

THE TECHNICIAN

FUTSAL

**A New
Under-21
Competition**

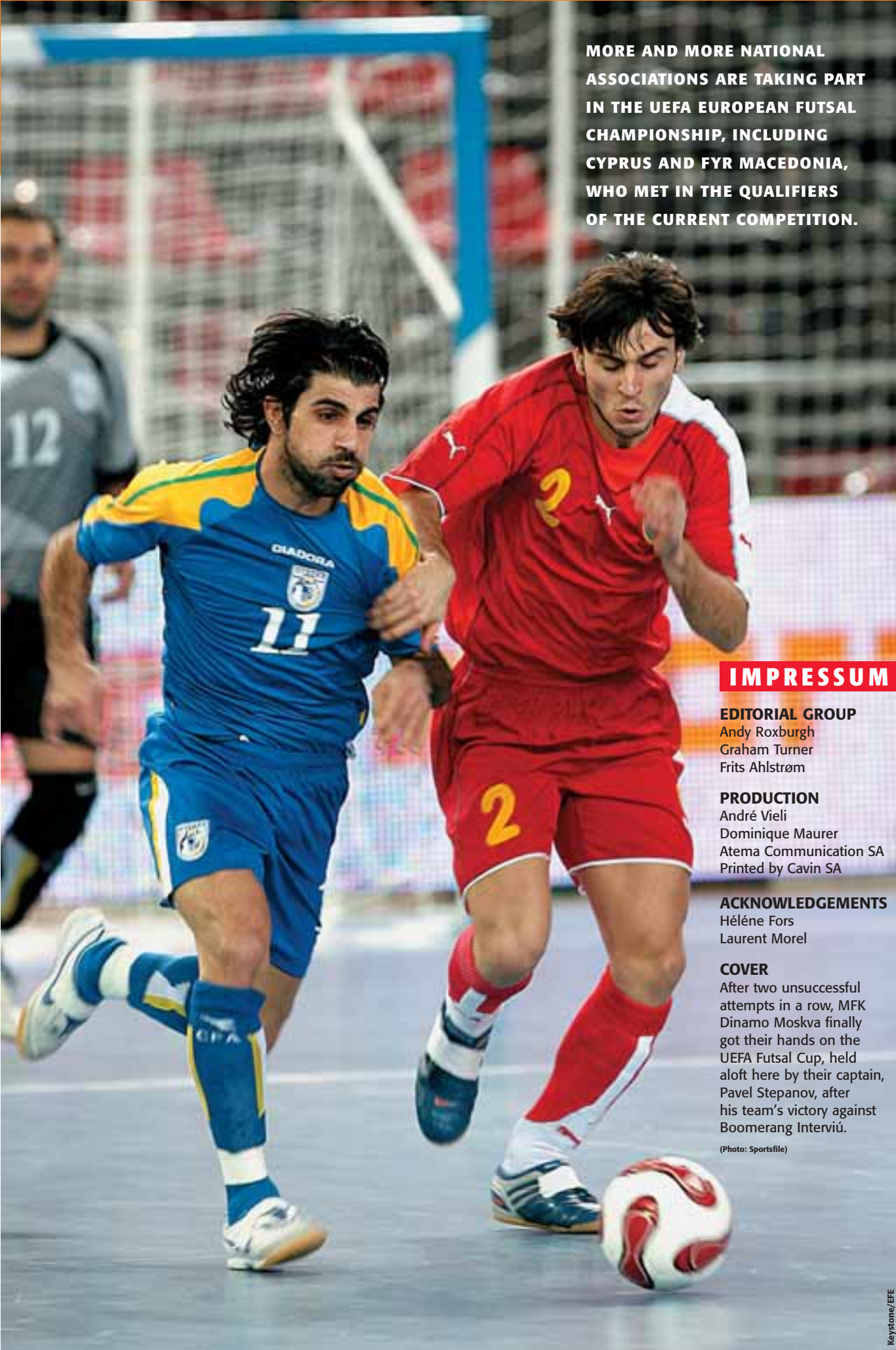
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**NEWSLETTER
FOR COACHES**
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MORE AND MORE NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS ARE TAKING PART IN THE UEFA EUROPEAN FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP, INCLUDING CYPRUS AND FYR MACEDONIA, WHO MET IN THE QUALIFIERS OF THE CURRENT COMPETITION.

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COVER

After two unsuccessful attempts in a row, MFK Dinamo Moskva finally got their hands on the UEFA Futsal Cup, held aloft here by their captain, Pavel Stepanov, after his team's victory against Boomerang Interiú.

(Photo: Sportsfile)

A NEW UNDER-21 COMPETITION

EDITORIAL

BY PETR FOUSEK, CHAIRMAN
UEFA FUTSAL COMMITTEE

I have been a member of UEFA's Futsal Committee for 13 years now, about half of them as chairman. If I think back to my first meeting, it's like going back to the Stone Age. It's hard to believe the progress futsal has made in the last ten or 15 years.

I talked about this in my last editorial, mentioning how we started the first qualifying round with ten teams and how we have now reached 40, talking about the work that the Futsal Committee has done over the years and the improvements we have seen. But futsal is moving too fast for us to spend time looking back. The important thing is to look to the future.

A recent decision by UEFA's Executive Committee has laid good foundations for the future. The Futsal Committee proposed the introduction of a European under-21 tournament, and this proposal has been accepted. We are sure that this represents another turning point in our history, another important milestone. Not just because of the competition itself but also because, in the national associations, this will represent a tremendous boost for youth players. This is especially important because, in futsal, under-21 players really count as youth players, whereas in the outdoor game they are so often established club players and sometimes internationals at senior level. Ten years ago in my country, the under-21 internationals were nearly always playing in junior teams or B teams. Nowadays, they are in the top league or even playing abroad. They are fully integrated into professional parameters.

But in futsal the situation is different – and we are making it even more differ-

ent. In football, the under-21 competition is played by men who are under-21 when it starts but can be 'under 23' when it finishes. In futsal, we are adjusting the dates so that the players are genuinely under-21s when the final round is played. This means that the qualifying phase will be of enormous benefit to players of around 19.

We therefore need to start doing some serious work at grassroots and youth levels, where we now need to detect the talents we would wish to nurture in elite youth programmes. To an outsider, it might sound strange for me to begin to talk about youth development programmes after 13 years on UEFA's committee. But in futsal, we have always been aware that there are two ways of getting the ball rolling. One way is to begin at grassroots level with regional plans, an overall development strategy and so on. After three, four or five years, you might be ready to establish a league and a national team.

But we shouldn't forget that futsal is a fast train and you need to jump aboard before it's gone. So the other option is to set up a league and a national team and then work your way down from the top. This option has the advantage of offering promotion and motivation. In the following pages you can see an illustration of this – the approach taken

by Turkey. I was in Istanbul for a workshop and, immediately afterwards, the Turkish association set up a national team which earned a lot of promotion in the media, generated enormous public interest and, I think, did a lot for the development of futsal in a country where it had not previously existed in a genuinely structured form. I firmly believe that when you have a national team and a league firmly in place, you can easily turn to regional and grassroots development, and a lot of national associations have been quick to see how grassroots futsal can be beneficial for the technical skills of their players. The Nordic countries, like Finland, are now realising that futsal is ideally suited to be written into their youth development schemes. The Brazilians have always acknowledged this and it's great to see the registration cards for Ronaldo or Ronaldinho when they started as kids in their local futsal leagues.

The time has therefore come for more efforts to be made in youth programmes and in grassroots schemes. Futsal is something that deserves to be developed and deserves all our efforts to do so. It deserves interest. It deserves dedication. A lot can change in your life but you always remember your loves. I would just like to say that futsal has always been my *femme fatale* and will continue to be so in the future.



The creation of a national team has boosted the development of futsal in Turkey.

INTERVIEW

BY GRAHAM TURNER



FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE UEFA FUTSAL CUP WAS DECIDED IN A FOUR-TEAM FINAL TOURNAMENT STAGED AT THE SPANISH HOME OF ELPOZO MURCIA TURÍSTICA FS. FOR THE COACH, HOSTING SUCH A TOURNAMENT IS SOMETHING OF A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD. ASK PORTUGAL'S LUIZ FILIPE SCOLARI ABOUT EURO 2004; ASK GERMANY'S JÜRGEN KLINSMANN; ASK MICHAL STRIZ, THE CZECH REPUBLIC'S COACH AT THE 2005 EUROPEAN FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS IN OSTRAVA. EXPECTATIONS ARE HIGH; SO IS THE PRESSURE.

IN MURCIA, THE DRUMS WERE BEATING AND THE FANS WERE CHANTING AS THE CLOCK TICKED ITS WAY DOWN TO THREE MINUTES IN THE ALL-SPANISH SEMI-FINAL AGAINST ARCH-RIVALS BOOMERANG INTERVIÚ. THE HOME TEAM WAS 2-1 UP AGAINST THE TWO-TIME EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS. THE BOOMERANG COACH, JESÚS CANDELAS, WITHDREW HIS GOALKEEPER, 'SCHUMACHER' EQUALISED, AND WITH 1.07 SECONDS REMAINING, DANIEL MADE IT 3-2 FOR THE VISITORS. THE HOSTS – PLAYERS AND FANS ALIKE – WERE THUNDERSTRUCK. IN THE DRESSING-ROOM, THERE WERE TEARS AND TALK OF MANCHESTER UNITED'S 1999 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE VICTORY IN BARCELONA. BUT, UNLIKE BAYERN MUNICH, THE VANQUISHED IN MURCIA HAD TO PLAY FOR THE BRONZE MEDAL LESS THAN 48 HOURS LATER. HOW DOES A TECHNICIAN HANDLE THAT? THIS WAS ONE OF THE QUESTIONS WE PUT TO THE ELPOZO COACH, EDUARDO SÃO THIAGO LENZ, ALIAS

D U D A

1 • First of all, how does a 36-year-old coach manage to accumulate almost 300 games in charge of one club?

"I always wanted to be a futsal coach – right since I was a youth player. I was always interested in the tactical side of the game, trying to help my team-mates. I was convinced that one day I would be a futsal coach. It's a vocation rather than a job. So when I began to feel that my standards as a player were dropping away a bit, I was lucky enough to receive a definitive push from my club. I was playing for ElPozo and I was 31 at the time. I knew I could have had three or four more years of playing but I jumped at the chance of making such an early start to my career as a coach."

2 • Did you have any coaching qualifications at the time?

"Of course, in Spain, you need a coaching licence to work. I had done my Level 1 course – valid for youth and amateur futsal – while I was living in Madrid and playing for Boomerang Interviú. Then, after I moved to Murcia to join ElPozo, I did the Level 2 course, also through the Madrid regional association. At the moment, I'm doing my Level 3 course because that is becoming mandatory for coaches working in the top division of the professional league. I'm doing the course in Madrid, so it means getting the car out every Sunday and driving to Madrid and back. It's about 800km. We're talking about specialised futsal courses. The Level 3 course is supervised by the national

sports council and covers the full range from methodology to law and sports medicine as well as the technical, tactical and physical aspects. At the moment I'm in a group of six coaches and it has been organised so that we can all go to Madrid on the rest day after our Saturday league games. Then there's an intensive residential part of the course in Madrid at the end of June and beginning of July at the Spanish association's national training centre."

3 • What was the most difficult part of your fast transition from playing to coaching?

"I think I was well prepared for the job because I had been interested in coaching for so many years. I had done enough to make sure that when I got



ONE OF THE UEFA FUTSAL CUP SEMI-FINALS WAS AN ALL-SPANISH AFFAIR BETWEEN ELPOZO MURCIA (KIKE, IN RED) AND BOOMERANG INTERVIÚ (MARQUINHO).

'punishment' approach can be efficient with players of limited mental potential. The squads I have worked with have been different and it has been very important and satisfying to be able to convince them about ways of doing the job rather than impose my own views."

6 • The last-second defeat by Boomerang was an obvious challenge...

"Yes. We immediately talked about our next objective, which was to win our three remaining league games. In the Spanish league, the top four go into play-offs, with the top two playing the semi-finals at home. So we had a concrete objective. The important thing was to avoid sending the players home and having them come back for the third-place match against Charleroi with that grief still in their minds. That's why, on the morning after the match, I had them in for a 90-minute training session. From a physical point of view, it was important to loosen off but it was even more important to get together and for everybody to get the thoughts from the night before off his chest.

into the bullring, the bull didn't catch me by surprise. In my case, the major challenges were related to my age and my relationship to the rest of the squad. The squad had been team-mates and it wasn't easy to take command of people you were on such familiar terms with. So I prepared myself well to be able to establish a new relationship. It was a very good group to work with and the club gave me full support. I obviously had to work within certain financial limits but I had freedom to sign the players I wanted and everything worked out well because we won the league in my first year. That helped to cement a good relationship between the coach and the club and those bonds have been strengthened as other objectives have been reached."

4 • What percentage of your work is psychological?

"It's difficult to measure a percentage but all the work you do as a coach in futsal has an important psychological component. I think the head is the footballer's most important asset. So much depends on the morale of a team and its confidence in being able to attain objectives. In order to train and stay in optimal physical conditions, a player has to be prepared to make sacrifices – and, to make sacrifices, you need to be convinced that they are worthwhile. Having said that, if a player doesn't have the right footballing qualities, psychology

isn't going to resolve that problem. If you have talent, if you have individual 'stars', then psychology and man management are crucial. If you don't have talent..."

5 • So man management is an important aspect of your work?

"Managing the squad is extremely important if you want to achieve results. I've known coaches who have been, let's say, punishment-orientated. It depends on what sort of players you've got but my view is that the



Vinicius Bacaro of ElPozo Murcia breaks away from Lucio in the match for third place against Action 21 Charleroi.

Photos: Sportsfile



DUDA AND JESUS CANDELAS COME FACE TO FACE AGAIN BEFORE THE UEFA FUTSAL CUP SEMI-FINAL BETWEEN ELPOZO MURCIA AND BOOMERANG INTERVIÚ.

No one had to make a speech. But we had to make sure we had the right approach to the third-place match. We agreed that the game against Charleroi was important for the crucial league games that were to follow. We didn't want to finish fourth of the final four and we wanted the game to act as a bridge towards our league objectives."

7 • Do you encourage players to air their views in the dressing-room?

"Yes, but on that occasion it was hardly necessary. It's an interesting fact of human nature that some people feel sad while others feel the need to demonstrate that they feel sad. It's like going to a funeral and seeing who wants to transmit the image of being sad. My view is that, in moments of sadness, you should try to pick other people up rather than focus on your own sadness and your own image. Translating that into futsal terms, we said what we had to say and then we went out and had a training session that was focused exclusively on enjoying ourselves and having a laugh."

8 • After the match we found you tucked away in a seat in the press room lost in your thoughts. What was going through your mind?

"A lot of things. This might be difficult for 'outsiders' to understand but it might be a situation that other coaches can identify with. Our club had lost three league finals against the same team. We won the league last year but it wasn't against Interviú. A 'league final' in Spain is the best of five matches and we always took them to the fifth game and we always had chances to win. But we didn't. And, three weeks earlier, we had lost the cup final against them. It would be wrong to talk about 'psychosis' but even my daughter begins to worry when we're playing against them. Then you have a chance to exorcise all those ghosts in a semi-final of a UEFA competition and you're so close to doing it. There were a lot of factors to handle and it was a challenge to find the right track."

9 • Jesús Candelas was very gracious. Is there a good atmosphere among Spanish coaches?

"We're enjoying some sweet moments in terms of relationships. There's a new generation who respect each other a great deal and who realise that we have a role to play in promoting and developing futsal. In the last seven years we've witnessed the arrival of some really professional coaches who've been determined to improve. We've met at courses; we've exchanged ideas at seminars; we've built up very respectful relationships."

10 • Spain has a top-level pro league. But what is being done in youth futsal?

"ElPozo is the only club to have a nursery side in the second division. There are restrictions on the players who can play there: they must be under-23s; they must be European Community players. But the coach is Guina, a former Brazilian international. We also have a youth team that has won the Spanish championship and a younger junior team that has done the same. Our club is unusual because it's a fact of life that the board of directors at the average club will prefer to invest money in a star signing rather than grassroots development. And, of course, the coaches at lower levels usually

have salaries at lower levels, when the opposite should be true. The best youth coaches should be properly rewarded. If I won the lottery and could build my own club I would focus on having good, professional coaches at youth levels. Utopia at the moment!"

11 • What is a typical week at ElPozo?

"Rest on Sunday; training morning and afternoon on Monday; Tuesday morning; Wednesday morning and afternoon; Thursday either morning or afternoon; and Friday morning preparing for the match on Saturday afternoon. To prepare games I use a lot of video – partly because of what I was saying about convincing people with evidence rather than words. We study opponents but I usually watch the videos rather than the players. We talk about set plays; where we defend and so on. I show them a video before the final training session so that we can really put into practice the issues that I have mentioned in the team talk."

12 • If you had one wish for the future of futsal, what would it be?

"For the people who write the Laws of the Game to listen to club coaches so that the game can become more dynamic and more spectacular. The second wish is for futsal to become an Olympic sport."



Duda gives out his orders in the match for third place in the UEFA Futsal Cup.

ONE OF MFK DINAMO MOSKVA'S
BRAZILIAN PLAYERS, TATU (IN WHITE),
UP AGAINST JULIO GARCIA
IN THE UEFA FUTSAL CUP FINAL AGAINST
BOOMERANG INTERVIÚ.



NOTES FROM MURCIA

The Winning Coach – Yury Rudnev

Having reached two finals yet having taken the silver medal from both, MFK Dinamo Moskva were neither favourites nor outsiders in Murcia. Club president Konstantin Eremenko felt that the side needed an extra push and, after Alexander Shibaev had led the side into the final four, brought 52-year-old Yury Rudnev – at Dinamo from 2003 to 2005 – back from TTG-Java Yugorsk.

His side was made to fight hard for the 3-1 semi-final win against Action 21 Charleroi and even harder for victory in the final against Boomerang Interviú. "I'm drained," he said afterwards. "Exhausted. I haven't got any strength or emotions left. This makes me so happy that I left the outdoor game for futsal 15 years ago. In football, I wouldn't have experienced these emotions and this success." Asked to pinpoint the reasons for success, he said: "It has been a question of intensive work. The team has improved in many aspects. In discipline, in organisation, in tactical awareness, in mobility, in counter-attacking and in attitude. In Murcia we were able to beat the best team in the world. It was not easy because our level of physical preparation didn't allow us to maintain the momentum we had in the first half. We were not able to press them so hard in the middle-to-front areas and that allowed them to create a lot of dangerous situations during the second period. Before the match I told my players that there are moments in life when you have the chance to perform a great deed. In a final, this is the case. If we had played three games against Boomerang, I don't think



Yury Rudnev, coach of MFK Dinamo Moskva.

we could have done it. But in one game I thought it was possible."

Yury, who admits to having two obsessions in life – futsal and family – explains, "I have always tried to prepare myself thoroughly for the job. I can't remember how many videos I have studied. I used to watch how Dina played when they were undeniably the top team in Moscow and Russia. And I studied our opponents very carefully before we travelled to Murcia. In that sense, you can say that I'm a self-taught coach. When I arrived back at Dinamo, I thought there were things I could improve – and one of the fundamentals was to forge unity in the dressing-room between the Brazilian and Russian groups, to overcome the differences of character and culture. We have seven Brazilians in the squad, which makes life complicated for the coach. We have people who act as interpreters and our fitness coach

is Spanish. Little by little we have managed to create good team spirit and the will to battle for results. I think that's why we beat them: on will to win. But it wasn't easy – and I was furious when we conceded the equaliser when they had withdrawn their goalkeeper because 5 v 4 situations are something we had worked on very hard."

The Player-Keeper

Dinamo were the only team not to deploy the player-keeper in Murcia (as they were never trailing on the scoreboard). Christian Vavádio opted to withdraw the Charleroi keeper when 3-1 down with two minutes to play in the semi-final; ElPozo used two different player-keepers (but mostly Portuguese international Joël) when trailing 1-0 with four minutes to play in the third-place match; and, as Boomerang were behind in the latter stages of both games, Jesús Candelas threw on Neto as from 36'30 against ElPozo and from 38'00 in the final. On both occasions, his side responded with goals.



Substituting their goalkeeper, Neto, at the end of the match allowed Boomerang Interviú to score in the dying minutes in both of their matches in the UEFA Futsal Cup "Final Four".



THE NEW FORMAT OF THE UEFA FUTSAL CUP PROVED TO BE AN EXCELLENT WAY TO PROMOTE CLUB FUTSAL.



All of the goalkeepers, including ElPozo Murcia's Juanjo, played well.

The Goals

The 'Final Four' produced a total of 14 goals at an average of 3.5 per match – a low tally by futsal standards. "It doesn't surprise me in the slightest," commented the ElPozo coach, Duda. "As they stand today, the Laws of the Game make it easy to organise defensive play. Futsal has always been associated with flowing play and lots of goals. If we are not careful, we could strip the game of one its greatest assets." Having said that, the standard of goalkeeping in Murcia was extremely high. So hats off to Eder Fehrman (Action 21), Caio and Juanjo (ElPozo), Luís Amado (Boomerang) and Dinamo's Pavel Stepanov, beaten only twice in 80 minutes. It was also significant that six of the 14 goals were scored in the last three minutes. Put differently, 43% of the goals were scored in 7.5% of the playing time.

Substitutions

All four teams made individual substitutions – in other words, no coach changed the four outfielders simultaneously. None of them made more than two changes simultaneously. The five starters remained unchanged

for an average of four minutes. The longest start by an outfield player corresponded to Action 21 skipper Karim Chaibai, on until he scored after 8'04 in the bronze-medal match. Christian Vavádio had expressed a desire to 'blood' some of his youngsters but, with a medal in sight, he fielded his most experienced campaigners – Chaibai and Zico – for extended periods.

Time-Out

Nine of the time-outs were called in the final five minutes of each half but Christian Vavádio opted to give his players a breather between the 12th and 14th minutes. The earliest call was by Boomerang's Jesús Candelas (7'11 when his team was struggling against Dinamo in the final) and another early call proved to be decisive. Yury Rudnev called his team off when awarded a free kick after 12'19 in the final. "I told them exactly how to take it," he explained, "and they did it perfectly". Kelson finished the rehearsed move that put the Russians ahead.

The Final Four Format

There were conflicting feelings among the coaches. On the one hand, it made for a spectacular, well-organised event which attracted TV coverage, sponsorship and did an excellent job of promoting futsal. But the coaches were unanimous in regretting that the current format allowed Boomerang Interviú, for instance, to dispute the final without ever playing a UEFA Futsal Cup match before their own fans on their home territory in Alcalá de Henares.

Semi-finals

MFK Dinamo Moskva v Action 21 Charleroi 3-1

1-0 Pula (4'50) 1-1 Chaibai (10'53) 2-1 Kobzar (21'19)
3-1 Kelson (37'47)

ElPozo Murcia Turística v Boomerang Interviú 2-3

1-0 Kike (1'09) 1-1 Marquinho (5'21) 2-1 Bacaro (34'42)
2-2 Schumacher (37'55) 2-3 Daniel (39'58)

Bronze-medal match

Action 21 Charleroi v ElPozo Murcia Turística 1-1

(3-4 in penalty shoot-out)

1-0 Chaibai (8'04) 1-1 Vinicius (37'16)

Penalties: 0-1 Vinicius 1-1 Zico 1-2 Alvaro 1-2 Jhonny 1-3 Kike
2-3 Chaibai 2-3 Mauricio 3-3 Salhi 3-4 Bacaro 3-4 Lucio

The final

MFK Dinamo Moskva v Boomerang Interviú 2-1

1-0 Kelson (12'21) 1-1 Neto (38'33) 2-1 Pula (39'33)

**ÖMER KANER HAS
TAKEN CHARGE OF THE TURKISH
NATIONAL FUTSAL TEAM.**



FIGC

IN FUTSAL, BEING A COACH USUALLY INVOLVES MUCH MORE THAN COACHING. THIS IS A MESSAGE THAT HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED LOUDLY AND CLEARLY IN THE FIRST TWO ISSUES OF THE FUTSAL TECHNICIAN BY COACHES RANGING FROM THE VASTLY EXPERIENCED JAVIER LOZANO TO THE NEWEST OF NEWCOMERS. IN MANY OF UEFA'S MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS, FUTSAL FOUNDATIONS ARE BEING LAID BY TECHNICIANS WHO, IN ADDITION TO COACHING THEIR TEAMS, ARE REQUIRED TO UNDERTAKE PIONEERING WORK OUTSIDE THE DRESSING ROOM. BUT IS IT CORRECT TO REFER TO 'FOUNDATIONS'? EVEN THOUGH WORLD CHAMPIONS SPAIN HAVE CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE FUTSAL LADDER, JAVIER LOZANO EXPLAINED IN OUR FIRST ISSUE THAT THEY HAD 'STARTED WITH THE ROOF', AIMING TO BUILD A NATIONAL TEAM CAPABLE OF ATTRACTING PUBLIC INTEREST AND OF PROVIDING THE SUNSHINE WHICH WOULD DRAW UP THE GRASSROOTS. THE APPROACH IS BEING ADOPTED BY OTHER ASSOCIATIONS BUT WITH AN INFINITY OF VARIATIONS ON THE THEME. AND ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING ILLUSTRATIONS IS THE CREATIVE WAY IN WHICH ÖMER KANER IS SETTING ABOUT

RAISING THE TURKISH FLAG

Ömer Kaner never played futsal. He had a distinguished career as a professional in the outdoor game with Eskişehirspor, Fenerbahçe and Karagümrük, and was capped once by Turkey. As a coach, he has been in charge of Fenerbahçe and Polish club Pogon Szczecin. In fact, his nearest approximation to futsal was to take part in one of those indoor tournaments played by 'outdoor' clubs in Germany during the winter break. But when the Turkish football association asked him to take futsal in hand, he agreed immediately.

What happened next made European futsal sit up and take notice. On 13 December 2006, the Turkish national team lost 7-3 in its international debut against Romania. Thirty-six days and six defeats later, Ömer took his team to a European Championship qualifying tournament in Finland and took top place in the group, drawing 5-5 with the hosts and registering wins against Albania (6-3) and Armenia (5-2). Even though the next phase produced

defeats against Belarus, France and Italy, a mark had been made. And there's much more to the story than a sequence of results.

"My first step was to head for the universities because that was the only place where futsal was being played in Turkey," Ömer Kaner explains. "I watched about 400 or 500 players and selected 25 for a training camp in Izmir. At first I was very happy about the levels of speed and technique. But the more I studied futsal, the more convinced I became that we wouldn't be able to field a truly competitive national team."

Rahim Hacikerimoglu, coaching in Belgium with Brussels United, was invited to attend the training camp in Izmir. He pointed out that the Turkish communities in Belgium and the Netherlands included some top-quality players. Ömer Kaner promptly packed his bags, watched a squad of Turkish players take on Brussels United in a couple of

games, and selected a 14-man national squad for the qualifiers in Finland.

"When I was at UEFA headquarters in Nyon for the draw," Ömer Kaner recalls, "Turkey were in it but we didn't have a single player. We went to Finland after ten days of training together, focusing on team mechanisms and off-the-ball movements. Then, in the second qualifying phase in Italy, we saw what real futsal is all about! But we played a fantastic game against Italy and their coach, Alessandro Nuccorini, congratulated me for having built a wonderful team in such a short time." Six of Turkey's seven goals in that tournament were scored by Özcan Cihan, who plays his futsal with Hasselt in the Belgian league.

But the important thing is that it was also an excellent education for me. I know that football and futsal are brothers, but I had to learn a different game in a very short time. It's not easy, but you can build very quickly in your mind, based on your own experience.



ITALY MEET TURKEY IN THE UEFA EUROPEAN FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFYING ROUND.

I've been fortunate to be able to visit countries like Belgium and Holland, and my next stop is a specialised course at the Italian association's centre in Coverciano."

Ömer Kaner's original idea had been to promote futsal by using outdoor stars from the bronze-medal team at the 2002 World Cup. "I soon realised that this might produce crowds but not results. But I did take Ümit Davala as captain for our first game against Romania and he has stayed on board as our under-21 coach."

The results in Finland allowed the Turkish association to attain its first objective: to form a flagship national team which would serve as a vehicle for the promotion of futsal throughout the country. "Starting from the top aroused a lot of interest and we immediately began to receive mail from all over the country, with people wanting to form

futsal teams. In a way, they were too fast out of the blocks because we had to tell them to be patient until we had the right infrastructure in place. But we will have our first futsal league this year, based on teams playing in eight regional competitions. The winners of each will be brought to Istanbul for the title play-offs."

In the meantime, Petr Fousek, chairman of UEFA's Futsal Committee, and Laurent Morel, futsal competitions manager, had been invited to Istanbul to brief 50 representatives of football clubs from the top two divisions. "This was important," says Ömer Kaner. "We have no specialist futsal coaches in Turkey," he admits, "so there is a lot to do in terms of educating technicians and referees as well as players – and the public, who need to be made aware of the rules and, above all, the virtues of futsal. I think we will begin to see real results in three to four years time."

are trying to get futsal off the ground. Let Derek explain in his own words:

Meetings and Presentations

"It was important to explain to key groups and committees why futsal is being promoted and to pre-empt any risk of it being mistaken for a rival to football. Presentations highlighted development aspects of futsal in terms of technique, along with the opportunities it offers players, coaches, match officials and administrators."

Awareness

"In the initial stages of promoting futsal, I felt it was important to have material resources to educate and demonstrate. I produced a DVD and associated information booklets, and I'm working on material for our FAI website and on promotional posters for indoor facilities."

Introductory Workshops

"Our team of development officers helped to identify and invite key people in 22 locations throughout Ireland with an average participation of 45 at each workshop. All participants received a futsal ball and the DVD. The content was a PowerPoint presentation underlining the benefits of playing futsal and a practical demonstration using local children."

Equipment

"I approached our equipment supplier and asked them to give us 2,000 futsal balls free of charge for use in promoting futsal. They agreed, because they recognised that there was potential for a whole new business channel. At the same time, teams and leagues wishing to start playing futsal were offered a 50% grant by the FAI towards the cost of buying futsal goalposts."

The Under-21 National Futsal League

"Our national league football season runs from March to November, while the under-21 season starts only in May.

"BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN" IN IRELAND

One of the newcomers in the 2007/08 UEFA Futsal Cup will be the champion of a newly-formed under-21 league in the Republic of Ireland. The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) faces identical challenges to Ömer Kaner and his Turkish colleagues but the approach is radically different. As yet, there is no national team, for instance. With technical director Packie Bonner putting his shoulder to the wheel, the driving force is Derek O'Neill, appointed last year as futsal officer and shortly to present a five-year strategic plan for the development of futsal in his country.

"I can sympathise with the Turkish approach based on launching a successful national team," Derek com-

ments, "as I believe higher-level activity lends much-needed profile to the game, particularly among the media. This, in turn, highlights the presence of the game at all levels within the Irish football family. That's why we're adopting a bottom-up, top-down approach because, while we recognise the importance of a high-profile element, it's essential to develop sustainable grassroots activity for the long-term health of the game."

How difficult is it to work on the roof and the foundations at the same time? Derek provided a fascinating answer to that question via a series of working points that might be of value to associations who, like the Turks and the Irish,

**SHAMROCK ROVERS
HAVE WON THE FIRST FUTSAL
CHAMPIONSHIP IN
THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.**



So I could identify a window of opportunity for players from the under-21 sides in the national league to participate in a pilot futsal league. It has been welcomed; the players seem to enjoy it; the introduction of prize money and the idea of participating in the UEFA Futsal Cup have been incentives; and feedback has been positive. I expect this to develop very soon into an open-age competition with double the number of clubs on the starting grid."

The National Team

"My aim is to form a 'development squad' from the players competing in the under-21 league and to begin playing international friendlies in 2008. Hopefully, it will not be long before we can enter a national team in UEFA competitions."

Coaching Courses

"Education is the key to long-term growth and there needs to be a follow-up to the workshops. We hope to have

developed a futsal coaching course by the end of this year and roll it out in 2008. At the end of last month, I took a group to the UEFA Futsal Cup finals in Murcia. There were eight coaches from teams who have participated in the pilot under-21 league, plus four representatives from amateur and children's leagues. I strongly believe in providing this sort of opportunity to help educate key people about futsal. It is an incentive for them to embrace the game and the way we are trying to develop it, and, at the same time, the atmosphere and the speed of top-level futsal matches always capture their attention and imagination. It will open the coaches' eyes to what it's all about at the highest level of the club game and, hopefully, help to upgrade the standard of play in our league. I have focused on coaches, but I believe that arranging this sort of trip to a major futsal event is also a golden opportunity to showcase futsal to potential sponsors."

Referees

"My first step was to identify a group of young referees who had an interest in futsal and to invite them to Lisbon to watch the futsal league derby between Sporting and Benfica. It was an incentive and an educational trip to give them a taste of high-level futsal and to offer them an insight into the roles and responsibilities. Thanks to João Rocha, the group was able to meet the match officials to share views and information – and this was a great help in recruiting referees for the pilot under-21 league."

"At the same time, futsal has been written into inner-city projects in Dublin; a 50-team under-13 competition was organised in the capital last year, and partnerships have been established at community, school, college and local-authority levels – all of which could easily be material for our grassroots newsletter. We've done a lot in 15 months!" Derek admits. "But the nice thing is that there's much, much more to do."



The first futsal championship to be organised in the Republic of Ireland was a success.

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