MARK O'HAIRE'S GROSVENOR SPORT BLOG

France vs England

Saturday 18th July, 22:00

The third-place play-off is often described as the match nobody wants to play, making motivation one of the hardest elements to assess. That feels especially true here, with France and England both arriving in Miami having expected to contest Sunday's World Cup final instead.

Team news only adds to the uncertainty. History suggests both managers are likely to rotate, giving squad players an opportunity after a demanding tournament, but the relaxed nature of this fixture has regularly produced entertaining football.

Eleven of the last 12 World Cup third-place play-offs have featured Over 2.5 Goals, nine saw both teams score and six produced at least four goals. Those 12 matches have averaged an impressive 3.67 goals, highlighting how quickly these contests can open up once the pressure of knockout football disappears.

With the pressure of lifting the World Cup now gone, both managers may also be more willing to give their attacking players licence to express themselves rather than prioritise structure and game management, further increasing the chances of an open, entertaining encounter.

While those goal trends are well established and reflected in the market, I still think there is value in siding with France to come out on top in what should be another high-scoring affair.

Les Bleus simply possess greater strength in depth. Didier Deschamps can afford to rotate without sacrificing too much quality, while France boast arguably the deepest attacking squad in the competition. They've scored at least twice in 17 of their last 20 internationals, netting three or more goals in eight of their previous 13.

England, by comparison, have looked increasingly stretched throughout the knockout rounds. Their defensive unit has lacked continuity through injuries, suspensions and tactical reshuffles, while the Three Lions appeared to run out of legs during the closing stages against Argentina after another physically and emotionally draining tie.

France should also arrive with a physical edge. Having played their quarter-final on Thursday before Tuesday's semi-final, Les Bleus have enjoyed extra recovery days compared to England, who endured 120 minutes against Norway before another exhausting encounter with Argentina.

Deschamps' squad have also travelled considerably less throughout the tournament, remaining largely based in the north-east of the United States.

England are still capable of playing their part, however. William Saliba's absence weakens France defensively and Les Bleus haven't always looked watertight without him. That makes another Both Teams To Score outcome highly plausible.

Rather than backing short-priced goal lines, France to win and Both Teams To Score stands out at the prices, fitting both the historical profile of this fixture and the likely match script.

The player markets also point firmly towards Kylian Mbappé. With the Golden Boot still within reach, expect the France captain to insist on playing and remain the focal point of Les Bleus' attack. Whenever he's featured for more than 45 minutes, Mbappé has scored in 12 of his last 14 international appearances

His shooting numbers remain equally compelling, producing 2+ shots on target in 14 of his last 17 starts for France.

Against an England defence that has struggled to establish consistency throughout the tournament, France to win, Mbappé to score and Mbappé to record 2+ shots on target makes plenty of appeal as an alternative angle.

Best Bets

- France to win and Both Teams To Score (19/10)
- France to win, Kylian Mbappe to Score and Kylian Mbappe Over 1.5 Shots on-Target (7/4)