

UEFA



No. 194

DIRECT

Q2 2021
OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
OF THE UNION OF EUROPEAN
FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS



BACK TOGETHER



UEFA
EURO2020



UEFA

FOUNDATION

TM.

for children



YEARS





Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President

A TIME FOR CELEBRATION

All good things come to those who wait', as the saying goes. Finally, the stage is set for one of world sport's blue-riband occasions. UEFA EURO 2020, European national team football's premium event, is here at long last...

After a year's delay owing to the pandemic, and amid the difficulties and uncertainties that we have all faced, it is time to revel in a month-long festival of football that will further enrich the annals of the game's history. Finally, the wider football community can come together and rejoice in the sport that we love and cherish.

The EURO has always reflected the enduring importance of national team football as part of the fabric of the game. This time around, we are not just celebrating the competition's 60th anniversary by staging a unique EURO in 11 cities throughout Europe. The tournament will also be the largest major sports event since the outbreak of the pandemic. It represents a moment of communion, when we fully realise just how much football means to us.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped to make this EURO happen. We have succeeded in delivering something that might have seemed impossible – a labour of love requiring patience, flexibility, improvisation, teamwork and a fantastic spirit of solidarity. Despite everything, the original vision of staging the EURO across Europe has remained intact. We can feel immense pride in our remarkable achievement in ensuring that the event takes place.

We are especially delighted that, with the necessary precautions in place, spectators will be able to attend matches at the EURO. Fans are the lifeblood of football, and it is a great relief to us that the strange silence that has become commonplace in our stadiums will give way to the sights and sounds of fans thrilling to the drama unfolding in front of them. This scenario gives us hope that things are gradually returning to a state of normality after a protracted period when virtually nothing has seemed normal.

EURO 2020 will leave behind a wealth of unforgettable memories. It has been the longest ever wait between one European Championship and the next. Now that the waiting is over, we should savour the moment more than ever before.

IN THIS ISSUE

Q2 2021



Official publication of the Union of European Football Associations

Chief editor:

Emmanuel Deconche

Deputy chief editor:

Dominique Maurer

Chief writer:

Mark Chaplin

Subeditor:

Susan Angel

External contributors:

Julien Hernandez (pages 8-13)
 Sam Adams (pages 16-17)
 Graham Dunbar/AP (pages 22-23)
 Simon Hart (pages 40-41, 52-57, 74-75, 78-79)
 Graham Turner (pages 42-43, 58-63)
 Ben Gladwell (pages 46-47, 50-51)

Translations:

UEFA Language Services

Production:

Touchline

Printing:

Artgraphic Cavin,
 CH-1422 Grandson

Editorial deadline:

9 June 2021

Photos:

Getty Images unless mentioned



RUNNING FOOTBALL



08 Who will be the next European champions?

UEFA Direct assesses the 24 teams vying to lift the Henri Delaunay Trophy.

22 Interview

Dr Daniel Koch, UEFA's medical advisor for EURO 2020, explains UEFA's efforts to protect everyone involved from the risk of infection.

24 Refereeing

The referees prepare for EURO 2020 action.

26 Ticketing

Ticketing for EURO 2020 has been a complex matter owing to the pandemic.

64 Interview

Armand Duka, president of the Albanian Football Association and member of the UEFA Executive Committee, talks about football in his country, among other topics.

70 UEFA club licensing benchmarking report

The 12th edition of The European Club Footballing Landscape report provides an in-depth examination of how the pandemic has affected European football.



06 Interview

Martin Kallen, CEO of UEFA Events SA, talks about the challenges of organising EURO 2020, a tournament like no other.



30 45th UEFA Congress

Meeting in Montreux, Switzerland, the UEFA Congress roundly condemns the plans to create a so-called 'Super League'.



36 UEFA club competitions

The 2020/21 men's, women's and futsal club competitions closed with one or two surprises and some important changes on the horizon.



SUPPORTING FOOTBALL

28 Interview

Michele Uva, UEFA's director of football social responsibility, sets out the organisation's plans to make a difference on human rights and environmental sustainability.

96 Sign for an Equal Game!



DEVELOPING FOOTBALL

18 UEFA HatTrick Programme

Revenue generated by the EURO is channelled back into the game to support football development activities all over Europe.

52 The Technician

Two helpings in this issue, one on making the transition from player to coach, and the other on the importance of mental aspects in coach education.



72 UEFA Grow

The Football Federations of the Future programme is helping UEFA member associations survive the new reality caused by the pandemic.

74 UEFA Research Grant Programme

A comparison of female and male footballers shows that female footballers differ little from their male counterparts when it comes to tactical and cognitive aspects of the game.

78 News from member associations

MARTIN KALLEN

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE, POSSIBLE

UEFA Events SA CEO Martin Kallen, a veteran of five EURO tournaments, reflects on his toughest ever challenge – staging the world’s biggest sporting event to take place since the start of the pandemic.



Even before a ball was kicked, UEFA EURO 2020 was already a major international tournament unlike any before.

Whether it is staging matches across 11 different venues, postponing the event due to a global pandemic or adapting regulations to protect the players and welcome fans back into stadiums, this European Championship will live long in the memory.

With the last preparations firmly under way, UEFA Direct caught up with UEFA Events SA CEO Martin Kallen, responsible for making the impossible, possible.

Martin, how can you describe the period since UEFA’s decision to postpone EURO 2020 by 12 months?

It was a challenging time. At first, it was a shock – it was the first time that we had this situation where we suddenly needed to postpone the EURO by one year.

We have it in our contracts that such things can happen, but this really came as something new, and it was not something for which we could be prepared.

We had to really consider how to move forward. At the beginning, we thought the pandemic could last a few weeks, and then a few months, but it became clear that the only chance we had, with all the parameters of the football calendar, was to postpone the EURO by a year and then discuss how to move forward.

You have to speak to all your partners and stakeholders – governments, host cities, stadiums, commercial partners and broadcasters, plus our many suppliers.

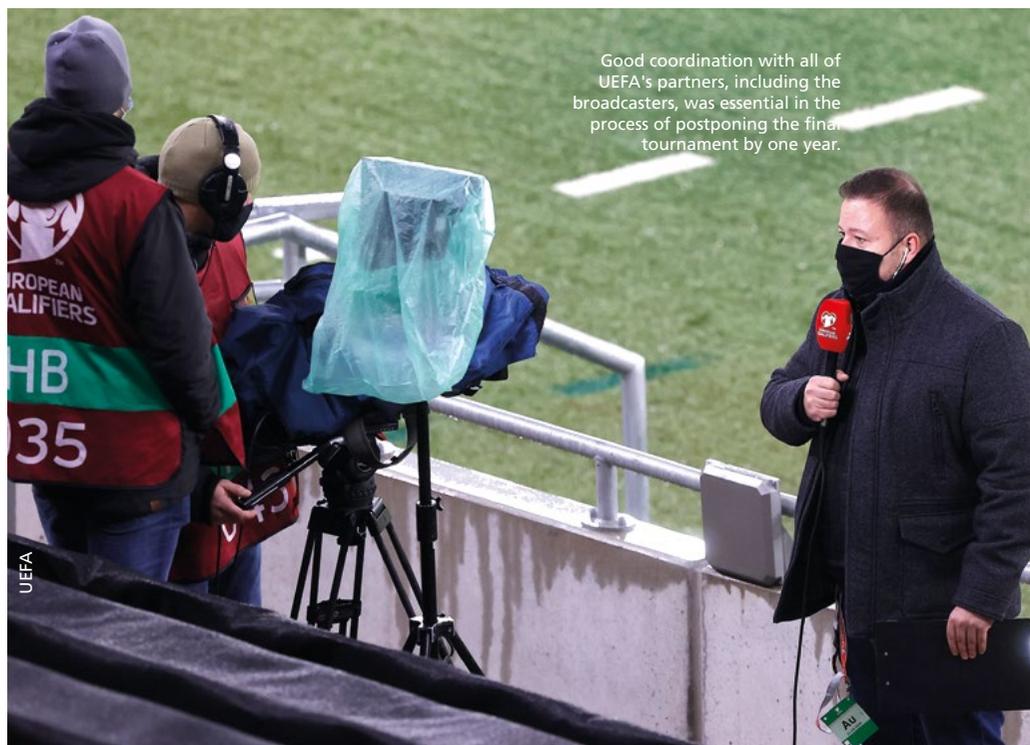
Within UEFA, we have a lot of fixed-term contract employees, so we had to consider how we could honour these contracts, continue without people or

bring them back. There has been a lot of administration, a lot of legal work, but we can say that everybody has played the game and done their utmost to get us to a position where EURO 2020 can begin.

When we wake up on 12 July and the celebrations are over after the final, we can be very thankful to everyone who was involved and who gave their all to make the European Championship happen. It will be a time to reflect and feel very proud of absolutely everybody.

How does organising EURO 2020 compare to the previous four European Championships you have been involved with?

We had a pattern from past competitions – how to organise a EURO, how to organise a big event, what is important,



Good coordination with all of UEFA’s partners, including the broadcasters, was essential in the process of postponing the final tournament by one year.



Charles McQuillan

EURO 2020 will be the biggest competition to have been held with spectators since the start of the pandemic.

what is less important, what you have to focus on. This year, we had to do a lot of these things completely differently.

Each EURO has its own major subject or point of concern. This year, of course, it is dealing with the pandemic.

In 2004 in Portugal, we only had 21 months to organise it, with lots of new stadiums, so construction was a very important subject. In 2008, in Austria and Switzerland, the weather was a challenge. We had to change the grass in Basel, we lost the television signal and power due to the weather, and we also had big fan zones for the first time.

In 2012, with Poland and Ukraine, there was a whole new infrastructure to be built in two countries, and, in 2016 in France, the main issue was security and terrorism, and they did an excellent job in creating a safe and secure environment for fans.

In 2020, it was already unique with so many different countries, but the pandemic meant nothing was certain anymore and has brought new issues every day – how we clean and disinfect stadiums, how we deal with testing, how we can bring spectators back.

How important is it to bring fans back to stadiums in a safe manner?

The first priority, second priority and third priority at a tournament is always fan safety. It's important for everybody that we have spectators back – it represents a step towards normality for all of us in society.

Football without fans is not the same and it's very important to have them back, so I will be very, very happy to see supporters throughout the tournament, and we can feel satisfied that we managed to make this happen.

There will be 11 host cities rather than the 12 planned – can you talk about the situation with Dublin and Bilbao?

We looked at different scenarios over the past 12 months, and in the end, the best scenario was to remain with what we started with – if you have more countries, it can help to share the risks, and with so many host nations qualified, there is less international travel for many supporters.

Unfortunately, it proved impossible to stage matches with supporters in Dublin

and Bilbao, but we have a very good relationship with Dublin, the Football Association of Ireland and the Irish government. The same goes for Bilbao and the Spanish Football Federation, and we were able to move those matches to Seville.

What legacy plans are in place for UEFA EURO 2020?

Each EURO has a legacy and, each time, the legacy gets a little bit better. For EURO 2020, we only constructed one new stadium, in Budapest, which is a positive step, not building any 'white elephants'.

Social responsibility is important to us and we have developed several existing programmes as well as creating new ones, with programmes differing across the 11 venues.

A big event is never 100% sustainable, that would be impossible, but we have done our utmost to make sure EURO 2020 is environmentally friendly. So, we have already paid to offset the carbon and have agreed free public transport in some of the host cities. 🌱



A EURO LIKE NO OTHER

After Portugal in 2016, who will be the next European champions: an old hand at winning major titles or maybe an outsider? Predictions are harder than usual for EURO 2020, which differs in more ways than one from previous final tournaments, with many of the 24 contenders in with a good chance.

Having cruised through the EURO qualifiers, and currently unbeaten in 22 matches, Italy are back on the crest of a wave.





EURO 2020 – to be held from 11 June to 11 July 2021 – will be nothing if not out of the ordinary. Never before will a EURO have been so different from previous tournaments, with ‘firsts’ wherever you look – starting with the decision taken in 2012 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Europe’s flagship national team football competition by making it a truly pan-European event, with the 51 matches staged in 12 cities scattered throughout Europe. On 23 April 2021, however, it was decided to move the group matches assigned to Bilbao to Seville and those due to have been played in Dublin to St Petersburg. The round of 16 match that should have been played in Dublin was moved to Wembley Stadium in London.

Qualifying was also different this time round. As with EURO 2016, 24 teams have qualified, but while 20 of them booked their tickets through the traditional qualifying group stage, the remaining four secured their places through a new system of play-offs based on their results in the UEFA Nations League.

Finally, EURO 2020 has kept its name even though it will be held in 2021, having been delayed by a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the spectre of the pandemic remains and will inevitably have an impact on the overall organisation of the tournament.

However, one thing that does not change and even helps to create a sense of normality is the speculation over who will win. Excluding the play-offs held in October and November 2020, the qualifying competition concluded in November 2019, a full 19 months before the start of EURO 2020, which is an eternity in the world of sport.

Even though, in the meantime, the teams have been able to compete in the group stage of the 2020/21 Nations League, or start their 2022 World Cup qualifying campaigns, it is difficult to draw up a clear hierarchy among European football’s traditional heavyweights, who are all raring to be crowned champions of Europe.

Here we assess the runners and riders ahead of a group stage that will see the top two in each group and the four best third-placed teams qualify for the round of 16. →

GROUP A	
Italy	Switzerland
Turkey	Wales

The Italians are back! Surprise absentees from the 2018 World Cup, the Squadra Azzurra have been on the crest of a wave ever since and are currently unbeaten in 25 matches. After cruising through the EURO qualifiers – 10 wins, 37 goals scored and 4 conceded – Roberto Mancini’s men maintained their imperious form to secure a place in the 2020/21 Nations League finals and started their 2022 World Cup campaign with three wins.

The reasons for their resurgence? Newfound solidity, burgeoning collective strength and a plethora of attacking players capable of producing decisive moments. Runners-up in 2000 and 2012, Italy’s only EURO title was won on home soil in 1968.

Their three group matches this June will be held at the Olimpico in Rome, the scene of Italy’s European Championship triumph 53 years ago – something to fire up Marco Verratti and co, perhaps?

Before they get carried away, however, Italy will need to negotiate a very well-balanced group, comprising four teams that all took part in EURO 2016 in France.

One of them, Switzerland, almost reached their first-ever EURO quarter-final five years ago, losing to Poland on penalties in the round of 16. They dominated their EURO 2020 qualifying group, confirming their status as one of Europe’s leading football nations, and have now qualified for eight of the last nine major tournaments.

Wales, on the other hand, will be competing in a EURO for only the second time, and will be hoping to repeat their 2016 performance, which saw Gareth Bale and his team-mates reach the semi-finals. Although they only scraped through their qualifying group thanks to an Aaron Ramsey brace in their final match against Hungary, the Welsh team then flew through their League B group in the Nations League and remain on an upward trajectory.

Turkey, meanwhile, will be hoping to put a disappointing EURO 2016 behind them and certainly have grounds for optimism, especially with a defence marshalled by Çağlar Söyüncü and Merih Demiral that was the joint best, with Belgium, in the entire qualifying competition (conceding only three goals). The Turks’ defensive solidity, which enabled them to secure four points in their two matches against France, will be a vital asset in a tournament in which every goal will be crucial.



Kevin De Bruyne and his team-mates are better equipped than ever to secure Belgium’s first major title.

GROUP B	
Belgium	Russia
Denmark	Finland

A steamroller. There is no better word to describe the Belgian men’s football team since 2018. The statistics paint a fairly accurate picture of how Roberto Martínez’s men have dominated their opponents in recent times: ten wins in ten matches, the best attack (40 goals scored) and the joint best defence (three goals conceded) in the EURO qualifiers, followed by five wins and 16 goals in six Nations League matches. With the highest goal tally across all 14 Nations League groups, having already notched up 12 goals in three 2022 World Cup qualifiers, Belgium seem better equipped than ever to finally secure their first major title and crown their golden generation (Hazard, De Bruyne, Lukaku, et al.).

Belgium will play two matches in St Petersburg, where they saw their World Cup dreams shattered by France in the 2018 semi-finals, and where they will be reunited with Russia, one of their opponents in a qualifying

group in which, apart from two defeats to Belgium, the Russians won all eight of their matches and scored 33 goals.

With three matches in St Petersburg, Denis Cheryshev and his compatriots will be keen to make the most of home advantage, as they did at the 2018 World Cup (when they reached the quarter-finals).

Another recent victim of the Belgian steamroller (in the Nations League), Denmark find themselves back on the EURO stage after a rare absence in 2016, thanks to a collective discipline.

One of ten previous EURO winners (in 1992), Denmark will begin the tournament with their sights set on a place in the round of 16 and the advantage of playing two matches in Copenhagen.

The objective will be the same for Finland who, like North Macedonia, will be playing in their first-ever EURO. Thanks to ten goals from Teemu Pukki (out of 18 in total), the Finns saw off Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina to secure a place among the European elite. Will they upset the odds again this summer?



GROUP C

Ukraine	Netherlands
Austria	N. Macedonia

All four teams in Group C will be out to make amends, since none of them qualified for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Ukraine are the top seeds thanks to their magnificent first-place finish in the qualifiers, when they beat the reigning champions, Portugal, to top spot in their group and remained undefeated. Andriy Shevchenko's men will be determined to forget their disastrous EURO 2016, when they failed to score a single goal or win any points.

However, the role of group favourites will be taken by the Netherlands. After failing to reach EURO 2016 and the 2018 World Cup, the Dutch ended their period in the wilderness by qualifying behind Germany.

Frénkie de Jong and his young team-mates, including several of Europe's leading lights at club level, will be looking for a successful return to the international scene, starting with three group matches in Amsterdam. They will need to watch out for Austria,

however, who sailed through qualifying to reach a second consecutive EURO for the first time in their history. After performing well in the Nations League, where they recently won promotion to League A, David Alaba and co will be hoping for a better outcome than the Austrians have achieved in their most recent major tournament appearances, not having won a EURO or World Cup finals match since 1990.

At the other end of the spectrum, North Macedonia will start EURO 2020 with an unblemished record since it will be their first major international tournament.

Having already caught the eye in the qualifiers, finishing third in their group behind Poland and Austria, the North Macedonians overcame Kosovo (2-1) and then Georgia (1-0) in the play-offs. Fittingly, it was a goal from the evergreen Goran Pandev (aged 37), his nation's best-ever goalscorer, that secured North Macedonia's ticket to EURO 2020. →



After failing to reach EURO 2016 and the 2018 World Cup, the Netherlands (Memphis Depay in action here) will be looking for a successful return to the international stage.

GROUP D

England	Croatia
Czech Republic	Scotland

London's Wembley Stadium was the venue of England's sole triumph in a major tournament in 1966. Will history repeat itself 55 years later? There is certainly a chance, since the stadium will host the Three Lions' EURO 2020 group matches as well as two round of 16 matches, the semi-finals and final.

The England team's rise in power in recent years makes the possibility even more real. Led by Harry Kane, the 2018 World Cup semi-finalists sailed through the qualifying competition, in which the Tottenham Hotspur striker finished as leading goalscorer (12 goals).

Full of fresh-faced youngsters, the England team are undoubtedly among the favourites to win EURO 2020, but they will need to overcome some familiar foes before they can start dreaming of bigger things.

Their first opponents will be Croatia, who denied them a place in the 2018 World Cup final by beating them in extra time at the semi-final stage. After subsequently losing the final, the Croatians did not clinch their place at EURO 2020 until the last matchday, and their results in the Nations League and World Cup qualifiers point to a slight drop in performance levels since 2018. Even so, the wealth of experience in their ranks will

stand them in good stead as they seek to finally shine at the EURO, a competition in which they have enjoyed little success over the years, with quarter-final appearances in 1996 and 2008 their greatest achievements to date.

An even more recent opponent for England, the Czech Republic secured a prestigious 2-1 win in Prague, but finished behind the English in the qualifying group table.

Unlike the Croatians, the Czechs have an impressive EURO record. EURO 2020 will be their seventh consecutive appearance, with previous highlights including an unforgettable final defeat to Germany in 1996... at Wembley.

There will certainly be plenty of references to the past in this group, since its final member, Scotland, contested the first-ever international match against England in 1872 and the two teams have faced each other a record 114 times.

Having performed miracles in the play-offs by winning two consecutive penalty shoot-outs, the Scots will play two matches at home in Glasgow as they seek to qualify for the knockout stage, a feat that eluded them in their two previous attempts in 1992 and 1996.

Wembley is hosting eight EURO 2020 matches, including the semi-finals and the final, and it would be a dream come true for England to win their first European Championship at their national stadium.

GROUP E

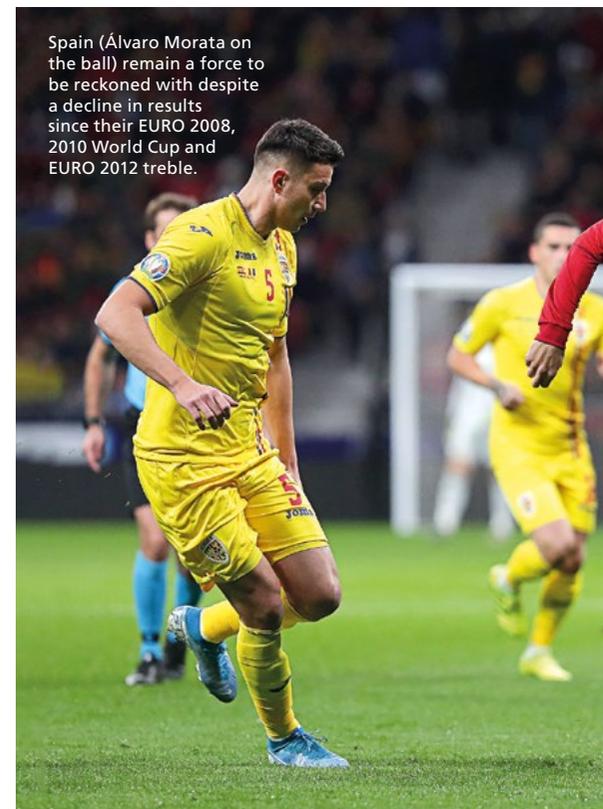
Spain	Poland
Sweden	Slovakia

This tight-looking group features three teams that reached at least the round of 16 at EURO 2020.

Spain, group favourites despite a decline in results since their memorable EURO 2008, 2010 World Cup and EURO 2012 treble, remain a major force at continental level, as they demonstrated in a recent 6-0 win over Germany that saw them qualify for the 2020/21 Nations League finals.

As usual, Sergio Ramos and his colleagues strolled through their EURO 2020 qualifying group. With a clever blend of experience and youth, Spain are one of the favourites to win the competition, especially as they will play their group matches at home in Seville, which replaces Bilbao as a host city.

Poland, who had never reached a EURO before 2008 but have qualified each time since, may be considered outsiders. Led by the classy Robert Lewandowski, the Poles will be keen to at least match their performance in 2016, when they reached the quarter-finals.



Spain (Álvaro Morata on the ball) remain a force to be reckoned with despite a decline in results since their EURO 2008, 2010 World Cup and EURO 2012 treble.

World champions and EURO 2016 finalists France will be counting on the speed of Mbappé to help them win their third European Championship after 1984 and 2000.



Like Poland, Sweden have established themselves at Europe's top table, qualifying fairly easily for a sixth consecutive EURO from a group in which Spain were the only team to beat and finish above them.

After a successful 2018 World Cup in which they were defeated by England in the quarter-finals, the Swedes will hope to fare better than in their last three EURO finals, when they were knocked out in the first round.

Slovakia, on the other hand, have never been eliminated in the first round of a EURO, their only previous appearance being in 2016 when they reached the round of 16. The Slovaks' road to their second successive EURO was a long one, culminating with play-off wins over the Republic of Ireland on penalties and then Northern Ireland after extra time. They even changed coach between the two play-off matches when Štefan Tarkovič, who will lead the Slovakian team at EURO 2020, took the reins.



GROUP F	
Germany	France
Portugal	Hungary

Featuring the last two World Cup winners as well as the current European champions, Group F captured everyone's imagination when the draw was made.

Germany are perhaps less fancied than usual after their early elimination from the 2018 World Cup and some disappointing recent results, including their defeat by North Macedonia in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, that suggest Joachim Löw's team is nearing the end of its current cycle. But Germany are Germany, and they will be competing in their 13th consecutive EURO, have reached at least the semi-finals in the last three editions and rarely fail twice in a row.

They will also play their three group matches on home soil, starting with a game against France in a repeat of the EURO 2016 semi-final that saw Didier Deschamps' men win a fiercely contested encounter in Marseille.

Losing finalists in 2016, Antoine Griezmann and his team-mates banished this painful memory by becoming world champions two years later and have maintained a winning momentum ever since.

After an impressive qualifying campaign, they eased their way to the 2020/21 Nations League

finals at the expense of... Portugal. Revenge will be on everyone's mind in this group. Although the Portuguese were recently beaten by France, they were the team to deny Les Bleus the EURO 2016 title when they lifted their first international trophy.

Portugal's second quickly followed when they won the Nations League in 2019. Even though he has now scored over 100 goals for his national team, Cristiano Ronaldo remains hungry for success, as he proved once again in the qualifying competition (11 goals), and will spearhead Portugal's defence of their title.

Meanwhile, Hungary secured their place alongside Europe's elite by beating Iceland in the play-offs, scoring twice in the last five minutes in Budapest. The Hungarians will play two matches on home turf, giving them extra hope of stopping their more illustrious opponents in their tracks and reaching the round of 16, as they did at EURO 2016. 🇮🇪

Cristiano Ronaldo and his Portugal team-mates will be going all out to retain their title.





2021 MATCH SCHEDULE

GROUP STAGE

	GROUP STAGE												
	Matchday 1					Matchday 2				Matchday 3			
	FRI 11.06	SAT 12.06	SUN 13.06	MON 14.06	TUE 15.06	WED 16.06	THU 17.06	FRI 18.06	SAT 19.06	SUN 20.06	MON 21.06	TUE 22.06	WED 23.06
 ROME Olimpico in Rome CET	1 TUR v ITA 21:00					14 ITA v SUI 21:00				26 ITA v WAL 18:00			
 BAKU Baku Olympic Stadium CET +2		2 WAL v SUI 15:00				15 TUR v WAL 18:00				25 SUI v TUR 18:00			
 ST-PETERSBURG Saint Petersburg Stadium CET +1		4 BEL v RUS 21:00		10 POL v SVK 18:00		15 FIN v RUS 15:00		21 SWE v SVK 15:00			28 FIN v BEL 21:00		34 SWE v POL 18:00
 COPENHAGEN Parken Stadium CET		3 DEN v FIN 18:00					16 DEN v BEL 18:00				27 RUS v DEN 21:00		
 AMSTERDAM Johan Cruyff Arena CET			5 NED v UKR 21:00				17 NED v AUT 21:00				29 MKD v NED 18:00		
 BUCHAREST National Arena Bucharest CET +1			6 AUT v MKD 18:00				18 UKR v MKD 15:00				30 UKR v AUT 18:00		
 LONDON Wembley Stadium CET -1			7 ENG v CRO 15:00					20 ENG v SCO 21:00				32 CZE v ENG 21:00	
 GLASGOW Hampden Park CET -1				8 SCO v CZE 15:00				19 CRO v CZE 18:00				31 CRO v SCO 21:00	
 SEVILLE La Cartuja Stadium Seville CET				9 ESP v SWE 21:00					22 ESP v POL 21:00				33 SVK v ESP 18:00
 MUNICH Football Arena Munich CET					12 FRA v GER 21:00				24 POR v GER 18:00				36 GER v HUN 21:00
 BUDAPEST Puskás Aréna CET					11 HUN v POR 18:00				23 HUN v FRA 15:00				35 POR v FRA 21:00



KNOCKOUT STAGE												
		Round of 16				Quarter-finals		Semi-finals		Final		
24.06 25.06	SAT 26.06	SUN 27.06	MON 28.06	TUE 29.06	30.06 01.07	FRI 02.07	SAT 03.07	04.07 05.07	TUE 06.07	WED 07.07	08.07 09.07 10.07	SUN 11.07
REST DAYS							43 W43 v W44 21:00					
							47 W40 v W38 18:00					
				42 2D v 2E 18:00								
		38 2A v 2B 18:00					45 W41 v W42 18:00					
				41 1F v 3A/B/C 21:00								
		37 1A v 2C 21:00			44 1D v 2F 18:00					49 W46 v W45 21:00	50 W48 v W47 21:00	
				48 1E v 3A/B/C/D 21:00								
			39 1B v 3A/D/E/F 21:00									
						46 W39 v W37 21:00						
		40 1C v 3D/E/F 18:00										
												51 W49 v W50 21:00

- GROUP A**
- A1 Turkey (TUR)
 - A2 Italy (ITA)
 - A3 Wales (WAL)
 - A4 Switzerland (SUI)

- GROUP B**
- B1 Denmark (DEN)
 - B2 Finland (FIN)
 - B3 Belgium (BEL)
 - B4 Russia (RUS)

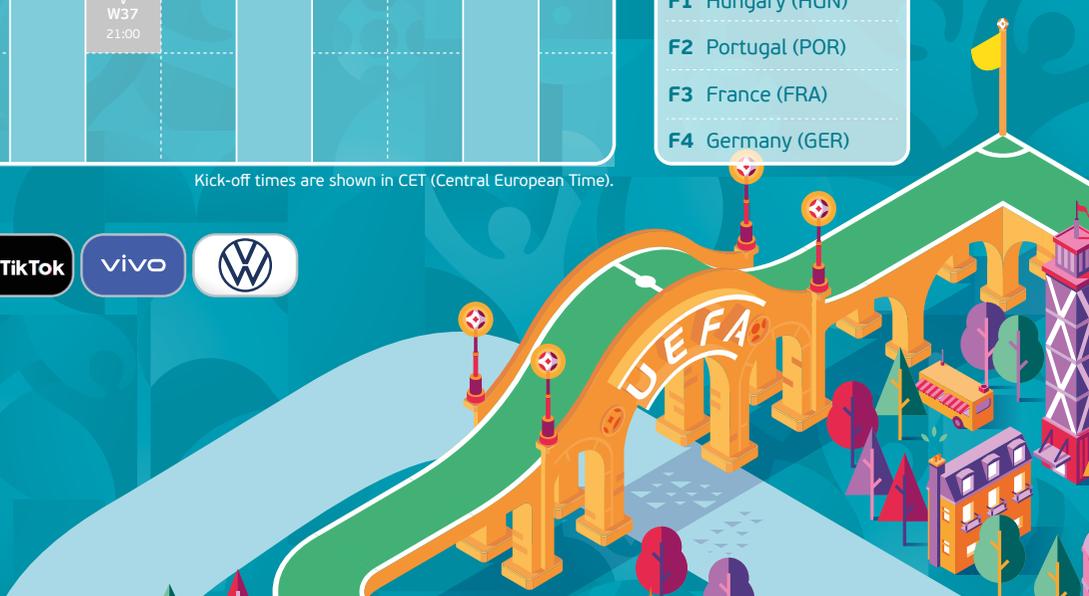
- GROUP C**
- C1 Netherlands (NED)
 - C2 Ukraine (UKR)
 - C3 Austria (AUT)
 - C4 North Macedonia (MKD)

- GROUP D**
- D1 England (ENG)
 - D2 Croatia (CRO)
 - D3 Scotland (SCO)
 - D4 Czech Republic (CZE)

- GROUP E**
- E1 Spain (ESP)
 - E2 Sweden (SWE)
 - E3 Poland (POL)
 - E4 Slovakia (SVK)

- GROUP F**
- F1 Hungary (HUN)
 - F2 Portugal (POR)
 - F3 France (FRA)
 - F4 Germany (GER)

Kick-off times are shown in CET (Central European Time).



WEMBLEY PRIMED FOR EURO RETURN

Out of the 11 cities hosting EURO 2020 fixtures, there was always a natural place for the tournament to conclude – in a stadium as famed as any other in world sport.

The first-ever final golden goal, Robben's last-minute winner, Hurst's hat-trick, Gascoigne's EURO magic, the Mighty Magyars – just a handful of the vivid moments football fans associate with the stadium that many consider the home of the sport: Wembley.

In a tournament being played across all of Europe, it feels fitting that the outcome will be decided in this corner of north-west London. It is one of those few venues whose mystique crosses borders and conjures dreams of lifting a trophy there among players from all over the world.

It has also played its own part in European Championship history, a quarter of a century ago, when it was at the heart of a tournament still remembered fondly in England. Wembley has been completely renovated since then – the towers swapped for the arch. It has lost none of its magic, though, and it is ready for the return of major championship football.

It is also time for the return of fans. Having a football cathedral like Wembley at the forefront of supporters taking their seats once more is an appropriately symbolic step back – as summed up by Chris Bryant, head of tournament delivery at The Football Association (FA). "We have all missed the presence of fans inside stadiums throughout Europe," he said. "To see at least 22,500 fans inside Wembley for all our games will be a very welcome sight. The energy, excitement and atmosphere they will bring will be incredible, and we hope that we can have even more fans in for the latter stages, helping to deliver an unforgettable event."

Indeed, London itself is at the vanguard of hosting international sporting events

again following a year like no other. That it is one of the world's great cities is not in question, but it also has a close connection with football. The Laws of the Game were first drawn up in a Covent Garden pub in 1863, it is the home to the FA Cup final and there are 12 professional clubs from London playing in the country's top four tiers.

While the tournament is being played across the continent, Wembley will be most in use, with eight games scheduled at the famous ground – including the semi-finals and final. It is, of course, no stranger to big matches. Wembley has hosted a record seven European Cup finals. It was also where the Three Lions lifted the Jules Rimet trophy in 1966, and there was of course that wonderful summer of EURO '96.

It has been no mean feat to ensure the return of the finals – after being pushed back 12 months following the onset of the pandemic. "To get this tournament away in the first place is a phenomenal achievement by all those involved," added Bryant. "From an operational point of view, we of course hope for a smooth and safe delivery in the face of a number of challenges. On top of that, we want to support UEFA in putting on a show befitting of the occasion.

"We have to thank our local authorities, partners and government for all their efforts in ensuring Wembley can remain the focal point of such a huge global tournament," he said. "It has been a massive stakeholder effort, with each and every one of them playing their part. The fact that their commitment hasn't wavered throughout speaks volumes to how important the tournament is to us all and we just cannot wait for it all to begin."

Wembley Stadium

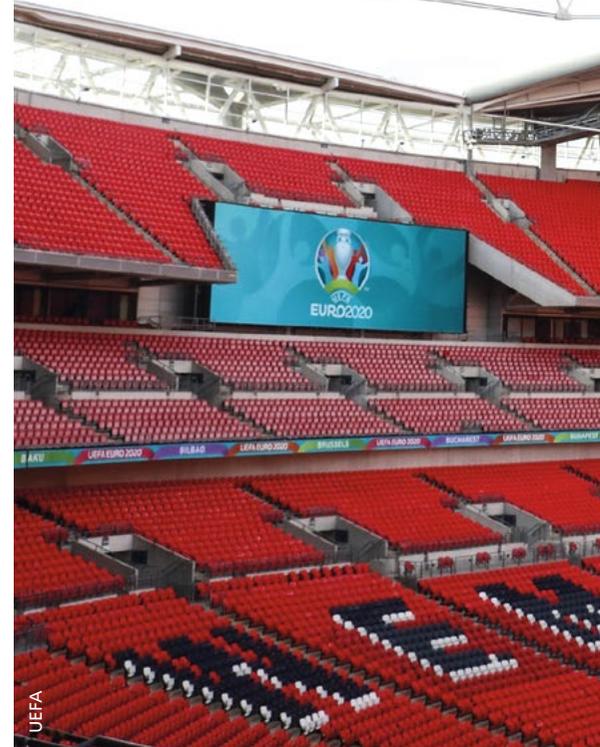
MATCHES

13 June: England v Croatia
18 June: England v Scotland
22 June: Czech Republic v England

26 June: Round of 16
29 June: Round of 16

6 July: Semi-final
7 July: Semi-final

11 July: Final



The Three Lions reached both the semi-finals at the last World Cup and the UEFA Nations League and have a young squad intent on making their own mark at football's most famous venue. However, just the celebration of helping to hold this tournament is victory enough for now. "Wembley Stadium was built to host major events," said Bryant, "and to host the EURO final after what has been such a challenging year for all will be a very special moment indeed." 🌍



London

The most visited city on the planet and a global melting pot, London has succeeded in preserving centuries of history while nurturing innovation in fields as diverse as art, commerce, fashion and research. The capital of the UK has something for everyone and many of its landmarks are

instantly recognisable, with household names including the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge and Trafalgar Square. Wembley Stadium also figures prominently on that list, and the legendary ground has spread its fame since it was rebuilt and reopened in 2007, the new venue ready for the return of a major international tournament.

Seville steps in

Seville may be a late addition to the EURO 2020 party, but the football pedigree of the city means it more than holds its own among the 11 venues for this summer's celebration of national team football.

The Andalusian capital had to step in when original host Bilbao bowed out, its matches moving to La Cartuja Stadium Seville. It means the city will welcome its home nation of Spain for the group phase, not an honour it is unused to, with the national team having played many games in Seville down the years.

The stadiums of the city's two big clubs, Sevilla and Real Betis, hosted fixtures at the 1982 World Cup and four years later, Sevilla's Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán Stadium also held the European Cup final. Since it was constructed in 1999, though, La Cartuja has been the go-to for major international sporting events, staging the athletics' World Championships that same year, and the 2003 UEFA Cup final.

Seville is the most-visited Spanish city after Madrid and Barcelona. Known as the warmest city in continental Europe it is well frequented by sun-seeking tourists, is the home to sherry and, reputedly, tapas, and its majestic old town contains three UNESCO World Heritage sites in its four square kilometre site.



La Cartuja
Stadium Seville

HOW THE EUROS SUPPORT EUROPEAN FOOTBALL



GUIDE TO UEFA HATTRICK

All 26 national associations involved in EURO 2020 – either as participants and/or hosts – benefit from a development programme that channels a significant proportion of European Championship profits back into the game.



A is for Artificial – Romania has built numerous artificial pitches to allow more footballers at amateur and grassroots level to continue to train and play all year round.

RFF

As a non-profit organisation, UEFA is committed to reinvesting as much as possible of the revenue generated by its national team and club competitions into the development of the game. No single UEFA event contributes more to the governing body's mission than the EURO.

Since 2004, European Championships have funded the HatTrick development programme, by which UEFA annually distributes an average of €194 million to Europe's 55 national associations. The money supports a wide variety of football development activities, such as improving infrastructure, supporting women's football, kick-starting social responsibility activities, and running coach and referee courses.

By 2024, HatTrick will have channelled a cumulative €2.6 billion into projects across the continent – making it one of the largest solidarity initiatives in sport.

The programme's contribution to the long-term welfare of European football has rarely been clearer than during the past two seasons, when clubs, leagues and associations struggled to cope with lost revenue due to fewer matches and reduced ticket sales. After reassuring associations in April 2020 about its next four-year HatTrick commitment (equivalent to €775.5 million from 2020 to 2024), UEFA extraordinarily released a total of €236.5 million for member associations meet the challenges of COVID-19 in their respective countries, lifting the usual conditions on payments and allowing each association to set its own priorities in light of the negative impact of the pandemic on football at all levels.

Given there are 26 associations either participating in or hosting EURO 2020 matches, UEFA Direct has compiled an A-Z guide highlighting just a few of the projects that might not have happened without the availability of HatTrick funding.

A IS FOR THE ARTIFICIAL PITCHES that ensure more Romanian footballers at amateur and grassroots level can continue to train and play competitively throughout their country's harsh winters.

B IS FOR BILINGUAL BIEL, a French- and German-speaking city in Switzerland, selected to host a national women's youth academy. It will offer leading 13-15 year-old Swiss players a chance to nurture their talent, at the same time as continuing school.

C IS FOR CERTIFIED COACH EDUCATORS selected by Sweden's national association to ensure the country's high number of registered players receive quality coaching wherever they live. Specialist skills include fitness, behavioural science and goalkeeping.

D IS FOR DRAGON PARK IN NEWPORT, one of two national development centres built in Wales to improve player and coaching standards. With the National Centre for Welsh Football at Colliers Park, Wrexham, these state-of-the-art facilities have helped the national teams qualify for European competitions.

E IS FOR CHANNEL ELEVEN (CANAL 11), a television channel set up by Portugal's football federation in 2019 to promote national football through live matches, exclusive interviews and social responsibility features promoting inclusion, diversity and accessibility.

F IS FOR 'FOOTBALL WITH A HEART', a campaign organised by the Czech Republic's national association to raise awareness of football's role in integrating marginalised communities into society.

G is for Grassroots – grassroots football is a priority in Scotland and even more so during the pandemic.

G IS FOR 'GIVE FOR GRASSROOTS', a support fund launched by the Scottish Football Association that enabled football fans to help grassroots clubs continue to provide for children in local communities during the pandemic.

H is for the HASAN DOĞAN national team training centre and education facilities near Istanbul in Turkey, renovated in 2008 and named after the late former president of the Turkish Football Federation.



I IS FOR THE INFRASTRUCTURE that Azerbaijan's national association is building to support the growth of elite and youth football for women and men outside the capital of Baku. Projects include the reconstruction of the Shamakhi City Stadium, located on the ancient Silk Road.

J IS FOR JYVÄSKYLÄ, in central Finland, site of one of three regional centres of excellence that have strongly supported the development of clubs and



players. Finland's national association is targeting one trained coach for every player in the country.

K IS FOR KHERSON, one of nine Ukrainian regions where newly built mini-pitches are bringing together local communities. The initiative means football lies at the heart of Vinnytsia, Donetsk, Kherson, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhia, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Odesa and Zhytomyr.

L IS FOR THE UPGRADE OF LIGHTING AND SOUND at Wembley stadium in England to comply with EURO 2020 requirements and improve the experience for broadcasters and fans.

M IS FOR MAKING FOOTBALL MORE FUN, the French Football Federation's efforts to create more opportunities and to offer two less traditional forms of the game: futsal and five-a-side, a popular past-time in France.

N IS FOR 'NOBODY OFFSIDE', Belgium's national association project that gives people with disabilities more opportunities to play the beautiful game.

O IS FOR 'OUTSIDE MUST BE ONSIDE' – 'Draußen muss drin sein' – a petition started by the German Football Association, in partnership with the national Olympic Sports Confederation, encouraging fans to sign up in support of amateur sports, badly hit by the pandemic.

P IS FOR THE 39 PENITENTIARY INSTITUTIONS that, thanks to a project funded by the Spanish national association, will develop football →



E is for Eleven, the Portuguese Football Federation's Canal11.



FIGC

R is for Rete!, Italy's initiative to promote the integration of vulnerable communities into society.

thanks to the purchase of VAR vehicles equipped with video operating rooms and VAR cameras in stadiums.

W IS FOR WET WEATHER in Croatia in September 2020, which required the urgent renovation of leading club's football pitches, including the installation of drainage and pitch heating systems.

X IS FOR 'XERCISE SESSIONS that the Danish football association is introducing to attract more 30–50 year-old men and women to take up football. Other initiatives target teenagers, football volunteers, young girls and socially disadvantaged communities.

Y IS FOR YOUTH FOOTBALL in Austria, where the national association has closed a gap in the women's football pyramid by creating a clear pathway for talented 14–19 year-olds to develop and progress to the national team.

Z IS ZEIST, location of a football campus built by the Royal Netherlands Football Association to host training camps for all national teams, a sports medical centre, educational conferences and Dutch football stakeholders, including the professional league. 🌐

academies to help rehabilitate prisoners. Over 800 inmates will train as football instructors and 700 as referees.

Q IS FOR QUALIFICATION FOR THE EUROS, the North Macedonian association's successful achievement of its long-term goal thanks to strategic investment in better training facilities and stadiums throughout the country.

R IS FOR RETE! (Network), events run by the Italian Football Federation to promote the integration of vulnerable communities into society. To date, the initiative has benefitted 2,600 foreign minors, young adults, immigrants and people under humanitarian protection.

S IS FOR SPECIALISED SPORTS SCHOOLS in Russia equipped with brand-new football pitches, part of the national association's efforts to increase national participation levels in football.

T IS FOR THE 7,000 TEACHERS trained to ensure football is an integral part of Hungary's national school curriculum.

Introducing football to girls and boys and their parents early is key to the national association's drive to increase participation levels across the country.

U IS FOR 'FOOTBALL UNITES US' ('Łączy Nas Piłka'), a project that uses technology to help Poland's national association increase participation levels. It includes a TV channel for children and parents, e-learning courses for coaches and a website for a new amateur league.

V IS FOR THE VIDEO ASSISTANCE REFEREE (VAR) system that will be introduced for every game in Slovakia's top division from the 2022/23 season



////////////////////
 "I want to emphasise what many fans don't know. UEFA distributes the vast majority of its revenue back into the game."

Aleksander Čeferin, UEFA President



We Are The People EURO 2020 official song

THE MUSIC CAMPAIGN was launched on the giant screens at Wembley Stadium a few weeks before the start of the tournament, with the stadium's arch illuminated in the colours of EURO 2020. The track, from legendary Dutch DJ/producer Martin Garrix, also features Bono and The Edge. We Are The People hopes to reflect the positivity, hope and determination required for any team to succeed, as well as offering a sense of togetherness, which fits the theme of EURO 2020 – unity. For the first time, a EURO will be played across the continent, which will display the overriding theme of unity throughout.

Garrix has also produced the official walkout and broadcast music for the tournament. He was unveiled as the official music artist for EURO 2020 in Amsterdam in October 2019 and is delighted his hard work can now finally be unveiled.

Garrix's vision for We Are The People came to life when both Bono and his U2 bandmate The Edge agreed to feature on the song. The collaboration evolved further with Bono writing the lyrics and creating melodies and The Edge adding the leading guitar riffs, resulting in a perfect blend of the signature sounds of each artist.

Louis Van Baar

eEURO 2021 final tournament

UEFA eEURO 2021 is the second national team efootball competition featuring all 55 UEFA member associations. Gamers compete exclusively on Konami's eFootball PES 2021 Season Update on Playstation 4. Italy won the inaugural competition last year.

The qualifying group stage ran over four days between 15 March and 26 April, with ten group winners booking places in July's final tournament. Every country played two matches each (1v1) against the other nations in their group; points from both matches were added to the group table. The ten runners-up took part in a play-off

tournament to determine the other six finalists. The contenders were split into two groups of five, with the top three advancing from each.

The finals will be a live event scheduled in London from 8 to 10 July. The top two in each of the four-team groups progress to the knockout stage. Every match until the final will then be a best-of-three series, with the final itself played as a best of five.

A total of €100,000 in cash prizes will be split between all the finalists, including €40,000 for the winners.

Matches will be shown live on UEFA's official YouTube channel.

The 16 finalists

Group A:

Serbia, Montenegro, Poland, Turkey

Group B:

Romania, Croatia, Portugal, Russia

Group C:

Spain, Greece, Netherlands, Germany

Group D:

France, Israel, Ukraine, Italy

DR DANIEL KOCH EURO 2020 MEDICAL ADVISOR

PUTTING HEALTH AND SAFETY FIRST

EURO 2020’s medical advisor, Dr Daniel Koch, an expert on communicable diseases, explains why staging the tournament in 11 different countries is facilitating UEFA’s efforts to protect everyone involved from the risk of infection.

At the start of the global pandemic, Dr Daniel Koch, head of communicable diseases at the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, won widespread respect in his home country thanks to regular and reassuring advice on combating the COVID-19 virus. As medical advisor to EURO 2020, the benefits of Dr Koch’s expertise will reach far beyond his native Switzerland.

Since joining European football’s governing body in January 2021, Dr Koch has played a key role in ensuring UEFA meets its number one objective for the EURO – minimising the risks of infection for everyone involved in the tournament, from players and match officials to organisers and the limited numbers of returning fans. This has involved working closely with government and health authorities at all 11 host EURO venues and helping the governing body produce its own minimum health and hygiene requirements to supplement local regulations in each country.

Talking to UEFA Direct on the eve of EURO 2020, Dr Koch said he was “very pleased and quite optimistic”.

How are you feeling about where we are ahead of the tournament?

If we look at the numbers everywhere in Europe now, the curves are going down. That was somewhat expected, because it’s coming into summer, and respiratory viruses are seasonal in our region. So, we are confident and happy at the moment, because when we started the planning, this was not so clear.

Is it a big victory to be able to retain the concept of hosting it in numerous cities across Europe?

I don’t think it’s a victory; I think it’s an advantage. It’s better to have it spread around so we have more flexibility if one of the cities [drops] out, but for now, we are very happy that it’s stayed at this big number of 11. I think it was an incorrect assumption to say it would be much

easier if there’s only one country, because then you have fans from all over going to the same place and going back, which produces exactly the same danger of spreading.

Has the pan-European format actually been an advantage for staging the tournament during a pandemic?

Yes. I think it isn’t right to say, “OK, if we close everything, that’s the safest option,” because what we’ve seen now is that fans go and have their parties in any case, whether it’s organised or not. So, it’s much safer to prepare and to organise, and I think the advantage is that, now, 11 places can organise their security for the fans – because it’s clear that the security of the fans is, for UEFA, a top priority – and that makes it easier. The risk that it gets out of control is much less.

EURO 2020’s pan-European format also means that nine national teams will play at home. These fans can attend their team’s matches without having to cross borders.

Of course, we have to be cautious because international travel is not only dependent on UEFA’s position. It’s really the big issue in Europe, and we have to see how that develops in the next few weeks. I think, in most cases, it’ll be flying in and flying out. I think that will be the more normal thing.

What would your message be to the teams and the fans?

Play fair. The footballers are playing fair. I think [the fans need] to be cautious, to enjoy it but also to respect the rules.



Who is UEFA’s EURO 2020 medical advisor?

After studying medicine in the Swiss capital of Berne and qualifying as a physician, in 1988, Dr Koch joined the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). During his 14-year career with the ICRC, he served as medical coordinator in Sierra Leone, Uganda, South Africa and Peru. In 1996/97, Dr Koch obtained a master’s degree in public health (MPH) at the renowned Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in the United States.

As well as serving as the head of communicable diseases at Switzerland’s Federal Office of Public Health, Dr Koch also oversaw the pandemic preparedness and vaccination sections. In 2002/03, he was a member of a task force addressing the SARS pandemic, the H5N1 avian influenza and, subsequently, the influenza pandemic H1N1 in 2009.





Safety measures to protect fans at EURO 2020

Based on both UEFA's Minimum Health & Hygiene Requirements for the Return of Spectators and local public health guidelines, each of the 11 EURO 2020 host venues will employ a range of safety measures to protect fans before, during and after games. These include:

Specified entry time slots for every ticket holder

Fans will have a 30-minute window to arrive at the stadium to ensure adherence to social distancing guidelines.

Hygiene

An average of 800 hand sanitiser units will be placed at strategic points around each stadium. All EURO stadiums will be cleaned on a regular basis throughout match days.

Queueing

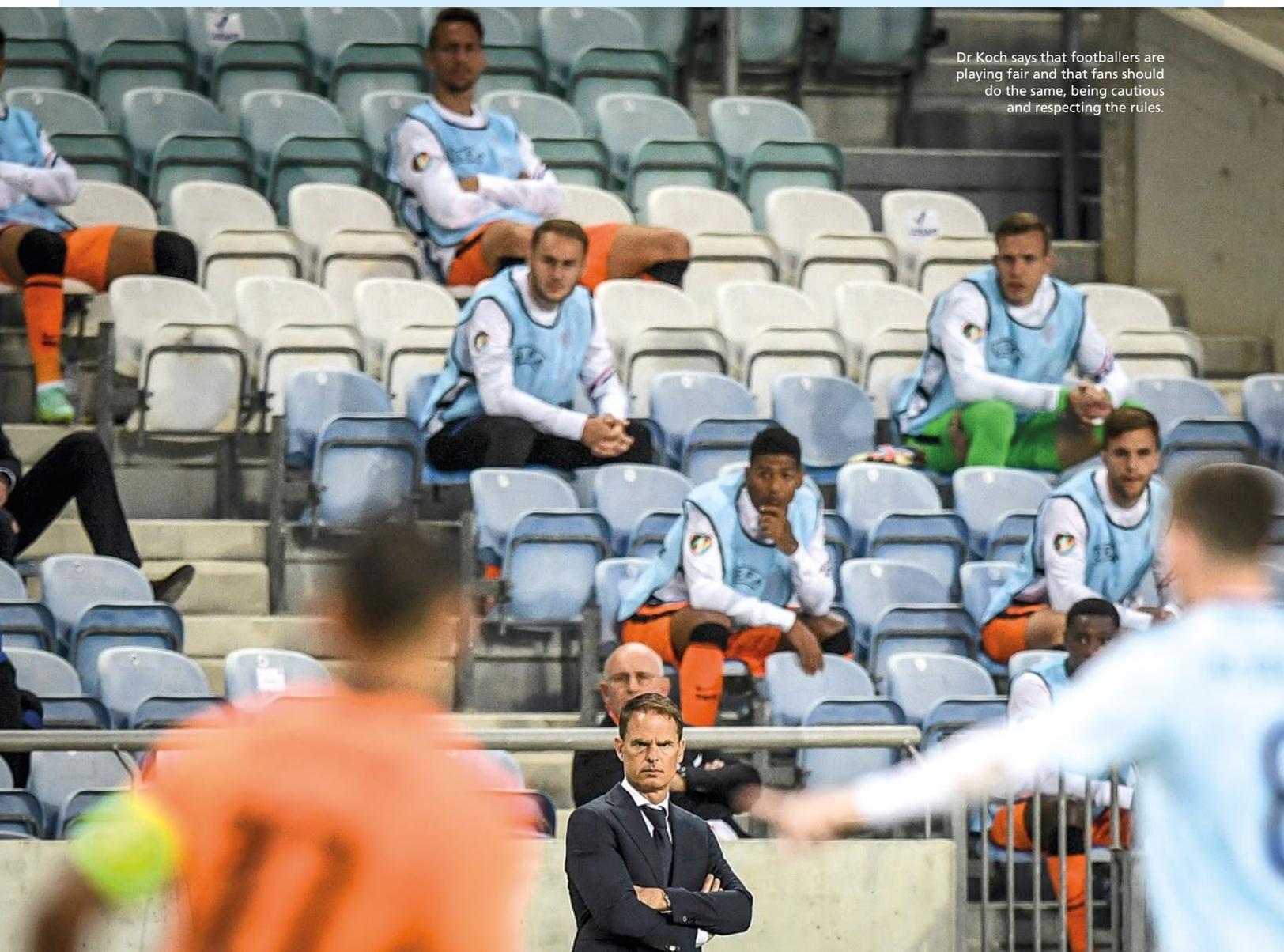
Clear floor markings will help fans maintain movement without compromising social distancing regulations.

Public awareness

Safety measures will be promoted heavily throughout each stadium so everyone is aware of the rules.

Cashless transactions

Every venue will accept card payments, with many using contactless readers.



Dr Koch says that footballers are playing fair and that fans should do the same, being cautious and respecting the rules.



READY FOR ACTION

The EURO 2020 referees workshop in Nyon from 10 to 13 May proved conclusively that the officials were in prime physical and mental condition for the tournament.

The EURO 2020 referees fine-tune their preparations for the tournament.

UEFA

The 18 referees and 22 video assistant referees (VAR) chosen for the EURO's 25th team undertook a fitness test and attended practical sessions in the first in-person referee gathering since the outbreak of the pandemic in spring 2020. All necessary health precautions and protocols were in place for the event, which focused on UEFA's refereeing guidelines and what is expected of the match officials at the tournament.

UEFA's Referees Committee chairman, Roberto Rosetti, left the referees in no doubt: "Keep up the standards that got you here," he said. "We want the referees to maintain their traditionally high standards at the EURO. We're expecting top-quality referees who are professional and totally focused on their task on the field of play."

The referees were briefed on clarifications to the handball laws

which will be implemented at the EURO. As the interpretation of handball incidents has not always been consistent due to incorrect applications of the law, the reworked provisions stipulate that not every contact between a player's hand/arm and the ball is a handball offence.

Football's lawmakers, the International Football Association Board (IFAB), have also addressed the criterion of the hand/arm making a player's body 'unnaturally bigger', and have confirmed that referees should continue to use their judgement in determining the validity of the hand/arm's position in relation to the player's movement in that specific situation. Under the clarified provisions, it is a handball offence when a player deliberately touches the ball with their hand/arm, for example, moving the hand/arm towards the ball, or touches the ball with the hand/arm after making their body 'unnaturally bigger'.

In addition, accidental handball by a team-mate before a goal is scored and accidental handball creating a goal-scoring opportunity will no longer be considered as offences.

The EURO referees are being urged to punish holding and pushing offences in the penalty area, and to protect players by taking strong action against reckless challenges and serious foul play. Rosetti also encouraged the referees to "stay calm and in control" in handling players. "We have clear proof," he said, "that the if referees are calm, focused and relaxed, the players react in a very positive way."

The video assistant referee (VAR) system will be deployed for the first time at a EURO final tournament. "VARs should only intervene when a referee makes a clear and obvious mistake, or in cases of serious missed incidents," said Rosetti. "The role of the VARs is extremely crucial in helping referees." ⚽

REFEREE TEAMS APPOINTED

On 21 April, the UEFA Referees Committee appointed the 18 referees and their referee assistant teams who will take charge of the 51 matches at EURO 2020.

In addition, as part of an exchange programme within the framework of the cooperation agreement between UEFA and the South American football confederation, CONMEBOL, for the first time ever, a South American referee will join the European group of referees and a European referee will travel to South America. Argentinian referee Fernando Rapallini and his assistants will join the selected European referees for EURO 2020, while a Spanish refereeing team led by Jesús Gil Manzano will be part of the selected CONMEBOL referees for the Copa América 2021.

“The exchange of referees with CONMEBOL for our two flagship tournaments will enrich both competitions, and will enhance the experience of top referees,” said the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin. “Europe and South America have so much football quality and tradition, including in refereeing. This exchange is a defining part of our cooperation programme, which will help us improve our competitions.”

Also for the first time, a female official has been selected for a men’s EURO. Stéphanie Frappart (France), who has officiated at several matches in UEFA’s men’s club and national team competitions this season, has been selected as a support match official and will be acting as fourth official at matches together with other colleagues.

Each refereeing team will consist of a referee, two assistant referees, a fourth official, a reserve assistant referee at the stadium and a team of four video match officials.

A preparation course for all referees, referee assistants and video match officials took place in Nyon from 10 to 13 May.

Referees, referee assistants and support referees will have their base camp in Istanbul from 7 June



Roberto Rosetti, UEFA's Referees Committee chairman.

List of referees selected for EURO 2020

Felix Brych	(Germany)	Antonio Miguel Mateu Lahoz	(Spain)
Cüneyt Çakır	(Turkey)	Michael Oliver	(England)
Carlos Del Cerro Grande	(Spain)	Daniele Orsato	(Italy)
Andreas Ekberg	(Sweden)	Fernando Rapallini	(Argentina)
Orel Grinfeld	(Israel)	Artur Manuel Ribeiro Soares Dias	(Portugal)
Ovidiu Alin Hategan	(Romania)	Daniel Siebert	(Germany)
Sergei Karasev	(Russia)	Anthony Taylor	(England)
Istvan Kovacs	(Romania)	Clément Turpin	(France)
Bjorn Kuipers	(Netherlands)	Clément Turpin	(France)
Danny Makkellie	(Netherlands)	Slavko Vinčić	(Slovenia)

until the completion of the quarter-finals, after which the remaining match officials will move to London for the final three matches. 🌐

THE COMPLEXITIES OF TICKETING

EURO 2020 was set to be the biggest EURO ever with 3 million tickets across 12 host cities all over Europe.

In 2019, when UEFA launched its ticket applications, records were broken, with an impressive 19.3 million applications from across the world – almost double the level of the initial demand for EURO 2016. Before the pandemic hit, EURO 2020 was officially the most in-demand UEFA EURO ever with a total of 28.3 million ticket requests from fans in over 200 countries.

Ironically, the ticketing slogan LIVE IT. FOR REAL aimed to help ensure that live football was brought to more fans than ever before.

Furthermore, the ticketing strategy was named Fans First, with 82% of the tickets reserved for fans, more than one million tickets available for €50 or less across 44 matches, and 40,000 tickets available for under €100 for the semi-finals and final in London.

Paradoxically, the rearranged tournament, which will take place from 11 June to 11 July 2021, will likely be one of the smallest tournaments in recent times in relation to fan numbers.

The major EURO 2020 ticketing milestones

17 March 2020

UEFA announced the postponement of its flagship national team competition. UEFA reassured existing ticket buyers that if they

could not attend the tournament in 2021, the face value of their tickets would be refunded in full.

Ticket return phases

There have been four ticket return windows during which ticket buyers could return their tickets and receive a refund. Each ticket return window involved system updates to ensure fans could log in to their accounts and opt to return their tickets; clear, planned communication to ticket buyers via email about the return process and their refunds; continuous updates to UEFA's website and FAQ in 12 languages; and, finally, ensuring all refunds were processed in a timely fashion.

Socially distanced seating plans

The UEFA ticketing venue configuration team is responsible for building stadiums in the system to ensure that when tickets are sold, they can be assigned block, row and seat numbers that match the configuration to the corresponding stadium. Unsurprisingly, the pandemic and the social distancing measures made this mapping exercise very complicated. For example, the ever-changing definition of what is deemed a safe distance between fans has created some challenges – some countries defined 1.5 metres nose to nose between fans as being safe, whereas others defined a safe distance as 2 metres shoulder and shoulder. With no two stadiums being the same and with spacing between seats varying considerably, the venue configuration

team has been extremely busy designing, mapping and building countless different seating patterns.

What about tickets for the fans of the final four teams to qualify?

In November 2020, Hungary, North Macedonia, Scotland and Slovakia were the last four teams to qualify for EURO 2020. Tickets had already been sold via the participating national associations to fans of the 20 other teams that had already qualified. Fans of the final four teams were naturally keen to secure their tickets. Normally, when a team qualifies, this is the best time to promote ticket sales to fans as they are extremely excited about the prospect of their team playing in the finals. However, given that the pandemic was not showing many signs of easing, ticket sales for fans of these teams were put on hold.

9 April 2021 – 8 of 12 venues announce capacity decision

In April, eight venues confirmed their varying capacity decisions. St Petersburg confirmed a capacity of 50%, with the possibility of increasing the capacity by the end of April, while Budapest



Spectators will be back inside Parken Stadium for EURO 2020 matches, but in a limited number, unlike at Denmark's EURO qualifier against the Republic of Ireland on 7 June 2019, which was played to a packed stadium.

announced 100%, subject to spectators fulfilling strict stadium entry requirements. Baku confirmed a capacity of 50%; Amsterdam, Bucharest, Copenhagen and Glasgow confirmed a capacity of 25%–33%, with some venues keeping open the option potentially to raise their capacities at the end of April 2021 depending on the development of their mass testing programmes and general health conditions. London confirmed a minimum capacity of 25% for the three group matches and round of 16 match, and is hoping to confirm a higher capacity in early June for the semi-finals and final. UEFA granted Dublin, Munich, Rome and Bilbao an extension of the deadline until 19 April 2021.

With this announcement, UEFA needed to ensure that all ticket buyers were informed and provide them with another opportunity to return their tickets. With the ever-changing travel restrictions across the world, the ticketing team also had to ensure ticket buyers were up to date with where to find the latest information relating to both travel restrictions and COVID-19 measures.

23 April 2021 – clarity at last

UEFA announced the final (as can be) decisions for EURO 2020 venues. Matches in Munich were confirmed with a minimum of 14,500 spectators, Seville replaced Bilbao, and Dublin's matches were moved to St Petersburg and London.

For the UEFA ticketing team, this meant refunding all existing ticket buyers for matches initially scheduled in Bilbao and Dublin.

Furthermore, considering that the location for most knockout matches will not be known until completion of the group stage, and given the existing significant travel restrictions, UEFA decided to cancel and refund all Follow My Team tickets. This meant more emails to ticket buyers, more updates to the website, more updates to the FAQ and building a new stadium in the system. These processes alone involved many stakeholders across the UEFA administration, including digital, media, communications, venue management, legal and senior management.

What about matches with more tickets sold than the new agreed capacities?

UEFA ticketing ran ballots per match, per venue, and kept ticket buyers up to date with the progress of the ballots with a dedicated FAQ. Unfortunately, this resulted in many fans losing their tickets. Any ticket buyer who lost their tickets via the ballot process received a full refund for the face value of their tickets. Importantly, ticket buyers who had their tickets cancelled via the ballot process will have priority should future ticket sales phases take place.

Will tickets be sold closer to the tournament?

With the help of the participating national associations, UEFA recently sold tickets to the fans of the final four teams to qualify (Hungary, North Macedonia, Scotland and Slovakia). Additionally, fans of Poland, Spain and Sweden have matches at rearranged venues, so tickets have been sold to fans of those teams. Subject to availability, for some matches, it may be possible to sell a limited number of tickets on a first come first served basis. This is expected to happen in the first half of June.

Mobile tickets

Before the pandemic, mobile tickets were already planned for a large percentage of ticket holders. However, as the pandemic created rapidly and constantly moving pieces, it was decided to extend the official UEFA EURO 2020 mobile tickets app for use by more target groups, including hospitality and broadcasters. The official mobile ticket app is now available to download for iPhone and Android users.

UEFA is committed to ensuring the sustainability of EURO 2020, and having over half a million mobile tickets will contribute to this objective by significantly reducing the number of paper tickets compared with previous tournaments. ♻️

MICHELE UVA

“UEFA MUST MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

In a wide-ranging interview, Michele Uva, UEFA’s director of football social responsibility, sets out the organisation’s plans for European football to make both a direct and an indirect difference on human rights and environmental sustainability.



set of social priorities. As a governing body, it is our task to provide a policy framework that unifies European football’s sustainability programmes, ensuring they all speak the same language.

UEFA’s own programmes will be based on 11 policies, each setting ten-year targets, indicators and actions for different aspects of environmental sustainability and human rights.

By measuring progress against a common set of goals, we want to inspire the wider football community – our stakeholders, domestic leagues, commercial and broadcast sponsors and, above all, the national associations. Our first goal is to ensure all 55 associations employ a dedicated football social responsibility manager. We expect to achieve that by the end of next season. This will provide a single point of reference at each national association with whom we can share our strategy and expertise. It will also create a community of best practice that grows together.

How can UEFA make a difference on topics where multinational organisations and governments often struggle to succeed?

We must be realistic and find a balance between topics where football can make a direct impact and those where our influence is more indirect. For example, by ensuring people with disabilities can play football, our sport is making a measurable difference to individual’s lives.

There are other issues that UEFA cannot directly solve, but we still have the power to raise awareness about the scale of the problem. Remember that around 90 million people play football in Europe, making our community one of the biggest networks in the world.

During the Under-21 EURO finals in Hungary and Slovenia, our Cleaner Air, Better Game campaign helped inform both

football fans and stakeholders about the real and present danger of air pollution. How many people are actually aware that poor air quality contributes to one in eight deaths in Europe each year? The campaign also advocated ten simple changes that we can all take in our daily lives to reduce the impact of air pollution.

What has UEFA learnt from the Cleaner Air, Better Game campaign?

We are still learning how football can use its influence to support climate action, as well as adapt to reduce its own environmental impact. After all, UEFA only signed up to the European Union’s Green Deal last December. Cleaner Air, Better Game represents our first step on this journey.

On 7 June, the day after the Under-21 EURO final, we staged an online climate and environment workshop in Ljubljana to share the campaign’s lessons with the wider football, political and scientific community. It was a moment to recap and review. European Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans took part, together with Lučka Kajfež Bogataj, Slovenia’s Nobel Prize-winning climate scientist, former professional footballer and environmental activist Mathieu Flamini, Lindita Xhaferi Salihu, the Sport for Climate Action lead at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), climate and environmental experts, and of course, UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin.

How closely will UEFA work with multinational organisations like the EU and the United Nations to achieve its social responsibility goals?

Whatever action UEFA takes, we will achieve nothing by working alone. Issues like climate change and air pollution pose global questions, whose answers will never lie with any one institution.

Why has UEFA made football social responsibility part of its long-term strategy?

When your sport is played and followed by millions of people, your actions have an enormous impact on society, especially the young. That brings a responsibility that football cannot ignore and is why UEFA has integrated social responsibility into every aspect of its five-year strategy for European football.

UEFA believes that football can play a lead role in promoting behavioural change on two key global issues: the environment and human rights. There are several specific areas where we can contribute. For example, the pandemic showed how football can help individuals cope with mental health issues.

This year, we will invest €12 million in social responsibility activities. For us, it is an investment in the future, not only for football but also society.

UEFA is made up of 55 national football associations. How will you ensure European football has a united voice on social issues?

We recognise that each football association must address a different

Building blocks of UEFA's fifth pillar

UEFA's strategy steering committee – composed of presidents and general secretaries representing seven member associations – has worked on the new Responsibility pillar since the start of January. It will complement the four other pillars that underpin UEFA's 2019–14 strategy: Football, Trust, Competitiveness and Prosperity.

The fifth pillar, approved by the Executive Committee on 19 April in Montreux, aims to strengthen football's role in upholding human rights and building a sustainable environment. It is based on 11 specific policies. For each, UEFA is creating a set of goals, actions and indicators.

1. Anti-discrimination
2. Child and youth safeguarding
3. Solidarity and rights
4. Football for all
5. Health and well-being
6. Equality and inclusion
7. Refugee support
8. Environmental protection
9. Event sustainability
10. Circular economy
11. Infrastructure sustainability

Moving forward, it will be important to connect with people who work on these issues on a regular basis: global institutions, football stakeholders, partners and scientific experts. Collaboration will help us find the right path to follow and measures to take. In addition to our partnerships with the United Nations and the EU on climate action, we recently signed a cooperation protocol with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to support refugee access to sport and enhance social inclusion.

Are you still confident that EURO 2020 will be a carbon-neutral event?

EURO 2020 will be one of the most environmentally friendly finals ever. To some extent, the pandemic has helped us achieve this goal by limiting the number of fans travelling to matches, but other actions will also improve the event's climate and environmental legacy.

Most host cities will encourage ticket holders, volunteers, media and UEFA staff to reduce air pollution by offering free public transport and smart mobility – not only on match days, but throughout the tournament. They will also encourage fans to walk to the stadium. All stadiums will recycle and reuse waste. If national associations can implement these measures for future football events,

then EURO 2020 will have left a strong environmental and sustainability legacy.

What else is UEFA planning to ensure football becomes more accountable for its climate and environmental impact?

For EURO 2020, we are compensating for carbon emissions, but the long-term goal is to significantly reduce the level of emissions related to our events. By EURO 2024 in Germany, we expect to have a full package of best-practice actions for more sustainable football events.

As a first step, we are currently assessing ways to measure and limit football's impact on both the climate and the environment. For example, what is the percentage of renewable energy used in football stadiums? What proportion of materials purchased for our events is sourced locally? Are we assessing air quality? By setting our own concrete targets, we can challenge other football events to become more accountable.

How quickly do you expect UEFA and European football to deliver real results?

UEFA cannot go from 100 to zero overnight. Making football more accountable for its climate and environmental impact will take time, not least to build up our technical expertise in a new field. However, there can be no turning back – climate change's impact on our game is not going away, and it will take all the energy and ingenuity that has characterised our organisation's response to a year of unprecedented challenges to adapt and find solutions. UEFA is here for the long road, driven by the conviction that we can, indeed must, make a difference. 🌍

AIR POLLUTION IS A THREAT TO YOUR HEALTH AND YOUR GAME

UEFA CLEANER AIR BETTER GAME

Play your part and take a step! uefa.count-us-in.org

Clean air is a bigger priority than ever.



SOLIDARITY BEFORE SELF-INTEREST

UEFA held its 45th Ordinary Congress in Montreux on 20 April. In his address to representatives of Europe’s national football associations and other Congress guests, UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin emphasised the importance of unity and solidarity in guiding European football’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He also expressed vehement opposition to the notion of a breakaway European ‘Super League’, announced on the eve of the Congress and roundly condemned across the world.

Switzerland’s dramatic mountain scenery, rising precipitously from the shores of Lake Geneva, provided an appropriate setting for the 2021 edition of Europe’s annual football parliament. Not just because this was the first face-to-face gathering of UEFA’s 55 member associations permitted

since the start of the pandemic. The event also took place against the backdrop of plans by a group of European clubs to set up a so-called ‘Super League’ in direct opposition to UEFA’s own club competitions.

Revealed the weekend before the Congress and described by the UEFA

president as “a spit in the face of all football lovers”, the proposal was instantly condemned by players, fans, administrators, politicians, journalists and the public alike.

‘A shift that has to be stopped’
In his keynote speech to the Congress,

“In times of crisis, human beings can choose between two options: self-interest or solidarity. You have chosen solidarity together.”

Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President

League is part of our heritage. We are custodians of an ideal. That of open competitions in which everyone can dream. Respect for history. Respect for tradition. Respect for others. There is a reason European football leads the world at both club and national team level. Because it is based on a clear model that has stood the test of time. A model based on diversity. Diversity is what makes European society unique. The same applies to football. People need to know that anything is possible... that everyone has a chance. We need to keep the dream alive.

“Football is dynamic, unpredictable. This is what makes it a beautiful game. Those clubs who think they are big and untouchable today should remember where they came from... if they are European giants today, it is partly thanks to UEFA – which, for over 60 years, has been protecting the ideal of competitions accessed purely on the basis of sporting merit. Without UEFA, who knows where they would be now.”

The UEFA president reflected that, seemingly, “a tiny handful of club bosses have been trying to profit from the situation in which we have found ourselves of late in order to impose their demands and get their hands on this heritage of ours. They have been trying to privatise football, one of society’s last remaining collective assets. But we were ready for them... we had already developed our vision, a vision that we have been working on for more than two years now. And we have the backing of the vast majority of clubs, including giants of the game who respect football, its history and its ideals.”

United in solidarity

Mr Čeferin noted that unity had also characterised European football’s response to the unprecedented challenge posed by the COVID-19 crisis. “In the face of adversity, you have three choices,” he reflected. “You can let it define you, let it destroy you, or let it strengthen you. For me, it is clear which →

the UEFA president spoke of “a shift in recent years. A semantic and ideological shift. A shift that too often ignores what happens on the pitch, that ignores sporting merit. A shift that has to be stopped immediately. The ultimate aim, for some, is no longer to decorate the club’s trophy cabinet with silverware, but to fill the bank account with cash. Contempt (for smaller clubs, for supporters respectful of tradition and for institutions) is replacing ethics. Selfishness is replacing solidarity. Money has become more important than glory, greed more important than loyalty, and dividends more important than passion.”

“Football is part of our heritage,” the UEFA president added. “The Champions



Karl-Erik
NILSSON

Aleksander
ČEFERIN

Theodore
THEODORIDIS



At the UEFA Congress in Montreux, FIFA president Gianni Infantino and IOC president Thomas Bach both firmly condemned the attempt to create a 'Super League'.

choice we have taken. The crisis that began a little over a year ago will only make us stronger. Not only that – but football will emerge stronger than ever.

“We have shown that when football as a whole is faced with an unprecedented situation – we talk to each other, we listen to each other, and we find solutions. This crisis has proved once and for all that football is embedded in our society’s DNA. It is part of our continent’s history – and our collective memories. It has been one of its greatest success stories for more than a century... together we have achieved something exceptional: with crises and emergencies part of our everyday life, we have performed miracle after miracle, and made it seem almost normal.”

Football – ‘restoring hope’

The return of UEFA’s competitions last summer after the hiatus caused by the pandemic’s spread had, the UEFA president emphasised, “restored hope when the whole world had come to a standstill – football was a true lifeline for many.” He called for resilience and vision in facing future challenges – including the organisation of the coming EURO 2020 finals after a year’s delay. “Rest assured, we will be ready,” he promised. “We will try to give you as ‘normal’ a EURO as possible. It will be the first event of a global dimension to be held since the pandemic struck... it will be the perfect opportunity to show the world that Europe is celebrating life.”

Moreover, women’s football, he continued, was ready to be taken to a new level. “The changes we have made to the Women’s Champions League (see pages 44-45) will guarantee a more

exciting competition. Meanwhile, for the national teams, a major event lies ahead: Women’s EURO 2022 in England. The objective is to usher in a new era for women’s football. You can count on us to deliver.”

Helping clubs recover from COVID – fighting discrimination

The UEFA president underlined UEFA’s determination to help clubs overcome financial problems suffered during the COVID crisis. “I have read that we are planning to abolish financial fair play,” he said. “Let me be clear: that is not going to happen... ever. However, we do need to adapt it to the new reality. We need to encourage and release investments... to correct some of the injustices that financial fair play may indirectly bring about in the current circumstances.”

Mr Čeferin also urged a proactive stance to combat new forms of discrimination that had emerged in



recent times. “There have been abuses both on the pitch and on social media,” he said. “This is unacceptable and needs to be stopped. Allowing a culture of hatred to grow with impunity is dangerous... not only for football, but for society as a whole. We’ve had enough of these cowards who hide behind their anonymity to spew out their noxious ideologies.”

UEFA’s club competition vision – ‘building the football of the future’

The UEFA president highlighted the lengthy consultation process behind the creation of a new format for the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League from the 2024/25 season, announced by UEFA ahead of the Congress (see pages 36-37). “This is no compromise. It is an ambition shared by a vast majority,” he said. “Competitions will remain open to all, with more participants from more countries, more big matches and more opportunities for smaller clubs to go further.

“Off the pitch, UEFA will remain the governing body, while at the same time increasing the involvement of clubs in order to continue developing European football in a spirit of collaboration. In short, it is a perfectly balanced ambition. With these reforms, I believe we are building the football of the future.

“In times of crisis,” the UEFA president closed, “human beings can choose between two options: self-interest or solidarity. You have chosen solidarity together. A choice that will enable us to emerge stronger from this crisis, and make football stronger than ever.”

Congress elections

Elections were also on the agenda at the Montreux Congress, with three new members joining the UEFA Executive Committee, a new FIFA vice-president taking his seat on behalf of the four British associations, and two new European members being welcomed onto the FIFA Council.

Election for eight seats on the UEFA Executive Committee (four-year terms)

First ballot (absolute majority – more than half of the valid votes cast)

Elected:

Gabriele Gravina (Italy) 53 (new)
Karl-Erik Nilsson (Sweden) 52
Alexander Dyukov (Russia) 50 (new)
David Gill (England) 48
Zbigniew Boniek (Poland) 47
Rainer Koch (Germany) 47
Servet Yardımcı (Turkey) 47
Just Spee (Netherlands) 31 (new)

The following candidate was not elected:
Mehdi Bayat (Belgium) 14

Michael van Praag did not stand for re-election. John Delaney (Republic of Ireland) and Michele Uva (Italy) resigned before the end of their respective terms.

Election for the FIFA vice-president position reserved for the four British associations (two-year term)

Elected:

David Martin (Northern Ireland) 48

The following candidates were not elected:

Michael Mulraney (Scotland) 4
Kieran O'Connor (Wales) 3

Election for one female member position on the FIFA Council (four-year term)

Re-elected:

Evelina Christillin (Italy) 33

The following candidate was not elected:

Laura McAllister (Wales) 22

Election for four ordinary member positions on the FIFA Council (four-year term)

Elected by acclamation:

Răzvan Burleanu (Romania) (new)
Georgios Koumas (Cyprus)
Peter Peters (Germany) (new)
Dejan Savičević (Montenegro)

Ratifications

Nasser Al-Khelaifi and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge were ratified as the representatives of the European Club Association (ECA) on the UEFA Executive Committee by acclamation for three-year terms.

Javier Tebas was ratified by acclamation as the European Leagues' representative on the UEFA Executive Committee for a four-year term.

New members of the UEFA Organs for the Administration of Justice and of the UEFA Governance and Compliance Committee were ratified for two-year terms.

The 2019/20 financial statements and the budget for the 2021/22 financial year were approved. Several statutory amendments were approved and entered into force immediately.

The UEFA Congress bestowed honorary membership upon Michael van Praag (Netherlands) for his outstanding service to European football and UEFA since 2000, and his tenure as a UEFA Executive Committee member since 2009.

The next UEFA Congress will take place in Vienna on 11 May 2022.





WORKING FOR THE GOOD OF FOOTBALL

UEFA's Executive Committee has taken key decisions and approved important measures during a hectic spring. UEFA Direct's timeline highlights the committee's recent moves to enhance solidarity in European football and foster the game's essential well-being, as well as enabling football to adapt constantly to difficult and unprecedented times.



The Executive Committee met in Montreux under strict health protection measures.

17 February

With clubs experiencing major difficulties in organising matches owing to the pandemic, the Executive Committee cancels the 2020/21 UEFA Youth League, stressing that youth players' health and safety is paramount.

23 February

- The pandemic forces the committee to cancel the 2020/21 European women's and men's Under-19 championships, owing to government restrictions affecting the travelling of teams.
- The 2020/21 UEFA Futsal Champions League finals are moved from Belarus

to Croatia, given the epidemiological situation in Belarus and travel restrictions into the country. [The finals were moved again to Zadar, Croatia, in early April after Croatia's national health authorities requested the use of the Arena Zagreb as a COVID vaccination site.]

- The committee approves a concussion substitution trial for the 2019-21 European Under-21 Championship final phase in Hungary and Slovenia. In accordance with an International Football Association Board (IFAB) protocol, each team may use one 'concussion substitute' per match, regardless of the number of substitutes already used.

31 March

- In line with temporary provisions in the IFAB Laws of the Game, because the reasons for the five-substitutions rule remain valid against the background of national and international football calendars affected by the pandemic, and given that the rule is already in place for the 2022 World Cup qualifying matches, the committee allows the use of up to five substitutions at EURO 2020 and the 2021 UEFA Nations League finals and relegation play-outs.
- The UEFA-imposed spectator attendance limit of a maximum of 30% of the relevant stadium's seating capacity is lifted, along with the ban on spectators attending futsal matches. With each of UEFA's 55 member associations facing a different situation in tackling the pandemic, the committee rules that such a cap is no longer needed and that the decision on the number of permitted spectators should be the exclusive responsibility of the relevant local/national authorities.

However, ongoing travel restrictions and the need to minimise COVID-related risks prompts the committee to confirm last October's decision prohibiting visiting fans from attending UEFA competition matches – a measure remaining valid up to May's club competition finals.

19 April (meeting in Montreux)

- A new format is approved by the committee for UEFA's club competitions from 2024/25 (see pages 36-37). The reforms, which follow a widespread consultation process, stipulate that domestic performance should be the key to qualification and reconfirm principles of solidarity and open competition.

The changes made are designed to secure the positive future of European football at every level and meet the evolving needs of all its stakeholders.

"This new format supports the status and future of the domestic game throughout Europe as well," says the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin.

- The committee approves a pioneering new financial distribution model for the UEFA Women's Champions League, which will see the world's biggest women's club competition – which kicks off the 2021/22 season with a new format, including a 16-team group stage – redistribute a projected €24 million to women's football across Europe – more than four times greater than the current figure – either as rewards to competing clubs or as solidarity payments to non-competing clubs.

23 April

Munich is confirmed as a EURO 2020 host venue. Meanwhile, the four EURO matches scheduled for Bilbao are moved across Spain to Seville, following the local authorities' conclusion that fans were very unlikely to be able to attend the matches scheduled to be played in Bilbao.

Meanwhile, the three group matches due to be played in Dublin are reallocated to St Petersburg and Dublin's round of 16 match is moved to London's Wembley Stadium. "We have been working diligently with the host associations and local authorities to ensure a safe and festive environment at the games," says the UEFA president.

4 May

The committee agrees to increase EURO 2020 team player lists from 23 to 26, preventing possible player shortages for teams due to possible positive COVID-19 test results and subsequent quarantine measures. 🌐



Under the new
Champions League
format starting in 2024,
the finalists will play 17
matches instead of the
current 13.



NEW FORMAT FOR UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

'Every Game Counts' is the pledge as UEFA announces a major change to the format of its men's club competitions from 2024, with the group stage giving way to a new league stage.

A 36-team league with every team playing ten matches each. This is a central outcome of UEFA's reforms of the UEFA Champions League – a bold new format to be mirrored by UEFA's other men's club competitions in a fresh chapter for European club football.

From 2024 all three men's competitions – the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League and UEFA Conference League – will have their group stage replaced by a single league. The number of participating teams and matches will differ for each competition, but the slogan of 'Every Game Counts' will apply to all.

For the UEFA Champions League, this marks the latest step in the evolution of a competition whose inaugural group stage took place in 1991/92 – the season before the European Champion Clubs' Cup was relaunched as the UEFA Champions League.

The pivotal change in the reforms announced by the UEFA Executive Committee after its meeting on 19 April 2021 is the departure from the current format's opening 32-team group stage. Where today the UEFA Champions League season begins with participants divided into eight groups of four, from 2024 there will be a single league made up of all 36 competing teams – thus allowing four more clubs the opportunity to take part and pit their wits against Europe's strongest sides.

Under the new format, teams will play four matches more than is currently the case. They will no longer play three opponents twice – home and away – but will instead face fixtures against ten different teams, half of them at home and half of them away. This gives the opportunity for clubs to test themselves against a wider range of opponents – and also raises

the prospect of fans seeing the top teams go head to head more often earlier in the competition. Additionally, the new format should mean that there is more to play for right up until the final night of league action.

As a hypothetical example of how the reformed competition will work, if FC Bayern München, the reigning champions, were entering it today, they would be placed in a pot with the other highest-ranked sides. A draw would determine which ten teams they would face and ensure that they would play an equal number of games against higher and lower-ranked opponents, spread evenly across their ten match days – five of them at home in Munich and the other five away.

How the last 16 will take shape

The results of each match will decide the overall ranking in the new league, with three points for a win and one for a draw still applying.

While the top eight teams will advance automatically to the round of 16, those sides placed between ninth and 24th will enter a play-off round. Those who finish between 9th and 16th will be seeded in the play-off draw, meaning they will face a team placed 17th to 24th – with home advantage in the second-leg match. Teams who finish 25th or lower will be eliminated, with no access to the Europa League or Europa Conference League.

The eight clubs who prevail in the play-offs will then progress to the round of 16, where they will each face one of the top eight finishers. From the round of 16 onwards, the competition will continue to follow a knockout format. 🔄

SETTING THE STANDARD FOR CLUB FOOTBALL

Ever since the competition took shape in 1955, the European Champion Clubs' Cup, or the UEFA Champions League as it has been known since the early 1990s, has set the standard for club football around the world.

The competition celebrated its 65th birthday last autumn – and with a bold new format set to make UEFA's club competitions even more exciting from 2024 onwards, the Champions League continues to go from strength to strength.

Here, we chart the events and milestones that have characterised the development of the world's favourite club competition since its birth more than six decades ago.

EUROPEAN CHAMPION CLUBS' CUP

21 June 1955

UEFA's Executive Committee confirms at its meeting in Paris that, following the world football body FIFA's approval, UEFA will organise a new European club competition, originally proposed by the French newspaper L'Équipe.

1955/56

The European Champion Clubs' Cup starts life as a 16-team invitational tournament, with a 3-3 first-round, first-leg draw between Portugal's Sporting CP and Yugoslavia's FK Partizan getting things off to an entertaining start in Lisbon on 4 September 1955. Real Madrid are crowned the first champions when they defeat French champions Reims 4-3 in a spectacular final in Paris – the first of five successive titles for the Spanish outfit.

26 May 1993.
Marseille's captain Didier Deschamps lifts the first UEFA Champions League trophy.





13 June 1956. Real Madrid's Alfredo Di Stéfano clutches the European Champion Clubs' Cup after the first-ever final, with a delighted Santiago Bernabéu getting a hand on the trophy too.

Pressesports

1956/57

Six more nations enter representatives following the success of the first campaign. Spain is the first country to have two entrants, with titleholders Madrid joined by domestic champions Athletic Bilbao. A preliminary round, featuring 12 teams organised geographically, precedes the 16-team first round.

1967/68

The European Champion Clubs' Cup entry list is bolstered through to the mid-1960s by an increasing number of domestic champions. For the 1967/68 campaign, a 32-team competition is established, featuring four two-legged rounds prior to a single-match final. This model would endure for more than 20 years.

18/19 April and 29 May 1991

The UEFA Executive Committee holds initial discussions on a new format for the competition at its meeting in London in April. A working group is set up to create a groundwork for a new set of tournament regulations.

The group's proposals are approved at the Executive Committee's meeting in Bari, Italy, in late May. The 1991/92 season will be used as a transitional season for the new format, which will include a group stage for the first time.

19 September 1991

At an Extraordinary UEFA Congress in Montreux, Switzerland, delegates approve what will eventually become the Champions League from the 1992/93 season.

1991/92

Following two knockout rounds, the remaining eight teams are split into two groups, with all teams meeting each other home and away and the group winners contesting the final.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1992/93

The 'revolution' does not just bring with it a change of name but a whole new identity for Europe's premier club competition. The Champions League anthem and starball logo are an instant success, ensuring that everybody, everywhere will quickly recognise the new format for the European Cup,

although the competition does not officially carry the UEFA prefix in its name during its first season, and the name 'Champions League' is adopted to give prominence to the group stage at this time.

1993/94

The second season with the UEFA Champions League logo (adopted in the group stage and semi-finals; the rest of the tournament continues to be called the European Champion Clubs' Cup).

For one season only, a one-legged semi-final is introduced, with the two group winners playing at home against the two runners-up from the other groups.

1994/95

For the first time, UEFA introduces a 16-team group stage, to which titleholders Milan and the national champions of the seven countries at the top of the UEFA rankings receive a bye, and the champions from the next 16 countries in the rankings take part in a qualifying round to determine the final eight group-stage qualifiers. First- and second-placed teams progress from the group stage to the two-legged quarter-finals.

1997/98

Another first, as domestic league runners-up from the top eight associations in the rankings are allowed into the competition, with champions from smaller nations returning after three years competing in the UEFA Cup. This makes the competition more open and ensures that teams from all nations can qualify, while also raising the standard of the competition through the presence of more top teams. Two qualifying rounds precede the new 24-team group stage, which sees six group winners and two best-placed runners-up proceed to the quarter-finals.

1999/2000

The Champions League expands further

with two group stages, and up to four teams permitted from the three top-ranked nations, three from nations 4 to 6 and two from nations 7 to 15.

The new format sees 32 teams entering a first group stage with eight groups of four, the top two from each group going through to a second 16-team group stage. From there, the top two teams in each of the four groups advance to the quarter-finals.

2003/04

The competition reverts back to a single group-stage format, with a knockout round of 16 replacing the second group phase.

2009/10

A new system for qualifying is introduced, with two separate paths for domestic champions and non-champions that did not automatically qualify for the group stage. An additional qualifying round, the play-off round, is also introduced, and a total of ten teams emerge from this qualifying phase for the 32-team group stage.

2015/16

The winners of the UEFA Europa League are now allocated a place in the UEFA Champions League, with the maximum number of entrants from one nation increasing to five.

2019/20

In a special one-off competition, following the temporary suspension of European football as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Champions League's closing stages are completed in a 'final eight' tournament in Lisbon. Teams meet in one-off straight knockout matches, with Bayern eventually emerging triumphant with a 1-0 win over Paris Saint-Germain in the final – the first to be played behind closed doors. 🌐



CHELSEA MAKE IT TWO

Chelsea earned their second UEFA Champions League triumph as, for the second year running, Portugal provided the setting for this year's all-English final.

Portugal provided the stage and England the actors as the 2020/21 UEFA Champions League campaign ended with Manchester City and Chelsea contesting the final at Porto's Estádio do Dragão on 29 May.

It was the competition's third all-English final and was refereed by a Spaniard, Antonio Miguel Mateu Lahoz, yet there was a significant German influence on proceedings as Thomas Tuchel, installed as Chelsea coach only 123 days earlier, orchestrated a defensive masterclass by the Londoners. A losing finalist with Paris Saint-Germain in Lisbon just nine months earlier, Tuchel saw his Chelsea side stifle City and prevail through a solitary goal by another German, Kai Havertz.

The 21-year-old picked the perfect moment for his first UEFA Champions League goal as he raced clear on to a fabulous Mason Mount through ball, rounded Ederson and scored in the 42nd minute. It was the 366th goal of the campaign and enough to earn Chelsea their second UEFA Champions League triumph. As for City, led to their first final by coach Pep Guardiola – ten years after his own last success in the competition

with Barcelona – they were the ninth English club to contest a final and the 42nd overall, yet their quest for European football's biggest prize goes on.

Spectators return

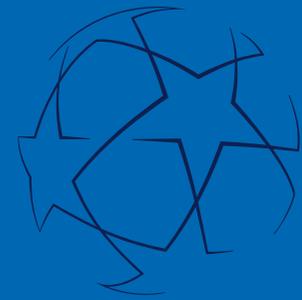
One notable highlight of the 66th European Cup/UEFA Champions League final was the sight of spectators in the stands at the Estádio do Dragão after a season played out almost entirely in front of empty seats. UEFA's wish for supporters of the two finalists to attend the match had led to the decision, confirmed on 13 May, to move the match to Porto from the Atatürk Stadium in Istanbul. This followed the UK government placing Turkey on its red list of COVID-19 travel destinations, which meant it would have been impossible for followers of City and Chelsea to attend a final in Istanbul.

UEFA discussed moving the match to England but, despite the efforts of The Football Association and the authorities, it was not possible to achieve the necessary exemptions from UK quarantine arrangements. Consequently, the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) stepped in and the Portuguese authorities agreed to a capacity of 33% or up to 16,500 spectators at Estádio do Dragão, which thus became the third stadium in the country to host the final, after the Estádio Nacional (1967) and Estádio da Luz (2014, 2020). With Portugal a green-list destination for England, fans and players attending the final did not have to quarantine on their return home.

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, said of the switch: "Fans have had to suffer more than 12 months without the ability to see their teams live and reaching a Champions League final is the pinnacle of club football. To deprive those supporters of the chance to see the match in person was not an option and I am



Kai Havertz propels Chelsea to their second Champions League victory after 2012.



Porto, 29 May 2021
Manchester City FC 0-1 (0-1)
Chelsea FC

Referee: Antonio Miguel
Mateu Lahoz





delighted that this compromise has been found. After the year that fans have endured, it is not right that they don't have the chance to watch their teams in the biggest game of the season. Once again we have turned to our friends in Portugal to help both UEFA and the Champions League and I am, as always, very grateful to the FPF and the Portuguese government for agreeing to stage the match at such short notice."

To ensure the safety of those attending the match, fans entering the stadium had to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test result. Each of the finalists was offered an allocation of 6,000 tickets reserved for their supporters and the sale of those was conducted by the clubs directly. Meanwhile, from 25 May, 1,700 tickets went on sale for the general public, exclusively on UEFA.com.

The final was aired in more than 200 countries worldwide and estimated to have reached 250 million people globally via in-home broadcast or live streaming. That massive global audience saw the action preceded by a virtual performance by platinum-certified artist/producer Marshmello in the UEFA Champions League final opening ceremony presented by Pepsi. The Porto showpiece was the 125th and last game of the 66th European Cup/UEFA Champions League

season – a season which, owing to the circumstances of the pandemic, had begun later than usual, in October. Additionally, it featured several knockout ties contested in neutral venues because of travel restrictions: in the round of 16, the Atlético Madrid v Chelsea first-leg meeting was played in Bucharest, while Budapest staged both legs of the Leipzig v Liverpool and Borussia Mönchengladbach v Manchester City ties. Chelsea, the eventual champions, then played both legs of their quarter-final with Porto in Seville. They made it to Porto in the end – and, happily, some of their fans too. 🍷

2

CHELSEA join Juventus, Nottingham Forest and Porto on two Champion Clubs' Cup/Champions League titles.

3

THOMAS TUCHEL becomes the third successive German winning coach, after Jürgen Klopp (Liverpool) and Hansi Flick (Bayern Munich).

8

CITY become the eighth successive final debutant to lose, following on from Valencia, Bayer 04 Leverkusen, Monaco, Arsenal, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur and Paris Saint-Germain.

WINDS OF CHANGE IN WOMEN'S CLUB FOOTBALL

Barcelona don the European crown for the first time in Gothenburg on 16 May.

The stadium clock has just ticked past the hour mark. Kadidiatou Diani latches on to the ball wide on the right and fires in a low cross. Wendie Renard, racing back to prevent the ball from reaching Marie-Antoinette Katoto, nudges the ball at the near post and wrong-foots her own goalkeeper, Sarah Bouhaddi.

It may seem bizarre to focus on an own goal in the second leg of a quarter-final. But it ended a dynasty. Or, to be pedantic, Olympique Lyonnais' reign of 1,788 days on the throne of women's club football in Europe. Just 37 weeks earlier, in San Sebastián, the French club had recorded a fifth successive UEFA Women's Champions League victory, equalling the record Real Madrid's men's team had set way back in 1960. In fact, the annals of the game offer some curious parallels. Real Madrid's domination was ended by rivals from the same country. But their conquerors, FC Barcelona, failed to lift the trophy. History repeated itself in 2021. Paris Saint-Germain, favourites after their away-goals victory in Lyon, suffered a semi-final defeat against, as fate would have it, Barcelona.

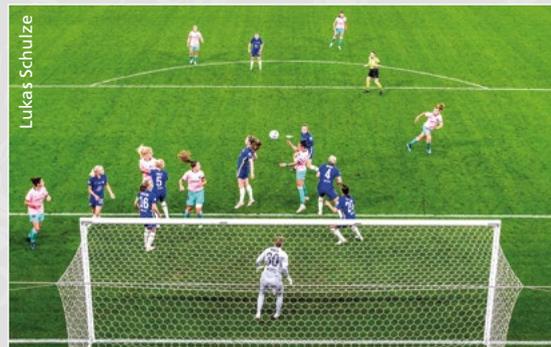
Ninety minutes after Barça had celebrated that 2-1 semi-final win against PSG, Chelsea defeated FC Bayern München to strengthen the feeling that history was being made. The 12th single-match final in the UEFA Women's Champions League was going to be the first not to involve a French or German club. Eight of the previous 11 finals had been Germany v France. Of the 22 finalists, 11 had hailed from France and nine from Germany. Of the 19 champions since the UEFA Women's Cup kicked-off in 2001, 17 had been French or German. In 2021, a new name was to be engraved on the trophy. Hair was being ruffled by a wind of change.

As neutral observers watched the season rise to a crescendo, the competitive edge provided another

16 May – Gothenburg
Chelsea FC 0-4 FC Barcelona



FC Barcelona are the first club to have won both the women's and men's Champions Leagues.



breath of fresh air. Among the ties disputed by the top eight, FC Bayern München's 4-0 aggregate win against Sweden's FC Rosengård was the most comfortable margin of victory. Chelsea's 5-1 tally against VfL Wolfsburg seems equally conclusive. But the scoreboard did not accurately reflect a tie in which last season's silver medallists had 30 goal attempts to Chelsea's 11. Ditto the Londoners' 6-3 aggregate in the semi-final against FC Bayern. In the dying moments of the second leg, the German visitors were within centimetres of the away goal which would have earned a trip to Gothenburg, only for Chelsea to scramble the ball off the line and, with the keeper stranded in attack, break upfield to roll the ball into an unguarded net and seal a deceptive 4-1 scoreline.

The other semi-final was disputed with equal intensity and nervous tension. After travelling home from Paris with an encouraging 1-1 draw, Barcelona

took a 2-0 lead in the home leg against PSG. But a set play allowed the French visitors to pull a goal back, leaving the hosts to dig deep into mental strength and play out almost an hour in the knowledge that another away goal would put them out.

And so to Gothenburg for the wind-of-change final between English and Spanish clubs. Lluís Cortés took Barça to Sweden with memories of 2019 weighing heavily in their baggage. In that final, his team had fallen 4-0 behind to rampant Olympique Lyonnais within half an hour – an experience which had shaped the club's approach to athletic and mental performance levels. In Gothenburg, history was to repeat itself – but in reverse. Chelsea suffered the huge psychological blow of conceding a freak own goal after only 37 seconds in a pinball scenario after a shot by Lieke Martens had cannoned back from the crossbar. Then, with Barça's wingers as exuberant as Lyon's had been two years earlier, a cutback from the right provoked a penalty. Seven minutes later, a superb combination move allowed Aitana Bonmatí to coolly find the net. And a high-speed solo run from the left by Martens allowed right-winger Caroline Graham Hansen to knock the ball home from close range. Within 36 minutes, Barcelona's high-pressing game, high-tempo passing and exceptional technique had given them a 4-0 advantage.

After the break, Emma Hayes switched to a back line of three and, pushing forward in numbers, Chelsea posed more problems and grabbed a larger slice of possession. But, as Spain's national team manager Jorge Vilda – UEFA's technical observer at the final – succinctly put it: "Chelsea changed the game. But they couldn't change the score."

As the fireworks streamed into the Gothenburg night, Barcelona celebrated their dream come true. Or, to express it more pragmatically, they had used the painful lesson of 2019 to work hard at proving they could compete at the highest level. Their reward was a first-ever title that allowed Barça to become the first club to be champions of Europe in men's and women's football. In the history of the UEFA Women's Champions League, it was a landmark season. 🏆



Safety first

Careful planning ensured the season reached its conclusion despite the pandemic.

Organising this season's UEFA Women's Champions League posed a significant logistical challenge due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, but careful planning and the implementation of UEFA's Return to Play Protocol ensured another successful campaign.

To cut down on the number of fixtures required, the qualifying round mini-tournaments of previous years were replaced by two single-legged knockout rounds. At these games and others throughout the season, a series of procedures were followed to minimise the risk to all those involved.

These included requirements for social distancing, mask wearing and handwashing; travel and accommodation policies designed to minimise the risk of infection and transmission; and extensive testing for players, staff and officials. Overall, between 15 August 2020 and 4 January 2021, UEFA conducted 6,459 tests at Women's Champions League games.

Despite those measures, several difficulties still needed to be overcome. In the round of 32, for example, the tie between Välerenga and Brøndby had to be played as a single match in Brøndby due to quarantine restrictions imposed by the Norwegian authorities. Elsewhere, outbreaks of COVID-19 cases at clubs forced games to be postponed or, in one case, forfeited. Nevertheless, a diligent organisational effort ultimately succeeded in keeping disruptions to a minimum.



Lukas Schütze



'A GIANT STEP FORWARD'

The UEFA Women's Champions League is driving the development of women's football across Europe. From next season, a new format and greater exposure will take it to another level.

Less than two minutes. That was how long it took for the UEFA Women's Cup to explode into life just over 20 years ago, on 14 August 2001, as Moldovan side Codru Chişinău took on Ilirija of Slovenia in the first qualifying round of the inaugural edition. Gabriela Enache broke new ground with the early goal, celebrating the opening salvo in a 9-0 victory for Codru – and the historic first strike in a competition that has continued to drive the development of the women's game ever since.

Then, as now, the aim of the new tournament was to accelerate the growth of women's football in Europe, raising the status, quality and exposure of the sport. The evolution of the competition since that landmark first qualifier speaks to its success, the UEFA Women's Cup notably becoming the UEFA Women's Champions League in 2009/10, and from next season it will embark on an even more exciting chapter. Part of UEFA's long-term strategy to develop women's football, the 2021/22 edition will be bigger and better than ever as various innovations take the game to a new level.

Perhaps the most immediately visible change will be a revised format, with the current knockout round of 16 replaced by a group stage featuring four groups of four teams playing each other home and away. The top two in each group will progress to the quarter-finals, while qualification for the group stage will be split into champions and league paths (as in the men's UEFA Champions League) to ensure at least ten member associations are represented.

"We needed to work on both improving the competitiveness of the UEFA Women's Champions League and giving teams more guaranteed matches," said Nadine Kessler, UEFA's chief of women's football.

"Introducing a group stage will help address both of these issues. It will also provide a better platform for the competition's promotion, raising interest among the general public, media and commercial partners."

Increasing engagement

Those objectives will likewise be served by a centralised broadcast deal from next season, designed to increase the competition's exposure and generate more revenue to funnel back into women's football.



With the new Women's Champions League format, sponsors will benefit from greater exposure.

"We want as many people as possible to tune into the matches, exclusive exposure like this will give women's football a massive boost."

Nadine Kessler
UEFA's chief of women's football

Currently, only the final is centrally marketed by UEFA but, under the new format, media rights will be centralised from the group stage onwards, with UEFA producing every game for TV or online streaming purposes.

"We want as many people as possible to tune into the matches," explained Kessler. "Exclusive exposure like this will give women's football a massive boost." Indeed, this decision is already paying

dividends, with new commercial partners secured before the new format comes into effect.

Crucially, the benefits of the new format will be felt across the entire women's football landscape in Europe. Thanks to a new financial distribution model, the 2021/22 edition will redistribute a projected total of €24m – more than four times greater than the current figure – either as rewards for

the competing clubs or, for the first time ever, as solidarity payments to non-competing teams.

This increase in financial distribution will be made possible by the centralisation of media rights and – in another first – a cross-subsidy from UEFA's men's club competitions to support the women's game. "Every last euro generated by the Women's Champions League and even more will go back into the women's game," said UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin, outlining "a giant step forward" for the sport.

New anthem and logo unveiled

The UEFA Women's Champions League will have a new anthem and brand identity from the start of the 2021/22 season.

The 2021/22 season will mark the start of a new dawn for the UEFA Women's Champions League. The addition of a group stage and the quadrupling of prize money has already been announced, but now the competition will have its very own anthem as well as an updated logo and brand identity.

The addition of a new anthem and branding is just the latest stage of an overhaul of UEFA women's football, in line with UEFA's Time for Action women's football strategy, which aims to double the reach and value of UEFA flagship women's competitions by 2024.

A new identity

The anthem, which has been developed in collaboration with global music agency MassiveMusic, follows the same principles as the world-famous men's UEFA Champions League anthem and is sung in UEFA's three official languages – English, French and German – by the Groot Omroepkoor (Dutch Broadcasting Choir).

Branding agency Works Ltd oversaw the UEFA Women's Champions League's new brand identity. "The new brand identity of the UEFA Women's Champions League has the potential to take the competition to the next level by giving it the visual recognition that the world's greatest women's club competition deserves," said UEFA's marketing director, Guy-Laurent Epstein.

Innovation driving change

The competition's broad overhaul does not end there, with new regulations also set to help professionalise and modernise the women's game. In order to safeguard the welfare of players who become mothers, for example, participating clubs will have the flexibility to alter their squad lists during the season in order to temporarily replace players either because they are pregnant, or because they leave for or return from maternity leave. Meanwhile, the introduction of a B list will allow clubs to supplement their squad lists by including young players, and from 2022/23 a locally trained player rule will help nurture the growth of homegrown talent. In addition, video assistant referees (VAR) will be deployed at every match in the knockout stage, and no longer just the final.

"Each one of these changes is driven by a united vision and ensures that we are all moving in the same direction – forwards," added Nadine Kessler. "We are excited to bring the new UEFA Women's Champions League to the world and to bring football fans the best players and the best teams, in the best women's club competition in the world." 🌍



JOY FOR 50,000 AS VILLARREAL WIN THE UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

The 50th and shortest UEFA Europa League concluded with Villarreal CF lifting their first-ever European trophy, becoming the club from the smallest city to win the competition.

With the 2019/20 competition culminating in an unprecedented August final, qualifying for the 2020/21 edition started later than usual, with both seasons running in parallel for three days before Sevilla won the 49th UEFA Cup/UEFA Europa League on 21 August 2020.

The continuation of the pandemic meant the qualifying rounds were truncated into single-leg ties, including the play-off round on 1 October. The group stage commenced on 22 October, with the first three rounds of matches played on consecutive weeks and the final three matchdays also following consecutively from 26 November to 10 December.

In total, 204 matches were successfully staged, in spite of constantly evolving travel restrictions and COVID-19-related complications. The only exception was

Villarreal's final group fixture against Qarabağ FK, although this had no impact on the final group standings. As a result, Villarreal played a total of just 14 matches en route to lifting the trophy rather than 15.

The journey to Gdańsk started in spectacular fashion, with the most prolific group stage in the competition's history. The 442 goals, setting a new tournament record at an average of 3.09 per game, included a particularly bountiful third matchday when the previous single matchday record of 81 goals was smashed. The ball hit the back of the net 93 times on 5 November, which included two hat-tricks – from Sparta Praha's Lukáš Juliš and LOSC Lille's Yusuf Yazıcı, in the eventual French Ligue 1 champions' win at AC Milan, which ended the Italian club's run of 24 games unbeaten in all

competitions. As the goals continued to pour in, qualification for the round of 32 was confirmed prematurely by a host of clubs, including AS Roma, Tottenham Hotspur and their London rivals Arsenal, who joined an elite group of nine clubs to boast a perfect group stage record of six wins out of six.

Manchester United were among the eight clubs dropping down from the UEFA Champions League for the knockout stage, though their first challenge in the round of 32 was "like a Champions League draw," according to their coach, Ole Gunnar Solskjær, as they met Real Sociedad de Fútbol – leaders in the Spanish Liga when the draw was made in December. The first leg of that tie, like several others in the knockout stages, was moved to a neutral venue due to travel restrictions, with United enjoying their trip to Turin's Juventus Stadium slightly more than their nominal hosts, as they ran out 4-0 winners.





The outcome of the final came down to the two goalkeepers, David de Gea and Geronimo Rulli.

Final: 26 May – Gdańsk

Villarreal CF v Manchester United FC 1-1
(1-0, 1-1) – 11-10 after penalties

Referee: Clément Turpin (France)

The Red Devils' path to the final was certainly not an easy one, however, and their next challenge came from the then Italian Serie A leaders, Milan. A Paul Pogba strike at San Siro took Solskjær's men through, and they alternated Spanish and Italian opponents again by beating Granada CF and Roma in the quarter-finals and semi-finals respectively to reach their second Europa League final after winning in 2017. Villarreal joined them in the showpiece with wins against Salzburg, Dynamo Kyiv, Dinamo Zagreb and Arsenal, with Unai Emery's men winning a remarkable 11 and drawing just two of their games as they progressed unbeaten to what would be their coach's fifth Europa League final, but the first for a club from the small Castellón city of Vila-Real.

The entire population of Vila-Real would have filled United's Old Trafford home, with space for social distancing, and a considerable proportion made the trip to Poland for their date with history. A crowd of 9,412 – a magnificent sight after a year dominated by behind-closed-doors

matches – witnessed an intense final with the nominal Goliath, United, seeking to release all its force on the nominal David.

As the legend goes, David defeated Goliath against all odds in a single combat, yet it was a collective effort that saw Villarreal bring their illustrious opponents to their knees, starting with a compact defensive display that left United with no clear route to goal. Indeed, the post-match statistics confirmed that the Red Devils managed just two shots on target, one in the first half and one in the second, as they were constantly frustrated – despite enjoying the majority of possession in both halves – by Villarreal's defensive discipline. The Spanish team did not limit themselves to defending, however. With the metronomic movement of experienced midfielder Dani Parejo, and the support of Gerard Moreno dropping deep to receive the ball, they were able to pose a tangible threat on the break.

With the game largely confined to the centre third, full-backs Alfonso Pedraza and Juan Foyth were unable to exude the

influence and authority that had been a feature of Villarreal's season, but in Luke Shaw and Aaron Wan-Bissaka, they were faced with two familiarly adventurous full-backs who ensured they had enough work to do defensively. This is when Emery's final management experience came into play, as he replaced all four of his wide players with fresh legs during the second half, giving his team a visible edge energetically as Solskjær remained reluctant to alter his trusted starting XI.

In a competition where many set pieces provided goals and goalscoring opportunities, it was perhaps unsurprising that all the goals came from dead-ball situations. Parejo delivered an inviting ball for Gerard Moreno to strike home and give Villarreal the advantage on the half-hour mark, while it was a corner which led to United's equaliser, swept in by Edinson Cavani after a series of ricochets inside the Villarreal penalty area early in the second half. Parity remained right through extra time, when Solskjær did finally make some changes to his tiring team, albeit late on, with an eye on the seemingly inevitable penalty shoot-out.

Both teams sent their most confident penalty takers up first, but there did not appear to be an ounce of nerves in any of the outfield players, who would all be called upon to step up to the spot – and score. It was then the turn of the goalkeepers. Gerónimo Rulli replicated the confidence and composure of his outfield players by beating David de Gea, leaving United's Spanish custodian to place the ball on the spot as the last player on the field to go through the nerve-wracking rigmarole. The record sequence of penalty perfection had to end somewhere, and it was United's No1 who was denied by his opposite number, sparking celebratory scenes in front of the stand filled with ecstatic Villarreal fans.

It left 50,577 vila-realenes and vila-realences celebrating the greatest achievement in a UEFA club competition for a club from such a small city, and Emery savouring a now familiar feeling with his fourth Europa League title. 🏆

UEL = Unai Emery League

"How many coaches are able to coach finals?" asked Dušan Fitzel, one of UEFA's technical observers analysing the 50th edition of the Europa League. "Unai Emery has experience; he's won it three times with Sevilla, and it could be this experience [that made the difference]." Emery's fourth win came in his fifth final, including the 2019 defeat to Chelsea while at the helm of Arsenal. Of the 12 editions since the rebranding of the UEFA Cup in 2009/10, Emery has scooped one third of the winners' medals. That cannot be purely coincidental. "Emery's a maestro of tactics and strategies," said Ginés Meléndez. "He deserves a lot of credit for his work – the organisation and discipline were fantastic." Emery proved once again he knew how to get his game plan and strategy right when it mattered, and that comes from experience, not chance, to win the Unai Emery League.





UEFA EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE TROPHY UNVEILED



Next season, a brand-new men's UEFA club competition will kick off – the UEFA Europa Conference League. The matches will be played on Thursday nights, alongside the UEFA Europa League.

Standing 57.5cm tall and weighing 11kg, the new trophy consists of 32 hexagonal spines – one for each team in the group stage of the competition – twisting and curving from the trophy base. The curved shape of the spines was inspired by the flight of a football as it heads towards the goal – the ultimate moment of optimism for fans. The base and top are made from hand-brushed brass with a matte galvanic steel effect, while the spines feature a glossy silver finishing.

Aside from giving more players the chance to experience European football, which can only help to develop their footballing careers, the competition will also give clubs an additional chance to win a European trophy.

"We want to make our competitions more inclusive – to give clubs and fans the chance to dream and compete for European honours," said the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin.

"This is why we created the UEFA Europa Conference League. We have 55 national associations that make up UEFA, and it is important to give clubs from as many associations as possible the chance to prolong their European campaigns for as long as possible."

The branding

The UEFA Europa Conference League will be heavily intertwined with the UEFA Europa League from a marketing perspective and the brand identities of the two competitions are part of the same family. Both brand identities contain different expressions of a device referred to as the energy wave.

The UEFA Europa Conference League visual identity represents the optimistic, inspiring and open nature of the competition. Its energy wave is more

curved and fluid in form – taking influence from the new UEFA Europa Conference League trophy.

With the introduction of the UEFA Europa Conference League, the UEFA Europa League brand identity has also been upgraded to reflect the more competitive and selective nature of the competition. It features a bolder logo and more dynamic energy wave, both being more angular in form.

The UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League brand identities were designed to work together as well as separately to cater for a seamless matchnight experience.

The trophy for the UEFA Europa Conference League was designed by Pentagram and the brand identity was designed by Turquoise. Both agencies are based in London.

The new UEFA Europa Conference League and the UEFA Europa League will both use the same anthem.

Sponsors will enjoy rights across both the UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League, meaning exposure and activation opportunities, as well as exclusive association, for all of the matches that will be played on Thursday evenings.

"The UEFA Europa Conference League is a very exciting proposition for our broadcasters and partners," said UEFA marketing director Guy-Laurent Epstein. "It will give them an unprecedented reach into a greater number of markets and the possibility to engage with new audiences."

184 teams

In all, 184 teams will be involved over the course of the 2021/22 season, including at least one from each of the 55 associations and 46 clubs transferring from either the UEFA Champions League or UEFA Europa League.

Schedule

First qualifying round draw:
15 June 2021

Second qualifying round draw:
16 June

First qualifying round:
8 & 15 July

Third qualifying round draw:
19 July

Second qualifying round:
22 & 29 July

Play-off round draw:
2 August

Third qualifying round:
5 & 12 August

Play-offs:
19 & 26 August

Group stage draw:
27 August

Group stage:
**16 & 30 September, 21 October,
4 & 25 November, 9 December**

Knockout round play-off draw:
13 December

Knockout round play-offs:
17 & 24 February 2022

Round of 16 draw:
25 February

Round of 16:
10 & 17 March

Quarter-finals & semi-final draw:
18 March

Quarter-finals:
7 & 14 April

Semi-finals:
28 April & 5 May



Final:
25 May 2022 (National Arena, Tirana)

Before the group stage, there will be three qualifying rounds and a play-off round (split into a main path, and a champions path for those transferring from the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League champions path).

The competing teams will all be trying to qualify for the group stage, which like the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League, will feature eight groups of four teams, followed by knockout round play-offs, the round of 16, quarter-finals, semi-finals and final, the first of which will take place in Tirana, Albania, on 25 May 2022. The winners will gain a place in the following season's

UEFA Europa League group stage if they have not qualified for the UEFA Champions League via their domestic competition.

Impact on the other men's club competitions

The introduction of the UEFA Europa Conference League will have no impact on the UEFA Champions League. However, the UEFA Europa League group stage will be reduced from 48 to 32 teams – eight groups of four.

The eight UEFA Europa League group winners progress automatically to the round of 16. There will also be additional

knockout round play-offs prior to the UEFA Europa League round of 16; these will be between the eight UEFA Europa League group runners-up and the eight third-ranked teams of the UEFA Champions League groups.

The UEFA Europa League access list will also change accordingly, with the previous season's UEFA Europa Conference League winners joined in the group stage by 11 teams who qualify directly via their domestic associations. Additionally, ten teams will come through UEFA Europa League qualifying and a further ten from UEFA Champions League qualifying. 🌟



SPORTING CP WRESTLE TITLE BACK FROM BARÇA

Two years on from their first triumph, Sporting CP took the UEFA Futsal Champions League title back from holders Barça in a dramatic final in Zadar.

The 2019 champions emerged triumphant from an expanded final tournament, with COVID-19 complications also causing a change in venue. Originally scheduled to take place in Minsk from 28 April to 3 May, the Croatian city of Zadar's Krešimira Čosića Arena hosted the seven games, which started as they meant to go on with a pulsating quarter-final contest between Kairat Almaty and SL Benfica. It was a feisty encounter, which included a red card for Kairat's iconic goalkeeper Higuita and an unscheduled debut for teenage replacement Narun Serikov – himself a 12th-hour arrival in Croatia – and the Kazakhstani side's 6-2 extra-time win set

up a semi-final meeting with defending champions Barça, who saw off the challenge of Slovenian final-round debutants Futsal Klub Dobovec. Completing an exact repeat of the 2019 semi-finals, record champions Inter FS gained revenge for their 2016 final defeat to Ugra Yugorsk with a 3-0 win over the Russian side and Sporting saw off a spirited KPRF 3-2.

With the experience and coaching acumen of Nuno Dias, Tino Pérez, Kaká and Andreu Plaza calling the shots from the touchlines, some originality and innovation, particularly with set plays, was to be expected. And so it proved as dead-ball situations became increasingly decisive as the well-versed teams cancelled

each other out technically and tactically. "They did some very good scouting," noted UEFA's technical observer Miguel Rodrigo, highlighting in particular how Kairat managed to neutralise the threat of Benfica keeper Diego Roncaglio, and how Barça diligently switched to a diamond 1-1-2-1 shape whenever their opponent's goalkeeper entered their territory, returning to 1-4-0 after intimidating the opposing custodian into a retreat.

Repeat of the 2019 semis

Sporting's semi-final opponents were Inter, and like their 2019 meeting in Almaty, Nuno Dias' men prevailed. "They are our Achilles heel, given the way they play,"

said Inter's assistant coach Chicho Ibáñez prophetically since, once again, the Portuguese side scored five, although this time they conceded just two rather than the three they shipped at the Almaty Arena. Alex Merlim – who, together with Diego Cavinato and Guitta, was also a starter two years ago – was once again influential with his sublime set-piece delivery, teeing up his Italian compatriot for the opener. Inter replied with a successful set play of their own, Borja turning in José Raya's corner, but Guitta became more daring afterwards and put Sporting back ahead with a deflected shot before Taynan added a third. After Tomás Paço turned Lucas Trípodí's corner into his own goal, Sporting had to weather a storm, striking out ruthlessly to put the game beyond Inter's reach.

The other semi-final was also a repeat of 2019, when Kairat reached the final on home territory in front of a tournament record 12,090 fans. Deprived of the suspended Higuita, it was always going to be a challenge for Kaká, who recognised his loss would hurt more in terms of the influence his habitual keeper has over the rest of his team. "Higuita is not the threat, but rather it is the threat that he causes to help his teammates," said the Brazilian coach. Nineteen-year-old Serikov – the youngest player in all of the finals' squads – took his place in goal and, though he made some fine saves, a hat-trick from Ferrao helped the holders reach a second straight final.

A fitting conclusion

That final looked to be firmly in the Catalans' control after Marcênio and Ximbinha gave them a 2-0 half-time advantage, but a second-half transformation ensued with Barça punished for dropping back and operating a much lower press, thus inviting Sporting to attack, at times deploying two pivots to wreak havoc. It did not take long for the vibrant Zicky Té to become the first teenager to score in UEFA futsal club finals. As Barça coach Andreu Plaza later admitted, the goal knocked the confidence out of his team while giving Sporting a significant psychological boost, which they transformed almost immediately

into an equaliser, Zicky this time assisting Erick to level matters.

Sporting had already shown during their previous two games in Zadar that they were made of strong stuff, and their 45-game unbeaten run in all competitions, stretching back to a 5-4 league cup final loss to Benfica on 12 January 2020, was further evidence of their calibre. With momentum now on their side, a Taynan free-kick rattled the post and fell out for João Matos to complete the turnaround. Barça went for the power play, but as Miguel Rodrigo noted, it felt "closer to becoming 4-2 than 3-3" as Sporting simply oozed confidence. When Erick's long shot towards an open goal struck the post and Pany Varela tucked in the rebound, the mountain became too high for Barça to climb, and though Ferrao struck a consolation, Sporting held on to become only the second team in the 20 finals to recover from two goals down to win, after Kairat against FC Dynamo in 2013.

It was a fitting conclusion to a unique final eight competition that showcased some of the best of the continent's futsal, and the passion and drama inherent to a game which continues to grow at a pace, with the UEFA Futsal EURO in the Netherlands, Sporting's bid to defend their UEFA Futsal Champions League title and the second UEFA European Under-19 Futsal Championship in Jaén, Spain, all to look forward to in 2022. 🏆

2021/22 UEFA Futsal Champions League

The 2021/22 UEFA Futsal Champions League will return to its regular format, with preliminary, main and elite rounds played as one-venue mini-tournaments and four-team knockout finals in April, with the venue selected once the contenders are known.

Calendar

Preliminary & main round draw: 7 July 2021

Preliminary round: 20–25 August

Main round: 12–17 October

Elite round draw: 3 November

Elite round: 23–28 November

Final draw: TBC

Finals: 28/29 April & 30 April/ 1 May 2022 (TBC)

Quarter-finals (28 & 29 April)

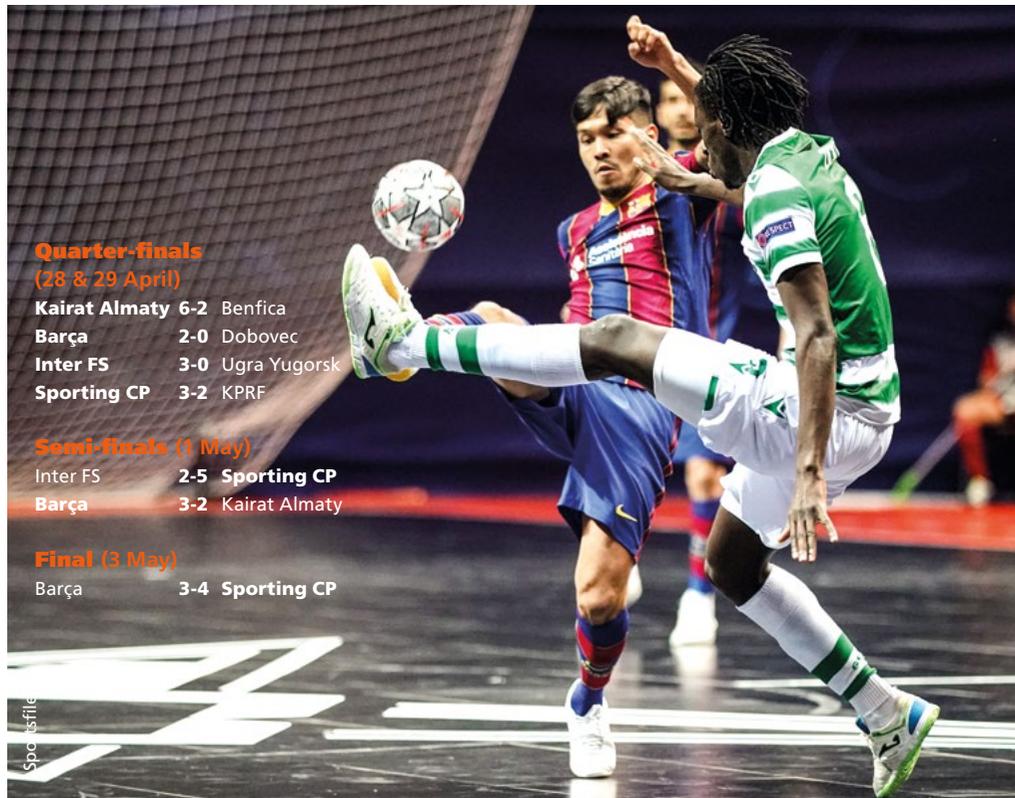
Kairat Almaty	6-2	Benfica
Barça	2-0	Dobovec
Inter FS	3-0	Ugra Yugorsk
Sporting CP	3-2	KPRF

Semi-finals (3 May)

Inter FS	2-5	Sporting CP
Barça	3-2	Kairat Almaty

Final (3 May)

Barça	3-4	Sporting CP
-------	------------	--------------------



Zicky Té (Sporting CP) outmanoeuvres Daniel Shiraishi (Barcelona) during the final in Zadar, Croatia.



SMOOTHING THE PATHWAY

Belgium and Italy adopt a novel approach to the transition from playing to coaching.



Take a look at your favourite league table and work out how many of the coaches were top-level players. And how many have become successful coaches without an illustrious playing career. One of football's great debating points is whether one background is better than the other. Do great footballers make great coaches? Or, as Arrigo Sacchi famously argued, "You don't have to have been a horse to be a jockey." Italy's coaching guru could be cited alongside the likes of José Mourinho, André Villas-Boas or Maurizio Sarri as examples of a coaching vocation weighing more heavily than playing experience as a top-level pro.

At the other end of the spectrum, a list of big names who stepped rapidly from the pitch to the technical area could start with Pep Guardiola, Zinedine Zidane, Diego Simeone, Gareth Southgate, Didier Deschamps... and in the middle, a group whose playing careers were prematurely truncated by injury, such as Thomas Tuchel at 25 or Rafa Benítez at 27, opening doors for an early kick-off in the coaching profession.

The UEFA Coaching Convention offers scope for national associations to streamline the transition from playing to coaching by organising – to summarise some of the wording in Articles 25–27 of the convention – "a specific course for long-serving professionals that comprises the content of both a UEFA B diploma course and a UEFA A diploma course". The 'terms and conditions' of the combined courses stipulate 240 hours of education based on the full A diploma course plus modules from the B course, with a 50-50 split between off-pitch learning and reality-based practical units on the pitch. And, to qualify for the course, participants must have played at least seven full seasons in the top division of a league in a UEFA or FIFA member association. Some countries were quick on the ball, with Italy, for example, currently conducting a fourth combined A + B course for former top pros. And Belgium has taken a different angle by offering

a B diploma course for players currently active in the national squad during the spells when they are together on international duty.

Where and when to start

Early transitions from playing to coaching are rare but not new – as illustrated by some of the speakers at UEFA's student exchange events for coaches engaged in UEFA Pro diploma courses. Gareth Southgate, for example, expresses reservations about stepping too quickly from pitch to technical area. As he explains in his book *Anything Is Possible*: "I was offered the chance to take over as manager. It meant finishing my last season as captain and then beginning the next in charge of everything from team selection, strategy and formation to player transfers and staff responsibilities. I accepted the job based on my experience wearing the captain's armband. I was used to speaking to the team and knew how I wanted to be treated as a player. Looking back, that was nowhere near enough in terms of preparation for being a club manager. I had no idea how complex it was going to be. It all happened so quickly that I didn't take my coaching qualifications until after the season had started."

Thomas Schaaf also recalls the early grounding he obtained by coaching a Werder Bremen youth squad while still playing in the first team. "It was quite intense, but I believe it was a really good education, a good decision on how to approach things. As a player, you naturally think that you might know it all, or at least a lot. But you see quickly that you're missing key background knowledge. I really enjoyed being so immersed in it while I was still active as a player."

Debate on the timing of coach education is by no means exclusive to the men's game. Sweden's Anna Signeul, currently the Finland women's national team coach, regards herself as fortunate to have had the chance to start her coach education via courses during the close season. "I had the equivalent of a UEFA B licence at 24," she recalls, "and, by →

the time I stopped playing, I already had my A diploma. This was a huge benefit, as it meant I could go directly into coaching and, while I was doing my coaching qualifications, I learned so many things that helped me as a football player." She then helped to create a similar pathway for top players during her 12 years in charge of Scotland. Former England manager Hope Powell comments: "I started coaching at 17 while I was playing and I believe it really helped to develop my game. I got my C and B licences as a player so I was actively coaching while playing and found the transition just part of the process and not at all challenging." She became the first woman to earn a UEFA Pro diploma and took over the England team at the age of 32.

Italy's example

Although they all speak positively about the advantages of starting coach education while still active, one of the realities of today's game is that the workloads borne by top professionals make it difficult to blend playing with coach education. Italy was one of the front-runners in realising that a combined UEFA A + B course could accelerate transitions and shorten intervals



////////////////////////////////////
 "I had no idea how complex the transition from player to manager was going to be. It all happened so quickly that I didn't take my coaching qualifications until after the season had started."

Gareth Southgate
 England head coach



Former England women's national team manager Hope Powell started coaching when she was 17 and got her C and B diplomas while she was still playing.



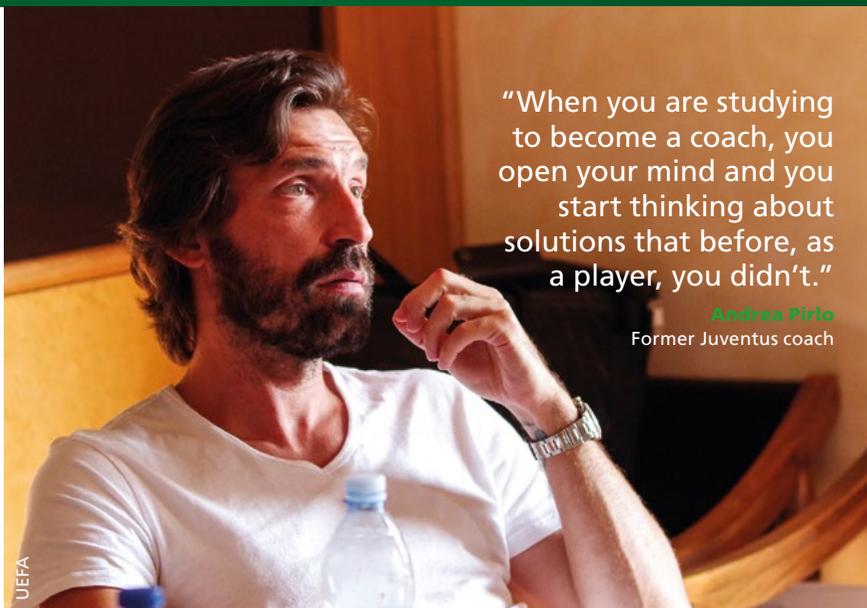
Gennaro Gattuso



between hanging up boots and taking up residence in the technical area. Back in 2012, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) organised a course attended by ten of the players who had become world champions in 2006, including Fabio Cannavaro, Gennaro Gattuso, Filippo Inzaghi, Marco Materazzi, Alessandro Nesta and Gianluca Zambrotta, plus, curiously, former goalkeeper Giovanni Galli – in the squad when Italy had previously lifted the trophy in Madrid in 1982. Luca Toni and Morgan De Sanctis were among the familiar names at the second course in 2017; Thiago Motta and Andrea Pirlo at the third in 2018; and the group currently negotiating the fourth course includes Alessandro Del Piero, Daniele De Rossi, Riccardo Montolivo and Christian Vieri.

"Examining topics in depth and speaking with other students are the most beautiful things about the course," says their colleague Federico Balzaretti, the international full-back who took a silver medal home from EURO 2012. "And subjects like psychology and data analysis in which I have fewer skills but are very important for a coach. I also love terminology very much: as a coach you must communicate clearly with your players." Andrea Pirlo, in an interview for the FIGC's coach education magazine, commented: "When you are studying to become a coach, you open your mind and you start thinking about solutions that before, as a player, you didn't."

Renzo Ulivieri, Italy's director of coach education, acknowledges that the courses require a different approach. "In the combined UEFA B and A course, we can avoid some of the technical aspects that we have in other courses. After all, we are dealing with great ex-professional football



“When you are studying to become a coach, you open your mind and you start thinking about solutions that before, as a player, you didn’t.”

Andrea Pirlo
Former Juventus coach

players, so they are perfectly familiar with the details of technique. What we have to teach them instead is how to correct other players, exploiting the advantage of their own technical level. They wouldn’t be great football players if they didn’t possess excellent football technique, but teaching is completely different. We have to teach them how to teach.”

He also draws on the players’ own experiences. “Our students offer us perspectives on a concept that is deeply rooted in our football school, though it might be questioned in other national schools: analytical methods. For example, in one of our recent sessions I asked Christian Vieri about his relationship with the ball when he was a very young player in Pisa. He answered that it was a complicated relationship, but before and after every training session he did what he felt he needed: analytical technique with a view to become better. The same with Alessandro Del Piero. He explained how at every training session he dedicated time to practising free-kicks with the same objective – to become better in this speciality. This is our school philosophy. They have learned from their experiences in the game but now they have to give the right tools to others.”

The Belgian way

Belgium’s coach education director, Kris Van Der Haegen, says much the same as his Italian counterpart. He is currently directing the novel – not to say revolutionary – scheme which the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) has

set up to allow current national team players to go through the UEFA diploma course. “This is a new experience for me as an educator,” he comments. “It has confirmed my belief that coach education must be learner-centred. They are a different group, so you need a different approach. You have to adapt. You obviously set out to deliver the same content as you would to other students but you don’t need to teach them the game of football. Also, they want to study the same way as they play – at high speed and with great intensity. Their tactical level is amazing and sometimes you realise that you’ve covered a topic in 45 minutes which, with another group, could easily have taken two hours. Their standards are high; they ask a lot of questions; and, of course, they expect the course leaders to be well prepared. So as an educator you need to make sure you are giving them challenging exercises. If you asked them to do a three-hour session on a single topic, they would disconnect. Roberto is very clear about this. In fact the way he deals with and understands the players is amazing.” Roberto is, of course, Roberto Martínez, Belgium’s men’s national team coach and technical director.

The Belgian course is unique in that it allows the participants to meet UEFA Coaching Convention requirements by exploiting the periods of time when the Red Devils get together for international double-headers. A parallel project has been designed for members of the women’s squad (a mix of current and former players) which is also a

groundbreaking innovation.

The use of precious time during get-togethers evidently requires full support from the national team coach – and Roberto Martínez has been unstinting. “Belgian football has produced a golden generation,” he says, “and it’s a unique moment when you become the world’s number one. So our aim is to prepare these players to extend their influence on Belgian football beyond their playing days. We don’t want to lose them the moment they retire. We want to offer them the opportunity to make the transition from playing to coaching as smoothly as possible. So, within the RBFA we designed a plan to create a new pathway. Kris is the course director and we have a group of tutors to work in specific areas. The COVID situation has meant that we’ve needed to be very careful about bringing tutors in from outside, so the coaching staff around the national team have had roles to play during the course.”

Logistics are based on assigning one day of each get-together to course activities – and provisions are evidently made for players who are injured or not selected. “There are regular contacts with all the participants,” Martínez explains →

2006 world champions Fabio Cannavaro and Alessandro Del Piero took the first coach education course organised by the Italian Football Federation for former players in 2012.



and we have parallel arrangements in place for anyone who is injured or not in the squad." Apart from online work, participants are given alternative dates to attend sessions at the national training centre in Tubize.

Martínez admits to being surprised by the response from the players. "I started asking players in 2018 if they would be interested in this sort of course. I didn't try to persuade them or pressurise them – just asked if they would like to participate. I thought that maybe ten or so might be interested, so it was a surprise to get 23. And we had feedback from a lot of ex-internationals who wished they had been given an opportunity like this."

"I think one of the key elements in coach education," Kris Van Der Haegen maintains, "is to deliver the course content in an optimal learning environment and then transfer it into a real work environment at a club. The better we align the learning and work environments, the more effective our courses will be. That's how to help them develop the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes they will need to take into the job." He and Martínez feel that working with the players while they are still active seems to help these elements to interlock. "It's a well-designed and well-organised concept," Martínez remarks. "It's a great group. Players like Romelu Lukaku, Jan Vertonghen, Kevin De Bruyne... they are the same generation but, within that, there's quite a wide range of ages and levels of experience. And then they are playing at the best clubs in England, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Italy... so they come to the course from different footballing cultures and from different dressing rooms. Doing the coaching course means that they don't just talk to each other as players and that adds a dimension to the group."

Focusing on specifics

"It is something of a perfect storm," Martínez maintains, "because, apart from looking at topics like in-possession and out-of-possession concepts or overall playing philosophies, we can pinpoint aspects that are specific to individual players and, as they are at an important point in their playing careers, this input is something they can take back to their clubs. The other very important thing is that the participants begin to think as coaches. As a player you tend to focus on details in your own game, but when

Kevin De Bruyne is one of Belgium's current national team players following a UEFA B coaching diploma course while on international duty.



Belgian FA

you begin to look through the eyes of a coach you are encouraged to broaden your horizons and think more about the other components in the game. Apart from the technical and tactical aspects that they study, they become familiar with organisational issues and a structured approach through tactical periodisation and so on. More importantly, thinking as a coach enhances their authority, leadership qualities and decision-making. All this, as I said, goes with them back to their clubs. So I'm sure this is better than waiting till retirement age to start your coaching qualification process."

A further benefit is that course content can be designed to interlock with day-to-day aspects of international duty. "This is what we do with the women's group," Van Der Haegen explains. "Our double-header in February started with a game against the Netherlands on a Thursday. So, after dinner on the Sunday, we gave the course participants some clips of the Dutch team and asked them to devise a game plan along with three training sessions aimed at preparing it. At individual meetings on the next morning, they presented what they had done. In the afternoon we – the coaching staff –

“The players want to study the same way as they play – at high speed and with great intensity. Their tactical level is amazing and sometimes you realise that you’ve covered a topic in 45 minutes which, with another group, could easily have taken two hours.”

Kris Van Der Haegen
Belgium’s coach education director



presented our tactical plan for the game. So they felt involved in the preparation work. And it got them thinking, looking for solutions. This is important, as there is less exposure of women’s football on TV and it’s easy for them to be experienced and enthusiastic players, but they are much less experienced as observers. The best thing, though, is that you can see on the pitch that the coaching course is developing their understanding of the game and giving added value to their attacking and defensive play.

“With the men, the approach is different,” he adds. “We give them clips



Zinédine Zidane

from the major leagues and avoid using the teams they play for. By the way, the lockdown had a silver lining, as the players had more time on their hands while there was no club activity. We set up a studio at Tubize and organised Zoom meetings conducted by Roberto and myself. Then we put them to work in pairs or trios. This is good because the pairings can be productive. Imagine, for example, that you have Simon Mignolet and Dries Mertens working together. The goalkeeper will focus on being organised and structured; the striker will lean towards creativity and ways of upsetting defences. He will like surprises while the keeper doesn’t like them at all! It’s a good mix.”

Time will tell whether the Belgian project will inspire other national associations to follow suit. Is it enough to allow top players to embark on coaching qualifications once they retire? Or is it also viable to encourage them into coaching while they are literally and figuratively on the ball? Evidently a few more rungs need to be climbed on the ladder towards a top-level coaching career. Anyone who wishes to go on towards a UEFA Pro diploma course in the future will be required to complete at least one season as head coach at elite youth or



senior amateur level, or as assistant coach in the professional game, so that all the knowledge and experience acquired in their courses can be tested and improved in a real coaching environment before moving up to the top rungs.

Martínez believes that encouraging active players to take an interest in coaching will yield dividends for Belgian football. “It’s great that the players begin to think like coaches and I’m convinced that in six years, maybe, or certainly within the next decade, we will see quite a few of them in action as coaches – which can only be good for the future of Belgian football.”

Kevin De Bruyne agrees with his boss about the benefits. “The project has provided me with a great opportunity to look beyond my playing days, while also benefitting the way I look at that game right now as an active footballer,” says Manchester City’s attacking midfielder. “I think it’s important for every player to consider what comes next, no matter what stage of their career they are at, and the course has been an enjoyable way of doing that. To be able to fit it in around trips with the national team is a huge benefit and is hopefully making us as a squad think more about the game. And that can only serve to help us out on the grass.” 🌱



MIND GAMES

How important are mental aspects in coach education?

If an audience were asked to list aspects of coaching, most would immediately focus on technical, tactical and physical elements of the game. But how important are mental aspects in football and in coaching?

The question emerged from a recent experience-sharing event organised by UEFA. The football Union of Russia had requested UEFA support for a further education programme aimed at elite coaches from premier league clubs, academies and national teams. The pandemic converted the programme into a series of online events, among them a three-day session organised by UEFA's technical development department and presented by the French Football Federation (FFF). National technical director Hubert Fournier kicked off

the proceedings. Lionel Rouxel, general manager of France's national teams in the U16–U20 bracket, led a session on match play and performance. And it was Franck Thivilier's presentation on the optimisation of mental performance that raised the

question. UEFA takes a holistic approach to the development of players and coaches, on the basis that both are human beings. So, to what extent should mental aspects feature in the UEFA diploma courses organised by member associations? →



In his UEFA Pro courses at the French Football Federation, Franck Thivilier highlights the importance of stress management and mental performance for coaches and players.



Coaches are under permanent media surveillance, as Didier Deschamps was at the press conference after the EURO 2016 final.

Permanent surveillance

Thivillier, coach education specialist and member of UEFA’s Jira Panel [the panel brings together recognised experts in the art of coaching and educating coaches], has special responsibility at the FFF for psychological aspects of the game in addition to his tasks as head of coach education. “The coach is the most observed person at a club,” he says, “and he is under permanent surveillance – by players, directors, supporters, media, local politicians... If the coach shows the slightest sign of weakness or succumbs to pressure, he becomes fragile and vulnerable. In coach education, one needs to emphasise that the external pressures are extremely strong and that there is a need to generate, within yourself, a counter pressure that the coach needs to discover and develop. It is also important to point out that the coach’s emotions are highly contagious. One who is stressed communicates that stress to the players and can easily contaminate the whole group. So stress management is a crucial issue.”

“It is one thing to become competent in the technical and tactical aspects of the job,” he adds. “But the aspect of mental performance is like a new continent waiting to be explored in greater depth. Leading and guiding a group of men or

women requires a great deal of mental preparation, mental energy and, above all, self-knowledge.”

As a result, the FFF has injected ‘mental performance’ topics into all coach education courses: 10 hours at

the UEFA B and C levels, 21 hours for UEFA A students, and 32 hours for coaches bidding for UEFA Pro diplomas. In each case, work is split between lecture room and pitch, with the Pro students also benefiting from individual support.

The FFF is not alone in highlighting the relevance of mental performance and well-being. Nigel Best, Northern Ireland’s coach education manager, provides one example. “It had become apparent to me through my contacts with elite professional players and coaches on our UEFA courses that there was a need to consider mental needs. And some specific incidents had raised my awareness of the need for mental health and stress management issues to be included on our curriculum,” he explains.

The role of psychology

The next step was triggered by a fortuitous encounter with a psychiatrist called Jagdish Basra – though in coach education circles her name is invariably shortened to ‘Dr Jag’. “We agreed,” Best recalls, “that she would give a one-hour presentation to



Coaches cannot let their emotions get the better of them.

a group of former pros on the B licence course. We knew that top pros are often sceptical about engaging with psychiatrists and that men, in particular, are reluctant to open up on emotional problems. But it turned out to be a cathartic experience for them and, at the end, 17 of the 20 remained behind to consult with Dr Jag individually. This fully justified the risk we had taken by including the topic in our timetable. These days we have a mental health curriculum from UEFA B through to the Pro level, with Dr Jag helping us to design content specific to what we believe is appropriate at each stage of the coaches' journey through their UEFA pathway. We have discussed expansion beyond the mental health aspect and have now added to the curriculum the mental/psychological aspect of the game covering areas like mindset, managing emotions, leadership and so on."

Niall O'Regan, his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, has led the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) along a similarly comprehensive pathway with Dr Jag among the names on the team sheet, along with a number of specialised guest speakers and Jennifer Lace, a sport psychology practitioner in coach education. Space does not permit an in-depth perusal of the FAI's newly launched UEFA licence psychology

////////////////////////////////////
 "In coach education, one needs to emphasise that the external pressures are extremely strong and that there is a need to generate, within yourself, a counter pressure that the coach needs to discover and develop."

Franck Thivilier, coach education specialist and member of UEFA's Jira Panel

curriculum but there is room for a bit of sampling – their blueprint for the mental performance modules in UEFA Elite Youth A courses for example.

The course content features topics such as Understanding Teenage Brains (the scientific data and their relevance to football); how principles of mindfulness and relaxation techniques can be applied to football; methods of enhancing motivation and commitment; effective leadership; and conflict resolution. And one of the interesting exercises is based on identifying the leadership skills in great coaches and what made them effective. The curriculum for UEFA B courses similarly includes a group discussion session based on looking at talented players and identifying the behavioural patterns and

the personality traits which influenced their footballing performances.

Mental health at every level

All three associations, however, are keen to stress that the importance of mental performance is not exclusive to elite levels – and they have done this by including modules on each rung of the UEFA coach education ladder. At UEFA C level, aimed principally at coaches in grassroots football, the FFF course focuses on identifying and implementing mechanisms for controlling emotions and for listening to and understanding oneself and others, using a reference book about football providing a pathway to self-knowledge as a platform for discussion. The FAI C course includes a →



Coaches at all levels of the game need to be able to comfort and encourage their players.



"We have discussed expansion beyond the mental health aspect and have now added the mental/psychological aspect of the game; areas like mindset, managing emotions, leadership."

Nigel Best, Northern Ireland's coach education manager



module where students are encouraged to understand how psychology can best be applied to football, along with mechanisms for creating a positive team culture.

“In the grassroots game,” Niall O’Regan comments, “we have a collaboration with Jigsaw, which is the national centre for youth mental health here in Ireland. They focus on intervening early to support the mental health of those aged 12 to 25 and they recognise that coaches are in an ideal position to promote and support young people’s mental health. We conducted a workshop which is now being delivered regionally through the FAI’s online learning management system as a self-paced e-learning course where coaches can participate whenever it is convenient for them.”

Up at UEFA Pro level, students need to be equipped to step into a world where behaviour and body language on the touchline can be subjected to constant scrutiny from TV cameras. Unsurprisingly, this is where the French and Irish modules converge in promoting self-reflection, analysis of emotional intelligence and the use of the various personality tests currently available. The FFF’s UEFA Pro course, having worked hard on concentration and motivation issues at A level, focuses on issues such as identifying and improving vitality in order to increase the inner energy levels of an individual or a group – leading into factors such as enhancing the quality of sleep; using regeneration activities such as yoga, meditation, breathing techniques, balneology and even, as one leading English club does, aromatherapy; or work on relationships. The eight four-hour modules also address self-awareness issues, such as understanding the mechanisms that govern the coach’s own identity with a view to building a group identity – and then comparing group performances with the management methods underlying them.

As Nigel Best remarks: “At the elite end of football, preparation for success goes beyond physical, technical and tactical preparation. Preparation of the mind is also critical, both for individuals and the team. It is critical for players and coaches

The confidence that coaches can inspire in their players is vitally important, as Pep Guardiola showed with Phil Foden at Manchester City.

Nowadays, social media is part and parcel of a footballer's life and it is up to coaches to harness its influence.

in order to make correct decisions, and it is the ability to make the correct decision regularly, even under pressure, that distinguishes those who regularly achieve success."

Emotional intelligence

For Franck Thivilier, the greatest advantage derived from mental performance education is to help the coach to empathise with players and, above all, to create an optimal working environment. "The first thing is to develop and control the environment," he says, "because it can have an enormous impact on attitude and performance – especially in this age when players so often move from one country to another and encounter a completely different environment. A lot of research demonstrates that environment exercises an influence on behaviour. To give you a simple example, if you go for a walk in the forest, your heart rate is lower than if you were doing the same walk in the streets of Paris. So the coach can gain benefits from analysing the work context and recognising the elements in the environment that favour or inhibit mental activation."

His compatriot Gérard Houllier always maintained that "leadership is the transfer of emotions" – and Thivilier endorses that standpoint. "What do you think is the most difficult psychological element for a player or coach to manage?" he asked his online audience in Russia. The one-word answer was 'emotions'. On the same wavelength, the FAI's UEFA A course content focuses on the management of emotions, while their Pro level syllabus highlights the importance of assessing one's own emotional intelligence. Thivilier, meanwhile, extends the Houllier pathway by examining methodologies and the levers that can be used on the training ground to generate emotions. "Emotional states can have an impact on your behaviour and your level of competence," he says. "So, for the coach, it's important to be able to create emotional states that can motivate."

"When you are looking at methodology," he adds, "the basic question is 'how do I learn?'. I learn by



experiencing emotions and I understand by analysing the tasks I am asked to perform. On the training ground, the coach basically tells a story. You could say that the story is a season and that every chapter in that story is a match. The coach needs to bear that in mind every day and make sure that the story is coherent, that the players understand, and that they find it coherent and, if possible, inspiring. A good story will stimulate the imagination, create positive attitudes within the group's dynamics, and convert problems and setbacks into learning opportunities."

Interestingly, Thivilier encourages coaches, when watching videos, not only to take note of tactical details but also to relive their own emotions with a view to understanding the mechanisms that govern one's own identity and then building a group with a strong identity of its own. Part of emotional intelligence is to intelligently use the emotional information transmitted by other individuals within the group.

The personal touch

The enormous – and healthy – diversity of individual and collective identities gives coaches latitude within the framework of mental performance. Niall O'Regan says: "Coaches are now really beginning to understand how significant a role psychology plays in their environment and they are working through the

comprehension and understanding stage of the material presented on our courses. Many of the coaches wanted and requested further information or an implementation list of what to do and how to do it. But we explain to them that they, as coaches, need to take the information, reflect upon it and look at ways in which they can implement it in their own environments. There is not a basic guide or a one-size fit. The coaches have been extremely engaged and find the thought-provoking messages delivered during the presentations and the in-depth discussions significant in terms of peer learning."

"Mental performance," Thivilier emphasises, "is not just about what happens on the training ground. It permeates all the work that the coach does. It's about creating and maintaining a healthy, energised environment; generating positive interaction between all the cells within the organism; limiting the impact of external influences on the work to be done; and making sure there are facilities for well-defined tasks – not just pitches, gyms, fitness rooms or dressing rooms, but also spaces for leisure, meditation or other relaxing and de-stressing activities." In coach education, how important is it to point out that the psychological well-being and mental performance of coaches can positively influence the performance of their players? 🌱

ARMAND DUKA

'FOOTBALL IS MAGIC'

Armand Duka has high hopes for football in Albania. President of the Albanian Football Association (FSHF) since 2002, and a successful and versatile businessman, the 58-year-old is masterminding the drive to develop the country's football infrastructures, and has been a keen and insightful member of the UEFA Executive Committee since his election in 2019.

Duka tells UEFA Direct about the football scene in his native country, explains how UEFA's assistance has been crucial in Albania's footballing progress – and looks forward to 'a historic moment' when the Albanian capital, Tirana, stages the first-ever UEFA Europa Conference League final in 2022.

We're living through difficult and unprecedented times. How has Albania, and the country's football, experienced these times?

Albania has been going through a very difficult situation in terms of the pandemic. In March and April last year, we were in complete lockdown, and football suffered the same fate. The Albanian Football Association allocated two monthly salaries to each individual earning their living through football... players, coaches, referees, managers, medical staff and club administrative staff. In May, we returned to the pitch with health protocol rules in place, and we managed to successfully complete all football

activities in the 2019/20 season. The 2020/21 season got under way, and we haven't cancelled any planned activities. Professionals, amateurs, youth players – all of these categories are playing and training in accordance with the COVID-related rules and protocols that are in force. Despite obvious financial constraints brought about by the situation, we've managed to survive with our activities because of the great support that UEFA and FIFA have given us. It's my fondest hope that we can return to normal as soon as possible.

Has Albanian football – the association, clubs, players – been able to make social and solidarity contributions?

Unfortunately, only three months before the spread of COVID-19 in the country, Albania was severely affected by a devastating earthquake, which took the lives of 54 people and caused enormous damage to thousands of homes and businesses. Football showed great

solidarity by donating food supplies during the first days of the emergency. The game took great care of the children of families whom had been affected; professional footballers, including national team players, went out there to play with the children and entertain them.

The FSHF set up a solidarity fund, which brought in contributions from many of our fellow European national associations. I'd like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all of them on behalf of the Albanian people and the association's administration, as well as national team footballers and staff. Four houses destroyed by the earthquake were built anew as a result of these generous funds.

Moreover, we were quite active during the lockdown period last March and April. We managed to organise online games, competitions and activities to help and support children who were confined to home. We enabled the national teams' technical staff to conduct online home training for all ages. As a special token of our thanks to all the health staff, we donated national team jerseys and footballs, and we proclaimed the medical teams of the COVID-19 hospitals as 'Our National Team' in a widely publicised ceremony that we held in our National Arena.

We obviously know you as a football administrator, but what's your profession?

I'm an economist, a graduate of the University of Tirana. Following my studies, I started a private business, an initiative that turned out to be successful, and today I'm part of the national business community. I manage a diversified portfolio of businesses. →



At their first-ever EURO in 2016, Albania recorded their first major tournament win with victory over Romania in the group stage.





Opened in 2019, the National Stadium in Tirana (22,000 seats) is the pride of Albanian football and has been selected by UEFA as the venue for the first-ever UEFA Europa Conference League final in 2022.

Were you a football fan from an early age?

I'm a fan of sports in general, and football in particular. However, until the age of 19, I played volleyball rather than football. I followed the example of my older brother, who used to be a very good volleyball player, rather than the passion of my father, who used to be a footballer when he was young. But, of course, I've always watched the game, either as a fan in the stadium or on TV.

What's your first big memory of football as a youngster?

A European Champion Clubs' Cup match in 1978 definitely made a great impression – Vllaznia's 2-0 win against Austria Vienna. It was the first time that I saw an Albanian team play against a European team, and it was a double pleasure, because my

favourite team won and I was able to watch the game at the stadium.

Did you play yourself? Did you have any ambitions to make a career as a player?

No, as I said before, I've never played football at a high level. But when we were small, we played street football. We spent four or five hours a day playing football and talking about Brazilian superstars such as Pelé and Garrincha. Like most youngsters, we dreamed of becoming famous footballers.

Did you have a favourite player – an idol – and team?

My favourite footballer was the great Diego Armando Maradona, possibly because we almost shared the same name. I also like footballers who achieve



Armand Duka is a huge fan of Diego Maradona, in action here against Italy during the 1986 World Cup.



greatness through hard work and dedication. My favourite team is Vllaznia in Albania, and Milan in Europe.

How did you get into the administrative side of the game? What's your career path been in this respect?

My journey in the football world, in addition to being a fan, began in the late 1990s, when I sponsored my home team Erzeni and Teuta Durrës, the city where I live and established some of my businesses. To be completely honest, I had no ambitions, and I didn't aspire to become a club leader, and even less so an association leader. I was very dedicated and committed to my businesses, which me and my brother managed.

Some of my friends, professional club leaders, advised me to run for the position

“It seems incredible when I walk into our national stadium, and I wonder if it was really us that did all this. Indeed, it isn't a dream, but a reality. It's the fruit of policies and strategies implemented by our association, the outcome of projects supported by UEFA and FIFA, and serves as a tribute to the commitment and professionalism of our administration.”

of association president. Although I had initial reservations, I agreed to run and won the election.

After I took the helm of the association, my life and commitments changed. I devoted myself fully to the association. We established real football headquarters, achieved institutional consolidation and organisational independence, and committed to football development.

Albanian football has enjoyed important successes in recent times, including major changes in stadium infrastructure, the construction of new training centres and the association's new headquarters, and the Albanian national team's excellent qualification for EURO 2016. What have been the reasons for this progress?

It's true that we've changed a lot of things. It seemed like a dream when I found myself with the national team at EURO 2016. At the same time, it seems incredible when I walk into our national stadium, and I wonder if it was really us that did all this. Indeed, it isn't a dream, but a reality. It's the fruit of policies and strategies implemented by our association, the outcome of projects supported by UEFA and FIFA, and serves as a tribute to the commitment and professionalism of our administration. During these years, we've built 49 football pitches and 81 mini-football pitches; we've reconstructed 59 stadiums and financed the lighting systems in eight stadiums. In addition, we've completed the construction of three new stadiums, and we're on the way to finishing a fourth. We've licensed 1,719 male coaches and 68 female coaches, we've built a clear strategy for national teams and for youth football, and we're

implementing a very ambitious project for women's football, which aims at increasing girls' participation. Our next project is the construction of 100 natural-grass training fields throughout the country – a vital project given the high number of children interested in playing the Albanians' most loved sport. Seeing the love that girls and boys have for football is a motivation and encouragement to do more and better every hour, every day and every month.

Albania will stage the first-ever final of the UEFA Europa Conference League in 2022. You must be very proud of this honour.

Yes, most definitely. This was great news not only for the association and for our football, but also for Albania in general. The country will benefit greatly from hosting an event of this scale. We're preparing diligently, and the first final of this new competition in Tirana will be a historic moment. We'll organise a final of the highest quality. The task not only involves staging a football match – the work will also encompass the stadium, infrastructure, transportation, hotels, and so on. I firmly believe that we'll succeed, and that we'll once again demonstrate Albania's contribution to European football. Albania and the Albanians are renowned for their hospitality, and they will have the opportunity to show it.

What's the best match you've ever seen?

The most dramatic match was the 2005 UEFA Champions League final between Milan and Liverpool, when Liverpool came back from three goals down to win the trophy in a penalty shoot-out. As for the national team, my favourite memory is →



The president of the Albanian Football Association at a children's football camp.

Albania's phenomenal 2-1 win over Greece in a World Cup qualifier, shortly after the Greek team had won the EURO 2004 title.

And what about the best goal you've ever seen?

I've seen many great goals, but the one I enjoyed most was a goal scored by our defender Mërgim Mavraj against Armenia [in the EURO 2016 qualifying competition]. It was a crucial goal on our journey to the EURO 2016 finals.

Watching your national team, do you still get excited when they score a goal?

Before each match I think that if we score I won't get too enthusiastic, but I've

never been able to keep that promise. I still celebrate like mad, just like an ordinary fan in the stands. Football is magic... but in my position, of course, it's a magic that also comes with responsibility.

Is there any one person that has inspired you in your life?

I've tried to follow good examples in different areas of life. This applies to both business and football administration. As far as my family is concerned, the people that have influenced me the most are my parents. They brought up their children to adhere to values such as commitment, harmony and being there for the family. I'm proud of that.



How do you relax and switch off away from football? Do you have any special hobbies?

My daily life is busy and intense with business and football activities. I'm a perfectionist, and I have very little time left to relax. During the summer, since I live near the coast, I relax at the seaside. However, the thing I like most is fishing, even though I can't do it as often as I would like.

Are you proud of being able to contribute to UEFA's development, in particular at the highest level as an Executive Committee member? How do you view UEFA's continual progress as the umbrella organisation of European football?

I'm very proud. I highly appreciate the trust of my colleagues and I try to give my best, wishing to share the experience and issues of medium and small countries within the Executive Committee. UEFA is an organisation with perfect democracy which, at the highest levels, gives small countries like Albania the opportunity to be represented. I'm a first-hand witness to the great progress of the organisation, its clear vision and ideas.

Its role is decisive for football development in Europe and within the member associations. The support given is vital for small member countries who would not have come far without UEFA's help.

How have UEFA's HatTrick and Grow programmes helped Albania?

It's thanks to the extraordinary assistance given by the HatTrick programme that major infrastructural changes have taken place in Albanian football in the last two decades. This programme has enabled us to build the first training centre for the national team; we've improved the condition of over 12 stadiums throughout Albania; we've managed to install lighting systems in many stadiums. As I said earlier, we have three new stadiums, and are finishing a fourth. The training grounds we've built all over Albania have had a great impact.

Currently, we have more talented footballers in our football categories and, consequently, in the national teams – all a result of major investment. The Grow project helped us immensely in one of our strategy pillars for the growth of Albanian football – children's football and girls' football are our priorities for this four-year period. This project covered 286 high schools, and more than 20,000 children had their first contact with football from Grow. Today, we're following up their progress. We're seeing how many of the children who started their football journey in schools where the project was implemented are now part of football academies.

I'm extremely grateful for the work and the direct impact that these two major UEFA projects have had in Albania.

How important do you feel that respect and fair play are in football?

Respect for us means starting from the way that UEFA member associations respect each other – especially the respect shown by more developed football countries towards those which are still developing, and the way that UEFA's leadership respects every member's opinions and proposals.

This respect is one of the factors that makes UEFA successful, helping it to move forward every day and inspire people to make their contribution.

I'm convinced that everyone in our game recognises the importance of respect and fair play. And, certainly, we should never think that we've done enough, and we shouldn't stop working towards embedding these values in everyone's minds.

If you had one wish for football in general in the future, what would it be?

My biggest wish is for football to remain as authentic as possible, and to not undergo major changes.

And for football in Albania?

Our game is the most loved and followed sport in Albania. Given the people's love for the game, I want to fulfil their dreams. In particular, I want to see as many girls and boys having fun playing. This vision is my ultimate passion and personal objective. 🌍



"I still celebrate like mad, just like an ordinary fan in the stands. Football is magic... but in my position, of course, it is a magic that also comes with responsibility."

Albania – in action here against Lithuania – finished top of their UEFA Nations League group and won promotion to League B.

EUROPEAN FOOTBALL SHOWS SOLIDARITY IN RESISTING COVID SHOCK

UEFA has released the 12th edition of The European Club Footballing Landscape report, its annual club licensing benchmarking report on European club football.

While the report again provides the most wide-ranging and precise deep delve into the European football finance landscape, this year's edition provides the first authoritative and in-depth examination of how the pandemic has affected European football.

The report shows that clubs across all tiers of European football are forecast to miss out on €9 billion of revenue in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years.

In the report foreword, UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin says: "In last year's report, I said that European football was strong, united, resilient and ready for new challenges. But no one could have predicted that we would have to face the biggest challenge to football, sport and society in modern times. However, thanks to almost a decade of financial fair play regulations, before the outbreak European football could hardly have been in better financial shape."

As this report shows, top-division club revenues had surged: with annual growth of 8.2%, the 711 top-division clubs added €1.9 million to their revenues in 2019, while operating profits were the second

highest ever recorded, and club cash reserves and balance sheets were the strongest on record.

The report shows in granular detail just how destructive the pandemic has been to club finances. But it also shows how European football worked together to avert a greater crisis. UEFA, together with domestic cup and leagues, completely restructured the competition calendar in 2020. With the EURO postponed and UEFA club competitions delayed, 38 top-tier European leagues were able to conclude their 2020 season, with all leagues able to start the current season. This saved clubs an estimated €2 billion in additional domestic TV contract penalties and rebates.



The UEFA club licensing benchmarking report examines, among other topics, the financial impact of the pandemic on European football (Manchester City v Paris Saint-Germain in the 2020/21 UEFA Champions League semi-finals).

By 6 May, the successful return to play protocol had enabled UEFA to organise 1,432 matches with 163,844 COVID tests since the pandemic struck. More than 99% of matches have been delivered as planned.

Deep stakeholder cooperation enabled the global transfer window to be extended and financial fair play rules to be adapted. So far, this has prevented any contagion in the settlement of transfer debts.

Nonetheless, the report shows that the current projection of lost revenues across the 2019–21 period is €7.2bn for top-tier and €1.5bn for lower-tier professional football. Every level and every corner of professional football has been hit hard. Clubs with heavy reliance on supporter attendance are particularly impacted by the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic on the transfer market is also explored in detail in the report. It shows that European clubs' transfer spending in the summer of 2020 was down by an estimated 39% on the record summer 2019 window, and down by 30% on the average for the previous three summers.

Elsewhere, the report documents the current season and looks to the future. Despite the pandemic leading to 210 million fewer matchday supporters, overall interest in European club football is higher than ever. Record television viewing figures,

record numbers of new club investors and investment, and a rebound in club web traffic are all referenced in the report.

On a lighter note, the report analyses tens of thousands of matches to document a significant decrease in home wins, from 45% pre-COVID to 42% post-COVID and identifies other trends such as notable decreases in away team yellow and red cards.

The UEFA president says: "The whole football ecosystem, professional, amateur and youth, has been heavily disrupted by the pandemic. This requires deep cooperation and a coordinated response across the football pyramid. Solidarity, not self-interest, must prevail and will win the day. This report clearly shows that we are now operating in a new financial reality, and it is becoming clear that our current financial fair play regulations will need to be adapted and updated. Financial sustainability will remain our goal, and UEFA and European football will work as a team to equip our sport with new rules for a new future." ⚽



HELPING ASSOCIATIONS PLAN FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

2020 was a year of challenges and upheaval for people around the globe. Facing up to a 'once-in-a-century' pandemic has forced many organisations to replan, reorganise and reprioritise so that they can survive the new reality caused by COVID-19.



FFU

The world of football has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. National associations have had to cope with problems as varied as stadium closures and reduced revenues, as well as governments halting participation at grassroots level and the subsequent impact on leagues and clubs.

In the face of such challenges, football as a whole appears to have shown a strong level of resilience and flexibility. It has also become clear that the associations that are best equipped to deal with the uncertainty caused by the pandemic are those that have a clear vision and purpose to refer to as they refocus for the future.

Football Federations of the Future

One way that national associations can assess their current performance levels and set targets for the future is through UEFA's Football Federations of the Future model.

Football Federations of the Future was launched as part of the UEFA Grow programme in October 2019 with the specific aim of enabling national

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

It is a strategic framework developed in collaboration with all 55 UEFA member associations, with expert analysis and best practice advice provided by external consultants and industry representatives from across the business, using both corporate and sporting know-how.

By going through the Football Federations of the Future process, national associations can benchmark their current performance levels across 16 different pillars that are key to running a football association, and then work alongside UEFA and the external consultants to plan how to develop and reach their potential in those pillars by setting tangible and realistic targets for growth for each.

The pillars themselves encompass the core areas a national association needs to consider to maximise its potential and are as varied as strategic planning and governance, participation and public affairs. By setting targets for each of the pillars, associations can maximise business

potential and productivity to boost performance across the association as a whole as it delivers against its overall vision.

Since its launch, Football Federations of the Future has been used by 16 national associations, with North Macedonia, Northern Ireland, Norway, Russia and Wales the latest to complete the exercise. Four more – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo and Sweden – are currently going through the process. It is a flexible model that can be completed swiftly if an association needs rapid analysis of its organisation and goals, or it can be stretched over a few months should an association wish to proceed at a slower pace.

The output of the process can be used in many ways. It can be a springboard for national associations to develop and launch new strategies, or provide a holistic checkpoint to evaluate how current strategies are performing and where priorities should be set. Whatever the timescale or rationale, throughout the process UEFA works closely with each

association and is on hand at every stage to provide support, guidance and expertise. Perhaps most importantly, once the process is complete, the UEFA Grow team remains close to the association to support ongoing development, providing full support in delivering any agreed new targets or objectives.

Next on the agenda

It is not only national associations that are preparing to face the challenges of the future; the Football Federations of the Future model is also evolving. Since its inception, two new pillars, on human resources and financial management, have been developed and added to the process, based on feedback on the ever changing challenges that associations come up against. In adding these pillars, UEFA has brought in experts from various industries and backgrounds to detail best practice

“The Football Federations of the Future initiative is a crucial process in developing European football. The entire management team at the Football Union of Russia (FUR) has been working closely with UEFA to map out future strategy in Russian football, and long-term collaboration between the FUR and UEFA has been agreed at strategic and operational levels.”

Alexander Dyukov, President of the Football Union of Russia

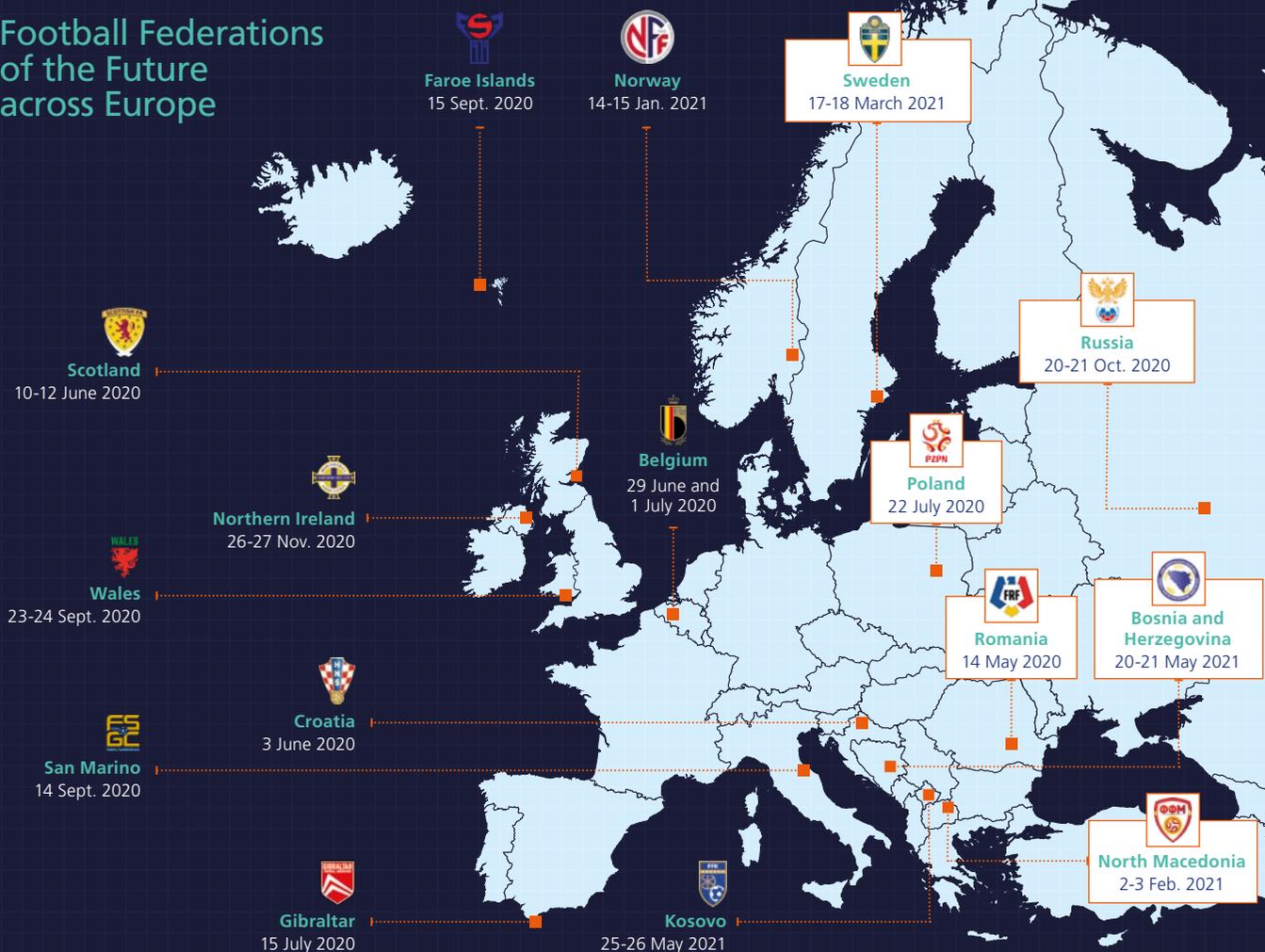
advice for associations in those areas and apply them to the world of football.

In the coming months, additional content will be developed to ensure that each Football Federations of the Future pillar has a suitable women’s football focus, while the support materials for the strategic framework are constantly under review to ensure they remain best in

class in an ever evolving football world.

Will 2021 be the year the world returns to some sense of normality after COVID-19? It is still too early to say, but the need for national associations to have robust long-term strategies as well as the ability to be agile and flexible when facing the challenges of the future is greater than ever before. 🌐

Football Federations of the Future across Europe



STUDY SHINES NEW LIGHT ON WOMEN'S GAME

With the support of a UEFA research grant, a team from the German Sport University Cologne has showed that female footballers differ little from their male counterparts when it comes to tactical and cognitive aspects of the game.

From Professor Daniel Memmert comes a simple explanation of the motivation for his study comparing the tactical performance of female and male footballers. "There are so many statements about women's football and we wanted to check if they were true," says the professor, who is executive head of the Institute of Exercise Training and Sport Informatics at the German Sport University Cologne.

As he makes clear, many statements about the women's game are unflattering, as well as untrue, and the study he has led, with the help of a UEFA research grant, shines a positive light. This study, titled 'A comparison of football-specific tactical

Kenny Beele



Professor Daniel Memmert, executive head of the Institute of Exercise Training and Sport Informatics at the German Sport University Cologne.

performance of women and men in Europe', involved an approach free of any information about gender as it employed event and position data as well as computer

software to assess 12 matches – six in the women's game, six in the men's – from the perspective of tactics and positioning.

A gender-free approach

The findings drawn from this 'blind data', as Professor Memmert terms it, provide food for thought. "With our event and position data, nobody can see if it's a women's or men's match. It seems with these KPIs [key performance indicators] that women's matches have similar processes as men's. Of course, men are stronger than women – that's obvious – and we didn't have physical variants like endurance and speed, but from the tactical and cognitive points



of view, the football seems very similar. This is surprising and that's good for women's football."

Supported by the German Football Association (DFB), the study was chosen by the UEFA Research Grant Programme Jury as one of its six research projects for 2020. Professor Memmert undertook it with three university colleagues – Maximilian Klemp, Marc Garnica Caparrós and Jonas Imkamp – and they took their sample of matches from the national team arena. On the women's side, all six came from Women's EURO 2017: group-stage fixtures between Portugal and England, Germany and Sweden, England and Scotland, Russia and Germany, and the Austria v Spain quarter-final and Netherlands v Denmark final.

The men's matches comprised Germany's UEFA EURO 2016 quarter-final and semi-final matches against Italy and France, as well as qualifiers against Georgia and the Republic of Ireland, and friendlies against England and Slovakia. On this selection, Professor Memmert says: "If the women were of a certain world ranking, we tried to find men's matches that had a similar ranking so we could say they were equally

strong. This was very important as no one could say you chose women's matches that were of a higher standard than the men's. We matched them."

Dynamic tactical evaluation

The German researchers used a software tool, Soccer, for their analysis. It is a tool used 'in the field', as Professor Memmert puts it, by a number of clubs, ranging from TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in Germany via FC Salzburg in Austria to Philadelphia Union in the United States, and it involves a process of dynamic tactical evaluation – which means, in brief, mapping out patterns and interactions using tactical key performance indicators and position data.

The KPIs in questions were: number of passes; number of successful passes; pass success rate; number of crosses; number of dribbles; number of clearances; number of shots on target. Meanwhile, the position data comprised quality of passes in attack, pressing after losing the ball (both within 10 metres, and beyond that distance), and recognising and using space when attacking in the penalty box and also in the final third.

"We don't like to have video material as

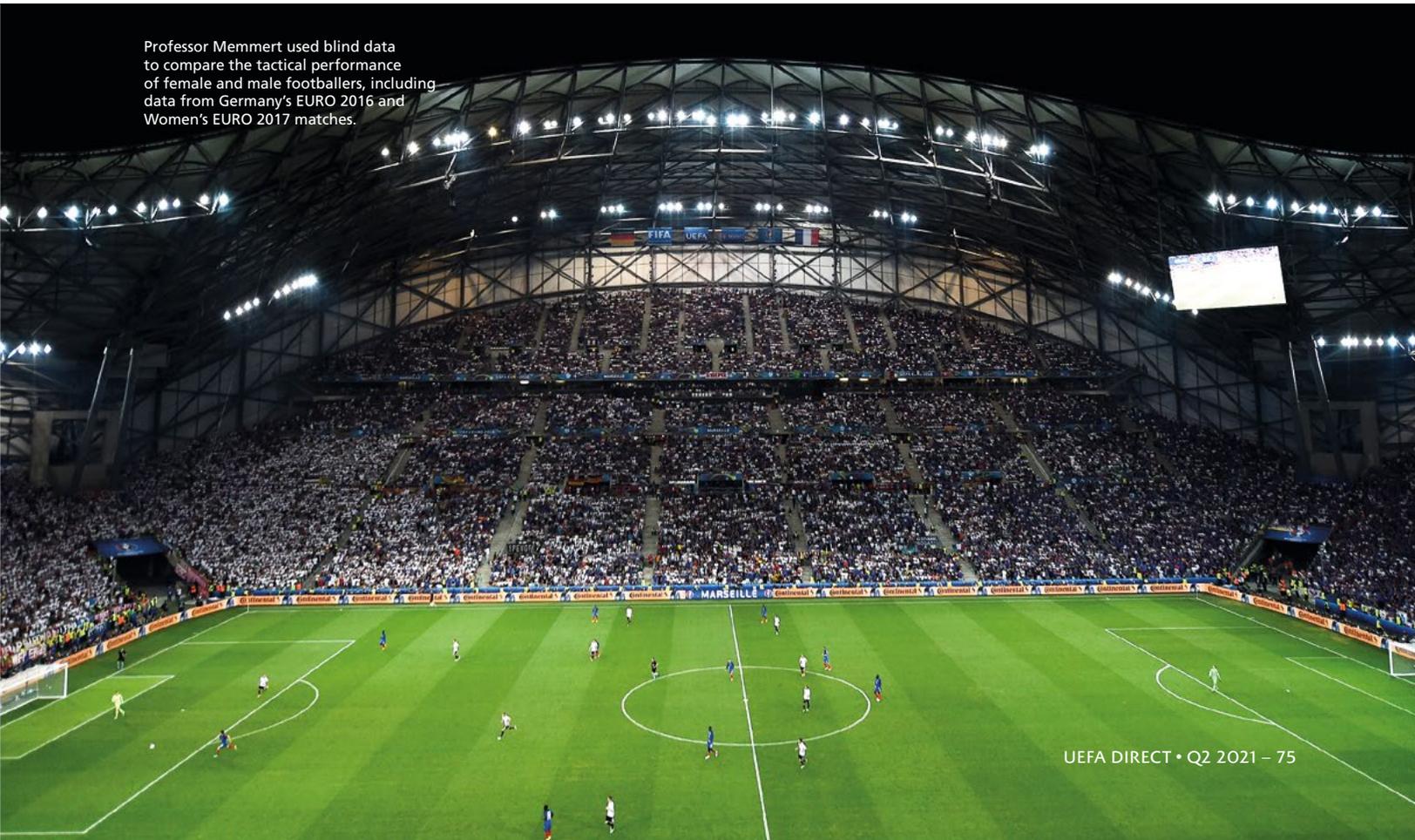
that can lead to bias," he says. "We used event and position data along with 12 KPIs, looking at the performance and behaviour of players on the pitch, and from both you can't know if it's a men's or a women's match. We wanted no prejudices about women's football, and we were the first study in world to do that."

More women's data sets needed

The project, it is worth relating, also brought up one noteworthy difficulty which offered the researchers a sense of the different attitudes to be found towards women's football.

As Professor Memmert explains, despite numerous enquiries, it was not easy to acquire a large sample of event and position data sets for evaluation. "We spent half a year going to companies to get the material. Some didn't want to give us it – some were afraid we'd show women were really bad in comparison with the men, while others said, 'We don't need women's reports'. It was a fight to get this data. We hope, therefore, that in future more data sets of women's football matches will be generated and available to research." 🌱

Professor Memmert used blind data to compare the tactical performance of female and male footballers, including data from Germany's EURO 2016 and Women's EURO 2017 matches.





Croatia and Slovenia legends turn out in force for Petrinja region

THE UEFA PRESIDENT, Aleksander Čeferin, joined an all-star cast of former players as Slovenian legends overcame their Croatian counterparts in a charity match in Petrinja on 13 March.



The UEFA president had offered UEFA's support in organising the match to the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) president, Davor Šuker, having investigated ways to help the Petrinja region following the earthquakes that struck the area, killing seven people in December. European football's governing body has donated €50,000 to the Croatian Red Cross, with the HNS committing 200,000 Croatian kunas and the Slovenian Football Association (NZS) donating €5,000 to local club Mladost, whose stadium hosted the fixture.

2020/21 youth competitions cancelled

THE UEFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

decided on 17 February to cancel the 2020/21 UEFA Youth League owing to the pandemic.

The committee had initially decided last year to amend the format of the 2020/21 competition and to delay its start, but the measures imposed by health authorities around Europe continued to evolve. Travel restrictions affecting participating clubs were creating major difficulties for organising their matches and two clubs had already withdrawn from the competition.

The Executive Committee stressed that there was no possibility to further postpone the start of the competition and that the health and safety of youth players must come first.

The UEFA Club Competitions Committee and the European Club Association were both consulted and supported the decision to cancel this season's UEFA Youth League.

On 23 February, the UEFA Executive Committee decided to cancel the 2021 women's and men's European Under-19 championships owing to the pandemic. The decision had already been taken to cancel this season's women's and men's European Under-17 championships.

The UEFA member associations were consulted and supported this decision, recognising that although it is unfortunate that no youth competitions can take place this season, the health and safety of young players must be the main concern in the current circumstances.

Concussion substitution trial

THE UEFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE approved a concussion substitution trial for the 2019–21 European Under-21 Championship final phase in Hungary and Slovenia.

Each team could use one concussion substitute per match, regardless of the number of substitutes already used, in accordance with Protocol A as outlined by the IFAB.

Concussion substitutions are counted on top of the number of normal substitution opportunities, and it is irrelevant whether, at the time of the concussion substitution, all

other substitutions have already been made by the team or not. However, a concussion substitute cannot be a player who has previously been substituted.

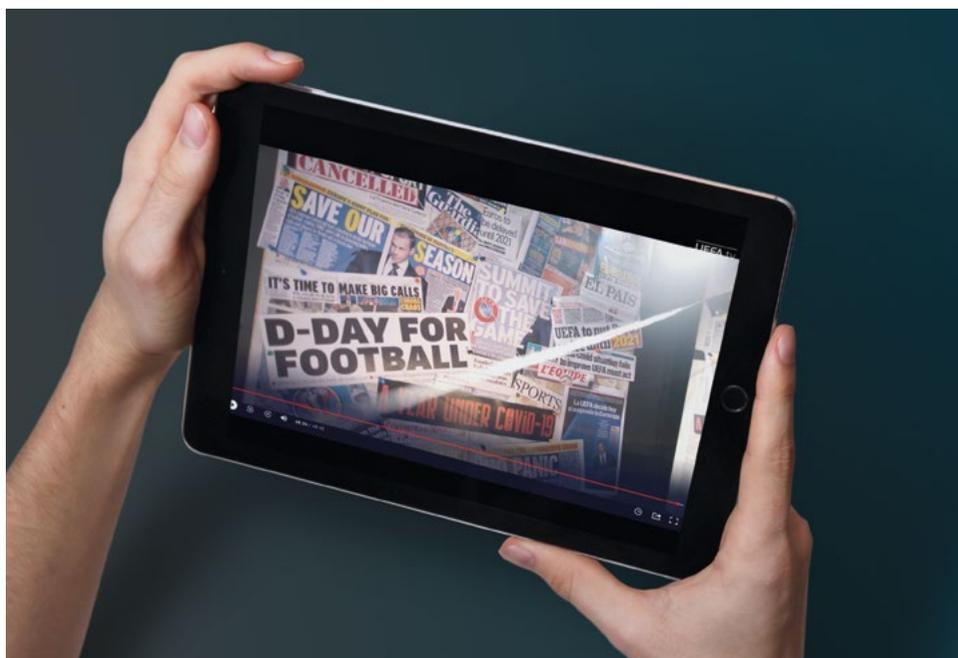
A Year Under COVID-19

EXACTLY ONE YEAR after the decision to postpone EURO 2020 by 12 months, UEFA.tv launched a brand-new documentary offering a unique, behind-the-scenes look at what it has taken to safeguard European football – from its temporary halt to its return to play. In this documentary, the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, and other UEFA officials explain how European club and national team competitions have returned to play so successfully and safely, despite the pandemic.

A Year Under COVID-19 charts life inside UEFA from the perspective of its senior officials, whose leadership was central to the safe conclusion of four club competitions last summer and remains critical to this day. For the first time, this feature-length

documentary gives viewers an insight into the hours of hard work, research and analysis guiding decisions that brought UEFA national team and club matches back to stadiums across the continent and into living rooms all over the world. It explains all, from the difficult but essential decision to suspend plans for EURO 2020 to the crucial negotiations and teamwork that allowed the game to get back up and running so quickly and safely.

The documentary reserves special focus for the development of the UEFA Return To Play Protocol, which established operational and medical guidelines for staging around 1,500 matches and implementing more than 125,000 COVID-19 tests since last August.



New UEFA C diploma for grassroots coaches

GRASSROOTS COACHES across Europe will have a chance to join UEFA's family of more than 200,000 active qualified coaches thanks to the launch of the new UEFA C diploma.

The latest addition to UEFA's highly respected coaching certificates, consisting of a course of a minimum of 60

hours, will provide both an introduction to coaching and a clear development pathway for anyone looking to enhance their skills, from parents and volunteers to teachers and anyone else who already holds a training position.

"This is an important step for UEFA and the many thousands

of coaches in European grassroots football," said UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin.

"It also underlines UEFA's long-term commitment to grassroots football at a time when many clubs and communities are unable to train and play as normal due to lockdown restrictions."

UEFA Foundation for Children signs Ivan Rakitić

THE UEFA Foundation for Children has announced that Sevilla midfielder Ivan Rakitić is to join the institution as its first official ambassador. The former Croatian international will have the opportunity to take part in UEFA foundation-led initiatives, as well as promoting the good work undertaken by the body to help improve the lives of children worldwide.

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, who is also chairman of the board of trustees of the UEFA Foundation for Children, is delighted that Rakitić has committed his support to the organisation. "Ivan Rakitić is not only one of the greatest midfielders of his generation; he is also a person who wants to make a tangible difference away from the pitch in order to improve the lives of others," the UEFA president said. "I have been extremely impressed with Ivan's commitment and desire to help children around the world and we are looking forward to working closely with him in order to achieve these goals. The door is always open for players, both past and present, to follow Ivan's example and join the UEFA foundation in an ambassadorial role."

"To be a part of the UEFA foundation family gives me a lot of pride," Rakitić said. "I'm really happy about it, and it gives me a lot of responsibility to show everyone that together with the UEFA foundation and all the players we can accomplish a lot and, above all, help children all over the world smile with joy. The fact that I'm a father of two girls means that I know and understand how important it is to see that smile on children's faces."





WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TAKES STEP FORWARD IN FINLAND



The Football Association of Finland celebrates 50 years of organised women's football this year and the outlook is rosier than ever thanks to February's launch of its first women's football strategy.



Ari Lahti, president of the Football Association of Finland, and Heidi Pihlaja, head of women's football development, celebrate the renaming of the women's football league as the Kansallinen Liiga – in English, the National League.

The 50th anniversary of organised women's football in Finland arrives this year – a milestone that the country's football association will celebrate with the slogan 'The game has opened to everyone'. This slogan now holds even more substance thanks to the launch of the first women's football strategy for the Finnish game.

The Football Association of Finland drew inspiration from UEFA's Time for Action women's football strategy for the period 2019–24 when, two years ago, it appointed Heidi Pihlaja as its first head of women's football development. Her first action was to develop a new approach for the Finnish women's league, and fundamental to this were certain specific watchwords – equality, a will to succeed and boldness.

Pihlaja explains: "In the summer of 2019, we started the work of developing the women's game in Finland by producing a new strategy for the league." This resulted in the renaming

of the league as the Kansallinen Liiga – in English, the National League. "The choice of a gender-neutral name was representative of a cultural change," adds Pihlaja, noting that "the name of the game is football, no matter who kicks the ball".

To provide a stronger economic platform for the new league, the Finnish FA succeeded in finding a main commercial partner in Subway and a broadcast partner in Sanoma Media Finland, both on long-term deals. To instil a fresh sense of purpose, meanwhile, it gave clubs a series of strategic targets, with financial support dependent on their success in reaching these goals. With the help of the UEFA Grow programme, clubs have been able to access advice in the areas of marketing, commercial and fan engagement.

Aiming for full equality

Throughout 2020, Pihlaja worked on developing her FA's women's football strategy.



The historic Helsinki Olympic Stadium re-opened after renovation in August 2020. During the half-time interval of the opening match, future stars played a mini-derby on the field.

One significant feature of this strategy is its integration into the association's overall strategy. Ari Lahti, the Finnish FA president, has said of this: "One of our main goals for the coming years is to increase the inclusion of women and girls in the football family. We have already introduced equal national team contracts and strengthened the role of the top league for women. Reaching full equality in sports still demands tons of hard work, but we are committed to that development."

The Football Association of Finland has received support in its work from Sissel Gynnild Hartley, a Norwegian football marketing expert assigned a mentor role through UEFA. She has shared her experience of working for the English Football Association, for which she developed the 'A League Of Our Own' campaign for the Women's Super League.

The early signs for the Kansallinen Liiga are encouraging. With the launch of a new website and better channels of communication with local and national media, the coverage of the league increased by 34% in 2020 compared with the previous season. Moreover, despite the COVID-19 restrictions, league attendances rose by 15% last year.

Increasing opportunities for girls

Looking ahead, in February the Finnish association began the recruitment process for a new full-time employee who will have the task of helping clubs to improve the coaching of their girls' teams as well as to better integrate the girls' operations into their existing club structures. This is fundamental to the stated ambition of the association that clubs across Finland – which normally combine top-level sides with a grassroots section – should have girls' football fully integrated (and to which end it has released a series of guidelines).

Pihlaja draws encouragement from the number of clubs that are focused on increasing opportunities for girls, and she cites the 82 applications received from clubs across the country looking to take part in the UEFA Playmakers programme, set to start in Finland this spring. The ultimate goal is to make football the most popular sport for girls and women in Finland by 2027 – which is the year that Finland hopes to be hosting FIFA Women's World Cup matches as part of a joint Nordic bid with Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

A more immediate goal was a place at Women's EURO 2022 in England – and it was fitting that on 19 February, the same day that the strategy was launched, Finland secured qualification thanks to a 1-0 victory over Portugal. Linda Sällström's goal in the third minute of stoppage time provided another good reason for celebration, leaving Finns looking forward to their first participation since 2013 – and their fourth overall. 🇫🇮

The UEFA Playmakers programme is set to start in Finland this spring in 38 locations.





WOMEN'S FOOTBALL: WORTH PROMOTING

In response to global trends, the Polish Football Association (PZPN) is focusing strongly on the development of women's football.

PAWEŁ DRAŻBA

The new PZPN strategy for 2020–25, which includes women's football as one of the key pillars, acts as a driver of the development of this discipline in Poland. In recent months, the PZPN has rebranded its women's competitions and acquired a TV partner.

The recent reorganisation of the women's competition system in Poland,

along with a plan for the development of projects dedicated to women's football, assumes the professionalisation of the discipline and large-scale promotion of women's football. Promotional activities aim to increase the level of knowledge about women's football and, consequently, help women's football matches to reach a wider audience. The increased popularity

The Polish FA is going all out to promote women's football, with a new visual identity, reorganised competitions and free-to-air broadcasting of matches helping it achieve its development goals.

of the sport is expected to result in a greater number of girls and women taking part. Moreover, for the purposes of popularisation, from the 2020/21 season, and at least for three seasons, women's Ekstraliga competitions will be broadcast on a free-to-air Polish television channel (TVP). Alongside the women's national team matches, which are being already shown on TVP, this brings a new women's football offer for football fans in Poland.

New visual identity builds recognition

In addition to contracting a TV broadcaster, the PZPN conducted a comprehensive rebranding of the women's competitions. The new graphic design applies to the top division, lower leagues, futsal and beach soccer, as well as the Polish Cup and the central youth girls' league. The competitions received a new visual identity, including a dedicated colour scheme and logo. All projects carried out by the PZPN are communicated using a unified symbol, to help maintain consistency and build recognition. The new identity is used in official communications, including social media channels and TV broadcasts, stadium branding, stationery and official publications.

The results of the actions taken are good audience ratings for women's matches and a growing interest in football among young female players. It is also reflected in business terms, mainly through new commercial partnerships. In recent months, the PZPN has gained two partners for the women's Ekstraliga competitions: the STATSCORE company will provide professional sports statistics for all matches, while the manufacturer of the Zina brand will supply all clubs with sets of official balls. 🏆

A CUP COMPETITION WITH A DIFFERENCE

In each country, the cup is the competition for everybody, no matter whether they compete in the elite league or in the lower divisions.

PAUL ZAHARIA



The Romanian Cup sits majestically between two legends of FC Argeş Piteşti, Mihai Ianovschi (left) and Ion Vlădoiu.

Maybe more than other competitions, the national cup belongs to all of a country's football fans and comes with a special history, special and unknown stories, events and heroes, and, above all, a special flavour.

On this basis, and also taking into consideration that this season's 'pandemic' edition had to be played without fans in the stands, the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) decided to launch a unique campaign, called 'The cup comes to you', to cherish the performances, stories and heroes of previous Romanian men's cup competitions. It has been about supporting the beloved sport that unites all Romanian football fans and about showing how proud they are of their favourite teams.

It is a unique campaign with a unique format, which is the fruit of long, hard work by the FRF communications department. The formula applied was based on the results obtained by all

Romanian teams since 1933, starting with the round of 32. Separate points were awarded to each team depending on the league they were in at the time, if they eliminated a team from a higher, lower or equal league, the round reached, if they won the cup or reached the final, and so on. Account was also taken of the fact that, traditionally, the top-division teams start out directly in the round of 32, which means that a team from a lower division has to negotiate a higher number of rounds.

The number of points obtained by each team was added to the number achieved by all other teams from the same county. Romania has 41 counties, plus Bucharest, the capital city. The 16 highest-ranking counties (unsurprisingly, Bucharest was the top-ranked) earned the right to take part in the campaign, which has been promoted by members of the FRF communications department through TV interviews and reports – with the trophy always by their side – in 48 cities and

villages in the 16 counties. In all, they covered more than 4,500 kilometres and interviewed a total of 118 people – players, coaches, referees and journalists who had played a key role in or witnessed special cup moments. Video messages from Romanian national team players born in one of the 16 participating counties were also broadcast on the FRF's official YouTube channel.

The competition got under way on 15 February, with each competing county drawn against another for the round of 16. Each symbolic match between counties lasted four days, during which fans could vote – LOVE or WOW – on the special FRF Cup official Facebook page.

The quarter-finals, semi-finals and final took place on 22 May, three days before the real cup final.

The county that won this symbolic competition thanks to the votes cast by the fans has received an actual-size replica of the real trophy, which will be displayed in 2022 during all competitions played in the county at the level of children's, youth, grassroots and veterans' football, and in schools and kindergartens, to symbolise the values of Romanian football and of its cup competition.

In addition, five of the fans who placed their votes were drawn as winners of a special contest. All will receive prizes, such as a full set of kit or a T-shirt of the national team signed by all players, as well as a cup winner's medal.

Everybody could participate, everybody could win prizes and, most importantly, all participants were winners, being able to enjoy the history of the cup and the stories recounted by those who created and witnessed it. 🌐

FIRST WOMEN'S UNDER-15 CHAMPIONSHIP KICKS OFF

ANDI VERCANI



Women's football in Albania is constantly growing thanks to the Albanian Football Association's strategies to extend it to all ages and throughout the country. At the beginning of February, the women's Under-15 championship kicked off for the first time. The championship involves teams that invest a lot of effort in young players, girls in particular.

The president of the Albanian Football Association, Armand Duka, and national team player Megi Doçi attended the inaugural match.

Speaking ahead of the match, Armand Duka said the championship was a very important part of the association's strategy for the development of



children's and youth football. The new competition is the fruit of several years of work by the entire Albanian football community, with the aim of bringing as many girls as possible close to football.

"Women's football in Albania has made important developments, not only

in terms of its popularity but also in the quality of our teams," he added.

Megi Doçi also praised the initiative and offered her advice to the players: "You can achieve anything if you have the passion, the desire, and if you work hard. I wish you every success."

REFEREES STRESS-TEST VAR

MICHAEL GRASWALD



With the video assistant referee (VAR) system set to be introduced in the Austrian Bundesliga at the start of the 2021/22 season, 63 referees and assistant referees are now in the final stages of VAR training and recently completed the first set of trials under real-life conditions.

Having completed theoretical units on

VAR protocols and video analysis of past matches, the participants embarked on the next stage of the programme, which involved simulations of actual match situations.

The referees practised using VAR in mini-matches, individual match situations and 'surrogate matches' (90-minute matches with simulated VAR

communication).

"We are now in the penultimate phase of the training programme. All that remains is full real matches," said Austrian FIFA referee Harald Lechner. The coronavirus pandemic caused some logistical difficulties, as the organisers had to

find teams capable of re-enacting real-life scenarios that required the referee team and VAR to make decisions. "For the match situations, we need teams that are well prepared for this kind of exercise. This takes a huge amount of organisation, but I think we did an excellent job," said Ali Hofmann, the Austrian FA's VAR project manager.

Despite all the obstacles, the participants' overall verdict after the fourth instalment of the VAR training programme was extremely upbeat. "The feedback was very positive. We found the referees were really keen to practise," said Ali Hofmann.

Robert Sedlacek, chair of the Austrian FA's referees committee, also hailed the course as a success: "It went very well. It is clear that everyone who took part is making great progress. If we make good use of the time we have left, we will be as ready as we can be when VAR is introduced."



AZERBAIJAN

www.affa.az

TURAN TOVUZ FOOTBALL ACADEMY INAUGURATED

FIRUZ ABDULLA

 On 16 January, the opening ceremony of the football academy built by the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA), with the

financial support of FIFA and UEFA, took place at the Turan Tovuz football club.

The inauguration was attended by the AFFA president Rovnag Abdullayev, head

of the Tovuz district executive power Mammad Mammadov, executive vice-president of the AFFA Elkhan Mammadov, president of the western regional football federation Nadir Nabiyeu and chairman of the Turan Tovuz club Ogtay Abdullayev. FIFA and UEFA contributed 81% of the construction costs and the AFFA the remaining 19%.

In addition to four mini-pitches, one of which is covered, the academy boasts meeting rooms, restaurants, a gym and offices, among other facilities, while the stadium has all the required installations (changing rooms, press conference room, medical room, doping control room, etc.).



BELGIUM

www.rbfa.be

ROYAL BELGIAN FA CREATES AND SHARES KNOWLEDGE

MATTEO BALLIAUW

 In 2020, the Royal Belgian FA (RBFA) elaborated a strategy for the RBFA knowledge centre. Based on four pillars, the national association and its regions want to create and share knowledge on all domains of football in a scientific way. The four pillars are research, education, player support and knowledge sharing.

Last September, the RBFA launched a first study on its channels. It was carried out in cooperation with the knowledge centre coordinator, Matteo Balliauw, and focused on the ideal career paths for young football talents. The launch of this study and the accompanying video were the starting point of the applied knowledge centre strategy. Since then, many more studies have been shared on the RBFA corporate channels, each time including a call to action for researchers and thesis students to work with the RBFA knowledge centre. The range of topics is very diverse: from discrimination within



sport, fan engagement, the retraining of football players, econometrics, sports business, management and marketing to sports data and artificial intelligence. The research centre also engages in UEFA research initiatives, such as the UEFA Grow SROI Model (social return on investment) study for Belgium and its regions, which will soon be published, and the UEFA Research Grant Programme, for which academics within the RBFA network are encouraged to submit proposals.

As well as sharing scientific studies, the knowledge centre also publishes a monthly (data) infographic called 'Did you know?', showing key data and insights from the previous period. In this way, the RBFA aims to realise its objective to be transparent about the professional activities that take place within the organisation. For more information or to collaborate with the knowledge centre, contact knowledge.centre@rbfa.be.

NEW HEAD COACH FOR THE MEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

FEDJA KRVAVAC



Bosnia and Herzegovina entered the new year with a new men's national team head coach.

Bulgarian Ivaylo Petev replaces Dušan Bajević, who had failed to achieve a single win in either the EURO 2020 play-offs or the UEFA Nations League. Petev has a tough job ahead of him in the qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup.

"It is a great honour, but also a great responsibility for me that I was elected as the head coach of the national team of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I believe in myself and I will do everything I can to get a good result. Bosnia and Herzegovina has some very good players and I believe the results we all want will come. The atmosphere is important and we will try to get the most out of the players. The group is tough and we will do our best to achieve success. We have a common goal and we must all work as one."

In other news, Miralem Pjanić was named the best sportsperson in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2020. Pjanić has played 98 games for the national team and scored 15 goals. He currently plays his club football with Barcelona, and has previously played for Metz, Olympique Lyonnais, Roma and Juventus.

"Thank you all for the sportsperson of the year award. I am honoured to receive it. I thank all those who voted for me, as well as the national team and the club. It was a very successful season with Juventus, and moving to Barcelona is certainly the crowning moment of my career and something phenomenal. I hope there will be a lot more success in the future. This will be another reason to work better and to be a role model for children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so that one day they will perhaps be in the national team and at the biggest clubs in the world," Pjanić said on receiving the award.



Ivaylo Petev

Off the pitch, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation has begun work to introduce a quality management system in internal business processes through ISO standards.

The federation's executive board approved the project as part of a comprehensive process of standardising business processes within the alliance. The implementation of relevant ISO standards should improve the overall performance of the federation, and ensure that it consistently achieves its statutory objectives within defined competencies.

HEALTH EDUCATION THROUGH FOOTBALL

SØREN BENNIKE AND TINA ENESTRØM



The '11 for Health' programme implemented in Danish primary schools is recognised by researchers as a major step forward in encouraging children to be more physically active.

It is well documented that physical inactivity is one of the biggest public health threats. This is especially true for children and young people, the majority of whom are not active enough for

optimal health. In response, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a global action plan on physical activity for 2018 to 2030, in which school-based policy initiatives are put forward as an essential component to create a more active society.

A recent editorial in the British Journal of Sports Medicine by Thornton, Dvorak and Asif (2021) recognises Denmark's '11 for Health' programme for its proven wide-ranging positive benefits on health and health knowledge. The initiative is an enjoyable 11-week programme of exercise and health education through football for 10-12 year-olds that is offered to all schools in a collaboration between the Danish Football Association and the University of Southern Denmark.

The children play football, are physically active and learn about health.

In the editorial, the authors highlight that it is "both low cost and effective in improving health outcomes for the children involved. We, therefore, challenge other football associations and governments, to implement an '11 for Health' initiative in their country. Enhancing health education, improving health knowledge and increasing physical activity in youth through the joys of sport is a model proven successful. Spreading this important message to more children around the world will be key in addressing WHO's global action plan on physical activity and ensuring kids learn, play and have fun while pursuing optimal health."



ENGLAND

www.thefa.com

NEW SCHEME FOR COACHES IN ELITE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

REBECCA LEWIN



In February, the English FA announced the launch of the Coaching Excellence Initiative, an 18-month programme created to develop and connect high-performance coaches working in the elite women's game.

Fourteen coaches have been selected for the inaugural programme, providing them with bespoke, high-quality coach development experiences underpinned by regular one-to-one support from a dedicated team of mentors.

The coaches will receive individual and collective learning opportunities at regular workshops and interventions to support their individual and collective needs, unique to the experiences faced in women's football.

Delivered annually via group gatherings

in high-performance environments, peer mentoring and individual support, the programme will advance the coaching and leadership ability of selected senior coaches working in the elite women's game, including The FA Women's Super League, FA Women's Championship and the England women's pathway.

The programme will become a mainstay of The FA's commitment in the 2020–24 Inspiring Positive Change strategy to provide coaches with personalised and high-quality experiences. Each season, 14 to 18 coaches – 75% of whom will be women – will be supported via the programme.

The 14 coaches for the 2020/21 programme were selected following an application process that included



Audrey Cooper, The FA's head of women's coach development.

individual assessment and interviews with relevant individuals at clubs and national teams.

The inaugural 18-month programme started in August 2020 and has so far seen the coaches receive formal learning opportunities through group events held online, as well as virtual small-group meet-ups.

ESTONIA

www.jalgpall.ee

NEW COACHING TEAM FOR WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

MAARJA SAULEP



Estonia's men's national team start the 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign with a new coaching staff.

At the start of the year, Thomas Häberli from Switzerland was appointed as the head coach, while his compatriot Michael Müller and Estonians Norbert Hurt, Andres Oper and Mart Poom joined him as assistant coaches.

Häberli, 46, played for top Swiss clubs FC Basel and BSC Young Boys as a striker and played one match for the Swiss national team. He finished the Swiss premier league in second position on four occasions and was the second-highest goalscorer in the league in 2007/08. He also took part in UEFA club competition matches.

Michael Müller specialises in physical training, injury prevention and recovery.



Previously, he worked at Swiss clubs FC Luzern and FC Basel. He has also worked with professional cycling teams and track and field athletes.

Norbert Hurt has coached different top clubs in Estonia, as well as the boys' Under-17 national team. He won the league title with FC Flora in 2015 and in recent years has been the club's sporting director. Andres Oper and Mart Poom

are national team legends and have previously been part of the national team coaching staff. Oper won 134 caps for the national team, scoring a record 38 goals along the way. Goalkeeper Poom represented his country in 120 matches and played for many English clubs, including Arsenal, Derby County, Sunderland and Watford.

LENE TERP TAKES THE REINS OF THE WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

TERJI NIELSEN



The Faroe Islands Football Association has appointed Lene Terp from Denmark as the new head coach of the women's national team.

Terp, 47, has a lot of experience both as a player and as a coach at the highest level. She played as a professional in England with Fulham and in the US. She also played no fewer than 105 international matches for Denmark and captained the national team for five years.

For a period of time, she worked at the Danish FA as women's football talent director. As a coach, she has been in charge of several top Danish club teams as well as Denmark's women's Under-17 national team. When the Danish women's senior team reached the final of Women's EURO 2017, she was the assistant coach of the team.

The contract between the Faroe Islands Football Association and Lene Terp is for a period of four years, and the Danish coach will live on the islands for this period of time.



FSF

WILLY SAGNOL APPOINTED NEW HEAD COACH

OTAR GIORGADZE



Willy Sagnol is the new head coach of the Georgian national team. The 2006 World Cup finalist with France and winner of the UEFA Champions League and numerous other titles with Bayern Munich will take charge of the national side for the 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign.

"If we all work towards the same goal, then I think we can achieve success. The team has good potential,



Levan Kobiashvili and Willy Sagnol

which is why I decided to come here. However, we must increase this potential. Everything will depend on the effort – if you only give 99%, it is not good enough, but 100% effort usually produces

results," Sagnol said. The French specialist previously coached the French Under-21 team and Bordeaux. Most recently, he was Carlo Ancelotti's assistant at Bayern Munich.

GERMANY

www.dfb.de

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

THOMAS HACKBARTH



'Homophobia in football' was the cover story of the March edition of the monthly football magazine 11Freunde. The magazine sent out an appeal in response to the fact that there are still, in 2021, no openly gay players in the German men's professional leagues: "Nobody should be pressured into coming out. It's the free choice of every individual. But we want everyone

who decides to come out to know that they can count on our full support and solidarity." The appeal was signed by 800 players, including many established German internationals, past and present.

The German Football Association (DFB) got firmly behind the initiative with a rainbow-coloured ad, having already created a sexual and gender diversity helpline in January. Football is for

everyone. On the pitch and in the stands. We want to experience this diversity. But to do that, we need to promote it and break down the barriers that remain. Former German international and European Championship runner-up Thomas Hitzlsperger, who came out as gay in 2014 after retiring as a player, wrote on Twitter: "Another step in the right direction – well played."

GIBRALTAR

www.gibraltarfifa.com

STAY AT HOME SUPER SQUAD INITIATIVE

STEVEN GONZALEZ



As Gibraltar welcomed in 2021, a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic hit hard. With more than 1,000 active cases over the Christmas and New Year period and a rising death toll, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar had no option but to impose a national lockdown.

All sporting activity was suspended, including Gibraltar's national league, and all schools were closed, with the educational curriculum moved to online learning. In an effort to assist both parents and children with the difficult and sometimes stressful aspects of homeschooling, the Gibraltar FA launched its Stay at Home Super Squad initiative with the aim of lifting the morale of children under the age of 12.

Some 1,000 Super Squad stationery sets were delivered across Gibraltar by a team of delivery drivers from the Gibraltar taxi association, led by Gibraltar's Under-19 head coach, Malcolm Martin.

Apart from stationery, football-themed educational puzzles and booklets on how to improve football skills at home were included in the Super Squad packs. Youngsters were encouraged to upload photos of them with their packs (with parental consent) onto the Gibraltar FA social media pages, and the takers of the best photos received signed Gibraltar national team kits.



The Gibraltar FA general secretary, Ivan Robba, said: "As Gibraltar went through its most difficult period of the pandemic, and all our youngsters faced missing school for the second time within a year, we felt we had a duty to do something that would lift morale and try to help all those parents who, during these difficult

times, were finding it hard to motivate their children to do their schoolwork at home. To see Gibraltar's children receiving their Super Squad deliveries with huge smiles on their faces, as they were stuck at home without being able to go to school and play football, was a joy to behold."

ICELAND

www.ksi.is



KSI The Football Association of Iceland has published a report on the overall status of women in Icelandic football, the result of a two-year project analysing the current status, including suggestions on how to move forward and improve where needed. The objectives are to enable girls and women to grow within the game, at their pace and

in a healthy environment; to encourage more girls to play football; to bring in more women in leadership roles, and more women as coaches, referees and volunteers; to raise the overall level and visibility of the women's game and support elite player development; and to strengthen the overall position of women within Icelandic football.

At the association's general assembly in 2020, more women than ever before were on the list of club representatives. In an open letter to the clubs, the president of the FA of Iceland, Gudni Bergsson, called on club leaders to take further steps in that direction ahead of the 2021 assembly, and join the initiative to bring more women into the game. "Currently, one third of all registered players in Iceland are women, but we are nowhere near that when it comes to administrators, coaches and referees. We must do better," he said.

The report lists a number of different but linked projects, all lined up towards the same objective – to bring more women into the game – with various projects already started or under construction. The initiative and the association's commitment have been strengthened by a new official strategy on equality for the Icelandic football family and a new equality policy for the association's administration.

ISRAEL

www.football.org.il

FOOD PARCELS FOR FAMILIES IN NEED DURING THE PANDEMIC

EITAN DOTAN

ISRAEL Football teaches us that when a great team like the national one is in difficulty, the support of the fans makes all the difference. Now, there is an entire nation in difficulty and it is our turn to take to the field and give support through concrete actions, putting our hearts into it.

A record number of more than 11,000 food parcels were distributed as part of the 'It's our duty' project, after total donations reached 1,670,000 shekels.

The project, run in collaboration with the LAPS Foundation, led by Lapo Elkann, was designed to help needy families who have been affected economically by the coronavirus pandemic and have difficulty



obtaining basic food products. This was a joint initiative of the football associations of Israel, Italy and Portugal.

The Israel FA president, Oren Hasson, said: "The Israeli national teams and the football association immediately joined this unique and necessary project. Even if the fans are not with us in the stadiums these days, they are always close to our hearts and this is an extraordinary opportunity to help as much as possible. The dressing room of the Israeli national team is a wonderful example of the mosaic of which Israeli society is composed. The unity and mutual respect that characterise it are the basis that ensures the success of the project at local and international levels."

ITALY

www.figc.it

GABRIELE GRAVINA RE-ELECTED PRESIDENT

DIEGO ANTENZIO



With 73.45% of the votes, Gabriele Gravina was re-elected as president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) at the general meeting held in Rome on 22 February. The only other candidate standing for the presidency was Cosimo Sibilìa. Elected for the first time on 22 October 2018, Gravina will now lead the FIGC until 2024.

The meeting opened with a minute's silence in remembrance of the victims of COVID-19, followed by welcome speeches from the representatives of FIFA, UEFA and CONI (the Italian national Olympic committee).

"Football," said the FIFA president, Gianni Infantino, in a video link, "can give us hope for the future. Italy has played an important role and I want to congratulate the whole FIGC. Concerning women's football, reforms and infrastructure, don't forget that 'united we win and divided we lose'."

UEFA deputy general secretary Giorgio Marchetti brought greetings from the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, and underlined the pivotal role of Italian football in the international community, recalling the fact that EURO 2020 would kick off in Rome: "We are working very well with the FIGC and the city of Rome, hoping that this tournament can close



this very difficult year on a positive note. The federation is carrying out important projects, notably in the areas of women's football and Paralympic and experimental football, but the development of football requires infrastructure and it cannot be denied that Italy still has a lot to do in this regard."

There were also words of praise for the FIGC and the management of activities during the acute phases of the pandemic from the CONI president, Giovanni Malagò: "I had some doubts about how football should start again after the first lockdown, but I warmly congratulated both Gabriele Gravina and Cosimo Sibilìa before, and I do so again today, because they both recognised the need to get the show back on the road."

In addition to the presidential election, the meeting also elected members of the

FIGC board: Claudio Lotito and Giuseppe Marotta (Serie A); Giuseppe Pasini and Alessandro Marino (Lega Pro); Stella Frascà, Daniele Ortolano, Florio Zanon, Francesco Franchi and Maria Rita Acciardi (Lega Dilettanti); Davide Biondini and Umberto Calcagno (pro) and Valerio Bernardi and Chiara Marchitelli (amateur) as player representatives; and Mario Beretta (pro) and Zoi Gloria Giatras (amateur) as coach representatives.

The league presidents are ex officio members of the board, namely, Paolo Dal Pino (Serie A), Maura Balata (Serie B), Francesco Ghirelli (Lega Pro), Cosimo Sibilìa (Dilettanti) and Alfredo Trentalange (AIA).

For the next four-year period, innovation, competence and continuity will guide the work that awaits Gravina during, as he calls it, "the second half of our match for the future" – an exciting challenge with many problems that need to be tackled. He also thanked everyone for their trust, dedication, availability and support, adding that: "Consensus and enthusiasm have strengthened the development of the strategic plan. We couldn't stop and we won't stop. We made sacrifices and didn't back down. The path will be difficult, complex and arduous. But now it's time to put on our boots and start playing."

KOSOVO

www.ffk-kosova.com

FOOTBALL IN SCHOOLS

MAKI BAJRAMI



The Football Federation of Kosovo is focusing on football for girls and boys this year. Despite the ongoing pandemic, the federation is making good progress with its projects in this area.

A curriculum-based programme has started to be rolled out for nine-year-olds in primary schools. To ensure the highest quality of education, the federation has hired professional

coaches to run the school football lessons.

The programme will help children develop their physical skills and open the way for them to join local teams, and perhaps even turn professional one day.

The programme is still in its first year and has been implemented with success in 14 schools so far. During the next three years, the federation aims to have 80% of schools involved.



LATVIA

www.lff.lv

ŠTEINBORS NAMED PLAYER OF THE YEAR FOR SECOND YEAR IN A ROW

TOMS ĀRMANIS



Pāvels Šteinbors has been named as Latvia's player of the year for 2020, making it two such honours in as many years for the goalkeeper of the Latvian national team and Polish side Jagiellonia Białystok. Interestingly, since 2013, only once has the player of the year award gone to a player other than a goalkeeper.

For the past two years, Šteinbors has been the first-choice goalkeeper for the Latvian national team. Last year, he was between the posts for four UEFA Nations League matches, not once conceding more than one goal.

The winners of Latvia's annual football awards are determined in an open vote by representatives of the Latvian Football Federation, clubs, leagues and the media.

For the first time in her career, Sandra Voitāne from German side SV Meppen was voted as the best female player in Latvia, while Miks Babris received his first recognition as the best in futsal, Mihails Koņevs maintained his position as the best coach, Raimonds Krullis was named as the best youth player and Stefan Panić from Serbia was recognised as the best player in the Latvian top division.

Awards were presented in 29 different categories. For the first time, the president of the Latvian Football Federation made his own special award to recognise a noteworthy contribution to the development of Latvian football. Vadims Ļašenko selected the country's centre for disease prevention and control as the recipient of this award, highlighting the importance of the work done by the centre in the fight against COVID-19 and its contribution to providing safe conditions for the continuation of football competitions.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

MALTA FA LAUNCHES FIRST STRATEGY

KEVIN AZZOPARDI



The Malta Football Association has launched its first strategy, which will serve as the basis for the association's commitment to raise the game across all levels.

The strategic plan, covering the period from 2020 to 2024, sets out eight goals associated with four areas of key importance:

- further technical and infrastructural development;
- growth and sustainability of football clubs, strengthening protection through a legal framework;
- broadening the exposure and commercial value of the association and the domestic competitions;
- improving good governance by strengthening the compliance and integrity aspects.

The strategic plan follows ratification by the association's executive committee of the Vision 2027 document presented by the Malta FA president, Bjorn Vassallo, in 2019. The process is also part of UEFA's Football Federations of the Future



strategic framework under the guidance provided by the UEFA Grow programme.

"The vision of the Malta FA is to further strengthen its investment to build a stronger foundation, prioritising long-term development and the sustainability of Maltese football across all levels, from community, grassroots, amateur, women's and youth football all the way to the elite, clubs and national teams," Bjorn Vassallo said.

"The actions and projects we are proposing in this comprehensive strategic plan are ambitious but realistic and achievable, guided by our conviction that we can perform better as a footballing nation."

The pillars complement the association's mission statement, which is "to continue growing and improving the

game of football and the people in it at all levels; fostering a positive social change to embrace a sporting culture; championing national pride and unity as we strive to achieve high standards and inspire people."

Work on the delivery of the strategy is in full swing with a host of projects already launched. The Malta FA executive committee has approved the constitution of the Inħobb il-Futbol Foundation – one of the pillars of the new strategy. The implementation of a new performance strategy for youth development is at the heart of the foundation's mission. It is based on the principles of greater accessibility and increased participation in football, the pathway from grassroots to elite level, child protection and player welfare.

The strategy is the culmination of a wide consultation process with internal and external stakeholders, from which the Malta FA sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing Maltese football and chart the way forward by establishing clear targets.

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

A CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT MATCH-FIXING

ION BUGA



On 8 February, the Football Association of Moldova (FMF), with the support of the ministry of education, culture and research (MECC), launched a campaign to support the efforts aimed at preventing, detecting, reporting, and punishing match-fixing and other forms of corruption in sport. The FMF has adopted a policy of zero tolerance towards match manipulation.

The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of match-fixing threats, to provide positive role models for players, coaches, and other officials and to educate them on how to recognise, resist and report attempts to fix matches.

As part of the campaign, the FMF has used its official website and media channels as the main platforms to share information concerning match-fixing.

The association has also released video material to help clubs, players and officials to better understand the phenomenon of illegal betting and inviting and encouraging everyone to get involved in detecting manipulators. The campaign involves current and former international players, who came up with their own messages to promote the integrity and protection of matches and competitions. During the first two weeks of the campaign, 15 articles and reports were published containing information and relevant steps on how to protect the integrity of football.

All clubs involved in national competitions received information materials, which they will share in their stadiums. In the next months, integrity officers will organise workshops for



top-division clubs, at which the players and technical staff will learn more about this negative phenomenon that affects the quality and credibility of football and turns away spectators and sponsors.

Football is the most loved and played game in the world, and the mission of the FMF is to ensure that the sport is protected from any form of risk. Only together can the whole football community stop the scourge by informing, raising awareness and condemning match-fixing, as well as by implementing anti-match-fixing policies and practices established by FIFA and UEFA.

NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

NORTHERN IRELAND MANAGER DELIVERS 'FANTASTIC INSIGHT' TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

NIGEL TILSON



Ian Baraclough, the Northern Ireland senior men's team manager, has been discussing the merits of performance analysis with students at one of the country's main universities.

'How coaches and players utilise the process of assessing performance' was the main focus of an online session the manager staged for students on a degree course run by Ulster University in partnership with the Irish Football Association.

The BSc Hons Football Coaching and Business Management

degree is usually delivered on a fast-track part-time basis at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park; however, during the pandemic it is being delivered remotely.

In the online session, the Northern Ireland boss also discussed various other topics with students on the course.

Course director Kyle Ferguson said: "The partnership between Ulster University and the Irish FA provides unique opportunities for our students to hear from experts such as Ian throughout their studies.

"It was a fantastic insight into football at the top level of the game, which touched on so many of the learning outcomes across a number of modules the students are studying, such as performance analysis, strategic business management and coaching."

Co-designed by Ulster University and the Irish FA, the BSc Hons Football Coaching and Business Management offers a pathway for experienced coaches, current players and those aspiring to progress within the football industry.

The innovative degree allows students to combine theory and practice with the completion of professional UEFA coaching qualifications along with an undergraduate degree.



Ian Baraclough

LEAGUE OF IRELAND TO TRIAL CONCUSSION SUBSTITUTES

GARETH MAHER

 The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) has been given the green light to trial concussion substitutes in the 2021 League of Ireland season.

An application was approved by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) in time for the new measures to be used for the first time at the President's Cup meeting of Shamrock Rovers and Dundalk at Tallaght Stadium on 12 March.

The IFAB confirmed its approval in a letter to League of Ireland director Mark Scanlon, with the FAI adopting Protocol B, which will form the basis for the season-long trial in the men's premier and first divisions, the women's national league and the senior men's and women's cup competitions.

The IFAB-led trial is designed so that in the event of an actual or suspected concussion, the player in question is permanently removed from the match to protect their welfare, but the player's team does not suffer a numerical

disadvantage. Protocol B allows for two permanent concussion subs per team in a game.

Welcoming the approval from the IFAB, Mark Scanlon said: "The FAI is delighted that the Protocol B concussion substitute guidelines will be used in the new League of Ireland season, beginning with the President's Cup match on 12 March.

"We have worked on this plan with our medical director, Dr Alan Byrne, since the IFAB first approved such trials in December and we have opted for Protocol B with the approval and full support of the board of the FAI, the national league executive committee, women's national league committee and our clubs. This approach prevents a player sustaining another concussion during the match as multiple head injury incidents can have very serious consequences. It also sends a strong message that, if in doubt, the player is withdrawn but there is no numerical or tactical disadvantage to either side by prioritising the player's

welfare. The rule reduces the pressure on medical personnel to make a quick assessment and is simple to operate."

Dr Byrne has produced an information video for players, coaches and supporters ahead of the trial period and updated club medical staff and management on Protocol B during a virtual conference ahead of the new season.

He said: "FIFA and UEFA have been involved for many years in research around concussion and this is a development which I very much welcome. I don't think we can ever be done with educating and making people more aware of this topic.

"The season-long trial is part of the knowledge gathering around the whole area of concussion. We hope to gain some knowledge around the types of injuries that can cause concussion, help build our knowledge base and put us in a better position to make decisions around the welfare and safety of our players."

NEW VISUAL IDENTITY AND STRATEGIC PLAN

PRESS OFFICE

 February was a busy month for the San Marino Football Federation (FSGC) as it entered its 90th year of activity.

The federation chose San Marino's national day, Saint Agatha Day, on 5 February to launch new national team and federation logos. Previously, there had been just one single logo, featuring the San Marino state coat of arms and no immediate association with football. The old logo also severely limited the federation's commercial opportunities owing to the presence of the state coat of arms. The new logos ensure an instant connection with the world of football and will allow the FSGC to exploit its



commercial potential to the full. They complete the image makeover that began with the presentation of new domestic competition logos last autumn. The support of UEFA Grow was invaluable in the whole process of designing and selecting the new logos.

The FSGC was also able to work with

UEFA experts to draw up its first strategic plan for the four-year period from 2021 to 2024, which was presented to all the internal and external stakeholders of the FSGC on 24 February. The plan is the result of a collaborative effort between all the members of the San Marino football family, who will also be decisive in the implementation phase. 'Improving the lives of the people of San Marino through football' – this is the vision of the FSGC for the coming four years. Among its key objectives, the federation has its sights set on getting into the top 200 in the FIFA World Rankings, increasing participation, developing clubs and women's football, and expanding football infrastructure.

SLOVAKIA

www.futbalsfz.sk

LUCIA ONDRUŠOVÁ BECOMES FIRST WOMAN TO WIN 100 CAPS FOR SLOVAKIA

PETER SURIN



In February, Lucia Ondrušová earned a place in the history of Slovak football by becoming the first woman to be capped 100 times by her country.

When the coach gave the signal to substitute Slovakia's captain, Dominika Škorváňková, ten minutes into the second half of the Malta v Slovakia friendly game, everything went according to the carefully laid plan. The only one who knew nothing about it was the hero of the following minutes.

Škorváňková took off the captain's armband and handed it to the player who came on to replace her.

"When my teammate and very good friend put the captain's armband into my hand, it took me a few seconds to realise what was going on. It was a very emotional moment for me, it was the biggest moment of the day, of the whole match," said Ondrušová, who marked her 100th cap



by scoring her 12th international goal just a couple of minutes after taking to the field. Peter Kopúň, head coach of the Slovak women's national team said it is an honour for him to coach her.

Bratislava-born Ondrušová played for Slovan before moving abroad to try her luck. She has played for six clubs in four other countries and won a number of

honours in her playing career to date, including league titles with Slovan Bratislava and with FC Neunkirch in Switzerland and, notably, five Czech championships and five women's cups with Sparta Praha. In addition to playing in Switzerland and the Czech Republic (where she also played for FC Basel and Bohemians Praha respectively), Ondrušová has played Italian Serie A football with AGSM Verona and in the German Bundesliga with 1. FC Köln.

"Football is big part of my life, a beautiful part. And I am not done with it yet. One more year, maybe two..."

On the day she won her 100th cap, Ondrušová was preparing packages for homeless people in Cologne with her team-mates. She also runs individual training sessions for four talented Under-10 players (three boys and a girl) in Prague. Lucia has a clear vision for the future, and, with her 100th cap, she has become an icon of women's football in Slovakia and beyond.

TURKEY

www.tff.org

NEW DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT APPOINTED

GÖRKEM KIRGIZ



Oğuz Çetin has been appointed as the new director of football development at the Turkish Football Federation. His responsibilities will include coach education, elite youth player development, grassroots, women's football, futsal and beach soccer.

Çetin played for his country 70 times at senior level, captaining the national team on 32 of those occasions. He was a member of Turkey's squad for EURO '96 in England.

He also served as the national team's technical director for a while and was on the technical staff for Turkey's journey to the EURO 2008 semi-finals.

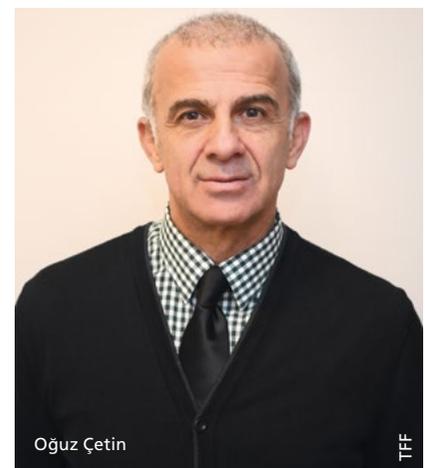
Çetin played his club football with

Sakaryaspor, Fenerbahçe, İstanbulspor and Adanaspor. He still holds the record for playing the most matches in the history of the top division, having clocked up 503 Super League matches. After he had hung up his boots, he worked as technical director and coach at various clubs, including Fenerbahçe.

Rüştü Reçber has been appointed to assist Oğuz Çetin as deputy director of football development.

Reçber kept goal for the national team a record 120 times, including during the 2002 World Cup, when Turkey finished in third place, and EURO 2008.

At club level, he played for Antalyaspor, Fenerbahçe, Barcelona and Beşiktaş.



Oğuz Çetin

TFF

GROW PROJECT YIELDS POSITIVE RESULTS

YURI MAZNYCHENKO

 UEFA, the Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF) and three of Ukraine's regional football associations have been taking part since late January in a series of online seminars to adapt and implement European approaches to the strategic development of football within the framework of the UEFA Grow programme.

The UAF's own Grow project is being implemented in cooperation with UEFA with regard to the strategic development of football at regional level. The aim is to increase the number of active players of all ages and genders, build partnerships with local stakeholders, analyse the current situation and potential opportunities for the development of amateur club structures, and to study the

impact of grassroots football on society and its values as a social and economic phenomenon. Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk and Kyiv are the three regions currently involved in the project.

"Given the progress of UEFA Grow in Ukraine, we can say that it is productive, successful and has already given us a lot of important data that will help develop and promote football at regional level. Our team has done a lot to increase the number of active players of all ages and genders in selected areas, and we have been working out solutions that will form the basis for further development of grassroots football in Ukraine. We want to spread the principle across the country that football is an activity for everyone," said the UAF president, Andrii Pavelko.

Since the UAF launched its Grow project in July 2019, the three regions have registered 15,332 players in the association's database, a 27% increase.

The football associations of Estonia, Moldova, Norway and Serbia have also shared their experience with the UAF about increasing the popularity of football through the development of local amateur clubs. UEFA grassroots development mentor Igor Janković from Serbia, alongside colleagues from the other aforementioned European associations, presented the process and achievements of FC Apollo 04 (Kragujevac, Serbia), FK Petlić (Smederevo, Serbia), FC Elva (Elva, Estonia), JK Tulevik (Viljandi, Estonia), FC Petrocub (Sărata-Galbenă, Moldova) and IF Ready (Oslo, Norway).

FOOTBALL V HOMOPHOBIA MONTH OF ACTION

MELISSA PALMER

 February marks both LGBT History Month and the international campaign month of Football v Homophobia (FvH), an initiative that unites football in opposing homophobia and prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people across the game.

In support of the imperative FvH initiative, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) has launched a Welsh LGBT+ Football network, which is targeted at grassroots clubs and highlights the importance of being an inclusive club. The network is there to discuss what an inclusive environment looks like at a grassroots club, identify the potential barriers for LGBTQI+ people in football, as well as what clubs can do to develop meaningful change.

Being proactive, learning and listening to the stories of those within the LGBTQI+



community is an important element of being a better LGBTQI+ ally – a topic that was discussed further on the Welsh Premier Women's League's 'The Player Zone' panel, which featured a number of incredible LGBTQI+ ambassadors, including Welsh international Jess Fishlock.

To further the visibility of the LGBTQI+ community in Welsh football and inspire further confidence and action, the FAW has shared a series of videos that highlight LGBTQI+ voices that are

involved across all levels of the game in Wales, including fans, players and club officials. The videos can be viewed on the FA Wales YouTube channel.

The video series has also been used to signpost Wales' first supporters' group for members of the LGBTQI+ community. The Rainbow Wall was officially launched ahead of Wales' World Cup qualifier in Belgium on 24 March, with a joint virtual pre-match social with the Belgian national team's LGBTQI+ fan group.

JUNE**31 May – 6 June in Hungary and Slovenia**

U21 EURO 2021: knockout stage

1–8 June

European Under-21 Championship: 2021–23: qualifying group stage

8 June

UEFA Champions League: preliminary round draw

11 June – 11 July

UEFA EURO 2020

15 June

UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa Conference League: first qualifying round draws

16 June

UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa Conference League: second qualifying round draws

22 and 25 June

UEFA Champions League: preliminary round

JULY**2 July**

UEFA Women's Champions League: preliminary (TBC) and first round draws

6/7 and 13/14 July

UEFA Champions League: first qualifying round

7 July

UEFA Futsal Champions League: preliminary and main round draws
European Under-19 Futsal Championship: qualifying round draw

8 and 15 July

UEFA Europa Conference League: first qualifying round

9 July

Executive Committee

19 July

UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League: third qualifying round draws

20/21 and 27/28 July

UEFA Champions League: second qualifying round

22 and 29 July

UEFA Europa Conference League: second qualifying round

28/29 July

UEFA Women's Champions League: preliminary round (first legs) – TBC

AUGUST**2 August**

UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League: play-off draws

3/4 and 12 August

UEFA Champions League: third qualifying round

4/5 August

UEFA Women's Champions League: preliminary round (return legs) – TBC

5 and 12 August

UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League: third qualifying round

11 August, Belfast

UEFA Super Cup

16–19 August

UEFA Women's Futsal EURO: preliminary round (Group B)

17/18 and 24/25 August

UEFA Champions League: play-offs

18 August

UEFA Women's Champions League: round 1 semi-finals

19 and 26 August

UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League: play-offs

20–25 August

UEFA Futsal Champions League: preliminary round

21 August

UEFA Women's Champions League: round 1 final and third-place match

22 August

UEFA Women's Champions League: round 2 draw

26 August

UEFA Champions League: group stage draw

27 August

UEFA Europa League and UEFA Europa Conference League: group stage draws

31 August – 1 September

UEFA Women's Champions League: round 2 (first legs)

NOTICES

- Re-elected as national association president: **Christian Andreassen** (Faroe Islands), **Gudni Bergsson** (Iceland), **Dominique Blanc** (Switzerland), **Alexander Dyukov** (Russia), **Noël Le Graët** (France), **Gabriele Gravina** (Italy), **Gerry McAnaney** (Republic of Ireland), **Karl-Erik Nilsson** (Sweden), **Leonid Oleinicenco** (Moldova), **Aivar Pohlak** (Estonia), **Hugo Quaderer** (Liechtenstein)
- Elected as national association president: **Petr Fousek** (Czech Republic), **Muamed Sejdini** (North Macedonia), **Theodoros Zagorakis** (Greece), **Vico Zeljković** (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- New address for the Football Association of Wales: Hensol, Vale of Glamorgan, CF72 8JY, United Kingdom

OBITUARIES

Much-respected French coach **Gérard Houllier** passed away on 14 December at the age of 73. He was a member of the UEFA Development and Technical Assistance Committee from 1992 to 1996 and the UEFA Jira Panel from 2006 to 2011. He also acted as technical instructor and coaching adviser, and on many occasions worked as a technical observer for club competition finals and major tournaments.

Renowned Slovakian coach **Jozef Vengloš** passed away on 26 January at the age of 84. He was chairman of the UEFA Development and Technical Assistance Committee from 2000 to 2004, then vice-chairman from 2004 to 2006, and a member of the UEFA Jira Panel from 2004 to 2009. He was also a member of various technical study groups for several major UEFA competitions. He was awarded the UEFA Order of Merit in Diamond in 2007.

SIGN FOR AN EQUAL GAME

Join us

We can only fight discrimination
if we stand together as a team.



RESPECT