

BetFan

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5	 The Champagne Kid	+60.30
6	 The MasterPlan	+40.02
7	 IProSpeed	+36.81

TODAY'S FREE SPORTS BETTING TIPS...

Deep Thought

Taunton 15:40 - Full @ 6/4

Neo Investments

Clonmel 13:25 - Benny In Milan @ 3/1

Smart Wagers

Ludlow 16:00 - Pique Rock @ 4/1

England Can Beat Croatia But In The Wrong Match

- By Ian Hudson

For the first time ever in English top flight football three teams are unbeaten after 12 fixtures. The group stage of the Champions League is getting interesting with upcoming deciding matches in qualification for the last 16. No matter though because there is another international break which will put a halt to the two biggest competitions in world football for a programme of international friendlies and the nonsense that is the UEFA Nations League. Are you in or out? Not the UK and the European Union but Wayne Rooney's ceremonial appearance for England against the United States in the friendly at Wembley on Thursday night.

The issue has become divisive and split a nation. Peter Shilton thinks an England cap has been devalued, Paul Ince is not happy and the reaction from the Press has been generally negative. It will be interesting to see the reception Rooney gets from the crowd when he walks on to the pitch. The body language of his team mates should reveal how they feel. My guess is that the reaction to Rooney from the fans and his colleagues will be positive because they will appreciate what he has done. Rooney has scored more goals for England than any other player and deserves recognition.

In the context of qualification for the finals of Euro 2020 and actually winning the competition a match at home against the USA in November is pretty meaningless. Gareth Southgate has created a good working environment and sending Rooney on for a guest appearance towards the end of a friendly will do no damage to his goodwill. Most of the current squad have played and trained with Rooney and understand what he has contributed. He now plays his football for DC United in MLS and players and fans in the States understand what he is about. England's opponents won't feel patronised because the best player in their league is in the other team as an honour.

Croatia are at home to Spain on the same night in England's Nations League group. The World Cup losing finalists played out an insipid goalless draw at home against England behind closed doors due to previous crowd trouble. It's not clear if fans will be allowed to attend this fixture but a home win is not on the cards. The 3-2 win against Spain has opened up the group and a draw would be the best result for England. Even if there are fans inside the ground Spain have the form and players to avoid defeat and share the points to do England a favour.

The England players would probably swap 100 wins against Croatia in the Nations League for a win when it mattered most. The dynamic is different but if England then beat Croatia at Wembley on Sunday they would be favourites to win the group. The World Cup semi-final was ultimately won by the best team but England were 22 minutes away from playing in the final. Croatia were worthy winners in Russia because they dominated midfield and created more chances over 120 minutes. England can get a bit of revenge by beating Croatia this time.

If results pan out in a different way England could finish bottom and be relegated to League B. The winners of the four divisions in League A qualify for a knockout tournament next June which decides who wins the Nations League. The competition provides a route for some countries into Euro 2020 so it could be beneficial to do well. England should qualify anyway so winning the Nations League has very little value. Does that mean representing England in the Nations League devalues a cap? In the context of that scenario Wayne Rooney deserves his swansong and it would be fitting if he scored in the USA friendly match.

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

Is Rooney Bigger Than Brexit Today?

If Wayne Rooney comes on towards the end of England's friendly against the United States at Wembley tonight in percentage terms what detrimental affect will it have on England's chances of winning Euro 2020? Subject closed! If you can disregard this divisive issue which this morning seems as big as the Brexit deal England are playing an international fixture at the national stadium.

It's a prep match for the Nations League meeting with Croatia at Wembley on Sunday and that team are at home to Spain in the competition tonight. Croatia were spirited and determined when beating England after extra-time in the semi-finals of the World Cup but that was then and this is now. A home win would help England but a more likely outcome is three points for SPAIN at 23/20 with **bet365**.

It's ironic that on a day that the relationship that Northern Ireland has with the rest of the UK and Europe is being discussed they play a friendly across the border against the other Ireland. It's the first time in over seven years that the two Ireland's have contested a football match. In the context of international football it's more about the geography and history than a match that could produce lots of goals.

In six fixtures on the road Northern Ireland have not scored a single goal and Ireland did not find the net in the two matches during the last international break. Ireland have had 18 shots in their three Nations League fixtures to date and their neighbours lack creativity up front. Correct score betting is fraught with danger but on this occasion NO GOALS is the most logical bet at 5/1 with **Paddy Power**.

Clonmel stages its biggest race today (3.00) and the conditions chase over two miles and four furlongs has attracted a small but select field of five runners. The betting and ratings suggest only the outsider Rashaan can be dismissed. Kemboy and Doctor Phoenix have the best recent form but neither horse has run for over 200 days. Fitness could be an issue for two horses that have not won at the Grade 2 level of today's race. A TOI PHIL is proven in this type of company and was second in this race last year. Ridden by Davy Russell and trained by Gordon Elliott the combination can produce a win with their horse and that outcome is 5/1 with.