How To Bet On Football

While the central aim of outsmarting the bookies hasn't changed for the punter, there are of course all sorts of ways to place a bet on football matches these days. In order to eke out some profit, it's worth nosediving down various paths to find the angle deserving of the greatest attention.

Record

The match outcome is an obvious place to start and as with any market, patterns that emerge and hold true consistently shouldn't be lightly ignored. For example, Everton have been desperately poor on the road against the best teams in recent campaigns, going just W1-D14-L31 at top-six finishers over the past eight since 2011/12. Even that sole victory came over a Southampton side that finished sixth in 2015/16, while in addition they've lost four of five winless trips with the current top six this term.

Although patterns like these must be looked at, finding value is the be all and end all, so the football betting odds must also be taken into consideration. The best team doesn't always win and taking the Everton example, on many occasions the Toffees were able to hold their opponents to stalemates and backing the home win wasn't profitable below a certain price.

Over those past eight campaigns, Everton were W1-D4-L10 when their top-six hosts were bigger than 1.7 to win and D10-L21 when below that threshold. Despite losing around two-thirds of these clashes in both cases, the difference in prices would have led to a 2.1% loss when on the short side and a 28.4% profit at the bigger prices on offer when getting behind Everton's opponents on the outright.

Circumstance

Beyond those that have produced similar outcomes time and time again, many teams are worth paying attention to by virtue of recent form or circumstance. It may just be fleeting success or a mere dip in results, but it's always useful to have an understanding as to why there was a change in fortunes. For example, a new manager at the helm has the potential to raise a team out of a slump, particularly if the previous incumbent was deeply unpopular with the squad, though sometimes the problems at a club run deeper than the dugout and you shouldn't just bank in an instant revival.

Alternatively, an injury to a key player or two can wreak havoc if squad depth is lacking. Man City have found that out at centre-back in the absence of Aymeric Laporte, conceding twice as many goals per game without him in the starting lineup since the beginning of last season, and winning 17 of the last 18 he's featured in. while Crystal Palace can often find themselves on the losing side when talisman Wilfried Zaha fails to start. 2016/17 was the first time the now 27-year-old reached double figures for goals and assists combined in the top flight, and since that season the Eagles have lost a whopping 74% of their games without the Ivorian international.

Tactics can also prove crucial in certain situations. Sometimes managers appear to repeat mistakes rather than learning from them and that applies to the best in the business too. Pep Guardiola has long struggled on the road in Champions League football, finding teams that counter at pace problematic, with a recent win at the Bernabeu bucking the trend. His only other victories i10 charge of away European knockout ties at either Bayern or City came over Arsenal, Basel and Schalke, rather than the truly elite sides that City need to beat in order to realize their ambitions.

Handicaps

There are many occasions where we may favour one team over the other, but where the plausible threat of a draw leaves the match outcome risky at the prices. In these situations, it's worth taking some cover by plumping for draw no bet or the double chance. These are essentially Asian handicaps (+0 and +0.5 respectively), while there are other options to get partially behind a team via this method. Moreover, negative handicaps (European or Asian) afford the opportunity to back teams we're confident can win by a greater margin, but are too slim to back in the outright.

Where the handicap provides little value

Different teams will establish different patterns and the handicap is by no means the only way to get a big enough price when a mismatch comes about. Over in Serie A, Juventus are quite often at very short odds, which is understandable given their domestic dominance. However, they're not infallible and rarely win by big margins like some of their fellow European heavyweights, often leaving them unattractive on the outright or handicaps. A reliably efficient nature can lead to good value backing the one-goal winning margin though, while on home turf alone their sturdy defence provides plenty of opportunities to land a win to nil.

Weigh up relevant factors

While some patterns are long standing (like Barcelona's imperious record at the Nou Camp in Europe), teams can quickly change over a short period of time with the departures and arrivals each transfer window brings. Indeed, the Monaco team of 2016/17 featured the likes of Kylian Mbappe, Falcao, Fabinho and Bernardo Silva amongst others, but was swiftly dismantled and they haven't reproduced their success domestically or on the continental stage. The prevalence of recent form over past record must be weighed in the balance, and ultimately knowledge is key here as to working out what data sample is most relevant to look at.

At the most obvious end of the spectrum, looking at a promoted side over their first few games of the season, results from the previous campaign have to be treated with a degree of skepticism – especially if they've made significant additions since then. However, not everything about promoted teams' past results is irrelevant, and it remains to be seen whether other teams can emulate the recent successes of Wolves and Sheffield Utd.

Most teams are not heading into the season off the back of promotion, however, and there are various opposition types that can be used to narrow down the relevance of past results. Man Utd provide a fine example this season, at least up to the point of signing Bruno Fernandes. His arrival has galvanized the club and brought sorely needed creativity to the midfield, but prior to that the Red Devils were often dropping points in unexpected quarters. Up against teams outside the current top seven, United went W2-D1-L5 on the road up until that point, failing to score in any of those defeats, and a tidy 124.25% profit was to be had in opposing them in those games.

Summary

Whether it's getting behind teams in one form or another, or nothing to do with the likely winner such as over/under goals or a both teams to score bet, patterns are key to unearthing some value. However, they can only effectively be relied upon where the data sample is limited to a relevant period that won't skew results, the selection of which requires up to date knowledge of a club's performances or circumstances.