

Q&A interview between Matthew Walton and "The Scotsman"

Q1. Your real identity is purposely kept secret and you're only known as "The Scotsman", but without blowing your cover, can you tell me a bit more about yourself, your background and your experience in the betting industry?

A1. I live just outside Glasgow. I have a degree in Maths and have always been fanatical about football, watching everything that was on TV when I was a kid.

I was casually betting throughout University but in my final year I became aware of jobs for Sports Traders and Odds Compilers with a Maths degree being the requirement, so I thought that would be my dream job! I started as a Junior Trader with a well-known firm in London after graduating and that was a real eye opener in terms of properly understanding the industry.

I then started pricing up the four Scottish leagues for myself using my new-found skills, ranking the teams in terms of who would be favourites on a neutral venue and reading match reports every week taking particular notice of teams that had been especially lucky or unlucky in a match. These principals have stayed with me to this day, albeit my pricing methods are now a world away from when I started in terms of sophistication and complication!

At the start of the 2007/08 season I took part in a Scottish football tipping competition on the Betfair forum and did so for three seasons, winning one year and showing a profit in all three. I haven't really looked back since.

In my career so far I've worked for major UK bookmakers as a trader, I had a particularly enlightening time at a spread betting firm and also learned a huge amount working for an Asian betting syndicate where we would be placing bets into the Asian markets.

I have been continually improving my own pricing methods over the past eleven years, picking things up along the way as I look to constantly improve and keep up with technological advances in the industry.

Q2. From visiting you in your home city of Glasgow, and talking to you on the phone countless times, I know you live and breathe Scottish football.

So can you just explain why you're so dedicated to it and why it's such a profitable area to focus on?

A2. I suppose I'm interested and dedicated to Scottish football because I'm Scottish and I've been so heavily engrossed in football since as far back as I can remember. To say it's my "*real passion*" is a gross understatement. I absolutely love studying and pricing up teams and the financial benefits it brings me and my family make all the work I put in worthwhile.

Scottish football is certainly a niche area with the level of media coverage nowhere near what you find for the English and European leagues, so it takes a lot of burrowing away to find out team-news and information about players which the bookmakers just don't have time to do. This is one of the main reasons why I feel I'm one step ahead of the bookmakers.

Q3. On a similar theme, the vast majority of my private database live in England and I know most of them just stick to betting on English teams.

Why would you encourage them to broaden their horizons and start winning money from Scottish football?

A3. I think any punter would be happy being profitable regardless of the competition they're betting on. I suppose most people watching the weekend football scores come in will see the Scottish results and be mildly curious about what's going on north of the border.

With all the bookies pricing up Scottish football early in the week, a hugely viable betting opportunity exists to take advantage of leagues that don't see the same attention as the bigger ones.

Q4. Having an edge over the bookies and other punters is critical to accumulating tax-free cash over the course of a season.

Can you please tell me what you do which marks you out as an expert who knows how to extract money from Scottish football?

A4. There are two main reasons why I believe I have an edge in the Scottish markets in particular - a lack of publically available data to use for pricing models and a lack of information about team-news.

Betting syndicates generate their own advanced data by watching full games and then coding chances, while bookmakers will buy it from companies like Opta in order to try and produce the most accurate pricing models.

Websites such as WhoScored and Squawka provide this Opta data for free to the public, but they don't cover even the Scottish Premiership, let alone the lower leagues! Outside of the top division there just isn't the footage for syndicates or bookmakers to be able to have that advanced level of data needed, which creates a clear advantage for someone like me!

The same can be said for the team and player information. In order to know how a specific player being absent from a team should move the price, it's important to have accurate player ratings and access to team-news.

Granted, the syndicates will have contacts within clubs to give them all the latest news, but my style of betting is to get into the market before the syndicates do, taking advantage of prices before any potential movements the day before or on the day of games.

It's my belief that using my own pricing model and player adjustment techniques on the leagues that don't have publically available information is where my edge lies.

Q5. Can you give me an insight in to how you go about targeting value bets in your favoured 1-X-2 and Over/Under Total Goals markets?

A5. All my prices are done by generating Supremacy and Total Goals quotes for each match using my pricing model and then adjusting for things like team-news and motivation.

These quotes are then transferred into 1-X-2, Asian Handicap and Over/Under prices and compared to the market prices to seek out the value. I don't bet everything that my prices throw up, as I then investigate further and usually whittle them down to about four or five best 1-X-2 and the same number of Goals bets in a normal four league weekend.

Of course, with bookmakers becoming smarter and the markets ever more efficient, it's sometimes necessary to place some bets much earlier in the week so as not to miss a price and some weeks there are fewer bets.

Q6. You've already mentioned your pricing model. Have you been working to improve it even more in the lead up to the new season kicking off on Saturday, July 15th?

In fact, have you been adjusting and fine-tuning any of the strategies that have been so successful for you in the past?

A6. Absolutely!

The summer break gives me time to make all the improvements that I want to make throughout the season. Mainly these are time-saving things within my own spreadsheets and calculations, but I'm always reading articles on analytics and betting so if anything in particular catches my eye I look at how I can integrate that into my current techniques.

It's a constant battle for perfection. I don't change anything without testing first and obviously I won't be changing the fundamentals that have proven so successful for me in past seasons, but there are always new ideas and techniques that can be improved upon.

The two main areas I've been working on this summer have been Home Advantage and the linking between teams in different leagues for Cup games.

Q7. 71% of the bets you've shared with me and my members over the last couple of seasons have been outside of the SPL (Scottish Premier League).

Is there any particular reason for this?

A7. I treat all four leagues the same in terms of pricing and it's the same methods used on each.

I think there's more of an edge in the lower leagues however, for the reasons I mentioned earlier about lack of data and information.

The bottom two divisions - League One and League Two - in particular are unique in their own way. There are now only a few teams in these leagues that are full-time, so the majority of the players all have 'normal' jobs, train two nights a week and receive £50 or less on a Saturday for their troubles.

Instead of teams that have an array of quality players, there are perhaps only one or two key men per team and if they are missing for a game it can have a much bigger impact than in the top leagues. All four leagues get the same attention from me, which I know isn't the case for the bookmakers.

Q8. Your performance figures for the 2016/17 season came in at 271 bets, a 45.39% winning strike rate and a profit to advised stakes of 53.67 points.

Do you expect to repeat this for 2017/18 or do you have even bigger targets?

A8. I'd be looking to at least repeat these figures for the new season, but as I've mentioned with my continued search for improvement, I'm always hoping to do even better.

My figures for the 2015/16 season were very similar, following some major improvements I made to my model around April 2015. With the same conditions for the season ahead I'm confident of another successful campaign. I'd be happier with a higher strike rate of course, but it's less of an issue as my average price advised on my 1-X-2 bets is slightly above 2/1.

Q9. I've flagged up to members in the past that some of your lower league bets can be price-sensitive and they should always have multiple accounts with the bookies and betting exchanges.

Have you got any specific comments about this and what general advice would you give to someone on the subject of getting on who is looking to copy your bets for the new season?

A9. Yes it's essential that members have accounts with most of the major firms in order to have the best chance at getting on at the advised prices.

Marathonbet operate to the smallest margin earliest in the week so are likely to be best price for a lot of my bets.

There are only a few firms that will put up Asian Handicap prices in Scotland without needing to wait on the actual Asian market (Pinnacle, SBO) to use as a guide, these being Bet365, BetVictor and 32Red/888Sport/Unibet who are all the same company.

Going up with prices before the rest shows some sign of confidence in their own prices, so they *should* be more likely to lay a bet than the others who are just offering a service by blindly copying the market price.

With my bets being 1-X-2 and Over/Under, it's my intention to get on before the market in Asia has properly formed in order to take advantage of the early inefficiencies. For football, the big Asian books set the price for the whole industry and they're often much later going up with their lower league prices than for the major leagues, often delaying until the day before the game. This presents an opportunity for me and our members to place our bets before the market has 'corrected' itself, and betting in the traditional markets rather than Asian Handicaps it shouldn't alert the books to any 'sharp' behaviour.

Q10. Based on your years of experience within the betting industry and the income you generate from strategically betting on Scottish football,

what tips, hints and general words of advice would you give to regular punters trying to improve their own betting?

A10. The key for me is to specialise in one area if looking to improve your personal betting.

It's not possible to know everything about every major European football league for example. I focus on the four Scottish leagues, which is 42 teams in total, and I find that I'm at capacity in terms of workload each week.

When you need to have an opinion about each team, know all the players in order to adjust for absences, along with doing the research for team-news, then it's a time intensive task.

Looking at my first method of pricing up teams back from 2006, I think that's an excellent place to start for anyone who doesn't have odds compiling experience.

Specialise in a league or two and keep a rankings table with the teams in order of who'd be favourites if they played on a neutral venue tomorrow, changing the order accordingly after every round of fixtures.

The best team would be set to 0 and all the teams below would be the size of underdog they'd be in terms of Supremacy, i.e. Chelsea 0, Tottenham +0.3, Man City +0.4.

Read the match reports and look at match stats (even advanced stats if available) and note down teams that have been unfortunate or particularly lucky in getting results they haven't deserved. In terms of assessing team strength, goals scored in a match are quite a poor indicator as football is such a low scoring sport.

This method is far from an exact science and you'll not be able to determine accurately whether Celtic should be 1.5 or 2 goal favourites at home to Hearts, but it certainly works better for teams that are matched more closely.

There are plenty of articles online that a google search for "football odds compiling" will throw up that will also help. Using your knowledge and opinion to form a price to then compare to the market is essential if you hope to beat the bookies in the longer term. Or if that sounds like too much work then get in touch with Matthew, join the Scottish Football Income Booster advisory service and let me do all the hard work for you!