

A grassroots paradise

Some days are special. And when you work in football, these memorable occasions often involve big stadiums, star players and thrilling matches. But sometimes it is an event in the grassroots of the game that leaves a lasting impression. For example, I will never forget the grassroots competition which was staged in Red Square, Moscow, prior to the 2008 UEFA Champions League final – it was spectacular. Following the recent UEFA Grassroots Workshop in the Netherlands, I can add another magic moment to my scrapbook of great football memories: the practical demonstration organised by the amateur club Rijnsburgse, involving 300 of their youth members, was a sight to behold – a total grassroots experience which impressed everyone who witnessed it.

Young players, from the ages of 5 to 19, were in action in an area which consisted of 6 pitches, 2 of which had artificial grass. The kaleidoscope of activities included a variety of small-sided games for different age groups (for boys, girls and disabled players), special training for goalkeepers, and a structured coaching session for some promising boys and girls. There was even a children's futsal competition in the large indoor hall. The visual impact of this mass participation was stunning, and a credit to Dutch organisation, flair and know-how.

Everything that UEFA promotes in its grassroots philosophy was addressed in this festival of football. Safety was a priority, fair play was a must and there was no discrimination – it was truly football for all. The action was dynamic, with everyone involved, and the practices and games, using appropriate equipment, were simple, fun and challenging. Creativity, personal development and cooperation were very much in evidence. And the coaches, many of them volunteers, were impressive in the way they conducted themselves. The latter was not by chance.

The head of the Rijnsburgse youth programme, Peter Kerkhof, viewed himself as a coach of coaches and insisted that the club staff behave in a positive manner. As he said during our visit: *"I tell our coaches, metaphorically speaking, to look in the mirror and decide if they like what they see. If they are screaming and shouting at young players, the view will be ugly and we don't want that approach at our club."* With this attitude, and their commitment to the game and the community, it is little wonder that they are a very successful club. However, according to Piet Hubers, technical manager for the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB), Rijnsburgse is not an isolated case. *"There are many grassroots clubs like this in the Netherlands,"* he said, without a hint of boastfulness.

The club visit during our 9th UEFA Grassroots Workshop provided us with a benchmark demonstration. Here we met people who love football and love what football can do. It was, for me and many association colleagues, a short time spent in a grassroots paradise – a special football day to remember.

Andy Roxburgh



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UEFA Grassroots Day

Chapter 2

Michel Platini's idea of moving the UEFA Champions League final from Wednesday to Saturday opened a window of grassroots opportunities. A year ago, Wednesday 19 May, three days before the first Saturday final, became the first ever UEFA Grassroots Day, with a series of events staged in Madrid as a prelude to the big match and an illustration of how to strengthen the links between the elite and grassroots levels of the game. Hundreds of thousands of grassroots players, ranging from kids to veterans, took part in football-themed events all over Europe, with fun, fair play and the concept of 'football for all' the central themes. In Madrid, superstars mingled with star-struck kids in games – and none were more star-struck than the boys who found themselves in the same team as Zinédine Zidane

and who, for the first five minutes, were so overawed that they were afraid to pass the ball to him...

Objectives were so successfully achieved during the pioneer project that a second UEFA Grassroots Day was immediately written into the 2011 diary. Wednesday 25 May was designated to provide the highpoint of a whole week of grassroots football leading up to the Wembley final, with London's Hyde Park taking over from Madrid's El Retiro as a spectacular city-centre venue for the festival.

As in 2010, the objective is to recognise and celebrate grassroots football. And, as in 2010, the UEFA Grassroots Day – even though the epicentre is in London – is generating ripples right across Europe. The list of events staged last year included, for example, football on



each of Germany's 1,000 mini-pitches and 3v3, 5v5 and 7v7 tournaments in football and futsal organised by regional associations at 14 venues in Portugal. The script for the second chapter in 2011 is so extensive that, rather than fill a printed page, it is best read by visiting UEFA.com and clicking on UEFA Training Ground, Grassroots then European events. Scrolling through the event diary for the month of May brings up around 70 grassroots events staged just about everywhere from Azerbaijan to Wales. A few bite-sized samples are the events in the 27 regions of Ukraine; girls' days in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (with one of them to coincide with the UEFA Women's Champions League final in Fulham), street football and football-for-all activities in a dozen Serbian cities, primary school events for Under-11s over the length and breadth of Italy, nationwide programmes in Latvia and Moldova, a girls' football day in Liechtenstein and festivals of football at 22 venues in Turkey.

The Grassroots Day website also features educational material which links sporting, educational and social values in a series of lessons addressing the themes of winning and losing and teamwork. This was an element which was warmly welcomed by teachers and parents last year and had positive effects in terms of engaging youngsters in discussions about issues which can have an impact on their personal development.

The range of events in London during the run-up to the UEFA Champions League final was described by Jeff Davis, the FA's national development manager, at the UEFA Grassroots Workshop in Noordwijk, as "a celebration of diversity involving the 149 ethnic groups to be found within the population of London". The programme was designed to line up with the overall objective of engaging Londoners in this major footballing event and, especially, to motivate young people from the English capital's housing estates to get involved in football – and to sustain that involvement beyond the Wembley final. The Wembley week therefore features prominently in the Kickz competition

organised within the London United community programme, along with London regional competitions involving inter-county league winners and boys' and girls' fair play teams.



A grand setting for Grassroots Day in Warsaw in 2010



The presence of Zinédine Zidane was a big attraction at the Grassroots Day in Madrid in 2010

The FA's grassroots programmes centre on the Champions Festival in Hyde Park – the venue for 100 sessions of skills clinics and mini-games throughout the week, scheduled to dovetail with school hours and played on a spontaneous 'just join in' principle under the guidance of FA skills coaches. There is also a women's football clinic involving players from centres of excellence in and around the capital, in addition to disability football and competitions for players in the veteran category.

The UEFA Grassroots Day kicks off with a press conference involving grassroots ambassadors Sir Trevor Brooking and Gianluca Vialli, alongside UEFA's technical director, Andy Roxburgh. The schedule then continues with competitions involving teams from primary and secondary schools in London and the official handover of a UEFA-funded mini-pitch at St Gregory's school in the London borough of Brent – for use by the local community as well as the school itself.

Outside the capital, activities have also been scheduled in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham. Any questions about why these four cities have been singled out might be answered by glancing at the English teams who have won the UEFA Champions League or its forerunner, the European Champion Clubs' Cup, to give it its official name, where Aston Villa, Manchester United and Nottingham Forest stand alongside Liverpool as former champions of Europe. The matches in the four cities, involving members of the title-winning teams of the past, fit nicely into the overall objective of forging links between the elite and grassroots games. ●

The Grassroots Bazaar

One of the sessions at the UEFA Grassroots Workshop in Noordwijk was entitled The Grassroots Bazaar. It was only 45 minutes dedicated to projects in Georgia, Serbia and Turkey, ranging from school programmes to disability football and grassroots tournaments for refugees, but the title could easily be applied to an event where the idea was for all UEFA's member associations to walk around the 'bazaar', discover what their colleagues had to offer and – rather than try to copy – to pick out the 'products' that they found most attractive and most applicable to their own grassroots ambitions. Among them were...

School projects

These ineluctably entail cooperation with governments and other authorities. Dimitri Bokeria reviewed the School-ball programme which has gained momentum since it was launched in 2006 as a joint venture by the Georgian national association, the country's street football association and the ministry of education and science. From an initial total of 2,000 participants, the number shot up to 17,240 in 2010 and plans are already afoot to expand the age group as from 2012.

The Georgian project currently involves 13-17,000 pupils in the 11-13 age group from between 1,200 and 1,600 state schools. The contribution by the national association has been considerable, bearing in mind that the project requires some 150 referees, up to 1,200 coaches, between 50 and 80 football association instructors and 80 volunteers to keep it running. The competition itself is organised in three stages: qualification phase, regional knockout rounds and a 16-team final tournament.

As sub-projects, the Georgian association is also organising a disability programme for, at the moment, 240 players and a 'football therapy' scheme catering for the refugee community – a project supported by the UN refugee agency UNHCR. The school project is being opened to girls in 50 pilot projects and UEFA's HatTrick funds are helping to educate 200 school sports teachers up to C licence level.

A similar project is about to kick off in Serbia. Grassroots manager Igor Jankovic outlined in Noordwijk a project aimed at upgrading grassroots football in the country, based on a league system which will optimise usage of the association's 85 mini-pitches. The official kick-off is scheduled for September but pilot events are already





Michel Platini, UEFA President, and Ronnie Whelan, ambassador for the 2011 UEFA Europa League final, with children from Dublin primary schools at a Football for All event when the Irish city received the Europa League trophy

football, as this makes them attractive to the media, to partners – or potential partners – and to the public.” As a result, big names such as Patrik Berger, Vladimír Šmicer, Tomáš Rosický, Petr Čech, Tomáš Ujfaluši, Tomáš Galásek and Radek Bejbl, along with some of the more senior legends of Czech football, have been more than delighted to

play the ambassadorial roles attached to age-limit teams, African aid projects and all the other events organised by the national association.

This makes it easier to stage annual grassroots ceremonial evenings (nine have taken place already) that are attractive enough to earn, in the case of the most recent one, 90 minutes of live TV coverage on the country’s main network. Awards for the best grassroots events are mixed in with the trophies presented to the best players and coaches in youth football, women’s football and futsal.

Grassroots at major events

This issue features an overview of the grassroots events during the week preceding the UEFA Champions League final at Wembley. But the principle of linking the base to the peak is spreading fast at European and national association levels. For the UEFA Europa League final in Dublin, for example, a Football for All event involving primary school children was arranged to coincide with the cup handover in April and, a day before the final, the UEFA-funded maxi-pitch at the Cabbage Patch in the Irish capital was officially inaugurated. A Road to the Final competition involving 2,000 grassroots players from local communities had special features aimed at encouraging a passing game and maximal use of the width of the pitch – with three goals at each end. Fair play was encouraged by awards for the most sporting players and female participation was one of the core objectives. In mixed games, goals scored by girls counted double – a feature which encouraged the boys to give them a fair share of the ball.

The DBU – the Danish national association – is also pegging activities to the European Under-21 final tournament they are hosting in June, creating high levels of interaction between the grassroots and the big games in four cities. Pre-tournament events are being organised in the fan zones, ambassadors have been recruited to promote the Under-21 finals at club level, academic projects have been developed in conjunction with Syddanmark University College and promotion of the final tournament has been dovetailed with the ‘end of season’ events which are part of life at Danish amateur clubs. But this is another story for a future issue... ●

under way, with six weeks of football festival in April and May, four more in the May–June period and six more when the scheme is officially launched.

The idea is to encourage 600,000 pupils in 3,500 primary schools to enjoy kicking the ball on mini-pitches within the framework of a fully integrated Football for All programme. As in Georgia, the Serbian association has to build an infrastructure which includes 102 local coordinators, along with 32 municipal and regional supervisors.

Benchmarks in school football are still being laid by the Ukrainian national association, which has been instrumental in offering grassroots football to 5 million pupils and training 30,000 teachers to lead football sessions at schools. But that could be a full story in its own right another time...

Disability football

How much disability football do you see on TV? In Noordwijk, Serbülent Şengün explained that this is by no means mission impossible and that matches in Turkey’s amputee league are now benefiting from television coverage. This is part of an ambitious four-year plan which pulls together the country’s various disability federations and other stakeholders (ministry of education, universities, local governments, private sponsors and Special Olympics) in the organisation of 14 leagues in four disability sectors, all under the umbrella of the Turkish national association, currently engaged in educating specialist coaches and creating disability centres. The long-term aim of the four-year plan is to increase awareness and participation levels among an estimated ‘disability population’ of some 9 million people, most of whom currently have a ‘stay-at-home’ attitude.

Promoting the grassroots

As UEFA’s technical director, Andy Roxburgh, stressed during the workshop, promotion is not an end product. But it is a valuable vehicle when it comes to increasing the visibility of grassroots football and encouraging people to take part. The use of ambassadors, festivals and award ceremonies in promoting the game was also underlined by the Czech Republic’s director of amateur football, Otakar Mestek.

“Each and every one of our bigger grassroots projects,” he told the audience in Noordwijk, “has its own ambassador. We always focus on linking our projects to professional

More Than Just A Game

What do Fernando Hierro, Jacob Zuma and Ian Cashmore have in common? It's not nationality, because they are Spanish, South African and Scottish respectively. It's not age either, because Zuma is a generation ahead of the other two. Give up? Well, the answer is that all three have been involved in grassroots football and are aware of its value.

At the UEFA Grassroots Workshop in Noordwijk, Andy Roxburgh, UEFA's technical director, made a comprehensive presentation reviewing the various ways in which the grassroots game can be promoted and the supporters of the future can be encouraged to take an active interest in the game of football. He examined the importance of the roles to be played by high-profile grassroots ambassadors, sponsor events aimed at specific target groups, campaigns designed to achieve pre-determined objectives, public events such as festivals and award ceremonies and exploiting the opportunities offered by websites and social networks. But, in terms of motivating and stimulating players, volunteers and coaches, there are few things better than real-life stories based on personalities who have emerged from the grassroots game. This is where the three men come in...

"I was a street player until I was 14 years old." These are the words of Fernando Hierro, who came from Velez-Malaga in the south of Spain and who struggled for recognition as a youth player. He played at the local grassroots club Velez, except for one brief spell at the Málaga CF academy, which ended in rejection. His brothers Antonio and Manuel were both professionals, and it was the latter who persuaded his club, Real Valladolid CF, to have a look at the young Fernando. The team from the region of Castile-Leon ultimately took a chance on the 19-year-old and, two years later, he joined Real Madrid CF. The rest is history. With three UEFA Champions League titles, two World Club Championship winner's medals and 89 caps for Spain, the former superstar is about to conclude a very successful period – including the FIFA World Cup victory in South Africa – as the Spanish FA's technical director. All top footballers were once grassroots players; some just left the grassroots quicker than others. Fernando Hierro arrived late into top-level football, but his patience and determination finally paid off.

When Fernando was one year old, the political prisoners on South Africa's notorious Robben Island, off the coast of Cape Town, created a grassroots football organisation called the Makana FA. Those fighting for South African freedom, including Nelson Mandela, created a football environment which was all-inclusive – it was football for all, with three levels of competition. A book and

a film were produced to record their wonderful football story and both were aptly named *More Than Just A Game*. Those who took part during the 21 years of the FA's existence on the island spoke about the importance of football from a social, health, educational and personal perspective. The game gave them a sense of purpose, dignity, a respect for democracy and passion. Football was a positive force which created hope. Jacob Zuma was a leading referee during the early years of the grassroots football association on Robben Island and is now president of the rainbow nation of South Africa, the host of last year's FIFA World Cup.

Unlike Fernando Hierro and Jacob Zuma, Ian Cashmore was not at the World Cup in 2010 – he was coaching his grassroots club in Scotland. Ian was a professional player who was injured in a tragic training ground accident and was then confined, aged 22, to life in a wheelchair. With remarkable courage, an overwhelming passion for football and unstinting support from his wife, Cathy, for the past 25 years he has dedicated himself to managing teams, developing players, raising funds and chairing club committee meetings. Ian's grassroots leadership was recognised last year by UEFA, and his work continues to inspire the grassroots players he guides.

Fernando Hierro, Jacob Zuma and Ian Cashmore have different backgrounds and different histories, but each of them has a grassroots story to tell. It may be a tale of football itself or proof that the "*passionate art*", as it was described by the writer JB Priestley, is more than just a game.

A love of football and what football can do can make a major contribution to society. At the same time, grassroots football activities can also nurture star players, countries' presidents and maybe a few inspiring coaches. ●

Fernando Hierro (6) shakes hands with Michael Laudrup at a match between former football stars at the Champions Festival in Madrid in 2010





Street football
in Croatia

Can you Master your Emotions?

Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand." Nelson Mandela is not the only political figure to recognise the social values of sport in general and football in particular with, these days, more and more governments, institutions, authorities and other organisations lending support to grassroots activities in the firm belief that they have palpable social benefits.

There is ample evidence to support the theory that football is a 'school for life'. But, at the UEFA Grassroots Workshop, the focus was on the game's emotional components. Elation, despair, injustice, frustration, anger... it's difficult to list the emotional states that can be generated at roller coaster speed during a couple of hours on a football pitch. Learning to master those emotions was the

Mark's involvement in the emotional sphere dates back to the time when he acted as a volunteer on a telephone counselling service for people in distress bringing him into contact with those who had experienced extremes of emotion. In Noordwijk, he reviewed the importance of 'emotional intelligence' in the world of football and gave the participants an advance glimpse of the book and e-book prepared with the help of UEFA and about to be launched in Belgium, England, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland under the title Master Your Emotions – or simply MYE to those already familiar with the project.

At elite levels of football, the ability to master emotions is not underrated. For example, the coaches who select players for Spain's age-limit teams insist that a young player, however gifted in other respects, is unlikely to pull on the red shirt if he or she reacts to match situations with excessive euphoria or despair. At the top end of the game, the sports psychologist has been a familiar figure in dressing rooms for the last couple of decades. But how can this be applied in the grassroots game, where the 'football for all' philosophy opens dressing room doors to players with widely varying cultures, personalities and temperaments?

The question takes on even greater relevance if, at the peak of the football pyramid, role models do not always set an example of model behaviour. This is easily translated into the grassroots game, as illustrated by a quote from a 14-year-old player which appears in the MYE book: "They tell us to play fairly, but then you see the referee and the coach having a slanging match. It's pathetic."

Such scenarios are nothing new to the more experienced grassroots campaigners. Many clubs have long since introduced codes of conduct for parents as well as players, with a view to preventing behavioural problems from spoiling fun football environments. Children and young people tend to retain and copy what they see and experience, rather than what they are told. As William Gaillard, UEFA's presidential adviser, said when introducing Mark Milton to the audience in Noordwijk, "if there is a lack of respect for each other, for opponents, for rules or for referees, it is a matter of great concern for UEFA".



Per Ravn Omdal, honorary member of UEFA and ardent supporter of grassroots football, at the workshop in Noordwijk

subject of a presentation by Mark Milton, chairman of the Education 4 Peace foundation, whose declared objective is to diminish violence in football and in society. The foundation was created in 2002 and, with the World Health Organization and UEFA also on board, initiated an inaugural international congress on emotional health. "Mental health is basically a scientific issue," Mark explained, "whereas emotional health goes beyond that."



Hence the support for the MYE project, which sets out to promote behavioural best practice at grassroots level (which coincides with footballers' formative years) and make sure that football's unifying forces are channelled towards positive social attitudes and, in addition to offering a lot of healthy fun, help to educate youngsters in 'life skills'.

Easier said than done – though Mark Milton admits there have been important advances. For example, many

generations have been encouraged to keep emotional matters to themselves, whereas "these days, emotions can be freely expressed and discussed and, at the same time, 'social skills' have become an important element in many career paths".

The printed and online material has been designed to form the educational basis for mastering emotions. The content goes into great detail, scenario by scenario, and is divided into four sections aimed at different target groups: children, parents, coaches and players. As Mark Milton said in Noordwijk, "this is basically a journey towards self-knowledge, well-being and self-responsibility, during which we examine the responses to a full palette of emotions".

A game of football can require players to react to quickly changing emotions and accelerated moves between extremes. Emotional responses to winning and losing, for example, can be negative if not properly controlled – to the extent that many grassroots football projects have extracted or minimised competitive elements with a view to focusing even more clearly on the 'fun' aspect of the game and stepping away from the 'winners and losers' syndrome.

This is one of the issues addressed not only in the MYE material but also in the 'lessons' to be found in the Grassroots Day section of the Training Ground on UEFA.com. Apart from result- and performance-generated emotional responses, the MYE book assesses

how the emotions aroused during a game can have an impact on energy levels, technique and ball skills, tactical awareness, motivation and concentration. Emotional intelligence is crucial to

prevent this from happening or at least to minimise the effects, and the material provides a great deal of food for thought on how this can best be developed.

Constant self-appraisal is one of the means to this end, with the 'inner observer' offering ways of releasing tension. Being equipped to deal with criticism is another fundamental weapon in the MYE armoury, along with the ability and readiness to listen. This was one of the qualities highlighted during the pilot session in Zeist, where participants were split into pairs. One was then asked to speak for three minutes on an emotional situation they had been required to deal with, while the challenge for the other person was to listen and concentrate for those three minutes without saying a word. The listeners admitted that it was far from easy...

Communication also plays a prominent role. For example, what are the best ways of saying 'no' or voicing disagreement or anger in a non-violent fashion? Communication is also crucial when parents or coaches are trying to educate grassroots players to master their emotions. Transmitting the right messages and making them acceptable to the recipients entails an understanding of present-day concepts of 'authority'. The ultimate message, however, is that learning to master your emotions is a big step towards preventing violence and promoting respect on the field of play – and then taking those principles from the pitch into daily life in society. ●



The football pitch: where emotions come alive

The obvious question is how the *Master Your Emotions* concept can best be injected into Europe's grassroots curriculum. Personal tuition is evidently the most direct route – and pilot courses have already been conducted. The participants in Noordwijk, for example, were shown images of an event recently conducted at the headquarters of the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB) in Zeist, involving a group of grassroots leaders.

Volunteering Information

When he was re-elected as UEFA president at the Ordinary UEFA Congress in Paris in March, one of Michel Platini's reactions was to express gratitude to "the millions of grassroots coaches and volunteers all over Europe who devote themselves to football out of passion and love for the game". There can be no doubt that the vote of thanks was well directed – nor that the contributions by volunteers are crucial in keeping grassroots football alive and kicking. At the same time, the diversity of cultures within the European footballing community means that challenges sometimes arise in terms of attracting volunteers into the grassroots game. This was an interesting issue addressed by Robin Russell, UEFA football development consultant, during the grassroots workshop.

One of the fundamental questions was to ask, quite simply, "What is a volunteer?" Most answers would stress the 'unpaid' aspect. But this is not always the case. In Denmark, for example, a large majority of grassroots coaches receive something akin to €500 a year. As Robin neatly put it, "volunteers may or may not be paid – but money is a token recognition of their work, not a motivation for doing it". On the opening morning, there were murmurs of appreciation when, during a review of the hosts' grassroots programmes, Ruud Dokter – coach of the Dutch Under-16 team and one of the KNVB's Pro licence instructors – revealed that he and his colleagues combine their 'professional' roles at the national association with volunteer work at club level in order to get a real feel of what the role is all about.

However, the participants in Noordwijk were quick to acknowledge cultural differences which exert influence on grassroots activities. Whereas the Nordic countries offer prime examples of a volunteer culture deeply rooted in the fabric of society, other associations are working in environments where no such vocation exists. The challenge is therefore to attract volunteers into the grassroots game and to attract them in a way that makes them want to get involved, rather than feeling obliged to get involved.

Robin Russell pinpointed some of the benefits which can make the role attractive. Volunteers can make crucial contributions, see the results of their work, feel involved in a project, fulfil their passionate interest in the game of football, go home with a sense of achievement, meet other people and further their own social, leadership and professional skills.

A survey of the sort of people who enjoy contributing to grassroots football reveals that volunteers are an interesting

social mix of former players, former referees, teachers, social workers (including police officers), students, family and friends, senior citizens who have time to dedicate to the game and friends of existing volunteers. Parents are obvious candidates – and it's not mission impossible to encourage them to become involved behind the scenes instead of just dropping their children at the gate and driving away.

An important factor is that paths into grassroots football need to be easy. Potential volunteers sometimes simply do not know how they can become involved, are deterred by bureaucratic barriers or feel that, although they possess knowledge about the game, they don't have the necessary skills. In other words, infrastructures are needed to make them feel welcome and to offer them appropriate guidance.



The infrastructures vary. The welcome offered by the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB), for instance, includes a tracksuit bearing the national association's logo – a simple and relatively inexpensive move which immediately helps newcomers to feel involved and to be part of a football family. The Scottish FA offers free coaching tuition. In Ukraine, PE teachers who find themselves in charge of grassroots football sessions are given a starter pack containing a football, a pump, playing kit, a tactics board with markers and an easy-to-follow book and CD on the basics of coaching. In the Republic of Ireland, the normal practice is for volunteers to be allocated to specific tasks, based on a user-friendly participation time of two hours per week. As Robin Russell remarked in Noordwijk, volunteers need to have a clear idea of the job in hand and should be given 'bite-sized' workloads that are comfortable to handle. As Piet Hubers, the KNVB's technical department manager, commented, "the most successful volunteer projects are those in which volunteers have a clearly demarcated role involving not too many things, but very specific responsibilities."

He also stressed that a volunteer 'workforce' is not just a question of numbers. The most valuable contributions tend to be made by genuinely committed volunteers, even if they are not especially numerous. Pointing this commitment in the right directions is therefore crucial – which leads on to

the importance of training the volunteers to perform their tasks and to perform them in a certain way.

Again, methods vary. In Iceland, for example, the 575 men and women who coach the country's 19,000



A group discussion at the workshop in Noordwijk

registered players have gained mandatory coaching qualifications. In Denmark, grassroots coaches are mentored for a year before taking over a team. The English FA believes in recruiting ex-volunteers to coordinate the training of new ones.

There is also the question of where the volunteers should receive their training. Many national associations feel that this is best done at the clubs and organise the educational sessions in manageable three-hour modules. Robin Russell, who has helped to design UEFA's online content related to the Coaches Circle, Training Ground and other educational projects, insisted in Noordwijk that one of the keys is "to use 21st century methods, not 19th century methods". His message was that today's younger generations expect digital tools to be used and that knowledge is widely available on the web. In other words, online content can be a useful tool in training volunteers and helping them to add specific skills to their football knowledge.

He also urged national associations to track and measure the success of their recruitment campaigns, in order to discover the volunteers' likes and dislikes. Retaining an enthusiastic 'workforce' is as important as recruiting it – which means that volunteers need to be offered the right sort of support while they are doing their jobs and need to have their commitment recognised. The importance of acknowledging their contributions is illustrated by the German national association's nationwide Thank You project, which has been designed to highlight and recognise, every year, the contributions made by around 3,000 of the country's grassroots volunteers. Many other national associations have also realised the importance of grassroots awards and, in some cases, the high-profile annual galas where awards are presented to the top names in the professional game also serve to highlight the volunteers who, as Michel Platini put it, "devote themselves to football out of passion and love for the game". ●



The Charter Challenge

Since the introduction of the UEFA Grassroots Charter in 2005, the commitment of national associations to this particular endorsement programme has steadily intensified.

Five associations were the original signatories and, with the approval of UEFA's Executive Committee, 50 will have signed by this summer. Once an association has satisfied the basic UEFA criteria, the aim is to upgrade their programme. The UEFA Grassroots Charter, a tool for development, provides the necessary guidelines.

The UEFA Grassroots Panel has identified four levels of attainment, from basic to premier, and the so-called 'star system' allows associations to collect the specific credits they need in order to progress up the grassroots league table.

Nine member associations have already reached the superior level, having gained six stars/credits, and three of those have initiated the process for premier level recognition. The difference between the levels can be summarised as progressing from the basic activities (such as numbers playing, small-sided games, courses for boys/girls, promotional events and introductory courses for grassroots coaches) to a premier-standard programme (involving clubs/schools, year-round schemes, sustainability, 11-a-side football, quality control, nationwide involvement, grassroots leaders' education, and competitions for all ages and all categories).

The UEFA Grassroots Charter has challenged the associations to increase and improve their efforts at the foundation level of the game. They have responded magnificently, having recognised that their grassroots work has an impact on the game (remember, every top footballer was once a grassroots player) and on society, because of the contribution that football can make to the health, education, integration and lifestyle of young people. The UEFA charter provided the stimulus; the associations have turned it into a cause. ●

