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



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TODAY'S FREE SPORTS BETTING TIPS...

TWL Pro Tip

Haydock 15:10 - Waldstern @ 4/5 Win Bet

Trend Betting

Salisbury 13:50 - The Groove @ 6/1 Each Way Bet

Two Percent Club

Carlisle 19:30 - Snookered @ 8/1 Win Bet

What's The UEFA Nations League All About? - By Ian

Hudson

The international football cycle of World Cups and federation finals over a four year period has been in place since 1960. Every other year there are major finals and that structure has passed the test of time. International teams play friendlies and competitive fixtures but now there is a new concept that combines each type of match. England are the fourth favourites to win the UEFA Nations League and their campaign begins with a home match against Spain on Saturday evening.

The 55 competing nations are divided into leagues and groups. England are in League A and their group opponents are Spain and Croatia. The four group winners in League A progress to the knockout stages of two semi-finals and a deciding match. Four nations, one from each league, qualify for the 2020 European Championship finals which are being played in 13 countries across Europe. The semi-finals and final will be played at Wembley in the summer of 2020.

The England squad met up for the first time since the World Cup this week. There seemed to be a relaxed atmosphere as Gareth Southgate and the coaching staff greeted the players. Everybody seemed quite pleased to meet again and there was a sense of a bond between the management and players. The feel good factor from the World Cup has been carried into the two year cycle that culminates with Euro 2020. Given different circumstances it is quite feasible England could now be the football world champions.

Croatia are probably the last team England want to meet. In the first half of the World Cup last four meeting England scored an early goal and were close to adding to their tally. It was a different match in the second half as Croatia took control. There was an inevitability about the equaliser and then the tie was decided when Croatia scored again in extra-time. Ultimately the best team qualified for the final but England came home with their heads held high. Southgate has made some tweaks to his first squad after almost managing his country to win the World Cup.

Despite the grand name the Nations League is a tournament of friendlies. Matches will be played on dates when there have been non-competitive matches in the past. Team selection and motivation will be the key to the outcome of matches. Players and staff may not have the energy for a third tournament in a four year period. League matches are played on a home and away basis so teams in a group of three will play four fixtures in the first stage of the Nations League. As World Cup winners France are the favourites to win the first tournament.

Southgate has gathered a 22-man squad for the Nations League match against Spain and the friendly international against Switzerland on Tuesday. Raheem Sterling has withdrawn from the squad but his goals won't be missed. Despite being a regular scorer for Manchester City he looks a different animal when chances present themselves to him wearing an England shirt. Sterling had several scoring

opportunities in the World Cup but did not find the net. England will be relying in Harry Kane for goals and he won the Golden Boot in the World Cup.

Spain won their group in the World Cup but then lost to the hosts Russia on penalties in the round of the last 16. Some of the stalwarts have retired from international football or are past their prime. The glory days of winning the World Cup and Euros are a thing of the past and there is a new breed. England's squad is little changed from the 23 players who went to Russia in the summer. England have the motivation to win in front of an appreciative crowd so can begin their Nations League journey by beating Spain at Wembley Stadium this weekend.

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

Gareth Bale Plays For Wales Against Ireland

Ryan Giggs famously rarely turned up for meaningless matches that Wales played possibly because Sir Alex Ferguson told him he couldn't. The Manchester United player and manager could have been concocting injuries and illness and it was more than a coincidence that Giggs was fit enough to play in competitive matches for Wales. His most effective player is committed to always playing for his country.

It must have been frustrating for a series of managers of the Welsh national team that their best player was unavailable so often. The roles are now different and the current manager of Wales must be delighted that Gareth Bale is available for selection for the Nations League match at home to Ireland. That manager is Giggs and GARETH BALE is 14/5 with William Hill to score the first goal.

The Nations League is basically about international friendlies disguised as competitive matches. The concept has given a structure to fixtures that meant so little that Giggs more often than not stayed in Manchester due to some minor complaint that always seemed to clear up before Manchester United's next match. In any battle of will Ferguson held sway and Giggs pulled out of Wales' squads.

The current manager of Wales has the chance in Cardiff tonight to compensate for failure to qualify for the World Cup that was partly due to a 1-0 loss at home to Ireland. In fact there is a competitive element to tonight's match because the league winners qualify for the Euro 2020 playoffs next March. However, there are 12 teams vying for that one place. WALES are 10/11 with Betfair to beat Ireland tonight.

Salisbury has been in the news for all the wrong reasons but today the racecourse stages a decent meeting that features one of only two Group races at the track. The fillies' stakes over six furlongs for horses aged two is a Group 3 race which has attracted some decent juveniles. On form and ratings FIRELIGHT is the horse to back and that runner is 6/4 with Ladbrokes to win Salisbury's biggest fillies' race.