

Bet on Brazil, says sport academic

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Brazil will win the FIFA 2014 World Cup according to the bookmakers -

and a statistical study by a University of Stirling sport economist.

Stirling lecturer Dr Nicolas Scelles analysed more than 2,800 international matches in the past three years and considered 18 different variables before coming to his conclusion.

Dr Scelles also found Scotland could have reached the knockout stages had they - and not Croatia - qualified for the showpiece tournament. And England can expect a quarter-final defeat at the hands of World Cup holders Spain.

The study, which focused on matches between 2011 and 2013, compared factors such as Gross domestic product (GDP), population difference and the number of football players from which each nation has to choose as well as the percentage of those playing for the 10 most valuable clubs as according to the Forbes Rich List.

It also took into account each nation's past international experience, which confederation they compete in and even the credentials of each manager.

"I cannot say for certain that it will happen, but according to the findings of the study, Brazil should win although their international rivals Argentina came a close second," explained Dr Scelles, who found his own nation France should expect to finish second behind Ecuador in their group before crashing out at the hands of Argentina.

"The FIFA World rankings would suggest Spain are favourites and Brazil fourth, but these are based on arbitrary choices. We looked at a number of variables and models to consider the outcome in a more scientific approach. In each model, the semi-finals tended to feature Brazil, Germany, Argentina and Spain although both Chile and Uruguay made it to this stage depending on the model.

"After Euro 2012, a number of players retired so I looked at the overall time period from the past two years and the period from after the European Championships. In all six models, Brazil emerged as champions. Playing at home should be an advantage for Brazil, but many Brazilian people are not happy about the money spent on stadiums instead of addressing poverty, so home advantage could end up being a disadvantage."

Three further variables compared the outcome of matches which were meaningful for both clubs; just one and neither – such as friendly fixtures. Dr Scelles developed the prediction model with Wladimir Andreff from Pantheon-Sorbonne University in France and presented his findings at the Football Research conference held at the University of Caen Basse-Normandie.

He added: "At first, the idea of prediction was not the main motivation behind the research; I was interested in trying to modify and better understand the different economic determinants and specifically consider matches where one, both or neither team has something to play for as these haven't been tested in depth before.

"As the model progressed it became more and more interesting and it was able to explain roughly 45% of variations, which is a pretty good return considering the unpredictability of predicting football scores.

"I suppose if you know all the outcomes then it's not going to be as interesting to watch, but as a sport economist I wanted to study different economic determinants and understand their value."

Dr Scelles joined Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence from the University of Poitiers and is a sport economist at Stirling alongside Stephen Morrow, who recently published an in-depth study of the impact of UEFA's Financial Fair Play regulations.

Provided by University of Stirling

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