

The SMART FIFA World Cup 2018!^{1, 2}

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As always, it seems to have taken forever for the FIFA World Cup to have arrived but when it has we have all become absorbed by what it takes to get through the qualifying groups and then what route it will take to make it to the final.

However, let's take one step back and consider what has happened before a ball has even been kicked and the achievement, for the sake of this paper, that England have made and are then set to continue with through the tournament.

For those of you that don't want to use England as your example, please substitute the team of your choice and then you simply have to adapt the path as we work our way towards tournament glory and the ultimate achievement. Let me just return though to what I just said, and just consider for one moment, what we have already achieved, a seat at the table of the world's biggest game with thirty-one other teams all trying to compete for the same prize as England.

Yes, just consider it, because although you will always find the doom and gloom merchants of those saying England can't do this and England won't so that, I can think of a number of nations, such as Holland, Italy and the United States of America that would swap places with us right now, as they never received the invitation.

The SMART FIFA Strategy of every single Project Team!

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² Editor's note: Now it is the quarterfinals of the 2018 World Cup that began in Russia in June and England is still alive. However the individual teams do, the points in this article should survive long after the 2018 World Cup is concluded.

So, we are down to the last thirty-two and from that the first thing we have to consider is the size and scale of the project before us. Well, there are eight groups of four teams and inside the group we have to play each team once. To put that into perspective now, by qualifying, England, like every other team, is now only seven matches away from winning the tournament. Sounds simple really, but as we know and have seen through the suffering for many tournaments, there seems to be a rule, if you are not German you can't win.

So, how can we make that change count this time?

Well, having taken the matches into account, England now have the prospect of three weeks in Russia with a number of long haul flights, balanced between the training sessions and of course the small matter of playing the matches.

Prior to arrival, the management team underwent a long sustained thought process to design the right strategy for preparation. Yes, the strategy was for preparation, not just to win the tournament, there is so much more that goes into event management and tournament management than simply playing the right games at the right time.

England's choice of warm up matches weren't simply an exercise in keeping the team fit, playing against Nigeria and Costa Rica was a result of the draw that had placed them into Group G, with their three opponents, Tunisia, Panama and a well versed friend in Belgium. It was by choosing the stranger opponents in the warm-up matches that allowed England the flavour of what might come when playing teams from nations that typically they wouldn't compete against on a regular basis.

Two pre-tournament matches played and two more sets of lessons learned into the knowledge management box of tools and so it was off to Russia and the chance of becoming national heroes and making history.

The SMART FIFA Asset Management!

So, in front of an audience of around three and a half billions people, the scene was set and a nation held its breath. All the time that the early games of the tournament started, the England family had to settle in, getting their training regime working for them and just like any trip away for work, get used to the surroundings both on and off work time.

As we know, all great successes start with understanding the governance, or the rules of the tournament. So, having established the draw for the group, knowing the order in which they would play what teams, the locations of the games and so the travel involved and the rules around bookings and suspensions, the team and its management could start to plot the strategy to success.

Just for clarification, the rules on suspensions is that any player gaining two yellow cards during the groups matches or the round of sixteen and the quarter finals, will be subject to missing the next match. The red card is much simpler. Receive a red card and miss the next match. This rule was changed a number of years ago after FIFA decided that a player being booked in a

semi-final should not miss the final on the carry forward of cards rule, after the famous incident in the Italia 1990 World Cup semi-final clash between England and West Germany with Paul Gascoigne and hence the only players that can now miss the final will be those sent off in the semi-final and therefore suspended for the next match.

So, rules established and strategies in place, it is not quite simply eleven or twenty three players that are going to win the World Cup. Understanding the right resources and therefore that asset management becomes key to a successful tournament. You know you have three matches to play in the group stages and you also know the travel involved for each game, so not only is the right playing staff an essential find for the management team, but also the training and conditioning team and the recovery and medical staff.

The SMART FIFA Key “Behind every great team ...”!

Behind every great man, you know the phrase, well this is exactly the same, just on a greater scale. Behind every great team, in a larger support staff that coordinates everything like a precision Swiss watch, arranging the logistics for the training, the kit preparation and the transport so that those involved in the key ninety minutes only have to worry about one thing, winning.

As I mentioned earlier, the draw is crucial. Not only do you learn who your opponents in the group stage are, but it also maps out the two routes to the final that you may have to take. The two routes, quite simply are defined by how you finish in your own qualification group, first or second. Pure logic says that by achieving first place in the group, your route to the quarter finals should be simpler, but that is applying the rule that none of the seeded teams will underperform and that each game would go the way it is stated on paper. As Brian Clough once famously stated, “Football is played on grass, not paper”.

So, with logical out of the window, the key thing for the team to concentrate on is themselves. They can plan and surmise what might happen in the other groups, but their first focus has to be on getting out of the group and then into the final sixteen round when the knockout football really starts.

The SMART FIFA Performance Management!

So, for England, first up it is Tunisia, on paper, no ... remember the quote about paper. So, how much do you know about how they play and how much will that affect your own process of thinking about who plays and more importantly as a team, how you play?

Each team will have its own well known and hidden strengths and so the research by the management team around what and how to manage such an opponent starts many months in advance. Well, we did say the best thing to focus on was your own team’s performance, so after a little SWOT analysis of the opposition, what team will you put out against the strong, physical Africans and what formation?

The final days before the first game, the last minute tactics and set plays will be drilled into the players' minds, generally by now they know who is and isn't playing, it is quite simply the best kept secret. Finally, the game is upon you and through the ninety minutes you will start with a key strategy, then around every ten to fifteen minutes, or at a key moment, review the situation and assess performance. It is at these key stage gates that most games are won and lost as the team manager adapts the play and the players to best suit the conditions and the context of the game.

So, match over. How did they perform, was it what you expected and what have you learned about your team? This checkpoint and post-match analysis is paramount for the management team, as there will be many views being shared across many platforms. Some of the feedback will be useful, others quite simply derogatory and so to keep the team balanced and calm, it is right to protect them from criticism whilst also not letting them believe, if the game has been such a success, that they are now untouchable. This system of self and situational awareness by the management team keeps the team focused, whether the result was positive or not, after all there are still two more group matches to be played.

Having navigated your way through the first game, what is the state of the team, are there players that picked up knocks, or did players have poor games and you have to consider resting them for the second match? Dependent upon the result of the first game there may be more or less pressure now on the team but your job as the team management is to keep them focused and believing, after all, you are now only six matches away from winning the greatest prize in football.

The SMART FIFA Decision Making Management!

Having gone through the reiteration of the first game to now plan and prepare for the new opponent, you discover yourself facing Panama. Yes, Panama, a team that has never qualified for the World Cup before and surely can only be here for the experience. Experience and history tells us that the moment you think you can't lose, you are more open to defeat than ever before. Ask the teams in the past that played in the World Cups, not only the English teams that have flattered to deceive, but the French against Senegal when as Champions clearly couldn't lose their opening game.

We know it happens, we therefore have guard against playing against these so called smaller nations to make sure it doesn't happen. After the motivation speech is over and the right team for this match has been selected once again, then we play the ninety minutes of plan and counter plan once more with our opponent looking to come out the other side, unscathed by injury but once again victorious. With two wins in the opening two games, we now know that we have the place in the last sixteen secured, but that brings about a new problem for the management team to decide upon and then action.

The third and final group match is against Belgium, the group favourites and the team that we had already identified as the strongest opponents we would face in the group stages.

However, how have they performed so far and are they looking strong or are they under pressure to get a result to stay in the competition?

My gut instinct is that this will be the group decider and so with it comes a key decision to make. You are in the last sixteen, well done for the first milestone, however, do you have any players in need of a rest or that are currently on yellow cards or suspended?

Having an understanding of this impact on your team structure and who and what might be available will have a huge influence on your decision making. As we said earlier, of course you want to win the group, logic tells you that it will give you the simpler last sixteen game, so once again the preparation and the research into the team that you know best from your group opponents comes into play and your final preparations are made.

Of course you are going to plan to win the group, that is the only real decision, but knowing that you are already through gives you greater scope for change. This has to balance with the belief that too much change at this time may rest the players before the last sixteen but when they are brought back together for the next round, will they gel again. Add to that playing the player on the fringe of the team in this last match and then watching him play the best game of his life, how do you then drop him back to the bench. No one said management was easy, this is why you are in the hot seat, but it is time to make your decision and then adapt as the final group game plays out over another ninety minutes.

The SMART FIFA Achievement Management!

So, with the group phase over, you need to give the recognition to your team and to celebrate the first achievement, being through to the knockout phases. Recognition of achievement, even the small steps, is a crucial part towards team success. Yes, I hear some people saying that it is only the group stages and the hard work is yet to be done, but there are now sixteen teams heading home and once again would love the chance to swap places with you.

So, sixteen teams left, but your focus is now on the number four. Only four of those team are going to be your opponents on your charge towards glory, the remainder will knock each other out along the way and so do not need to be your direct concern.

Also, you are now out of the group stage and so need to return to the little matter of governance. The rules have changed in certain places now, there is now three points for a win and one for a draw, it is no longer about points, this is knockout football. Simply put, lose one match and you are going home. Yes, the game is still going to be played over ninety minutes, but now there is also a matter of extra time and the dreaded English penalty kicks to take into account, so the rewards may now be higher as you step closer to the prize, but the risks loom larger also.

Using the sense of logic, I know there is no logic towards football, but for the sake of this paper, we will say that the seedings worked out correctly, this leads us to finishing second in the group behind Belgium after a thrilling and compelling 3-3 draw.

Due to finishing second, that now takes us into the last sixteen against the team that won Group H, so for this paper, the highest seeds, Poland.

The SMART FIFA Team Selection Management!

By now, you will know the routine that the team is going to go through for preparation and research again and as it happens, although you have finished second, Poland is a team that you have come across many times before and have a lot of background information on. Every game from this point onwards is crucial to win and so now team selection based on performance and energy becomes a key factor in the selection process.

Who is performing well and who not so, how are players working together and have you found a special gem in your team that now can make the real difference. The difference from the last sixteen onwards is that there is pressure on every player in every minute of the game. One simple mistake now and the dream of historical glory is over. As the management team you now have the task of keeping the players calm enough to relax but focused to deliver.

Ninety minutes will once again pass and in these ninety minutes the changes and counter changes by the management team fall under the microscope more than ever. It is not just the players everyone is watching now, it's every action you make and every decision you make. As the game draws closer to extra time to you hold back on a resource for the extra thirty minutes or play your hand now and try to win the game before full time so as to gain valuable rest time? Every decision you make has a lasting impression, not simply on the game, but on the tournament, the nation and on history. What will you be remembered for when the tournament is finally over?

Success, after a 2-0 win against Poland the nation rejoices for a short moment as it already looks to the game only four days away, against Germany. Yes, the old foe and so talk of penalty shoot-outs and re-runs on the TV of Stuart Pearce and Chris Waddle fill the airwaves.

The SMART FIFA Situational & Leadership Awareness!

You have a young team, a team that knows they have beaten the Germans recently and so shouldn't see the tournament game as any other than another match. Having to distract your team whilst also keeping them focused on what really matters is a real case of situational awareness and great situational leadership. Which players just need the bravado, which need the comforting hand and word to just let them know that everything is in place and everything is just right.

Yes, because it's Germany there is going to be little chance of resting players at this stage, but any player that has reached this stage and has not been suspended, will want to be involved in this match, otherwise they wouldn't be here. It is helpful that it is only four days between the games as although this does limit the time between matches for players to recover, it also means the gap between the game is shorter and maintaining focus becomes a little easier. Perhaps half a day off at this stage, just to let the team relax is in order and something that can just boost the morale and motivate them for the big match ahead.

All this time, as the team management, you have also been focusing on tactics and strategies, away from the telling eyes of the media and of the players, letting them know you know what the plan is and you know how you are going to implement it.

Quarter final match day arrives and you know you have your team just how and where you want them, with a short sharp word before you let them go out, with your tactical know how and the effort, enthusiasm and guile of the team, you have a 1-0 victory in ninety minutes. Yes, it was Germany, yes it was the quarter finals of the World Cup, but they are the team checking in at the airport for the next flight out to Berlin.

This is the moment to take a deep breath, the yellow cards are all cancelled and other than for any outstanding injuries, you now have a full squad of players to choose from. The euphoria from the nation in beating just a great foe has lead them to believe that you are now untouchable, but you know there are still two more steps until real celebration and you know that with the weight of expectation on you and your team, this is the moment you don't want to buckle. Who remembers the losing semi-finalists anyway? That's easy to answer, ask the group from Italia 90, ask Gary Lineker if he ever wonders what it just might have been like to walk out in the World Cup Final having got so close.

Seedings allowing, it is either Ronaldo and Portugal or Messi and Argentina, so a nice simple game to consider then. The reality of course is that it is your judgement against the judgement of the opposition and your team against theirs. Preparation and team selection is no different, it is quite simply choosing the right person for the right job at the right time. Whether that might be at the beginning of the game, as an early change or personnel or tactic or in the last minute, all that has truly changed is the context. It is how you manage the change of the situation, the pressure of the moment and the way you pass that perception of calm confidence to the team around you that gets you through this moment.

2-1 win and a place in the World Cup Final.

The SMART FIFA World Cup Final Attitude!

Every boy and girl that loves football, from the age of five dreams of lifting the World Cup for their country and this is your moment to be part of history. You consider what history has meant for all these years and all the heartache that has come along with it. Yes, we had '66 but that was then and no matter how long we want to remember that great day at Wembley Stadium, this is here and this is now.

Everything you have ever learned, every tactic you have ever considered and every moment, good and bad that has happened before is racing through your mind. This time however, you are now in the forefront of all the



media, the spotlight of the world and the 3.5 billion viewers are all on you.

Telling yourself that it is just one more match will calm you to a set degree, but knowing how much pressure you are under is what makes good managers, great managers and what makes great managers, world class managers. These days we use the words far too freely about being the world's greatest or being phenomenal, but this achievement, the one that stands before you in the next few hours, is yours and your teams to accomplish and to be remembered forever.

It is either the hosts Russia, or the mighty Brazil, but on this day, this special day, all the planning, the strategizing and the tactical know how is not going to stop you from achieving your ultimate goal.

From the first moment when you gained an understanding of the governance of the tournament, to when you devised your strategy for coming out of the groups, to then re-planning the knockout stages, one key milestone at a time, using the right assets, with the blend of experience and youth, with your own self-awareness, your team awareness and your situational awareness, in the right operational environment you reacted to pressure when and how you had to, in the right way, proving to yourself and to the rest of the world, you are truly World Cup Smart.

About the Author



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Professor Mark Reeson is a project management specialist with over thirty years' experience. A Fellow of the Association for Project Management, he has been involved in many project and programme consultative roles. Most recently Mark has been working with the Saudi Arabian Municipality of the Eastern Province to change the way that project management is carried out within the region, using his newly recognised SMART Sustainability Modelling for project and business management.

He was appointed a Professor of Project Management at the University of Business and Technology, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which was a culmination of his work in training and consulting in the region on matters that relate to project management, supply chain management and sustainability modelling. Having previously held the position of a specialist Sustainability Management Global Advisor, he has moved forward from that position and now regularly supports businesses and projects alike in streamlining their approaches to change and strategic development providing greater longevity in their business planning.

Having started his career in the Royal Air Force, Mark has continued to develop by working and delivering projects in multiple fields of industry ranging from the nuclear environment, into pharmaceuticals, finance and also the international sporting fields.

Mark has developed his role within project management through further experience with the nuclear industry and is now the owner of M R Project Solutions Limited where he has fulfilled the role of Project Management Advisor for the last three and a half years covering every continent. His role is very much client facing and Mark now almost permanently travels the world meeting clients, developing solutions and providing training for their project families either directly through his own organisation or in support of others. Mark's main role is the development and the consultation with many organisations on ensuring they choose the right approach or methodology to deliver their projects and then follows this up with the correct bespoke training programmes for how their company wants to share this learning with their staff members.

Mark has changed the approach to learning by the ongoing development of his original 'Living Learning' programme by introducing a new learning experience for all taking the classroom format and making it come to life with his popular and original 'Applied Learning' simulation

training and coaching technique. He has taken this forward over the past few years to introduce this training style so that project management learning and behaviour has now started to be delivered into the schools and colleges looking to develop the technical, behavioural and contextual skills and attitudes of their students.

As a regular public speaker Mark now shares his experience, knowledge and commitment with those associations wanting to move forward in a more sustainable and successful manner. Mark's next aim is to develop this further and to spread project management knowledge and competency to many more organisations worldwide, having already started with successful deliveries globally.

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