



ViewerTrack

FIFA World Cup 2006

Pre-Tournament Predictions - Netherlands

Initiative, a leading global communications company



Highest European TV ratings predicted in Holland

Introduction

Three countries consistently draw the highest average ratings per match at international soccer tournaments: Brazil, Argentina and the Netherlands. All three nations are fanatical in their devotion to soccer, and come to a near-standstill when the FIFA World Cup takes place.

Initiative predicts that this story will be repeated during FIFA World Cup 2006, with the Netherlands having the highest average ratings per match in Europe.

Why soccer draws such high TV ratings in the Netherlands

Across the world, soccer is most popular in those countries which:

- i) Have a strong heritage in the sport;
- ii) Have good international / club soccer teams.

Both of these are true in the Netherlands. The country has a fine history of producing stylish, successful soccer players and teams, especially the Ajax and Dutch teams of the 1970s, in the 'Total Football' era. Dutch soccer remains strong today, with the national team having reached the semi-finals at both UEFA Euro 2000 and UEFA Euro 2004.

International soccer is especially popular in the Netherlands because Dutch fans' interest extends beyond the success of the *Oranje* team. Unlike other major European countries, most notably Italy and the UK, fans in the Netherlands are not particularly partisan in their soccer TV viewing habits. While games featuring the *Oranje* team attract the highest TV audiences, large viewerships are also drawn for matches involving other countries. This helps to boost the average ratings per match in the Netherlands.

The Dutch are also huge sports fans in general. Other sports such as speed skating and darts also attract millions of Dutch TV viewers.



Dutch audiences at World Cup 2002 were small by historic standards

While soccer is hugely popular in the Netherlands, TV ratings were uncommonly low during FIFA World Cup 2002. Dutch interest in the tournament was punctured by their failure to qualify. The seven-hour time difference to Japan / Korea, where the World Cup was held, was another negative factor influencing in-home viewing figures. Most of the matches took place during the mornings, far from peak viewing time.

Consequently, while average ratings per match were higher in the Netherlands than anywhere else in Europe during FIFA World Cup 1998, UEFA Euro 2000 and UEFA Euro 2004, they were only 21st highest in Europe for FIFA World Cup 2002. Average audiences per match fell by 68 per cent in 2002 compared with FIFA World Cup 1998.

Huge audience growth predicted for World Cup 2006

Initiative predicts that Dutch ratings will bounce back from their 2002 lows to be the highest in Europe once again at FIFA World Cup 2006.

While audiences fell primarily in 2002 because of the failure of the Dutch team to qualify for the World Cup, this time round the Dutch team has qualified. Under the new management of Marco van Basten, the Dutch team has been rejuvenated with a lot of young players now in the team. During the qualifying round for FIFA World Cup 2006, the Dutch team won more games and more points than any other European team, even though they had a tough qualifying group against the likes of the Czech Republic and Romania. As a result, the Dutch team is among the favorites to win FIFA World Cup 2006.

Audience figures will also be boosted by the World Cup being held this summer in Germany. With the matches being played at a much more convenient time of day for European fans, this will have a huge positive effect on live in-home viewing figures throughout Europe.



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