

EDITORIAL

THE COLOURS OF THE GRASSROOTS RAINBOW

This year marks the tenth anniversary of UEFA's campaign to promote grassroots football on a pan-European basis. The idea can be traced back to 2004, when the Summer of Grassroots Football was launched with the objective of engaging as many players as possible and, as a knock-on benefit, generating communication among UEFA's member associations. For the first time, they could be made aware of what other national associations were doing in terms of organising summer events and encouraging men, women, boys and girls of all ages to enjoy some football – some of it competitive in tournament contexts; some of it totally non-competitive on a fun-football basis. The concept proved to be so popular that, in five years, the number of participants declared to UEFA rose from 500,000 to 4.6 million.

But the decade of UEFA's strengthened commitment to grassroots football can be divided cleanly into two halves. After 2009, it was felt that the Summer of Grassroots Football had become too diffuse and, impelled by the UEFA president's proposal to move the Champions League final from Wednesday to Saturday, the UEFA Grassroots Day was born. The epicentre of the first one was the Champions Festival set up in the El Retiro park in Madrid prior to the final between FC Internazionale Milano and FC Bayern München. In 2014, the city of Lisbon provides the focal point for the fifth.

The evolution of the Summer of Grassroots Football into the UEFA Grassroots Day symbolises UEFA's approach to the promotion of the game at all grassroots levels. There has been constant questioning, a constant desire to review and improve, a constant commitment to looking for better ways of offering support to national associations, and no time for resting on laurels.

In terms of describing all the excellent projects currently being implemented by UEFA's member



Sportfile

Youngsters all over Europe enjoyed last year's UEFA Grassroots Day

associations, this newsletter can do little more than scratch the surface. But the following pages paint a picture, albeit with broad brushstrokes. The fifth chapter in the story of the UEFA Grassroots Day features an unprecedented number of grassroots activities along the length and breadth of the continent. At the same time, the UEFA Grassroots Charter is gaining further impetus following an in-depth review of its parameters and its objectives. And the pages dedicated to the 2014 UEFA Grassroots Day Awards represent a tribute to the sheer diversity of the efforts being made by so many dedicated individuals – most of them volunteers. Together, they paint all the colours of the grassroots rainbow.

Furthermore, UEFA is enthusiastically promoting football in schools, building on the basis of UEFA's declared conviction that grassroots programmes should be "vehicles for educational, sporting and social development". The project sets out to increase mass participation in conjunction with educational authorities and national associations and to use school environments to build solid foundations for football and to disseminate healthy and positive life skills. This is what grassroots football is all about. ●

IN THIS ISSUE

THE GRASSROOTS PODIUM	2-4
THE 2014 UEFA GRASSROOTS DAY AWARDS	5-7
A ROUND OF APPLAUSE	8-11
GRASSROOTS IN TURIN AND LISBON	12

THE GRASSROOTS PODIUM

UEFA's 50th anniversary in 2004 had major repercussions for the growth of grassroots football throughout Europe. Not only was the Summer of Grassroots Football launched as a vehicle for the promotion and recognition of grassroots events, but the UEFA Grassroots Charter was conceived with a view to encouraging and supporting national associations in terms of upgrading their activities at all grassroots levels. Regular readers might recall that, within eight years of the charter's official launch in 2005, the circle had been closed, in the sense that all 53 members – prior to the incorporation of Gibraltar as number 54 – had become signatories.

It represented an outstanding success story – and an appropriate moment for reassessment. As a reminder, the charter had steadily evolved to keep pace with the rapid development of grassroots activities among UEFA's member associations. A first star was awarded for a basic grassroots programme; stars 2 to 5 were awarded on the basis of 'promotion and growth', 'registered players', 'social and disability projects' and activities which encouraged the growth of women's football; a sixth star was introduced for a highly developed grassroots programme; and a seventh – the maximum accolade – for benchmark-setting programmes.

Various questions about the future of the scheme were posed to the discussion groups at the UEFA grassroots workshop held in Oslo in

2013 – and there was consensus that the time had come for a revised approach. There were uncertainties about accurately measuring the criteria which differentiated the sixth and seventh stars, while the process of adding additional floors to the structure was felt to have created an over-complicated piece of architecture. And there was a view that continually offering additional stars to the leading grassroots nations was not really encouraging growth and development among national associations who were further back in the field. There was also a clear need for the Grassroots Charter to reflect demographic and social changes which had become apparent during the years since its launch.

UEFA's plans to maintain earmarked financial and logistical support for national associations' grassroots development are now being based on simplified criteria which are clear, measurable and consistent. With this in view, the star system has been rationalised into three levels of recognition: bronze for a basic level of grassroots programming, silver for advanced level, and gold for the national associations where top-quality grassroots programmes, conforming to UEFA's benchmarks, are being implemented.

The simplified criteria have been honed down to prioritise the basic concepts of grassroots activities. Does the national association under review have a focus on increasing the number of registered players? Are specific efforts being made to retain players as they approach adulthood?



The team photo from the recent meeting of the UEFA Grassroots Panel, including the Polish hosts of the event in Warsaw. Left to right: Stefan Majewski, Bogdan Basalaj, Matthieu Bulliard and Frank Ludolph (both UEFA administration), Jim Fleeting, Willi Hink, Jeff Davies, Yevgeni Stolitenko, Gaioz Darsadze, Arnaldo Cunha, Liam McGroarty, Timo Huttunen, Magdalena Urbanska, Kelly Simmons, Otakar Mestek, Per Ravn Omdal and fellow UEFA grassroots ambassador Gianni Rivera (with Piet Hubers behind), Robin Russell, Paul Krähenbühl, Piotr Maranda, Lukasz Wochowski and UEFA's chief technical officer, Ioan Lupescu



Sportfile

Does the association operate an inclusive and comprehensive grassroots programme which effectively provides footballing opportunities for everyone? The revised criteria for charter assessments have been gathered under five headings: Growth, Retention, Education, Always Fair Play and Terms – and the capital letters have been used to show that the initials add up to GREAT. Which is why the charter is now being implemented under the slogan of helping national associations to go “from good to GREAT”.

The starting point for the new charter remains essentially unchanged. To achieve UEFA recognition, a national association is required to demonstrate that a grassroots programme forms part of the overall strategy. In order to lay the foundations for this, each association is required to have a committee and a manager or director who is responsible for grassroots football, a dedicated budget specifically assigned to grassroots football and the administrative costs of organising and running it, coherent targets and objectives for development, and clear codes of conduct in terms of respect in all its guises – in other words, there must be a firm commitment to offering football to all would-be players and to achieving objectives of social value, including the eradication of racist behaviour, bigotry and discrimination.

The Growth sector is evidently based on participation figures, measured as a percentage of national population or an increase in the number of registered players over the last three years. Recent statistics have confirmed rapid growth in the numbers of female players, along with a 2% increase in the figures for male footballers under the age of 18. The numbers are heartening in the context of a society where birth rates are falling. On the other hand, a significant downturn in the numbers of adult male players demonstrates the need to emphasise the importance of Retention. Dictionary definitions of ‘retain’ are generally based on ‘to keep’ or ‘to continue to hold’. But, in this specific footballing context, retention is all about offering incentives and encouragement for teenagers to continue to play and to make their football a lifelong activity – which extends beyond playing into roles as coaches, administrators, mentors or volunteers.

Ways of achieving this will evidently vary according to the social parameters of individual national associations. And best-practice formulas for player retention will figure prominently in the UEFA Study Group Scheme events dedicated to grassroots football. Success in complying with this key criterion in the new charter will be measured by expressing the number of players

In one of the skills clinics at the Champions Festival attached to the UEFA Champions League final, former England international Graeme Le Saux passes on advice to young players



Participants at the UEFA grassroots workshop staged in Oslo

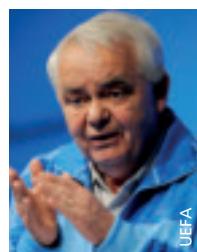
aged 18 or over as a percentage of those under the age of 18 or by measuring the growth in the number of 18+ players over a three-year period. This is accompanied by statistical monitoring of the percentage of female players in the total number of registrations.

The new charter also prioritises giving even greater momentum to the standards of coach education which, thanks to the efforts made by national associations, have risen considerably in recent years. At grassroots levels, UEFA's objective is to further enhance standards by increasing the number of teams coached by men or women who have, at least, fulfilled the criteria of the UEFA leader's certificate and, moving up a rung, those who hold the UEFA C grassroots coach certificate.

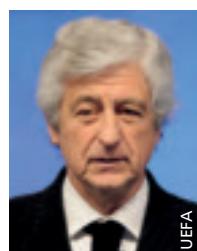
Under the Always Fair Play banner, signatories to the UEFA Grassroots Charter will be required to set up and run social programmes aimed at specific target groups such as disabled people, homeless people, orphans, other disadvantaged groups, prisoners and ethnic minorities – all with the clear objective of promoting integration and core social values. In addition, associations will need to activate fair play programmes based on UEFA's principles of respect and diversity.

Finally, the Terms section refers to the establishment of reliable working data related to clubs, teams and, at gold level in the new charter, individual players, who will need to be recorded according to name, date of birth and gender.

In practical terms, the revised charter will come into force in July 2014, with national associations being re-evaluated after the initial three-year period terminating in June 2017. Provisionally, associations currently holding one-star status will be admitted at bronze level, those with two to five stars will be given silver status, and the six-star associations will start the new cycle as 'gold card holders'. Obviously, the first important step for associations will be to verify the data they supply in 2014, as this will provide the baseline figures for the evaluation in 2017. The second step, for associations to ensure they continue to receive UEFA's earmarked funding, is to indicate the progress they are making towards meeting the revised criteria – and how they intend to use the funding to further develop their grassroots programmes.



As UEFA's grassroots ambassador **Per Ravn Omdal** said at the UEFA grassroots workshop in his native Norway last year: *"We have the best product in the world but we must continually refine it and adapt it to future needs."* The new UEFA Grassroots Charter represents a step in that direction. As Omdal added: *"All over Europe, coaches and leaders are organising football activities for millions of boys and girls, every day, year after year. UEFA's new Grassroots Charter will stimulate participation from all age groups even further, as well as improve quality in education and training."*



Italian legend **Gianni Rivera**, another UEFA ambassador for the grassroots game, says: *"The new criteria of the UEFA Grassroots Charter have been revised taking into account precisely this philosophy, favouring the reduction of differences between one national association and another and, at the same time, encouraging the associations to develop more educational activities for youths and adults, as well as stimulating and implementing control systems to facilitate effective support and to retain players for as long as possible within football family."* ●

THE 2014 UEFA GRASSROOTS DAY AWARDS

During its five-year existence, the concept of the UEFA Grassroots Day Awards has steadily gained momentum – to the extent that allocating the gold medals has become a task which is enjoyable and thorny in equal parts. Simply publishing a list of the winners does scant justice to the large number of very worthy nominees. In other words, there's more to the awards concept than the awards themselves. The sheer diversity among the contenders translates into tributes to the people and organisations who, in different ways, are the lifeblood of grassroots football in a wide range of European countries. So, as well as offering due recognition to the 2014 UEFA Grassroots Day Awards winners, these pages also pay a homage to a selection of the other nominees, on the basis that they help to paint a picture of the sort of work that is currently being done and that they may inspire similar ideas within other national associations, who may get a glimpse of principles which they can adapt to their own particular needs and objectives. But let's start with the winners:

Best Grassroots Leader

Gold: Pat Griffin (Scotland)

The 2014 award is a tribute to four decades of unstinting service to local and regional grassroots football, underpinned by love for the game and a special passion for the amateur and grassroots area of the sport.

Pat Griffin's name was still appearing on team sheets for the Milton Amateur Football Club's over-35 team until 2013 – when the small matter of a hip replacement forced him to hang up his boots at the tender age of 58. At risk of offending him, it might be suggested that his off-the-pitch contributions have outweighed the value of his performances on the field of play.

As his 'playing name' of Mister Milton might indicate, Griffin was on the list of founder members when the club was born in the Scottish city of Stirling in 1972. Since then, he has remained faithful to Milton AFC as player, coach and committee member and in a wide range of other roles. An indication that the club was being well-run was that it became a serial winner of the Stirlingshire Amateur League and even reached the final of the Scottish Amateur Cup. But Griffin's greatest satisfactions are derived from the way the club has developed over the years – not least the transformation of the old black-ash pitches at Bannockburn High School. The standard of the playing field has risen from the ashes to an all-weather artificial surface which promotes decent match play in all conditions and also provides reliable facilities for evening training sessions during the week.

The improved quality of the surface has laid the foundations for improvements in both playing and coaching.

Ten years ago, Griffin was instrumental in starting the Milton Football & Sports Club, where the prefix 'under' is applied to almost everything except performing. The club runs Under-9s, Under-10s, Under-11s, Under-12s, Under-13s, Under-14s, Under-15s and Under-19s under the auspices of its soccer school, plus the girls' teams and three adult sides. The number of players has topped 350 and is steadily growing as more children jump on board at the lower end of the scale. This has nudged the number of coaches, monitors and volunteers into three figures.

All this requires financing – and Griffin's total commitment has proved crucial in this field. Apart from leading by example with his own civil engineering company, he has invested a lot of hard work in obtaining sponsorship deals which are still helping the club to upgrade its facilities. Within Stirlingshire, the Milton club has picked up a series of awards – including an individual Local Service to Sport Award for Griffin himself. The UEFA Grassroots Day Award broadens this into a role on the international stage for a man who, as the Scottish FA's citation nicely understates, "*is a very well respected individual within amateur football... and many treat him in high regard*". So do we. Thanks for everything, Pat!



Pat Griffin has every reason to feel satisfied with his achievements of the past four decades



The youngsters keep a close eye on each other's ball skills during a Pro Amateurfußball activity

Best Grassroots Project Gold: Pro Amateurfußball (Germany), an eight-point campaign for grassroots football

The UEFA Grassroots Day Award represents recognition for a project which looks far beyond day-to-day issues with a view to securing the future well-being of grassroots football in Bavaria. The project was launched in 2011 in response to the realities of demographic changes in this specific region of Germany. However, it addresses fundamental issues which are by no means unique to Bavaria and which could easily apply to many other national associations within the European footballing family.

Demographic data predicted that a clear drop in the birth rate would lead to a decrease of 52,000 boys playing football in the 7-18 age bracket. At the same time, studies indicated disparities between urban and rural areas. The Bavarian association reacted promptly with a long-term scheme aiming to minimise the negative repercussions on amateur clubs in terms of finances, staffing and the numbers of qualified specialists or volunteers.

The challenge here is to summarise the eight points of the plan within a few paragraphs. The first was to strengthen ties between clubs and schools, notably via assistance to teachers in

terms of advanced training. At the time when UEFA received the nomination, 232 specific cases of enhanced club-school cooperation had been recorded.

A second challenge of the project was to maintain the growth of girls' football by creating new teams – and by inviting well over 1,000 girls to sample football for the first time via training sessions offered free of charge by 54 clubs. At the same time, support is being provided to Bavarian clubs with regard to crucial administration issues, such as player registration, taxation and legal requirements. On the field of play, the fourth point of the programme is based on enhancing the quality of coaching by organising additional education for coaches and assistants – the success of which had been measured by the participation of 1,283 trainers from 146 clubs. Training staff to streamline communications between the Bavarian association and its member clubs has been successfully undertaken – with the participation of 624 volunteer.

At the same time, the project has focused on raising the media profile of amateur football in the region, based on displaying the sport on web platforms and encouraging clubs to make their own websites as user-friendly as possible for children and to exploit social media to the full. Teamwork between association and clubs is

being developed by a series of round-table meetings aimed at maximising the exchange of knowledge and discussing how best to address the issues which are going to be crucial to the future of the grassroots game in the region. Last but not least, the project aims to offer maximal support to existing referees and to encourage young people to consider a career in that department of the game.

The Bavarian association's eight-point plan earned ten out of ten!

Best Grassroots Club Gold: FC Skanderborg (Denmark)

How can you choose a club that plays in the second division? The answer to that question is that FC Skanderborg have successfully married elite football with an extensive grassroots programme which reaches deep into the communities around the shores of the lake which bears the same name in the Jylland region of Denmark. One of the advantages of the club's pyramid structure is that the senior teams provide role models for the grassroots players who form the solid base – and the players at the peak of the pyramid are active in the development work done on the lower echelons.

It's easier said than done. The club has 1,100 members and runs no fewer than 66 teams. Activities are spread around six different stadiums

and training facilities – which poses challenges in terms of creating and fostering a 'corporate identity' and a sense of belonging. Priority is therefore given to social events and activities for children which bring the family together and promote the crucial relationships between the players and coaches at all the different age levels. The same principle applies to the coaches of the teams, who all attend induction courses aimed at implanting a mindset and a philosophy which permeate all the different strata of the club.

Fair play is one of the common denominators which give the club its identity. FC Skanderborg have long since been recognised by the Danish national association as a fair play club, which has clearly defined principles for the children, youths and adults who play their football wearing the club's yellow-and-blue strip.

The club's contributions to the community stem from the conviction that the status of 'leading light' in the region entails certain social responsibilities. Hence the extensive cooperation with local schools and institutions, epitomised by the decision to allow other clubs in the area to use the first artificial pitch in the municipality, laid by FC Skanderborg but, typically, made available to the entire community. ●

OK, the cheque is important, but the most important thing at FC Skanderborg is giving footballing opportunities to the whole of the community



Henning Hansen

A ROUND OF APPLAUSE



also encouraged players and parents to participate in grassroots activities by staging colourful children's festivals where historical and cultural elements blend in with the football. The children's football league has been an outstanding success, growing into a nationwide competition which involves almost 3,000 teams and 50,000 players in the 8-12 age bracket.

One of the salient features in the Best Grassroots Leader category was the high percentage of women among the nominees. Norway's Tove Iren Vindenes and Denmark's Maibritt Mathiasen, for example. The former has been an outstanding leader and coach at the Nest-Sotra club for the last 14 years, one of her personal highlights being leading her team at the Special Olympics Summer Games in Athens in 2011.

In the meantime, she was becoming a driving force in disability football, not only at her club, but also within the larger confines of the Hordaland region of Norway. The league for the disabled which she initiated in 2007 has been acclaimed as a benchmark competition within the country.

Maibritt Mathiasen was nominated on the basis of her inspirational role at Guldborg IF, where she has been in the chair since 1990. She has to address challenges of a different nature in a peripheral region of Denmark demographically altered by depopulation. The closure of the local school, due to decreasing numbers of pupils, meant that children had to commute further to receive their education. Her response was to found an after-school club aimed at promoting healthy living and community spirit. The way the club has become the focal point for social activities has made it a best-practice example for clubs and districts where depopulation has also become an issue.

Much the same parameters can be applied to **SPK Høken**, who took the **bronze medal** in the Best Grassroots Club category. The club, founded 80 years ago, is based in a community of only 453 inhabitants in a remote area on the island of Andøya in northwestern Norway, where depopulation is also a conditioning factor. Yet the club has 147 registered players and fields seven teams – making it a vital focal point for the life of the community.

Where there's a football there's joy – no matter if it's cold enough to wear gloves and the grass is struggling to stay warm

Denmark, Germany and Scotland may have climbed to the top step of the podium in the UEFA Grassroots Day Awards, but it needed photo finishes to sort out the medal placings.

In the Best Grassroots Leader category, Pat Griffin was given a hard run by **Daiva Statkevičienė**, a grassroots role model in Lithuania, who took the **silver medal**. She is a physical education teacher for kindergarten children and a volunteer grassroots coach who has made an enormous impact since taking over her current role in 2010, organising four festivals in the city of Kaunas, involving over 1,200 children under the age of 7. In the meantime, she was running 12 one-day seminars at venues all over Lithuania aimed at enhancing the education of grassroots leaders, while also playing an active role in the country's 'Women for Football' project. And she made an outstanding contribution to the UEFA Grassroots Day celebrations in 2013 by organising a mass-participation event involving 2,000 children, 450 teachers and 500 parents from 96 different kindergartens.

Victor Gorlov, the winner of this year's **bronze medal**, has also been deeply involved in events pegged to UEFA Grassroots Day. A former journalist and social activist, he is the creator, organiser and president of the children's football league in Russia, where his hard work invested in persuading big companies to become stakeholders has paid impressive dividends. He has

Alongside them on the podium are **Valadares Gaia FC**, winners of this year's **silver medal**. The Portuguese club identified a lack of footballing opportunities for women and girls in a catchment area in and around Vila Nova de Gaia with a population of around 300,000. To remedy the situation, the club established a competitive senior team in which the players operate as role models and ambassadors (or 'godmothers', as the club has baptised them), touring primary and secondary schools and working to attract more girls into the football environment and to support their development by coaching them during training sessions. Apart from running age-limit teams in local leagues, the club organises social tournaments for youth teams and solidarity games where the senior side contributes to social causes.

A prime illustration of the diversity among the other nominees for the club award is the story of Lithuania's **FK Simnas**, whose grassroots objectives had other obstacles to overcome – namely that the grass roots on their training pitch were being eaten by goats. This was the scenario when the club resumed its activities in 2004 with a Summer of Grassroots Football event attended by barely a dozen or so kids who were prepared to fight the goats for ball possession. But it sparked a revolution. The

persistence of a local teacher succeeded in persuading the owners that there were better grazing pastures for goats and, having got the goat factor out of the way, FK Simnas and the local authority combined to refurbish the pitch. In a town of 1,200 inhabitants, the club now runs three age-limit teams and a senior side and holds the Lithuanian record for the ratio of full-size football pitches to population.

Arguably, it was the Best Grassroots Project category which provided the most arduous task to the jury – or rather, the juries – as the verdicts were reached by a special working group, a bureau attached to UEFA's technical assistance committee and, finally, the UEFA Executive Committee, which discussed and endorsed the awards at their meeting in Astana at the end of March.

Behind the Bavarian project which emerged as the winner, the **silver** went to the **Coping Through Football** programme currently being run in England. The project is based on the chilling statistic that, in the UK, suicide is the second-biggest killer of males in the 18-25 age group. The root cause can be traced to mental health issues of which 50 % have started by the age of 14 and 75 % by the mid-20s. This was the starting point for a project aimed at promoting improved

The UEFA grassroots programme is helping to offer more opportunities for girls all over Europe to enjoy football





sportstitle

Match action from last season's Young Champions tournament staged to celebrate UEFA Grassroots Day prior to the UEFA Champions League final at Wembley Stadium

mental health by providing a safe and healthy environment in which troubled young men can engage in 'football therapy'.

It started in 2007 with twice-weekly sessions involving adults from northeast London. Since then, it has flourished – and its success has been backed by solid evidence presented in evaluation reports. The football sessions are used as a hub, around which a healthy environment is created via social events and workshops. The coach aims at maximum involvement by all participants, with an emphasis on enhancing self-esteem and encouraging the players to get on with normal lives. In other words, the focus is on treating them as football players rather than 'mental health patients'.

The vast majority of participants have reported important benefits. The project has helped them to recover a sense of identity, to address addiction problems (80 % success rate), to improve lifestyles and physical well-being, and to open up a new social world. The participants are referred to the project by medical professionals and it has been demonstrated that the programme promotes significant benefits in terms of reducing reliance on (costly) 'acute care' treatment within the mainstream health services.

This year's **bronze** medal has been awarded to the **Tour de Club** project run in the Czech Republic by the Prague Football Union with a view to promoting close links between the elite and grassroots levels of the game. All the professional clubs in the Czech capital signed up to the scheme, which basically allows players, coaches and other top-club employees to visit smaller amateur clubs to offer them support and practical tutoring.

The other nominees also included some original concepts, such as the project initiated by veteran players in Piraeus with a clear focus on helping to address health issues within the Greek region. The association of veteran players came into being in 1999 and there are currently 21 veteran teams affiliated to the project in which some 50 matches are played all around Greece for charity purposes and 'torch runs' are organised to increase social awareness and to raise food donations. Revenue also translates into donations to UNESCO and the Red Cross, along with local disability associations and aid to parents of children with neoplastic diseases. The project has also allowed a blood bank to be established and for defibrillators to be added to medical facilities. A clinic has been set up where some 5,000 players of all ages have been given ECG testing, while boys and girls are also being offered physiotherapy sessions free of charge thanks to the revenue generated by the project.

A different type of social benefit is being obtained from the Integration Cup project which embraces five cities in Austria and currently involves some 1,600 players.

The scheme, now one of the biggest grassroots events in the country, was born in Salzburg in 2006, when the customers of a Greek tavern expressed a desire to play football against their counterparts from an Irish pub on the other side of the road. The Greece v Ireland fixture led to a competition involving teams from other immigrant communities: Brazil Salzburg, Spain Salzburg, Turkey Salzburg, Afghanistan Salzburg, and so on. As the scheme became more structured, it was restricted to genuinely amateur players and one team per country. Now, in 2014, the competition has become 20 times bigger

and its avowed aim is to grow into a benchmark event for cities in other countries to follow. The statistics make compelling reading. The 2013 edition involved 154 teams, 1,694 players, 348 matches and 190 volunteers who played vital roles in an estimated 2,892 hours of work. For the record, the competition was won by Turkey Salzburg (2-0 winners against Hungary in the final), with the team captain receiving the trophy prior to kick-off at the FIFA World Cup qualifier between Austria and the Republic of Ireland at the Ernst-Happel-Stadion in Vienna.

In the same year, a tournament for women was staged for the first time, with nine teams taking part. As of 2014, two teams of players with Down's syndrome are also among the starters in a tournament which has been universally acclaimed and given full political and social backing.

Similar social inclusion objectives are behind the Get2 Football project organised by the Danish Football Association in conjunction with the Danish sports confederation, local clubs and the ministry responsible for children, gender equality, integration and social affairs. The scheme stemmed from the desire to offer activities to children regardless of gender, ethnic origins, social background or financial resources. In Denmark, some 30,000 children spend a week of their summer holiday at one of 265 football schools – but many are left out because of their parents' economic status. The association therefore pinpointed marginalised children and socially deprived neighbourhoods and offered them chances to attend football schools just like the other children. Clubs in socially disadvantaged areas are chosen to host the schools and this has been found to

motivate the volunteers and to strengthen ties between the club, the local community and the football association.

Still in Denmark, other national associations might be interested in taking note of the Action & Guidelines project which has been running since the 2006/07 season and which is helping to remedy the drop-out rates which, as mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, are becoming a concern. 2012 saw the publication of a trainers' manual aimed at grassroots coaches or leaders and focusing on how best to create good youth football environments.

The next step is to provide clubs with concrete tools to solve the challenges facing them in the current climate, based on documented knowledge and experience at 'best-practice' clubs in terms of their ability to minimise drop-out rates and to encourage former grassroots players to return to the game. In Denmark, the drop-out rate between children's and youth football has been reduced to 47% – but the figure is still high enough to justify every possible support for clubs where player retention is a major issue.

We could go on to analyse other projects such as the futsal scheme at Russian schools and universities which, last season, attracted over a million participants. Or the All Girls On The Pitch campaign run by the Østfold regional association in Norway, which has doubled the number of girls playing football. Or the Little Football programme in Lithuania which allows over 10,000 Under-7s to play football at 200 kindergartens. Or the Spartans Community Football Club in Scotland, which is a social project and a club all rolled into one. But those are stories for another day... ●

The 2013 UEFA Grassroots Day Champions Festival demonstrated that there's nothing like football for bringing together children of all creeds and social backgrounds



Sportsfile

GRASSROOTS IN TURIN AND LISBON



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UEFA Grassroots Day is a hymn to the 'football for all' concept, with disabled children encouraged to take part in games

The UEFA tradition of bringing elite and grassroots football to the finals of the major club competitions is being transported to Turin and Lisbon – the cities which, in chronological order, are hosting this year's UEFA Europa League and UEFA Champions League finals.

UEFA will once again be donating maxi-pitches designed to add to grassroots facilities in the host cities but, this season, Turin will be the scenario for a variation on the theme. The Italian city benefited from a profound renovation of its sports facilities when hosting the Winter Olympic Games eight years ago and, in consequence, has asked UEFA to present its gift to the city in the form of 'portable pitches' rather than the traditional fixed-location maxi-pitch. They are being installed on the Piazza San Carlo in the city centre to make their debut as the venues for a grassroots tournament on the day of the final, involving four girls' teams in the 8 to 10 age group and four boys' teams in the Under-8 category.

The UEFA Champions Festival is being set up in the centre of Lisbon where, in addition to the hugely popular skills clinics, training sessions with professional coaches or exhibitions such as the UEFA Champions League Museum and the UEFA Champions Gallery with more than 150 pictures, the adidas Young Champions tournament will be played, along with showcase disability games. The maxi-pitch is being donated to Clube Oriental de Lisboa, one of the capital's historic football entities based in the Chelas neighbourhood. UEFA's donation signifies a complete transformation of the existing sand-based seven-a-side court into a much more user-friendly surface. Construction work started at the beginning of April and the official opening ceremony (involving teams of 8 to 10-year-olds) will be the focal point of the myriad of activities all over Europe which will take place on Wednesday 21 May – UEFA Grassroots Day. •

Editorial group: Ioan Lupescu, Frank K. Ludolph, Graham Turner
Administration: Matthieu Bulliard, David Gough