

ALGERIA
Population: 38 million (35th\*)
Per capita: \$7,600 (137th\*)
Been there before: Three times
Pinnacle: First round
The Redeemer: Forward Islam Slimani
Fate in a tweet: After giving U.S. a scare in 2010, Algeria barely made it to Brazil. Expect the usual first-round exit.

ARGENTINA
Population: 42 million (33rd)
Per capita: \$18,400 (74th)
Been there before: 15 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1978 and 1986)
The Redeemer: Forward Lionel Messi
Fate in a tweet: Smooth sailing through first round and Round of 16, then Argentina will have to hope Messi can shift gears from star to legend.

AUSTRALIA
Population: 22 million (56th)
Per capita: \$43,300 (20th)
Been there before: Three times
Pinnacle: Round of 16 (2006)
The Redeemer: Forward Tim Cahill
Fate in a tweet: Brutal group (Spain, Netherlands, Chile) means the boys from Down Under will not likely see the light of day.

BELGIUM
Population: 10 million (84th)
Per capita: \$38,500 (30th)
Been there before: 11 times
Pinnacle: Fourth place (1986)
The Redeemer: Forward Eden Hazard
Fate in a tweet: Belgium can win its group. But the Red Devils will likely cool off in the knockout stages.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
Population: 3.8 million (129th)
Per capita: \$8,400 (129th)
Been there before: First time
Pinnacle: None
The Redeemer: Forward Edin Dzeko
Fate in a tweet: Dzeko and Vedad Ibrisevic, who played a year at Saint Louis, will give the D-marks a pair that few match, but U never know how debutants will do.

BRAZIL
Population: 201 million (6th)
Per capita: \$12,100 (107th)
Been there before: 19 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002)
The Redeemer: Forward Neymar
Fate in a tweet: Certainly the host with the most, Brazil's big concern is the pressure of being at home. But a Seleção will nutmeg that and reach the final.

CAMEROON
Population: 20 million (59th)
Per capita: \$2,400 (186th)
Been there before: Six times
Pinnacle: Quarterfinals (1990)
The Redeemer: Forward Samuel Eto'o
Fate in a tweet: Eto'o is still the indomitable Lions man, er, man, man, but this pride is missing the sharp teeth, so expect them to be the prey this time.

CHILE
Population: 17 million (63rd)
Per capita: \$13,700 (72nd)
Been there before: Eight times
Pinnacle: Third place (1962)
The Redeemer: Midfielder Arturo Vidal
Fate in a tweet: Spain and/or Holland will underestimate Chile, and La Roja will pull a stunner to make the knockout stages before being sent home by Brazil.

COLOMBIA
Population: 45 million (30th)
Per capita: \$31,000 (110th)
Been there before: Four times
Pinnacle: Round of 16 (1990)
The Redeemer: Defender Mario Yepes
Fate in a tweet: Even without injured star striker Radamel Falcao, Colombia should top Group C and maybe even pull off a surprise in the Round of 16.

COSTA RICA
Population: 4.6 million (122nd)
Per capita: \$12,800 (102nd)
Been there before: Three times
Pinnacle: Round of 16 (1990)
The Redeemer: Forward Bryan Ruiz
Fate in a tweet: Say the Ticos play way over their heads, they will still have to overcome Group D mates who have combined to win seven of the 19 World Cups.

CROATIA
Population: 4.4 million (125th)
Per capita: \$17,800 (78th)
Been there before: Three times
Pinnacle: Third place (1998)
The Redeemer: Defender Dario Srna
Fate in a tweet: Hrvatska will take a thrumping from Brazil in the opener, pull it together to take second in Group A and be ousted by Spain in the final 16.

ECUADOR
Population: 15 million (68th)
Per capita: \$10,600 (115th)
Been there before: Two times
Pinnacle: Round of 16 (2006)
The Redeemer: Midfielder Antonio Valencia
Fate in a tweet: Despite the loss of striker Christian Benitez, who died of heart failure last summer, Ecuador still has enough talent, but it's not enough.

ENGLAND
Population: 53 million (26th)
Per capita: \$50,566 (15th)
Been there before: 13 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1966)
The Redeemer: Forward Wayne Rooney
Fate in a tweet: By luck or amok, England has not gone further than the quarters in any World Cup in the Western Hemisphere. That will continue in Brazil.

FRANCE
Population: 66 million (22nd)
Per capita: \$35,700 (38th)
Been there before: 13 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1998)
The Redeemer: Forward Karim Benzema
Fate in a tweet: Two of its last four Cups ended in chaos, the other two ended in trips to the final. France will be comme ci, comme ça this go-round.

GERMANY
Population: 80 million (18th)
Per capita: \$39,500 (29th)
Been there before: 17 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1954, 1974, 1990)
The Redeemer: Midfielder Thomas Muller
Fate in a tweet: The Germans have made the semis in 12 of 17 Cups. They'll do it again here, but will fall to Brazil in one of the best matches in 20 years.

GHANA
Population: 25 million (49th)
Per capita: \$3,500 (174th)
Been there before: Twice
Pinnacle: Quarterfinals (2010)
The Redeemer: Forward Kevin-Prince Boateng
Fate in a tweet: Ghana is impressive in attack, but defense will let it down in a difficult group. Advancement is not in the stars for the Black Stars.

VENUES

Table listing 12 venues: Arena Da Amazonia, Estadio Nacional, Arena Pantanal, Arena Corinthians, Estadio Beira-Rio, Arena Da Baixada, Estadio Do Maracana, Estadio Mineirao, Arena Fonte Nova, Arena Pernambuco, Estadio Das Dunas, Estadio Castelao.

Table with 2 columns: Country, Match details. Includes Brazil vs Croatia, Brazil vs Cameroon, Brazil vs Mexico, Brazil vs Colombia, Brazil vs Chile, Brazil vs Netherlands, Brazil vs Australia, Brazil vs Spain, Brazil vs USA.

Table with 2 columns: Country, Match details. Includes Spain vs Netherlands, Chile vs Australia, Spain vs Chile, Netherlands vs Australia, Spain vs Australia, Netherlands vs Chile, Australia vs Spain, Spain vs France, France vs Russia.

Table with 2 columns: Country, Match details. Includes Ghana vs USA, USA vs Portugal, USA vs Germany.

TOP 10 MUST-WATCH PLAYERS

There are bound to be some great moments and brilliant individual performances at the World Cup. Some big talents to keep an eye on competing on the world's biggest stage:

Player profiles for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, including photos and brief biographies.

Player profiles for Neymar and Arjen Robben, including photos and brief biographies.

Player profiles for Diego Costa and Philipp Lahm, including photos and brief biographies.

Player profiles for Eden Hazard and Luis Suarez, including photos and brief biographies.

Player profiles for Yaya Toure and Mario Balotelli, including photos and brief biographies.

BRAZUCA

2014 World Cup official ball. 'Brazuca' is used as a term for Brazilians living abroad... The ball's design, its ribbons in shades of blue, gold and green, symbolize the traditional Bahia bands or 'wish bracelets' popular in Brazil.



HOW IT WILL GO DOWN: DAVE ORD'S WORLD CUP PREDICTIONS

Group stage predictions for Groups A through H, listing teams and predicted outcomes.

ROUND OF 16

Round of 16 match predictions: Brazil vs Chile, Colombia vs Italy, Spain vs Croatia, Uruguay vs Ivory Coast.

QUARTERFINALS

Quarterfinal match predictions: Brazil vs Colombia, Spain vs Uruguay, Argentina vs Switzerland, Portugal vs Belgium.

SEMIFINALS

Semifinal match predictions: Brazil vs Germany, Spain vs Portugal.

THIRD-PLACE

Third-place match prediction: Germany vs Portugal.

FINAL

Final match prediction: Brazil vs Spain.

GROUP STAGE MATCHES

Table listing all group stage matches from Group A to Group H, including dates and venues.

SECOND STAGE MATCHES



HOST CITIES



POSTER

2014 World Cup official poster. The poster was unveiled on January 30, 2013 in Rio de Janeiro. The poster, designed by Brazilian creative agency Crama, was selected ahead of two other designs by a high-profile judging panel.



FULECO

2014 World Cup official mascot. The mascot is a Brazilian three-banded armadillo. It's one of only two species of armadillos with the ability to roll up into a tight, almost impenetrable ball.

VENUES

Table listing 12 venues: Arena Da Amazonia, Estadio Nacional, Arena Pantanal, Arena Corinthians, Estadio Beira-Rio, Arena Da Baixada, Estadio Do Maracana, Estadio Mineirao, Arena Fonte Nova, Arena Pernambuco, Estadio Das Dunas, Estadio Castelao.

GREECE
Population: 20 million (81st)
Per capita: \$23,600 (63rd)
Been there before: Twice
Pinnacle: First round
The Redeemer: Forward Kostas Mitroglou
Fate in a tweet: The Greeks' defense gives them a chance against anybody, but that doesn't mean they will garner enough points to move on.

HONDURAS
Population: 8.5 million (94th)
Per capita: \$4,800 (163rd)
Been there before: Twice
Pinnacle: First round
The Redeemer: Forward Carlos Costly
Fate in a tweet: The Honduran jersey is known for a large 'H' on the left side. It should stand for 'help' because it will need all it can get to survive.

IRAN
Population: 80 million (19th)
Per capita: \$12,800 (103rd)
Been there before: Three times
Pinnacle: First round
The Redeemer: Midfielder Ehsan Nekoonaee
Fate in a tweet: Iran has won just one match in its other three World Cup appearances. If it doubled that total in Brazil, it would be a big surprise.

ITALY
Population: 61 million (24th)
Per capita: \$29,600 (51st)
Been there before: 17 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1934, 1938, 1982, 2006)
The Redeemer: Forward Mario Balotelli
Fate in a tweet: The fate of this experienced Italian side will undoubtedly come down to Super Mario can overcome his elder ego Balotelli-Balotelli.

IVORY COAST
Population: 22 million (55th)
Per capita: \$1,800 (196th)
Been there before: Twice
Pinnacle: First round
The Redeemer: Midfielder Yaya Toure
Fate in a tweet: Ivory Coast should get out of its group, which is missing a real powerhouse, but then the burden will be too heavy for even Les Elephants.

JAPAN
Population: 127 million (11th)
Per capita: \$37,100 (36th)
Been there before: Four times
Pinnacle: Round of 16 (2002, 2010)
The Redeemer: Forward Shinji Kagawa
Fate in a tweet: Japan has never gone past the Round of 16, but always puts out a credible team. It could come away without a loss yet still not advance.

MEXICO
Population: 120 million (12th)
Per capita: \$15,600 (89th)
Been there before: 14 times
Pinnacle: Quarterfinals (1970, 1986)
The Redeemer: Defender Rafael Marquez
Fate in a tweet: After the below-par qualifying campaign, it's hard to know how Mexico will do. If it doesn't show up, El Tri will be out in three.

NETHERLANDS
Population: 16 million (66th)
Per capita: \$41,400 (24th)
Been there before: Nine times
Pinnacle: Runner up (1974, 1978, 2010)
The Redeemer: Forward Robin van Persie
Fate in a tweet: The Netherlands could go far, but if it underestimates Chile in the final first-round match the Orange could be in Dutch with their fans.

NIGERIA
Population: 177 million (8th)
Per capita: \$2,900 (189th)
Been there before: Four times
Pinnacle: Round of 16 (1994, 1998)
The Redeemer: Forward Emmanuel Emenike
Fate in a tweet: A hot and humid second match against Bosnia and Herzegovina could be the decider on whether the Super Eagles soar into the second round.

PORTUGAL
Population: 10 million (80th)
Per capita: \$22,900 (64th)
Been there before: Five times
Pinnacle: Third place (1966)
The Redeemer: Forward Cristiano Ronaldo
Fate in a tweet: Ronaldo is at his step-over best, but the won't be enough to help Portugal in the semis when it loses the Iberian Peninsula derby to Spain.

RUSSIA
Population: 142 million (10th)
Per capita: \$18,100 (77th)
Been there before: Nine times
Pinnacle: Fourth place (1956)
The Redeemer: Forward Aleksandr Kerzhakov
Fate in a tweet: Russia will be deliberate and progress to the second round, probably as the group runner-up. However, it will end at the feet of Germany.

SOUTH KOREA
Population: 49 million (27th)
Per capita: \$33,200 (42nd)
Been there before: Eight times
Pinnacle: Fourth place (2002)
The Redeemer: Midfielder Son Heung-Min
Fate in a tweet: South Korea narrowly qualified and there was tension among the players. The team with 'Be the Reds' rallying cry will be in the red.

SPAIN
Population: 47 million (29th)
Per capita: \$30,100 (47th)
Been there before: 13 times
Pinnacle: Winner (2010)
The Redeemer: Forward Cesc Fabregas
Fate in a tweet: The defending champ may be getting older, but these are not a bunch of senior citizens. Expect them to improve each round and make the final.

SWITZERLAND
Population: 8 million (96th)
Per capita: \$54,000 (13th)
Been there before: Nine times
Pinnacle: Quarterfinals (1934, 1938, 1954)
The Redeemer: Midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri
Fate in a tweet: This Swiss is not aged. The youthful team will build on an undefeated qualifying mark and give someone a run for the money in the second round.

UNITED STATES
Population: 318 million (3rd)
Per capita: \$52,800 (13th)
Been there before: Nine times
Pinnacle: Semifinals (1930)
The Redeemer: Midfielder Michael Bradley
Fate in a tweet: The U.S. opens with difficult Ghana and then plays Portugal, followed by Germany. Oh, and it has to travel 8,800 miles for the 3 matches.

URUGUAY
Population: 3.3 million (135th)
Per capita: \$16,600 (80th)
Been there before: 11 times
Pinnacle: Winner (1930, 1950)
The Redeemer: Forward Luis Suarez
Fate in a tweet: The next-door neighbor will make itself at home and ride that to the latter stages. But Uruguay will not duplicate its 2010 semifinal run.

CREDITS

Credits: Editor: Dave Ord; Design: Hugo Torres; Illustrations: Chiara Bautista; AP: FIFA; Photos: The Associated Press.