

Are You Ready for Some Futbol?

What to watch for during the 2018 World Cup

BY EAN MONTAGUE

The United States leads the world in many categories, but soccer is not one of them. The men's 2018 World Cup begins this June, with the U.S. team left out for the first time since 1986. That has left many fans upset at the stall in the progress soccer has made in the United States in recent years.

"It's disappointing because we're just starting to see soccer get bigger in the U.S.," said senior Chris Troemel, an intramural soccer referee.

Others think the failure to qualify will serve as a wake-up call to change the sport.

"I was upset, but kind of happy because I think [the direction] will change now," said fellow referee and senior Aaron Bergmans.

While U.S. fans can hold on to the hope that there is always four years from now, there are still plenty of reasons to tune into the biggest sporting event in the world this summer. The World Cup will be hosted in Russia, and recent political events have caused controversy that will continue throughout the tournament. On the field, several nations have incredible stories that will make them fun to cheer for on the pitch. For those whose home country failed to qualify, here are a few teams to watch:

ICELAND

This is the first time that Iceland has qualified for the World Cup. The Nordic island has a population roughly half the size of North Dakota but still managed to find 11 players good enough to qualify for the tournament. After an impressive showing at the 2016 European Championship, including a victory over soccer-inventors England, Iceland will certainly be a team to watch this summer.

PANAMA

One of three teams from North and Central America, Panama has also qualified for its first World Cup. The country hopes to overcome the 1,000-to-1 Vegas odds against them to win the tournament and show that they belong on the international stage.

EGYPT

Despite not qualifying since 1990, Egypt has the potential to make a surprise run in the tournament. Led by forward Mohamed Salah, one of the English Premier League's most exciting players, Egypt will play exciting, attack-style football that should be fun to watch for even the casual soccer fan.

The World Cup begins June 14 when host Russia faces off against Saudi Arabia. Four years ago, all matches were screened on the big screen at the MSU International Center, so you can be sure to catch the action in East Lansing around soccer fans. Check out your favorite sports bar, meet up with some friends, and take in the beautiful game and one of the most prestigious sporting events in the world.



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