Much has been made of the inter-continental games so far this World Cup, especially considering the presence of 3 of the 4 CONCACAF countries making it past the group stages. Traditionally South American and European countries have had the most success.

To see how various (FIFA defined) continents have done compared to past World Cup results, I used past World Cup data collected from 11v11.com. I looked at the past World Cup results (here is an example from the United States’ page <http://www.11v11.com/teams/usa/tab/stats/comp/978>). These results include all World Cup and World Cup qualifying games, which is what I limited my analysis to. World Cup qualifying games are a little different, but considering these are almost always between countries that are in the same continent, I think its OK because I drop intra-continent games. What defines a continent is pretty hazy, so I just stuck with FIFA’s definitions. This means that Australia is actually a part of Asia, and some other anomalies. This division of the world is the best way to stay consistent, though. The continents I ended up using were Africa, Asia, CONCACAF, Europe, Oceania and South America.

If you want to look at the code I wrote to do the analysis (both the data scraping, the actual analysis, and the visualization) head over to here <https://github.com/fordb/wc-continent-headtohead>

There’s nothing too crazy going on in the analysis, so I’ll just show the graphs I created below.

GRAPHS

Each one shows how each individual continent has historically fared against every other continent. I focused on just GA per game and GF per game because this can be compared no matter how many games have occurred between each continent. GA and GF are also a little more representative than wins, losses and draws. Nate Silver preferred GF/GA when he created his Soccer Power Index.

From these, it’s clear that Europe and Brazil have historically dominated. Oceania is a little bit of an outlier just because of how few countries from there qualify for the World Cup. It seems like Oceania teams have dominated CONCACAF teams in what limited games have occurred between them. We probably can’t infer much from the small sample size, though.

CONCACAF teams have historically scored just under 1.5 goals per game against European teams, and closer to 1.4 goals per game against South American teams. This compared to also giving up 2 and just over 2 goals per game, respectively.

How does this compare to this year’s World Cup? Below is a table showing the stats of the current World Cup.

TABLE

It seems that CONCACAF has fared a little better this World Cup against South America than in the past, while performing on par with the past with European countires.