



Love of the ball

Peter Rudbæk, the Danish FA's technical director, had a "grassroots moment" many years ago when he was the head coach of Aalborg BK. Peter had just won the coach of the year award when he met his five-year-old neighbour in the street. In a loud, enthusiastic voice, the youngster said: "Congratulations Mr Rudbæk. This makes you the third best coach in Denmark." Peter thanked the boy and then asked: "Out of interest, who are first and second?" Without hesitation, the diminutive neighbour declared: "Mr Sepp Piontek (Denmark's national coach at the time) and Poul, my coach." In the child's small world, his football teacher was more important than the best club coach in the country. However, it was the inanimate object under the boy's left arm that was more significant to him than any coach, no matter how famous or personal. It was his ball that fascinated him – it was the ball that was at the centre of his universe.

Like most children, Peter's young neighbour was unaware of the history of football. Maybe when he was older, he would learn that in ancient times pig or cow bladders were used to create a primitive ball; that 150 years ago, the advent of the rubber bladder was a turning point for football manufacturers; that the mass production of footballs was a direct consequence of the English League being formed in the late 19th century; that the first 32-panel ball was produced in his very own Denmark in the 1950s; and that the first official FIFA ball was made by adidas and used in the World Cup in 1970. All that mattered to our five-year-old footballer was the ball under his arm and the next opportunity to play.

For young children, the challenge has always been to relate to the ball, to run with it, to strike it in the chosen direction, and to score goals in small games with their friends. It is amazing how popular someone can be when they own a football – this was particularly true in previous generations when footballs were less plentiful. Talking about the past, Marcello Lippi, Italy's World Cup winning coach, voiced his concern about the trends in children's football: "Children's lives are far more complicated than ours were. Of course, they play a lot less football than we did." Poignant words when we reflect on the virtual reality world of 21st century youngsters and the changes in society that have limited the possibilities for spontaneous play.

Many national associations, including the Danish FA, have now recognised the need to create more playing opportunities and to promote age-related training, particularly for children in the 5 to 14-year-old category – the "golden age of development". With street football almost extinct, like leather footballs sewn up with laces, the task of artificially recreating the street environment and the education of age-specific football teachers is now being embraced. The DBU's philosophy in this area is summed up in their new grassroots teaching manual: "A good football environment ensures that as many players as possible, for as long as possible, have access to environments which positively affect their development." And, when it comes to playing with the ball, the individual nature of skill acquisition is emphasised: "Technical training should always be based on the players' level – rather than their age." For the Danes, and others who lead the way in grassroots education, the ball and appropriate game forms are at the heart of their age-related programmes – practice and play being carefully balanced. With no disrespect to Poul, the coach of Peter's young neighbour, the words of Arsène Wenger resonate: "The game itself is the greatest teacher." Yes, as long as it is adapted to the strengths and needs of young grassroots players, and not a watered-down version of adult 11 v 11.

The legendary Liverpool coach, Bill Shankly, had a gift for simplifying the game and getting to the essence of the matter. He once said: "What a great day for football; all we need is some green grass and a ball." It is the fascination with the latter that must be at the core of age-related football education. UEFA's grassroots motto – Carry The Ball Close To Your Heart – is a metaphoric message and a rallying call for developing a love of the ball as a priority when nurturing our youngest recruits to the game. Peter Rudbæk's young neighbour may not have known the history of the game, or the importance of being coach of the year, or that Denmark would one day be a model of grassroots development, but he did know something: that the ball can be your friend and you should carry it close to your heart.

Andy Roxburgh, UEFA Technical Director



UEFA Grassroots
newsletter

Seventh heaven

The UEFA Grassroots Charter has steadily gained momentum since it was introduced in 2005 with the aim of encouraging and challenging national associations to increase their work rate at the foundation levels of the game. The response has been magnificent and, as a question to provoke some discussion over a cup of coffee, it could be asked whether it is coincidence that nine of the national associations whose senior teams have qualified for UEFA EURO 2012 have earned five or more UEFA stars for their efforts at grassroots levels. Although the grassroots credo is based on "football for all" concepts, is it legitimate to ask whether, as a spin-off benefit, their hard work at the base of the footballing pyramid yields dividends in terms of discovering and developing young talent?

Ratification by UEFA's Executive Committee of Kazakhstan as a one-star signatory to the charter allows the total number of member association signatories to reach 52. To be more precise, membership status can be broken down as follows:

★	20 member associations
★★	4 member associations
★★★	5 member associations
★★★★	4 member associations
★★★★★	11 member associations
★★★★★★	8 member associations

In recent months, the Czech Republic, France and Turkey have achieved five-star status, while the national association of Wales has been admitted to join England, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Ukraine in the select band which enjoy the current ceiling level of six-star status.

Just to recap, basic one-star membership signifies recognition of an association which has a foundation-level grassroots programme. Four more stars can be added – in any order – in the categories of promotion and growth, numbers of registered grassroots participants, social and disability programmes, and levels of female participation in grassroots football. The sixth star was added to the grassroots galaxy to provide

recognition for national associations which had attained a superior level based on advanced grassroots programmes. It is a remarkable fact that, in the six years since the pan-European project was launched, 162 grassroots stars have been awarded to charter members.

Impetus has been so strong that there are now plans to add a seventh star to the UEFA Grassroots Charter, with a view to endorsing and rewarding associations which have reached a premier level via benchmark-setting grassroots programmes. Five national associations have already expressed their interest in applying for the additional star.

However, seven-star status is not something to be given lightly. The ultimate accolade will only be earned by national associations whose grassroots programmes fulfil stringent criteria currently being fine-tuned by UEFA for ultimate approval by the Executive Committee – with particular emphasis on sustainability and quality-control mechanisms. The criteria can be grouped under seven sub-headings:

Structure

The key questions here focus on the strength of leadership and administrative structures in national and/or regional associations in the sectors of children's and youth and amateur football. It is also important that the association has a mission statement, clear regulations, and a well-defined grassroots plan.

Player programmes

In a seven-star environment, the issues are to ensure that there are year-round opportunities for playing and practising at all the various levels, including clubs and schools. The other highly relevant factors in this category relate to specific areas such as the standard of the referees who handle grassroots games, health and safety aspects related to the welfare of grassroots players, and the efficiency of screening



The UEFA president signs the charter with Giorgio Crescentini (on his left) and Pier Luigi Ceccoli, president and vice-president of the San Marino Football Federation

processes for the male and female coaches and volunteers who are in charge of grassroots activities.

Coach and leader programmes

In benchmark-setting grassroots programmes, coach education is a vital element, along with registration and tracking systems which allow coaches and leaders to be accurately followed through their curriculum vitae. Well-defined structures are essential and, ideally, age-appropriate leadership is available to all grassroots players. It is also important to ascertain whether policies have been

Resources

At seven-star level, national and regional associations are expected to invest significant percentages of annual budgets in grassroots football, possibly ensuring sustainability by involving trusts, foundations or other partnerships which offer guarantees with regard to the funding of grassroots programmes. The resources subheading also covers the field of communications, with emphasis on the collection and distribution of information and direct contact with grassroots players, leaders, coaches and organisers via newsletters or dedicated websites.



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A showcase match between partially sighted and blind Portuguese and German players at EURO 2008

established for the screening of staff and volunteers – and for the recruitment of new players.

Facilities

A seven-star association will possess a complete, up-to-date audit of playing and training facilities, with a view to monitoring maintenance and availability on an all-year basis. The audit will also help to pinpoint areas where additional facilities – some of them age-appropriate – may be required.

Quality control

This represents a key issue, as the objective is not to win a seventh star and then rest on laurels. Benchmark-setting programmes need to be constantly maintained via efficient quality-control mechanisms, based on regular reviews and systems which allow findings to be analysed and properly followed up.

Corporate social responsibility

The seven-star association needs to be committed to forging links between social responsibility principles and grassroots football projects.

At the same time, the criteria for seven-star membership will focus on the positioning of grassroots responsibilities within national association structures. For maximum effectiveness, there should be clearly defined links between the technical and grassroots units, in order to ensure that grassroots football is fully integrated into sporting elements and not allowed to become a purely administrative siding with minimal connections to the association's main-track activities at the elite end of the game.

But the crucial question to be asked when applications for seven-star membership are being evaluated is a simple one: why does this grassroots programme deserve benchmark recognition? The idea is to make absolutely sure that to play football in a seven-star country is to enter a grassroots heaven. ●

Robin's crystal ball

Robin Russell's vast experience in grassroots football can be traced through a long spell at the FA in his native England, development projects in various countries dotted around the globe, long-term membership of UEFA's grassroots panel and, currently, continued involvement in UEFA's grassroots programmes in a consultancy role. A recent conversation with UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, turned to the subject of how radically the parameters of grassroots football have changed during the last decade or so. But they agreed that, in the grassroots world, looking ahead is more important than looking back. That, to Robin, was a challenge. He went home, dusted off his crystal ball, and came up with ten points which, in his opinion, could become major grassroots trends in the next ten years. The list is thought-provoking. How many of these ideas could become reality in your country's grassroots development?

1. Grassroots – but on what type of grass?

Will there be a marked trend towards the use of synthetic grass? The quality of artificial grass has undoubtedly improved in recent years and is likely to continue to do so. Although preferences at the top end of the game are clearly for natural grass, the arguments in favour of synthetic surfaces at grassroots levels are that the pitches are more durable and last longer, that they are usually cheaper to maintain, and that they require less water – which, in many countries, is an issue which could take on greater

importance over the next ten years, if not already. Another relevant question is whether synthetic surfaces offer advantages in terms of intensive usage in relationship with natural 11-a-side pitches which, in some countries, remain unused for a large percentage of the week.

2. 11 v 11? Or small-sided games?

There will always be a hard core of grassroots players who are totally committed to the game. But, with greater numbers becoming interested in playing at grassroots level, other leisure patterns come into play – and this could mean a greater presence of adults (over-18s) who are reluctant to commit to, say, 30 weekends per season of 11-a-side football. Can the grassroots game cater for the players who want to enjoy their football in smaller bites? The answer may well depend on small-sided games to correspond with working and social units which are smaller than they were 20 years ago – and a quantity of televised football which sometimes acts as a deterrent to participation. As debating points, is it legitimate to argue that five-a-side games are less intimidating for the unskilled? Or that they generate fewer cases of indiscipline or misconduct?

3. Can grassroots football become more flexible?

The first two debating points lead to a third. Will grassroots programmes have to offer greater flexibility? Will players tend to drift away from club memberships which involve yearly subscriptions? Will there be a greater need for "pay and play" opportunities similar to those available in, for example, tennis or golf? Will these opportunities be available 365 days per year, rather than exclusively during a "football season"? How can grassroots schemes best embrace the large number of people who want to play football purely for occasional fun rather than as a fixed commitment over a period of time?



Franklin/Bongarts/Getty Images

Reduced-size pitches are popular for grassroots football

4. Moving away from the clubhouse?

Will advances in online technology inevitably be reflected in the way grassroots football is organised? How widely will the concept of the “virtual club” be implanted? A virtual club is one which minimises running costs by using a social networking home page as a clubhouse. Will grassroots organisers increasingly opt to cut administration costs by offering booking and results services, for example, via the web? How can potential players best be made aware of the nearest facilities by using web pages? And can online services be developed in a way that offers incentives to players – such as the facility to download images of the matches they have played in?

5. Volunteers and parents – how will they be involved?

Linked to the previous point, to what extent can do-it-yourself principles be applied to grassroots football? DIY, in this context, means self-organisation, with reduced reliance on officers, committees and volunteers, coupled with greater emphasis on giving organisational grassroots football responsibilities to the participants who play it. In this respect, will small-sided football, such as five-a-side, become more viable in that it requires fewer volunteers to run it and minimal refereeing to handle it? Will there also be a greater trend towards involving parents in the organisation of grassroots football – as opposed to, in some cases, merely tolerating their presence? Is this likely to emerge as a key issue in the development of the grassroots game at a time when, in some countries, sport and physical education have less specific gravity within school timetables?

6. A trend towards business principles?

Will clubs and national associations be increasingly obliged to compete with commercial providers who sell grassroots football? Or will there be a trend towards working hand in hand? Can attractive social environments be created in which being a club member is not a prerequisite? Will facility sharing become more prevalent, with the result that home and away concepts become blurred (and less relevant) in grassroots leagues?

7. Grassroots on the doorstep?

With travel costs spiralling in many countries, will participation levels in grassroots football depend on the ability to offer participation as close as possible to the players’ homes or places of work? Will the creation of facilities such as mini-pitches or maxi-pitches in urban areas take on greater importance? A greater emphasis

on close-at-hand facilities would also score points in terms of green ecology and cost-effectiveness for participants.

8. Social value = added value?

As explained elsewhere in this issue, the social values attached to grassroots football are achieving greater



D. Aquilina

A seminar on artificial turf in Malta last spring

recognition – and are likely to continue to do so. Will groups and friendships therefore take on greater importance than the traditional concepts of teams or clubs? Will leagues, cups and other competitions become less important than social values such as camaraderie?

9. Football without frontiers?

Linked to the previous debating point, will grassroots football further enhance its value as a unifying and integrating force in countries which have multi-ethnic communities? How can grassroots programmes best be designed in order to appeal to all ethnic groups and to maximise the social plus points which can be derived from enjoying the game of football?

10. What will be the best mix?

Currently, mixed football is solidly structured and regulated. But is the way forward based on offering boys and girls, men and women, greater opportunities to play fun football in mixed teams? Cultures and traditions vary – but will the time come when grassroots activities can be based on friendships and social contacts rather than a one-sex approach?

They may be summarised as just ten pointers towards the future of grassroots football. But a myriad of thought-provoking images emerge from Robin’s crystal ball... ●

London and beyond

And now for Munich. The last issue of the Grassroots Newsletter, sent to the printer just before the second UEFA Grassroots Day, outlined the events scheduled to take place in London – and right across the continent – during the run-up to the UEFA Champions League final at Wembley. The 2011 edition echoed the resounding success of the project which had been initiated in Madrid a year earlier, with the result that Wednesday 16 May has been highlighted in the 2012 diary for the third project of its kind, with the epicentre in Munich, the venue for this season's UEFA Champions League final.

Although the UEFA Grassroots Day was born as a pan-European concept, the success of the UEFA Champions Festival staged at Hyde Park in the English capital illustrated the relevance of having a focal point – a high-profile celebration of grassroots football associated with an event of global magnitude. Former Scottish international John Collins, visiting the Champions Festival as an adidas grassroots ambassador, said: *"UEFA has been working very well, throughout Europe, over a long period, so this can be regarded as the culmination of a whole year's work in grassroots football."*

South African legend Lucas Radebe, also in Hyde Park as one of UEFA's grassroots ambassadors, added: *"The most important thing is for UEFA to be seen to be supporting and promoting grassroots football all over Europe because the future looks great. Grassroots football is something massive – and we must do all we can to take care of it."* Sir Trevor Brooking, head of football development at the English FA, said: *"It's a special day that focuses on the grassroots game, but it also highlights how crucial grassroots football is in the longer term. It's all about focusing on the fun element and trying to develop the skill base in an environment where everyone is encouraged to try new things."*

Former Chelsea star and England international Graeme Le Saux played a leading role in the skills clinics which were part of a varied menu of grassroots activities in Hyde Park. *"It illustrated the fantastic power of football,"* he said, *"and the whole festival was about communities and interaction with the*

city that hosts the UEFA Champions League final. In a social context, it's a fantastic game because, as soon as you get a football out, everyone is the same."

The Grassroots Day events in London provided a striking link with the summit of the professional game. But they represented the highly visible peak of a massive iceberg. As mentioned in our previous issue, the events pegged to UEFA Grassroots Day offered grassroots activities to millions of girls, boys, women and men right across Europe. As a list of projects would fill pages and pages, the magnitude and impetus of grassroots campaigns can best be measured by consulting the diary of events which features in the Training Ground section of UEFA.com. A click on Grassroots and then European Events opens up a mine of information about the whole spectrum of activities organised by UEFA's member associations, ranging from school events to disability tournaments.

The sheer magnitude of the list underlines the principle that, apart from direct involvement in the organisation of



Sir Trevor Brooking, director of football development at the English FA, and former Scotland international John Collins took part in UEFA Grassroots Day activities in London last May



A match played against a backdrop of respect during UEFA Grassroots Day in London

the UEFA Grassroots Day events at the Champions Festival in London, UEFA's role is to encourage rather than to organise. And, even though the UEFA Champions League final is acclaimed as the great climax to the club competition season, another big match, played ten days earlier, had also been the cue for some intense grassroots activities. The UEFA Europa League final staged in Dublin provided incentives for the national association in the Republic of Ireland to promote grassroots football via a series of projects aimed at highlighting the social values of the game.

to promote the final, to encourage fair play, to involve female players and to develop skills. The result was a scheme aimed at club and community teams of Under-10s and Under-12s in 20 local areas around Dublin – and it attracted 1,949 participants. Special fair play rules were tried and tested during pilot matches before the competition proper got under way and clubs were obliged to enter a female team. In the community competition, teams had to have at least one girl on the pitch at all times, and goals scored by the girls counted double – which helped to ensure that they were involved in play and were valued members of their teams. In terms of skill development, the salient feature was the presence of three goals at each end, with the avowed intention of prioritising a passing game and use of the full depth and width of the pitch.

The result was that, according to the FAI's grassroots manager, Miriam Malone, "the quality of games improved enormously as the players got used to the concept. We implemented a 'three passes before shooting' rule which encouraged them to play football instead of just running directly towards the goal all the time." The Road to the Final competition, which culminated in semi-finals and finals played at the Irishtown Stadium on the eve of the big match, also meant that coaches had to be educated – which, in turn, was a good reason for organising a small-sided games workshop for the local coaches who were involved in the project.

Allied with all the activities in London, the event in Dublin which, on its final day, was attended by the UEFA president, Michel Platini, illustrated how grassroots activities can effectively be pegged to big matches at elite levels – and this philosophy is being pursued by UEFA during the run-up to this season's finals in Bucharest and Munich, where grassroots football will, once again, feature on the menu. ●



The grand scheme

UEFA's Study Group Scheme (SGS) is proving to be an enormous success. The sentence could easily be interpreted as self-congratulation – but it isn't. UEFA can take credit for having initiated the project in the summer of 2008 but, when it comes to analysing the resounding successes of the last three years, congratulations need to be directed to the national associations which have brought the scheme to life. An SGS event is based on one member association acting as host to delegations from three others with a view to exchanging knowledge, experience and best-practice concepts. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with the host associations bending over backwards to make the seminars a success. They have invariably shown their best face and fielded their strongest teams to make sure that the results have been optimal.

"This is a very good scheme indeed," says Norway's Per Ravn Omdal, UEFA's grassroots ambassador. *"Exchange of best practice is what we are looking for, and, when I had the pleasure of visiting quite a few of the seminars we staged last season, I met a lot of enthusiastic people from all manner of countries who were united in their dedication to grassroots football and eager to take new ideas on board. I am sure that European football as a whole will benefit from the decision taken by UEFA's Executive Committee to extend the scheme beyond its original time span and to prolong it for four more years."* All 53 of UEFA's member associations have been involved in the scheme, either as hosts or visitors or both.

The SGS has now been expanded from four to five specialities, with the inclusion of seminars dedicated to the education of goalkeeper coaches in addition to elite youth football, women's football, coach education and grassroots football. The latter has proved to be extremely popular, with 22% of all the seminars staged thus far dedicated to the grassroots of the game. The Dutch have always been among the front runners in the grassroots world, and Piet Hubers, manager of the Dutch FA's technical department, says: *"I can confirm that the Study Group Scheme seminars are very inspiring – and not only for the visitors. When you host a seminar, it gives you energy. You take pride in showing your guests your projects and activities and, on the other hand, when you are a visitor, it is always interesting to see how other countries manage their projects and to discover what their vision is on grassroots football. There is a lot of mutual respect – and maybe the success of the UEFA scheme has been built on that."*

UEFA's vision was to lay foundations which would help national associations to tap into the expertise of the countries considered to be the role models in the grassroots field. The idea is for the visitors to make maximum use of the knowledge and experience of the hosts in events that can be described as "multipliers", in that the information and practical details can be taken away and injected into grassroots projects in other countries. This cross-fertilisation



Practical drills in Ukraine during a UEFA Study Group Scheme seminar

process has proved to be highly successful, with visiting teams taking home ideas and information and then deciding which elements could be most successfully adapted to their particular grassroots needs.

Grassroots schemes in Ukraine, for example, are among the most advanced in Europe – and participation

levels in UEFA's Summers of Grassroots Football have always been highly impressive. Kelly Simmons who, as the English FA's "Head of National Game" is currently leading the implementation of a national game strategy which is investing £200 million into grassroots football over a four-year period, had no doubts about the value of an SGS visit to Ukraine. "At The FA, we really looked forward to the workshop on grassroots football in Ukraine. I was fortunate that, as a member of the UEFA Grassroots Panel, I had heard quite a lot about their excellent work in this area. So it was great to have an opportunity to find out more about how they develop and grow the grassroots game. I find that these workshops are invaluable in terms of taking to peers about common issues and solutions in the development of grassroots football."



A Study Group Scheme seminar in Azerbaijan



The popularity and the usefulness of the grassroots seminars can be underpinned by the growing momentum of the statistics. During the inaugural season of the SGS, 10 grassroots visits were staged. In the 2009/10 season, this increased to 12 – and then to 13 during the 2010/11 campaign. On the schedule for the current season, 16 grassroots seminars appear, with the national associations of Cyprus, Israel, Malta, Moldova and Slovenia acting

as SGS hosts for the first time. All five are staging grassroots workshops.

The growing desire to develop grassroots programmes even further is reflected by the four-year trend in the SGS. The 22 grassroots visits organised during the first two seasons of the scheme can be compared with 29 focused on coach education and 30 on elite youth football. The 16 seminars scheduled for the current season push grassroots

up to the same level as elite youth football and ahead of the other two specialities. During the 2011/12 campaign, delegations from 48 national associations will be travelling across the continent to take part in grassroots seminars, meaning that around 530 grassroots technicians and organisers will be taking part in the knowledge sharing programme.

This does not add up to laurels that can be rested on. UEFA's Grassroots Panel has been monitoring the success of the Study Group Scheme and looking for ways of improving it even further. One area currently being reviewed is the core content of the grassroots seminars, in which – up till now – the host association has tailored the agenda to the specific interests of the visiting groups. This flexibility has been one of the many virtues of the scheme while, on the other hand, some participants have suggested that UEFA take a greater hand in the preparation of the workshop content.

"I think the Study Group Scheme has had a fantastically positive effect," UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh, says, "because it allows all of our national associations to see how their role model colleagues are working in the grassroots field." "I think it also has to be seen in a broader context," adds Per Ravn Omdal. "UEFA's Grassroots Charter has been a major stimulator and, when you add the Study Group Scheme to this, it becomes an instrument to improve the focus on grassroots football all over Europe and has done a great deal to make sure that grassroots football is included in the strategic thinking in a big majority of national associations." ●

Added values

The core attractions of grassroots football are that it is great just to kick a ball around with your mates, that anyone can join in, and that you can play it without spending a fortune on equipment. But, while the fun factor in football continues to be fundamental, authorities and governing bodies outside the game are now ready to acknowledge that sport in general and football in particular offer a broad spectrum of add-on values which can help to lay foundations for a healthy and fully integrated society. Those involved in the organisation or administration of grassroots programmes therefore need to be aware of the important peripheral factors which now need to be injected into their objectives or mission statements.

Education, for example. Football is a vehicle which is being increasingly used for educational purposes in a classroom context. Teachers often use football content to make connections with their "audience" and use it as a peg on which to hang material related to other academic subjects which might appear to be less attractive. In terms of developing the person – as opposed to academic qualifications – football also lays important foundations. Players learn to deal with challenges and to solve problems. This starts in the simplest of ways when grassroots players have to find ways of beating opponents in 1 v 1 situations, have to work out how to react when face to face with the goalkeeper, or need to find solutions for 2 v 2

or 3 v 3 situations during a game. Football also transmits strong messages about social values such as respecting rules, team-mates, opponents, officials, and the principles of fair play, along with elements that are difficult to teach, such as the appreciation of hard work.

Lifestyle factors also enter into the grassroots football equation in a society where welfare and medical costs have, in many countries, become important political and financial issues. Health and fitness are two different things – a healthy person is not necessarily fit and a fit person is not always healthy. Ideally, football can help to look after both. At the same time, grassroots football can transmit lifestyle messages about, for example, smoking, recreational drugs and healthy diets – the latter being the subject of *Eat For Goals*, the book produced by UEFA and the World Heart Federation, one of UEFA's football and social responsibility core partners, with the support of the European Commission. Available in various languages, it contains the favorite recipes of various top players. UEFA's next lifestyle project is the *Master Your Emotions* book, developed by another of UEFA's football and social responsibility core partners, Education4Peace, with UEFA's support, and which is also going to be available in online versions.

Clubs, national associations, governments, local authorities and NGOs are increasingly aware of the social benefits which can be directly derived from grassroots programmes. As the chairman of UEFA's Medical Committee, Michel D'Hooghe, maintains, *"if you move to a different town or country, the first thing you should do is to join a local football club. It really helps you to integrate."* Social integration has become an important added value in a large number of grassroots projects all over Europe, many of them backed by non-football entities. Football – and UEFA in particular – has been in the front line of the battle against any form of discrimination and, as UEFA's grassroots ambassador, Per Ravn Omdal, says: *"One of the best things about football is that it's colour blind."* The use of football as a unifying force has been steadily gaining momentum over the last decade or so, along with acknowledgement of the role of grassroots activities in personality development in a day and age when online technology is making



Recipe ideas for a healthy diet

UEFA

it easier and easier to live “by remote control” rather than on a face to face basis. Football provides opportunities to relate and communicate with other people, to mix socially with team-mates, to develop friendships and to absorb messages which can influence social behaviour. At no matter what age, closest friends are very often the people encountered on a football pitch and in the dressing room.

Until relatively recently, one of the often heard adages of the game was “*football and politics don’t mix*”. But, now, grassroots football is demonstrating that they do. Politicians are aware that grassroots football can help them fulfil their duty towards society via many of the points mentioned above. This, in turn, means that politicians have become more aware of and receptive to the need to invest in facilities such as urban pitches, training facilities and lighting. National associations are evidently at the sharp end of grassroots projects, but governments and local authorities are increasingly willing to provide support when needed.

Much the same applies within the business community. Many grassroots activities and promotions enjoy commercial recognition, endorsement or sponsorship by companies which recognise that they give a healthy look to their image by associating themselves with a sport that offers them a wonderful platform and a direct route to large numbers of potential customers. Grassroots football is an attractive market because of its positive values and environment and because it is essentially family-oriented.

But the fringe benefits, no matter how important they are becoming in today’s society, should not be allowed to obscure the core element. Football is both a sport and a school for life. Along with the fun and lifestyle elements, grassroots activities offer sporting satisfactions associated with the acquisition of skills, technique and the basic concepts of the planet’s most popular team game. Enjoyment

is enhanced by learning to play better and by gradually injecting competitive elements based on a natural desire to improve and to win – rather than on material objectives



Numerous grassroots football events attract brands

such as cups, medals or money. With children, football can be played as league or cup competitions, but without an over-emphasis on results or points. Games present opportunities for youngsters to learn to handle winning and losing – to be good losers and good winners. Players do not like losing, but they can learn how to live with it and how to handle it. The main motivation at grassroots level is not so much winning as sharing and enjoying a game with friends and, quite simply, love of the game. As UEFA’s technical director, Andy Roxburgh, says: “Every top player was once a grassroots player – the only difference is that some leave the grassroots level earlier than others.”

As Jürgen Klinsmann, currently the manager of the US national team, famously remarked: “Grassroots soccer is for all ages, genders, sizes, shapes, levels of ability, nationalities, faiths, races... everyone.” Arsène Wenger harmonises with the view that “a child growing up in Japan loves the ball in exactly the same way as a child in France”. Today, grassroots football offers a broad spectrum of social benefits but the core value is still the passion for playing the game. Louis Armstrong once said: “What we play is life” – and, instead of jazz music, he could easily have been referring to grassroots football. ●



A festival for children during the final round of the European Women’s U17 Championship in Nyon in 2010

Top of the grassroots

Pages of the calendar have been turned since UEFA's annual awards were announced on UEFA Grassroots Day. But it would be a travesty not to recognise the 2011 winners in the three award categories. It has to be said that the jury debated long and hard before proposals were submitted to the UEFA Executive Committee and the names were slipped into the three Oscar-winners' envelopes.

Best Grassroots Project

The 2010 award had gone to the Open Fun Football Schools in Moldova and, in 2011 a German project was selected for the accolade, in the face of some outstanding opposition. Had there been bronze and silver medals, they would have gone to the mini and maxi-league project in Serbia and the large-scale Kolos programme of rural children's festivals involving 45,320 teams in Ukraine.



The award, however, went to the German region of **Schleswig-Holstein** in recognition of a comprehensive, benchmarking development programme undertaken by a regional association with strong emphasis on social values, such as the promotion of fair play principles and opposition to violence and xenophobia.

Best Grassroots Club

Again, the sheer quality of the candidates made decision-making a challenging process. If possible, a position on the podium would have been occupied by Dutch club FlevoBoys, a role-model grassroots club at regional level with a strong youth policy and an enviable track record in the education of grassroots coaches and leaders. English club Curley Park Rangers FC also had a strong case based on 36 years of work at community level with 550 members and 38 teams.

But the 2011 award went to Finland's **Hameenlinnan Jalkapalloseura**, a blend of four clubs which merged in 1999 and, over the last



Vesa Koivunen



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decade, has organised grassroots activities at all levels, including disability and recreational, has established excellent relationships with schools, and has created a top-class social and footballing environment.

Best Grassroots Leader

The basic principle is to recognise hard work and commitment by coaches or organisers over a number of years – and all of the nominees were deserving of an award. Heinz Maintolk of German club SV Sedlitz 90, for example, received a DFB award for 20 years of work with asylum seekers. And Slovenia's Danilo Lukner of ONS Ljubljana has also been working for 20 years in children's football programmes, in roles ranging from coach to president.



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However, the 2011 award went to **John de Looze** in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to grassroots football as a volunteer amateur club organiser working hand in hand with the Dutch national association, the KNVB, in organising all sorts of grassroots activities, ranging from summer camps to disability programmes. ●

Editorial Group
Andy Roxburgh
Graham Turner

Production
André Vieli
Dominique Maurer

Layout, Print
CO Créations
Artgraphic Cavin SA