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## England expects: style, flair and passion at the World Cup

**Drawing on many years' experience of the international menswear industry, Nick Bell assesses England's chances of making an impact on the World Cup and wonders whether we might have missed an opportunity for sartorial success.**

A casual exchange on Twitter with the editor of the Leisure Review on the subject of touchline sartorial etiquette led to a discussion on the merits of official team uniforms and whether they reflected or influenced performance on the pitch.

A quick poke around our own company archive at DAKS threw up a photo of the England Football team, resplendent in their light grey, double-breasted cool wool merino suits, standing on the steps waiting to board their Britannia Airways flight from Luton to the 1986 Mexico World Cup. Not much is remembered of our performance on the pitch beyond the fact that we 'came close' only to be brought down by the hand of God but those suits certainly made a statement.

Our current team, judging by a recent photo spread in the pages of GQ, will travel to Brazil in a grey, single-breasted two-piece supplied by M&S. Safe, does the job, uncontroversial and unlikely to cause offence, but also unlikely to excite, inspire or indeed last the distance. Italy, I see, have turned to Dolce & Gabbana for their black, slim-fit number. Styled to within an inch of their lives, the Italians are expected to offer under-stated flair while getting results and even if they do occasionally get over-defensive, they will look good while doing it. The Germans can rely on Hugo Boss, a solid performer that will adapt to any situation and leave the wearer in no doubt that he has a safe investment that will see him through to the end.

For England the situation gets no better when looking to the leaders of the pack, the men entrusted with inspiring the players to unleash their talents and cut a swathe through any defence with style and panache. From an England perspective, our enduring images are Graham Taylor, who never quite shook off the Turnip jibe, or Steve McClaren cowering under an umbrella on the Wembley touchline. Even when we went further afield hoping for some continental flair Sven delivered only style over substance and a fashion-heavy WAG-fest in Baden Baden. Rather than delivering Italian design and style, Fabio Capello played it dour and safe. Taking away Wayne's Playstation in South Africa proved fatal but perhaps the safety-first approach of that FA-badged blazer played its part.

If only we could turn to a Joachim Low, smouldering on the touchline, adjusting his carefully knotted scarf while inspiring his young charges to swat away anyone daring to present themselves before them. Who can forget Cesar Menotti, black suit, black tie, white shirt, pacing his area in Argentina 1978, a cigarette on the go reminding his Argentina team that anything less than a win meant a chat with the Junta? Or Enzo Bearzot, the manager of Italy at Spain 1982: seersucker jacket, blue Oxford-cotton button-down, plain navy knitted tie. He encouraged his team to

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be flexible and adventurous, and ultimately they lifted the World Cup, overcoming Germany in the final.

For England, Brazil 2014 might be yet another World Cup where we look back ruefully on missed opportunities. Our very own Paul Smith can cut a sharp suit, Jermyn Street's best can furnish a dashing shirt, Northampton's finest can protect those precious feet, and all the accoutrements of the modern-day footballer can be safely tucked away in a fine Mulberry holdall. We should have all we need to send the team off with the confidence to stroll through the competition and make us proud, even if their most admiring glances are restricted to the walk along the beach at Copacabana.

We can hope, we can dream but for those contemplating a wager on England it is worth noting that Marks and Spencer recently announced yet another drop in profits and, despite the signing of star names to reinvigorate their performance, sales of their clothing lines slipped behind Next for the first time. Plus ça change and all that.

**Nick Bell is one of the many experienced internationals in the DAKS squad and after a career in menswear and tailoring spanning decades he can spot a well-cut collar from 100m. Founded more than a century ago, DAKS has become synonymous with British style and has provided suits for the England football squad on numerous occasions, perhaps most notably for the World Cup in 1966 but also in 1970, 1980, 1990 and 1992.**

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