

How to Win the World Cup

Sure, ESPN can tell you what a team's on-the-field strategy should be for taking home the 2010 World Cup, but only *Afar* can give you the real formula for victory: a perfect alignment of geopolitical factors.* Here are the teams we think have the best shot at winning—and why.

1 BECOME A WEALTHY DEMOCRACY.

Philosophically speaking, democracies reward both collective effort and individual achievement—two key ingredients for a winning soccer team. Wealthy democracies like England, Spain, and Germany benefit from a substantial middle-class workforce, which provides not only potential players but also a fan base to support the sport.

2 BE OPPRESSIVE! B-E OPPRESSIVE!

On the other hand, the more a country clamps down on civil liberties and political rights, as in Nigeria and Algeria, the more it harnesses the powerful motivator of fear. No one wants to disappoint a despot. Aspiring autocrats, beware: Increasing oppression yields a relatively small improvement in soccer performance.

3 GAIN INDEPENDENCE FROM FRANCE OR, LESS IDEALLY, THE UK AFTER 1900.

The French seem to have instilled a single-minded and more abiding love of *le foot* in their colonies (Algeria) than the British have. English colonial athletic interests have always been divided among footie (Nigeria), cricket (India),

and rugby (South Africa). Soccer spread beyond the British Isles around 1900, so already-liberated countries, such as those in Latin America, don't need to thank any colonizing power for their soccer prowess.

4 JOIN OPEC.

For Nigeria and Algeria, oil income may add just the right degree of financial stability to give them an edge over otherwise similar World Cup-qualifying neighbors Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and Ghana. However, it may not be enough. No oil-producing country has ever won a World Cup.

5 HAVE SUCCESSFUL CLUB TEAMS.

The more domestic club teams, such as Brazil's Grêmio and England's Manchester United, a country sends to the quarter-finals of its continental tournament, the better the national team will be. But this isn't because of the players: Manchester United's roster features footballers from 20 different countries. Instead, winning club teams show a country's financial—and emotional—commitment to the sport. And you can't get more emotionally committed than our two front-runners, Brazil and England. **A**



Brazil



England

*WE DIDN'T MAKE THIS UP. SPORTS ECONOMIST MICHAEL A. LEEDS CALCULATED THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN 28 GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS AND SOCCER PERFORMANCE, RANKING TEAMS BASED ON THEIR PROBABILITY OF WINNING THE 2010 WORLD CUP. FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE AFAR.COM/BLOG



Algeria



Nigeria



Argentina



Uruguay



Spain



Germany