

UEFA



No. 157

DIRECT

MAY 2016
OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
OF THE UNION OF EUROPEAN
FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS

FOOTBALL FOR LIFE

UEFA Grassroots
Workshop in Slovenia



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Milan and San Siro
roll out the red carpet

JACQUES FERRAN

The business of creating
the European Cup

SWITZERLAND UNITED

Many cultures,
one team



UEFA

FOUNDATIONTM

for children

www.uefafoundation.org



WATERING THE GRASSROOTS

The climax to the club competition season is upon us and it is not long now before we crown the best teams in Europe. However, as important as the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Europa League are, it is necessary to remember that professional football is only the pinnacle of the game. For UEFA, football is about so much more than our elite competitions, and it all starts with the work that we do at grassroots level, together with our national associations all over Europe.

This was aptly illustrated at the 11th UEFA Grassroots Workshop in Slovenia and the 3rd UEFA Youth League finals in Nyon.

The UEFA Grassroots Workshop has long been a means for us to increase cooperation

with and between all of UEFA's member associations, with a view to creating and managing ever more programmes that protect the future of football. We have a responsibility and a desire to be present when children of all ages, backgrounds and abilities start playing the game. We want to be there to guide, nurture and support them as they discover what football can teach them both on and off the field.

Regarding the UEFA Youth League, it is safe to say that young footballers across Europe are thriving on the experience of participating in this fantastic competition. We are very happy with the competition's new format for this season, which brought an expansion in the number of participants from 32 to 64. The decision taken to make the Youth League a permanent fixture in the European football calendar has certainly proved its worth, enhancing the quality of the competition and giving more countries the chance to participate. We are looking forward to seeing more and more talented young players develop their skills as a result of their involvement.



A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Theodoridis'.

Theodore Theodoridis
UEFA General Secretary ad interim



IN THIS ISSUE

8 MESGO graduations

The Executive Master in European Sport Governance continues to provide executives and administrators in sport with a unique platform for continuing professional development.

10 UEFA Champions League

The stage is set in Milan for the ultimate showdown in European club football on 28 May.

12 UEFA Europa League

St. Jakob-Park in Basel is ready to host its fifth European club competition final on 18 May.

13 European Under-17 Championship finals

While their female counterparts head to Belarus, the best men's Under-17 teams in Europe prepare for their moment of truth in Azerbaijan, where the focus is firmly on laying the foundations for the future.

16 Henri Delaunay Cup

Not only is it the greatest prize in European national team football but, despite its various transformations over the years, the Henri Delaunay Cup is an important part of European football's cultural heritage.

18 Interview

Jacques Ferran is one of the founding fathers of the first-ever European club competition. Now 96, he looks back on the origins of what would later become the UEFA Champions League.

24 Grassroots football

The 11th UEFA Grassroots Workshop, held in Slovenia from 11 to 14 April, gives a voice to the 99% that make up the grassroots of the game.

30 For the record

UEFA's Elite Club Injury Study identifies positive trends in overall injury rates and player availability.

32 Special feature

The second match at this summer's EURO 2016, Switzerland v Albania, throws up some interesting issues of national identity and family loyalty.

38 News from member associations



Official publication of the Union of European Football Associations

Chief editor:
Emmanuel Deconche

Deputy chief editor:
Dominique Maurer

External contributors:
Yannick Rappan (SFV-ASF, page 12), François Verdenet (L'Équipe, pages 32-37) and André Vieli (pages 16-17)

Production:
Touchline

Printing:
Artgraphic Cavin
CH-1422 Grandson

Editorial deadline:
15 April 2016

Cover photo:
Grassroots football in action at the 11th UEFA Grassroots Workshop, held at the national training centre in Kranj, Slovenia.
Sportsfile



18



Presse Sports

24



Sportsfile



Getty Images

32

SPREADING THE WORD

UEFA has launched a Media Outreach Programme to help its member associations in their communications aims.

“It’s a pleasure to be hosting an event that will allow us to develop the tools to achieve our communications goals – not only about our competitions,” said Football Association of Montenegro (FSCG) general secretary – and UEFA Media Committee member – Momir Djurdjevac in his opening address. “We fully understand the challenges faced by associations and we need a strategic approach in order to address them.”

Football associations, stakeholders and UEFA focus their energies on promoting, protecting and developing our sport. At the very first pilot session of a new project, communications teams got together in Montenegro to discuss relaying that strong message to the wider media. Picture the scene: a mini-tournament for two national youth teams has just finished and the communications team of the host nation faces a race against time. Getting the messages out to the public about the results and assisting media with their requests is time-consuming and brings many pressures. Resources are in short supply.

Solving that dilemma is at the heart of the creation of UEFA’s Media Outreach Programme, which made its debut in the Montenegrin town of Budva on 5 and 6 April. There, UEFA’s communications team met with counterparts from national associations, the UEFA ‘correspondents’ in each of those territories and members of the UEFA Media Committee at a workshop to better understand common needs in order to become more efficient in messaging.

Positive messages

“This is a programme that allows us to work directly with national associations all over Europe on messaging, tools and strategy, so that we can be best aligned in telling the world what we do to promote, protect and develop football,” said UEFA’s chief of communications and media, Pedro Pinto, in opening the workshop.

“What really inspires me about working at UEFA is to see all the stories at grassroots level about people who are falling in love with the game and what is being done to support that regionally and locally. Also making the media aware of that is of vital importance to us as a governing body.”

The gathering on the Adriatic coast was the first of two workshops planned during the pilot phase. The national associations of Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Moldova and Ukraine joined the hosts, Montenegro.

Understanding our image

Participants heard an engaging presentation on the UEFA GROW 2020 project, which interacts with associations to understand the image of football and the association in their country and to build the sport there. Supporting that programme, the associations and correspondents then got together in breakout sessions to discuss next steps, which principally involved the sourcing and sharing of multimedia materials.

Local media representatives were also invited to Budva, where they heard about UEFA’s mission to develop the sport as well as the varied roles of media relations and communications around the initiatives of both UEFA and the host association. “We are part of the same family and it is bringing huge benefits,” concluded FSCG press officer Ivan Radović. “We are striving to produce great content together, so that we can get better engagement with our fans, to build a basis for our first fan relationship management (FRM) base and really give the fans a better way of communication and a better approach.” 🌐



Sportsfile

UEFA’s Media Outreach Programme brought together communications teams from all over Europe for a first workshop in Budva in Montenegro at the beginning of April.



Sportsfile



THE UEFA FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN – ALREADY MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The UEFA Foundation for Children has been up and running for a year now, so we decided it was time to catch up with its chairman, José Manuel Barroso, to ask how things are going.

A year after its launch, what is your initial assessment of the work the foundation has done?

The foundation is already making a difference all over the world, for the time being with the one exception of South America. Today, thousands of children who are underprivileged or living in difficult circumstances are being supported in their daily lives by the foundation and its partners – through education and opportunities to play, among other things. That is simply priceless.

In concrete terms, what has the foundation done?

First of all, we made sure to continue working on the projects that UEFA had been supporting itself. One such project is Just Play, a unique football programme in Oceania for children aged 6 to 12, which aims to engage the community and promote healthy lifestyles. Another involves socio-educational football activities in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. At the same time, we are supporting projects as wide-ranging as a pan-European research project on autism and a partnership with the John Giles Foundation in the fields of health and social integration in the Republic of Ireland. I should also mention One Goal for Education, which is using football to promote social inclusion through big clubs in Belgium, England, Israel, the Netherlands and Scotland.

Are you planning any particular activities for UEFA EURO 2016?

First, we've launched 20,000 Children's Smiles, a project that will enable 20,000 disadvantaged children and accompanying adults to attend one of 43 EURO 2016 matches. Second, in cooperation with Sport dans la Ville (Sport in the City) and streetfootballworld – associations that use sport as a vehicle for social change – we are organising a solidarity tournament in Lyon, where 500 girls and boys from all over the world will come together. And finally, we will have a European schools tournament in Lens and Lille,

which will bring together young people aged 18 and under, for the most part from the 30 UEFA member associations which did not qualify for EURO 2016.

Do you have any particular criteria for your partnerships?

We define our action as ethical and responsible. We have chosen to be completely transparent, as the foundation's website shows, and our partners know that everything is subject to the UN's code of ethics, which sets out very strict rules on working with children and respecting the environment, for example.

How does UEFA support you?

First of all, UEFA – which the foundation is independent from – has committed to giving us an annual grant until 2025. In addition to that, a large amount of work has been done by UEFA staff and through UEFA events and activities. This has involved the allocation of revenue to foundation projects and a desire to act responsibly by giving competition and event materials a second life. A number of projects and associations have benefited from material support in the form of bibs, balls and all sorts of other equipment. The Children's Dreams programme, which aims to help make the football-related dreams of seriously ill children come true, would also not be possible without the direct support of UEFA.

What are the main things that the foundation will be doing in the near future?

In order to develop our activities, we will continue to look for new forms of financing that respect the code of ethics – and we will do this with complete transparency. And we will continue to mobilise the whole football family – clubs, associations, sponsors, etc – because a simple ball can erase differences such as skin colour, background and religion, and because, at the end of the day, football is a fantastic tool to help people live together in harmony. 🌍



José Manuel Barroso
Chairman of the UEFA Foundation for Children





MESGO GRADUATES READY TO HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN SPORTS GOVERNANCE

The scene in the Lennart Johansson auditorium at UEFA headquarters in Nyon was the educational equivalent of full time at the end of a first-leg tie. The successful graduates from the third edition of the Executive Master in European Sport Governance (MESGO) were excited as much about what they had accomplished as where it might lead.

Speakers at the graduation ceremony were keen to stress that MESGO graduation was not the end of a journey, but rather the point at which those involved would take the lessons they had learnt and implement them in their respective places of work, for the benefit of European and national associations, clubs, leagues, trade unions, public institutions, governments and partner organisations.

Making a difference

"It's an essential experience for us, because MESGO gave us not only the knowledge, it

gives us an introduction to many different sports," said graduate Elkhan Mammadov, general secretary of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA). "We can be too oriented towards football but we can learn a lot from other sports – through the process, we have seen that there are some elements that can be implemented in the future in football, especially in terms of youth development."

UEFA marketing manager Noel Mooney works with national associations across Europe to improve football's image using the innovative GROW 2020 programme. A video



The third edition of the Executive Master in European Sport Governance (MESGO) came to a close with the graduation ceremony held at UEFA headquarters in Nyon on 1 April. The fourth edition gets under way in September.

screened at the ceremony showed the high hopes he has for the impact that his MESGO studies will have on the football family.

"MESGO gives you an ability to understand and actively participate in sport's decision-making processes on a proactive basis, to be reactive, and to preserve and further the interests of sport," added UEFA's competitions director, Giorgio Marchetti, in his address to the graduates. "I hope that the programme has given you the tools to do that. You should be very proud of yourselves for what you have achieved. We are very proud of you." The graduates also heard passionate and reflective speeches by Jean Brihault, president of the European Handball Federation, Nicolas Pélout, director of executive education at Sciences Po, and Didier Primault, general manager of the Centre de Droit et d'Économie du Sport (CDES) at the University of Limoges (one of UEFA's academic partners).

Looking ahead to MESGO IV

Contributing to the professional management of football across Europe has long been one of UEFA's key objectives. Through its various professional development programmes, UEFA is committed to offering training tailored to the executives and staff of its member associations at all levels.

The MESGO programme – which is delivered by five internationally renowned academic institutions, with the support of UEFA and other European and international sports governing bodies – is designed specifically for the top executives and senior staff of national and international sports organisations. It is particularly useful for board members, general secretaries, directors and other senior managers dealing with international affairs and/or regulatory matters. The MESGO III cohort included the CEOs or general secretaries of six UEFA member associations.

The course is made up of nine one-week sessions spread over 19 months. Seven sessions take place in European cities, with two sessions being held outside Europe (in New York and Tokyo for the fourth edition) to allow an in-depth study of other organisational models.

Preparations are already well under way for the fourth edition of the MESGO programme, which will start in September. The opening session will be held in Paris, with the final session scheduled to take place in Tokyo. The final list of participants will be available in June.

For more information on the MESGO programme, take a look at its website: www.mesgo.org.

TO DATE

58
graduates

25
from UEFA member
associations

13
currently hold the position of
president, general secretary
or deputy general secretary
of their association



Getty Images

MILAN PULLS OUT ALL THE STOPS FOR CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL

Preparations are entering their final stages, both on and off the pitch, as Milan readies itself to welcome the cream of European football once again.



Milan will host the UEFA Champions League final on Saturday 28 May – the fourth time that the city has staged the climax to Europe’s premier club competition – and final preparations are already well under way, both at the stadium and across the city.

The match will take place at San Siro, the home of seven-time European champions AC Milan and three-time winners FC Internazionale Milano, who last lifted the trophy in 2010.

In fact, Internazionale were also victorious in 1965, the first time the final was held at San Siro, when they lifted the trophy for the second time in two years. SL Benfica were the runners-up in that first Milanese final, going down 1-0 to Inter, and five years later, the second San Siro showpiece was equally tight, with Feyenoord needing extra time to finally see off Celtic FC.

The third and most recent final in Milan came in 2001, when FC Bayern München claimed their fourth European title, defeating Valencia CF 5-4 on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

While San Siro is also a notable music venue – staging concerts by Bob Marley, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen, Michael Jackson, the Rolling Stones and U2, among many others – it is best

known as a football stadium. It was built for AC Milan in 1925 and named after the city’s San Siro district, where it is located. Inter beat Milan 6-3 in the stadium’s inaugural match on 19 September 1926.

AC Milan owned the stadium until it was sold to the city in 1935, and its capacity was then increased to more than 50,000 in 1939. Internazionale moved into the venue in 1947, and a revamp in the mid-1950s took its capacity to more than 100,000. The stadium was used as a venue for the 1980 European Championship, the same year that it was officially renamed in honour of former Internazionale and AC Milan player Giuseppe Meazza. It then underwent further renovations in preparation for the 1990 FIFA World Cup, becoming an all-seater and acquiring its impressive concrete towers.

Festival of fun

However, the distinctive San Siro will not have a monopoly on the public’s attention in the week leading up to the Champions League final. The Champions Festival has become an established part of the build-up to the Champions League final, and this year’s event promises to be

The Champions Festival will be held in the very heart of Milan, across five iconic locations, including Piazza del Duomo.



another one to remember. It will be held in the very heart of Milan, across five iconic locations: Piazza del Duomo, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Via Mercanti/Via Dante, Piazza Castello and Castello Sforzesco. These areas are normally better known for their famous museums and art collections, but for four days from Thursday 26 May they will be dominated by football.

The trophy will arrive in Milan on the Thursday morning, with the Champions Gallery having opened the previous evening. There will be a media event involving former Champions League winners from Internazionale and AC Milan on the Wednesday night, hosted by international journalist Gabriele Marcotti. Former greats from the two clubs have promoted the gallery in video messages, reflecting on their finest moments in the competition, and those messages will be used in promotions across Italy during the build-up to its opening.

The gallery, which will be located at the festival site, will feature around 150 images, reflecting the history of UEFA's premier club competition and some of the ways in which its revenues have contributed to the development, promotion and protection of the game across Europe. There will also be a display featuring the shirts of all 32 teams that participated in this season's group stage.

Wide range of attractions

The festival itself will feature a whole host of activities for visitors to enjoy. For example, a treasure hunt is scheduled to run from Thursday to Saturday, with a number of great prizes on offer. There will also be a giant replica of the Champions League trophy, which will feature in social media activities. These will include a competition to find the best selfie taken with the trophy, giving festival attendees the chance to win two tickets to the final.

The main events at the festival will be centred around the pitch and the stage. The highlight on the pitch will probably be the Ultimate Champions match, which will feature star

names from years gone by. The 2015 line-ups included Cafu, Edwin van der Sar, Davor Šuker and Clarence Seedorf. While this year's squads are still to be finalised, women will play in the match for the first time, with UEFA Women's Champions League final ambassador Patrizia Panico set to take to the field.

Also on the pitch will be a series of activities showcasing grassroots football in Milan: football clinics, football sessions for players of all abilities and the adidas Young Champions tournament. Meanwhile, a series of top DJs and musicians will light up the stage, beginning with a performance by a superb gospel choir. The likes of Lea Rue, Andrea Del Vescovo, Francesco Rossi and Benny Benassi are all scheduled to appear.

Matchday will be the busiest day on the stage, with the Konami Pro Evolution Soccer Finals in the afternoon, followed by a special hour-long DJ set by Gaizka Mendietta – himself a Champions League runner-up with Valencia CF in 2000 and 2001.

Champions League sponsors will be prominent at the festival, with Gazprom organising a Football for Friendship event and Pepsi staging a five-a-side competition. Pepsi will also be promoting its Pepsi Max brand at both the Duomo and the Castello, while Nissan will organise a number of activities, including transporting the trophy from the festival to the stadium.

PlayStation and Sony Xperia will provide a large number of products (such as headphones, Bluetooth speakers, tablets and mobile devices) for integration into UEFA on-site promotions. Meanwhile, UniCredit will highlight their sponsorship rights and key products in their tent at the Duomo, while the Castello site will feature an upgraded version of their robot keeper. They also plan to display match coins and credit card countdown clocks at both sites.

The Champions Festival opens at 10.00 local time on Thursday 26 May and will be open throughout the next four days before closing its doors for the final time at 17.00 on the Sunday. 🌐

5
Champions Festival locations

150
images in the Champions Gallery

2001
last time Milan staged UEFA Champions League final

71,500
San Siro capacity for the final



Thinkstock Photos

BASEL AND ST. JAKOB-PARK AT THE READY

This year's UEFA Europa League final is taking place in the Swiss city of Basel, on the banks of the Rhine, at the heart of Europe. Having staged several matches at UEFA EURO 2008, including the opening match and one of the semi-finals, the city is ready and raring to host another major international showpiece.



St. Jakob-Park, home of Swiss club FC Basel 1893, is staging this year's Europa League final on 18 May. After co-hosting EURO 2008 with Austria, Switzerland is thrilled to be

providing the backdrop to another big event on the European football calendar. St. Jakob-Park is accustomed to hosting great nights of football featuring FC Basel 1893, who reached the UEFA Champions League round of 16 in 2003, 2012 and 2015 at the expense of opponents such as Liverpool FC (in 2003 and 2015) and Manchester United FC (in 2012). It has also played host to four previous UEFA club competition finals, all in the European Cup Winners' Cup (in 1969, 1975, 1979 and 1984).

Basel, and its population of 166,000, sits right at the heart of Europe. Built on both banks of the Rhine, it forms something of a Swiss enclave between Germany and France. A city of openness, Basel is also a city of culture: with attractions such as the Fine Arts Museum, Jean Tinguely Museum, Beyeler Foundation and Museum of Cultures, it boasts a higher density of museums of international renown than any other Swiss city.

This spirit of openness is also evident in the city's architecture, which is characterised by numerous modern buildings designed by famous architects such as Herzog & de Meuron, Mario Botta, Diener & Diener and Richard Meyer.

Basel is delighted to be welcoming this season's Europa League finalists and their fans. Its 35,000-capacity stadium, built more or less exclusively for football, will provide a perfect setting for a spectacular and exciting final, as well as a level of security befitting such an event.

At EURO 2008, the Swiss team failed to progress beyond the group stage, and the semi-final played at St. Jakob-Park saw Germany beat Turkey 3-2. The Swiss have since played several fixtures there, however, including



Getty Images

the match that secured them a place at the 2010 World Cup. The city of Basel and the local organisers are doing everything in their power to ensure the same magical atmosphere for the Europa League final and to provide the best possible conditions for a high-quality match full of drama, excitement and emotion. 🇨🇭

Philipp Lahm scores in the 90th minute against Turkey at St. Jakob-Park to secure Germany a place in the final of EURO 2008.

THE EUROPEAN CUP WINNERS' CUP FINALS PLAYED IN BASEL

1969: FC Barcelona 2-3 ŠK Slovan Bratislava

1975: Ferencvárosi TC 0-3 FC Dynamo Kyiv

1979: Fortuna Düsseldorf 3-4 FC Barcelona (aet)

1984: Juventus 2-1 FC Porto

BELARUS, HERE WE COME!

The European Women's Under-17 Championship kicks off on 4 May, with powerhouses Spain and Germany drawn together in Group B.



Three nations will be represented for the first time at the European Women's Under-17 Championship finals in May as the competition continues to broaden footballing horizons across the continent. Hosts Belarus join the party, as do the Czech Republic and Serbia, bringing the number of teams to have qualified for final tournaments at this level to 20. Indeed, it is the first time a Czech women's side has qualified for a UEFA final tournament at any level.

Qualifying concluded in dramatic fashion on 29 March, when Allegra Poljak struck a hat-trick to help Serbia beat Iceland 5-1 to clinch the best runners-up spot. That completed an impressive field which also includes champions Spain and four-time winners Germany, plus England, Italy and Norway.

Spain and Germany have won seven of eight UEFA women's U17 titles and they meet in Group B alongside Italy and the Czech Republic. Keep an eye out for Spain's Lorena Navarro, joint top scorer in qualifying with nine goals, who has picked up from where she left off in last summer's final tournament in Iceland, where aged just 14 she scored in Spain's 5-2 win in the final against Switzerland. Hosts Belarus meet Serbia, England and Norway in Group A.

All to play for

Poland are the only other side to have lifted the trophy, and they did so in 2013 when it was still a four-team event. Since then the tournament has expanded to eight, with the intensity of the competition increasing year on year. Belarus will be no exception. Matches will be played at five venues in the capital Minsk, Zhodino, Slutsk and Borisov (Gorodskoi Stadium and Borisov Arena), with the final held at the 13,121-capacity Borisov Arena on Monday 16 May. Belarus also successfully hosted the European Women's Under-19 Championship finals in 2009, a lucky omen for England, who clinched their first title at that level that year.

For the 2015 Belarus women's player of the year, Svetlana Astasheva, this is a huge window of opportunity for the young hopefuls. "The number of girls in football is increasing, and staging this tournament should give it a further boost by motivating young players," she said. "Girls will see what they can aspire to. They will begin to understand they are not training for the sake of it,



David Catry

but for something bigger, if their attitude is right." As for advice, she adds: "Listen to and think about what your coach says. Forget about everyone else and believe in yourself. Just go out there and show what you're capable of."

As if the title of European champions were not enough, there are also three places at stake for the 2016 U-17 Women's World Cup, with the two finalists and the winner of the play-off between the beaten semi-finalists earning places in Jordan. 🌍

The Czech Republic's Kamila Dubcová puts her best foot forward against Tess Laplacette of France in their elite round tie in Flers, France, on 19 March (1-1), paving the way for the visitors' first appearance at the final tournament of a UEFA women's competition.

THE CONTENDERS

Group A
Belarus (hosts)
Serbia
England
Norway

Group B
Italy
Czech Republic
Germany
Spain (holders)

MATCH SCHEDULE

Group stage
4, 7 and 10 May

Semi-finals
13 May

World Cup play-off
16 May

Final
16 May

ROLL OF HONOUR

2015 Spain
2014 Germany
2013 Poland
2012 Germany
2011 Spain
2010 Spain
2009 Germany
2008 Germany



Getty Images

BAKU TO THE FUTURE

As Azerbaijan prepare to kick off this season’s European Under-17 Championship final tournament, an impressive development programme is laying the foundations for success in the years ahead.



A tangible sense of excitement swirls around the Bayil Arena in Baku. The Azerbaijan boys’ team have just won a match at a UEFA-sponsored international development tournament and inside the dressing room the celebrations are led by Elkhan Mammadov, general secretary of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA). Everything around the tournament serves to illustrate the association’s dedication to developing strong foundations for football, which bodes well for Azerbaijan’s hosting of this season’s European Under-17 Championship final tournament in May.

“Everything actually started in 2009 in terms of our infrastructure,” explained Mammadov. “One of the things that motivated us to invest was the U-17 Women’s World Cup, which we hosted in 2012. Having been awarded that tournament in 2010, we decided to make this investment as part of our commitment to football development.” If the smiles in the dressing room at Bayil Arena indicate the enjoyment now derived from

that commitment, another key factor in the game’s growth in Azerbaijan is the focus on development over results, in the immediate term at least. Winning the right to stage UEFA EURO 2020 matches – including a quarter-final – in Baku planted another significant milestone on the football map for young players and stakeholders alike. When that tournament arrives in four years’ time, it will be another opportunity to inspire Azerbaijan’s next generation.

High level of promise

“The infrastructure is very good and improving every year,” said Robert Prosinečki, head coach of the senior national team.

“This country does everything to offer the best in terms of stadiums and pitches, and it’s important that the kids who want to play have good grounds to play on. The youngsters have a lot of talent and we bring them here to work with them collectively and in a positive way.” The former Croatian international believes the Azerbaijani youth

Boyd Reith of the Netherlands and Germany’s Jannis Kübler in the elite round, which both teams navigated successfully to secure their place at the final tournament in Baku.

THE CONTENDERS

Group A

Azerbaijan (hosts), Portugal, Belgium, Scotland

Group B

Ukraine, Germany, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Group C

France (title-holders), Denmark, England, Sweden

Group D

Italy, Serbia, Netherlands, Spain

MATCH SCHEDULE

Group stage

5/6, 8/9 and 11/12 May

Baku Olympic Stadium, Qarabağ Stadium, 8km Stadium and Dalga Arena

Quarter-finals

14/15 May

8km Stadium and Dalga Arena

Semi-finals

18 May

Baku Olympic Stadium

Final

21 May

Baku Olympic Stadium



teams are already illustrating a high level of promise, with the goal of EURO 2020 in mind and excellent stages on which to showcase their skills. Dalga Arena – situated around 35km from Baku – is another ground that has facilitated football development in Azerbaijan, having been constructed, like Bayil, with assistance from UEFA’s HatTrick programme.

The two stadiums hosted matches at the U-17 Women’s World Cup and continue to benefit the grassroots and elite levels of the game.

Staging that World Cup in 2012 clearly left a legacy for women’s football in Azerbaijan, which continues to go from strength to strength. Building on the boys’ success at the above-mentioned U16 development tournament in 2015, the girls put in a solid performance at an equivalent competition the following week.

From 20 female players to... 4,000

“I enjoy playing against international teams,” said Sanay Fatullayeva after an impressive performance helped the hosts to victory over Georgia. “You meet other players, coaches and people and learn how they play, and maybe learn some new tricks. If the association wasn’t working hard then we wouldn’t be here, so I’m grateful they are giving me the opportunity to do what I enjoy.”

Playing football with a smile was not necessarily top priority in 2011 when Azerbaijan took their only women’s team – an Under-15 side – to a training camp at UEFA headquarters in Nyon. As well as trying to establish a completely new team, the task back then was to destroy a stereotype that girls and women cannot play football and thus to nurture interest in participation.

“Today we have girls playing on an equal footing with boys, in the same leagues, and we even have projects where girls and boys play on the same team,” added Mammadov.

“This project is implemented in different schools in the regions, and in Baku too. The regulations state that every team must have at least one girl, which helps the integration of girls in sport in general. We cannot have a men’s team at U15, U17 and U19 levels and not have the same for the girls. That would be discrimination.” From an estimated 20 to 25 registered female players at the start of the decade, Azerbaijan had moved to about 4,000 in April 2015. That surge is a rich dividend derived from the AFFA’s avid development initiatives. With further inspiration on offer from Europe’s finest U17 prospects at the final tournament in May, more burgeoning talent may soon be uncovered. ⚽

AZERBAIJAN READY FOR KICK-OFF

Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina are both competing in European U17 finals for the first time.

The 15th UEFA European Under-17 Championship final tournament is taking place in Baku from 5 to 21 May, with the hosts kicking off their debut appearance in Group A alongside Portugal, Belgium and Scotland. Bosnia and Herzegovina will also be appearing for the first time, bringing the number of UEFA member associations represented at this level over the past 15 years to 38 out of 54. Title-holders France meet 2014 winners England in Group C, with both aiming for a record third title in this age group. Three other associations have won the title twice before: Russia (in 2006 and 2013), the Netherlands (in 2011 and 2012) and Spain (in 2007 and 2008). Baku Olympic Stadium will host the final on 21 May, with Qarabağ Stadium, 8km Stadium and Dalga Arena also staging matches.

Many great players have performed on this stage before going on to make their names at senior club and national team level, with the likes of World Cup winners Mario Götze, Cesc Fàbregas and Gerard Piqué recent examples. Paul Pogba was in the France side that reached the semi-finals in 2010, and despite losing to eventual champions England, he looks back on the experience with great fondness: “It’s a great memory, playing in that EURO against England, Spain and other big nations. It was a good experience for a young player. We lost but I learnt a lot. It helped me grow. It was always a dream of mine to wear that shirt and play for my country – for the French national team.”

Six years on, Pogba will be hoping to inspire France to victory on home soil at EURO 2016, and he has some words of advice for those players about to give their all in Azerbaijan: “Never give up and give everything. Realise your dreams. You must believe in them until the end.”

SILVERWARE WITH A STORY

The USSR were the first team to lift the now iconic trophy in 1960, in what was then the European Nations' Cup. Since then, the Henri Delaunay Cup has been through a couple of transformations but retained every ounce of its prestige.

The Soviet national team's journey was two matches shorter than it should have been, the political context prompting Spain to forfeit both legs of their quarter-final tie. The USSR therefore went straight from the first round (the round of 16) to the final phase in France, where they beat Czechoslovakia and then Yugoslavia to lift the first European trophy at the Parc des Princes in Paris.

That was then, this is now. The 17 teams that entered the inaugural competition would not even be enough to fill the current final tournament, with a record 24 teams in the starting blocks for EURO 2016. The mass appeal was instantaneous, with 100,572 spectators turning out for the USSR's round of 16 match against Hungary in Moscow, but in all other areas today's competition bears little resemblance. If nothing else, its creators could never have conceived the dizzying array of communication channels and marketing platforms at our disposal, first through TV, then the internet and now the mighty social media.

Same trophy ...

Everything has changed since 1960, or so it would seem: the name of the competition (it was rebranded the European Football Championship in 1968), the number of teams and matches, and the broader political, social and technological context. One thing has, however, remained the same: the name of the coveted trophy, the Henri Delaunay Cup. General secretary of both the French Football Federation (FFF) and, with the establishment of UEFA in 1954, the governing body of European football, Henri Delaunay was one of the great advocates of organising a Europe-wide competition for national teams, but ill health and his untimely death prevented him from seeing his project come to fruition. His son, Pierre, succeeded him in the role of UEFA General Secretary and, along with several broad-minded leaders, took over where his father had left off in convincing the European national associations, some of whom remained reticent, to give the competition the green light. It was far from a foregone conclusion,

but they succeeded at the UEFA Congress in Stockholm in June 1958 and the competition was launched that same year.

UEFA decided, quite rightly, to pay homage to Henri Delaunay by naming the trophy after him and the FFF volunteered to pay for it, entrusting Pierre Delaunay with the design. "Europe is a word of Greek origin," he said. "Europe originated in the Mediterranean Basin, and Greece invented the Olympic Games, so I thought it would be a good idea to find an ancient Greek artefact, depicting a ball if possible – something which was not particularly common – and reproduce this in the form of a trophy." By chance perhaps, but also thanks to a journalist with refined tastes and connections with then UEFA Executive Committee member Constantin Constantaras, Pierre Delaunay's dream came true.

The national archaeological museum in Athens was displaying a sculpture of an athlete balancing a ball on his knee. The work was reproduced on the Henri Delaunay Cup by Parisian silversmith Chobillon.

... different dimensions

This historic, cultural element was lost in 2006 when UEFA decided it was time for something bigger and better. In light of the competition's growth over the years, its commercial success, its global standing and its marketing, it was decided that the trophy was too small for such a big competition. It was therefore given an extra 18cm. As for the artistic representation of a player in the nude on the back, few people, and none who were consulted, grasped its significance. London-based silversmith Asprey was therefore instructed to replace the bas-relief with the



UEFA



Presse Sports

The USSR's Igor Netto, the first captain to lift the Henri Delaunay Cup, salutes the crowd with legendary Soviet goalkeeper Lev Yashin and the rest of the team. Bottom right: The original bas-relief from the national archaeological museum in Athens.

names of the previous winners. The marble base was also removed (bringing the enlarged trophy's weight down to 8kg) and, in another concession to modern times, the name of the competition was written in English, instead of the original French.

Thankfully, the transformations did not stop there, and as the players who prevail in France this summer will see when they lift the Henri Delaunay Cup at the Stade de France on 10 July, our Greek friend and his football have been returned to their rightful place, a true testament to the place of football in Europe's sporting and cultural heritage. 🏆



National archaeological museum of Athens

INTERVIEW

"We took a gamble, because there was no way we or the clubs could organise such a big competition."



JACQUES FERRAN

'LAUNCHING THE EUROPEAN CUP WAS A GAMBLE'

More than 60 years ago, a group of journalists from L'Équipe had the idea of creating a cup competition for Europe's clubs. Jacques Ferran, now aged 96, still remembers the fantastic adventure that led to the creation of the world's greatest club competition as if it were yesterday.

Back in the 1950s, most of UEFA's founding members were focusing on national teams. How did you and Gabriel Hanot, journalists working for L'Équipe, come up with the idea of creating a European club competition?

The starting point for Gabriel Hanot's big idea was his feeling that the clubs deserved more than they were getting. In terms of seniority at the newspaper, Jacques de Ryswick was head of department at the time, then there was Gabriel Hanot, and I was the most junior. But it was Gabriel Hanot who first said that the clubs did not have the standing or status they deserved.

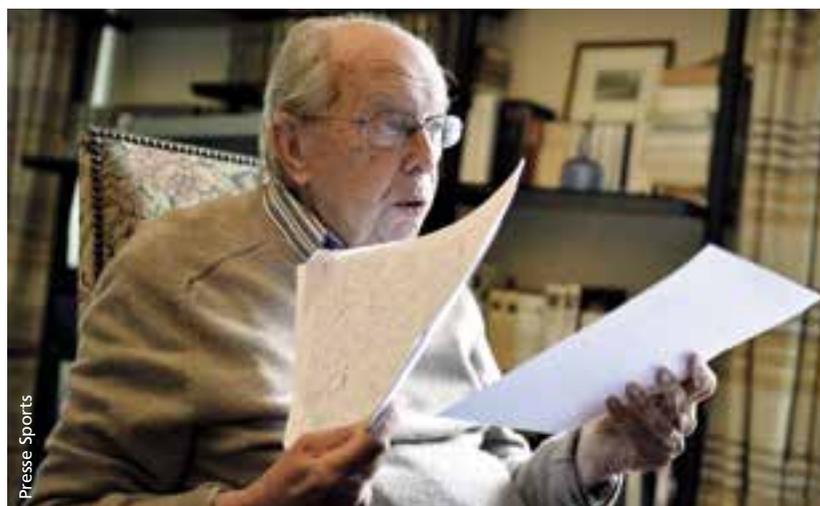
What state was club football in at that time?

The big European clubs were making a considerable effort to attract crowds to their stadiums, and that was happening on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Don't forget that the USSR, Yugoslavia and Hungary, who were dominating world football at the time, also had big clubs. De Ryswick and Hanot thought that a club competition would be easier to organise and was more warranted than a competition for Europe's national teams. The national teams had their national associations to take care of them, but we didn't know who was going to take care of a European club competition. The clubs themselves were not in a position to organise it, so we came to the conclusion that it was up to us at L'Équipe to do it.

What triggered that idea?

From time to time, Gabriel Hanot went abroad during the week to pick up information for the newspaper. In December 1954 he went to watch the English champions, Wolverhampton Wanderers, who were playing a couple of friendlies at Molineux against clubs from Eastern Europe. Wolves beat Puskás and Kocsis's Budapest Honvéd, as well as Spartak Moscow. That was enough for an English journalist to describe Wolves as the "world club champions". Gabriel Hanot, with his wisdom, calmness and legendary humour, wrote a long article in the next day's edition saying: "Before we can say that Wolves are the world club champions, they have to play Real Madrid or AC Milan – and play them over two legs." →

Jacques Ferran in his office at L'Équipe in 1957, and at home in Paris in 2015.



Presse Sports



Presse Sports

It all came together very quickly ...

This business of ‘creating the European Cup’ happened very quickly, because we, as journalists, were not like those administrators and politicians with time on their hands. We thought that if a competition needed to be established, it should be established immediately. So, the very day that Hanot’s article was published, Jacques de Ryswick, the head of the football department, wrote a remarkable article in which he sketched out the future competition – including the role of television. That was in 1954. Can you imagine? He actually designed the European Cup and said, “Why don’t we set this competition up?” The very next day, we got to work. We consulted the big European clubs to see whether they would buy into our idea and would be interested in taking part in the competition. Nine times out of ten we got a response, either via the special reporters that we dispatched to foreign capitals and major cities or through the post or over the phone, and we published the responses as we received them.

How did the clubs react?

They were very amenable to the idea, with the exception of a few clubs. Barcelona were reluctant. But Real Madrid, led by Santiago Bernabéu and Raimundo Saporta, sent us a letter saying that they would open up their stadium – which was still called Estadio de Chamartín at the time – to all the big clubs that came to contest the European Cup, including those from Eastern Europe. They could see, right from the outset, that this competition had to reach beyond the Iron Curtain and involve clubs from both Eastern and Western Europe.

Otherwise, it would not have the necessary status.

How did the international federations react to this proposal for a European Cup?

We weren’t proposing it. We were inventing it – creating it. Why? First of all, because the FIFA President, Rodolphe Seeldrayers, had told us that FIFA was favourable to the idea, but could not organise a club competition – especially not a European one. We thought that the only possible organiser was UEFA, which had just been established [in June 1954]. By a historic stroke of luck, UEFA and the European Cup were being created at the same time. Without UEFA, I don’t think it would have been possible to launch the European Cup. Who would have organised it? Gabriel Hanot and I attended the first UEFA Congress in Vienna, Austria, on 2 March 1955, just two months after that famous article. We were welcomed by the UEFA Executive Committee, which had just been established. It was chaired by a Dane called Ebbe Schwartz. We told them why we wanted this competition, explaining that it needed to exist and that we were convinced that it would be a fabulous success ... but that nobody wanted to organise it and it was obvious that UEFA should do it. They said no, because they couldn’t see why federations should organise club competitions. That seems incredible now. These days, if the clubs wanted to organise it, UEFA would be up in arms. But no – back in early 1955, UEFA said no.

So, you returned from Vienna empty-handed. What did you do then?



Presse Sports

With 38,000 spectators assembled for the inaugural final at Parc des Princes in Paris, Jacques Ferran shares a quiet word with Stade de Reims star turn and soon-to-be Real Madrid player Raymond Kopa.

Gabriel Hanot and I returned from Vienna thinking that it was up to us – i.e. L'Équipe – to organise it. We wanted to help, but in fact it was the clubs themselves that wanted to organise it. We drew up a list of 16 clubs and invited them to Paris – all expenses paid. Jacques Goddet, the owner of L'Équipe, never forgot that, as it cost him a fair amount. They weren't all domestic champions, as we couldn't possibly know who would win their leagues in three or four months' time.

How did you pick them, then?

We picked them based on how good they looked ... Real Madrid from Spain, of course, Milan from Italy, Chelsea from England ... We sent them a letter of invitation – all expenses paid, travel, rooms at the Ambassador Hotel on Boulevard Haussmann in Paris, close to L'Équipe, the Lido cabaret club, restaurants, etc., and two days of meetings chaired by Jacques Goddet at the Ambassador Hotel.

Other than the clubs and L'Équipe, who else attended those meetings?

We wanted to have someone running the competition who was not from a club. We didn't ask the French Football Federation, which was run by Henri Delaunay and his son Pierre at the time and wasn't too keen on the creation of the European Cup. The federation wanted to set up a cup competition for Europe's national teams instead. So, we turned to the association of French clubs that would later become the French Professional Football League, which was chaired by Paul Nicolas at the time. Its deputy chairman, Ernest Bedrignan, chaired the meeting that established the European Cup, adopting regulations that I had written. The regulations were approved by an organising committee chaired by Bedrignan, with Santiago Bernabéu and Gusztáv Sebes – a giant of Hungarian football – acting as deputy chairmen. All of the five or six members of that committee were club administrators, such as the chairman of Chelsea. They took it all very seriously, and arranged a meeting in order to organise and contest the European Cup.

Without any FIFA or UEFA involvement, then?

No – but very quickly, FIFA and UEFA started to think: "What's happening here? Here's a competition that has the potential to be the biggest of them all, and it's going to be organised by the clubs and a newspaper? We can't be having that." FIFA said that, in its opinion, UEFA should organise it. But on one condition: the competition could not be called

the 'Coupe d'Europe des clubs' [European Clubs' Cup], because the [French] noun 'Europe' could only be used for the 'Coupe d'Europe des nations' [European Nations' Cup]. So, the competition was called the 'Coupe des clubs champions européens' or European Champion Clubs' Cup – until it was later renamed the UEFA Champions League. But I don't like using the English name; I prefer 'Ligue des champions'. Given that we French invented it, it annoys me that it has an English name!

Was there a lot of discussion about the competition format and regulations?

No, not really. We went through each of my points, one by one, discussed them a bit, and then they were approved. The regulations were unanimously approved in their entirety. We had another meeting the next day to discuss the first round.

And to organise a draw?

No, we decided not to have a draw because we didn't want to end up with the two favourites playing each other in the first round. I think it was the only round of a European Cup that didn't involve domestic champions or a draw. But, of course, as soon as we turned our backs, UEFA – at the behest of FIFA – decided to take over after all, and since that day it has done a pretty good job of organising it. We took a gamble, because there was no way we or the clubs could organise such a big competition. How would we appoint referees? How would we punish players or the clubs themselves? It simply wasn't possible. We would have had to establish a committee, and so on. It was much better for UEFA to take care of it.

Was the competition an overnight success?

Yes. There was great excitement from the start, with average crowds of almost 30,000 during the first season. That's quite something for →

"No sooner had we entered the second round than the completion of the competition was in doubt, because their respective countries – Franco's Spain and Tito's Yugoslavia – would have nothing to do with each other."

Robert Jonquet and Miguel Munoz shake hands in the presence of English referee Arthur Ellis. Madrid claimed the cup that night, and found it a permanent place in their trophy cabinet after their fifth consecutive win in 1960.



INTERVIEW

a new competition, especially as we had no English club, because Chelsea – under pressure from their national association – had decided to wait and see how the first edition worked out.

And so the first draw was held ahead of the second round?

After the first round there were eight teams left. UEFA had the nice idea of inviting me to Brussels to perform the first European Cup draw. I'm rather proud of that. It was UEFA's way of paying tribute to us. I conducted the draw and the first two names I pulled from the hat were Real Madrid and Partizan. No sooner had we entered the second round than the completion of the competition was in doubt, because their respective countries – Franco's Spain and Tito's Yugoslavia – would have nothing to do with each other. And yet football was strong enough to bring the two teams together nonetheless. Bernabéu's assistant, Saporta, was an extremely intelligent, well-connected man, and rather than getting visas for the players who would be travelling between Madrid and Belgrade, he managed to secure them free passage through obscure border posts without visas.

What do you remember of that first-ever final?

It was played in Paris, at Parc des Princes, on 13 June 1956. There was a joyful atmosphere – no acrimony, just celebration. It was good. We were hoping that Reims would win, but nobody was disappointed to see Madrid come out on top. It was a beautiful summer's evening, with the perfect line-up: Real Madrid, who had been the main proponents of the competition, and Stade de Reims, the big team of the moment, with Raymond Kopa. Reims put up a really good fight and took the lead twice, but then Madrid took the upper hand and dominated the game with their liegeman and champion all-rounder, Alfredo Di Stefano.

Was Di Stefano as special as they say? How was he different from the other players at the time?

There's a lot of debate nowadays about whether Messi and Ronaldo are the best players of all time. When I think of Pelé and Di Stefano, I rank them one and two without hesitation, well above Messi. Pelé won three World Cups and was the only player capable of winning a match single-handedly. Di Stefano was second to Pelé but still greater than Messi because he had the whole team looking to him. He was a real leader, which Messi is not. Messi is a great solo artist, dribbler, goalscorer, the lot, but he doesn't control his team the



way Di Stefano did. He was Real Madrid. When people tell me nowadays that the Neymar-Messi-Suárez forward line is unparalleled worldwide, I say that I saw Di Stefano, Puskás, Gento and Kopa play together, which wasn't bad either.

Who presented the trophy to the winners?

At the end of the match, we were ready with the trophy, which we had had made at a silversmith's on Rue de la Paix in Paris. Jacques Goddet handed it to Santiago Bernabéu, saying: "I'm giving you this trophy because it is the child of love." It was beautiful. That day was the crowning moment of our magnum opus: the creation of the European Cup.

Did you ever imagine, back in 1955, that the competition would achieve the size and status that it has today?

Yes. I thought it would have a strong start and keep on growing. How would it evolve, and in what circumstances? That, we didn't know. And would it end up a victim of its own success? That was our concern. Would UEFA organise it with equanimity, doing everything it could for the competition and keeping it on a tight rein from a sporting perspective in terms of the appointment of referees and the fight against doping? Would UEFA be up to the task? Would the clubs one day try to take control, as happens with competitions in the USA? That has indeed happened, but UEFA resisted it well. 🌐

"When people tell me nowadays that the Neymar-Messi-Suárez forward line is unparalleled worldwide, I say that I saw Di Stefano, Puskás, Gento and Kopa play together, which wasn't bad either."

Alfredo Di Stefano and Santiago Bernabéu keep a firm hold on the celebrated cup.



JOURNALISTS WRITE HISTORY

It was a group of journalists at L'Équipe who first came up with the idea for the European Champion Clubs' Cup. Jacques Ferran remembers it well.

At L'Équipe back then, much more so than today, we journalists really wanted to play a part in sport. We saw ourselves as stakeholders. I remember, for example, when the World Cup was held in Brazil in 1950. The French team had failed to qualify, but a few months before the tournament, because they didn't have 16 teams, the Brazilians invited France to take part. The team were in pretty poor shape at that time and the clubs pushed the federation to decline. Our reaction at L'Équipe and France Football – the reaction of people like Hanot – was to say: "How can this be? We have been given the opportunity to play at the World Cup and we are turning it down."

That was in 1950. I'd been working as a journalist for just two years, and I went to see Henri Delaunay, the general secretary of the French Football Federation and the most powerful man in the French game. "We at L'Équipe would like to ask you if there's a chance you might reconsider your decision," I said. He was very nice about it – we had met before – but he said no, there was no chance: "The clubs have made their decision and the players have already been released on leave." So we didn't go. As you can see from that, we felt we had a part to play, that we were stakeholders in sport as a whole. We organised the Tour de France – we organised all sorts of things, in fact – but we also had a part to play more generally. That's the first thing. Secondly, more so than today, we believed it was important to come up with new ideas. We invented the European Footballer of the Year award, for example, one year after creating the European Cup. That's quite something. We also established the Golden Boot award for Europe's best goalscorer. We came up with all sorts of things. We, at France Football, were the first to give players stars (i.e. to rate them), which everyone does nowadays. We had so many ideas that we tried to bring to life.

It was the journalists at L'Équipe who created the European Cup, not the paper. I really must stress that. It wasn't the owner, the director or the boss. No, it was journalists who created the European Cup and the European Footballer of the Year award. We needed to get the boss's approval if we wanted to invent a competition,

but when we went to see Jacques Goddet he welcomed us with open arms, because he thought primarily in economic terms. L'Équipe was a sports daily and we sold very few copies during the week – there was no football to write about on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays.

We rehashed old news, looking back on what had happened the previous Sunday and announcing as early as possible what was coming up the following Sunday. But there was no reporting, no news. There wasn't enough to write about, so the creation of a European Cup to be contested during the week was a godsend. In fact, Jacques Goddet wrote in his autobiography that if he had asked UEFA for a dollar for every match played as a result of us and our ideas, he would have been a very rich man, which is true.

An editorial meeting at L'Équipe in 1984, led by Jacques Ferran shortly before his retirement.





FOOTBALL FOR LIFE



From 11 to 14 April in Slovenia, the 11th UEFA Grassroots Workshop brought together grassroots managers from UEFA's 54 member associations, as well as representatives from FIFA, Africa, Asia, CONCACAF and Oceania, to explore developments across Europe, share examples of best practice and discuss new ideas and activities.

Football for Life, the slogan adopted for the 11th UEFA Grassroots Workshop, encapsulates the social and lifestyle benefits of football and, at the same time underlines the value of encouraging boys, girls, men and women to stay in the game and tread a long, healthy pathway from child to veteran. The workshop, successfully staged in the vicinity of the Slovenian FA's national training centre just outside Ljubljana, assembled two practical sessions, five round-table discussions, a chorus of 42 different voices on stage and more than 20 presentations into an impressive picture of best-practice grassroots projects currently being implemented across the length and breadth of European football.

The meeting in Ljubljana showcased the progress made during the three years that had elapsed between the UEFA Grassroots Workshops in Norway and Slovenia. A downloadable app gave participants all sorts of information and allowed them to take part in polls. It also highlighted the growing relevance of digital technology in the running and development of grassroots football, with Carl Darlington, for example, stepping on stage to reveal how online access has simplified the logistics of coaching courses in Wales and made them infinitely more user-friendly. Much the same could be said for the newly erected UEFA Play digital platform, which offers a portfolio of best-practice case histories from all over the continent.

A new Grassroots Charter

The programme in Slovenia was built on the five pillars of one of the other major novelties – the new UEFA Grassroots Charter: Growth, Retention, Education, Always Fair Play and Terms. The latter prompted debate on the urgent need for reliable data on which partnerships between grassroots football and potential sponsors can be built. This interlocked with a presentation of UEFA's new GROW 2020 project, based on helping national associations to adopt a holistic approach to the growth of the grassroots game, integrating football and marketing concepts into tailor-made development programmes.

The issues of growth and retention prompted reflections on best-practice responses to a society where fitness centres are a growth industry, yet fun football can offer a route to fitness that is more enjoyable than pounding treadmills or pumping weights. "I am convinced," said UEFA's grassroots ambassador Per Omdal, "that the way forward is to encourage the grassroots clubs to offer the public what they want."



'Opening facilities to the community'

Merthyr Town FC does just that. Elliott Evans, representing the Welsh club, stepped on stage to receive UEFA's Best Grassroots Club award from Omdal in recognition of the work done in, as Evans put it, "opening the club and its facilities to the community". "It is important to show appreciation of such work and projects," said Omdal, "and I strongly recommend all national associations to do this." Omdal also presented the Best Grassroots Project award to Otakar Mestek and Michal Blažej of the Czech Republic for their My First Goal programme, while Lithuania's Martynas Karpavicius choked up with emotion on receiving the Best Grassroots Leader award.

However, the most striking feature of the event in Slovenia was the sheer diversity of a programme which ranged, for example, from 2 v 2 football for the Under-6 age-group in Belgium to images of 90-year-olds keeping themselves in trim by taking part in small-sided, small-pitch 'football for fitness' sessions. It all added up to a powerful endorsement of Football for Life.

Slovenia's double pyramid

Football is traditionally depicted as a vast pyramid with grassroots activities forming the solid, substantial base. However, the Slovenian

"What impressed me most was that this was not only about football on the pitch. It was a whole concept for a healthy and rewarding lifestyle. It certainly set benchmarks for us in Africa to look at."

Edgar Watson
Member of the African confederation's Technical and Development Committee



Sportsfile

Elliott Evans of Merthyr Town FC in Wales (right) receives the award for Best Grassroots Club 2015 from Per Ravn Omdal.



Sportsfile

hosts, maybe inspired by the mountain-range logo that appears on the country's national team shirts, prefer to illustrate their football strategy as a double pyramid, with a small elite development pyramid slotting in alongside the towering structure of football-for-all grassroots programmes. As Matjaž Jaklič, head of the national association's technical department, told the audience in Ljubljana: "Until Under-13 level, all players have equal opportunities. Then we start to trace different pathways for the potential elite players. The double pyramid makes it easier to explain to external stakeholders and convince them that grassroots football is about parameters that are different from elite youth development."

General Secretary Aleš Zavrl explained: "All our clubs are essentially grassroots clubs and we are working on establishing good connections between them and the schools. This is part of a four-year grassroots project which we started in 2014 and also part of a wider strategic plan which we call Vision 2020. Our football has changed a lot in recent years as, before independence in 1991, skiing was the country's number one sport. Qualifying for the World Cup changed the environment in football and its place in our society as a whole. Figures show that football is now number one. There is satisfaction, such as seeing that coach education programmes are well-structured and

that more and more young talents are coming into coaching. On the other hand, we are like some other countries where the growth of our sport has overtaken our infrastructure and we need to work on upgrading pitches and training facilities so that we can cope with the increasing demand for grassroots activities."

Hosting the UEFA Grassroots Workshop therefore has a relevance. "We are keen to learn from more experienced national associations as well as from UEFA," Zavrl said. "It is very important for our development that we absorb new ideas and best practices. This is very helpful indeed, because we can look at other projects and adapt them to Slovenia's requirements. At the workshop, it was very important that the grassroots coordinators from all our regions were also present, as they are the ones who do the day-to-day work at grassroots levels. It also helps us to address the issue of bringing the clubs' youth academies closer to the grassroots game, so that each party understands its role and the work that needs to be done."

The explosive growth of women's football was one of the topics that permeated the entire workshop programme, with Zavrl admitting: "There is room for improvement in this area because a very low number of our clubs run women's teams and, in one region, there are none. Part of the national association's strategic plan is therefore to persuade clubs to establish women's teams. Our first step has been to organise festivals – using our national women's teams – to attract girls into the game and to show them that they can play and enjoy football."

Seeing the sound

Support for the International Blind Sports Association has featured prominently in UEFA's Football For All portfolio since 2006 and, at the workshop in Slovenia, the grassroots manager of the national association of Turkey (TFF), Sertan Kırığası, outlined how UEFA's initiative in this field has contributed to the development of football for the visually impaired in his country. "In the past," he explained, "our disability programmes focused mainly on one-day events. But, more recently, we have made efforts to make the public aware that football is for everybody."

The TFF's readiness to fund disability projects raised an immediate response from the Visually Impaired Sports Federation – with the result that a national league with eight teams was set up in the space of four months. One of the first moves was to baptise the new competition 'Those Who See The Sound Football League' – a name which had an immediate public appeal. →



Sportsfile



So did a promotional match involving current Turkish national team players, which gave the competition a high-profile kick-off. Sponsorship from a leading telecommunications company gave the project a further boost, as did live TV coverage of a dozen league games in the last two seasons – something which allowed more and more of the Turkish public to ‘see the sound’ along with the blind players who had been given a great chance to enjoy some football and to lay the foundations for the national team to gain a place at the Paralympic Games in Rio.

Fit to play

What would you do if were out on the pitch and one of the players suddenly plummeted to the ground and started having convulsions? If you answer “panic!” you are definitely not alone. But, of course, it is not the winning answer, as Patrick Pion, grassroots manager and deputy technical director at the French Football Federation, explained to his colleagues in Ljubljana. He admitted being startled and alarmed when he had been confronted with an epileptic fit on the training pitch. But he’s now a firm advocate of opening the door and allowing epilepsy sufferers to share the joys of football. And, at the same time, enlisting support from ministries of health and sport to promote education in life-saving skills among grassroots players, coaches, referees and

leaders as an integral element in the promotion of ‘fun football for health’.

Going back to the question of epilepsy, the launching pad for the FFF project was solid evidence from medical specialists assuring that playing football does not make epilepsy worse and, on the other hand, helps to combat associated conditions, in addition to health and lifestyle benefits of playing the game. Opening the door was not easy – mainly due to reluctance among ‘third parties’. Some doctors were wary about issuing the appropriate health certificates; some parents and coaches were edgy about taking responsibility.

But the FFF, conscious that epilepsy affects a significant slice of the population, initially set up a partnership with the national epilepsy committee in 2008, played a promotional all-star game in 2009, enrolled international goalkeeper Mickaël Landreau as ambassador, and set about raising awareness about the benefits of playing football and persuading epilepsy sufferers that there is no reason for them not to enjoy the sport. This entailed upgrading the information provided to those around the epilepsy sufferers, in terms of making any fits or seizures seem less alarming and providing simple advice on how to deal with them. The door has been opened in France. And it is hoped that similar doors will be opened elsewhere in Europe. 🌐



Sportsfile



Sportsfile

“There were so many excellent presentations, and eye-openers such as the UEFA Play online platform or the app which was set up for the event.”

Masahiro Sugiyama
Grassroots development officer at the Asian confederation



Sportsfile



FOOTBALL FOR (A HEALTHY) LIFE

“The message is that football has a great potential for the prevention and treatment of lifestyle diseases and to be an important tool in rehabilitation programmes.” Those were the final words from Professor Peter Krstrup from Copenhagen University, a master in sports sciences and exercise physiology, specialising in the domain of team sport and health. Compressing the wealth of compelling information that preceded his closing remark in Ljubljana into a few lines is a nigh-impossible mission requiring the use of the written equivalents of sound bites. But, solid medical evidence aside, the links he forged between football and health issues interlocked beautifully with UEFA’s social responsibility beliefs and the healthcare issues, such as obesity, which are currently of great concern to governing bodies across the continent, not least the European Commission.

Prof. Krstrup’s findings are based on research conducted over the last 13 years and medical evidence presented in more than a hundred scientific publications. On stage in Slovenia, he quoted: “Physical activity is a cornerstone in the prevention and treatment of lifestyle diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes.” (Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports); “Sport seems to contribute to the health of nations.” (The Lancet); and, in comparing the value of football against other sports: “The best evidence was found for football and running, especially regarding positive cardiovascular and metabolic benefits.” (British Journal of Sports Medicine).

The beauty of Prof. Krstrup’s studies is that they embrace men and women of all age groups and include studies related to the benefits of football among people obliged to deal with diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis or prostate cancer, to name but a few.

Tests on women aged 30–50 with high blood pressure revealed that three one-hour sessions of football over 15 weeks yielded a reduction of 12/6 mmHg in their readings; for a group of men aged 30–55, the same programme led to a reduction of 13/8 mmHg. “This is similar to the results achieved via medication,” he commented, “but medication does nothing more than lower the blood pressure, whereas football also gives you a lot of side benefits.”

A further study looked at homeless men and women aged 25–45 – a community five times more likely to require hospitalisation due to sudden trauma, frequently as a result of falls traceable to low postural balance. Three months of ‘football therapy’ worked wonders for balance, aerobic fitness, cholesterol and muscle strength – and, in consequence, healthcare costs. In Denmark, he reported, a project involving six hospitals and nearby football clubs has demonstrated the value of combining football with treatment for prostate cancer. At the same time, the government and local authorities are supporting schemes to allow veterans in the 70–90 age bracket to enjoy some football, on the basis of research which confirms substantial health and healthcare benefits to the community as a whole. The evidence is so overwhelming that, in an age when more and more people are conscious of the need to work on fitness, the Danish national association, in conjunction with the University of Copenhagen, is working hard on implementing the concept of Football Fitness as a valuable and enjoyable tool in the pursuit of greater social well-being.

At the same time, Prof. Krstrup was keen to refine his definition of ‘football’. “We’re talking about non-competitive football, more like training than match play. This way, there is minimal injury risk and the optimal formula is based on a warm-up focusing on balance and strength followed by small-sided games on small pitches.” He regards two one-hour sessions per week as the ideal but concedes: “Small-volume training also helps. For example, we ran research on female hospital employees based on 2x15-minute sessions in their lunch breaks. And the effects were very positive on aerobic fitness and fat loss.”

He also stressed that the ‘perceived exertion’ was lower than in other forms of exercise. In other words, the enjoyment of football lessened the psychological impression of ‘hard work’. Reviewing other positive effects, such as heart function, fat loss or bone mineralisation, he commented: “Football provides an effective combination of cardiovascular, endurance and strength training, using all energy systems and muscle fibres, and it is fun too.”

INJURY STUDY DELIVERS BENEFITS

National associations, clubs and the wider scientific community all derive benefit from the information provided in UEFA's Elite Club Injury Study.

This comprehensive report, which first appeared in 2001, is compiled on behalf of the UEFA Medical Committee by the committee's first vice-chairman, Professor Jan Ekstrand. It provides vital football-specific data to help in the daily work of treating and preventing injuries.

The latest report focuses on the period between July 2014 and May 2015, and includes data provided by 23 clubs that qualified for the 2014/15 UEFA Champions League group stage. The data covers exposure, general injury patterns, training injuries, match injuries, severe injuries, muscle

injuries, ligament injuries, re-injuries, and squad attendance, availability and absences.

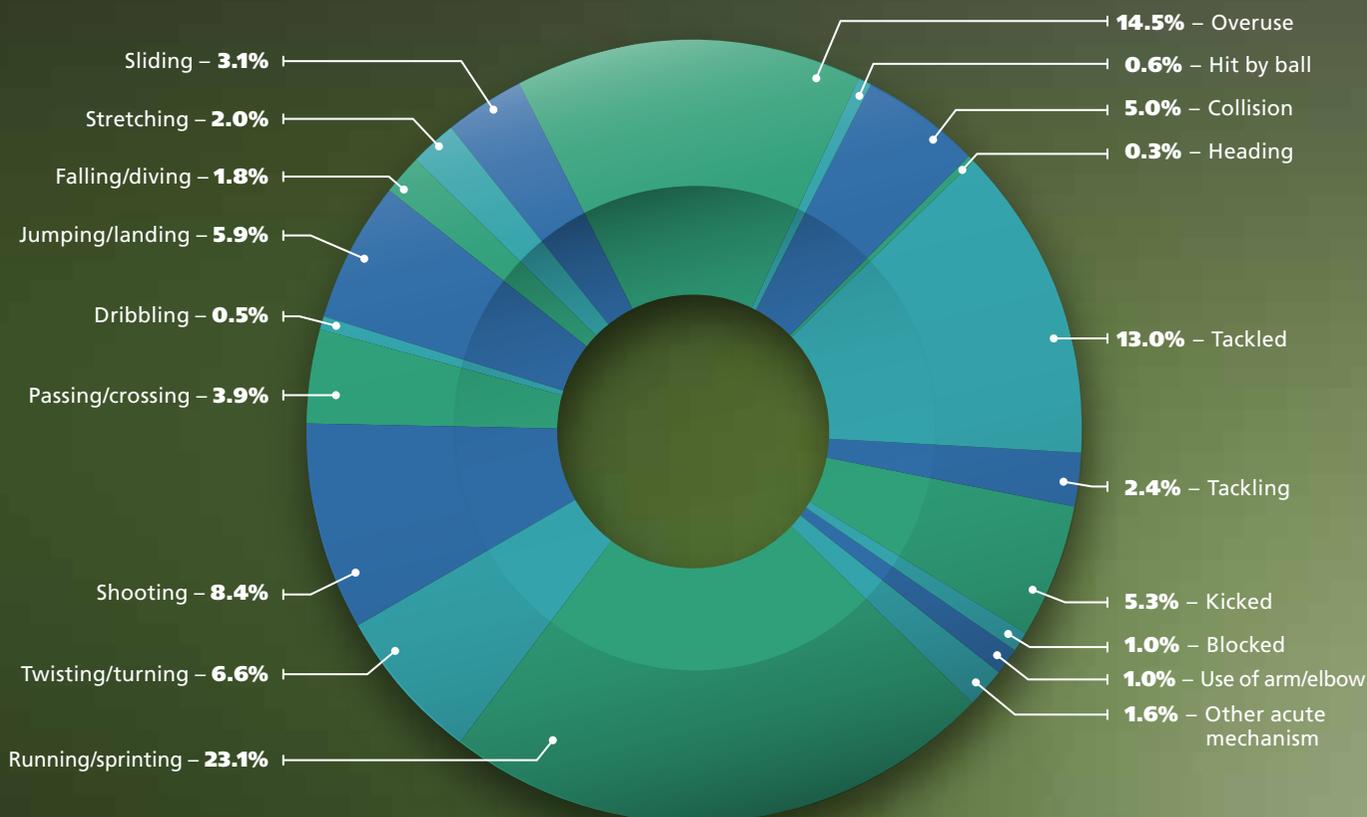
UEFA's report represents an unparalleled historical archive of injury data specific to football, offering crucial information to clubs, associations and the wider scientific community about injury patterns and risks, the likely prevalence of certain injury types and expected 'return to play' times.

The study has also created a unique community of doctors, who meet once a year to discuss injury trends and share their experiences in an open forum of a kind that is rare among rivals in elite sport.

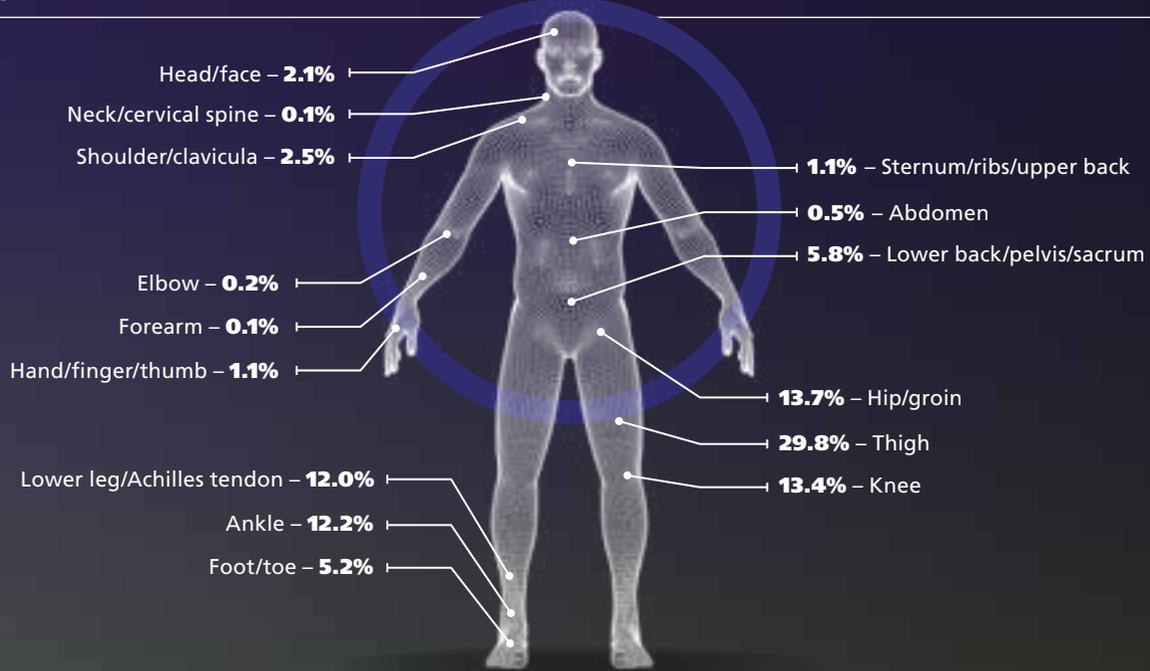


The UEFA Elite Club Injury Study 2014/15 is available on UEFA.org.

INJURY MECHANISM



Injury location



Total injury rate (14 seasons)

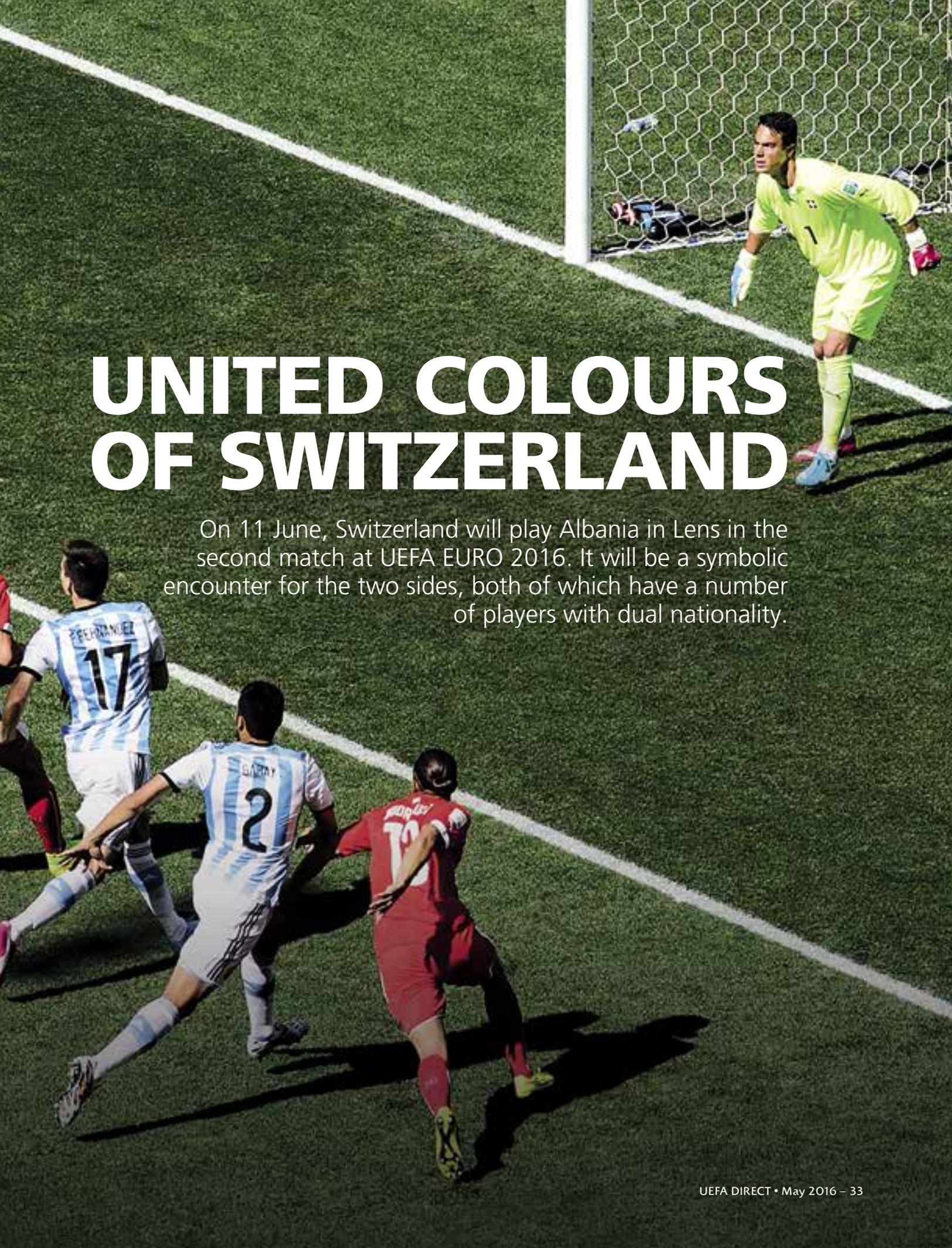


Squad availability rates for matches (14 seasons)





Against Argentina in the 2014 World Cup round of 16, Gökhan Inler (of Turkish origin), Granit Xhaka (of Albanian descent), Fabian Schär (from the Swiss canton of St Gallen), Johan Djourou (born in Abidjan, Ivory Coast), Valon Behrami (also originating from Albania), and the Hispano-Swiss Ricardo Rodriguez paint a perfect picture of the multiculturalism at the heart of Swiss football.

A high-angle photograph of a soccer match. In the upper right, a goalkeeper in a bright yellow kit is positioned near the goal. In the lower left, several players are visible: two in light blue and white striped jerseys (Argentina) and one in a red jersey (Albania). The players are in motion on a green grass field with white boundary lines. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

UNITED COLOURS OF SWITZERLAND

On 11 June, Switzerland will play Albania in Lens in the second match at UEFA EURO 2016. It will be a symbolic encounter for the two sides, both of which have a number of players with dual nationality.



Getty Images

On 11 October, the districts of Oerlikon in Zurich and Bourdonnette in Lausanne and the small town of Olten in the canton of Solothurn erupted in celebration when the final whistle was blown at the end of Albania's 3-0 victory in Armenia. The joyous scenes in those characteristically peaceful Swiss suburbs mirrored those observed on Tirana's long thoroughfares, the streets suddenly filled with flags featuring Albania's black double-headed eagle. Albania, a country of 3 million people, had qualified for its first ever EURO. The car horns in the suburbs rang out long into the night with unrelenting enthusiasm. And on 11 June the level of excitement in Lens promises to be even higher. The day after France and Romania get the ball rolling in the tournament's opening match, Albania take on Switzerland at Stade Bollaert-Delelis in what could be seen as a family affair for which tickets sold out in no time.

The two teams have mixed blood and in some instances mixed loyalties, with both sides relying heavily on Albanian/Kosovan immigrants who have come to Switzerland since the 1990s – particularly following the wars that tore the Balkans apart at the end of the last century. In Albania's starting line-up for that historic qualifying match against Armenia were five players who had been brought up and trained in Switzerland, namely Naser Aliji, Berat Djimsiti, Taulant Xhaka, Shkëlzen Gashi and Migjen Basha. Against Portugal in September 2015, no fewer than seven of the players in red and black shirts had dual nationality. Ermir Lenjani, Burim Kukeli, Arlind Ajeti and Amir Abrashi were all born between Zurich and Berne or trained at FC Lausanne-Sport, FC Baden or FC Winterthur. That rich stream of talent from

the Balkans is also having a highly beneficial impact on the Swiss national side, which has managed to secure the services of the cream of Switzerland's Albanian-speaking contingent. Indeed, those players will form the core of the team that takes to the field at EURO 2016 – notably up front. Xherdan Shaqiri, Granit Xhaka, Valon Behrami, Admir Mehmedi, Blerim Dzemali and Pajtim Kasami have established themselves as linchpins of the 12th best team in the FIFA rankings (March 2016). Switzerland is increasingly drawing on its second-generation immigrants, primarily members of the Kosovan diaspora, of whom there are 170,000 in its population of more than 8 million.

"The match against Albania at EURO 2016 will be a bit like Switzerland v Switzerland," says Pierluigi Tami, the 54-year-old coach of Grasshopper Club Zürich, and many of his compatriots agree. Former assistant to Köbi Kuhn and then Ottmar Hitzfeld, and coach of the national Under-21 side from 2009 to 2015, Tami has watched these dual-nationality players flourish, before facing the dilemma of having to decide definitively which senior side to play for. "All of these players have played for all the different national youth teams in Switzerland, from the Under-15s right up to the Under-21s," says Tami, who also coached the Swiss team at the 2012 Olympics. "Switzerland has benefited greatly from these young players. Their dual culture contributes to the richness of our football. It has fed into it and caused a change of mentality. These waves of immigration, like those from Italy, Portugal, Spain or Turkey in the past, have contributed to the reinvigoration and rise of Swiss football. Everyone has benefited from these pools of talent, which have been further refined by the excellent player development and coach education



EURO 2016 SWITZERLAND'S QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

Switzerland	0-2	England
Slovenia	1-0	Switzerland
San Marino	0-4	Switzerland
Switzerland	4-0	Lithuania
Switzerland	3-0	Estonia
Lithuania	1-2	Switzerland
Switzerland	3-2	Slovenia
England	2-0	Switzerland
Switzerland	7-0	San Marino
Estonia	0-1	Switzerland

At the 2006 World Cup in Germany there were eight players with foreign roots in the Swiss squad, and that had increased to 15 by 2014.

schemes that Switzerland has established since the mid-1990s.”

The most multicultural team at the 2014 World Cup

Indeed, it was after the 1994 World Cup in the United States – Switzerland’s first since their appearance in England in 1966, 28 years earlier – that Swiss football began to recover. Since the turn of the century, they have qualified for three World Cups (in 2006, 2010 and 2014), and they are about to contest their third EURO (having also taken part in 2004 and 2008).

This dramatic improvement is due to their large-scale investment in player development and infrastructure, as well as the various waves of immigration (notably from the Balkans, with players of Albanian and Kosovan origin being joined by Macedonians, Croats, Serbs and Bosnians). At the 2006 World Cup in Germany there were eight players with foreign roots in the Swiss squad, and that had increased to 15 by 2014. That made the Swiss the most multicultural team in Brazil on the basis of the birthplaces of the 23 players in their squad (which had, of course, been selected by Hitzfeld, a German). In fact, all seven of the Swiss team’s goals at the 2014 World Cup (where they were knocked out in the round of 16, losing 1-0 to Argentina after extra time) were scored by players with foreign roots, with six scored by ethnic Albanians (Mehmedi, Dzemali, Xhaka and Shaqiri) and the seventh scored by Haris Seferovic, who is of Bosnian origin.

“What is more, we have lost lots of excellent players along the way – such as Mladen



Getty Images

Petrić and Ivan Rakitić, who played for us until Under-21 level before opting to play for Croatia, or Zdravko Kuzmanović, who chose to play for Serbia,” explains Bernard Challandes, the 64-year-old coach who was in charge of Switzerland’s youth teams in the 1990s and oversaw the national Under-21 team from 2001 to 2007.

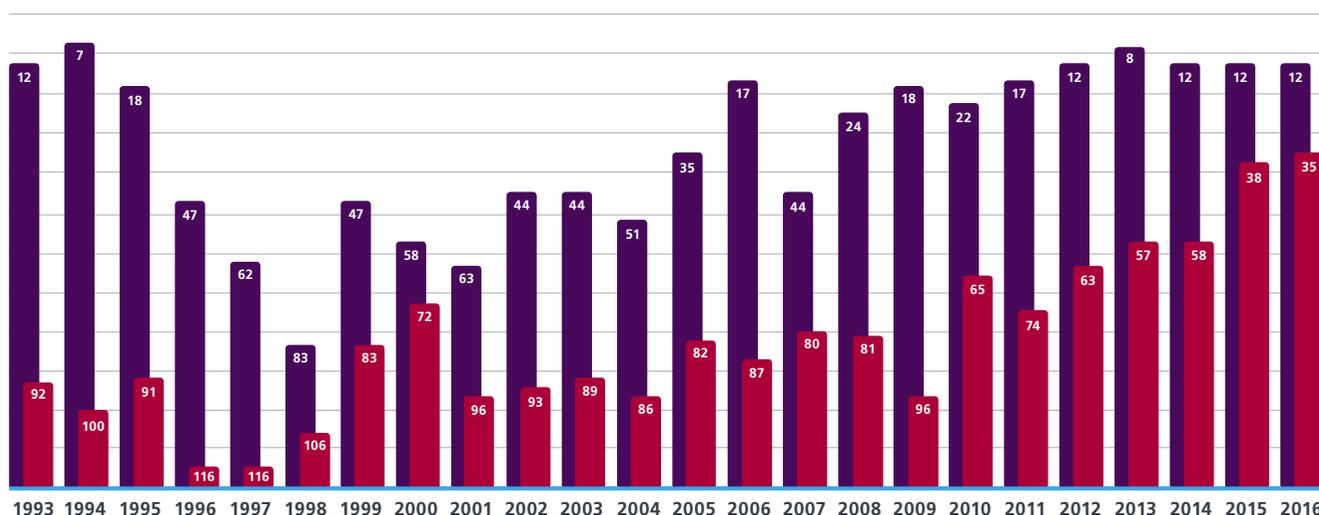
“Back then, I had to fight to persuade certain players to choose Switzerland over Albania at senior level. And in the mid-2000s playing for Albania was not as attractive as it is today. It’s a different story now that Albania are more competitive and qualifying for major international competitions. But the situation has to be regarded as beneficial for Switzerland. The contribution made by all these players has been wholly positive. Not only are they really good footballers, with great technical skills, but they have helped change our mentality. They have shaken us out of our typically Swiss comfort zone and got our →

Pajtim Kasami, whose parents are Albanian, has his eyes on the prize for Switzerland against San Marino in October 2015.

RAISING THE BAR

SWITZERLAND AND ALBANIA’S FIFA RANKINGS

■ SWITZERLAND ■ ALBANIA





Presse Sports

young players to take risks with their football, develop their characters and become much stronger mentally. The players with immigrant roots have also helped to strengthen our clubs, and with them our domestic championship, before going to play abroad. That dual impact has boosted both our national teams and our club sides. It has benefited the whole of Switzerland's football pyramid."

When the 'segundos' face each other

The 52-year-old head coach of the Swiss national team, Vladimir Petković, is acutely aware of these sensibilities. He came to Switzerland as an immigrant in 1987, and since 2000 he has held three passports – Bosnian, Croatian and Swiss. In addition to his technical skills, the former S.S. Lazio coach – who worked as a social worker in Ticino until 2008, combining it with his managerial duties at FC Lugano and AC Bellinzona – is said to have been appointed head coach of the national side on account of his ability to manage such a multicultural team, which he believes is its strength, "as the team has always had a kind of sacred unity".

With around two-thirds of the players in its various national sides – from Under-15s right up to the senior team – holding dual nationality, Switzerland has enjoyed more than a decade of success on the pitch. The Swiss Under-17s were world champions in 2009 and European champions in 2002, while in the European Under-21 Championship Switzerland made it to the semi-finals in 2002 and the final in 2011.

Those age group sides benefited from the presence of a number of segundos – second-generation immigrants born in Switzerland. When the segundos in those youth teams

first start being selected for national teams at senior level, Switzerland is almost always their first choice. But after a few months – or a few years in some cases – those who have not been picked and are getting impatient turn to their parents' country of birth. When Switzerland and Albania last played each other, in qualifying matches for the 2014 World Cup in 2012 and 2013 (with Switzerland winning on both occasions – 2-0 in Lucerne and 2-1 in Tirana), more than half of the players on the pitch could have played for either side. In the second match in Tirana, where Switzerland booked their ticket to Brazil, six members of the Swiss team fell into that category – Granit Xhaka, Behrami, Mehmedi, Dzemali, Kasami and Shaqiri.

Shaqiri, the former FC Bayern München forward, had a special pair of boots made for the occasion (which he still wears today) featuring the flags of Switzerland, Albania and Kosovo. Behrami, who was born in Mitrovica and is now 30, was just five years old when his parents fled Kosovo and sought refuge in Ticino. He has the Albanian eagle tattooed on his right calf and the Swiss and Kosovan flags tattooed on his left arm. "These emblems remind me where I have come from and who I am," the Watford FC midfielder said recently. "There is part of me in each of these countries, and I do not want to forsake any of them. I am of Albanian origin, but I owe Switzerland everything. If I had to sum it up, I would say that my heart is half Swiss and half Albanian/Kosovan, but my legs, my arms and the rest of my body always give everything for Switzerland out on the pitch. Switzerland has done a wonderful job of integrating people, and I am a symbol of that. I benefited from that process, which surpassed all of my expectations. The decision to play for Switzerland was ultimately

Ermir Lenjani, one of a number of Albania players who grew up in Switzerland.



EURO 2016 ALBANIA'S QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

Portugal	0-1	Albania
Albania	1-1	Denmark
Serbia	0-3 (f)	Albania
Albania	2-1	Armenia
Denmark	0-0	Albania
Albania	0-1	Portugal
Albania	0-2	Serbia
Armenia	0-3	Albania

(f): Match forfeited

XHAKA V XHAKA

Brothers Granit and Taulant Xhaka, who play for two different national teams (Switzerland and Albania), will go head to head this summer at EURO 2016.

When Switzerland take on Albania in Lens on 11 June, the Swiss will be supporting Granit, while the Albanians will be rooting for Taulant. And their parents, Eli and Ragip Xhaka, will be torn in two, doubtless hoping for a draw. While Jérôme and Kevin-Prince Boateng have met twice at a World Cup (in 2010 and 2014), playing for Germany and Ghana respectively, this will be the first time that two siblings have played against each other at a EURO. And yet, the Xhaka brothers could easily have ended up wearing the same shirt.

Originally from Kosovo, their father, Ragip, fled to Switzerland as a political refugee in the early 1990s, having spent three years in a Yugoslav prison on account of his 'beliefs'. Together with his wife, Eli, and little Taulant, who was born in Basel in March 1991, Ragip found work as a gardener in Basel, and Granit was born there in September 1992. The two brothers quickly developed into talented footballers, initially at FC Concordia Basel and later at FC Basel 1893, where they represented Switzerland in the various youth teams without ever questioning their sporting nationality. But Granit, who was considered a precocious talent, quickly began to outperform his older brother. At the age of 20, the attacking midfielder moved to VfL Borussia Mönchengladbach on a €9m transfer, a record at the time for the German club.

Granit is regarded as the second jewel of Swiss football, alongside Xherdan Shaqiri. He was part of the Swiss team that won the U-17 World Cup in 2009, before playing in the side that reached the final of the European

Under-21 Championship in 2011. That same year, Hitzfeld awarded him his first cap at senior level in a 2-2 draw with England. Also a Swiss international from Under-17 to Under-21 level, Taulant's upward trajectory was less linear and came to a halt just short of the Swiss senior side.

The artist and the warrior

The Basel player, who was loaned to Grasshoppers in 2012/13, had a decision to make if he was to take that final step and play international football at senior level. Facing strong competition from the likes of Gökhan Inler and Valon Behrami, he opted to play for Albania instead, making his debut in the red and black shirt in Albania's historic 1-0 win away against Portugal. "Their two careers are typical of what happens with dual-nationality players who have grown up in Switzerland," explains Challandes, now a scout for Basel. "But they are two fairly different players. Granit [40 caps; 6 goals] is the more talented of the two, with exceptional technical, tactical and physical ability. He also has a strong character. He's a linchpin of the national side, and I can see him having a real impact at EURO 2016. Taulant [10 caps] is a warrior, a 'midfield terrier'. He, too, has character and charisma. And he's constantly improving. I can see him moving abroad soon, probably following his brother to the Bundesliga." But before that, their paths will cross in Lens, where they will face each other, brother against brother, as they did as children playing in the corridor of their Basel apartment.

an easy and logical one. Switzerland changed my life and that of my entire family."

Players like Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka, who have signed with clubs in England and Germany respectively, are heroes to young people in Switzerland, where the Stoke City forward is used to market football video games and advertise the national team's main sponsors alongside the Mönchengladbach midfielder. "The players who have a choice still tend to opt for Switzerland," says Walter Fernandez, a former Swiss international who now works as an agent. "It might not be what the parents would choose, but it's what the players are choosing. Those who are playing for Albania either didn't have the option of playing for Switzerland or – like Gashi, who

might have had a chance – didn't have the patience to wait. Most of the others would have been unlikely to make the cut in the long term. That said, the progress made by Albania at international level is now giving those players opportunities to show what they can do.

"The example of Ermir Lenjani, who learnt to play here in Switzerland [at FC Winterthur], speaks volumes. A strong performance with Albania against France [in a 1-1 draw in November 2014] brought him to the attention of a number of clubs in France's Ligue 1, and he signed for Stade Rennais FC a few weeks later, before moving to FC Nantes [on loan]." The gap between Switzerland and Albania is definitely shrinking as the two teams both raise the bar. 🇨🇭



Granit (above) and Taulant will go head to head in Lens on 11 June.

EURO 2016 KITS REVEALED

BY TRITAN KOKONA



The Albanian Football Federation (FSHF) has presented the kits that its national team will wear at EURO 2016 in France. A fashion show was organised for the occasion at the University of Arts in Tirana, involving big names from the worlds of art and culture, former footballers and national football team coaches. The three official kits (red shirt, black shorts and red socks as the home kit, an all-white away kit and an all-black third-choice kit) were modelled by national team players Lorik Cana (captain), Etrit Berisha (goalkeeper), Ansi Agolli, Shkelzen Gashi, Taulant Xhaka, Sokol Cikalleshi, Mërgim Mavraj and Bekim Balaj. The kits were designed by the Albanian company Pik Creative, which was selected by a panel composed of specialists, stylists, journalists and other renowned figures. The winning design is called 'Triumph' and features an image



of the Albanian emblem, the two-headed eagle, on the front of the shirts and the motto 'Ti Shqipëri, më jep nder' ('You, Albania, give me honour') across the back of the neck. It was well received by all at the fashion show. The kits are being manufactured by the Italian company Macron, with which the FSHF has signed

a six-year deal. To give the Albanian jersey the historical value it deserves, in honour of the federation's first-ever appearance in a major tournament, the FSHF has decided that it will be used only for EURO 2016. A new design will be produced for the 2018 World Cup qualifiers.

PROJEKT12 GOES INTO EXTRA TIME

BY CARMEN REDL



Projekt12, an individual player development programme for Austria's most talented young footballers that was launched in 2009 by the Austrian Football Association (ÖFB) in partnership with the federal ministry of defence and sport and the Austrian Bundesliga is being extended for a second time. The successful programme will now continue until at least 2018. A high-level event was recently organised to mark the extension of the programme, looking back on its achievements to date and looking ahead to its objectives over the next three years.

Sports minister Hans Peter Doskozil, ÖFB president Leo Windtner, Bundesliga executive director Christian Ebenbauer and Raiffeisen marketing director Leodegar Pruschak were there on behalf of programme partners to address matters of sporting policy. An elite expert panel discussed the programme's priorities as regards training methods,



sports medicine and sports psychology. But how exactly is the substance of the programme implemented in the everyday training regimes of clubs and academies? How do clubs approach the concept of 'individualisation', and how relevant is that nowadays in modern football? Andreas Müller, sporting director at SK Rapid Wien, and two academy directors, Willi Schuldes (SK Rapid Wien) and Ralf Muhr (FK Austria Wien), reported on the benefits of Projekt12

for clubs and gave participants insight into their day-to-day work with the country's most talented young players.

Those theoretical discussions were then followed by a practical demonstration. The event ended with participants travelling in the national team's official coach (provided by K&K Busreisen) to Ernst-Happel-Stadion, where an individual training session was taking place with SK Rapid Wien's Projekt12 players and other stars of the future.

AZERBAIJAN

www.affa.az

THIRD TERM FOR ROVNAG ABDULLAYEV IN THE PRESIDENT'S SEAT

BY MIKAYIL NARIMANOGLU

 The AGM of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) was held in Baku on 11 March. Theodore Theodoridis, UEFA General Secretary ad interim, attended the meeting together with the minister of youth and sport, Azad Rahimov, media representatives and other guests.

After the AFFA president, Rovnag Abdullayev, had delivered his annual report, the Azerbaijani minister of youth and sport acknowledged the work of the association in developing football

in Azerbaijan. Elections were then held, with Rovnag Abdullayev re-elected as the AFFA president for a third term, and other members of the AFFA executive committee elected or re-elected. The UEFA General Secretary ad interim addressed the meeting and wished the AFFA president and executive committee all the best in their work to further develop football in Azerbaijan.

After the meeting, a press conference was held with the AFFA president and the UEFA General Secretary ad interim.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

www.nfsbih.ba

FIRST UNDER-17 FINALS

BY FUAD KRVAVAC

 Bosnia's Under-17s have achieved a historic first by qualifying for this year's European Under-17 Championship final tournament in Baku, Azerbaijan. In their elite round mini-tournament in Georgia, their first feat was a 2-1 win against the host team, which they followed up with a 1-0 win against Italy, taking Sakib Malkočević and his team within grasp of a place at the final tournament. Despite losing 2-1 to Russia in their last match, the young Bosnians finished their elite round group ahead of Russia, in second place, which secured them their ticket to Azerbaijan. It was the third time in a row that Malkočević had taken Bosnia and Herzegovina to the elite round of the European Under-17 Championship, and this time it was third time lucky.

"We wanted to qualify so very much, and after our superb win against Italy, we were really close to the finishing line. To finish in second place in a tough group like this, and to leave the Russians by the wayside, is a huge achievement.



We are heading to Azerbaijan to get the best result possible," Malkočević said. On their way to the elite round, the young Bosnians finished their qualifying group also in second place and also with two wins and a defeat. In that mini-tournament in Moldova, they beat Estonia 2-1 and the hosts 5-0, before losing 3-0 to Ukraine. The whole team have given their all to make it to the final tournament, with goalkeeper Filip Vasilj (NK Lokomotiva Zagreb), defender Saša Perić (FK Crvena zvezda), midfielder Stefan Kovač (FK Crvena zvezda) and forward Nedim Hadžić (FK Sarajevo) showing particular promise. Hadžić has been the young Dragons' biggest hero – top scorer in the premier youth league in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he scored the decisive elite round goals against both

Italy and Russia.

"This is the first time we've qualified for a big tournament and that's a huge achievement for us. We've been rewarded for all our work during the past year. We're united as a team and that's one of the reasons for our success," Hadžić said. At senior level, meanwhile, the national team have played two friendly matches in preparation for their World Cup qualifying campaign. Mehmed Baždarević's team beat Luxembourg 3-0 at home and won 2-0 away to Switzerland.

Finally, in their European Championship qualifiers, the Under-21s drew 0-0 with Kazakhstan in Astana at the end of March, leaving Darko Nestorović's team with two points from five matches and in fifth place in their group.

PROMISING PREPARATIONS FOR WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

BY YORDAN GROZDANOV



2016 started well enough for the Bulgarian national team, with Ivaylo Petev's squad achieving two victories away from home in friendly matches within the space of five days. The games against Portugal and FYR Macedonia were part of the team's preparations for the upcoming qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

The Bulgarian team showed excellent collective spirit and attacking creativity, and the players were organised and disciplined, all of which sends out a positive signal to the fans.

In the first of those friendly matches, against Portugal on 25 March at Estádio Dr. Magalhães Pessoa, goalkeeper Vladislav Stoyanov had a great game and produced a string of excellent saves that helped secure Bulgaria's 1-0 win



after Marcelinho, in his national team debut, had given them the lead in the 19th minute. The striker wriggled free of Pepe and squeezed the ball home past Portugal's goalkeeper Anthony Lopes after a superb pass from Ivelin Popov.

In the 66th minute, Portugal were awarded a spot kick by referee Carlos Clos Gomez, who adjudged Nikolay Bodurov to have handled Pepe's cross, and captain Cristiano Ronaldo stepped up to take the

penalty, only to be denied by a save from Stoyanov.

Three days later, Bulgaria's winning streak continued against FYR Macedonia. Dimitar Rangelov (in the 65th minute) and Aleksandar Tonev (87th minute) scored the only goals of the match in Skopje.

Showing great efficiency in attack and not conceding a goal in either match, the Bulgarian national team is definitely heading in the right direction.

IVICA OLIĆ RETIRES FROM NATIONAL TEAM DUTY

BY TOMISLAV PACAK



Long-time international striker Ivica Olić decided to retire from national team football at the beginning of March. "Saying goodbye to the Croatian jersey is a very emotional moment for me. Croatia has always been above everything else. That will not change, and I wish my national team every success in France this summer. I will be Croatia's biggest fan," Olić wrote in an open letter published on the Croatian Football Federation's official website.

Olić retires with 104 caps and 20 goals for his country, including World Cup strikes against Italy in 2002 and then against Cameroon in 2014, which put him in the record books as Croatia's oldest scorer at a World Cup. The tireless striker remains a symbol of relentless effort in the national team jersey, a player who



gave everything in every single match and had a magnificent career he truly deserved. Meanwhile, his former teammates have played two friendly matches against Israel and Hungary in their new kit launched for UEFA EURO 2016. Instantly recognisable and widely praised, the new chequered shirt and socks were voted best EURO 2016 kit by FourFourTwo magazine, with the away kit also in the top six. In other news, the Croatian fan club 'Uvijek vjerni' presented its annual awards at a ceremony in Osijek. Ivan Rakitić was named the best national team player in 2015, while the Under-17 team received the youth award, and Ivica Grnja was given a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to Croatian football as a player and a coach.

Last but definitely not least, the Croatian Under-19 team booked their place at this year's European Under-19 Championship final round by winning all three of their elite round matches. It is the 20th major tournament that Croatia's youth teams have reached since the country gained independence.

CYPRUS

www.cfa.com.cy

NEW CENTRE OF REFEREEING EXCELLENCE

BY CONSTANTINOS SHIAMBOULLIS



The St George Hotel in Paphos was the venue for the first-ever Cyprus Centre of Refereeing Excellence (CYCORE) course, where 12 talented young match officials, including three women, took part in four days of intensive coaching from 3 to 6 March. The four trios of match officials each refereed a game, which was filmed by two different cameras and analysed in depth afterwards. UEFA Referees Committee member Kyros Vassaras was invited as the main technical instructor, having the advantage of being able to deliver all his presentations in Greek. He was supported by CFA referee instructor Kostas Kapitanis. In addition to the technical presentations, the group also undertook daily training sessions, outdoor practical exercises and an introduction to the Yo-Yo fitness assessment. There were also sessions on psychology and nutrition,



both important elements of refereeing. The group will meet again towards the end of 2016. Until then, every member will be supported by a coach to further develop their skills and closely monitor their progress. The course is a mini version of UEFA's very successful CORE programme. Alan Snoddy, head of refereeing at the Cyprus FA, said: "It is important for the future of refereeing in Cyprus that we make every effort to find promising young match officials and give them maximum support. Many other countries are now adopting this CORE approach and Cyprus must keep pace with all these new developments in refereeing. I hope this can become an annual event."

FAROE ISLANDS

www.football.fo

FROM BRAZILIAN IMMIGRANT TO INTERNATIONAL REFEREE

BY TERJI NIELSEN



Fifteen years ago, when Alex Troleis travelled all the long way from his native Brazil to work in the Faroe Islands, he could never have imagined that one day he would represent his adopted country as an international referee. And yet here he is, a Faroese citizen with a Faroese wife, two children, his own house and, now, the status of FIFA international referee. The 35-year-old says he now feels as much Faroese as Brazilian. He has settled into life on the islands, where he works as an electrician. "When I came to the Faroe Islands, it was just for the work. But I started playing football, and in 2004 I joined the top league on the islands. Then in 2007 I got my refereeing qualification and from there I started focusing more on refereeing than on playing football," he explains. He says that never in his wildest dreams could



he have imagined that it would be the start of a refereeing career that would see him rise to the rank of FIFA match official. He has already completed his first international assignment. "I refereed at a European Under-17 qualifying tournament in Belgium in March. When I walked onto the pitch to referee the first match between Spain and Slovenia, it was an amazing feeling. I had goosebumps all over my body. It was just unbelievable," he says. Now he cannot wait to hear from UEFA or FIFA about his next appointment. "It's very exciting, as was the UEFA course in Cyprus for new FIFA referees, where all our instructors were former top officials. It's like a dream come true."

ESTONIA

www.jalgpall.ee

BRINGING FOOTBALL CLOSER TO CHILDREN

BY MAARJA SAULEP



In autumn 2014 the Estonian Football Association (EJL) started a project called 'Jalgpall kooli!', which translates as 'Football to schools!' The aim of the project is to promote a healthy lifestyle among schoolchildren and help get more teachers, children and parents involved in football. EJL coaches visit schools across Estonia with coaches and players from local football clubs and together they offer schoolchildren the opportunity to enjoy fun football games and exercises. As well as offering teachers advice and tips on how to use football in physical education classes, the project also provides the schools with footballs, bibs and cones.

Since the project began, over 150 schools all over the country have benefited. In the first year alone, more than 7,600 children participated in the project and similar figures are likely for the second year, with 70 schools already having taken part. The project, supported by Coca-Cola Hellenic, is expected to run until 2020 and the plan is to visit all schools at least twice.



A HOPEFUL START TO 2016

BY KAKHA SHALAMBERIDZE

 2016 began with some significant events for the Georgian Football Federation (GFF), including the appointment of a new head coach, the acquisition of a new sponsor, and the publication of a new magazine.

Georgian football fans have high hopes following the appointment of new head coach Vladimir Weiss. The Slovak comes to Georgia with a lot of national team coaching experience, something that has lacked before in Georgian football's 26-year history.

Weiss comes from a dynasty of footballers and made his name with Artmedia Petržalka, taking the small Bratislava-based club to the group stage of the UEFA Champions League. His coaching success continued with the Slovakian national team, whom he took to the 2010 World Cup, where they reached the knockout stage at

the expense of the reigning world champions Italy.

Most recently, Weiss worked in Kazakhstan at Kairat Almaty, until he got the offer from the Georgian Football Federation and returned to national team coaching after a six-year break.

Apart from a new head coach, the Georgian national team has also acquired a new general sponsor, the GFF having recently signed a lucrative two-year contract with VTB Bank. This unprecedented deal will hopefully be followed by contracts with other companies wishing to join VTB in backing the national side.

This and future news will also be published by the GFF in a new quarterly magazine called Pekhurti (Football). It will also contain analytical pieces, which has met with enthusiasm from the Georgian football community.



INTEGRATION AWARD FOR WILLI LEMKE

BY THOMAS HACKBARTH

 Every football fan above a certain age knows the name Willi Lemke. The 69-year-old former manager shaped the golden years of Bundesliga club Werder Bremen and since 2008 has served as special adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on sport for development and peace. In recognition of his contribution to sport and society, Lemke has been awarded a DFB and Mercedes-Benz Integration Award (special award category). The DFB's first vice-president, Reinhard Rauball, and treasurer, Reinhard Grindel, together with Dirk Jakobs of Daimler AG, presented Lemke with his prestigious award at a ceremony at the German football museum in Dortmund on 14 March. The other 2015 award winners were FC Vorwärts Drögeheide (clubs category), Champions ohne Grenzen (Champions without borders) from Berlin



(voluntary and community organisations category) and Bachschule Offenbach (schools category).

"Clubs are like the glue that holds our society together. No one there cares how much money you have in your wallet or education on your CV," Lemke said at the awards ceremony. "It's fantastic to see clubs opening their doors and inviting refugees to play. Sport helps to combat the monotony of everyday life in refugee shelters."

Oliver Bierhoff, German international Ilkay Gündogan, 2015 World Cup top scorer Célia Šašić, the DFB's integration ambassador, Jimmy Hartwig, and the German government's migration, refugees and integration commissioner, Aydan Özoguz, were also in attendance at the German football museum. The DFB and Mercedes-Benz Integration Award was established in 2007 and each of the 2015 award winners received a Mercedes-Benz Vito worth over €56,000.

GREECE

www.epo.gr

SKIBBE MEETS WITH SUPER LEAGUE COACHES

BY GIOTA KAISARI



In preparation for the 2018 World Cup qualifiers, Greece's head coach, Michael Skibbe, and team doctor George Gkodolias have met with all the coaches and doctors of the Greek Super League clubs.

The president of the Greek Football Federation (HFF), George Gkirtzikis, was there to welcome everyone to the meeting. He thanked the club representatives for their cooperation and expressed his confidence that their joining forces with the national team coach and the HFF would have positive and useful repercussions for Greek football as a whole. "It was a good idea to meet together," Skibbe said. "We analysed our friendly match against Iceland and



we identified the team's strengths and weaknesses. Afterwards, we discussed the level of Greek football from a tactical and technical perspective. From my point of view, sharing Skibbe's and experiences can only have positive results. We all

agree that the national team and club coaches are jointly responsible for the growth of Greek football. We shall continue to meet in the future in order to develop the potential of Greek footballers as much as possible."

HUNGARY

www.mlsz.hu / en.mlsz.hu

FOOTBALL FEVER MOUNTS AHEAD OF EURO 2016

BY MÁRTON DINNYÉS



Late last year the Hungarian national team achieved its greatest success for several decades. After 30 years the team qualified for a major international tournament and ended a 44-year wait to once again participate in a European Championship final tournament.

That success has elicited real football fever among sports fans in the country, the national football team rediscovering its long-lost popularity, as exemplified recently when captain Balázs Dzsudzsák and his players took to the pitch against Croatia for a friendly match in front of a capacity crowd at Groupama Aréna in Budapest.

The popularity of the national team coached by Bernd Storck, or rather that of the players who make up the squad, is increasing more and more as EURO 2016 approaches, with more and more people showing an interest in the team, even those who have never really followed football before.



The Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ) is tapping into this surge in popularity and hoping to turn the players into household names by depicting them as likeable cartoon characters.

The cartoon drawings had their first outing before the match against Croatia, since when they have started to appear in many more places, including at stadiums across the country and at MLSZ events.

ITALY

www.figc.it

A TRIUMPHANT MONTH FOR THE NATIONAL YOUTH TEAMS

BY DIEGO ANTENOZIO



March turned out to be a glorious month for Italy's national youth teams. Eleven victories, three draws and just a single defeat saw the women's Under-17 and men's Under-19 and Under-17 teams each qualify for their European Championship finals. And there was further success for the men's Under-20 and Under-16 teams, who both ran out winners in their respective editions of the Four Nations tournament played between Germany, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. Such a string of successes is understandably a source of pride for all those involved in nurturing the young players, not least the head coach of the senior men's team, Antonio Conte, whose responsibilities extend to overseeing the national youth team set-up. On the eve of the senior national team's friendly with Germany, Conte made a point of highlighting the progress made over the last four years, praising the work done to build on the excellent foundations laid by Arrigo Sacchi, who served as national youth team coordinator until July 2014.

"It's a fantastic outcome that leaves us feeling very optimistic," enthused Carlo Tavecchio, president of the Italian Football Federation. "We want to see growth from the ground up. My compliments go to our young men and women, who encapsulate our pride as Italians and give us genuine hope for the future." It is six years since the men's Under-19 team last participated in a European final tournament, and Paolo Vanoli's

team secured qualification in front of a passionate home crowd. By that stage, the women's Under-17 team, coached by Rita Guarino, had already secured their return to their final tournament after an absence of four years, as had the men's Under-17s, who won their group in the elite round in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Alberico Evani, head coach of the men's Under-20s, summed up the situation perfectly: "These victories are the reward for the work we've put in over the last few years and are proof of the standards we've been able to set throughout the national youth team set-up, from the Under-15s upwards." It was a sentiment echoed by Vanoli following his Under-19 team's decisive match against Turkey: "We knew we would have our work cut out against these teams, particularly in terms of experience. A lot of their players are already playing top-flight football."

Meanwhile, Guarino praised her Under-17 team's technical and emotional maturity. "It was both a mental and a physical challenge. The girls gave everything and never doubted themselves. They deserve their place at the finals. When you play well, you can push yourself that little bit harder." Huge credit should also go to the organisers of the Under-19 and women's Under-17 elite round matches, in the Veneto and the Romagna regions respectively, and the exceptional promotional activities, logistical support, and hospitality provided by the local authorities in the two regions.

LATVIA

www.lff.lv

FIRST UEFA A GOALKEEPER COURSE IN THE BALTICS

BY TOMS ĀRMANIS



Latvia has become the first Baltic state to organise and host a UEFA Goalkeeper A licence coaching course. The first session took place in January and the second in March. The whole course will last for about a year and a half, and preparations began in earnest back in April last year, when Latvia hosted a UEFA Goalkeeper A licence workshop for its instructors, which was a major step towards getting the green light to organise the new course. The coaching instructors are advised by former Estonian national team goalkeeper Mart Poom, who now works as a UEFA goalkeeping expert. He says that Latvia is a shining example of how to work towards educating goalkeeper coaches.

This first UEFA Goalkeeper A licence course in the Baltics brings together six of the best goalkeeper coaches in Latvia (Aleksandrs Koliņko, Vjačeslavs Dusmanovs, Sergejs Diguļovs, Viktors Spole, Jevgēņijs Belovs and Dmitrijs Petrenko), as well as two coaches from Lithuania (Audrius Paškevičius and Audrius Ramonas). Their instructors are Artūrs Biezais, Aleksandrs Proskurnins and Andrejs Piedels.



LITHUANIA

www.lff.lt

PROMISING DEBUT FOR GIRLS' FUTSAL

BY VAIDOTAS JANUŠKA



The Lithuanian Football Federation's grassroots department recently organised its first-ever girls' futsal tournaments for schools. The initiative surpassed all expectations, with a total



of 347 teams taking part. Girls across the country – many trying the sport for the first time – took part in regional Under-13 and Under-15 tournaments, with the winners facing off at national finals in April. The initiative is called LadyGolas and is a girls-only indoor version of the mixed Golas tournaments, which take place outdoors in the spring. "LadyGolas has surprised many people, at least in the sense that people were sceptical as to whether futsal was appropriate for girls. The Lithuanian Football Federation has made futsal and women's football two of its top priorities, so we had the idea of combining the two and getting girls involved during the winter period," said project manager Vilma Zurzė.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF THE GAME

BY ALEX VELLA



Following the lead given by UEFA, the Malta Football Association (MFA) is engaged in a three-year educational football programme for boys and girls aimed at enhancing the image of the game. The programme, launched in collaboration with the Maltese Youth FA and with the support of McDonald's (Malta), is named 'The McDonald's Football Plus for Kids'.

The MFA is one of six pilot associations selected by UEFA to take part in its GROW 2020 marketing project, which aims to put football on a higher standing across Europe and increase participation, while also boosting fan support and revenues.

Football is the top participation sport on the Maltese islands, achieving 55% in the popularity stakes. Surveys have shown that 15% of adults have played the game at one time or another, a figure that is higher than for other sports. Participation by youngsters was higher still, with 39% saying they played football.

By contrast, the image of football in Malta ranked below that of other sports, so there is a clear need to improve perceptions of a sport that enjoys so



D. Aquilina

much popularity in Malta. The extensive programme which has been launched to do just that targets the youth sector first and foremost, to instil a greater love for the game through education. This is part of the MFA's vision for the coming years, the basic pillars of which are growth and quality.

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

BY SVETLANA CEBAN



On 8 March, International Women's Day, a football match between former Moldovan women's and men's internationals, was held at the CSCT Buiucani ground for the fourth year in a row. Before the match, the men presented flowers to each of the women. The game was fast and ended in a convincing 11-9 win for the women. The match was organised by the Football Association of Moldova

(FMF) together with CCPA/OFFS Moldova (Cross Cultures Project Association/ Open Fun Football Schools). The head of women's football at the FMF, Natalia Ceban, as well as national women's team coaches Alina Stețenco, Eugenia Miron and Elena Subbotina, played an important role in the team's remarkable win. Representatives of CCPA/OFFS Moldova also took to the field, including Lurie Conusevici (captain of the men's



Boris Kharchenko

team) and Svetlana Patraș (captain of the women's team), both of whom are assistant coordinators with CCPA/OFFS Moldova, as well as Diana Bobuțac, Olga Isac and Iana Pogarevici, instructors for CCPA/OFFS Moldova. The match was well attended and received good media coverage as well, with match reports on the FMF's official website and on TV.

BOOSTING DISABILITY FOOTBALL

BY NIGEL TILSON



The Irish Football Association (IFA) is developing a new disability football plan so that more young disabled people can enjoy the game. The plan, which will cover the period from 2016 to 2020, aims to provide more strategic support to clubs and organisations that are already involved in disability football or would like to get involved.

IFA disability manager Alan Crooks, a UEFA Pro licence coach with vast experience at international level in terms of disability coach education and inclusivity, explains: "Our new plan supports the development of inclusive clubs, which is a key target of the IFA's Let Them Play youth football strategy. Basically, this means encouraging clubs that don't traditionally cater for people with disabilities to get involved and work with clubs that do to enhance the service they provide." More than 5,000 young people are already involved in IFA



disability football programmes across Northern Ireland, and the aim is to double that number over the next ten years as part of Let Them Play. As well as providing support to special schools and clubs that cater for people with disabilities, the IFA

supports the development of powerchair football, deaf football, visual impairment football, cerebral palsy football, frame football and learning disability football. Alan Crooks also runs disability-specific coach education courses for the IFA.

BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS IN PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

BY STEPHEN FINN



High-performance director Ruud Dokter has signed a five-year contract extension with the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), allowing the Dutchman to continue his work with Irish football until the end of 2020. His role in leading the FAI player development and emerging talent programmes is vital to further develop the foundations that have been laid to achieve long-term success from our most promising players.

"First of all I have to say that the FAI has been a great organisation to work with because it is an organisation working on the development of football for the future," Dokter said. "It is great working with the clubs, all of our affiliates and everybody in the football community. This is an exciting time for Irish football. It's important for

me to say that in the two and a half years I've been here I feel that so much has been accomplished, and I didn't hesitate for a second to renew my contract with the FAI.

"There are many challenges ahead of us and we are focused on continuing to make improvements in the development of players in Ireland. We've achieved much already, including rolling out the first two recommendations of the FAI player development plan, improving the emerging talent programme structures, and completing the FAI women's strategic plan for 2015-18. We've also made continued improvements in coach education. The Under-19 and Under-17 leagues have proven to be successful and we will introduce a national Under-15 league in the coming years.



"We've made great strides with our underage international teams, with our boys' Under-17 team reaching the European Championship finals in Bulgaria last year. Similarly, our women's Under-19 and Under-17 teams have both reached European Championship final tournaments in the last two years. We are working to build on those successes. I see many opportunities for Irish football and I'm looking forward to the coming years with the FAI."

ROMANIA

www.frf.ro

BE ACTIVE, LOVE YOUR HEART!

BY PAUL ZAHARIA



A recent survey revealed that fewer than 25% of Romanian children aged 7 to 12 living in low-income urban neighbourhoods do 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity – the benchmark recommended by the World Health Organization. In response, the Romanian Football Association (FRF) has launched 'Through movement, the heart smiles' in six schools located in low-income neighbourhoods in Romania's biggest cities: Bucharest, Cluj and Timisoara.

For this latest addition to the FRF's social responsibility portfolio, the association has teamed up with the Romanian Heart Foundation, a national member of the World Heart Federation (WHF), a global organisation dedicated to the fight against cardiovascular disease, which has been working with UEFA for



several years to develop initiatives to encourage people to get more active and play football. Former Romanian international, seasoned coach and current manager of the FRF scouting department, Aurel Țicleanu, has been appointed

as project ambassador. The project's slogan is 'Be active, love your heart!' and the aim is to teach children about the importance of regular exercise. Teachers and coaches have been provided with lots of resources to help them organise fun, stimulating activities, and materials are also being produced for parents, to show them how to help their children overcome barriers such as a lack of time and poor infrastructure. Football is one of the best ways to be active, and arguably the most fun, but walking can be and is also encouraged as a means of achieving a healthier lifestyle. That is why the project also includes a walking contest in the six schools. It is not designed to be competitive but to stimulate physical activity and encourage the children to explore other ways in which they can enjoy being active.

SAN MARINO

www.fsgc.sm

REFEREE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

BY STEFANO PODESCHI



The San Marino Football Federation (FSGC) and the San Marino referees association were honoured to be asked by FIFA and UEFA to organise a tuition programme combining the 8th Course for National Referee Instructors and the 7th Course for National Referee Fitness Instructors in Europe as part of the governing bodies' joint Referee Assistance Programme (RAP). The combined course, which aims to raise refereeing standards across Europe, took place in San Marino from 26 February to 6 March. It was attended by the head of refereeing, a referee instructor and a fitness coach from each of the 54 UEFA member associations, with sessions led by senior referee instructors from both UEFA and FIFA. The classroom sessions included video analysis using clips from the FIFA and UEFA archives. The participants agreed that the opportunity to study footage from different leagues around Europe

was particularly beneficial. The practical sessions held at the refurbished San Marino Stadium complex were equally well received. They provided fitness instructors with the chance to try out new methods for improving and monitoring the fitness levels of match officials, while the referee instructors ran through exercises designed to improve movement around the pitch and in-game decision-making. A group of young players selected from San Marino's national youth teams and referees from the San Marino referees association were on hand to assist and worked closely with the 54 instructors attending the course.

Like similar initiatives in the past, the course proved a real success. All of the participants reported that they found the issues covered both relevant and interesting, and they returned to their respective national associations with new knowledge and skills to pass on to match officials back home. Many participants



also expressed the opinion that FIFA and UEFA were working together more effectively than ever in their efforts to make the understanding and interpretation of the Laws of the Game and the evaluation of referees' decisions more consistent throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

NICOLA STURGEON BECOMES OFFICIAL PATRON OF THE SCOTLAND WOMEN'S TEAM

BY DAVID CHILDS



The first minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, will promote and champion the women's national team and work with the football authorities to encourage more and more girls and women to get involved in and follow the game. As a keen supporter of Scottish sport, and under the first minister's leadership, the Scottish government is committed to gender equality and includes a cabinet with an equal split of men and women.

Women's national team coach Anna Signeul and her squad were invited to Bute House, the first minister's official residence, to meet their new patron and discuss how they can work together to develop awareness and involvement in the national game among girls and women. "We are absolutely delighted to receive this official backing from the first minister," Signeul said. "Our



women's programme has enjoyed great support from the Scottish government, sportscotland and the sportscotland Institute of Sport over the years, and this underlines just how much the women's game has grown in Scotland. We have some crucial games ahead of us this year, with the ultimate aim of reaching the UEFA Women's EURO in the Netherlands next summer, and we really appreciate the support that we receive from fans across the country. Adding the support of the first minister is a fantastic boost for the squad as we prepare to resume the

qualifying campaign."

The first minister herself said: "I'm delighted and honoured to accept the role of patron of the Scotland women's national football team, and I enjoyed meeting Anna and the squad to hear about the encouraging progress they are making in the current qualification campaign for next year's European Championships. It's an exciting time for women's football, which is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, and I hope to use this role to promote the women's game at all levels across Scotland. I would like to see more women participating in the sport, and more people watching the sport, and will work with the Scottish FA and others to achieve this. I look forward to hearing about how I can support and help increase awareness of the game – and getting along to games when I can."

HALL OF FAME OPENS ITS DOORS

BY PETER SURIN



The day for which Slovak football fans had been waiting so long finally arrived on 27 March, when the Slovak Football Hall of Fame officially opened its doors.

"The players, coaches, referees, stakeholders, journalists and everyone else to whom we pay our respect and gratitude are worthy of their place here. It is they who created the famous Slovak footballing past, and without memories or knowledge of the past, there is no present," said Ján Kováčik, president of the Slovak Football Association.

The Slovak Football Hall of Fame is a tribute to all those who have raised the nation's awareness and love of the game through their footballing skills or life, to all those who have given Slovak football fame, respect and a good name.

The first 11 legends honoured in

the Hall of Fame are: Slovak player of the century Ján Popluhár; coach of the century Jozef Vengloš; 1976 European Championship winners Jozef Čapkovič, Karol Dobiaš and Anton Ondruš; illustrious striker Jozef Adamec; 1969 European Cup Winners' Cup winner Karol Jokl; 1962 World Cup runners-up Adolf Scherer, Viliam Schrojč and the aforementioned Adamec; 1966 World Cup linesman Karol Galba, also member of the first UEFA Referees Committee; and pioneering coach Leopold Štastný – making eight players, two coaches and one referee in all. Five of them – Galba, Jokl, Popluhár, Schrojč and Štastný – were inducted to the Hall of Fame posthumously and were represented by their families at the opening ceremony.

The symbol of the Hall of Fame is a unique artefact with which every inductee

is awarded. It is made of bronze and represents the corner of a football goal with the ball hitting the net. It is the work of sculptor Jozef Horob.



SWEDEN

www.svenskfotboll.se

DIVERSITY ON THE BOARD AND THE PITCH

BY JONAS NYSTEDT



On 19 March the Swedish FA held its 112th annual meeting and re-elected Karl-Erik Nilsson as its president for a fifth one-year term.

Meanwhile, the Swedish FA continues to pursue its objective of achieving a situation where men and women each account for at least 40% of the membership of all of the association's bodies and committees in the near future. It already has a term limit in place, precluding elected members from serving more than 12 years.

At present, three of the seven members of the board of the Swedish FA are women. Vice-president Rose-Marie Frebran and member Annelie Larsson were both re-elected at the latest AGM, and are joined by newly elected member Annica Grälls, chairperson of the Swedish association of women's elite football



clubs. At the AGM, the Swedish FA also presented a CSR initiative to encourage diversity and integration.

The association has raised funds to enable football clubs in Sweden to run their own CSR projects at grassroots level, for example football activities for newly arrived migrants, or to do with racial discrimination or LGBTQ matters. In a very well-received speech, coach instructor

Ramin Kiani presented his life story. He described football as having been the key factor in helping him integrate into Swedish society when he arrived from a war-stricken Iran 30 years ago. "Hopefully, 20 or 30 years from now, we will be listening to those arriving in Sweden today telling new stories about how football helped them cope with life in a totally new environment," he said.

SWITZERLAND

www.football.ch

150,000 PLAYERS IN 6,000 TEAMS

BY PIERRE BENOIT



For more than 30 years, the annual Credit Suisse Cup has been the biggest youth sports event in Switzerland, with more than 150,000 girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 16 taking part. Every year, more than 6,000 teams from across Switzerland and Liechtenstein battle it out for a place at the summer finals day, which this year will again take place in Basel. In nearly all Swiss cantons, as well as in Liechtenstein, the qualifying tournaments take place between April and the beginning of June. The sole exception is the canton of Grisons, where those qualifying matches are played in the autumn of the previous year. This year's finals day will once again be held at Basel's St. Jakob sports complex, where 290 teams will go looking for goals, points and victories in simultaneous matches spread across more than 20 pitches, with trophies up for grabs in a total of 14 different categories. In addition to those exciting tournament



matches, schoolchildren will also have the opportunity to pit themselves against the professionals in the 'Beat the Pro Parcours' (a competition involving dribbling, sprinting, shooting and a football quiz), have their photo taken with a prominent representative of the Swiss Football Association and play in the tents

organised by the association's partners, Credit Suisse and Puma.

This year's finals day will take place on 15 June. Meanwhile, the 'Beat the Pro Parcours' will again be visiting various schools around the country, and it is not too late for children to sign up and take part.

TURKEY

www.tff.org

VISUALLY IMPAIRED FOOTBALL TAKES OFF

BY AYDIN GÜVENİR

 The fourth season of the Turkish league for visually impaired footballers, sponsored by Turkcell, one of the country's biggest telecommunication firms, got under way last month within the framework of the Turkey Plays Football project, which is supported by the Turkish Football Federation (TFF). The TFF is keen to make football accessible to disabled participants and does as much as it can in that direction. Last summer, with its support, the Turkish visually impaired team won the IBSA Blind Football European Championships and they now have their sights set on the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.



TFF

UKRAINE

www.ffu.org.ua

EUROPEAN UNDER-17 FINALS, HERE WE COME!

BY YURI MAZNYCHENKO



Pavlo Kubanov

 Oleksandr Petrakov's Under-17 team returned to Kyiv in jubilant mood after topping their group in the 2015/16 European Under-17 Championship elite round and earning a place in the final tournament in Azerbaijan in May.

They put six goals away in the first two matches in their elite round mini-tournament, beating both Finland and Turkey 3-0. Only hosts England managed to spoil the Ukrainian goalkeeper's clean sheet, putting a goal past him in the first half of their last match. However, Ukraine pulled a goal back in the second half to come away with a draw. It is the

fifth time that Ukraine have reached a European Under-17 Championship final tournament. The last time was in 2012/13, when Oleksandr Holovko was at the helm and his team cruised past Germany in qualifying.

"I'm a really happy man! This first place and ticket to the final tournament are thanks to the hard work of the coaching staff and every player. We have no individual stars in our team but we showed ourselves to be a star team. And we don't plan to stop there. Our aim is to come back with medals from the final round," Petrakov said on his team's return to Kyiv.

WALES

www.faw.cymru

WALES TEAM PROMOTE LANGUAGE LEARNING

BY ROB DOWLING

 Players from the Wales national football team are doing their bit to encourage schoolchildren to learn foreign languages by launching a new learning resource pack.

The educational resources have been produced as part of the Welsh government's Global Futures plan, which aims to improve and promote modern foreign languages in Wales and to increase the number of schoolchildren choosing to study foreign languages at GCSE and A level.

The resources, which draw on this summer's EURO 2016, have been published on a digital learning platform for schools, allowing teachers to

capitalise on their pupils' excitement in the run-up to the tournament and use the packs to promote the importance and relevance of modern foreign languages.

The Wales manager, Chris Coleman, said: "I am delighted that we are involved in this programme. From experience I know how important it is to be able to communicate in different languages, having spent time in Spain and in Greece. As a squad, if we can help and encourage youngsters in any way to learn another language on the back of our success, then we will be delighted to offer all our support. Sport, especially football, can play a huge part in promoting such initiatives."

The packs have been produced in six languages – French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Welsh.



FAW

BIRTHDAYS

Campbell Ogilvie (Scotland, 1 May)
Peter Mikkelsen (Denmark, 1 May)
Vasko Dojčinovski (FYR Macedonia, 1 May)
Alexey Smertin (Russia, 5 May)
Anton Fagan (Scotland, 2 May)
Chris Bonett (Malta, 2 May)
Vladimir Medved (Slovakia, 3 May)
Olivier Chovaux (France, 3 May)
Haim Jakov (Israel, 3 May)
Volodymyr Chorno-Ivanov (Ukraine, 3 May)
Ronen Hershco (Israel, 3 May)
Anghel Iordanescu (Romania, 4 May)
Peter Gilliéron (Switzerland, 5 May)
Christian Welander (Sweden, 5 May)
Costakis Koutsokoumnis
 (Cyprus, 5 May) **60th**
Goran Mihajević (Montenegro, 5 May)
Ken Ridden (England, 6 May)
Gudmundur Petursson (Iceland, 6 May) **70th**
Karl-Erik Nilsson (Sweden, 6 May)
Charles Flint (England, 7 May)
Pekka Luhtanen (Finland, 8 May)
Michel Pralong (Switzerland, 8 May)
Marc Dobbelaer (Belgium, 8 May)
Miroslav Tulinger (Czech Republic, 8 May)
Dan Vo Quang (France, 8 May)
Stuart Turner (England, 9 May)
Magnus Forssblad (Sweden, 10 May)
Yuri Baskakov (Russia, 10 May)
Jean-Marie Gantenbein
 (Luxembourg, 11 May)
Timo Huttunen (Finland, 11 May)
Volodymyr Geninson (Ukraine, 12 May) **40th**
Gaston Schreurs (Belgium, 13 May)
Henrik Ravnild (Denmark, 13 May)
Carlos Manuel Ferreira Matos
 (Portugal, 14 May)
Maria Luisa Villa Gutiérrez (Spain, 14 May)
Hans-Jörg Eissmann (Germany, 15 May)
Piotr Maranda (Poland, 15 May)
Nikolay Levnikov (Russia, 15 May) **60th**
Evzen Amler (Czech Republic, 15 May)
Sotirios Sinnis (Greece, 15 May)
Luis Cuervas Del Real (Spain, 15 May)
Azamat Aitkhozhin
 (Kazakhstan, 15 May) **40th**
Egon Franck (Germany, 16 May)
Denys Lutiuk (Ukraine, 16 May)
Svein Johannessen (Norway, 17 May)
Kadri Jägel (Estonia, 17 May)
Lars Appelqvist (Sweden, 18 May)
Tamara Chichinadze (Georgia, 18 May)
Andreas Morisbak (Norway, 19 May)
Jozef Marko (Slovakia, 19 May) **70th**
Gaetano De Gabriele (Malta, 19 May)

Milovan Djukanović (Montenegro, 19 May)
Rune Pedersen (Norway, 19 May)
Raimondas Statkevicius (Lithuania, 19 May)
Greg Dyke (England, 20 May)
Michał Listkiewicz (Poland, 20 May)
Sandra Renon (France, 20 May)
Neli Lozeva (Bulgaria, 20 May)
Ewa Gajewska (Poland, 21 May)
Nicolai Cebotari (Moldova, 21 May)
Costas Kapitanis (Cyprus, 21 May)
Theo van Seggelen (Netherlands, 22 May)
Karl Dhont (Belgium, 22 May)
Packie Bonner (Republic of Ireland, 24 May)
Ainar Leppänen (Estonia, 24 May)
Teresa Romao (Portugal, 24 May)
Andrzej Zareba (Poland, 24 May)
Semen Andreev (Russia, 25 May)
Hans Cooman (Belgium, 25 May)
Ivančica Sudac (Croatia, 25 May)
Marco Tura (San Marino, 26 May) **60th**
Evgeni Giner (Russia, 26 May)
Peter Lawwell (Scotland, 27 May)
Jim Stjerne Hansen (Denmark, 28 May)
Jean-Pierre Escalettes (France, 29 May)
Jacques Antenen (Switzerland, 29 May) **60th**
Jozef Kliment (Slovakia, 29 May)
Donel Conway (Republic of Ireland, 31 May)
István Huszár (Hungary, 31 May)
Arnaldo Cunha (Portugal, 31 May)
Mad Øland (Denmark, 31 May)

NOTICES

- Yuriy Zapisotskiy has replaced Vladimir Geninson as general secretary of the Football Federation of Ukraine.
- Rovnag Abdullayev was re-elected on 11 March for a third term as president of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan.
- Karl-Erik Nilsson was re-elected on 19 March for another one-year term as president of the Swedish Football Association.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Meetings

2 May, Budapest
 Executive Committee

3 May, Budapest
 40th Ordinary UEFA Congress

9–13 May, Nyon
 Women's Football Leadership Programme

12 May, Mexico
 FIFA Congress

Competitions

4–16 May, Belarus
 European Women's Under-17 Championship:
 final tournament

5–21 May, Azerbaijan
 European Under-17 Championship: final
 tournament

18 May, Basel
 UEFA Europa League: final

26 May, Reggio Emilia
 UEFA Women's Champions League: final

28 May, Milan
 UEFA Champions League: final



NO TO RACISM



RESPECT

UEFA.org