Barcelona celebrate second Youth League title

JUMPING FOR JOY

THE TECHNICIAN
Words of wisdom from Marcel Koller

WORLD CUP
14 European teams at the ready

#EQUALGAME
Promoting inclusion in Ukraine
Hey say time flies when you are having fun, and this past European club competition season certainly glided by so quickly that it is hard to believe it is all coming to an end. Our elite competitions have once again been at their best, with plenty of thrilling twists and turns on the pitch, and goals scored at record pace! As we approached the finals in Lyon and Kyiv, it was easy to see why the UEFA Champions League, the UEFA Europa League and the UEFA Women’s Champions League are now more popular than ever.

Our youth competitions have also been raising the bar to new levels. It was with great pleasure that I watched the top talents go head to head in an exciting conclusion to another entertaining UEFA Youth League season. This competition is going from strength to strength and, as I presented the trophy to FC Barcelona, I could tell how much it meant to each and every one of the young champions.

All our club matches this past season featured branding for our new #EqualGame campaign. I believe this initiative, which promotes diversity, inclusion and accessibility, has been very successful, and I would like to announce that it has inspired the creation of a new award. Starting this summer, we will be presenting the #EqualGame Award to the professional player, male or female, who has been a role model in his or her community in matters relating to the social responsibility values of the campaign. Football is a force for good, and players who take action and set an example should be commended.

Of course, now the attention of most football fans around the globe will turn to the World Cup, where 14 European teams will be competing. Considering that four of the last five World Cups have been won by European sides, I expect our representatives to once again excel on Russian soil. I wish all of them the best of luck, and hope they can provide their fans with plenty of thrills and excitement. I am also confident that Russia will host a memorable tournament, with a festive and safe atmosphere at all venues. I look forward to watching my fair share of games, both in the stadiums and on TV.

Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President
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BARCELONA DO IT AGAIN

It was a case of back to the future for the 2017/18 UEFA Youth League finals at Colovray stadium from 20 to 23 April, as inaugural winners of five years ago Barcelona lifted their second Lennart Johansson Trophy in an enthralling weekend, emerging 3-0 victors over two-time champions Chelsea.

The Catalan side were worthy winners, having conceded just one goal en route to the final four, impressively eliminating Paris and Atlético Madrid in the knockout stages without conceding.

Barça and Chelsea, alongside FC Porto and Manchester City, fought it out under glorious springtime sunshine as a genuine festival of football came to Nyon. Sell-out crowds, from local schoolchildren to football fans of all ages, were treated to three entertaining games of the highest quality, with many a ‘remember the name’ moment on display from the youngsters.

Friday’s first game saw highly fancied Chelsea pushed all the way by debutants Porto, with the English side emerging victorious on penalties after a rollercoaster semi-final.

Cheered on by the local Portuguese population, in addition to a few famous faces in the stands, including Luís Figo, Vítor Baía and Paolo Ferreira, João Brandão’s side came from behind to take the lead just ten minutes before the final whistle, but with a surprise in store.

Chelsea showed just why they are two-time champions of this competition, demonstrating real character as Joshua Grant equalised with just three minutes remaining to ensure those present would witness a first-ever penalty shootout at this stage of the finals. As ever with spot kicks, the goalkeepers came to the fore, with Porto’s Diogo Costa and Chelsea’s Jamie Cumming both excelling. It was ultimately Cumming who produced a remarkable – and decisive – third save to send the 2015 and 2016 winners through. It was a tough blow for Porto, who would have been worthy finalists, though Brandão feels the experience will see them return stronger next year.

No fairytail comeback

“The UEFA Youth League is very important because it allows our players to experience different styles of football and cultures,” he said. “It also demands a higher standard, which obviously helps our players to grow individually and as a team. We’ll be back; FC Porto always play to win.”
Meanwhile, the day’s second semi-final saw Barça edge out Man City 5-4 in a genuine classic that had just about everything. Carles Pérez and Alex Collado twice gave Barça the lead, with Joel Latibeaudière and Lukas Nmecha restoring parity on each occasion. A wonderful Ricard Puig free-kick put the Catalans side 3-2 up and two further goals in two minutes just before half-time from Pérez and Alejandro Marqués – after City had been reduced to ten men – appeared to have put the tie to bed.

However, the Citizens roared back as substitute Rabbi Matondo fired in from a distance before Nmecha’s second of the game five minutes from time ensured a nervy ending, though there was to be no fairy-tale comeback for Simon Davies’ team.

The final was a less complicated affair for Francisco García Pimienta’s side, as Barcelona dominated Chelsea from the off. A Marqués strike in each half – meaning he had scored in the quarters, semis and final of the competition in his debut season with the club – were followed by a late Abel Ruiz effort to complete a 3-0 win.

“I’m delighted. The sky’s the limit for these boys. I think we’re worthy winners of the UEFA Youth League and I’m thrilled for them; they thoroughly deserve it,” beamed García Pimienta.

“Being able to take part in events like this is very important and contributes a lot to the players’ learning and improvement. At the end of the day, our aim is to prepare them for the first team.

“That’s done by getting this kind of experience, both in the group stage and the finals. It’s great for them if they can play in as many of these games as possible, but it’s even better if they can win,” he said.

Getting their hands on the trophy was a perfect gift for Collado, who celebrated his 19th birthday the day before the final. Like midfielder Ruiz, Marqués, Puig and Juan Miranda have all been involved in senior football this season, playing for Barcelona B in Spain’s second division.

**Bridge between youth and senior teams**

Success in the UEFA Youth League is not defined purely in terms of medals. In a tournament designed to help bridge the gap between youth and senior teams, it was encouraging that nine players featured in both the UEFA Youth League and the UEFA Champions League (group stage onwards) in 2017/18*.

Manchester City duo Phil Foden and Brahim Díaz missed the finals weekend, having made three appearances in the senior competition. “They’re not here, but for the right reasons,” explained Jason Wilcox, City’s academy director. “The fact is that they’ve now played in Champions League games, so we’re doing our job.”

Likewise, Porto’s Diogo Dalot missed the semi-final clash with Chelsea, given his prominent role in the club’s successful push for a first Portuguese Liga title in five seasons. Chelsea’s Ethan Ampadu, also in his maiden UEFA Youth League campaign, might have missed out because of injury but that should not detract from what has been a breakthrough season for the 17-year-old, making his senior debut for both Chelsea and Wales.

It is not only players making the step-up. Since leading Barcelona to glory, García Pimienta has been named coach of Barcelona B in a move that can only bode well for his group of title-winning youngsters. Their triumph concluded a tournament in which 43 different countries were represented – three more than in the 2016/17 season.

**Results**

| Semi-finals – 20 April 2018 | Chelsea FC 2-2 FC Porto | Chelsea win 5-4 on penalties | Referee: Srdjan Jovanovic (Serbia) |
| Manchester City FC 4-5 FC Barcelona | Referee: Aliyar Aghayev (Azerbaijan) |

**Final – 23 April 2018**

| Chelsea FC 0-3 FC Barcelona | Referee: Andreas Ekberg (Sweden) |

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*Players in the 2017/18 UEFA Youth League and UEFA Champions League (group stage to final) Fabrizio Caligara (Juventus) Diogo Dalot (Porto) Brahim Díaz (Manchester City) Phil Foden (Manchester City) Alexander Isak (Dortmund) Khetag Khosonov (CSKA Moskva) Tyrel Malacia ( Feyenoord) Kazaia Sterling (Tottenham Hotspur) Dylan Vente (Feyenoord)

**Off the pitch**

Away from the turf, the players sat in talks delivered by UEFA, including one from Pierluigi Collina, UEFA’s chief refereeing officer, designed to help them advance as people as well as athletes. They learned about the importance of respect, dedication and teamwork from some of the game’s leading figures, and were given the opportunity to get to know each other over a barbecue before the finals kicked off, while the two finalists also shared a post-match dinner on the Monday.

On the Saturday morning, the finalists took part in a skills challenge that combined technique and ability with fun and competitiveness, as they attempted to volley as many bouncing balls as possible into the four corners of the goal within 45 seconds. Tension built as both sides eventually had to be taken away by their coaches after trying to have another go and better each other.

The participating teams also attended the Match for Solidarity at the Stade de Genève (see page 28). There they watched on as childhood idols such as Ronaldinho, Cafu and Raúl González proved the truth of the old adage that “form is temporary, class is permanent” by putting on a fantastic show on behalf of the UEFA Foundation for Children and the United Nations. Those young spectors may hope that one day they themselves will be the ones bringing such joy to stars of the future.
INTER SET MORE RECORDS WITH FIFTH FUTSAL CUP TRIUMPH

In the last season before the competition is relaunched as the UEFA Futsal Champions League, Inter FS secured a record fifth UEFA Futsal Cup title with a typically dominant display in Zaragoza.

After 17 seasons, the UEFA Futsal Cup will become the UEFA Futsal Champions League in 2018/19. And of those 17 competitions, Madrid’s Inter – known as Boomerang Interviú in the early years – have now won five, or three more than anyone else.

They secured that record-breaking fifth title with a 5-2 victory over Sporting Clube de Portugal (whom they had beaten 7-0 in last year’s final in Almaty), becoming only the second team ever to retain the Futsal Cup, after compatriots Playas de Castellón FS, who triumphed in both 2001/02 and 2002/03. Coincidentally, both of those final wins also came against the same club – Action 21 Charleroi.

Although the competition will not actually be rebranded until next season, its format changed this season in preparation for that relaunch.

For the first time, three countries were guaranteed two representatives – then three became four when holders Inter also qualified as national champions. Consequently, Spain, Portugal, Russia and Italy were each represented by two clubs. All in all, a record 56 clubs entered from 52 associations, including Northern Irish debutants Belfast United FC.

In a further change, the top four seeds entered the competition in the main round, rather than being given byes straight to the elite-round stage. Nevertheless, most of the leading contenders still made it through to the elite round, with the exception of six-time finalists FC Dynamo of Russia, who lost all three of their main round games.

In the elite round, Inter faced two-time winners Kairat Almaty in Group D, with the Spanish side winning the deciding encounter 5-3 in front of a home crowd to go through to the semi-finals. Like the holders, Sporting and two-time champions FC Barcelona also progressed with a maximum nine points. The identity of the fourth semi-finalists, however, was a big shock.

Győri ETO FC are elite-round regulars but, having lost their first two main-round games 7-0 to Barcelona and 5-0 to Luparense C/5 before scraping through to the next round, their chances of making it any further seemed slim. Indeed, despite hosting their elite-round group, they then lost 3-2 to FC Stalitsa Minsk in their opening match. However, Győr then defeated Ukraine’s Kherson 3-2, with two goals in the last two minutes (with the winner coming just five seconds from time), before securing a shock 6-4 victory over Luparense to become Hungary’s first-ever semi-finalists – a major triumph for coach Javi Rodríguez (a three-time Futsal Cup winner as a player), who had joined the club just before their European campaign started.

Final tournament in Spain

With two Spanish representatives, the previous practice of awarding hosting rights to a single club was shelved, with Zaragoza – neatly positioned halfway between Barcelona and Madrid – staging the final tournament. The Pabellón Príncipe Felipe was close to its 10,700 capacity on both nights and produced a superb atmosphere.

Having seen top scorer Fábio Aguiar depart for his native Portugal after the elite round, Győr always faced a tough task in the finals, with Rodríguez pointing out that the highest-paid player at each of their three rivals probably earned more than his entire squad combined. The draw for the final tournament, which took place at Camp Nou at half-time in the UEFA Champions League match between Barcelona and Chelsea, pitted his side against Sporting, and by half-time in that first semi-final, the Portuguese side were

RESULTS

Semi-finals – 20 April 2018
Győri ETO FC 1-6 Sporting Clube de Portugal
Referees: Ondřej Černý (Czech Republic) / Angelo Galante (Italy)

Inter FS 2-1 FC Barcelona
Referees: Bogdan Sorescu (Romania) / Saša Tomić (Croatia)

Third-place play-off – 22 April 2018
Győri ETO FC 1-7 FC Barcelona
Referees: Ondřej Černý (Czech Republic) / Angelo Galante (Italy)

Final – 22 April 2018
Sporting Clube de Portugal 2-5 Inter FS
Referees: Bogdan Sorescu (Romania) / Saša Tomić (Croatia)
5-0 up (including two goals for Cardinal, who was keen to secure a European title, having missed out on Portugal’s Futsal EURO 2018 triumph through injury, with fellow Lions Pedro Cary, João Matos, André Sousa and Pany Varela all getting their hands on silverware in Ljubljana). Győr rallied in the second half, but Sporting ultimately prevailed 6-1, progressing to their third final – and their first outside Almaty, where they had been runners-up both in 2011 and last year.

However, most of the attention on semi-final night was focused on the all-Spanish showdown between Inter and Barcelona, who between them have dominated the domestic scene in recent years and played out three high-scoring draws in their previous three meetings. They did not disappoint. The match was played at a blistering pace, full of passion and hard challenges, as well as spectacular skill. Inter got on top early on, and in the fourth minute, captain Ortiz – a veteran of their 2009 and 2017 triumphs – turned in a Daniel Shiraishi free-kick. Barcelona warmed to their task as the half wore on, but could not find a way through. Inter then got back on top after

the break – only to concede a 29th minute equaliser to Esquerdinha. Not long afterwards, though, Ortiz struck again. Barcelona gave everything, but for the second year running Ortiz proved to be Inter’s semi-final match winner. Inter were into their third straight final, equalling a feat twice achieved by Dynamo. 

Barcelona had to console themselves with third place, which they secured thanks to a 7-1 victory over Győr. It would have been more too, had it not been for the Hungarian goalkeeper, Marcell Alasztics, who used to be the reserve goalkeeper for the club’s football team and was named man of the match. At the same time, that award could easily have gone to Esquerdinha, whose hat-trick brought his final tournament tally to four goals, equalling a record that he himself had set in 2015 with ISK Dina Moskva.

**A Sporting v Inter final**

But now the question came – could Sporting get any closer to Inter than they had in their 7-0 final defeat 12 months earlier? From the off, the signs were ominous. According to coach Jesús Velasco, Inter’s star player, Ricardinho, was “only at 80%” as O Mágico continued his recovery from a serious injury suffered during Portugal’s Futsal EURO final win two months earlier. If that was the case, though, he hid it well. Indeed, as in the semi-final, he was on inspired form against his old rivals from his days with SL Benfica.

In the third minute, he set up Gadeia for the opener, and although Diego Cavinato swiftly equalised, Ricardinho then restored Inter’s lead with a thunderous long-range strike. That moved him on to a total of eight goals in Futsal Cup final tournaments – equalling the record set by Esquerdinha in the previous match. Elisandro then scored Inter’s third, and early in the second half Rafael – who had missed the semi-final because of tonsillitis – made it 4-1.

When faced with a similar situation in 2017, Sporting went for broke and Inter piled on the goals. This time, Sporting kept themselves in contention, but only just over three minutes remained when Diogo pulled one back. Sporting kept pushing but then, in the dying seconds, Pola rolled the ball into an unguarded net from inside his own half to seal a 5-2 win for Inter.

Not only had they moved on to five wins and emulated Castellón in retaining the trophy, Inter had also matched their compatriots’ record of 13 straight wins in Futsal Cup fixtures.

History was clearly on Ricardinho’s mind after the game. “We have shown that we are the leaders of Europe,” he said. “The ‘Green Machine’ of Schumacher, Marquinho and Daniel were [in the 2000s], and now we are.”

Inter dedicated their victory to kit man Cecilio Rodríguez, who had died in March, presenting the trophy to his widow.

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**Elisandro (Inter) in action in the final against Sporting.**

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WELCOME TO RUSSIA 2018!

From 14 June to 15 July, the Russian Federation will play host to the 2018 FIFA World Cup. It represents a landmark moment for international football: the first time in history that the tournament has been staged in eastern Europe.

From the moment Russia was confirmed as host way back in December 2010, the country has worked tirelessly to prepare for the tournament. Besides renovating stadiums and training facilities across the country, it has undertaken major infrastructural work in each of the host cities to ensure they meet FIFA standards. It is safe to say that the Russian Federation is now fully ready for the World Cup.

A total of 32 national teams will take part in the tournament, 14 of them from Europe. The draw for the group stages of the finals was held at the Kremlin Palace in Moscow back in December, in the presence of a host of football legends including Pele, Diego Maradona, Ronaldo, Cafu, Gordon Banks, Fabio Cannavaro, Carles Puyol, Diego Forlan, Laurent Blanc and Gary Lineker. The ceremony was officially launched by President Putin and FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

During the ceremony, Miroslav Klose, a World Cup winner with Germany in 2014 when he finished as the tournament’s top scorer, was on hand to unveil the coveted trophy, for which the 32 teams will compete this summer. Over the last eight months, hundreds of thousands of football fans around the world have had the opportunity to get a close look at the trophy themselves thanks to the World Cup trophy tour, which has seen it travel the length and breadth of Russia, and visit 51 other nations on six continents, making it the biggest event of its kind in the tournament’s history. Ticket sales for the World Cup got under way on 14 September last year. All fans attending matches will receive a fan passport (fan ID) when they buy their ticket. Meanwhile, fans without tickets will still be able to enjoy the matches on the giant screens at one of 11 fan festival sites in the host cities.

Last autumn, adidas unveiled the official ball for the 2018 World Cup, the Telstar 18. Replicas of the official ball, in classic black and white, are among the many items of licensed merchandise available for purchase at the official World Cup stores in the host cities. Also certain to be a popular souvenir will be the official 2018 World Cup mascot, a wolf called Zabivaka.

Helping to ensure the success of the event will be a 15,000-strong team of volunteers. Applications reached a record high, with some 177,000 people in 190 different countries applying for roles. Many of those recruited have already been put through their paces at the Confederations Cup last year.

The Fisht Olympic Stadium will host four group matches, including two all-European head-to-heads – Portugal v Spain and Germany v Sweden.
Five host clusters
Matches will be held in 12 stadiums in 11 cities. Reflecting the country’s vast geographical expanse, spanning 11 time zones in all, the host cities were divided into five clusters: Central (Moscow), North (St Petersburg and Kaliningrad), South (Sochi and Rostov-on-Don), Volga (Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Kazan, Saransk and Volgograd) and Urals (Ekaterinburg).

Two of the venues are located in the capital, which will host both the opening match and the final. Specifically, that honour will go to Luzhniki Stadium, the country’s largest football stadium. It is certainly no stranger to staging iconic sporting events, having played host to the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games as well as the UEFA Cup final in 1999 and most recently the UEFA Champions League final in 2008.

In 2013, the stadium was closed for major renovation work to prepare it for the World Cup. That work was completed last year and the stadium opened its doors again for a prestigious friendly between Russia and Argentina attended by 78,750 spectators.

“Luzhniki Stadium has really changed,” commented Russian national team coach Stanislav Cherchesov after that match. “All the new stadiums in our country are magnificent, including Luzhniki.” In addition to the opening match, between Russia and Saudi Arabia, and the final, Luzhniki will host three other group stage matches, as well as a round of 16 match and one of the two semi-finals.

The other venue in the capital is Spartak Stadium, home to the club of the same name. This newly built arena opened in 2014 with a capacity of 45,000 and was one of four stadiums to host matches during the 2017 Confederations Cup. This summer Spartak Stadium will welcome four group stage games and one of the round of 16 matches.

Another venue that played a prominent role during the Confederations Cup, hosting the opening game and the final, was the St Petersburg Stadium. Located on the Baltic city’s Krestovskiy Island, it is home to FC Zenit and, with a capacity of 67,000, will be the second-largest venue at the World Cup. It is scheduled to host no fewer than seven matches, including the third-place game.

Two other World Cup venues were also put to the test during the Confederations Cup: Kazan Arena in the city of the same name, which is home to FC Rubin, and Fisht Olympic Stadium in Sochi – which was the main venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics. Another of the venues, the Volgograd Arena, was thrust into the limelight on 9 May, when it hosted the Russian Cup final. The other six World Cup venues – in Kaliningrad, Samara, Ekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Saransk and Rostov-on-Don – all have regular experience hosting top-level matches in the Russian leagues.

Needless to say, all of the stadiums and host cities are raring to go and looking forward to welcoming visitors from near and far to this summer’s football extravaganza.
EUROPE’S HOPES RIDING HIGH

At the end of a qualifying competition full of thrills and spills, 13 European nations booked tickets to Russia for this summer’s World Cup finals. Of the usual suspects, Italy and the Netherlands missed out, while Iceland will be Europe’s sole World Cup debutants in 2018.

**Group A: Russia must make history**

Although the USSR reached the World Cup semi-finals in 1966, Russia have failed to make it past the first round in any of their three appearances (1994, 2002 and 2014).

As this year’s hosts they will be looking to put this right. With no qualifying matches, Stanislav Cherchesov’s men have only had friendly matches to keep them occupied for the last two years and have enjoyed varying degrees of success, ranging from a narrow 1-0 defeat to Argentina and an encouraging 3-3 draw with Spain in November 2017 to heavy losses against Brazil (3-0) and France (3-1) in March 2018.

The draw was reasonably kind to Russia, who will face Saudi Arabia in the opening match in Moscow on 14 June, followed by games against Egypt and Uruguay. Their first target will be to get through the group stage, something they failed to achieve at the 2017 Confederations Cup but that, with the exception of South Africa in 2010, all World Cup hosts have managed since 1930.

**Group B: An Iberian duel**

Spain and Portugal have been two of Europe’s most successful teams over the past 20 years, with Spain tending to dispose of their Iberian neighbours on their road to glory, eliminating Portugal in both the 2010 World Cup round of 16 and the EURO 2012 semi-finals before going on to lift the trophy.

At the 2014 World Cup and EURO 2016, however, the armada came unstuck, making an early exit from both tournaments. Portugal took advantage of this dramatic fall from grace by winning their first major honour at the end of an epic EURO 2016 campaign in France.

Having trailed Switzerland for most of the qualifying competition, the Portuguese secured their ticket to Russia by beating the Swiss 2-0 at home on the final matchday. Rather like their EURO 2016 success, they owe their place in the finals to a solid defence (4 goals conceded in 10 matches) and an unstoppable Cristiano Ronaldo (15 goals). Fernando Santos’s men will be able to call upon both in Russia and, with Spain awaiting on matchday 1, they will need to hit the ground running.

Spain, meanwhile, enjoyed a highly impressive qualifying campaign, with nine wins, one draw, 36 goals scored and only three conceded (the best defence in the competition). With a squad containing a number of 2010 World Cup winners, whose Russian adventure looks likely to be their last on the international stage (Iniesta, Piqué, Fabregas, Silva and Ramos), alongside less experienced players with numerous youth titles under their belts (Carvajal, Asensio, Isco, etc.), Julen Lopetegui seems to have found a good balance.

The Spaniards and Portuguese are the favourites in a group that includes Morocco, who have only reached the last 16 once (in 1986), and Iran, who have never made it past the first round.

**Group C: France the favourites, with Denmark on their tail**

Pooled with Peru, Australia and Denmark, France were considered by many to have been given the most favourable draw of all and are clear favourites to win Group C.

After being denied a home victory at the last gasp by Portugal at EURO 2016, Hugo Lloris and his team-mates qualified quite comfortably ahead of opponents including Sweden and the
Netherlands. Nevertheless, despite their huge attacking potential, Les Bleus only scored 18 goals in ten matches.

With talent such as Griezmann, Mbappé, Giroud, Dembélé, Coman, Lacazette, Martial, Fekir, Thauvin and Payet to call on, the choice is vast, but eye-catching displays have been few and far between in recent times. The French should be able to build confidence in what is a relatively straightforward group, but can they go all the way, as they did in 1998?

Before contemplating such a feat, they will come up against Denmark in a final group fixture that will bring back some happy memories for the Scandinavians, who eliminated title-holders France at exactly the same stage of the 2002 World Cup. Having failed to qualify for the 2014 World Cup and EURO 2016, Denmark secured their place in Russia with a superb 5-1 play-off second-leg win over the Republic of Ireland in Dublin.

Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Christian Eriksen, who bagged a hat-trick in Dublin and was outstanding throughout the qualifying campaign (11 goals, 3 assists), will be one to watch in Russia. With a squad containing a number of regulars familiar with the demands of Europe’s top leagues (Kasper Schmeichel, Simon Kjaer and Thomas Delaney, to name just three), Denmark seem sufficiently equipped to cause a surprise or two.

**Group D: Iceland and Croatia, more than outsiders**

After Iceland’s recent achievements, nothing they can do will take anyone by surprise. Until two years ago, they had never even taken part in a major tournament. That was before EURO 2016, when they enthralled the whole of Europe by reaching the quarter-finals.

They followed this up by finishing top of an evenly balanced World Cup qualifying group, ahead of teams such as Croatia, Ukraine and Turkey, thanks in part to five wins out of five at their elfin Laugardalsvöllur stadium (capacity just 9,800).

Star player Gylfi Sigurdsson is the central cog of a team that remains solid and well organised by coach Heimir Hallgrimsson, who seamlessly succeeded Swede Lars Lagerbäck after EURO 2016.

One statistic in particular demonstrates Iceland’s incredible feat. With fewer than 350,000 inhabitants, Iceland is the first country with a population of under 1 million ever to qualify for a World Cup final tournament.

Alongside Argentina, a giant of world football, and Nigeria, who regularly qualify for major competitions, Iceland will be joined in Group D by fellow Europeans Croatia.

After finishing below Iceland in their qualifying group, the Croatians saw off Greece in the play-offs (4-1, 0-0) to reach their fifth World Cup finals. A magnificent run to the semi-finals in their inaugural appearance in 1998 was followed by first-round elimination in 2002, 2006 and 2014. Despite an attractive playing style, Croatia’s golden generation (Luka Modrić, Ivan Rakitić, Dejan Lovren, Ivan Perišić and Mario Mandžukić, for example) has yet to perform well at a major tournament.

The 2018 World Cup is probably their last opportunity to shine on a global stage and, even in a tough group, the Croatians’ experience and know-how give them good reason to believe that they can produce results commensurate with their talent.
Group E: Can Switzerland and Serbia topple Brazil?

To many pundits, Brazil are the hot favourites for the title this summer. Yet before they can start dreaming of a sixth World Cup, the Brazilians will need to navigate a group containing Costa Rica and two European teams, Switzerland and Serbia.

Taking on the World Cup favourites in their opening match is nothing new to the Swiss, who created a huge upset when they beat Spain 1-0 in 2010. Can they do the same to Brazil in 2018? Switzerland certainly have some talented players, and their consistency at the top level shows that they are a force to be reckoned with. In Russia, they will contest their fourth consecutive World Cup, having reached the last 16 in 2014 before losing narrowly to Argentina (1-0 a.e.t.).

Despite an almost perfect campaign (nine wins and one defeat), the Swiss were beaten by Portugal to top spot in their qualifying group before eliminating Northern Ireland in the play-offs (1-0, 0-0).

After missing out on the last EURO, Serbia have enjoyed a renaissance, thanks in no small part to striker Aleksandar Mitrović (6 goals in 10 matches). They avoided the play-offs by winning their qualifying group ahead of the Republic of Ireland, Wales and Austria, who had all taken part in EURO 2016.

This summer Serbia can rely on some experienced defensive players, such as Ivanović, Kolarov and Matić, who have been at top European clubs for many years. Taking on Costa Rica in their first match could secure them a place in the last 16, a round they have only reached once before, in 1998 as Yugoslavia.

Group F: Germany supreme, with Sweden on their heels?

It is hard to avoid understatement when discussing Germany’s chances of success in Russia. The current holders are among the teams most widely tipped to lift the trophy in 2018. As usual. Having narrowly failed to add EURO 2016 to their 2014 World Cup triumph when they lost to France in the semi-finals, Joachim Löw’s men finished the qualifying competition with a 100% record. With ten wins from ten matches and 43 goals scored by 21 players, the German coach was able to rotate his squad and involve as many players as possible.

And if any further justification of the Germans’ status as favourites were needed, the history books speak volumes: they have reached the semi-finals in 12 of the last 16 World Cups and have progressed beyond the first round in all 18 of their final tournament appearances.

In Russia, they will face Mexico, who they beat 4-1 in the 2017 Confederations Cup semi-final before defeating Chile 1-0 in the final.

South Korea and Sweden will join them in Group F. The Swedes caused the biggest shock of the qualifying competition by ousting Italy in the play-offs (1-0, 0-0) in front of a global audience both moved by Gianluigi Buffon’s tears and struck by the Swedish team’s composure.

Sweden has coped well with Zlatan Ibrahimović’s retirement from international football, thanks in particular to the emergence of striker Marcus Berg, who scored eight goals in the qualifiers.

While there are no real stars in the Scandinavians’ squad, their collective strength invariably makes them a tricky opponent. Sweden’s objective in Russia is clear: to get past the first round, something they have not achieved in a final tournament (World Cup or EURO) since the 2006 World Cup, when they were knocked out in the round of 16 by Germany.

Group G: Belgium and England, two big guns together

The draw did no favours to Tunisia and Panama, pitting them against two European heavy hitters, Belgium and England, who both qualified undefeated with 17 victories in 20 matches between them.

However, although their results were similar, their styles are very different. Belgium, blessed with a golden generation, scored more goals than any other team in the European Qualifiers (43). Romelu Lukaku (11 goals) in particular benefited from the incredible attacking verve
of a team that includes some of the continent’s most talented individuals, such as Eden Hazard (6 goals, 5 assists), Dries Mertens (5 goals, 7 assists) and Kevin de Bruyne (4 assists).

Frequently hailed as a team for the future in recent years, the time has come for Belgium to live up to their billing in a final tournament, following quarter-final exits at the 2014 World Cup and EURO 2016.

They are not the only ones to have struggled to reach the latter stages of recent tournaments. England, despite constantly being among the favourites, have not made it through to a World Cup semi-final since 1990.

In contrast to the Belgians, England’s main strength in qualifying was their defence (three goals conceded: the best defence in the competition). In attack, much depends on Harry Kane’s ability to make the difference, although England’s talented youngsters (such as Marcus Rashford, Dele Alli and Raheem Sterling) are starting to emerge from the shadows.

Following the cataclysmic defeat to Iceland in the EURO 2016 round of 16, English supporters are warming to their national team once again. England have only lost once in 21 matches against Belgium (in 1936), giving them a considerable psychological advantage ahead of their final group encounter in Kaliningrad on 28 June, which could determine who tops the group.

**Group H: Poland counting on Lewandowski**

Despite netting 15 times in 10 matches, Cristiano Ronaldo did not finish as the European Qualifiers’ leading scorer.

As many as 16 of the 28 goals scored by Poland in their ten qualifying matches were credited to Robert Lewandowski, who thereby helped his country sail a relatively smooth passage to their first World Cup finals since 2006. Excitement levels in Poland are therefore sky-high, with more than 100,000 Poles expected to travel to Russia to support their team.

Talented though he is, Lewandowski is not the only gifted player in Poland’s ranks, as they showed at EURO 2016 by remaining unbeaten in five matches and going out on penalties to the eventual winners, Portugal, in the quarter-finals.

As the only European team in an evenly matched Group H, in which they will face Senegal, Colombia and Japan, Poland seem more than capable of progressing to the round of 16. Only then can they begin dreaming of going further in the competition, as they did in 1974 and 1982 when they finished in third place.

Poland’s Robert Lewandowski was the best scorer in the European Qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup, with 16 goals to his name.

England are pinning their hopes on striker Harry Kane, with his season total of 45 goals across all competitions.

Poland’s Robert Lewandowski was the best scorer in the European Qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup, with 16 goals to his name.
‘FOOTBALL OPENS HEARTS’

“I am a coach but football has become more than a game to me,” says Oleksandr Fomichev, who is using ‘the power of football’ to improve the lives of people in his community. “It’s an education, a philosophy and a phenomenon. I try to show young people how to change their lives through football.”

A lawyer and businessman by profession, the 32-year-old, who is originally from Donetsk, moved from the eastern Ukrainian city following the outbreak of unrest in 2014. He left behind his business, while some family members were unable to follow him. However, he has succeeded in creating a new life for himself in the western Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivsk.

He now works for the League of Tolerance charity, whose aim is to teach people about common values and the importance of inclusion, enabling them to look at life from a different perspective, which ultimately leads to positive change. In a compelling analogy, he explains: “Football pitches mirror society as a whole. We use football to show that we all should be involved in the game, and that in the same way, we should all be involved in society.”

Oleksandr’s love for the game shines through in everything he does. A decent footballer in his youth, he is now showing, through his role as a coach, that the sport has the unique power to promote inclusion.

“We invite people from the whole of Ukraine, irrespective of their background: some may have disabilities, some may be from ethnic minorities and some might be internally displaced people,” he says. “Thanks to our work, we can get all these groups together and show that, on the training ground, people communicate with each other and realise that there is actually no difference between us at all.”

A modest and articulate man, Oleksandr pours his heart into what he fiercely believes will result in a better future for his community and country.

“Keeping faith in people is the most important factor for the development of every country and the world as a whole. We can build a sustainable society and use football as one of the tools that brings us together.”
“I’M A COACH, I WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND I TEACH THEM HOW TO USE FOOTBALL TO IMPLEMENT POSITIVE CHANGES IN THEIR SOCIAL LIVES.”
“This is the power of football, which helps people from diverse backgrounds to find a common tongue, even though they speak different languages. It helps us improve our society.”
"WE INVITE PEOPLE FROM THE WHOLE OF UKRAINE, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR BACKGROUND: SOME MAY HAVE DISABILITIES, SOME MAY BE FROM ETHNIC MINORITIES AND SOME MIGHT BE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE."
“FOR A LONG TIME, I DIDN’T UNDERSTAND THAT FOOTBALL IS SOMETHING THAT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD AROUND ME.”
“I didn’t make it as a professional or reach any high standard but nevertheless I’ve managed to keep up my love for the game and the ability to share that love.”
PARTICIPATION – KEY TO GROWING THE GAME

Football is the world’s most popular sport both on and off the field. However, maintaining that position is a constant challenge, given factors such as lifestyle, the game’s image, and the wide range of activities available to young and old alike in today’s society.

Launched in 2015, the UEFA GROW programme offers tailor-made consultation services to UEFA member associations in the sectors most relevant for them. It has become the central business development platform for national associations all over Europe to grow the game in a systematic and strategic approach.

Without people playing football, it would be very difficult for the sport to flourish, so participation is one of the most important pillars of UEFA GROW. Although professional footballers grab the headlines, they make up only a tiny fraction of those who actually play.

**Solid foundations**
This is how UEFA GROW is looking to help. The programme assists the national association in drafting a growth plan for participation and retention, which includes the definition of clear yearly targets for different age categories in both men’s and women’s football. The plan will also detail the corresponding responsibilities, optimum structures and programmes, and of course budgets.

Analysing participation data for 55 national football associations is no easy task. Nor is it helped by different definitions of what participation actually means. In research conducted by UEFA GROW in over 30 countries, more than 25% of the adult population claimed to play football regularly, yet the average percentage of registered players in clubs is as low as 3% UEFA-wide, i.e. there are many players but few are registered.

UEFA GROW has been able to call on the expertise of the UEFA Grassroots Charter and the UEFA Women’s Football Development Programme, which are two longstanding initiatives aimed at increasing participation by supporting specific aspects of the game. This helps UEFA GROW gain a better understanding of the base of the football participation pyramid, because without solid foundations it is difficult to expand and prosper.

Analyzing this data enables UEFA GROW to see where funding is required, what resources are lacking and what challenges are faced. Moreover, if there is a need to get more granular information, UEFA GROW representatives will spend additional time working with regional staff and structures.

A national association is only as good as the structures that support it. Understanding the needs of the regional associations and clubs is therefore a critical part of driving active participation in the sport.

UEFA GROW started working with the Polish Football Federation (PZPN) in January 2016. After a detailed analysis of the footballing landscape within the country, the association understood how it was paramount to support its regions to get more people playing and engage those who are currently playing but are not connected to the association.

The PZPN is hiring 48 people (three per region in the country) to work on boosting participation. It aims to increase its 400,000 registered players to over a million by 2022, but also to engage around 3 million unregistered players nationwide.

“The people at UEFA give us the benefit of their know-how and experience, helping us improve our projects and make them really effective.”

The Polish FA aims to grow from 400,000 registered players today to more than one million in 2022.
Every registered player counts

UEFA GROW also has a positive effect away from the football pitch, ensuring awareness at government levels that football participation contributes enormously to society. The programme recently supported the development of an econometric model (social return on investment) that can measure the impact of participation on health, social and economic performance metrics.

For example, in Romania a registered player has a value of €1,650 to society. This is explained by the amount of money that the state manages to save on every person who plays football, given their improved health and education, reduced levels of crime, and contributions to the national GDP from increased employment opportunities, facility development and the sports service industry.

When analysing the impact on the country’s health service, a study conducted by UEFA GROW found that it had managed to save around half a billion euros because people were staying active, thereby reducing the likelihood of conditions such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

The Romanian Football Federation (FRF) has also been working hard to boost women’s football in conjunction with UEFA’s Together #WePlayStrong initiative, which strives to get more girls and women playing the game, and the UEFA Women’s Football Development Programme.

The FRF has been instrumental in securing the chance for girls to play football in schools, while it has also introduced a league system for girls to ensure they have more regular playing opportunities.

“The growth of registered players is a key aspect of the work we do in the federation,” said Răzvan Burleanu, president of the FRF. “The federation analysed the opportunities for girls and boys to play football in schools and decided on a programme of education and a review of the competition model to make sure that especially more girls had the opportunity to play football more regularly.”

The hike in participation levels has been impressive. In 2016, just 3,000 girls were playing football. The following year, this number had risen to over 48,000 who were competing in school competitions.

To ensure that the girls receive the best possible coaching, the FRF has also introduced online education modules for teachers. The association has now seen retention levels among girls increase, partly due to the fact the coaching they get is more engaging and enjoyable.

A football head coach is ultimately judged on performance, and UEFA GROW is no exception to this rule. So far, the programme has worked with 28 UEFA national associations, and on average there has been an 18% growth in registered players over the last two and a half years.

In contrast, those associations that have yet to sign up for the programme are seeing a downward trend in participation rates, leading to the conclusion that those implementing a strategic, scientific and systematic approach to growing participation are reaping the rewards of fostering a healthy footballing environment.
LEADING THE MATCH DELEGATION

From the Champions League through to youth competitions, the UEFA match delegate is the highest UEFA authority on site at every match.

The UEFA football operations unit is in charge of instructing and appointing match delegates for more than 2,000 matches annually. As the eyes and ears of the organisation, they hold great responsibility, ensuring matches are well organised in accordance with the many regulations and procedures, and that the UEFA disciplinary services receive a full report of any infractions.

 Ensuring that delegates are able to uphold UEFA’s high standards at every match is essential. To this effect, seven seminars were recently held in Helsinki, Munich, Tel Aviv, Chisinau, Ljubljana, Tallinn and Belfast, attended by a total of 236 delegates.

 They received updates on competition matters and regulations along with training on how to manage challenging and crisis situations. The seminars were also an opportunity for delegates to network with colleagues and share best practices and on-site experiences.

 Additionally, these events allow the football operations unit to clarify how to deal with various situations such as medical inspections, pyrotechnics, racist behaviour, offensive banners and reporting, using real-case scenarios. Delegates at the recent seminars also discussed the most challenging situations they had faced and how they had resolved them.

Northern Ireland
The most recent seminar was held in Belfast on 23 and 24 April at the spectacular Ballygally Castle Hotel, set against the stunning backdrop of the Antrim coastline.

“Many of the delegates were from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, but we were also lucky enough to welcome experienced delegates from Portugal, Bulgaria and Montenegro,” said William Campbell, head of the CEO office at the Irish Football Association. “In total, 14 nations were represented.”

William, also a UEFA delegate, said it was an excellent opportunity to share knowledge and learn from his fellow delegates’ experience. “One of the key things about being a delegate is, no matter how well prepared you are for a match, you never quite know what to expect.

“Anything could happen, and while the vast majority of UEFA competition matches proceed without a hitch, when you do hear of incidents, you always think, ‘how would I have dealt with that?’.

Understanding how others have reacted to situations and their thought processes is hugely beneficial.”

Milovan Djukanović, head of the international department at the Football Association of Montenegro, appreciated the combination of theory and learning from experience for facing challenging situations. “We were able to discover problem-solving options using certain psychological approaches. We were guided to think through match issues from various positions and roles to gain a better understanding of the overall impact and potential solutions.”

Peadar Ryan, a senior council member with the Football Association of Ireland and a serving police officer, was impressed by the breadth of expertise at the event.

“Firstly, I think it’s important to say nobody is the finished article, and every day on duty is a school day.

“We had a great mix of specialist areas at the seminar because, while we’re all involved in football in some way, we come from different backgrounds. As a police officer I was able to bring my understanding of security measures to the seminar, while I learned a great deal from colleagues involved in media matters and tournament organisation.”

Peadar adds that while every effort is made to ensure matches go ahead smoothly, problems can arise, and occasionally these are outside UEFA’s control. “Things happen that you can’t legislate for, but there are procedures in place to make sure the right course of action is followed,” he explained.

“Everyone experiences some kind of difficulty on the ground, and discussing how these are managed is really helpful, making us all better prepared.”

A delegate for ten years and president of the Scottish Football Association, Alan McRae found the key message of consistency particularly useful. “The session on ensuring consistency across all delegates’ work was very interesting, particularly as we were given examples of good reporting, and a structured model to follow for problem-solving, highlighting the situation, showing you’ve exhausted all available options, explaining the consequences and ultimately, the solution,” he said.

“I was first appointed as a delegate in 2009, and the role has changed enormously since then. Previously we had rather cumbersome and lengthy report-writing, but now we have slick new systems. And with the huge changes in football security, we have also had to adapt,” he went on. “But the fundamental principles of being a delegate still apply. An ability to negotiate, always be approachable, demonstrate reason and be able to make big decisions, sometimes very quickly, are all key. It was a really interesting and highly enjoyable workshop.”

Representatives of 14 UEFA member associations were at the seminar in Belfast.
FOOTBALL AIDS REFUGEES

As part of UEFA's Study Group Scheme, representatives of 21 member associations met in the Republic of Ireland in early April to consider how football can be used to help migrants.

Football can bring people together, foster mutual understanding and break down prejudices.

A total of 65 million people around the world have been driven from their homes – 9 out of every 1,000 people worldwide. While some countries are more affected than others, this forced migration has sparked a global debate spanning social, cultural, economic, political and environmental issues.

As the world’s most popular sport, and one that is deeply embedded in the fabric of society, football has been affected by this global crisis, yet also has the potential to help alleviate it. Many of UEFA’s member associations have been directly impacted and have sought to improve matters in their countries.

Against that background, representatives of various national associations recently attended a UEFA Study Group Scheme seminar entitled Football and Refugees with the express intention of learning from one another, as well as from other relevant experts and organisations, and addressing this issue in the most effective manner possible.

The seminar, which took place in the Republic of Ireland from 3 to 6 April and was organised in cooperation with the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), brought together representatives of 21 member associations, as well as delegates from expert NGOs and universities, to discuss challenges and share good practice when using football to help refugees.

Open discussions

Visits to futsal leagues, open training sessions, and coaching and volunteering programmes for refugees in the Galway and Athlone areas brought the topic to life. Open and candid discussions with local stakeholders on the history of their programmes deepened participants’ understanding of the benefits and challenges of such initiatives.

Laura Easton, football development manager at the Football Association of Wales Trust, shared her main conclusions with the organisers after the seminar:

- Everybody has the right to play and enjoy football.
- Every association has a responsibility to champion the sport and provide opportunities for all.
- To engage with vulnerable groups, it helps if you can find an authoritative voice within the relevant community who can speak to people on your behalf.
- You need to build trust.
- It is important to be aware of – and use – networks outside football to support your activities.
- You need to create a long-term pathway for people who want to play regularly. It is about more than just providing short-term programmes.
- It is important to nurture and develop the skills of people in the local community, so they can carry on the work without the national association having to be there all the time.

“Hosting this UEFA study visit provided a great opportunity for us to share what we do and, perhaps just as importantly, to hear from, network with and learn from other associations, UEFA and other partners,” said Des Tomlinson, national coordinator for the FAI’s intercultural football programme and host of the seminar. “These three days gave us time to reflect on, debate and digest some of the key considerations when seeking to get people with refugee backgrounds involved in football.

“Our study visit took participants on a road trip through Ireland, providing them with first-hand experience of how our refugee football programmes are delivered, with the support of clubs and other community stakeholders. They also met some of the people – both within the FAI and in our clubs and communities – who contribute to the success of these programmes.

“The overall aim was to share our good practices with other associations, and one of the legacies of this visit will be a compendium of good practices, which is currently being compiled by UEFA,” he concluded.

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A glittering array of football legends came to Geneva on 21 April to take part in the UEFA-United Nations Match for Solidarity – not only to parade their skills, but also to give their support to children with disabilities.

The Swiss city’s Stade de Genève was the setting for a memorable occasion on a warm and sunny spring day, with 23,654 fans filling the stands to marvel at the stars on show, who lined up for two teams captained by Portuguese superstar Luís Figo and Brazilian ace Ronaldinho.

Fans were treated to 90 minutes of top-class entertainment, with Figo’s team running out narrow 4-3 winners. Raúl González, Robert Pires, Nuno Gomes and Michel Salgado found the net for Figo’s team, with Célia Šašić, Alexander Frei and Cafu replying for Ronaldinho’s team.

The match was aimed at promoting peace, human rights and well-being in the world through the United Nations sustainable development goals, with the proceeds from the match going to the UEFA Foundation for Children to finance humanitarian and development projects to help disabled children in Geneva and much further afield.

Funds were also generated by a special digital auction of football memorabilia and other items, including signed shirts, balls and unique experiences offered by clubs and national associations. A charity dinner in Geneva after the match added to the fundraising drive. Autisme Genève is the local beneficiary of the charity match. This non-profit organisation was set up on the initiative of parents of children with autism spectrum disorders.

At international level, the funds will support projects in Africa, Asia and South America. The projects will be chosen by a committee of representatives from UEFA, the United Nations Office in Geneva and the Fondation du Stade de Genève.

The UEFA president, Aleksander Ceferin, who attended the game, was delighted at the success of the match. “I would like to thank the football legends and referees who made such a crucial contribution by taking part in the match,” he said, “as well as the United Nations, who teamed up with us for such a good cause.

“Special thanks also go to the authorities in Geneva and all other partners, as well as to the generous donors who attended the charity dinner and participated in the auction. And, of course, to all the fans who came to the stadium in great numbers to give their tremendous support.

“Football can play a vital role in improving lives,” the UEFA president continued, “and the Match for Solidarity has demonstrated just how our sport can act as a force for social good.”

Michael Møller, director-general of the United Nations Office in Geneva, also hailed the response to the event. “I am proud the United Nations and UEFA could partner for this event to promote solidarity for peace, rights and well-being through the sustainable development goals,” he said. “And all for a good cause – to help underprivileged children around the world.”

Luís Figo and his fellow stars had a great deal of fun on the field. “We’ve enjoyed the match,” Figo said after the final whistle. “We feel that we’re reflecting the values of sport, and that we have had the chance to help people.”

A children’s match provided the curtain-raiser ahead of the charity match, with 11 youngsters from 11 different countries meeting for the first time and forming a team to play against a team of children from the Geneva area.
16 NEW MESGO GRADUATES

On 6 April, the fourth Executive Master in Sport Governance (MESGO) came to a conclusion, with 16 participants from various international sports federations and other sport-related organisations celebrating their graduation at the House of European Football in Nyon.

This MESGO programme – which, like its predecessors, sought to enhance the management skills of senior professional administrators at European and global sports organisations – comprised nine sessions spread over 18 months and three continents, with sessions taking place in Paris, Nyon/Lausanne, Amsterdam, Brussels, London, Barcelona, Mainz/Frankfurt am Main, New York and Tokyo.

The programme acts as a catalyst, providing a vital source of knowledge, training and personal development, while contributing to the evolution of sports organisations throughout Europe and beyond. MESGO’s strength lies in its multidisciplinary approach, which seeks to address issues and challenges affecting professional sport from various different points of view, looking at them from a sporting, political, economic and social perspective. The programme is organised by UEFA in cooperation with a number of partners – five renowned European universities and various international sports federations. As of the fifth edition, UEFA will have a new MESGO partner – the Council of Europe.

Structure of MESGO sessions
MESGO IV’s nine sessions were all hosted by partner universities and/or major sports organisations and comprised a combination of academic content, first-hand accounts from experienced practitioners working in the sports sector, lectures providing input from other industries, discussions/debates, case studies, practical exercises, role play, networking and social activities.

Session 1 – Context of international sport
This first session sought to develop an understanding of international sport’s institutional and economic operating environment, as well as looking at governance in a sporting context, the specificity of sport and the international sports model.

Session 2 – Governance of sports organisations
This session explained the core aims and objectives of sports’ governing bodies and explored the various organisational structures, corporate governance systems, management decision-making processes and commercial revenue-generating activities which governing bodies use to achieve those goals.

Session 3 – Competition design and regulation
The third session looked at the wide range of regulatory systems that are used by different sports to organise successful competitions, outlining their respective strengths and weaknesses in the context of sport’s special economic framework.

Session 4 – Legal frameworks
The programme’s fourth session sought to explain the wider legal context in which sports’ governing bodies operate (particularly with regard to the European Union) and outline the range of legal mechanisms at their disposal in their governance and regulatory roles.

Session 5 – Strategic marketing
This session examined the importance of adopting a strategic approach to the marketing of sports properties in order to create value in both the short and the long term.

Session 6 – Sports events
The sixth session looked at key factors in the organisation of a successful sports event.

Session 7 – Ethics
The programme’s seventh session explored the various ethical challenges facing sports organisations and outlined key mechanisms for addressing them.

Session 8 – The North American model
This session looked at how professional sports are organised in North America.

Session 9 – The future of sport governance
Drawing on material from the previous eight sessions and analysis of the development of sport in Asia over the last ten years, the ninth and final session provided an overview of the key challenges that sports’ governing bodies may face in the future. Asia is of particular interest in this regard, given the various challenges (demographic, economic, political, etc.) that the continent has faced over the years.

The fifth MESGO programme will begin in Paris in September. Further information at www.mesgo.org or from info@mesgo.org.
BE READY TO ADAPT

Marcel Koller has known highs and lows during his two decades as a football coach. The former Switzerland defender won league titles in his home country with both FC St Gallen and Grasshopper Club Zürich, before spells working in Germany with 1.FC Köln and VfL Bochum 1848. Subsequently he became the first coach to earn Austria qualification for a major tournament since 1998, when guiding them to UEFA EURO 2016.

In the space of 20 years, the 57-year-old has seen significant changes in the way the game is played — and in the dynamic between players and coaches. Little wonder his advice to young coaches is to be flexible: “You have to adapt your idea to fit the pace, technical ability or intelligence of what’s available to you.”

As a player with Grasshopper, what were the first steps you took towards a career in coaching?
When I was 25 I wondered what I’d do after playing, so I started off with kids’ football. I did coaching seminars in Switzerland for the B and A diplomas, and then I got the instructor’s diploma, which at that time was the highest diploma in Switzerland. At 31, I had the highest qualification but I was still a player and it was good to be able to watch coaches at first hand. I broke my leg and was out for a while and got the chance to manage the youth team. In my recovery period, when Leo Beenhakker was the coach, I also assisted with the first team.

Was there one particular coach who influenced you?
During my playing days, which were quite a while ago, I always wondered how I could bring the training on to the pitch. It wasn’t as if you had your laptop and mobile and all the social media possibilities you have now. What would happen, for example, was that somebody would play a defender as a striker even though they weren’t a striker. That’s something that wouldn’t happen today. When Roy Hodgson arrived as Swiss national-team manager he had very concrete ideas about how to automate a lot of training drills and then you could see how these drills would play out on the pitch to bring you goals. I think he was one of the first people to do this very practically and then the second was Leo Beenhakker [at Grasshopper]. I was privileged to be his assistant coach for three months and he imported a lot of ideas, in terms of playing systems, from the Netherlands and Spain, and that helped me a lot.

You’d played at the top level and won 56 caps for Switzerland. Why did you decide to step down a level to take your first job at FC Wil 1900 in 1997/98?
For me it was clear that I wanted to start in the lower leagues to gain experience. It was good to understand how to treat players and how to communicate with them. Wil was still not a professional club then — we only had two professionals, plus myself as the manager. The rest worked 80% and we started training at 4.30pm. We trained four times a week and it was difficult. They were still at work in their heads and you could notice that. So for me it was important to greet every individual player with a handshake. I didn’t just go into the dressing room and say ‘Hello everyone, now training will start’. Instead I went to every player, shook their hand, looked them in the eye and spoke with them for short while. I tried to talk about football to make them forget about work, and get them involved as quickly as possible. I was there for a year and a half and at that time we still had the relegation/promotion play-off round. We were in first place [before his January 1999 departure], and we’d use the team spirit to try to manage it. When you don’t have top players at your disposal, it’s my philosophy to use harmony – maybe that’s the wrong word, but you can only manage with a good team spirit.

How would you describe your leadership style back then and how has it developed?
I think I was most likely cooperative. It’s important to know what you want, to be able to convey that to your players. At the end of the day, they need to know how we want to play, what my ideas are, and I have to convey that. I think you have to be funny but in the same way you have to be successful, so you also have to demand things if one or two players are failing to implement something. It’s important to talk to the players and use video, with today’s possibilities, to show the players. Back then, I used to get my own TV from home and bring in VHS cassettes.
At St Gallen, you led the club to its first Swiss title for almost a century. How did you do it?
That had to do with communication. St Gallen is a city with a population of 80,000, which is relatively small. The players were just happy if they won one or two games and the locals would give them a pat on the back saying everything was super. I was used to something different at Grasshopper. We didn't just try to win two games, but to win titles and cups or make it to international competitions. I got there halfway through the season, in the winter, and in Switzerland there was the play-off system, and I learned that the players only got a bonus for the first stage of the season, and then during the [second] championship stage they stopped getting them. I remember after the second game, there were talks, and I said that it was important not to get complacent but to continue to work. I tried to convey that, but the players didn't take it on board. We had talks with video clips and everything but then a player said to me, 'Boss, we get bonuses until December and then it stops. So after that, there's nothing to play for.'

And then the penny dropped. The president wanted to give me the same bonus for staying up, but a bonus for the title, for the cup or for the UEFA Cup. And after negotiations, he gave it to me. With the players, it was the same – I went to the board and said: ‘We have to change this. The players can’t just have motivation for half a year, it should be a whole year.’ I wanted them to understand that, as their coach, I wanted them to have goals. I didn’t want them to receive money to achieve the minimum, but to help them to achieve something big. We had a great team spirit. We weren’t the best team in terms of player ability – Basel, Lugano and Zurich were better – and at the start our opponents underestimated us, but I was there putting on the pressure, saying that we could hold on until the end. And in the end, after 96 years, we won our second championship, which was a great surprise.

Your next step as a manager was back at your old club, Grasshopper, where you won the championship again. What was it like managing there?
We had players who were individually better than those at St Gallen. Straight away, in training, I noticed there was a better technical ability and speed that enabled them to play quicker.

There were also some foreign players there and it was important for me to make the team a collective. That doesn’t mean you have to spend time with players or be friends off the pitch, but you need to have the same ideas and follow the same path, and if you have that, you can be successful.

Looking at the media, do you have any recommendations how to handle them?
Maybe I’m a little bit different in that I try to treat everyone equally. By that, I mean I wouldn’t take those who criticise me most out for dinner to avoid criticism in the press. I try to treat everyone the same and don’t give special bits of

“At Grasshopper, there were also some foreign players there and it was important for me to make the team a collective. That doesn’t mean you have to spend time with players or be friends off the pitch, but you need to have the same ideas and follow the same path, and if you have that, you can be successful.”
information to some people just because they’re my friends. That does mean that when things don’t go well, the criticism comes in thick and fast, and you have to be able to handle that. In the end it’s important to be able to find that out for yourself – maybe for you, it could be better to speak to a couple of journalists to give them some information so they write nicer things about you. Ultimately, though, it’s their job and they have to fill their notepad and write a story. When the manager loses, maybe for two weeks they’ll write nice things, but if everyone is writing bad things, then even they can’t write nice things so it all comes back to bite you.

Some coaches say they don’t read the papers. How about you? I think it’s important to be informed, and also to know what your players are saying in public. They might reveal a tactic or strategy, so it’s important because the players get asked: ‘How’s the manager? Do you want to play offensively/defensively?’ It’s important to stay in the loop, to be able to intervene if need be.

On a similar line, could you talk about the significance of the press officer? It’s important for them to have a thick skin because journalists want a lot. They want to talk to the players and, more often than not, they want to speak to the good players and it’s important for the team that you share it out a bit. You shouldn’t always take the same players; you should include the others because they also belong to the team, and this is good for players that don’t get a lot of exposure.

An even more important ally of the coach is his or her assistant. What’s your approach to choosing whom to work alongside? For the majority of my time as a coach, I took on the assistant coach who was already there, meaning we had an assistant who already knew the players and the set-up and I was ready to work with them. You need good support too, which is why it’s very common for managers to take an assistant with them. The advantage of that is your assistant knows your ideas and approach and can therefore pass them on. The disadvantage is not having all the information when you start somewhere new, and that can take time.

During your time as a coach in Germany, you won promotion with Bochum but also lost a relegation battle with Köln. How different are these two challenges? They’re very different because if you have the chance to win titles then there’s positive euphoria – you notice it in the stadium, with the fans; you even notice it at home with family. Everyone pats you on the back. When you’re on the other side battling relegation, it’s brutal. I experienced that in Germany, the negative energy. Everyone thinks they know better, everyone comes to tell you that – people come to training, and have a go at you and the players, and your colleagues come in scared that they’re going to lose their jobs and they unload all that pressure on to you too.

At Bochum, I had a sports psychologist on the staff, but we had one player, an ex-international, and I couldn’t play him at home anymore because he’d lost his confidence. He couldn’t control the ball and when he had a bad touch, you’d hear groans in the stadium: ‘Not him again! Another mistake!’ Players notice that. He was burnt out by it. I talked to him and I told him I’d play him away. It’s huge pressure that you have to try to cope with all the time. You need to be wide awake every day and as a manager you have to lead by example. The players need to see that you still have energy. Even when it’s going badly, you have to be the first one that says, ‘We can do this’. If you stand in front of the players not knowing if you can do it, then you can forget it.

“For the majority of my time as a coach, I took on the assistant coach who was already there, meaning we had an assistant who already knew the players and the set-up and I was ready to work with them.”
How about presenting the right message to the media, in the face of this pressure?
For me, the best way, if you’re disappointed or angry, is not to go on camera. Just walk away, take a shower to cool off or get some air. If you’re full of adrenaline or you’re a bit disappointed and you react, it’s more difficult to get things under control. From my experience, I give myself five minutes to clear my head and prepare what I want to say. You’re a coach and the players watch TV, so if you speak in front of the press and you’re in a bad mood then the players will hear that too.
It’s important to speak with the players, to pass on the criticism or praise before you talk to the press, so the player feels important that he heard it first, and then you can talk to the press.

Moving on to your most recent role, how did you find the switch to international football as a coach with Austria?
With a national team, you only have them ten times a year. When you start as the manager, you only have ten days to convey your ideas in November, and then they’re away for three months. Then in summer you have some friendly matches, and then in October it all starts. In September, October and November they come every month, but to get your ideas across is very difficult. I used to say: ‘I’m a manager without a team!’ It took almost two and a half years to convey the ideas that I had in my head, to the point where I thought, ‘OK now they’ve got it.’

“Patience is difficult these days; everything moves so fast. You notice with the young players that patience is hard. If I say to them, ‘Be patient’, the patience is gone the next day.”

How did you maintain a dialogue with your Austria players outside of the international get-togethers?
If you want to convey your ideas, then you have to talk a lot. I visited the players at their clubs, and I’d travel in the week to meet the players and have more time for conversations. I took my laptop with me, and we worked with videos, and I edited sequences together of the players so I could tell them what I wanted from them – ‘I liked that, but this I’d like done differently’.

Overall, how would you say the coach’s job has changed since you started as a head coach in 1997?
Today there’s a lot more communication. I had managers in the past that hardly spoke to me. When you had an injury, they’d say: ‘Make sure you get better’. They only cared about the players who were there. That just made me more determined to come back, but nowadays it wouldn’t work. Now it’s important to talk to players, and even to put your arm around some of them, or to talk about things that aren’t related to football.

Sometimes people have troubles at home or feel they’re under pressure from their families. The players don’t always say that to the manager because they think they won’t get played on the Saturday, so they keep it in. But it’s important to be able to build up a relationship. It doesn’t always have to be friendship as it’s important to shake them occasionally when you’re not pleased with them. Sometimes a player doesn’t listen to you, then comes and asks why they’re not playing. And you have to tell them, because they didn’t train well enough. Patience is difficult these days because everything moves so fast. You notice with the young players that patience is hard. If I say to them, ‘Be patient’, the patience is gone the next day.

What tactical trends have you observed that exist today compared with even five years ago?
If you have one playing system, that’s not enough these days. You have to be able to play two or three. You need to be able to react to the opponent if your system doesn’t work. You have to reposition the players. That’s the work done in training. At the top level, it’s down to athleticism, pace and technical ability. It can be different, but the top players are unbelievable. When you’re over 30 and every three days you play your best game, it’s a lot to handle, and you’re constantly travelling. It’s very intense and I think it’s harder now for players over 30. If you’re a top club with 18 top players, maybe you can give some players a break, and that’s important because it’s high intensity. For your fitness regeneration and muscle health, it is better to catch it earlier than to tear something and be out for three months.

My favourite system
As a manager, you have your favourite systems. When I was in Switzerland, I usually played 4-4-2 or 4-3-3. People will say it’s the manager’s idea, but it’s important to include the players – if you have four top players, maybe it’s better to play 4-3-3 or in 3-4-3. In that respect, it’s important not to restrict yourself. If you’re in a club where you have the option to buy certain players, then you can orientate yourself around that – whether you want to play counter, offensive, pressing or defensive. In Austria, they played 4-3-2-1 in the national team before me, and were primarily defensive.

My predecessor thought Austria could only play counterattacking. I’m more active. I was like that as a player – I didn’t like just watching, waiting for the opponent to make a mistake I could take advantage of. I was always the kind of player who preferred to attack.
What advice would you give to young managers starting out today?

I’d always advise young managers to learn how they should act with players. It always comes back to bite you if you lie to them – I prefer the direct approach, which is difficult as a manager. When you have two players who are equally as good as each other, with only one position available, you have to explain that and there’s no real explanation. As the manager, you need to make a decision and it’s important to be open and honest. Sometimes you have to explain that you just had a feeling. It can be that the player gets upset and slams doors, but that’s part of it. Another thing is, as a manager, you can’t always introduce ideas for which you need top-quality players. The players might not have the technical ability or speed, their touch might send the ball three or four metres away, which at the top level, results in the loss of the ball.

So, it’s important to adapt – it’s important to have an idea about how you’ll work at the highest level, but you need to look at the players you have available. If you see you don’t have enough strikers or not enough pace, maybe you need to back off a bit. You can’t play high pressing with that, so maybe you need to play defensive or on the counter-attack.

To give an example, when I started with Austria, during one of the first training sessions, a player took the ball and David Alaba was three metres away from him. I stopped play to say: ‘If your opponent receives the ball and you move in quickly, he won’t have time to control the ball, but if you’re three metres away, we’re at a disadvantage. I want you to be right next to him.’ Two minutes later, almost exactly the same situation happened: the ball comes in, and Alaba is right there. Sorted, in two minutes. That’s what it’s like with David Alaba – he’s a top player, with quick reactions and perception. At Bochum, I had a player and every year I’d tell him to close down the middle so the opponent couldn’t speed up the game. He was slower in his mentality and that’s the difference. You don’t have top players everywhere – you have to work with what’s at your disposal to try and convey the ideas you have. Some get it quickly, some more slowly and some not at all.
After declaring their interest in hosting UEFA EURO 2024 in March 2017, Germany and Turkey have submitted their bid books.

On 24 April, the German Football Association (DFB) submitted its bid dossier at the House of European Football in Nyon. The documents were handed over to the UEFA general secretary, Theodore Theodoridis, by DFB president Reinhard Grindel, accompanied by the DFB’s general secretary Friedrich Curtius, EURO 2024 bid ambassador Philipp Lahm, and ambassador for integration Celia Šašić.

Two days later, it was the turn of the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) president, Yıldırım Demirören, to hand his national association’s bid documents in to the UEFA general secretary. The TFF delegation also included first vice-president Servet Yardımcı, vice-president Ali Dürüst, board members Cengiz Zülfikaroğlu, Alaattin Aykaç and Mustafa Çağlar, general secretary Kadir Kardaş and TFF bid ambassador Barış Telli.

In the coming weeks, the UEFA administration will start appraising the final bid dossiers, at which point it may require the bidders to provide further information or confirmation.

As part of its transparent bidding process, UEFA will then complete a written evaluation report on each bid by September 2018, before the UEFA Executive Committee meets in Nyon on 27 September to take its decision on the EURO 2024 hosts.
PLAYING FOR EQUALITY

NUBAR AGHAZADA

A special friendly match was recently held between representatives of foreign diplomatic missions and the Azerbaijani Under-19 girls’ team in support of gender equality in the country. Both teams wore kit promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and featuring the hashtag #playforequality.

The event was jointly organised by the UN, the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, the heads of mission spouses association in Azerbaijan and the Mexican embassy, with the support of the local ministry of youth and sport.

“Sport has huge potential to empower women and girls and provide them with life skills and opportunities,” said Ghulam Isaczai, the UN’s resident coordinator in Azerbaijan, in his welcome address.

“The UN will continue to work with the Azerbaijani authorities and civil society in its efforts to empower girls and women.”

Indeed, the opportunity to play sport is a fundamental right for all, according to Article 1 of UNESCO’s International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport.

The young female players who took part in this event did a great job of promoting gender equality, acting as role models and showcasing their skills.

FOSTERING SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

JÉRÉMY SMEETS

Organised by the Belgian FA and Pro League in partnership with social organisations, the Belgian Homeless Cup (BHC) is designed to empower homeless people and help them reintegrate into society.

Through football, homeless players increase their chances of finding long-term accommodation, employment or training, as well as developing their social and communication skills. They also enjoy the health benefits of improved physical fitness; in other words, becoming stronger both physically and mentally.

Each homeless team is a partnership between a professional or semi-professional club and a social organisation. The 39 homeless teams in Belgium involve a total of 72 social institutions, 22 football clubs and 15 municipal authorities. The Belgian Homeless Cup comes into contact with 500 homeless people each week and organises as many as 900 training sessions a year.

Held at the Belgian football centre in Tubize on 5 March, the 2018 BHC once again demonstrated that the Belgian FA’s training facility truly is home to all Belgian football. The tournament gave the several hundred participants the opportunity to discover what it is like to be part of the Belgian men’s or women’s national team for a day, a feeling made all the more tangible when the men’s national team coach, Roberto Martínez, made an appearance to present the medals at the end of the event.

Martínez confirmed his commitment to this cause by attending the first Belgian Homeless Cup gala on 15 March. More than 140 people gathered for this event, which, with its auction highlight, raised over €25,000 in support of the further development of homeless football.

Guests at the gala were also able to meet a number of players from the Belgian men’s and women’s national homeless football teams, who shared their stories and described the role football plays in their lives.

The gala was a huge success and will undoubtedly become a regular feature of the social calendar.
UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

NIKOLAY DYULGEROV

Various diplomatic missions, institutions and non-governmental organisations in Bulgaria again showcased football’s power to unite people, on the pitch of the Boyana national football base in April.

Under the patronage of the Bulgarian minister of foreign affairs, Ekaterina Zaharieva, this year’s tournament commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the same time, the Bulgarian Football Union (BFU) and the United Nations Association of Bulgaria joined forces to promote tolerance and respect for human rights through sport by entering into a cooperation agreement signed by the BFU deputy executive director, Pavel Kolev, and the vice-chairwoman of the United Nations Association of Bulgaria, Petranka Fileva. The initiative is the start of a new long-term partnership between the two organisations.

The partnership is based on the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in particular Goal 3 Good Health and Well-Being, Goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals – as well as the promotion of sport as a means of diplomacy for achieving peace and understanding between the nations.

“I am certain that this partnership will achieve very valuable results that are not only beneficial for Bulgarian society, but also at European level, and why not worldwide,” stated Pavel Kolev.

He highlighted that football has always been a game that unites people. “In this context it is good for us as a federation and the United Nations Association of Bulgaria to work together in an attempt, if not to resolve, then at least lighten the burden of a number of social issues.”

This year’s match once again proved to be a show of universal language of peace and human rights, regardless of gender, age, origin, religion and social status, as well as a way to overcome differences in people’s beliefs.

Seven teams represented the diplomatic missions of Turkey, Iran, Sudan and Ukraine, with other teams representing the Bulgarian ministry of foreign affairs, the International Relations Research Student Association (IRRSA) and the United Nations Association of Bulgaria. The Turks took the title for a second year in a row, and also garnered most of the individual achievement awards. The podium was shared by the IRRSA, who came in second, and Iran, who took third place.

AUTISM AWARENESS AND RESPECT FOR MINORITIES

NIKA BAHTIJAREVIĆ

As Croatia’s club season draws to an end and the World Cup approaches, the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) has doubled down on its grassroots efforts with a number of activities to help children in marginalised populations.

On 18 April, the HNS joined forces with the Pogled autism association to hold a charity futsal tournament to raise funds for individual therapy for children with autism spectrum disorders and to build a children’s park in Nedelišće. The futsal tournament received support from a number of Croatian football clubs and governing bodies and, inspired by this success, the Croatian FA has nominated the Pogled autism association for funding from the UEFA Foundation for Children.

Two days later, the HNS and Croatia’s World Roma Organization hosted their ninth national minorities football camp in Pula. Attended by more than 250 children, who learned about the role of football as a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity and respect towards all social groups, this football camp was the two organisations’ biggest collaboration to date.

In other news, the Croatian FA held its first general assembly of 2018, at which Croatian football executive legend Ante Pavlović was pronounced the HNS’s first-ever honorary general secretary. At the same meeting, the HNS awarded its youth trophy to Stjepan Benić, Jozo Pirić, Milan Đuričić and the late Rudolf Krznarić for their contributions to the development of Croatian football.

On the national team front, Croatia are gearing up for their most exciting year in recent history, as the team prepares to face Brazil and Senegal in two friendlies, Argentina, Nigeria and Iceland in the group stage of the World Cup, and former world champions Spain and England in the UEFA Nations League.

And while that list alone would be more than enough to appease any football fan, Croatia supporters have two more exciting (and recently announced) matches to look forward to: friendlies against reigning European champions Portugal and AFC Asian Cup regulars Jordan in the autumn.
HRH THE CROWN PRINCESS OF DENMARK RECEIVES UEFA DONATION

ANNE TJELL

On 22 March, Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary of Denmark brought a royal touch to the international friendly between Denmark and Panama. Before the players entered the pitch for the World Cup warm-up game, the crown princess herself was on the pitch at Brøndby Stadium. Not in football boots but in the company of the chairman of the Danish FA, Jesper Møller. Both were greeted by the crowd attending the match and a group of enthusiastic children.

The crown princess is chairwoman of the Mary Foundation and it was in this capacity that she was there to receive a donation of €50,000 from the UEFA Foundation for Children. The donation is to support the Mary Foundation’s work to ensure that all children thrive and feel accepted in their free time, with an emphasis on football and sport.

And what better occasion for the cheque handover than a football match, where the crown princess – herself a keen supporter of the national team – could deliver a clear message about the Mary Foundation’s work.

With an emphasis on bullying, the Mary Foundation has been undertaking world-leading research into the overlooked topic of how doing sport affects children’s well-being.

Most children associate sport with having fun and making friends. However, approximately 1 in 10 children in the third to sixth grades in Danish schools have at some point dropped out of a leisure activity because of bullying or poor welfare. That number has decreased since the research was first completed in 2013, when 1 in 8 children said they were affected.

The research has resulted in the development of tools and partnerships with the Danish FA and top handball player Mikkel Hansen revolving around two core projects: Antibully, a project to prevent bullying in children’s handball, and Klubfidosen, which is about creating a safe environment in football clubs, to make all children feel safe and welcome. These two projects constitute the main reason why the Mary Foundation was selected for a UEFA Foundation for Children donation.

Jesper Møller said: “It is of great importance that children have a good time and feel secure playing football in the clubs all over Denmark. Therefore, we are very excited about working together with the Mary Foundation and the crown princess to make sure that the important work is implemented and further developed.”

The Mary Foundation plans to put the donation towards its ongoing work in football clubs.

‘ON THE BOARD’ GRADUATES CELEBRATE AT WEMBLEY

SIOBHAN BURKE

The latest group to graduate from the On The Board football governance programme run by Effective Board Member (EBM) recently celebrated their achievement with a ceremony at Wembley Stadium.

Supported by The Football Association and the Professional Footballers’ Association, the EBM programme, delivered by The Governance Forum and designed to equip current and former BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) and female footballers with the skills they need to sit on the boards of football-related organisations, is now in its fifth year. Its earliest proponents include West Bromwich Albion FC’s caretaker manager Darren Moore, former Blackburn Rovers FC and Wigan Athletic FC forward Jason Roberts, and former Birmingham City FC players Dave Barnett and Michael Johnson.

The programme has evolved over the years and has been completed by a wide range of participants from across the football landscape. This year’s graduates include former Norwich City FC player Paul McVeigh and Guyanese international Christopher Nurse.

In addition to celebrating the achievements of this year’s graduates, the ceremony provided an excellent opportunity for current and former participants to pay tribute to the late Cyrille Regis alongside members of the Regis family and special guests such as Brighton and Hove Albion FC’s manager, Chris Hughton.

To learn more about The Football Association’s inclusion programmes, please visit TheFA.com.
March and April were busy months for the Estonian FA, with hosting a UEFA Study Group Scheme seminar and a UEFA match delegates workshop both on the agenda.

For the first time, Estonia organised a Study Group Scheme seminar, where coaches and officials from San Marino, Gibraltar, Portugal, Estonia, Georgia and Albania exchanged technical know-how on football’s role in schools and school sport.

The officials from the Estonian FA shared their experiences of their Jalgpall kooli! project, the Rimi football skills festivals and summer camps, and the Spin youth sports programme.

Jalgpall kooli! or the Football for School! project, is aimed at popularising football among teachers, pupils and parents. Qualified coaches and local clubs go into schools and run training sessions for the pupils. The Spin youth sports programme is about giving children of different ages the opportunity to develop social skills they need in life while playing football. Football skills festivals and summer camps are held every year and they see thousands of children enjoy the game in a supportive and fun environment.

“It was good to share the experience and knowledge we have from various projects and how we’ve included schools in our activities,” said Teet Allas, head of the Estonian FA’s grassroots department.

“We also gained a lot of new ideas for how to introduce football to more people,” he added.

In mid-April, a workshop in Tallinn welcomed UEFA match delegates from Andorra, Albania, Belgium, Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland.

During the two-day seminar, the 38 delegates reviewed various case studies, discussed delegates’ duties, touched on the issues of safety and security during matches, and had practical sessions where they focused on communication skills and incident management.

For the next four years, the national teams of the Faroe Islands will be wearing kits from Italian manufacture Macron, the first time the kits have been specially designed.

Representatives of the Faroese FA designed the shirts with the supplier’s help and as a result they now feature various details such as a map of the islands discreetly printed on them and the local name for the country, Føroyar, on the neck.

While the previous contract with adidas was good, the Faroese FA could not miss the opportunity to be involved in the design process.

When the new kit was presented to the Faroese media and general public, it received a very positive response and the Faroese FA’s webshop has been busy ever since!
In March, the Football Association of Finland announced that two clubs in the Finnish first league – HJK Helsinki and Ilves Tampere – had reached the fifth and highest level of its club charter. Both these clubs are extremely strong in the player and grassroots development sectors.

The club charter was established in 2013/14, in cooperation with 32 pilot clubs, with a view to helping clubs develop their sporting activities and general management. By late March this year, a total of 184 clubs were taking part in the initiative, accounting for 75% of all registered players in Finland.

The Finnish FA is committed to assessing each participating club every year, with each assessment triggering a development process at the club in question, supported by Finnish FA experts and external consultants. The club charter covers three sectors – sports management, general management and communication/marketing – and has five levels.

To reach the highest level, a club has to complete a year-long development process in player development. The process is facilitated by a consultant appointed and funded by the Finnish FA and, once completed, the club is assessed by Laatukeskus Excellence Finland. That level-five assessment is based on RADAR logic, which forms part of the EFQM excellence model.

“We want to be the top Nordic football club,” said Aki Riihilahti, chief executive of HJK Helsinki (and vice-chairman of the European Club Association). “We are striving for excellence in terms of both quality and sustainability, so we need to develop and measure our operations on all fronts. It is crucial that our country’s football landscape, infrastructure and operations help us to achieve this. This has therefore been a good process for all parties.”

Over two days, 16 of the top French eFoot players clashed at the Clairefontaine national football centre in a battle to gain their place on the French national team.

At the outcome of these qualifiers, four players were selected for the national team under coach Neo, aka Fabien Devide: Corentin Thuillier (alias Maestro), Nathan Gil (alias Herozia), Lucas Cuillerier (alias DaXe) and Corentin Chevrey (alias RockY).

These four players therefore join France’s first national side and will soon be playing in exhibition matches against other nations.

“I’m proud to coach this first French eFoot side. These four new players are talented and hungry to face off against other countries,” said Neo.

“The excellent level displayed throughout this weekend gives us high hopes for the rest of the season.”

“The FFF intends to be a pioneer in eSports and launching a French eFoot team fits in perfectly with the strategy to innovate under our Ambition 2020 action plan,” said François Vasseur, marketing director. “We will be consolidating our expertise in all aspects of football and expanding our very active community.”
SECOND CERTIFICATE IN FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT KICKS OFF

KETI GOLIADEZ

The Georgian CFM – the local equivalent of UEFA’s education programme – has just started its second intake. The programme is the first partnership project by the Georgian Football Federation (GFF) and the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA). Free for all participants, it is fully funded by the GFF and the Football Development Fund of Georgia.

The launch ceremony was attended by the Georgian minister of culture and sport, Mikheil Giorgadze; the GFF president, Levan Kobiashvili; and GIPA rector Maka Ioseliani, who congratulated the participants on the start of the course and wished them good luck.

“Education is one of the top priorities for the GFF,” said Kobiashvili. “We are delighted to partner with such a prestigious institution as the GIPA, which will ensure that the programme is conducted to the highest standards.” Maka Ioseliani expressed her full support for the programme. “In today’s reality, it is rare to see an institution demonstrate such a progressive and timely approach to the issue of education, as Mr Kobiashvili and the Georgian Football Federation have done,” she said.

The certificate programme forms part of a three-year cooperation agreement signed by the GFF and the GIPA. “I feel sure the agreement will give rise to a number of engaging projects. Success in sport, or indeed in any other field, is impossible to imagine without an associated improvement in education and qualifications,” added Mr Giorgadze.

The five-month programme aims to train representatives of the football sector in management skills to support the development of domestic football. It is specifically designed for representatives of football clubs, other entities under the GFF’s jurisdiction, as well as individuals responsible for the development of the sport in the country.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL WIN AS A FIFA MEMBER

STEVEN GONZALEZ

It was a day the majority of Gibraltarian football fans had been eagerly looking forward to: the first time in two years they could watch their beloved national team on home turf and wear their red and white with pride at Victoria Stadium.

There was an air of expectancy in the stadium despite the fact that Gibraltar’s Latvian opponents were, ironically, the last team to play an international fixture in Gibraltar and had won by a resounding 5-0.

As the game kicked off, Gibraltar started out by far the more ambitious. Playing at home, with their fans behind them, they were determined to put on a show. Yet by half-time it was still 0-0. Latvia made three changes at half-time but still the massive home support dominated the play on the field.

The deadlock was finally broken in the 88th minute, when Gibraltar were awarded a free-kick and Liam Walker scored the first international goal on Gibraltarian soil in four years. Victoria Stadium erupted!

Four minutes of added time that seemed like an eternity for the local crowd ultimately did not help Latvia, and the match ended with Gibraltar’s first international victory on home soil, their first as a FIFA member, and only their second since joining UEFA, not to mention their first clean sheet in two years!
PALOTAI INSPIRES YOUNG REFEREES

MÁRTON DINNYÉS

One of Hungary’s finest referees, Károly Palotai, passed away earlier this year at the age of 82. He had a unique career in football, winning a gold medal at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo as a player before going on to officiate in many World Cup and European Football Championship fixtures as a referee.

In 2015, the Hungarian Football Federation launched its Palotai programme with a view to inspiring talented young referees throughout the country. Only referees under the age of 20 are eligible to take part, with men requiring two years’ experience and women one year. The programme helps young match officials gain a better understanding of what it takes to be a modern football referee and gives their careers a boost. So far, 460 participants have enjoyed the benefits of this nationwide programme.

With Palotai serving as a role model for the young referees, they should be motivated to work hard and improve their skills. Some may even go on to officiate at international level, following in the footsteps of some of Hungary’s greatest referees, such as István Zsolt, Sándor Puhl and Viktor Kassai – and, of course, Palotai himself.

FOOTBALL CHALLENGE

EITAN DOTAN

The Israel Football Association’s recent Football Challenge encouraged children to develop their cognitive and analytical skills with tasks that combined football and mathematical puzzles. The winner, 14-year-old Almog Wald, will be jetting off to Russia this summer to watch a match at the 2018 World Cup.

International tests show that Israeli schoolchildren still lag some way behind their peers in other OECD countries when it comes to mathematics, science and reading, regardless of socio-economic background. The children say that school is not always relevant to their world and that they do not always see a connection between school subjects and real life. Many of them lack motivation and do not see any need to invest time and effort in their schoolwork. With that in mind, this innovative competition sought to combine football with puzzles presenting maths challenges from the real world.

The Football Challenge involved a variety of different stages in which competitors had to answer two trivia questions about football, solve maths problems, score a goal while blindfolded, record their efforts on video, and upload that video to the internet.

To get through the competition, children had to display creative mathematical thinking, demonstrate critical analysis and independent thought, take calculated risks and show initiative – all qualities that they will need to succeed in later life. The judges then selected the best videos based on the children’s ability to complete the various tasks.

The competition took place over a two-week period in late January and early February.
SERIE A REFEREEING PUT UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

DIEGO ANTONOZIO

The Salone d’Onore at the headquarters of the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) in Rome provided the setting for the annual meeting between Italy’s top-tier referees, members of the referee selection commission for Serie A (CAN A) and officials, head coaches and players’ representatives from the 20 top-division clubs.

Speakers included Giovanni Malagò, CONI president and Serie A special commissioner; Roberto Fabbricini, special commissioner of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC); Marcello Nicchi, president of the Italian referees’ association (AIA); Damiano Tommasi, president of the Italian footballers’ association (AIC); and Biagio Savarese, vice-president of the Italian football coaches association (AIAC).

The highlight of the morning’s programme was provided by Nicola Rizzoli, head of referee selection for Serie A, who presented statistics from the ongoing 2017/18 season updated to matchday 33.

Compared with the previous campaign, the figures reveal a number of significant developments, from a drop in the number of fouls (-8.8%), yellow cards (-14.7%), and red cards (-6.4%, with only one sending off for dissent compared with 11 in 2016/17) to an increase in penalties (+4.3%).

The most dramatic change, however, was a 19.3% reduction in player protests and a 43% drop in diving and other forms of simulation.

Inevitably, Rizzoli dedicated much of his attention to the video assistant referee (VAR) system, which has been trialled during the Serie A campaign. He reminded the meeting that the match officials had used the protocol set out by the IFAB, which limits the use of VAR to correcting ‘clear and obvious errors’.

In 346 matches (330 in Serie A, 16 in the Coppa Italia), referees made 1,736 VAR checks (916 for goals, 464 for penalty awards and 356 for red cards) and 105 of them had led to a change of decision. When these decisions were subjected to further analysis, it was concluded that 17 were actually wrong, including 8 that were deemed to have significantly influenced the outcome of the match.

Overall, the statistics underline the potential impact of this new technology, including its effectiveness as a deterrent against anti-sporting behaviour. The average time taken for the officials to make a decision using VAR dropped from 82 seconds in the first three matchdays to 31.5 seconds in the latter half of the season, while – in another positive result – use of the system actually coincided with a marginal gain in effective playing time, with the ball in play for an average of 43 seconds more per match compared with 2016/17.

KASPARS GORKŠS ELECTED PRESIDENT

TOMS ĀRMANIS

Former Latvian national team captain Kaspars Gorkšs was elected as the new president of the Latvian Football Federation (LFF) at its annual congress on 27 April.

His predecessor, Guntis Indriksons, who had held the position since 1996, announced last year that he would resign with effect from this year’s congress.

Three candidates – Kaspars Gorkšs, Krišjānis Klaviņš, president of SK Cēsis, and Vadims Ļašenko, head of the Latvian futsal association – stood and Gorkšs was elected during the first round of voting for a term that lasts until the 2020 LFF congress.

“In football we say that preparation for the next match starts after the final whistle of the previous game,” said the newly elected president in his first public address. “That’s also true for me – there is no room for euphoria, because a lot needs to be done. Football must become the passion of Latvia.”

Kaspars Gorkšs is one of the most popular and successful footballers in recent Latvian history. He was capped 89 times and since 2010 had captained the national team. In October 2017 he announced his retirement from playing the game.
FROM TOP-CAPPED PLAYER TO GENERAL SECRETARY

ANTON BANZER

The Liechtenstein Football Association (LFV) has just appointed another well-known player to its ranks. He is national team goalkeeper Peter Jehle, who will take up the position of LFV general secretary in July after hanging up his boots and goalkeeper’s gloves.

Jehle follows in the footsteps of Mario Frick and Martin Stocklasa, who joined the association a year ago as coaches. The 36-year-old feels it is the right time to retire from active play and to dedicate himself to the LFV and make a long-term commitment to the future of the game in his country.

With 132 caps from his 20-year career, and crowned Liechtenstein player of the year in 2014 and 2016, Jehle started out as a youth player with FC Schaan, before playing for his country at youth level. By the age of 16, he was already defending the senior national team goal.

After a stint with teams abroad, notably in Portugal and France, he returned home in 2009 to play for FC Vaduz.

Peter Jehle succeeds Philipp Patsch as general secretary, who is leaving to pursue new professional challenges.

TROPHY TOUR AND VALLETTA CROWNED

KEVIN AZZOPARDI

In the weeks leading up to the final day of this season’s premier league, the Malta FA organised a mini-tour for the new league trophy.

Designed by Thomas Lyte, the renowned London-based silversmiths who also produced the new FA trophy, the stunning cup is handcrafted in sterling silver and weighs in at five kilos, including the plinth.

The first stop on the tour was the national sports school, where the trophy was displayed to the great interest and enthusiasm of the pupils, who were also treated to a Q&A session with four Malta internationals: Hibernians defender Andrei Agius, Cain Attard, the Birkirkara wing back, and Ryan Camilleri and Paul Fenech, respectively captains of Valletta and Balzan.

A thrilling final to the 2017/18 premier league campaign culminated in Valletta FC being crowned Maltese champions for the 24th time in their history. The title race went down to the wire as Valletta FC and Balzan FC headed into their final-day league matches level on 55 points.

Valletta FC accomplished their mission after beating third-placed Gżira United 2-1, while Balzan went down 1-0 to Hibernians on the same afternoon. Those results meant that Valletta sealed top spot and the crown with a total of 58 points, three ahead of Balzan, who qualified for the Europa League along with Gżira United, who are making a return to European competitions after a lapse of more than 40 years. In the other categories, Qormi won the first-division championship, Gudja United captured the second-division championship and Santa Venera Lightnings finished top of the third division. Birkirkara retained the women’s league crown.
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Irish Football Association’s education and heritage centre is now officially one of Belfast’s top visitor attractions. Housed in the national football stadium at Windsor Park, it tells the unique story of Northern Ireland football from the 1880s to the present day using a variety of media, interactive displays and key artefacts.

“We’re aiming for 10,000 visitors and 600 tours in 2018 and we are confident we’ll reach that target,” Garrett adds.

EDUCATION AND HERITAGE CENTRE
A TOP VISITOR ATTRACTION

The centre has a number of trusted volunteer tour guides, who have received extensive training to deliver a top visitor experience.

“By the end of 2017 we were sitting at number 33 out of 233 things to do in Belfast with a five-star rating from TripAdvisor,” explains centre manager Stephen Garrett. “Our aim this year was to get in to the top 20, so we’re naturally delighted to currently be in sixth place with a five-star rating.”

Inaugurated last March by Northern Ireland manager Michael O’Neill and most-capped player Pat Jennings, the centre welcomed 7,197 visitors from all over the world – and held 448 tours – in its first nine months of operation.

PRESS OFFICE

The ninth Moldovan football yearbook was recently published in Chișinău. The involvement of the Football Association of Moldova (FMF) in this invaluable publication lends it added credibility as a point of reference. Since the first issue in 2010, the editor, Victor Daghi, has recorded the major events of the last domestic football season for posterity.

After an opening message from Pavel Cebanu, the FMF president, on the association’s achievements, the 128-page yearbook provides masses of statistics on the 2017 season, including all appearances and goalscorers in Moldova’s top three divisions.

The yearbook is a must for statisticians, providing full individual analyses for each top-division club, with facts, photos and figures supplemented by a narrative season review and selected historical records.

It also updates a list of all Moldovan champions since 1992, an all-time league table, details of the highest goalscorers of all time for the top two divisions and information about each Moldovan Cup final and Super Cup.

2017 YEARBOOK

PRESS OFFICE

MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

www.fmfd.md

2017 YEARBOOK

www.irishfa.com

MOLDOVA
For the first time, Norway has qualified for both the Under-19 and Under-17 European Championship final tournaments in the same season. The eye of the needle to qualify for UEFA youth championship final tournaments is very hard to pass through. Norway is a relatively small football nation, and it is therefore hugely inspiring that we have qualified for both the Under-19 and Under-17 European Championship finals in the same year for the first time.

Margins are, of course, always a factor in football, but we think we are beginning to see the results of the more systematic player development work we started investing in a few years back when we set up the national team school. The Norwegian Football Association has also confirmed its gold-level status under the UEFA Grassroots Charter this year. Norwegian football’s overall vision is to provide football activity to anyone who wants to play football, whatever their level and whoever they are. This means, among other things, that there is no talent selection in children’s football up to the age of 13, which some claim as having been an obstacle to developing quality players. Norwegian football is working on improvements in many areas, but we see the success of our Under-19s and Under-17s as proof that we can do two things at the same time: develop good international players, and make sure that football is accessible to everyone at grassroots level.

The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) has launched the Club Mark programme, which is intended to help grassroots clubs throughout the country. The award is based on best practice in the governance, management and administration of a club. Three clubs have already completed the first stage of the programme, and representatives from Mayo’s Achill Rovers, Donegal’s Gweedore Celtic and Waterford’s Park Rangers were presented with their awards at the official launch by the FAI’s chief executive, John Delaney. Speaking at the event, Delaney said the introduction of the FAI Club Mark was the latest step in helping grassroots clubs around the country achieve their full potential. “The FAI Club Mark will help lead to the improvement of standards in our clubs. We will recognise the great work done by the clubs in their communities, and take it to another level. “We’ve over 2,000 clubs in the country of different sizes. The FAI Club Mark will help assist the clubs to improve their standards off the pitch.” For more information on the FAI Club Mark, visit www.fai.ie/domestic/fai-club-mark.
With an absolute majority of 168 votes from the 254 affiliated members present (out of 256), 33-year-old Răzvan Burleanu was elected in a single ballot for a second four-year term as president of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) at the association’s general assembly, held at its headquarters in Bucharest on 18 April. Burleanu first became president on 5 March 2014.

Expressing gratitude for the association’s hard work over the previous four years, he said his door would continue to remain open to clubs and staff.

He also extended a hand to the other candidates, Ioan Lupescu, Marcel Pușcaș and Ilie Drăgan, and promised to do his best to ensure continued unity over the next four years.

Unity has actually been one of the recurrent themes of the FRF president’s speeches, emphasising not only the association’s philosophy and approach, but also the direction to be followed in the future.

“As the real force of Romanian football, we have developed projects, put football first, and the FRF members above all else,” he said after his re-election. “The aim during my first term was to ensure financial stability. Now we have gained confidence and are ready to go to the next level.

“We have a duty to all the youngsters playing in the newly created competitions, and a duty to the second and third leagues, women’s football and to futsal. So we’ll carry on and make sure that Romanian football serves you all. Let’s be a generation who only look towards a better future,” declared Burleanu to a standing ovation.

The Scottish Football Association recently announced that energy company SSE would be the title sponsor of its girls’ soccer centres.

The Scottish FA’s soccer centres aim to encourage a new generation of girls aged 5–12 to fall in love with football in a fun and nurturing environment.

Initially launched in April 2017 across the Scottish FA’s six regions, by the end of the year there were 39 soccer centres, involving some 650 girls.

Thanks to SSE’s investment, the association is aiming to have more than 1,000 girls enrolled at 50 soccer centres by the end of 2018. Soccer centres are run in partnership with local authorities, leisure trusts, schools and community clubs, delivering weekly sessions and helping to create a pathway into the club game.

Six members of the Scottish women’s national team have been appointed ambassadors for the soccer centres in their respective home regions, providing visible female role models for all participating girls.

SSE’s sponsorship of the soccer centres was announced at a launch event at the SSE Hydro arena on 23 April attended by Scottish internationals Lee Alexander and Claire Emslie, as well as the national team’s head coach, Shelley Kerr.

The event was also attended by more than 100 girls from local schools Camstradden Primary, Glasgow Gaelic School and St Patrick’s Primary, who took part in small-sided matches and training drills led by the Scottish FA staff and soccer centre ambassadors, as well as a special Q&A session with Shelley Kerr.

Statistics for girls’ and women’s football have increased significantly in Scotland in recent years, with the number of registered players rising from 10,000 to 12,000 by the end of 2017. “We are delighted to welcome SSE on board as title sponsor of our girls’ soccer centres and are extremely grateful to them for their investment in growing the girls’ game in Scotland,” said Donald Gillies, head of girls’ and women’s football at the Scottish FA. “Since the girls’ soccer centres were launched last year, we have seen a tremendous uptake from young girls, no doubt sparked by the success of our women’s national team and the excellent work of local partners.”
21 LEGENDS IN THE HALL OF FAME

PETER SURIN

Since its inauguration in spring 2016, the Slovak football Hall of Fame has, as it were, come of age. There are now 21 inductees, up from the initial 11, another five having been added in 2017, with five more in 2018.

“...is a unique project, an expression of respect for those who have raised the art of football to a vital example of our nation’s self-awareness, for those who deserve glory and who have forged the reputation of Slovak football,” reads the preamble to the museum’s statutes.

Places are reserved for football players, coaches, referees, officials and journalists: whoever deserves recognition for hard and honest work in Slovak football. Nominees also need to embody the attributes of public respect, with a strong character and the right moral values.

The criteria are tough, but only such personalities are worthy of the unique trophy – a bronze statue by academic sculptor Jozef Hobor, featuring the ball in the top corner of the goal – and a certificate of their place in the Slovak football pantheon.


All of these amazing football players have written an indelible chapter in the history of Slovak, Czechoslovak, European and world football. The silver medal at the 1964 Olympic games (Urban); European Championship glory in 1976 (Masný); European Champion Clubs’ Cup semi-final with Spartak Trnava (Malatinsky); European Champion Clubs’ Cup quarter-final and all-time best player for Sparta Prague (Kvašňák); and memorable goalscorer against Brazil in the 1970 World Cup (Petraš).

Many of them have experienced highs and lows in their personal lives following their successful football careers, yet their well-deserved place in the hall of fame will endure.

STATUES SEND ANTI-BULLYING MESSAGE

ANDREAS NILSSON

There were a few puzzled looks as Sweden’s national team walked out to face Chile at Friends Arena on 24 March without the usual player escorts by their sides. Instead, each player carried a statuette.

The symbolic gesture was part of a high-profile campaign against bullying, in which 25 life-sized bronze sculptures have been installed at the arena, depicting vulnerable children in environments where bullying typically occurs: hallways, locker rooms, bathrooms and cafeterias.

The underlying message is simple: don’t be a spectator if you witness bullying. “Seven out of ten adults today still do nothing when they see bullying before their very eyes. This campaign aims to make the victims visible and encourage adults to step in when they see children being harassed.”

The campaign has been financed by Swedbank, partner of both the Swedish FA and the Friends Foundation. “We’re very grateful that the national team helped us spread this important message,” says Swedbank’s Johan Eriksson. “Football has the unique ability to engage people’s attention and if our national players highlight the cause it can change the daily lives of thousands of children.”
PARTY TIME FOR THE AMATEUR LEAGUE

PIERRE BENOIT

In terms of membership, the Swiss amateur league is by far the largest of the three divisions of the Swiss Football Association, and in 2021 it will be celebrating its 100th anniversary. Preparations for the jubilee celebrations are already in full swing, with Urs Dickerhof, the chairman of the central Switzerland regional association, appointed to chair the organising committee.

The amateur league comprises ten regional associations and plays an important role in Swiss football. The current Swiss FA president, Peter Gilliéron, stems from its ranks, as does his predecessor, Marcel Mathier, now honorary president.

Now, even before their jubilee celebrations, the amateur league members already have cause to celebrate, having achieved gold status under the UEFA Grassroots Charter following the evaluation of all UEFA member associations by the UEFA Grassroots Panel.

“This achievement belongs to all those active in amateur football in Switzerland,” says Dominique Blanc, the chairman of the amateur league and vice-president of the Swiss FA. “We are proud of our clubs as they never rest on their laurels, but constantly strive to improve and are therefore able to continually attract more and more men and women to the game.”

The Swiss FA’s head of grassroots football, Raphael Kern, explains the key factors that contributed to UEFA’s glowing evaluation: “Our outstanding cooperation with the regional associations, the federal authorities and the cantons impressed UEFA, which also recognised the quality of Clubcorner, our digital platform that supports the match operations and club administration.”

WALES

ROB DOWLING

The Football Association of Wales has launched a new Welsh football magazine webshow featuring stories from all over the country.

Each episode supplements the association’s strategic plan (More than a Game) and highlights the work going on in all aspects of the game in Wales from grassroots to international level, in an entertaining and engaging 20-minute show.

FC Cymru is broadcast on the FA Wales Facebook and YouTube channels in addition to being available to watch on FAW.Cymru.

Recent episodes have included lifestyle features on Welsh fan fashion, music and an intriguing story about how the Seven Sisters Junior Football Club have funded their Under-9 section through a sponsorship deal with British punk band Sleaford Mods.

The content of the show is designed to appeal to different types of audience in order to expand the reach of FA Wales beyond its regular cohort of fans.
**BIRTHDAYS**

Ekaterina Fedyshina (Russia, 1 June)  
Maksimas Bechterevas (Lithuania, 5 June)  
Michael Joseph Hyland (Republic of Ireland, 6 June)  
Lars-Åke Björck (Sweden, 7 June)  
Onofre Costa (Hungary, 7 June)  
Klara Bjartmarz (Iceland, 3 June)  
Michel Sablon (Belgium, 7 June)  
Stefano Braschi (Italy, 6 June)  
Ivaylo Ivkov (Bulgaria, 3 June)  
Radek Lobo (Czech Republic, 3 June)  
Sándor Berzi (Hungary, 7 June)  
Targo Kaldoja (Latvia, 29 June)  
Jørn West Larsen (Denmark, 12 June)  
Petri Antero Jakonen (Finland, 9 June)  
Thórir Hákonarson (Iceland, 11 June)  
Nuno Castro (Portugal, 27 June)  
José Venancio López Hierro (Spain, 12 June)  
José Luis López Serrano (Spain, 12 June)  
Galina Doneva (Bulgaria, 14 June)  
Nuno Castro (Portugal, 14 June)  
Vyacheslav Koloskov (Russia, 15 June)  
Michael Joseph Maessen (Netherlands, 17 June)  
Rainer Werthmann (Germany, 17 June)  
Markus Nobs (Switzerland, 17 June)  
Anne Rei (Estonia, 17 June)  
Philippe Piat (France, 18 June)  
Hannelore Ratzeburg (Germany, 18 June)  
Ivan Novak (Croatia, 18 June)  
Kepa Larumbe Beain (Spain, 16 June)  
Michael Joseph Hyland (Republic of Ireland, 6 June)  
Johan Mikkelsen (Denmark, 9 June)  
Antoine Portelli (Malta, 9 June)  
Petri Antero Jakonen (Finland, 9 June)  
Jonathan Ford (Wales, 9 June)  
Federico Mancuso (Argentina, 9 June)  
Andreas Zielpiotz (Germany, 9 June)  
Davor Škundrić (Croatia, 9 June)  
Ivan Novak (Croatia, 18 June)  
Leslie Irvine (Northern Ireland, 23 June)  
Jean-Jacques Schonckert (Luxembourg, 24 June)  
Renatus Temmink (Netherlands, 24 June)  
João Rocha (Portugal, 24 June)  
Jouni Huhttiä (Finland, 24 June)  
Jeanneette Good (Finland, 24 June)  
Tom Proctor (Northern Ireland, 23 June)  
Tom Borgions (Belgium, 24 June)  
Vladimir Dunauskas (Lithuania, 24 June)  
Barry Bright (England, 27 June)  
Barry Bright (England, 27 June)  
Sigurður Hannesson (Iceland, 27 June)  
Ejybúlfr Olafsson (Iceland, 27 June)  
Ruud Dokter (Republic of Ireland, 27 June)  
José Venancio López Hierro (Spain, 27 June)  
Wim Koevermans (Belgium, 28 June)  
Alessandro Giacinti (San Marino, 28 June)  
Ivan Borissov Lekov (Bulgaria, 29 June)  
Michael Tsichritzis (Greece, 29 June)  
Paul-Daniel Zaharia (Romania, 29 June)  
Ginta Pēce (Latvia, 29 June)  
Peter van Zunderd (Netherlands, 30 June)  

**NOTICES**

- On 18 April Răzvan Burleanu was re-elected president of the Romanian Football Federation.
- On 27 April Kaspars Gorkšs was elected president of the Latvian Football Federation. He replaces Guntis Indriksons.

**FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

Meetings

12 June, Nyon  
UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League: preliminary round draws

12/13 June, Moscow  
FIFA Congress

19 June, Nyon  
UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League: draws for the first and second qualifying rounds

22 June, Nyon  
UEFA Women's Champions League: qualifying round draw

Competitions

4–12 June  
Women's World Cup: qualifying matches

European Women's Under-19 Championship: elite round

14 June–15 July, Russia  
World Cup

26 June  
UEFA Champions League: preliminary round (semi-finals)

28 June  
UEFA Europa League: preliminary round (first legs)

29 June  
UEFA Champions League: preliminary round (final)