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TODAY'S FREE SPORTS BETTING TIPS...

Shrewd Tipster

Win Bet - Chelmsford (A.W) 19:40 - Mesquite @ 9/4

Betting Development

Win Bet - Hamilton 14:30 - Jabbarockie @ 2/1

On The Nod

Win Bet - Wolverhampton (A.W) 16:50 - Coviglia @ 9/2

What's The Point Of Playing Nigeria And Costa Rica? -

By Rick Elliott

England are playing Nigeria and Costa Rica in friendlies before the real action begins in the World Cup. Wembley and Elland Road will probably be full to the rafters but there is very little point to these fixtures. Surely it would be better to give the players a break so they can join up for the World Cup rested and refreshed. The matches don't seem to serve much purpose because if Gareth Southgate doesn't know his starting eleven and the alternatives what's he been doing for the last two years?

If England don't progress from their group in the World Cup there is something badly wrong. The last two tournaments have been disasters but that could be more to do with management than any lack of ability. England could have hardly been given easier challenges in their first two matches. Tunisia and Panama are 30th and 31st in the outright betting for the World Cup and only Saudi Arabia are a bigger price. Belgium could be difficult to beat but by the third match England should have six points in the bag. In the context of these matches the two friendlies mean nothing.

England's supporters deserve so much more than abject failures when the World Cup and European Championships come around. Wembley is often full even after a tournament where England have let themselves and the country down. No doubt the Wembley crowd will give England a good send off and the same thing will happen in Leeds. It's all optimism now but in less than a month it could be all over and the squad could be back home. Even if England win impressively against Nigeria and Costa Rica it could all be forgotten if points are dropped in the first World Cup group two matches.

The bookmakers give Nigeria and Costa Rica no chance of winning the World Cup and on current form they should be eliminated at the group stage. It's difficult to see what can be gained from these meetings but it's highly unlikely they will be repeated at the World Cup. Conversely, neither side would wish to play a fixture that could happen again at the World Cup so getting extra rest rather than using up energy in friendlies would seem the right thing to do. It's worth trying something new after abysmal efforts in recent tournaments.

It would make sense for Southgate to send out his first string in one of these matches and give the fringe players a chance in the other one. If he makes numerous changes at half-time and in the second half the effort would be devalued further. The tactics employed by the opposition could be replicated in the World Cup but England are playing Tunisia and Panama and not Germany and Brazil. It's far better to be positive from the outset and score some early goals rather than struggle to a draw or narrow victory. England should be winning these friendlies and their first two matches in the World Cup with a few goals to spare but on past history they probably will not.

Belgium will be the best team England have played this year but hopefully England won't need a win to progress. Both sides should have maximum points and the outcome will determine which team wins the group. The winner of Group G plays the runner-up in Group H (possibly Poland) and the runner-up in Group G plays the winner of Group H (possibly Colombia). Whoever England meet in the quarter-finals if progressing will be a top side so there's no point anticipating the draw. England should embark on the World Cup campaign after beating Nigeria and Costa Rica

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

England Must Make A Good Start This Time

England have not won their opening match in a major tournament since beating Paraguay in the 2006 World Cup. Months of hype cause optimism and then the country is deflated after a draw or defeat. The pressure becomes more intense to win the second match. England scramble through the group but then face a tough draw. As soon as they encounter decent opponents the failure to start with three points catches up but surely things will be different in Russia this time. England are not exactly in the Group of Death!

England begin their World Cup of 2018 campaign with a match against Tunisia who are the 30th biggest price to lift the trophy. It would be refreshing for a change if England went for a win from the first whistle rather than being more cautious and getting desperate when the first goal does not arrive. The second match against Panama will present a similar standard of opponent's and then the third match against Belgium should be the group decider. ENGLAND are 5/4 with [Ladbrokes](#) to win World Cup Group G.

Golden State beat Cleveland to win the NBA Championship last season and they have met in the finals for the last three years. At the start of the campaign it looked like history was about to repeat itself but at times another NBA Finals between the Warriors and Cavaliers was not on the cards. The two stars of the show are Steph Curry for Golden State and LeBron James for Cleveland. Curry's side have home advantage in the first of the best of 7 series and can start with a win. GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS are 10/11 with [Betfair](#) to win by more than 12 points.

The waters have been muddied for the Derby because Saturday's race at Epsom could be run on soft ground. Aidan O'Brien has said that won't be ideal for all his runners, especially the odds-on favourite Saxon Warrior. However, the second favourite Roaring Lion won't be suited by give in the ground so neither horse has an advantage on the predicted underfoot conditions. The going is always Standard on the Polytrack at Chelmsford City where there is a decent meeting this evening. MESQUITE is the horse to back in one of the features at 7.40 at 2/1 with [bet365](#).