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UEFA DIRECT

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OF THE UNION OF EUROPEAN
FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

How Iceland, one of Europe's smallest nations, made the big time



FUTSAL EURO

A record-breaking tournament

THE TECHNICIAN

A hat-trick for Del Bosque?

FOR THE RECORD

10 years of club licensing



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A NEW DAWN FOR UEFA DIRECT

Dear readers,

It is with great pride that UEFA presents to you the new and improved UEFA Direct. Following a diligent consultation period with internal and external stakeholders, we have relaunched your magazine with the aim of further informing and engaging you in the work we do together to protect, promote and develop football in Europe.

So what can you expect? From a first glance, you will notice that the number of pages has more than doubled. However, as we all know, bigger is not necessarily always better and that is why our focus is not only on the breadth of the magazine, or even its new look and feel: it is also on the stories that showcase all our achievements in grassroots, development and education.

We also want to highlight all your victories, both on and off the field, and to feature the profiles of the people who accomplish them. Furthermore, we will aim to use a larger number of creative images to reflect the diversity of football cultures around Europe, while simultaneously producing an increased number of dynamic graphics which contain insightful facts and figures on how the sport we love is growing and flourishing on our continent.

We sincerely hope that you will enjoy this new version of UEFA Direct and welcome feedback on how we can further improve it.

Pedro Pinto
UEFA Chief of Communications and Media





34



26



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Football can only be played
outdoors a few months a year
in Iceland.
Keystone



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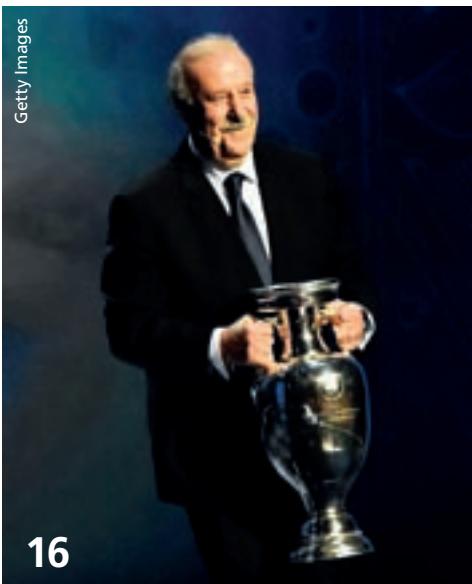
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Getty Images



UEFA



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

February's FIFA presidential election and the implementation of goal-line technology in UEFA competitions were the main items on the agenda for the UEFA Executive Committee's first meeting of the year in Nyon on 21 January. The following day, the presidents and general secretaries of UEFA's 54 member associations also came to the House of European Football for a briefing on the election for the FIFA presidency, which will be held in Zurich on 26 February.

The Executive Committee and European national associations gave their backing to UEFA General Secretary Gianni Infantino, who is standing as a candidate for the presidency of world football's governing body. "The UEFA Executive Committee would like to affirm that we unanimously endorse Gianni Infantino's candidacy for the FIFA presidency," a statement said. "UEFA's national associations also overwhelmingly expressed their support for Gianni and will officially announce their individual positions in due course, respecting their internal formal procedures."

"Gianni Infantino entered the presidential race for football's world governing body on 26 October 2015, with the backing of the UEFA

Executive Committee," the statement continued, "and we are certain he is the right man to take FIFA forward now."

"I am very honoured for the support I have received from the Executive Committee and the associations," Gianni Infantino said after the discussions in Nyon. "I know now, even more so, what my responsibilities are. This increases my belief in doing the right thing for football."

The Executive Committee also decided in Nyon that no UEFA presidential election would be scheduled until the sports justice appeal bodies, including potentially the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), had taken a decision with regard to the suspension of the UEFA President, Michel Platini. In December, the FIFA Ethics Committee decided to suspend Mr Platini for eight years from all football-related activities.

"The UEFA Executive Committee and UEFA's national associations would like to state that we have taken note of the decision of the FIFA Ethics Committee to suspend the UEFA President, Michel Platini," a statement read. "We hope his name is cleared and he can return to the European football family as quickly as possible."

The UEFA Executive Committee at its first meeting of 2016 in Nyon.



UEFA



Getty Images for UEFA

With the introduction of goal-line technology, AARs will be able to concentrate on what is happening in the penalty area.

GREEN LIGHT FOR GOAL-LINE TECHNOLOGY

Goal-line technology will be implemented for EURO 2016 in France, as well as for the 2016/17 UEFA Champions League from the play-offs onwards. The Executive Committee also decided to examine the feasibility of introducing goal-line technology in the UEFA Europa League from the group stage onwards, starting in the 2017/18 season.

The system will be used in tandem with additional assistant referees (AARs), who have been successfully deployed in major UEFA competitions in recent years to stand on each goal-line and watch in particular for incidents in the penalty box, such as holding and pushing, thus helping the referee to take the correct decisions.

In addition to the use of goal-line technology, the AARs will continue to play a crucial role in monitoring all activity in and around the penalty area. It was also disclosed that the supplier of the goal-line technology system would be announced in due course.

UEFA's chief refereeing officer, Pierluigi Collina, was present in Nyon to highlight the reasons for UEFA's introduction of goal-line technology. He explained that the Executive Committee's decision had followed a year of serious and professional preparation work: "It's not a decision taken quickly. More than one and a half years ago, Michel Platini told us to investigate if working with the

additional assistant referee system and goal-line technology together would be worthwhile."

"Monitoring hundreds of matches and talking with our match officials, the feedback we got was that to be focussed on goal-line incidents, they had to be ready well before the ball arrives. This meant losing control of what happened between when the ball was kicked and the possible goal-line incident. This reduced the possibility for our additional assistant referees to really support the referees in controlling what was going on inside the penalty area. So we were convinced that implementing goal-line technology would be a further step in a better control of the match."

The Executive Committee noted that preparations for EURO 2016 in France between 10 June and 10 July were in the final phase. Anticipation is growing for the event in which, for the first time, 24 national teams will contest the Henri Delaunay Cup.

An amendment was introduced to article 21.05 of the 2014–16 European Football Championship regulations. As a result, teams who have qualified for the final round may play two friendly matches against other participating teams – as opposed to the one friendly match initially stipulated in the regulations – provided that they are not in the same final tournament group. ☈

"We were convinced that implementing goal-line technology would be a further step in a better control of the match."

Pierluigi Collina
Chief refereeing officer,
UEFA

UEFA CERTIFICATE IN FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT

IRISH UNITE FOR MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

A notable 'first' in the UEFA Certificate in Football Management (UEFA CFM) activities saw the national associations of the Republic of Ireland (FAI) and Northern Ireland (IFA) co-host a national edition of this football management education programme.

The initial cross-border Irish seminar was held in Dublin last April, and was followed by a second seminar in Belfast (Northern Ireland) in August, and the third seminar and graduation ceremony in Dundalk (Republic of Ireland) in December.

A total of 34 participants graduated – 16 from the Republic of Ireland, 13 from Northern Ireland, two each from Gibraltar and Scotland, and one from Wales – showing the pan-European reach of the programme.

The nine-month UEFA CFM programme comprises six interactive online modules and three face-to-face seminars. Topics include

studies in football organisation, strategy and strategic management, operational management, marketing and sponsorship, communications, media and public relations and event management.

Graduates receive certificates awarded by the Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (IDHEAP) at the University of Lausanne, and the academic content of the programme is the responsibility of renowned academics from universities in France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

"UEFA invests time and intellectual capital in projects such as this, so that people can be better football administrators," said the IFA's chief executive, Patrick Nelson. "It's a great initiative to give this level of training to our own staff, and to share it with other associations," added the FAI's head of human resources, Pat McGinty.

"UEFA invests time and intellectual capital in projects such as this, so that people can be better football administrators."

Patrick Nelson
IFA chief executive

EXECUTIVE MASTER IN EUROPEAN SPORT GOVERNANCE

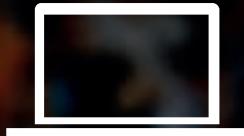
MESGO APPLICATIONS OPEN

The application process is open for the fourth session of the UEFA-backed Executive Master in European Sport Governance (MESGO), which starts in September 2016. MESGO is a unique programme designed for professionals in the sports sector wishing to improve their skills by mastering the complex dimensions and diversity of international practices related to professional

sports governance. It also shows UEFA's commitment to the sustainable development of football across Europe by working with stakeholders on educational projects. The application deadline is 28 March 2016. Visit www.mesgo.org to apply online or send an email to universities@uefa.ch if you would like more information.

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SETTING THE STAGE

In terms of drama and excitement, the EURO 2016 final draw in Paris offered a taste of what fans can expect this summer.



Getty Images

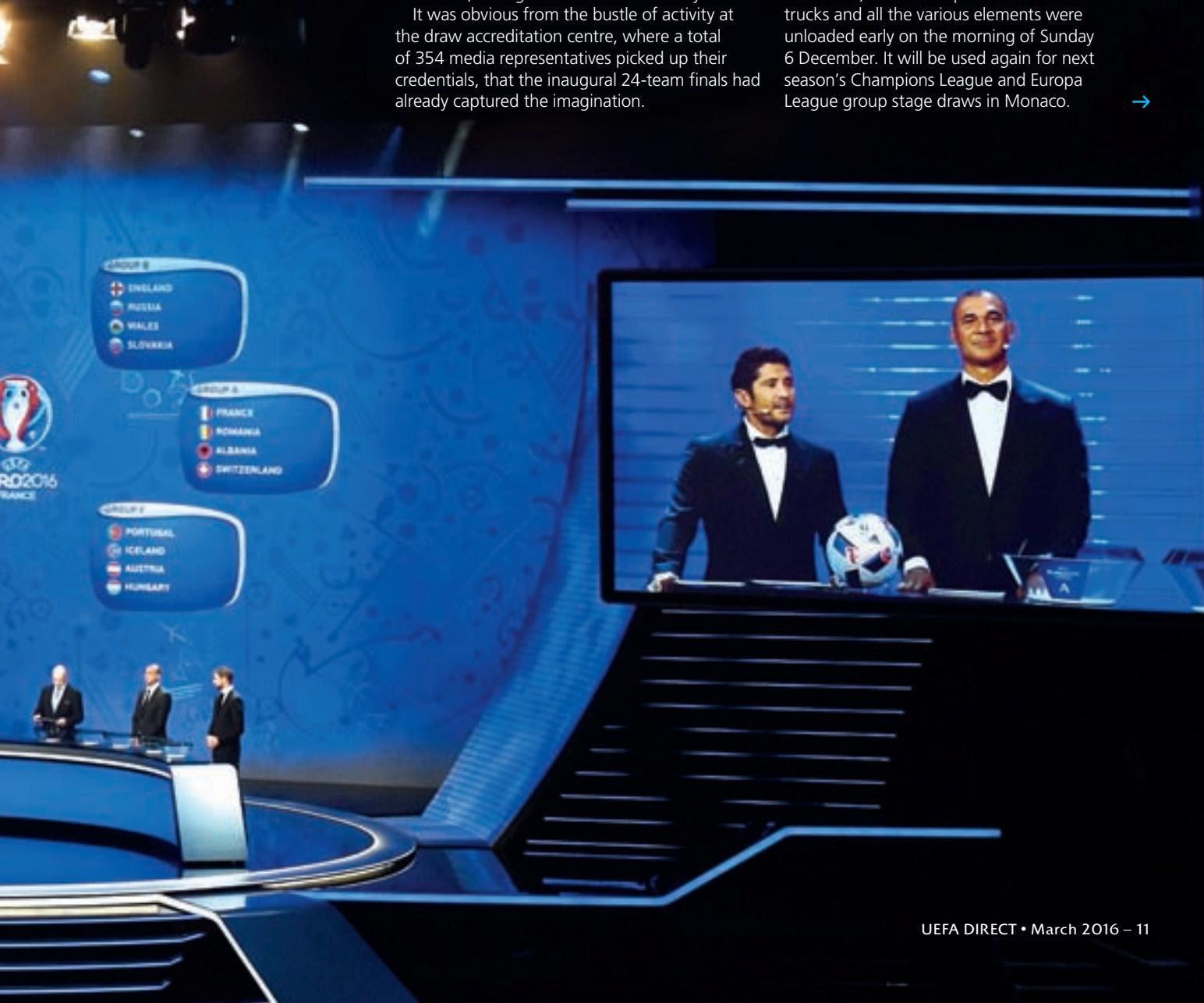
Few places on earth are as steeped in the dramatic arts as Paris, and the French capital provided the backdrop for an evening of tension, expectation and excitement as the final draw for EURO 2016 unfolded on 12 December. After a qualifying campaign packed with shocks, the eyes of the football world turned to the Palais des Congrès for another serving of spectacle and emotion – and the landmark event in the run-up to the final tournament did not disappoint.

The tone was set on the eve of the ceremony as the UEFA Executive Committee held its final meeting of 2015, followed by a press conference streamed live on UEFA.org at which it was announced that the tournament prize money was being increased from €196m at EURO 2012 to €301m, raising the stakes considerably.

It was obvious from the bustle of activity at the draw accreditation centre, where a total of 354 media representatives picked up their credentials, that the inaugural 24-team finals had already captured the imagination.

The TV compound next to the Palais des Congrès was similarly animated, with more than 40 UEFA broadcast partners setting up on-site operations. And while the final preparations were being made to ensure everything ran smoothly, a steady flow of attendees were checking in at the hotel, including the national team coaches. Some of them, such as Sweden's Erik Hamrén, combined the trip with visits to their final tournament base camps. The Blågult have opted for Pornichet, near Nantes, on the Atlantic coast as their home from home this summer.

Back at the draw hall, the stage had been set up and was ready for action. Created by celebrated German designer Jürgen Schmidt-André, it was first used for the Champions League and Europa League group stage draws in Monaco in August. After being in storage since then, it was transported to Paris in six trucks and all the various elements were unloaded early on the morning of Sunday 6 December. It will be used again for next season's Champions League and Europa League group stage draws in Monaco. →



EURO 2016 FINAL DRAW

For its outing in the principality, the stage had been put together in two weeks, but after being enlarged and enhanced for the Palais des Congrès it required a whole new effort to rebuild it on-site. A team of 16 worked on the construction effort, while another 20 oversaw the technical aspects – including the 4K rear-screen projection on the back wall, which gave the stage a EURO-specific colour scheme, as did LED strips on the side walls, desks, floor and steps. By Wednesday afternoon the installation was complete, with rehearsals able to begin the following afternoon after a final round of checks.

The Anticipation mounts

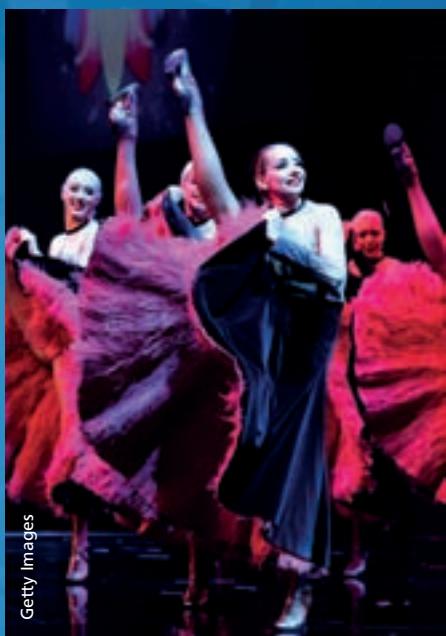
The Palais des Congrès needed just one final touch on the day of the draw: the laying of the red carpet at the main entrance. And it was there that the ceremony started in earnest, with the 24 coaches, 22 national association presidents and 23 general secretaries, plus assorted VIPs – including UEFA's honorary president, Lennart Johansson – entering the lobby flanked by photographers and cameramen. Some guests, such as Christian Karembeu, stopped for interviews on the way, the 1998 World Cup and EURO 2000 winner being one of the ambassadors for the



After the draw, the media swarmed to get the first reactions of the coaches, including Wales's Chris Coleman.

'RICHNESS, BEAUTY AND DIVERSITY'

UEFA ceremonies manager Julien Pateau explains the inspiration behind a memorable draw show



What was your overriding goal when planning the show?

We wanted to showcase the richness, beauty and diversity of French culture, but to avoid slipping into caricatures. We wanted to modernise the clichés in order to create beautiful images. For example, we had the idea very early on to use cancan dancers to kick off the show, to give it a proper French touch and a fun atmosphere so that everyone would immediately understand we were in France and it was a party.

What was the thinking behind the trapeze section?

The third part focused on *La France romantique*, and I know the trapeze duo well as I've worked with them before. They're a couple in real life – so their love story on stage was real. That was important as the challenge was to ensure nothing rang false.

Where did you find the young hip-hop dancers?

They're all registered with the UNSS [Union Nationale de Sport Scolaire], the French school sports union, who we've entered into a partnership with. A lot of the kids needed psychological support after the Paris terrorist attacks as around half were from a school close to the Bataclan, and the rest were from a school in Saint-Denis. Many were shocked by what had happened, but the show did them a lot of good.

Was the show designed more for a TV audience or the people in the hall?

The idea was to present a good image of France to the world, for it to work on TV. We focused on lighting and worked closely with the director, Jean-Jacques Amsellem, but we also wanted to put on a good show for everyone there.

354

More than 350 written journalists, web reporters, photographers and TV or radio non-rights holders were accredited for the final draw

103

A total of 103 broadcasters covered the draw, with the event reaching over 200 territories

31

There were 31 rights holders putting questions to coaches in the flash area, as well as 31 commentary positions in the draw hall and 17 unilateral cameras

110

The organisers were assisted by 110 volunteers providing valuable support in media services, information technology, accreditation, VIP services, TV production and transport

1

The UEFA EURO 2016 final draw was the number one worldwide trend on Twitter on 12 December, generating 13,483,685 impressions on the day of the ceremony

EURO 2016 volunteer programme which had inspired 22,600 applicants between the ages of 18 and 81 to apply for 6,500 jobs at the final tournament.

At 18:00 Paris time, with anticipation levels reaching a crescendo, hosts Ruud Gullit and Bixente Lizarazu welcomed the assembled audience and worldwide TV viewers, who were treated to a typically French flourish as 24 cancan dancers from the famous Lido cabaret poured down the aisles from the back of the hall. Taking the stage to Jacques Offenbach's Infernal Galop, the dancers got the event off to a colourful and energetic start. They were followed by a video introduction to the ten host cities.

A song for all fans

The entertainment continued with a thrilling trapeze display from the Cirque du Soleil, followed by 24 young dancers wearing the colours of each competing nation, who performed an eye-catching routine with the tournament mascot, Super Victor. That was the cue for David Guetta, EURO 2016 music ambassador, to join the proceedings and discuss the tournament's official anthem, This One's For You, a song about unity due for release this spring. The superstar DJ and music producer is currently calling on supporters to feature on the anthem, with fans around the globe invited to record their own personal contribution on EURO2016.com/DavidGuetta.

Predicting "a fantastic tournament", the UEFA General Secretary, Gianni Infantino, then oversaw the draw itself, with help from EURO legends Antonín Panenka, Oliver Bierhoff, David Trezeguet and Angelos Charisteas – each a scorer in a European Championship final. The coaches looked on with their best poker faces as they discovered who their teams would meet, but they were soon able to share their thoughts as they gave interviews to rights holders in the flash area after the ceremony. Their reactions were beamed far and wide, as well as on giant screens in the media working area, where hundreds of journalists rattled off their own views. From the flash area, the 24 technicians proceeded to the mixed zone to be grilled by non-rights holders, all the while sharing kind words with their newly revealed opposite numbers. For the time being, at least.

Backstage, the Twitter Blue Room was abuzz as the likes of Lizarazu and Trezeguet popped in to answer questions posed by the public. It had been a long day for all involved, yet the chance to decompress was almost at hand, and gradually everyone retired to the post-draw party on the first floor, where food stands representing the host cities offered up



STARS OF THE SHOW

The EURO 2016 final draw was replete with famous faces and football legends, but none of it would have been possible without the underrated stars of the show – the draw balls. Produced by adidas according to strict instructions and closely guarded ever since, they held the keys to the 36 group games and beyond. "The insertion of the slips of paper into the balls is the trickiest part – and the most exciting," says UEFA senior EURO and Nations League competitions manager, Marcello Alleca, on hand at the Palais des Congrès. "This delicate operation takes place twice, under the ever watchful eye of a notary: once shortly before rehearsal and once shortly before the draw, because from the moment the balls are closed they must remain under constant supervision until the draw starts."

Measuring 11.4cm by 7.5cm, the slips of paper fit neatly inside the balls, which are 5.5cm in diameter and composed of two halves that screw together – with spares available. Nevertheless, the process is not without its challenges. "We used a dressing room backstage, right next to David Guetta's," Marcello recalls. "Luckily, he was not too noisy and did not disturb our concentration." With the EURO legends briefed on what to do, nothing was left to chance before the balls completed their mission and could begin their post-draw life as part of UEFA's memorabilia collection, which regularly appears in exhibitions.

local fare from their regions. With the lights low and the walls decorated with framed pictures of iconic EURO moments, a jazz band helped wash away some of the accumulated nerves – though centre stage undoubtedly belonged to the Henri Delaunay Cup, as people gravitated towards it, cameras at the ready. And so the countdown to EURO 2016 truly began. ☑

FANS SNAP UP EURO TICKETS

The second sales phase ended on 18 January with great demand from supporters.



10	31
host cities	days
24	51
teams	matches

3.5 MILLION
ticket requests in 36 days

There has been huge demand for tickets for EURO 2016 in France this summer. More than 3.5 million tickets were requested for the tournament's 51 matches by supporters from 189 territories between 14 December 2015 and 18 January 2016. Many, of course, will be watching their team in a final tournament for the first time thanks to the expanded 24-team format and this has only heightened the anticipation. Fans of first-time qualifiers Iceland, for instance, applied for 26,985 tickets, enough for 8.15% of the nation's 330,000 population to watch a game.

Germany v Poland tops the wish list

The hottest ticket was for the Group C match between Germany and Poland in Saint-Denis on 16 June, while the majority of ticket requests overall came from Poland, France, Austria, the Republic of Ireland and Switzerland. In total, 800,000 tickets, about 32% of the total tournament quota, were made available to the fans of the 24 teams through the same number of dedicated portals on [EURO2016.com](#), the official ticket sales platform.

Following their teams

Supporters were able to buy tickets for all of their teams' games, including potential knockout ties. These Follow My Team tickets allowed fans to reserve places for any knockout games their team qualified for, and guaranteed them refunds if their side does not go on to reach the round in question.

Although the maximum number of tickets per application was limited to four per match, groups of supporters could link separate applications to sit together in the stadium through a Group ID.

Access for all

UEFA has also teamed up with the Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) to ensure the fulfilment of the EURO 2016 Access for All project, which aims to provide disabled fans with accessibility tickets and audio-descriptive commentary services for partially sighted and blind fans.

Ticket portals for each of the 24 nations were made available in 17 languages, while a dedicated customer service centre provided professional support in all these languages.

EURO 2016 COUNTDOWN

The key dates and places in the build-up to UEFA EURO 2016 and beyond.

2 March

100 days to go

2/3 March

Participating teams workshop, Paris

15/16 March

Sponsors workshop III, Lyon

1 April – 9 June

Trophy tour, France
(25 cities across the country)

18–21 April

Referees workshop, Paris

29 May – 5 June

European schools tournament, Lens and Lille

6 June

International broadcast centre fully operational, Paris

9 June

Opening party:
David Guetta concert,
Paris

10 June

Opening match:
France v Romania,
Stade de France, Saint-Denis

10 June – 10 July

UEFA EURO 2016

30 June – 8 July

International solidarity tournament,
Lyon and Paris

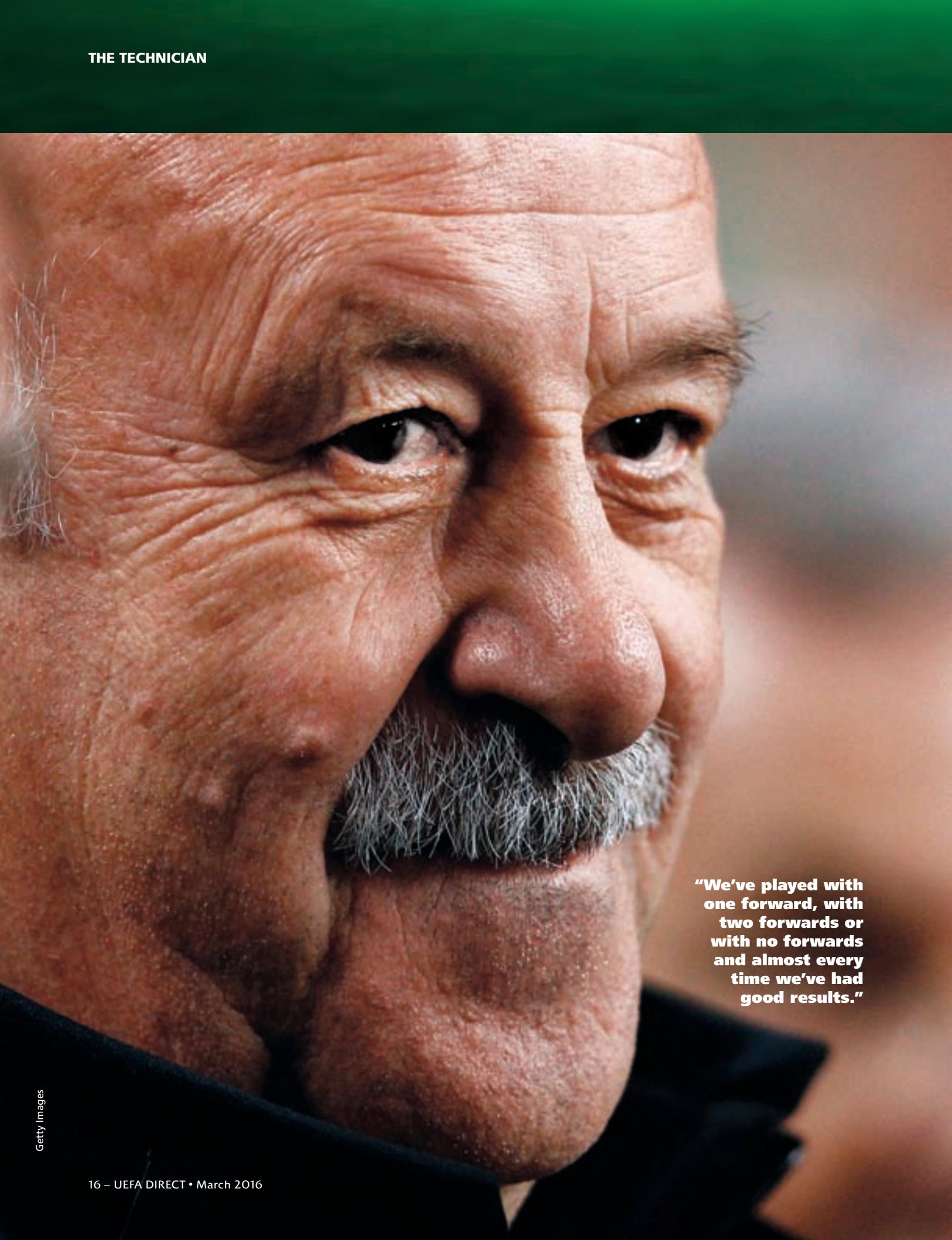
10 July

Final, Stade de France, Saint-Denis

12 September

UEFA National Team Coaches Conference, Paris

Getty Images, UEFA



THE TECHNICIAN

"We've played with one forward, with two forwards or with no forwards and almost every time we've had good results."

VICENTE DEL BOSQUE

'STILL STRIVING TO BE THE BEST'

Evolution, not revolution, is the watchword for Spain's head coach as his team targets a record third straight EURO title.

You are the coach. As you take your team into EURO 2016, you could field seven of the players who started the World Cup final in Johannesburg back in 2010. But would you? You could even pick half a dozen of the starters who ended Spain's 44-year wait to regain the European Championship by beating Germany in Vienna under the guidance of Luis Aragónés in 2008. You could select no fewer than nine of the starting line-up from when Spain successfully defended their European crown by beating Italy in Kiev in 2012. But the youngest would be 27 and five would have passed their 30th birthdays. So would you? Bearing in mind Spain's startling failure to progress beyond the group stage at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, is this a time for evolution or revolution?

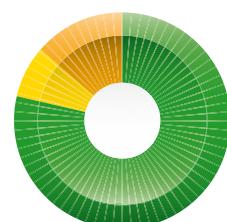
There are still a few months to wait before you can compare your answer with that of Spain's head coach, Vicente del Bosque. He does, however, hint strongly at a preference for evolution after a EURO qualifying campaign that yielded nine wins from ten games. Looking

back at progress since the World Cup, he comments: "We have taken some careful steps forward. We didn't really start a revolution or make any dramatic steps. Instead, we just developed further, step by step, introducing players who we think are right to put together a good national team. There is a block of players who have stayed, such as Jordi Alba, Gerard Piqué, Sergio Busquets, Andrés Iniesta, Cesc Fàbregas and David Silva, and we've added some younger lads who, I think, have freshened the team up. I think it's normal to proceed like that."

Continuity is written with a capital C in Spain's footballing lexicon. And that starts at the top. Angel María Villar Llona's benchmark-setting tenure as president of the Royal Spanish Football Federation has provided a platform on which sustained success in UEFA's age-limit competitions – and ultimately at senior level – has been built. In the wake of the disappointment in Brazil, the media were quick to pronounce that Spain's winning cycle had come to an end, but Villar would have none of it. Del Bosque remains and, in his case,



THAT WINNING FEELING



- 82 wins
- 8 draws
- 14 losses

In 104 games in charge of Spain, Vicente del Bosque has achieved a terrific record, winning 79% of his matches.

continuity is not just about years or matches on the bench. His equanimous, avuncular personality provides a steady hand at the tiller. Since taking over in 2008, he has become the first coach to be champion of Europe and the world at both club and national team levels, yet shies away from any hint of personality cult. "I think the victory at EURO 2008 made us feel proud and meant we could forget the complexes we might have had in the past. A lot of different factors came together back then. We have a better youth system now and we don't have to look around at the work being done by other national associations. We have better facilities, and coaches who are better qualified to do a great job."

Del Bosque denies that, in 2016, his team needs to be reinvented. "Some of the players from Brazil are still with us and have been showing excellent performances at their clubs all year long," he maintains. The last three words are not without significance, given that players from Barcelona, who have tended

to supply core elements not only in terms of manpower but also with regard to playing style, may have to cope with an extended EURO on the back of a season which could entail as many as 65 competitive matches. But he shrugs off suggestions that freshness and preparation time could become key issues.

'A bit of time pressure'

"We will do more or less the same as every time," he insists. "But we will certainly have a bit of time pressure after the end of the domestic season and other competitions like the Champions League. We have always been able to manage those pressures in previous tournaments, so I hope we will be successful in what we do this time."

A further coaching challenge will be the selection of a playing structure, and Del Bosque has displayed enough flexibility to have used different team shapes to win two Champions Leagues with Real Madrid plus a EURO and a World Cup with Spain. In the national team, the

Fernando Torres scores Spain's third goal in their 4-0 victory over Italy in the final of EURO 2012.



Getty Images

"If I had to name favourites, I think France and Germany would be my picks – along with Spain."

main issue is in attack. With neither Barcelona nor the two big Madrid teams fielding Spaniards in their habitual line-ups, he is obliged to cast his net elsewhere – or, as he has done in the past, manage without strikers. In previous front lines, players such as David Villa could hardly be described as classic target strikers and, among the goalscorers who have caught the eye in Spain's age-limit sides, Villarreal's Adrián López and Paco Alcácer at Valencia are rapiers rather than blunt-instrument strikers.

"The team has always been very interesting in terms of attack," Del Bosque comments. "We've played with one forward, with two forwards or with no forwards and a lot of midfielders. And almost every time we've had good results. I don't think I have a favourite playing system because it always depends on the players available to you and the characteristics they have. You draw a picture starting from that. The initial picture is not so important. It is more about the way you play the game."

Del Bosque's daily routine at the national association's training centre at Las Rozas includes a breakfast with his coaching staff – not just those pegged to the senior team but also those responsible for all the age-limit sides. Spain's recent successes have been recompense for a clear playing philosophy implemented from the bottom to the top of the pyramid.

"I don't think there are many coaches who think in a defensive way," the 65-year-old maintains. "We like to play and be proactive, to have possession of the ball, to dominate matches, to play attacking football and have a lot of attacking players on the pitch. Of course you need balance with defence, but if you dominate the match and impose your game, then everything is in your hands."

Spain's possession-based domination game now has to be played without the dancing feet and shrewd footballing brain of Xavi Hernández. "As I've said many times, he is irreplaceable," Del Bosque admits. "But you can't think about the past; you need to think ahead. If not, you can't go out and play. We have to adapt our game to players like Thiago, Koke and Isco, all young lads who are also great midfielders."

The question is whether the evolving Spain team is great enough to defend the title and, adding Paris to Vienna and Kiev, record a unique hat-trick of victories. "In sport, you win and you lose," says the imperturbable Del Bosque without so much as a twitch of the moustache. "In the last four years we've had the experience of winning matches and losing matches. We didn't play a good World Cup, that is evident, but we're still striving to be the best. I wouldn't say we are the main favourites because we all know how to play football and it has balanced out to such an extent that there is no great superiority of one national team over the others. If I had to name favourites, I think France and Germany would be my picks – along with Spain. We will be one of the teams trying to win the title. But it won't be easy, as the competition is enormous."

Asked to name three key aspects of a tournament like a EURO, Del Bosque does not hesitate. "Firstly, the human and personal relationships are important – living well together. Secondly, you need to have a clear idea of how you want to play – a clear concept. And you all have to share the same objective. In the end, though, you always need a bit of luck as well. Winning another EURO would be a fantastic achievement. If you have good players, you should be able to achieve good results. The difficult but nice job for the coach is to get all those players together in a winning team." 

Getty Images



FUTSAL SCALES NEW HEIGHTS IN SERBIA

From 2 to 13 February Belgrade played host to the 9th European Futsal Championship final round, where Spain reclaimed the title.

Belgrade Arena was sold out for many of the matches, particularly those involving Serbia, cheered on by more than 11,000 supporters in their 3-1 group match win against Portugal.





Sportsfile

The record books will show that Russia and Spain disputed the final for the fourth time and that Spain made it three out of four to take their collection of European championships to six. But Futsal EURO 2016 in Serbia from 2 to 13 February could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as a routine affair. Records were broken. New benchmarks were set. Attendances on the final day sent the total into six figures for the first time in the history of the competition. Five of the 20 matches were watched by sell-out crowds of 11,161 at the magnificent Belgrade Arena. When the Serbia

team recorded a 'personal best' by playing their way through to the knockout rounds, all tickets were sold within half an hour, with requests totalling 20,000 per game. TV audiences in countries such as Spain and Portugal made impressive reading. Ricardinho's magic goal for Portugal against Serbia went viral, attracting 8.5 million views on social media in next to no time. There was unscriptable drama such as the host team's winning goal against Ukraine when the giant screen showed that 0.3 seconds of the quarter-final remained. It all added up to a memorable event and a priceless advertisement for futsal.

Spain's Pola scores the first of his two goals in the final against Russia.



A PASSION FOR FUTSAL

The fans turned out in droves and played a big part in the tournament's success.

"It was a great arena. The fans created a great atmosphere and showed that their passion for sport includes a love for futsal." That was the parting comment from Portugal coach Jorge Braz after his superstar Ricardinho, having lived up to his 'Magician' label with some crazily inventive goals, had been called into the centre of the Belgrade Arena to receive a prolonged standing ovation from another massive crowd of 8,850. That was exactly 1,000 short of the attendance for Spain's 4-1 win over Ukraine which, two days earlier, had become the highest ever recorded for a Futsal EURO group game not involving the hosts. Serbia's surging run to a first semi-final appearance, meanwhile, fired public interest to the extent that their matches were played to sell-out crowds of 11,161. The atmosphere was an inspiration to visiting players from countries where domestic games are watched by much smaller audiences – and an initially daunting responsibility for the host team. "It wasn't easy to start the tournament in front of a record-breaking crowd, and we needed almost the entire first half to get used to the wonderful atmosphere," Serbia coach Aca Kovačević said. "But such great support from the public drove us on to our success."

Debutants surprise the odds...

Serbia certainly played its part. Not just the national association who teamed up with UEFA and the city of Belgrade in the organisation of the two-week event. The national team, led by Aca Kovačević, fired up the public by beating Slovenia in the opening match and fuelled passions even further by defeating one of the title contenders, Portugal, to claim top spot in Group A and provoke a stampede for quarter-final tickets.

In three-team groups, defeat in the opening match is usually bad news – and Hungary, in Group B, joined Slovenia in making an early

exit from the competition after losing to Spain in their first game. However, Azerbaijan and debutants Kazakhstan, in Groups C and D respectively, provided striking exceptions to the rule by bouncing back from defeats to reach the quarter-finals. The former edged past the Czech Republic, scoring one more than their opponents in an 11-goal thriller. Kazakhstan, after losing narrowly to Russia, beat Croatia 4-2 and went on to become one of the main talking points of the tournament.

Cacau's team, drawn mostly from Kairat Almaty, champions of Europe at club level in 2013 and 2015, had the unconventional →



sportsfile

strategy of using goalkeeper Higuita as a fifth outfielder – a ploy which disconcerted their opponents. Their quarter-final pitted them against defending champions Italy, who had looked compact, confident and efficient in the group stage which, unusually in futsal, they negotiated without conceding a goal. Against Kazakhstan, however, their campaign went pear-shaped thanks to a compendium of uncharacteristic errors which, every time they scored a comeback goal, led them to concede again in a matter of seconds. The champions' 5-2 defeat was one of the major surprises of the event in Belgrade.

Another had been the 3-1 defeat of Portugal by Serbia, in spite of Ricardinho's wonder goal. It condemned Jorge Braz's team to a quarter-final against Spain and, even though Ricardinho brought the crowd to its feet with another work of art, the Spanish players were well worth their 6-2 victory.

This was the follow-up match to the hosts' dramatic victory over Ukraine, with Miloš Simić skilfully turning a waist-high cross into the net after 39'59.7. The thunderstruck Ukrainians barely had time to blink, let alone produce a comeback while the local players and supporters were going wild.

... and write a piece of history

Serbia's first ever semi-final pitted them against Russia. Sergei Skorovich's side had tiptoed through Group C, scoring only four goals. But the 6-2 quarter-final win against Azerbaijan hinted that the Russians were gaining momentum. Against the hardworking hosts, with batteries charged by popular fervour, they twice took the lead but were unable to put any distance between themselves and the hosts. Then a red card for attacking spearhead Eder Lima allowed Serbia to equalise when their opponents were a man

Spain's captain, Ortiz, celebrates another European Futsal Championship win for his country.



down, and force extra time. A single goal by Romulo was enough to break local hearts.

In the other semi-final, Spain seemed to be cruising against a Kazakhstan side deprived of Higuita, suspended, and Chingiz Yesenamanov, injured. They had replied four times after conceding an early lead, yet permitted their opponents, fielding a flying goalkeeper, to creep back to 4-3 before Raúl Campos delivered the coup de grâce and set the scene for Spain's new final against Russia. Kazakhstan then went on to write a piece of history by taking the bronze medal at their first appearance in the finals, Cacau's team romping to a 5-2 victory over the flagging hosts before yet another capacity crowd.

Russia v Spain is traditionally marked by nerves and a degree of caution. When the ball started rolling in the arena, Russia worked on the Spanish nervous system by pressing high to disturb their construction work. But, little by little, Spain settled into their high-tempo passing game and the balance of the game was changed by lapses of concentration in the Russian ranks. A simple kick-in allowed Spain to take the lead and, in 93 seconds, another kick-in and two ball wins put an eyebrow-raising 0-4 on the scoreboard at the arena. A nutshell description of Russia's demise could easily be that losses of possession led to the loss of a title.

Ten-goal final spectacle

A fine medium-range strike from the right at least added hope and motivation to Sergei Skorovich's half-time talk. But Russia's use

of the flying goalkeeper allowed Spain's goalkeeper Paco Sedano to put a high-gloss final coat on a brilliant tournament. It also gave wings to Spain's counterpunching talents, with Miguelín careering so fast down the left flank that one feared he might burst out onto the streets of Belgrade. Fortunately, he had the braking power and the presence of mind to cut inside and slot the ball into the unguarded Russian net to make it 1-5. The same unguarded net was ruffled twice more from long range by Miguelín and Mario Rivillos, allowing them to share the top-scorer award. Two late consolations settled the 3-7 scoreline (the highest winning margin in Futsal EURO history), with the 10-goal spectacle also bringing the total to an all-time tournament record of 129.

The sight of Spanish players walking up to collect their gold medals wearing shirts emblazoned with names like Lozano, Aicardo or Fernandao, absent from the finals through injury, gave added value to the achievement of Spain's coach, José Venancio López, in converting a 'makeshift team' into worthy champions of Europe. But there was much more to the tournament than the goals, the pageantry and the glory. Legacy and sustainability projects had been pegged to the event, and a nationwide primary school programme had culminated in 700 boys and girls playing grassroots futsal in the arena... Futsal EURO 2016 was a success for Belgrade, a success for Serbia, a success for Spain and, above all, a success for futsal. ☺

REACHING A WIDER AUDIENCE

Youth, grassroots and social responsibility activities were a key feature of the final tournament.

The impact of Futsal EURO 2016 on both futsal and football in Serbia will be felt a long time after the trophy was lifted at Belgrade Arena.

Capitalising on the excitement that the tournament was able to bring, a grassroots initiative entitled 'My School – My Club' was launched and played out by Under-12 boys' and girls' teams at schools across the country. The competition – organised with the Football Association of Serbia (FSS) – concluded with a

final tournament on 10 February at the arena that had been home to futsal's stars throughout the finals. The social approach aimed not only to engage the next generation but in doing so, to promote the values of gender equality, fair play and respect throughout the events. The Serbian ministry of education was also involved in the inclusion of schools and the distribution of free tickets to youngsters, provided by UEFA.

Meanwhile, sustainability

initiatives were promoted with local schoolchildren providing illustrations for a 'tips and tricks' guide for an environmentally friendly final tournament, which was published in Serbian.

The celebration of European futsal's finest teams also gave a window of opportunity for many to understand the work of the UEFA Foundation for Children, with an exhibition portraying several perspectives on life at the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan.

REFEREES READY FOR THE CHALLENGE

UEFA recently brought together more than 100 referees and assistant referees from across the continent for two special courses, which included everything from video analysis to intensive technical drills.

UEFA holds annual winter courses for its top male and female referees, as well as for new international officials. The courses, among other things, prepare referees for the second half of the season, and newcomers are primed for their duties on and off the field. Cyprus staged the latest courses in Limassol between 31 January and 4 February. Meanwhile, Europe's leading assistant referees came to the Mediterranean island from 26 to 28 January for their own specialist three-day gathering.

The UEFA Referees Committee comprises former referees with great experience of major world and European occasions, and members were, as is customary, present in Cyprus to lead 122 referees, including 30 women, through a

week of intensive technical and practical work, discussions, analysis and mutual feedback.

A modern top referee needs to be as much of an athlete as the players. Consequently, stringent fitness training and medical tests under UEFA expert Werner Helsen assessed the referees' physical condition, along with visual examinations to ensure that their eyesight and vision are up to the mark.

"The UEFA Referees Committee decided to offer courses which bring together elite male and female referees, and newcomers starting out on the international scene, and this has brought excellent results," Referees Committee chairman and UEFA first vice-president Ángel María Villar Llona said in his welcome address.

"Talent must go hand in hand with hard work and courage, which is needed to take difficult decisions quickly under pressure in important matches with high stakes."

**Pierluigi Collina
Chief refereeing officer,
UEFA**



"It would be a shame to be among experienced international referees here and not learn from them," he stressed to the young newcomers in particular. "Use every minute to learn from those with a lot of experience to offer."

EURO ahead

Eighteen elite referees will handle matches at this summer's UEFA EURO 2016 in France. "This means that they can show the world how good they are," Villar Llona reflected, "but it also carries a great responsibility in terms of preparation and training." Further specific training awaits the EURO match officials – referees, assistant referees and additional assistant referees – in April.

The referees were briefed about the UEFA Executive Committee's recent decision to introduce goal-line technology for EURO 2016 and the 2016/17 UEFA Champions League from the play-offs onwards. This system will work alongside additional assistant referees, whose task remains to monitor activity in and around the penalty area.

UEFA's chief refereeing officer, Pierluigi Collina, introduced the new officials to the attributes needed to be a top referee – including talent, courage and a cool head. "You need talent, but talent is not enough," he explained. "Talent must go hand in hand with hard work and courage, which is needed to take difficult decisions quickly under pressure in important matches with high stakes."

Sessions and tests on the Laws of the Game and their application were led by UEFA refereeing officer Hugh Dallas and Referees Committee colleague Vladimir Sajn, as well as presentations including numerous video clips of match incidents that were the focus of analysis and discussion sessions. As well as participating in technical and education sessions with their male colleagues, the female referees attended their own sessions with Referees Committee members Dagmar Damková and Bo Karlsson, and their fitness was also given a comprehensive test.

Management skills to control a match and communicate with players were on the agenda, alongside current tactical trends, presented by UEFA's chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu. With clear communication paramount among a referee team, Stefan de Sutter, chief flight instructor at Brussels Airlines, highlighted similarities between referees and pilots in having to assess accurately and take quick, correct decisions.

A referee's integrity must never be in doubt. "You are now representatives of UEFA, football and fair play," advised Referees Committee member David Elleray. "You do not tolerate corruption or dishonesty. We are unable to accept any conduct that is unprofessional."



Any attempts to involve referees in match-fixing required a "Three Rs" solution – Recognise what is happening; Reject an approach; Report the matter.

Assistants' gathering

Meanwhile, just over 50 assistant referees took part in their course containing its own targets, especially in specific on-field training on areas such as agility, acceleration and changing direction. "We consider the contribution of assistant referees to be crucial," said Pierluigi Collina. "It is obviously important that referees are on top form, but they need assistant referees to be at the top of their game as well." Former international assistants Leif Lindberg, Philip Sharp, Giovanni Stevanato and Maciej Wierzbowski provided invaluable specialist input in Cyprus.

"You are not a linesman anymore – those days are over," Hugh Dallas told the men with the flags. "You are now assisting the referee in making accurate decisions, in particular on incidents that happen within your area of responsibility." Clear, short and accurate communication with the other match officials is crucial, as well as situation awareness. "Pay attention to changes in a match, such as when a substitution is made and when a goal is scored," said Dallas. "Remain focused and concentrated." The professional and committed attitude shown by the referees and assistants in Limassol suggests that this will not be an issue as a challenging spring and summer approach. ☺

Back row, L-R: Viktor Kassai (HUN), Szymon Marciniak (POL), Nicola Rizzoli (ITA), Milorad Mažić (SRB), Felix Brych (GER), Clément Turpin (FRA).
Middle row, L-R: Damir Skomina (SVN), Carlos Velasco (ESP), Bjorn Kuipers (NED), Sergey Karasev (RUS), William Collum (SCO), Cüneyt Çakır (TUR).
Front row, L-R: Martin Atkinson (ENG), Pavel Kralovec (CZE), Ovidiu Hategan (ROU), Svein Moen (NOR), Mark Clattenburg (ENG), Jonas Eriksson (SWE).

FROM FOUR TO TWENTY-FOUR

The number of teams contesting the final round of the European Football Championship will rise to 24 this year, up from just four in 1960. While the expansion of the tournament has not been linear, mirroring the fits and starts of European history, it is as justified today as it ever was.

In 1927, Henri Delaunay, the general secretary of the French Football Federation, supported by his Austrian counterpart, Hugo Meisl, the coach of Austria's phenomenal 'Wunderteam', had the idea of organising a competition for Europe's national teams. That competition was eventually established after the war, two years after the death of its founding father (who had since become the first general secretary of the new Union of European Football Associations), with the trophy bearing Delaunay's name.

1960

Four up

There was considerable resistance to the creation of this new European competition. Sir Stanley Rous, the secretary of The Football Association, and Ottorino Barassi, the president of the Italian Football Federation, were high-profile opponents of the initiative, believing that the competition would overburden the football calendar, stir up nationalist sentiment, turn into a commercial operation, etc. The clubs, for their part, were reluctant to release their players for more international matches. Meanwhile, FIFA feared that this new European Nations' Cup would overshadow the FIFA World Cup, established 25 years earlier, in which Europe's teams were a major force.

The organisers decided, given that the football calendar was already heavily congested (with each country's best players being required, alongside their respective domestic championships, to play in qualifying matches for the World Cup, the European Champion Clubs' Cup and international friendlies), to forgo group matches in favour of a knockout format and to organise the final round of the competition in even years without a World Cup. On 28 June 1957, the UEFA Congress in Copenhagen decided – by 15 votes to 7, with 4 abstentions and 1 blank paper – to establish the European Nations' Cup.

A total of 17 national associations signed up for the inaugural competition, but a number of countries – including the four British nations, Italy, West Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium – declined to take part. The competition was organised on a knockout basis, with teams playing each other home and away over two legs. The semi-finals and the final were scheduled for early in the summer of 1960 and were to be hosted by one of the semi-finalists.

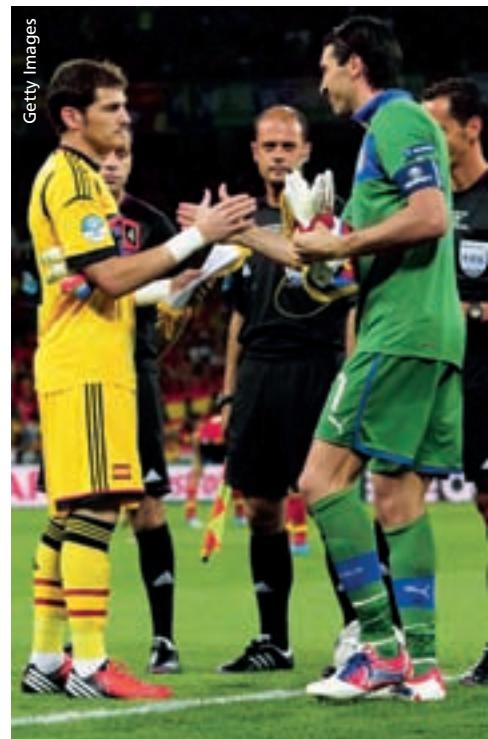
Four years later, most of the major absentees signed up for the second competition, with only West Germany and Scotland insisting on remaining on the sidelines. They did, however, take part in the next competition, which was renamed the European Football Championship. That competition, which was contested by 31 of UEFA's 33 member associations, featured a qualifying phase involving eight groups. The teams in each group played each other twice on a league basis, with the eight group winners then facing off in the quarter-finals. The final tournament (comprising the last two rounds – i.e. the semi-finals and the final) was again hosted by one of the four semi-finalists, a format that remained in place until after the 1976 tournament.

While those first five competitions were won by five different teams – the Soviet Union (1960), Spain (1964), Italy (1968), West Germany (1972) and Czechoslovakia (1976) – the Soviet Union were the standout team of the period, lifting the trophy in 1960, making it to the final in both 1964 and 1972, and reaching the semi-finals in 1968.

1980

The big eight

By the mid-1970s, the UEFA President, Artemio Franchi, had come to the conclusion that the final round needed to be enlarged if the tournament was to have a higher profile. Others agreed





Presse Sports

Parc des Princes, Paris, 10 July 1960: Yugoslavia's captain, Borivoje Kostić, shakes hands with Arthur Ellis, the referee for the first European Nations' Cup final, as Igor Netto, captain of the Soviet Union team that would go on to win that final, hurries over to follow suit.

Olympic Stadium, Kiev, 1 July 2012: Spain's Iker Casillas and Italy's Gianluigi Buffon demonstrate the now well-oiled display of sportsmanship and respect ahead of the EURO 2012 final.

with him, and so the format of the final round was amended in 1980. That tournament was contested by seven teams that had made it through the qualifying phase – the format of which was unchanged – plus the host team, which qualified automatically. The eight teams at that new-look tournament were divided into two groups of four, with the two group winners contesting the final and the two runners-up facing off in the third-place play-off.

Italy was selected to host the 12-day tournament – which was, it must be said, only a qualified success. There was an average of fewer than two goals per game and, above all, there was a lack of public interest in matches not involving Italy. For example, just over 47,000 spectators saw West Germany beat Belgium 2-1 in the final at Rome's Stadio Olimpico – a stadium that could have accommodated twice that number.

The addition of semi-finals and the abolition of the third-place play-off at the 1984 tournament in France – the first to officially be called a 'EURO' – gave the tournament a dynamism that it has never lost. Europe marvelled at the wonderful French team, led by Michel Platini, which beat Spain 2-0 in the 1984 final, just as it would

marvel at Marco van Basten's Dutch side, which defeated the Soviet Union 2-0 in the 1988 final.

EURO '92 sparked similar levels of excitement. With the civil war in the Balkans having begun the previous year, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Yugoslavia, one of the eight countries to have qualified. In accordance with competition regulations, UEFA asked the Danish team (which had finished second to Yugoslavia in qualifying) to take their place. The Danish players returned from their summer holidays to take part in – and ultimately win – the tournament, defeating Germany (which had been reunified in October 1990) 2-0 in the final.

1996 Up to 16

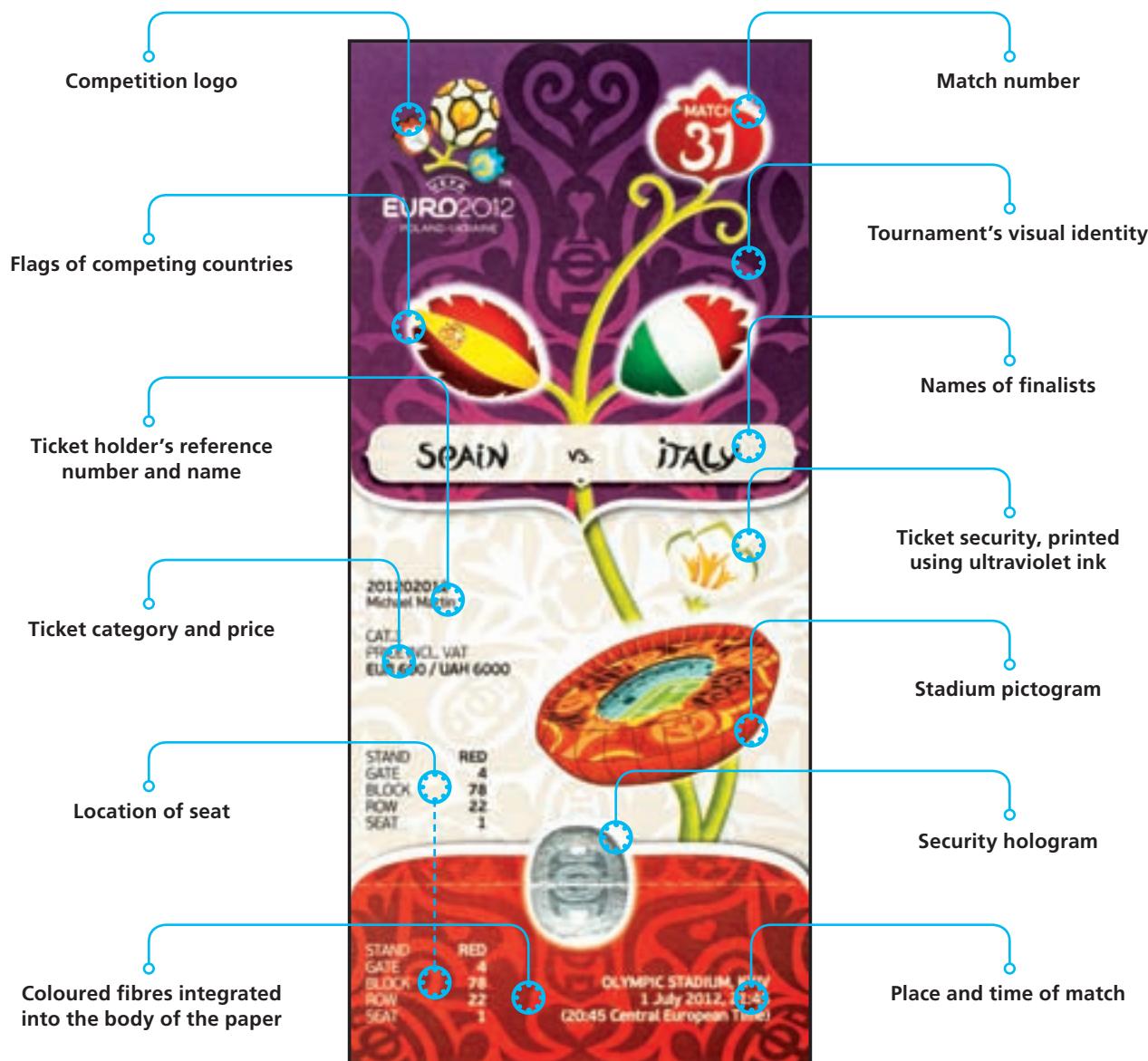
The geopolitical upheaval seen in Europe in the early 1990s resulted in a series of new countries joining UEFA, bringing the total number of member associations to 43 – nine more than in 1980. The UEFA Executive Committee began looking at this issue in November 1992 and decided to double the number of teams participating in EURO '96, which was set to take place in England. This proved to be an excellent idea, as three and a half years later, three of those 'new' countries (Russia, Croatia and the Czech Republic) took part in the tournament. Indeed, Pavel Nedvěd and his Czech team-mates got as far as the final, where they lost 2-1, with the Germans needing a golden goal to secure victory. (Four years later, France beat Italy in the final of EURO 2000 in the Netherlands – also 2-1, and also thanks to a golden goal – with the golden goal rule subsequently being abolished.) The enlargement to 16 teams was a resounding success, with the tournament becoming the third most-watched sporting event on television after the World Cup and the Olympic Games.

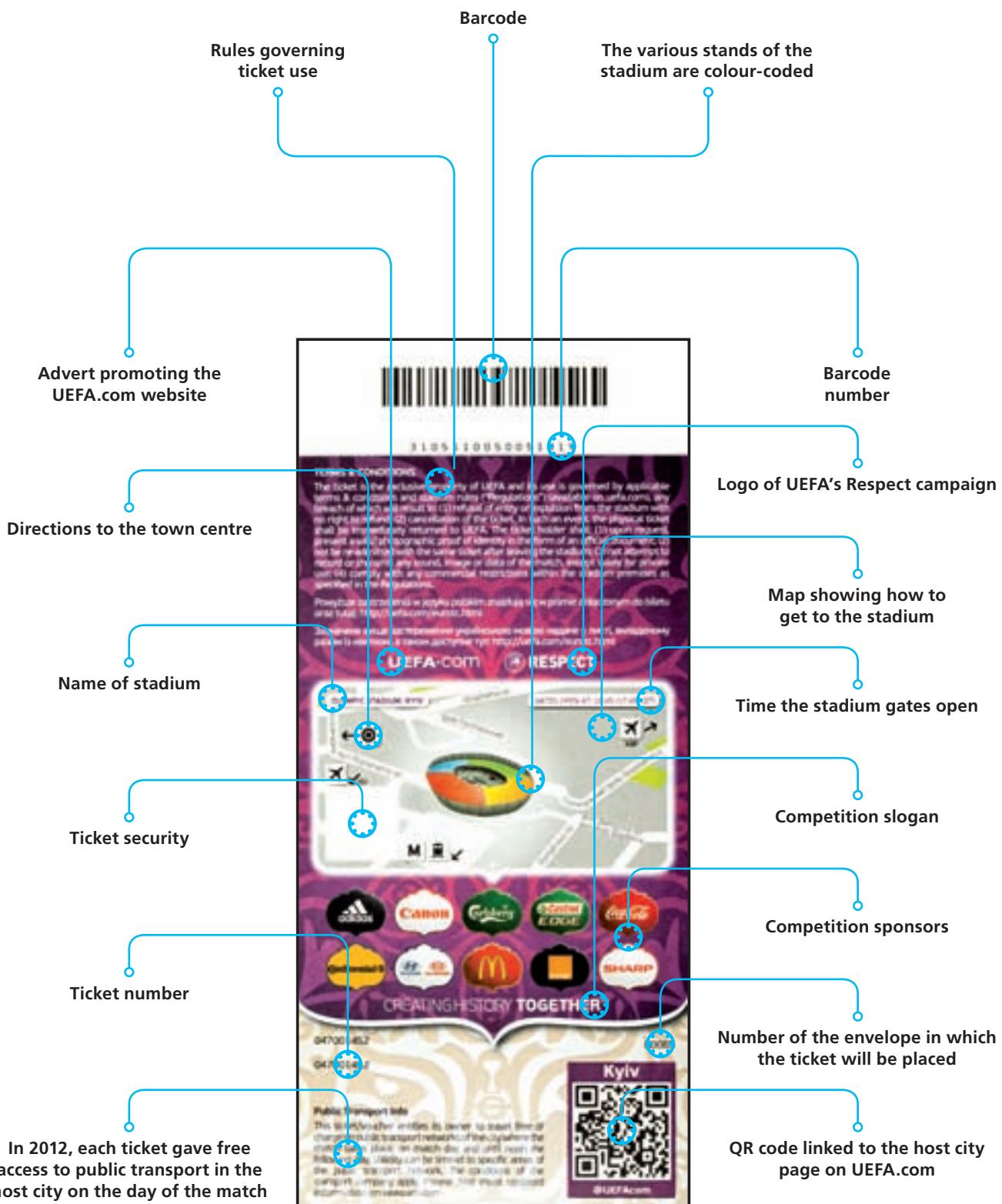
Thus far, the 21st century has been notable for both the success of Mediterranean countries – with France winning in 2000, Greece lifting the trophy in 2004, and Spain emerging triumphant in 2008 and 2012 – and the dominance of the Spanish side, with Iniesta, Xavi, Casillas, Ramos et al achieving an unprecedented treble by winning EURO 2008, the 2010 World Cup and EURO 2012. It has also seen UEFA become the first major international sports federation to take the risk – and reap the rewards – of having the final round of its flagship competition hosted by two different countries: Belgium and the Netherlands in 2000, followed by Austria and Switzerland in 2008, and Poland and Ukraine in 2012. And in 2020, it will take the even more audacious step of organising a EURO in 13 different countries. Before that, though, EURO 2016 in France will be hosted by a single country – albeit with 24 teams contesting the tournament for the very first time. ☈



MORE THAN JUST A TICKET

Match tickets for UEFA competitions are more than just passports to the excitement of the stadium experience. They are also technological gems that contain an unexpected amount of information, as you can see from this ticket for the final of EURO 2012.





CLUB LICENSING

UEFA has published a report on how the club licensing system has developed since it was introduced over ten years ago, its impact on European club football, and how it is implemented in each of UEFA's 54 member associations.

The report provides an in-depth explanation of the characteristics of the club licensing system and how it functions as well as illustrating how the system has evolved with the introduction of financial fair play.

The wide-ranging application of club licensing can be seen through a comprehensive analysis of the scope and extent of club licensing across Europe, in respect of both UEFA and domestic competitions. The report also has a section dedicated to each national licensor, with various club licensing information being placed within the context of football in each country.



In addition, the report also looks at the achievements in tackling many of the commonly cited problems of European club football which the system has tried to address, such as financial transparency, inadequate stadiums, overdue payables, and lack of youth investment.

OVERDUE PAYABLES

Overdue payables have been reduced by 91% since 2011.

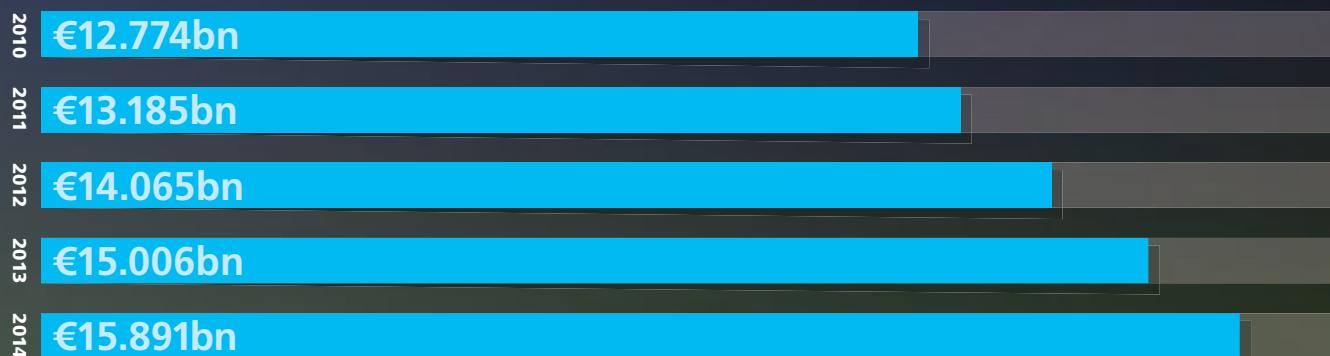


2011	€57m
2012 -47%	€30m
2013 -70%	€9m
2014 -11%	€8m
2015 -37%	€5m

10 YEARS ON...

TOP-DIVISION TOTAL REVENUE

(without transfers) for all 54* UEFA member associations by financial year



*The financial data for Gibraltar is only available for the financial years 2013 and 2014 as they did not become a UEFA member association until 2012.

DOWNTURN IN WAGE GROWTH

After a decade where wage growth outstripped revenue growth, revenues have now grown faster than wages for two consecutive years.



NET LOSSES

Since the financial fair play rules were introduced, the combined net losses of clubs have decreased by 70%.



OPERATING RESULTS

European clubs generated the highest underlying operating profits in history in 2014.





ICELAND'S QUIET REVOLUTION

Iceland were the surprise package of the qualifying campaign for EURO 2016. They have undergone a gradual transformation over the last 15 years – a remarkable development carried out in the country's sports halls and indoor facilities.



The stunning Hasteinsvöllur stadium on the island of Vestmannaeyjar, home to three-time Icelandic champions IBV.

Iceland have qualified for EURO 2016, the first time they have ever made it to the final round of Europe's most prestigious national team competition. That feat was made possible by the team's unbeaten record at their home ground, Laugardalsvöllur (which also houses the offices of the national association on the second floor). No visiting team – including the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Turkey – managed to secure a win on Icelandic soil. "We are an island with a population of 300,000, the size of a small European town, and we have qualified for EURO 2016, as well as competing in the European basketball and handball championships. It's crazy when

you think about it!" says Víðir Sigurdsson, chief sports editor of the daily newspaper Morgunbladid. All the more so given that, for decades, Iceland's football fans had to make do with meagre achievements amid long series of defeats, as well as 'kick and rush' tactics implemented by highly physical players.

"When we played France here in 1998 [ed.: a game that finished 1-1], we had five central defenders at the back, and we played long balls to our three forwards. The midfield was practically non-existent. We didn't have anyone who was capable of retaining possession," recalls Hermann Hreidarsson, a former captain of the national side. "The national team used →



IS

to be made up of the six or seven guys who played abroad, who were guaranteed to play, plus three or four others from the domestic league, who considered themselves fortunate to be selected. That wasn't enough when it came to taking on the big European teams and being competitive." Arnór Gudjohnsen, a pioneer of Icelandic football who played for RSC Anderlecht and FC Girondins de Bordeaux in the 1980s and early 1990s, says: "Today, there are perhaps 20 players who are capable of playing abroad and being in the starting 11." These days, all 10,000 tickets for matches at Laugardalsvöllur (which holds 3% of the country's population) are snapped up in minutes, regardless of the opposition.

So, how has a country in the north Atlantic, which previously had to be content with trying to lose by as small a margin as possible, managed to produce 100 or so professional footballers and become a feared destination for opposing teams in just five years? Óskar Thór Ármannsson, who is in charge of sport at a ministry that spans culture, youth, science and education, looks back at the origins of the transformation: "In the 1990s, we had a problem with young people drinking alcohol and smoking. As a result, the ministry commissioned a number

of studies, which showed that, if organised properly, enrolling children at sports clubs could help to reduce alcoholism in that section of the population. Politicians took steps to address the issue – initially at municipal level." When town councils got involved in the early 2000s, Iceland was in the midst of an economic boom. The positive effects of that were also being felt at local level, as Siggi Eyjólfsson, who was head of player development and technical director at the Football Association of Iceland from 2002 to 2014, explains: "In 2002, town councils began building indoor pitches. People were happy for their local taxes to be used in that way, as they wanted their children to have the opportunity to train."

An indoor solution

Back then, Iceland had just one indoor pitch. Now, 13 years later, it has a total of 13 (7 full size and 6 half size), as well as around 30 artificial outdoor pitches, 154 mini-pitches and 148 natural outdoor pitches the length and breadth of the island. That has been a key factor in the development of Icelandic football, given that the country's domestic championship runs from mid-May to the end of September on account of its weather. "In the past, people played basketball

The Kórinn hall in Kópavogur near Reykjavík boasts one of Iceland's seven full-size indoor pitches.

329,100

With a population of 329,100 and a surface area of 102,775km², Iceland is one of the least densely populated countries on Earth at 3.2 residents per square kilometre.



"All clubs must be coached by people with at least a UEFA B licence, if not an A licence. Before you can start coaching, even if you want to coach children, you need to have a B licence. It's mandatory."

Heimir Hallgrímsson
Joint head coach of
Iceland's national team

and handball in the winter months, and football was a summer sport. You can forget about playing on grass in this country between October and the end of April. Between the wind, the rain, the snow and the ice, it's just not possible. Now, football is no longer just a summer sport. With indoor pitches, and even artificial outdoor pitches, players can train all year round," explains Heimir Hallgrímsson, joint head coach of the national side.

On the outskirts of the capital, top-flight club Breidablik have a gigantic indoor facility where you can smell the freshly laid artificial turf. Its fantastic artificial surface makes it one of the best player development centres in the country – with players such as Swansea City AFC midfielder Gylfi Sigurdsson having learnt their trade there – and it allows teenagers to train after school up to five times a week. The rest of the time, they play matches. Children over the age of 14 even have the opportunity to travel abroad to tournaments, explains Dadi Rafnsson, the club's head of player development: "They have been to England to play against Chelsea FC and West Ham United FC. They now know that they are just as good as those sides and capable of beating them."

A big small country

Iceland is small in terms of its population, but not in terms of its physical size. It is larger than Portugal, for example. And although two-thirds of its population live in Reykjavík, the remainder are scattered among Iceland's glaciers, lava fields and herds of sheep. The country's vast expanses of wild terrain and the permanent battle against the elements are also defining features of the famous Icelandic psyche, Heimir Hallgrímsson explains: "The people of Iceland like to think that they are tougher than other nations, that they have something special that makes them stronger. The primary reason for that – and this is a fact – is the weather. It can be nice, but then ten minutes later, you can have a storm, rain or snow. You just have to get on with it. This can sometimes be a tough place to live, especially outside of Reykjavík. There are plenty of things that are simply not possible because of the weather."

So, Iceland had the players, the facilities and the right mentality. It just needed some people to bring it all together. In 2002, Siggi Eyjólfsson, a former international with a degree in sports psychology from the University of North Carolina, became the national association's technical director. His task was to train the country's football coaches. He decided, with the support of the national association, that coaches should be required to obtain coaching licences before they could be hired. "All clubs must be coached by people with at least a UEFA

HAT-TRICK HITS THE SPOT

Iceland's achievement in qualifying for EURO 2016 is just the tip of the iceberg. The women's senior and Under-17s teams and the men's Under-21s have all qualified for European Championship final tournaments in recent years, indicating that the development work the Football Association of Iceland (KSÍ) has undertaken in the past decade has benefitted all levels of the game. For the KSÍ president, Geir Thorsteinsson, UEFA's HatTrick programme, which is entirely funded by revenue from the European Football Championship, has been instrumental in improving standards across the board. "It has helped in many ways, both in technical aspects and also in terms of facilities," he said. "That could be various things – pitches, or football halls or stands for our top division – but in fact it has improved conditions throughout our game. It has been vital that UEFA has really taken care to distribute the money created in the international game to the small associations as well. Without that financial support we would never have been able to achieve this."

HatTrick I (2004–08)

Enlargement of the Laugardalsvöllur national stadium; construction of new KSÍ headquarters

HatTrick II (2008–12)

Infrastructure projects; completion of the new headquarters; grassroots and social projects

HatTrick III (2012–16)

Construction fund for facilities in regions, clubs and municipalities; goalkeeper course for young players; mini-pitch festivals; regional referee education programme

HatTrick IV (2016–20)

Goalkeeper development; grassroots activities; construction fund; social responsibility programmes

B licence, if not an A licence. Before you can start coaching, even if you want to coach children, you need to have a B licence. It's mandatory," Hallgrímsson explains. As a result, the country now boasts a wealth of talented coaches, from the villages of the western fjords to the →

capital Reykjavik. Íris Róbertsdóttir, president of Icelandic club ÍBV Vestmannaeyjar, concurs: "The coach of my six-year-old daughter's team has a UEFA A licence. The association is very strict on that. It's not possible for teams to be coached by someone's mum or dad. All coaches are qualified and paid, even in a village with 500 inhabitants." Eyjólfsson has now stepped down from that position and is assistant coach at Lillestrøm SK in Norway, but that does not prevent him from praising the Icelandic model at his press conferences: "In Iceland, there are 90 clubs and around 700 coaches with licences. More than 200 of those have an A licence, and the rest have a B licence."

Having been buoyed by the economic growth of the early to mid-2000s, the country then faced a more difficult situation from 2008

onwards. "The crisis was very hard, as there was an enormous amount of uncertainty and nobody knew what was going to happen. For at least two years, people were losing their jobs and property prices were exorbitant," Dadi Rafnsson explains. "However, in a small country, everyone has a safety net, and people often perform two different functions. A lawyer might also be a writer; a taxi driver might be a drummer in a band that is touring Europe. Our team's goalkeeper, for instance, also directs videos and adverts."

Although the country was collapsing, some people saw the crisis as an opportunity – a chance for Icelandic football to take a good look at itself. That introspection proved to be beneficial. In his ministerial office, Óskar Thór Ármannsson concurs: "The financial crisis reduced the amount of money in the game. It became more difficult for clubs to find sponsors, but the crisis had no impact on the development of the sport, as a crisis forces you to find new resources and do even more with what you have." Dadi Rafnsson's club, Breidablik, is a perfect illustration of that: "In 2006, we had quite a few foreign players. They were the only professionals at the club, and we finished in the lower reaches of the table. They all left in 2008 when we stopped being able to pay them, and we were forced to play youngsters developed at the club. Some were as young as 16, but we ended up winning the league! Nine of them are now playing professionally in Europe."

GEIR THORSTEINSSON

'I'VE BEEN DREAMING OF THIS FOR SUCH A LONG TIME'

It has been a steep climb, but the view from the summit makes it worthwhile for the Football Association of Iceland president.



How do you feel looking ahead to EURO 2016?

It's a proud moment. I've been dreaming of this for such a long time. Now it's a fact it's really exciting. There will be between 7,000 and 9,000 people travelling to each match. It's unbelievable.

What are the keys to this success?

Improving the facilities has been so important for our game. Building the football halls really changed training conditions. When I was young we didn't have such facilities. It was so different to what we have today, when we can train more or less all year round.

What coaching structures have been put in place?

We've always worked hard at our

youth levels because we are so few. We have 20,000 registered players, two-thirds of whom are 16 or under. We didn't have the facilities to work all year round or the coaching diplomas that we have implemented now, through UEFA, and which have raised the standard. We also made demands through the club licensing system – another UEFA project. We have gained a lot from that because we have imposed conditions on the clubs, requiring them to have qualified coaches for even the youngest players.

Mini-pitches are also popular...

When we started the project our aim was to build about 40 mini-pitches, but we've built about 150 all over Iceland. In the small communities, that has been very positive for the game – even from the smallest places you get great players.

'Here, everyone knows an international'

The team's tactical mastermind is Lars Lagerbäck. "He has done a superb job. He has got the team organised; he knows how to stop opponents from playing; and he knows how to get results with small nations, as he showed with Sweden," explains his colleague Hallgrímsson, who is due to take sole charge of the side after EURO 2016. When the Swede arrived in 2011, he immediately brought in promising young players such as Jóhann Guðmundsson, Aron Gunnarsson, Kolbeinn Sigþórsson and Gylfi Sigurðsson. "They played together for the Under-21s, so they know each other very well, both on and off the pitch. They also acquired good experience of international football at youth level, which is of great benefit. All of them are at good clubs and playing regularly, which is very important to me," he says. Lagerbäck switched to a 4-4-2 and made use of the inherent adaptability of the Icelandic people – a nation used to living in the middle of nowhere in the shadow of volcanos. "We are a very well organised team, and everybody works very hard for the team. That is the basis for our success."



AFP/Getty Images

Kolbeinn Sigthórsson on the ball during Iceland's 2-2 draw with Latvia on 10 October 2015.

Gylfi Sigurdsson is a world-class player, but compared with the Netherlands or France, we do not have as many talented individuals or players of the same calibre. When you're facing a team that is as strong as the Netherlands, you have to adapt. I instructed one of our forwards to drop back when we were defending, in order to help prevent their midfield from launching attacks. That's something you don't need to do when you're playing against weaker sides."

After very nearly taking Iceland to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil (with the team finishing second in their group, before being beaten by Croatia in the play-offs), Lagerbäck has now

taken that final step with qualification for EURO 2016. However, the Football Association of Iceland is already looking further ahead and wants to achieve sustainable development in the longer term. It has few resources, admittedly, but it has plenty of ideas. For example, the limitations imposed by Iceland's small pool of players mean that the country's player development centres hardly reject anyone. This means that even occasional late developers are catered for. "The idea is that young players are never turned away before the age of 19. There is always a team that they can play for," Dadi Rafnsson says. "Alfred Finnbogason, for example, who has just joined Olympiacos FC and was the top goalscorer in the Dutch league, was in the B team here at Breydablik until the age of 19." What is more, public pressure is almost non-existent in Iceland, in the same way that players don't have star status. It's not unusual, for example, to see Eidur Gudjohnsen walking freely around the town centre when he's back in the country, without being asked for pictures or autographs. "Here, everyone knows someone from the national team personally. And they certainly know someone who knows someone. Everyone has an uncle or a cousin who has played football at a high level," Dadi Rafnsson says. Iceland is like every other small country in that respect. ☑

ICELAND'S QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

Iceland	3-0	Turkey
Latvia	0-3	Iceland
Iceland	2-0	Netherlands
Czech Republic	2-1	Iceland
Kazakhstan	0-3	Iceland
Iceland	2-1	Czech Republic
Netherlands	0-1	Iceland
Iceland	0-0	Kazakhstan
Iceland	2-2	Latvia
Turkey	1-0	Iceland

ANNUAL COACH EDUCATION SEMINAR

BY CARMEN REDL



In mid-January the Austrian Football Association (ÖFB) held its annual coach education seminar at Franz-Horr-Stadion in Vienna and Maria Enzersdorf on the outskirts of the capital. The seminar was aimed at coaches with UEFA Pro, A and B licences and counted as a continuing professional development activity. It was attended by 300 participants, who discussed, among other topics, the question of where Austria stands relative to other countries, as well as the success of the 'Belgian method' and the influences and challenges in

L-R: Wolfgang Luisser (U21 assistant coach), Willi Ruttensteiner, Niko Kovač, Werner Gregoritsch and Thomas Janeschitz (senior team assistant coach)

decision-making. The practical part of the seminar focused on issues such as the implementation of a footballing philosophy and the transition from defence to attack after winning the ball.

In addition to presentations by the ÖFB's



sporting director, Willi Ruttensteiner, and the coach of the national Under-21 side, Werner Gregoritsch, international speakers were also on hand to give the participants the benefit of their wisdom on matters of theory and practice. They were Niko Kovač, Kris Van Der Haegen (head of coach education at the Royal Belgian Football Association), FIFA instructor Holger Osieck and UEFA instructor Dany Ryser.

The seminar was also a fitting opportunity to bid a fond farewell to Otto Waldhardt and Ilse Pichlmann, who are retiring after many long years of service managing coach education and continuing professional development at the ÖFB.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

www.nfsbih.ba

REFEREES GIVE BLOOD

BY FUAD KRVAVAC

 At its last meeting of 2015, the executive board of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation (NFSBiH) decided to offer Mehmed Baždarević a new two-year contract as coach of the national team, despite the team missing out on a place at EURO 2016. Baždarević's first mission now is to get the national team ready for the 2018 World Cup qualifiers.

In other news, Bosnia and Herzegovina's referees and referee instructors took part in a campaign to encourage people to give blood, to

highlight to other sportsmen and the public that fair play is something that should extend beyond the field of play and should be practised in our everyday lives. All the regional referee associations took part, getting the message out through the width and breadth of the country.

"Around 300 donors across the country responded to the call to give blood and, in doing so, to help save lives," said Ibrahim Hasanbegović, one of the organizers of the campaign and chairman of the Sarajevo cantonal referees association. "We plan to make

it an annual event now," he added.

Elsewhere, the constituent assembly of the union of professional footballers of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been held in Zenica. "The biggest problems faced by footballers in our country concern the non-payment of pension, disability and health insurance, and salaries not being paid on time," said Aldin Džidić, whose idea it was to establish a national professional players' union.

Vitomir Paškalj was elected chairman of the new union as a former footballer and someone who encountered these problems during his career. "The players' union will provide maximum support and other assistance. The football association is behind us, which is a huge advantage," he said. The inaugural meeting was also attended by Elmir Pilav, head of competitions and events at the NFSBiH. "The federation certainly takes account of registered football players in clubs in Bosnia and Herzegovina; however, the creation of the union is a step forward in the protection of their rights," he said.

The union will work in close cooperation with other players' unions in the region (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro and FYR Macedonia), which already play a major role on the national football scene.



Some of the Sarajevo referees who responded to the call to give blood

BULGARIA

www.bfunion.bg

SEMINAR FOR ELITE REFEREE OBSERVERS

BY THE MEDIA DEPARTMENT

 A seminar for FIFA elite referee observers was held in Sofia in January, with 28 participants attending the five-day event. The seminar was held in collaboration with the Bulgaria FA (BFU) referees committee.

The main goal of the seminar was to improve the quality of referee observers through a new interactive way of analysing situations on the pitch and to ensure that referee observers work from the same criteria as referees. The seminar featured workshops, presentations and educational tests on topics including fouls and misconduct, tactical fouls, 'How do match incidents affect match officials' individual marks?', offside, debriefing exercises, analysis of assessment reports and the Laws on the Game.



The main instructor at this seminar was FIFA technical referee instructor Steve Bennett. "As with any referees, you always have to remind them about new laws and concepts that we have to introduce. In order to raise the level of referees, we have to bring up the level of referee instructors and also we have to make sure the observers are reporting the correct information from the match on their report in order for the referees to learn," he said. UEFA refereeing officer Marc Batta was a guest at the seminar. "The BFU referees committee is doing a good job and we will continue to work on it. The key is to work," he said.

At the end of this successful event, Steve Bennett presented all participants with a FIFA certificate of attendance.

CROATIA

www.hns-cff.hr

PAST AND PRESENT IN FOCUS

BY TOMISLAV PACAK



 In December, the president of the Croatian Football Federation (HNS), Davor Šuker, unveiled a monument to the first football in Croatia in the city of Zupanja. The first football was brought to Zupanja in the late 19th century by English industrialists. "I am proud to see this monument in Zupanja, which shows that we care about the history of the game. At the same time, however, we are determined to invest as much as possible in new pitches and equipment so we can provide the best conditions for developing new football talent in every part of Croatia," Davor Šuker said.

In other news, during its regular general meeting, the HNS named former presidents Mladen Vediš and Branko Mikša as honorary presidents. Vediš was the first president of the Croatian Football Federation, while Mikša led the HNS at the time of its biggest success, when it won the bronze medal at the 1998 World Cup. The HNS also acknowledged the many contributions of Martin Novoselac, former player and long-standing youth coach, who retired at the end of 2015.

While caring about its history and important figures, the HNS is at the same time focusing on the future of football. In that regard, the first women's futsal championship kicked off in December with a well-organised tournament in Zadar, and in January, Rovinj and Umag hosted the traditional winter camps for the different youth teams, in which

almost 200 boys and girls took part.

The HNS also organised a first football forum in Zagreb, gathering many respectable individuals as speakers for two panel discussions – on the role of the media and the role of business in Croatian football.

Looking back to 2015, a number of Croatian players were recognised for their achievements during the year. Real Madrid's Luka Modrić was selected for the FIFA FIFPro World XI, while Barcelona's Ivan Rakitić was named Croatian sportsman of the year, becoming only the fifth footballer to receive the award in the 64-year history of the award. The Croatian Olympic Committee chose the Croatian national team as the best promoter of Croatia for the sixth time in the history of the award.

While preparing for EURO 2016, the HNS has already started planning for the European Under-17 Championship final tournament that it will be hosting in 2017. At the kick-off meeting organised with the LOC, the tournament director, Romeo Jozak, said: "A huge project is ahead of us, but I can say that we are looking forward to the challenge."

Last but not least, the HNS has appointed an experienced security expert, Miroslav Marković, as its new security officer. His predecessor, Zoran Cvirk, has moved to the new position of assistant executive director for event management and match manager.

CZECH REPUBLIC

www.fotbal.cz

GRASSROOTS GALA NIGHT

BY MICHAL BLAŽEK

 Grassroots football in the Czech Republic was celebrated at a gala evening on 10 January. It was the 14th ceremony of its kind. During the evening, attended by more than 500 guests, awards were presented to the best men's, women's and futsal players and coaches, as well as, among others, for the best grassroots event, best social programme and fair play. The winner of the main category, the best Under-19 player, was Czech Under-21 international Václav Černý of Ajax Amsterdam, who took the award for the second year in a row. Unfortunately, Václav could not be there to collect his award because he was at an Ajax Amsterdam training camp in Turkey at the time.



FACR

Václav Černý

DENMARK

www.dbu.dk

NEW NATIONAL COACH

BY MARTIN MOGENSEN

 The appointment of Norwegian Åge Hareide as the new head coach of the Danish national team signals the start of a new era, after Morten Olsen resigned following the EURO 2016 play-offs in November.

The main goal is clear: to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. For that, Hareide comes to the job with a worthy track record that bolsters confidence in achieving that goal. He has won the Norwegian and Danish championships, is a two-time winner of the Norwegian cup and Swedish championship, and is also a Swedish cup winner. In addition, he guided Malmö to the group stage of the UEFA Champions League in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Born in 1953 in Ålesund, in western Norway, Hareide played for Hødd, Molde (Norway), Manchester City and Norwich City, as well as earning 50 caps for Norway and scoring five goals for his country. After he hung up his playing boots, he moved into coaching and in this capacity has had spells with, among others, Molde, Helsingborg (Sweden), Brøndby (Denmark), Rosenborg (Norway),

Malmö (Sweden) and the Norwegian national team.

His contract as Denmark's national coach is for two years, with the option of a two-year extension.



ENGLAND

www.thefa.com

ON THE ROAD TO THE PEOPLE'S FA CUP

BY ANTHONY SNOW

 The FA People's Cup got under way in January, featuring over 4,000 teams and 35,000 amateur players across England. With 129 different venues playing host to the first round, it was a busy weekend. Winning teams from the first round go through to the regional semi-finals in February, with the finals forming part of the Sport Relief charity weekend in March, when the teams will compete for the chance to win tickets to The FA Cup Final in May at Wembley.

The competition features ten different categories, male and female, ranging from an Under-14 tournament to walking football for the over-50s. There is also a pan-disability tournament. Ian Clarke,

captain of Croydon Casuals, who were beaten finalists in the Walking Football tournament last year, hopes his team can go one better this time around. "Last year everyone enjoyed the competition and while we were disappointed to lose on penalties, it was great just to be in the grand final of a national competition," he said.

Clarke expects this season's cup will prove even tougher to conquer, given the rising popularity of walking football in the last six months. With the game restricted to those over the age of 50, it is a growing format of the sport, which does not surprise Clarke in the slightest. He has been involved in walking football since 2013 after seeing

a feature on the BBC and deciding to get involved locally. Since then, he has helped form the Casuals and has been involved in numerous competitions as well thoroughly enjoying the social side of the game.

A host of familiar faces turned out to support participants in the first round, including England goalkeeping legend Peter Shilton, England women's all-time top goalscorer Kelly Smith, and the chairman of The FA, Greg Dyke, who said: "Again, what a fantastic tournament it is proving to be – bigger and better than last year and a wonderful opportunity for everyone taking part to experience their own cup romance."

ESTONIA

www.jalgpall.ee

CLUB RUNS SUCCESSFUL CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN

BY MAARJA SAULEP



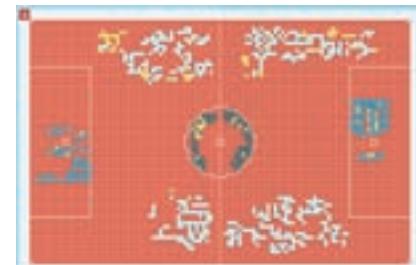
The south Estonian top-division football club JK Tammeka Tartu has successfully run a crowdfunding campaign, during which it raised €150,000 to put towards improving local training conditions. The money will be used to convert an old stadium into a modern training facility called the Sepa football centre.

The club launched a website and invited people to make a donation by buying their own virtual square metre of the artificial field. By the end of the campaign, all the square metres had been sold and a total of

3,109 people, companies and businesses had donated to the project. The campaign ran for 71 days, from 2 November 2015 to 12 January 2016.

The project came about because the town of Tartu has about 2,000 football players in all age groups, including its top division team, but lacks high-quality pitches for training and games. During winter time the existing artificial pitches cannot cope with the demand and get icy and overcrowded.

The total cost of the project is €450,000, two-thirds of which is being



The virtual football field used for the campaign

covered by a bank loan and with the help of the Estonian FA. The remaining €150,000 comes from the successful crowdfunding project. The new football centre should be ready in July, when JK Tammeka Tartu plans to organise Estonia's biggest ever public viewing there, inviting all the donors to watch the EURO 2016 final on a giant screen on the new field.

FINLAND

www.palloliitto.fi

NEW FOOTBALL APPLICATION

BY JUKKA SALASUO

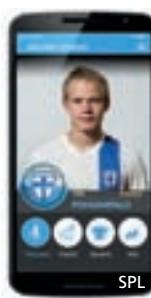


Football and futsal players in Finland now have an official mobile application at their disposal. Launched in November, Futis currently includes the player pass (licence), news and also benefits and discounts from the official Finland national team online store. All existing players – about 130,000 of them – have already received log-in instructions and usernames, which

new players will receive on registering. For children the application can be downloaded onto their parents' mobile devices. With the application, the practice of sending out printed player passes by post becomes a thing of the past, with electronic passes replacing the old paper.

The application will develop all the time and will eventually include many more functions, allowing players to communicate

with each other and share their social media profiles and football-related videos, for example. Players will also be able to communicate with their coaches, who, in turn, will be able to give feedback to players, with a view to encouraging players to practise more in their own time. Over time, as new functions are developed, the application is expected to become a popular tool for all football and futsal players in Finland.



FRANCE

www.fff.fr

ONE-STOP SHOP FOR MEDIA

BY LAURA GOUTRY



The French Football Federation (FFF) has launched a new IT tool for journalists. Devised to facilitate the transmission of information and communication with the FFF's press office, this extranet platform will eventually become the main interface between journalists and the FFF.

With press releases, press kits, breaking news, the media library, video content, and more available there

since January, all the information that journalists need is now at their fingertips. Media representatives can also use the extranet to request accreditation for FFF events or to submit filming requests.

This project comes under the Blue Horizon 2016 action plan, one of the main aims of which is to modernise and improve the way French football is run.



NATIONAL MEDICAL TEAM APPOINTED

BY STEVEN GONZALEZ

 The Gibraltar FA recently appointed a new medical team to take charge of all of the association's medical matters and issues. With immediate effect, Dr Keith Gracia becomes the new chief medical officer and Iain Latin (who has been and continues to be the national team physio) has been appointed as head physiotherapist. Both Dr Gracia and Iain are experts in their chosen professions and not only bring a vast amount of

knowledge to the Gibraltar FA's medical department, but also bring an immense and unparalleled local reputation with them.

Dr Keith Gracia is thrilled about his appointment and cannot wait to get started: "It is a great opportunity for me and an immense privilege to have been offered this role by the Gibraltar FA. It is an immense honour to be in a position where as a Gibraltarian I can not only represent my country but also work with

our top footballers throughout all of our age groups. I am very much looking forward to being part of this exciting project and developing the Gibraltar FA's medical department into one that we can all be proud of."

Iain Latin, meanwhile, has worked extremely efficiently with Gibraltar's national team since its first official friendly, against Slovakia in November 2013, and also cannot wait to get started: "I am absolutely delighted and honoured to have been given this role and opportunity. It has always been and will continue to be a privilege to represent my country and work with all of our national teams. I am extremely grateful to the Gibraltar FA and am very much looking forward to working with the medical team to ensure its development and growth."

The association's general secretary, Dennis Beiso, is delighted to be able to welcome both Dr Gracia and Iain into the Gibraltar FA: "It is with great pleasure that I welcome Keith and Iain into the Gibraltar FA set-up. They are extremely talented Gibraltarian medical professionals, both with great reputations, and add to our ever growing pool of great Gibraltarian assets within the Gibraltar FA."



Head physiotherapist Iain Latin at work

COMPETENCE CENTRES IN THE REGIONS

BY EITAN DOTAN

 The Israel Football Association (IFA), in conjunction with the ministry of sport and the local authorities, will start operating competence centres in the next few months as part of a national project to develop football in Israel. The project will start in five regions around the country for players aged from 12 to 14.

The competence centres will constitute regional centres that provide services to clubs and teams in that geographic region that are affiliated to the IFA. Generally, clubs in Israel do not have

the capability to provide professional enrichment, resources such as academies, and manpower. The centres will therefore serve as regional academies at which all talented youngsters will be able to train and advance. In addition, the centres will be used to train and qualify coaches, as well as to run professional specialisation courses and to improve training capabilities. They will also guarantee instruction and training at the highest level for the clubs and their officials.

Each centre has multiple objectives: to find and foster talented youngsters;

to advance and foster coaches and professional staff; and, naturally, to provide improved and enlarged training facilities. Ronen Hershco, director of the IFA national teams and education department, and the project manager, said: "The competence centres will also make it possible to provide equal conditions for everyone – for those in peripheral areas and for small clubs as well as big clubs. There is no doubt that the competence centres will widen the activities of Israeli football and enhance and upgrade it."

ITALY

www.figc.it

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN SCHOOLS

BY DIEGO ANTENOZIO

 The youth and schools department of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) is expanding its project 'Valori in Rete' (Values in goal) with a specific programme tailored to the development of women's football and futsal in junior high schools.

'Ragazze in gioco' (Girls at play), designed in cooperation with the ministry of education, universities and research (MIUR), has three main objectives: to promote football and sport among girls; to increase participation in FIGC women's competitions; and to reduce the number of young people who give up playing sport.

Schools that regularly compete in school sports championships will be invited to take part in the project, as will interested schools that meet certain requirements, such as having suitable football/futsal infrastructure and the possibility of coaching support from local FIGC-licensed clubs. Before the programme kicks off in March, coaches from the FIGC's youth and schools department will deliver ten hours of training to the school teachers involved.

'Ragazze in gioco' also gives schools the opportunity to organise activities outside of school time at the clubs providing coaching support. In May, the participating schools will compete in a tournament to determine which ones will be included in the overall programme to support the development of women's football.



FIGC

KAZAKHSTAN

www.kff.kz

NEW ACADEMY OPENS

BY DMITRIY NESTERENKO

 On 1 December the Football Federation of Kazakhstan (KFF) held a formal ceremony to mark the opening of its Ontustik Academy in the city of Shymkent. The ceremony was attended by, among others, the first deputy mayor of the South Kazakhstan region, Darkhan Satybaldy, as well as the KFF president, Yerlan Kozhagapanov, general secretary, Azamat Aitkhozhin, vice-presidents Seilda Bayshakov and Baglan Ergeshev, and executive committee member Bauyrzhan Abdubaitov. They were joined by Kazakh football stars past and present.

"I am delighted to be here with you all celebrating the Day of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the official opening of the Ontustik Academy," the KFF president said in his welcome speech. After the official opening ceremony, a group of players from the Ontustik Academy took to the field alongside their idols, playing a match against a team of Kazakh football stars. The match ended in a 0-0 draw.

The Ontustik Academy was created with the support of the KFF on the basis of a public-private partnership between

the BIIK football centre, which provides football infrastructure (including a hotel); the administration of the South Kazakhstan region, which funds some of the upkeep of the academy; and the KFF, which provides coaches, kit and equipment.

The academy actually opened for business in June last year, when Spanish youth coaches helped their Kazakh counterparts to select 65 top young footballers from among more than 600 children aged between 10 and 14. In January, the Spanish coaches returned to the academy to select a new group of talents, all born in 2004.

The Day of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan was chosen for the opening ceremony to pay tribute to the support and encouragement shown by the country's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to youth football development. By opening football academies and centres around the country, we aim to create a pool of talent for our country's national teams at youth and senior level, and, ultimately, to put Kazakhstan on the map as a global footballing powerhouse.



Players from the Ontustik Academy take on Kazakh football stars

KFF

VĀJINS VOTED FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR

BY TOMS ĀRMANIS

 Andris Vājins, who plays in goal for the Latvian national team as well as for FC Sion in Switzerland, has been voted Latvia's footballer of the year for 2015. It was his third such award, having previously won the title in 2008 and 2013, and the third year in a row that the award went to a goalkeeper.

The footballer of the year is voted for by the coaches of the different Latvian national teams, the top division clubs and their captains, the top division union, the members of the board of the Latvian Football Federation (LFF) and Latvian football journalists. Other nominees were defenders Kaspars Dubra and Kaspars Gorkšs and striker Deniss Rakels.

The heroes of Latvian football in 2015 were hailed at the annual awards evening of the LFF, when 25 awards were presented to the most notable persons on

and off the football pitch. The theme of this year's event was 'People with values shape football'.

Other highlights of the evening included Ieva Bidermane being named best women footballer of the year, Argentine Cristian Damian Torres being

named best top division player, Andris Treimanis taking the best referee award for the second year in a row, and Haralds Gudermanis being named the best assistant referee for no less than the seventh year in a row. The best youth footballer of 2015 was Nikita Juhnevičs.



LFF

MALTA FA INVESTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

BY ALEX VELLA

 The Malta FA is constantly expanding and improving its infrastructure. Projects are also geared towards making the association's facilities more attractive for its member clubs and the different Maltese national teams. In recent months a new floodlighting system was installed at the training grounds adjacent to the Ta' Qali

National Stadium. This facility will make it possible for the natural grass pitches to be used at irregular hours. At the National Stadium itself, the grass pitch will be replaced by a lush new surface once the 2015/16 season is over. The aim is to have the new pitch in place by the summer. Elsewhere, a new state-of-the-art medical and physiotherapy clinic was

also inaugurated last year.

These and other ongoing works are also bound to have a bearing on the association's objective of attracting commercial business by offering better facilities for training camps for foreign teams. The island's mild climate and relatively warm temperatures, besides the grass training grounds and quality facilities, should lure clubs from Europe and beyond for training sessions during their cold winter season. The proximity of hotels to the training hub will be another advantage. In early January the Dutch club PSV Eindhoven were on the island for a week. They were followed by Legia Warsaw of Poland, whose two-week stint also turned out to be very useful for them. A third team, who are staying until mid-February, are Terek Grozny from Russia's top division. As this goes to show, our investment in infrastructure is already paying off, both for our own teams as well as those from abroad.

PSV Eindhoven at the Ta' Qali training grounds



D. Aquilina

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

BRIGHTENING THE LIVES OF ORPHANED CHILDREN

BY THE PRESS OFFICE

 As part of its ongoing charitable work, the Football Association of Moldova (FMF) paid its traditional visit bearing gifts to the Concordia orphanage in Pirla in the east Moldovan region of Dubasari.

It was the tenth year in a row that the FMF had visited the orphanage, where 300 children ranging in age from one to 16 gathered in the sports hall to receive gifts of sweets, footballs and magazines from the FMF president, Pavel Cebanu, accompanied by Moldovan internationals Ion Jardan and Alexandru Vremea, both of FC Zimbru Chișinău.



After the children had received their gifts, they had the opportunity to get autographs and to sing and dance for their famous guests.

NETHERLANDS

www.knvb.nl

WORLDCOACHES REACHES 56,000 CHILDREN IN 2015

BY BRAM GROOT

 Last year was a very good year for the WorldCoaches programme of the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB). It got 56,000 children in 13 different countries playing football. Furthermore, 1,400 certificates were awarded to local coaches, who are now able to set up their own local youth training programmes. A WorldCoach is more than a football coach. WorldCoaches are trained to be contact persons and role models for children as well. Children can play football in a fun and responsible way and learn about their social environment at the same time. Since the WorldCoaches programme began in October 2009, more

than 9,000 certificates have been awarded to local coaches and over 360,000 children have been inspired to develop their social and sporting skills.

Aron Winter, former Dutch international and player with Ajax, Lazio Roma and Inter Milan, is one of the programme's ambassadors: "I gave many courses in a lot of countries last year. It was great to see how much fun children have playing football and how positive the development of coaches is for the local community. Working in countries where the conditions are a lot less favourable than in the Netherlands or Europe left an impression. My favourite memory from last year has to be the time I spent with children in Ghana. Together with local heroes Matthew Amoah and Stephan Appiah, we ran a training session for 150 excited children."

At the moment, WorldCoaches programmes are being run in Surinam, Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Ghana, South Africa, India and Indonesia.

Aron Winter in Ghana



NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

ROADSHOWS INSPIRE GIRLS

BY NIGEL TILSON

 The Irish FA will be delivering girls' football roadshows across Northern Ireland in April and May. The Live Your Goals roadshows are aimed at increasing the number of girls that play football in Northern Ireland and helping to raise the profile of the sport. The Irish FA's women's domestic football manager, Sara Booth, said: "We are working hard to encourage more girls to play football and programmes such as Live Your Goals are imperative in helping us achieve this."

The free-entry roadshows, aimed at girls aged 10 and 11, will feature skills



IFA

drills, small-sided games, inflatables, competitions and music. They are being held at 16 venues right across Northern Ireland.

Members of the Northern Ireland international women's squad will also be in attendance at the FIFA-backed events to get involved with all the activities.

Sara added: "Female players around the world are role models of footballing excellence and technique, perseverance, discipline, teamwork, respect and fair play. We are hoping those attending the roadshows will be inspired to participate in football and the events will demonstrate how they can achieve their goals through football."

The first of the roadshows takes place in Omagh on 12 April and the programme will conclude in Castlereagh on 20 May. Over the past two years the Irish FA has provided football for 2,700 girls through Live Your Goals activities, including roadshows.

MAJOR SPONSORSHIP DEAL FOR WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

BY MATILDE DIAS

 The Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) announced in January a new three-year sponsorship deal with one of the world's largest insurance companies, Allianz, for its women's national teams, women's football championships and also the women's FA cup and super cup. This deal includes naming rights for all women's national competitions and a commitment to invest in the women's game and support the nationwide programmes of girls-only

football activities promoted by the FPF. The sponsorship also includes an agreement to televise women's national team and women's national championship matches.

It represents a landmark moment in the history of women's football in Portugal, as it is the first ever major sponsorship of the women's competitions. It signals the growth and stature of the women's game in recent years, since the FPF implemented its strategic development programme for women's football.



FPF

PRAISE FOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATION WORK

BY PAUL ZAHARIA

 On 15 January the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) was recognised for its comprehensive and constant efforts against discrimination, especially its initiative to elaborate a concrete and feasible anti-discrimination through football strategy.

The Penalty Against Discrimination award was presented to the FRF general secretary, Radu Visan, by the organisers, ActiveWatch and Romani CRISS.

ActiveWatch is one of the most important organisations in Romania in the field of promoting and defending human

rights. It is also Romania's number one press monitoring agency and a member of IFEX (the global network defending and promoting free expression). Romani CRISS (the Roma Centre for Social Intervention and Studies) defends the rights of the Romanian Roma community and works to prevent discrimination against the Roma minority in all areas of public life.

FRF anti-discrimination activities such as its Fair Play Days, Diversity Cup and Football for All competition not only promote football and non-discrimination,

but also enable hundreds of youngsters to understand and learn values that they should put into practice both on and off the pitch.

Three days after receiving the award, the FRF hosted a meeting of the task force set up to fight discrimination through football as part of the wider initiative to put in place a global anti-discrimination strategy in Romanian society. The other members of the task force come from the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, the Bucharest gendarmerie, the department for inter-ethnic relations, the Social-Democrat Institute, Romani CRISS and the Romanian professional football league.

The executive director of FARE (the Football Against Racism in Europe network), Piara Powar, also attended this latest task force meeting. He congratulated the FRF on its anti-discrimination work and strategy, which could be considered as a model for all other Romanian sports federations as well as for many European federations, and announced that the FARE network would continue its close cooperation with the FRF. The task force aims to have a working strategy finished and adopted by 31 March this year.



The anti-discrimination task force meeting

SCOTLAND

www.scottishfa.co.uk

AN EXCITING YEAR FOR SCOTTISH REFEREES

BY DAVID CHILDS



Scotland's representatives on the FIFA international referees list for 2016 were celebrated at an awards dinner in January.

Twenty-one officials have made the list for this year, consisting of nine referees and 12 assistant referees, who received their FIFA badges at a ceremony

in Glasgow. At UEFA level, meanwhile, referees John Beatton and Lorraine Clark have been promoted from the second to the first category and Andrew Dallas moves up from category 3 to category 2. Craig Thomson, William Collum and Morag Pirie all retain their UEFA elite referees statuses.



Scottish FA

UEFA elite referees are qualified to officiate high-level matches in Europe, most notably in the Champions League, while category 1 referees can be appointed for the latter stages of the Europa League and the earlier rounds of the Champions League. Second and third category referees are appointed for youth tournaments, and first, second and third category referees can be appointed as additional assistant referees.

2016 promises to be an exciting year for Scottish refereeing, with William Collum – who refereed the 2015 UEFA Super Cup between FC Barcelona and Sevilla – one of 18 referees appointed for EURO 2016.

The Scottish FA's head of referee operations, John Fleming, said: "It is very satisfying, as head of referee operations, to see so many Scottish referees awarded FIFA international badges for the year. It is recognition of the hard work, dedication and sacrifices that they have made over many years to reach the highest level."

SLOVAKIA

www.futbalsfz.sk

NEW MEMORANDUM OF COOPERATION WITH THE UAE

BY PETER ŠURIN

 The Slovak Football Association has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the United Arab Emirates Football Association.

The memorandum was signed in December following a meeting in the UAE between the two football associations to discuss where and how they could cooperate. The Slovak FA was represented by its president, Ján Kováčik, and general secretary, Jozef Kliment. "We are already cooperating closely with many European associations and are an active member of UEFA. Naturally, we are also very interested in cooperation outside Europe and are therefore honoured to have been approached by the

UAE FA," Jozef Kliment said afterwards.

The areas discussed at the meeting were wide and varied, ranging from coach and referee education, development programmes for youth and women's football and the possibility of arranging more mutual matches and training camps for teams of various ages, to knowledge-sharing on developing and managing sports facilities, and the realms of sports science, sports medicine, business and media expert knowledge, and exchange programmes for technical, administrative and management staff.

The resulting memorandum of cooperation is built on shared opinions and a mutual interest in helping football



Ján Kováčik and Yousoof Yaqoob Al Serkal

to develop and move with the times.

The signing of the agreement by Ján Kováčik and Yousoof Yaqoob Al Serkal, president of the UAE FA, was the highlight of the Slovak representatives' short trip to the United Arab Emirates.

SWITZERLAND

www.football.ch

MEDIA AND REFEREEING

BY PIERRE BENOIT

 Every football fan knows the SFV scene, sat in their armchair watching the umpteenth replay of a controversial goal, trying to decide for themselves whether it should have been given. Yet even in super-slow motion it is often impossible to say with absolute certainty whether the goalscorer was offside or not.

About two minutes have passed since the referee decided that the player was not offside and awarded the goal. He had just a split second to take a decision with his assistants, with no video footage and no slow motion.



What's more, the referee knows that after the match he will have to put up with the disputed goal and his split-second decision being discussed on TV, online and all over the next day's papers, with the manager of the defeated club describing it as scandalous and declaring that with refereeing like that his club stands no chance of winning the league.

With the aim of helping radio and TV presenters and journalists to make more professional, better informed comments, the Swiss FA's Bruno Grossen, who is responsible for the training of Switzerland's top referees, invited media representatives to a workshop at which controversial situations were shown, analysed and discussed. "The presenters and journalists have to respond almost as quickly as the referee takes his decision, so it's important that they know the rules and why the referee took the decision he did," Grossen says. "The participants enjoyed it and it's definitely an exercise that we'll be repeating." The feedback from media representatives was equally positive.

TURKEY

www.tff.org

TURKEY LIFT AEGEAN CUP

BY AYDIN GÜVENIR

 The 17th edition of the 2016 Aegean Cup was held from 18 to

23 January in Izmir, Kusadasi and Manisa. Eight Under-16 national teams took part, from the USA, Czech Republic, Belgium, Ukraine, Greece, Norway, Romania and the hosts themselves.

The Aegean Cup is one of the most prestigious international tournaments in this age category. Since it began in 1999, when it was called the Bora Öztürk tournament, teams from 20 different countries have taken part. It has been the Aegean Cup since 2002 and has been played every year except 2005. Originally played as an Under-15 competition, the age level was increased to Under-17 in

2002 before becoming an Under-16 competition in 2004.

This year Turkey, Ukraine, Norway and Czech Republic formed Group A, while the USA, Greece, Romania and Belgium made up Group B. Turkey won Group A with nine points and went through to the final against the USA, who finished Group B in first place with six points.

In the final, the hosts came out on top, beating the USA 3-1 and winning the competition for the second year in a row and the eighth time in all.

Third place in the tournament went to Greece, runners-up in Group B, who beat Group A runners-up Ukraine 1-0 with a last-minute goal in the play-off.



UKRAINE

www.ffu.org.ua

UKRAINE WIN DEVELOPMENT CUP IN BELARUS

BY YURI MAZNYCHENKO

 Ukraine's Under-17 team have won this year's prestigious Development Cup tournament, which takes place every January in Minsk, Belarus, on artificial turf.

On the road to the final, where they met the host nation, Oleksandr Petrakov's team enjoyed a winning streak of three matches, beating Moldova 5-1, Georgia 3-1 and Israel 3-1 after a goalless opening match against Finland.

In the final itself, Ukraine took Belarus by surprise, scoring twice in the first ten minutes, both goals coming from Kulakov. Belarus had pulled back a goal by half-time, but after the break the

'blue-yellows' sealed their victory by converting a counterattack to take the final score to 3-1. It was Ukraine's third victory in the tournament and their first since 2012, when they beat Georgia 2-0.



ABFF

BIRTHDAYS

Benny Jacobsen (Denmark, 1 March)
Luis Medina Cantalejo (Spain, 1 March)
Damir Vrbanović (Croatia, 2 March)
Jenni Kennedy (England, 2 March)
Hans Lorenz (Germany, 3 March)
Zbigniew Boniek (Poland, 3 March) **60th**
Alexandru Deaconu (Romania, 3 March)
Carolin Greiner Mai (Germany, 3 March)
François Vasseur (France, 3 March)
Patrick McGrath (Republic of Ireland, 4 March)
Kuddusi Müftüoglu (Turkey, 4 March)
Crawford Wilson (Northern Ireland, 5 March)
Zoran Bahtijarević (Croatia, 5 March)
Ronen Hershco (Israel, 5 March)
Jim Shaw (Northern Ireland, 6 March)
Boris Durlen (Croatia, 6 March)
Ichko Lozev (Bulgaria, 6 March) **60th**
Hervé Piccirillo (France, 6 March)
Dan Ashworth (England, 6 March)
Pedro María Aurteneche Viñegra (Spain, 7 March)
Dušan Maravić (Serbia, 7 March)
Tomás Gea (Andorra, 7 March) **50th**
Josep Lluís Vilaseca Guasch (Spain, 8 March)
Kris Bellon (Belgium, 8 March)
Alexis Ponnet (Belgium, 9 March)
Henk Kesler (Netherlands, 9 March)
Herbert Fandel (Germany, 9 March)
Otar Giorgadze (Georgia, 9 March)
Mateo Beusan (Croatia, 10 March)
Ilkka Koho (Finland, 10 March)
Jasmin Baković (Bosnia-Herzegovina, 10 March)
Diana Andersen (Denmark, 10 March)
Lucien Kayser (Luxembourg, 11 March)
Olga Zhukovska (Ukraine, 11 March)
Jean-François Crucke (Belgium, 12 March)
Miroslav Vitković (Croatia, 12 March)
Thomas Partl (Austria, 13 March)
Yngve Hallén (Norway, 14 March)
Neil Jardine (Northern Ireland, 14 March)
Nikola Prentic (Montenegro, 14 March)
Ivan Ćurković (Serbia, 15 March)
Götz Dimanski (Germany, 15 March)
Michael Thomas Ross (Northern Ireland, 15 March)
Cornelis Bakker (Netherlands, 17 March)
Simeon Tsolakidis (Greece, 17 March) **50th**
Christos Skapoullis (Cyprus, 18 March)
Marcello Nicchi (Italy, 18 March)
Paul Elliott (England, 18 March)
Marina Tashchyan (Armenia, 18 March)
Ronald Zimmermann (Germany, 19 March)
Sándor Csányi (Hungary, 20 March)
Edward Foley (Republic of Ireland, 20 March)

Jim Boyce (Northern Ireland, 21 March)
Kai-Erik Arstad (Norway, 21 March)
Denis Bastari (Albania, 21 March)
Ginés Meléndez (Spain, 22 March)
Chris Georgiades (Cyprus, 22 March)
Michail Kassabov (Bulgaria, 22 March)
Pascal Fritz (France, 25 January)
Luca Zorzi (Switzerland, 22 March)
Hugo Quaderer (Liechtenstein, 22 March)
Pafsanias Papanikolaou (Greece, 22 March) **40th**
Andrew Niven (Scotland, 22 March)
Franz Krösslhuber (Austria, 23 March)
Andrea Lastrucci (Italy, 23 March)
Mirosław Malinowski (Poland, 23 March)
Mahmut Özgener (Turkey, 23 March)
Hilda McDermott (Republic of Ireland, 23 March)
Outi Saarinen (Finland, 23 March) **50th**
Fernando Ruiz Hierro (Spain, 23 March)
Dejan Dimovski (FYR Macedonia, 23 March)
Christoforos Zografas (Greece, 24 March)
Michael Kirchner (Germany, 25 March)
Wilfried Straub (Germany, 26 March)
Gitte Holm (Denmark, 26 March)
Jelle Goes (Netherlands, 26 March)
Steen Jørgensen (Denmark, 26 March)
John Peacock (England, 27 March) **60th**
José Antonio Casajus (Spain, 27 March)
Armen Minasyan (Armenia, 27 March)
Pavel Cebanu (Moldova, 28 March)
Edgar Obertüfer (Switzerland, 29 March)
Ian Beasley (England, 29 March)
Stefan Ormandjiev (Bulgaria, 29 March)

Alan Snoddy (Northern Ireland, 29 March)
Bernadette Constantin (France, 29 March)
Bernadino González Vázquez (Spain, 29 March) **50th**
Sanna Pirhonen (Finland, 29 March)
William Hugh Wilson (Scotland, 30 March)
Richard Havrilla (Slovakia, 31 March) **50th**
Marina Mamaeva (Russia, 31 March)
Matteo Simone Trefoloni (Italy, 31 March)

COMMUNICATIONS

- The Lithuanian Football Federation has appointed Edvinas Eimontas as its president, replacing Julius Kvedaras, and has appointed Nerijus Dunauskas as its general secretary, replacing Edvinas Eimontas.
- The Gibraltar Football Association has a new postal address:
62/64 Irish Town, 2nd Floor
PO Box 513
GX11 1AA
Gibraltar
- The Football Federation of Kazakhstan has a new postal address:
8 Saryarka Avenue, 4th Floor
Astana 010000
Kazakhstan

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Meetings

8 March, Nyon
 HatTrick Committee

18 March, Nyon
 UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League: quarter-final draws

21 March, Nyon
 Club Licensing Committee

Competitions

8/9 March
 UEFA Youth League: quarter-finals

22 March
 Futsal World Cup European qualifying: play-offs (first legs)

8/9 and 15/16 March
 UEFA Champions League: round of 16 (return legs)

23/24 March
 UEFA Women's Champions League: quarter-finals (first legs)

10 March
 UEFA Europa League: round of 16 (first legs)

23–29 March
 European Under-21 Championship: qualifiers

17 March
 UEFA Europa League: round of 16 (return legs)

30/31 March
 UEFA Women's Champions League: quarter-finals (return legs)



NO TO RACISM

