The 2018 FIFA World Cup

After four years of waiting, it’s time again to prepare your voice for a few weeks of shouting at the TV screen. The FIFA World Cup starts in Moscow on 14 June. The tournament will see 32 countries battle to decide who will lift the iconic golden trophy. Considering the last World Cup was watched by around 3.2 billion people – that’s almost half the world’s entire population – this is one event that is simply not possible to ignore.

The host country
This will be Russia’s first time hosting the tournament. The matches will take place in 12 stadiums, distributed across 11 cities. Russia is an enormous country, so most of the matches will be played in cities towards the west of the country to reduce travel time between matches for fans and teams. Even so, the distance between the host cities will be up to 1,500 miles. That’s about the same distance as between Moscow and London!

The Group Stage
The initial two weeks of the competition are called the Group Stage. The 32 competing countries have been divided into eight groups. Each country plays a match against the three other teams in their group. In this stage, any team can win, lose or draw a match. Based on the results of these matches, two teams from each group go through to the next round.
The round of 16

Once the Group Stage finishes, the rest of the tournament works as a knockout phase. This means that it is only possible to win or lose a match. If the score at 90 minutes is a draw, the match goes to extra time (30 minutes) or even a penalty shootout. The first stage of the knockout phase is called the round of 16, in which the teams who have qualified from the Group Stage play against each other. This decides which eight teams will move on to the finals.

The finals

On 6 and 7 July, the quarter-finals will take place. From the competing eight teams, the four winning teams will go through to the semi-finals. Finally, two remaining teams will go through to the World Cup final in Moscow on 15 July.

Experts’ predictions

Of course, everybody has their favourite team who they want to win. But the experts agree that some teams have a stronger chance. The winners of the last World Cup were Germany. They are still at the top of the FIFA global rankings and many people think that they could win the trophy again. Another team with good chances is Brazil. With five previous World Cup trophies, Brazil are the most successful team in the history of the tournament and could be able to win again. Other teams who are expected to do well are France, Argentina and Spain.

Star players

All eyes will be on football’s biggest superstars: Lionel Messi (for Argentina) and Cristiano Ronaldo (for Portugal). Despite their many successes in the Spanish league, neither player has ever lifted the World Cup trophy. Both players are in their thirties, meaning that this could be their last chance. Another player to watch will be Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian player who has scored so many goals for his UK club (Liverpool) this season. The top scorer of the 2014 World Cup was Colombia’s James Rodriguez, who is expected to impress fans once again. Brazilians are hoping that their star player Neymar will have recovered from a recent injury.

With so much talent, there’s no doubt that the 2018 World Cup is going to be an international obsession this June and July. So make sure you’re watching. And if you’re fortunate enough to be from one of the 32 competing nations, best of luck!
Tasks

Task 1
Are the sentences true or false?

1. In 2014, the World Cup was watched by more than 50 per cent of people in the world.
   Answer: True

2. The shortest distance between Russia’s host cities is 1,500 miles.
   Answer: True

3. At the end of the Group Stage, 16 teams go through to the next part of the tournament.
   Answer: True

4. In the knockout phase, every match has a penalty shootout.
   Answer: True

5. According to FIFA, the German team are number one in the world.
   Answer: True

6. Brazil have won more World Cup tournaments than any other team.
   Answer: True

7. Cristiano Ronaldo has had a lot of success playing for Spain.
   Answer: True

8. Brazil’s Neymar is expected to be the top scorer at World Cup 2018.
   Answer: True

Task 2
Complete the sentences with a word from the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>draw</th>
<th>lift</th>
<th>season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>through</td>
<td>top</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Thirty-two countries battle to decide who will draw the iconic golden trophy.

2. The matches will lift place in 12 stadiums.

3. In this stage, any team can win, lose or season a match.

4. Finally, two remaining teams will go through to the World Cup final in Moscow on 15 July.

5. They are still at the top of the FIFA global rankings.

6. Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian player who has scored so many goals for his UK club (Liverpool) this season .

Discussion
In your opinion, which team will win the 2018 World Cup? Which players will be the stars of the tournament?
Answers

Preparation task
1. e
2. g
3. c
4. b
5. f
6. h
7. a
8. d

Task 1
1. False
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. True
7. False
8. False

Task 2
1. lift
2. take
3. draw
4. through
5. top
6. season