

UEFA



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SLOVENIA IN THE SPOTLIGHT

High aspirations for Futsal EURO 2018 and beyond

#EQUALGAME

The story of an openly
gay footballer

INTERVIEW

Reinhard Grindel,
UEFA vice-president

INCLUSION

Colour-blindness
in football



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A YEAR TO BE PROUD OF

The curtains are closing on another year and as I look back at our many accomplishments and achievements in 2017, I cannot help but feel a great sense of pride and satisfaction.

First, I would like to congratulate all those involved in hosting the final rounds of UEFA competitions during the past 12 months. From the record-breaking Women's EURO in the Netherlands to the exciting Under-21 final tournament in Poland or the vibrant UEFA Regions' Cup in Turkey, to name but a few, I thank you for your efforts. UEFA places great importance on delivering all its competitions to the highest possible standard and could not do so without the professionalism and hard work of all those involved in their planning, organisation and execution.

Our club competitions also provided many unforgettable moments of magic. In Cardiff, Mario Mandžukić of Juventus scored one of the greatest goals ever seen in a UEFA Champions League final, but it was Real Madrid who won the clash of the titans and took the trophy home for a record 12th time. Manchester United reigned victorious in the UEFA Europa League, Olympique Lyonnais triumphed in the UEFA Women's Champions League and Salzburg won the UEFA Youth League.

We witnessed incredible individual performances from arguably two of the best players to have ever graced a football pitch, Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, who continue to break goalscoring records in our competitions. We should not take this for granted as they will both one day hang up their boots, making way for a new generation of footballing history-makers.

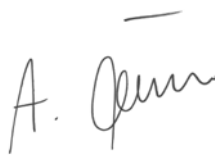
There were also many landmark moments off the pitch in 2017. Much-needed governance reforms were passed in Helsinki which will allow UEFA to become a more open, transparent and modern organisation, while internally we created a new protection of the game division and a

women's football unit in order to strengthen both these areas.

We have worked diligently to improve communication and cooperation with our key stakeholders, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the clubs, the leagues and the players for their collaboration and teamwork. We each have our own interests to protect but as long as we always put the greater good of football first, then we will do what is right for the game we love. There is no doubt that we will face many challenges in the months and years to come. We need to look at competitive balance; we need to further develop financial fair play; we need to increase financial transparency in football ... But if we play as a team, we will succeed. It is together that we are strongest.

I would like to share one final thought, and it concerns the power of football as a force for good. On my travels this year, I was able to see with my own eyes how our sport can bring hope and happiness to those less fortunate than ourselves. I am very proud of the work that has been done so far by the UEFA Foundation for Children and by the other charitable institutions that we support, but I think we can still do more. So I call on everyone to do their share and use football to support social projects and initiatives that make the world a better place.

My very best wishes to you all for the festive season, and see you again in the new year!



Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President





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NEW PROJECTS AND NEW FACES

Set up just two-and-a-half years ago, the UEFA Foundation for Children already supports no fewer than 107 projects in Europe and beyond. At the latest meeting of its board of trustees, new projects were approved and three new members joined the board, including the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, who was unanimously elected as the foundation's new chairman.

At its half-yearly meeting on 22 November, the board of trustees of the UEFA Foundation for Children unanimously elected the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, as its chairman until 2019. He takes over from former European Commission president José Manuel Barroso, who chaired the foundation since its creation in 2015.

"I am delighted to have the opportunity to work even closer with our foundation, which plays an instrumental role in aiding children living in challenging and difficult conditions around the world," the UEFA president said.


Aleksander Čeferin was one of three new members to join the board of trustees, the other two being Kairat Boranbayev, president of the Kazakhstan Premier League and of the National Paralympic Committee of Kazakhstan, and Kevin Lamour, director of the UEFA president's and executive office.

Projects all over the world

The board of trustees also approved 28 projects (14 in Europe and 14 in the rest of the world) from a shortlist drawn up following a call for projects issued in August. Those projects all have one thing in common: they use sport, and football in particular, to drive social change. By supporting these projects, the UEFA Foundation for Children seeks to protect and defend the fundamental rights of children and young adults who are victims of social, economic, political or armed conflicts. The new projects take the number of countries in which the foundation is active to 81, adding 15 new locations to the list. Nathalie Iannetta-Sabattier, one of the trustees who was part of the working group that shortlisted the projects, said: "All we

ever hear about football concerns the big competitions, the transfers and the scandals. At the UEFA Foundation for Children, however, we can see on a daily basis how our sport is a powerful driver of social change. The projects that were sent to us from all over the world are proof that, thanks to football, it is possible to support the social integration of refugees, the empowerment of girls, the faster, more sustainable inclusion of disabled people, and so on. The wide variety of projects that we received is a hallmark of the extraordinary richness and generosity inherent in each of us."

Annual report

Since it was set up in April 2015, the UEFA Foundation for Children has given financial support to 107 projects in 81 countries, benefitting more than 700,000 children and young adults. To find out more about the projects supported by the UEFA Foundation for Children, its second annual report is now available on the foundation's website (<https://uefafoundation.org>) or on request from media@uefafoundation.org. 



The board of trustees of the UEFA Foundation for Children (left to right): Kevin Lamour, Fiona May, Peter Gilliéron, Aleksander Čeferin, Nathalie Iannetta-Sabattier, Kairat Boranbayev and Norman Darmanin Demajo. Missing from the line-up: Esther Gascón Carbajosa, Margarita Louis-Dreyfus and Elkhann Mammadov.

NYON DISCUSSIONS CLOSE THE YEAR

UEFA EURO 2020 venue matters and UEFA Nations League seedings were among the items on the agenda for the Executive Committee's last meeting of 2017, held in Nyon on 7 December.

EURO 2020

The meeting, chaired by the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, took a decision regarding the Eurostadium project in Brussels, chosen as one of the host cities for EURO 2020. Due to the project's failure to meet the conditions imposed by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 20 September, the committee decided in a vote that the four matches initially scheduled to be played in Brussels (three group matches and one round of 16 match) will now be played at Wembley Stadium in London. Consequently, Wembley will now host seven EURO 2020 matches in total, having already been chosen to stage the tournament's semi-finals and final.

Meanwhile, the Stadio Olimpico in Rome was selected as the venue for the EURO 2020 opening match. The host city pairings were also decided by means of a random draw from among six different lists of city pairings established on the basis of sporting strength and geographical considerations, producing the following configuration:

Group A: Rome, Baku

Group B: St Petersburg, Copenhagen

Group C: Amsterdam, Bucharest

Group D: London, Glasgow

Group E: Bilbao, Dublin

Group F: Munich, Budapest

Each host country that qualifies for the final tournament will play a minimum of two matches at home in the group stage.

UEFA Nations League

The seedings for the inaugural UEFA Nations League draw in Lausanne on 24 January were decided, with the teams in each league allocated to different pots on the basis of their UEFA rankings.



League A

Pot 1: Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Spain

Pot 2: France, England, Switzerland, Italy

Pot 3: Poland, Iceland, Croatia, Netherlands

League B

Pot 1: Austria, Wales, Russia, Slovakia

Pot 2: Sweden, Ukraine, Republic of Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Pot 3: Northern Ireland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Turkey

League C

Pot 1: Hungary, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia

Pot 2: Greece, Serbia, Albania, Norway

Pot 3: Montenegro, Israel, Bulgaria, Finland

Pot 4: Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania

League D

Pot 1: Azerbaijan, FYR Macedonia, Belarus, Georgia

Pot 2: Armenia, Latvia, Faroe Islands, Luxembourg

Pot 3: Kazakhstan, Moldova, Liechtenstein, Malta

Pot 4: Andorra, Kosovo, San Marino, Gibraltar

The draw procedure was also approved, and it was confirmed that the teams of Russia and Ukraine, and Armenia and Azerbaijan, would be kept apart in the proceedings. Following January's draw, UEFA Nations League matches will begin in September.

UEFA Futsal Cup

The 10,700-capacity Pabellón Príncipe Felipe in Zaragoza, Spain, was appointed as the venue for the 2018 UEFA Futsal Cup finals, to be played between Inter FS and Barcelona (Spain), Sporting CP (Portugal) and Győr (Hungary) from 19 to 22 April.

Finally, a new three-year memorandum of understanding with the Alliance of European Football Coaches' Associations (AEFCA) was approved, enabling further cooperation between UEFA and the continent's coaches. The agreement enters into force on 1 January 2018 and runs until the end of 2020.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled for 25 February – the day before the 42nd Ordinary UEFA Congress takes place in Bratislava, Slovakia. 🏆

SUPPORTING YOUR SUCCESS

On 3 November, European football's governing body launched a brand-new support programme, UEFA ASSIST, to provide other football confederations with greater knowledge-sharing and development opportunities.

Promoting, protecting and developing football has long been one of UEFA's central objectives and to complement all the work done in Europe, UEFA has now created a global programme which will increase solidarity and enhance football development around the world, by helping to meet the needs of the other confederations and their member associations.

Under the tagline 'Supporting your success', the main scope of UEFA ASSIST is to share knowledge and best practices to help UEFA's sister confederations to develop and strengthen football within their respective territories. UEFA ASSIST is designed to provide practical rather than financial assistance and to offer support through development activities.

UEFA ASSIST is composed of four pillars, each providing specific support to national associations and confederations worldwide.

• Education and knowledge-sharing

UEFA ASSIST will share knowledge and best practices by making experts available and providing access to UEFA's educational programmes.

• Development of youth football

UEFA ASSIST will provide opportunities for talented young players to gain experience of playing in a competitive environment, to learn about different cultures and to network through youth development tournaments.

• Infrastructure

UEFA ASSIST will support infrastructure projects that provide immediate benefits to the member associations of other confederations.

• UEFA member association support

UEFA member associations are encouraged and supported by UEFA ASSIST to establish and develop their own programmes and activities outside Europe.

The first UEFA ASSIST project to get off the ground was an Under-15s development tournament organised in association with CONMEBOL. All ten South American national teams and two European sides – Croatia and the Czech Republic – took part in the competition, which was played in the cities of Mendoza and San Juan in Argentina from 4 to 17 November. Against

the backdrop of the Andes mountains, Argentina lifted the Sudamericano U15 trophy in an unforgettable final, beating rivals Brazil at Estadio del Bicentenario in San Juan. The night could not have been better for the local team, who came back from 2-0 down to win 3-2.

"This was a very interesting experience, which points towards greater integration and interchange. Two continents willing to learn, willing to listen and showing a great deal of professionalism. It is great to see that the development system available to these kids is more solid than what I had in my early years," said UEFA ambassador David Trezeguet, who not only spent time with the squads, but also talked to vulnerable local youngsters who are working to overcome their difficult childhoods. The importance of respect, eating well and thinking as a group, not as individuals, were the premises he underlined in his talks.

"I don't speak any English, but every time I bumped into a Czech Republic player in the lift, I would try to say something to him, if only by using signs," said Argentina goalkeeper Rocco Ríos Novo. This was the first time that most of the players had boarded a plane and interacted with other nationalities, and they fully embraced the opportunity. As well as sharing the same hotel, the Czech Republic and Argentina, for example, organised visits together to a nearby paediatric hospital.

"Working with UEFA is fundamental from many perspectives. This could be an exciting first step in terms of future collaboration, and it has set an example of how a tournament of this kind can be excellently organised," said CONMEBOL's director of competitions, Hugo Figueredo.

As well as playing competitive football and visiting local community structures, the participants took part in various educational workshops, focusing on social development, nutrition and health, among other things, while dedicated seminars were also organised for the coaches, referees and administrators involved.

UEFA has already demonstrated its commitment to international cooperation and global football development over the years, by providing ad hoc support and signing memorandums of understanding with all five of its sister confederations. UEFA ASSIST builds on this spirit of solidarity and reinforces UEFA's efforts to support the promotion, protection and development of football worldwide. 🌐



Croatia and the Czech Republic represented Europe in the Under-15s tournament organised in Argentina with the support of UEFA ASSIST.

ELITE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT DRIVE

UEFA's primary aim is for football to flourish in all four corners of Europe. To achieve this objective, it is helping its member associations to develop promising players at youth level through a specific elite youth development programme that looks set to bear considerable fruit in the coming years.



Nurturing young elite footballers throughout Europe has long been a priority for UEFA. Under the leadership of former French international Jean-François Domergue, who joined UEFA as head of football development back in 2014, work quickly got under way to establish a dedicated elite youth development programme.

"The objective," says Domergue, "was to put in place a programme which would assist smaller and medium-sized associations to develop elite players. It was decided to set up a pilot project, and after visits to associations which would be eligible for support, we chose four for the pilot phase – Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and FYR Macedonia."

Under-14 and Under-15 players are the focus of the pilot scheme, the objective being to implement a technical and educational programme within the four participating associations, given that proper football education, schooling and personal support are all seen as important elements in a youngster's development.

From 2014/15 to 2018/19, each of the quartet is receiving UEFA funding every season to help cover the running costs of a football academy for Under-14s and Under-15s, establish a technical programme, and develop training standards to help their young players progress. UEFA is making five visits a year to each of the four associations to monitor their progress, offer support and share technical, educational and managerial know-how.

When attitude matters

The four associations are being assisted in setting up effective national academy systems that ensure close ties between the association, schools and clubs, thus creating a top-quality environment for talented players and a clear link between football training and school education.

In addition to high-quality technical, tactical and fitness training – the latter including guidance on nutrition and hygiene – the youngsters are also being taught life skills in terms of their

personal conduct, attitude and sense of responsibility.

As the pilot project countries continue to put their development structures in place, UEFA has now set up a full elite youth development programme for all 55 of its member associations, to further support the fostering of young players (Under-13s to Under-16s) throughout Europe.

Until 2019/20, the 55 associations are all being given valuable funding via the UEFA HatTrick programme to set up projects in any two of the following areas – elite youth development with or without academies, girls' football development, performance optimisation through extensive use of IT tools, and coach education. UEFA has set up a dedicated team that is in regular contact with all 55 associations to discuss and monitor the progress of their chosen projects.

As part of this development process, UEFA also places great emphasis on its programme of elite development tournaments for boys and girls at Under-16 level. Since 2013, many associations have hosted such tournaments, which give young players vital international experience at an early stage of their career paths – and, significantly, a considerable number of those players have already gone on to play for their clubs' senior teams in UEFA and FIFA competitions.

UEFA's elite youth development strategy is clearly starting to pay dividends. "Statistics we have gathered on our visits show that more and more associations now have strong programmes and clear visions for fostering their young talents," Domergue reflects. "And there is a clear will among the rest of the associations to ensure that they will soon be in a similar position."

"We want to help our associations produce better players," he concludes. "In doing so, we are investing in the future of European football as a whole." 🏆



SLOVENIA MAKING GREAT STRIDES

These are exciting times for the Football Association of Slovenia (NZS). As well as hosting UEFA Futsal EURO 2018 in Ljubljana from 30 January to 10 February, the association has launched a series of programmes designed to enable all the country's youngsters to play football, while its newly elected president has plans to develop the national league. With all this going on, and more besides, the NZS is running at full speed and looking to the future with confidence.

As part of the promotion of Futsal EURO 2018, 180 men, women and children passed a ball 6km from Ljubljana city centre to Stožice Arena. Spanish superstar Miguelín started the ride.





The Slovenians made it through to their first final round of the European Futsal Championship back in 2003. They have been final-round regulars since 2010.

“All our primary schools have indoor sports halls, which are used not just by schoolchildren. They’re also hired out to futsal clubs at the end of the school day. Everyone shares the facilities. There are 45 schools in Ljubljana alone and you can play with a futsal club at half of them.”

**Daniel Videtić
Member of the
Futsal EURO 2018 Office**

Emblazoned on the side of a municipal bus, a giant poster of Jan Oblak patrols the snowy streets of Ljubljana. The freezing temperatures of mid-November are making themselves felt and the first flakes of snow are falling on the city’s roofs and roads. Photographed in his yellow jersey, with its black-striped sleeves, and wearing a steely look on his face, the Slovenian keeper slowly weaves his way down the street, halting only for a red light or a bus stop – enough time for the locals to see that Oblak is not lending his image to promote the latest designs of a fashion brand but to support the breast cancer charity Europa Donna.

Despite being the superstar of the Slovenian national team, the Atlético goalkeeper remains a discreet young man who is in no way drawn to the spotlight. “Children really look up to Jan Oblak,” says NZS president Radenko Mijatović, confirming the player’s popularity. But despite his status, the tall, fair-haired keeper is known first and foremost for being a dedicated professional who is fully focused on his sporting career and who keeps his mind on the job.

“Jan is very strong mentally,” adds NZS technical director Matjaz Jaklič. “He always stays very calm, even if he’s playing in front of a million people.” Oblak deserves credit for his discretion and restraint, which stand in contrast to the need among many players of his age to seek continual media exposure.

Increased exposure is, however, the very commodity that the NZS president is keen to achieve for Slovenian football. Having taken the helm in 2016, following the

election of the previous incumbent, Aleksander Čeferin, as UEFA president, Mijatović has made increasing NZS revenue from marketing, sponsorship and TV rights as one of his main goals.

“People talk about football a lot before the national team’s games and the derbies between Olimpija Ljubljana and Maribor,” he explains, “but the rest of the time the sport still doesn’t get enough coverage in the media. We enjoy excellent relationships with our sponsors, but we need to do more when it comes to marketing and advertising the game.”

A figure has been put on these ambitious objectives, with the NZS hoping to increase sponsorship and advertising revenue by 10% each season by 2020. Another of the association’s goals is to raise its social media profile and to get its messages out to as wide an audience as possible. The foundations have already been laid, with the NZS now operating official accounts on all social media platforms. “We’re even on Snapchat,” says Mijatović, whose business-minded approach and determination to succeed shine through.

Born in what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina at a time when it was part of the former Yugoslavia, Mijatović first went to Slovenia when he did his national service. He fell in love with the small country, which shares a border with Austria to the north and nestles between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea. So much so that he decided to stay there and embarked on a brief career as a footballer.

Lacking the talent to make a proper living on the pitch, Mijatović found a job at a cardboard factory, starting out on the

factory floor. "I climbed my way up," he says three decades on, in his suit and tie. He has done even better than that, having sat on the board of several companies before becoming vice-president of the NZS and then taking on the top job last year.

The final countdown to Futsal EURO 2018

After so many years spent shaking hands in business meetings and closing deals, Mijatović knows just how important it is to have dependable financial partners. And the NZS will have an excellent opportunity to show potential investors that it is a partner they can rely on when Futsal EURO 2018 comes to town from 30 January to 10 February next year. The matches will be played in the north of the Slovenian capital, where the old streets of the city centre give way to broad three-lane boulevards and where buildings are few and far between.

It is there, just inside the ring road that runs around the city, that a huge 'tortoiseshell' can be found, rising tens of metres high, with undulating concrete and glass edges. The 'tortoiseshell' is the Stožice Arena, a vast multisports facility that also hosts basketball, volleyball and ice hockey matches, not to mention concerts by the likes of David Guetta, Elton John and Bob Dylan.

Member of the Futsal EURO 2018 Office Daniel Videtič is revelling in the prospect of welcoming Europe's finest futsal players: "The arena can seat more than 10,000 spectators and we hope it's going to be full. To prepare for the tournament, we began working with UEFA very early on. We've been working on the project for nearly a year now, so we haven't had to rush things. We've taken it step by step and everything has gone smoothly. We're on track."

To make sure as many spectators as possible turn up, Videtič has spent the last few months organising promotional events in the centre of the city. On 5 April, as winter gave way to spring, the NZS chose to mark the 300-days-to-go milestone by unveiling a large countdown clock on the banks of the Ljubljana, the river that splits the capital in two.

Two months later, 180 players came together to form a human chain and play passes to each other all the way from the countdown clock to the Stožice Arena, 6km to the north. Lending some stardust to the event was Spanish futsal ace Miguelín, who



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had the honour playing the first pass, and the entire Slovenia futsal team. "It took them an hour to pass the ball all the way to the arena," says a smiling Videtič as he recalls the occasion. "It was lovely."

The latest event to promote the tournament was the final draw, staged in September in the magnificent surroundings of Ljubljana Castle, a small fortress built in the late 16th century on a hilltop overlooking the Slovenian capital. The assembled dignitaries included the UEFA president, Slovenia's two-time Olympic skiing champion Tina Maze, and former footballers such as Milenko Acimović. The draw handed Slovenia an opening match with Serbia, who were also their first opponents at the previous Futsal EURO, held in Belgrade in 2016.

All these events have been shared extensively on social media, while a media consultancy has been given the task of making videos for YouTube.

As he waits to see if Slovenia can get the better of Serbia, who reached the semi-finals on their home court last year, Mijatović is keen to draw attention to the ability of his association to stage international competitions: "The final round of the European Under-17 Championship was held in Slovenia in 2012. We've got great infrastructure and we're used to organising tournaments here, which means we are well placed to host [international] competitions."

Meanwhile, Videtič points to the country's facilities and, above all, the popularity of the sport in Slovenia as factors that will help to guarantee the →



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"We enjoy excellent relationships with our sponsors, but we need to do more when it comes to marketing and advertising the game."

Radenko Mijatović
NZS president

success of Futsal EURO 2018: "All our primary schools have indoor sports halls, which are used not just by schoolchildren. They're also hired out to futsal clubs at the end of the school day. Everyone shares the facilities. There are 45 schools in Ljubljana alone and you can play with a futsal club at half of them."

The NZS, Slovenia, the fans and the 12 participating teams have just a few weeks to wait before the Futsal EURO buzz hits the country's largest sports arena and the action gets under way.

First-class facilities in place

The most striking sign of the NZS's rude health can be found on the other side of Ljubljana's ring road, 30km to the north to be precise. It is there, amid woodland and overlooked by the snowy peaks of the nearby Alps, that the national association has its new headquarters.

A vast building with pristine white walls and large bay windows that afford a clear view of the interior, it stands next to three football pitches awaiting the next national team get-together. A little further in the distance can be seen a castle used by the government to host official receptions, while the only other neighbours in the vicinity are the guests of a luxury hotel situated a little over a kilometre to the east. It all means the staff of the NZS can work in total peace and quiet, and enjoy some stunning scenery to boot.

Mijatović smiles as he recalls the days when the NZS had to share its former Ljubljana premises with a number of companies: "When we decided to move, we looked for locations in Ljubljana before deciding to build our own centre. It's perfect. It's right out in the countryside but it's still close to the city and the airport."

The new HQ, part-funded by the UEFA HatTrick programme, was officially opened amid much pomp and ceremony in May 2016. Among the entertainment laid on for the 500 guests was the arrival of the UEFA flag by parachute. Listening to the people who work there, all that is lacking are floodlights for the pitches. The reason for that is a rare species of butterfly that inhabits the forest. The installation of bright lights next to its habitat would



prevent it from reproducing, a 'nice' obstacle to which the NZS hopes soon to find a solution that suits footballers and lepidopterans alike.

NZS technical director Jaklić occupies an office on the ground floor of the new HQ. In charge of women's and grassroots football, youth teams and coach education, he has a wide remit that allows him to keep a close eye on the development of football in Slovenia. He is also responsible for launching and running a number of NZS programmes.

Of all his areas of responsibility, women's football is the one that excites him the most. One of his biggest causes for satisfaction is the fact that the NZS has successfully built up three national women's teams: Under-17s, Under-19s and seniors. "They're all coached by people with UEFA Pro licences," he adds.

In a bid to encourage girls to take up football, the NZS has given them access to a number of programmes that were previously only open to boys, as Jaklić goes on to explain: "Four years ago we opened an academy in Ljubljana for the best girls in the country. There are 32 of them today and most of them are playing for the national teams." His enthusiasm is

shared by Mijatović, who recognises the value of the players getting to spend as much time as possible with each other: "They play together, they live together and they go to school together."

The academy was set up in response to the fact that not every town in Slovenia has a women's football team. "But there are talented girls everywhere. And that was the problem," Jaklić says. Girls in towns without a women's team have to train with the boys, which is less than ideal. Another 'problem' is that the vast majority of Slovenian girls go on to university. The fact that Slovenia – a nation of barely 2 million people – has only three university towns (Ljubljana, Maribor and Koper), left the NZS with another question to ponder: "How do we get them to continue playing when they go to university and leave their club?" as Jaklić puts it.

The Ljubljana academy has provided the answer, allowing the best young female players to study and carry on training in the best possible conditions. "If we hadn't done it," he continues, "a lot of them would have given up playing."



The Stožice Arena was the venue for EuroBasket 2013.



"Four years ago we opened an academy in Ljubljana for the best girls in the country. There are 32 of them today and most of them are playing for the national teams."

Matjaz Jaklič
NZS technical director

The battle to be number one

While targeting potential future members of the women's national team, the NZS is also focusing on grassroots football for girls. Five years ago, with the aid of funding from UEFA, it started 'I Love to Play Football' festivals to promote the game among young girls.

As part of last year's programme, five open days were held across the country, featuring workshops, training drills and circuits. As Jaklič explains, the idea is to help participants take their first steps towards joining a club: "A lot of girls kick a ball for the very first time at these events. We establish contact with them and clubs can then approach them. The girls that are keen eventually end up joining clubs. Our approach is to start at the bottom."

By focusing on young players, the NZS is hoping that women's sections will become more of a permanent fixture at clubs. The equation is blindingly simple: the more girls enrol, the more teams there will be. And the younger they are, the likelier they are to play the game for a long time. The policy seems to be paying off – at a little over 2,500 at the last count, the number of registered female players is rising.



The spectacular backdrop of the Football Association of Slovenia's ultra-modern headquarters, which opened in 2016.

None of Slovenia's female footballers play the game professionally and only a handful play abroad, a situation that Jaklič is keen to address by developing the women's game even further. In order to achieve that, and make teams as competitive as possible, he is putting as much emphasis on the human touch and interpersonal factors as he is on training. His objective is for women not just to play the game but also to take up coaching, administrative roles and as many other positions as possible.

"I think it's very important for women have other women around. It makes for better communication," he explains. "It's not good when you only have men in charge of a women's team. We need to have women in the dressing room, on the bus and everywhere else, communicating with the players. It's

psychological and it goes well beyond the simple need to get results." In continuing to attract more and more players, male and female, the NZS is hoping to consolidate football's position as the number one sport in Slovenia.

The game has long had competition from indoor sports such as volleyball, handball (Slovenia finished third at the IHF Men's World Championships in France this year) and, above all, basketball.

That competition increased this September, when the men's basketball players earned national hero status by winning the European title (see inset). Led by the outstanding Goran Dragić, who makes the plays for NBA franchise Miami Heat, they went unbeaten in the tournament, capping their stunning run with victory over Serbia in the final. In the process, Dragić and co. had many →



Getty Images

Having drawn 2-2 against Scotland in Ljubljana on 8 October, Slovenia finished in fourth place with 15 points in their World Cup qualifying group.

youngsters dreaming of pulling on a sleeveless vest and playing the game. Mijatović refuses to panic, however: "There's not that much competition with basketball really. Youngsters want to play football first and foremost. Out of every ten youngsters, there are eight who are drawn to football and two who'll play basketball."

In his bid to maintain football's popularity in Slovenia, Mijatović can count on the support on the country's biggest teams: NK Maribor, who recently competed in their second UEFA Champions League group stage in three years; and NK Domžale, who have been battling it out in the UEFA Europa League. Meanwhile, every match in the country's ten-team top division is broadcast on TV, week in week out, along with selected games from the second division, giving football the kind of coverage not afforded to other sports.

Starting them young

Seated in his large office looking out on the forest, Jaklić reflects on how far Slovenian football has come since the days before the country gained its independence: "We became a separate state in 1991. When we were part of Yugoslavia we had a reputation for being a winter sports country, but football is the number one sport now."

Aside from Oblak, his fellow players in the national team and the clubs competing on the European stage, Jaklić also has to make sure that the grassroots game is thriving. The specific efforts made to promote the game among girls are just one part of that. Realising that school is where children start kicking a ball around for fun, and drawing on Slovenia's network of school sports facilities, the NZS has set

up a programme to encourage all youngsters to take up the game. Some 70% of the country's schools are taking part in the initiative, which runs for the duration of the academic year – from September to June – with some 6,000 boys and girls staying on after their lessons for football practice.

"The main aim is to motivate these young children and give them the chance to discover what football is all about," explains Jaklić. "They stay in their environment after their classes, with their friends and in their school, and they train."

In addition to training sessions, matches are organised between schools, albeit with the accent very much on fun and enjoyment rather than results (goals are not counted and players swap teams in the middle of games). As part of the programme, children also learn to keep dressing rooms tidy, be disciplined and on time and, in the case of the younger ones, get changed by themselves. It is a healthy way for children to learn from each other, and one from which the NZS wants local clubs to benefit by inviting youngsters to pay them a visit and have a look around their facilities, thereby introducing them to the club and hopefully encouraging them to join. Getting children to play the game for fun and then join a club if they are keen is just the first step. The next step is to keep them in the game for as long as possible and help them to progress.

A cause of regret for Mijatović is the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who leave



Sportida

Slovenia to try their luck abroad and then invariably end up in reserve teams or second-division sides: "My aim is for young players to stay here as long as they can and then leave for a European club where they're actually going to get a game," says the NZS president. "Though we've got quite a few players who are with good European teams and 99% of our national team players are based abroad, the standard of the Slovenian championship is improving every year. It's important for the fans that we have good clubs, but it's also important for marketing the game and for youngsters. The better the championship is, the more they'll want to play football."

In echoing those views, Jaklić offers up the example of gifted young forward Jan Mlakar. Born in 1998, Mlakar came

Getting children to play the game for fun and then join a club if they are keen is just the first step. The next step is to keep them in the game for as long as possible and help them to progress.

through the youth ranks at NK Domzale before leaving for Fiorentina when he was 16. Unable to make the breakthrough after three years in Tuscany, he has been loaned out to an Italian second-division side, where he has barely played a game. "We still pick him for our Under-21 team, though, because we know he's the best young forward Slovenia's got," Jaklič explains. "Having said that, if he'd stayed here, he would have become an even better player."

Another challenge is to deter players of a similar age from giving up the game completely, either because of their studies or their ability. The NZS has seen many youngsters turn their backs on football when they are trying to make the jump from Under-15 to Under-17. It is a pivotal point in the player pathway, and a tough one in terms of who makes the cut. "It's very hard when a 16-year-old hears that there's no longer a place for them at the club where they started out," laments the technical director. "Look at the youngsters who've spent six or seven years with a team only to be told that they're not good enough and can't play for them anymore. They want to stay at the club, train two or three times a week, and play matches at a lower standard."

"The thing is they can't because clubs don't have enough teams. They want to carry on playing for the club they love and where their friends are, but they have to go and look for another one."

In Jaklič's eyes, the key is to build new pitches and give clubs the chance to have more teams, which in turn would give youngsters more opportunities to play. That process is already under way, with a significant amount of the funding received through the UEFA HatTrick programme now being channelled into the construction of these much-needed facilities.

"There are several dozen of them," explains Jaklič, who rounds off by saying: "With the increase in the number of players, clubs will need to create new teams so that everyone can get a game. And if these youngsters stay on in Slovenia or have the chance to play in our league before going abroad, then the clubs will make more money and will be able to bring on new players. It's a virtuous circle."

Oblak, who was spotted keeping goal for Olimpija Ljubljana a good few years before his face was plastered on the city's buses, would not argue with that. 🇸🇮

SLOVENIAN SPORT CONTINUES TO SOAR

Slovenia's victory at the FIBA EuroBasket 2017 was the greatest triumph in the country's sporting history. It was no one-off however, but the continuation of a definite upward trend for a country that is passionate about its sport.

Slovenia's success in the biggest team sports has been striking to say the least. Indeed, few countries in Europe can match its record when it comes to qualifying for the final stages of major tournaments, such as World Cups, European Championships and the Olympic Games. The nation's men's volleyball team won silver at the 2015 European Championships, while the men's handball team provided further cause for celebration this year by winning World Championship bronze, their first major medal of any hue.

Though Slovenia is still a young country, having only gained independence in 1991, many of its athletes excelled in previous years under the Yugoslavian flag. Prominent among them was the gymnast Leon Štukelj, who remains an icon of Slovenian sport thanks to the three Olympic gold medals he won in 1924 and 1928.

While Slovenia only ranks 144th in the world in terms of population size, when it comes to its sporting achievements since independence, it stands far higher. In 14 editions of the Olympic Games (summer and winter combined), the country has amassed 38 medals across a wide array of sports, including rowing, athletics, judo, ski jumping and Alpine skiing. The most notable of Slovenia's Olympic medallists is the recently retired skier Tina Maze, who won two golds at Sochi 2014 and was one of the leading figures on the women's Alpine skiing scene from 2010 onwards.

While Slovenia's sportsmen and women have found success across a variety of sports, nowhere have they excelled more than in ski jumping – a true national obsession. Peter Prevc, the 2016 World Cup winner, is the latest in a long line of Slovenian champions who have made a habit of distinguishing themselves at the legendary World Cup event in Planica, in the Julian Alps. Here, where ski jumping becomes ski flying, athletes can jump out to 250 metres in front of crowds in excess of 50,000.

The latest example of the ability of Slovenian ski jumping to nurture champion athletes came only this year, when Primož Roglič – a 2007 junior world team champion in the sport – became the first Slovenian to win a stage of the Tour de France. Not surprisingly, his groundbreaking achievement came in the mountains.

Getty Images



COUNTDOWN TO KICK-OFF

UEFA Futsal EURO 2018 kicks off in Ljubljana on 30 January, with tournament ambassador Milenko Ačimović predicting “a great atmosphere” as Europe’s top 12 sides vie for the title.

Milenko Ačimović expects fans to turn out in “big numbers” as he counts down the days to kick-off at UEFA Futsal EURO 2018 in Slovenia’s capital, Ljubljana. It is the first time his country will have hosted a senior UEFA tournament and the former Slovenia midfielder believes supporters are in for a treat as Europe’s top teams put on a show at the 12,480-capacity Stožice Arena between 30 January and the final on 10 February. “I’m sure there will be a great atmosphere,” he said. “We do not have many occasions like that here. This is the European Championship and I think Slovenia is a great choice for the venue. We have a great national team and people in Slovenia love football and futsal. It ought to be a positive for the players, as I expect the fans to turn out in big numbers.”

Hosts Slovenia get the ball rolling against neighbours Serbia in Group A, and Ačimović is hoping home advantage will work in their favour. “This team have so many positive things going for them and it’s certainly an advantage to play in front of your fans,” he said. “Playing in a European Championship on home territory can only be a good thing. Of course, everybody says that the first match is key, because if you get off to a good start, it gives the players a boost.”

Group A: Slovenia, Italy, Serbia

The opening line-up is a repeat of the first game in Belgrade at Futsal EURO 2016 when Serbia ran out 5-1 winners against Slovenia in front of 11,161 – a record attendance for an opening game. Serbia sold out all five of their matches as they reached the semi-finals two years ago – their best ever finish – but they will be taking nothing for granted after being pushed to the limit by the Czech Republic

in the play-offs to qualify this time round. There was no such trouble for Slovenia, who qualified automatically as hosts and will be appearing in their fifth straight Futsal EURO. With a team built around the experienced Igor Osredkar, Alen Fetić and Kristjan Čujec, home expectations are high, even though Group A rivals Serbia and two-time champions Italy provide a daunting challenge. Kick-off cannot come soon enough for an Azzurri side desperate to make amends for the disappointment of Futsal EURO 2016. After beating Russia 3-1 in the final in 2014 to lift the trophy for a second time, the defending champions were knocked out in the quarter-finals by Kazakhstan last time out, and they return intent on reclaiming the title.

Group B: Russia, Kazakhstan, Poland

Russia have contested each of the past three finals and six in all, but have lifted the trophy just once. That triumph – on penalties – came against Spain in 1999, but it is the Iberian side that have had the upper hand in recent years, including in the 2016 final, which Spain won 7-3. With veterans Eder Lima and Robinho providing the spark, the 2016 Futsal World Cup finalists will challenge again, but they face a tough early test against Kazakhstan, who in 2016 became the first final-tournament debutants since the inaugural 1996 competition to finish in the top three. Inspired by star man Higuaita, Cacau’s side are out to underline their new status as a powerhouse in the sport. Poland, meanwhile, are appearing in the finals for just the second time – and for the first time in 16 years. They pulled off one of the surprises of the qualifying campaign when they held Spain to a 1-1 draw, and they built on that achievement

SCHEDULE

Group stage

30 January

Group A: Slovenia v Serbia
Group B: Russia v Poland

31 January

Group C: Portugal v Romania
Group D: Spain v France

1 February

Group B: Poland v Kazakhstan
Group A: Serbia v Italy

2 February

Group D: France v Azerbaijan
Group C: Romania v Ukraine

3 February

Group B: Kazakhstan v Russia
Group A: Italy v Slovenia

4 February

Group C: Ukraine v Portugal
Group D: Azerbaijan v Spain

Quarter-finals

5/6 February

Semi-finals

8 February

Third-place match and final

10 February



by ousting Hungary in the play-offs. Captain Marcin Mikołajewicz got the crucial goal against the holders and feels his side have nothing to fear. "Nobody believed we could do something positive against Spain, but we did," he said.

Group C: Portugal, Ukraine, Romania

Hopes are high once again as Portugal set their sights on the trophy. After impressing en route to the Futsal World Cup semi-finals in 2016, and with the brilliant Ricardinho at the top of his game, could this be the year everything falls into place? The 2010 finalists certainly encountered few obstacles in qualifying, progressing without dropping a point and posting a 4-0 victory against Romania, whom they meet again in Ljubljana. Romania missed out on Futsal EURO 2016, but the side is packed full of experience. Player-coach Robert Lupo and Florin Matei, Dumitru Stoica and Vlad Iancu all appeared in

Romania's three previous EUROS, while captain Emil Răducu, Florin Ignat, Alpar Csoma and Marius Matei featured in the squads that reached the last eight in 2012 and 2014. Two-time runners-up Ukraine are contesting their ninth successive EURO, but it is 13 years since they last reached the semis and they have exited in the quarter-finals every time since the round was introduced in 2010. Ukraine may not be replete with star names, but coach Oleksandr Kosenko draws strength from a formidable team ethic. Well-drilled set pieces, polished open-play moves and tireless energy are the hallmarks of his organised and disciplined line-up.

Group D: Spain, Azerbaijan, France

Coach Pierre Jacky described reaching the finals as "a landmark for French futsal" and insists his side "will keep dreaming" as they approach their first final tournament. France – the only new faces

in Slovenia – pulled off the biggest shock in qualifying when they ousted 2012 semi-finalists Croatia in the play-offs, and Les Bleus now face an even greater challenge after being drawn to face seven-time winners Spain in their opening game. For the holders, the objective remains the same: return home with the trophy. José Venancio López's side romped to the title in style two years ago, scoring a record 27 goals, including seven in the final against Russia. Spain are the only European team to have lifted the Futsal World Cup, in 2000 and 2004, and have dominated the European stage since winning the inaugural tournament in 1996. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, are firmly established at the top table of European futsal. They are contesting their fifth successive Futsal EURO and after reaching the quarter-finals on their Futsal World Cup debut in 2016, will hope to replicate that achievement here at least. 🌐



FUTSAL AND WOMEN REFEREES PRIMED FOR THE FUTURE

The development and continued progress of Europe's referees remains a number one priority for UEFA. Two recent courses continued the excellent work being done, with futsal referees stepping up their preparations for Futsal EURO 2018 in Slovenia, and promising young female match officials setting out on the road towards Women's EURO 2021.



Some 30 futsal referees gathered in Ljubljana from 6 to 8 November to mark an important milestone along the road to European national team futsal's premier tournament, to be held at the Stožice Arena in the Slovenian capital from 30 January to 10 February next year. Three days of fitness assessments and practical and theoretical training will lead to UEFA selecting 18 officials – 16 referees and 2 reserves – to take charge of matches at the tournament.

"We brought the referees together to give them instructions on consistency in decision-making, and to test their fitness," said UEFA futsal referee instructor Pedro Ángel Galán Nieto. "They have taken the FIFA test, and must pass it to be eligible for the EURO."

The training sessions in Slovenia focused on the skills that a futsal referee needs to handle matches at the top level. "We looked at speed and agility," Galán Nieto explained, "because the way that futsal is

"We want the young referees to grab this chance. We have four years before Women's EURO 2021 to monitor them and train them to be part of the next top-level generation."

Dagmar Damková
UEFA refereeing officer

played requires these two attributes from a referee. You need speed to keep up with play, and agility because you have to change direction a lot of times.

"The fitness aspect is crucial. Futsal teams at elite level train regularly – and the referees have to be able to match their fitness. We are encouraging UEFA's national associations to create fitness programmes for their futsal referees," he added.

Tactical studies

UEFA instructs its referees, both in the 11-a-side game and futsal, to enhance their preparation for matches by studying team tactics and player characteristics – aspects that will help them to read a game and respond to situations. "It's essential – if you can anticipate and understand, this will help you to run the game and take decisions," said Galán Nieto.

Futsal EURO 2018 in Ljubljana will showcase the very best that European futsal has to offer, with high-profile coverage in Europe and beyond. The tournament referees are being urged to safeguard futsal's positive image. "We are asking the referees to protect the players," said Galán Nieto, "because in doing so, we are protecting the game." In addition, teamwork will be an essential component at the finals, given the referee system comprising two on-field referees and an off-field official, similar to a fourth official in outdoor football. "To achieve



consistency, futsal referees need to be able to communicate, to be able to align themselves when taking decisions,” Galán Nieto reflected.

UEFA has recently taken a series of strategic decisions to enhance the profile of futsal – these include the flagship EURO moving to 16 teams and taking place every four years from 2022, a new Women’s Futsal EURO from 2019, the renaming of the main European club competition as the UEFA Futsal Champions League from 2018/19, and the introduction of a European Under-19 Futsal Championship in 2019.

“These are exciting times for everyone in futsal,” said Galán Nieto. “The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, is a futsal man. He supports our sport and the new UEFA strategy will hopefully help us to recruit more referees to futsal – especially women. The new competitions in particular will provide an incentive for people to become futsal referees.”

2021 target

Meanwhile, the development of Europe’s female referees is moving on apace. UEFA fully understands that a new generation of officials must be fostered with the future in mind – in particular in view of the next European Women’s Championship final tournament in four years’ time.

The road to Women’s EURO 2021 is under way for a group of young European female referees, who were in Nyon from 30 October to 3 November for a course designed to give them crucial assistance as they move along their career paths.

Nineteen national associations from throughout Europe were represented by 21 first and second-category match officials. They took part in instruction sessions focusing on issues such as positioning, reading the game, handball, match



management and penalty-area incidents, and were given briefings on the qualities needed to succeed at the highest levels.

“Following the Women’s EURO in the Netherlands, we have now begun focusing on the four-year cycle until the next Women’s EURO,” said UEFA refereeing officer Dagmar Damková. “We think that the referees that we brought to Nyon have potential, and we want to show them the way forward, because we believe that they can achieve something. So the idea is to prepare them to become elite referees,” she added.

Fitness factor

The young referees were also put through their paces under the expert eye of UEFA’s fitness team. Top physical condition is a must for female referees as women’s football continues to move forward rapidly, not only from a technical and tactical perspective, but also in terms of fitness.

“One day, if they join the elite group,” Damková explained, “the referees will go on UEFA’s summer and winter courses,

and will have to pass fitness tests – so we have been guiding and advising them in what to expect in this regard.” The referees have been taking charge of domestic and UEFA matches, including in the Women’s Champions League, and some have also already taken part in the UEFA Centre of Refereeing Excellence (CORE) programme that trains up-and-coming match officials for future assignments.

This latest course reflected UEFA’s commitment to nurturing female referees at all levels of the game as part of its comprehensive overall development strategy. “It’s a positive factor that we are constantly enhancing development work with women officials,” said Damková, “to include not only the elite levels, but also promising referees in other categories.

“We want the young referees to grab this chance. We have four years before Women’s EURO 2021 to monitor them and train them to be part of the next top-level generation.” ⚽

GIVING FORMER ELITE FOOTBALLERS NEW CHALLENGES

After so many years excelling in one profession, it is not easy to turn the page and try something else. However, this does not mean that former elite footballers should have to turn their backs on the game, as UEFA's Executive Master for International Players shows.

In November 2015, 24 former international footballers embarked on the first-ever UEFA Executive Master for International Players (MIP) programme. Two years later, it was time to celebrate a good job well done at their graduation ceremony in Nyon.

The MIP equips high-profile internationals with the tools to transfer their playing strengths into effective management skills that can only benefit football as a whole.

Leadership, discipline and a commitment to high-level performance are the hallmarks of trophy winners and the MIP ensures that these skills do not go to waste when elite players retire from the game.

"I am extremely honoured to be part of this first cohort of MIP alumni," said Jason Roberts, who enjoyed a distinguished career as a striker in England. During the course, he discovered that many of the skills which helped him become a top footballer could actually be transferred into his new career choices: "Sometimes during the course I had to draw on my experience of taking a penalty to win a game or taking a shot to gain promotion. It is that pressurised, especially among your peers, people you respect and people who you know," he said. "It has been a huge challenge – one that I have relished, but also one where I have enjoyed making myself feel uncomfortable."

Bianca Rech, a former Germany international, is currently working for the women's football department at Bayern Munich and she says she would recommend the MIP to anyone looking to develop a second career after hanging up their boots: "Your football career can end very quickly because of an injury or something else. When you're young, you don't think about what's coming next, but it's so important to make players aware that there is a time after playing football



and there is not always a red carpet waiting for you."

The MIP programme comprises seven week-long sessions, each of which deals with a different aspect of football administration and management. The programme is delivered by two world-class academic institutions: the University of Limoges in France and Birkbeck Sport Business Centre in London. The course has also been developed in partnership with FIFPro Division Europe and the European Club Association (ECA).

The 24 participants in the first edition of the UEFA MIP were: Eric Abidal (France), Kike Boned (Spain), Keld Bordinggaard (Denmark), Balima Boureima (Burkina Faso), Bruno Cheyrou (France), Nikos Dabizas (Greece), Nuno Gomes (Portugal), Pierre Issa (South Africa), Christian Karembou (France), Sebastian Kehl (Germany), Jessica Landström (Sweden), Mbo Mpenza (Belgium), Patrick Müller (Switzerland), Geremie Njitap (Cameroon), Viola Odebrecht (Germany), Rai Oliveira (Brazil), Juninho Pernambucano (Brazil), Bianca Rech (Germany), Jason Roberts (Grenada), Simon Rolfes (Germany), Dan Romann (Israel), Roberto Rosetti (Italy), Hannu Tihinen (Finland) and Maris Verpakovskis (Latvia). 🌐

NEW STUDENTS BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY

When the first graduation ceremony took place at UEFA headquarters in Nyon on 16 November, students on the second edition of the MIP were also on the UEFA campus for their first classes. The following former elite players are taking part in the second edition of the MIP (2017-19): Eniola Aluko (England), Ioannis Amanatidis (Greece), Dmitri Bulykin (Russia), Goran Bunjevčević (Serbia), Constantinos Charalambides (Cyprus), Youri Djorkaeff (France), Paul Elliott (England), Gareth Farelly (Republic of Ireland), Luis García (Spain), Kaspars Gorkks (Latvia), Tamás Hajnal (Hungary), Michael Johnson (Jamaica), Annike Krahn (Germany), Maxwell Scherrer Andrade (Brazil), Patrick Mboma (Cameroon), Gaizka Mendietia (Spain), Lise Overgaard Munk (Denmark), Dimitris Papadopoulos (Greece), Stiliyan Petrov (Bulgaria), Doug Reed (England), Deividas Šemberas (Lithuania), Gilberto Silva (Brazil), Kumar Thapa (Nepal), Kolo Touré (Ivory Coast), Hugo Viana (Portugal) and Zisis Vryzas (Greece).

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO WIN THE UEFA WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE?

UEFA has been supporting football-related academic research projects through its Research Grant Programme since 2010. This month, Edson Filho and Jean Rettig present one such study on performance in elite women's football.



Edson Filho presents the findings of the research project at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon.

Why we carried out this research

Most previous research in football has focused on the men's game. Given that football has become an increasingly popular sport among girls and women around the world, we decided to examine the factors that lead to successful performance in the top competition in women's club football – the UEFA Women's Champions League. We reasoned that, in order to promote gender balance in sports and advance best practice guidelines to inform the education of coaches and practitioners, we should study the unique factors related to successful performance in women's football.

How we went about it

Excellence in football depends on individual psychology, group psychology and broader contextual factors, including country-specific characteristics. Accordingly, we conducted a hierarchical, multilevel analysis to profile the characteristics of successful

coaches, teams and countries participating in the Women's Champions League over the past five seasons.

What we found

Our findings highlight that coaching experience, the quality of the team as a whole, the cross-cultural effects of having an international roster, and the strength of women's football at national level are key factors for success in the Women's Champions League.

Coaching experience matters

Experienced coaches are more likely to be successful than newcomers, and the coaches with the most experience in the Women's Champions League itself have the highest chances of success. An alternative interpretation is that successful coaches keep their jobs for longer. Either way, preventing frequent coach turnover may boost team performance and, in the long term, help to regulate coach education and salaries.

The team comes first

Successful teams in the Women's Champions League win because of the quality of the team as a whole. Football managers should invest wisely – spending significant resources on a single player or a few star players might not produce the best outcomes, and may contribute to an overinflation of salaries.

The benefits of diversity

Internationalisation is a good thing, as diverse, multicultural teams are more likely to be successful. Players with different backgrounds approach the game from different cultural perspectives and use different defensive and offensive tactics, ultimately contributing to improved team performance.

Stronger countries, stronger teams, stronger players

We found a relationship between the FIFA world rankings and performance in the Women's Champions League. To raise the standard of women's football around the world, it is paramount to create educational and financial initiatives to get young girls to play football, particularly in countries where women's football is less developed and practised. 🌍

Edson Filho is a lecturer in sport psychology at the University of Central Lancashire. His main interests include the study of expert individuals and high-performing teams in sport, music and the performing arts.

Jean Rettig is an adjunct professor at Florida State University. Her research interests centre around student-athlete engagement and team dynamics in sport.

ROMANIA TAKING BOLD STEPS FORWARD IN STADIUM SAFETY AND SECURITY

Romania has set the course for the future with a raft of far-reaching stadium safety and security policies and activities. Serious incidents at a national team match and a tragic nightclub fire in the capital city of Bucharest were key turning points that prompted the Romanian Football Federation and local authorities to join forces to enhance, redefine and restructure safety and security practices across the board. Their diligent work is ongoing and already bearing fruit.

An important step underpinning Romania's efforts in the field of safety and security has been its signing of the 2016 Council of Europe Convention on Integrated Safety, Security and Service at Football Matches and Other Sports Events. The convention aims to guarantee a welcoming atmosphere inside and outside stadiums, promote the safety of spectators, improve dialogue between the police, local authorities, football clubs and supporters, strengthen international police cooperation, and support effective measures to prevent and punish hooliganism.

The recent UEFA-EU Stadium and Security Conference in Munich featured a case study on how Romania is implementing the convention, which builds on and will ultimately replace the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sport Events and in particular at Football Matches that came into being following stadium tragedies in the 1980s such as Heysel (1985) and Hillsborough (1989).

After preparations that included a UEFA course for club security officers and police commanders, Romania signed the new convention on 29 November 2016. With further assistance and cooperation from UEFA, the serious work needed to implement the convention then got under way.

The UEFA-EU conference heard that serious disorder at a European Qualifier between Romania and Hungary in Bucharest in October 2014 had been a catalyst for urgent action. The Romanian Football Federation in particular was determined that spectator profiles at football matches should undergo radical change.

Excluding troublemakers is a critical component in any efforts to enhance safety and security at matches, and the gathering in Munich was told how Romania had brought in legislation allowing three levels of bans. The country's police and gendarmerie – the military

police force – can impose bans directly on known hooligans on the streets.

Prosecutors also have administrative exclusion powers. Finally, the criminal courts can impose exclusion orders of up to five years. In addition, so-called 'spotters' are now being deployed in Romania, using IT technology to exchange information on banned individuals and tracking them in cities to make sure they do not come to stadiums.

Facilities and certification

Turning to the stadiums themselves, and their facilities and certification, the



Safety and security in stadiums is an absolute priority for UEFA, as it also is for the Romanian Football Federation.

conference heard how Romania had built eight new football stadiums since 2000, the 'jewel' being the 55,600-capacity National Arena in Bucharest, which hosted the 2012 UEFA Europa League final.

As facilities and infrastructure appeared to be moving in the right direction, however, a fire at the Colectiv nightclub in Bucharest in October 2015 resulting in 64 people losing their lives. This brought to public attention the fact that many venues in Romania functioned without appropriate fire safety approvals from the authorities – and this included the National Arena. The stadium was closed in November 2015 and did not reopen for five months – leading to serious financial losses and damage to Romania's reputation for infrastructure safety.

The fire triggered further immediate action by the Romanian authorities, as a result of which stringent new safety certification procedures are now in force across the country.

Training stewards

Romania has also taken important steps in training stadium stewards – another key area of safety and security. An occupational standard for stewarding has been defined, and Romania has adopted the UEFA 'train the trainer' package that provides 90 hours of mandatory training. These measures are allowing Romania to standardise training for stadium stewards at national level.

The new system is being rolled out successfully. Making it a requirement for all stewards – whether responsible for safety or security – to be trained and certified to the same standard has been crucial, as has securing the support of the private security industry.

Policing styles

Policing is also being redefined in Romania. A 'friendly but firm' approach has been embraced, as well as graded deployment – using officers in ordinary uniforms to communicate with the fans and bringing in public-order procedures only when the circumstances demand it. Since this move to a more dialogue-based approach, no large-scale interventions by the gendarmerie have been necessary at football matches.

Another part of the case study presented at the UEFA-EU conference in Munich centred on international cooperation. It showed how Romania has one of the best-resourced national football



In Romania, the police take a 'friendly but firm' approach with fans.

information points (NFIPs) in Europe. A mini-documentary on the recent World Cup qualifier between Romania and Denmark highlighted the international police cooperation that took place in connection with the match, and the deployment of 'spotters' from both countries to detect banned spectators or potential troublemakers. The resources invested and deployed for this match were considered to have more than paid off and clearly represent the way forward.

"Football is a phenomenon centred on the fan experience and fair play," says Anton Cernat, head of the Romanian NFIP, "and in order to ensure a safe and welcoming atmosphere, we must define clear roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder within an integrated national strategy.

"Dialogue with the fans and local communities, an effective exclusion and inclusion system, and effective national coordination are the driving forces for success. Romania's gendarmerie is one of the leading agencies at national level. It has embraced the vast majority of European best practices and continues to adapt and implement them on an ongoing basis, taking national circumstances and

So-called 'spotters' are now being deployed in Romania, using IT technology to exchange information on banned individuals and tracking them in cities to make sure they do not come to stadiums.

challenges into account. Our role is crucial for ensuring the safety and security of spectators, but our will is to be as invisible as possible and act in a targeted way, without affecting the overall fan experience".

A continuous journey

Romania is one of 26 countries that have signed the 2016 convention so far. The results of its efforts to improve and enhance safety and security measures at football matches – and in other areas of society – are visible, and further progress is clearly imminent, given the country's commitment to change and improvement in this sector.

The Romanian Football Federation is determined to make an enduring contribution to this progress, as its president, Răzvan Burleanu, explains: "We are in a process of continuous training and upgrading, so that we can establish a good practice model that we can adapt and export to the football clubs – our members of the Romanian Football Federation.

"Among the projects I will mention as part of this specific development are mandatory [spectator] data collection for matches organised by the Romanian Football Federation and the creation of specially designed safer family zones in the stands, which have been extremely well received by the Romanian public. We want to have the best public for our football – and we want to make sure they enjoy our football in the best possible conditions".

Romania's stadium security efforts are to be commended, and UEFA will continue to partner the country on its journey. 🌐



LIAM DAVIS – ENGLAND

"IT SHOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM FOR ANY GAY PERSON TO PLAY FOOTBALL"

The words of 27-year-old Liam Davis perfectly sum up the crucial values promoted by UEFA's #EqualGame campaign in favour of diversity, inclusion and accessibility in football.

Liam is the only openly gay semi-professional footballer in the United Kingdom, and is one of the millions of football enthusiasts across Europe who make the game what it is – an endless source of joy, friendship and respect. Liam plays in midfield for Cleethorpes Town, a Northern Premier League club in the eastern English county of Lincolnshire. He has loved football all his life, and came out as gay at the age of 18. From a loving, caring family, he has received sterling support from his club, teammates, spectators and all other sides, and any fears that he might be ostracised have never materialised. "I've had no real problems," he says, "and don't think I ever will."

"Football is there for anyone who has a love for the game – whether playing, supporting or watching," Liam reflects. "There shouldn't be anything to hold anybody back."

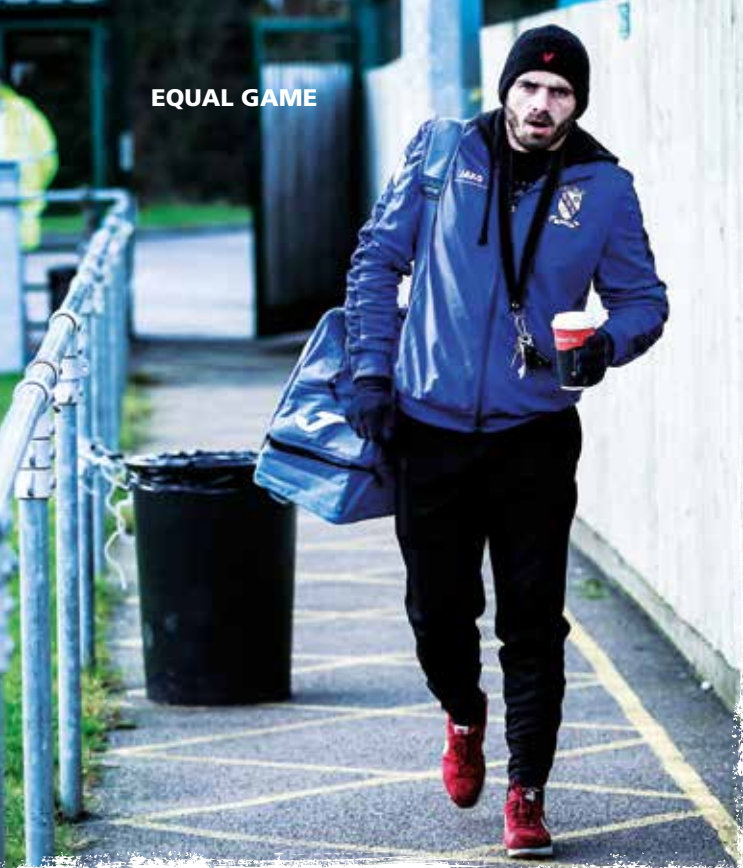
In addition to his football journey, he owns and runs a restaurant in his home area, and is a well-respected member of the close-knit local community.

Liam has already enjoyed one football experience of a lifetime – an appearance for his club in the final of the English FA Vase competition at the hallowed Wembley Stadium.

His advice to other gay footballers? "Don't worry too much – just be yourself." Wise words that we heartily endorse.

The logo for the #EqualGame campaign. It features a stylized hashtag symbol with horizontal stripes in blue, yellow, and red, followed by the words "EQUAL GAME" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

EQUAL GAME



"I'VE NEVER HAD ISSUES AT ANY CLUB I'VE BEEN AT IN TERMS OF THE WAY ANY OF MY TEAM-MATES, MANAGEMENT, STAFF OR FANS FEEL ABOUT MY SEXUALITY. BUT I HAVE RECEIVED ABUSE A COUPLE OF TIMES FROM OPPONENTS."





**"I'VE NEVER GIVEN A
THOUGHT TO ME AND MY SEXUAL
ORIENTATION WHEN I'M PLAYING
FOOTBALL. IT'S JUST FOOTBALL.
BALL, GOAL, GAME."**





"WHAT I LOVE ABOUT
RUNNING A LOCAL
BUSINESS IN CLEETHORPES
IS THE FACT THAT I'VE
CONSTANTLY GOT PEOPLE
TO TALK TO. I'VE NEVER
THOUGHT 'I FEEL A
BIT LONELY' OR 'I DON'T
FEEL AS IF THERE'S
ANYBODY THERE.'"

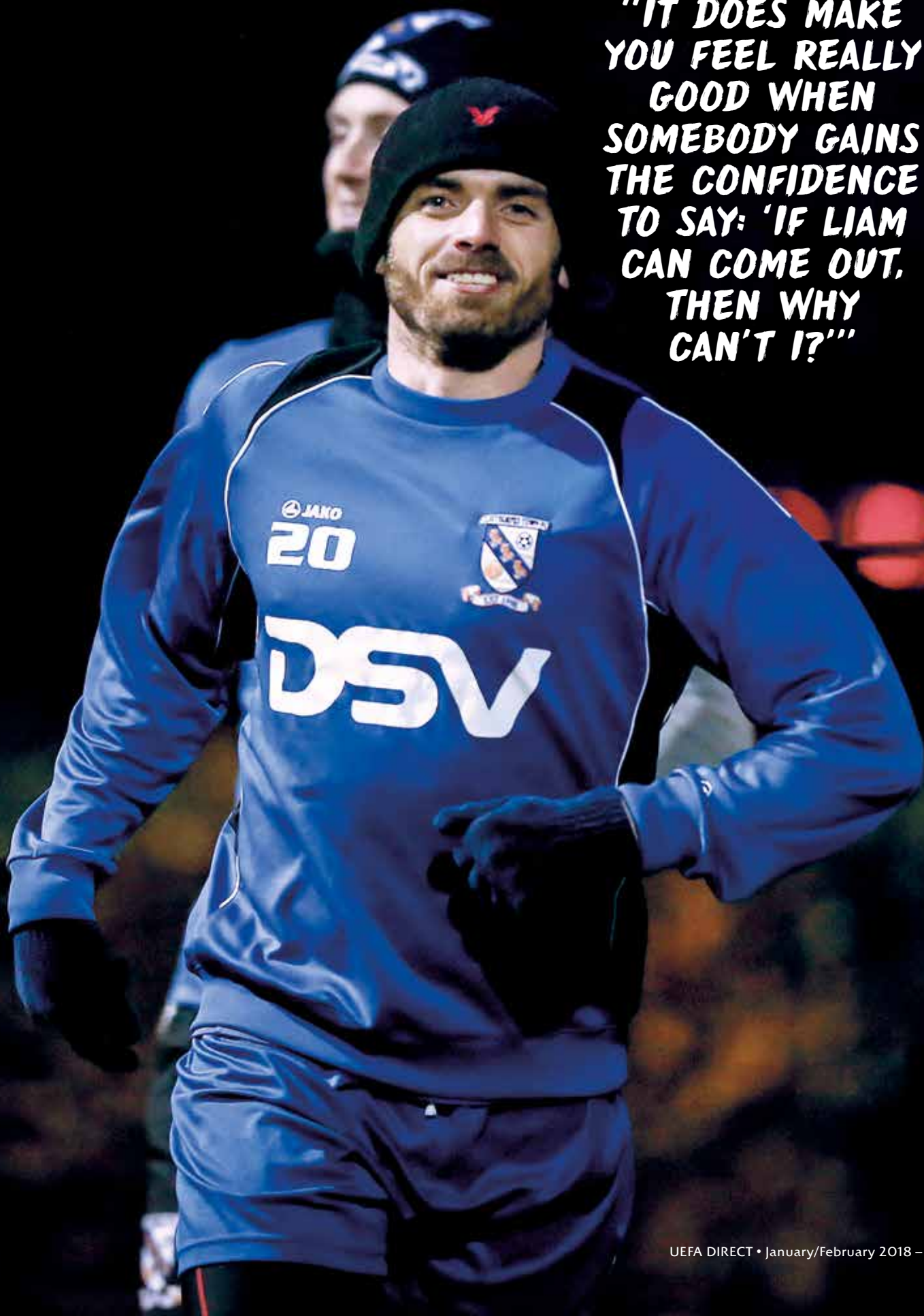




**"I GUESS I'M PROBABLY NOT THE FIRST GAY PLAYER
TO PLAY AT WEMBLEY. BUT TO BE THE FIRST OPENLY
GAY MALE PLAYER TO PLAY AT WEMBLEY,
THAT'S A PROUD MOMENT."**



**"IT DOES MAKE
YOU FEEL REALLY
GOOD WHEN
SOMEBODY GAINS
THE CONFIDENCE
TO SAY: 'IF LIAM
CAN COME OUT,
THEN WHY
CAN'T I?'"**



Photos: UEFA



REINHARD GRINDEL

'FOOTBALL TRIGGERS EMOTIONS IN EVERYONE'

UEFA vice-president Reinhard Grindel has enjoyed a varied and versatile professional life, from political journalism to the German federal parliament and then the German Football Association (DFB), one of Europe's largest national associations. The 56-year-old has been DFB president since 2016 and is relishing the role in a country that is home to the current World Cup champions and savours regular successes at all levels of the game.

Reinhard Grindel has adored football since childhood. Here, he tells us why football plays such a key social role, why Germany is such a power in the game, and how he still feels the passion and excitement of any devoted fan.

We know you as a football administrator, but where exactly does your professional background lie?

I have a law degree, but always took a keen interest in politics, so for 15 years I worked as a political journalist, my last two postings being as head of the [German TV broadcaster] ZDF studios in Berlin and Brussels respectively. After that I changed sides, so to speak, to become an MP in the German Bundestag from 2002 to 2016.

Has this career path helped you in your present role?

I've got to say that these career moves taught me to make clear and precise statements, and they provided me with

experience in dealing with the media and in facilitating compromise between diverging interests – key skills that are proving very beneficial indeed in my current position as DFB president.

Were you a football fan as a child?

Certainly, and I used to be one of those much sought-after species – a street footballer. Practically every afternoon we, that's me and the boys from our neighbourhood, played football in the street or in a nearby park. Classic 'jumpers for goalposts' stuff, and we loved it. From there to joining a proper football club was only a small step.

What are your first footballing memories?

My first memories are of the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. We actually used to restage the matches the following day. It was a lovely time, because I was allowed to stay up late and watch games, and because it was a great opportunity for my father and I to grow really close. →



Reinhard Grindel with childhood idol Uwe Seeler (right), whose legendary header helped West Germany to victory against England in the 1970 World Cup quarter-finals, and Horst Eckel (left), a member of the 1954 West Germany team that won the World Cup.

"If you ask me for a childhood idol, it would have to be Uwe Seeler. He was a first-class player, but he also remained firmly grounded, humble and modest."





Getty Images

West Germany beat England in the quarter-finals of that exciting 1970 World Cup, not to forget their crazy semi-final against Italy [which Italy won 4-3 after extra time] ...

I distinctly remember Uwe Seeler's equaliser to make it 2-2 [in the quarter-final]. He scored it with the back of his head, a truly legendary German national team goal to this day. By then, England believed they had the match in the bag. They'd even taken Bobby Charlton off so he'd be fresh for the semi-final! Many of the German players at that time had played in the final we lost against England at Wembley in the 1966 World Cup. For that reason, this victory was very special. So I'd say that result made losing the semi-final to Italy a little more bearable.

So from 1970, you fell head over heels in love with football?

Yes, it's been a part of my life since childhood. I played into my teens, but then decided to hang up my boots because I needed to wear glasses, which became too much of a handicap. Looking back, I think it's a pity that nobody at the time thought about winning me over to become a referee. It would have been a wonderful way to stay connected with the game!

Did you or do you still have a favourite position on the pitch?

Not really. I played in any position, from right-winger to goalkeeper in the end, because I hoped that wearing glasses would trouble me less in goal. Unfortunately that wasn't the case.

These days I haven't so much time to play, but when I do it's from the back. As a youngster I loved playing as a forward, because I was pretty tall – and I exploited my height advantage for headers!

Did you have any favourite players?

I grew up in Hamburg, close to Sportplatz Am Rothenbaum, which was Hamburger SV's home ground at the time. I hung out there a lot during holidays, watching the team train and collecting autographs, for example from Uwe Seeler. So if you ask me for a childhood idol, it would have to be Uwe Seeler. He is still an idol of mine.

Why is Uwe Seeler such an idol for you?

Well, first of all because he was a first-class player. But also because he has always remained firmly grounded, humble and modest. As a professional, he never left HSV, despite all those tempting financial offers from major European clubs – in his case, Italian clubs. His is a household

name everywhere in Germany, even with people who are far too young to have ever seen him play. Whenever he goes to national team matches or we attend functions together, it is obvious that people still love him for his good-natured and open attitude.

Was there any specific point in time when you chose to become a football administrator, or was it a spontaneous decision?

It was anything but a planned development. Just like many other young boys, what I really wanted was to become a professional player, but it was not to be.

And was this a disappointment?

No, because, quite frankly, I quickly accepted that I lacked the quality and the talent to make it. However, it's all the more of a privilege, joy and honour to be close to the German national team now, heading the DFB delegation and joining our country's best footballers as they take part in major tournaments.

“Integration is absolutely central, for example the integration of migrant children, of people with disabilities, and of people who ended up on the wrong side of the law and now need to be reintegrated into society.”



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Sami Khedira gives his shirt to a young disabled fan after Germany's World Cup qualifier against Norway in Stuttgart on 4 September. Social responsibility in football is one of Reinhard Grindel's priorities for the DFB.



Getty Images

Germany's 7-1 victory against Brazil in Belo Horizonte in 2014 was one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history.

You've done many different things in your life so far. How do your past experiences help you in the here and now?

Well, in whatever office I've held over the years, I've always wanted to make a difference and move things forward. Perhaps there's no better office than DFB president, where the possibilities are so diverse – just look at what football can do in terms of integrating people. It is up to us to make optimum use of this. And I'm strongly in favour of football assuming its social responsibility.

In which areas do you think football should take the lead?

Integration is absolutely central, for example the integration of migrant children, of people with disabilities, and of people who ended up on the wrong side of the law and now need to be reintegrated into society. These are some of the causes for which the DFB and its foundations are doing valuable work. I would even go as far as to say that football is where the integration of refugees works best. For many people in Germany, their club is basically like a home from home, a family almost, that gives them guidance and teaches them values. Football can do all of these things. Making a contribution to keeping this system intact, perhaps even making it better – this is an important, major and wonderful task to be involved in. As DFB president, it is possible for me to move a lot of things forward.

What are the biggest pros of being DFB president, and what do you like most about your position?

Whenever I go to visit clubs at the grassroots, it is very gratifying to see how much time and commitment people invest on a voluntary basis in coaching and looking after children's and youth teams. The enthusiasm and the quality shown by our amateur clubs is great, because the children love coming to training and stay in football. As a result, we ensure that the game is handed down to the next generation.



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What do you think is your biggest asset?

Continuity and the solid structures that have been put in place, both at grassroots and elite levels. There are some 25,000 clubs in Germany, with hundreds of thousands of youth coaches who are discovering talented players. We have 366 training centres across Germany where players aged 10 to 14 are trained by qualified coaches. This way, hardly any promising youngsters will still slip through the net. Then there are the performance centres of the Bundesliga clubs and others. I believe that this pathway from a broad base to the elite means that talented young players – think of Mario Götze or Leroy Sané – will continue to make it into our senior national team, even at a very young age.

So grassroots is the key?

We always say: "Without healthy grassroots, the national team can't play top football." That's the secret. But I'm quite sure that many other nations have long since begun to discover that for themselves.

Let's move on to some personal views – what would you say is the best match you've ever seen?

Germany's 7-1 win [against Brazil] at the 2014 World Cup in Belo Horizonte. To see a team dominate play so impressively, against the host nation in a World Cup semi-final – I don't think we will witness something like this again anytime soon. →



Mesut Özil scores against Italy in the EURO 2016 quarter-final, which Germany eventually won on penalties.

“When important matches go to the wire, I can be very passionate. Football triggers emotions in everyone ... and that includes the DFB president!”

And the German team, despite such a landslide victory, won plaudits for their humility and fair play ...

What made this occasion so special was the way that the German players conducted themselves after the final whistle. They refrained from wild celebrations. In fact, they showed empathy and respect, and found words of comfort and encouragement for the Brazilian players. Fair play in its truest form, and it was really fantastic to witness this.

When you're in the stadium, do you still say to yourself: “Wow, I'm in a stadium and it feels wonderful”?

Oh yes, I do! Just think of a national team match, or the DFB Cup final in Germany. But I must say that I'm just as happy in the stands of a sold-out stadium somewhere in the fourth-tier regional league, or watching a district league match in a small town somewhere. There is just as much passion and enthusiasm for football in the air. Football can also be good to watch and exciting when big money is not at stake.

When you're at a national team match and Germany score, what do you do – jump up and punch the air or cheer inwardly?

I'd say it depends on whether we're talking about an important EURO match or a simple friendly match. But, in principle, I'd say that my pulse beats faster when the action is under way.

How passionate can you get?

Let's say I have the passion of a fan – and as DFB president as well. I know how much is at stake for the association on

various levels when our national team is successful. Children and youngsters want to emulate their idols.

Yes, success breeds interest ...

There is a clear correlation between the success of the German national team on the one hand and the popularity of football in Germany on the other. Our sport has a special role in Germany – but we must never rest on our laurels. Think of German tennis – there was this incredible tennis boom, stirred up by Steffi Graf and Boris Becker. A lot of children and youngsters began playing tennis. Now, we see that tennis does not have such idols, and the boom has passed.

Let's assume you're at a national team match, sitting next to the president of the opposing national association, and Germany score. How do you react?

Well, we recently hosted Norway for a World Cup qualifier. We won 6-0 and the Norwegian FA's president, Terje Svendsen, was indeed sitting right next to me. Once Germany were 3-0 ahead, I simply sat still for the other goals because you take your colleague's feelings into account. But such self-restraint doesn't always prevail!

Can you give us an example?

I remember the EURO 2016 quarter-final against Italy. My colleague, the president of the Italian FA, Carlo Tavecchio, was sat near to me, but I still cheered and celebrated. Of course, before and after the match, we assured each other that our good friendship would stand whatever the outcome, and that was the case. He understood me and didn't take my celebrations to heart. When important matches go to the wire, I can be very passionate. Football triggers emotions in everyone ... and that includes the DFB president! 🇮🇹



The DFB president enjoys a moment's calm in Sochi before the semi-final against Mexico in the 2017 Confederations Cup, which Germany went on to win.

THE PACK GIVES CHASE TO LYON

Reigning champions Lyon are favourites to win the UEFA Women's Champions League for the third season in a row – and for a record fifth time overall – but the other seven teams in next March's quarter-finals will all be keen to break the French club's stranglehold on the trophy.

The holders were the team everyone wanted to avoid in the quarter-finals. Winners of the competition in the last two seasons, as well as in 2011 and 2012, Lyon are now bidding to move ahead of 1. FFC Frankfurt and become the most successful side in the competition's history.

If anything, the French club's start to their latest trophy defence has been their most impressive yet. Disposing of Poland's Medyk Konin in the round of 32 and then BIK Kazygurt of Kazakhstan in the following round, Lyon racked up 30 goals, conceding none, in four resounding wins. Ada Hegerberg helped herself to 13 goals in those four games to move way out front as the competition's leading scorer this season.

The dubious honour of trying to halt Lyon's progress has fallen to Spain's only representative in the quarter-finals, Barcelona, who also won their first four games with four clean sheets to secure a place in the last eight for the fourth time in five years. Spearheading their bid to reach a second successive semi-final is Lieke Martens, a Women's EURO 2017 winner with the Netherlands, who was recently named UEFA Women's Player of the Year and The Best FIFA Women's Player of 2017.

Elsewhere, Lyon's compatriots from Montpellier take on Chelsea. Having qualified for the tournament by pipping the 2015 and 2017 Champions League runners-up Paris Saint-Germain to second place in their domestic league last season, Montpellier showed plenty of steel in their opening match against Russia's Zvezda 2005, winning 2-0 away after going down 1-0 at home in the first leg. The French side then eased past Brescia in the last 16.

Destination Kyiv

Chelsea are the only club left in the competition who have never featured in the last eight before. In their third successive appearance in the competition, the Londoners have knocked out Bayern Munich and Rosengård. Domestic rivals Manchester City are the other English club still in the running. City have established themselves as one of European football's leading lights and will be looking to become the second British side to win the Women's Champions League, following Arsenal in 2007.

Last term, the Mancunians impressed in a tight semi-final against Lyon, while this season they cruised past Austria's St. Pölten and Norway's LSK in their opening two ties, so they should be full of confidence when they take on Sweden's Linköping. The latter, meanwhile, will be looking to improve on their two previous quarter-final appearances in 2011 and 2015.

Elsewhere, Wolfsburg have been every bit as impressive as Lyon on their way to the quarter-finals, crushing Atlético Madrid 12-2 in the second leg of the round of 32 and then dispatching Fiorentina 7-3 on aggregate in the last 16. Next up they face Slavia Praha, who were joined in the last 16 by local rivals Sparta Praha – the first time two clubs from the same city have advanced as far. The Czech side will be aiming to prevent their German opponents from reaching the semis for the fifth time in six years. The winners of that tie will take on Montpellier or Chelsea in the last four.

Having lost to Olympique Lyonnais the last two seasons, Wolfsburg will be grateful to avoid them in the semis, should they advance. The French and German giants met in the final in 2013 and 2016, and it would be no great surprise to see a rematch in Kyiv on 24 May. ⚽

Quarter-finals 21/22 and 28/29 March

Montpellier	v	Chelsea
Wolfsburg	v	Slavia Praha
Manchester City	v	Linköping
Lyon	v	Barcelona



In the round of 32, Chelsea knocked out Bayern Munich with an away goal.

Getty Images

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES FROM THE NETHERLANDS

With the dust beginning to settle on UEFA Women's EURO 2017 and the Netherlands' ending of the 22-year German monopoly that was nestling safely in the record books, national team coaches and women's football specialists from all of UEFA's member associations were invited to a conference in Amsterdam in November, where the brief was to pinpoint the take-home messages transmitted by the final tournament in the Netherlands and translate them into useful pointers for the coaches working at all levels of the fast-growing women's game.

In Amsterdam, the views expressed by UEFA's technical observers Hesterine de Reus, Patricia González, Jarmo Matikainen and Anne Noë (also recorded in the tournament review published in print and online) provided a valuable glance in the rear-view mirror during the steady onward drive that is sweeping through the women's game.

"To be successful in the future, we need greater variety and flexibility in our attacking options" (Martin Sjögren). "The teams in possession didn't seem to find solutions against deep defensive blocks. Options in the final third were not good enough" (Freyr Alexandersson). "All teams can defend well in the box, so we need to find solutions. Different kinds of crosses, running pathways into the box, overloads with more overlapping players" (Pia Sundhage). These comments by the coaches of Norway, Iceland and Sweden encapsulate one of the major talking points to emerge from a final tournament which, on the road to the final, posted a miserly all-time low of 2.07 goals per match. Even though the thrilling six-goal grand finale in Enschede lifted the overall average to 2.19, the prevalence of defence over attack was a salient feature of the first 16-team event, where Austria – one of five debutants – laid the foundations for a historic run to the semi-finals by conceding one goal in 510 minutes of football. The goal tally at EURO 2017 was 28% lower than the average registered at the 2015 Women's World Cup.

Although statistics do not lie, they are often quite good at concealing the truth. So debate focused on whether the scarcity

of goals was down to effective defending or ineffective attacking. Or both. In presenting the 'case for the defence', Jarmo Matikainen expressed the view that for teams [at Women's EURO 2017] "all attributes related to defending had continued to improve" and that "once in defensive shape, teams were very difficult to break down". Austria evidently provided a reference point, Dominik Thalhammer's team implementing rapid transitions to defensive mode with one of the screening midfielders – Sara Puntigam – quickly slotting into the space between centre-back and left-back to complete a back line of five.

Building from the back

Defensive density was further illustrated by the fact that, even though the number of goal attempts increased by 18.5% in relation to EURO 2013, the conversion rate dropped and 24% of attempts were blocked by defenders. The arts of defending also interlocked, with noticeable improvements in athletic preparation. As Jarmo Matikainen commented: "All teams had invested in physical preparation and were able to produce high-quality defensive work during the game and throughout an intensive tournament." A glut of late goals is traditionally linked to fatigue factors – and this trend was notable by its absence in the Netherlands. Tournament data reveal that 55% of the goals were scored before the half-time interval.

Investment in fitness levels also made an impact on game strategies, with teams, as

Jarmo Matikainen pointed out, displaying "greater ability to recover quickly after losing possession" and to execute "immediate pressing to regain possession whenever possible". Defensive efficacy was further underlined by the fact that 23 of the 26 games which produced victories were won by the team scoring first. Even though the opening goal hit the net during the opening half-hour in half of those matches – giving the opposition time to find a response – teams were equipped to successfully preserve (or extend) their advantage.

Hence the doubts expressed by coaches and observers alike about whether attacking finesse had been able to keep pace with advances in the art of defending. As Spain coach Jorge Vilda commented: "When you have an opponent who shuts it down at the back and is able to sustain pace and power over the 90 minutes, you have to cope with lack of space in the final third. It's difficult, but I'm convinced we can find solutions."

This was one of the themes picked up by Patricia González when she took the stage to discuss attacking play. Spain, along with Germany and France, were alone among the 16 contestants to have more than 50% of possession in each game. All three were eliminated in the quarter-finals. Overall, eight of the tournament's 26 victories were for the team with the lesser share of possession. The same three teams topped the table in terms of the number of passes per game and per phase of possession (Spain 3.6, Germany 3.5, France 2.7) compared with, for example, England's 1.7 or Austria's 1.2. "I felt that the →





Sportsfile

possession teams didn't have enough changes of pace in their attacking game," commented Denmark coach Nils Nielsen, "whereas teams like England were able to do a lot of damage with direct fast-forward attacking." The three 'possession teams' scored 10 goals in the 12 matches they played – 7 of which were from dead-ball situations. In other words, their 1,100 minutes of football yielded only three open-play goals. Efficient finishing was evidently a factor in the equation. Whereas England needed only 5.18 attempts to score a goal and the Netherlands 5.77, Germany required 17.6, France 21.67 and Spain 36.5.

Playing direct pays dividends

The viability of the direct approach was underlined by the fact that 24% of the tournament's open-play goals could be attributed to fast counterattacks executed before the opponent's defensive block had time to assemble. The Netherlands capitalised on coaching-manual counters to score crucial goals, while Austria implemented a clear counterattacking strategy. As the tournament review indicates: "The preference was to play as directly as possible into the final third, exploiting Nina Burger's intelligent off-the-ball running and composure on the ball. Second-ball support was provided at sprint speed, with Laura Feiersinger breaking out fast on the right to play a key transition role in an effective defence-to-attack strategy." In Amsterdam, Nils Nielsen, during the coaches' forum session, took the microphone to express the opinion that Feiersinger was his prototype of the player of the future: "unpredictable," he said, "but everything she did made a contribution to the team's collective play". His opinion provokes reflections on potential dividends from the development of 'transition players'. As Iceland's Freyr Alexandersson admitted: "We did not use our transition moments as well as we could have. There were

As in the match between Austria and Switzerland (1-0), strikers often came up against tight defences.

moments when we opted to clear the ball out instead of passing to our transition player."

On stage in Amsterdam, Hesterine de Reus's review of player development issues broached the subject of players ready, willing and able to engage in one-on-ones in the final third: "Could it be that coaches are underestimating the value of one-on-one abilities, not basing game plans on them, not encouraging players to use them – or even discouraging players from using them?" "What I missed," added Patricia González, "was greater bravery in going one-on-one in the final third. Players like Nadia Nadim, Lieke Martens and Pernille Harder stood out because they were willing to create disbalance by taking on opponents." Jarmo Matikainen added: "We saw excellent one-on-one defending – but not so much at the other end. There was a tendency to be very disciplined in applying game plans, and maybe not enough room for improvisation."

The coaches on stage were quick to endorse the importance of audacity in the final third. "I support this absolutely," Nils Nielsen commented. "You don't win by being careful, so the key is to go 100%. This was our approach in the final. It was certainly more interesting than if we had parked the bus in front of our goal. We would probably have lost anyway ..." Switzerland coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg added: "I always ask my players to try their one-on-one skills. It's important that they feel brave enough. So it's something that, as coaches, we should encourage even more."

Although it was fair to argue that defensive qualities had the edge at Women's EURO 2017, goals were scored – and, as Patricia González pointed out, wing play generated almost one third of the tournament's open-play goals. Teams were aware that, with defensive blocks difficult to penetrate centrally, the most

Getty Images



"Players like Nadia Nadim [left], Lieke Martens and Pernille Harder stood out because they were willing to create disbalance by taking on opponents."

Patricia González
UEFA technical observer

viable solution was to go round them. However, statistics related to supply from the wide areas generated more questions than answers. In numerical terms, the possession teams – Spain, Germany and France – delivered the most crosses, with Spain registering the highest success rate (59%) based on whether the delivery found a team-mate or not. On the other hand, the Netherlands, very much a mid-table team in terms of quantity and success rate, owed four of their nine open-play goals to supply from the wide areas, largely because they were able to penetrate into the areas behind full-backs (notably by playing into space on the right to exploit the pace of Shanice van de Sanden) and deliver crosses that goalkeepers and back-tracking defenders found awkward to deal with.

By and large, they found set plays easier to deal with. Although dead-ball situations accounted for almost one-third of the tournament's goals, 37% were penalties. The major talking point, however, was the total of four goals from 303 corner kicks – two of them on the opening matchday – while the scouting of opponents was

barely under way. The question for coaches is whether, with a success rate of 1:76 (1:29 at Women's EURO 2013), it is worth investing training ground time in rehearsing set plays. Nils Nielsen was among those who acknowledged the need to work on the defensive side. "If you were to lose a game because of poor defending at a corner, you would feel really bad." Martina Voss-Tecklenburg also conceded: "You have very little room for creativity at corners in attack. The options are limited and working on set plays in training is not a lot of fun. Free-kicks offer you more scope and, in general, set plays can be useful if you have a specialist in delivering them." Scotland coach Anna Signeul (now with Finland) agreed: "The quality of delivery is everything. That's why we enlisted the help of a specialist to work on kicking techniques." Dominik Thalhammer, on the other hand, felt that: "Set plays are an important part of the game and, during the run-up to EURO, we focused on them quite a lot. Not just corners, I have to emphasise. We also scored a goal from a long throw ..."

A spotlight on goalkeeping

Maybe the hottest potato was handed to former Belgium keeper – and national team coach – Anne Noé, asked to analyse goalkeeping performances. In Amsterdam, she followed up comments in the tournament review that: "In an honest review of Women's EURO 2017, goalkeeping is a nettle that has to be grasped. But for goalkeepers' errors, the goal tally would have fallen even further below its record low. A compilation of important – many of them match-changing – errors might give goalkeeper coaches sleepless nights. Crosses misjudged or mishandled, shots palmed into the net, questionable positioning of keeper and wall at set plays, passes directly to the opposition striker. On the other hand, the tournament was painted in chiaroscuro – the errors were mixed with a large number of outstanding saves."

Anne Noé reviewed the contrasting facets of a tournament which illustrated, as she put it, the route from hero to zero – and vice versa. The 31 matches produced 23 clean sheets, athletic qualities had undoubtedly improved, long-range shots →

WOMEN'S EURO 2017 IN NUMBERS



Average of
2.19
goals
per match



24%
of open-play goals
attributed to
counterattacks



23
clean sheets
in a total of
31 matches

(historically a fertile source of goals in women's football) were so competently dealt with that only two reached the net, and mental preparation allowed keepers to rebound strongly after errors. But, as she pointed out, keepers often opted to parry or punch instead of catching the ball even when unchallenged – and this frequently prolonged the opposition's attack by keeping the ball in play and creating scenes of chaos in the box.

Handling and decision-making apart, her review of the take-away messages for goalkeeper development also included the fact that 34% of the tournament's goals had been scored from the zone between the penalty spot and the edge of the goal area, and 29% from inside the latter. The inference is that goalkeeper coaches should not be over-reluctant to pepper keepers from close range on the training ground.

The overall impression, however, was that, whereas goalkeeping standards had been one of the outstanding features in 2013, Women's EURO 2017 had left a more enigmatic legacy. "Have goalkeepers not made the same progress as outfield players?" Noé asked. "Or was it just a bad month at the office?" The second option was supported, as it happened, by events at the European Women's Under-19 Championship final tournament which kicked off less than 48 hours after the Dutch had lifted the trophy in Enschede. Performances in Northern Ireland prompted the UEFA technical observers to include three keepers in the tournament's all-star squad. England coach 'Mo' Marley said she had "two outstanding goalkeepers" in her squad and, even though results went against their teams, the goalkeepers of Scotland and Northern Ireland were applauded for impressive performances. Anja Palusevic, one of the observers, commented: "We are seeing results from good-quality coaching and it augurs well for the future."

The adjacency of the two tournaments provided a link with two issues of concern to the coaches in Amsterdam: how best to bridge the gap between Under-19 and senior levels, and how best to prepare players mentally for the jump into pressure-laden atmospheres at major tournaments played to huge audiences.

The responses by national associations to the challenge of steering players from youth development levels on to the senior stage are too diverse to be listed. But



The conference in Amsterdam on 6 November brought together UEFA technical observers and national team coaches.

"The growth in the popularity of women's football is bringing it closer to the men's game. But the men are well ahead of us in dealing with the pressures. We need to educate our players to cope with all the trappings that go with top-level sport."

Jorge Vilda
Spain's women's national team coach



Martina Voss-Tecklenburg spoke for a great many of her coaching colleagues when she said: "The biggest challenge during that transitional phase is making the jump in terms of athletic ability, reaction time and levels of match intensity."

On the athletic front, a majority of the coaches who travelled to Women's EURO 2017 acknowledged that they had worked hard on bringing fitness levels up to international standards from the more modest parameters of domestic competitions. At the same time, they admitted that indices of serious injury at youth development levels were triggering alarms. As Germany coach Steffi Jones commented: "As coaches, we need to achieve the right balance – we need to consider the welfare of the players and not just have our own results uppermost in our minds."

Being in the right state of mind

The coaches unanimously underlined the value of preparing players mentally for life at the top. Nils Nielsen, for example, explained how his players had been nervous prior to Denmark's opening game against Belgium and felt more at ease when wearing the underdog label: "We knew the tournament was going to be tough and it was important to make it clear that, if something went wrong, we were not going to lie down and cry. If

your head is not in the game, it is very difficult to be successful." Anna Signeul explained how mental preparation had been fundamental in allowing her players to bounce back after defeats by England and Portugal. Dominik Thalhammer underlined the important role played by the mental coach who has been working with the Austria team since 2011 and who has been fully integrated into the coaching team. And as Spain coach Jorge Vilda remarked: "The growth in the popularity of women's football is bringing it closer to the men's game. But the men are well ahead of us in dealing with the pressures. We need to educate our players to cope with the media work, the sponsor work ... all the trappings that go with top-level sport."

Links with the men's game provided another talking point in Amsterdam, where Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, for example, underlined the value of a holistic approach to football in general, rather than treating women's football as a separate entity. "In Switzerland," she told her colleagues, "we focus on cooperation and input from everybody – including club coaches." Dominik Thalhammer spoke of regular meetings with the coaches of the men's team and the useful tips they had given him during the run-up to the final tournament.

Focus on the future

All of this prompted Richard Barnwell, coach of the Estonia women's Under-19 team, to enquire about the fundamentals at youth development levels. "To make players feel comfortable on the ball, to stress the importance of enjoying the game, to be prepared not to win every match, and to set reasonable targets," said Nils Nielsen. "If you don't have a large pool of players," added Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, "the coach has to design a playing strategy according to the strengths of the individual players." "To have a vision and a dream at the national association and to go for them," said Dominik Thalhammer, "and, when you lose, not to look at the result but at the process and ask whether you have achieved the targets you had set." "To devise a long-term development plan," Anna Signeul chipped in, "including all competition structures. And share your vision with the clubs."

In Amsterdam, it was easy to open the floor to questions. In print, that facility ceases to exist. If readers could ask questions, the first might easily be how it is possible to write so much without mentioning Sarina Wiegman. She earned a standing ovation from her colleagues with a frank, open-book exposé of all the meticulous planning and attention to detail which had underpinned the Netherlands' run to the title – after which UEFA's managing director of technical development, Ioan Lupescu, and Anne Rei, chairwomen of the UEFA Women's Football Committee, stepped on stage to present a commemorative plaque to the champion coach. Wiegman gave an extensive interview in issue No 172, but it is only fair to give her the last word here: "The starting point was a dream. Then hard work on tasks and responsibilities among the players and the team behind the team. Then we focused on commitment and togetherness. We examined every possible scenario on and off the pitch to prevent unknown situations. And we pursued our goal of getting into the hearts of Dutch society." The Netherlands also set benchmarks for the other national associations aspiring to develop champions of the future. 🍷

The Austrians were the surprise of Women's EURO 2017, making it through to the semi-finals in their first-ever final tournament.





Colour-blind players, referees, stewards and spectators can have real problems telling teams' kits apart.

UEFA

SEEING THE GAME IN A NEW LIGHT

Around 320 million people around the world, almost all of them men, have some form of colour vision deficiency. While awareness of the condition remains limited both inside and outside the game, it poses a genuine challenge for those concerned and action is now being taken to reduce the colour-blindness barriers in football.

Given the extent to which statistics have taken over the world of football, it is quite striking how little data there is on colour blindness in the game. It is estimated that 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women have some form of colour vision deficiency, i.e. an inability to perceive colours normally. In football terms, that means that virtually every men's football team contains at least one colour-blind player. Deuteranopia and deuteranomaly, protanopia and protanomaly, tritanopia and tritanomaly ... the generic term 'colour blindness' encompasses a whole range of conditions, which are basically defined according to which colours the vision deficiency affects and the severity of that deficiency. When explaining the phenomenon and its many variations, specialists tend to say that there are as many forms of colour blindness as there are people who are colour blind. These people face myriad difficulties in everyday life, and football is no exception. On the contrary, it is an activity in which vision, and colour vision in particular, is crucial.

The first question that springs to mind when considering colour blindness in football is: "How does a colour-blind player distinguish between team-mates and opponents, if there is a kit-colour clash?" And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Players are faced with countless situations of this kind. And what about referees, coaches, TV viewers and stadium-goers? In a full 90,000-seater stadium such as Wembley, the statistics suggest that some 5,500 spectators experience some form of colour vision deficiency. The Wembley example is particularly apt, since the English FA has done more than any

other national association to address the issue, and recently published a guidance document entitled Colour Blindness in Football. Designed to raise awareness and explain how to improve the football experience for everyone affected, it highlights the real-life experiences of colour-blind people involved in football, many of which are hard to imagine for people with normal colour vision. Take the EURO 2016 round of 16 match between Portugal and Croatia, for example: the Portuguese were playing in light-green shorts and shirts; the Croats in red and white chequered shirts and white shorts. The kits were easy for the majority of spectators and TV viewers to tell apart but they generated a lot of reactions on social media from colour-blind fans, some of whom found the teams very difficult to distinguish between because of their 'poor' colour perception. This is because both kits appeared more or less white to people with a certain type of colour blindness, for whom the match was virtually impossible to follow. To make matters worse, for another demographic the kit worn by Cristiano Ronaldo and his team-mates appeared to be the same colour as the pitch!

A man's world (or almost)

This match between Portugal and Croatia is just one of dozens, if not hundreds, of examples of matches that cause problems for colour-blind spectators each season. To give an idea of the number of people affected, it is estimated, for example, that 140 million colour-blind TV viewers watched at least one EURO 2016 match – out of a cumulative TV audience of 2.5 billion. This estimate is based on the →

When explaining the phenomenon and its many variations, specialists tend to say that there are as many forms of colour blindness as there are people who are colour-blind.



When the Netherlands and Northern Ireland compete in their traditional colours, people with protanomaly have to look at the players' shorts to tell the two teams apart.



Getty Images

premise that, for EURO 2016, 70% of TV viewers were men. This is an important factor, since colour blindness is very much a man's world: only 1 in 200 women are affected, compared with 1 in 12 men. The reason for this apparent anomaly? Women have two X chromosomes, whereas men have only one. Since colour blindness is usually an inherited condition caused

To make the game more accessible to colour-blind players, it is necessary to select equipment in the right combinations of colours so that they can clearly see what is what.

by 'faulty' sequencing in the DNA of the X chromosome, for a woman to be colour-blind the DNA of both X chromosomes must be faulty. Women's football is therefore less affected by issues of colour blindness, although male spectators and TV viewers may beg to differ. A universal game in all senses of the term, football is an incredibly

powerful platform for inclusion. Until now, however, very little has been done to make the sport accessible to people with colour blindness. Far too little, according to specialists such as the founder of Colour Blind Awareness, Kathryn Albany-Ward, who assisted The FA and its Senior Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Funke Adeworu, with their comprehensive guide. "If we don't address this," Kathryn Albany-Ward explains, "individuals will continue to be excluded. At grassroots level young children will be put off the game because they can't follow instructions in training or identify their team-mates. In addition, clubs will risk a commercial impact when fans switch off TV coverage of matches they can't follow or if they find it difficult to purchase tickets online."

While the term 'discrimination' is typically used in relation to race or gender, it more accurately refers to the prejudicial treatment of any category of person, including those with colour blindness. There are countless situations in which colour-blind players in particular are put at a disadvantage, whether it is distinguishing between team-mates and opponents in a match, identifying the different cones, bibs, etc. used in training or deciphering the colourful formations drawn on tactical boards, to name but a few. All of these things are barriers that limit the potential of the players concerned, especially if they are not aware themselves that they have a colour vision deficiency and no one else detects it.

Losing the thread

To make the game more accessible to colour-blind players, it is necessary to select equipment in the right combinations of colours so that they can clearly see what is what. That is easier said than done. It is very difficult for someone with normal colour vision to see the world through the eyes of someone with a colour vision deficiency, and vice versa. The confusion between red and green is a classic example, but there are myriad other combinations that cause problems: black and red is one, light green and yellow is another, yellow and orange is no better, blue and brown likewise. The list goes on, but given that professional clubs have so many different kits nowadays (three a season for most), the potential for confusion could be more or less eliminated in every game if everyone were aware of the issue and those responsible for selecting kit combinations had a basic grounding in the subject. It is possible to find combinations that most colour-blind people can clearly distinguish between, such as black and white, white and blue, black and yellow, or blue and yellow. It is also possible, and helpful, to use different colours for →



A COMPLEX EQUATION

Although there are numerous causes of colour blindness, including nerve, brain and eye damage, in most cases the condition is a genetic deficiency of one or more of the three 'cone' cells in the retina of the eye. One type of cone perceives blue light, another perceives green and the third perceives red. The three main categories of colour blindness are based on which of the three types of cone is affected, and each is further subdivided according to the extent of the resultant colour vision deficiency.

Monochromacy

This is both the rarest and the most severe form of colour blindness.

People with monochromatic vision (**1 in around 33,000**) can see no colour at all and their world consists of different shades of grey, ranging from black to white.

Dichromacy

(2.1% of the world's population)

People with dichromatic colour vision have only two types of cone which are able to perceive colour:

- **Protanopia:** People with protanopia are able to perceive green and blue light but have no red-sensitive cones (1%)
- **Deuteranopia:** People with deuteranopia are able to perceive red and blue light but have no green-sensitive cones (1.1%).
- **Tritanopia:** People with tritanopia are able to perceive red and green light but have no blue-sensitive cones (0.005%).

Anomalous trichromacy

(5.9% of the world's population)

In the case of anomalous trichromacy, all three cone types are used to perceive light colours (red, green and blue) but one type of cone perceives light slightly out of alignment. As a result, people with 'faulty' trichromatic vision struggle to perceive certain colours and distinguish between them, depending on which cone type is 'faulty':

- **Protanomaly:** reduced sensitivity to red light (1%)
- **Deuteranomaly:** reduced sensitivity to green light (4.9%)
- **Tritanomaly:** reduced sensitivity to blue light (less than 0.001%)

Source:
www.colourblindawareness.org



Children risk being put off the game if they cannot pick out their team-mates on the pitch.



Hervé Galand/FFF

“Given the number of people affected, there are potentially millions of people who are lost to the game, or not enjoying it as much as they could.”

Peter Gilliéron
UEFA Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee chairman

different items of kit, so that even if a player, spectator or TV viewer struggles to distinguish between the two teams’ shirts, they can tell them apart by their socks or shorts instead.

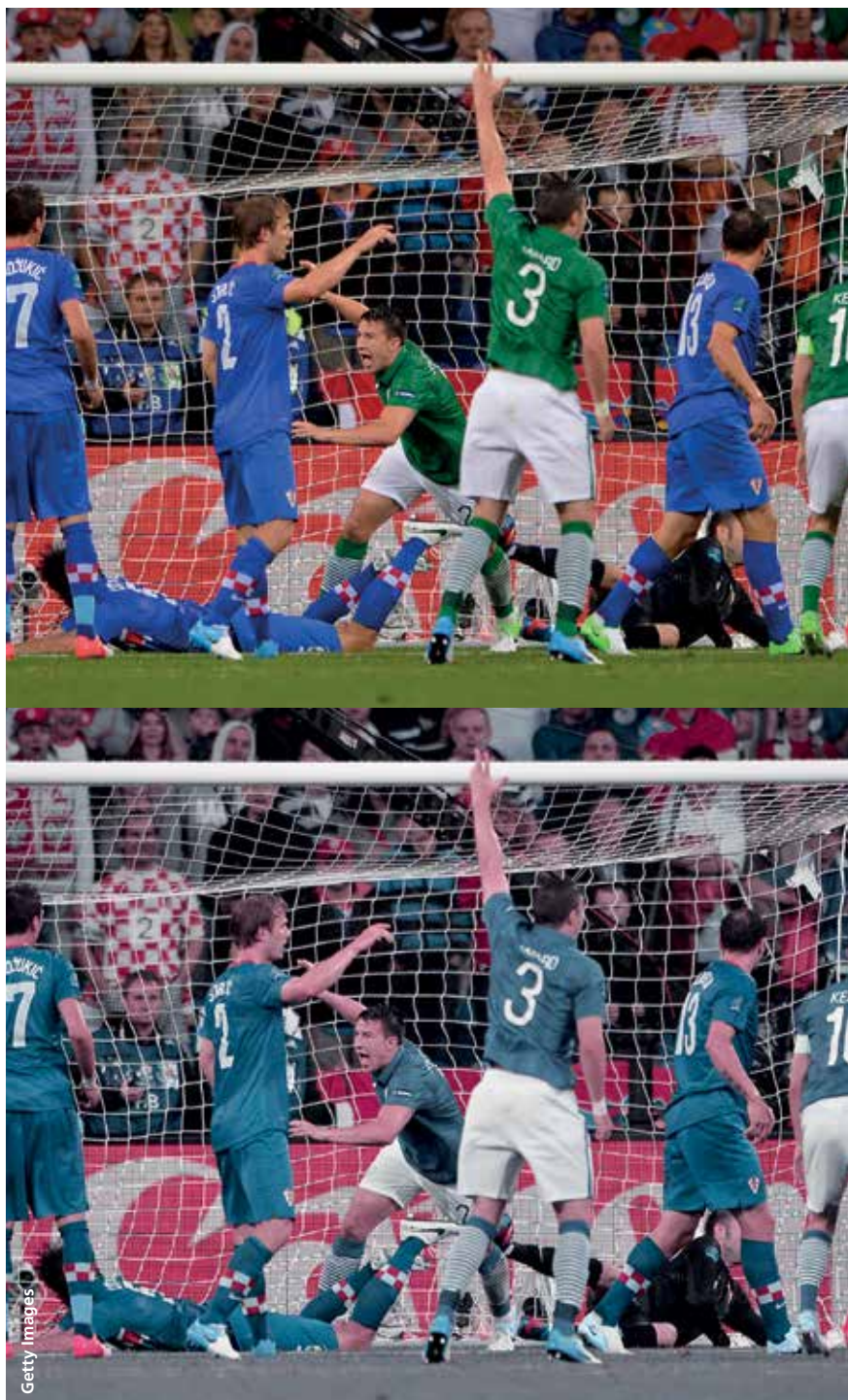
While thinking about the kit used for outfield players, goalkeepers and referees, it is equally important to consider the ball. Put simply, the whiter the better. Many kit manufacturers have produced predominantly red balls in recent years, or balls with red patterning, which is the ultimate heresy for the great many people who cannot distinguish between red and green, and therefore struggle to spot the ball against the pitch. And the colour clashes encountered at stadiums are not limited to the pitch – colour-blind spectators encounter much the same problems in the stands as they do elsewhere in their everyday lives. No-go colour combinations are often used on maps and plans, for example, making it difficult for people with certain colour vision deficiencies to find their way around. The same goes for online ticketing systems, where the colour codes used to distinguish between different stands and categories of seating can be a nightmare to decipher.

“Given the number of people affected, there are potentially millions of people who are lost to the game, or not enjoying it as much as they could. And it’s not only millions of fans whose experience of football is hampered by colour blindness, but also players, coaches and referees, among others,” says Peter Gilliéron, chairman of the UEFA Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee. Inclusion is one of the key pillars of the Respect agenda championed by UEFA, which is therefore closely monitoring efforts to make the game more inclusive for people with colour blindness. In September 2016,

the NFL, or National Football League, in the United States was the first league to announce having taken colour-blind TV viewers into account when selecting team kits. For a match between the Buffalo Bills and the New York Jets, it decided that the

Bills would play in their traditional red kit, but that the Jets would be in white, rather than green. One year later, the clubs appeared alongside each other in an advertising campaign run by their kit manufacturer, the Bills in red and the Jets

in green. The reactions from thousands of fans who were completely unable to tell them apart once again brought the issue to light, but in order to effectively address it, everyone – whatever their colour vision – needs to open their eyes. 🧐



Getty Images

KEEPING AN EYE ON SAFETY AND SECURITY

The problems colour-blind spectators face trying to follow matches are one thing; those they could encounter in the event of a stadium emergency are quite another. Failure to take colour blindness into account can have serious consequences, for example in the event of a fire or a stadium evacuation. Illegible instructions on fire extinguishers, printed in colours that blend into the background? Emergency exits that are clearly signposted for most but effectively disguised for others? And if spectators may be colour blind, so too may stewards, which is an even more problematic scenario. What if they actually give spectators the wrong instructions in the event of an emergency? To prevent these sorts of problems, stadium signage needs to be designed so that it is accessible and legible for all. And that means not just relying on colours to convey information. It is far too dangerous to rely on reds and greens to guide thousands of spectators, given how many people cannot tell the two colours apart.

The difference between blue and green is not so black and white for people with tritanomaly.

ALBANIA

www.fshf.org

CHILDREN'S FOOTBALL – AN ABSOLUTE PRIORITY

GERTI ÇARÇANI



Former men's national team captain Lorik Cana has become the Football Association of Albania's ambassador for children's football, the promotion of which is among the association's top priorities. Cana was already an ambassador for the wider grassroots project of the association.

Armand Duka, president of the Football Association of Albania, said: "Children's football is an absolute priority for us. We have to think about the future."

On taking up his new role, Cana said: "It's a programme that encourages children to play football and even excel at it. There are many good things that

can be done in our country. As grassroots ambassador, I hope to encourage children to grow up in the spirit of sport."

Various projects are already under way and plans are in the pipeline with the ministry of education to introduce football lessons as part of the school curriculum.

AUSTRIA

www.oefb.at

ERNST HAPPEL'S LEGACY LIVES ON

IRIS STÖCKELMAYR



On 14 November, the Austrian Football Association (ÖFB) hosted a friendly match against Uruguay to mark the 25th anniversary of the death of legendary player and coach Ernst Happel and to keep his memory alive, particularly among the younger generations.

"Ernst Happel is one of the greatest football personalities Austria has ever

produced," said the ÖFB president, Leo Windtner. "The ÖFB would like to remember his achievements and his unique qualities as a coach and a person and to preserve his legacy."

As a player, Happel represented his country at two World Cups (1954 and 1958). As a coach, he led the Netherlands to the World Cup final in 1978.

At club level, he won the European Champion Clubs' Cup, the forerunner to the UEFA Champions League, with Feyenoord in 1970 and with Hamburg in 1983, and he also won the European/South American Cup with Feyenoord.

Ernst Happel was head coach of the Austrian national team from 1 January 1992 until his death on 14 November later that year.

AZERBAIJAN

www.affa.az

TOGETHER #WEPLAYSTRONG SEMINAR

FIRUZ ABDULLA



The Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) hosted a two-day seminar in October as part of UEFA's women's football marketing campaign Together #WePlayStrong, which aims to make football the number one sport for women across Europe by 2020. The seminar took place at the AFFA headquarters and was attended by UEFA representatives, the AFFA deputy general secretary and staff from the association's grassroots, marketing and sponsorship, women's football, registration and statistics, intellectual property rights, international relations and club licensing departments. The first day of the seminar looked at women's football on the pitch

and from a commercial point of view, with fruitful group discussions taking place.

Before the seminar, the AFFA general secretary, Elkhann Mammadov, met with the UEFA representatives to discuss the agenda. He also shared his views on the state of women's football in Azerbaijan and the development of the game in Europe, including the format of the European competitions, in which more experienced and longer established teams often won by significant margins against less experienced teams.

This, he said, dented the morale of the less experienced players and lessened the interest of the national associations concerned in promoting women's football.



BELARUS

www.bff.by

TAKING GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL FORWARD

GLEB STAKHOVSKY



Since coming into being on 1 March, the grassroots unit of the Belarus Football Federation (BFF) has been hard at work organising tournaments and festivals, among other activities. The unit consists of two in-house grassroots managers and seven regional grassroots managers. Before the separate unit was created, one grassroots manager had the job of covering the whole country. Six months on and the federation decided to request UEFA's assistance to organise a grassroots development workshop.

The joint BFF-UEFA workshop took place in Minsk from 6 to 10 November. UEFA experts Piet Hubers (Netherlands) and Jamie Houchen (England) were on hand to help run the event, in which the nine members of the BFF's grassroots unit participated, together with 14 volunteers

(children's and youth coaches, referees, heads of private football clubs, heads of amateur football leagues, physical education teachers, representatives of local authorities, etc.) from different regions of the country, and a specialist from the Kazakhstan Football Federation.

The programme of the five-day event included discussions on all manner of topics, from how to improve grassroots football in the country to the training of leaders, coaches and volunteers in the different regions. The theory was interspersed with practical exercises related to coaching and the organisation of large-scale children's tournaments and festivals.

The final goal of the workshop was to define the mission, philosophy and strategy of grassroots football in Belarus, as well as to draw up a plan

for grassroots development based on the knowledge gained during the workshop.

The participation and input of the UEFA experts was highly appreciated – not only from the point of view of their knowledge of grassroots football, but also their ability to connect with the participants and bring the workshop alive in an open and relaxed atmosphere.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

www.nfsbih.ba

A ROUND-UP OF NATIONAL TEAM ACTION

FEDJA KRVAVAC



Bosnia and Herzegovina's qualifying campaign for next year's World Cup in Russia did not end as well as they would have liked. In their penultimate qualifying match, goals from Haris Medunjanin, Edina Višće and Dario Džumić were not enough to hold off Belgium, who beat the home side 4-3 at Grbavica stadium in Sarajevo. The team's final qualifier took them to Tallinn, where they secured a 2-1 win against Estonia, leaving them in third place in their qualifying group and out of the running for a place at the World Cup in Russia.

The game against Estonia would be Bosnia and Herzegovina's last under head coach Mehmed Baždarević. Following the national team's failure to qualify for the World Cup, the executive committee of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation decided not to extend his contract. The federation's technical

committee will now prepare a detailed analysis of why the national team failed to qualify, and the mediation committee, together with former international Zvezdan Misimović, will be in charge of proposing a candidate for the position of new head coach.

Fortunately, the Under-21s had more to smile about, following their 3-1 victory over Portugal in the qualifying round of the European Under-21 Championship. Although the Portuguese took an early lead through a Joao Carvalho goal, the Bosnians ran out winners thanks to goals from Besim Šerbečić, Ermedin Demirović and Luka Menalo. The Under-19s also had cause to celebrate after winning their two friendly matches against FYR Macedonia 3-0 and 1-0.

Meanwhile, the Under-17s travelled to Skopje for their European Under-17 Championship qualifying round mini-tournament. The first match ended in a

goalless draw against the home side. That was followed by a 4-0 win against Moldova and a 1-1 draw with Slovakia, which put Bosnia and Herzegovina at the top of the group and through to the elite round.

In the UEFA Futsal Cup, Mostar's run came to an end in the main round of qualifying. Despite beating the hosts of the mini-tournament held in the Romanian city of Deva, defeat at the hands of Araz Naxçıvan of Azerbaijan and Luxol St Andrews of Malta left the Bosnian club at the bottom of their group.

In the UEFA Youth League, Željezničar have played some impressive football, helping them progress through the domestic champions path to the play-offs, after beating Ludogorets 4-3 on aggregate in the first round and Lokomotiva Zagreb on away goals in the second round of the competition.

CROATIA

www.hns-cff.hr

CROATIA OFF TO THE WORLD CUP!

TOMISLAV PACAK



With a convincing 4-1 aggregate win against Greece in the play-offs, the Croatian national football team booked their ticket for a tenth major tournament, the 2018 World Cup in Russia. It will be Croatia's fifth World Cup appearance, after finishing third in the 1998 World Cup in France and playing in the group stage in Japan/South Korea in 2002, Germany in 2006, and Brazil in 2014.

Since taking over as head coach for Croatia's last match in Group I and winning that match in Ukraine to reach the play-offs, Zlatko Dalić has signed a contract to manage the team until July 2020. "In the qualifiers against Ukraine and Greece, Zlatko Dalić absolutely justified our confidence in him, confirming he was the right choice. The Croatian Football Federation will ensure that he and his team have the best possible conditions for their World Cup preparations in order to achieve the best possible result," said the president

of the Croatian Football Federation (HNS), Davor Šuker.

The great 4-1 home win against Greece in the World Cup play-offs was also the first match at which blind and visually impaired supporters had the opportunity to follow a national team match through audio-descriptive commentary provided by the HNS. This was another step towards total inclusion in football, in line with the aim of UEFA's #EqualGame campaign. The HNS joins UEFA in strongly supporting the idea that everybody should be able to enjoy football, regardless of who they are, where they are from or how skilful they are.

On a sadder note, the match against Greece started with a minute's silence for former Croatia international Josip Weber, who died on 8 November, aged 52. Weber was capped three times for Croatia before starting to play for the Belgium national team, with whom he participated in the 1994 World Cup.

FAROE ISLANDS

www.football.fo

NEW FIFA REFEREE FROM THE FAROES

TERJI NIELSEN



After 11 years as a FIFA referee, Petur Reinert has called it a day in international football, and in the future he will referee only in the Faroese league. "It has been an amazing journey in international football, but it is time to call it a day. Being an international referee is demanding, and I have really enjoyed every moment on pitches all around Europe. But injury has been troubling me for the last few years, and now it is time to stop," Reinert said.

As a result of his retirement from international refereeing, a new international referee from the Faroe Islands



Petur Reinert, second from right and Kári J. á Høvdanum, far left

has been appointed. He is Kári J. á Høvdanum, who has been refereeing for a number of years. In 2014 he refereed his first game in the top flight in the Faroe Islands with his father, Jóannes Mikkelsen, as one of the assistant referees.

"I am obviously delighted with getting the opportunity to be an international referee, and I am looking forward to international duties," he said.

ENGLAND

www.thefa.com

RAISING MONEY FOR CANCER RESEARCH

REBECCA LISTER



In 2016, The Football Association chose the Bobby Moore Fund for Cancer Research UK as its official charity partner. Set up in 1993 by Stephanie Moore, the widow of England's World Cup-winning captain, the charity raises money to fund pioneering, life-saving bowel cancer research. Since the partnership began, FA staff have staunchly been raising funds and awareness for this good cause. Their commitment off the pitch has been matched by the England teams on it. The friendly match between England



and Brazil at Wembley on 14 November was the highlight of The FA's partnership with the charity so far.

Fittingly, the match took place on the 44th anniversary of Bobby Moore's final game for the Three Lions. There was an abundance of fundraising activity at the game, with over £100,000 being collected.

Those attending the game were able to take part in a digital auction and raffles, and there were over 100 people collecting money for the charity on the concourses at Wembley Stadium.

The screens around the stadium paid homage to England's greatest ever captain and his performance against Brazil in the 1970 World Cup in Guadalajara. Of particular interest was Bobby Moore's shirt swap with Pelé at the end of that game – the Brazilian legend has said that Moore's shirt is his most prized possession.

To date, the Bobby Moore Fund has raised over £23m for vital research into tackling bowel cancer, which remains the UK's second most common cause of cancer deaths, claiming the lives of 44 people – the equivalent of four football teams – every day in the UK.

GEORGIA

www.gff.ge

TORPEDO KUTAISI CHAMPIONS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 15 YEARS

TATA BURDULI



The Georgian premier league (2017 Erovnuli Liga) ended in dramatic fashion, with the titleholders decided on the final



matchday, when Dinamo Tbilisi and Torpedo Kutaisi faced each other at Dinamo Arena in the decisive encounter. Before the match, the side from the capital held a two-point advantage over their rivals and only needed a draw to clinch the title.

The match was decided in Torpedo's favour by Tornike Kapanadze's goal in the 74th minute. However, the real drama unfolded in added time, when Dinamo were given the opportunity to equalise from the penalty spot. Torpedo's goalkeeper and club captain, Roin Kvashvadze, saved his Dinamo counterpart's spot kick and ensured that the domestic title went to Kutaisi for the first time in 15 years.

The champions received their trophy from the president of the Georgian Football Federation, Levan Kobiashvili. The newly designed trophy is in the form of a shield, echoing the details of a traditional shield from the Georgian

region of Khevsureti, which was historically used both as a defensive and an offensive weapon. The trophy was designed by Georgian jeweller Goga Elbakidze. The white gold-coated shield is 55cm in diameter and weighs 10kg. It features traditional Khevsurian patterns, as well as the names of all past Georgian league champions.

Torpedo Kutaisi finished the season on 76 points, one ahead of Dinamo Tbilisi. FC Samtredia came third with 68 points. Shukura Kobuleti finished bottom of the table and got relegated to the second tier. Dinamo Batumi and Kolkheta Poti will be contesting relegation play-offs against Sioni Bolnisi and Merani Martvili, respectively.

The 2017 Georgian national league season was played out in a spring-autumn format for the first time.

The league's top scorer was Irakli Sikharulidze of Lokomotivi Tbilisi, who found the net on 25 occasions.

GIBRALTAR

www.gibraltarfifa.com

AHEAD OF THE GAME

STEVEN GONZALEZ



Following recent investigations by the NFL, UEFA, FIFA and the BBC into the dangers of young people heading a football, the Gibraltar Football Association (GFA) has taken steps to lessen the risks of potential injury.

In April, the GFA's technical director, Desri Curry, and the association's youth committee invited all of Gibraltar's clubs to participate in a review of the rules applicable at youth level. Three months later, at the end of the review period, it was unanimously agreed to actively discourage all players under the age of 12 from heading the ball during games and training sessions.

The aim was twofold: first, it would

encourage players to keep the ball on the ground and help them develop their technical skills; second, and more importantly, it would help reduce the risks of any short or long-term damage such as dementia, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (boxer's brain damage) and other brain injuries.

"We undertook a complete review of our youth structure and, after a three-month consultation period, the clubs in Gibraltar agreed to implement the new heading rules from the start of the 2017/18 season," Curry said. "We also agreed that these rule changes, including the no-heading rule for under-12s, would be reviewed again during our winter break, and if and when UEFA and FIFA



issue any directives on this very important topic. In some ways the GFA is 'ahead of the game' (excuse the pun), but we have considered the very obvious footballing benefits and the even more obvious health benefits."

As a result of the GFA's rule change, all boys and girls under the age of 12 in Gibraltar are actively discouraged from heading the ball during training and games, with the emphasis being on fun, inclusivity and playing without pressure.

LATVIA

www.lff.lv

YOUNG TALENTS SHINE ON EUROPEAN TOUR

TOMS ĀRMANIS



Each year the Latvian Football Federation (LFF) brings the best Under-13, Under-14 and Under-15 players to its football academy to develop their skills through training sessions with Latvia's best youth coaches and in various tournaments.

At the end of the season, players from the academy are selected for two age-limit teams to take part in a European tour. This year, it was the chance of the best Under-13 and Under-14 players, who travelled to Germany to compete against their peers from Bayern Munich and FC Augsburg, to Poland to play Legia Warszawa, and to the Czech Republic to play Sparta Prague. The Under-13 team consisted of 18 players from eight clubs, while the Under-14 team comprised 18 youngsters from nine clubs. FK Liepāja, FS Metta and BFC Daugavpils had the most players picked for the tour, with



nine, seven and five players respectively.

The Under-14 team managed to win all three of their matches, while the Under-13 team went home with one win, one loss and one draw. The top scorer was Artjoms Puzirevskis (Under-14s), who netted four goals in three games.

This was the sixth year of the LFF football academy, which is already proving its worth in helping players to make the transition from eight-a-side to 11-a-side football, as well as providing the national teams with comprehensive information about the best young players in the country.

LUXEMBOURG

www.flf.lu

AIR-COVERED PITCH

JOËL WOLFF



The Luxembourg Football Federation (FLF) decided in 2016 to install an air dome over one of the pitches at its national training centre,

located alongside the FLF headquarters in Mondrange, in order to provide its young players with even better conditions in which to train.



The FLF went for an inflatable structure that requires no walls or columns. Made of special UV and dirt-resistant PVC, it is anchored to the ground and uses pressurised air and airlocks to maintain its form and provide players with the best possible training conditions, whatever the weather.

The FLF's inflatable structure is 18 metres high and covers a 108 x 66-metre next-generation artificial pitch, with heating and indirect LED lighting (1,000 lux) to ensure teams can train in comfort, even when it is cold and dark outside.

The pitch, whose air-supported cover was financed entirely by the HatTrick programme and will remain in place year-round, will be operational by the end of January and officially inaugurated on 1 February, in the presence of the UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK

KEVIN AZZOPARDI



Social responsibility initiatives have ranked high on the Malta Football Association's agenda over the past few months. In line with its Football For Life programme, the Malta FA has teamed up with the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society to embark on an awareness campaign on gender-based violence. Some of the country's leading footballers have embraced this nationwide initiative, which was launched a few weeks ago by the president of Malta, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, and Norman Darmanin Demajo, president of the Malta FA.

Malta players Michael Mifsud, Alfred Effiong, Andrei Agius and goalkeeper Andrew Hogg appear in a video whose central message is that there are no winners in gender-based violence – only losers – and the players urge the public

to 'kick it out' once and for all. The video also features international referee Trustin Farrugia Cann and Gabriella Zahra from the Malta women's team. Thanking the players for their support, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca said: "Together with the Malta Football Association and the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, I'm spearheading the #StopGenderViolence campaign because I am convinced we must target the public at large in tackling all issues related to gender-based violence in Malta."

Norman Darmanin Demajo, who is also a member of the board of trustees of the UEFA Foundation for Children, said: "Football is a powerful tool to promote good causes and raise awareness about important issues for the good of our society, and the

Malta FA fully supports the efforts of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society to increase awareness about this plight."

The #StopGenderViolence campaign was also included in the events organised by the Malta FA during the FARE Football People action weeks. Among the other events was a full-day convention involving the participation of NGOs and people from diverse situations, including refugees, migrants and young people.

In October, the Malta FA joined other football associations across Europe in promoting World Heart Day. World Heart Day aims to raise awareness of cardiovascular disease and to educate people on the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle. The motto of this year's World Heart Day, which is also backed by UEFA, was Share the Power.

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL VETERANS' TOURNAMENT

PRESS OFFICE



The Real Succes stadium in Chisinau and the Moldovan technical centre in Vadul lui Voda were the venues for the 11th international veterans' tournament, the FA of Moldova Cup, in November. The tournament was set up by the Football Association of Moldova (FMF) in memory of former Moldovan player and coach Vladimir Jindler.



Three teams took part in the latest edition alongside the home team. They were the veterans' teams from Constanta in Romania, Pinsk in Belarus and Reni in Ukraine. Played in the spirit of fair play and friendliness in which it was intended, the tournament saw the home team win the first semi-final 1-0 against Pinsk, with the Romanians beating Reni 8-2 in the other semi-final. In the third place play-off, Reni narrowly beat Pinsk 2-1, while the final itself was won by the Moldovans, who beat their Romanian opponents 5-1.

The FMF president, Pavel Cebanu, along with FMF executive committee member Anatol Teslev and the tournament director, Petru Soltanici, were on hand to present participants

with their well-deserved trophies and gifts. Mihai Moraru (Chisinau) took home the player of the tournament award, while Necea Pașata (Constanta), Iurii Lagodin (Pinsk), Nicolae Bartean (Reni) and Anatolie Ribac (Chisinau) were voted the best players of their teams.

"We are very happy to host this great tournament and see so many familiar faces," said Pavel Cebanu. "During these two days, young players had the opportunity to see their former idols in action. I was pleased by the level of organisation and the atmosphere in the stadiums."

Chisinau can add this latest triumph to their long list of previous FA of Moldova Cup victories, having only been pipped to the post once before, by Pinsk in 2010.

NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

FOSTERING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

NIGEL TILSON



The Irish Football Association has launched a project designed to maximise the potential of the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park in Belfast. The initiative aims to benefit the wider Belfast community through a ten-year, £1.5m programme developed by the Irish FA with Belfast city council and the department for communities.

The initiative will see the redeveloped stadium act as a catalyst for a wide range of programmes and projects promoting community engagement through schools, clubs and youth organisations. It will also support new and existing football clubs to increase their capacity to develop and grow, and promote well-being and healthy lifestyle choices among the wider population.

Furthermore, the scheme will offer coach education, funding support, volunteering opportunities and a wide range of other activities, including walking football and futsal, and the stadium and its facilities will be made available for community-based events. The association's director of football development, Michael Boyd, said: "The Irish FA aims to promote, foster and develop football for all in Northern Ireland and is committed to using the National Football Stadium to bring positive benefits to communities across Belfast. This initiative will enable us to use football to deliver programmes in areas such as mental health, capacity building, community relations and well-being."

Launching the scheme, the lord mayor of Belfast, Nuala McAllister, said the

programme has the potential to make a real difference in communities across the city.



From left: Michael Boyd, Nuala McAllister, Fergus Devitt of the department for communities, and Irish FA president David Martin

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

www.fai.ie

COMBINING HIGHER EDUCATION WITH ELITE FOOTBALL

GARETH MAHER



More young players can balance their studies with playing the beautiful game thanks to the excellent work of the department for schools, university and college football of the Football Association of Ireland (FAI). Led by national coordinator Mark Scanlon, the department has been able to introduce a professional structure to college and university football throughout the country, and more players are signing up as a result.

At a recent exhibition, representatives of 17 colleges or universities were given the chance to speak to prospective students, fellow administrators and football coaches about what they can offer. One of the perks for students is that they can obtain an education while playing elite-level football in the republic's men's or women's leagues. Players can also aspire to be selected for the World University Games.

"A very important focus for us at the FAI is the holistic development of young players, and we were delighted to be able to



organise this exhibition for the players to learn more about their third-level [higher education] options," Scanlon said.

"All 64 players who are representing their provinces this weekend are playing at a high level as well as studying for their leaving certificates, and it is important for them to start thinking about their future careers. We are keen to promote the importance of education as well as the scholarships that are available here in Ireland for young students playing at elite level," he added.

"Choosing your third-level course is a very important decision so we encourage players to really think about what they would like to do in their careers, research the different courses available and make the decision that's right for their future," he concluded.

Combining higher education and elite football is a win-win situation all round.

ROMANIA

www.frf.ro

A NEW LOOK FOR THE NATIONAL TEAMS

PAUL ZAHARIA



For the first time in its history, the Romanian national football team has a new visual identity and kit with which to sally forth into the UEFA Nations League and its EURO 2020 qualifying campaign.

With the Nations League kicking off in the same year as Romania celebrates the centenary of its 'great union' (between Transylvania and Romania), the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) thought this was the ideal occasion to give its national teams their own brand.

The new visual identity was unveiled in Bucharest on 3 November by its creator, Aneta Bogdan, managing partner of the design company Brandient. The design symbolises and promotes unity among Romanians, and sportswear manufacturer Joma has contributed to this by producing a modern and innovative kit that will make players and supporters stand out in stadiums throughout the world.

The new national team emblem is a modern reinterpretation of Romania's coat of arms, containing the symbols

of the five Romanian provinces around a pentagon. The same emblem appears on the new kit, which was modelled at the ceremony by Under-19 players Andrei Vlad, Andrei Sîntean and Andrei Truşescu, who, only a few days later, helped their team qualify brilliantly for the elite round of the European Under-19 Championship.

The name of the country appears on back of the shirt, while the motto 'Împreună suntem fotbal' (Together we are football) printed on the inside of the collar completes the design. The home and away kits remain in the traditional yellow and red, while the goalkeeper's kit will be available in three different colours: black, purple and green.

In a symbolic gesture, the sporting manager of the FRF, Adrian Mutu, presented a new national team shirt to Vlad Dragomir, captain of the Under-19 team, to mark its passing to the new generation of Romanian footballers.

"Starting today, the national teams will wear a coat of arms that celebrates the history of Romania and its pursuit of



victory," said the FRF president, Răzvan Burleanu. "The new coat of arms and kit are a call for unity and commitment from all national team players of today and tomorrow. Only together can we become better and win."

"I am very happy that the national team's new journey coincides with this launch," added the head coach of the senior men's team, Cosmin Contra. "As you know, I've always been a patriot and this is why I believe wearing this jersey, ennobled by Romania's coat of arms, will make a difference for the players and help them to play with even more pride."

RUSSIA

www.rfs.ru

LUZHNIKI STADIUM REOPENS ITS DOORS

EKATERINA GRISHENKOVA



Russia is busy preparing to host the World Cup for the first time in its history. Those preparations include getting the 12 stadiums in 11 cities across the country ready for the action. Two of those stadiums are in the Russian capital – the Spartak and Luzhniki stadiums, with Luzhniki having the honour of being the venue for the opening match and the final.

Luzhniki first opened in 1956 and has hosted many great events in its time, including the 1980 Summer Olympics and the finals of the 1998/99 UEFA Cup (Parma v Marseille) and the 2007/08 UEFA Champions League (Manchester United v Chelsea). In 2013 it closed for the renovation works needed for the forthcoming World Cup. One of the crucial aspects of the renovation project

was to preserve the historical facade of the stadium, which has become one of Moscow's iconic landmarks.

Those works are now complete, and on 11 November, Luzhniki Stadium celebrated its reopening by hosting an international friendly between Russia and Argentina (both teams will play in next summer's World Cup). The only goal of the match, which was attended by 78,750 spectators, was scored by Argentina's Sergio Agüero in the 86th minute.

Retaining its status as Russia's foremost football stadium, the Luzhniki Stadium will certainly be a showpiece of this year's momentous event.



Mikhail Shapaev-RFS

SCOTLAND

www.scottishfa.co.uk

PROJECT BRAVE

MICHAEL LAMONT



The Scottish Football Association has confirmed the status of the clubs that have applied to be part of its new Project Brave academy structure. The goal is to work with the clubs to improve the overall standard of young Scottish footballers by placing a greater focus on talent development and optimising playing opportunities, which, in turn, will enhance the domestic game by ensuring a more efficient pathway to first-team football and boost the national team in its efforts.

Applicant clubs were graded according to a criteria-based system and an assessment of measurable performance outcomes (MPOs).

The increased funding received by the elite clubs from the Scottish FA will help them to achieve their MPOs and encourage best practice. Those in the progressive and performance categories will also still have access to funding from the Scottish FA to support the running and improvement of their academies.

The eight clubs that have attained elite-level status are: Aberdeen, Celtic, Hamilton Academical, Heart of Midlothian, Hibernian, Kilmarnock, Motherwell and Rangers.

In the progressive category are Ayr United, Dundee United, Forth Valley, Inverness Caledonian Thistle, Partick Thistle, Ross County (to be confirmed), St Mirren and St Johnstone, with Dundee, Fife, Greenock Morton (to be confirmed) and Queen's Park at performance level.

SLOVAKIA

www.futbalsfz.sk

ĎURICA RETIRES FROM INTERNATIONAL DUTY

PETER SURIN



Slovak defender Ján Ďurica has called time on his illustrious international career. The 36-year-old played for his country 91 times, scoring four goals along the way. He played in the 2010 World Cup and at EURO 2016, playing all eight of Slovakia's matches at the tournaments and did not miss a single minute.

His last international was a friendly against Norway on 14 November, for which he was given the honour of wearing the captain's armband. Slovakia did him proud, running out 1-0 winners. "We had agreed with Ján before the start of the World Cup qualifiers that this would be his last qualifying campaign. The international window in November was his last," said national team head coach Ján Kozák.

Ďurica played for the national team for almost 13 years, usually wearing his favourite No4 shirt. He made his debut in July 2004 in a friendly against Japan in Hiroshima. He is currently the fourth most-capped player in Slovakian football, after Miroslav Karhan (107), Marek Hamšík (103) and Martin Škrtel (95). It was his own decision to retire from

international football, to make room for the next generation. "It was time," he said. "I planned to end my international career after the 2018 World Cup, but our qualifying campaign didn't go as well as we had hoped, and we ended the campaign as worst runners-up, without a spot in the play-offs. So, it was the right time."

Ďurica was the centre of media attention after the Norway friendly. He said that every player had to take such a decision sooner or later to let younger players come through. Every player should know when it is time to quit, he told reporters, and, after giving his all in 91 matches, that time was now for him. The Dunajská Streda-born player was overcome with emotion during the national anthem before his farewell match against Norway. "It was a very emotional moment for me. All my team-mates were wearing T-shirts with my photo as we walked out onto the pitch. I want to say thank you to everyone," Ďurica said after the match.

He was first and foremost a fighter. Although not the most skilful with the ball at his feet, his determination,



dedication and strength in the air made him a valuable asset, forming a strong central-defensive unit with Martin Škrtel. He was never sent off, striking the perfect balance with his aggressive yet fair playing style.

At club level, Ďurica has played for DAC 1904 Dunajská Streda and Artmedia Petržalka in Slovakia, Russian clubs Saturn Ramenskoye and Lokomotiv Moscow, and Hannover 96 in Germany. He now plays for Trabzonspor in Turkey, where his contract runs until summer 2018. "We will see what happens then," he said.

SWEDEN

www.svenskfotboll.se

2017 AWARDS

ANDREAS NILSSON



The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, and the Swedish prime minister, Stefan Löfven, were among the distinguished presenters at the annual televised awards ceremony that brings the Swedish football season to a close.

Kosovare Asllani (Linköpings FC) picked up the female player of the year award for 2017, at the end of a season during which she was a key player for club and country, helping Linköping to win the Swedish league and to make it to the quarter-finals of the UEFA Women's Champions League.

For the men, there was a new name on the player of the year award, after an incredible ten straight years of Ibrahimović inscriptions. The Sweden team captain, Andreas Granqvist



Kosovare Asllani and Andreas Granqvist

(FC Krasnodar), was given the award in recognition of his leadership in helping to steer Sweden to a place at the 2018 World Cup.

Other notable award recipients were Östersunds FK (performance of the year, in recognition of their successful run in the UEFA Europa League), Pia Sundhage (lifetime achievement award for being a tireless trailblazer in women's football) and Vinbergs IF (community youth club of the year).

UKRAINE

www.ffu.org.ua

STEWARDS AND VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT FOR THE FINALS

YURI MAZNYCHENKO



The Football Federation of Ukraine has launched a campaign to recruit stewards and volunteers for the men's and women's UEFA Champions League finals next May. The UEFA Women's Champions League final will be held on Thursday 24 May at Valeriy Lobanovskyi Dynamo Stadium, with the UEFA Champions League final following two days later, on Saturday 26 May, at the NSC Olimpiyskyi.

The recruitment programme was launched in November and the application process remains open until January 2018.

Work will not be limited to the stadiums; the team of more than 500 volunteers will be involved in other equally important areas as well – access management, accreditation, ceremonies, commercial aspects, logistics, match and media operations, TV production

and many others. Once the applications have closed, the process to recruit the required number of volunteers will continue with interviews (in January and February), role assignments (March/April), training (April) and then the operational phase itself (May).

"In general, we are looking for ambitious people who are over 18 and fluent in Ukrainian and English. It's an opportunity to help others, make new acquaintances, find new friends, build a career and much more," says Oksana Lesyk, coordinator of the volunteer programme. "Volunteers have the big responsibility of presenting our country and demonstrating its hospitality to those who come to the finals. All members of the volunteer programme will receive certificates in recognition of their participation," she added.

SWITZERLAND

www.football.ch

IT IS NOT THE WINNING THAT COUNTS

PIERRE BENOIT



The Swiss Football Association has been committed to youth football for decades, promoting not only the elite level, but also the grassroots. The association's latest project, the 'Experience over results' campaign, aims to promote fair play both on the pitch and, more importantly, off it.

At youth matches, those watching the game from the sidelines often get just as involved as the children on the pitch – and unfortunately this can often manifest itself in more than just words of encouragement. Heated exchanges can arise, with spectators hurling insults at one another, as well as at coaches, referees and the footballers themselves.

"Consequently, parents are ruining the children's enjoyment of football and playing matches," says the Swiss FA's head of children's football, Dominik Müller. "Children should be able to play in a child-friendly environment, without feeling under any pressure."

Hence the new campaign to encourage calmness and composure on the sidelines. The campaign's key messages are available in the form of videos and postcards with messages from children to coaches, parents, spectators, club leaders and other children, as well as their team-mates and opponents.

In addition to sending clubs a newsletter presenting the campaign in detail, the Swiss FA is providing cones to mark out spectator areas. Clubs can also order banners, flyers and posters via the campaign's official portal: www.football.ch/erlebnis. The videos are also available on Facebook together with messages from players on the men's and women's national teams who are supporting the campaign as ambassadors.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Davor Šuker (Croatia, 1 January) **50th**
David Mujiri (Georgia, 2 January) **40th**
Gerhard Sager (Sweden, 3 January)
George Pirtskhalava
 (Georgia, 3 January)
Andreas Demetriou (Cyprus, 3 January)
Alexis Spirin (Russia, 4 January)
José Fontelas Gomes
 (Portugal, 4 January)
David George Collins (Wales, 5 January)
Mette Christiansen (Norway, 5 January)
Peter Oskam (Netherlands, 5 January)
Mariano Moreno (Spain, 6 January)
Michael Zoratti (Austria, 6 January)
Siarhei Safaryan (Belarus, 6 January)
Rudolf Marxer (Liechtenstein, 6 January)
Sergii Lysenchuk (Ukraine, 6 January)
Andrejs Šipailo (Latvia, 7 January)
Nelly Viennot (France, 8 January)
Alf Hansen (Norway, 8 January)
Bernhard Neuhold (Austria, 8 January)
Franco Ferrari (Italy, 9 January)
Monika Staab (Switzerland, 9 January)
Velid Imamović
 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 9 January)
Antonín Plachý
 (Czech Republic, 9 January)
Duygu Yaşar (Turkey, 9 January)
Herbert Hübel
 (Austria, 10 January) **60th**
Emil Bozhinovski
 (FYR Macedonia, 10 January)
Zsolt Széld (Hungary, 10 January)
Hans-Dieter Drewitz
 (Germany, 11 January)
Olivier Brochart (France, 11 January)
Juan N. García-Nieto Portabella
 (Spain, 12 January)
Drago Koš (Slovenia, 13 January)
Sofoklis Pilavios (Greece, 13 January)
Lilach Asulin (Israel, 13 January)
Ausra Kance (Lithuania, 13 January)
Siarhei Ilyich (Belarus, 13 January)
Niccolo Donna (Italy, 13 January)
Marc Keller (France, 14 January) **50th**
Igor Satkii (Moldova, 14 January)
Nodar Akhalkatsi (Georgia, 14 January)

Radu Vişan (Romania, 14 January)
Alessandro Lulli (Italy, 15 January)
Phivos Vakis (Cyprus, 15 January)
Atanas Furnadzhiev
 (Bulgaria, 15 January)
Mitja Lainscak (Slovenia, 15 January)
Kleomenis Bontiotis
 (Greece, 16 January)
Milan Karadžić (Serbia, 16 January)
Kenneth Reeh (Denmark, 16 January)
Sune Hellströmer (Sweden, 17 January)
Jan W. Wegereef
 (Netherlands, 17 January)
Aristeidis Stavropoulos
 (Greece, 17 January)
Blaženka Logarušić (Croatia, 17 January)
Tibor Nyilasi (Hungary, 18 January)
Mark Boetekees
 (Netherlands, 18 January)
Bujar Kasmi (Albania, 19 January)
Artur Azaryan (Armenia, 19 January)
Lars-Åke Lagrell (Sweden, 20 January)
Pedro Ángel Galán Nieto
 (Spain, 20 January)
Ilir Shulku (Albania, 20 January)
Maciej Sawicki (Poland, 20 January)
Bjorn Vassallo (Malta, 20 January)
Ángel María Villar Llona
 (Spain, 21 January)
Maria Teresa Andreu Grau
 (Spain, 21 January)
Vladimir Iveta (Croatia, 21 January)
Are Habicht (Estonia, 22 January)
Alan Freeland (Scotland, 22 January)
Lassin Isaksen (Faroe Islands, 22 January)
Krzysztof Malinowski
 (Poland, 22 January)
Anja Kunick (Germany, 22 January)
Teuvo Holopainen
 (Finland, 23 January) **70th**
Harry M. Been (Netherlands, 23 January)
Pat Quigley
 (Republic of Ireland, 24 January)
Patrick Wattebled (France, 24 January)
Ofer Eini (Israel, 24 January)
Anneli Gustafsson (Sweden, 24 January)
Nikolai Ivanov (Russia, 24 January)
Edi Šunjić (Croatia, 24 January)
Philipp Patsch (Liechtenstein, 24 January)

Minke Booij (Netherlands, 24 January)
Gevorg Hovhannisyan
 (Armenia, 25 January) **60th**
Pascal Fritz (France, 25 January)
Metin Kazancıoğlu
 (Turkey, 26 January) **60th**
Mirosław Ryszka (Poland, 26 January)
Florence Hardouin (France, 26 January)
Massimo Nanni (San Marino, 26 January)
Cyril Zimmermann
 (Switzerland, 26 January)
Saša Zagorc (Slovenia, 26 January)
Krister Malmsten (Sweden, 27 January)
Thomas Cayol (France, 27 January)
Gilles Leclair (France, 30 January)
Stefan Majewski (Poland, 31 January)
Brian Lawlor (Wales, 31 January)
Alexandros Spyropoulos
 (Greece, 31 January)
Vadims Direktorenko (Latvia, 31 January)
Andrew James Foulerton
 (England, 31 January)

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Volker Roth (Germany, 1 February)
Karen Espelund (Norway, 1 February)
Kyros Vassaras (Greece, 1 February)
Trygve Bornø (Norway, 2 February)
Barbara Moschini (Italy, 2 February)
Urs Reinhard (Switzerland, 2 February)
Steen Dahrup (Denmark, 3 February) **60th**
Mark Blackburne (England, 3 February)
Mika Paatelainen (Finland, 3 February)
Renata Tomasova
 (Slovakia, 3 February) **50th**
Sergii Vladyko (Ukraine, 3 February) **40th**
Jelena Oblaković-Babić
 (Serbia, 3 February)
Vaclav Krondl
 (Czech Republic, 5 February)
Peter Rudbaek (Denmark, 5 February)
Igor Gryshchenko (Ukraine, 5 February)
Lars-Christer Olsson
 (Sweden, 6 February)
Gabriel Weiss (Slovakia, 6 February)
Josep Maria Bartomeu
 (Spain, 6 February)
Leonid Kaloshin (Russia, 6 February)

Duško Grabovac (Croatia, 7 February)
Michael Gerlinger (Germany, 7 February)
Johan van Kouterik
 (Netherlands, 8 February)
Michael Appleby (England, 8 February)
Fino Fini (Italy, 9 February)
Danilo Filacchione (Italy, 9 February)
Luc Rabat (France, 10 February)
Götz Bender (Germany, 10 February)
Stewart Regan (Scotland, 10 February)
Willie McDougall
 (Scotland, 11 February)
Annelie Larsson (Sweden, 11 February)
Fritz Stuchlik (Austria, 11 February)
Madeline Ekvall (Sweden, 11 February)
Borislav Mihaylov
 (Bulgaria, 12 February)
David McDowell Zor
 (Slovenia, 12 February) **50th**
Oleksandr Bandurko
 (Ukraine, 13 February)
Pierluigi Collina (Italy, 13 February)
Christian Mutschler
 (Switzerland, 13 February)
Roman Babaev
 (Russia, 13 February) **40th**
Marinus den Engelsman
 (Netherlands, 14 February)
Manuel Lopez Fernandez
 (Spain, 14 February)
Thomas Weyhing
 (Germany, 14 February)
Livio Bazzoli (Italy, 14 February)
Peter Bonde
 (Denmark, 14 February) **60th**
Juan Carlos Miralles
 (Andorra, 14 February) **60th**
Joeri Van De Velde
 (Belgium, 14 February)
Susanne Erlandsson
 (Sweden, 15 February)
Leif Sundell (Sweden, 15 February) **60th**
Katriina Elovirta (Finland, 15 February)
Sonia Testaguzza
 (Switzerland, 15 February)
Svitlana Shkil (Ukraine, 15 February)
Orkhan Huseynzade
 (Azerbaijan, 15 February)
Jan Pauly (Czech Republic, 16 February)

Roman Sowinski (Poland, 16 February)
Terje Svendsen (Norway, 17 February)
Goran Bunjevčević (Serbia, 17 February)
Antonio Dario (Italy, 17 February)
Robert Barczy (Hungary, 17 February)
Gudrun Inga Sivertsen
 (Iceland, 17 February)
Jozef Vengloš (Slovakia, 18 February)
Patrick Kelly
 (Republic of Ireland, 18 February)
Pertti Alaja (Finland, 18 February)
Vasily Melnychuk (Ukraine, 18 February)
Jordi Pascual (Andorra, 18 February)
Petro Ivanov (Ukraine, 18 February) **40th**
Jānis Mežekis (Latvia, 19 February)
Louis Peila (Switzerland, 19 February)
Lars Arnesson (Sweden, 20 February)
Eggert Magnusson
 (Iceland, 20 February)
Edward Potok (Poland, 20 February)
Ion Geolgau (Romania, 20 February)
Ralph Zloczower
 (Switzerland, 21 February)
Fernando Gomes (Portugal, 21 February)
Jarmo Matikainen (Finland, 21 February)
Eugène Westerink
 (Netherlands, 21 February)
Damien Garitte (Belgium, 22 February)
Asim Khudiyev (Azerbaijan, 22 February)
Vladimir Šajn (Slovenia, 22 February)
Ana Caetano (Portugal, 22 February)
Burim Sejdić
 (FYR Macedonia, 22 February)
Rick Parry (England, 23 February)
Peter Jones (England, 24 February)
Oleg Harlamov (Estonia, 24 February)
Xavier Palacin (England, 24 February)
Josep García (Andorra, 26 February)
Per Eliasson (Sweden, 26 February)
Ghenadie Scurtul
 (Moldova, 26 February)
Egidius Braun (Germany, 27 February)
Enrique Cerezo Torres
 (Spain, 27 February) **70th**
Peter Lundström (Finland, 27 February)
John Beattie (England, 28 February)
Panagiotis Papachristos
 (Greece, 28 February)
Markus Stenger (Germany, 28 February)

NOTICES

- On 1 November, the Hellenic Football Federation confirmed the appointment of Alexandros Dedes as its general secretary, a position he previously held on an interim basis.
- In December, Martin Malík was elected as the new president of the Football Association of the Czech Republic.

Forthcoming events

Meetings

24 January, Lausanne
 UEFA Nations League: group stage draw

1 February, Nyon
 Women's Football Committee

12 February, Nyon
 Football Committee

23 February, Nyon
 UEFA Europa League: round of 16 draw

25 February, Bratislava
 Executive Committee

26 February, Bratislava
 Ordinary UEFA Congress

Competitions

30 January – 10 February, Ljubljana
 Futsal EURO 2018

6/7 February
 UEFA Youth League: play-offs

13/14 + 20/21 February
 UEFA Champions League: round of 16 (first legs)

15 February
 UEFA Europa League: round of 32 (first legs)

20/21 February
 UEFA Youth League: round of 16

22 February
 UEFA Europa League: round of 32 (return legs)



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