Exactly 20 years ago, UEFA convened a working group on the subject of children’s football, under the chairmanship of Per Ravn Omdal, UEFA Executive Committee member at that time and an evergreen champion of the grassroots cause. The members, including legendary Dutch coach Rinus Michels, produced a basic paper on the topic, in which they declared that UEFA and its member associations must take responsibility for this vital area of football development. “A successful top can only be achieved through serious and solid base work and this starts in childhood.” This was their collective standpoint.

Today, grassroots football in Europe is better developed and there is a greater appreciation of its importance and impact, from both a sporting and a social perspective. However, much more needs to be done, particularly when it comes to children’s football.

In my view, player development can be considered in four phases: the fun phase (up to 8 years), the formation phase (9-12 years), when the regulated, adult game is recognised, and the final phase (17 years plus), when hopefully the “flower” is in full bloom. In the case of the latter two stages, 11 v 11 matches, increasing competition and the gradual achievement of grown-up standards and know-how are core elements. But children’s football is another world, with its own characteristics and its own philosophy. Children are not small adults, and small-sided games are more appropriate for their needs and development than “big” games. Even at FC Barcelona’s academy, La Masia, where they work with talented youngsters, the small-sided game is the preferred option in the 8-12 age bracket.

In the fun phase, young children aged eight and under develop a fascination for the ball, acquire the thrill of scoring goals, get a lot of touches on the ball and play mini-games (e.g. 4 v 4). The aim here is to attract children to the game and for them to enjoy playing with their friends. On the other hand, the foundation phase, from 9 to 12 years, is the “golden age of learning” and the most important stage for mastering the ball, getting to know football’s basic principles, exploring the imagination, and developing a love of the game which, for many, becomes a life-long passion. In order to implement the aforementioned, there needs to be more emphasis on producing children’s football coaches, specialists who are trained to deal with the personal and footballing development of young people. Rinus Michels was in no doubt about the approach required. In his view: “Good coaches use the basic criteria of street football for their vision of grassroots development.”

Investment in grassroots football is important (youths, amateurs and veterans), but a commitment to children’s football is a must. Failing to recognise this and living in a time warp where the streets miraculously produce players will guarantee a decline in football’s popularity and its future development. UEFA and the national associations, as governing bodies, need to take responsibility for the football education of children. As the late Whitney Houston sang: “I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.” The 1992 UEFA working group on children’s football would have endorsed those heartfelt sentiments, and so should we.

Andy Roxburgh, UEFA Technical Director
The third UEFA Grassroots Day, scheduled for 16 May, has heralded an unprecedented number and variety of grassroots activities throughout UEFA’s 53 member associations. But, as usual, the epicentre is at the venue for the season’s biggest club event – the UEFA Champions League final. The focal point is the Olympiapark, the huge area surrounding the Olympiastadion, which, two days before the men’s final between FC Bayern München and Chelsea FC, is hosting the UEFA Women’s Champions League final.

UEFA Grassroots Day is the cue to open the Champions Festival – a four-day event which offers free entertainment to the public and invites them to “Join the Game”, as the slogan puts it. The UEFA Champions League partners have organised a wide range of fun football activities, children can participate in skill clinics and coaching courses featuring the Champions Festival ambassadors, Patrick Andersen, Giovane Elber, Jay-Jay Okocha and Willy Sagnol, and fans can have their photos taken with the two Champions League trophies or watch big names such as Cafú, Davor Suker, Michael Laudrup, Steve McManaman, Youri Djorkaeff and Stéphane Chapuisat showcasing their skills in the Ultimate Champions match, coached by Paul Breitner, ambassador for the men’s final. Steffi Jones, by the way, has been performing the same role during the run-up to the UEFA Women’s Champions League final. Grassroots futsal is the theme for the day before the Ultimate Champions game, with Portuguese superstar Ricardinho helping to run skills clinics.

Grassroots football is high on the agenda, with the Bavarian football association (with 1.2 million players, far bigger than many national associations) organising grassroots activities for boys, girls, men and women, from the most junior levels right through to the 50+ age group – not forgetting special sessions dedicated to futsal and...
various categories of disability football. Each day of the festival is linked to a different theme with, obviously, grassroots football taking centre stage on Wednesday 16 May.

However, the effects of UEFA Grassroots Day extend far beyond Munich. The German Football Association (DFB) has used it as a trigger for country-wide grassroots activities and a far-reaching review of grassroots strategies which could have a profound effect on the future development of the game.

As in the previous two years, the DFB has converted UEFA Grassroots Day into an “outreach day” aimed at strengthening the roots of the game by bringing as many as possible of the country’s 1,000 mini-pitches into action for local tournaments. The 2012 edition has set a new record by featuring games and tournaments on 775 of them. But the connecting thread is the theme of cooperation between schools and clubs.

The seeds were sown by the Team 2011 project which, during the three years running up to the FIFA Women’s World Cup, focused on developing women’s football via links between clubs and schools. Since then the theme has taken on greater significance due to changes in the German education system which require a review of grassroots strategy. School timetables that traditionally ran to 13.00 or 13.30 are now being extended until 16.30. There are several knock-on effects, including the fact that – especially in high-density urban areas where demand is great – some two hours of football on mini-pitches can be lost, with the result that activities have to be condensed into a tighter time span. Scheduling changes also became necessary given that the traditional training or playing time for kids’ teams is around 15.00 or 16.00.

On the other hand, the expanded school timetables open a window of opportunity for football to be added to the curriculum – and this is what the DFB is keen to promote at a time when other sports are also trying to target a diminishing young population. The situation is an encouragement for clubs to approach schools with proposals for coordinated football activities under the slogan “Schools + Clubs = A Strong Team”. The move has provoked a positive response among clubs which, up to now, have had enough players to live without school contacts but which now realise that, in the more competitive environment, collaboration with schools can be fruitful in terms of recruitment.

This strategy is being dovetailed with the DFB’s 20,000+ Project, launched three years ago with the aim of offering guidance to primary school teachers. Research had shown that 90% were women with no first-hand football experience. In general they were not anti-football, but simply lacked confidence in their ability to organise and conduct football activities. The answer was an eight-hour induction course which surpassed the objective (as suggested by its name) of offering information and support to 20,000 teachers. The project reached 25,000 and follow-up research clearly indicated that the teachers had gained confidence in their ability to organise grassroots games and tournaments. “It’s a win-win situation because we help to make the kids happy — and the teachers are happy if the kids are happy,” DFB director Willi Hink says. The result is the launch, linked to UEFA Grassroots Day, of a second phase of the project, also aimed at making primary school teachers feel comfortable about working with children in a grassroots football environment and offering them further opportunities to earn additional qualifications.

Another DFB project linked to UEFA Grassroots Day and to the Champions Festival in Munich is the second phase of the DFB Mobile programme. This is another scheme launched three years ago, whereby 30 specially equipped vehicles (with 10 drivers assigned duties with each) toured the country to offer demonstrations and skills clinics. During these three years, the DFB Mobile fleet has visited around 11,000 clubs — and the second stage of the project also dovetails with the School + Club programme by switching the focus towards schools as well as clubs. Moreover, DFB Mobile vehicles have been written into the script for the Champions Festival in Munich.

As has the handover of a maxi-pitch to the city of Munich by UEFA’s president, Michel Platini. The maxi-pitch triples the dimensions of the traditional mini-pitch (20 x 40m instead of 20 x 13m) and offers advantages in terms of logistics and flexibility in urban areas, while allowing tournaments to be organised on a very local basis in areas which are socially under-privileged and where parents would struggle to finance trips to away games.

The aim of UEFA Grassroots Day is to highlight and celebrate grassroots football right across the continent and to link it to the peak of the professional game by pegging events to the UEFA Champions League final. After the two previous editions at El Retiro in Madrid and Hyde Park in London, the programme for the events at the Olympiastadion in Munich has set out to break records and set new benchmarks.
Assessing grassroots activities with the UEFA Champions League final has become a well-established tradition. And it is one that is also taking root in the UEFA Europa League. Last season’s final in Dublin was the first major club final to be played in the Republic of Ireland and the same can be said about the 2012 season, which took the final to Romania for the first time. Bucharest had previously hosted the European Under-21 Championship final tournament in 1998, but the UEFA Europa League showdown was the first major club event to be staged in the capital.

Like the Irish, the Romanians grasped the opportunity to link grassroots activities with the elite professional event at their new National Arena. And this was two-way traffic. After its president, Michel Platini, had handed the UEFA Europa League trophy to Sorin Oprescu, the mayor of Bucharest, UEFA took the cup out to meet the public. During the weeks leading up to the final, the trophy went on a tour of the Romanian capital, with fans able to have their photo taken with the silverware that was up for grabs in the final on 9 May.

The competition kicked off two months before the UEFA Europa League final, with a series of tournaments in the six districts of the city. The Romanian FA provided equipment and organisational support and the preliminary stage of the competition was completed just before the end of April, with six district winners in each of the three categories going through to the city finals.

Matches were five-a-side and played on 40 x 20m mini-pitches, with each team deploying a squad of up to ten players and switching them around freely by means of flying substitutions. Games were 2 x 15 minutes with a 5-minute half-time interval.

Apart from the pleasure of taking part, there were tangible incentives aimed at encouraging the children to continue to play grassroots football. Each participating team was provided with footballs, bibs and equipment such as cones for training sessions. All the children received educational material and there were certificates for players, teachers and schools. The teams that reached the city stage of the competition received playing gear, medals and trophies.

The tournament also had to be underpinned by the sort of logistics that should be seen at all grassroots events – especially when children are involved. Medical attendance, for example, had to be guaranteed at each and every match. This entailed a considerable amount of communication work, as fixture lists had to be compiled on a flexible basis, taking into account the availability of teachers and teams. Referees were appointed by the local association in Bucharest, but security arrangements for the city stage of the
competition were the responsibility of the Romanian FA, which also took on board the logistics and funding for the teams’ transport. Drinks for participants were provided at all venues. And, importantly, the Romanian FA attached a promotional campaign to the event with a view to publicising the availability and importance of grassroots football.

For organisers of similar grassroots events, it might be interesting to note that the Romanian FA had to budget for all the items mentioned above plus the costs of football gear and accessories, the renting of pitches, refereeing, transportation of football material as well as the teams and, in some cases, areas such as protocol. The budget also had to allow for in-city advertising via flyers and banners, plus paid advertising in certain media.

The response to the project was certainly worth all the resources put into it. Around 100 schools in Bucharest accepted the invitation to take part, with about 4,000 boys and girls on pitches during the first stage of the event.

The next challenge was to effectively pin the Grassroots Bucharest Trophy to the UEFA Europa League final at the National Arena. This was achieved by scheduling the final “city stage” of the event for the two days leading up to the big match. The venue chosen was the Tineretului Park, an enormous recreational area in the southern part of central Bucharest, created during the 1960s. As it contains superb facilities for children and for sport, it was a logical choice for the climax of the competition, which involved the six district winners in each of the three playing categories. The games were played on mini-pitches in the park. Apart from fully supporting the Grassroots Bucharest Trophy project, UEFA also contributed to the legacy of the 2012 UEFA Europa League final, with its president, Michel Platini, handing over to the city a maxi-pitch which further enhances the opportunities for grassroots football in the Romanian capital and serves to commemorate the first major club final to be played in Bucharest.
Since the UEFA Grassroots Awards were introduced in 2010, the Grassroots Newsletter has simply recorded the winners in the three categories – which, bearing in mind the quality of the nominees, the slim margins between them and the amount of time needed by the jury to determine the “winners”, is probably harsh justice for those in the “nearly but not quite” category. Every year, UEFA invites its 53 member associations to nominate candidates for the awards, and the responses add up to an impressive illustration of the range, diversity and quality of the grassroots work currently being undertaken in all corners of the continent.

In a fashion, today’s Grassroots Awards have preserved the spirit which prompted the introduction of the Magnificent Seven in the year 2000. As stated in the letter sent to the national associations at the time, “at a stage when more and more people are obsessed with what they can get out of football, it’s appropriate to pay tribute to some of the many, many people who have put a lifetime of endeavour and enthusiasm into the game without the slightest hint of ulterior motives and, in some cases, without seeking to be paid.” The seven winners received an award at UEFA’s annual season kick-off event in Monaco – which was a way of pegging the grassroots game to “elite” events, in this case the draws for the two major club competitions and the annual UEFA Super Cup.

The Magnificent Seven concept essentially rewarded individual contributions. The current Grassroots Awards have expanded on this theme by offering appropriate recognition to grassroots projects, grassroots leaders and clubs which devote special attention to grassroots football. The spirit, however, remains essentially unchanged in that the aim is to highlight the invaluable work – very often undertaken on an amateur or volunteer basis – which lays the foundations for some impressive grassroots schemes.

The third year of the UEFA Grassroots Awards has produced a rich crop of candidates in all three categories. The winners will be announced on UEFA.com within the next couple of months. In the meantime, the selection panel will be discussing the merits of all nominees and facing the difficult but rewarding task of picking out the winners. Without giving away any secrets, the following few lines might give you a flavour of the nominations that have been received.

**Projects**

**Denmark:** the DBU is running a flourishing football schools project involving some 29,000 children from 247 schools.

**Finland:** the national association’s Fortum Tutor programme focuses on training grassroots coaches. Around 130 clubs and 2,000 youngsters are involved in the scheme, which will help offer specialised education to 300 grassroots coaches.

**Greece:** the Viotia project is currently focusing on educating and supporting local organisers of grassroots football.
Iceland: a promotional project features a series of visits to clubs which offer grassroots football to children, with the involvement of Freyr Sverrisson, coach of Iceland’s Under-16 and Under-17 national teams, and the charismatic, crowd-pulling Tobbi The Clown!

Montenegro: the Osetic League project focuses on four major cities, with about 3,000 children in the 6 to 11 age bracket offered opportunities to play grassroots football every week.

Netherlands: the ING Minis project, involving 500 clubs and giving Under-6 and Under-7-year-olds a chance to play football, has registered a massive increase in the number of grassroots players.

Northern Ireland: the Belfast Street League is a five-a-side grassroots football project which is proving inspirational in terms of social values.

Norway: fair play projects have been launched at regional level.

Russia: grassroots projects include teenage football leagues, 150 tournaments involving some 50,000 players in the 8 to 13 age group and skills development in Lev Yashin clinics.

Scotland: the Tesco Bank Football Challenge involves 19,000 youngsters, with 1,000 grassroots instructors receiving coach education.

Sweden: the regional association in Vaste Gotland has set up grassroots events involving 280 clubs from small towns and villages under the slogan “One Club in Each Village – Football Everywhere”.

Ukraine: the Open Fun Schools project involves 30,000 youngsters – 30% of them girls and 82% newcomers to grassroots sporting activities.

Clubs

Denmark: Kolding Boldklub has surrounded grassroots football activities with a social centre based on volunteer work, allowing the club to offer a comprehensive package of activities.

Hungary: the Szeghalom club has existed since 1926 and now offers holiday/training camp football for 250 children aged 5 to 14, with the aim of imparting positive social values.

Moldova: CSCT Buiucani in Chisinau also focuses on developing social values with grassroots activities involving 300 children in the 6 to 7 age bracket.

Netherlands: Sho Oud Beijerland has been run by enthusiastic volunteers since 1930 and now offers grassroots opportunities to players aged 5 to 19, with special emphasis on an Under-6 and Under-7 programme.

Republic of Ireland: Tramore AFC, celebrating its 60th birthday this year, runs 22 teams (2 of them women’s), organises a fair play tournament and has been named club of the year.

Leaders

Denmark: Benny Hansen has been a volunteer since 1956, is chairman of Glejbjerg SF and has contributed to grassroots work in Jutland, the Danish FA and various other sports organisations.

Hungary: Csilla Ugrai is an ex-footballer (with Hapoel Tel Aviv among others) now engaged in the promotion of girls’ football.

Norway: Atle Solheim has been a leading light at Selje IL since 1994 as grassroots coach, leader, organiser, motivator and standard-bearer for fair play concepts.

Russia: Victor Gorcov has been a grassroots leader for the last 25 years, playing pioneering roles in teenage leagues, futsal tournaments and grassroots football on snow or at night!

Serbia: Miodrag Maksimovic has been acclaimed as a great educator in Special Olympic categories.

Ukraine: Igor Kochetov, currently chairman of the Kyiv football federation, has got 27,000 players involved in the You Are Not Alone project. The final word is an apology to all the nominees who have had to be left out for lack of space – and an invitation to watch out for the names of the 2012 Grassroots Award winners on UEFA.com.
UEFA has devised a unique way for youngsters to learn about its 53 member associations, with a new Top Trumps game that mixes education and fun released in conjunction with UEFA Grassroots Day.

The third UEFA Grassroots Day has, as with previous editions, been scheduled for the week of the finals of the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Women's Champions League to celebrate grassroots football across Europe. By being held in the week of the biggest club fixtures of the year, the event emphasises UEFA's stance that elite football cannot flourish without healthy grassroots, while transmitting the all-important message that football is open to everyone.

Events to mark UEFA Grassroots Day are taking place in each of UEFA's member association countries on 16 May, but the focal point of the celebrations is in Munich, during the UEFA Champions Festival. As well as a number of organised grassroots football activities planned to take place at the Olympiapark, including skills clinics with star players and the finals of the Young Champions competition, visitors will also get the opportunity to win their own Top Trumps set by answering questions based on information contained within the cards.

The game is based on the popular Top Trumps concept, where the idea is to outscore your opponents with a particular statistic. The statistics in the UEFA Grassroots Day version of the game are geared around UEFA's member associations, with a card dedicated to each.

As an enjoyable way of educating players about each association, the essential figures are a mix of grassroots and elite information: number of domestic top-flight league titles won by the association's record-holding club,
number of men’s national team competition appearances, number of amateur players active within the country, number of registered female players and, finally, number of UEFA club trophies won by teams from the association.

So for example, Germany’s one million plus female players would trump all rival cards, while in the UEFA club trophies category the Spanish card would be the one to hold.

In addition, the cards contain details about each country’s capital city, currency and golden player, as nominated as part of UEFA’s 50th anniversary Jubilee Awards in 2004. Each card also includes a “Did you know?” fact, such as how Albania eliminated Germany to reach the quarter-finals of the 1982-84 European Under-21 Championship and how grass pitches were not introduced in Cyprus until the mid-1970s.

A total of 10,700 packs of these special edition Top Trumps have been produced in English, with a further 2,150 in French, German and Spanish respectively. The majority are being distributed to the national associations, which will in turn hand them out at schools and grassroots clubs over the summer. Meanwhile, the packs are also available to buy in Munich at the UEFA Champions Festival from 16 to 19 May.

As well as the physical cards, there is also an online version of the game on the UEFA Training Ground at www.uefa.com/trainingground.

Women’s football is Germany’s trump card

UEFA Training Ground

Founded in 2007, the UEFA Training Ground is the ultimate grassroots football resource, tapping into the talents of the game’s leading players, coaches and referees to inspire and teach those just starting out and those eager to learn more.

Since last year, the website has also been the online home of UEFA Grassroots Day, hosting videos, news and photos about activities arranged all over Europe. In one of the video features on the site you can find out more about the winners of the UEFA Grassroots Day awards, with insights on last season’s winners from the Netherlands, Finland and Germany showing the powerful effect of grassroots football across the continent.

The website also includes a grassroots calendar, so you can keep abreast of all of the activities arranged by UEFA’s 53 member associations for this year’s UEFA Grassroots Day, with information about the events and links to the association websites so you can find out how to get involved yourself.

Away from UEFA Grassroots Day, the grassroots section of the UEFA Training Ground also includes videos and news highlighting the best grassroots programmes and initiatives of UEFA’s member associations, as well as those championed by UEFA itself such as the UEFA HatTrick programme and UEFA Study Group Scheme.

Visit the UEFA Training Ground’s grassroots section today at www.uefa.com/trainingground/grassroots.
In recent years, awareness of the social values and benefits attached to grassroots football has been steadily growing. Many of UEFA's member associations are currently working hand in hand with national, local or European authorities on a wide range of projects which use the game of football as a valuable educational tool in encouraging and enhancing social integration. UEFA has offered support to schemes such as the Homeless World Cup which target marginal elements within society and recent editions of the Grassroots Newsletter have featured a number of programmes which have set benchmarks.

However, in terms of originality, a project recently undertaken by the Moldovan national association catches the eye. Many of the marginal elements in society lead to contact – or confrontation – with those responsible for enforcing the law. The Moldovan FA therefore collaborated with the ministry of the interior in a scheme aimed at promoting mutual understanding. The declared objectives were to humanise law enforcement measures, to offer greater encouragement for youngsters to indulge in positive rather than negative activities, and to promote dialogue between law enforcers and youths exposed to the dangers of drug-taking, alcoholism or child abuse.

A squad of 20 law enforcement officers (18 male and 2 female) was selected by the ministry of the interior. It was a good cross-section involving ranks up to the level of colonel. The first part of the pilot project was based on the 20 candidates taking part in a C licence coaching course, which is a prerequisite for all youth coaches and which focuses on the development of grassroots players in the 8-14 age bracket. The content of course included practical elements, such as the planning and structuring of training sessions, but also gave the participants an insight into the basic pedagogical principles of teaching youth players and the educational processes which have proven to be the most effective. For the seven-day course, the squad was divided into smaller working groups and there was direct contact with a total of 125 children during practical sessions in which the student coaches were asked to organise skill stations and training routines.

The course was supervised by the Moldovan FA's head of technical development, but most of the presentations and practical demonstrations were conducted by seven coaches – five of them female – who had earned UEFA B licence status. As a knock-on benefit, acting as mentors to the coaching candidates enriched their experience in organising grassroots football.

During the course, the law enforcers/student coaches were introduced to the universal child protection pledge which features rules related to the behaviour of players and coaches. This proved to be of great interest, with the
policemen and women agreeing that the implantation and enforcement of the document would be an effective tool in terms of keeping children on the right track.

As the course went on, the attitudes within the group became of great interest to the organisers. Some candidates had started with the mistaken premise that they would automatically receive the C licence on an honorary basis. Others set out on the adventure with half-hearted commitment illustrated by details such as reluctance to switch off mobile phones. But the course had, as the post-event report put it, “a profound effect on all the candidates”. The group quickly formed a compact working unit in which differences of rank became blurred and all were prepared to express opinions. They not only developed their understanding of football but also discovered how to read situations in different ways. As the report also mentioned, “some were exposed to Western-based thinking for the first time”. The course represented a unique opportunity to broaden horizons.

The next stage of the project was to offer the participants opportunities to establish closer relationships within the community. Eight clubs in the Moldovan capital, Chisinau, volunteered to take part and eight of the original squad of 20 were selected to work as assistants to the head coaches during a period of six weeks. The objectives were threefold: to offer the law enforcers valuable experience in the realities of youth coaching, to encourage them to swap uniform for tracksuit and develop relationships with young players, and to study the degrees of integration and acceptance within the team.

Again, there were initial misconceptions to deal with – and the Moldovan FA brought the various stakeholders together to clarify roles and objectives. But results were impressive. The law enforcers’ confidence and knowledge increased rapidly, with the head coaches willing to give them greater responsibilities and levels of trust. This led to an equally rapid increase in respect and bonding between the team members and the new coaches. Barriers between local communities and law enforcement were dramatically reduced.

The culminating phase of the pilot project was a two-day event involving the eight clubs which had welcomed the course participants. It was organised and run by the student coaches under the supervision of their instructors, with 96 male and female players in the 13-16 age group taking part. The students were given responsibility for coaching the youngsters in a series of skills stations, after which each law enforcer sat down with the players to discuss the behavioural rules set out in the child protection charter. The final chapter was in the form of a 4v4 round robin tournament played without referees in a climate which encouraged the grassroots players to work together and to find solutions for any problems or incidents. As the post-event report remarked: “This demonstrated that sometimes authority needs to take a step back and allow communities the time and space to get their own house in order. Stepping in too quickly can cause resentment and possibly even hostility.”

The Moldovan project provided a clear indication that a passion for grassroots football can be an invaluable tool in breaking down barriers between communities and law enforcement. The report concluded: “Encouraging youths to engage with police through soccer allows both parties to be involved in physical activity that promotes teamwork, communication, discipline and, most importantly, mutual respect. This was a point emphasised by the student coaches who, through their coaching experiences at the clubs, found that they were gaining respect within the community and, in turn, finding new self-respect within themselves.” Fascinating!
We believe in grassroots football. Full stop. Our objective is international promotion of the fact that football offers joy, opportunities and challenges for everyone – especially when played on a non-competitive basis with the emphasis on fun, positive social attitudes and a friendly atmosphere.

These words were spoken by Per Ravn Omdal, the former UEFA vice-president who is currently acting as the organisation’s grassroots ambassador. And they were delivered during a typically passionate address to the participants at the 9th UEFA Grassroots Workshop, staged in the Dutch town of Noordwijk in April 2011. Mr Omdal is, to put it mildly, quite pleased that the 10th is taking place next year in his native Norway.

But Per Ravn Omdal’s unsurpassable commitment to the grassroots game is not the only reason to return to Norway, where the 5th UEFA Grassroots Workshop was staged in 2004. The Football Association of Norway has long since been setting benchmarks – which is why so many other national associations express great interest in visiting Norway for events staged under the umbrella of UEFA’s Study Group Scheme. Norway was one of the five founder signatories to UEFA’s Grassroots Charter in September 2005 and, with the same four teammates (England, Germany, the Netherlands and Scotland), was the first to achieve five-star status. The Norwegians were also among the first seven associations to be awarded six stars and they are currently candidates for a seventh, which would further underline their benchmarking role in the grassroots game.

The core features of the last workshop in Noordwijk were the promotion of the sporting and social values of grassroots football, along with, as Per Ravn Omdal put it, “the crucial importance of creating mutual respect and understanding between the grassroots and professional levels of the game.” These elements will be at the heart of the next event, too, at the Ullevaal Stadium in Oslo, where one of the main objectives will be to analyse the effectiveness of local grassroots structures.

“We are a small country, so being selected by UEFA is an inspiration for our association,” says Kjetil Person Siem, general secretary of the Norwegian FA. “It represents recognition of the work we have been and are doing in grassroots football and provides a great opportunity to host all the nations in the football family and spend time together discussing ways to develop grassroots football even further.”