



ViewerTrack

FIFA World Cup 2006

Pre-Tournament Predictions - Asia

Initiative, a leading global communications company



Strong Asian audiences predicted for World Cup 2006

Introduction

Throughout the 20th Century, the FIFA World Cup was always hosted in either Europe or the Americas. However, for the first World Cup of the 21st Century, Japan and South Korea were awarded joint-hosting rights, as FIFA continued its efforts to spread soccer to all corners of the globe.

Holding the World Cup in Asia had a massive positive effect on Asian viewing figures. Soccer has continued to grow in importance in Asia since then, with impressive audiences seen during Euro 2004. This summary report puts the historic development of Asian audiences in context, and explains why expectations are high for viewership during World Cup 2006.

Asian audiences boomed during World Cup 2002

Since its beginnings in 1930, the FIFA World Cup has traditionally seen its largest followings in Europe and South America. However, this was not true at World Cup 2002. Instead, average audiences per match were higher in Asia than in more "traditional" markets.

Asian audiences rose by 50% - 100% for World Cup 2002 compared with 1998. Viewer growth was for two main reasons:

- For the first time ever, matches were played in prime time for Asian fans. This convenient scheduling boosted viewing figures.
- The relative success of Asian teams also generated greater interest in Asia. South Korea surpassed expectations in reaching the semi-finals, and Japan reached the Second Round. Their performances led to soccer assuming unprecedented importance in the region.



Euro 2004 was hugely popular in Asia

Even though, by definition, no Asian country participated in Euro 2004, the tournament nevertheless proved to be hugely popular in Asia. For example, more Thais than Portuguese watched Euro 2004, even though Portugal was the host nation and reached the final.

Euro 2004 built on the success of World Cup 2002, with high viewing figures a continuation of an overall trend for soccer to become more popular, even in markets where it is not yet the most watched TV sport. Audiences have risen as the growth of satellite and cable television, plus broadcasters' heavy investment in live soccer rights, has enabled fans across Asia to watch more club and international soccer. Fans awareness and interest in foreign players has also increased, with some star Asian soccer stars playing in European leagues, such as Park Ji-Sung at Manchester United.

Large Asian audiences expected for World Cup 2006

Initiative predicts that Asian audience figures for World Cup 2006 will be strong, on the back of the success in the region of World Cup 2002 and Euro 2004. This is for two main reasons:

- With the World Cup being held in Germany this summer, matches will be broadcast in late evening and at night in Asia. However, experience from Euro 2004 suggests that the effect of the difference in time zones between Asia and Europe will not be as great as might be expected. Even though fans around the world would almost universally agree that soccer must be watched live, and Euro 2004 matches were played during the night in Asia, millions of Asian fans postponed their bedtimes to watch the matches.
- Initiative also expects there to be a 'halo' effect following Asian success at World Cup 2002. Viewing figures always rise when a 'Local Hero' tastes victory, but also stay high in the following years as fans' expectations are raised. Consequently, we expect audiences in South Korea to be particularly high, given their performances four years ago.

Conversely, however, we expect Chinese audience figures to fall given that China has failed to qualify for this summer's World Cup. During World Cup 2002, TV audiences in China doubled when China was playing, compared with an average match. This year, Chinese viewing figures will not enjoy a similar boost.



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