

He's one of the men behind the microphone whose distinctive voice is regularly heard by millions of football fans. John "Motty" Motson, king of the sheepskin coat, is already preparing for his part in this year's Euro 2004 tournament. He's fired up and eager to get to Portugal.

"I'd like to wait until the end of the Premiership season and after the FA Cup Final to start my preparation, but unfortunately time doesn't permit that," says Motty. "I've been thinking about it during the season, making notes and watching all the friendly matches, trying to build up a picture of the teams taking part."

So how do European tournaments, in Motty's opinion, compare with the World Cup? Some people, he says, have tried to over-simplify it by saying it's the World Cup without Brazil and Argentina.

"I understand what they mean," he adds. "It's a more condensed tournament with only 16 teams taking part instead of 32, so you get to the heart of it slightly quicker. Also, I think to the viewing public, a greater majority of the players will be familiar," he says. "With no disrespect to the teams from Asia and Africa, they're largely unknown to a home audience, whereas you've got quite a few countries in this championship where some of the players play in the Premiership."

Motty has commentated on many tournaments during his career, but the 1984 tournament in France, which England weren't part of, sticks in his memory because there was one really outstanding match where France beat Portugal 3-2.

"It was the semi-final in Marseille, I think, and Portugal were leading 2-1. The match went into extra time and Michel Platini scored the

winning goal in the last minute," recalls Motty. "It was a very dramatic game, one which stands out in my mind. Euro 96 stands out too, as England got to the brink of the final."

Once the tournament begins, a lot of Motty's homework involves watching the matches he's not commentating on, which will be screened on Portuguese television. Unlike the last World Cup in Japan which, says Motty, was one of the most logistically difficult tournaments he's ever had to do, the time factor in Portugal will allow him to do that.

"Some of the games played in Korea weren't even shown in Japan. The Japan World Cup was unique in the fact that it wasn't possible to see the teams you were next going to commentate on, but in Portugal, hopefully the way it's structured, I can top up my pre-tournament homework by watching these teams on television."

A typical day for Motty during the tournament involves last minute preparation, getting to the stadium, reading the day's papers and catching up on all the latest news. Even when he's not commentating on a match, he's still working.

"If I'm not commentating, then I'll make sure

“It wouldn’t surprise me to see the Czech Republic go through and either Holland or Germany miss out, because I think the Czech Republic are a very underrated side.”

With thoughts turning to England, Motty sees this year’s tournament as a bit of a chequered one for the team, following disappointments in 1988 and 2000.

“I think the nation will be really disappointed if we don’t qualify, of course, and I think people are expecting England to go one step further than in Japan. I’d really like to think that England would get to the semi final. Beyond that you can’t really predict it, because you don’t know who their opponents are likely to be.”

Commentating on the finals of such a huge tournament is a real buzz for any commentator, but for Motty, the finals are something apart from the rest.

“Any commentator worth his salt would want to be remembered for the number of World Cup finals and European championship finals he’s done in his career. You get an FA Cup final every year. I know it has its own special place in the calendar, but for every four FA Cup finals, you only get one of these. The same applies for the World Cup.”

So, does Motty get a chance to have a break at the end of this year’s tournament?

“When we come back from Portugal it’s about five weeks until the Premiership season starts again, and of course we have the return of *Match Of The Day*,



If there's ever going to be a good time to play France, then it's the opening match of Euro 2004 – which could be lucky for England. That's according to BBC TV commentator Steve Wilson, anyway.

“France lost to Senegal in their first game of the World Cup so if you're going to play them it's not a bad thing that it's the first game of the tournament,” he says hopefully. “I don't think England are in the worst group; I would fancy us on paper to beat Croatia and Switzerland, and then that should be enough regardless of the game against France – although I'd rather not lose the opening game!”

But it's a measure of the quality on show at Euro 2004 that Steve is taking nothing for granted.

“All the groups are really hard,” he comments. “And there are some great derby matches in the group stages – Germany v Holland; Portugal v Spain, England v France; they really get the juices going and any one of those would be a fantastic final, so I think that goes to show how good all the groups should be.

“I remember in Euro 2000, even though England didn't do that well, almost every game was really high quality. From a football purist's point of view it was a fantastic tournament because the standard of football was so high, and I think Euro 2004 could be even better.”

And he's optimistic that it will be better for England too. “I actually think we've got a decent chance of making the semi-finals. I think beyond that might be a bit tricky. But I really hope we do well, obviously.”

And not just from a fan's point of view – somehow working on a tournament once England go out is just that bit flatter, he says.

“I can remember in the World Cup we were doing the quarter final between Germany and the USA just after England went out to Brazil. I sat there in the stadium in Korea with Joe Royle, who was summarising for BBC Television, watching England lose, and we sort of sat there and looked at each other and it was actually one of the hardest games that you could imagine doing. We had to say, right we've got to forget that for the next couple of hours

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And now his “few bits” have expanded so much that Euro 2004 marks a new era for Steve. “I’m moving off radio completely after the end of the domestic season to do *Match Of The Day*,” he explains. “As time has gone on I prefer doing TV so I’m pleased, although I really enjoyed doing Radio Five Live.”

But though he’ll only be working on the BBC’s televised games at Euro 2004, he’s still preparing as comprehensively as ever.

“My preparation has really started now in that even though squads haven’t been named, if you see a Portuguese player or a Dutch player or a Spanish player doing something in the Champions League or UEFA Cup tie, or read about them in their domestic league, you make a note of it. Then when the coaches name their final squads I really kick into action full-time and I will find out as much as I can about each player, and information such as the country’s previous history in internationals against the countries they are going to play in the tournament.

“I do everything on computer and I like to, as much as possible, have it done before I get there so that once there I’ve got time to go and watch training sessions, go to press conferences and things like that, and not have to worry too much about the nitty gritty of who Portugal’s left back plays for and how many times he’s played for his country.”

And Steve’s research has really fired him up for Euro 2004.

“I’ve been looking at the website to look at the stadia and things like that, and they look fantastic. From what I’ve seen so far they’ve done a really great job of getting the grounds together and I’m sure the organisation is going to be really good. I have covered a few games in Portugal and they are pretty fanatical, so I think the atmosphere in the grounds should be really good as well.

“I have to say the overall experience of doing a

Five Live presenter Mark Pougatch has mixed feelings about England having France in their Euro 2004 group. On the one hand, Mark reckons it's a tough call because France are his tips for the championship. But on the other hand, at least he'll get to see them play.

"I watched all three group games with France at Euro 2000 and they were just unbelievable," he recalls admiringly. "Zidane in particular; I remember watching him play against Denmark and thinking this guy was like a ballet dancer with a football at the end of his toe. He was mesmeric, just sensational, and because it was a small ground we were quite close so you could really see how good he was – his balance, his ability, his technique, his control, his vision. To see him in the flesh that close up; I remember thinking this guy is on a different planet."

And despite – or rather, because of – France's disastrous World Cup in 2002, Mark reckons they're the team to beat this time round. "I do think they'll win; they've got the best team, the best players and they know that after what happened in the World Cup that everybody is looking at them, they've got to deliver," he says. "I think they'll be unbelievably determined, absolutely gunning for it because of the World Cup. If you look at their team they are terrifying. I look at England v France and I'm absolutely petrified. I think if we get a draw there that will be a great result, I really do."

And even with something from the France game, the hard work's not over, with Switzerland and Croatia also in Group B. "There's no duff team there, no margin for error," says the 36-year-old Londoner. And that's the mark of the European Championships; every match is extremely tough, even in the group phase.

"Because obviously the World Cup has to reflect global football you inevitably get two or three teams you know aren't going to do anything, or provide much of a match for anybody; you never get that in the European Championship," says Mark. "In a way you could argue they are stronger than the World Cup because European football is so strong – just add in Argentina and Brazil and it could look like the World Cup. In fact the group stages are probably better than the group stages at the World Cup."

Which could go some way to explaining England's dismal record in these championships – in recent times they have never qualified from the group phase, apart from when the tournament was held in England.

"Let's face it, we have an appalling record," grimaces Mark. "Apart from the one that was held here our record is diabolical. but Euro 88, 92, 2000... absolutely shocking, the lot of them."

Though he reckons we will at least make it out of the group this time round, it's as much the way England play as the result that he'll be looking for.

"When England went out of the World Cup it was so deflating because they went out in such a limp way. I'm not expecting them to win, but if they give it a really good go that's what you ask for – like Italia 90, like Euro 96."

It also makes his job more enjoyable, as he'll



course keeping an eye on the other teams in the tournament.

“I want to watch Totti, I want to see just how good he is because, everyone goes on about him; I want to watch Zidane – I know that’s an obvious thing to say but we don’t see him every week; I want to see Nedved because he was European Player of the Year; there are some really good young Dutch players, like Robben who’s going to Chelsea, Van der Vaart who’s at Ajax; and there are a couple of players in the Spanish side – if he plays, Reyes, he’s looked really good for Arsenal, and Joaquín Sánchez of Real Betis,” he says with obvious relish.

And he shows equal enthusiasm for the names in Five Live’s own Euro 2004 team.

“We’ll have people who’ve played in these things, Terry Butcher and Chris Waddle; they’re always a font of great stories. Then we’re going to get some managers, Gordon Strachan and Alan Curbishley, which is great – we know them anyway because we interview them and talk to them regularly.

“So you’ve got a nice mix – you’ve got us, the commentators, the journalists; then you’ve got people we know really well already like Terry and Chris who we’ve used for five or six years; then we’ve got people we know a bit but we don’t know them socially. Everyone mucks in together and it’s great fun!”

And from his times there on holiday, he reckons Portugal will provide the perfect setting for a great European Championships. “I like the climate, I like the seafood... the people are quite laid back, they love their football, it’s just a great package,” he grins.





Holland as potential winners,” he says cagily. “And there is nearly always one surprise team. If you look back at World Cups and European Championships, Turkey finished third in the last World Cup which was never on the agenda, Denmark won the championship in 92 against expectation, the Czechs got to the final at Wembley which wasn’t expected, Croatia got to the World Cup semi finals too... I’m not sure necessarily that they’ll be a surprise team because they qualified so strongly, but the dangerous outsider this time would probably be the Czech Republic and I think they could easily eliminate either Holland or Germany from their group, so that would put the cat among the pigeons.

“But it’s all down to availability really. If England get their top eleven out on the pitch they are in there with a chance, but I think there are certain guys – Gerrard, Campbell, Owen – who they cannot afford to be without.”

But it’s another England star that Mike is watching out for. “The player I’m looking forward to seeing most of all, actually, is one of our own and that’s Wayne Rooney. He’s such an unknown quantity at international level – I can see parallels between him and Gascoigne at Italia 90, I can see him making the same sort of impact, so he’s probably the player I’m looking forward to seeing most of all.”

Other players Mike will be keeping an eye on include Luis Figo, in his home country and possibly playing in his last big tournament; Pavel Nedved of the Czech Republic, the European Footballer of the Year; and rising star Zlatan Ibrahimovic, the Swedish youngster who recently scored a cracking goal against England. And then, of course, there are the Premierships stars to look out for.

“One thing that’s changed dramatically about the European Championships since it started is that so many of the players are now playing in

the Premiership,” Mike says. “There are so many club rivalries now. Half the French team are Premiership players – it’s great in a sense, it gives the tournament an extra dimension. You’re struggling to find any country that hasn’t got some Premiership player in it.”

But it’s what happens off the field that will ultimately have the biggest say in how much Mike enjoys the Euro 2004.

“All the tournaments I’ve followed overseas have been absolutely hijacked by the loonies – 88, 92, and 2000, when England came very close to getting thrown out of the last tournament,” he frowns.

“It is obviously now much harder for people who are intent on causing trouble to travel, but I’m reluctant to tempt fate,” he adds. “It doesn’t take too many people to ruin it for the vast majority and because of all the past experiences we’ve had, that is my biggest apprehension – that you’ll get an element of people who aren’t even going to go to the games, who’ll just go somewhere like Faro and cause problems.”

It’s no coincidence that his happiest memory from any European Championships was at the trouble-free Euro 96, held in England.

“The night England beat Holland at Wembley 4-1, that’s the best I’ve seen England play since the 1970 World Cup in Mexico,” he recalls. “It was also, significantly, the one tournament where we were just reporting on football and nothing else.”