



FUTSAL
CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE
RIGA 2022



29 APRIL – 1 MAY
OFFICIAL PROGRAMME
RIGA, LATVIA

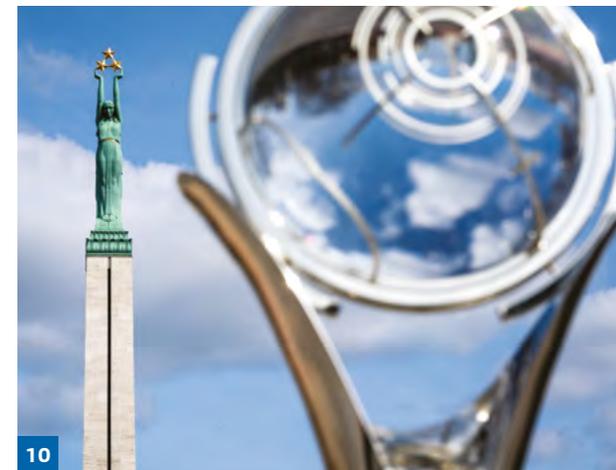
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WELCOME HOME

João Matos salutes the Sporting CP fans on his side's return to Lisbon from Zadar, Croatia, after winning the 2021 UEFA Futsal Champions League. Matos was among the scorers as Sporting recovered from 2-0 down in the final against Barça to win 4-3, claiming the title for the second time in three years.



BECAUSE EVERY
CHILD IS A CHAMPION



WELCOME TO THE FINALS

LAI PNI LŪGTI FINĀLTURNĪRĀ!

I wish you a warm welcome to Latvia and its capital Riga for the UEFA Futsal Champions League finals.

UEFA's important decision in 2018 to rename its premier club futsal competition is having a significant impact in raising its profile, as well as boosting public awareness of futsal in general. A bright future awaits European futsal as the sport sets a positive course ahead – bolstered by UEFA's strategic campaign to foster the game's appeal and exposure.

The Arena Riga has already had experience of staging a major European futsal tournament when it hosted the inaugural UEFA European Under-19 Futsal Championship finals in 2019. Now, this impressive venue will be the setting for an exciting tournament featuring many of futsal's finest stars who will provide fans with action of the highest calibre.

We are looking forward to some excellent entertainment as the participating teams strive to add the prestigious title to their list of honours. Enjoy the action – and may the best team win!

Sirsniģi sveicu jūs Latvijā, tās galvaspilsētā Rīgā un UEFA telpu futbola Čempionu līgas finālturnīrā.

2018. gadā UEFA pieņēma nozīmīgu lēmumu pārdēvēt savas galvenās telpu futbola klubu sacensības. Tas ievērojami sekmēja atpazīstamību, kā arī veicināja sabiedrības izpratni par telpu futbolu. Pateicoties UEFA stratēģiskajai kampaņai, ar ko tiek popularizēta telpu futbola pievilcība un priekšrocības, šis sporta veids kļūst arvien populārāks, tādēļ Eiropā to sagaida spoža nākotne.

Lieliska pieredze vērienīgu telpu futbola sacensību rīkošanā "Arēnā Rīga" tika gūta 2019. gadā, kad šeit risinājās pirmais UEFA Eiropas telpu futbola čempionāta finālturnīrs U-19 vecuma grupā. Tagad šajā iespaidīgajā norises vietā notiks aizraujošas sacensības, kurās piedalīsies daudzi telpu futbola vislabākie spēlētāji, kuri līdzjutējiem demonstrēs augstākā līmeņa spēli.

Ar nepacietību gaidām lielisku izklaidi, jo dalībnieku komandas centīsies iegūt prestižo titulu, ko pievienot savam godalgu klāstam. Novēlam jums izbaudīt šo notikumu, un lai uzvar labākā komanda!

Aleksander Čeferin

UEFA President
UEFA prezidents



WELCOME TO LATVIA

LAIPNI LŪGTI LATVIJĀ

We are delighted to welcome the best clubs and biggest stars of European futsal to the Arena Riga, right here in the heart of Latvia's capital!

We would like to thank UEFA for showing confidence in the Latvian Football Federation (LFF) to organise a tournament of this magnitude. Riga boasts high-quality infrastructure and amazing tourism opportunities and has shown on numerous occasions that it can host sporting events at the highest level in a festive atmosphere. Our capital welcomes the tournament participants and futsal lovers from all over Europe with open arms and with a broad entertainment programme on offer.

Many people will benefit from having this event in Riga and Latvia. Firstly, the entire Latvian futsal community which is growing and developing rapidly. Secondly, Latvian sports fans are being given the opportunity to enjoy the best that futsal can offer. Latvian football's image abroad will also benefit, confirming our ability to organise a European sporting event of this magnitude.

In 2019, we felt the responsibility that came with hosting the first UEFA European Under-19 Futsal Championship. Because futsal has a special place in the Latvian football system, we are now ambitiously climbing to a new level.

We wish everyone a successful tournament!

Laipni lūdzam Eiropas spēcīgākos telpu futbola klubus un lielākās zvaigznes Latvijā, mūsu galvaspilsētā un "Arēnā Rīga"!

Esam pateicīgi UEFA par izrādīto uzticību. Ir novērtētas LFF spējas uzņemties šāda turnīra rīkošanu, kā arī Rīgas kā spēļu mājvietas augstais līmenis nepieciešamajā infrastruktūrā un tūrisma iespējās. Rīga jau vairākkārt ir apliecinājusi, ka prot uzņemt visaugstākā līmeņa sporta notikumus un radīt ap tiem svētku sajūtu. Mūsu galvaspilsēta turnīra dalībniekus un telpu futbola cienītājus no visas Eiropas uzņem ar atplestām rokām un plašu izklaides programmu.

Ieguvēji no šāda līmeņa notikuma Rīgā un Latvijā ir uzreiz vairāki. Pirmkārt, tas ir viss Latvijas telpu futbols, kas strauji un attīstās, un otrkārt, tas ir Latvijas sporta līdzjutējs, kuram tiek dota iespēja baudīt augstvērtīgāko, ko telpu futbols spēj piedāvāt. Starp ieguvējiem ir arī Latvijas futbola starptautiskais tēls, apliecinot mūsu kompetenci un varēšanu sarīkot Eiropas visaugstākā līmeņa sporta notikumu.

Ar lielu atbildības sajūtu 2019. gadā uzņēmām pirmo Eiropas čempionāta finālturnīru U-19 telpu futbola izlasēm, un pašlaik ar ambiciozu attieksmi iekāpjam jaunā līmenī, jo telpu futbolam Latvijas futbola sistēmā ir īpaša vieta.

Lai visiem izdevies turnīrs!

Vadims Ļašenko

LFF President

LFF prezidents



Benfica celebrate during their decisive elite-round defeat of debutants Levante

ON THE ROAD TO RIGA

SOME FAMILIAR FACES AND ONE NEWCOMER – WITH A LEGENDARY LEADER – EMERGED FROM QUALIFYING AND WILL NOW CONTEST THE TROPHY

There was a return to normality in 2021/22 as the Futsal Champions League resumed its usual format after the streamlined knockout tournament of the previous COVID-impacted season had culminated in an eight-team finals.

It was not quite business as usual though. Strict adherence to UEFA's Return to Play Protocol continued, with players, teams and officials following COVID-19 safety measures to ensure games went ahead. In all, 120 were played over three rounds of mini-tournaments to determine the four teams that reached the Riga finals.

Significantly as well, fans were also back in the stands and over 30,000 people attended qualifying games. Only one group mini-tournament had to be played behind closed doors and no games were called off.

In the opening preliminary round, history was made by old and new. Diamant Linz became the first Austrian side to successfully negotiate a round of UEFA futsal competition, while 42-year-old Rizvan Farzaliyev, ever-present for Araz Naxçivan, equalled Lúcio's record of 69 UEFA futsal club appearances.

The top seeds entered in the main round, with former winners including Benfica, Kairat Almaty and Barça progressing. Spanish debutants Levante joined them, as did the only side to survive from the preliminary round, Haladás. Holders Sporting CP advanced too, alongside an ACCS Asnières Villeneuve 92 team who pushed 2021 quarter-finalists Dobovec down to third despite Ricardinho's absence.

On to the elite round. Only the group winners advanced to the finals, and in

Group B it came down to the final day, with Sporting CP narrowly finishing ahead of 2008 champions Ekaterinburg on goal difference after a 1–1 draw in the Lisbon decider. It was more comfortable for Barça and Benfica who each finished six points clear at the top of their sections.

Tyumen won all three Group A games, but the suspension of Russian teams meant that it was the runners-up who took the finals spot. On paper, two-time champions Kairat Almaty were the other main contenders, but they ended up behind ACCS (still missing Ricardinho!) on goal difference, due in large part to Abdessamad Mohammed who scored four times in the French side's 10-5 rout of Viten Orsha. ■



Thiago Bolinha on the ball for ACCS



Barça's Ferrão top-scored in the elite round with five goals

QUALIFYING IN NUMBERS

TOP SCORERS

- 11 Mirko Marinković (Diamant Linz, pictured)
- 10 Zoltán Dróth (Haladás)
- 9 Diego Cavinato (Sporting CP)
- 8 Jukka Kytölä (Kampuksen Dynamo)
- 8 Maneca (Araz Naxçıvan)
- 8 Italo (Kampuksen Dynamo)



TOP SCORERS BY ROUND

- PRELIMINARY ROUND
 - 11 Mirko Marinković (Diamant Linz)
- MAIN ROUND
 - 6 Daniel Araujo (United Galați)
- ELITE ROUND
 - 5 Ferrão (Barça)

MOST ASSISTS

- 10 Celino Alves (Luxol St Andrews)
- 10 Cvijetin Pavić (Diamant Linz)
- 8 Alex Merlim (Sporting CP)
- 7 Ramiz Chovdarov (Araz Naxçıvan)
- 6 Arthur (Benfica)



822
goals scored

120
matches played



6.85
goals per match

5
minutes and

50
seconds per goal

ehr

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ACCS ASNIÈRES VILLENEUVE 92



COACH
Sergio Mullor Cabrera

DATE OF BIRTH
24/06/1982

Three of the teams here in Riga are the futsal sections of famed football clubs. That trio are also regulars in the final tournament of this competition and all have their names etched on the trophy. The fourth are cut from a different cloth. ACCS (Citizen, Cultural, Educational and Sports Association) were formed in the Paris suburb of Villeneuve in 2008 and formed a futsal team in 2014

which kicked off in the fifth tier of French football. Eight years on they have reached the semi-finals of the Futsal Champions League, albeit via a late call when Tyumen were removed after Russian teams were suspended from UEFA competition.

ACCS may have come through the back door, but to have even been in a position to do so was already an achievement. They began the elite round with a 5-2 loss to Tyumen →

FINAL TOURNAMENT
APPEARANCES 1

BEST PERFORMANCE
This season



SQUAD

Goalkeepers	Nationality	Date of birth	Qualifying apps/goals	Competition apps/goals
1 Careca	BRA	03/04/1989	6/0	6/0
12 Moussa Diagouraga	FRA	14/08/1995	6/0	9/0
20 Abal Faouziddine	FRA	22/05/1998	6/0	8/0
Outfield players				
3 Thiago Bolinha	AZE	19/02/1987	6/3	21/18
5 Mehdi Bouabdellaoui	FRA	31/10/1994	0/0	0/0
6 Abdellillah Alla	FRA	13/05/1989	3/0	3/0
7 Mamadou Touré	FRA	15/09/2001	6/3	9/3
9 Nelson Lutin	FRA	05/12/1997	6/2	9/5
10 Ricardinho	POR	03/09/1985	0/0	62/49
11 Souheil Mouhoudine	FRA	29/03/1995	6/4	9/4
13 Yassine Ziyati	FRA	28/08/2002	3/0	3/0
14 Landry N'Gala	FRA	08/06/1993	6/2	12/3
17 Hamouja Sakouna	FRA	11/11/2000	0/0	0/0
18 Salah Galmim	FRA	05/12/2000	0/0	1/0

QUALIFYING RESULTS AND STANDINGS

Main round Group 2

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Sporting CP (POR)	3	3	0	0	18	5	9
ACCS (FRA)	3	2	0	1	14	8	6
Dobovec* (SVN)	3	1	0	2	7	12	3
MFC Atyrau (KAZ)	3	0	0	3	2	16	0

*Tournament hosts

Sporting 4-3 ACCS, Atyrau 1-2 Dobovec, Atyrau 1-8 Sporting, Dobovec 4-5 ACCS, ACCS 6-0 Atyrau, Dobovec 1-6 Sporting

Elite round Group A

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Tyumen* (RUS)	3	3	0	0	11	6	9
ACCS (FRA)	3	1	1	1	15	13	4
Kairat (KAZ)	3	1	1	1	8	8	4
Viten Orsha (BLR)	3	0	0	3	9	16	0

*Tournament hosts

Kairat 3-2 Viten Orsha, ACCS 2-5 Tyumen, ACCS 3-3 Kairat, Tyumen 3-2 Viten Orsha, Viten Orsha 5-10 ACCS, Tyumen 3-2 Kairat

PLAYER TO WATCH

RICARDINHO

Back from injury in time to aim for a fourth career UEFA futsal club title, the 36-year-old magician of the wing has a profile, talent and will to win almost unmatched.



See UEFA.com for final tournament squad.

ACCS got the better of some established clubs in qualifying



→ but bounced back next day with a superb 3-3 draw against two-time champions Kairat Almaty. ACCS actually led 2-0 but eventually needed a Souheil Mouhoudine equaliser to secure a crucial point. They then beat Viten Orsha 10-5 courtesy of four Abdessamad Mohammed goals, and when Kairat lost 3-2 to Tyumen, ACCS were assured of the runners-up spot on goal difference, which was ultimately good enough to qualify. ACCS had already laid down a marker in the main round, falling narrowly 4-3 to champions Sporting CP, having led at 2-1 and 3-2. Wins against 2021 quarter-finalists Dobovec and Kazakhstan's Atyrau took ACCS to the elite round in some comfort.

Their success is all the more incredible considering they spent this season in France's second tier, having been relegated for financial reasons after winning the 2020/21 French title. There were departures, notably coach Jesús Velasco and Ortiz to Barça – who had pipped ACCS 2-1 to reach last season's Futsal Champions

League finals – as well as Bruno Coelho to Napoli. But the French side retained some key players including the man whose signing in 2020 caught the world's attention, Ricardinho. Injury has kept O Magico out for most this season, but new coach Sergio Mullor still had a talented squad at his disposal in qualifying, with Azerbaijan pivot Thiago Bolinha and top French talent such as Mouhoudine, Nelson Lutin and Landry N'Gala leading the charge. Mohammed, however, left the club following the elite round.

ACCS have never done things the conventional way. They won the French Cup while still a third-tier team in 2017, turned heads when they signed futsal's hottest property Ricardinho, then nearly shocked Barça on their Futsal Champions League debut last season. Their innovative use of streaming and social media has also helped to build a fanbase. This term they have recaptured that impressive form in Europe, won promotion back to the top flight and gone far again in the French Cup. And with the Magician up to his tricks, anything is surely possible. ■

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*Cenas aprēķinātas, braucot ar Toyota Corolla ne sastrēgumu laikā.



SPORTING CP



COACH
Nuno Dias

DATE OF BIRTH
28/12/1972

No team from outside Spain have successfully defended the UEFA futsal club title, or won it three times in a row in total; Sporting CP may well break that hoodoo in Riga. Thrice runners-up in the old UEFA Futsal Cup, they have won two of the three editions since the rebranding to UEFA Futsal Champions League in 2018/19, and their squad has been the bedrock of the Portugal team that

have won the FIFA Futsal World Cup and two UEFA Futsal EURO titles over the past few years.

Their road to a ninth final tournament, 20 years on from hosting the first in 2001/02, began far from easily. Sporting CP twice trailed ACCS before beginning the main round with a 4–3 victory, following that up with resounding wins against MFC Atyrau and 2021 quarter-finalists Dobovec to top their group. →

FINAL TOURNAMENT
APPEARANCES 9

BEST PERFORMANCE
Winners 2019, 2021



SQUAD

Goalkeepers	Nationality	Date of birth	Qualifying apps/goals	Competition apps/goals
1 Gonçalo	POR	21/01/1992	3/0	32/0
14 Guitta	BRA	11/06/1987	6/2	25/3
Outfield players				
4 Tomás Paçó	POR	19/04/2000	3/0	8/4
6 Zicky Té	POR	01/09/2001	6/3	11/5
7 Cardinal	POR	26/06/1985	3/1	31/26
8 Erick Mendonça	POR	21/07/1995	5/1	24/10
9 João Matos	POR	21/02/1987	6/1	66/13
10 Pauleta	POR	12/06/1994	5/0	16/3
11 Waltinho	BRA	24/11/1991	6/5	9/7
17 Diego Cavinato	ITA	06/05/1985	6/9	41/37
18 Pany Varela	POR	25/02/1989	1/0	46/7
19 Caio Ruiz	BRA	18/07/1997	6/2	6/2
20 Miguel Ângelo	POR	02/02/1994	6/1	14/1
29 Alex Merlim	ITA	15/07/1986	6/3	46/16

QUALIFYING RESULTS AND STANDINGS

Main round Group 2

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Sporting CP (POR)	3	3	0	0	18	5	9
ACCS (FRA)	3	2	0	1	14	8	6
Dobovec* (SVN)	3	1	0	2	7	12	3
MFC Atyrau (KAZ)	3	0	0	3	2	16	0

*Tournament hosts

Sporting CP 4–3 ACCS, MFC Atyrau 1–2 Dobovec, MFC Atyrau 1–8 Sporting CP, Dobovec 4–5 ACCS, ACCS 6–0 MFC Atyrau, Dobovec 1–6 Sporting CP

Elite round Group B

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Sporting CP* (POR)	3	2	1	0	12	4	7
Ekaterinburg (RUS)	3	2	1	0	9	4	7
MNK Olmussum (CRO)	3	1	0	2	7	9	3
Hovocubo (NED)	3	0	0	3	6	17	0

*Tournament hosts

Ekaterinburg 5–1 Hovocubo, MNK Olmussum 1–3 Sporting CP, MNK Olmussum 2–3 Ekaterinburg, Sporting CP 8–2 Hovocubo, Hovocubo 3–4 MNK Olmussum, Sporting CP 1–1 Ekaterinburg

PLAYER TO WATCH

ZICKY TÉ

Fans' player of the tournament at last season's finals, and the technical experts' pick in Portugal's Futsal EURO 2022 triumph, the 20-year-old is already one of the sport's biggest stars.



See UEFA.com for final tournament squad.



Alex Merlim lets fly for Sporting



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→ The holders hosted their elite round mini-tournament in Lisbon. Two victories – 3–1 against MNK Olmissum and crucially, 8–2 versus Hovocubo – meant Sporting CP went into the final-day decider ahead of 2008 champions Ekaterinburg on goal difference. And just as well. Waltinho's opener just past the half-hour was quickly cancelled out by Dmitri Prudnikov, and Sporting CP had to cling on for the 1–1 draw.

Getting results when they need them is second nature to a team that recovered from 2–0 down in last year's final against Barça, a trait their players have helped Portugal exploit to dramatic effect for their recent successes too.

Inspirational captain João Matos, defender Erick Mendonça, World Cup final hero Pany Valera, wingers Miguel Ângelo and Pauleta plus two stars who arrived fully formed

from the youth team, Zicky Té and Tomás Paçó, are all fresh from winning Futsal EURO and World Cup titles in recent months.

Experienced pivot Cardinal missed those tournaments but is back playing and back among the goals. On top of that, Sporting CP can call on two superb Italian attackers in Diego Cavinato and Alex Merlim, Brazil pivot Waltinho and many people's choice as the world's best goalkeeper, Guitta.

A club averaging better than a domestic trophy per year since forming in 1985, Sporting CP have a two-decade futsal rivalry with Benfica that has spread to the European stage, the Lions leapfrogging the Eagles' sole UEFA title with their 2019 and 2021 triumphs. Those wins were long coming, after final losses in 2011, 2017 and 2018, plus three last-four defeats. ■

Kazakhstan's Higuita has set the trend for goalkeepers being able to play outfield

TALKING TACTICS

THE EVOLVING ROLES OF THE GOALKEEPER AND PIVOT WERE AMONG SEVERAL HOT TOPICS UP FOR DISCUSSION AT UEFA FUTSAL EURO 2022 IN THE NETHERLANDS

FLYING KEEPERS TAKING OFF

UEFA Futsal EURO 2022 revealed a clear trend towards the Higuita school of goalkeeping. The example of the Kazakhstan guardian, renowned in recent years for contributing to the team's attacking play – and goals – had been a rarity on the international stage. Not so in the Netherlands.

"Game after game, a sizeable majority of goalkeepers were ready to push forward as fifth outfielders at any point," UEFA technical observer Miguel Rodrigo commented. "But there were big differences in the way they did it."

Not many, it has to be said, matched Higuita's attacking impact – although the tournament offered examples, such as the run deep into the Bosnia and Herzegovina half by Spain's Dídac Plana and the pass

that allowed Carlos Ortiz to set up their first goal of the finals. More frequently the keeper could be seen moving out towards a touchline to offer an extra passing option at a kick-in or during build-up play, making a couple of passes without venturing too far into opposition territory and then scampering back to goal.

"It was often to distract the opposition – to make it easier to play out of a high press or to create numerical superiority – rather than with clear attacking intent," Rodrigo mused. "But coaches are increasingly encouraging keepers to become active outside their area and create moments of numerical superiority without the need to send on a flying goalkeeper." Two goals were scored with the keeper as an extra outfielder and three were conceded. Some images from the tournament →

Dídac Plana looked to get forward for Spain

→ could be compared with the outdoor game at the time, when Manuel Neuer rewrote the keeper's job description and provoked a spate of imitators who were less accomplished with their feet. If the trend is towards the Higuita-style of goalkeeping in futsal, coaches at development levels will need to ensure that keepers are adequately equipped to act as the extra outfielder. "At the moment," says Rodrigo, "do all teams have keepers with enough ball skills to play this way?"

PIVOTAL QUESTIONS

The question of pivots again emerged in 2022. "In the Netherlands we saw teams playing 1-4-0 in a fairly flat line," said Mato Stanković, the other UEFA technical observer at the tournament. "OK, the coach can sometimes use this option to rest certain players or break up the rhythm of the other team. But I didn't see many big chances being created when teams were playing this system."

Rodrigo agreed. "At this EURO the 1-3-1 system worked better in terms of creating goal attempts and dangerous situations. All the teams had a strong pivot in their squad and we've seen that when he's on court, their play is more threatening to opponents."



Zicky Té has emerged as a stellar pivot for club and country

"I wouldn't say that one system is better than the other. And you need both options if the coach is to have an influence on the run of play. It's not about the coach having a personal preference – it's about reading the game situation and deciding which system is more appropriate."

The technical observers cited the champions as a prime example. "Portugal without Zicky Té were a different proposition," said Stanković. "And Spain, before Solano came in as an extra pivot. In a 1-4-0 it's more about keeping the ball and, maybe, disturbing the opponents' tempo."

They agreed that Portugal were more incisive when operating with a pivot, with Zicky's contribution crucial during the comeback victories over Serbia, Spain and Russia. Ball-possession statistics are unreliable in futsal, as they are so easily distorted when one team has long periods on the ball when playing the flying keeper. But the fact that Portugal's share of possession dropped away in the second half of games – when Zicky spent more time on court – indicates more direct attacking in a 1-3-1 formation. Portugal dominated the second half of the final yet their share of the ball dropped from 57% to 38%.

"Almost all the teams played the two formats: 1-3-1 and 1-4-0," said Rodrigo. "The key is when and how you use them. The 1-3-1 offers you an option to play out of a high press or for the goalkeeper to launch an attack with a long throw. And it's easier to connect with the pivot in two or three passes to give depth to the attacking."

Rodrigo's analysis of the goals scored in the Netherlands showed that, in open-play attacks where the two systems could be accurately defined, 1-3-1 yielded three times as many goals as 1-4-0. Said Stanković: "We saw a lot of matches where the 1-3-1 looked the better option when teams were looking for an end product." ■

Read the UEFA Futsal EURO 2022 technical report at [uefatechnicalreports.com](https://uefa.com/technical-reports)

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MATCH SCHEDULE

#UCLFutsal

SEMI-FINALS

FRI 29 APR	18:00	ACCS	v	Sporting CP
	21:00	Benfica	v	Barça

THIRD-PLACE MATCH

SUN 01 MAY	15:00		v	
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FINAL

SUN 01 MAY	18:00		v	
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All times local. All matches played at the Arena Riga.

RULES AND REGS

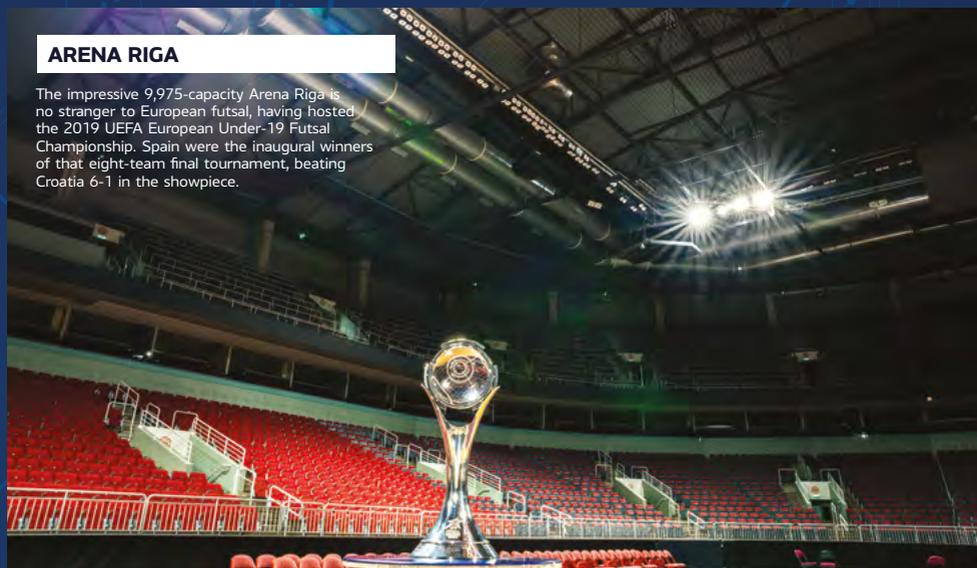
If a semi-final or the final is drawn, two five-minute periods of extra-time will be played, followed by a penalty shoot-out if necessary.

The third-place match will go straight to penalties if the game is drawn after normal time.



ARENA RIGA

The impressive 9,975-capacity Arena Riga is no stranger to European futsal, having hosted the 2019 UEFA European Under-19 Futsal Championship. Spain were the inaugural winners of that eight-team final tournament, beating Croatia 6-1 in the showpiece.



REFEREES

Vedran Babić (CRO)
 Nikola Jelić (CRO)
 Nicola Manzione (ITA)
 Chiara Perona (ITA)
 Ondřej Černý (CZE)
 Gábor Kovács (HUN)

REFEREE OBSERVER

Silvo Borošak (SVN)



Riga will provide a beautiful backdrop to the finals

The match-ups

Sporting needed late Guitta and Alex Merlim goals to beat ACCS in their main round opener; now they play again in the first semi-final, with Ricardinho set to be up against old rivals from his past clubs. Former champions Benfica and Barça meet next; surprisingly they have never previously faced off in the finals.



Ricardinho will be going toe to toe with an old foe



BENFICA



COACH
José María Pazos Méndez

DATE OF BIRTH
28/03/1974

Benfica were the first Portuguese side to win the European title and, 12 years on, hope to repeat the trick; in the process dethroning Lisbon rivals Sporting CP and moving the pair level on two triumphs.

The Eagles appointed their much-travelled Spanish coach for this season, and demonstrated their ambition by storming through qualifying with six wins

from six, all 12 of their used outfield players scoring at least once (and 11 of them two goals or more). After being pushed close by Belgium's Halle-Gooik in their opening main round game, Benfic's 5–1 defeat of former champions Ekaterinburg preceded a 10–1 win against group hosts Lučenec, when nine different players found the net. The goals kept coming in the elite round, staged in Lisbon. →

FINAL TOURNAMENT
APPEARANCES 5

BEST PERFORMANCE
Winners 2010



SQUAD

Goalkeepers	Nationality	Date of birth	Qualifying apps/goals	Competition apps/goals
12 André Sousa	POR	25/02/1986	6/0	29/1
13 Diego Roncaglio	BRA	15/07/1988	6/1	25/1
Outfield players				
2 Silvestre Ferreira	POR	05/05/1999	6/2	9/2
3 Rômulo	RUS	28/09/1986	3/2	31/12
4 Afonso Jesus	POR	06/01/1998	6/4	21/5
7 Arthur	BRA	16/05/1994	5/2	22/5
8 Rafael Henmi	JPN	30/07/1992	6/1	28/5
9 Nilson Miguel	POR	10/05/1992	6/2	15/3
10 Robinho	RUS	28/01/1983	6/2	20/12
11 Ivan Chishkala	RUS	11/07/1995	6/4	26/14
15 Hossein Tayebi	IRI	29/09/1988	6/4	32/14
16 Bruno Cintra	BRA	05/10/1993	6/2	12/4
18 Jacaré	BRA	20/01/1999	6/3	9/5
70 Rocha	BRA	30/03/1995	0/0	18/6

QUALIFYING RESULTS AND STANDINGS

Main round Group 1

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Benfica (POR)	3	3	0	0	17	3	9
Ekaterinburg (RUS)	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Halle-Gooik (BEL)	3	1	0	2	8	4	3
Lučenec* (SVK)	3	0	0	3	2	20	0

*Tournament hosts

Benfica 2–1 Halle-Gooik, Ekaterinburg 3–0 Lučenec, Ekaterinburg 1–5 Benfica, Lučenec 1–7 Halle-Gooik, Halle-Gooik 0–1 Ekaterinburg, Lučenec 1–10 Benfica

Elite round Group D

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Benfica* (POR)	3	3	0	0	15	5	9
Haladás (HUN)	3	1	0	2	9	11	3
Levante (ESP)	3	1	0	2	8	10	3
Uragan (UKR)	3	1	0	2	5	11	3

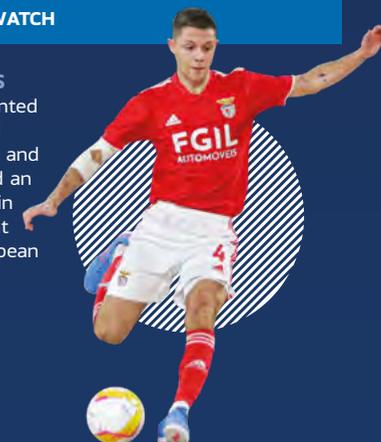
*Tournament hosts

Levante 3–5 Uragan, Haladás 3–8 Benfica, Haladás 2–3 Levante, Benfica 4–0 Uragan, Uragan 0–4 Haladás, Benfica 3–2 Levante

PLAYER TO WATCH

AFONSO JESUS

The hugely talented defender joined Benfica in 2016 and has since played an important part in Portugal's recent world and European successes.



See UEFA.com for final tournament squad.

Evergreen Robinho is aiming to win with a third club



→ Benfica overcame Haladás 8–3 and Uragan 4–0 to leave them only needing a draw against Levante. A three-goal lead was whittled down to 3–2 but the Lisbon outfit held on to end six points clear in their group, and back in the last four for the first time since 2015/16.

Benfica's squad is heavy on quality, not least with two hugely experienced goalkeepers in Diego Roncaglio and André Sousa. There are more wise old heads in the shape of Robinho, close-season arrival Rômulo and the free-scoring Iranian, Hossein Tayebi. Rafael Henmi, Ivan Chishkala, Nilson Miguel and Arthur are also very familiar at the top level, and Bruno Cintra arrived in the summer. Pivot Rocha was a winter signing, while the Eagles have no shortage of young talents such

as Portugal star Afonso Jesus, Silvestre Ferreira and Jacaré.

Much of that squad were involved last year when Benfica reached the eight-team tournament in Zadar but fell in quarter-final extra time to Kairat Almaty having twice equalised in regulation.

They have twice reached the final, both times against Inter FS. They lost over two legs in 2003/04 when their stand-out talent was the teenage Ricardinho, who six years later helped Benfica lift the trophy after a 3–2 extra-time triumph in front of nearly 10,000 fans in Lisbon. Losing semi-finalists in 2011 and 2016, there were elite-round near misses in 2018/19 and 2019/20 before the last-eight loss a year ago. Yet now Benfica are back within two games of a second title, and they have the talent to claim it. ■



CHAMPIONS JOURNAL

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BARÇA



COACH
Jesús Velasco

DATE OF BIRTH
02/01/1967

Barça are in the last four for the ninth time in 11 seasons. Sporting CP's dramatic final comeback last year in Zadar denied the Catalan giants a fourth title but they return stronger than ever following a summer revamp. There was the appointment of former player Jordi Torres as technical director and a much-decorated new coach in Jesús Velasco, who led Inter FS to consecutive European titles.

Velasco arrived from ACCS, as did another old Inter master, Carlos Ortiz, linking up with his former rivals to fill the defensive space vacated by Aicardo. Pito also joined, giving Barça a second star Brazil pivot alongside the peerless Ferrão, who Barça hope to have fit after a thigh injury. Both have six goals in the Champions League so far this season, as do club stalwart Sergio Lozano, back from long-term injury, →

FINAL TOURNAMENT
APPEARANCES 9

BEST PERFORMANCE
Winners 2012, 2014, 2020



SQUAD

Goalkeepers	Nationality	Date of birth	Qualifying apps/goals	Competition apps/goals
21 Didac Plana	ESP	22/05/1990	6/1	26/2
26 Miquel Feixas	ESP	04/09/1997	6/0	13/0
Outfield players				
2 Bernat Povill	ESP	05/07/2001	6/2	19/6
3 Matheus Rodrigues	BRA	03/10/1996	6/6	13/7
4 André Coelho	POR	30/10/1993	6/3	21/6
7 Dyego	BRA	05/08/1989	6/2	41/14
8 Adolfo	ESP	19/05/1993	6/3	33/12
9 Sergio Lozano	ESP	09/11/1988	6/6	41/25
10 Esquerdinha	BRA	18/11/1985	3/1	33/29
11 Ferrão	BRA	29/10/1990	6/6	33/32
17 Pito	BRA	06/11/1991	5/6	9/7
18 Marcênio	BRA	05/10/1987	6/0	38/8
23 Carlos Ortiz	ESP	03/10/1983	6/2	50/12

QUALIFYING RESULTS AND STANDINGS

Main round Group 3

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Barça (ESP)	3	3	0	0	21	4	9
Levante (ESP)	3	1	1	1	8	12	4
Viten Orsha (BLR)	3	0	2	1	6	10	2
Kauno Žalgiris* (LTU)	3	0	1	2	5	14	1

*Tournament hosts

Barça 5–1 Viten Orsha, Levante 4–1 Kauno Žalgiris, Levante 2–9 Barça, Kauno Žalgiris 3–3 Orsha, Viten Orsha 2–2 Levante, Kauno Žalgiris 1–7 Barça

Elite round Group C

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Barça (ESP)	3	3	0	0	19	7	9
Plzeň* (CZE)	3	1	0	2	9	9	3
Halle-Gooik (BEL)	3	1	0	2	11	15	3
Dobovec (SVN)	3	1	0	2	6	14	3

*Tournament hosts

Barça 8–2 Dobovec, Halle-Gooik 3–6 Plzeň, Halle-Gooik 4–8 Barça, Plzeň 2–3 Dobovec, Dobovec 1–4 Halle-Gooik, Plzeň 1–3 Barça

PLAYER TO WATCH

CARLOS ORTIZ
Three times a winner with Inter and now with their great rivals after a brief spell at ACCS, Spain legend Ortiz is a defender of grace and unmatched experience.



See UEFA.com for final tournament squad.



Barça have a habit of peaking in the Futsal Champions League

→ and Matheus Rodrigues, another of the strong Brazil contingent including wingers Dyego and Marcênio.

Spain pivot Adolfo's role is even more crucial with Esquerdinha out injured, while André Coelho and Bernat Povill are alongside Ortiz in defence, and Dídac Plana and Miquel Feizas options in goal. Velasco has an all-star squad comparable to his best at Inter. Their results in the competition so far bear that out: six matches, six wins, 40 goals scored and only 11 conceded. They have won every game by at least two goals.

That maintains the excellent European record of Barça, whose futsal section was started in 1986 but really came to the fore in the 2010s. Their first Spanish league title

came in 2010/11, part of a domestic treble, and they followed that up by winning the UEFA Futsal Cup on debut, taking bronze the next season and reclaiming the trophy in 2013/14. A third title came at home at Palau Blaugrana in 2019/20 having been restricted to two more bronzes in 2017/18 and 2018/19. Barça had one hand on the trophy again in Zadar last year only for Sporting CP to snatch it away.

Having never won a major honour before 2011, Barça now have 23 to their name, including those three UEFA titles – two off Inter's competition record. Coach Velasco warned in early March: "We must be clear that we will reach peak form when it is time to play the Champions League." ■



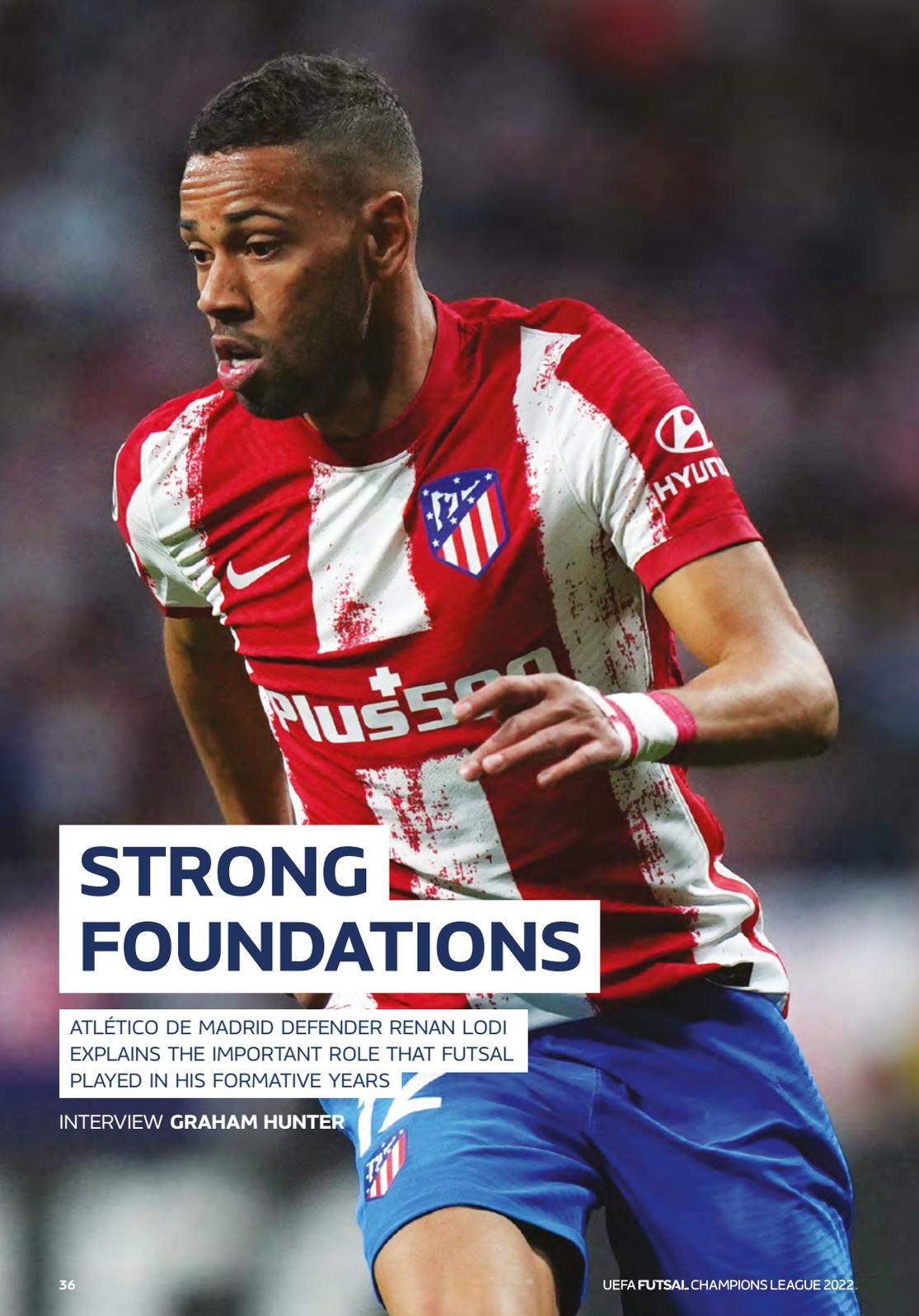
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STRONG FOUNDATIONS

ATLÉTICO DE MADRID DEFENDER RENAN LODI EXPLAINS THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT FUTSAL PLAYED IN HIS FORMATIVE YEARS

INTERVIEW GRAHAM HUNTER

Did you enjoy playing futsal when you were younger?

I played up until I was 14; I think it was actually a bit late for me to stop playing futsal! But it helped me in an extraordinary way. And when I started playing, from the very beginning I said, "I never want to stop playing it." Futsal started opening doors so that I could then move to a pitch – but the first time I played on a pitch, I didn't want to. I'd tell my coach, "No, I want to go back to futsal." After I started to play on pitches, I used futsal techniques a lot: mastering how to manoeuvre the ball, making quick decisions. And to this day, I think I still have futsal inside me.

So futsal helped you to make the transition to 11-a-side?

The good thing about playing futsal is that it's a very intense sport: you have to finish a move in a very short period of time, to put it one way. And after I made the switch to the pitch, I took all those tools and applied them on the field: the intensity of today's gameplay, the decision-making, being able to get out of a small space when you're crowded by two or three players. Making short dribbles is also characteristic of futsal. Today I see that I'm a complete player in this regard thanks to futsal. I was able to get those tools and take them to the pitch.

Do you have a favourite side to watch these days?

I usually watch the Portuguese national futsal team; Barcelona's futsal team as well.

You wore the number 10 shirt for your futsal club in Brazil – what were they called?

It was a club from Serrana named Arena and I was the captain. At the time I had already taken part in trials for some football clubs, but I didn't make the cut. So I had some experience; I was still a kid, but I had that experience of going to clubs and coming back. I think it was because of this that I was captain; talking to my team-mates, helping them.

There's a story that as a child in Serrana, you'd sell empty soda cans to pay for the bus fare to go to football training sessions.

Well I was never in need, let's say: we had enough food and water. We had those basic needs covered. But financially, we'd be found lacking. My father would find himself unemployed at times; my grandparents had a pension, but they didn't have enough to allow me to continue training in a different town. So one day I said, "Leave that to me. I'll find a way." So I started collecting empty soda cans to raise money, selling them at different places; that's where my dream of playing professionally began.

During that period, was there a time when you thought, "Am I really going to be successful?"

The first time I felt that was while collecting cans. I'd often say, "One day a scout will come and take me to a different town, and then I'll be on my way to becoming a professional football player." And it happened just like that, before I joined Athletico Paranaense. That's when I said to myself, "I will fight for my goals. I want to play abroad. I want to play in the Champions League." Serrana is a town of 40,000 people; it's very unlikely that anyone would come from there and get as far as I did, so I've got to thank all the people that had a part in that. It's not every day that a boy from Serrana makes his way into Spanish or European football.

And finally, why do you think futsal is so popular in Brazil?

I think it's because of the style of the Brazilian people: playing futsal as if it was their last time doing so, not being weighed down by responsibilities. If you see a Brazilian futsal player in action, they like to do stepovers, nutmegs; there isn't much responsibility there. Also, Brazil is a powerhouse in the futsal world. There was Falcão, now there are new names coming up. From my point of view, the Brazilian futsal player wants to have fun and enjoy the moment. ■

GOING PLACES

AS A PROFESSIONAL SPORT FUTSAL MAY BE IN ITS INFANCY, BUT THERE ARE DISTINCT SIGNS OF MATURITY AS THE GAME GROWS IN STATURE AND POPULARITY

Portugal fans cheer their side at the recent Futsal EURO

It is 20 years since the first UEFA futsal club competition concluded with a final in front of 1,500 fans in Lisbon. Only 27 associations entered teams that season: in this Futsal Champions League (the fourth since the Futsal Cup was rebranded), 55 clubs from 51 nations took part.

The last time the finals were played in front of fans pre-COVID-19, an aggregate attendance of around 40,000 watched the four 2019 matches in Almaty. Such is futsal's status now that the top teams

can attract crowds even outside the sport's traditional hotbeds, hence the decision to stage this tournament in a neutral venue and open the game to a wider audience. Riga is just the second city to host the finals as a neutral venue; the other time was last year, when the Croatian city of Zadar hosted a behind-closed-doors event in the grip of the pandemic.

The 2002 UEFA Futsal Cup final was only the fourth time European football's governing body had handed out a trophy

in the small-sided sport, having previously organised national-team EUROs in 1996, 1999 and 2001. This year alone sees four UEFA futsal tournaments! Portugal won the expanded 16-team men's UEFA Futsal EURO in Amsterdam in February, and after the Futsal Champions League finals still to come in 2022, we have the UEFA Women's EURO in Portugal and UEFA Under-19 Futsal EURO in Spain.

"Futsal's status and appeal has grown considerably – the result of a new strategy

implemented by UEFA designed to increase the sport's profile and exposure at all levels," states UEFA President Alexander Čeferin. That means hundreds of futsal fixtures under UEFA auspices, on top of thriving leagues throughout Europe. Futsal is no longer football's little brother or a development tool for budding soccer stars. It is beginning to stand on its own two feet.

That said, there is plenty of synergy and cross-promotion to be had from the sharing of sporting knowledge between the two codes, as well as enthusiastic endorsement from football's biggest names. It is no coincidence that three of the four contenders in Riga are the futsal sections of clubs principally famous for their exploits in the outdoor game.



Heavyweights Portugal and Spain met in the semi-finals

UEFA and its member national associations are the governing bodies for both sports in Europe, and the revenue generated by the major football competitions plays its part in funding the development of futsal. Most directly, any national association represented in one or more of UEFA's futsal competitions, including at club level, is entitled to an incentive payment: in 2020 that amounted to an annual figure of up to €55,000.

The incentive payments are part of UEFA's HatTrick programme, for which the European →



Spanish side Inter celebrate their second triumph in 2006

→ governing body has committed €775.5m from the revenue raised by the men's football EURO over the next four years to help associations develop the game in all forms and at all levels. Each association can receive up to €4.5m over the 2020–24 cycle, with some choosing to dedicate funds towards specific futsal projects.

Examples include San Marino's new 1,000-seat futsal arena capable of hosting international fixtures, and mobile pitches in colder nations like Finland and also Spain, where the pitch is used by the national team to promote futsal across the country. The French Football Federation is using the

“Futsal has grown considerably as a result of a strategy designed to increase its profile and exposure”

funds to convert existing outdoor multi-sport spaces and unused tennis courts into 40m x 20m structures dedicated to futsal.

Germany is not a futsal power and their men's national team only made their debut in 2016. But the German Football Association (DFB) aims to join the elite, and broke ground this season with the new Futsal Bundesliga: a ten-team national league with streamed matches and halls set up with dedicated futsal pitches for optimum presentation. Marcel Loosveld, who played for and coached the Netherlands before becoming Germany coach, said: “In futsal, we want to do justice to the DFB's position in the football world. The introduction of the Bundesliga is an important building block. Our national players can compete regularly at a high level, which will make them better individually and the national team will benefit.”

From the professional stars playing in Riga or at this year's Futsal EURO in the Netherlands, to those countries and newer teams still finding their way, the sport's ecosystem is thriving across the continent despite the setback of the pandemic. ■

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Sporting CP celebrate their triumph in Zadar, Croatia

THE CHAMPIONS

SPORTING CP RECLAIMED THE CROWN, LIFTING THE TROPHY FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THREE YEARS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 2021 Sporting CP 4-3 Barça | 2011 Montesilvano 5-2 Sporting CP |
| 2020 Barça 2-1 Murcia | 2010 Benfica 3-2 Inter* |
| 2019 Sporting CP 2-1 Kairat | 2009 Inter 5-1 Ekaterinburg |
| 2018 Inter 5-2 Sporting CP | 2008 Ekaterinburg 4-4 Murcia** |
| 2017 Inter 7-0 Sporting CP | 2007 Dinamo 2-1 Inter |
| 2016 Ugra 4-3 Inter | 2006 Inter 9-7 Dinamo*** |
| 2015 Kairat 3-2 Barça | 2005 Charleroi 10-9 Dinamo*/*** |
| 2014 Barça 5-2 Dinamo* | 2004 Inter 7-5 Benfica*** |
| 2013 Kairat 4-3 Dinamo | 2003 Castellón 7-5 Charleroi*** |
| 2012 Barça 3-1 Dinamo | 2002 Castellón 5-1 Charleroi |

*After extra time
 **Ekaterinburg won 3-2 on penalties
 ***Aggregate after two legs
 Eight-team final tournament 2002 and 2021;
 two-legged final 2003–2006; final four 2007–2020 and from present.

Lay's 
THE PERFECT MATCH





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