

The world is ready to go football crazy! Which countries will do well at this year's FIFA World Cup? And which teenage players will everybody be talking about?

Have you bought your favourite team's shirt? Have your friends started working on their Neymar hairstyle? After four years of waiting, it's time again for the FIFA World Cup. It takes place in Russia between 14 June and 15 July.

Which countries will take part?

The 32 countries which have qualified include top international teams like Brazil, Spain and Argentina. However, there are also a few surprises. Panama will make its first appearance ever at the World Cup. The same is true for Iceland, which, with a population of just 350,000, will be the least-populated country ever to participate.

How does the tournament work?

The initial two weeks of the competition are called the Group Stage, where each group has four teams who must all play against each other. From each group, the two teams who finish with the most points go through to the next stage. From 30 June until 11 July, the remaining teams first play the round of 16, then the quarter-finals and the semi-finals. In the end, two teams will qualify for the final in Moscow on 15 July.

Who will be the stars?

The World Cup will feature football's biggest names. There has been plenty of discussion about the two top stars: Cristiano Ronaldo who plays for Portugal and Lionel Messi from Argentina. Both players have had enormous success in their club careers but, now in their thirties, this could be the last chance for them to lift the World Cup trophy. Brazilian fans are worried about their star player, Neymar. In recent months he has been suffering from a leg injury, but hopes to be fully fit again for the tournament.

What about teen players?

The 2018 tournament will feature many young players, some of whom are still teenagers. The French player Kylian Mbappé is just 19 years old and is already the second-most expensive player at Paris Saint-Germain. As a striker, French supporters are hoping that he will provide a lot of goals. Another 19-year-old to watch is Morocco's Achraf Hakimi. This young player is already a star at his club, Real Madrid. He plays as a defender, meaning Moroccan fans will be hopeful that their goal is very well protected.

What are the new rules?

The most important change for this year's tournament is the introduction of VAR (video assistant referee). When the referee needs to make a difficult decision during the match, he can communicate with a team of experts who are watching the match via video link. The referee can also interrupt the match so that he can watch a video replay of certain moments. Another new rule for World Cup 2018 will be a change to the traditional limit of three substitute players during a match. Under the new system, teams will be allowed to make a fourth substitution if the match goes to extra time.

What about the UK?

The only UK team competing at the 2018 World Cup will be England. Placed in a group with Belgium, Panama and Tunisia, English fans are hoping to do well in the Group Stage and then progress to the later rounds. The team features many young stars such as the midfielders Raheem Sterling and Dele Alli, who have both played strong seasons this year for their clubs in the English Premiership. So perhaps English fans can allow themselves to at least dream of glory.

The last World Cup (Brazil, 2014) was watched by 3.2 billion people. That's almost half the population of the entire world! So whether you're a football fan or not, this year's tournament is going to be impossible to avoid. Make sure you're watching, and may the best team win!