

UEFA



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BACK IN PLAY



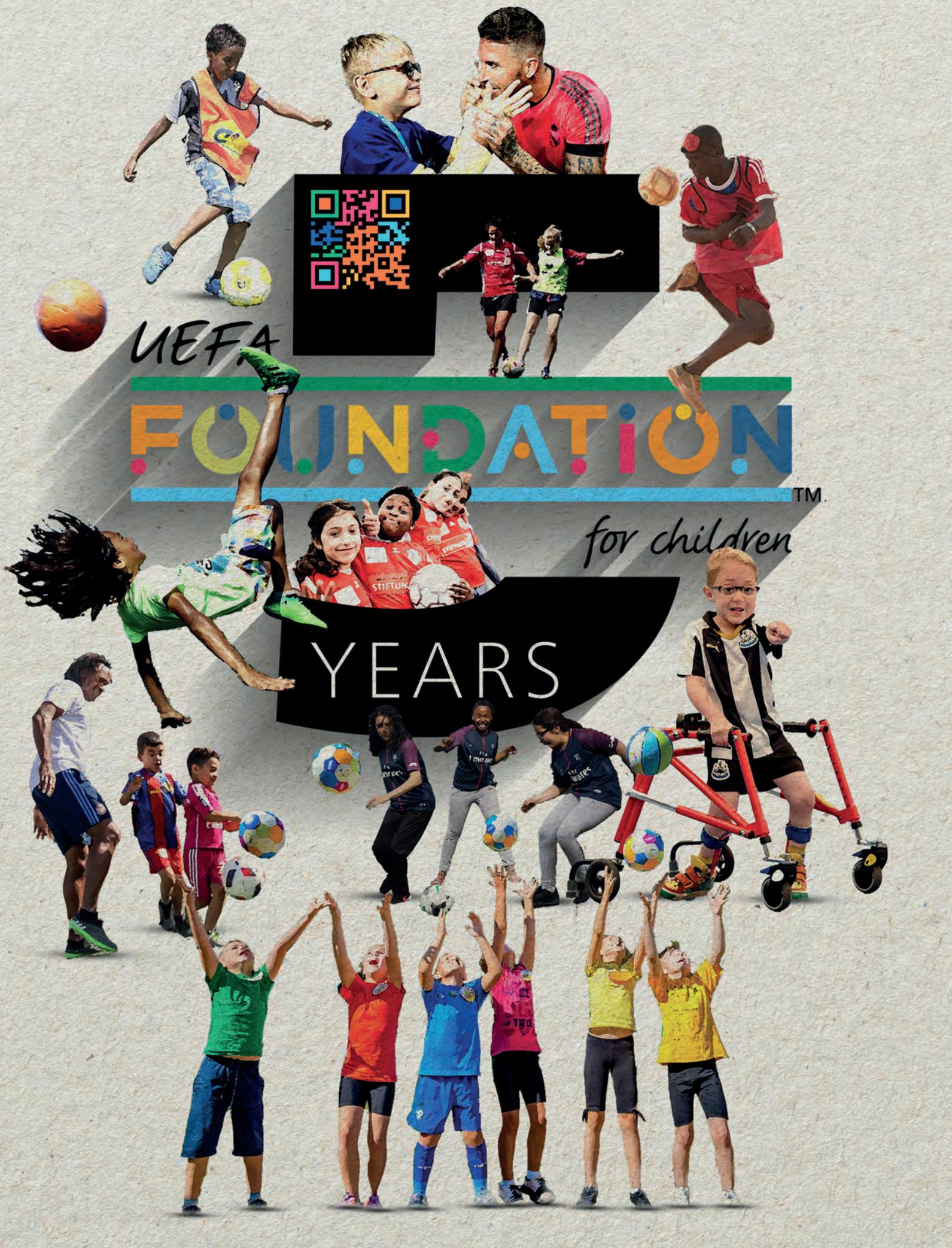
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Theodore Theodoridis
UEFA General Secretary

A MOMENT TO SAVOUR, A TIME TO REFLECT

After the unprecedented hiatus brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, football is steadily coming back to life. This edition of UEFA Direct reports on the imminent return of our elite competitions, assessing the obstacles that the European football community has had to overcome together to successfully rewrite UEFA's competitions calendar – both for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 seasons.

UEFA's return to play, with matches set to kick off in August, represents a milestone moment and the first chance to take stock of our journey to date through an extraordinary period.

The COVID-19 pandemic's outbreak in the spring brought European football to a standstill, and there was understandable concern that UEFA would not be able to finish its 2019/20 club competition season. Other major competitions, such as UEFA EURO 2020 and Women's EURO 2021, were postponed for a year. The outlook was uncertain, and the ramifications were difficult to predict.

As our president underlines in his interview on pages 6–7, despite these challenges, UEFA maintained a steadfast belief that better times would come. Now, following a great deal of hard work, cooperation and compromise behind the scenes, we are ready to deliver a match schedule in August and beyond that will bring the latest club competitions to completion, and set the 2020/21 competition campaign in motion. The moment when 'live' UEFA action returns to the spotlight will doubtless be one to savour, offering hope and joy to football lovers young and old.

Our sport has taken a back seat in recent times as the world has learned to live with the impact – personal, economic and otherwise – of COVID-19. Football has been missed during its absence – demonstrating clearly how much the game means to those who care about it and providing telling proof of football's enduring status as part of the fabric of our society.

Consequently, UEFA strongly feels that by 'returning to play' – albeit in circumstances that will still require caution and great care for our matches to take place – we are contributing to raising the morale of millions of people. It also shows how UEFA is adapting to the current reality to continue delivering on its core mission: running competitions and protecting, promoting and developing European football.

I for one am sure to experience a multitude of emotions when the first referee's whistle is blown in August – excitement, happiness, relief, anticipation. I am equally certain that those feelings will be shared and understood by anyone that holds the beautiful game close to their heart...

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JULY/AUGUST 2020



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'THERE'S BEEN A REAL WILLINGNESS TO REACH COMPROMISES'

UEFA president **Aleksander Čeferin** is playing a pivotal role in guiding European football and its governing body through the COVID-19 crisis. In this interview with UEFA Direct, he talks about UEFA's leadership during these extraordinary times, and explains why the spirit of solidarity and sacrifice shown by football's various stakeholders offers a positive lesson for the future.

What has been your personal experience of the COVID-19 crisis?

These recent months have obviously been a period of great uncertainty for everyone. As far as my family and myself are concerned, it's brought us even closer together...

As UEFA president, you've lived on the front line of football's longest period of inactivity since the Second World War. How have you coped with the situation?

Well, you must remember that the Second World War didn't actually stop football completely, unlike the COVID-19 crisis... from a professional point of view, there's been a lot of pressure and a great deal of hard work – but I'm happy and relieved that football is returning across Europe.

UEFA has rewritten its match calendar to ensure its competitions can 'return to play', while minimising risks to the health and safety of everyone involved. What did it take to do this?

Key stakeholders have had to sacrifice something. UEFA has sacrificed part of its season to enable the completion of ongoing domestic leagues by the end

of July, with UEFA then completing its own 2019/20 club competition season in August. The leagues agreed to this, and the solidarity of the clubs will be equally important for the national team window in September.

In what ways has responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic brought Europe's football community closer together?

We've seen a great deal of unity and solidarity between UEFA, national associations, clubs and leagues. That's been a quality which you can see in the decisions taken. There's been a real overall willingness to reach compromises.

You're in constant contact with UEFA's 55 member associations across Europe. How is UEFA helping them respond to the crisis?

The associations are all facing a variety of challenges. UEFA's relationship with them is a crucial cornerstone of our activities – they've always backed us in what we do, and we always support them. So, we've made an advance payment of €236.5m from UEFA's HatTrick programme funding*

that they can use to offset the consequences of financial losses caused by the COVID-19 situation. Moreover, the associations can naturally rest assured that they will be able to count on our unfailing support in the future.

Did you always believe that UEFA's 2019/20 competitions would still be played to a conclusion in 2020?

I believed it from the first moment. You should always be optimistic, and if something like this crisis happens, you must have a plan ready. At the present time, we will be playing matches without spectators until further notice. We will not take any risks.

Do you feel that UEFA has taken the right decisions at the right time over these months?

We, as a governing body, have had to bear in mind that we must take care of all of football – not just UEFA's competitions. Consequently, we've tried to lead the way in Europe, and I think we've done so quite successfully. I think the decision to postpone EURO 2020 to next year was a key moment, because it was taken at quite an early stage. Everybody understood that we did this to help the other

*Since 2004, UEFA's HatTrick programme has channelled revenue from the European Championships to national associations to support football development projects. Despite the postponement of EURO 2020, UEFA will honour its fifth HatTrick funding cycle, investing a total of €775.5 million in European football over the next four years.

UEFA

stakeholders and, once more, I must underline the spirit of total unity and solidarity that was forthcoming.

What steps can UEFA take to protect grassroots football across Europe from the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis?

There's been a major focus, of course, on the elite competitions. But it's also clear that grassroots football will always be a vital part of our mission. Given the medical protocols and provisions that will be in place, it will be important first of all that no one takes any unnecessary risks. And we must all be especially careful where children are concerned.

What have you learned about the underlying strengths of European football in this period? What lessons can be learned for the future?

I think it's hard to say at this stage what UEFA will learn, and what the world will learn. We'll certainly all learn that we're very fragile, and that a virus can actually bring the world virtually to a standstill... and that means football as well. But we'll all come through this crisis, and I'm sure that we'll emerge stronger and wiser than before.

The football community has shown not just unity and solidarity, but also friendship and respect. We're

communicating with each other every day, and we must continue to do so in the future. We might have disagreements, of course, but as long as we communicate and are all ready to sacrifice something, then we'll be on the right path.

As a football fan, what do you think you'll feel when you next watch a UEFA match in a stadium?

I'm sure that it will be a great feeling... like everyone, I would feel even better if the fans were there. But I'm an optimistic person, and my great hope is that spectators will be able to return to our matches as soon as possible. 🙏

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 "The football community has shown not just unity and solidarity, but also friendship and respect."



AUGUST RETURN TO PLAY FOR UEFA'S COMPETITIONS

The UEFA Executive Committee's videoconference meeting on 17 June will be remembered as one of the most momentous occasions in UEFA's long and rich history – coming as it did just two days after the organisation's 66th birthday.

The committee gave the go-ahead for UEFA's various men's and women's competitions to resume in August, ending a hiatus that began in March when the COVID-19 pandemic forced a halt to the European domestic and international football programme.

Responding to new developments

The Executive Committee's green light came as national governments and authorities began easing the lockdown conditions put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19. By June, many European domestic football competitions were gradually coming out of hibernation after the enforced period of inactivity, with league and cup matches getting under way again behind closed doors as a protective and preventative measure. The committee considered this as the right moment for UEFA's competitions to follow suit...

Football's wait: the preparation process

In the face of the COVID-19 crisis,

European football was compelled to take an unaccustomed back seat this spring, owing to the worldwide escalation of the pandemic. With people's health and safety paramount, UEFA put all of its competitions on hold until further notice in March, in compliance with national measures and World Health Organization recommendations. "The unprecedented circumstances indeed made it impossible for any sport to take place," said UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin. The only possibility in an uncertain and somewhat unreal atmosphere was to start preparing for better days ahead.

Background: finding a solution

From mid-March, an ongoing working and regular consultation process involved UEFA, its 55 member associations and other major stakeholders – notably, the European Club Association (ECA), the European Leagues (EL) and the players' union FIFPRO Europe. Working groups were set up to look at the calendar and assess the economic, financial and regulatory impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an expert medical panel

was created to examine the health issues. Working together, Europe's football community aimed to answer a question facing everyone in the game: how to complete the 2019/20 UEFA club competition season and finish domestic competitions across Europe as soon as circumstances would permit football to resume.

Finding the right response required an intense and challenging period of ideas and proposals, discussions, online meetings and telephone calls, expert analysis findings, exchanges of information and data, and urgent consultations. The solution subsequently approved by the UEFA Executive Committee gives priority to European domestic competitions, by enabling them to be played first and completed by the end of July, before UEFA's 2019/20 club competitions restart at the beginning of August.

Minimising risks, safeguarding value

UEFA's objective, especially with the revised club competition format put in place, is to minimise risks by keeping the



highest level of control over matches, limiting international travel and local journeys, and ensuring a safe accommodation environment; protecting competition, clubs and players by softening the match burden at the end of a long competitive summer of domestic action; and safeguarding value by offering the best possible format with only high-value matches, as well as to compensate lost match broadcasting opportunities.

The 2020/21 UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League qualification phases will be played as single legs instead of as home and away legs, thus cutting down on travel, hotel reservations and meetings, and lowering the risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

The EURO factor

A crucial catalyst for the club competition solution was UEFA's early decision in March to postpone its premium national team tournament, UEFA EURO 2020, until summer 2021. "UEFA took a bold decision when it decided to postpone EURO 2020," the UEFA president explained. "But in doing so, we created the space which has allowed domestic club competitions across the continent to resume, where possible, and play to a conclusion."

Neutral venues

Several factors drove the decision to bring the 2019/20 club competition campaign to its conclusion at neutral venues. These included the limited time available to find

appropriate solutions; the need to choose countries with a positive evolution in their epidemiologic situation; full support from the countries' football associations and

local authorities; good stadium infrastructures; and the associations' operational expertise.

The national associations of Portugal, Germany and Spain emerged as impressive and ideal candidates: they offered good venue concepts, government guarantees were forthcoming, and signed contracts have been provided for the venues.

Club competitions: player registration and substitutes

Teams may register three new players on their List A for the rest of the 2019/20 season, provided they were already registered and eligible for the club since the last registration deadline, with List A still containing a maximum 25 players. Clubs may not register newly transferred players. Five substitutions will be allowed in the 2019/20 matches to comply with temporary Laws of the Game changes, while the number of substitutions for 2020/21 will remain at three. →



Key Executive Committee decisions:

- **5–30 August:** Completion of UEFA's 2019/20 club competitions in single-leg matches played in three countries: Portugal (UEFA Champions League), Germany (UEFA Europa League) and Spain (UEFA Women's Champions League);
- **8 August – 1 October:** 2020/21 UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League qualifying phase;
- **3 September – 18 November:** UEFA Nations League group stage;
- **24 September:** UEFA Super Cup match in Budapest;
- **7–13 October:** 2020/21 UEFA Women's Champions League qualifying round mini-tournaments;
- **8 October/12 November:** European Qualifiers play-offs – semi-finals and finals respectively;
- **20/22 October:** Start of the respective 2020/21 UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League group stages;
- **11/12 and 18/19 November:** 2020/21 UEFA Women's Champions League round of 32;
- **11 June – 11 July 2021:** UEFA EURO 2020 to be staged in 12 host cities as scheduled across Europe.

(Full details of the UEFA Return to Play calendar can be found on pages 12–13)





Travel restrictions and social distancing recommendations mean that the Executive Committee has to meet by videoconference for the time being.

Matches behind closed doors

UEFA has adopted a ‘wait and see’ approach to this crucial protective and preventative issue. Given the constantly evolving situation, the UEFA administration agreed to continue to closely monitor the situation – it was felt that more time and information was needed, and continued close consultation with local authorities required, before any final decision could be taken on admitting spectators to UEFA competition matches. On 9 July, the Executive Committee decided that all matches would be played behind closed doors until further notice.

Medical protocol: keeping everyone safe

The medical working group’s deliberations will culminate in an extensive UEFA medical protocol, aimed at ensuring the safety and health of everyone involved in UEFA’s matches when they resume. Testing will be carried out on players and technical/medical staff, referees and UEFA match officers, and will be conducted alongside the application of other measures of infection prevention, such as social distancing, access to disinfection products, frequent and thorough hand washing, and the wearing of personal protective equipment at the stadium. Teams will have to adopt travel and accommodation policies that protect their members from risk of infection; stadium requirements will include a zoning system to be implemented in order to prevent uncontrolled or indirect contact issues, and stadium attendance will be limited to teams, officials and working staff. The medical protocol, which is now being finalised, will initially apply for the senior

men’s and women’s club and national team competitions and a further iteration will be produced for youth and futsal competitions. It will be a living document which can also be adapted to local legislation and requirements.

Matchday operational guidelines are also being adapted, both at club and national team level, so they are more tailored to football’s new norms. UEFA’s main challenge is to implement protocols and procedures that ensure its matches can take place with the same level of safety across all 55 national associations.

EURO 2020: one year later

While there was obvious disappointment at the postponement of UEFA EURO 2020, there is now considerable optimism about next summer’s rescheduled tournament. Signed undertakings have been received from all host associations, stadiums and host cities, which means that the same 12 venues as originally appointed will host the 51 matches: Amsterdam, Baku, Bilbao, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Dublin, Glasgow, London, Munich, Rome and Saint Petersburg.

Youth and women’s football, futsal: remembering their importance

An essential UEFA objective is to complete its current youth and futsal competitions. “We are firm believers in their importance and the significance of the overall growth and development of the game,” said the UEFA president. The completion of the 2019/20 UEFA Women’s Champions League also transmits a strong signal. “This competition has exciting times

ahead,” the UEFA president added, “and we want to enhance the momentum in the women’s game, not lose it.”

Unity and solidarity

Finally, as European football finds its feet again, one particularly positive fact has emerged from the COVID-19 crisis – the spirit of solidarity that has prevailed since March. Cooperation and understanding have been the order of the day as UEFA, the national associations and the various stakeholders have striven in tandem to steer football through extremely troubled times.

UEFA has made its own solidarity mark in this period. It released €236.5m of HatTrick assistance programme funding to help its 55 member associations meet the challenges of COVID-19 in their respective countries. In addition, with many clubs facing financial difficulties amid the crisis, UEFA released club benefit payments for the clubs’ contribution to European national team competitions, with 676 clubs from UEFA member associations receiving amounts ranging from €3,200 to €630,000 for their contribution to the European Qualifiers and the UEFA Nations League for the 2018–20 period.

Without this togetherness and teamwork on all sides, the task of maintaining football’s stability and plotting a course through the crisis would undoubtedly have been twice as daunting, as the UEFA president acknowledged: “The football community has worked together and shown tremendous unity during this unprecedented crisis,” he reflected. “I am convinced that we will come out of this crisis stronger and with closer links than ever before.” 🌐

Emergency club licensing measures

At its videoconference meeting, the Executive Committee approved temporary emergency measures as addenda to the UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations, to offset the impact of COVID-19 on club finances. The measures provide flexibility, while ensuring that clubs fulfil transfer and salary obligations on time, and give clubs more time to quantify and account for unanticipated revenue losses.

Overdue payables – valid for 2020/21 season

Among the key elements, all clubs in UEFA competitions must prove as at 31 July (instead of 30 June) and 30 September that they do not have any overdue payables in respect of transfers, employees and social/tax authorities as a result of obligations due to be paid up to 30 June and 30 September respectively.

Break-even rule – valid for 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons

The 2020 financial year assessment is postponed for one season, and will be assessed together with the 2021 financial year; the 2020/21 monitoring period is curtailed and only covers two reporting periods (financial years ending in 2018 and 2019). Meanwhile, the 2021/22 monitoring period is extended and covers four reporting periods (financial years ending in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021), and the 2020 and 2021 financial years will be assessed as one single period.

Player registration

The Executive Committee also set the player registration deadline for the 2020/21 UEFA club competitions group stages at 6 October 2020, and approved heading guidelines for young footballers designed to help protect their health and safety in training and matches.

The 2021/22 European Qualifiers draw procedure was approved – pending FIFA's final confirmation – and features ten groups. Group winners qualify directly for the 2022 World Cup, while group runners-up will take part in play-offs with two teams from the UEFA Nations League to determine the last three European qualifiers.

New women's youth competition formats

Finally, the European Women's Under-17 and Under-19 Championships will have a new format from 2021/22 to help further develop elite female youth players. A league-style qualifying format will see teams divided on coefficient rankings into two leagues, A and B, each with groups of four teams playing mini-tournaments.

A second group round in League A will replace the current elite round, with the winners (and best runner-up) qualifying for the final tournament. After that second round, the winners of the League B mini-tournaments will be promoted and the last-placed League A teams will be relegated into the first round of the next championship.

Final tournament hosts will be drawn into a league according to their coefficient and play as any other team throughout the competition, with their final tournament place guaranteed, irrespective of their results.

The Executive Committee approved heading guidelines for youth players.



NEW DATES FOR UEFA COMPETITIONS

Find out the new dates for this and next season's club competitions, plus all the revised national team competition schedules.

UEFA club competitions



2019/20 UEFA Champions League

Round of 16

7/8 August: Second legs to be played at home teams' stadiums where conditions allow

Quarter-finals & semi-finals – Lisbon

Single-leg ties on 12/13/14/15 August (quarters) and 18/19 August (semis) played at the Estádio do Sport Lisboa e Benfica and Estádio José Alvalade.

Final – Lisbon

23 August: Estádio do Sport Lisboa e Benfica

2020/21 UEFA Champions League

Preliminary round

8 and 11 August (single-leg ties)

First qualifying round

18/19 August (single-leg ties)

Second qualifying round

25/26 August (single-leg ties)

Third qualifying round

15/16 September (single-leg ties)

Play-offs

22/23 & 29/30 September

Group stage

20/21 & 27/28 October, 3/4 & 24/25

November, 1/2 & 8/9 December

No date changes to subsequent rounds



2019/20 UEFA Europa League

Round of 16

5/6 August: Second legs to be played at home teams' stadiums where conditions allow. FC Internazionale Milano v Getafe CF and Sevilla FC v AS Roma, whose first leg was also postponed, will be played as a single leg in Germany.

Quarter-finals & semi-finals – Cologne, Duisburg, Düsseldorf & Gelsenkirchen

Single-leg ties on 10/11 August (quarters) and 16/17 August (semis)

Final – Cologne

21 August: Stadion Köln

2020/21 UEFA Europa League

Preliminary round

20 August (single-leg ties)

First qualifying round

27 August (single-leg ties)

Second qualifying round

17 September (single-leg ties)

Third qualifying round

24 September (single-leg ties)

Play-offs

1 October (single-leg ties)

Group stage

22 & 29 October, 5 & 26 November,

3 & 10 December

No date changes to subsequent rounds



2019/20 UEFA Women's Champions League

Quarter-finals & semi-finals – Bilbao & San Sebastián

Single-leg ties on 21/22 August (quarters) and 25/26 August (semis) played at the San Mamés Stadium and Anoeta Stadium.

Final – San Sebastián

30 August: Anoeta Stadium

2020/21 UEFA Women's Champions League

Qualifying round mini-tournaments

7–13 October

Round of 32

11/12 & 18/19 November

Round of 16

3/4 & 10/11 March

Quarter-finals

23/24 March & 31 March / 1 April

Semi-finals

24/25 April & 1/2 May

Final – Gothenburg

16 May: Gamla Ullevi



2020 UEFA Super Cup – Budapest

24 September: Puskás Aréna, Budapest*

*originally scheduled to be played in Porto on 12 August 2020.



2019/20 UEFA Youth League

Round of 16

16 August, Nyon

Final tournament

Quarter-finals: 18/19 August, Nyon

Semi-finals: 22 August, Nyon

Final – Nyon

25 August: Colovray Stadium

UEFA men's national team competitions



UEFA EURO 2020

Play-offs

Semi-finals: 8 October

Finals: 12 November

Final tournament

Rescheduled from 11 June to 11 July 2021



2019–21 European Under-21 Championship

Qualifying round

To be concluded in September, October and November 2020

Group stage – Hungary and Slovenia

Group stage: 16 teams in 4 groups, 24–31 March 2021

Final tournament – Hungary and Slovenia

Quarter-finals, semi-finals & final:

31 May – 6 June 2021

Final – Ljubljana

6 June 2021: Ljubljana



2019/20 European Under-19 Championship

Elite round

2–8 September

Final tournament – Northern Ireland

Group stage: 7–17 October

Semi-finals, final & U-20 World Cup

play-off: 11–14 November



2019/20 European Under-17 Championship

Elite round

Cancelled

Final tournament – Estonia

Cancelled

Friendly matches

Autumn matches: 7/8 October

& 11/12 November



2020/21 UEFA Nations League

League phase

Group stage matches: 3/4/5 & 6/7/8

September, 10/11 & 13/14 October,

14/15 & 17/18 November

Finals

Under review



2020/21 UEFA Regions' Cup

Cancelled

UEFA women's national team competitions



UEFA Women's EURO 2021

Qualifying round & play-offs

Latest info: Remaining group matches to be played in FIFA women's international windows in September, October, November and December 2020; play-offs rescheduled for window in April 2021.

Final tournament – England

Latest info: rescheduled for 6–31 July 2022



2019/20 European Women's Under-19 Championship

Elite round

Cancelled

Final tournament – Georgia

Cancelled



2019/20 European Women's Under-17 Championship

Elite round

12–20 September

Final tournament* – Sweden

Quarter-finals, semi-finals & final:

4–10 October

**also serves as qualification competition for the U-17 Women's World Cup.*

UEFA futsal competitions



UEFA Futsal EURO 2020-22

Qualifying play-offs

2–11 November 2020

Group stage and play-offs

6 December 2020 to 17 November 2021

Latest info: New dates under review

Finals tournament – Netherlands

Latest info: Finals scheduled to take place from 19 January to 6 February 2022 in the Netherlands.

2020 Futsal World Cup

European Play-offs

2–11 November 2020



2019/20 UEFA Futsal Champions League

Finals – Barcelona*

Semi-finals, third-place play-off

& final: 8–11 October

**Original host Minsk will now hold next season's finals in April 2021.*



UEFA Women's Futsal EURO 2022

Preliminary round

4–9 May 2021

Main round

19–24 October 2021

Finals

24–27 March 2022



2020/21 European Under-19 Futsal Championship

Final tournament

1–7 November 2021

SOLID PLATFORM FOR EUROPEAN FOOTBALL TO BOUNCE BACK

The COVID-19 crisis has shaken economies and societies around the world. UEFA's five-year strategy has laid solid foundations which will help European football to withstand the shock and adapt to sport's 'new normal' – according to the members of the UEFA strategy steering committee.



It has quickly become a cliché, but it does not make it any less true that we are currently living through unprecedented times. The norms of everyday life have been turned upside down and the impact has been felt by people around the world – not least here in Europe.

Despite its prominent role in our society, sport can often feel like it exists outside the normal news cycle. Traditionally, football has offered an escape, something people can turn to in tough times. The national mood of a country has often been lifted by its football team – we only need to recall the scenes in Utrecht following Women's EURO 2017 or in Paris during the 2018 World Cup to see how national successes can galvanise entire countries, uniting fans from all backgrounds in a shared eruption of euphoria.

'Bringing people closer' is one of football's great strengths, but with the term 'social distancing' now a public health mantra repeated across the world, our great sport cannot do that for the time being, at least not in a physical way. It can, though, still bring communities closer in spirit. Solidarity across European football will be vital to ensure an eventual triumphant return at every level – we are all in it together.

Fortunately, we are well placed to bounce back. The UEFA Strategy 2019–24: Together for the Future of Football was not developed with a global health emergency in mind but, in responding to the unique challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more relevant than ever.

Projects set up, developed and progressed to fulfil the strategy's four goals – participation, good governance, solidarity and finance – have helped our sport resist the shock to the system and allow us to look forward with cautious confidence. From creating incentives that help implement good governance principles to the Football Federations of the Future programme, which fosters business development, national associations are well placed to ride out the worst of COVID-19's impact on our sport.

A strategy's long-term success is ultimately measured by the fulfilment of its goals. However, its effectiveness requires in-built flexibility – circumstances change over a five-year period and that demands an agile response. For example, with each of its 55 member associations affected by COVID-19 in different ways, UEFA realised early on that national associations were best placed to determine how to protect football in their own countries. Rather than ring-fencing development funding for specific projects,

as in more normal times, UEFA gave an immediate and direct boost to all member associations by releasing €236.5m of HatTrick funds.

With their domestic seasons brought to an abrupt standstill, clubs faced a sudden and unexpected cessation in activity. In a similar vein to the flexibility shown by quickly making HatTrick payments available to member associations, UEFA fast-tracked the release of €70m in solidarity funds to clubs that have contributed players to UEFA national team competition matches. In total, 676 clubs from every UEFA nation benefited.

While the strategy's ability to adapt to changing circumstances has undoubtedly helped national associations cope with the short-term emergency, its long-term goals should drive European football's long-term economic recovery. Once football restarts across the continent and down the leagues, the development of a new, third UEFA club competition will ensure a broader spread of teams from different countries get the opportunity to play European football and benefit from its revenue. Furthermore, the ongoing efforts to ensure economic sustainability through club licensing and financial fair play have given clubs the best possible chance of weathering a storm that – for the time being – includes limited matchday income.

Building consensus through a collaborative approach was a key enabler in creating the strategy. That cornerstone did not just determine how it was constructed, but also shaped the attitude and spirit in which the work would be carried out. It meant that, in a time of unique challenges as football stopped across Europe for the first time in 75 years, stakeholder working groups could quickly be formed, ensuring the inclusion of every key stakeholder in the decision-making process.

From this, consensus could be reached and priorities established around difficult decisions that, in the past, might have foundered on conflicting interests. For example, UEFA agreed to postpone flagship national team tournaments and delay the return of its club competitions to ensure that domestic competitions had every opportunity to finish their season. This was done for the overall good of European football.

UEFA's strategy was designed to tackle the many challenges European football would face over the next decade. While few would have predicted the nature and size of the current test, the measures laid down in advance have ensured our response has been firm and united. It has given us the best possible chance to keep football as Europe's most played, trusted and engaging sport.

UEFA strategy steering committee

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ONE YEAR IN

Launched at the UEFA Congress in February 2019, Together for the Future of Football gave a clear direction and vision for the European game, with buy-in from all major stakeholders.

The first year of implementation saw great strides taken in numerous key domains. Looking ahead, the strategy will not only have to tackle the challenges anticipated at the time of its creation, but also the many more resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the strategy was launched, UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin said: “Our mission is to keep football the most

played, trusted and engaging sport. This is not just a mission for UEFA but for everyone involved in football, and we should all be united in this mission.”

The pandemic does not change this mission, and in many ways gives it further significance – so what measures have been implemented within the parameters of the strategy’s four pillars?



Football

Objectives

1. Grow and secure long-term participation within European football
2. Lead and support the advancement of national football associations
3. Ensure football in Europe is accessible and available to all
4. Promote and develop football infrastructure across Europe

Key achievements

Football in Schools programme

- launched in 2020 to promote football as a social and educational tool, and develop a player pathway to link up with clubs.

PlayMakers collaboration with Disney

- innovative new approach based on play designed to increase five- to eight-year-old girls’ participation in sport and raise their self-confidence. Aims to change perception about girls playing football.

Football Federations of the Future

- business development programme offering assistance to national associations.

COVID-19 impact

The pandemic stopped organised football at all levels, but UEFA’s strategic goals of participation, accessibility and development remained more important than ever. The UEFA-Disney tie-up adapted PlayMakers to run Play at Home, which encouraged children to stay active, even while locked down at home.

UEFA strategy steering committee

“We took several excellent steps forward in 2019 as we aim to increase participation across all areas of society, and while we have experienced this unique hiatus in people actually playing the game, we are confident in our long-term aims.”



Trust

Objectives

1. Provide leadership to the national associations
2. Promote good governance and increased transparency
3. Protect the integrity of football
4. Develop stakeholder involvement

Key achievements

UEFA internal governance and compliance unit

- set up to align UEFA activities with good governance principles.

UEFA finals: revised bidding processes

- more transparent bidding processes for UEFA competition finals to ensure adherence to various requirements (e.g. sustainability standards).

COVID-19 impact

Providing support and guidance to European football’s leaders is helping our community to navigate uncertain times and lay solid foundations for building the future.

UEFA strategy steering committee

“The strategy is a united front across European football but in no other area is this perhaps more important than in the Trust pillar. This first year provided some examples of excellent collaboration as we aim to raise good governance standards, increase transparency and guard football’s integrity.”



Competitiveness

Objectives

1. Ensure all UEFA competitions are competitive and meaningful for all
2. Pursue the optimal football calendar to facilitate domestic and international competitions
3. Work to maintain competitive balance through sporting and financial measures
4. Protect and support financial sustainability at all levels

Key achievements

UEFA Europa Conference League

- allows clubs from a higher number of member associations to participate in UEFA club competitions, with winners granted access to the Europa League group stage.

UEFA Nations League

- adjusted after first edition to further reduce number of friendlies and encourage more meaningful competitive matches.

Launch of women's club licensing

- basis for securing sustainable practices and advancing professionalism within the women's game.

COVID-19 impact

The global health emergency has brought challenges both for the financial security of stakeholders and the overall football calendar. UEFA took proactive measures to inject cash in advance to help member associations and clubs cope with the crisis, to quickly establish consensus around a road map for restarting competitions.

UEFA strategy steering committee

"At both club and national team level, the ball is rolling to offer further opportunities for meaningful, competitive football as work continues to ensure financial sustainability best practice is followed."



Prosperity

Objectives

1. Continue growing revenues
2. Pursue more efficient development through research and investment
3. Establish continuous fan engagement and relationships
4. Enhance our international image and awareness

Key achievements

UEFA.tv

- launch of streaming platform, giving fans increased access to live and on-demand video, both for UEFA and domestic competitions.

UEFA Club Competitions SA

- advising and making recommendations to UEFA on strategic business topics.

UEFA innovation hub

- set up to encourage cutting-edge research and to create a forum for testing ground-breaking approaches to football's development.

COVID-19 impact

In 2020, European football experienced its longest period of inactivity since World War II. New thinking is essential to ensure the sport continues to grow post-pandemic.

UEFA strategy steering committee

"There were several exciting developments in 2019 that keep us pushing forward on numerous fronts. These include different innovations concerning our 'stock-in-trade' output but also within other areas of opportunity such as esports."

THE POWER OF VISION IN DRIVING LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Football Federations of the Future enables national associations to establish a clear vision and ensure they have a robust strategy in place to grow and develop football.

In recent months, the world has had to adapt to COVID-19 and, as a result, the goalposts have shifted for many sports organisations across Europe.

For national football associations, this has meant priorities have had to change, as attention focuses on ensuring football, at all levels of the game, adheres to changes in government legislation and, moving forward, can exist in an environment that ensures the health and well-being of all its participants, from players and fans to volunteers and administrators.

In shaping a response to this pandemic, the choices facing national associations are tough ones, the outcomes of which could have ramifications for the future of the game in that country, not just in the months ahead, but for many years to come.

The solution is not easy. But, wherever possible, the focus must be to think beyond short-term necessity and keep sight of the long-term vision the association has established for the future of football in that country. This enables

plans to be measured against their ability to support an organisation in achieving its long-term strategic goals.

Without the existence of a clear vision, supported by a detailed and robust strategic plan, national associations lose the ability to benchmark potential solutions and, as a result, are far less likely to make decisions that will support the long-term interests of the organisation. Football Federations of the Future was launched by UEFA in October 2019 with the specific aim of enabling national

Football Federations of the Future



STRATEGIC PLANNING

"Every association has a clear strategy for growth with a corresponding implementation system"



PARTICIPATION

"Understanding, growing and retaining as many participants as possible"



ENGAGEMENT

"Improving our connection with the football family"



REVENUES

"Increasing the funding required to grow the game"



IMAGE

"A Football Federation of the Future has a positive image and is a respected, transparent and modern organisation"



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

"Strong partnerships with governments and municipalities to grow football"



INSIGHTS

"A Football Federation of the Future is insight-driven and makes decisions based on evidence"



BRAND

"A Football Federation of the Future uses brands as strategic tools to create value for the organisation, football and society"



COMMUNICATION

"Strategic communications capability that supports the national association in achieving its overall organisational goals"



GOVERNANCE

"Improving the governance of our national associations"



IT

"Make IT matter – fit for purpose"



EDUCATION

"Ensuring all staff have the right skill sets to achieve the organisation's goals"



MEDIA RIGHTS & CONTENT

"Optimising our media rights opportunities, reaching more and more people the right way"



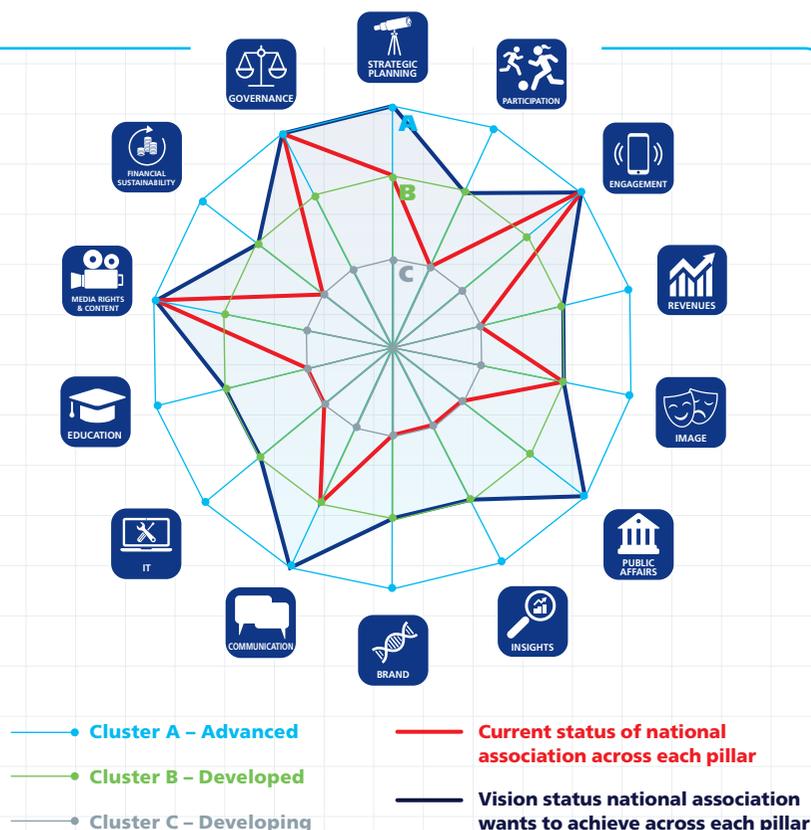
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

"Making European football financially sustainable, protecting its long-term viability and stability"

The Football Federations of the Future cluster model enables a national association to assess which cluster (A – Advanced, B – Developed or C – Developing) most accurately defines its current status across each of the 14 individual business pillars.

The vision is then determined based on how, and to what extent, the national association needs to develop its capability across each of the individual pillars, in order to be able to deliver against its organisational objectives.

In this example, we can see that as a result of working through Football Federations of the Future, the national association has determined that, in order to deliver against its long-term strategic goals, it must focus on developing its capability across nine core areas of its business. Of those nine areas, it has identified public affairs as presenting the single biggest opportunity for growth, based on its current versus vision status.



associations to establish their own vision and set the strategic direction for the future of football in their own country.

Since its launch, it has proven to be a powerful business development tool, supporting national associations of all sizes and levels of resource across two key areas.

Firstly, for those associations looking to move to the next level of their overall development, Football Federations of the Future acts as a springboard, providing them with the necessary framework and guidance to enable them to successfully do so.

Secondly, using the same methodology, national associations are able to review or ‘stress test’ their strategic plans to ensure they remain valid and that individual departments are on track to achieve their own objectives. This process provides valuable insight to the senior management team and allows them to be able to address any issues at an early stage in order that plans can be changed and the organisation, as a whole, remains on course to deliver against its long-term vision.

Football Federations of the Future is designed to support national associations that are looking to:

- **Accelerate their overall development. Football Federations of the Future acts as a springboard, providing them with the necessary guidance and framework.**
- **Review or ‘stress test’ their strategic plans, to ensure they remain valid and that individual departments are on track to achieve their own objectives.**

Your future in your hands

Football Federations of the Future is built around the principle of self-assessment. It provides national associations with a process through which they are able to holistically analyse and rate their current status across 14 core areas of the business. They can then use this as the basis to plot a path that identifies how, and in what ways, they need to develop across each of these pillars, using the Football Federations of the Future cluster model as a guide in order to deliver against their long-term vision.

Throughout this process, and beyond, UEFA works closely with each national association and is on hand at every

stage to provide the necessary support and guidance.

As a result of being part of Football Federations of the Future, national associations are able to envision a better, more sustainable future. They will have developed a clear, coordinated and effective strategy that will provide them with a comprehensive understanding of where their organisational priorities should be focused over the coming years and what additional resources are required, across what areas of the business, in order for the national association to be able to move towards delivering against its overall vision for the future of football in its country. 🌐

HOW THE CLUB LICENSING SYSTEM IS IMPLEMENTED ACROSS EUROPE

UEFA has recently published for the first time an interactive report that sets out how the club licensing system is implemented across each of UEFA's 55 member associations.

The UEFA Club Licensing System: Overview of Implementation and Application across Europe not only gives an overview of what the system is and how it works, but also provides, among other information, insights into how each national association is organised, the types of regulations and requirements in place, as well as various initiatives introduced at national level.

The UEFA club licensing system has evolved greatly since it was introduced in 2004 in order to adapt to the continuously evolving European football landscape. As explained in more detail in the report, clubs that qualify on sporting merit for UEFA club competitions must be granted a licence in order to be admitted to the competition in question. This licence acts as a certificate confirming that a club fulfils all UEFA's minimum criteria and is delivered by the UEFA member association or league, which acts as the licensor and assesses each applicant club against the set requirements. The criteria themselves are spread across five pillars: sporting, infrastructure, personnel and administrative, legal and financial.

One of the features that makes the UEFA club licensing system special is its flexibility. UEFA sets the minimum standards that must be respected across



Michele Uva, UEFA vice-president and chairman of the Club Licensing Committee, opens a workshop in Vienna in 2019.

CEPA

the continent, but licensors may adapt them to their national context or needs and introduce additional criteria or higher standards. Similarly, licensors may also choose whether to apply club licensing principles only to clubs that have qualified for UEFA club competitions or for their own domestic competitions as well.

Another merit of the system is that it favours the organisational and managerial development of the football system as a whole by strengthening the efficient functioning of regulatory structures, while promoting the principles of proportionality, equal treatment, non-discrimination and subsidiarity, among others.

Over the years, the club licensing system has become an intrinsic part of both the operational and strategic framework of European club football and has also acted as the basis for gathering information at UEFA level on related matters. The large database that UEFA has garnered over the years has enabled many benchmarking analyses, including the annual UEFA Club Licensing Benchmarking Report. This is the first time, however, that all information related to the governance and regulatory structures in place throughout Europe has been gathered to share with licensors and the general public.

In the current circumstances, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of a regulatory framework at UEFA and at national level in helping to limit the damage from the financial shortfalls caused by this crisis throughout the European football pyramid and ensuring the welfare of the European football community.

The report also gives an overview of the current landscape of women's football in Europe. A club licensing system for women's football was introduced in 2018 as part of UEFA's drive to further women's football. It will be applied for the first time as part of the admission process for the 2020/21 UEFA Women's Champions League.

Essentially, this new report provides a general overview and historical data, before delving deeper into the different comparative information available in relation to licensors and their regulations, domestic club licensing and club monitoring systems, the financial framework these systems work under, and the specific organisational structures and administration in place.

Meanwhile, UEFA aims to continue developing the system, with the ultimate aim of continuing to raise standards across the board in European football. 🌐





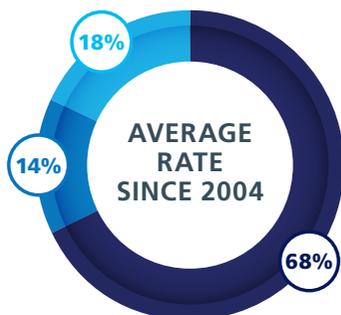
LICENSING STATS



582

UEFA licence applications out of **715** top-division clubs in 2019

RESULTS FOR TOP DIVISION CLUBS



- Granted a UEFA licence
- Refused a UEFA licence
- Did not apply for a UEFA licence

The UEFA club licensing system defines criteria for admission to UEFA competitions (Benfica take on Lyon in the UEFA Champions League on 23 October 2019).



Konami



Konami

ITALY EMERGE TRIUMPHANT

Italy won UEFA eEURO 2020, the inaugural efootball version of the EUROs, at the end of a competition featuring representatives of UEFA’s 55 member associations that helped to promote efootball throughout the continent.

Lorenzo Insigne secured the European title for the Azzurri with a curling strike in additional time at the end of the final. The Italian players rushed to congratulate their new national hero at the conclusion of a thrilling match against disappointed Serbian opponents.

This could have been the finale of UEFA EURO 2020, such was the extraordinary realism. But it was, in fact, the culmination of eEURO 2020, the first edition of this competition organised by UEFA and played on its partner Konami’s eFootball PES 2020.

As far as first editions go, this was a highly ambitious one, since eEURO 2020 was the biggest ever national team efootball competition.

All 55 UEFA member associations took part in the competition, which was based on the usual EURO template but adapted to the world of efootball.

The simple format meant the competition was easy to follow: each country was represented by its national



Ukraine’s gamers in action during eEURO 2020 (see also page 64).

efootball team, made up of two to four gamers selected in national tournaments. All the players represented their national team on eFootball PES 2020. In the final, the Italian football players therefore used

their PS4 handsets to control their country’s star players, including the likes of Marco Verratti, Fabio Quagliarella and Ciro Immobile, while their Serbian opponents were able to harness the talents of



FIGC



Winners' words

The four Italian players give their impressions of the first ever UEFA eEURO

Was it a special competition compared with the ones you typically participate in?

AlonsoGrayfox: It was a magical, unique experience, definitely the most important competition since I have been playing PES competitively. I think it will be something I will remember for all of my life.

Naples17x: The experience of this competition was beautiful, especially because each nation had its own team – even though it was played 1v1, it was as if all the four of us were playing at the same time.

Nicaldan: Definitely a magical experience, the most important competition I have participated in and it was the fulfilment of a dream. Representing your country is different from any other competition.

Npk02: It was a terrific experience; the organisation was of a very high level. It certainly was a special competition, different from the others, because representing your country is a source of pride and makes you face challenges with a special sensation.

Does representing your country invoke pride or pressure?

Naples17x: To represent my country is a source of pride, but there is also a lot

of pressure because you know that you are representing a nation... your nation!

Npk02: Pressure is normal in a competitive environment, but the pride and the warmth of the people more than make up for that.

What was the biggest moment of the competition for you?

AlonsoGrayfox: Definitely the last goal that gave us the eEURO; a very arduous game resolved by the magic of Insigne controlled by our Carmine.

Nicaldan: Certainly the match with France, the tournament favourites; a match that ended on penalties... an incredible feeling to get through the round and to the finals thanks to my victory.

Npk02: The most important moment was getting through the semi-final; winning it made us realise we could win the tournament.

How would you judge the level of play at the competition?

AlonsoGrayfox: Very high. The elite of PES were all there and this could only give us more satisfaction at having won.

Npk02: This is the competition with the highest level that I have ever faced. It was an honour to be able to participate in this fantastic tournament and above all I will never forget the thrill of winning it.

Nicaldan: The level was high, many teams of the highest level. Each national team wanted to win, and to be able to challenge and even win against the two most feared teams, France and Serbia.

Npk02: The level of play is the most difficult that can be found in the world's competitive environment.



players such as Dušan Tadić, Luka Jović and Adem Ljajić.

Did the competition's format put the smaller European nations at a disadvantage? Not at all, thanks to a stat balancing mode that put Germany on the same footing as Gibraltar, for example, and enabled all countries to participate on a level playing field.

Under this system, the main characteristics of the players were retained – Kylian Mbappé was still quicker than

Kostas Mitroglou – but the overall standard of the teams was similar. This enabled countries that rarely achieve much success in the real world of European football to grab more of the headlines.

Luxembourg, for example, reached the 16-team final tournament by winning Group F in a very precisely organised qualifying phase from 9 to 30 March.

The 55 European nations were split into ten groups of five or six, with each country playing two matches against the →



Konami

other countries in the same group on the last four Mondays of March.

Each pair of matches was played on a 1v1 basis, with the aggregate score deciding the winner. The ten group winners qualified for the final tournament, where they were joined by six other teams who came through play-offs involving the qualifying group runners-up.

Final tournament plans affected by COVID-19

The 16 finalists included some of the larger European footballing nations, such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain, alongside some that have never taken part in a traditional EURO, such as Israel, Luxembourg and Montenegro.

The final tournament was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, having originally been scheduled to be held on 10 and 11 July, the two days leading up to the EURO 2020 final, with all the participants gathering for a live event in London. After EURO 2020 was postponed until summer 2021, UEFA decided to go ahead with the eEURO 2020 final tournament, bringing it forward to 23 and 24 May and holding it fully online.

The cast list reflected the prestige of the event, since the vast majority of the participants were established football players at national and international level and included several PES world champions, professional football players from some of Europe's top clubs

(Manchester United FC, FC Barcelona, FC Bayern München, AS Monaco, etc.) and numerous national champions.

Not all the finalists were from the same mould, however, with the line-up also featuring Croatian Andrej Šporčić (džaner18), a former professional footballer and Under-17 international who played in the Croatian first division, and Finland's Jussi Aalto, who has arthrogyrosis multiplex congenita, a condition which affects the movement of his joints and requires him to use a wheelchair. His example demonstrates the inclusive nature of efootball and the eEURO, which gave all Europeans a chance to represent their country in a high-profile international competition.

Huge visibility across UEFA's platforms

By staging the eEURO 2020 finals at a time when virtually all sports competitions were on hold, UEFA was able to put the event firmly in the media spotlight.

Although it was clearly unable to completely fill the void left for the fans by the suspension of the UEFA club competitions and domestic leagues, eEURO 2020 received plenty of coverage on UEFA's digital platforms, including live transmission of the whole competition on UEFA's YouTube channel.

Many of UEFA's broadcast partners also showed the event, which was watched by a cumulative audience of more than 8 million. The viewing figures were particularly encouraging in view of the fact that most people watching were youngsters, a slightly different audience from UEFA's more traditional competitions.

A rather unusual format was used for the final tournament. The 16 teams were divided into four groups of four, with two teams from each group qualifying for the quarter-finals.

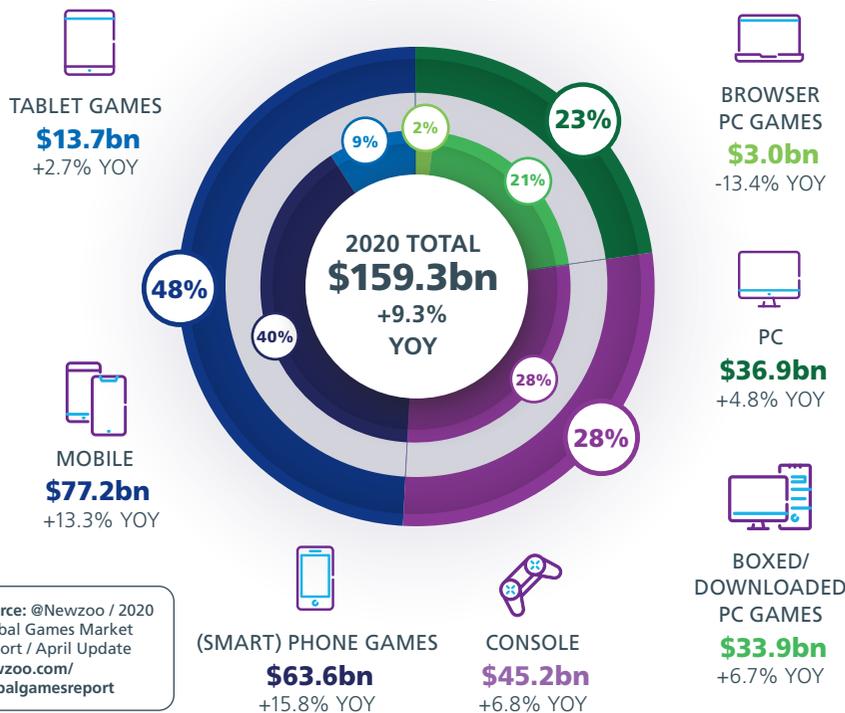
Nothing unusual there, except that the teams did not play all the other teams in their group. Two initial fixtures were played in each group, before the winners then met to contest a quarter-final berth.

The losers of the first two matches then faced each other, with a second loss bringing elimination. The winner of the losers' fixture went into a tiebreaker with the loser of the winners' tie, with the victors claiming the second quarter-final spot.

The eight teams that progressed were the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Serbia,

2020 global games market

Per device and segment with year-on-year (YOY) growth rates



Source: @Newzoo / 2020 Global Games Market Report / April Update
newzoo.com/globalgamesreport



GUY-LAURENT EPSTEIN,
UEFA EVENTS SA MARKETING DIRECTOR

'We want to engage with new audiences'

What are the principal reasons behind UEFA's decision to launch an football version of UEFA EURO 2020?

The esports market has been increasing for a number of years now. While football simulation games are a small part of this for the time being, we see it as an opportunity to engage with new audiences and to provide additional content for the existing fans of our competitions.

We were also conscious of the fact that a large proportion of our national associations had expressed an interest in doing something in the esports space, but either didn't have the available resources or weren't sure where to start. This competition provided the ideal entry point.

The initial feedback on the competition has been positive and so we expect to see future editions.

What is your assessment of the competition, from a sporting standpoint as well as the involvement of national associations and audience reaction?

The competition was undoubtedly a success. The national associations were thoroughly engaged, organising boot camps, physical events and online qualifiers to select their teams.

The final phase saw the presence of traditional football powerhouses such as France and Germany, but also the emergence of countries that we aren't used to seeing at the final stages of our traditional tournaments such as Luxembourg and Montenegro. The stat balancing mode in the game allowed all countries to compete on an even playing field. The final phase was covered digitally on all UEFA social media channels



All
55
UEFA member
associations participated
in the first eURO



Over
10,000
gamers signed up
to participate
in the tournament



Across the
whole tournament
15 million
viewers tuned in
(on UEFA channels)

(YouTube, Facebook and Twitter) as well as by 25 EURO broadcast partners, including SRF and Sky Italia. Viewing figures exceeded expectations with over 8 million views.

What impact did the COVID-19 crisis have on the competition? Did eEuro 2020 somewhat fill the void left by the lack of on-field competitions?

The goal of UEFA's venture into esports is not to replace on-field football, but rather to complement it. It is true that COVID-19 has created a unique situation with people being able to consume less live sporting action and searching for new types of content.

Originally, the final had been planned to be a live event, but we were able to adapt to hold the finals online with all the gamers participating remotely.

Italy, Israel, France and Croatia. The format of the quarter-finals and semi-finals was identical, with 1v1 matches on a best-of-three basis.

The quarter-final between France and Croatia, for example, saw the two French players Walid Tebane (usmakabyle) and Lotfi Derradji (Lotfi_Derradji) beat their Croatian opponents, Marko Gelo (Gelszapresic-) and Andrej Šporčić (dzaner18), to reach the last four.

In the semi-finals, the French, who were among the favourites for the competition, were defeated by Italy by two games to zero. The other semi-final was more closely fought, with Serbia beating Romania 2-1.

Unstoppable Immobile, heroic Insigne

The format was altered again for the final.

The matches were again contested 1v1, but this time as a best of five, similar to the knockout series used in American professional leagues.

With each country free to select between two and four players, the final was disputed by four Italians and two Serbs. It comprised a total of four matches.

Alfonso Mereu (AlonsoGrayfox) gave Italy an early advantage by beating Marko Roksić (RoksaCZv22) 4-2 in a match that featured a hat-trick by striker Ciro Immobile.

Stefan Slavković (Kepa_PFC), Serbia's number two (a professional efootball player for FC Nantes, just like his teammate, Marko Roksić) levelled the score with a 5-1 victory over Rosario Accurso (Genoa_Npk02) in which the Serbian forwards had a field day.

Italy then regained the lead after a very tight encounter between their captain, Nicola Lillo (Nicaldan), and Marko Roksić, with Ciro Immobile scoring the only goal. Going into the fourth match with a 2-1 lead, the Italians therefore only needed one more win, which was secured in dramatic fashion by their fourth player, Carmine Liuzzi (Naples17x), thanks to a late personal masterclass by Lorenzo Insigne.

It was the culmination of a journey lasting several months for the Italian players, who had qualified for the Squadra Azzurra eSport in a national tournament in late 2019. They were worthy winners of the title of European champions and the €40,000 prize that came with it, out of prize money totalling €100,000. 🏆

BODY AND MIND TRAINING

Thanks to careful planning, detailed research and preparation, expert advice, and a spirit of teamwork and positive thinking on all sides, match officials – referees, assistant referees and video assistant referees – have still been training and analysing their ‘trade’ while football has waited to return.

The chairman of UEFA’s Referees Committee, Roberto Rosetti, explains how UEFA put a plan into operation to keep the referees ‘in business’ in these difficult times. “The first step that I took at the onset of the pandemic was to write an open letter to the referees, in which I asked them first and foremost to take care of themselves and their families – I also promised them that we’d continue to work together as a group during the crisis and find solutions to keep active.

“We then contacted the referees one by one – myself and the UEFA refereeing officers Dagmar Damková, Hugh Dallas, Marc Batta and Vlado Šajn – because we felt that human contact was vital in this difficult period to show that we’re together and united as a ‘family’. Then we started



INTERVIEW: WERNER HELSEN



‘Every disadvantage has its advantage’

UEFA sports scientist and referee fitness expert Werner Helsen talks about training Europe’s referees during the COVID-19 crisis.

How quickly were you able to set up the training programme once the crisis expanded, and how much did your extensive experience help you?

As a sports scientist, I’m fortunate to have access to the most up-to-date information. Furthermore, we’re trained to always think about new tools and technologies to support match officials in the most professional way.

As a result, I was able to provide the referees with information shortly after the last UEFA Champions League

games were played – how to train and eat to boost immunity; functional training at home; mental training; simple and effective tips to sleep well during lockdown; training exercises to do at home; how to preserve muscle mass... all kinds of information that is valuable to referees in a similar way as it is to players.

How important is mental training in such a situation?

It’s very important indeed. It’s extremely complementary to the physical training sessions, and



Artur Soares Dias, Porto (Portugal)



Fyodor Zammit (Malta)



Kristo Tohver, Tallinn (Estonia)

out on the task of setting up technical and training activities for them.”

Vast experience was already at hand: Professor Werner Helsen, UEFA’s long-standing sports scientist and referee training expert from Belgium (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), started collecting and researching information and ideas from a wide range of sources. The fruits of his dedication were the launching of a referee training programme featuring home training routines and online group training sessions. “Of course,” Rosetti explains, “this programme has always been adapted to the circumstances in each country.”

Perception 4 Perfection

Alongside this programme, an online tool for decision-making training – Perception 4 Perfection – was set up for referees, video assistant referees (VAR) and assistant referees, comprising video clips and footage of fouls, offside and goal/no

goal situations, and has included feedback from the UEFA refereeing officers. Clips from matches were also produced for the referees to study performances and identify potential areas of improvement.

The match officials have been exchanging feedback with the referee officers on the various clips – with the result that continuity in the referees’ study and analysis work has still been guaranteed during the COVID-19 crisis.

The various home training and group exercises drawn up by Werner Helsen have covered a variety of different and interesting facets. In addition to physical exercise – including strength training, cardiovascular exercises and functional training at home with little or no equipment – the programme has included tips on mental training, such as keeping calm, holding stress at bay, and practising yoga and mindfulness. “Our referees are already extremely resilient because they

learn to deal with pressure,” Rosetti emphasises. “But in these exceptional times, we felt it was important to give them the opportunity to do mind training to help them along the way.”

A team in their own right

The spirit of togetherness that binds the UEFA refereeing community has been a key component in the present environment. “It’s always part of our overall concept that we function as a solid group,” says Rosetti. “And this has especially been the case now.

“The referees have been in contact, encouraging each other, showing concern for each other’s well-being – it’s something that makes our referees so strong as a team.” Meanwhile, Rosetti and the UEFA refereeing officers have been holding a video meeting every week to plan and discuss strategies and steps for now and the future. 🌍

has also been a distraction in these special times. Consequently, I provided the referees with a list of exercises and websites for ‘brain training’, stress management and mindfulness. In the online group sessions, we have also worked on brain and body activation.

What have you been advising the referees NOT to do in this situation?

We’ve been recommending them not to practise too intensively! Excessively intense training can weaken the immune system. For these reasons, we’ve been recommending avoiding too intense training during the pandemic and also limiting the high-intensity sessions to two sessions of a maximum of one hour per week.

This has been a new experience for you in your role and work.

What do you think you’ll learn from the experience... and what do you think the referees will learn?

Personally, I’ve discovered new opportunities in terms of technologies for online training and coaching, as reflected in the work we’ve been doing in this recent period. As Johan Cruyff once said: “Every disadvantage has its advantage.”

We’ve also shown how flexible we all can be. It’s unbelievable how quickly we all complied with the lockdown instructions, given they have had such a huge impact on our daily personal and professional lives. And this also applies to referees. They’ve being equally flexible in their training approach at this time.

Like Roberto Rosetti, have you also been feeling the famous ‘team spirit’ that exists among the match officials?

More than ever! One of the main reasons why referees have appreciated the online group training sessions has been to see and meet each other. It’s been a great way to stay in touch! In these difficult times, we have needed to act as a team more than ever before!

You must be looking forward to the day when you’ve got the referees together again out in the open air at a UEFA course?

Of course; it will be something special for all of us. In the meantime, we’re also encouraging the referees to use ‘visual imagery’. For example, we’re asking the men’s football referees to imagine being involved in the preparatory workshop for EURO 2020, or even the tournament itself. It’s designed to help referees to think in a positive way about the challenges that lie ahead...

THE WAY BACK

Elite football competitions are gradually resuming across Europe, even if behind closed doors and according to strict health regulations. How have trainers helped players maintain fitness during the long COVID-19 lockdown, and what challenges do they face in getting them match fit again? We ask the experts.

It was not training as they had known it. On 8 May, the day of the Barcelona squad's return to their Ciutat Esportiva after 56 days, each player worked with a ball on his own. There was no chance for the usual chatter and laughter with team-mates, indeed not even a shower afterwards – the 'zona de aguas' with its sauna, hydromassage pool and Jacuzzi was strictly off limits. Instead, each player simply picked up a sealed bag containing his kit for the following day, got into his car and drove home. Yet there were no grumbles, no expressions of anxiety. "No, the complete opposite," says Fran Soto, the first-team physical trainer. "They were delighted to get out again and be able to enjoy what they most like doing."

For Lionel Messi and co, it was the start of the process of getting ready to play competitive football again after the game's unprecedented pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a process that players had already begun some weeks earlier in Germany and the Faroe Islands, whose league programmes were the first to resume on 16 May. Others would follow as football began its gradual return elsewhere across the continent. In this special report, we speak to coaching staff,

physical trainers and medical experts from around Europe to gain an understanding of the impact of this hiatus on players' bodies and minds – and the work done, both during the confinement period and afterwards, to get players back on the pitch.

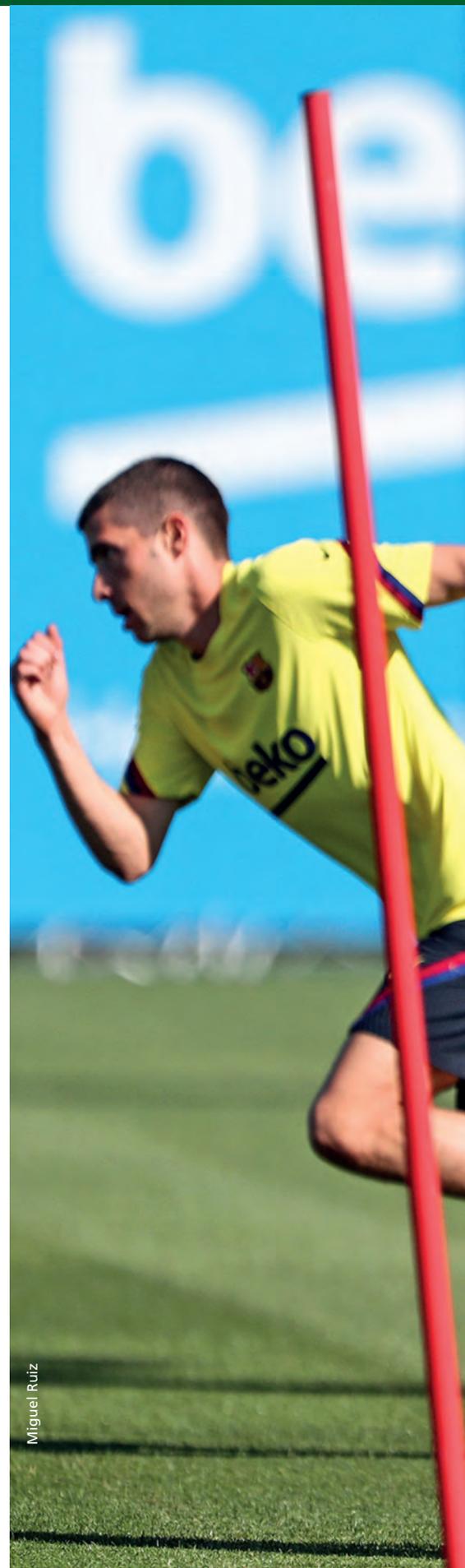
Keeping physically fit at home

The immediate challenge at many clubs was to provide programmes and equipment for players to use at home. Spain was one of the European countries worst affected by COVID-19 and endured a strict seven-week lockdown. At Barcelona, most players had "quite well-equipped gyms" according to Soto. Some 850km to the south, though, his counterpart at La Liga club Granada, Víctor Lafuente, recounts how he and colleagues "almost completely dismantled" the training ground gym to ensure players had the right kit, including exercise bikes and running machines. "The most important objectives from the physiological and biological side were to avoid a loss of muscle mass and to avoid a major detraining," Lafuente adds of the initial goal. "Our training plan gave a lot of importance to power and had phases of high-intensity work."

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 "We tried to simulate the micro-cycle of two games a week, with two peaks of workload, one during the week, the other at the end."

Fran Soto

FC Barcelona's first-team physical trainer



Miguel Ruiz



Fran Soto follows the protocol in a protective mask and gloves on Barcelona's return to training.

Barcelona had entered the lockdown top of La Liga and still in contention in the UEFA Champions League. Because of this, says Soto, they “tried to simulate the micro-cycle of two games a week, with two peaks of workload, one during the week, the other at the end.” Soto and his colleagues António Gomez and Edu Pons each took a group of “seven or eight players” whom they monitored, though they were wary of too rigorous an approach. “After discussing it and considering the profile of the players in question – players on the whole with vast experience and many years at the top – we decided in the end to leave them a bit more freedom and to allow them to disconnect a little,” he elaborates. “These are players who normally don’t have such prolonged periods of inactivity, without any competition. We even let them decide whether they wanted to do the sessions in the morning or evening depending on their family situation. The only thing we insisted on was getting their RPE [rating of perceived exertion] from the session so we could keep track of their workload.”

According to the fitness trainer at Ajax, Alessandro Schoenmaker, the first aim when establishing a programme for their players during the initial period at home was “to maintain the physical capacity that you lose very quickly – speed, power, strength. There was low-intensity training for central adaptations and high-intensity training for peripheral adaptations to try to reduce the detraining effect.” Each player had a Polar heart-rate monitor watch delivered to his home and this, together with a tracking app, meant a younger squad than Barcelona’s received closer monitoring. Schoenmaker explains: “Some of them went outside, running and biking, and other ideas we suggested. Others stayed at home as they didn’t want contact with people outside and used Wattbikes and training material provided. I could track them and see what they were doing and where, and gave them constant feedback.”

Vosse de Boode, the club’s head of sports science and data analytics, adds: “We knew when they were going for a run and how fast they ran. They had to upload it through their phone to us.” The technology was there and the data too but, De Boode observes, they were now working outside of the usual “micro-cycles” of matches. There was uncertainty “whether we had to go on →

Quini puts on a face mask at Granada's training ground (left); forward Darwin Machis takes instructions as training resumes.



a maintenance programme or train up towards a certain goal, and not having a goal for the players was something really hard for their motivation."

In the case of Bayern München in Germany, they sought to provide motivation with compulsory group training by videoconference. A similar concept of team peer pressure applied at Racing Genk, the 2019 Belgian champions, whose players used a WhatsApp group to post videos of themselves carrying out their prescribed strength training. "They could see the other players who were doing it – and who wasn't," notes one of the club's sport scientists, Roel Tambeur.

The question of refuelling was another challenge for footballers no longer expending the usual amount of energy. At Genk, for example, players had to provide weekly updates on their weight (rather than daily as would be normal) and received instructions from the club dietician on maintaining their protein intake, including from shakes. "Often players think when you don't do so much sport you need to eat less, but it's important you keep eating enough protein," Tambeur explains. "We tried to give them five moments each day where they could take proteins to keep their muscle mass." For those squad members

living alone, there was a meal delivery service from the club. At Barcelona too, where some players have their own chefs, there was advice given on what foods to eat (as well as instructions to spend enough time outdoors each day to maintain their vitamin D levels).

Keeping mentally fit at home

If that was players' bodies, how about their minds? Joost Leenders, the Ajax psychologist, set up a "virtual locker room in a closed platform on Instagram" to counter possible feelings of isolation on the part of the Dutch club's players. "We posted content five times per week, Monday to Friday. Each Monday we posted challenges with a lot of humour and fun involved. Every Wednesday we posted something from our nutritionist. Each Thursday we posted tactical principles." Additionally, as at Barcelona, the playing

"The most important objectives from the physiological and biological side were to avoid a loss of muscle mass and to avoid a major detraining."

Victor Lafuente

Granada's first-team physical trainer

squad was split into groups of eight, with each group assigned a staff member who liaised with them. There were small group chats on Zoom – "Just to stay in contact and talk about the lockdown, talk about struggles, insecurities, or about fun or creative things" – while certain players required one-to-one conversations. "I had a lot of contact with four or five players to talk about their individual struggles," adds Leenders.

Ajax made the headlines in the Netherlands when their players took on members of Team Jumbo-Visma, the Dutch cycling outfit, in a virtual race on the Zwift app. Leenders, who also works with the cyclists, had connected Ajax coach Erik ten Haag with the Team Jumbo-Visma management. "It was really good for them to discuss their struggles and learn from each other," he says. "Schoenmaker, who assembled the Ajax

team for this morale-boosting exercise, adds: "In the end we got eight players with five of their cyclists and one of our players beat them... only because he didn't follow the instructions!"

Another perspective on players' responses comes from Simon Clifford, an independent coach who works alongside several English league clubs, offering mentoring advice to individual players. In his conversations, he listened to some "with a point to prove, going at it 110% and maybe doing extra stuff they shouldn't do" and wondered whether they risked burnout before even returning to the training pitch.

Others he found less motivated. "Some aren't used to working without somebody there watching and encouraging them or telling them, 'That was good'. When it went on, you had players asking, 'Are we going to be back at all?'. I imagine some got used to a normality they've never had." Yet with his younger players, in particular, he sensed

an awareness of the opportunities that might arise with the resumption, with coaches likely to rotate squads more owing to fatigue. "They're generally more robust and can play and train more and their recovery is less," says Clifford. "The other thing is, if they were playing Under-23 football, it's more or less behind closed doors too, and that's a factor."

The limitations of home training

Whatever the levels of motivation, Clifford found his players were only able to do so much from home. "One of the biggest difficulties from the training aspect has been not being able to work with the ball and another player," he said, noting that it was not just the passing, receiving and shooting, but also "twisting and turning, and accelerating away from a man". One suggestion he made, therefore, was a form of "shadow football", involving moving and turning with the ball and some visualisation techniques.

Paul Balsom, head of performance at OH Leuven in Belgium, makes a similar point: "What happens with players not getting enough touches with the ball? How about the perception of distances and decision-making?" In this respect, Genk offered one solution as they were already using an online training system with their players, MyMindWorks. One activity involves receiving a football and passing it back while simultaneously carrying out a task on an iPad. For another, players perform mental arithmetic while touching a series of numbered cones with their foot.

Such exercises are geared to improving mental, visual and cognitive parameters and are endorsed by Professor Werner Helsen from the University of Leuven, who works as a fitness expert with UEFA's referees. He says of Genk's approach: "They do it very often with players, for 15 minutes following a warm-up, and call it brain and body activation. It's very challenging, and is something I picked →

The injury risk

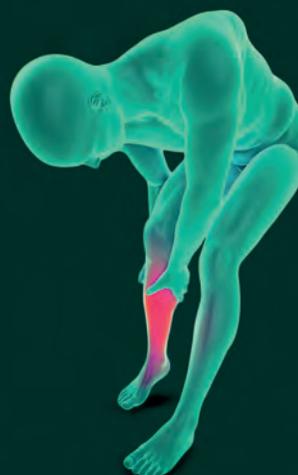
What are the dangers of returning to football after a long pause and limited preparation time?

Time alone will tell the impact on footballers' bodies of the COVID-19 interruption and subsequent return to action, though Professor Jan Ekstrand, the UEFA injury studies' lead expert, has two hypotheses. "One is that it increases the injury risk, especially muscle injuries because detraining means they lose some of their fitness and it's very difficult to keep the speed and match intensity during training, and especially if it's individual training. Another hypothesis may be that maybe it decreases the injuries because the complaint from players for many years is they've never had enough time to recover and they're fatigued." He considers the former more likely.

Preventing the loss of muscle mass was one of the chief concerns of club fitness and conditioning staff during the pause, and it seemed telling that five players at Borussia Dortmund suffered muscle strain injuries in May. Moreover, according to data from the Jena Institute of Sport Science, there were 0.88 injuries per game in the first round of matches when the Bundesliga resumed, compared with a pre-lockdown average of around 0.27. Ekstrand adds: "The most probable scenario is when you get back to matches like now in Germany, they'll not be prepared for the intensity but will mentally be very fresh. The players will be very willing but the risk is



Bundesliga injuries per game



that they'll not be prepared in the muscles."

Professor Werner Helsen has his own concerns, citing the example from American Football of the abbreviated pre-season in 2011 following a 136-day lockout. Players had just 17 days' training before pre-season matches, and there were 12 Achilles tendon ruptures recorded in the first 29 days back, compared with only five ruptures per year in previous seasons. "On the restart both players and referees had a particular number of injuries of the lower limbs – in particular, the Achilles and hamstrings – so the typical advice we're giving to players and also referees is to focus in a proper way on strength training of the lower limbs," says Helsen. "This is what we're doing in online group training sessions, using weights or minibands to do resistance strength training at home."

Reflections on a sport interrupted

Positives taken and lessons learned



Fran Soto, Barcelona:

"It has taken us out of our comfort zone and the daily routine we'd established... For those players with a family nucleus, who are so used to travelling and not being at home so much, it's been an experience they've told us they've enjoyed."



Alessandro Schoenmaker, Ajax:

"I hope they develop a little bit more self-discipline. They had seven weeks where they had to train by themselves, look after themselves, listen to their bodies. I hope they're more independent now, but you don't know until they come back."



Roel Tambreur, Racing Genk:

"I'm a sports scientist and data analyst, but this has showed me that talking and communicating with each other is difficult to replace. The most important information you get off players is when you see them in the morning and ask, 'How are you?'"



Vosse de Boode, Ajax:

"Many of the youth players get soreness from a combination of growth issues and the training load, but after this period, one of the youth doctors has mentioned that there are very few players that still have those issues."

up from working with players and now also apply with referees. Cognitive loading is very important for players but also referees, who, when they run, need to remember which player to caution or not." Helsen, who has researched the benefits of motor imagery, has developed an app (perception4perfection.eu) which shows how match officials – along with car drivers, aeroplane pilots and even radiologists – can practise decision-making "under time pressure" using specific footage from their area of expertise. Back at Ajax, De Boode acknowledges the significance of such approaches: "If you've not been playing games for a long time, your system will have to adapt again, not only in terms of the quickness of your body, but also the quickness of

the game and your decision-making and pattern recognition." Yet she offers a more sceptical tone, citing a player at Ajax whose computer avatar was slower than he was in reality, which meant having to make "completely different decisions". She argues: "At this stage video games are not really tailor-made to the possibilities of a specific player at elite level. Of course, you can watch videos and try to stimulate that part but it's all suggestion and none of it proven."

Nothing like the real thing

Of course, there is nothing like the real thing – the smell of the grass and its soft feel underfoot. At Barcelona, as the return loomed, players embarked on a series of mobility exercises – "Three times a day to

counter the effects of sedentariness," says Soto – as well as "stress tests", including "cold showers to get the body out of this state of comfort from being at home so long". This was "not a normal pre-season", he affirms, and not just for the absence of group training for the first ten days. It began with COVID-19 testing, and, as at every club, a measure of uncertainty over the condition of players. The usual process at this stage involves measuring baseline physical data and elements crucial to performance, including mobility and flexibility; power; speed and agility; reaction time; aerobic capacity; and cardiovascular health and function. Yet as De Boode says of her Ajax players: "No one really knows what this exact programme on a bike does to their football fitness."

Happily, down in Granada, Lafuente found his players in decent shape, noting that "when a player turns up for pre-season, he arrives in a worse condition than that of the players who've come back now". They had been encouraged to think about their game during the →



Bayern reserve goalkeeper Christian Früchtel is stretched to the limit as the German champions get out on the grass.

The ultimate confinement

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet finds a couple of lessons for footballers from his six months in space.

“In a sense, the situation that’s been facing footballers is pretty similar to my time on the International Space Station in that it takes discipline to maintain your level of physical fitness during confinement, but you’re a professional – you deal with what you have, and it’s repetitive, but you have to do it because it’s your job. The only advice I’d give them is to take it slow when they come back. Sometimes you might not be fully aware of the consequences on your body. You think you’re fine but actually you haven’t been exposed to really extreme loads of exercise, to really fast-paced exercise.

With the push of two fingers, you can just float across the entire International Space Station, but the result of this is you lose quite a lot of muscle mass, especially in the thighs, legs, back muscles – all those muscles that you train every day without even realising it, just by standing or sitting or walking. We have a special bike, without the saddle because we’re floating, but with pedals. We do the equivalent of weightlifting too – a lot of squats and deadlifts over the course of a mission. It’s resisted exercise with air pressure simulating the weights, and that’s every single day for an hour and a half. We have a treadmill too, which we are attached to with a belt as otherwise we’d float away. In total, it’s two and a half hours every day to keep the muscle mass pretty stable, though there are some areas in which you still lose something, particularly the deep back muscles around your spine. The spine doesn’t need to be supported and so those muscles tend to relax, to atrophy, and you lose also some bone density because you’re not being subjected to gravity.



I was up there for six months and I lost weight, partly because of the muscle loss and also because the food isn’t great up there and you feel full very quickly – the food floats in your digestive system. I lost seven kilos in the first two months, which is not unexpected, and then with exercise and better alimentation for the rest of mission, I ended up maybe three or four kilos less than I’d been when we launched. Aside from food, we take vitamin D with every meal because we’re inside all the time and so missing exposure to the sun.

We have our challenges when we return to Earth too. One thing to make sure of is to get your balance right because your inner ear is very impacted by weightlessness: your brain adapts your balance system and you may very well lose your balance back on Earth so there are exercises like walking in a straight line. Indeed there’s a whole programme for three months. Your spatial awareness

changes too. You’ve been used to a two-dimensional environment for your entire life really and then suddenly you’re in this space station where just by flipping yourself upside down; it’s a whole new environment so you get much more stimuli to your nervous system and your coordination and spatial orientation. We do exercises involving catching different balls that are thrown at you in different orders. Depending on the number and colour of the ball, you have to turn to your right and catch it with your left hand, or turn to your left and catch it with your right hand. When you come back from a mission, you’re actually better at this because your brain has rewired itself and you’re more aware of your three-dimensional surroundings, so I think these exercises could really apply to football. You can’t send all the football players to space, but if you could they would come back maybe a tiny bit better!”



It's been the training pitch only for Ajax's players so far.

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 "If you've not been playing games for a long time, your system will have to adapt again, not only in terms of the quickness of your body, but also the quickness of the game and your decision-making and pattern recognition."

Vosse de Boode,
 Ajax's head of sports science and data analytics

lockdown, with weekly video analysis sessions with head coach Diego Martínez on "movement, strategy, tactics", and the first sessions back involved a mix of football and fitness work. "Apart from the conditioning aspect we tried to include habits of play like their body shape when receiving the ball quality of pass, of movement. It was conditioning and power and prevention but also the habits of play that we consider important." With a guiding principle of "sensible progression", week two, for instance, involved the following sequence: three days featuring a "heavy session", a recovery day, another "heavy session", and then a rest day. It is worth adding that Lafuente had limited his players to "only 15-20 minutes maximum" of jogging when Spain's tight shutdown was first eased to allow outdoor exercise. This was to avoid "stress on the joint and tendons", and for the same reason "jump training" was off the agenda.

In other countries, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, players went back to the training ground even though their league campaigns had been cancelled. "If we give them a break of three months, it's just too long," says Tambour of the Genk squad's

return ahead of a four-week summer break. "We could give them running and strength programmes at home, but the problem with that is you miss the football-specific neuro-muscular load, like kicking, change of direction, high-speed running. If you don't do that, the chance of an injury would be too high."

When Ajax returned, the head of the club's medical staff, Dr Niels Wijne, had the same concerns touched on above: "neuro-muscular tiredness" and a potential overload for the tendons and ligaments. With the Eredivisie cancelled, Schoenmaker and his colleagues prepared a three-week programme. "Some had still done a little bit of football but it wasn't training in the normal environment," he says. "It was already announced the season was finished so it was more for the mental side – to get them back to the club, see the coaches, smell the grass, put the boots on and train."

The Ajax squad began a fresh four-week break from the training ground on 18 May, with a training programme to follow in that period, though those foreign players unable to leave the Netherlands began work back at the club, at their own

request, from 25 May. At the time of writing, Ajax had just learned of a 12 September start date for the 2020/21 Eredivisie campaign. Dr Wijne envisages the need for "at least six weeks' full contact training and friendly games" before competitive action and his colleague De Boode wonders what the impact will be for teams in countries like the Netherlands and Belgium when entering the qualifying rounds of next season's UEFA competitions against opponents who have played matches during the summer in their resumed domestic competitions. A series of August friendly matches should help. "Teams that have been playing are a lot better prepared for not only the physical load but also the quickness of the game," De Boode adds.

For Barcelona, there has been a different challenge – restarting a season at the business end, with the twin incentives of competing for La Liga and the UEFA Champions League. "We're going to play it all in a short period of time with a very intense level of competition with two games a week and every match like a final," says Soto. Ideally, there will be an opportunity to "lower the level of activity" between the domestic season ending and the UEFA Champions League's planned resumption in August. "It'll be a case of keeping things ticking over," he adds, speaking before confirmation came of the 7/8 August date for Barcelona's rescheduled Round of 16 second leg against Napoli. A relief no doubt after the "uncertainty" which "made us reflect on everything". Soto's words but a sentiment all will agree with. 🌱

Prevention, not cure

Steps to reduce the risk of injury



1) Manage the training load

- Compare a player's status with training and game data from previous seasons.
- Assess training volume and intensity to identify potential problems such as spikes in load or evidence of maladaptation. Spikes are correlated with the onset of injury; loads that are too high and too low are associated with increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries.
- Ensure full collaboration across coaching and support staff to adjust training and address any player concerns; niggles and minor problems need treatment immediately.



2) Monitor training load with the right tools

- Look at the acute-chronic workload ratio along with week-to-week changes in training load; also heart-rate indices, jump protocols and force-velocity training.
- Self-report questionnaires are a useful tool. It is important to give immediate feedback.
- Develop psychological skills, e.g. cognitive-affective-behavioural strategies and meditative training.

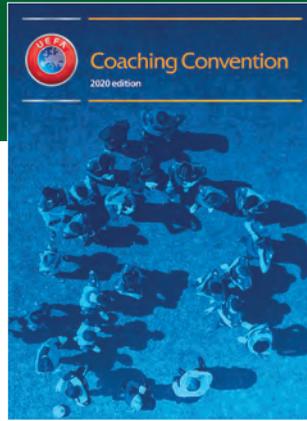
Sports scientist Roel Tambeur (third from right) helps to put the Racing Genk players through their paces.



STAYING AHEAD OF THE GAME

The new UEFA Coaching Convention
sets benchmarks for the future.





The 2020 edition of the Coaching Convention is available online.

It was one of golf's serial champions, Jack Nicklaus, who maintained that "complacency is a continuous struggle that we all have to fight". The principle is equally valid on Planet Football, where a run of four World Cups allied with a similar sequence of World U-20 titles have converted European coaches into serial champions. But any fears of complacency amid the coaching fraternity have been pre-empted by the launch of a fourth edition of the UEFA Coaching Convention, aimed at stimulating further improvement.

One thing needs saying straight away: the new convention is not a reprint of a bestseller. The fourth edition is the result of a deep-cleaning process conducted with the clear objectives of enhancing standards of coaching courses; strengthening the UEFA coaching pathway by inserting new building blocks into the structure; and highlighting the important role to be played by highly skilled coach educators in the quest for further development and success.

Setting out the stall

But it is worth pausing for a moment to set out the stall. The UEFA Coaching Convention can be traced back to a ceremony in Ghent on 17 January 1998, where Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain signed a prototype document. Ahead of expectations, all of UEFA's member associations became signatories within a decade and, building on that foundation, a revised, updated document was published in 2010, with a third edition superseding it five years later. Andy Roxburgh, the driving force behind the convention during his 18 years as UEFA's technical director, reflects that: "Coach educators, more than anybody, need to be totally up to date in their approach to the job. After all, it is pointless to train coaches for a game that existed 20 years ago. Football evolves quickly and coach educators have to keep pace with that."

So Arthur Conan Doyle, a believer that "anything is better than stagnation", would surely have had Sherlock Holmes tell his dear Watson that it was elementary to produce a fourth edition, extend the constant renewal process and endorse the oft-quoted saying that you need to stay ahead of the game to stay in it.

In-depth review process

One of the significant signposts along the road to the 2020 document was that, while the third edition was being finalised, a team from Leeds Beckett University in England was conducting an independent survey of the UEFA Coaching Convention and its impact. The conclusions, such as that "the convention had a very positive, indeed invaluable, impact on the development of European football and football coaching", were satisfying but no excuse for back-patting. The most interesting paragraphs were about areas for possible improvement – and recommendations were injected into an in-depth review process initiated in May 2018. A working group of coach education experts from UEFA's Jira Panel, including Belgium's director of coach education Kris Van Der Haegen, John Peacock (immensely successful with England's age-limit teams)

and Dany Ryser (U-17 World champion with Switzerland) then formulated proposed changes. From the Jira Panel, the final report was presented to UEFA's Development and Technical Assistance Committee, and then to the member associations at the Coach Education Conference staged in Cyprus in November 2019, before being approved by the UEFA Executive Committee in Amsterdam in March of this year.

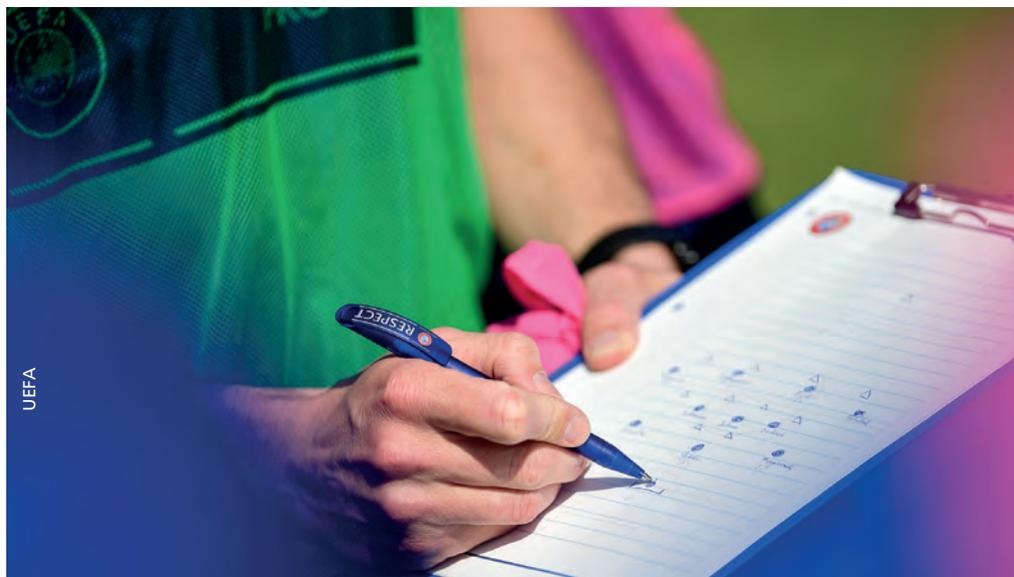
"I think we could say that this has brought us into a third phase of the convention," Dany Ryser comments. "The first was about introducing and implementing it. The second was about optimising its impact and recognising nuances between the situations in different national associations. The third is now about greater specialisation, offering tailor-made support to the associations – helping them to find the best way forward in their particular environment. On top of that, the important element is the greater focus on coach educators."

Three new diplomas

Some of the independent research team's recommendations ("steps to support the education of women coaches", for example) had already been injected into UEFA's development strategies. And others, such as "developing →

“Specialising with a clear focus on the individual development of young players, rather than a team emphasis, is an important forward move. The quality of players has to improve to cope with the increasing demands of the game.”

John Peacock
Technical instructor and Jira Panel member



enhanced structures to recognise children's and youth coaches", are clearly visible in the 2020 edition of the Coaching Convention, where the major innovations in the enhanced coaching pathway are three new UEFA diplomas.

Firstly, a UEFA C diploma has been moved up from the UEFA Grassroots Charter to become the first rung on the Coaching Convention ladder with the aim of enhancing coaching standards at grassroots levels. After a three-year transitional phase to make room for C diploma courses, this will become a mandatory qualification and a prerequisite for coaches applying for an upward move to UEFA B level. Secondly, a UEFA Goalkeeper B diploma makes its debut on the specialist branches within the convention with the objectives of filling the void below the Goalkeeper A diploma and focusing on coaching these specific skills at non-professional levels.

Thirdly, a UEFA Youth B diploma has been launched with a view to creating a more comprehensive youth coach education pathway, focusing on work done with potentially talented young players transitioning from grassroots or amateur football to elite level, thereby providing a stepping stone towards the UEFA Elite Youth A diploma.

"UEFA has taken an important step, raising the profile of youth coaching across Europe," John Peacock comments. "Specialising with a clear focus on the individual development of young players, rather than a team emphasis, is an important forward move. The quality of players has to improve to cope with the increasing demands of the game."

A past mentor of mine, Don Howe, ex-coach of Arsenal and England, once said: 'In order to be worthy of coaching outstanding players, you've got to keep learning and keep up'. These new diploma courses reinforce this point – we must continue to evolve as coaches from grassroots to elite in order to develop the next generation of players."

In all three of the new diplomas, we are talking about courses with a minimum duration of 60 hours and, as is the case with all UEFA diplomas, at least half of that time must be reality-based – practical sessions and hands-on work experience on the pitch. Coaching courses based on delivering instructions to students who had their heads down over notebooks have disappeared into the mists of the past.

Putting a magnifying glass to all the other innovations would probably send readers cross-eyed. Suffice to say that the new convention features reinforced guidelines on the content, duration and organisation of coaching courses; assessment procedures; further education requirements for licensed coaches (continuing professional development courses every three years); and educational pathways for former professional players – reshaping the so-called fast-tracking which, in the firm opinion of a legion of top technicians with Sir Alex Ferguson at the forefront, does would-be coaches no favours at all.

To be a tad more precise, the convention, for example, stipulates a minimum number of eight students per course and, in the specific case of Pro diploma education, a maximum of 20 – with a view to enabling interactivity, collaboration and peer learning. With, in the modern game, more players and coaching staff setting up homes from home in foreign countries, the convention also provides for greater flexibility when it comes to admitting non-native students to coaching courses. In fact, the terms of the

convention are totally aligned with EU legislation in this and every other respect.

Mandatory qualification for coach educators

But, standing back to view the broader brushstrokes of the new picture, one of the images to emerge is the profile of the coach educator – and the need to achieve a balance between those two words. Peter Rudbæk, Denmark's technical director for 15 years and long-term member of UEFA's Jira Panel, explains that: "Knowledge of football accounts for one part of the job. The rest is about teaching and learning techniques". Howard Wilkinson concurs: "One: it's about football. Two: it's about education. And I believe that teaching is the most important profession in the world. Without educators, we'd still be trying to light a fire." Belgium's Michel Sablon, one of the prime movers when a working group of coach education specialists helped to draft the original convention, maintains that: "The content of courses is one thing. You can copy and paste that. But, if you are to prepare coaches properly for the realities of a tough job, educational and communication skills are crucial."

The need to pay attention to the skills of coach educators was highlighted in the findings of the independent survey. "There appeared to be a large coach education 'legacy' workforce," the research team remarked, "some of whom were part-time and difficult to influence with new coaching ideas. There was also concern that some national associations had very undeveloped further education programmes for coach educators. So the development and improvement of coach educator education is seen as a key area for improvement within the convention."

The result is that the 2020 edition of the convention makes a major step forward by introducing a mandatory national qualification for coach educators – an innovation to be implemented by national

associations within the next three years. Among the basic requirements for the coach educator is the need to hold a coaching licence for, at the minimum, the same level as the course they teach. The educator must also be equipped to identify the individual needs of coaches; to fulfil the expectations of the national association in terms of quality and philosophy; and to promote the principles of lifelong learning and continuing professional development. In brief, the convention encourages national associations to recognise that developing the coaches of the future is a specialised art and one which, even in this day and age, is often undervalued. As Michel Sablon says: "The coach educator needs to be a source of knowledge and, I would say, inspiration. The challenge is to have the skills required to help other coaches to become better." Looking in his personal rear-view mirror, Sir Alex Ferguson once mused: "There's a lot to be said for being lucky enough to land the right mentor. The best ones can change your life". By focusing on the preparation of highly competent coach educators, the convention hopes to slice down – or even eliminate – the element of luck.

UEFA's football education services regard the new convention as a big step forward, adding to UEFA's coaching pathways and, at the same time, promoting even greater flexibility and movement across Europe. They are also keen to encourage national associations to further improve the standards of coaching courses and to link the worlds of education and employment by developing coaches' competences in realistic situations, which comes back to the need to develop highly skilled coach educators. An updated convention is not the end of the story, though – UEFA's role is to offer ongoing guidance and support to the national associations so that they can evolve together, continue to set benchmarks and stay ahead of the game. 🏆



COACHING'S HIDDEN TREASURE

UEFA's Jira Panel is commemorating its 25th birthday. It held its inaugural meeting in Paris on 14 and 15 March 1995 and went on to change the face of coaching all over Europe.



Sportsfile

Don't bother looking. No matter how many search engines you use to investigate high-profile coaches such as Gérard Houllier, Lars Lagerbäck, Gero Bisanz, Andy Roxburgh, Jozef Vengloš, or Lars Arnesson, to name but half a dozen, references to their work for UEFA's Jira Panel are as visible as a needle on the moon. So the Jira Panel's 25th birthday is unlikely to make headlines but, as Gérard Houllier puts it: "What happened in 1995 was visionary. And the impact is there for all to see."

In 1995, Houllier hosted the event which initiated the conversion of vision into reality. The French Football Federation offices in Paris provided the setting, on 14 and 15 March, for the first-ever meeting of what was then called the Jira Commission. To add to the aura of anonymity, the Jira Panel, as it is known

today, must be the only UEFA body whose name offers no clues about its functions. The commission, however, went into its first meeting with a clear brief "to develop a UEFA coach education structure; to upgrade standards of coach education; to protect the coaching profession and to facilitate freedom of movement within European countries in line with international law".

Today, much is taken for granted. But evoking the coaching scenario in 1995 is like asking today's children to imagine life without the internet or smartphones. Even though a very select minority could trace coach education structures back to the 1940s, coach education was a relatively recent element in the history of the game. Qualifications were, to put it mildly, a mixed bag. Some were not even football specific

The UEFA Jira Panel meeting in Cascais, Portugal, on 7 April 2008. Left to right: Jozef Vengloš, Per Ravn Omdal (Development and Assistance Committee) and Andy Roxburgh, UEFA technical director.

– basically university diplomas in physical education. Cross-border movements were rare. There was no hint, for example, of a Klopp, Guardiola, Ancelotti or Mourinho on the list of managers in England's Premier League, even though Jira Panel founder member Jozef Vengloš had broken the ice as the first non-British or Irish manager when he took charge at Aston Villa in 1990.

Convention on the Mutual Recognition of Coaching Qualifications

The origins of the Jira Panel can, however, be rewound beyond 1995. The prologue was written into the minutes of an Executive Committee meeting in 1991, when the concept of a pan-European coaching licence was approved. To draft a Convention on the Mutual Recognition of Coaching Qualifications, Václav Jira, chairman of the Technical Committee, enlisted a team of experts, including the legendary Rinus Michels and Scotland's Andy Roxburgh, who became UEFA's first technical director in 1994 and was subsequently labelled 'the father of UEFA's Coaching Convention'. The new technical director immediately created a special task force, which met in Brussels in April 1994 to design the structure. The typewritten minutes recorded: "It was hoped that agreements could be reached which would allow the cross-border movement of coaches."

In the meantime, after Jira's death in November 1993, it was decided that the commission/panel would bear his name.

'The most important technical project ever undertaken by UEFA'

Barely three months after the inaugural Jira meeting in Paris, the project was presented to UEFA's 49 member associations at a coach education directors' conference in Nyon and, as they say, the show was really on the road. Belgium's technical director Michel Sablon, a founding task force and Jira member, says it was "the most important thing UEFA ever did for football. It opened the door to another world. Now, if coaches come to you with a UEFA diploma, there is no discussion about their competence". His sentiment was echoed by UEFA president Lennart Johansson when, at a ceremony in Ghent on 17 January 1998, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain put the first six signatures to the first edition of the UEFA Coaching Convention. "I regard this as the most important technical project ever undertaken by UEFA," he said, "in the field of developing and improving European football."

During the 13th UEFA Coach Education Conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, on 26 November 2019, Luis Rubiales (Spain), UEFA vice-president and chairman of the Development and Technical Assistance Committee, presented Michel Sablon with a UEFA award in recognition of his contribution to the Coaching Convention framework in Europe.

At that juncture, few would have predicted that within a decade every UEFA member association would have become a signatory – which signified a huge workload for the Jira Panel members responsible for assessing and monitoring each association's coach education structures and courses. Peter Rudbæk, long-standing panel member and Denmark's technical director for the last 15 years, recalls: "At first we had to make sure that associations reached the minimum requirements. Today, the general level is high. So we're not policemen any more. We are more like critical friends." His colleague Ginés Meléndez (three hands required to count his European and World finals with Spain's age-limit teams) adds: "We must remain humble. But I wonder if it's coincidence that European coaches have won the last four senior and U-20 World Cups. The standard of coach education has jumped up. Better coaches mean better players and better teams..." Former England manager and long-term Jira Panel member Howard Wilkinson adds: "I would honestly argue that, if it wasn't for UEFA, coaching in many parts of Europe would still be in the dark ages."

Over the years, the convention has evolved, focusing more on reality-based learning, which is the key to an effective educational process. So the anniversary is an excuse to pay a quiet tribute to the coach education experts whose knowledge and dedication have, over the last quarter-century, made the Jira Panel one of UEFA's hidden treasures. 🌱





RESEARCHERS SHEDDING NEW LIGHT

The UEFA Research Grant Programme projects for 2019/20 have been submitted to UEFA, while the five winning bids for 2020/21 have been named.

Gender equity, recovery time and football for refugees were all areas explored in the newly completed batch of research projects supported by the UEFA Research Grant Programme. This is the tenth year of a programme created to analyse European football from the perspective of different academic disciplines in conjunction with national associations, and the findings of the five 2019/20 projects will be discussed in greater detail in a future issue of UEFA Direct.

Two of the projects looked into different aspects of male/female equity in football. In a joint project supported by the English Football Association, Donna De Haan (The Hague University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands) and Leanne Norman (Leeds Beckett University, England) asked: "What role can men play in facilitating gender equity in football governance?" Their paper was structured around the themes of the culture of football; the value placed on women in football (as opposed to 'women for women's football'); and

structure and relationships both interpersonally and organisationally. They gained insights from different individuals' experiences within football organisations and concluded that it is men who can make football culture more inclusive.

"A Comparison of the soccer-specific tactical performance of women and men in Europe" was the title of the paper submitted by Daniel Memmert and his team (German Sport University Cologne, Germany; supported by the German



Rahela Jurković, from the University of Zagreb, Croatia, carried out research on the power of football to build social bridges for refugees in the Balkan corridor (here Thomas Müller of Bayern training with refugees in Munich in 2015).

differences (such as more counterattacks and positional attacks by women) yet the other showed none of any real significance.

Ioannis Fatouros (University of Thessaly, Greece; Hellenic Football Federation) worked with Magni Mohr (University of Southern Denmark) and Georgios Ermidis (Parthenope University of Naples, Italy) to produce a paper looking at the “Performance and physiological analysis of overtime and implications for recovery and training”. They considered the effects on footballers of the 30-minute extra-time period and proposed that a 72-hour recovery period before the next game “may not be adequate” to reduce muscle damage and inflammation and restore skeletal muscle glycogen stores. Their research also highlighted the possible benefits of carbohydrate supplementation as a nutrition strategy to restore glycogen levels.

Recovery for referees (REFCOVERY) was the focus for Javier Sánchez (European University of Madrid, Spain; Royal Spanish Football Federation) in his paper titled “Understanding the recovery time course in elite football referees during a congested match schedule”. He looked at the effects on 42 elite referees and 84 assistant referees of the increase in matches and accompanying reduction in recuperation time between fixtures, and his results will be shared with not only elite referees but also universities and training centres to help develop more effective training systems. On a general note, he found that a congested match schedule led to a lower sprint distance and peak of acceleration in Spanish football referees, though there were differences noted between those in the first division and their second division counterparts (e.g. top-flight referees had a higher repeated sprint ability).

In “Football and refugees: cultural anthropology of the Balkan corridor

(2015–2019)”, Rahela Jurković (University of Zagreb, Croatia; Croatian Football Federation) interviewed 84 people, 71 of them refugees, in five countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia – with the aim of exploring the impact of playing football on the lives of refugees in the camps, towns and cities of southeast Europe. The findings of this research underlined the power of football to build social bridges yet also the need for equipment and places to play, and the difficulties encountered (and help required henceforth) in registering with local clubs.

The 2020/21 cycle

Meanwhile, the UEFA Research Grant Programme jury have named the five winning bids for grants for the 2020/21 cycle. These are as follows:

- “Clearing the confusion from concussion: A multidisciplinary approach to examine heading” by Bert Bond (University of Exeter, England; supported by the Football Association of Wales).
- “Mental health, wellbeing and coping with the everyday: An examination of what elite coaches endure” by Charles Crosby (Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales; English Football Association and Football Association of Wales).
- “Installation et optimisation de la diversité au sein des équipes féminines multinationales : conséquences pratiques pour les entraîneurs professionnels de football” (Integration and optimisation of diversity within multinational women’s sport teams: Practical implications for professional football coaches) by Manon Eluère, (Université Grenoble Alpes, France; French Football Federation).
- “High-velocity hamstring muscle training strategy” by Sigitas Kamandulis (Lithuanian Sports University, Lithuania; Lithuanian Football Federation), in collaboration with Joan Cadefau (National Institute of Physical Education and Sport of Catalonia, Spain).
- “The value of volunteering in grassroots football” by Pamela Wicker (Bielefeld University, Germany; supported by German Football Association), in collaboration with Larissa Davies (Sheffield Hallam University, England). 🏆

Pamela Wicker and Larissa Davies will study the value of volunteering in grassroots football.

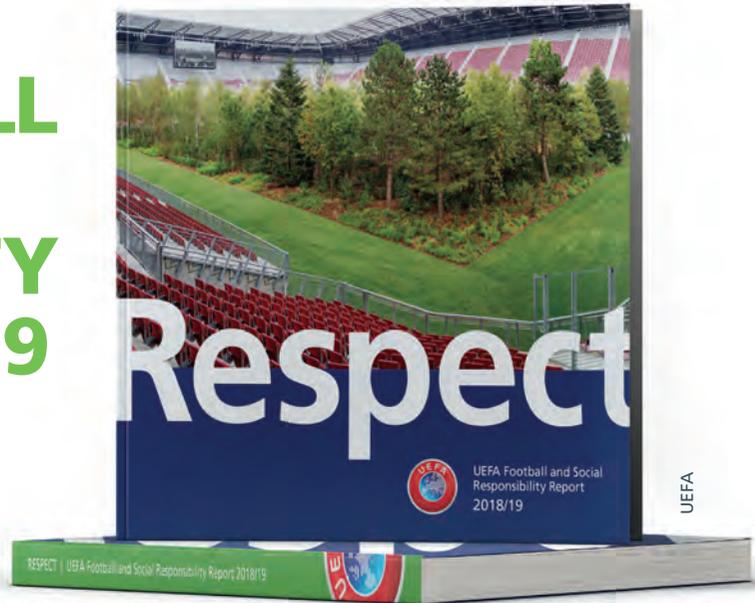
Football Association). Looking at possible similarities and differences in the tactical behaviour of women’s and men’s teams, they sought to avoid gender bias by comparing not only video data but event and positional data using 23 different key performance indicators (KPIs). Their paper highlighted the difficulty of drawing conclusions, given one data set showed



Sportsfile

UEFA FOOTBALL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT 2018/19

The latest UEFA Football and Social Responsibility Report showcases crucial commitments to using football's power for sustainable development.



'Purpose over profit' was one of the key messages delivered by the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, at the UEFA Congress in March 2020.

At the core of this message is the organisation's commitment to harnessing the power of football to help a wide array of ethical initiatives, as highlighted in the latest Football and Social

Responsibility (FSR) Report. This reflects UEFA's desire to enhance the value of its core business while contributing to sustainable development in society.

Across more than 270 pages, the report focuses on activities and projects covering a variety of issues: diversity and inclusion, the environment, health and well-being, child safeguarding, human rights and supporter relations.

UEFA's FSR programme is devised and delivered in cooperation with a diverse range of partners, including UEFA member associations, clubs, political bodies, NGOs and academic institutions.

#EqualGame

At the first #EqualGame Conference in April 2019, the UEFA president said he was ashamed that discussions on racism and discrimination were still necessary, but was also hopeful of a more equal and inclusive future.

As part of its commitment to promoting a game open to everybody, UEFA uses the #EqualGame platform to highlight unique stories of footballers of all ages and abilities from across Europe.

During the 2018/19 season, and in conjunction with UEFA partner the Fare network, more than 400 clubs and 35 national associations joined together under the #EqualGame banner to call for an end to racism, discrimination and intolerance.

Also in 2018, UEFA presented its first #EqualGame award to Georgian international Guram Kashia following his courageous public stand against homophobia.

The Georgian Football Federation has made the inclusion of people with disabilities in football one of its priorities.



Lasha Kuprashvili



Left: The Danish FA is keen to get more girls involved in football. **Below:** The Dutch FA has come up with the idea of “team boxes” containing fruit to encourage children to have a healthy snack after each match.

UEFA supports a range of partners who are working to ensure that everyone has a chance to play football if they want to. From cerebral palsy to blind football, amputee to deaf football, UEFA is pleased to help players prove that all you need is passion and determination to get involved in the game.

The UEFA Refugee Grant Scheme provides national associations with funding for refugee-related projects that use the power of football to bring people together, foster mutual understanding and break down prejudices. The FSR report focuses on the success of the Football Association of Norway, which has developed toolkits for clubs and regional bodies to help create inclusion opportunities for refugees and children from low-income families.

Education and knowledge sharing

Through a series of education and knowledge-sharing initiatives, the UEFA Academy leads and inspires the development of individuals and organisations to continuously elevate the game of football.

Its activities grew during 2018/19 to cover 56 events across 157 days, with programmes, seminars and workshops taking place all over the world.

With almost 1,500 graduates from more than 100 countries, the UEFA Academy supports a strong network of

professionals working in football, and in 2019 it also launched the UEFA For Players app, which was created to provide elite football players with essential information and advice on matters on and off the pitch.

Climate action

When UEFA signed the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework, it marked the start of an increased focus on climate change throughout European football.

UEFA has worked hard in its commitment to decrease its own carbon footprint, and with the support of South Pole, a carbon finance consultancy agency based in Switzerland, UEFA offset 34,475 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in 2018/19.

The organisation has also adapted its practices and procedures at home on its Nyon campus, also supporting national football associations in finding their own climate-friendly solutions, including the use of solar energy and retrofitting or constructing more environmentally friendly buildings.

Health and well-being

UEFA continues to work with Healthy Stadia as part of its commitment to promoting active and healthy lifestyles. In the 2018/19 FSR report, two national associations – the Royal Netherlands Football Association and the Irish Football



Association – are highlighted for their work in health, both mental and physical.

The 2018/19 club season culminated with the UEFA Champions Festival in Madrid, where healthy lifestyle activities for fans and families were developed and delivered over four days as part of the #EqualGame zone, with the support of UEFA ambassadors Edgar Davids and Christian Karembeu.

Outlook

The FSR report closes by highlighting some of the key areas of focus of the 2019/20 season, including UEFA EURO 2020, which owing to the COVID-19 pandemic will now take place in 2021.

These challenging times have certainly moved the goalposts for European football in recent months, but FSR remains at the heart of UEFA's activities as it faces the challenges of this crisis side by side with its partners and national associations. 🌱



FIVE YEARS OF BRINGING LIGHT TO CHILDREN'S LIVES

Five years have passed since the UEFA Foundation for Children was established to help European football fulfil its social responsibility to support and defend the rights of children all over the world.

UEFA Foundation

Football is more than just a game; it is a vehicle for change and a source of hope and possibilities for all children. It can be used to develop important life skills such as communication, teamwork and respect, and provides opportunities to lead, excel and gain confidence.

The projects supported by the foundation use sport, and football in particular, to help children in precarious situations and from disadvantaged backgrounds. Activities focus on the areas of health, education, access to sport, integration of minorities, personal development and youth employment.

245 projects reaching a million children

Some one million children have benefitted from the broad range of activities organised or funded by the foundation since it was created in April 2015. Through calls for project and awards, the foundation has provided grants to a total of 245 projects. Half of all funding has been dedicated to projects within Europe.

A common need identified by the foundation is for safe football infrastructure and equipment. The foundation has therefore supported the construction of many football

pitches and distributed over 35,000 balls and football kits to schools, children's institutions and associations. Over 34 tonnes of material from UEFA competitions has also been donated to children's programmes.

Promoting diversity and multiculturalism

The foundation has been able to support projects in 100 countries. Of the one million children who have already benefitted, at least 35% are girls, and the foundation is working to increase this proportion. Football is a powerful means of promoting gender equality and inclusion more broadly, by increasing the participation of minorities in programmes and in society, thereby helping more people to become active citizens.

National football associations and clubs have helped the foundation bring hope to children and give them reasons to dream. Almost 24,000 children who would otherwise never have had the chance to attend an international football match have been invited to a UEFA competition.

Thanks to the foundation, young amputees got the chance to meet some of the stars, including Chelsea's César Azpilicueta, at last year's UEFA Super Cup match in Istanbul.

The UEFA Super Cup has been a great stage on which to create awareness of the positive impact football can have. With the help of the participating clubs and their elite players, the foundation has used this stage to demonstrate that football can play an important role in children's lives and can change the outlooks of even the most vulnerable.

New challenges

As the world grapples with COVID-19, the resultant health crisis and its social and economic consequences, the foundation continues to do what it can to help the most vulnerable communities and organise responses that are adapted to the needs of each situation. The foundation was the first institutional supporter of the Common Goal COVID-19 Response Fund, set up to support community organisations in their immediate emergency response and longer-term recovery work. 🌐



UEFA Foundation

ENCOURAGING GIRLS TO PLAY FOOTBALL IN PARTNERSHIP WITH DISNEY

UEFA and Disney have teamed up to develop PlayMakers, a groundbreaking programme that uses Disney's world-renowned storytelling to encourage more girls to exercise regularly and fall in love with football.

Inspired by academic research showing the positive role of storytelling in helping children to take up sport, PlayMakers aims to increase the proportion of girls meeting the World Health Organization's minimum standards for physical activity (currently just 16%).

Targeting girls aged five to eight who are not already playing football, seven UEFA member associations – Austria, Belgium, Norway, Poland, Romania, Scotland and Serbia – are already set to roll out PlayMakers in schools, clubs and local communities. More associations are expected to introduce the programme later in the year.

Movement, teamwork, imagination

Unlike traditional football programmes, each of the ten initial PlayMakers training sessions follows the narrative of Disney

and Pixar's animated blockbuster *Incredibles 2*. Equipped with footballs, cones and bibs, trained coaches encourage participants to play the roles of popular characters such as Elastigirl, Violet, Mr Incredible and Dash, bringing the film's action to life through movement, teamwork and imagination.

The first few training sessions focus on building girls' confidence in their movement, encouraging them to think creatively and communicate easily with their friends. Although basic football skills are introduced in later sessions, the emphasis throughout the programme is on making sport fun.

Play-based learning, a unique approach at the heart of the PlayMakers programme, follows the results of a literary review commissioned by UEFA and conducted by Leeds Beckett University in England. The review assessed academic research

into what motivates young girls to participate in sport, identifying best practice coaching methods to create a safe learning environment. Its findings put particular emphasis on the benefits of play-based education. PlayMakers is also the result of a partnership with the English Football Association, which is currently running the Shooting Stars programme in cooperation with Disney.

Time for Action

PlayMakers is the first step towards achieving one of the main goals of UEFA's Time for Action women's football strategy, i.e. to double the number of women and girls playing football in Europe by 2024. "It is UEFA's duty to empower girls to play the game," said the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin. "Through this partnership with Disney, we will open up football to an audience not yet engaged with our sport." 🌍





WOMEN'S LEAGUE REBRANDED WITH NEW GENDER-NEUTRAL NAME

Good things are worth waiting for – none more so than the start of the new women's football league in Finland, which had been due to kick off under a new look and gender-neutral name in late March, only for the COVID-19 pandemic to force its postponement.

BY MIKAEL ERÄVUORI

Much has happened since the end of the previous Naisten Liiga (Women's League) season. In-depth strategy work was undertaken in which the vision and values of the women's league were crystallised and a complete facelift of the league's identity was developed.

In February, the Finnish FA announced the new gender-neutral name of the league, Kansallinen Liiga (National League), with a brand-new visual look and colour scheme. At the beginning of June, the Kansallinen Liiga launched its new, independent website along with the rescheduled fixture list. Then on 13 June, the league finally got under way with its new branding as well as a new TV partner and with Subway as its main commercial partner.

Having begun life as the Naisten SM-sarja (Finnish Women's Championship) in 1971, with the first competition played in 1974, in a cup format, and after being renamed the Naisten Liiga in 2007, the 'women's' prefix has now been dropped from the name of the league in a push for equality.

"The change is based on the basic values and vision of the league: we aim to be recognised as a modern elite sport with strong values of quality, courage and the ambition to succeed. We also wanted to emphasise the fact that we are talking primarily about football and not specifically about women. As we do not highlight gender in the men's competition names, we don't consider it relevant to do so in the names of the women's competitions. People don't come to games to watch women and girls on the pitch; they come to watch football", said Heidi Pihlaja,



SPL

head of development at the Finnish FA, adding, "We also want to point out emphatically that it is football no matter whether it is a man or a woman or a boy or a girl who is kicking the ball."

New logo

The new logo of the league symbolises

the two halves of the football pitch and the Roman numeral I. The two halves are equal, as everyone should be on the pitch, and the figure I stands for number one, the first, the best – demonstrating that women can also play football to become the best, and not just as a nice social hobby.

"While the Kansallinen Liiga also has its own colours, the visual identity is strongly based on the colours of the clubs in the league. The league would be nothing without the clubs playing in it, and that is why we wanted to bring out the clubs' own identities," Pihlaja explained.

Ten clubs are competing for the top spot in the 2020 season. Like any top league in the world, it is all about winning games, about giving everything on the pitch, about fair play, about entertainment, about joy – with no need for prefixes any more. The modern game is plain 'football' for everyone. 🌐



SPL



Getty Images



120 YEARS OF THE MALTA FA

The Malta Football Association is 120 years old. The officially recognised year of birth of the Malta FA is 1900, with Major William Henry Russel Prewer becoming the first president of the association in 1909.

BY KEVIN AZZOPARDI

The 120th anniversary of the Malta FA is an occasion to cherish and relive those moments, those epic matches and unforgettable events throughout this long and emotional journey of a footballing nation.

“This is a prestigious anniversary for the Malta FA, which is one of the oldest football associations in the world,” said Malta FA president Bjorn Vassallo. “We are naturally very proud of this.

The Malta national team line up for their first official match, against Austria in 1957.



We are commemorating this anniversary during unprecedented times owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impeded us from celebrating this occasion with football enthusiasts and friends. Nevertheless, it’s important for our association to commemorate this 120-year journey of a footballing nation, with its highs and lows, and celebrate the efforts of all those who have contributed to the development of Maltese football.”

Celebrations kicked off with the unveiling of the 120th anniversary logo during a special online event broadcast on the association’s Facebook page and YouTube channel.

Football stalwarts who have etched their names in the annals of Maltese football enlivened the discussion in the first part of the programme. The guests were Joe Cini, who was part of the Malta team that faced Austria in the country’s first official international match, played on 24 February 1957, former Malta captains Raymond Vella and Gilbert Agius, Birkirkara FC forward Michael Mifsud, the country’s most-capped player with over 140

appearances and a record tally of 41 goals for the national team, and Dorianne Theuma, who recently became the first female player to reach 100 appearances for the national team.

The discussion also featured the participation of Malta FA president Bjorn Vassallo, football journalists and former Malta FA president George Abela.

Despite the unprecedented difficulties caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the Malta FA president struck an upbeat note. “The 120th year of the Malta FA will certainly be remembered for the extraordinary challenges caused by the coronavirus,” he said. “I’m very confident that Maltese football will overcome the current difficulties and make an opportunity out of it.

“The Maltese people have always shown courage and resilience in times of adversity, and as a nation we have always managed to come back stronger. We look forward to consolidating the association’s footballing mission, as well as the social aspect, which is also at the heart of our work, in the months and years to come.”



FA OF MOLDOVA CELEBRATES ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

On 14 April 1990, the Football Association of Moldova (FMF) was founded.

BY THE COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

The first president of the FMF was Grigore Cușnir, with the association's initial offices being located in Chișinău city centre, at 73 Bulevardul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Since 1998, the FMF has had its own headquarters, located at 39 Strada Tricolorului.

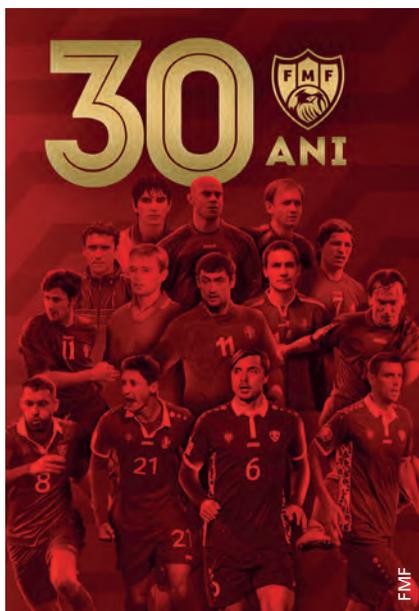
The association has been a member of UEFA since 10 February 1993 and a member of FIFA since 1994. Leonid Oleinicenco is the current president of the FMF, having been elected in 2019.

"Thank you for your commitment and faithful dedication to Moldovan football, for every minute, hour and day of your life you are giving to this phenomenon, which is a fundamental element in our society," said the FMF president in his message to the football community in Moldova.

Football is the most popular participation and spectator sport in Moldova, at both amateur and professional levels. The country has also enjoyed some success on the football field. The men's national Under-17 team reached the final tournament of the European Under-17 Championship in 2002, while FC Sheriff have played four times in the UEFA Europa League group stage.

Over the years, and with support from UEFA and FIFA, the FMF has invested a lot of money in expanding its sports facilities – the technical centre for the national teams in Vadul lui Vodă and the futsal arena in Ciorescu, not to mention more than 500 football pitches and mini-pitches all around the country. The FMF is also investing in coach education and other technical areas in a campaign designed to take the country's football forward in the future. Every year, the association hosts different European youth and futsal qualifying mini-tournaments.

Another major undertaking is the FMF's football in schools project – the largest social sport project in Moldova. The first two stages – football in kindergartens and physical education through football – have already been implemented and continue to



be implemented in schools across the country, with the direct support of the ministry of education, culture and research. The third stage – the creation of specialised football classes in schools – is the next major step and objective, which the FMF plans to achieve this year.

Planning for the future, the FMF has launched its strategy for the development of Moldovan football. The association will focus on four main areas in the 2020–24 period: grassroots football, the national team, the national division and women's football.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the association, the FMF website and social media channels posted stories every day for a week about the achievements of Moldovan football during the past 30 years. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the anniversary celebrations have been postponed until the end of the year. 🌐

ALBANIA

www.fshf.org

THE DOCTORS, OUR NATIONAL TEAM!

ANDI VERÇANI



As in the rest of the world, football in Albania was shut down owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and Albanian society is going through a difficult moment. The Albanian Football Association wanted to show appreciation to all the doctors and nurses that are on the front line against the deadly virus. Therefore, on National Health Day, the association created a special 'national team' made up of 459 doctors, nurses, health workers, ambulance drivers and others who are competing in this difficult,

unequal and unfair 'match' to save lives. Their names were printed on Albanian national team jerseys and were delivered to each of them in a sign of appreciation, support and solidarity. On 7 April, the jerseys covered the pitch of the Air Albania Stadium, delivering the message: THE DOCTORS, OUR NATIONAL TEAM!

Their names will stay on the official website of the Albanian Football Association as a reminder of their sacrifice. The football association also

thought about their children and delivered 459 balls so that the children could play football at home.

We call on everyone to respect the rules of social distancing to help stop the spread of the virus. This is the best support we can show to our doctors and all health workers who are leaving their families and risking their lives day and night in order to defeat the virus.

We are proud of them. We believe that soon enough, all together, we will win this 'match'!

ANDORRA

www.faf.ad

#FAFQUIZ PROVIDES A WELCOME DISTRACTION

XAVI BONET



The Andorran Football Federation (FAF) has been very active on social media during the COVID-19 lockdown, posting a question, puzzle or game each morning, followed by the solution in the evening, in its daily #FAFQUIZ.

Fans have been challenged with numerous brainteasers, including identifying matches from photos, spot the difference games, crosswords, recognising players from their childhood photos, guessing what



happened next in video clips and sudoku puzzles featuring first-division team logos. The quiz began with the hashtag #quedatcasa (stay at home), which became

#unultimesforç (one last effort) towards the end of Andorra's lockdown. With a total of 75 puzzles in 75 days, it proved very popular on social media.

The FAF also shared several short interviews to give fans an insight into the lives of football and futsal players, as well as live concerts featuring footballers-turned-musicians, a children's drawing competition and various other activities aimed at keeping people as entertained as possible during the lockdown.

AZERBAIJAN

www.affa.az

LAUNCH OF THE e-MILLI LEAGUE

TORA AKHMEDOVA



For the first time, the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) has invited teams playing in the premier league, first division, regional leagues, women's senior league, beach football and futsal competitions, and disability football tournaments to take part in an efootball league, the e-Milli league.

Co-organised by the AFFA and the

Sport Marketing Group under the rules of eFootball PES 2020, the inaugural nationwide competition, consisting of two three-month tournaments, got under way on 25 May.

While only teams representing professional football clubs are competing this first season, the second season will be open to all cyber football fans. The six players with the best

results will go through to international cyber championships. At the same time, friendly matches between cyber teams representing the most popular football clubs in Europe will be an unforgettable experience.

The official broadcast partner of the tournament is CBC Sport and Offside is the official media partner.

MINI-PITCHES TO BE BUILT IN ALL 118 DISTRICTS

ALEKSANDR ALEINIK

 In 2013, the Belarus Football Federation (ABFF) announced an ambitious joint project to build artificial mini-pitches in absolutely every area of the country. The main aim was to create an additional opportunity for boys and girls across Belarus to play football in the best conditions. Unfortunately, in



2015, after 40 pitches had been completed, the main partner faced financial problems and the initiative was frozen until further notice.

Happily, in 2018, the ABFF found a new partner, Bonfesto, which is one of the leading state dairy producers. The project was brought to life again, with plans to cover all 118 districts by the end of 2022. A massive joint effort of the new partner, the state, local governmental authorities and, of course, the ABFF ensured the launch of nine more pitches in 2018 and a further 12 in 2019. All new sites are equipped with a 20x40 artificial pitch, fixed football goals and a fence. The facilities are fully accessible to the local population throughout the year and the quality of the turf allows football to be played almost all year round, regardless of the weather.

So far, 61 regions have already been equipped, with plans for 19 pitches to be built each year until 2022 to encompass all 118 districts. One of the highlights of the project has been the new facility in the small town of Belynichi. The town has a population of just short of 10,000 people, and even with a lack of high-quality specialised sports facilities, three local players, including Aleksandr Pavlov (13 caps), Pavel Plaskonny (16 caps) and Yuri Kovalev (16 caps) have made it into the Belarus national team. During the opening ceremony, the ABFF president, Vladimir Bazanov, said: "The development and improvement of football infrastructure is one of the key areas for the ABFF in the coming years, and we have massive support from the state and our partners."

AN INITIATIVE FOR SUPPORTERS AND SPONSORS

PIERRE CORNEZ

 At the beginning of April, when the COVID-19 health crisis was at its height, the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) launched the #HomeGames initiative through its various communication channels.

The initiative had two objectives: firstly, to help our commercial partners during this difficult time by giving them some visibility and, secondly, to enable us to keep in touch with our supporters on a daily basis.

Each day, a quiz was put together to entertain fans stuck at home and teach them about different aspects of our favourite sport. We tested supporters' knowledge of the Belgian men's and women's national team players and coaches, as well as the rules of refereeing.

This fun, educational initiative proved very popular (as of early June, more than 33,000 entries had been received, with

the number of participants exceeding 5,000 on some days) and showed that many Belgian fans already knew a lot about football. A tie-breaker question was used



to identify an overall winner from among those who had scored full marks.

The initiative enabled many participants to expand their knowledge of the beautiful game, and the winners were awarded fantastic prizes, such as an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour at a men's national team match, a match shirt signed by the men's national team and a trip for two to an away match of the women's national team.

The initiative was also very popular with our commercial partners, since we were able to put the spotlight on one of our sponsors each day by displaying its logo and increasing its visibility. We essentially tried to use this difficult period to give our fans something different to keep them occupied and to support our sponsors – two categories of partner who are and will always be essential members of our football community.

FC SARAJEVO ARE THE CHAMPIONS

FEDJA KRVAVAC



As elsewhere in Europe, the ball stopped rolling on the football fields of Bosnia and Herzegovina owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Professional and amateur sports have been prohibited until the end of the pandemic. Therefore, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation (NFSBiH) took the decision to stop all competitions on 12 March. All club and national team players were left to do individual and group training by video. The federation was in daily contact by video link with players, coaches and referees. The restrictions did not affect the work and productivity of the NFSBiH, with some of its staff working from home.

All clubs in the country have suffered heavy financial losses, and the NFSBiH has become involved in combating this problem through requests to state bodies and UEFA. UEFA reacted immediately and provided financial resources that will be of great help to football in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The federation also

submitted its protocol for training and playing matches behind closed doors to the clubs and the relevant ministries.

Despite all necessary measures being taken to enable the continuation and completion of NFSBiH competitions, the Republika Srpska state bodies decided not to allow professional sport to resume before 1 July, leaving the NFSBiH with no choice but to terminate the championship and take the current rankings as final. Based on that decision, FC Sarajevo are this season's domestic champions and will play in the UEFA Champions League qualifiers, while second-placed FC Željezničar, third-placed HŠK Zrinjski and fourth-placed Borac will be entered in the UEFA Europa League qualifiers. Bottom of the table NK Čelik and FK Zvijezda 09 are relegated and will be replaced next session by FK Olimpik, champions of the first league of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and FK Krupa, champions of the Republika Srpska first league. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Cup,



which had reached the semi-final stage, will not be completed.

Despite the difficult situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, the NFSBiH has continued with the implementation of stadium infrastructure projects. As part of the preparations for Bosnia and Herzegovina's EURO 2020 play-offs and Nations League matches, all electrical installations at the Bilino Polje Stadium in Zenica have been replaced, including part of the lighting system, and new installations have been added for the needs of VAR. At Grbavica Stadium in Sarajevo, construction work on the roof of the east stand has been completed, financed by the NFSBiH with UEFA funds.

YOUNG PLAYERS GET FREE DAILY WORKOUT VIDEOS DURING THE LOCKDOWN

NIKA BAHTIJAREVIĆ



Like most European governments, in early March the Croatian government implemented strict lockdown measures to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus. As a result, the Croatian football season was put on indefinite hold and many footballers experienced the longest break in training and matches since they had started playing football as children.

Though a number of elite clubs did provide their players with at-home training plans, the vast majority of Croatia's 95,000 registered football players were left to fend for themselves, a fact that was quickly recognised by the football development department of the



Croatian Football Federation (HNS). With social distancing being our best defence against the coronavirus, the HNS launched an at-home workout project that would at once help players maintain their physical fitness during the national lockdown and urge them to stay at home.

Over the course of six weeks, the HNS produced a total of 36 workout videos, as

well as two additional videos on sports psychology, and diet and supplements. The videos were available for free on the federation's various social media platforms and featured players of the national men's senior and Under-21 teams, including Mateo Kovačić of Chelsea, Domagoj Vida of Beşiktaş, Nikola Katić of Rangers, and Antonio Marin and Nikola Moro of Dinamo Zagreb. The project content was viewed more than half a million times on both Instagram and Facebook and helped the HNS ensure that every single football player in Croatia – no matter how small their club – had access to workouts crafted by fitness experts.

TRAIN AT HOME PROJECT REACHES ALMOST 130,000 VIEWS

ALEŠ ROLL

 During the coronavirus pandemic, the Football Association of the Czech Republic launched the Train at Home project, giving athletes the possibility to train and keep fit in the confines of their homes at a time when the state of emergency had forced the shutdown of sports grounds, swimming pools, gyms and other sports facilities.

According to the Czech Marketing & Media portal (www.mam.cz), it has been the most visited project of its type in the Czech Republic. A total of 52 instructional videos clocked up almost 130,000 views on YouTube during the lockdown, each of them being clicked on about 2,500 times on average.

Train at Home, which is part of the Czech FA's successful My First Goal project, was created by the association's development department



and has former Czech international Karel Poborský, the current director of the elite youth department and head of the regional football academies, as one of its ambassadors.

The Czech FA is not the only Czech

sports organisation to have created training materials for home use. The Czech Basketball Federation, the Czech Ice Hockey Association, the Czech Sokol community and others have proposed similar projects.

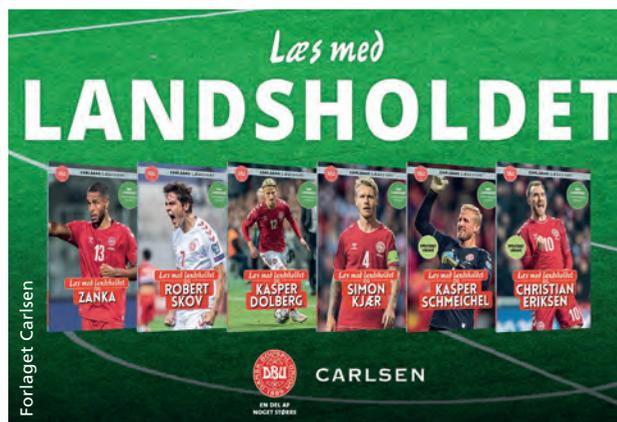
STAR PLAYERS HELP CHILDREN TO LEARN TO READ

SIGNE ULLSTAD

 Four new books in the Læs med Landsholdet (Read with the national team) series are bringing children closer to Danish national team players as well as helping children to learn to read. Proceeds from sales of the books will be donated to Fodboldfonden, a Danish organisation that supports disadvantaged and vulnerable children in Denmark.

Besides being stars of the national team, Kasper Schmeichel, Simon Kjær, Robert Skov and Mathias 'Zanka' Jørgensen now star in the four new books.

"As players in the national team, we have a huge responsibility as role models for many girls and boys, and it is incredible to have the opportunity to give something back to the those who follows us.



"For me personally, I am extremely happy that I can help children to learn to read by telling the story of my life as a football player," Zanka said.

The books are created by the Danish Football Association (DBU) in cooperation with the Carlsen publishing house and are for children aged between six and nine, who can discover a joy of reading with and about their football idols. The first books in the series were published

in 2017 and the whole series now contains 17 books about football players in the Danish men's and women's national teams.

ENGLAND

www.thefa.com

FOOTBALL'S STAYING HOME CAMPAIGN

NICK SMITH



At the beginning of April, The FA launched Football's Staying Home, a campaign across its digital channels to produce content to promote physical and mental well-being and offer hope, entertainment and togetherness at this difficult time.

With millions isolated in their own homes, Football's Staying Home houses informative, entertaining and empowering content, bringing together past and present players and experts from St George's Park. To date, the campaign has seen England players and coaches such

as Millie Bright, Ben Chilwell, Harry Kane, Tyrone Mings, Jordan Nobbs, Marcus Rashford, Jill Scott, Gareth Southgate and Ellen White make surprise calls to key workers, take part in entertaining quizzes, share home workouts and tackle serious issues as part of Mental Health Awareness Week.

In addition, in April, 16 internationals from the men's, women's and Under-21 squads put their skills to the test on a virtual pitch for the #FootballsStayingHome Cup, played out on FIFA 20 and streamed across The FA's social channels.

The campaign has also given fans the opportunity to 'play at the home of football'. Fans were encouraged to stay and play football at home, uploading their videos to social media. A 27-minute compilation featuring players of all ages was then broadcast on the giant screens at Wembley Stadium and streamed to millions.

The whole football community – fans, players, parents, teams, leagues and county FAs – have supported the campaign, all hopeful that football in England will not need to stay at home for too much longer, making its return when it is safe to do so.

ESTONIA

www.jalgpall.ee

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL GETS MORE EXPOSURE

MAARJA SAULEP



At the end of May, the Estonian women's football season got the green light to start league matches, and for the first time it is possible to watch top league matches regularly via live broadcasts.

By decision of the government, all matches were held without spectators until the end of June. However, those interested in women's football have not missed out because one match in each round has been broadcast live on the local website Soccernet.ee. A total of 20 live broadcasts will be made during the season.

"We are pleased that we can offer this valuable opportunity to women's teams through live broadcasts and increase the visibility of women's football in Estonia. In a situation where spectators were not allowed in the stadiums at the beginning of the season, live broadcasts played an even bigger role," said Anne Rei, general secretary of the Estonian Football Association.

In an effort to introduce more girls and women to the game of football, the Estonian Football Association has produced a video clip encouraging girls to choose football. The aim is to



popularise the game among women and girls and to emphasise that football is a suitable choice of sport for them.

The increase in the number of participants in the recreational league

also gives an indication of the growth of women's football. The league, which started in 2012, has grown steadily over the years, and a record number of 17 teams registered for the new season.

PREPARING FOR THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF THEM ALL

TERJI NIELSEN



Next May, the Faroe Islands will host the finals of the European Women's Under-17 Championship.

As hosts, the Faroe Islands qualify automatically for the final tournament, and there is no question that it will be the biggest challenge these girls have faced on the football pitch.

The preparations both on and off the pitch started a long time ago, but the coronavirus pandemic has thrown some obstacles in the way.

Having qualified directly, the Faroese girls will not take part in any qualification tournament or elite round. Therefore, a practice tournament has been arranged in Tórshavn in November to give the girls



a glimpse of what they will face next spring on home soil. Belgium, Denmark and Iceland will join the Faroe Islands in the tournament in November.

"This is a great opportunity for our girls to play some practice matches against strong opposition," says Pauli Poulsen, head coach of the Faroese women's Under-17 team.

WEEKLY VIDEO STORIES

PRESS OFFICE



In spite of the three-month break in the domestic league and the postponement of international fixtures, the Georgian Football Federation (GFF) has carried out various activities

during the pandemic. Soon after the outbreak, the federation donated GEL 100,000 towards the efforts to fight COVID-19 and offered some of its facilities for medical use. Together with Georgian

national team players, the GFF created weekly video stories for fans on social media, which proved to be highly popular. Our players offered an insight into their daily lives and provided words of encouragement for the population.

Under-15 girls teams received extensive coverage as part of the #WePlayStrong project, with online training sessions being held on a regular basis for them. The girls were given various challenges by instructors and received free training equipment to participate in the activities.

Hundreds of former players across the country received gift packs from the GFF in cooperation with regional federations. Gift packs were also handed out to 1,000 families across Georgia.

On 26 May, which marks Independence Day in Georgia, the GFF used the #ThankYou hashtag to express special gratitude to medical workers and others who have helped and supported the country during this difficult period.



GIBRALTAR

www.gibraltarfa.com

GIBRALTAR CHARITY RECEIVES UEFA FOUNDATION AWARD

STEVEN GONZALEZ



In January, as a continuation of the longstanding relationship between the Gibraltar FA and Gibraltarian charity Help Me Learn Africa, the association nominated the charity for a UEFA Foundation for Children award. The partnership between Help Me Learn Africa and the Gibraltar FA has developed over the past few years and has seen the Gibraltar FA supply the charity with football kits to allow youngsters from Maranatha school in a remote part of Ghana to take part in organised football. The school's football teams proudly wear Gibraltar national team kits for all their matches and, as a result, have become the 'best dressed team in the area' with stories of people travelling from rival villages and schools simply to see them play!

The nomination was prepared and submitted by the Gibraltar FA in conjunction with Help Me Learn Africa in March, highlighting the work done by this amazing charity in Ghana, which has helped with the construction of a school for underprivileged children who are football mad, and where football is a massive part of education and daily life. When the Gibraltar FA received

confirmation that the UEFA Foundation for Children board of trustees had decided to award €50,000 to Help Me Learn Africa, the news was an overwhelming boost to a charity that lives solely from community fundraising in Gibraltar and has achieved wonders on a very low budget. The founder of Help Me Learn Africa, Louise Barea, a registered nurse and therefore a key frontline healthcare worker during the COVID-19 crisis, was totally overwhelmed, shocked and extremely grateful to the UEFA foundation: "I am in complete shock. I really didn't expect to receive such recognition from such a prestigious organisation as the UEFA Foundation for Children. I would like to thank them and the Gibraltar FA from the bottom of my heart. This award means the world to our charity and it proves what I believe – that in life, the more you give, the more you receive. This award will have a huge impact on the lives of thousands of children living below the poverty line and I am excited to show the world all that we can do with it."

Reacting to the fantastic news, the Gibraltar FA's general secretary, Ivan Robba, said: "This is fantastic recognition



for Help Me Learn Africa, and a first for a Gibraltar charity, as the UEFA Foundation for Children is a prestigious foundation that has worked with many charities worldwide. I have known Louise for many years and have been following her incredible work with Help Me Learn Africa, which goes from strength to strength. Her dedication to the cause is exemplary, and I had no hesitation in nominating the charity for this award. I am extremely happy for her and all those who will benefit from this award, and also grateful to the board of trustees of UEFA Foundation for Children for choosing our nomination."

GREECE

www.epo.gr

THE BIG THANK YOU FROM THE NATIONAL TEAM

MICHAEL TSAPIDIS



Players of the men's national team and their head coach, John van 't Schip, have announced that they will dedicate the team's next fixture to health professionals, the true heroes of the fight against COVID-19.

With a big and heartfelt thank you, Vassilis Lampropoulos, Efthymis Koulouris, Sokratis Dioudis, Vassilis Barkas, Odysseas Vlahodimos, Alexandros Pashalakis, Kostas Galanopoulos and John van 't Schip have dedicated the next goal, the

next victory and the next celebration to all health professionals. It will be a message of appreciation on behalf of the whole Greek football community.

During the lockdown imposed by the Greek authorities, John van 't Schip communicated his personal support and the support of his players to Greek fans and encouraged everyone to adhere to the restrictions, to exercise and to show unity during these difficult and unprecedented times: "We are all in

this together. There is no winning or losing like there is in football. Health is always the most important thing in life," he said.

The Hellenic Football Federation also streamed a series of exercise videos for training at home to help football aficionados to stay fit and active and maintain their everyday contact with the game, while improving their technical skills at the same time.

STRICT MEASURES AS FANS RETURN TO THE STANDS

MÁRTON DINNYÉS



Along with Germany and Estonia, Hungary was one of the first European countries to resume its football season in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when a rescheduled men's top league fixture between reigning champions Ferencváros and mid-table Debrecen took place on 23 May, in line with the decision taken by the board of Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ) earlier that month.

In Hungary's case, 70 days had passed between the temporary shutdown of football and its resumption. Over the following six days, all men's and women's professional top-flight and cup fixtures were played behind closed doors, without

any fans and under strict conditions for players and staff, measures that were intended to protect public health and the health of every participant.

In both men's and women's football, only those competitions that affect qualification for UEFA competitions next season have resumed. Furthermore, the MLSZ's medical committee has drawn up a detailed health and examination protocol, according to which players will be regularly tested and social distancing measures will apply outside the confines of the pitch. The pitch area is heavily protected by the home club and the procedure is controlled at each match by a venue manager provided by the MLSZ.

Since 29 May, only limited numbers of fans have been permitted to enter any stadium to watch a men's or women's elite-level fixture, with only one spectator for every four seats being allowed if the host club even decides to admit spectators, which they are not compelled to do. In the men's Hungarian Cup, Budapest Honvéd and Mezőkövesd FC qualified for the cup final that was held in the Puskás Aréna on 3 June – for the first time since the stadium's renovation. In the 60,000-capacity arena, just over 10,000 fans were able to enjoy the game under such conditions. Honvéd won the cup with a 2-1 victory.

ITALIAN FOOTBALL PUTS COMMUNITY FIRST

DIEGO ANTENZIO



The COVID-19 pandemic that has affected Italy so severely in recent months has presented the world of football with enormous challenges, but it has also offered new opportunities. With all sporting activity suspended and people confined to their homes, the Italian Football Association (FIGC) has found alternative ways to fulfil its duties towards both the footballing community and wider society. The use of digital platforms in particular has ushered in a new age of communication with players, coaches, officials and other stakeholders at the professional, amateur and grassroots levels, with training programmes, CSR communication campaigns, fan engagement initiatives and administrative procedures all moving online in one form or another. A sizeable increase in online engagement confirms that these new modes of virtual interaction have been quick to catch on, and that the quality and range of services offered by the association can be deemed a success.



FIGC

The football family has also been quick to acknowledge its wider social responsibilities, and the FIGC has been unwavering in its support for the authorities since the start of the crisis. Acknowledging that "It is time to recognise those who, by putting the community first, have already beaten the virus", the association awarded a symbolic Scudetto del Cuore (Scudetto of the Heart) in recognition of the vital role played by key workers in the gruelling struggle against the virus, effectively naming healthcare professionals, the

police, the volunteers of the civil protection force and providers of other essential services as honorary Italian champions.

The FIGC has also helped to raise awareness of the lockdown rules through its campaign Le Regole del Gioco (Rules of the Game). Through its youth sector, the FIGC has also developed a wide programme of fun, educational activities for younger children, such as the Noi Giochiamo in Casa (We Play at Home) project, which focuses on physical and mental well-being, proper nutrition and the healthy use of digital devices. Perhaps most significant, however, are the concrete contributions made by the FIGC, including donations to the Lazzaro Spallanzani National Institute for Infectious Diseases in Rome, and the decision to make the technical centre at Coverciano available to the Florence division of the civil protection agency, which saw the national team hotel used to house patients with COVID-19 as they convalesced after leaving intensive care.

NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

HIGHLIGHTING ISSUES IN THE AMATEUR GAME

NIGEL TILSON



A survey and questionnaire have been launched as a first step towards improving amateur football in Northern Ireland. The two documents have been widely distributed with the aim of getting a complete picture of the amateur game in the country.

The Irish FA is keen to find out people's views on amateur football's future progression, along with an overview of the clubs, including their set-ups and community links, their needs and where

they see development opportunities. The questionnaire and survey have been sent out to those involved in the amateur game via the association's extensive database.

Michael Boyd, the Irish FA's director of football development, explained: "Work has to be done to identify the issues and to show the football public as a whole that the Irish FA has a commitment to support and develop the amateur game right across Northern Ireland.

"The questionnaire and survey are a first step. They will get the opinions of the clubs and the individuals involved in the game on a range of aspects. We want to work in partnership with all involved to make the amateur game bigger, better and sustainable."

Issues that are set to be addressed as a priority include retention of players in the 16-24 and over-35 age groups, insurance and the standard of coaching.

POLAND

www.pzpn.pl

GRASSROOTS CLUBS CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME GOING STRONG

RAFAŁ CEPKO



The Polish Football Association's grassroots clubs certification programme has been running for a year now. The innovative project is aimed at clubs that provide football training for children in the Under-6 to Under-13 age categories.

The certification programme was created as part of the development of a strategy for increasing participation in football in Poland. The Polish FA (PZPN) is an active player in the UEFA Grow programme and, in 2018, a social return on investment (SROI) tool was developed for Polish football. The subsequent SROI analysis confirms that investments in mass football have a significant impact in terms of economic value, social and health benefits and sports performance.

Analysing all the SROI pillars concerning Poland, the SROI, with 481,000 registered active players, amounted to PLN 2.2 billion. By putting more emphasis on the development of amateur football, for example, through the implementation of the grassroots clubs certification programme, this indicator will increase significantly. Assuming the additional registration of children and monitoring of the quality of training, that figure could

reach more than PLN 4.5 billion by 2025 with one million registered players. The SROI analysis helped the PZPN to convince the Polish government to invest PLN 35 million in the certification programme.

From the very beginning, the PZPN prepared the programme carefully by acquiring knowledge, identifying qualified staff for its implementation and carrying out consultations not only at European level, but also directly with grassroots clubs in the pilot phase. Awarding a certificate to a given club at one of

the three levels (gold, silver or bronze) is synonymous with fulfilling a number of criteria and a guarantee of quality training.

A club is certified for two full seasons, during which it is regularly monitored by the Polish FA. Nearly 1,200 clubs applied for the first project cycle (2019-21). All of them were monitored thoroughly and 694 certificates were awarded. Currently, after nearly a full year of the project's implementation, 632 clubs remain in the programme: 386 at bronze level, 133 at silver and 113 at gold. They will receive a total of PLN 35 million in funding from the Polish ministry of sport. It is the largest budget in the history of public funds for the promotion of a particular sport among children and young people. Clubs can use the money for specific purposes: remuneration of coaches, improvement of their coaching qualifications and renting of sports facilities.

The Polish FA continually evaluates the project in terms of content, operation and criteria. The PZPN hopes that as the project develops, certified clubs will also raise their standards and quality of operation.



HOMESKILLS PROJECT PROVES TO BE A HUGE HIT

GARETH MAHER



Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) reacted quickly to launch new grassroots channels, with a HomeSkills programme acting as the flagship project.

Every day throughout the worldwide lockdown, the HomeSkills programme delivered videos to encourage boys and girls to practise specific techniques and then share them with the FAI team, which would send out prizes to the best entrant.

With over two million impressions on social media and 300,000 video views, the HomeSkills programme proved to be a huge success as children all around the world got involved and stayed active practising the different skills. There was a lot of support from FAI staff and Republic of Ireland international players and coaches, who helped to deliver the videos by either introducing them, narrating the



skills, or even doing the full demonstrations themselves.

FAI deputy acting CEO Niall Quinn said: "When FAI HomeSkills began on our new FAI grassroots social media channels, we could only have dreamed it would become this popular. While the schools remain closed until the autumn, we are delighted to give children a chance to get outside and improve their skills. I see the videos being sent in each day, and am blown away by the creativity of the children involved. We are constantly seeing new families become involved, and it's great to see."

Quinn, a former Ireland international with 21 goals in 92 games, appeared on the popular Operation Transformation show on national broadcaster RTE to promote the HomeSkills programme, which continues to grow in popularity across social media.

eROMANIAN FA CUP FOR A GOOD CAUSE

PAUL ZAHARIA



Without any action on the pitch, the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) and the 14 first league clubs decided to join forces for charity and to connect with their fans at the same time.

Between 27 April and 6 May, the FRF and the first league clubs organised the eRomanian FA Cup on FIFA 20 using PlayStation 4 consoles. Each team was represented by their own 'real' players, including many of their star performers. The competition system was simple: each match was decided on the best of three games, with all the gamers having an average rating of 85.

A total of 13 matches (each composed of three games) were broadcast live on the FRF's FA Cup Facebook page and on the official FRF YouTube channel, attracting more than 200,000 views

during the two weeks of competition. Most of the viewers – predominantly fans of the participating teams or of football in general – bought virtual season tickets for the whole event. Each ticket cost 10 lei (about €2.1) and all the proceeds were donated to UNICEF to buy personal protective equipment, infrared thermometers and other crucial equipment for UNICEF's global response to COVID-19 among children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

The Timișoreana brewery, official sponsor of the Romanian senior and Under-21 national teams, as well as long-time partner of the Romanian FA Cup, supported the eRomanian FA Cup and raised money for the Romanian Red Cross. The company also hosted a dedicated talk show every evening

featuring former Romania goalkeeper Bogdan Lobonț, one of the country's best TV football commentators and a well-known vlogger, who talked about the ematches and answered questions from fans.

Although the primary goal was to help children and play a vital role in fighting the pandemic, being a competition, there still had to be a winner. That honour went to Universitatea Craiova, whose forward Mihai Roman won both games against Ștefan Drăghici (representing CS Gaz Metan Mediaș). So, as they prepare for the resumption of the first league and their quest to become 'real' champions, Universitatea have already won a trophy, albeit a virtual one, and, more importantly, have contributed to a very good cause.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS VERSUS COVID-19

EKATERINA GRISHENKOVA



The Football Union of Russia (FUR) has conducted active information work to combat COVID-19.

Different digital platforms (@TeamRussia, @rfsruofficial), including the official website, have been used actively during the fight against the virus. A series of interviews with coaches and players of various Russian national teams has been published on www.rfs.ru, including with players who play and live abroad. The coaches and players gave recommendations on staying safe and well, how to pass the time during the lockdown and how to keep fit on your own.

For the whole lockdown period, the official logo of the FUR has been replaced on all the association's digital platforms with one showing an eagle inside a house to reflect the #StayAtHome campaign.



RFS

Meanwhile, the FUR and the Mir payment system, the official partner of the Russian men's senior national football team, have run a joint project. In a series of videos #MirAtHome on the TeamRussia YouTube channel, representatives of the men's and women's national teams told people how to lead healthy lifestyles and stay in good shape while staying at home. The stars of the first #MirAtHome clips were the men's national team's personal training and rehabilitation specialist, Igor Stepanov, and the team's head doctor, Eduard Bezuglov. Clear and simple infographics were also prepared for fans on how to eat properly during the lockdown. As part of the project, online video sessions have been conducted with Russian national team players Aleksandr Erokhin, Anton Shunin, Vyacheslav Karavaev, Ksenia Kovalenko and Roman Zobnin.

In another project, conducted with the Russian Post, the #GoodNewsPost campaign was run on the Instagram accounts of all of Russia's national teams. The Russian football community shared positive news from their lives with their fans, showing how important it is to be able to enjoy simple things and small, but very important, sports victories that happened even in these difficult times. The project was opened by Stanislav Cherchesov, head coach of the men's national team. He talked to fans about

how he has spent time with his family and trained at home, including running on a treadmill. He was joined by players from the men's and women's national teams, the Under-21 team, players from the regions, FIFA referees, etc. In return, fans shared their good-news stories.

The FUR has also conducted a number of campaigns supporting doctors. Players from the national football, futsal and beach soccer teams thanked doctors and medical workers, and applauded them in a joint video for their invaluable work. Likewise, the association is supporting the Humanity's Heroes campaign launched by FIFA to thank doctors and medical workers who fight against COVID-19 daily. Two Russian men's national team players, captain Artem Dzyuba and Denis Cheryshev, joined David Beckham, Ronaldo, Marta, Zinedine Zidane, Pelé, Diego Maradona and other stars of world football in a similar video.

As part of its #StayHome campaign, during which the FUR urged people to stay at home during COVID-19, Russian arenas were lit up with the words 'Doctors are our heroes! Thank you!'. The action was initiated at the legendary Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow, and other stadiums soon followed suit. The facades of several stadiums also paid a personal tribute to doctors treating COVID-19 patients by displaying their names.

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS THE RETURN OF FOOTBALL

LUCA PELLICIONI



The San Marino football community has made no secret of its desire to get playing again.

With the decree-law enacted by the government on 31 March, the secretary of state for sport was given the power to grant exemptions to the ban on sporting events, provided certain protocols are in

place. It is therefore the intention of the San Marino Football Federation (FSGC) to apply for an exemption so that the 2019/20 season can be completed in time for the start of next season's UEFA competitions, with the league moving directly to the championship play-offs rather than playing out the remaining league fixtures.

Some youth football is already back in action. With one eye on the autumn qualifiers for the European Under-17 and Under-19 Championships, the squads at the San Marino academy began group training again on 1 June, albeit following official guidelines to protect against the spread of the virus.

SCOTLAND

www.scottishfa.co.uk

EDUCATING COACHES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

MICHAEL LAMONT



The Scottish FA has launched an e-learning mental health education module that will be available to all coaches, volunteers and administrators within the game. The module has been created by Hampden Sports Clinic in conjunction with the mental health phonenumber Breathing Space.

The Scottish FA has become the first of the home nations to create its own bespoke course, which is an educational tool for all coaches, to help them understand the importance of mental health along with advice on how to deal with the issue effectively. The module is expected to educate more than 10,000

people across the game every year.

Mental health problems affect 25% of adults in Scotland and are something that 10% of teenagers across the country are currently living with.

This is the latest Scottish FA initiative put in place to help and raise awareness of those living with mental health issues, after the association demonstrated its support for the Heads Up campaign, spearheaded by the Duke of Cambridge, earlier this year. All kick-off times in the Scottish Cup fifth round were delayed by one minute to encourage players, staff and supporters alike to engage in conversation around mental health.

Later this year, the Mental Health Action Plan will be launched across Scotland. Greig Paterson, the Scottish FA's head of coach education and development, said: "We are passionate about ensuring our coaches are as well equipped as possible to continue their coaching journey once they have undergone their courses and we want them to be as well rounded as possible."



SLOVAKIA

www.futbalsfz.sk

REFEREES TESTED FOR COVID-19

PETER SURIN



Following the decision to restart the Slovak first league on 13 June, the Slovak Football Association, in cooperation with the AGEL clinic in Bratislava, prepared a plan for testing referees for COVID-19. The tests were paid for by the football association.

The referees were divided into groups for the tests as a precautionary measure – if one of the referees in a group had tested positive, the whole group would have had to be quarantined, while the referees in the other groups could have continued officiating. Altogether, 77 referees were tested.

Slovakia's number one referee, Ivan Kružliak, said: "The testing did not look comfortable when I saw it being done on TV, but the reality was not so bad. It was a necessary measure." He also said that he and his colleagues have to work with the unwritten football rule about the spirit of the game in these unprecedented times. "Emotions are part of the game, especially after scoring a goal. We have to urge players not to overdo the celebrations, but cautioning them after scoring a goal in the 90th minute after such a long break with no football is not on the agenda. First and foremost, we are all humans and we should act accordingly."



SWEDEN

www.svenskfotboll.se

SWEDISH FA APP BEATS IKEA AND TIKTOK

ANDREAS NILSSON



With 256,000 users in May, the Min Fotboll app became the most downloaded and popular app (all categories) in Sweden this spring. Min Fotboll is an official app developed and run by the Swedish FA to give grassroots clubs and their followers the opportunity to get live streams and reports from their games.

Apps and websites catering to team sports have been around for a long time in Sweden. Clubs have either paid private companies to use their online services, or used free alternatives that use third-party advertising and harvest data from the users.

Ahead of the 2020 season, the Swedish FA decided to launch a free-to-use app of its own where the individual teams have control over any privacy issues and where

any future revenue will stay in football.

Min Fotboll is integrated with the association's own competition system to ensure that fixtures, results and tables are official and correct. User-generated content from teams is allowed in the form of live streaming/reporting, line-ups, photos, updates and emotes. Users register strictly through their phone number, which minimises the risk of abuse. Teams can also block video or photos from games they participate in, and control any privacy issues related to minors – all in accordance with the rules of GDPR.

"We're very pleased with the launch of Min Fotboll. During the weekend in mid-May when we became the most downloaded app in Sweden, 2,700 youth games were reported live in the app and

1,100 of those had live video with 71,000 online viewers. We've had a great reception from the grassroots clubs and the growth potential remains high," said the Swedish FA general secretary, Håkan Sjöstrand.



SWITZERLAND

www.football.ch

PLAY RESUMES

PIERRE BENOÎT



At the end of May, representatives of the 20 Super League and Swiss League clubs gathered for an extraordinary general meeting at the historic Stade de Suisse, venue of the West German national team's 3-2 victory over Hungary in the 1954 World Cup final.

However, discussions at the stadium which, to the delight of the tradition-conscious Bernese, will soon be known as the Wankdorf Stadium again, focused on the future of Swiss football rather than the past.

The main purpose of the meeting was to decide whether to resume the season, which had been suspended on 23 February because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 20 club representatives decided, with 17 votes in favour, to restart matches on 19 June, giving BSC Young Boys the chance to complete a domestic treble. The Berne club was represented at the meeting by its sporting



director, Christoph Spycher, who welcomed the decision.

"We had to choose between playing matches behind closed doors or abandoning the season. We think it's clear that playing matches behind closed doors is by far the lesser of the two evils," said the former Swiss international, who won 47 caps. Play is therefore set to resume in

Switzerland on 19 June and, after two rounds of matches a week, the new champions will be crowned by 2 August at the latest. The quarter-finals, semi-finals and final of the Swiss Cup will then be played.

To mitigate the increased risk of injury linked to the tight match schedule, the clubs decided that, in both divisions, a temporary rule should apply until the end of the season, allowing each team to use up to five substitutes per match instead of the usual maximum of three.

The second major item to be voted on concerned the expansion of the Super League to 12 teams, a proposal that the clubs once again rejected. The motion tabled by FC Lausanne-Sport was defeated by 14 votes to 5, leaving ten teams on each of the top two rungs of the country's football ladder. The clubs had already opposed reforms that would have meant increasing the size of the Super League on 23 April.

FIRST STEPS IN eFOOTBALL

YURI MAZNYCHENKO



While Ukraine's football community has been staying at home and real football has been in shutdown,

interest in efootball has been growing rapidly across the country.

At the end of 2019, a national PES 2020

efootball team was formed. The best four cyber players – Maksym Makson Andrasyuk, Ihorigor_8 Lyubchak, Vitalii Budb_Proshhe Lytvynov and Serhii Sergobibika Marchenko – were chosen in a national selection process and, a few months later, were representing the 'blue and yellows' in eEURO 2020 qualifying, where they finished third in their group in their first international competition.

Ukraine's efootball quartet also competed in the PES #StayHome European Nations Cup featuring 12 teams.

National team players Oleksandr Zinchenko and Yevhen Konoplyanka also tried their hand at efootball during the long lockdown, forming a FIFA Ultimate Team with Manchester City/France's Benjamin Mendy, Poland internationals Mateusz Klich and Maciej Rybus and Ajax/Romania's Razvan Marin.

The online battle of Zinchenko against famous eplayer Alex ForlanFS Mercer, who is in the top 100 in the FIFA.gg rankings, became the top attraction on the Ukrainian Association of Football's YouTube channel. The Manchester City player was not put off by his rival's level and amazingly beat him on an aggregate score of 4-3 over the two legs of the tie.



Volodymyr Rasner

KEEPING CLUBS CONNECTED

MELISSA PALMER



The Football Association of Wales' football magazine web show FC Cymru features and celebrates stories from all levels and aspects of the game in Wales. Although football in Wales came to a standstill owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FAW wanted to ensure that FC Cymru was still able to give recognition to the brilliant people involved in the game.

By using archived footage and conducting online webcam interviews, FC Cymru was able to pay tribute to the

many volunteers that are the lifeblood of Welsh football and that are working to keep connections between clubs' players, fans and the wider community while the pitches are empty.

The first of a series of FC Cymru 'minisodes' caught up with Kieran Howard of Brymbo Lodge YFC, Cori Beth of Cardiff City Ladies FC and Paul Evans, chairman of Caernarfon Town FC, to discuss how they and their clubs had been dealing with these difficult times. All clubs detailed the importance of keeping



players and fans engaged and involved in their football family even when matches were no longer able to be played. They have been doing so by making use of online platforms such as Zoom to host online football training and quizzes with players and parents, in addition to players and coaching staff recording personal messages of support and thanks to their fans. Many Welsh clubs have also taken part in initiatives to raise money for charitable causes and support for key workers across the country.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

July

10 July, Nyon

2019/20 UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League: quarter-final and semi-final draws

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: preliminary round draw

August

5/6 August

2019/20 UEFA Europa League: round of 16

7/8 August

2019/20 UEFA Champions League: round of 16

8 & 11 August

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: preliminary round

9 August, Nyon

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: first qualifying round draw

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: preliminary round draw

10 August, Nyon

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: second qualifying round draw

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: first qualifying round draw

10/11 August, Germany (Cologne, Duisburg, Düsseldorf, Gelsenkirchen)

2019/20 UEFA Europa League: quarter-finals

12–15 August, Lisbon

2019/20 UEFA Champions League: quarter-finals

16 August, Nyon

2019/20 UEFA Youth League: round of 16

16/17 August, Germany (Cologne, Duisburg, Düsseldorf, Gelsenkirchen)

2019/20 UEFA Europa League: semi-finals

18/19 August

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: first qualifying round

18/19 August, Lisbon

2019/20 UEFA Champions League: semi-finals

18/19 August, Nyon

2019/20 UEFA Youth League: quarter-finals

20 August

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: preliminary round

21 August, Cologne

2019/20 UEFA Europa League: final

21/22 August, Spain (Bilbao and San Sebastián)

2019/20 UEFA Women's Champions League: quarter-finals

22 August, Nyon

2019/20 UEFA Youth League: semi-finals

23 August, Lisbon

2019/20 UEFA Champions League: final

25 August, Nyon

2019/20 UEFA Youth League: final

25/26 August

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: second qualifying round

25/26 August, Spain (Bilbao and San Sebastián)

2019/20 UEFA Women's Champions League: semi-finals

27 August

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: first qualifying round

30 August, San Sebastián

2019/20 UEFA Women's Champions League: final

31 August, Nyon

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: third qualifying round draw

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: second qualifying round draw

September

1 September, Nyon

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: play-off draw

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: third qualifying round draw

2020/21 UEFA Women's Champions League: qualifying round draw

2 September, Nyon

2020–22 European Futsal Championship: qualifying group stage draw

2–8 September

2019–21 European Under-21 Championship: qualifying round

2019/20 European Under-19 Championship: elite round

3–5 September

2020/21 UEFA Nations League: matchday 1

6–8 September

2020/21 UEFA Nations League: matchday 2

11 September

2019/20 European Under-19 Championship: final round draw

12–20 September

2019/20 European Women's Under-17 Championship: elite round

15/16 September

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: third qualifying round

17 September

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: second qualifying round

18 September, Nyon

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: play-off draw

22 September, Nyon

2019/20 European Women's Under-17 Championship: final draw

22/23 September

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: play-offs (first legs)

24 September, Budapest

Executive Committee

2020 UEFA Super Cup

24 September

2020/21 UEFA Europa League: third qualifying round

29/30 September

2020/21 UEFA Champions League: play-offs (return legs)

BIRTHDAYS IN JULY

1 WEDNESDAY	2 THURSDAY	3 FRIDAY	4 SATURDAY	5 SUNDAY	6 MONDAY	7 TUESDAY
Anthony Bloch (England) Răzvan Burleanu (Romania) Frank De Bleeckere (Belgium) Petar Krpan (Croatia) Hannu Tihinen (Finland) Aldi Topçiu (Albania) Antonie M. Verhagen (Netherlands)	Mustafa Erögüt (Turkey) 40 Philippe Hertig (Switzerland) Marinus Koopman (Netherlands) Rusmir Mrković (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Pjetur Sigurdsson (Iceland)	Carolina De Boeck (Belgium) Bertrand Layec (France) Peadar Ryan (Republic of Ireland)	Neale Barry (England) Massimo Cumbo (Italy) Miguel M. García Caba (Spain) Antonio Matarrese (Italy) 80 Roland Ospelt (Liechtenstein) Lukas Pittek (Slovakia)	Natalia Avdonchenko (Russia) Tiago Craveiro (Portugal) Patrick Nelson (Northern Ireland) 60		Augustus Constantin (Romania) Slaviša Kokeza (Serbia) Hans Schelling (Netherlands) Jorge Vilda Rodríguez (Spain)
9 THURSDAY	10 FRIDAY	11 SATURDAY	12 SUNDAY	13 MONDAY	14 TUESDAY	15 WEDNESDAY
Yordan Letchkov (Bulgaria) Sergiu Lisnic (Moldova) Heinrich Schifferle (Switzerland)	Thomas Christensen (Denmark) Levan Kobiasvili (Georgia) Markus Kopecky (Austria) Karel Vidlak (Czech Republic)	Darko Čeferin (Slovenia) Nina Hedlund (Norway)	Filip Popovski (North Macedonia)	Maria Teresa Costa (Portugal) Sjoukje de Jong (Netherlands) Sharon Zeevi (Israel)	Elke Günthner (Germany) Tai Regel Pundik (Denmark)	Robert Sedlacek (Austria) Ben Veenbrink (Netherlands)
17 FRIDAY	18 SATURDAY	19 SUNDAY	20 MONDAY	21 TUESDAY	22 WEDNESDAY	23 THURSDAY
Antonia Kokotou (Greece) Stefano La Porta (Italy) Giuseppe Mifsud-Bonnici (Malta) 90 Alexander Safonov (Russia)	Tomas Danilevičius (Lithuania)	Kari Iuell (Norway) Alfredo Trentalange (Italy)	Jan Kořinek (Czech Republic) Tormod Larsen (Norway)	Gudni Bergsson (Iceland) Patrick Dempsey (Republic of Ireland) Vladimir Radionov (Russia)	Emilio Butragueño (Spain) Balázs Makray (Hungary) 50 Iain Robertson Brines (Scotland) Michel Wuillert (Switzerland)	Pavel Malovič (Slovakia) Bontscho Todorov (Bulgaria)
25 SATURDAY	26 SUNDAY	27 MONDAY	28 TUESDAY	29 WEDNESDAY	30 THURSDAY	31 FRIDAY
Kerim Altıay (Turkey) Claus Christensen (Denmark) Mario Gallavotti (Italy) Nenad Radivojević (Serbia) Ferenc Ragadics (Hungary)	David Bowen (Northern Ireland) Alfred Ludwig (Austria) 70	Fernando Carro De Prada (Germany) Jeff Davis (England) Marc Juillerat (Switzerland)	Björn Ahlberg (Sweden) Karl Espen Eriksen (Norway) Nataša Joksimović (Serbia) Róbert Kispál (Hungary) Štefan Tivold (Slovenia)	Georgi Matevosyan (Armenia)	João Leal (Portugal) Kieran O'Connor (Wales)	Des Casey (Republic of Ireland) Cenk Cem (Turkey) Jozef De Ryck (Belgium) Tugomir Frajman (Slovenia) Duncan Fraser (Scotland) Joël Wolff (Luxembourg)

BIRTHDAYS IN AUGUST

1 SATURDAY	2 SUNDAY	3 MONDAY	4 TUESDAY	5 WEDNESDAY	6 THURSDAY	7 FRIDAY
Sheila Begbie (Scotland) Alf Hansen (Norway) Kimmo J. Lipponen (Finland)	Gerard Behan (Republic of Ireland) Bisser Botschev (Bulgaria) Luciano Lucì (Italy) Igor Popov (Moldova) Mehmet Süheyl Önen (Turkey)	Dariusz Pasięka (Poland) Andreas Schluchter (Switzerland) Franck Thivillier (France) Thura Win (England)	Mustafa Çağlar (Turkey) Jahangir Hasanazade (Azerbaijan) Thóroddur Hjaltalin (Iceland) José Miguel Monje Carrillo (Spain)	Aleh Chykun (Belarus) 60 David Gill (England) Yves Wehrli (France)	Piet Hubers (Netherlands)	Anna Bordiugova (Ukraine) Andrea Gotzmann (Germany) Pierino Lardi (Switzerland) Pericles Laskarakis (Greece)
9 SUNDAY	10 MONDAY	11 TUESDAY	12 WEDNESDAY	13 THURSDAY	14 FRIDAY	15 SATURDAY
Odd Flattum (Norway) Nick Nicolaou (Cyprus)	Peter Fossen (Netherlands) Silvano Lombardi (Switzerland) Jan Willem van Dop (Netherlands) 60	Urs Vogel (Switzerland)	Alexandros Dedes (Greece) Urban Hammar (Switzerland) Emil Kostadinov (Bulgaria) Domenico Messina (Italy) Mark Whitby (Wales)	Cornel Cristian Bivolaru (Romania) Kakha Chumburidze (Georgia) 40 Albano Janku (Albania) Joseph Mifsud (Malta) 70 Paul Tompkins (England) Metin Tunçer (Turkey) Roger Vanden Stock (Belgium) Michael Verschuere (Belgium) 50 Patrick Willemarck (Belgium)	Anette Karhu (Sweden) Alexander Medvedev (Russia) George Pandelea-Dobrovicescu (Romania)	Kjell Alseth (Norway) 60 Thibault De Gendt (Belgium) Antonio Domato (Italy) Jevgenijs Miļevskis (Latvia)
17 MONDAY	18 TUESDAY	19 WEDNESDAY	20 THURSDAY	21 FRIDAY	22 SATURDAY	23 SUNDAY
Dennis Beiso (Gibraltar) Sergey Pryadkin (Russia) Bente Ovedie Skogvang (Norway)	Romano Clavadetscher (Switzerland) Dane Jošt (Slovenia) Borja Santana (Spain)	Antonio Garcia Alcaraz (Spain) Patricia Gregory (England) Graham Hover (England) Hans Reijgwart (Netherlands)	Eren Eroğlu (Turkey) Per Ravn Omdal (Norway)	Carmel Bartolo (Malta) Marta Bonaria Atzori (Italy)	Kazimierz Oleszek (Poland)	Demetrio Albertini (Italy) Igor Pristovnik (Croatia) Luis Manuel Rubiales Béjar (Spain) Geoffrey Thompson (England)
25 TUESDAY	26 WEDNESDAY	27 THURSDAY	28 FRIDAY	29 SATURDAY	30 SUNDAY	31 MONDAY
Bert Andersson (Sweden)	Marcin Animucki (Poland) Ronit Glasman (Israel) 50 Regina Konink-Belksma (Netherlands) Scott Struthers (Scotland)	Tammo Beishuizen (Netherlands) Karen Nalbandyan (Armenia) Tom O'Shea (Republic of Ireland)	Savvas Constantinou (Cyprus) Vladimir Gashevski (North Macedonia) Christos Nicolaides (Cyprus)	Scilla Gennaro (Italy) Vadym Kostiuchenko (Ukraine)	Charles John Grundie (Northern Ireland) Boško Jovanetić (Serbia) Marián Ružbarský (Slovakia) Leo Windtner (Austria) 70	Cristel Brorsson (Sweden) Pedro Dias (Portugal) Christer Fällström (Sweden) Christoph Kollmeier (Germany) Stefano Podeschi (San Marino)

BIRTHDAYS IN SEPTEMBER

8 WEDNESDAY

Martin Maleck (Switzerland)
 Jacobo B. Pedreira (Spain)
 Ekaterina Todorova (Bulgaria)

16 THURSDAY

Michail Anagnostou (Greece)
 Lars Lagerbäck (Sweden)
 Ernst Nigg (Liechtenstein)
 Jiří Ulrich (Czech Republic)

24 FRIDAY

Gijs de Jong (Netherlands)

8 SATURDAY

Nico De Pauw (Belgium)
 Olivier Henry (Belgium)
 Plarent Kotherja (Albania)
 José Francisco Molina Jiménez (Spain) **50**
 Marcel Vanelschoot (Belgium)

16 SUNDAY

Victor Beceiro (Spain)
 Jacques Lagnier (France)
 Art Langeler (Netherlands) **50**

24 MONDAY

David Delferiere (Belgium)
 Nicolae Grigorescu (Romania)
 Pavel Kolev (Bulgaria)
 Johnny Vanspauwen (Belgium)

1 TUESDAY

José Guilherme Aguiar (Portugal)
 Gerhard Aigner (Germany)
 Manuel Díaz Vega (Spain)
 João Morais (Portugal)
 Alon Yefet (Israel)

6 SUNDAY

Shmuel Shteif (Israel)
 Bernd Stöber (Germany)
 Eija Vähälä (Finland)

11 FRIDAY

Tomas Karpavičius (Lithuania)
 Kenneth Rasmussen (Denmark)
 Ioannis Tsachilidis (Greece)
 Katarzyna Wierzbowska (Poland)

16 WEDNESDAY

Rimla Akhtar (England)
 Marco Borg (Malta)
 Antonis Petrou (Cyprus)
 Kelly Simmons (England)

21 MONDAY

Nenad Dikić (Serbia)
 Helena Herrero González (Spain)
 Nail Izmaylov (Russia)
 Vladislav Khodееv (Russia)
 Viktor Paradnikov (Ukraine)
 Stefan Weber (Germany)
 Luc Wilmes (Luxembourg)

26 SATURDAY

Kirsi Heikkinen (Finland)
 Dzmitry Kryshchanovich (Belarus)
 Stephen Lodge (England)
 Tomislav Madžar (Croatia)
 Camelia Nicolae (Romania)

2 WEDNESDAY

Marco Brunelli (Italy)
 Alain Giresse (France)
 Savo Milošević (Serbia)

7 MONDAY

Werner Helsen (Belgium)
 Antonio Laranjo (Portugal)
 György Mezey (Hungary)
 Edgaras Stankevičius (Lithuania)
 Vignir Thormóðsson (Iceland)

12 SATURDAY

Talal Darawshi (Israel)
 Tania Gravina (Malta)

17 THURSDAY

22 TUESDAY

Kairat Boranbayev (Kazakhstan)
 Cornelis De Bruin (Netherlands)
 Michalis Moushountas (Cyprus)
 Bernhard Schwarz (Austria)

27 SUNDAY

Julie-Anne Gross (France)
 Jens Kleinfeld (Germany)
 Jeroen Roest (Netherlands)

3 THURSDAY

David Elleray (England)
 Gérard Houllier (France)
 Raphael Kern (Switzerland)
 Rudolphe Mannaerts (Belgium)
 Bartłomiej Zalewski (Poland)

8 TUESDAY

Judit Berkesi (Hungary)
 Clemens Burgstaller (Austria)
 Adrian Titcombe (England)

13 SUNDAY

Ivan Gazidis (Italy)
 Ingrid Jonsson (Sweden)
 Philippe Prudhon (France)
 Lennart Schafroth (Sweden)
 Jon Skjervold (Norway)
 Stanisław Speczik (Poland)
 Lennart Vestervall (Sweden)

18 FRIDAY

Marija Andjelković (Serbia) **40**
 Şenes Erzik (Turkey)
 Stéphane Lannoy (France)
 Miroslava Migaľová (Slovakia)
 Roberto Rosetti (Italy)
 Raul Sanllehi (England)
 Antero Silva Resende (Portugal)
 Denis Soloviev (Russia)

23 WEDNESDAY

Goetz Eilers (Germany)
 Vlado Svilokos (Croatia)

28 MONDAY

Karel Bohuněk (Czech Republic) **70**
 Michael van Praag (Netherlands)
 Paloma Quintero Siles (Spain)

4 FRIDAY

Hendrik Grosse-Lefert (Germany)
 Grigoriy Surkis (Ukraine)

9 WEDNESDAY

Friedrich Curtius (Germany)
 Kostadin Gerginov (Bulgaria)
 Aki Riihilahti (Finland)
 Geir Thorsteinsson (Iceland)

14 MONDAY

Kim Robin Haugen (Norway)

19 SATURDAY

24 THURSDAY

Matteo Frameglia (Italy)
 Ionel Piscanu (Romania)
 Giangiorgio Spiess (Switzerland)
 Eugen Strigel (Germany)
 Magdalena Urbańska (Poland)

29 TUESDAY

Tamás Gudra (Hungary)
 Jon Ottar Morland (Norway)
 Cristian Vornicu (Romania) **50**

5 SATURDAY

Tomislav Svetina (Croatia)
 Barry Taylor (England)

10 THURSDAY

Manuela Bertona (Italy)
 Charles Robba (Gibraltar)

15 TUESDAY

Adam Giersz (Poland)
 Sokol Jareci (Albania)
 Eugeniusz Nowak (Poland)
 Marko Pantelić (Serbia)
 Anja Rein (Faroe Islands)
 Dejan Savićević (Montenegro)

20 SUNDAY

Paul Lyon (Gibraltar)
 Miloš Marković (Serbia)

25 FRIDAY

Ayşe İdil Cem (Turkey)
 Christine Frai (Germany)
 Rotem Kamer (Israel)
 Paul Krähenbühl (Switzerland) **70**
 Mogens Kreutzfeldt (Denmark)
 João Lopes Ferreira (Portugal)

30 WEDNESDAY

Dariusz Dziekanowski (Poland)
 Judith Frommelt (Liechtenstein)
 Cristina-Daniela Uluc (Romania)

NOTICES

- **Sándor Csányi** has been re-elected president of the Hungarian Football Federation.
- **Vadims Ļašenko** has been elected president of the Latvian Football Federation.



EQUAL GAME

UEFA RESPECT

