

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2011

CAN THE ALL BLACKS TURN OFF THE CHOKE AND GO FULL THROTTLE?

The All Blacks are the red-hot favourites for this World Cup. However, although they've been favourites for the past five World Cups, it's been almost a quarter of a century since they took glory. It seems that the All Blacks are almost as good at choking as they are at rugby. And yet, this year they're competing on home turf. Will this be the fuel injection they need?

In this edition of the Taylor Fry newsletter we ask: Can the All Blacks beat the choke and convert their red-hot favourite status into the coveted golden cup? Or will the Wallabies beat the odds and take the glory? Or will the Samoans continue their recent form and beat everything, the odds and the others, to become first-time winners?

That's right, it's almost Rugby World Cup time and here at Taylor Fry we're feeling the fever. And so, following our [Soccer World Cup](#) tipping model glory, we've decided to take a tilt at the rugby.

To help you find your way through the maze of uncertainties, we've built a lean mean model and asked it to give us the statistical lowdown. As any sports nut knows, predicting the result of the World Cup isn't just about team form. It's also about who's up against who, and what the breakdown of the brackets stages are. So our model simulates every possible game – including each pass, kick, tackle, scrum, lineout, try and conversion – and gives the odds for each team in each stage, as well as predicting the winner of the William Webb Ellis Cup. Well, predicting the winner with all the guts that maths can muster. The rest is up to the men on the field and the place they make for themselves in history.

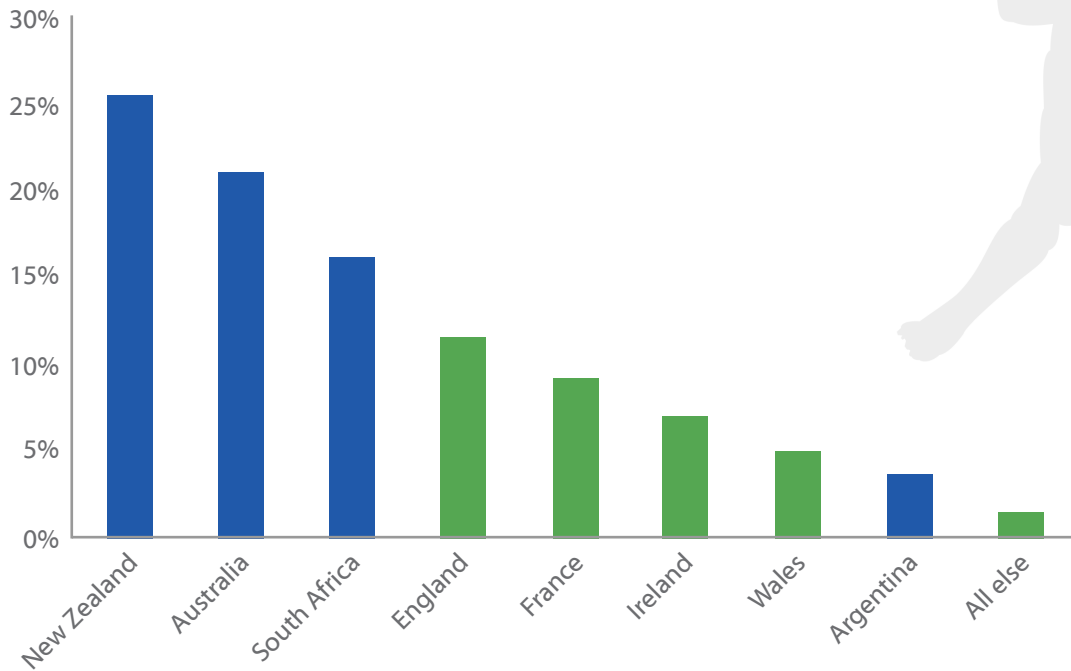
Southern Might?

Speaking of history, southern hemisphere teams have dominated the World Cup, with two wins each for the Springboks and the Wallabies. NZ, despite their undoubted prowess, have remained a one hit wonder, and as for the anti- antipodes, World Cup glory has gone north of the equator only once.

We've asked the TF simulator: will history repeat itself? The answer? There's a 2 out of 3 chance of a southern hemisphere victory. It seems that Southern Might might just be right, again.



Probability of winning the World Cup



Back in All Black?

For the hosts, the big question is: will the 2011 World Cup go down in history as just another missed opportunity?

Well, this is where our model really gets to strut its stuff. Given their rocking current form and home ground advantage, betting odds suggest that the All Blacks have almost a 50% chance of winning. However, the full story is a little more complex than that. When we take into account the All Blacks' historical tendency to choke at the last minute (but only when the stakes are at their highest) the model gives us the much less gutsy 25% chance of victory. That's if they can make it past a predicted Bok play-off in the semis.

Still, the Kiwis are the front-runners, with the Wallabies not far behind with a 21% chance of victory. Given our somewhat divided loyalties here at Taylor Fry (we've both Aussies and Kiwis on staff), this close call is causing some consternation.

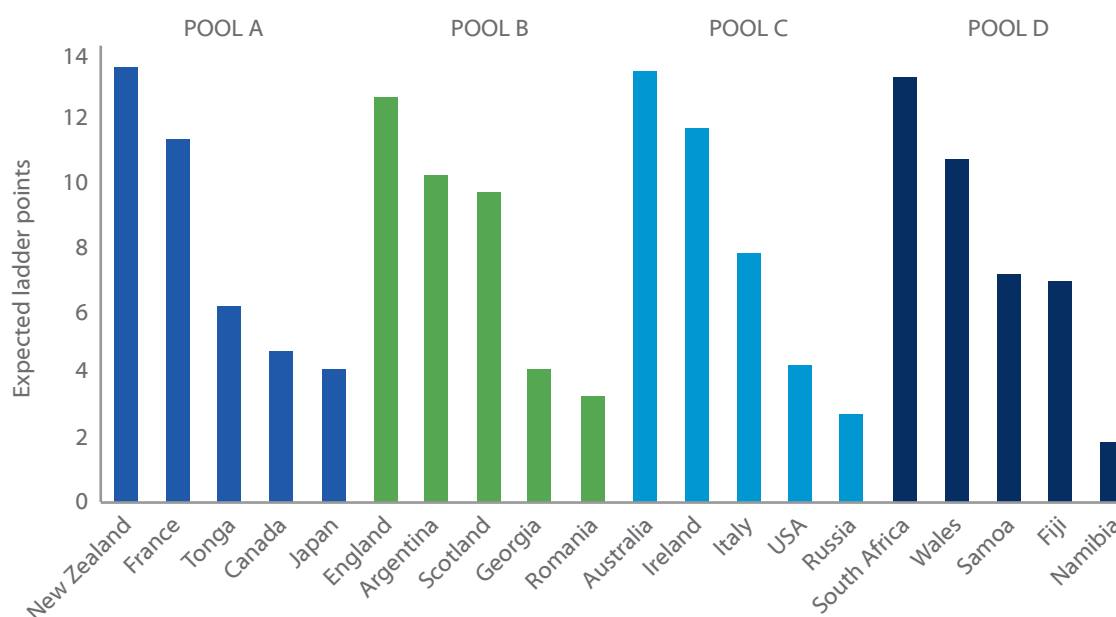
In the pool lads

Taking a closer look at who's up against who, pool C is by far the toughest, with Australia and Ireland jousting for top spot. They're old foes now, having been in the same group for 2 out of the last 3 World Cups.

Fortunately the Wallabies have always come up trumps. And the model isn't predicting anything new this year (phew!).



Expected ladder positions after the group



Clash of the Trans-Tasman titans? Or not....

In line with current world rankings, the Taylor Fry model expects the most likely final to be a Trans-Tasman rivalry, predicting this as a 1 out of 6½ chance. So at least some of us here at Taylor Fry have a good chance of being deliriously happy.

In other likelihoods, a Wallabies/Springboks final occurs 11% of the time. Luckily for the Wallabies, they belong on the opposite side of the draw to New Zealand and South Africa, and as we've mentioned, our model gives them almost as much of a shot at the final as the All Blacks.

The chances of an all-northern hemisphere grand final are pretty slim. But if it does happen it should be pretty thrilling, with our model giving bitter rivals England and Ireland the highest probability, with a 1 out of 30 chance.

In other bitter rivalries, Russia versus Georgia is a 1 in 330,000 chance, and a riot-patrolled final between the USA and Canada is expected to be a 1 in 140,000 chance.

Go the underdogs!

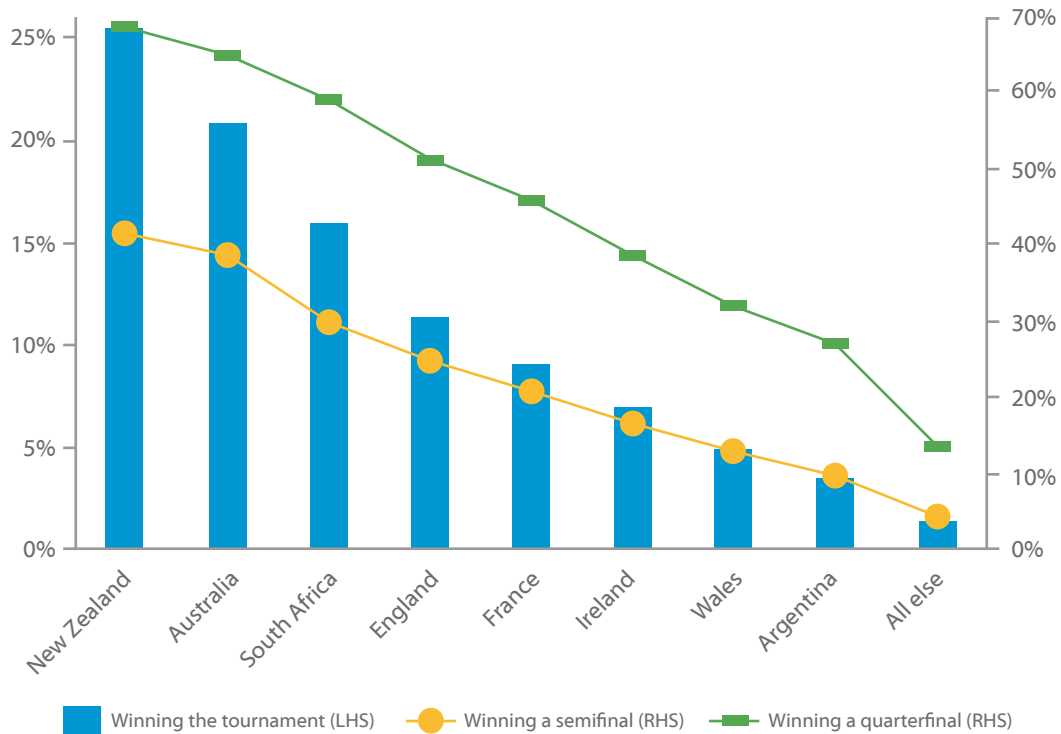
While the model isn't that optimistic about the Pacific Island nations of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, they do have a habit of punching above their weight, as the recent and unexpected Samoan pounding of Australia attests.

For instance, Fiji turned heads in 2007 when they defeated Wales in the pool stages to claim a quarter-finals berth. So be prepared for a few upsets from the Islanders.

But sometimes the underdogs just stay under: the biggest ever World Cup defeat was Australia against Namibia, 142 to nil. Sadly Namibia have to play the Springboks, Wales, Samoa and Fiji, a tough ask and one which looks virtually impossible for the minnow.

And we'd like to extend a warm rugby family welcome to Russia, which is in the running for the first time this year.

Probability of winning the World Cup, semi, quarters



Against all odds...

For those who really like a punt, get on the southern hemisphere bandwagon and go for Argentina. They meet England in the group stages and an upset there could mean they top the group and avoid the All Blacks and the Springboks in the later stages. Our model gives a 1 in 28 chance of the Argentineans being crowned world champs, which is a bit of a long shot, but they made it to the semis in 2007, so why not 2011?

Let the games begin

But wherever your allegiances lie, we say bring it on! Come October you can count on the Wallabies to stay the course, the Springboks to grind out the wins, the Pacific Island nations to razzle and dazzle, the folks from the northern hemisphere to be left wanting and the All Blacks to choke. Or not.

'Go the wallabies!'

'the only choking going on now is to me - aargh...'

'Go the All Blacks!'

'the last word from the Kiwis at Taylor Fry!'



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