

Football – Looking forward to Euro 2012

The Edinburgh Reporter Guide to Euro 2012

It is not long now until the eagerly awaited Euros start off with matches in both Ukraine and Poland from 8 June 2012 onwards. 51 teams started off in the qualifiers back in August 2010 and we are now down to the final 16. Even though Scotland is not participating (again) here is our guide to all 16 teams to help you choose your adopted country for the summer.

Group A

✘ Poland – Poland qualified for the tournament as joint hosts and this is only their second appearance in the European Championships. They finished bottom in their group with only one point in Euro 2008, after a 1-1 draw with then co-hosts Austria, when English Referee Howard Webb awarded a controversial 93rd minute penalty to the home nation. So they will hopefully be looking for better fortune this time around starting with the opening match of the tournament against 2004 champions Greece in Warsaw.

Verdict: Quarter Finals

✘ Greece – The surprise champions of Euro 2004 qualified for this tournament by topping their group in the most dramatic of fashions. After trailing 1-0 to Georgia at half time in their final Group F Qualifying match. The Georgians went down to 10 men after their goal scorer David Targamadze went off injured with 20 minutes to go but Georgian manager, Newcastle and Dundee legend Temuri Ketsbaia, had already used all three subs . The Greeks saw their chance and late goals from Giorgos Fotakis and Angelos Charisteas sealed their place in this summer's tournament. With their odds being exactly the same as it was pre Euro 2004 at 80/1 can they repeat it?

Verdict: Group Stage

☒ Russia – The 2018 World Cup Hosts are appearing in their 10th finals, coming off a good run to the semi-finals back in 2008, only to be stopped when they were beaten 3-0 by eventual champions Spain. Russia won the first ever European Championships back in 1960 when they were known as the Soviet Union. They defeated Yugoslavia 2-1 in the final after extra time in Paris.

Verdict – Quarter Finals

☒ Czech Republic – The Czechs reached the Euro's via a 3-0 aggregate win over Montenegro in the Playoffs and a, ahem, 90th minute penalty at Hampden Park, moving on. The Czech Republic have competed in the European Championships on four occasions now, beginning with a runner up spot in 96, then they failed to get out of the group stages in 2000, followed by a semi-final spot in 2004 and then in 2008 they once again failed to get out of their group. They will be hoping that legendary striker Milan Baros can carry on his phenomenal international goal scoring record where he is currently on 41 goals from 88 appearances.

Verdict: Group Stage

Group B

☒ Holland – No international football tournament would be complete without seeing a sea of orange in the stadiums and the Dutch are my pre-tournament favourites. Holland qualified with 9 wins out of 10 and this included 12 goals from Klaas-Jan Huntelaar which left him just one behind David Healy's record. The 2010 World Cup runners-up will be hoping to add to their '88 title on the 1st of July and I think this could be their year.

Verdict: Winners

☒ Denmark – Denmark come into the so called ‘Group of Death’ as the underdogs but the 1992 champions will be looking to make an impression this year as they never qualified for Euro 2008 and more importantly everyone else is looking at the other teams in this group so they will be completely under the radar.

Verdict: Group Stage

☒ Germany – 3 times World and European Champions Germany came through qualification with a 100% record, winning all 10 games. German coach Joachim Loew will be hoping that he can pick the Bayern Munich players up after their disappointment of the Champions League Final against Chelsea. The expected line up for Germany against Portugal in their opening match could feature between 6-8 Bayern players but they will be hoping to go one better than 2008 after losing to Spain in the Final.

Verdict: Runners up

☒ Portugal – Portugal qualified for the Euro’s after a 6-2 aggregate win over Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Playoffs. With being labelled a one man team it looks like it’s going to be tough going for the Portuguese fans, especially with being in a group containing Holland and Germany. If they can keep players fit and a certain Cristiano Ronaldo can produce the same form he has for club this season they could very well surprise a few.

Verdict: Group Stage

Group C

☒ Spain – The bookies’ favourites and many others to win the competition. Spain have been the dominant force in world football since winning Euro 2008, adding the small matter of

the World Cup in South Africa to that collection and also being ranked number 1 in the world. With key injuries hitting the team, most notably David Villa and Carlos Puyol, some people thought that they wouldn't be the team they've been in the last 4 years but with players like Real Madrid's Raul Albiol and Bilbao's Fernando Llorente to fill the voids,' La Furia Rojal' will still be in the running for their 3rd European Championship.

Verdict: Semi Finals

✘ Italy – Well what an eventful build up the Euro's for the 'Azzurri'. With match fixing allegations resulting in first choice left back Domenico Criscito to be dropped from the squad altogether and Juventus defender Leonardo Bonucci having also been investigated, this is not the preparation Head Coach Cesare Prandelli would have wanted. The strange thing about it is, the last two times that Italian football have been rocked by match fixing allegations leading up to a major tournament, they have gone on to win it (world cups 1982 & 2006). Could there be another twist in the tale?

Verdict: Group Stage

✘ Republic of Ireland – The Irish go into their first major tournament in 10 years and their first European Championship since 1988 were a Wim Kieft header for Holland in the 82nd minute dashed any dreams of the Republic reaching the semi-finals. One highlight for them in that tournament was when Ray Houghton scored an 8th minute winner against old foes England on June the 12th. 24 years and 2 days after that day, Ireland comes up against World and European Champions Spain; could there be another hero to keep Irish eyes smiling?

Verdict: Group Stage

✘ Croatia – Croatia are entering their 4th European Championships this year having never passed the quarter final stage. Croatia knows they have a great chance of

qualifying from this group, especially now that Italians have had their preparation disrupted massively. With players like Eduardo, Modric and Jelavic they could be the dark horses of the tournament.

Verdict: Quarter Finals

Group D

☒ Ukraine – This will be the co-hosts first ever appearance at a European Championship. The closest they ever got was at the playoff stage in the Euro 2000 qualifiers, where they were defeated by Slovenia 3-2 on aggregate. Their record against the other teams in Group D is not great viewing for the 'Zhovto-Blakytni', with only one win and three defeats against England, one win, two draws and one defeat against Sweden and zero wins, three draws and three defeats against France. This added to a very ageing team, I doubt the Ukrainian fans will be enjoying their summer as much as they had hoped.

Verdict: Group Stage

☒ Sweden – Sweden come up against England once again in a major tournament, having been drawn together at Euro '92, World Cup '02 and also the World Cup in '06. Out of these three meetings Sweden have never lost, with a win back in '92 and two draws at both World Cups, this could give them a huge confidence boost in trying to secure a qualifying spot from Group D.

Verdict: Group Stage

☒ France – Ever since the glory days of Zidane and Co. back in 1998 and 2000 and maybe even the World Cup Final in 2006 where they finished runners up, the French have never really had the same impact on a major tournament. At the World Cup in

2002 they failed to score a single goal, at the Euros in 2008 they couldn't get out of their group and who can forget the embarrassment caused under Raymond Domenech in South Africa two years ago? But all has changed now and with French legend Laurent Blanc taking over the reins and currently 21 games now without loss the French will definitely be hoping they are the Crème de la crème.

Verdict: Semi Finals

☒ England – Lastly we come to England. So much has gone on since the departure of Fabio Capello. They've had the surprise appointment of Roy Hodgson when everyone else wanted Harry, the Rio Rejection, injuries to Barry, Lampard and centre back Gary Cahill, no Rio Revival and the fact they have taken with them a striker that can't even play the first two games, along with a striker who has scored 6 goals in 42 appearances for Liverpool. Unfortunately for the England team also this year is the fact they won't have the same support as they usually do with many fans deciding to stay at home, it will be strange watching an England game at a major tournament without hundreds of St. George's flags draped everywhere. All in all it is England and you just never know what will happen.

Verdict: Quarter Finals

So there you go, that's how I believe Euro 2012 will end up. A sea of orange lifting the trophy, Ireland fans getting happily drunk no matter what the score and another knockout blow for the English. Here's hoping for a wonderful tournament and I know who I'll be supporting, A.B.E. (sorry England fans).

And what do you think? If you agree or disagree then please add your comments below....