

## EDITORIAL

## REWARDING HARD WORK

From 8 to 12 April, the UEFA Grassroots Workshop was held at Ullevaal Stadion in Oslo. It was the tenth event of its kind, and the first which I had the privilege to “lead” on behalf of UEFA.

The venue was perfect. On the first afternoon, it was somehow symbolic to see a full range of grassroots activities for girls and boys on the pitch which is usually associated with Norway's cup finals and national team matches. It symbolised how the base of the football pyramid should be brought as close to the peak as possible. This was brought home to me by the attitude of the participants. The workshop was held during the week when the return legs in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League were being played. The four matches involved teams from only five of the 53 UEFA member associations who attended the event in Oslo. But everybody wanted to watch the games, feel part of the action and admire the playing and coaching skills at the top end of European club football. Even though they were men and women whose jobs focus on the base of the pyramid, they were keen to see what is going on at the top. I believe that it is equally important for those engaged at the top of the professional tree not to lose sight of their origins at grassroots level. The common denominator is our passion for the game of football.

That's why, for me, it was a great privilege take the stage, on the third morning, alongside former Liverpool FC and Norway star Stig Inge Bjørnebye and three-time UEFA Champions League winner with Real Madrid CF Fernando Hierro. The presenter pointed out that we jointly totalled 239 appearances for our national teams. But we all recalled that, when we were grassroots players, we had dreams of reaching the top, but had no idea that we were going to make it. We also thought back with gratitude to the coaches who helped to shape us as footballers and



as human beings. And that was one of the other messages to emerge strongly from the workshop in Oslo – the importance of saying thank you.

Offering “fun football” opportunities to men, women, boys, girls, the socially underprivileged or those with impaired abilities is a task which is usually about the passion, the enthusiasm and the incredible work ethic of the men and women who make vital contributions as volunteers. In many national associations, there is not a volunteer culture to match that of our Nordic hosts. So that is something that, as we work together to nurture grassroots football throughout Europe, we need to develop.

Some national associations – including major nations like Germany – hold annual award ceremonies to thank volunteers for their efforts. UEFA has been at the forefront in this respect and is encouraging all national associations to follow suit. For the first time, our annual grassroots awards were presented during the workshop in Oslo and, to highlight the importance we give them, a footballing legend, Gianni Rivera, was on stage to present them.

It was good to reward hard work. And it was good to demonstrate that hard work at grassroots level is extremely rewarding. ●

*Ioan Lupescu*  
UEFA Chief Technical Officer

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# UEFA GRASSROOTS DAY – CHAPTER FOUR

The idea of promoting grassroots football on a pan-European basis dates back to 2004 when, as part of UEFA's golden jubilee commemorations, the Summer of Grassroots Football was launched, with the aim of engaging as many players as possible. Its success can be gauged by the fact that, in five years, the number of participants declared to UEFA rose from 500,000 to 4.6 million. However, the summer concept was so diffuse that, in 2009, it was decided to create a clearer focal point by naming a UEFA Grassroots Day. The proposal by the UEFA President, Michel Platini, to move the UEFA Champions League final from Wednesday to Saturday opened up a window of opportunity and, in 2010, the epicentre of the first UEFA Grassroots Day was a Champions Festival set up in the El Retiro park in central Madrid to coincide with the final between José Mourinho's FC Internazionale Milano and Louis van Gaal's FC Bayern München. Second and third chapters of the story were written in London and Munich – and the fourth is being penned in different areas of London, as the UEFA Champions League final returns to the English capital.

This year, Wednesday 22 May is The Day and, at UEFA's two major club competition finals, a wide range of grassroots activities have been wrapped around that date. In London, the UEFA President will be commemorating the day itself by handing over a maxi-pitch to the host association at Churchill Gardens in Pimlico, a 32-block housing estate erected in the post-war era.



Grassroots activities organised in connection with the UEFA Champions League final in Madrid in 2010...

By that time, Trafalgar Square, one of the emblematic tourist magnets in the city, will have been dressed in football livery, featuring giant signposts pointing the way to the two finals at Stamford Bridge and Wembley. The square will be illuminated by highlights of UEFA Champions League history, a photo booth will have been set up, and former internationals will be taking part in the celebrations – among

them Portugal's futsal icon Ricardinho, in London to demonstrate his skills.

But some events have been shifted slightly, bearing in mind that the Monday following the Wembley final is a public holiday in England. To achieve maximum impact, the Champions Festival will run from Thursday 23 May through to a climax on the day after the final. The venue is emblematic – the International Quarter alongside the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. As the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, told UEFA.com: *"It will provide a family event and will revive the spirit of community and celebration that made last year's Olympic Games so special."*

The UEFA Champions Festival is the first major event to be staged at the home of the 2012 Olympic Games. Former Liverpool FC, Real Madrid CF and England star Steve McManaman has been acting as UEFA's ambassador for this season's Wembley final and will be playing a prominent role in the events at the International Quarter, welcoming the fans to *"an event that gives both parents and children the opportunity to celebrate football in a truly spectacular venue with free admission for all. We expect everybody to be blown away by the amazing multi-event entertainment programme that is being offered."* One novelty is the presence of Irish graffiti artist James Earley, who will be gradually completing a work that will be a permanent legacy of the event.

The Champions Festival is set up in collaboration with the UEFA Champions League's commercial partners with a view to involving and entertaining as wide a public as possible via skills clinics, training sessions with professional coaches, and exhibitions such as the UEFA Champions League Museum. In conjunction with UEFA Grassroots Day, The FA is organising specific women's football and futsal days on Thursday and Friday respectively – the former pegged to the UEFA Women's Champions League final between defending champions Olympique Lyonnais and debutants VfL Wolfsburg at Stamford Bridge. Faye White will also be joined by Pia Sundhage, Steffi Jones and Patrik Andersson who, as ambassadors for the event, will be warming up the crowds for the UEFA Women's EURO 2013 in Sweden. This offers a good pointer as to how major events can be interlinked and associated with the grassroots game. The futsal games on the Friday will feature players from the English national team.

But the main spectator attraction at the Olympic Park is bound to be the Ultimate Champions match scheduled for 12.30 local time on the day of the Wembley final, when McManaman will be joined by Vítor Baía, Cafú, Robert Pirès, Giovanni





Getty Images

van Bronckhorst, Fabio Cannavaro, Christian Karembeu and other big stars who have recently hung up their professional boots. The events on the day after the final include mini-tournaments for Under-8 boys and Under-11 girls, plus matches and contests involving partially sighted and deaf players and a blind penalty shoot-out in which the public is invited to take part.

Taking part in grassroots games is also the keynote of the events which will have been linked to the UEFA Europa League final played at the Amsterdam ArenA ten days earlier. During the run-up to the big game, the Dutch national association (KNVB) is organising a series of mass participation events, starting with a competition involving 3,000 boys and girls from primary schools – to be more precise, 300 boys' and girls' teams in the Under-10 and Under-12 categories. As in London, events will have an Olympic flavour, with the finals and other activities taking place near the Olympic Stadium, at the Olympiaplein, home to AVV Swift, a grassroots club which runs 36 youth and 26 senior teams.

The other similarity to London is that the grassroots activities linked to the final feature specific theme days, the first being on 8 May, which has been given a "girls only" label. Training sessions, matches and skills clinics have been designed for some 400 players in youth categories, with players from AFC Ajax's women's team on the pitch to help out. Two days later, the theme switches to "clinics and tricks" with 300 youngsters sharpening their skills in the 6–11 and 12–14 age groups.

Next on the agenda is a family day, featuring a "young and old" tournament in which youngsters and their parents play alongside each other. Two days before the UEFA Europa League final, the theme is "Respect", symbolised by matches involving teenagers, neighbourhood parents and players from public services like the police, the fire brigade and social workers.

*...and in Munich in 2012*

This is one of the events to be staged at the maxi-pitch on Kramatweg, which has been donated by UEFA to the city of Amsterdam and which is to be officially handed over by the UEFA President at a ceremony on the eve of the final at the ArenA. This is to be followed by a children's disability match and a 2x10 minutes game between local children, with Team Platini taking on Team Kluivert – the latter named in honour of the former AFC Ajax striker Patrick Kluivert, who has been acting as UEFA ambassador for the Amsterdam final.

The aggregate result is an impressive total of grassroots events which are being pegged to UEFA's two major club finals. The reason for listing them is not only to highlight the events in themselves but also to illustrate the importance of exploiting the big events to offer something special to the players who form the broad base of the footballing pyramid and to encourage more youngsters to engage in a game which contributes to healthy lifestyles and social values – a theme which runs through the whole of this issue. ●

# BIG EVENT = GRASSROOTS OPPORTUNITY

The outstanding success of UEFA's decision to peg a Grassroots Day and a Champions Festival to the UEFA Champions League final has highlighted the value of the big events in the footballing calendar in terms of promoting grassroots activities. There are various ways of going about it, as emphasised during a trio of presentations at the recent workshop in Oslo.

The fixture list for 2013 features, in chronological order, the final tournament of the European Under-21 Championship in Israel and the Women's EURO 2013 in Sweden. To enrich the cocktail, the Norwegian hosts added some extra spice by running through some of the events which they link to the annual cup final played in November.

the Under-21 players (on site for the whole day) for pictures and autographs, and watch a game between national team players and celebrities such as singers and actors. *"What we did," Raz explained, "was to expose our activities, offer visitors memorable family moments and forge links between communities and the IFA. We had 20,000 visitors and 200,000 viewers on a sports channel. We also organised a quiz, which allowed us to collect data and reach out to more fans and grassroots players through the social media."*

## Green card

The IFA is one of the national associations to adopt the Finnish idea of giving referees a green card to show to players as a positive reward for a fair play gesture. The IFA has applied this concept to the grassroots football played

by some 15,000 children under the age of 12. The 25 players who had received the most green cards during the season were invited, with one parent, to take part in the parade which preceded the national team's FIFA World Cup qualifier against Portugal. The winners travelled to the stadium on a bus branded with the Under-21 livery, on which they met international referee Liran Liany. And, since that day, both children and parents have been acting as ambassadors for the Under-21 tournament.

The third pillar of the campaign was to demonstrate that the IFA stands for equality and coexistence, in the belief that cooperation in the world of football can be extended into other walks of life. *"We set out to stress that 25% of our players and our teams represent ethnic minorities," commented Raz. "And in our Under-21 squad we have*

*eight Arab and 14 Jewish players who are united by friendship and their love for football."* Prior to the final tournament, the squad visited a theatre in each host city to take part in discussions on coexistence, led by a professional mediator. The programme designed for the tournament itself features youth football activities, a Jewish/Arab competition organised in conjunction with the Peres Center for Peace, and an international conference for fans.

## Promotion of girls' football

The scenario in Sweden is completely different – as explained by Peter Landström, the Swedish FA's project leader for the UEFA Women's EURO 2013. *"Our objectives have been clear,"* he said.



Sportsfile

*The UEFA President gets involved in a bit of grassroots football at the draw for the UEFA Women's EURO 2013*

Orit Raz, youth department director at the Israel FA (IFA) explained that the campaign related to the Under-21 tournament had been built on three pillars. *"We wanted to create awareness of the event and to sell tickets,"* she told the audience in Oslo. *"But we also designed a programme in which families were our target market, where the emphasis was on rewarding social values, and – this is something special to Israel – to promote our Under-21 team as a role model of coexistence."*

The IFA decided to adapt their annual national team open day to the Under-21 squad, converting the national stadium into a sort of adventure park. Fans could visit the dressing rooms, ask



*"We want to fill stadiums and promote girls' football."*

An extensive programme was designed to achieve those aims, with the six venues for the final tournament paired off with the intention of offering tailor-made activities to local communities. In the Vaxjo/Kalmar axis, for example, the regional FA worked with grassroots clubs to organise 300 visits to kindergartens to inform the children about the Women's EURO 2013, training camps were arranged for over 300 girls in the 10–13 age-bracket (culminating in watching a Women's EURO 2013 game), and the Kalmar football festival provided a grassroots tournament for boys and girls aged between 10 and 14.

The menu for the Linköping/Norrköping pairing included some different ingredients, such as a basic-level coach education course for women and visits by an immigrant elite-level player, Shamiram Yakob, to girls in what Peter described as *"segregated areas"* with a view to encouraging them to try a game of football. Two other elite Swedish players conducted visits to 66 local schools with the aim of introducing the game to children in the 7-9 age bracket and putting them in touch with local grassroots clubs. Another interesting innovation was a series of visits to clubs by physiotherapists to educate girls aged 12-14 in *"knee control"* with the objective of preventing injuries – a topic which is especially relevant in the girls' game, where ratios of cruciate ligament injuries are significantly higher than in men's football. The full list of activities organised under the *"Winning Ground"* slogan (gaining ground in the promotion of girls' football) is too extensive to publish. But it would be remiss not to mention that the spectrum of events includes a conference involving the Swedish FA and the women's and men's leagues, an elite coaches conference, a symposium for referees from the Nordic countries, and a programme specifically designed for the commercial partners who offered support to the final tournament and the events attached to it.

### Gathering the football family

During the workshop in Oslo, Alf Hansen, a former teacher who has been director of football development at the Norwegian FA since 2009, explained how the cup final at Ullevaal Stadion, rated by Norwegians as the biggest date on their football calendar, is a peg on which various events are hung. *"We believe that it is important to use big events,"* he said, *"to gather the football family to offer them inspiration, reflection and professional input spiced with social experiences."*



*Grassroots football at Olympiapark in Munich before the 2012 UEFA Champions League final*

That menu sounds as though it represents some difficult work in the kitchen. But the first course has become a typical Norwegian dish. The cup final seminar is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year and has grown into a three-day event involving approximately 750 coaches from all levels, who culminate their visit to Oslo by attending the women's cup final on the Saturday and the men's final the following day. The seminar offers re-education opportunities for A and Pro licence coaches and features workshops dedicated specifically to areas such as children's football, player development and research – the latter helped by the fact that the Norwegian school of sports science is among the bodies who get together to organise the event.

With regard to grassroots football, the key element is a four-hour seminar, featuring top-level speakers, for 200 coaches, parents and volunteers. High-profile lecturers also participate in a five-hour seminar for grassroots leaders from clubs and regional associations. At this event, the Norwegian FA presents its annual awards to the best young leader, the best grassroots club and the best regional association.

The three national associations jointly demonstrate how big events can be exploited to form a football family, to gather the family together, and, in the case of Sweden this summer, to vigorously promote the further development of the rapidly growing women's game. ●

# THE INTEGRATION GAME

On page 4 of this issue, we mention how the Israel Football Association has been linking grassroots events to this summer's European Under-21 Championship final tournament. Arguably, a project in Northern Ireland is comparable with the scenario in Israel – not just because the two national associations happen to be identified with the same IFA initials, but mainly because, for a long period, football was being played against a backdrop of social conflict. But the interesting thing is that the Northern Irish national association has pinned a grassroots festival to a non-footballing event.

The starting point was when Derry-Londonderry was declared UK city of culture for 2013. The IFA grasped the opportunity to link football into the programme, with the association's coaching department running a number of events and activities in the city throughout the year. But the highest-profile event in their project is a large-scale grassroots festival in the city to commemorate UEFA Grassroots Day on 22 May. The venue for the festival is Ebrington Square, which is a new shared-space outdoor venue built on a former army parade ground and strategically placed between the two formerly opposed communities at the foot of the new Peace Bridge across the River Foyle.

Derry-Londonderry (the city is recognised by both names) has had a turbulent political history which has had repercussions in its footballing life. As it directly borders the Republic of Ireland, there have been issues of player eligibility, for example. However one constant has prevailed – the power of football to unite people from the two main political traditions. In recent years, the Irish FA has been making great efforts to develop football infrastructure in the city, with full-time staff delivering both football and social inclusion programmes. The declared aim of the Irish FA/UEFA grassroots festival is to showcase the positive values of the city and demonstrate how football can be used as a means to unite, play and learn together.

In consequence, the grassroots festival has been constructed to embrace a variety of activities and attractions to cater for all parts of the community: boys, girls, the elderly, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, people from socially disadvantaged groups, and local sporting and non-sporting personalities. The project was designed with a football arena as the focal point at the Ebrington Square venue. On the pitch, a full programme of structured games has been organised, giving all the social groupings from all sectors of the city opportunities to play some football. The hundreds of players involved in 12 hours of continuous football on UEFA Grassroots Day feature sporting heroes and local political figures who enthusiastically agreed to take part in fun challenge matches.

The festival also includes skills zones aimed at giving the general public opportunities to test their abilities at visually spectacular skill stations – and another novel feature is that, with assis-



Irish Football Association



tance from the Dutch embassy, Panna football is to be played in the city for the first time. This is a variation of the game which originated in Suriname where, as a logical result of the lack of goalposts in street football, goals are scored by putting the ball through the opponent's legs – or, to put it another way, a nutmeg is a goal. But that's another story.

The Grassroots Day activities in Derry-Londonderry represent a high-profile, media-friendly event staged against a backdrop of sustained work by the Irish FA. During the grassroots workshop in Oslo, Maria Wilson, the IFA's volunteer and policy development officer, explained how football has been proactive in times of significant social changes.

*"In the past," she explained, "there was a hostile environment which put a brake on the number of people coming to Northern Ireland. But suddenly we discovered that we had to deal with migrant communities. What we did was to set up, in 2003, a multi-ethnic team which we called World United, which was open to anyone who identified with our objectives of sharing our passion for the game, promoting respect and providing an environment free from racism and sectarianism."* World United initially travelled around Northern Ireland to play games, but the project gradually broadened into workshops for children and communities which reached a wider audience and helped to upgrade the skills of the volunteers who were contributing to the programme.

*"The idea of forming a Women's World United was born in 2009 and the idea came to fruition in 2011," Wilson adds. "As soon as the team started playing matches, we realised that there were very different needs and parameters within communities. But, within a year, we were able to stage workshops and engage clubs in community schemes, based on action plans which had a reach of three to five years into the future. We then started to go into schools to encourage them to embrace changes – and we published a teachers' workbook to help us to transmit our messages."*

The project moved even deeper into communities when a street league became operational at the beginning of 2010. This was a scheme which targeted marginalised males in the 17+ age bracket. "Marginalised" covered a broad spectrum of men who were homeless, who were long-term unemployed, who were fighting drug or alcohol dependencies, who were asylum seekers or who could be categorised in other disadvantaged groupings.



A young Irish footballer tests his skills

*"We organised two hours of football on Friday evenings," Wilson recalled, "and when we started, you could see from their body language that they were on the defensive. But, once the ball started rolling, you could see their self-esteem and motivation growing. Within a short time we were up to as many as 60 participants per week and some of them started admitting that the football had given them a new purpose in life. And, of course, their fitness started to improve."*

One of the slides that Maria projected onto the screen at the workshop in Oslo contained the following statistics:

- 92% said that playing in Street League had had positive effects on their health and well-being
- 92% said that being involved with Street League had improved their perception of other communities
- 89% said that Street League had benefited their life in some way
- 92% of players had found a new motivation for life
- 73% said their lives had changed for the better
- 93% had successfully addressed a drug or alcohol dependency
- 35% had secured regular employment
- 44% had improved their housing situation
- 39% had chosen to pursue their education.

The figures speak volumes for the success of one of the many social integration projects which are being prioritised throughout modern Europe with, on many occasions, solid financial support from governments and local authorities as well as footballing bodies. ●

# GRASSROOTS CLUBS OR CLUBS WITH GRASSROOTS

*"At my first club, I understood how important it was to have good coaches. That's when the kids need to be given their passion for the game of football."* The comment was made by UEFA's chief technical officer and former Romanian international loan Lupescu during the round-table session he mentions on the front page of this issue. But what is the club? And who are the coaches? Parameters vary widely across Europe – and the extremes were represented by former Spanish international Fernando Hierro and former Norway star Stig Inge Bjørnebye, who accompanied "Lupo" on stage in Oslo. *"In Spain",* Fernando explained, *"we don't have a volunteer culture to compare with Norway. At schools you need to be qualified as a coach, so it's difficult to be a traditional 'volunteer'. We're lucky in the sense that we have a coach education process that gives us so many top-quality coaches."*

## Strength of character

In Spain, professional clubs form most of the slices of the grassroots cake – which is also the case within other member associations. The debating point is to what extent elite talent detection and development encroach on purer "football for fun" principles. The potential conflict was highlighted when both Fernando and Stig (as he was nicknamed during his time in the Premier League) recalled that they had been told *"you're not going to make it"*. Fernando commented: *"This brought out the best in me and I was fortunate to be given a second chance by another professional club."* For Stig, it was almost the final curtain: *"My first instinct was to walk away from the game,"* he admitted. *"It was only after three days of talk-*



Fernando Hierro

*ing things over with my father that I decided to carry on. I came out of my comfort zone and I came back stronger. Three seasons later, I was in the national team."* Both had the strength of character to bounce back. But the underlying moral and debating point is whether "you're not going to make it" and similar sentences should be obliterated from the vocabulary of grassroots coaches in an era where one of the prime aims is to encourage teenagers to stay in the game throughout their adult life.

This is not to say that pro clubs ignore "fun football" concepts. Far from it. During the workshop in Oslo, for example, Bodo Menze, long-serving head of FC Schalke 04's youth department, explained how the German club reached

into grassroots football via the social responsibility programmes run by Schalke's foundation. By contrast, as explained by Stig, now head of football development at the Norwegian FA, top professional clubs account for only 2.4% of the clubs in Norway. *"I think it's wrong to set social responsibility programmes against elite development,"* he commented, *"when they should be feeding from each other, making demands on each other and assisting each other."*

## First-hand contact

The participants in the UEFA workshop had first-hand contact with prime examples of the approach in Norway, where there are 1,913 clubs with an average of 14 teams apiece. Participants in a practical session at Ullevaal Stadion, for instance, hailed from Skedsmo FK which, with 1,200 active players and 750 coaches or leaders, is among the biggest clubs in the country. The second practical session took the participants to Heming IL, an amateur club with a €1 million annual turnover and a philosophy which raises another debating point. Whereas other sports are frequently regarded as competitors to football, Heming embraces them – to the extent where Stig, at one stage, had to make a choice between football and ski-jumping. *"We work on the premise that it's positive to stimulate a desire for sporting activity,"* he maintains.



Stig Inge Bjørnebye

Heming's philosophy is to provide a wide range of sporting options to families living in the area and to offer routes to the top levels to those who are equipped to reach them. The club has 1,000 active football players, of whom 25% are girls. The 65 teams in the 6-12 age bracket play their football in 5v5 or 7v7 format and only the 16 teams in the 13-19 age group play 11v11. *"I think 13 is a fantastic age to start 11v11,"* Fernando Hierro commented, whereas Stig rued *"I always had to play 11v11 because there was nothing else at the time. Small-sided games are a great innovation."*

The club runs training or academy activities on every day of the year with, in the children's department, a "workforce" of 65 teams, 130 volunteers, 650 players and 1,200 parents. At 13, boys and girls move into the youth and senior department run by 350 players, 700 parents, 20 volunteers and 20 professionally qualified coaches. At Heming, the working premise is that the club and its philosophy are more important than the component





*A round table to kick off the discussions*

parts. The coaches and leaders are the key persons when it comes to transmitting the club's credo – which is why there are regular meetings between all the coaches, why there are written guidelines (in the club's "little green book") with regard to educational approach, and why the club engages in ongoing coach education programmes. Training sessions vary according to age groups, but the primordial target is to work on combining speed with technique. Sessions devote more-or-less equal time to speed and control, passing and possession play, and games with goals. Detailed game plans have been drawn up for all types of matches from 5v5 to 11v11 and published on a website that also features routines for individual training.

### Amateur principles

In the journey from amateur to professional clubs, FK Lyn – which also provided players for one of the practical sessions during the workshop – can be regarded as a halfway house. As one of the Norwegian league's co-founders in 1896, the club was traditionally divided into professional and amateur sections... until the financial collapse of the former in 2010. This led to a renaissance based on amateur principles and, in playing terms, Lyn's "phoenix from the ashes" act has pushed teams back up to the second tier of both the men's and women's game. A feature to underscore, however, is that Lyn also prioritise quality coaching and all the club's youth teams are run by professional coaches.

Continuing the journey further towards the professional side, the participants in Oslo ran into

FK Molde – a club which, despite having its home in a town of 26,000 inhabitants, has won the Norwegian league championship for the last two seasons. The professional club has an annual turnover of €13.5 million, with €810,000 specifically earmarked as a grassroots budget. Significantly, the club was represented by two men on the stage in Oslo: Tarje Jacobsen, a board member, and grassroots director Terje Myseth. The presence of the former provided a demonstration that the champions take their grassroots programme seriously and don't treat it as a sideshow. The club "recruits" (from within) between 45 and 70 young players who have the potential to progress to higher levels. But the emphasis is on providing football to 330 players in the 5-12 age group and 275 aged 13-19 – with the help of 145 volunteers and 1,200 parents.

*"I'm always grateful to my parents for having taken me to a club and introduced me to sport," Stig remarked. "For the future, those who have been there and done it are a great asset, even if they just add their presence at grassroots events as ambassadors." Fernando agreed: "You can be a role model and transmit the lessons you have learned. Football has helped us and now we have an obligation to help others."*

Ioan Lupescu summed it all up: *"We have seen that Norway is a big model for other countries to follow. That is why, if we want to promote and nurture grassroots football all over Europe, it is so important for us to work together and to learn from each other."* ●

# STARGAZING

The origins of pertinent debating at the UEFA grassroots workshop in Oslo can be traced back to a ceremony which had taken place some nine weeks earlier, when the president and general secretary of the Bulgarian national association had put their signatures to the UEFA Grassroots Charter. It laid a milestone in that all 53 member associations had become signatories and that, barely eight years after the charter's launch, the circle had been closed. This was obviously a cue for a degree of satisfaction but, at the same time, it represented a cue for reflection: what next? Success is no excuse for resting on laurels. The current challenge is to eliminate all risks of a full circle being confused with a zero.

natories by EURO 2008 and 25 associations with more than one star by 2009. In November 2009, 47 members had accumulated 117 stars. The current balance is:

✓ 1 star	18 member associations
✓ 2 stars	4
✓ 3 stars	7
✓ 4 stars	5
✓ 5 stars	9
✓ 6 stars	10

With six more stars pending ratification by the Executive Committee, the total is potentially 178 at an average of 3.36 per national association.



*The participants at the Oslo workshop get down to some theory*

The first chapter of the Oslo story was drafted by the UEFA Grassroots Panel, which met in the afternoon prior to the official opening of the workshop. Debating was then transferred into the discussion groups during the main event. And there will be further reflection by the panel and a working group before any concrete proposals are submitted to the Development and Technical Assistance Committee or, eventually, the Executive Committee.

The background to the ongoing review of current status is the sheer success of the UEFA Grassroots Charter. It was conceived in 2004 and born in the following year. The initial aim was to have 20 member associations on board by the end of 2007 – which was achieved with time to spare. The same applied to the targets of 30 sig-

As a reminder, stars 2 to 5 are awarded on the basis of "promotion and growth", "registered players", "social and disability projects" and programmes aimed at the growth of women's football. The sixth star is given for a highly developed grassroots programme and the seventh star – the maximum accolade – for programmes which attain benchmark levels. Nine member associations are currently eligible for the seventh star.

The questions posed in Oslo were whether the star system is over-complicated, whether the differences between six-star and seven-star status are clear enough, whether the criteria for the seventh star can be accurately measured, whether the sustained fulfilment of the star system requirements can be effectively monitored by UEFA on a regular basis (in three-year cycles), and whether it is now time to restructure and ration-

alise the system. One of the proposals was to change direction towards a simplified three-tier format based on growth in terms of registered players, the ability to encourage players to stay in the game, and grassroots programmes which effectively offer football to everyone in society. The pros and cons are being debated and the ongoing consultations represent an important symptom of UEFA's commitment to grassroots development and the determination to prevent the success of the Grassroots Charter from being translated into a loss of momentum. How can national associations be offered incentives to continually upgrade and fine-tune their grassroots programmes? And how can the six-star and seven-star members of the charter help other national associations to scale the grassroots ladder?



The review of the Grassroots Charter formed part of an opening-day session in Oslo, conducted by UEFA's chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu, and head of football education services, Frank Ludolph. They assessed the rapid progression and proliferation of grassroots programmes during the 18-year period since UEFA set up a Fun Football Working Group in 1995, converted it into a fully fledged committee in 1996, and organised the first UEFA grassroots conference in 1997. UEFA's grassroots newsletter was first published in 2001 – a year when national association presidents and general secretaries put their signatures to a declaration underscoring "the value of grassroots programmes as vehicles for educational, social and sporting development". To commemorate UEFA's golden jubilee in 2004, the "Summer of Grassroots Football" was introduced with the aim of encouraging member associations to develop massive promotional events, while the UEFA Grassroots Day came into play in 2010.

In the meantime, the first regional grassroots workshop had been staged in Oslo during the 2005/06 season and, since the introduction of UEFA's Study Group Scheme in 2008, 64 grassroots seminars have been hosted by 29 different national associations. "A lot of good work is being done by UEFA and its 53 member associations," said UEFA's grassroots ambassador, Per Ravn Omdal, when, with his resounding voice and clenched-fist passion, he delivered a trademark motivational address on the opening day of the event staged on his home soil in Norway. "We have the best product in the world but we must continually refine it and adapt it to future needs. Some people look at what is being achieved in the leading grassroots nations and they tend to say 'in our country, that is not possible'. I don't like to hear that. We must all focus on our local societies and decide how we can make them a little bit better."

For UEFA's grassroots ambassador, the keys are attitudes and the education of coaches, leaders and parents. "It's important to look at the football pyramid from time to time," he said. "We have thousands of people dealing with professional players, but our obligations are to the millions who are waiting out there for us. We have to focus on shaping human beings to become good citizens – some of whom might become good football players. We have to make sure that grassroots football is not steered by selfish coaching ambitions and that team selection is not based on winning. We mustn't forget that most kids start playing because they want to have fun with their friends, so we need to give them equal opportunities in terms of playing

*time; it is important for coaches to pay equal attention to all players; we need to encourage the better players to help the weaker ones; and we have to treat grassroots football as a family affair."*

This was borne out by UEFA grassroots consultant Robin Russell, who signalled healthy growth levels in associations where the number of female players is strong. Women are attracting other family members into football. Statistics, he added, suggest that patterns have changed over the last decade. It is significant that the number of registered males aged 18 or under has increased by 2%, even though birth rates have generally declined. There has been a 50% increase in the number of young female players, along with a 20% rise at adult level. However, since 2004, there has been a significant decrease in the total of adult male players – hence the need to shift the focus and to encourage young players to carry on playing football during their adult life.

As emphasised by the former Liverpool FC and Norway star Stig Inge Bjørnebye (currently head of football development at the Norwegian association): "We have to stimulate the desire for activity and we have to make sure that players enjoy looking forward to their next session and their next season."

In reviewing UEFA's contributions to the grassroots game, Ioan Lupescu stressed: "We need to work together to nurture the game. We need to have restless minds and we have to encourage each other to listen, to learn and to constantly ask questions." ●



# THE 2013 UEFA GRASSROOTS DAY AWARDS

UEFA has been acknowledging outstanding achievements in grassroots football since the "Magnificent Seven" awards were introduced at the turn of the century. Since 2010, this has evolved into UEFA's Grassroots Day awards, offered annually in three categories. A record number of 29 national associations proposed candidates for the 2013 awards, which were presented by Italian legend Gianni Rivera on stage at the 10th UEFA Grassroots Workshop in Oslo, after the proposals had been assessed by UEFA's Grassroots Panel, Development and Technical Assistance Committee and Executive Committee within a timespan of just four weeks.



Gianni Rivera presents the UEFA Grassroots Day awards to Margit Bajankiné (best grassroots project...

...Lydia Zwier-Kentie (best grassroots club)...



## Best grassroots project

**Gold:** Children's homes programme (Hungary): special social project providing regular football for children living in homes and orphanages.

Tibor Öze, the Hungarian football federation's grassroots manager: "Our main goal is that everybody, regardless of their abilities and skills, can find joy in football and feel part of the sport as a whole."

**Silver:** Apuseni Mountains project (Romania): providing much-needed footballing infrastructure in a mountainous region.

**Bronze:** Project FUTSAL "Football Used Towards Social Advancement and Learning" (Republic of Ireland and Wales): innovative cross-association programme using football and EU funding to engage long-term unemployed people.

## Best grassroots club

**Gold:** SC Cupa, SC Klarenbeek, VV Voorst, SV Wilp (Netherlands): a novel multi-club approach, casting aside local rivalries to provide football for women and girls in their region who would otherwise lack opportunities due to lack of numbers.

Gert van Bokhorst of Klarenbeek: "We are village communities and we play football for the joy of it. It doesn't matter if you are a

good or average player; you should be able to find a place to play."

**Silver:** Carshalton Athletic FC (England): football club whose focus is on the provision of football for everyone and where a new philosophy has seen an increase from five to more than 40 teams in just four years with further expansion to follow.

**Bronze:** S.S. Sangiorgina (Italy): a club with facilities open to everyone in the community free of charge, with a variety of innovative projects including social behaviour, lifestyle and integration.

## Best grassroots leader

**Gold:** Fikret Kadioglu (Turkey): volunteer leader whose exceptional organisational efforts provide football for 50% of the boys and girls in his remote region of the country.



...and Fikret Kadioglu (best grassroots leader)

"What makes me happiest is to see the smiles on the children's faces or to hear from the parents that a boy or girl is so excited that he or she cannot sleep at night. Now the kids stay away from all kinds of bad behaviour and start to discover their own abilities."

**Silver:** Gerd Liesegang (Germany): long-serving volunteer and hard-working vice-president of the Berlin regional FA, where he has implanted innovative local projects subsequently extended nationwide.

**Bronze:** Ljubodrag Stanić (Serbia): founder of an annual tournament for teams from all over the former Yugoslavia, whose football activity over four decades has given his town a reputation for grassroots football.

Hats off to all the award winners! ●