different games to get the latest breaking news. Do you have a rival team? Log on and find out what others are saying about them. Curious about a certain player's strategy? Subscribe to a blog through a website and find out what another aficionado thinks. Really, a sports website is the most efficient way to share, swap, and celebrate sports information – all within the comfort of your own home. Best of all, you're your own announcer, so your team is always the home team.

Sports fans deserve a website that is as stimulating as they are, especially during the seasons' wildest and craziest events such as March Madness, the Superbowl, the Kentucky Derby, and the World Series (to name just a few). A well-crafted and entertaining website is just what they need to stoke their fire and keep the heat on.

Many sports websites today focus on just one team or a single sport. Certainly, this is a great way to gather a tight-knit, excited group that will be eager to share even the tiniest tidbit of related trivia. But, a website can also be all-encompassing and cover sports of all kinds. In this way, a wider variety of fans

will interact with each other.

So, if you would like to have a hand in establishing a virtual athletic community, consider putting up a sports website. Before you know it, your site could have a following that rivals the NCAA, and logging on to it may become a national pastime in its own right.

Madison Lockwood is a customer relations associate for

<http://ApolloHosting.com>

,

<http://www.apollohosting.com>

. As a small business consultant, she helps prospective clients

understand how a website may benefit them both personally and professionally. Apollo Hosting provides website hosting, ecommerce hosting, & vps hosting to a wide range of customers.



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