



BetfairGuru World Cup 2018

An experimental look at rating International Football
Tournaments

BetfairGuru

<http://www.betfairguru.co>

Copyright Notice

“BetfairGuru World Cup 2018 Experiment”

Copyright © 2018
BetfairGuru Trading Service
<http://www.betfairguru.co/>

All Rights Reserved

The Copyright in this publication and the material in this publication (including without limitation the text and images) is owned by BetfairGuru Trading Service and remains the intellectual property of BetfairGuru Trading Service..

You have permission to redistribute this manual providing no changes are made to the content and the original author is acknowledged by linking to this website -
<http://www.betfairguru.co/>

Should you wish to discuss any further content, feel free to email me using the [contact form](#) at my website and I'll respond as soon as possible.

Introduction

Hello and thank you for downloading my free guide.

In it, we'll be looking at an experimental way of rating team strengths in International Football tournaments, then using it to simulate the tournament and predict what will happen.

It's important to note at the outset that I really have no idea how this will go. In previous tournaments, it's proven surprisingly effective but as the sample sizes are so small, it could well have just been down to luck.

Over time and after a number of tourneys, we should start to get a better idea of it's flaws and advantages and I've note some observations I've made so far in the next section of the guide.

In this section though, we're going to discuss the approach itself and work through the logic behind it.

My quest for something I could use for International Football started a long time ago but, as I've already mentioned, it's difficult to test any ideas out on live data and actually make projections.

This is a much more preferable way of operating in my mind than the usual back-fitted approach I see discussed on a lot of websites whilst doing my research on the subject.

It was through this research, I discovered there wasn't really anything of note already completed by anybody else. If there is, then I couldn't find it after much searching so I pretty much had to start my idea from scratch.

With teams themselves difficult to rate due to the ever varying calibre of their opponents and the difficulty in determining the weight of a friendly vs a competitive game, I struggled to settle on exactly how about rating the teams.

After much consideration I decided to start making use of some data I already had and try to build a model with a little bit of a difference.

Rather than rating teams directly, as you would with a model for domestic football, I decided to try and rate the teams in the model based on the sum of their parts.

So, rather than find a team rating, I would instead rate the individual players that make up the team, then I would combine all of the player ratings to create an overall team rating for each side.

This is the rating I would then use going forwards to denote the strength of the team as a whole.

Inevitably, there are flaws with this approach. For example, consider a team like Germany who have routinely exceeded the sum of their parts at International level and contrast that with teams like England who routinely fail to match their expected level and even Spain, who until recently, flattered to deceive in every tournament they appeared in.

I look at these flaws later in the guide so do feel assured they are considered however, I am very much open to feedback and collaboration on this so do get in touch via the website if you feel there's something I've overlooked or you would like to help me improve the model in time for the next tournament in 2020.

Getting back to the rating, and having a single rating proved troublesome when you had two closely matched sides.

How would we know which side would ultimately end up winning should the match go to penalties?

For me, it would most likely be the side with the higher quality midfielders and attackers.

Therefore, I decided to further split the rating down into a Defensive rating (consisting of the goalkeepers and defenders) and also an Attacking rating (midfielders and attackers.).

Again, there are issues with this since the midfield contributes to both stages of play and furthermore, in modern-day football, the forwards are typically the first line of defence in most high-press games.

These are other ideas that can be explored further in the future and until I've tested it as-is, it's difficult to know exactly what to change/adapt to improve it.

Previous iterations of the system can be explored in my guide on Euro 2016, which you can find on the website.

For the current tournament – World Cup 2018 – the final ratings are as follows

| Team | DefRat | AttRat | Totalrat |
|----------------|--------|--------|----------|
| Russia | 2418 | 1812 | 4230 |
| Saudi Arabia | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Egypt | 369 | -37 | 332 |
| Uruguay | 2301 | 1384 | 3685 |
| Portugal | 2032 | 3202 | 5234 |
| Spain | 6340 | 8872 | 15212 |
| Morocco | 889 | 2642 | 3531 |
| IR Iran | 265 | 106 | 371 |
| France | 4852 | 6928 | 11780 |
| Australia | 1889 | 1473 | 3362 |
| Peru | 485 | 511 | 996 |
| Denmark | 2191 | 3006 | 5197 |
| Argentina | 937 | 3728 | 4665 |
| Iceland | -51 | 1279 | 1228 |
| Croatia | 1394 | 4850 | 6244 |
| Nigeria | 820 | 603 | 1423 |
| Brazil | 3645 | 3593 | 7238 |
| Switzerland | 2762 | 2561 | 5323 |
| Costa Rica | 671 | 917 | 1588 |
| Serbia | 2024 | 4165 | 6189 |
| Germany | 4768 | 7286 | 12054 |
| Mexico | 1051 | 3421 | 4472 |
| Sweden | 2364 | 1113 | 3477 |
| Korea Republic | 268 | 1073 | 1341 |
| Belgium | 3580 | 2671 | 6251 |
| Panama | 296 | 1299 | 1595 |
| Tunisia | 440 | 518 | 958 |
| England | 2564 | 6613 | 9177 |
| Poland | 2497 | 2438 | 4935 |
| Senegal | 732 | 831 | 1563 |
| Colombia | 1281 | 2126 | 3407 |
| Japan | 461 | 1249 | 1710 |

We see the team, the Defence Rating, the Attack Rating and the Total Rating.

Going back to those close matches we discussed, by splitting the ratings down we can now determine which team has the better Midfielders and Attackers and therefore settle those close matches.

Some matches are easier to evaluate than others and there's a clearly identifiable winner.

The winner is decided by expected goal supremacy and I've calculated that as thus:

Assumed 2.4 goals per game on average.

We then attribute a % of those 2.4 goals to each team based on their rating.

So a match between Spain and Portugal would be calculated like this...

Total expected goals = 2.4

Spain Total Rating = 15212
Portugal Total Rating = 5234

Combined ratings = 20446

Spain % = 15212 / 20446 = 74.40%
Portugal % = 5234 / 20446 = 25.60%

Once we know what % of the total rating each team contributes, we just give each team that % of the total goals as well like this:

Spain Goals = 2.4 * 74.40% = 1.79 goals
Portugal Goals = 2.4 * 25.60% = 0.61 goals

This suggests Spain are comfortable winners with a clear goal margin of supremacy.

To be fair, this is a pretty crude method but it's proving difficult to simulate the matches further than this as we don't really have reliable long-term goal data.

It's the logical next step to refine this process.

Another thing to consider is that obviously, some games will have more goals than average and some will have less.

This method simulates an average match between these two teams so I feel it should be a reasonable enough barometer for the time being and other aspects of the model were more deserving of my development time at this stage.

I hope I've touched sufficiently on detail in this section about how the method works.

Let's look at some more quick technical notes, some of which we've already spoken about, before we move onto the meat of the guide.

Technical Details

In this section we'll detail a few, not necessarily related, points of interest for those of a more technical mindset that would like to explore the idea further.

Group Stage – Tie for top spot

As these situations invariably involve the two joint teams having drawn in their respective matches and as we are not collecting goals-scored information in this model... the group winner is determined by taking the higher attacking rating of the two tied teams.

Using this metric, I figured it indicated that team was likely to have scored more goals during the group overall and would therefore be likely to attain top spot anyway.

I'm not saying this is foolproof but it's worked out well for me previously and, all things considered, makes the most sense to me.

Draws in latter stages

The same idea applies as earlier, the team with the highest attacking rating is ultimately qualified for the next round.

The logic being that a higher attacking rating is likely to eventually lead to success should things go as far as a penalty shoot-out.

Again, it's not claimed as fool-proof but it's what I settled on as the best approach.

Experimental outlook

I'm conscious that this is still very much in its infancy and I approach it with the belief we're working towards a viable method but also very mindful of the inherent flaws.

We'll look at some of those in a moment and whilst they are a pain, it's important to establish their likelihood in advance so we can work on addressing them rather than

trying to find what went wrong afterwards.

If there's logic to your method and a prevailing train of thought behind where you ultimately want to end up, you should really be able to anticipate likely problems.

There's as much in it for me being proven right about the flaws than the idea proving out over a short span of games.

Expected flaws

The first thing worth noting is the method doesn't project too many draws.

To determine a winner, I looked for supremacy of 0.2 goals. I'm not sure that's giving enough leeway and I expect we'd see more realistic results working to 0.5 of a goal.

If we're swept away with draws, I'll look to play around with this figure and re-simulate after the tournament to see what difference it would have made.

For now though, whilst it's nice to be aware of the potential for a problem, I don't want to start messing around with it before a ball is even kicked.

I talk about another issue on the web page and that's the potential for certain teams players to be over-rated.

In my opinion, France have a much stronger squad than England in all areas, however, there are some equally rated players and the numerical representation of team strength indicates something much closer in terms of squad strength.

I have a theory on this and it's a rather complex one to detail in a Pdf but it's along these lines...

France's squad is drawn from across Europe, from teams that are not always the top teams in the league they're playing in and sometimes from sides that struggled through parts of the season.

England's squad on the other hand is drawn, in the most part, from top performing clubs, which by their very nature, feature top-performing players from other countries.

I suspect what's happening is that players like John Stones are afforded increased ratings due to having much less defensive pressure against them.

So they'd be rated high by all metrics used because they don't concede a lot of goals or are making a lot of interceptions whereas.. in reality, due to the way the teams play (primarily due to foreign players), they aren't really under a great deal of defensive pressure to begin with.

Likewise, with players like Harry Kane – to my mind one of the most over-rated players in world football at the moment – he isn't going to have Eriksen hand-feeding him 20 goals a season in the international set-up and that's not going to be reflected in the figures for this model.

I hope that makes sense, it's difficult for me to explain but I'm aware of it and it will be interesting to see if it's played out or not.

I expect it will be as the model has England as Semi-finalists and, whilst they're much improved recently, they haven't won a knock-out game at since 2006 I think... I'd personally be surprised if they made the quarter-finals.

Another issue is that some sides feature a lot of players with no player rating at all.

This leaves those sides with really low ratings or indeed 0 which obviously doesn't reflect their actual chances.

A lot of this problem is eradicated by the way I've simulated the results since we're really only looking for the winner, not necessarily what price they should be or how many goals they will score.

Thankfully, it's an issue confined to the perceived lower-quality sides like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia etc..

Those side are all technically proficient but lack the top-class talent to pull up any trees so it may not matter too much in the end.

It's something to consider going forward and don't rule out those sides looking much better in reality than they do in this ratings model.

A final note on squads and you may see some players in the final listings that are not actually in the squads themselves.

I wanted this model to be effective from well in advance of the tournament starting so it's calculated according to a likely available pool of players rather than the finalised squads.

I think it keeping like this across the board will work out too many issues that may arise but it's something I am, again, aware of and could maybe looking at altering if the results prove miles off this time around.

With that covered, let's look at each group in turn before moving onto the latter stages and seeing what our model threw out.

Group A - Analysis

Besides the attacking flair of the Uruguayans, there's really not all that much to get excited about in Group A.

| Group A | | |
|---------|--------------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | Russia | 7 |
| 2 | Uruguay | 7 |
| 3 | Egypt | 3 |
| 4 | Saudi Arabia | 0 |

Russia

On their showing in the Euro's, Russia were woeful although home advantage and expectation always seems to raise teams beyond their level during World Cups (South Africa aside who were dreadful regardless).

Our model has them to win the group although tying on points with Uruguay.

Their, and this is bizarre to me, higher attacking rating overall gives them the nod in the likelihood they will have scored more goals during the group.

Uruguay

Spoiled with attacking Talent in recent times and allied with a steely, almost Argentine approach to game-management, they have caused problems for a lot of teams in the last few World Cups.

I think we should expect more of the same although they lack the team-wide quality to make the latter stages in my opinion.

I think it a great shame for Suarez, who without Messi and Ronaldo would undoubtedly have been considered the World's best player at times in the last 4 years.

The last World Cup didn't end well for him, or his victim and with this likely to be his last appearance in the World Cup whilst retaining any sort of ability, I expect him to be a thorough handful.

1st place is the place to be in this group as if you finish 2nd, you're likely getting Spain in the Second Round . The model has them 2nd so let's see how it all turns out.

Egypt

Egypt have some talented players, as do most of the North African sides but the tactical nous is still not there and will not be for some time in my view. They have enough about them to cause problems for Russia though and could push for 2nd in what would be a major let-down for Russian hopes.

The model has them well beaten down in 3rd though with only a consolation victory over the Saudi's to their name. If it goes according to our outputs, they'll be out before the game is played.

Saudi Arabia

In previous World Cups, a wonderful solo-goal aside, the Saudi's have been underwhelming to say the least and I see no reason to expect anything different this year.

We expect them to garner 0 points and probably pick up a thrashing at some stage as they have done in previous tournaments.

Suggested Bets

This section will detail any sensible bets according to the model outputs.

I don't recommend betting them, it's mainly so I have more detailed records to keep on the outputs and how they may be used in the future.

You can download the betlist in full if you want to keep track of it yourself.

Russia to win Group A @ 3.05.

Group B - Analysis

A more straightforward group with a very interesting match thrown into the mix.

| Group B | | |
|---------|----------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | Spain | 9 |
| 2 | Portugal | 6 |
| 3 | Morocco | 3 |
| 4 | IR Iran | 0 |

Spain

Despite poor showings in the last 2 tourneys they've been to, Spain have to be considered right up there.

It's my personal opinion that Costa is the problem for them and their insistence on accommodating him has, at times, been their downfall as it's just not how they played when they were enjoying so much success.

Maybe it will work for them this time but I wonder if they will face the same issues again.

The model has them comfortable group winners and their match with Portugal in the first group game will tell us what we need to know.

Portugal

As reigning European Champions, Portugal will be expected to perform yet nobody really seems to think all that much of them.

Despite not even winning a group game at the Euro's, they emerged as winners having defeated a strong French team in the final.

My thoughts throughout that tournament, after their weird performances in the groups, on Portugal were "I would hate to have to play against them"

Comfortable in possession, cynical, energetic and very compact with Ronaldo up front.

If they play the same way here as they played in the latter stages, and stop trying to be Spain, they may find they can give the Spaniards a good game.

The first group match will be interesting but the model has them comfortable second after losing the opener to Spain.

Position is not as critical in this group as I'd imagine either side would fancy their chances against anybody in Group A.

Morocco

Morocco are given 3 points from a close defeat of Iran.

They had a decent team at one time but, despite being quite proficient technically, that was just one time and a long time ago at that.

Iran

My most notable memory of Iranian football is them beating the USA, although I forget the year and it'd be disingenuous to Google it and pretend I knew all along.

I think that's probably as good as it'll get and the model agrees giving them 0 points.

Suggested Bets

No obvious bets

Group C - Analysis

France look about as good as it gets in terms of squad strength, so the rest of the group should be just aiming for second place

| Group C | | |
|---------|-----------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | France | 9 |
| 2 | Denmark | 6 |
| 3 | Australia | 3 |
| 4 | Peru | 0 |

France

As aforementioned, if there's a stronger squad than France at this World Cup then I struggle to see it.

Some of the players they've left out would walk into most top-tier sides and the only question marks about them to my mind are their lack of a consistent goalscorer, and their ever-questionable temperaments.

They've flattered to deceive before, and won the World Cup with a far inferior side than was embarrassed in other tournaments so you never quite know what you're going to get with them.

We should get comfortable group domination and the model agrees, giving them 3 wins from 3 and all of them very comfortable.

Denmark

I like Denmark.

It's a beautiful country, full of interesting people and they consistently punch well above their weight, much like Sweden.

They've had World Class players down the years and whilst it's not the strongest squad they've ever had, they have a world-class player now too in Eriksen who's grossly under-rated.

I suspect he will be the difference between qualifying and not qualifying from the group although the model has them comfortable in 2nd place, losing only to a very strong France side and winning the other two games.

Australia

I suppose Football doesn't feature very highly in Australian Sport but at the same time, they really should have been to more World Cups when you consider who they're up against in qualifying.

I'm sure they'll be lively and whilst Mourinho has them qualifying, I'll politely disagree and don't really see where they will get a point from in this group.

The model disagrees with both me and Mourinho and gives them 3 points with a victory over Peru, which probably won't happen.

Peru

Flying high in the rankings and some people's pick as dark-horses, Peru play their first tournament in years.

I watched them last week and they were absolutely terrible, albeit in a friendly.

The model agrees with me and ranks them 'terrible', in 4th place with no points.

In reality, I suspect they will perform better than the model, but would be shocked (not surprised) if they see the Second Round.

Suggested Bets

No obvious bets

Group D - Analysis

A nasty group here with some surprises likely in store.

| Group D | | |
|---------|-----------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | Croatia | 9 |
| 2 | Argentina | 6 |
| 3 | Iceland | 1 |
| 4 | Nigeria | 1 |

Croatia

Along with Serbia, a team I always like to keep an eye on having been fascinated with the Yugoslavia team of the very early 90's.

They looked, at that time, a team to go on and dominate football and Croatia contributed the core of it with some supremely talented Serbs and Montenegrins splashed in if memory serves.

That told when they returned to international Football as it was Croatia that performed, with Yugoslavia (really just Serbia and Montenegro) performing miserably.

They haven't always performed since then but they've never had a bad side and this time they look particularly strong to me.

The model agrees, and expects them to win every game.

Argentina

Another team I grew up with for entirely different reasons, and another team that hasn't always performed, we have Argentina.

They should really have won the last World Cup despite not being the best team and they should have gone much further in some previous tournaments. I remember them leading beating Germany comfortably then taking off players to rest them for the next round before ultimately losing on penalties.

I think in recent times, a lot of the cynicism has gone out of their game and they're not perhaps as difficult to beat as they used to be.

Our model has Croatia to beat them and I don't think it's that unlikely although Argentina, in terms of attacking quality, could really just trounce anybody.

It depends how they shape up as they were awful in qualifying and weren't so great in the groups last time around.

Iceland

I don't imagine anybody is going to enjoy playing Iceland.

Massively over-achieving but with their work cut out in a nasty group, I suspect they will struggle for quality.

England played abysmally against them and went down but in the next round, France woke them up with a right good drubbing.

Nigeria

The West African teams are really no fun to play against these days and perhaps from the early 90's onwards when Cameroon made the breakthrough.

Nigeria too a few years on were a quite exciting team and produced some very talented players.

However, if their performance against England is anything go by, they're just going to be difficult to beat, hard to play against in general but aren't really capable of hurting even the half-decent teams.

Our model has them fighting for 3rd with Iceland and losing out on attacking threat.

Suggested Bets

Croatia to win Group D @ 3.30.

Group E - Analysis

The Brazilians look much better equipped than they did 4 years ago but will have their work cut out

| Group E | | |
|---------|-------------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | Brazil | 7 |
| 2 | Serbia | 5 |
| 3 | Switzerland | 4 |
| 4 | Costa Rica | 0 |

Brazil

Semi-finals last time out were deemed a bad performance and whilst most sides would consider it a success, they were really lucky to even make it that far having struggled against Croatia, if I remember correctly, and being distinctly second best against Colombia whilst kicking them to pieces and taking their best players out of the game.

A plan which backfired after the Colombians returned fire and crocked their only real top-play at the time in Neymar.

He's even better now and their style of play is much different however, when I've watched them play they rarely look all that impressive to me and don't break down the final third like Brazilian teams of years gone by.

The model has them to win the group from Serbia which should be achievable but I don't them scoring freely.

Serbia

Serbia have been dreadful since their separation from Yugoslavia, nowhere close to the same levels Croatia have achieved in the same time despite continually producing potentially top-drawer players.

They have a good solid team this time around though and should finally perform in a group devoid of obvious quality bar Brazil who they wouldn't necessarily expect to beat anyway.

The model has them 2nd above Switzerland who are typically solid but rarely dangerous.

Switzerland

Switzerland are another team that always seem to be around, punching above themselves but they're rarely anything but exceptionally pedestrian, preferring not to get thrashed than actually ever threatening to win a game.

They get the odd result, like against Spain in 2010 but they're generally flukes and play the same game as Poland, foregoing friendlies etc to maintain artificial ranking positions.

The model has them down to push Serbia closely for 2nd place but ultimately fall short.

Costa Rica

I'm watching them as I type this and England are absolutely battering them.. worrying times.

Expected to be "whipping boys" last time around, they actually finished third in a difficult group although this time I don't see them surprising anybody and the model agrees with me giving them 0 points and possibly out of it before the final game.

Suggested Bets

Serbia to qualify from Group E @ 2.30

Group F - Analysis

Perennial Semi-finalist or better and current holders should dominate as always

| Group F | | |
|---------|-------------------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | Germany | 9 |
| 2 | Mexico | 6 |
| 3 | Sweden | 3 |
| 4 | Korea Republic | 0 |

Germany

The dominant International side of my early years and perhaps the most impressive tournament side of all look set to dominate the group.

Their record since they won their first is impeccable and despite a few failures in more recent times, they've made it to Finals with truly awful sides before now and this time could probably leave out a team that would make the semi's comfortably.

There's concern they've remained too loyal to ageing players after a recent poor patch of form and the record of defending champions is typically poor in the next tournament but I have learned my lesson with the Germans long ago.

I remember an interview with Dietmar Hamann around 2002 when questioned on how Germany had managed to reach the World Cup Final with a really poor side, yet far more talented sides had not come close.

His reason was along the lines of mentality making the difference. They know they will win and don't consider they will not win the game and when the pressure is really on in the knockout stages, that self-belief can carry a team a long way.

Our model has them ranked very strong overall still and likely to win this group with ease.

Mexico

Despite them never really achieving anything, I've always enjoyed watching Mexico play.

For me, they play the game to win and try to be exciting along the way.

They're technically very capable and just lack the really top class players their Latin American neighbours seemingly have in abundance.

As usual, I don't expect they will cause any major shocks but they look comfortably second best in the group to me and the model agrees, having them lose only to Germany and win their other two games.

Sweden

I mentioned Sweden earlier and they're a side which always perhaps does a little better than they really should do.

This time, they've had better sides and they don't have a World-class player for the first time in a good few years so we might not see as good of a showing.

I'm sure they'll be hard to beat, but that's not enough in World Cups and the model has them on 3 points in 3rd.. looks about right to me.

Korea Republic

They had a good showing, with a lot of luck back in 2002 but have been awful ever since. Rock-bottom looks good to me, as "running about loads" doesn't get you many points at the highest level.

Suggested Bets

South Korea to finish rock-bottom of Group F @ 1.83

Group G - Analysis

With two big under-achievers in the same group, anything could happen

| Group G | | |
|---------|---------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | England | 9 |
| 2 | Belgium | 6 |
| 3 | Panama | 3 |
| 4 | Tunisia | 0 |

England

I've already discussed my thoughts on England being over-rated by the model but in reality, this is the first time in a long time I've seen England playing with so little pressure on them so I may be in for a surprise.

They've played some tough opponents in the last 2 years and held their own, albeit only in friendlies.

The model has them to win this group and whilst I'd be shocked if England make light work of the group stage (never happens), from what I've seen of Belgium they're really not worthy of the hype.

Belgium

The model has them second in the group and expected to lose to England.

I can't say I disagree with it based on having watched them play fairly frequently the last 4 years or so as whilst they have a collection of very gifted players, I've never seen them truly dominate a team from start to finish and put the game to bed.

A lot of their matches seem to be waiting around for something to happen, and if it doesn't there is no plan B.

They're rated very highly by the market but have been the last few tournaments whereupon they've done nothing of note. I wouldn't be stunned to see them disappoint again.

Panama

The model has them 3rd and I think that's generous but it expects them to beat Tunisia.

I don't expect too much from them at all really and envisage 10 men kicking the ball up the pitch, hoping to score from a set piece or something.

Tunisia

I've mentioned before about the technical proficiency of North African sides, their problem is tactical discipline and the lack of game-defining players.

That said, I'd expect them to make much more of a go of trying to win games than we'll see from Panama.

An interesting point worth mentioning is if either Tunisia or Panama can avoid defeat in their first 2 games, it's all to play for going into the last game when they will play each other and England and Belgium unable to both win their game.

It's not beyond the realms of possibility that one of them could end up winning the group by playing for 0-0's then going for it in the last game against much more evenly-matched opposition.

An interesting point.

The model disagrees with me and has them to finish last with 0 points.

Suggested Bets

Tunisia to finish rock-bottom of Group G @ 2.86
England to win group G @ 2.38

Group H - Analysis

An awkward looking group that could go any and all ways going into the final games

| Group H | | |
|---------|----------|-----|
| Pos | Team | Pts |
| 1 | Poland | 9 |
| 2 | Colombia | 6 |
| 3 | Japan | 1 |
| 4 | Senegal | 1 |

Poland

The model has them comfortable group winners but have you ever seen that with Poland?

They intelligently play the ranking system to ensure seedings at International tournaments that their play doesn't necessarily warrant and with the absence of any real big players bar Lewandowski, I think they're being grossly over-rated by the model, the rankings and the market.

Even with Lewandowski, I personally have never seen him have a good match and whilst it's possible I'm just watching the wrong ones, I'll go with my judgement until I'm proven wrong.

Worthy of note is that I used to think this about Ibrahimovic before happily accepting I was dead wrong later in his career.

They have some tough opponents in this group and I would be stunned if they win all 3 matches.

Colombia

I really enjoyed watching Colombia in the last World Cup as they were another team playing exciting, attacking football, always looking to score more goals irrespective of the state of play.

They were unlucky to lose to Brazil despite being the better side and their players are now 4 years savvier with a ton more experience.

I'm hoping that will tell although I've memories of an exceptionally-talented Colombia side failing miserably in 1994, hopefully there aren't similar repercussions if they fail again here.

The model has them 2nd but personally I'd have them group winners.

Japan

26 years into Japan's '100 year plan' and they're making progress having qualified for a number of tournaments now and rarely being embarrassed although clearly lacking the quality to make the latter stages.

I think they'll give most teams in this group a game though and the model seems harsh to me giving them only 1 point from 3 games but gaining 3rd from Senegal on account of goals scored.

This is the group that looks most open to me so I wouldn't be surprised to see any of the teams qualify for the next round.

Senegal

They've had some good showings at the World Cup but this isn't one of their better sides and one wonders how they qualify ahead of much stronger African Nations.

That said, none of the African sides are easy prey these days and the fitness, pace and strength of the players is quite remarkable and probably not very pleasant to play against.

Hopefully they go and play to win, and just see what happens.

The model doesn't fancy them at all though giving them last place although at least they get a point from a draw with Japan.

Suggested Bets

Senegal to finish rock-bottom of Group H @ 3.4

Poland to win group H @ 2.84

Last 16

With our groups now calculated we can move on and simulate the 2nd round of the tournament and this is how we have it panning out

| Date | Time | Match | Winner |
|--------------------|-------|---------------------|----------|
| Saturday 30th June | 15:00 | France vs Argentina | France |
| Saturday 30th June | 19:00 | Russia vs Portugal | Portugal |
| Sunday 1st July | 15:00 | Spain vs Uruguay | Spain |
| Sunday 1st July | 19:00 | Croatia Vs Denmark | Croatia |
| Monday 2nd July | 15:00 | Brazil vs Mexico | Brazil |
| Monday 2nd July | 19:00 | England vs Colombia | England |
| Tuesday 3rd July | 15:00 | Germany vs Serbia | Germany |
| Tuesday 3rd July | 19:00 | Poland vs Belgium | Belgium |

Not many surprises there you wouldn't think although France vs Argentina could go either way, as could that England game.

Betyind that though, I don't think there's all that much in the way of surprises here with most results going the way we would expect.

Quarter Finals

There's a result in the quarters that I don't necessarily agree with, and you guessed it – it's the England game.

| Date | Time | Match | Winner |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------|---------|
| Friday 6th July | 15:00 | Portugal vs France | France |
| Friday 6th July | 19:00 | Brazil Vs England | England |
| Saturday 7th July | 15:00 | Germany vs Belgium | Germany |
| Saturday 7th July | 19:00 | Spain vs Croatia | Spain |

That said, this is far from a vintage Brazil side to my eye so it could swing that way and it'll be a tight game regardless.

The other results are pretty straightforward and what we would expect to see.

According to the model, the England game aside, the other results are all pretty comfortable victories.

Semi Finals

Some interesting matches in the semi's if all goes to plan.

| Date | Time | Match | Winner |
|---------------------|-------|-------------------|--------|
| Tuesday 10th July | 15:00 | France Vs England | France |
| Wednesday 11th July | 19:00 | Spain vs Germany | Spain |

I think, and the model agrees, that we'd see a resounding victory for France in this match. The model also says we see a close match between Germany and Spain but with the Spaniards ultimately prevailing – possibly on penalties which they won't like.

If these results do pan out like this, we've two exciting games to follow with Spain vs France in the final and the Germans taking on England in the 3rd place play off.

It's worth noting at this point that despite our take on this 'rivalry', having spoken to many Germans, they really don't see it the same way.

Their main rivalry is with the Netherlands, whereas we like to think it's with us.

Regardless, it'd be a major accomplishment for England to reach this stage and I'd wager it won't work out like this.

3rd Place Play-off

The model has the German's rubbing English noses in it and showing true professionalism to the end.

| Date | Time | Match | Winner |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|---------|
| Saturday 14th July | 15:00 | England Vs Germany | Germany |

It looks to be comfortable too with England unlikely to cause too many problems at all.

Final

And to the final where we feature 2 of the 3 bets sides to start off with (Germany being the 2nd top-rated side but falling to Spain in the semi's).

| Date | Time | Match | Winner |
|------------------|-------|-----------------|--------|
| Sunday 15th July | 15:00 | France Vs Spain | Spain |

The match is down to be a very tight affair, and penalties are not unlikely but Spain are taken to win.

I've pitched this idea to my brother and he counters that Spain are not the side of old.

I agree with that, but neither is anybody else and they absolutely destroyed an, albeit weakened, Argentina side only as far back as March.

Their issue in this match will be space. From what I've seen of France you really don't get any space to play your own game and I wonder just how dominant they would be with a more tactically astute manager in charge.

To be fair, at this stage of the tournament, team-ratings could be wildly different when factoring in injuries and suspensions etc. and that's something we could look at working into the model farther down the line.

The model says Spain with France running them close.

Other Bets

In this final section we'll look at some other possibly sound bets if the model is correct. I'll post my thinking below each bet and hopefully it helps you to see how I'm processing the outputs and viewing their usefulness in the long-term.

Back France To Win The World Cup @ 7.6

The model has them as finalists and eventual losers of a very tight game.
It makes sense to have them covered.

Back Spain To Win The World Cup @ 7.4

The model has them as finalists and eventual winners of a very tight game.
It makes sense to have them covered.

Back a Spain vs France Final @ 21.0

This is the projection and I suspect the odds are only so high because this final can only happen if they finish in the exact same position in their groups.

If they finish in different positions, they can't meet in the final since they're in the same half of the draw.

If they both qualify in first, much as we'd expect them to, I expect this price will plummet.

Diego Costa top-goalscorer @ 29

This goes against my own thinking as I think he causes Spain more problems than he can ever hope to solve.

However, somebody has to score their goals and the model expects them to go far.

Andrej Kramaric top-goalscorer @ 330.0+

A bit out of left-field this one but our model has Croatia as a strong side which will dominate the group.

He looks to be a starter and if he gets 3 or 4 in the groups stages, this price will be much much lower so I'm viewing it as a potential trading opportunity.

Radamel Falcao top-goalscorer @ 55.0

Not the player he was 5 years ago but still likely to be the figurehead of an attacking Colombia side that should do well in the groups.

An issue with this is they aren't expected to progress very far but, as with the previous bet, if he gets 3 in the groups then we'll be lucky to see 10.0 on this.

Beyond that, there's probably loads you could go at, I just picked out the stand-out stuff .

Hopefully you've enjoyed it and, if nothing else, have some ideas about developing your own models for future tournaments.

I'll be continuing with this in 2020 at the Euro's and I'll post a write-up on the website after we've finished to update the bet list and post my thoughts.

It'll be interesting to see if my predicted flaws play out as I expect and it will be even more interesting if the model gives us a reasonably accurate projection with positive betting results.

I'm looking forward to seeing how we get on!

BFG