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Inside Today...

FREE Tips From Power Bet Pro, Lucky 7 Naps and Two Percent Club

Top Tipsters For June 2018

**France Are Tipped To Win The World Cup
- By Rick Elliott**

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

England Can Head To Russia After Beating Costa Rica

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



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TODAY'S FREE SPORTS BETTING TIPS...

Power Bet Pro

Win Bet - Yarmouth 16:20 - Mutafarrid @ 9/4

Lucky 7 Naps

Win Bet - Ripon 15:10 - Mulligatawny @ 11/2

Two Percent Club

Win Bet - Carlisle 19:45 - French Resistance @ 15/2

France Are Tipped To Win The World Cup - By Rick Elliott

France have the players with the ability to win the World Cup for the second time and the first time outside their own country. Brazil are worthy favourites for the 2018 tournament in Russia where England could surprise a few doubters. Senegal could over perform relative to their odds and win their group. There are 32 teams competing this time which is just right for tournament football.

The ideal number of teams for a football championship is 16 or 32. The game has expanded so much and new nations have been created that the World Cup will never go back to a 16 team tournament but 32 competing nations seems perfect. There are eight groups of four teams who meet on a round robin basis with the top two teams in the group progressing to the last 16 and the knockout part of the event.

The term if it ain't broke don't fix it was invented for FIFA but the governing body seems duty bound to meddle. A 48 team tournament is being mooted for 2026 which will take place in Morocco or a consortium of nations in North America. By rights England should be the hosts again but maybe the country does not have enough friends in world football or the federation in Europe.

The host country should have a genuine chance of being world champions and Russia (2018), Qatar (2022) and possibly Morocco (2026) would not win the World Cup in a month of Sundays. On football terms Russia should not be staging the tournament and there could be non-footballing issues to emerge during the event that opens next Thursday when Russia play Saudi Arabia and culminates in the final on July 15th in which France can appear.

In Paul Pogba and Antoine Griezemann France have two genuine world class talents. Hugo Lloris is a reliable keeper and the defence is solid. N'Golo Kante has been a massive factor in the Premier League title winning teams at Leicester and Chelsea and Kylian Mbappe could be one of the young players of the tournament. Ousmane Dembelle and Olivier Giroud bring experience to the mix which can see France win the World Cup for the first time since 1998 at their own tournament.

Brazil have the most talented squad and need to put right the massive disappointment and catastrophe of losing 7-1 to Germany in the semi-finals in their own back yard in 2014. In Neymar they have a player who can dominate and change a game as he did when he was introduced for the second half for Brazil's friendly against Croatia last Saturday. Willian and Marcelo are brilliant payers and the squad is strong in all areas of the field. Brazil played France in the final in 1998 and there could be a repeat of that fixture in the semi-finals this year.

With England it always seems to be black or white at the World Cup but this time there are shades of grey. The nation is not expected to win the World Cup but this could be a relatively good tournament. Gareth Southgate seems intelligent and

unflustered in a Glenn Hoddle mould who was the best coach of England since Sir Alf Ramsay in 1966. Southgate has a clear system in mind and a workable plan can take a team far but not to ultimate glory though the last four is feasible.

Elite nations win the World Cup and when it matters most matches generally go to form. Senegal have the potential to win Group H based on their performance at last year's Africa Cup of Nations. They are in a winnable group in which Poland and Colombia are vulnerable and Japan are not good enough. Senegal can progress to the second round but ultimately the final can be a match in which France beat a team from the other half of the draw to win the 2018 World Cup.

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

England Can Head to Russia After Beating Costa Rica

It's the final dress rehearsal tonight when England play Costa Rica in their last friendly before the real action begins in the 2018 World Cup. The fixture at Elland Road in Leeds could be a chance for Gareth Southgate to field his strongest team or give the fringe players a chance. The England manager could play it both ways by sending out his best 11 in the first half and giving the second string a chance after the break. In any case a team selected from the World Cup squad should record a comfortable home win against Costa Rica before leaving for Russia. ENGLAND -1 can be backed at 23/20 with [Coral](#).

Costa Rica won England's group in Brazil in 2014. Roy Hodgson's teams played quite well in defeat against Italy and Uruguay but two defeats meant England were out of the World Cup after eight days. The third fixture against Costa Rica was an abysmal effort which was replicated against Iceland in the European Championships in 2016. Both teams have scored in just three of Costa Rica's last 12 fixtures. They are at number 25 in the FIFA rankings, 12 places above England. The most logical outcome is ENGLAND TO WIN TO NIL and that outcome is 19/20.

England scored four goals in six internationals before beating Nigeria 2-1 on Saturday at Wembley. There was enough in the first half to suggest England can beat Tunisia and Panama in their first two Group matches and then the meeting with Belgium becomes the group decider. Potentially England could play Senegal or Poland in the last 16 and then lose to Germany on penalties in the quarter-finals. THE LAST 8 is 11/5 with [bet365](#) in the stage of elimination market.

There is an evening meeting on the first day of the tournament when there is no World Cup action. ITV will broadcast the fixture from Newcastle on June 29th and hopefully by then England will still be in the World Cup. Its all Flat racing today at six meetings in Britain and Ireland and Leopardstown stages easily the most lucrative fixture. There are two listed races of which the 12 furlongs contest at 7.55 is the most interesting. On ratings the Aidan O'Brien trained GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI is the horse to back at 7/4 with [William Hill](#).