

UEFA



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SPAIN CROWNED FIRST WOMEN'S FUTSAL CHAMPIONS

**SPECIAL
FEATURE**

Italy ready for the U21 finals

THE TECHNICIAN

Franck Raviot, goalkeeper
coach to Les Bleus

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Theodore Theodoridis
UEFA General Secretary

LET THE FINALS BEGIN!

Welcome to the latest issue of UEFA Direct. April is one of my favourite months in the football calendar. The days are longer, the weather is better, and many competitions – both domestically and across Europe – are coming to their conclusion.

The excitement is building as we reach the last stages of both the UEFA Champions League and the Europa League. Clubs can see the final in sight and fans have already begun dreaming of – and plotting their way to – Madrid or Baku.

This year, of course, the club competition finals are joined on centre stage by the first-ever UEFA Nations League finals. The league stage was a resounding success, achieving the goal of reducing the number of meaningless friendlies in national team football and raising the competitive edge of matches; not only by pitching peer against peer but also by introducing promotion and relegation.

So England, the Netherlands and Switzerland will join hosts Portugal in the last four to see who will be the inaugural Nations League winners at the start of June.

These showpiece matches come at just the right time for the game, with the spectre of racism re-emerging in the last few months. Discrimination in any form is unacceptable and, at the recent #EqualGame Conference in London, hosted jointly by UEFA, the English FA and the Fare network, the issues facing society in general, and football in particular, were discussed by experts and participants alike.

UEFA has the toughest regulations to tackle racism, with first offences punished by a minimum of a partial stadium closure, right up to the possibility of disqualification from the competition. But football cannot tackle these broad societal problems on its own. We must work with the authorities to help them to educate the prejudiced and the mindless. UEFA stands ready to do that. I am certain that, as in so many parts of life, working together will in time bring better understanding and tolerance.

Achieving better understanding was also our aim in introducing VAR into the latter stages of the Champions League. No system is perfect and VAR has caused a lot of debate but, far from detracting from the drama and excitement, it has added its own dimension. Coaches and supporters will always disagree with reviews that go against them, but I have been impressed with the patient way that chief refereeing officer Roberto Rosetti and his team have gone about explaining how the system is being implemented and the difference between a factual decision and one where on-pitch referees must still be allowed to apply their own interpretation of events in making their minds up.

I hope you enjoy this issue of UEFA Direct, whether you are reading a printed copy or the new digital version, which has enabled us to reach many more readers than before.

IN THIS ISSUE

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20 Special feature

Italian football returns to centre stage.

12 In brief

15 Social responsibility

Wembley hosts the EqualGame conference on diversity and inclusion.

26 Education

The new UEFA Academy strengthens the organisation's commitment to learning.

28 UEFA GROW

The importance of strategic planning.

30 UEFA EURO 2020

From Baku to Budapest, preparations are in full swing.

40 #EqualGame

In Turkey on crutches or in Russia in the snow, football is accessible to everyone.

42 Scotland

The Malky Mackay top performance model.

44 Norway

A picture paints a thousand words.

45 Romania

Entering the digital era.

46 News from member associations



PressSports

16 History

The eventful life of the European Under-21 Championship.



Getty Images

34

The Technician

Franck Raviot, coach to France's World Cup goalkeepers, shares his vision of his role.



Sportsfile

6 Women's Futsal EURO

Spain claim the first title.

GROUNDBREAKING SPECTACLE IN GONDOMAR

Spain win first-ever Women's Futsal EURO.

“We feel like we're in heaven,” a beaming Vanessa Sotelo exclaimed after Spain's 4-0 win against hosts Portugal in the inaugural UEFA Women's Futsal EURO final. “I still can't believe that we are European champions.”

Sotelo scored Spain's fourth at the Pavilhão Multiusos de Gondomar in Porto on 17 February to put a final flourish on a competition that had only been voted into being by UEFA's Executive Committee less than two years previously. No wonder it took time for Spain's achievement to sink in.

At that point, only seven national associations had senior women's national teams and 30 nations had no registered women's futsal players at all. The new competition provided the impetus to change all that and a qualifying campaign involving 23 teams quickly showed how great an appetite there is for the sport.

On the men's side too, the Executive Committee had shown a strong commitment to futsal. At the national level, the men's Futsal EURO has been expanded to 16 teams for the 2022 final tournament, and a new men's Under-19 competition has been launched. Creating the UEFA Futsal Champions League out of the old UEFA Futsal Cup in time for this season, meanwhile, has elevated the game at club level.

Over 7,000 fans watched the four matches from 15 until 17 February involving Spain, Portugal, Russia and Ukraine in the Women's Futsal EURO in Gondomar, further underlining the competition's potential.

Sheer grandeur

“Women's futsal was long due a tournament like this, especially when it comes to the atmosphere we experienced.” The comment by the champion coach, Claudia Pons, neatly

summarises a history-making final tournament which could legitimately claim to have given the brand-new European Women's Futsal Championship a perfect start. Pictures of the magnificent scenario in Gondomar, just outside Porto, speak for themselves – as does the fact that, on the final day, the 2,800-capacity arena could have been filled twice over. A huge posse of photographers symptomised intense media interest. And coping with the sheer grandeur of the event emerged as one of the conditioning factors among players who, by and large, were unaccustomed to performing on such a noisy, spotlighted international stage.

First on court in Gondomar were Russia and Spain. Evgeni Kuzmin's side adopted a cautious, deep 1-1-2-1 defensive formation aimed at drawing the teeth out of Spain's high-tempo approach work and hoping that growing frustration would open up counterattacking opportunities. Claudia Pons's team, however, remained focused, composed and patient.

Their high defending and intense pressure on the ball restricted Russia to sporadic advances based on a long throw by goalkeeper Anastasiia Ivanova to an isolated pivot. Ironically, it was a Spanish counter which broke the ice: goalkeeper Silvia Aguete feeding Ampí on the left and Vanessa Sotelo calmly rolling the ball into the net after confusion in the Russia defence. Four more goals – two from kick-ins – sealed an unexpected 5-0 margin.

Big-match pressure

The hosts, seemingly tensed by big-match pressure, were similarly contained by Ukraine and went in at half-time with only a 1-0 advantage – Janice Silva pushing in a rebound. Nerves jangled even more when a fast counter down the right allowed Anna Sydorenko to equalise early in the second half. →



The Pavilhão Multiusos de Gondomar in Porto was the venue for the first Women's Futsal EURO.





Anita scores Spain's second goal in the final against Portugal.

Sportsfile

However, with Fifó providing two goals, one assist and generally bossing the game, Portugal ran out 5-1 winners as Ukraine, using only eight outfielders until the final minute, ran out of steam at the end of a creditably brave, uninhibited performance.

Much the same could be said of their contribution to the bronze-medal match. Russia, attacking more purposefully than they had against Spain, took a 2-0 advantage in the first quarter-hour, only for the Ukrainians to, again, show mental resilience by hitting back with two penalties – one from ten metres and one from six. Their medal hopes, however, were dashed when Luliia Forsiuk hit the last penalty of the shoot-out wide of Ivanova's right post.

The grandeur of the occasion and the host-nation pressures undermined Portugal's bid for the title. Two losses of possession in key defensive areas, followed by a lapse of concentration at a direct free-kick led to a 0-3 deficit within ten minutes as Spain stuck to their game plan based on fierce pressure on the ball and rapid transitions to defence mode. Portugal's anxieties translated into passion-fuelled attacking which, when not thwarted by Spain's orderly defensive work, was nullified by the excellent goalkeeping of Agüete. With Luís Conceição opting for the flying goalkeeper in the closing stages, another interception allowed Vanessa Sotelo to race clear, to complete the feat of scoring the first and last goals of the tournament and to clinch the 4-0 win and the title. As Claudia Pons said amid the jubilation: "Tonight we managed to play as we normally do and that was the key to success. We didn't crack under pressure."

Results

15 February

Semi-finals

Russia 0-5 Spain

Ukraine 1-5 Portugal

17 February

Third-place play-off

Russia 2-2 Ukraine
(Russia win 3-2 on penalties)

Final

Spain 4-0 Portugal



Sportsfile

Technical topics

Setting benchmarks

“Spain showed just how strong they are,” Russia coach Evgeni Kuzmin conceded after the 5-0 semi-final defeat. “It was a spectacular match and I think many teams could learn a lot by watching this game. Spain were favourites to win and they did, while we still have a lot to learn.”

Two days later, the final between Spain and Portugal, with its perfections and imperfections, could usefully be employed as something of a coaching manual for associations keen to make progress in this sphere.

High pressure

All four teams exerted high pressure at some stage of the tournament. Ukraine courageously did so against the hosts while, in the other semi-final, Russia were pushed deep by Spain and could only press high in the bronze-medal match.

With fitness levels and athletic qualities a prerequisite, Spain provided a prime example with their high 1-1-1-2 defensive structure based on two fast, agile players in a first line of defence; a third providing cover behind them; and the fourth outfielder staying deep as a rapid-response solution if the front lines were breached.

Spain’s ability to provoke errors was showcased in the opening phase of the final, when two losses of possession under pressure put Portugal two goals behind. Apart from excellent goalkeeping by Silvia Aguete, Spain’s two clean sheets – a rarity in futsal – owed a great deal to the efficiency of their well-structured high defending.

On the other side of the coin, the finalists also highlighted the importance of the levels of technique required to protect possession and play out of tight, demanding situations.

Pivotal questions

The top teams were equipped to switch from 1-3-1 to 1-4-0 attacking with or without a pivot. The UEFA technical observers noted a clear trend towards using the wide pivot.

As a foretaste of the material that will appear in an online technical report, **Diagram 1** illustrates Portugal’s 1-3-1 construction, with No8 starting wide on the left with a view to opening spaces for combinations on the other flank or between-lines passing through the centre.

If the pivot stays wide, the marker, aware of the extensive space behind her, was generally reluctant to stay close, offering opportunities for parallel passes to the pivot.



Russia's Oksana Alemaikina breaks away from Ukraine's Snizhana Volovenko in the match for third place.

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287

goals were scored during the whole competition at an average of

7.18

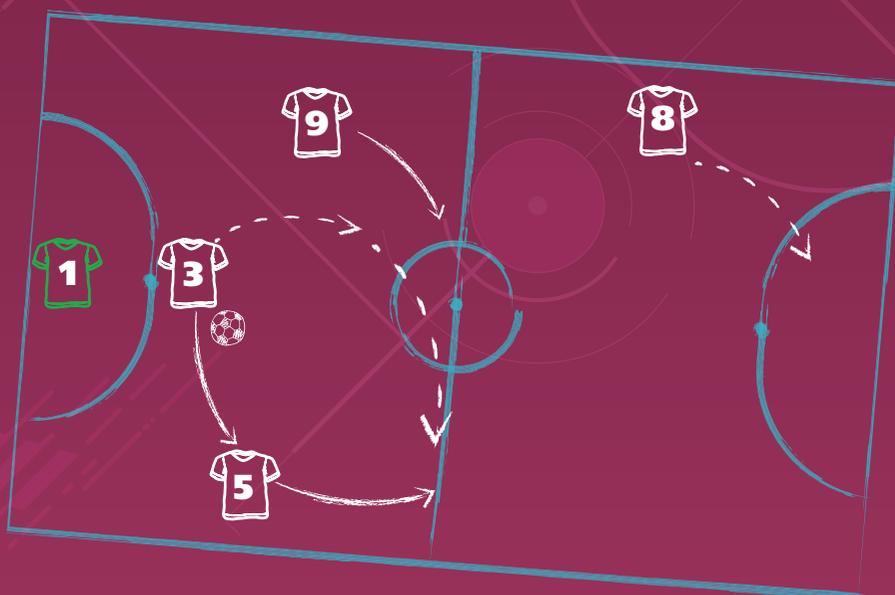
per game

Counters count

Overall, the groundbreaking competition produced 287 goals at an average of 7.18 per game. Although 19 goals in Portugal offered scant opportunities to detect goalscoring ‘trends’, seven goals underlined the value of fast counterattacking. For example, Russia’s opening goal in the bronze-medal match against Ukraine, when No17 Dina Danilova broke fast on the right then, when an opponent tried to close her down, passed to No4 Aleksandra Samorodova and continued her run past the unbalanced opponent, received the return pass and calmly converted.

Awareness by goalkeepers emerged as a key component of successful counterattacking, with Spain’s Aguete accurately finding Ampí on the left to launch the attack that crucially broke the deadlock against Russia. Or Portugal’s Naty, whose pass to Fifó allowed her to score the fifth against Ukraine after an exquisite first touch. →

Diagram 1



Dead ball alive

The tournament offered conflicting evidence. On the one hand, 70 corners failed to produce a goal. The technical observers attributed this to two factors.

Firstly, risk-management aspects, with teams reluctant to expose themselves to counters by over-committing.

Secondly, well-organised defensive mechanisms – for example, the observers gave credit to Ukraine for restricting Portugal to long-range attempts following corners. Free-kicks struck directly at goal were a rarity – the notable exception being Spain's third goal in the final, when Amelia Romero's shot squirmed in at the near post.

Kick-ins were a more fertile source of goals and opportunities. Spain's third goal against Russia highlighted the need for constant concentration as well as well-rehearsed mechanisms. The Russian players, thinking that a kick-in was in their favour and not heeding the referee's signal, moved upfield, allowing their opponents to score unopposed.

Diagram 2, however, shows one of Spain's mechanisms for kick-ins high up the court. No10 makes a blocking move to distract defenders, allowing No4 to run across and create a 2v1 situation on the left. With defenders moving out to deal with it, No10 runs at space with a view to connecting with a cross.

Diagram 3 illustrates how Ukraine dealt with high pressure by Russia at a kick-in deep in their own territory. The taker made a short pass to No17, who ran the ball towards the centre, taking her marker with her. She then back-heeled to No7 and continued a fast upfield run to receive in open space made even more accessible by the pivot's move to the touchline, ostensibly to offer herself for the parallel pass and inviting her marker to stay close.

Low flying

The flying goalkeeper flew only twice. Oleg Shaytanov sent on Snizhana Volovenko three times when Ukraine were trailing Portugal – but no goals were scored or conceded while the No10 was on court.

Statistics from the final reveal that Luís Conceição used Pisko eight times but, during the 202 seconds she was on court, Portugal did not manage a shot at goal. During her third appearance, an interception allowed Vanessa Sotelo to run clear and clinch her team's 4-0 win.

Spain's efficiency in power-play scenarios was based not only on well-organised, focused positional defending but also on terrier-like pressure on the ball in advanced areas of their defensive zone.



Diagram 2

Take-away lessons

Among the mental, physical, technical and tactical issues raised, UEFA technical observer Francesca Salvatore said: "This tournament confirmed the theory that, at top international level you need to step up the tempo."

Having faced Spain in qualifying, she also highlighted the champions' growth in confidence, composure and maturity, illustrating that mindsets and emotions also play a role.

As Javier Lozano, the second UEFA technical observer, commented after the final: "The Portugal team has enormous technical and tactical ability. But they struggled to cope with the occasion – the capacity crowd, the media ... and then their unforced errors due to nerves made them even more anxious and uncomfortable. They will have learned a lot from this experience – but so will the other teams." ⚽

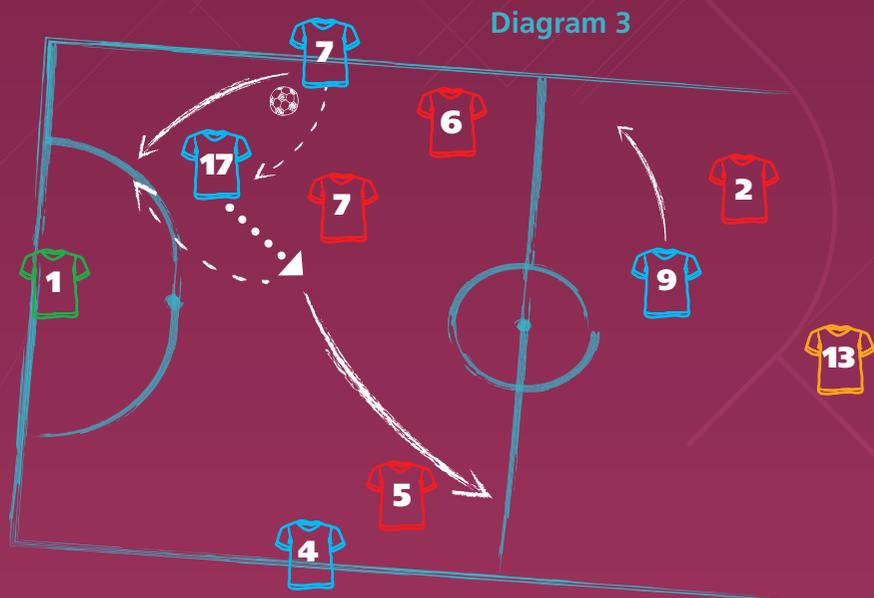


Diagram 3



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Claudia shows the way

The only female coach at the final tournament was the one to lift the trophy. And the career pathway of Claudia Pons is one that UEFA's development projects are keen to encourage.

She started her coach education in Barcelona while playing for Futsal Gironella (to add to her degree in physical education), while her playing career in the Spain national team laid solid foundations when, in 2015, she became assistant coach before stepping up to the number one role in August 2018.

"It was good preparation," she admits, "and I take care, as a coach, to avoid the things that I didn't like as a player." She admits to being self-demanding and not always enjoying a good night's sleep before big games.

"I place a lot of importance on defensive work," she comments, "and the importance of regaining the ball. And I'm aware that dead-ball situations can often

make the difference. When we attack, I want us to create opportunities and to be brave. And I always remind the players that they should enjoy playing the game."

In team selection, she focuses on readiness to work hard for the team and commitment to a playing philosophy.

"The players may not always be the best but they are the best for our style of play. Character is also important, as we need to be able to react when situations become difficult. It's an asset to have all-round qualities, as this gives me greater tactical options."

After watching her coaching demeanour in Portugal and during their confrontation in the qualifying group, UEFA technical observer Francesca Salvatore (coach of Italy's national team) was quick to applaud.

"She is a calm, tactically-equipped coach with an excellent, clear, efficient concept of play. And she has clearly won the hearts of her players. The result is a team with a strong identity – and she is one of the strong points."

Spain's Vanessa Sotelo named player of the tournament

UEFA's technical observers at the final tournament in Gondomar were Francesca Salvatore, coach of Italy's women's national team, and serial World Cup and EURO winner Javier Lozano.

Their role included the challenge of selecting the player of the tournament and an all-star squad.

Both entailed a degree of debate with, for example, Spain's Anita staking a valid claim for the player of the tournament award. Ultimately, it was her team-mate Vanessa Sotelo who stepped on to the podium to receive the trophy from Ricardinho because, as the technical observers put it, the Spain No9 "produced an outstanding all-round performance, contributing to the collective work in both attack and defence".

"Technically gifted with both feet," the observers went on, "she gave depth to her team's attacking and, from an excellent starting position, she was agile in her defensive covering and quickly switched to intelligent movements with or without the ball. She was always present when it came to covering team-mates and when she was closely

marked she made fast off-the-ball movements to open up spaces or to create channels for passes."

When it came to selecting an all-star squad of 14, debate was often coloured by differences between the two games played.

Between the posts, Ukraine's keeper was excellent in both matches. Spain's Aguete, on the other hand, was difficult to assess when Russia failed to produce an on-target shot in the semi-final but was outstanding when Portugal peppered her in the final. Portugal's Fifó, although subdued and often frustrated during the final, had demonstrated exceptional qualities during the match against Ukraine. Her team-mates Janice Silva and Cátia Morgado were among the talented players who, in the final reckoning, narrowly failed to make the squad.



Sportsfile

€100,000 for the ICRC



UEFA via Getty Images

ON 19 FEBRUARY, Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk handed over a cheque for €100,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on behalf of UEFA. Van Dijk received the cheque from UEFA vice-president Michele Uva before Liverpool's UEFA Champions League round of 16 first-leg match against Bayern Munich at Anfield. The donation was then presented by the player to Martin Schüepp, the ICRC's deputy regional director for Europe and Central Asia. The money will assist the ICRC's mission to reunite families caught up in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence. Virgil van Dijk was chosen to present the cheque after being named in the UEFA.com Fans' Team of the Year 2018.

UEFA Assist tournament meets multiple objectives

As part of its Assist programme, UEFA organised an Under-17 tournament in Antalya from 4 to 9 March.

THE EVENT in Turkey featured teams from three continents: Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda from the Confederation of African Football (CAF); Australia, a member of the Asian Football Confederation; and Belarus, Montenegro and Turkey, representing UEFA. The tournament provided opportunities for young players to gain experience in a competitive environment, while also learning about

different cultures, which helped to broaden their football education on and off the pitch. Another goal of the event was to give the eight CAF teams that have reached the final qualifying round for this year's U-17 World Cup – plus Australia, who have already booked their place at the World Cup – the opportunity to play preparatory matches. It was also a chance for the three European participants to take on opponents they would otherwise be unlikely to meet.



The UEFA Assist programme provides practical support for other football confederations and national associations in four specific areas: education and

knowledge-sharing, youth football development, infrastructure, and UEFA member association support to associations outside Europe.

Crucial knowledge for football doctors

A workshop organised in Rome as part of UEFA's Football Doctor Education Programme consolidated the work carried out in recent years to transmit medical knowledge that is essential for the treatment of football-related injuries.

THE WORKSHOP, attended by 52 doctors, dealt with trauma and emergency medical treatment on the field. The doctors who had previously attended a workshop on these subjects and who had already passed on their knowledge at national level focused this time on the teaching aspects. Doctors who had recently been appointed by national associations and had not yet attended such a workshop, along with those who had not yet passed on their knowledge at national level, concentrated on skills training and were taught how best to organise a workshop at national level in order to 'cascade' their newly acquired expertise.



"Football doctors will receive high-level education every other year in trauma and medical emergencies, and every four years in injury diagnosis and treatment,

as well as on general topics such as nutrition, psychology and rehabilitation structures," said Dr Michel D'Hooghe, chairman of UEFA's Medical Committee.

NOTICES

Edgaras Stankevičius has replaced Nerijus Dunauskas as general secretary of the Lithuanian Football Federation.

Kenneth Reeh has been named as acting CEO of the Danish Football Association, following the departure of Claus Bretton-Meyer.

Jan Pauly has replaced Rudolf Řepka as general secretary of the Football Association of the Czech Republic.

Anđan Džemidžić has replaced Jasmin Baković as general secretary of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation.

Marco Brunelli has replaced Michele Uva as CEO of the Italian Football Association.

Gudni Bergsson has been re-elected as president of the Football Association of Iceland for a two-year term.

Levan Kobiashvili has been re-elected as president of the Georgian Football Federation for a four-year term.

Aleksander Dyukov has been elected as president of the Football Union of Russia for a two-year term.

Muamed Sejдини has been elected as president of the Football Federation of North Macedonia for a two-year term.

Slaviša Kokeza has been re-elected as president of the Football Association of Serbia for a four-year term.

Vladimir Bazanov has been elected as president of the Football Federation of Belarus for a four-year term.

Karl-Erik Nilsson has been re-elected as president of the Swedish Football Association for a two-year term.

EURO 2020 mascot debuts in Amsterdam

THE OFFICIAL MASCOT for EURO 2020, Skillzy, made his first public appearance before the European Qualifier between the Netherlands and Germany in Amsterdam on 24 March. An all-star squad of 34 legends who have marked the history of the European Football Championship has also been announced. Their role is to serve as ambassadors to promote the 2020 finals, which celebrate the competition's 60th anniversary.

Meanwhile, at a ceremony held at the National Arena in Bucharest, it was announced



The EURO 2020 mascot, Skillzy, comes equipped with a dazzling array of football tricks.

that the EURO 2020 final draw will be held at ROMEXPO in the Romanian capital on 30 November.

Bucharest is one of 12 EURO 2020 host cities, none of which are, however, guaranteed a place in the 24-team final tournament, which will be held from 12 June to 12 July 2020.

The qualifying competition kicked off on 21 March and only 20 of the 24 finalists will be known when the draw takes place at the end of November. The remaining four places will go to the winners of the play-offs that will take place at the end of March 2020.

TROPHY TIME

Spring time means trophy time in Europe, and this year is certainly no exception, with no fewer than ten UEFA competitions reaching their conclusion in the next few months.

It all starts on 26 April, when two four-team final tournaments kick off: the finals of the first UEFA Futsal Champions League (formerly the UEFA Futsal Cup) in Almaty, which conclude on 28 April, and the UEFA Youth League finals in Nyon, which finish the following day. Featuring the continent's best futsal clubs in the one case and Europe's top Under-19 club sides in the other, both events follow the same format, with semi-finals followed by a final (plus a third-place play-off in the Futsal Champions League).

Under-17 championships

The spotlight then shifts to the younger generation and the final phases of the European Under-17 Championships. The 16-team men's tournament takes place in the Republic of Ireland from 3 to 19 May, while the eight women's Under-17 finalists will be in Bulgaria from 5 to 17 May. On the eve of the men's final, the first major club competition final of 2019, the UEFA Women's Champions League final, takes place in Budapest.

The women's club competition final will break new ground in more than one respect: not only will it be the first UEFA women's club competition final to have been played in Hungary, it will also be the first time the women's final has been held in a different country to the men's UEFA Champions League final. This year for the first time, it is the

UEFA Europa League and UEFA Champions League finals that will be played in the same week, just three days apart on Wednesday 29 May and Saturday 1 June. However, the geographical distance between them will be somewhat greater, since 4,500 kilometres separate the Estadio Metropolitano in Madrid (capacity 68,000), which will host the Champions League final, and the Olympic Stadium in Baku (capacity 70,000), where the Europa League final will be staged. It will be the first time either stadium has hosted a UEFA final.

A historic first

In yet another first, Portugal will be the venue for the inaugural UEFA Nations League finals from 5 to 9 June. England, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland will be battling it out to lift the trophy for the very first time. After the semi-finals in Porto and Guimarães on 5 and 6 June, the final itself takes place at Porto's Estádio do Dragão on 9 June. After a very busy start to the month, two more final tournaments bring the season to a close in the second half of June: the UEFA Regions' Cup finals, that will bring together the continent's best amateur regional teams in Bavaria from 18 to 26 June, and, the main attraction, the European Under-21 Championship finals in Italy and San Marino from 16 to 30 June. 🏆

Next up on the rostrum will be the winners of the 2018/19 UEFA Futsal Champions League final in Almaty.



#EQUALGAME CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHTS EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The campaign for greater equality, diversity and inclusion in football was the focal point of the keynote #EqualGame conference held at Wembley Stadium on 2 and 3 April.

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, admitted to a sense of shame about the problems that blemish football as he called for greater equality, diversity and inclusion during the conference.

"I am simply ashamed that today, in 2019, we have to organise a conference that promotes diversity," he told the delegates from over 50 countries who had gathered for the event organised jointly by UEFA, the English Football Association and the Fare network.

This was the fifth anti-discrimination conference since the inaugural event in London in 2002, and the UEFA president added: "I am ashamed that here in Europe not a weekend goes by without a discriminatory act taking place in a football stadium, at amateur or professional level.

"I am ashamed to see lone individuals uttering racist, sexist and homophobic insults without realising the devastating effect and symbolic significance of their words.

"I am ashamed to see that players, coaches, and officials do not dare to reveal their sexual orientation in public for fear of the reaction of our football community. This shows a deep-seated problem still exists."

Football as a social catalyst

For all its problems, the UEFA president stressed that football had real power as a social catalyst, observing that: "Football is a sport that wipes out all differences, social, racial, sexual and religious; the only colours that matter on the pitch are the colours of the players' shirts."

Over the course of the #EqualGame conference, it was clear to see the impressive range of anti-discrimination endeavours taking place on the part of UEFA member associations, leagues, clubs, political and governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

and minority groups. The UEFA president applauded the efforts of those "advocating change and calling for greater equality and justice" but stressed: "We need to keep doing more – more for other people, more for solidarity, more for diversity, because we must dare to change, we must dare to be different, dare to invest hugely in educating our children."

The power of diversity in football

Wembley was the backdrop to a cast of strong speakers who – through individual talks and discussion panels – helped explore the game's relationship with significant topics, including gender equality, diverse leadership, human rights, LGBT+ rights, and football and disability. On the subject of racism in football,

Greg Clarke, chairman of the English FA, highlighted the need to take a fresh look at the controls in place to combat this problem, arguing there was "an undue burden on the player to report incidents themselves".

A highlight of the conference was the concluding 'Voices from the pitch' discussion panel featuring Yaya Touré, the ex-Manchester City FC and Ivory Coast footballer; Belgium coach Roberto Martínez; Rachel Yankey, the former England women's footballer; Bibiana Steinhaus, the first woman to referee matches in the German Bundesliga; and Jason Roberts, CONCACAF's director of development. "I love the diversity of football, and one of the strengths of football is that we have diversity on the field, and I'd like to have even more of it off the field as well," Steinhaus said.🌍



HISTORY

Manchester, 8 March 1978. England's Tony Woodcock scored twice against Italy in the quarter-finals of the first European Under-21 competition. In the semi-finals, England lost against Yugoslavia, who went on to take the trophy.



A COMPETITION FULL OF PROMISE

With the latest European Under-21 Championship finals in Italy and San Marino just a few weeks away, we look back at the history of a competition in perpetual transformation that has succeeded in retaining its sporting and popular interest thanks to a format that has evolved through the decades.

Manuel Neuer, Mesut Özil, Sami Khedira, David De Gea, Juan Mata, Alvaro Morata ... A quick glance at the list of great players who have won the UEFA European Under-21 Championship over the past ten years shows how competitive it has become. The high standard of competition is further demonstrated by the names of the winning teams, with 12 of the 14 titles since 1992 having been shared between Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany. Only the Czech Republic (in 2002) and Sweden (in 2015) have managed to snatch the title away from

the giants. The European Under-21 Championship is therefore firmly established in the European football landscape and represents an important showcase for the continent's most promising young players. But it has not always been that way ... In fact, it is not an easy task to follow the history, with almost as many different formats as there have been competitions. Although the official list of winners shows Yugoslavia as winners of the inaugural European Under-21 Competition in 1978, the event's origins actually date back by more than a decade, to 1966.

The Challenge Cup

The European Champion Clubs' Cup – forerunner of the UEFA Champions League – had existed since 1955, and the European Football Championship – known then as the European Nations' Cup – had kicked off with a first final tournament in France in 1960. By the mid-1960s, UEFA wanted to create a new competition with a very clear objective: to provide a stage for players under 23 years of age. While youth competitions for players under 18 were already in existence, nothing was in place to assist their transition to the senior competitions. In a consultative vote at the



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1966 UEFA Congress in London, it was decided that a new Under-23 national team competition should be created. The project was launched the following January, when UEFA invited its member associations to take part in the Challenge Cup for National Representative Under-23 Teams. Seventeen countries signed up. The format chosen was somewhat unusual to say the least, but resulted from a desire to avoid clogging up an already overloaded calendar: the German Democratic Republic and Bulgaria were drawn to contest the inaugural competition in a single match, which took place on 7 June 1967. Bulgaria ran out 3-2 winners of a competition in which only two of the 17 associations that had entered actually took part. What followed was just as unconventional: Bulgaria, as defending champions, were required to face a 'challenger', drawn at random to try to capture the trophy in a one-off match on Bulgarian soil.

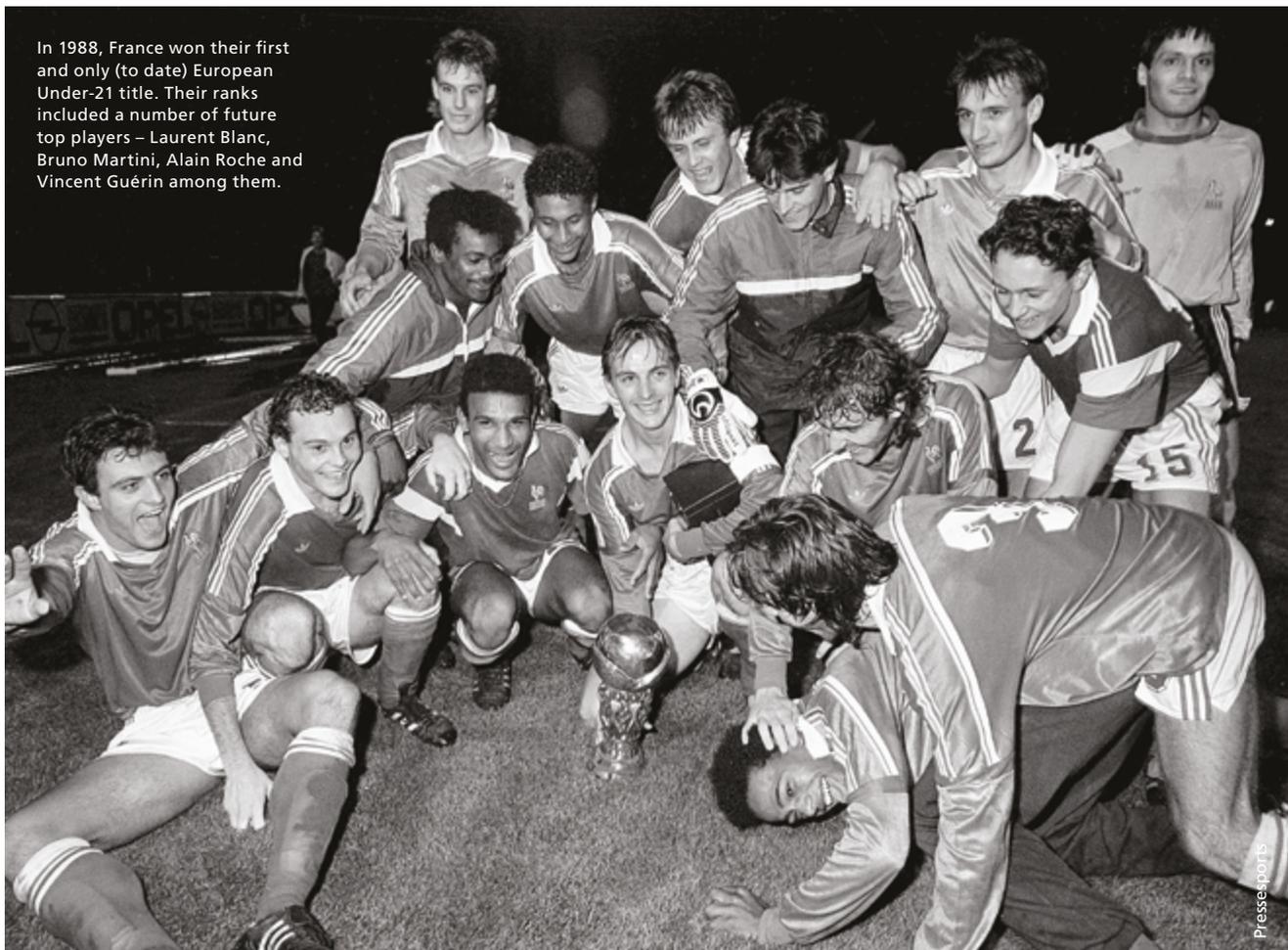
More common in boxing and sailing than in football, this format enabled Bulgaria to retain the title three times, twice more in 1967 and once in 1968 by fending off Finland, Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands in quick succession. It was Yugoslavia who finally knocked the Bulgarians off their perch on 26 October 1968, before emulating their feat of successfully defending the title three times in 1969 and 1970, against Spain, Sweden and Greece. The match between Greece and Yugoslavia in Athens on 24 March 1970 marked the end of the Challenge Cup era because, at the 1969 conference of member association presidents in Switzerland, UEFA had decided to launch a biennial Under-23 competition with a more traditional format. The Competition for National Representative Under-23 Teams, as it was called, was played three times between 1972 and 1976, under the same format

each time: the 21 to 23 participating associations were divided into eight qualifying groups which, in principle and in an effort to overcome calendar issues, were identical to the senior World Cup or European Championship qualifying groups, with matches to be played on the same day or weekend. The eight group winners contested the quarter-finals on a home-and-away basis, while the semi-finals and final were also two-legged affairs. This Under-23 competition was won by Czechoslovakia (1972), Hungary (1974) and the Soviet Union (1976).

A lower age limit, but not for everyone

Dominated on the whole by Eastern European teams, the competition was very popular with spectators, and the finals always attracted crowds of over 15,000. Despite this popularity, the conference of UEFA presidents and general secretaries →

In 1988, France won their first and only (to date) European Under-21 title. Their ranks included a number of future top players – Laurent Blanc, Bruno Martini, Alain Roche and Vincent Guérin among them.



held in Marbella on 28 January 1976 resolved to make some minor changes and took a decision that marked the real birth of the competition as we know it today: by reducing the age limit to 21, it made the competition more accessible to players in the 18–21 age bracket, many of whom had previously seen their path blocked by 22- and 23-year-olds.

The inaugural Under-21 Competition was held between 1976 and 1978, keeping to a format similar to the one used for the previous three Under-23 competitions. Yugoslavia won that first Under-21 Competition at the end of a lengthy ten-match campaign that concluded with a two-legged victory over the German Democratic Republic. Interestingly, the rules at the time allowed each team to field two players over 21, which is why Yugoslavia's Vahid Halilhodžić was able to lift the Under-21 trophy at the age of 26!

Eastern European dominance continued in the second competition, with the Soviet Union beating the German Democratic Republic in the 1980 final. After its early upheavals, the competition settled down with a format that remained unchanged until 1992, although it was renamed as the European

Under-21 Championship for the 1986–88 edition in order to emphasise its importance and role as a stepping stone to the senior national team competitions. On the pitch, it was dominated by the major Western European nations, who won five of the six championships between 1982 and 1992. England started the trend by winning two consecutive titles, beating the Federal Republic of Germany in 1982 and Spain two years later. The Spaniards took their revenge in 1986, defeating Italy on penalty kicks in the final. France continued the West's dominance against Greece in 1988, before the Soviet Union won the subsequent edition, thrashing Yugoslavia in the 1990 final. Italy then began its love affair with the competition with victory over Sweden in 1992 – the year when the competition became the European qualifying competition for the Olympic football tournament. UEFA decided to amend the format after that by introducing a final tournament from 1994. The qualifying phase and two-legged quarter-finals remained, but the semi-finals and final were to be played as single matches in the same country in the same week – as long as one of the semi-finalists was willing to host the finals.

From 4 to 16

France hosted the first Under-21 final round in April 1994, when they were joined by Italy, Portugal and Spain. The format change did not stop Italy from retaining their title, beating the hosts on penalties in the semi-finals and Portugal in the final thanks to a golden goal by Pierluigi Orlandini. The Italians continued their stranglehold on the trophy in 1996, winning their third consecutive title and setting a record that still stands today.

UEFA introduced a mini-revolution for the 1996–98 competition by abolishing the two-legged quarter-finals, which had existed since the competition began, and incorporating the last eight into the final round. The qualification system was also revised: the group winners did not all automatically go through to the final round, two of them being left to negotiate a play-off round. In May 1998, Romania hosted the first eight-team final round with quarter-finals, semi-finals, the final and play-off matches. Spain beat Greece in the final. There was another change in format for the 1998–2000 competition, with all the group winners and the seven best runners-up having to contest play-off matches to determine the eight finalists.

Having missed the 1998 finals, Italy regained 'their' title in 2000 with an Andrea Pirlo brace in the final against the Czech Republic. Staged in Slovakia, this tournament was the first to consist of a group stage (two groups of four), a third-place play-off and a final. However, semi-finals were reinstated in 2002, when the Czechs took revenge by eliminating the Italians in the last four before beating France on penalties in the final.

The format introduced in 2002 (eight teams, two groups of four, semi-finals and final) continued to be used until 2015. The only change during that period, adopted in 2005, was that the event switched to odd years from 2007 to avoid clashing with European Football Championship final rounds and World Cups. As a result, a separate draw was held to form the qualifying groups – meaning they were no longer identical to the European Championship or World Cup qualifying groups – and the host country for the finals, who would qualify automatically, was appointed a long time in advance rather than at the end of the qualifying campaign. Italy (2004), the Netherlands (2006 and 2007), Germany (2009), Spain (2011 and 2013) and Sweden (2015) were all crowned champions before the final round was expanded again in 2017, when

Poland hosted the first 12-team final tournament, for which the finalists started out split into three groups of four. The group winners were joined in the semi-finals by the best runner-up (Germany), who, in this instance, sneaked through the semi-finals before beating Spain in the final. Meanwhile, the expansion of the final tournament also resulted in changes to the qualification format: all group winners now qualified, leaving the four best runners-up to contest play-offs. This format remains in place for one last time for the 2019 finals, which will be held in Italy and San Marino from 16 to 30 June. At its meeting on 6 February 2019, the UEFA Executive Committee decided to increase the number of finalists to 16 from the 2021 final tournament, which will be co-hosted by Hungary and Slovenia. The Executive Committee believes this new format will give more countries an opportunity to qualify for the finals of this elite competition, providing invaluable experience for promising young players. Such is the thinking behind this latest change to the format of a competition that has been constantly reinventing itself for more than half a century in order to best meet the needs of the member associations and their young players. ⚽



With five titles to their name, the last won in 2004, Italy are currently the most successful nation at European Under-21 level.



THE 2019 EDITION

Stadiums

Stadio Renato Dall'Ara, Bologna
Stadio Città del Tricolore,
 Reggio Emilia
Stadio Dino Manuzzi, Cesena
Stadio Nereo Rocco, Trieste
Stadio Friuli, Udine
San Marino Stadium, Serravalle

Groups

Group A:
 Italy, Spain,
 Poland, Belgium

Group B:
 Germany, Denmark,
 Serbia, Austria

Group C:
 England, France,
 Romania, Croatia

Calendar

Group A: 16, 19, 22 June

Group B: 17, 20, 23 June

Group C: 18, 21, 24 June

Semi-finals: 27 June

Final: 30 June

Format

The three group winners and the best runner-up qualify for the semi-finals.

Olympic tournament

This final round will also act as the qualifying competition for the 2020 Olympic football tournament in Japan. All four semi-finalists will qualify, unless England are among them (the IOC only recognises Great Britain), in which case a play-off match will determine the fourth European participant.



Italy made a perfect start to their EURO 2020 qualifying campaign with a 2-0 win in Finland. Nicolò Barella (No18), one of the rising new generation, opened the scoring.



ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Back on centre stage thanks to some impressive results at youth level, Italy is beginning to reap the rewards of the development strategy it launched in 2010 – a timely revival of fortunes as the country prepares to co-host this year's European Under-21 Championship finals and several EURO 2020 matches.



It often takes a pivotal moment to bring about fundamental change. Four years after being crowned world champions for the fourth time, Italy were eliminated in the first round of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. "Being knocked out in the first round opened our eyes to the fact that the 2006 world champions were getting older. Together, former Italian Football Association president Giancarlo Abete and Demetrio Albertini re-established Club Italia [a body initially set up in 2002 to bring together and coordinate all Italian national teams] specifically with the aim of bringing through a new generation of Italian world champions to follow in the footsteps of the 2006 winners," explains Maurizio Viscidi, current Italian FA (FIGC) national youth teams coordinator. Arrigo Sacchi, the legendary former coach of AC Milan and

the Italian national team, was brought in as youth teams coordinator to lead the transition. "I was Sacchi's deputy," says Viscidi, "and we spent the first year observing and evaluating the available talent. The results were not good enough, since the Under-21s, Under-19s and Under-17s all failed to qualify for the final stages of their respective European championships. At the end of that year, we changed all the coaches and reorganised the talent scouting section, which had not been working as it should. These were our first two priorities: to improve the coaches and the scouts."

The Sacchi method

Sacchi quickly imposed his style and methods on the Italian national team model, with more ball work in training, a focus on predefined attacking →



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“It may seem strange, because football is the most inclusive sport of them all, but it is noticeable that more and more youngsters are giving up sport altogether at the age of 17 or 18. Keeping young players interested is therefore a crucial part of the education of future coaches.”

Demetrio Albertini
President of the national technical sector

strategies, and a compulsory 4-4-2 for all teams. “It’s a bit different now, in the sense that the system of play is no longer obligatory. Each coach can adapt the system depending on the quality of the players at their disposal.” Rather than just one simple idea, it was a whole new mindset that swept across the national technical centre at Coverciano, a 15-minute drive from Florence. Demetrio Albertini, AC Milan star of the early 1990s and now president of the national technical sector (research and education), takes up the story: “The coaches we let go were not lacking in ability. They were simply not used to working as a team or thinking about anything other than their own team and their own methodology. They found it difficult to accept our way of working.” Clearly, the rules for the 30,000 other coaches across the country are less restrictive than those that apply at national team level: “The idea is not to tell them what to do, but to equip them with as many tools as possible, at every level,” says Albertini. “For example, young people have changed, the distractions are different from what they used to be, and coaches also need to adapt. There is more to life than football. It may seem strange, because football is the most inclusive sport of them all, but it is noticeable that more and more youngsters are giving up sport altogether at the age of 17 or 18. Keeping young players interested is therefore a crucial part of the education of future coaches.” However, Albertini can comfort himself with the knowledge that many Italian youngsters are still very much in love with the beautiful game.



Gianluigi Donnarumma (here playing against Portugal in the UEFA Nations League) is a fine example of the gifted young players coming through the ranks in Italy. Aged just 20, the Milan goalkeeper is playing in his fourth Serie A season and has already been capped 12 times.

“There is no point moving from the Primavera to Serie A if you’re not going to play. Gianluca Mancini decided to go to Perugia in Serie B before a transitional year at Atalanta, where he is now a first-team regular.”

Luigi Di Biagio
Under-21 national team coach



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A EURO and the Under-21s

Recent results achieved by Italian national youth teams prove that the future looks bright: after the Under-19 side reached the European Under-19 Championship final twice in three years (2016 and 2018), the Under-17s followed in their footsteps in their own European competition last year. Although winning is the ultimate goal, the signs are nonetheless encouraging: “We have had some successful campaigns. You can’t win all the time, but you need a winning mentality. If you can’t quite get over the line, you shake your opponent’s hand with your head held high, get back to work and try again next time. Winning, or trying to win, must always be the objective,” says Luigi Di Biagio, Under-21 national team coach since 2013. “We can already see progress. Today, we are not only playing against the big nations at youth level on a regular basis, we are also beating them more and more often,” says Di Biagio, who is preparing his team for the European Under-21 Championship finals to be played on home soil and in San Marino in June. The missing link, as far as Di Biagio is concerned, is the lack of game time that young players clock up throughout the season. “Ultimately, we only have the players a few times a month, at the most. They spend the rest of the time with their clubs. We try to make sure young Italians get more time on the pitch, but we are lagging behind other countries in this respect. Of course, we have to be pleased when we see our young players appearing in Serie A, but other countries are ahead of the game. Some are already playing in the Champions League at that age. We are

still a long way behind, but we’re in a better place now than we were a few years ago.” From a more positive perspective, the Rome-born Under-21 coach is quick to mention a number of players who have set an example for others to follow. Current Atalanta BC defender Gianluca Mancini is a case in point: “There is no point moving from the Primavera [the Italian national youth league] to Serie A if you’re not going to play. Mancini decided to go to Perugia in Serie B before a transitional year at Atalanta, where he is now a first-team regular. The way he trains, thinks and communicates with everyone around him makes him a great role model.”

Winning an Under-21 title is always a huge milestone in any young player’s career, as Demetrio Albertini knows from personal experience. In 1992, having already established himself in the AC Milan side, the former defensive midfielder helped Italy to their first European Under-21 Championship title. It remains an unforgettable moment, even almost 30 years later: “What, is it already 27 years ago? The competition was a bit different then because it was held in two phases over a two-year period. In the final against Sweden, I missed the first leg in Ferrara, but I played in the return [in Växjö]. It was the first time Italy had won the trophy. Even though I had already made my debut for the senior national team, it was important to win this type of competition. Because that is what sport is all about. When you start a match or a competition, the objective is to finish as the winner. Winning also gives you confidence in your ability to win again in the future.” →



Three questions for ... Gabriele Gravina, FIGC president

How important is the European Under-21 Championship final tournament that Italy is co-hosting in June?

It is a very important event, a real test of our association's responsiveness. For me personally, it also has a tinge of nostalgia because I was the FIGC delegate the last time Italy won the title in 2004.

What are your objectives on the pitch?

We have set our goals high, for many different reasons. First, because the tournament is being played on home soil, where traditionally we have always achieved excellent results. Second, because we have a very strong team. It's a trophy that has eluded us for too long now, although the silverware is not all that is at stake, since places at the next Olympic Games are also up for grabs.

What would a home victory mean?

Winning at home is a great way of getting the public excited. When the team wins, the players, the association, the coaches and the supporters also win. The whole Italian nation wins. It is up to us to do everything we can to ensure that the Italian people, who are uncertain about the future, can find in sport and football the excitement they need to enjoy a more optimistic life.

Just like Albertini all those years ago, a number of current Italian Under-21 players have already broken into the full senior squad, including Gianluigi Donnarumma (AC Milan), Nicolò Barella (Cagliari Calcio), Federico Chiesa (ACF Fiorentina), Moise Kean (Juventus) and Nicolò Zaniolo (AS Roma). This is not a problem for Di Biagio, who

refuses to use this as an excuse for underperformance: "Since we have known them for years, it's not a problem. Obviously, any coach would like to work with them for as long as possible, but it's the same for every country. We're not interested in making excuses. Our aim is to prepare the best possible team to win." The message is clear.

For women's football, the future is now

Behind the scenes, this year's European Under-21 Championship final tournament will also be a test for the Italian FA, not only because it has not staged a UEFA final tournament of any kind since the Under-17 finals in 2005, but also with a view to the EURO 2020 matches that it will be hosting. "The association needs to be able to show that it can step up to the plate in all respects, in order to provide assurances for next year," says the FIGC president, Gabriele Gravina. "We are getting ready to host three group matches and a quarter-final in Rome in 2020, and we need to live up to the standards expected." As well as the European Under-21 Championship finals from 16 to 30 June, the Women's World Cup in France is high on the FIGC's agenda. Having previously been somewhat neglected, the women's game in Italy has been booming in recent seasons and



Martina Rosucci playing for Italy against Romania in the qualifiers for the 2019 Women's World Cup. It will be Italy's third Women's World Cup finals and their first since 1999.



is now an integral part of the association's development programme. Milena Bertolini, former player and current women's national team coach, welcomes these changes: "It's mainly in structural terms that women's football has been developing. Twenty years ago, the clubs had fewer financial resources and there was a shortage of technical and medical staff. With all due respect, it was a different world compared with what we have been experiencing in the last three or four years. In the 1990s, because football had such a strong tradition and an important place in our country, Italy was a great [football] nation. In the 2000s, women's football was not a priority here and, unlike in other countries, it did not develop at all. It is only recently that the clubs have had the resources to invest in their women's teams and that women have been able to play on a full-time basis. The days when they had to train in the evening after work are over. They now have all the support staff and facilities they need to develop properly."

The burgeoning interest of professional clubs in the women's game is illustrated by the fact that a recent match between Juventus and ACF Fiorentina at the Juventus Stadium in Turin drew a crowd of 40,000, a record for a women's match in Italy, and by the decision to stage the domestic cup final at Parma FC's Ennio Tardini stadium at the end of April. However, for Milena Bertolini, who dreams that women's football will one day be seen as a mainstream sport, the creation of a pantheon of great female players is just as important: "Playing at venues like that strengthens the status of women's football in Italy, especially in the eyes of young girls."

THE FIGURE

1 356 749

The number of registered FIGC members in 2016/17, including just over **32 000** referees

When I played, I only had male role models. Nowadays, with female role models to look up to, girls can imagine a future as a professional footballer. They can believe their dream is achievable." Marco Brunelli, CEO of the Italian FA, hopes that the Women's World Cup in June will encourage more Italian girls to take up football: "We need this to happen because it's clear that, having neglected it in the past, we must get the women's game well and truly off the ground. Women's football is becoming more structured and an event such as the World Cup should attract more young girls to take up the game. Women's football in Italy is attracting the right kind of attention. More and more Serie A clubs are setting up women's teams and interest among broadcasters is growing. Ten years ago, maybe less, this seemed impossible, which is why women's football is taking off at all levels." Among the many other projects and reforms that Gabriele Gravina and Marco Brunelli – who have only been at the helm of the FIGC for a few months – plan to carry out in the near future, the CEO says that: "One idea that is close to my heart, for example, is the creation of a legends' team, enabling every player who has ever worn the blue jersey at least once to do so again and become an ambassador for Italian football." Gabriele Gravina adds: "The main objective at the moment is to make people feel excited and positive about Italian football again. For various reasons, both on and off the pitch, the game has been cast in a negative light in recent years. It's now up to us to show everyone that Italian football is credible and that its growth is sustainable. These are our priorities." 🌍

“Women’s football in Italy is attracting the right kind of attention. More and more Serie A clubs are setting up women’s teams and interest among broadcasters is growing. Ten years ago, maybe less, this seemed impossible, which is why women’s football is taking off at all levels”

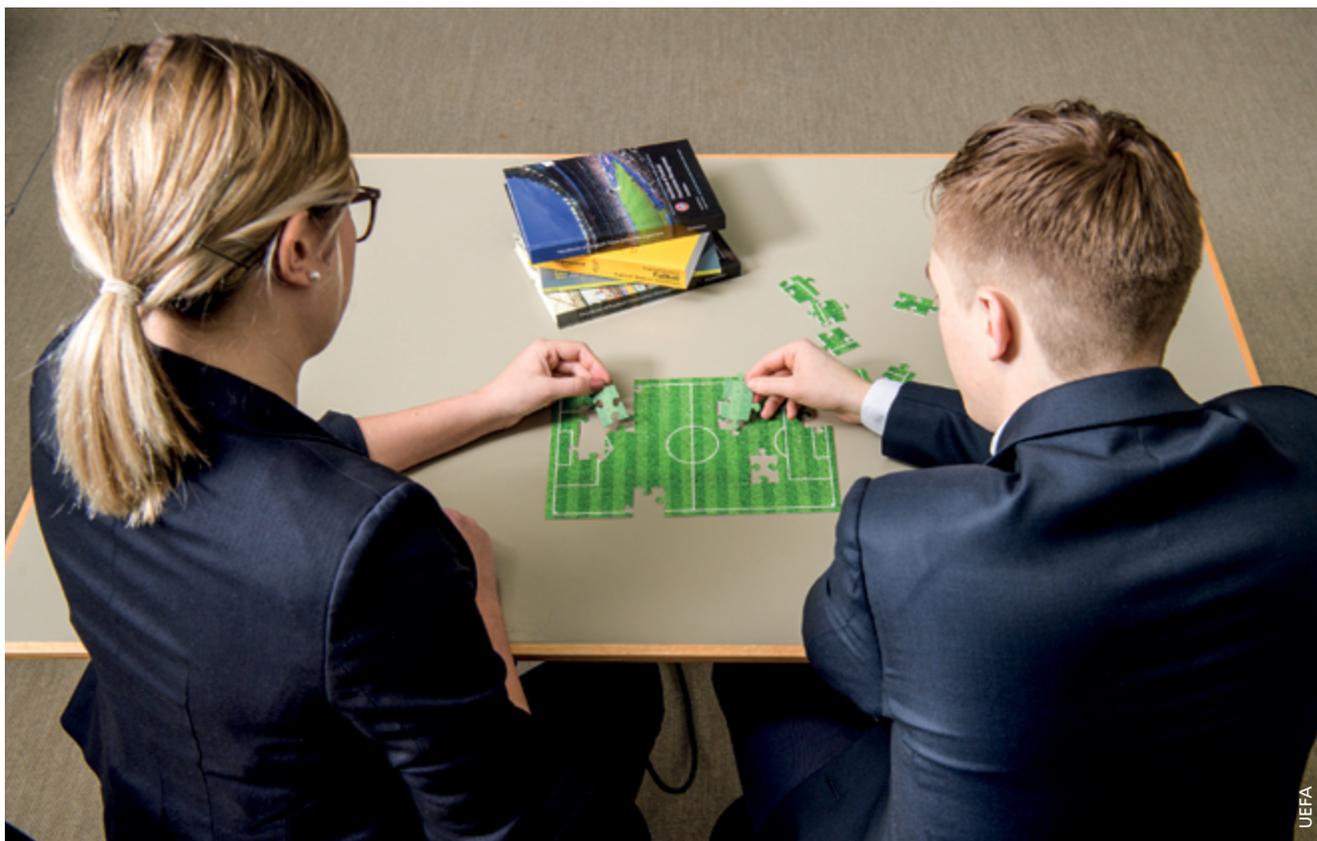
Milena Bertolini,
Women's national team coach



Getty Images

THE UEFA ACADEMY – A COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

UEFA has officially launched the UEFA Academy, bringing together all the organisation’s educational initiatives under one overarching brand with the aim of helping to develop people working in football.



Managing and organising modern-day football is a challenging task. The complex infrastructures and mechanisms require professional and qualified people to grow and lead the game throughout Europe.

UEFA’s role is to promote, protect and develop football, with the organisation caring deeply about the long-term well-being of the sport in Europe. Part of UEFA’s mission is to ensure that the game is nurtured across the continent, which includes guiding and educating people who work in football at all levels.

“In connection with UEFA’s core mission

of promoting, protecting and developing the game, the UEFA Academy will make sure that, no matter where they are in their careers, everyone working in football has the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge they need to continuously elevate the game,” said the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin.

Over the past decade, UEFA has shown a strong commitment to championing the values of education. With the number of education programmes continuing to rise, these learning initiatives have now been combined under the umbrella of the recently unveiled UEFA Academy. This also

makes it easier for potential applicants to find the course that is right for them, while the programme now has its own dedicated website.

What does the UEFA Academy offer?

More than 1,000 people have already graduated from UEFA’s various educational programmes, including graduates from all 55 UEFA member associations, many of whom have advanced their careers as a result.

At present, UEFA offers 15 courses, six of which lead to an academic certificate.

The courses cater for a diverse audience, from former footballers to those working in football bodies around the continent and beyond, and including people wanting to specialise in particular disciplines such as sports law or medicine.

Football may be a beautifully simple game, but the organisation of the sport has become a very complex industry, with people involved in all kinds of different specialities. Therefore, UEFA considers it vitally important to provide educational programmes for people in activities as diverse as football competition management or dealing with medical and legal aspects within the game.

Outside the specific coach and referee programmes managed by UEFA's specialised units, the UEFA Academy proposes development opportunities for everyone working in the football industry.

Five pillars

The UEFA Academy is split into five main pillars of learning:

Management programmes

UEFA offers three courses: the UEFA Certificate in Football Management, the UEFA Diploma in Football Leadership and Management, and the Executive Master in Sport Governance (MESGO). These courses cater for people at different stages of their careers and afford excellent insights into how the footballing landscape operates.

Programmes for specialists

These programmes are suitable for specialists in law, medicine, corporate (football) social responsibility and events. They give professionals the chance to enhance their careers within their respective areas.

Programmes for players

These programmes give players a route into a second career in football and provide them with recommendations and advice in matters such as financial management. The soon-to-be-launched UEFA for Players will assist players during their careers on a whole range of different topics, from dealing with the media to avoiding the dangers of match-fixing.

Knowledge sharing and research

The UEFA Research Grant Programme allows researchers and scientists to apply for grants and enables UEFA member associations to access best practices in a vast number of areas through the UEFA PLAY platform.



On-demand education

The UEFA Academy listens to the needs of football stakeholders and, upon request, can develop tailor-made programmes. The academy has developed a practical-oriented programme for the general secretaries of the Confederation of African Football as part of the UEFA Assist programme.

Anyone can join

Finding a path into football administration can be a daunting task. However, the UEFA Academy is now opening its doors to members of the general public, who

will be able to enrol on an open edition of the UEFA Certificate in Football Management, considered a reference in the football industry. UEFA member association staff will still be able to enrol on the traditional programme, which boasts more than 800 graduates to date.

The open edition is designed for people working in or in connection with the football industry, but who would not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in the course because they do not work at a national football association. The nine-month course, which is based on a blended learning concept, involves face-to-face seminars, online learning modules and written assignments. Participants acquire a comprehensive understanding of the football industry from all angles, as well as having the opportunity to strengthen their managerial skills. The open edition is accessible to participants who want to carry on working full-time as it is adapted to their needs. The deadline for submissions is 28 April.

Meanwhile, UEFA will continue to monitor the changing climate of European football. It is imperative for the UEFA Academy to remain innovative and for the programmes to be constantly updated to meet changing needs and expectations.

By ensuring that people involved in football are given opportunities to learn and expand their understanding of the industry, the UEFA Academy aims to help the game remain the world's number one sport. 🌐



For more information about the UEFA Academy and the courses it has to offer, visit the UEFA Academy website: uefaacademy.com.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Planning is never glamorous, but it provides the solid foundations needed for the future, to allow a national football association to flourish. That is why strategic planning sits right at the heart of the UEFA GROW programme.

The path towards modernisation can be a daunting prospect in any business, and football is no exception. A wrong turn can undo months of good work, while day-to-day issues often hinder the ability to focus on strategic goals. All organisations therefore benefit from having a long-term strategy.

The benefits of creating a strategy are numerous. It provides a clear, coordinated and prioritised focus and direction for everyone involved in the organisation as well as for external stakeholders. Since it launched in 2015, this has been the first step undertaken by UEFA GROW – a central

business development programme that helps UEFA's 55 member associations to grow the game around Europe in a systematic and strategic manner.

Strategic planning sits at the very heart of UEFA GROW, which supports national associations in developing a strategic plan, painting a clear picture of where the association is going and defining clear and strategic long-term objectives.

All national associations have goals. These can be to develop football in their country or to ensure that the future of the national team remains healthy. However, each association will have its own specific

challenges and be at different stages of development. Some may be more advanced, while others may be struggling to implement a plan in order to understand where their development priorities lie.

UEFA GROW is able to offer tailor-made consultation services to suit any association, regardless of their level of development or the resources they have at their disposal, understanding that each national association is different.

Grassroots football in Poland is feeling the benefits of the PZPN's successful strategic plan.



PZPN

How the process works

Many of UEFA GROW's pillars are intrinsically linked and strategic planning is the glue that binds everything together. For example, a national association may have increasing revenues as one of its strategic priorities.

However, to achieve this effectively, the association may also need to look carefully at other areas such as branding, communication, engagement and participation because all these areas are strongly connected and may influence commercial value. Having a strategic plan ties all the different elements together.

On joining UEFA GROW in early 2016, the Polish Football Association (PZPN) aimed to boost its revenue programme. It took the strategic decision to invest in its national team brand, which included building and improving experiences for fans and corporate customers. That move helped to drive ticket sales and hospitality revenue, thus achieving the association's goal.

However, the benefits have run even deeper. Increased viewing figures have made the PZPN more attractive to sponsors, while grassroots football has now been integrated more directly into its revenue programme.

"UEFA GROW has been a fantastic tool for the Polish Football Association," says the PZPN's general secretary, Maciej Sawicki. "The revenue strategy created as part of the programme has contributed considerably to an increase in the PZPN's income. Without funding, it wouldn't have been possible to implement so many excellent projects that are helping to develop football in Poland."

Targeting strategic goals

Last year, the Austrian Football Association (ÖFB) set out to build its first strategic plan with the help of UEFA GROW. The association's central aim was to connect key stakeholders, such as the Austrian Bundesliga and the regional associations, with the aim of trying to maximise the success of the country's national teams in the future.

The ÖFB's strategy targeted three key points – continuing to develop football in Austria, increasing engagement with the national teams and improving collaboration with the association's partners and stakeholders.

Developing grassroots football is also an important area for the ÖFB; however, according to the organisation's general

secretary, Thomas Hollerer, it will not be able to achieve this goal without significant involvement by the regional associations. This underlines the importance of implementing a strategic plan, so that everyone involved in the development of football in the country is striving to reach the same goal.

"Football is the biggest grassroots sport in Austria, but there is currently no coordinated strategy as regards how the sport cannot just maintain this position but also continue to develop," Hollerer said. "The number of registered players in Austria has stagnated. There has always been a strong interest in men's football, but the women's game is just beginning to take off. We must ensure that we support them, but at the same time we must not neglect the men's game."

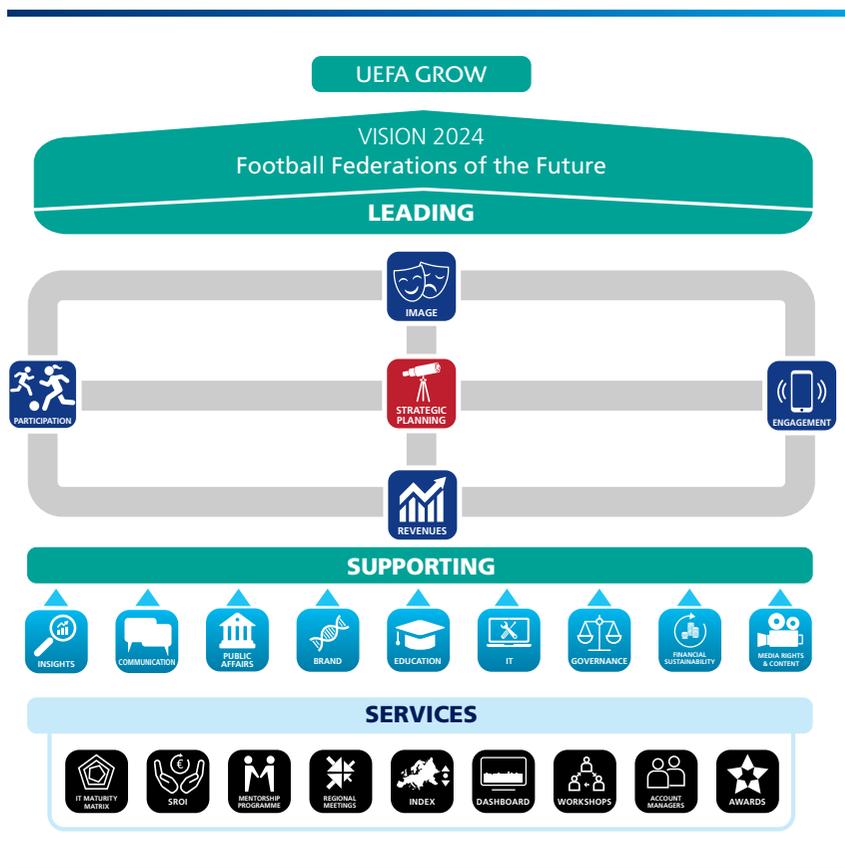
The Cyprus Football Association (CFA) is currently in the process of introducing its first strategic plan in partnership with UEFA GROW. While focusing on clear goals, such as increasing participation so that at least 3% of the population are playing football

by 2024 and building the country's first-ever training centre, the association is also looking to create a strategic vision for everyone working in the CFA, so that everyone has clear idea of its goals.

The five-year strategic plan, which started this year and runs until 2024, is a major stepping stone not only for the CFA, but also for the development of football in the country.

"Forming the CFA strategic plan 2019–24 has been a vital decision. We are pleased to be cooperating with the best experts from the UEFA GROW programme, gaining along the way all the expertise and knowledge of the best people across Europe in this area," said the CFA president, George Koumas.

"We know that implementing these strategic goals will be challenging, but it is imperative we do so to ensure that the sport in Cyprus remains as healthy as possible. Undeniably, this project has been a stepping stone for the Cyprus Football Association and football in Cyprus in general."



BEAUTIFUL BAKU

While a relative newcomer to the world of hosting international sporting events, Baku has quickly established itself as a popular host city with a lot to offer.

Baku is currently busy preparing to host the UEFA Europa League final and, at the same time, is getting ready to serve as one of the 12 host cities for EURO 2020. The general secretary of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA), Elkhan Mammadov, describes the association's plans for the EURO, why Baku is a great destination for football fans, and the legacy that is being built.

"We built a strategy so that Baku would become a sporting hub in the future, and slowly we are getting there. Baku will become a sporting hub," he says, recognising the commitment shown by

the association and local stakeholders, who are already driving to make the EURO a success in Baku.

So, what attracted the City of Winds – as Baku is known because of the sweeping gusts from the Caspian Sea – to becoming a EURO host? The city's pedigree in staging major events is growing, and shaping football in Azerbaijan for years to come is the AFFA's motivation.

"The legacy will be having more people to play football, to grow the game," Mammadov says. "Football is a sport, a sport that will never stop growing. Moreover, in the last few years, its popularity has increased remarkably.

Yes, there are other sports as well, and interest in them has also increased. However, football has always been the most popular sport of them all.

"For us, it is important to maintain the level of interest in football in the country and in the region as well. The legacy for us will be more kids playing football, more kids going outside and leaving their computers behind and playing football, therefore, encouraging a healthier lifestyle and building a healthier nation."

In perfect harmony

The largest city on the coast of the Caspian Sea, Baku is the lowest-lying capital in the world, at 28 metres below sea level. Baku is also home to the Baku Olympic Stadium, which will host three group matches plus a quarter-final at EURO 2020.

A city that has benefitted from rapid expansion in recent years, Baku also boasts a rich historical heritage, including Icheri Sheher, the old town, home to various cultural sites and the grand 15th-century Shirvanshahs Palace. Keen to showcase the impressive capital, Mammadov is looking forward to welcoming fans from across Europe, and beyond.





The presidents and general secretaries of UEFA and the AFFA at the unveiling of the host city logo in Baku.

“The legacy for us will be more kids playing football, more kids going outside and leaving their computers behind and playing football, therefore, encouraging a healthier lifestyle and building a healthier nation.”

Elkhan Mammadov
AFFA general secretary

“Baku has the advantage of being a city of harmony, with both a historic part which is very interesting and attractive for sightseeing, and also a modern part with different art exhibitions as well as different modern attractions,” he says. “Moreover, Baku is a sporting hub, with different sporting activities. So, tourists can enjoy three major sides of the city during their stay in Baku. All these sites are very close to each other, some even within walking distance.

Mammadov also explains how the buzz of the EURO will land in Baku long before the matches begin. “We want to build the fan zones before the event starts. So, maybe 30 days before the event, the fan zones will already be open. Volunteers, fans and tourists will be able to come and feel part of the event, including tourists who are not there for the matches. This is very important. And I think this will create a kind of competition among the fans as well because the 12 host cities will have their own fans.

“Prior to the event, we are planning to have different EURO-related competitions and there will be different sporting activities, not only football. Additional entertainment programmes will be arranged closer to the date. We are planning to have a calendar of events to promote EURO 2020 and the other host cities and, of course, to connect with the fans in the other 11 cities.”

Mammadov’s message to fans is: “Simply enjoy the EURO as much as possible. The event will last 30 days. Take the opportunity to take 30 days off, take a holiday and enjoy all 12 host cities.” 🌟

Baku

Situated on the shores of the Caspian Sea, Baku is the most easterly of the EURO 2020 host cities and will leave a striking impression when it welcomes the EURO for the first time. Baku is the capital of Azerbaijan, also known as the Land of Fire, and the natural gas fires burning on the hillside of the nearby Yanar Dag mountain are certainly a sight to behold. The Flame Towers skyscrapers in the city centre echo this natural phenomenon, lending a modern face to an ancient city. New too is the Baku Olympic Stadium that opened in 2015, has already staged Qarabağ FK’s UEFA Champions League group matches and will stage the UEFA Europa League final this season.

An unmissable party

In addition to promoting regional engagement and supporting fan mobility, Mammadov wants to see EURO 2020 leave a profound and lasting impact on the people of Baku. “For 2020, we are building a story of the EURO in general in Baku, and in neighbouring countries,” Mammadov adds. “Because we want the whole region to feel the thrill of EURO 2020. There will be different exciting activities organised in the city and we are going to extend the duration of the fan zone experience, so people can come and enjoy themselves there, and then go to the matches to support their teams.”



Baku Olympic Stadium
Capacity: 69,000

MATCHES

- 13 June: Group A match
- 17 June: Group A match
- 21 June: Group A match
- 4 July: Quarter-final



THE MODERN AGE

Budapest plans to bring a touch of nostalgic charm to its sophisticated new stadium as it prepares to host EURO 2020.

With a new stadium set to open its turnstiles and famous Hungarian player Zoltán Gera on board as a host city ambassador, Budapest is already getting the party started to welcome EURO 2020. The Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ) president, Sándor Csányi, shares the federation's plans to transform the football landscape in Budapest next summer, while celebrating fond memories.

One of the biggest attractions for both visiting and local fans will be the opening of the new, 68,000-capacity facility. The Ferenc Puskás Stadium is currently under construction on the same site that was home to the original Népstadion (People's Stadium) from 1953 until its closure in 2016.

Sándor Csányi underlines the importance of retaining the character and nostalgic charm of the old stadium, while moving into a new era: "The [old] Puskás stadium is very important for us as it served Hungarian football for more than 40 years. It even held double derbies where around 100,000 fans were present. Unfortunately, it had to be demolished due to technical issues, but to replace it we are building a large stadium for some 68,000 spectators with up-to-date technology and an excellent pitch. For the outside, we tried to preserve the characteristics of the old stadium, with the columns and pillars that used to be there.

"I hope it will be a joy not only to play in the new stadium, but to be there as a spectator as well. We were really nervous

about whether the stadium would be ready on time, but now I can comfortably say that it will be ready on schedule to host competitions at the appropriate level and quality."

Qualification is key

On the field, Hungary are aiming to qualify for the final tournament, which Sándor Csányi recognises is no easy task for head coach Marco Rossi and his team. "Obviously, we really want to be there in 2020 at the EURO, but all the European teams feel the same way," the MLSZ president says. "Everyone must do all they can to get there. I am also sure that Marco Rossi and his team will do their best to get there. Whether that will be enough, how lucky we are and how well our opponents play will depend on many things. I don't think I can't say that we will definitely be there, but I wouldn't say that there is no chance for us. It is fifty-fifty."

Meanwhile, Hungary's adventures at EURO 2016 in France three years ago are still prominent in the memory of Csányi. "For me, it was one of the greatest experiences of my life to see those matches, mainly because we had arrived there without a chance," he says. "However, I really didn't want us to lose our first match, and we didn't; we won (2-0 v Austria). In the second match, we drew



The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, with the mayor of Budapest, István Tarlós (left), and the MLSZ president, Sándor Csányi (right).

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"If the Hungarian team won in Budapest, at the Puskás stadium, it would be a huge celebration for the Hungarian nation and for the people of Budapest."

Sándor Csányi
MLSZ president



Budapest

iStock

(1-1 with Iceland) and in the third, we drew 3-3 against Portugal, who went on to become European champions.”

The euphoria of Hungary’s progression to the round of 16 is something Csányi wants to see repeated, especially when dreaming of playing on home soil at EURO 2020. “It was a fantastic experience, and it was fantastic to see how happy the Hungarian people, the Hungarian fans were with this victory. In Marseille (for the second group match), there were nearly 40,000 Hungarian fans supporting the team, and at the same time in Budapest, with the help of various screens, thousands upon thousands of people were watching the match, and after the qualification [reaching the round of 16], they poured onto the streets to celebrate. Well, I can imagine what would happen in Budapest if the Hungarian team won in Budapest, at the Puskás stadium. It would be a huge celebration for the Hungarian nation and for the people of Budapest.”

Giving back to Budapest

Sándor Csányi regards this unique EURO format as an opportunity to give something back to Budapest, as well as to build a legacy for football throughout Hungary. Describing it as recognition for the work the federation has carried out to date, the MLSZ president also believes there are further

Widely considered as one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, the Hungarian capital owes its name to the merger of Buda and Óbuda, on the west bank of the Danube, with Pest on the east. The river continues to serve as an important waterway in a city boasting around 80 geothermal springs and teeming with Gothic, baroque, neoclassical and art nouveau delights – to name just a few of the architectural styles on show. Football has left its mark as well, with Budapest producing many of the Magical Magyars from Hungary’s heyday in the 1950s, including Ferenc Puskás. Due to open next year on the site of the old Ferenc Puskás Stadium, the UEFA EURO 2020 venue will again immortalise the legendary Budapesti Honvéd and Real Madrid forward.

MATCHES

16 June: Group F match
20 June: Group F match
24 June: Group F match
28 June: Round of 16 match



Ferenc Puskás Stadium
Capacity: 68,000

MLSZ

opportunities for development. “I think that every host city in this EURO can take this as a sign of appreciation. In the past few years, we have been doing a lot to develop the infrastructure of Hungarian football. We have made serious efforts in grassroots football, at youth level and in women’s football. We’ve built some 1,100 football pitches or more and redeveloped about 1,800 pitches. First and second-division teams got new stadiums or the old ones were redeveloped. We’ve also multiplied the number of registered footballers in Hungary:

the current total number is three times more than ten years ago.”

“Our football is evolving. Our women’s and men’s Under-17 and Under-19 national teams have qualified for the elite rounds in their respective UEFA competitions, which didn’t happen very often before. And we were successful in the EURO 2016 qualifiers and in the finals too. This is an acknowledgement also for this work. I think this EURO can give us a new boost for the development of Hungarian football and will attract even more kids into the stadiums.” 🇮🇪

FRANCK RAVIOT

'KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON EVERYTHING, ALL OF THE TIME'

France's national team goalkeeper coach since 2010, 45-year old Franck Raviot loves his job. As the UEFA EURO 2020 qualifiers begin, he explains his way of working and sets out his vision of the role of national team goalkeeper.

How did you become a goalkeeper coach?

I finished my professional playing career in 1988, when I was 25. I was always the understudy [at RC Lens and FC Martigues] because the number one positions were all taken. Becoming a coach or trainer is not a trivial undertaking. It's something you have within you. As a player, I always wanted to understand what was going on and to know why I was doing a particular exercise or session, whether it was just with the other goalkeepers or with the whole squad. Aimé Jacquet, who had just become the national technical director after lifting the World Cup, advised me to get my coaching qualifications so I could look after the young goalkeepers at the Clairefontaine national football centre. That is where I first met Alphonse Areola. I was then put in charge of the Under-21 goalkeepers, which is when I worked with Hugo Lloris and Steve Mandanda for the first time.

Did any specific goalkeeper inspire you when you were younger?

Yes, two in particular: the first, as far as I was concerned, was a model of level-headedness, simplicity and efficiency. When he stretched out his arms ... That was Rinat Dasaev, the USSR goalkeeper. And in France, it was Bruno Martini, because he had everything: he kept things simple and always knew exactly what to do. He was a model professional because he was a real perfectionist. I was fortunate to meet this great technician when I first arrived at the national football centre and to work alongside him for more than ten years.

How did you train to be a coach?

I did my coaching qualifications very early on because a coach is, above all, a coach in the broad and noble sense of the word, and not just a goalkeeper coach. During my playing career, I had already started attending various coaching courses and gaining qualifications. And one of the conditions when I started working at the national football centre some 20 years ago was that I should continue my own education and gain further qualifications. I helped Bruno Martini set up the elite goalkeeper coach diploma in France, a line of work that I am continuing to pursue as part of my role at the centre. In February, the inaugural UEFA Goalkeeper A diploma course took place here at Clairefontaine, with eight participants.

Apart from by attending courses, how do you try to improve as a coach?

You can learn from anything, at any time, and from anyone. I therefore keep a very close eye on what's going on in the football world, as well as learning from things that might be happening elsewhere. I had the pleasure of meeting Thierry Omeyer [former goalkeeper for the French handball team, five-time world champion and double Olympic gold medallist]. Occasions like that are always rewarding because, if you want your goalkeeper to be a good all-rounder and a proper athlete, you sometimes have to look further afield ... In 2011, during a French national team get-together, Thierry Omeyer came to share his experiences with the goalkeepers. He spent a day experiencing what our world was like.

Did you put him in goal?

Yes, he took part in the training exercises we had planned for the day, but the skill set is different. What we have in common with handball goalkeepers lies in the mental side of the game, anything directly linked to the psychological dimension. The physical skills required are different, though, because in handball, the ball comes from a height, whereas in football it comes from ground level.

What are the main differences between your work and that of a club goalkeeper coach?

The main difference is the day-to-day management. With the national team, we don't have our goalkeeper every day, but only during international breaks, when we play one or two matches, sometimes more. The way we manage the goalkeeper is therefore different.

What do you do to maintain that link?

You have to know how to be present without being overbearing. You have to strike the right balance. Different goalkeepers have different needs. And all goalkeepers have their own daily routines and their own club coaches, whose work you have to respect. It seems logical and useful to establish and maintain contact with my club-based counterparts. A national team goalkeeper coach always keeps a close eye, seeking the right balance not only during team get-togethers, but at other times as well. Keeping your eyes open means learning as much as you can about your goalkeeper, whether by speaking to them directly on the phone, exchanging text messages →



or meeting up in person, because as well as WhatsApp messages and phone calls, face-to-face contact is essential.

How many times a season do you visit Hugo Lloris at his club, for example?

It varies a lot. In principle, I visit the four or five goalkeepers who have been selected or are in contention during the weeks leading up to each get-together. But I don't just visit the ones who are doing well. It's important to monitor all their performances and to be especially supportive when they are going through a tricky patch.

Is Didier Deschamps involved in planning your training sessions or are you completely independent?

It's a luxury and a privilege to have the trust of the national team coach because it means he gives us complete freedom in our work and what we do. However, we are constantly talking and sharing ideas with each other. And during group

sessions, of course, I have to provide whatever Didier wants as far as the goalkeepers are concerned. I work closely with Didier, so when I plan our goalkeeper sessions, I have to take into account what he will be doing with the group as a whole. And, in the same way, we have to plan for certain scenarios that are directly linked to our opponents' style of play. Will they put our goalkeeper under a lot of aerial pressure, for example? If so, the goalkeeper should practise this specific aspect in preparation for the match.

How do you think the goalkeeper's role has changed over the last 20 years?

Goalkeepers now have a much greater influence and impact on the game. Nowadays, goalkeepers are players just like the others, they think about the game and play an integral part in build-up play. For many years, goalkeepers were seen as the last defender, but now they are also the first attacker, playing a fundamental role in the instigation of attacking moves. They also set the tempo of the game.

These days, we are seeing more and more short throw-outs and goalkeepers being used to build up play from the back, which are very recent developments. Modern elite goalkeepers need a good all-round game and the ability to react to any problems they might come up against during a game. They need to think, evaluate and analyse. They also need to be instinctive. They no longer just play with their hands. They play with their hands, their feet, and even their heads.

What makes one goalkeeper more 'modern' than another?

The modern goalkeeper is complete and masters every aspect of the position. The goalkeeper of the future will also be equally comfortable using either foot. More and more of them are already emerging, but in the future, all goalkeepers will have a complete all-round game and be able to control play thanks to an array of technical skills and tactical understanding.

When you watch a goalkeeper for the first time, what do you look for in particular?

For me, active involvement in the game is fundamental. A goalkeeper is an active player who participates in and has a feel for the game. A goalkeeper is just as important as an outfield player. Being actively involved means taking part in



"Who said you had to be tall to be a goalkeeper? I disagree with people who say you need to be around two metres tall to play at the highest level. It's not true!"



Hugo Lloris makes a memorable save from a Martin Caceres header in France's quarter-final in the 2018 World Cup.

Pressphoto

“Didier gives everyone a voice. Ultimately, however, someone has to make the decisions, and that person is Didier. And when he makes a decision, we get behind him and give it our full support.”

the game as much as possible and having the ability to influence the game, as well as team-mates and opponents. It’s also being able to spot a problem quickly, assess the options, make a decision and do the right thing. To do this, you need genuine discernment and to be one step ahead.

And, since you are also a trainer, how do you assess young goalkeepers?

It’s very similar. You have to judge whether they have a feel for the game. Technique can be learned, improved and fine-tuned, but that deep-seated understanding of the game is an essential element to look for when talent-spotting for young goalkeepers. They should want to play and not be fearful. Most young goalkeepers do not take risks and are not active participants. They remain on the back foot, waiting for things to happen, and take on the role of the last defender. But they should not be the last defender, they should be a player. Their presence and influence are important. They should not be reactive, but proactive. There is nothing worse than a young goalkeeper paralysed by fear, afraid of something that might interfere with or harm their game. They need to take risks and be active rather than passive. In order to aid their progress, goalkeepers should play an active part in their own development.

These days, at set plays, we see sophisticated strategies such as screens and blocks being used. How do you manage that?

You have to make use of all the information and data available. After collecting and studying it closely, it is important to pass on as much knowledge as possible to the goalkeepers so that they are able to analyse situations on the pitch and, as I said before, stay ahead of the game. You can never be totally certain because football is not an exact



Didier Deschamps with Franck Riviot and assistant coach Guy Stéphan.

Getty Images

science. This is group work that we do with the goalkeeper, and with the other players as well, because goalkeepers should not always be isolated from their team-mates. So, as far as this kind of preparation is concerned, video analysis is the main tool we use.

Do you prepare video compilations of shots on goal and set plays?

Yes, we compile clips of attacking play, focusing on its main characteristics and key forward players, individual players’ strengths and weaknesses, a particular set play, or even a passing combination. The goalkeepers need all this information and are given access to it, but they are free to choose what to focus on and how they want to use it. It is often the tiniest details that make the difference in the end. Because the difference between winning and losing the ball is sometimes only a few centimetres.

Looking at the mental side, what are the differences between a goalkeeper and an outfield player?

Playing in such a thankless and difficult position, young goalkeepers need to pay attention to every little detail. They cannot afford to be careless. They have to be rigorous, precise and methodical,

aiming not just to ‘get things done’ but to ‘do things well’. A goalkeeper is an instinctive player with an above-average ability to analyse and reflect. Such a combination of skills will help them to do the job well which, in turn, will boost their confidence.

What do you think about the debate on how tall goalkeepers should be?

Who said you had to be tall to be a goalkeeper? I disagree with people who say you need to be around two metres tall to play at the highest level. It’s not true! These days, the best goalkeepers are the ones who see things and react the fastest, who are therefore quicker than average, who can analyse and absorb information much faster than others, and who have a good understanding of and feel for the game. As far as physical prowess is concerned ... there are some tall goalkeepers – 1.98m tall, for example – who move slowly, don’t read the game well, fail to assimilate information correctly, lack timing and body control, make bad decisions and do the wrong things. I’m sorry, but I prefer a goalkeeper of more average height, but who has all the necessary qualities. Look at Anthony Lopes [Olympique Lyonnais goalkeeper], who is one example among many. He compensates for his relatively average →

“Just before the match, It’s mainly just a few simple messages (...) but to use words that will have a positive impact. It’s very short, between 30 seconds and a minute. It’s almost a kind of ritual.”



100% on 16 June and to stay at that level until 15 July.

Since your first major tournament, EURO 2012, there has been a clear hierarchy among your goalkeepers. Is that important for you?

It’s an advantage and it makes life easier because a clearly defined hierarchy produces a sense of calm and tranquillity. It keeps the atmosphere healthy and positive. There is no ambiguity or misunderstanding, and everyone knows where they stand, fully aware of their responsibilities, role and objectives.

What part do you play in determining this hierarchy? Is it Didier Deschamps or Franck Riviot who chooses the French national team goalkeepers?

The great thing about the way Didier works is that things are very clear within the technical staff. We are constantly talking, interacting, sharing ideas and discussing among ourselves. Didier gives everyone a voice. Ultimately, however, someone has to make the decisions, and that person is Didier. And when he makes a decision, we get behind him and give it our full support.

height [1.84m] with other qualities: vision, speed, and so on.

How did you approach the World Cup as a goalkeeper coach?

First, it was a matter of taking the baton from my club-based colleagues, because that transition is important. When you meet the players at the start of the pre-tournament preparations, you have to bear in mind that they have only just finished a long, mentally and physically gruelling season. Most of them have played lots of matches and have been under pressure to produce results for their clubs. After the initial welcome, the first step is to quickly assess how everyone is and suggest an appropriate recovery programme. You might need

to focus on their physical condition or short-term fatigue, or it might be a stage of the season when they need to be doing more, or, on the contrary, taking it easy and doing a bit less so they can recuperate. We do this so they feel fresh and revitalised. It’s this first phase that enables us to crank things up and build their confidence. The final stage, just before the tournament starts, is when we put the finishing touches to our preparations, because you have to be at your peak when it all kicks off. We’re therefore looking for both efficiency and performance. That was the case when we played Australia in Russia on 16 June 2018. With Hugo, we had to realise that, although we needed to prepare and play warm-up matches, the most important thing was 16 June. He needed to be



Hugo Lloris needed to be especially skilful in the air in the 2018 World Cup group match against Australia.

The three France goalkeepers in Russia: Steve Mandanda, Hugo Lloris and Alphonse Areola.



FIFA

“It is to Hugo’s credit more than anyone else’s that he played well during the tournament: they were his performances, his successes and it was his World Cup. But he also knows that Steve and Alphonse played an important part.”



Getty Images

But before we get to that point, we have the chance to say what we think. We have to make our case and justify our opinions: Why? Why not? Why more? Why less? Once Didier has all this information, he makes the decision.

The third-choice goalkeeper is often a topic of discussion. Is there such a thing, in your opinion?

At the end of the day, since we have a clearly established hierarchy, we can talk about a number one, a number two and a number three. Alphonse Areola played the role of third-choice keeper perfectly at the World Cup. More than anything, being the number three means being on top of your game. It’s important to know that, if there is a problem with the other two, you have a goalkeeper you can count on to step in. It must be someone who demonstrates motivation, enthusiasm, freshness and dynamism on a daily basis.

Is there a sense of togetherness among the French national team goalkeepers?

The adventure we experienced together was unique, and such things should never

be played down. They must be enjoyed and savoured. It was the victory of a lifetime, producing moments of collective happiness and joy that were shared by the whole squad, starters and substitutes alike. There’s an image of Hugo lifting the cup, for example, but there’s also a picture of the three goalkeepers together for a few seconds at the final whistle. For me, that image is highly symbolic because it represents everything that those 55 days of competition were about. That photo says it all: sharing, togetherness, solidarity, smiles, faces, arms, mutual support. It is to Hugo’s credit more than anyone else’s that he played well during the tournament: they were his performances, his successes and it was his World Cup. But he also knows that Steve and Alphonse played an important part.

We often see you talking one to one with Hugo Lloris on the pitch just before matches. What do you say to him at those moments?

It’s mainly just a few simple messages, because at times like that it’s important not to say too much, but to use words that will have a positive impact. It’s very

short, between 30 seconds and a minute. It’s almost a kind of ritual.

Do you keep talking during the match or at half-time?

No, not during the match, but we talk briefly at half-time to make any adjustments we think are necessary.

His mistake against Croatia in the final was a paradoxical moment in what was an almost perfect World Cup. What were you thinking when it happened?

That incident will be remembered as a temporary blip, a misjudgement of the situation. We should not forget that it occurred in the 69th minute. There was still plenty of time left and, during those final 20 or so minutes, Hugo continued to put in an impressive performance. He was able to reassure us and put us at our ease, which is also a mark of greatness. It’s that ability to react well in difficult circumstances. As I’ve said before, what he did from start to finish commands respect. His performances during the tournament command respect. He was the best in the tournament. Once again, he demonstrated that he was one of the best goalkeepers in the world. But I had known that for a very long time. 🌱

BARIŞ TELLI – TURKEY

'THE AMPUTEE MESSI'

The ball has played a crucial role in Barış Telli's life. At the age of four, he lost his right leg in a road accident when chasing after a ball. But his love for the ball never left him – and it has brought him renown and reward as an amputee football star in his native Turkey.

Barış, 29, helped lead the Turkish national team to the European Amputee Football Championship title in 2017 and a World Cup runners-up spot last year. He has an impressive collection of awards at world and domestic level, including the best player award from the 2014 Amputee Football World Cup – earning himself the nickname 'the Amputee Messi'. Self-belief has helped Barış overcome any obstacles caused by his disability. He is also Turkey's first physically disabled PE teacher, a European medal-winning para-athlete and a Turkish wheelchair tennis champion. "I want them to get rid of the word 'impossible,'" he says. "Because nothing is impossible.

The most important thing is to make your dream a reality. I have never given up on my dreams – even with just one leg ..."



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IVAN GREBELKIN – RUSSIA

'SNOW CAN'T STOP ME FROM PLAYING FOOTBALL'

To play football in the snow is a testing experience at the best of times. To regularly play on a blanket of snow that stays on the ground for several months requires special devotion. In Russia, inside the Arctic Circle, 14-year-old Ivan Grebelkin is pursuing his football path in such extreme winter conditions.

"We have snow on the ground from October until May," says Ivan, from the town of Monchegorsk in the Murmansk region of Russia. "When we have heavy snowfall, you can't really see anything. If we have strong winds, the snow will drift up to your knees."

Ivan and his friends play and talk about football all the time. "Nothing can get in the way of me playing football," he says. "The weather only

makes the game more interesting." Ivan feels that honing his skills in the snow is helping to improve his technique and stamina.

The youngster holds a cherished dream – to make a successful career in football. His love of the game shines brightly. "Without football," he says, "life wouldn't be as colourful ... and football belongs to everybody who wants to play the game."



Scottish FA



STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

In December 2016, **Malky Mackay** walked through the doors of Hampden Park for the first time as Scottish FA performance director and immediately set to work to revolutionise the performance department.

BY MICHAEL LAMONT

In the past two years, the former Watford, Cardiff City and Wigan manager has implemented new ideas and philosophies to ensure the future of Scottish football is bright, as well as guaranteeing all areas of the Scottish game are provided for, while helping clubs and coaches alike.

How have you found life as the performance director of the Scottish FA and what have you looked to implement in your time in charge?

Firstly, I'm very proud and honoured to be the performance director at the Scottish FA and to have the chance to work with so many good people within the Scottish game.

There's been a huge overhaul over the past two years in terms of the performance department's way of working, including the implementation of the Pride Wheel, which is key to the work being done. When I came in, there were a number of different areas within the department working independently.

I felt that if we were going to improve across the department, we needed to come together and work in a similar fashion. We've implemented a 'plan, do, check, act' standardisation model across all areas to achieve consistent marginal gains.

How have you assessed the development of the national youth teams and the women's national teams?

I'm proud to have a group of highly skilled coaches working across the areas for which I'm responsible: men's Under-16s, 17s, 19s and 21s, as well as the Scotland women's national team and women's Under-17s and 19s. Scot Gemmill, Billy Stark, Brian McLaughlin and Stuart McLaren are all doing a fantastic job on the men's side, while on the women's side I'm incredibly proud to have brought on board Shelley Kerr, who has led us to our first Women's World Cup.

We're also one of just seven countries in Europe to have three female coaches in charge of our women's sides – Shelley,

Pauline Hamill and Pauline MacDonald are excellent role models for our women's game. I wanted our performance department to be more club-like.

The coaches regularly come together to share ideas and best practice.

I've asked them to ensure that when a player steps up through the age groups, they see consistency within a framework, which I believe will benefit us going forward. In the past two years, we've been starting to show real progress as we have integrated a new playing methodology involving more ball retention. This is evidence-based, with excellent recent results and performances against leading countries such as England, France, Spain, Germany and Brazil.

How are you helping the clubs in Scotland?

We're one of the few associations in Europe that part-fund our clubs' academies, to the tune of £2.5 million per year, through Club Academy Scotland.

We have asked our clubs to hire more full-time coaches and support staff, and to invest in better facilities, which will only serve to benefit our young players. Collaborating with the clubs is something I feel is so important to our game. We 'borrow' the clubs' players, and by working together we can take huge strides to benefit all stakeholders in Scottish football.



Billy Gilmour

Scottish FA

What has been done within the association to improve sports science and the way matches are analysed?

Initially, when I took on the role, I brought together high-performance commissioners, specialists from different fields who could help improve the performance department. The head of sports science at the Scottish FA, Graeme Jones, has implemented huge change within his area.

He has put together a structure where our eight international teams work together with a pool of physios, sports scientists, doctors and performance analysts. Our new performance analysis department is servicing all eight international teams with a detailed opposition analysis pack. This will ensure that preparation for our games are of the standard of top European clubs and countries.

How have coaches in Scotland benefitted from the work done by your performance department at the Scottish FA?

Scot Gemmill and I firmly believe that we need to work closely with our clubs to educate our young coaches. We've also collaborated with our football development and coach education department to ensure this has happened in a variety of ways over the past two years. We have asked club coaches to join our international staff for UEFA



The Scottish FA's Pride Wheel consolidates a number of functional areas into one model.

games and held themed masterclasses regularly. We've also introduced Pride Labs for our young club coaches, which are very targeted, and specific classroom sessions on certain subjects. What we're seeing as a result is a sharing of information between coaches about their experiences, which is groundbreaking in Scotland.

What are you doing to help nurture and identify the most talented players in the country?

Seven years ago, we started up our Scottish FA JD Performance School system. A hundred players from our system have earned professional contracts so far, with eight 16-year-olds making their first-team debuts in the SPFL last year. If you look at Belgium, who started their equivalent system over a decade ago, they're really beginning to see the benefits. We're starting to see similar effects in Scotland, and it's an incredibly exciting time for the game in our country. Our new talent ID structure is allowing us to reach further and wider than ever before in our quest to find talented young Scots. A department of very committed staff are watching more than 1,000 players a year and we now have a database of over 1,200 Scottish players. Our aim is to provide our A squads with a conveyor belt of talented players in the coming years.

What would your final message be to improve young coaches and footballers?

Strive for excellence. Excellence is modest improvement consistently done. 🔄





VISUAL STORYTELLING

The Football Association of Norway is making full use of the power of strong imagery to develop its brands and engage with the fans.

BY PEARSE CONNOLLY

The saying ‘a picture paints a thousand words’ is certainly true for the photo of the Norwegian women’s team standing on a mountain as they watch a base jumper take off in his wingsuit. It certainly gave the squad a new perception of ‘on-the-edge performance’ as they discussed similarities in preparation and risk during training camp.

The idea for the photo came out of the rebranding that the Football Association of Norway (NFF) conducted that separated the national teams from the association. This division provided total freedom to develop a strong, distinct brand story for the national teams.

The story focuses on the ruggedness and wild beauty of Norway, which means playing and performing anywhere, in any weather. We believe the teams reach the top not despite the challenges of our country but because of them.

“Preparation plays a key role for any national team,” says Jan Ove Nystuen, head of branding at the NFF. “The extreme

nature of base jumping from stunning mountains where preparation is a matter of life and death could be linked to our brand story. So, we decided to combine them by placing the women’s team in the scene itself.

Telling a deeper story

“The squad had a very fruitful discussion with Tom Erik Heimen, the base jumper in question, and saw how even the smallest details are vital. He also told them about the rewards he gets from the risks he takes. We believe these concepts of ruggedness and risk-taking are central to the image of our national teams.”

Capturing strong imagery driven by the brand story has now become everyday practice for the NFF and its picture agency.

“We work very closely together on the brief before camp and the games,” says Nystuen. “Our goal is to take pictures that go beyond just sports action photography, though we love that too!

“We want images that tell a deeper story, that trigger an emotional reaction and link to the essence of the team’s brand. These vary from senior to junior and from women’s to men’s football. So, we end up with a wealth of stories we can use and share to engage with the fans.

“Perhaps one of the best signs that this is working is how the players themselves are really quick to share the images. We give them all access to the image bank on their mobiles and we see how they post our pictures on their social media accounts. They give us input and feedback to take forward to the next camp and matches too.”

The NFF truly believes that associations can build closer relationships with the public and the players by focusing on storytelling visuals.

“It’s part of what we do now – the images bring us closer, we are stronger together #sterkeresammen,” says Nystuen. 🌐

ROMANIAN FOOTBALL ENTERS THE DIGITAL ERA

Apart from sporting objectives, one of the main goals of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) is to introduce ultra-modern processes for administrative work at all levels.

BY PAUL ZAHARIA

We could say that Romanian football is entering the digital era, giving people easier access to information and also making it easier to share information.

After a lot of hard work, the federation has launched its Football Connect platform, which, as its name suggests, seeks to connect all FRF members and constitutes one vast system of Romanian football activity, all uploaded onto one single platform.

Step by step, each entity and each person involved in football (club, county association, match official, player, referee, etc.) will have their own account, and all player registrations, match official reports and other administrative tasks will be done electronically. As a result, people who live outside the capital will no longer have to travel to Bucharest and, logically, save time. Everything will be done quickly and easily.

Licences and transfers first

The Football Connect system became functional in January, when it started to be used for the annual visas that are mandatory for all players. Transfer operations were introduced shortly thereafter to coincide with the start of the domestic winter transfer window on 29 January.

To ensure the smooth roll-out of the visa process, clubs were scheduled into a four-week timeframe by geographical criteria (county) and the operations were performed by each club's representative at FRF headquarters (visas put directly onto the players' IDs and entered electronically into the Football Connect system).

A similar initial process was applied to enter transfers. By the end of the transfer window, the Football Connect database had registered 7,162 players and more than 500 transfers, with 169 clubs using the platform to obtain visas, including 14

first league clubs, 20 second league clubs, 76 third league clubs and 59 youth clubs.

Futsal and women's football next

Futsal and women's football clubs are next up, with their players set to be registered on the platform this summer. Before long, each player at every level will have their own digital record of their personal statistics and career-related data.

"The Football Connect system, which the FRF started developing out of nothing

in June 2016, is crucial in the new digital era. It is a solution that will be of huge short and long-term benefit for everyone involved in football, and it will also ensure better management of information and administrative work as a whole, both within the FRF and for each club or other affiliated member. We have a service team that is permanently available to help our members to perform tasks digitally and make their lives easier," said the FRF president, Răzvan Burleanu. 🌐



The Romanian Football Federation's new digital platform facilitates all the administrative tasks that need to be completed to ensure smooth match operations, like for this second league match between Petrolul Ploiesti and Universitatea Cluj.

ALBANIA

www.fshf.org

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: FOOTBALL IN EVERY KINDERGARTEN

ANDI VERCANI



The Albanian Football Association (FSHF) and the Lorik Cana 5 Foundation have initiated a joint project to construct football pitches for the children of kindergartens, for a healthier and better life.

The first pitch has just been inaugurated at a kindergarten in the city of Elbasan, but the project will eventually spread all over the country.

During the inauguration, the FSHF president, Armand Duka, said: "In its strategy and objectives, the Albanian Football Association does not have only professional football, but it also aims to improve society in general. This project

makes us happy because we see the future. By investing in a kindergarten, we have an impact on the life of the children that play sport and learn through sport about being healthy and being the best in their chosen profession. Sport educates and develops children, helping them in their journey through life."

Lorik Cana said: "It wasn't easy for us to choose the best way to promote the values of sport in Albania. Football is one of the elements that brought joy to our country even in the most difficult situations, nurturing renowned figures that have become role models for future generations."



FSHF
Armand Duka (left) and Lorik Cana

AUSTRIA

www.oefb.at

RETIREMENT OF A TRUE FOOTBALL GREAT

SIMON-PETER CHARAMZA



Austria's most-capped female footballer, Nina Burger (108 senior international



GEPA Pictures

Nina Burger

appearances, 53 goals), will bring her professional playing career to a close this summer. After a farewell appearance for the national side against Sweden, she will not be renewing her current contract with German Bundesliga side SC Sand (43 goals in 88 matches) when it expires in the summer.

"I've been contemplating it for a long time. After the World Cup qualifiers, I told the coach, Dominik Thalhammer, that I was thinking of retiring. We agreed that I would let him know after the Cyprus Cup, and that's when I decided to finish my international playing career," Burger said.

The Austrian No10 played a crucial part in the women's national team's biggest achievement to date, scoring two goals at UEFA Women's EURO 2017 in the Netherlands and helping Austria to third place.

Nina Burger is not cutting all ties with sport. From next season, she plans to help out as assistant coach at her cherished

club, SV Neulengbach, for whom she scored over 300 goals between 2005 and 2015.

"I'm planning to stay in football, and to continue playing somewhere, but my main focus will be on coaching. I would like to train as a football coach, as well as complete some courses in athletics and fitness coaching, and then we'll see what happens."

Leo Windtner, president of the Austrian FA (ÖFB), describes Burger as a 'poster girl' of Austrian football. "With her performances on the pitch and, in particular, her attitude and personality, Nina has been a superb role model," he said, announcing plans to induct her as the 49th member of the ÖFB's hall of fame at the first opportunity.

Dominik Thalhammer, coach of the women's national team, said: "Nina has outstanding qualities and has worked really hard to promote women's football in Austria for many years. We will really miss her."

AZERBAIJAN

www.affa.az

STATE PRESIDENT ATTENDS BAKU 2019 ALL-STAR MATCH

TORA AKHMEDOVA

 The president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and his daughter Leyla Aliyeva watched the Baku 2019 all-star match held in front of the Nizami museum of Azerbaijan literature in Baku.

The match was organised as part of a series of events to mark Baku's hosting of the 2019 UEFA Europa League final and featured a team of western stars against a team of eastern stars.

Famous former and current players Jerzy Dudek, Michael Essien, Anderson Luís de Souza (Deco), Hamit Altintop, Nihat Kahveci, Andrey Arshavin and Revaz Arveladze took to the field, as did Azerbaijani veterans Nazim Suleymanov, ambassador of the 2019 UEFA Europa



League final, and Vali Gasimov.

In addition, regional league player Shohrat Rahimov took part alongside two young players selected in a fans' competition, Zaman Zahirzade and Mahammad Tanriverdiyev, and the captain of the local İTV channel team, Tural Dadashov, who won the Intellectual

Cup dedicated to the 2019 UEFA Europa League final.

President Aliyev met the players before receiving the UEFA Europa League trophy. The game ended in an 11-10 win for the western all-stars. After the match, the president met young spectators and posed for photographs with them.

BELARUS

www.abff.by

NEW WHITE WINGS CASUAL WEAR COLLECTION LAUNCHED

ALEKSANDR ALEINIK

 A month before the Belarusian national team's first match in the European Qualifiers for EURO 2020, the Belarus Football Federation (ABFF), in partnership with the official kit supplier, Macron, launched a brand-new line of casual wear for fans.

The collection stands out with a unique design created by the Italian manufacturer. Every product in the new line features Belarusian national colours and elements while, at the same time, forming part of a coordinated collection.

All products can be purchased online or from the official fan shop in Minsk. The new White Wings collection will also be available at the home matches of the Belarusian national team in 2019.

The ABFF's cooperation with the Italian sportswear company started in 2017, thanks to UEFA's kit assistance scheme. Following a visit by a Belarusian

delegation to the company's head office in Bologna, an innovative, stylish new national team kit was designed. It was unveiled by the players at the national art museum of Belarus, before being introduced for the national team's UEFA Nations League campaign.

The national team's nickname, White Wings, was devised in 2015, in the course of preparations for the European Qualifiers for EURO 2016. At the same time, the national team's playing kit acquired its first new look.



NEW FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS LAUNCHED

NIKA BAHTIJAREVIĆ

 At the 43rd UEFA Congress in Rome, the president of the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) and the 1998 World Cup Golden Boot winner, Davor Šuker, was re-elected to the UEFA Executive Committee. Šuker received the votes of 47 out of UEFA's 55 member associations, and his re-election is further confirmation of the great success that

Croatian football has been enjoying in recent years. "I am very proud to have the opportunity to assist the development of football as a UEFA executive, and I am grateful to all of Europe's national associations for re-electing me. I offer my sincerest congratulations to Aleksander [Čeferin] for his re-election as UEFA president," said Šuker.

Along with Šuker's commitment to growing football on a European level, the HNS is also maintaining its active role in developing football in Croatia – with the early months of 2019 seeing the launch of new infrastructure projects that will improve conditions for clubs in all regions of Croatia, as well as the initiation of projects aimed at popularising football among schoolchildren and growing Croatia's base of active players. With financial help from the FIFA Forward programme, the HNS also hosted the Croatia Cup, a friendly international women's tournament that brought together a number of European women's teams. As we head further into 2019, national team activities such as the European Qualifiers and the European Under-21 Championship finals are sure to bring even more attention to the beautiful game, and aid the HNS in growing it even further.



NEW OFFICIAL NATIONAL TEAM FAN CLUB

PETR ŠEDIVÝ

 Since March, the Czech national team has had its own official fan club. The first events its members took part in were the away EURO 2020 qualifier against England and a home friendly against Brazil. So, from now on, fan club members can actively influence the activities organised around the national team.

"We are planning to arrange fan points near the stadiums at our away matches. The fans will also vote for the songs for the playlists to be played before kick-off at our home games. We will communicate with the national team management and organise meetings with players and coaches, and we want to negotiate some advantages for them for buying tickets," says the fan club

manager, Svatopluk Smyšl.

The fan club helps its members for away games played abroad. The supporter liaison officer communicates information related to specific conditions and terms for attending the games at every stadium and in every country.

The fan club founders found a lot of inspiration abroad. In 2018, they participated in a meeting of similar fan clubs in Munich and learned how similar projects work in other countries.

The fan club is supported not only by the Football Association of the Czech Republic, but also by the national team management. National team coach Jaroslav Šilhavý confirms that support: "Communication with our fans is very important for all my team. When we



play our games in front of full stands and in a positive atmosphere, it helps us a lot. I welcome this initiative and believe there are a lot of great moments and experiences awaiting our team and fans in the future."

The foundation of the official fan club was endorsed by former Czech international and Ballon d'Or holder Pavel Nedvěd, and it met with a very positive response, with thousands of fans registering during the first weeks.

DENMARK

www.dbu.dk

FOOTBALL IS MEDICINE

ANNE TJELL



In January, leading researchers from around the world in the field of football as a health-promoting activity gathered for the 2019 Football is Medicine conference at the University of Southern Denmark. The conference was organised with the Danish Football Association, the Portuguese Football Federation, UEFA and the British Journal of Sports Medicine as partners, and followed the 2018 conference in Lisbon.

At this year's conference, the newest evidence of football as a tool for prevention and treatment of several non-communicable diseases was presented and discussed, highlighting research into the physiological, medical, psychological and sociological aspects

of recreational football. More than 200 researchers, practitioners, politicians and healthcare professionals from more than 20 countries participated in the conference and the pre-events – a FIFA 11 for Health course and a Danish FA football fitness coaching course.

Next year, the Football is Medicine conference will be held in Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands, in close collaboration with the Faroe Islands FA. More information about the conference can be found at footballismedicine.com.

Football as a health-promoting activity is always an important focus of the Danish FA. One success story in this area is the FC Prostata community, in which more than 250 players who have been diagnosed with prostate



Mayor Kenneth Muhs (left) along with chairman of the Danish FA, Jesper Møller

cancer are playing in 20 teams nationwide. The next step is Football for Hearts for players with cardiovascular disease. In close partnership with clubs, municipalities and hospitals, the Danish FA will aim for 800 Football for Hearts players and 30 teams within the next few years.

ENGLAND

www.thefa.com

BARCLAYS BECOMES FIRST TITLE SPONSOR OF THE FA WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

NICK SMITH



On 20 March, The Football Association (The FA) and Barclays announced a landmark partnership, the biggest ever investment in UK women's sport by a brand, with Barclays unveiled as the title sponsor of The FA Women's Super League from the 2019/20 season.

The multimillion-pound partnership – running until July 2022 – will see the top tier of women's football renamed as the Barclays FA Women's Super League and the introduction of record levels of investment in the women's game in England.

The new partnership includes The FA and Barclays working together to drive the growth of the women's game at grassroots level, with Barclays becoming the lead partner of the FA Girls' Football School Partnerships, a nationwide scheme to help develop girls' access to football at school.

The FA Women's Super League is Europe's only fully professional domestic female football league, and this new partnership will help The FA and the clubs transform the women's game in England. The partnership will also see the introduction of an annual £500,000 prize fund for the league, active as of the 2019/20 season

and distributed based on final league position.

The announcement is a significant landmark within The FA's Gameplan for Growth strategy, an ambitious four-year strategy announced in 2017 that aims to double participation, double the fan base and create a high-performance system for England teams.



ATTENDANCE FIGURES SHOOT UP

RASMUS RAIDLA



In July 2018, the Estonian Football Association started a pilot project as part of the UEFA GROW programme to increase attendances in the Estonian premier league. The project



Britt Maria Tael

began with three clubs – FC Flora, Tartu Tammeka and Narva Trans – recruiting their own community development officers.

Within a few months, results were already starting to show. At the end of August, a local derby between FC Flora and FC Levadia attracted a crowd of 1,804, overtaking the previous league attendance record set in 2015.

At the beginning of August, meanwhile, Narva Trans had achieved their highest attendance ever, with 824 fans following their match against Paide Linnameeskond. Moreover, since recruiting their community development officer, the club's average attendance has risen by an incredible 273%! The Estonian president, Kersti Kaljulaid, even attended one of Narva's home matches.

These impressive numbers have already sparked interest from other football associations, such as Latvia and Moldova, whose representatives visited Estonia at the end of August, just before the UEFA Super Cup in Tallinn.

Since the start of the new season, each premier league club, and even one second league club, has had its own community development officer, and the attendance figures are moving upwards.

On their premier league debut, newcomers Maardu Linnameeskond attracted 421 fans for their match against the reigning champions, Nõmme Kalju – an astounding 359% increase compared with the attendance at the first game last season.

FOOTBALL AT COLLEGE FOR TALENTED YOUNG PLAYERS

TERJI NIELSEN



From this summer, in cooperation with colleges in the Faroe Islands, the Faroe Islands Football Association will offer talented young footballers the opportunity to combine football and college.

"Our idea is to give talented young footballers who want to improve as players a special college offer. We always want our players to get even better, and that is why we are trying this new model," says Pætur S. Clementsen, technical director at the Faroe Islands FA.

The programme targets boys and girls who take their football seriously and who could be in the frame for the Faroese Under-17, Under-19 and Under-21 national teams.

Footballers who are not at college also have the opportunity to take part in the new programme. However, in those cases it is up to the player to make arrangements with their employer to



FSF

allow them to attend training sessions twice a week in the morning.

About 55 students have applied for the programme so far, most of whom have been accepted. There are two main colleges involved – Glasir college in the capital of Tórshavn and Kambisdalur

college in the Eysturoy region.

The football association is pleased with the initial number of applicants. "Now we can get started, and in a year's time, the number of applicants will hopefully be even higher," said Clementsen.

GEORGIA

www.gff.ge

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE PRIZE MONEY DONATED TO CHARITABLE CAUSES

KETI GOLIADZE



The Georgian Football Federation (GFF) and the Georgian national team have distributed 300,000 Georgian lari (approximately €98,660) evenly among three charitable organisations in Georgia. These are the Firefly World children's hospice, the Monk Andrew Foundation and the Georgia Solidarity Fund.

These three organisations have benefitted from the prize money the GFF received from the group stages of the UEFA Nations League, in which Georgia finished top of their group. The GFF decided to use part of the money for bonus payments to the players, with the rest allocated to charitable causes.

The GFF president, Levan Kobiashvili, and vice-presidents Kakha Chumburidze and Alexander Iashvili met representatives



of Firefly World and the Monk Andrew Foundation, thanking them for their work and presenting them with Georgian national team jerseys.

"It was a joint decision of the Georgian Football Federation and the Georgian national team to use the UEFA prize money earned for topping our Nations League group for charitable purposes.

"We chose three organisations that have been operating in Georgia for many years, helping children with cancer. I believe that the main criterion for evaluating the activities of every institution and society as a whole is the social good they can do for the benefit of those who are in need," said Levan Kobiashvili.

HUNGARY

www.mlsz.hu

HUNGARIAN YOUTH TEAMS AMONG THE ELITE

MÁRTON DINNYÉS



Hungary's four age-limit national teams have all been looking forward to their respective European Championship elite rounds this spring. Hungary's recent youth development programmes have yielded extremely positive results, with the number of registered players doubling in the space of just a few years, and the men's and women's Under-17 and Under-19 teams all progressing to the European elite rounds in each of the past three seasons – an unprecedented feat. It is even the sixth season in a row in the case of the women's Under-17s.

Success at youth level is also becoming increasingly important for the country's futsal teams, the Under-19 men's futsal team having recently drawn two tight matches with Belgium as they prepared for their European Championship main round matches at the end of March.



KICKING HOMOPHOBIA OUT OF FOOTBALL

EITAN DOTAN

 During Football v Homophobia month, a friendly rainbow football match was held in Herzliya between a mixed team of LGBT and heterosexual players and players from the Hapoel and Maccabi Herzliya youth teams as part of a joint programme of the New Israel Fund and the Israel Football Association (IFA) to kick violence and discrimination out of football. Top players from the men's and women's national teams also took part in the event.

The organisers of the match ensured a colourful atmosphere, and even before the opening whistle, they held up a banner saying 'Kick homophobia out of football'.

Shlomi Barzel, head of communications at the IFA, said: "We have been holding such events for the last few years and I always wonder if we need more events



of this kind. I hope that in the near future we will not need such events because we will already live in a society where a family with two fathers or two mothers won't be under a question mark anymore.

"We are all equal on the pitch, and we see improvements every year in the number of incidents of racism and violence, but there is always room for improvement."

GEARING UP TO HOST THE FIRST U19 FUTSAL EURO

TOMS ĀRMANIS

 The Latvian Football Federation (LFF) and Latvia's capital city, Riga, are gearing up to host the first Under-19 Futsal EURO from 8 to 14 September this year at the 9,975-capacity Arena Riga. They are the first UEFA finals of any kind to have been assigned to Latvia.

The new UEFA futsal competition was announced in 2017 as part of a revamp of UEFA's futsal competitions and features an eight-team final tournament. "I am sure this is only the beginning, our first step towards hosting large football events in Latvia. Welcoming the future stars of European futsal will be a great stepping stone for us as organisers," said Kaspars Gorkšs, president of the LFF. "With this decision, UEFA has expressed its trust in our capabilities to host a tournament of the highest quality. Our task is not only to be great hosts, but also prepare our



national team to be able to compete at this level."

Since December, the Latvian Under-19 futsal team has been participating in training sessions and friendlies against other national teams and local futsal clubs. This year, the team plans to hold eight training camps and play multiple friendlies in the lead-up to the final tournament.

"Futsal is experiencing noticeable

development all over Europe, and the introduction of such a competition is great testimony to that. One of our top priorities is to attract more and more people to football and to increase overall public interest in this beautiful game; therefore, this upcoming event gives us the opportunity to take serious steps towards both these strategic goals," Kaspars Gorkšs added.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

U16 GIRLS SHINE IN UEFA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TOURNAMENT

KEVIN AZZOPARDI



The Malta Football Association hosted two UEFA youth development tournaments at the Centenary Stadium between 4 and 9 March. Malta were joined by Albania, Denmark and Scotland in the boys' tournament while, in the girls' event, the other three participating teams were Albania, Andorra and Gibraltar.

The main objective of the UEFA youth development tournaments is to offer young footballing talents an additional opportunity to play competitive international matches.

The Maltese Under-16 girls earned the plaudits after winning their three matches in the tournament to claim top spot with maximum points, thus emulating their three-win run in last year's event.



Under the guidance of coach Dorianne Theuma, the Maltese girls attained three resounding wins, beating Gibraltar 5-1, Andorra 7-0 and Albania 4-0. Kailey Willis scored a hat-trick in the opening win over Gibraltar, and Haley Bugeja netted four in the 7-0 win over Andorra.

The Malta Under-16 boys' team, led by coach Noel Turner, were off to a flying start as they beat Albania 2-0, but they

lost their other two games, against eventual winners Denmark (4-0) and Scotland (1-0). Andrea Zammit scored Malta's goals in the 2-0 victory over Albania. Denmark topped the group with three wins for a total of nine points, Scotland were second with six points, followed by Malta with three points and then Albania, who did not manage to achieve any points.

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

FC MILSAMI WIN THE MOLDOVAN SUPER CUP

PRESS OFFICE



The 11th Moldovan Super Cup match, played in Tiraspol on 10 March, pitted local team FC Sheriff against FC Milsami Orhei. After a

dramatic match, cup holders FC Milsami lifted the trophy for the second time in their history, after seeing off champions FC Sheriff 5-4 in a penalty shoot-out.

At the official post-match ceremony, the FC Milsami captain, Radu Mîțu, was presented with the trophy by the general secretary of the Football Association of Moldova, Nicolai Cebotari.

"It was a tough game; we had our chances to score and to win the trophy, but now I want to congratulate our opponents. We have to focus now on our next matches in the domestic championship," said FC Sheriff coach Goran Sablić.

"It was not the ideal match from our perspective, but we are very happy to have won the Moldovan Super Cup! We will try to improve our game. Today, though, we celebrate," said FC Milsami coach Veaceslav Rusnac.

The Moldovan Super Cup was played for the first time in 2004. Since then, FC Sheriff have won it seven times, FC Milsami twice, and FC Dacia and FC Zimbru once each.



ROYAL COUPLE JOIN IN THE FUN

NIGEL TILSON

 William and Kate, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, followed in the footsteps of Northern Ireland legends such as George Best and Pat Jennings by taking to the pitch at the national football stadium at Windsor Park.

The royal couple learned about the Irish Football Association Foundation's award-winning initiatives during a visit to the Irish FA's HQ. They joined in with children involved in the Electric Ireland Shooting Stars programme, which promotes football participation for girls aged from four to seven, and the McDonald's Fun Football programme, which is aimed at encouraging children of all ages to play the game for the first time.

As well as the association's work with children, Prince William and the Duchess were told about the Irish FA's Stay Onside initiative, which uses sport to divert young people away from criminality and offending. They also met some of the Irish FA staff and volunteers involved in the Ahead of the Game mental health programme, who explained how the



UEFA-funded scheme is helping to support clubs and volunteers when dealing with mental health issues, with a focus on challenging the stigma and preventative measures.

In addition, William and Kate toured the Irish FA's Education and Heritage Centre, which tells the story of

Northern Ireland football through a variety of media and interactive displays. The royal couple also met Jason Browning, a member of the Northern Ireland powerchair football team, and spent time with graduates of the foundation's Female Football Leadership Programme.

LOGOS PAST AND PRESENT

PAWEŁ DRAŻBA

 The Polish Football Association (PZPN) has had 11 logos since the association was founded in 1920. Almost every version has featured an eagle, the image of which has changed significantly over the years. Most of the versions of the logo have also featured a ball.

The current logo was created in 2011 to freshen up the corporate image of the association. The creators wanted to preserve the eagle and the ball in the design, being symbols that are very important to supporters. From the different draft designs, inspired by history and the logos of other football associations both inside and outside Europe, and some of which incorporated



folk art and even graffiti, the association picked three designs to choose from,

before finally selecting a design that symbolises openness and dynamism.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

www.fai.ie

STEPPING UP PREPARATIONS FOR U17 EUROS

GARETH MAHER



Excitement is building in the Republic of Ireland ahead of the European Under-17 Championship final tournament kicking off on 3 May.

The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) has already announced an ambassador (former Ireland international John O'Shea),

unveiled a mascot (Barry The Bodhrán), revealed the seven venues where the games will be played, and have dressed up their headquarters in U17 EURO livery.

Before a media event with the tournament ambassador, the FAI revealed the signage that covers the entire front of the main building on the

national sports campus and acts as a terrific advertisement for the forthcoming tournament.

Several other promotional initiatives are also being activated, with schoolchildren being encouraged to 'adopt a nation' after the draw on 4 April, so that they can support whichever teams are playing in the stadium closest to them.

The FAI also plans to put on match analysis sessions for its national Under-17 league teams and functions for the Ireland squads that competed in this UEFA tournament in 1994 and 1998, when it was still classified as an Under-16 competition.

As the event draws ever nearer, anticipation is growing for what promises to be a superb tournament in Ireland.

For more information visit www.fai.ie/U17EURO.



RUSSIA

www.rfs.ru

A NEW HEAD FOR RUSSIAN FOOTBALL

EKATERINA GRISHENKOVA



Alexander Dyukov has been elected president of the Russian Football Union (RFU) – a position he will hold until 9 February 2021 – following a unanimous vote from delegates at the organisation's extraordinary conference in Moscow on 22 February.

Having been nominated by 63 RFU member organisations in January, Dyukov was selected as the sole candidate for the position.

The CEO of Gazprom Neft has a long-standing involvement in Russian football, having been president of FC Zenit (St Petersburg) from 2008 to 2017, and having also served as chairman of the FC Zenit board of directors and a member of the executive committee of the RFU. Under his leadership, Zenit won the Russian football championship in 2010, 2012 and 2015, and the Russian Cup in 2010 and 2016, as well as



Mikhail Shapovalov/RFU

Alexander Dyukov

achieving success in Europe, with Zenit winning the UEFA Cup and the UEFA Super Cup in 2008.

After his election, Alexander Dyukov said: "Thank you so much for your support and confidence. This is genuinely important to me – not only is it a great honour, but, of course, also a great responsibility. The tasks we face are challenging – but all the more interesting to address! There isn't any one single decision or initiative that will allow us to take Russian football to the next level. Achieving major change always depends on thousands of small changes. But we are more than capable of coping with these tasks!"

New members of the RFU executive committee were also elected at the conference, which was attended by Zoran Laković, UEFA's director of national associations, and Bjorn Vassallo, director for Europe at FIFA.

NEW PRESIDENTIAL TERM FOR SLAVIŠA KOKEZA

MIRKO VRBICA

 The Football Association of Serbia has unanimously re-elected Slaviša Kokeza as its president for a term that runs until 2023.

Slaviša Kokeza was first elected as the association's president in 2016, and has been delivering results. One of the promises he fulfilled was to put Serbian national team football back among the best teams in the world and to qualify for the World Cup in Russia. By placing its trust in him again, the association hopes he will continue to achieve success. A new goal for his new term is qualification for

EURO 2020, a competition that has been out of Serbia's reach for the past 20 years. The president's programme for his next term also includes the construction of a new national stadium, new headquarters for the association, and infrastructure improvements all over the country.

Among the distinguished guests at the assembly were Zoran Laković, former general secretary of the FA of Serbia and currently UEFA national associations director, Dejan Savičević, FIFA Council member and the president of the Football Association of Montenegro, Oliver Jung,



Zoran Laković (left), Slaviša Kokeza and Dejan Savičević

FIFA development programmes manager, and Božidar Maljković, president of the Serbian Olympic Committee.

In other elections, the assembly chose new members of the executive committee of the FA of Serbia, as well as members of various committees.

THREE LONG-SERVING INTERNATIONALS RETIRE

PETER SURIN

 Slovakia have started their quest to qualify for their second EURO in a row with three long-serving internationals now missing from their ranks, Martin Škrtel, Tomáš Hubočan and Adam Nemeč having decided to retire from the national team. Between them, they played for Slovakia 209 times, including at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (Škrtel) and EURO 2016 (all three).

"It wasn't an easy decision," said 34-year-old Martin Škrtel. "I weighed up all the pros and cons, and decided that after 15 years with the national team, it was time to make room for the next generation. It was an honour for me to play for the national team for such a long time and to captain the team at such an important tournament as EURO 2016." Škrtel's 103 caps will be written in gold letters in the history of Slovakian football. After Ján Ďurica's retirement from national team football in November 2017, the second member of the respected duo of Slovakia centre backs has also now bid farewell to the team. The traditional, rock-solid defensive duo will be missed and hard to replace.



Tomáš Hubočan (left), Martin Škrtel and Adam Nemeč

With 64 caps, Tomáš Hubočan has also decided to retire from international football. "It was a difficult decision. It's hard to say goodbye to my team-mates. I have the national team deep in my heart, however I had to take into account my current situation at club level," explained the 33-year-old Olympique Marseille defender, who has not been having the best time of his career in France and is likely to look for a new club after the end of the season.

"It is an honour to have played for Slovakia. It will leave unforgettable memories. However, I am getting older and I felt it was the right time to leave

the floor to younger players. New coaching staff have taken over and the new qualification cycle is starting, so it was the right time," explained 33-year-old Adam Nemeč, who notched up 42 caps and 13 goals in his career with the senior national team. Since summer 2018, he has been playing for FC Paphos in Cyprus.

The retirement of three stalwarts at the same time gave the new national team coach, Pavel Hapal, something of a challenge at the start of the EURO 2020 qualifying campaign. He had to decide who to play in the centre back position instead of Martin Škrtel and who would replace Adam Nemeč up front. "When I took up the role as the new national team coach, I spoke with all the players. I was counting on them for the next qualifying cycle. However, I respect their decisions."

The president of the Slovak FA, Ján Kováčik, was also taken by surprise. "I think it was a rushed decision by all three of them, but I respect it. I would like to thank them for everything they have done for the national team and for Slovakian football, and wish them all the best at club level."

SWITZERLAND

www.football.ch

CANDIDATES ANNOUNCED FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

PIERRE BENOIT



At the Swiss FA delegates' assembly on 18 May, a successor will be chosen for the association's president, 65-year-old Peter Gilliéron, who, after ten years at the helm, will not be standing for re-election.

Each of the three sections of the Swiss FA (Swiss Football League, Erste Liga and Amateur Liga) has selected a candidate to step into Gilliéron's shoes.

The Swiss Football League (SFL), which represents the clubs from the top two tiers of Swiss football (the Super League and the Challenge League), controls 28 of the 101 votes at the delegates' assembly. Its candidate is 50-year-old Jean-François Collet from western Switzerland, director of the Gstaad ATP tennis tournament, former chairman of FC Lausanne Sport and vice-president of the SFL board.

The candidate put forward by the Erste Liga, which provides a link between

professional football and the amateur game, is 56-year-old Kurt Zuppinger, who was Erste Liga president and Swiss FA vice-president from 2006 to 2014. The Erste Liga has 26 votes at the delegates' assembly.

Last but not least, the Amateur Liga, which represents Swiss grassroots football, is also hopeful of filling the presidential hot seat. Its candidate is 69-year-old Dominique Blanc from western Switzerland, who was president of the Vaud regional association for eight years and has been Amateur Liga president since 2015. The Amateur Liga has the largest number of delegates, with 47 votes.

As he steps down, Peter Gilliéron can look back at a successful time in office, highlights of which include the senior national team's participation in the 2010, 2014 and 2018 World Cups, as well as qualification for EURO 2016 and the finals



of the inaugural UEFA Nations League. During his period as general secretary (1993–2009), Switzerland also qualified for major international tournaments in 1994, 1996, 2004, 2006 and 2008, while a long list of successes at youth level was topped by European Under-17 Championship and U-17 World Cup titles.

The contest to succeed Peter Gilliéron seems open, and it would be no surprise if several rounds of voting were required to select the new Swiss FA president.

WALES

www.faw.cymru

FOOTBALL V HOMOPHOBIA SUPPORT ACROSS WALES

MELISSA PALMER



Football v Homophobia (FvH) is an international initiative opposing homophobia and transphobia in football, from grassroots level to professional football. In partnership with the Fare network, FvH uses football as a tool to challenge discrimination and remove prejudice based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression at all levels in football.

Conwy Borough FC, who play in the Huws Gray Alliance Football League, were the first team in Wales to wear a special edition shirt supporting the FvH initiative in their league fixture against Prestatyn Town.

As a club, Conwy Borough FC have zero tolerance of homophobia and

their players wore the specially commissioned rainbow shirt to raise awareness of homophobia in football. The special edition shirts are now being



auctioned to raise funds for the Football v Homophobia initiative and to further support the FvH campaign.

Cardiff Dragons FC, Wales' first and only LGBTI+ football team also supported the FvH initiative during their annual FvH match against Cardiff Met University staff, which is played in an inclusive and friendly environment. Cardiff Dragons exists to promote participation in and awareness of football, social cohesion and healthy lifestyles within the LGBTI+ community in Cardiff, South Wales and beyond.

The Football Association of Wales is incredibly proud to have football clubs across Wales demonstrating such social responsibility.

MAY BIRTHDAYS

1 WEDNESDAY Bent Clausen (Denmark) 60th Vasko Dojčinovski (North Macedonia) Alexey Smertin (Russia)	2 THURSDAY Anton Fagan (Scotland) Andrea Montemurro (Italy)	3 FRIDAY Olivier Chovaux (France) Ladislav Gadosi (Slovakia) Haim Jakov (Israel) Vladimir Medved (Slovakia)	4 SATURDAY Polly Handford (England) Anghel Iordanescu (Romania)	5 SUNDAY Peter Gilliéron (Switzerland) Goran Mihaljević (Montenegro) 50th Christian Welander (Sweden)	6 MONDAY Karl-Erik Nilsson (Sweden) Gudmundur Petursson (Iceland) Ken Ridden (England) Marcin Stefanski (Poland)	7 TUESDAY Charles Flint (England) Claus Thomsen (Denmark)
10 FRIDAY Yuri Baskakov (Russia) Magnus Forssblad (Sweden)	11 SATURDAY Maksym Betsko (Ukraine) 40th Jean-Marie Gantenbein (Luxembourg) Timo Huttunen (Finland)	12 SUNDAY Volodymyr Geninsov (Ukraine)	13 MONDAY Henrik Ravnild (Denmark) Gaston Schreurs (Belgium)	14 TUESDAY Sergey Anokhin (Russia) Neil Doncaster (Scotland) Muhamed Konjić (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Maria Luisa Villa Gutiérrez (Spain)	15 WEDNESDAY Azamat Aitkhozhin (Kazakhstan) Evzen Amler (Czech Republic) Luis Cuervas Del Real (Spain) Hans-Jörg Eissmann (GER) Knarik Grigoryan (Armenia) Nikolay Levnikov (Russia) Piotr Maranda (Poland) 70th Sotirios Sinnis (Greece)	16 THURSDAY Egon Franck (Germany)
19 SUNDAY Gaetano De Gabriele (Malta) Milovan Djukanović (Montenegro) Jozef Marko (Slovakia) Andreas Morisbak (Norway) Rune Pedersen (Norway) Raimondas Statkevicius (Lithuania)	20 MONDAY Michał Listkiewicz (Poland) Neli Lozeva (Bulgaria) 40th Sandra Renon (France)	21 TUESDAY Mette Bach Kjær (Denmark) Nicolai Cebotari (Moldova) Ewa Gajewska (Poland) Costas Kapitanis (Cyprus) Paulo Lourenço (Portugal)	22 WEDNESDAY Karl Dhont (Belgium) Rod Petrie (Scotland) Theo van Seggelen (Netherlands)	23 THURSDAY Christian Hockenjos (Germany)	24 FRIDAY Packie Bonner (Republic of Ireland) Ainar Leppänen (Estonia) Teresa Romão (Portugal) 40th Andrzej Zareba (Poland) 40th	25 SATURDAY Semen Andreev (Russia) Hans Cooman (Belgium) Ivančica Sudac (Croatia)
28 TUESDAY Jim Stjerne Hansen (Denmark)	29 WEDNESDAY Jacques Antenen (Switzerland) Jean-Pierre Escalettes (France) Jozef Kliment (Slovakia)	30 THURSDAY	31 FRIDAY Donel Conway (Republic of Ireland) Arnaldo Cunha (Portugal) 60th István Huszár (Hungary) Arne Larsen Økland (Norway) Mads Øland (Denmark)			

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

1 SATURDAY Ekaterina Fedyshina (Russia) 50th	2 SUNDAY Ferenc Székely (Hungary)	3 MONDAY Klara Bjartmarz (Iceland) 50th Ivaylo Ivkov (Bulgaria) Radek Lobo (Czech Republic) Liana Stoicescu (Romania)	4 TUESDAY Mete Düren (Turkey) Jean-Samuel Leuba (Switzerland) Vito Roberto Tisci (Italy) Yauheni Tratsiuk (Belarus) John Ward (Republic of Ireland)	5 WEDNESDAY Maksimas Bechterevas (Lithuania) John MacLean (Scotland) Ludovico Micallef (Malta) Jaap Uilenberg (Netherlands)	6 THURSDAY Stefano Braschi (Italy) Michael Hyland (Republic of Ireland)	7 FRIDAY Sándor Berzi (Hungary) 70th Lars-Åke Björck (Sweden) Onofre Costa (Portugal) Michel Sablon (Belgium)
10 MONDAY Hans Bangerter (Switzerland) Eleni Kiriou (Greece) Andrew Shaw (England)	11 TUESDAY Zoran Dimić (Serbia) Thórir Hakonarson (Iceland) 50th Kristinn Jakobsson (Iceland) 50th	12 WEDNESDAY Alain Courtois (Belgium) Haris Gvozden (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Jørn West Larsen (Denmark)	13 THURSDAY Roland Coquard (France) Matej Damjanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Targo Kaldoja (Estonia) 50th	14 FRIDAY Nuno Castro (Portugal) Galina Doneva (Bulgaria)	15 SATURDAY Miguel Galan Torres (Spain) Georgios Godalias (Greece) Viacheslav Koloskov (Russia) Vilma Zurze (Lithuania)	16 SUNDAY Sabri Çelik (Turkey) Alkan Ergün (Turkey) Kepa Larumbe (Spain) 40th Ramish Maliyev (Azerbaijan)
19 WEDNESDAY Tobias Wolf (Germany) 40th	20 THURSDAY Maria Mifsud (Malta)	21 FRIDAY Vakhtang Bzikadze (Georgia) Zoran Cvrk (Croatia) Ilya Kaenzig (Switzerland) Martin Malik (Czech Republic) Paulius Malzinskas (Lithuania) Tomasz Mikulski (Poland) Peter Peters (Germany)	22 SATURDAY David Martin (Northern Ireland)	23 SUNDAY Vladimir Antonov (Moldova) Leslie Irvine (Northern Ireland) Georg Pangl (Austria) Zvi Rosen (Israel)	24 MONDAY Tom Borgions (Belgium) Arturs Gaidels (Latvia) Jeanette Good (Finland) Hilmi Sinan Gürelli (Turkey) Jouni Hyytiä (Finland) Karlo Kankunen (Finland) João Rocha (Portugal) Jean-Jacques Schonckert (Luxembourg) 60th Renatus Temmink (Netherlands)	25 TUESDAY Mario Gjucinovski (North Macedonia) Michalis Koukoulakis (Greece)
28 FRIDAY Alessandro Giaquinto (San Marino) Wim Koevermans (Belgium)	29 SATURDAY Ivan Borissov Lekov (Bulgaria) Ginta Pece (Latvia) Michael Tschritzis (Greece) Paul-Daniel Zaharia (Romania)	30 SUNDAY Peter van Zunderd (Netherlands)				

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

8 WEDNESDAY

Marc Dobbelaer (Belgium)
Aleksandr Keplin (Kazakhstan) **40th**
Pekka Luhtanen (Finland)
David Malcolm (Northern Ireland) **50th**
Michel Pralong (Switzerland)
Miroslav Tulinger (Czech Republic)
Dan Vo Quang (France)

17 FRIDAY

Kadri Jägel (Estonia) **40th**
Svein Johannessen (Norway)

26 SUNDAY

Nikoloz Jgarkava (Georgia)

9 THURSDAY

18 SATURDAY

Lars Appelqvist (Sweden)
Tamara Chichinadze (Georgia)
Didier Quillot (France) **60th**

27 MONDAY

Peter Lawwell (Scotland) **60th**

MAY

Meetings

2 May, Nyon

Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee

3 May, Nyon

Women's Football Committee

8 May, Bruges

Medical Committee

14 May, Nyon

Club Competitions Committee

21 May, Nyon

National Team Competitions Committee

29 May, Baku

Executive Committee

31 May, Yerevan

European Under-19 Championship: final draw

Competitions

1 May

UEFA Champions League: semi-finals (first legs)

2 May

UEFA Europa League: semi-finals (first legs)

3–19 May, Republic of Ireland

European Under-17 Championship: final round

5–17 May, Bulgaria

European Women's Under-17 Championship: final round

7/8 May

UEFA Champions League: semi-finals (return legs)

9 May

UEFA Europa League: semi-finals (return legs)

18 May, Budapest

UEFA Women's Champions League: final

29 May, Baku

UEFA Europa League: final

JUNE

Meetings

6 June, Paris

FIFA Congress

11 June, Nyon

UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League: preliminary round draws

18 June, Nyon

UEFA Champions League: first and second qualifying round draws

19 June, Nyon

UEFA Europa League: first and second qualifying round draws

21 June, Nyon

UEFA Women's Champions League: qualifying round draw

Competitions

1 June, Madrid

UEFA Champions League: final

5–9 June, Portugal

UEFA Nations League: finals

5–11 June

2019–21 European Under-21 Championship: qualifying matches

7 June – 7 July, France

Women's World Cup

7/8 June

EURO 2020 qualifiers: matchday 3

10/11 June

EURO 2020 qualifiers: matchday 4

16–30 June, Italy/San Marino

2017–19 European Under-21 Championship: final round

18–26 June, Bavaria

UEFA Regions' Cup: final round

25 June

UEFA Champions League: preliminary round (semi-finals)

27 June

UEFA Europa League: preliminary round (first legs)

28 June

UEFA Champions League: preliminary round (final)

8 SATURDAY

Johannes Scholtz (Netherlands)

17 MONDAY

Michael Maessen (Netherlands)
Markus Nobs (Switzerland)
Anne Rei (Estonia) **50th**
Paolo Rondelli (San Marino)
Gregor Weimbs-Ackermann (Germany)
Rainer Werthmann (Germany) **60th**

26 WEDNESDAY

Foppe de Haan (Netherlands)
Nerijus Dunauskas (Lithuania)
Anja Palusevic (Germany)

9 SUNDAY

Jonathan Ford (Wales)
Petri Jakonen (Finland)
Monica Jorge (Portugal)
Jesper Møller Christensen (Denmark)
Antoine Portelli (Malta)

18 TUESDAY

Elkhan Mammadov (Azerbaijan) **40th**
Ivan Novak (Croatia)
Eduard Prodan (Albania)
Hannelore Ratzeburg (Germany)

27 THURSDAY

Barry Bright (England)
Ruud Dokter (Republic of Ireland)
Sigurdur Hannesson (Iceland)
Eyjolfur Olafsson (Iceland)
José Venancio López Hierro (Spain)



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