

World Cup Victory for Team Russia: What are the Odds?

By [Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber](#)

June 10, 2014



Russia's national soccer team players Vladimir Granat, Maxim Kanunnikov, Alexey Ionov and Igor Denisov on training in the town of Itu, Brazil Monday.

As the World Cup kicks off on Thursday, Russian soccer circles have tempered their expectations for Team Russia, juggling realistic goals with the farfetched hope that their team will capture the globe's most prized championship.

Leading U.K. bookmaker William Hill had set Russia's odds of winning the tournament at 100 to 1, while Brazil's odds of winning the title on home turf stood at 3 to 1 as of Tuesday.

While Russia seems to be no match for the tournament's top squads, European and North American bookmakers have nonetheless given the team the second-best odds to win its group, which includes South Korea, Belgium and Algeria. Russia is also favored to win its opening game against South Korea on June 18.

"The absence of so-called 'super-squads' like Germany and Brazil in Russia's group will likely contribute to its success," said Boris Bogdanov, the chief soccer editor at Sportbox.ru, speaking from Sao Paulo, Brazil. "It's important for Russia to win its first game against South Korea. The group stage is so short in this tournament and if you lose your opening match, you are putting yourself in a bad spot."

Bogdanov added that despite the odds being in its favor, Team Russia will have the uneasy task of stopping Belgium's energetic attack, neutralizing a hard-working South Korean squad, and outplaying a resilient Algerian team. Ilya Leonov, the captain of Russia's beach soccer national team, agreed that Russia's road to the elimination rounds will be taxing.

"Getting beyond the group stage won't be a walk in the park for Team Russia," Leonov told The Moscow Times on Tuesday. "I would want them to play Brazil in the final but this is not realistic. I think they will make it beyond the group stage and at least to the quarter finals."

Only the top two teams of each group will progress to the next round, where 16 teams will remain in contention for the title.

The Russian national squad, which currently ranks 19th in FIFA ratings, will be seeking redemption after years of disappointing international play. Russia failed to qualify for the last two World Cups and the squad was eliminated at the group stage in its last two appearances in the tournament in 1994 and 2002.

The bespectacled Fabio Capello, the team's iron coach who has won five Serie A titles and led Spanish side Real Madrid to two championships, will also be looking to improve his record in international play. The English national team, which Capello managed before joining Russia's coaching staff, was eliminated by Germany in the round of 16 at the last World Cup in 2010.

Despite a spotty international record, observers have agreed that Capello's squad, which has remained unbeaten through its last nine games, is on the right track to save itself from an early exit from the tournament.

Soccer players and analysts concur that the team's main strength is its defense, led by 28-year-old goalkeeper Igor Akinfeyev of CSKA Moscow.

"Our defense is strong, we have got a great goalkeeper and a solid back line," Leonov said. "I think our weakness lies in our attack. We've got some quick guys like [Alexander] Kerzhakov and [Alexander] Kokorin, but I think we are still not as powerful as we could be on that end."

Bogdanov also deplored the loss of captain Roman Shirokov, who sustained a knee injury in April, saying Shirokov's creative play in the midfield would be missed.

In the face of difficult opposition and unpredictable circumstance, Capello has toiled to enforce a regiment conducive to success. Earlier this week, the coach announced that his players would not be allowed to access Twitter during the tournament, isolating them from the distractions of social media.

Russia can also count on a broad support base both in Russia and among the Russian diaspora. On Monday the Russian consulate in Rio de Janeiro said that about 20,000 Russian fans would

be traveling to Brazil to support their team. But approximately 500 of these supporters have been labeled as "violent fans who may require special attention from consular services and law enforcement agencies" by Russian Consul General Andrei Budayev.

Russian soccer hooligans have turned the public's attention away from the pitch and onto the streets in recent years. At the UEFA Euro in 2012, more than 180 people were arrested and at least 15 injured during clashes between Russian and Polish fans before their teams drew in Warsaw.

Russian fans have also shown that they do not take defeat lightly. Following a 1-0 loss to Japan during the 2002 World Cup, fans who had been watching the game on an outdoor screen on Manezh Square in downtown Moscow vandalized the city center and set cars alight. Two people died and 50 were hospitalized after violence erupted.

But the exhilaration surrounding the world's most-watched sporting event tends to mollify even the most fervent soccer fans in Bogdanov's opinion.

"Fans who make the trip to Brazil are coming to take part in a big celebration," Bogdanov said. "This is not a place where you cause trouble. These are not club teams facing each other. I cannot remember any incidents involving Russian fans at past World Cups. There have only been isolated cases of violence in events like these, like clashes involving German and English fans at the 1998 World Cup. I think this time around there will be no problems."

See also:

[World Cup to Bring 20,000 Russian Football Fans to Brazil](#)

Contact the author at g.tetraultfarber@imedia.ru

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/06/10/world-cup-victory-for-team-russia-what-are-the-odds-a36354>