



The World Cup is quite an event, isn't it? Over a billion people from around the world tune in, sit transfixed in front of the television and watch nervously as they find out how their home country will have to progress, if it is to win the greatest trophy in sports. Fans wait with baited breath and a healthy dose of fevered panic as other countries do battle which might affect their own country's position. But at least England are in at the start, thanks to Becks.

But Beckham and the boys won't have it easy as their fellow compatriots include African giants Nigeria and Sweden, a team they haven't defeated since 1968. It's going to be a tough ride for Sven's squad, as they'll have to fight for every point they earn.

The 2002 World Cup will be the first ever World Cup to be co-hosted by two nations. Each country will share the group, second round, quarter-final and semi-final games, and the final will be held in Japan. FIFA have also announced that the winners of the 2002 Fifa World Cup Korea/Japan will have to qualify for the 2006 tournament in Germany. The Executive Board of FIFA met on the 30th November 2001 in Busan and concluded that champions should no longer receive the privilege of automatic entry for the World Cup Tournament.

The intense qualifying programme produced some shocks and surprises. Czech Republic and Colombia both failed to make the tournament after high ambitions prior to the qualifying process. Whilst smaller nations such as Slovenia showed what a stubborn and talented package they have become since their Euro 2000 exploits.

Defending champions France drew an interesting lot: first-timers Senegal, Uruguay and Denmark. At first glance it would appear the French have it pretty easy, but nothing could be further from the truth. Senegal plays a very similar style to the French, the South Americans play an attacking brand of football and Denmark have always been able to give any team a run for its money.

Likewise for Germany who drew the Republic of Ireland, Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. The Irish will undoubtedly pose a problem for the Germans, as will the spirited Africans and who knows what the Saudi Team might be able to pull out of the ghutra. (At 300/1 I might just have a few quid on them myself.) Germany should however qualify for the last 16, but may have a tougher time doing it than most expect.

Pity about co-hosts South Korea with Poland, Portugal and the U.S. to content with. The South Koreans look destined to struggle badly and could easily exit the tournament after the first round, without so much as a win - or a goal. Co-host Japan looks far luckier though with Russia, Belgium and Tunisia. With the obvious home advantage, the Japanese should be able to build on their performance four years ago.

First round fixtures are all listed in the tables opposite with France taking the honour of first kick-off against Senegal in Seoul on the 31st May. Second round games are played on the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th June 2002. The Quarter Finals are scheduled for the 21st and 22nd of June 2002 with the Semi Finals on the 25th and 26th of June 2002. The Third Place Play Off will be played on the 29th June 2002 and the Final will be played on the 30th June 2002.

Since the World Cup is still five months away, I won't attempt to make any predictions as to who will qualify from their group or who's going to win it all. I did notice some sports-writers tipping Italy but despite Becks recent dismissal of Argentina, Bookies William Hill were offering the following odds in January 2002.



4/1
Argentina
5/1
France, Italy
8/1
Brazil, Spain
10/1
England
11/1
Germany, Portugal
33/1
Cameroon
50/1
Belgium, Nigeria, Paraguay, Russia
66/1
Croatia, Japan, Korea Republic, Poland, Republic of Ireland, Sweden
80/1
Mexico, Uruguay
100/1
Ecuador, South Africa, Turkey
125/1
Denmark
150/1
Slovenia
150/1
U.S.A.
200/1
Costa Rica, Senegal
250/1
Tunisia, China
300/1
Saudi Arabia

**World Cup Match Tickets are available from:**  
[www.fifa.com](http://www.fifa.com)  
[www.budweiser.com](http://www.budweiser.com)  
[www.fifaworldcup.com](http://www.fifaworldcup.com)  
[www.jawoc.or.jp/index\\_e.htm](http://www.jawoc.or.jp/index_e.htm)  
[www.2002worldcupkorea.org/eng/index.php3](http://www.2002worldcupkorea.org/eng/index.php3)

**Japanese/Korean/British Times for Matches**  
 Japanese/Korean Kick-off time 14:30 - GMT Kick-off time 06:30  
 Japanese/Korean Kick-off time 15:30 - GMT Kick-off time 07:30  
 Japanese/Korean Kick-off time 16:30 - GMT Kick-off time 08:30  
 Japanese/Korean Kick-off time 18:00 - GMT Kick-off time 10:00  
 Japanese/Korean Kick-off time 20:30 - GMT Kick-off time 12:30  
**N.B. Check times - I think Seoul is 9 hours ahead not 8 - Ed**