

Did people beat FIFA's "predictions" about the EM 2008?

This is a short summary of the online study "Who will be the European champion in 2008?", which was run just before the start of the European championship in June 2008¹. 517 participants from 50 countries (i) indicated their interest in and their expertise about soccer, (ii) predicted the winner of the 24 group games and finally (iii) reported for a random subset of the team's players whether they recognized their names or not. The average age was 29 years; 40% percent of participants were female. On average, participants recognized 29% of the players and indicated an interest/expertise of 4.1 on a scale from 1 to 7.

Did people beat FIFA's "prediction"s about the EM 2008? A team's FIFA rank should reflect the strength of that team; the "FIFA rank strategy" predicted that the team with the better FIFA rank wins a game.² To answer this question the predictions for the 21 group games were analyzed, which did not end with a tie³. The table below shows how many percent of the games the FIFA rank and participants (on average) correctly predicted⁴.

The average participant correctly predicted 62% of the games, whereas the FIFA rank only achieved 57%. In other words, the average forecaster got one more game correct. Sixty-three percent of participants were better than the FIFA rank. Furthermore, people who recognized more players, predicted slightly better than people who recognized fewer players. Similar results were found for people who did (vs. did not) indicate interest in or expertise about soccer. Interestingly however, even these non-interested "non-experts" were better than the FIFA rank and they only fell about one game short when compared to the interested "experts".

In sum, (i) people did beat FIFA's predictions about the EM 2008 and (ii) self-described soccer experts did not make much better predictions than self-described non-experts.

Who's predictions?	% predictions correct	
	On average	Middle 50%
All participants (N = 517)	62%	57% - 71%
... who recognized <i>more</i> than 29% of player's names	65%	57% - 71%
... who recognized <i>less</i> than 29% of player's names	60%	52% - 67%
... who indicated interest/expertise <i>higher</i> than 4.1 (on a scale from 1 to 7)	65%	57% - 71%
... who indicated interest/expertise <i>lower</i> than 4.1 (on a scale from 1 to 7)	59%	52% - 67%
"FIFA rank strategy": Predict that the team with the better FIFA rank wins		57%

¹ <http://phpserver.psych.unibas.ch/em2008/>

² FIFA ranks were collected four weeks before the start of the Championship. Of course a lot of different things could have been analyzed; every analysis makes some simplifying assumptions and there are certainly multiple ways of analyzing the data. The analyses presented are just one possible look at the data at hand.

³ In the online study, participants could not predict a tie.

⁴ The column "Middle 50%" in the table indicates how much the middle 50% of participants vary on some measure. For example, if one orders all 517 participants according to how accurate their predictions were, cuts off the top 25% and the bottom 25% of participants, then the range of the remaining, middle 50% of people gives a good summary of how accurate a large portion of participants were.