

UEFA



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FUTSAL FEVER

As Inter FS regain
the UEFA Futsal Cup,
the indoor game
takes off in Europe

DESTINATION POLAND

Football development special
feature ahead of U21 finals

THE TECHNICIAN

Interview with Futsal Cup-winning
coach Jesús Velasco

CHAMPIONS IN CARDIFF

Countdown to the men's
and women's finals



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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

It's amazing how time flies. It seems like only yesterday that the UEFA club competition season started – and now here we are crowning the champions of our premier competitions.

This year's UEFA Champions League final in Cardiff sees two of the giants of European football go head to head. Real Madrid CF are looking to become the first team to defend their title since 1990, while Juventus aim to take the cup back to Turin for the first time since 1996.

The Champions League continues to go from strength to strength and fans across the continent have been thoroughly entertained this season. A record 375 goals have been scored since the start of the group stage, at an average of over three goals a game. Stadium attendances are also rising, and there has been a welcomed drop in the number of yellow cards issued.

I am also looking forward to watching the Women's Champions League final, with French powerhouses Olympique Lyonnais and Paris Saint-Germain vying for the title.

I am delighted that the profile of the UEFA Europa League has continued to grow. This year we saw two of the continent's most famous clubs, AFC Ajax and Manchester United FC, reach the final in Stockholm.

While these flagship competitions dominate the spotlight, we have an action packed summer of tournaments at all levels. Already, a competition-record crowd of over 10,000 turned out to watch the opening game in the final round of the European Women's Under-17 Championship in the Czech Republic,

hopefully inspiring some of the girls and boys attending to reach similar heights in the future.

These tournaments also give us the opportunity to test new rules that could benefit football around the world in the long run. For example, at the women's tournament in the Czech Republic and the men's Under-17 finals in Croatia, football's lawmakers, the International Football Association Board (IFAB), authorised us to trial a new order of kicks in penalty shoot-outs.

There is huge potential for us to develop and improve the women's game in particular, and I believe this summer's UEFA Women's EURO in the Netherlands has the potential to spark greater interest in the sport and lead to increased participation.

Five years after co-hosting UEFA EURO 2012, Poland will have the chance to host another of UEFA's most prestigious tournaments – the European Under-21 Championship finals. Not only do players thrive on the experience of competing at the highest international level; these tournaments also give fans the opportunity to watch top-quality football and solidify their life-long love of the game.



Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President



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Inter FS forward Pola takes on Sporting CP's Fortino. (*Sportsfile*)



Enrique Serrano



Sportsfile



PZaPN

A LANDMARK TOURNAMENT

Poland is set to host a landmark tournament in June – the first time that the European Under-21 Championship finals have been contested by 12 teams.

UEFA's official diary is a master of understatement. For the month of June, it simply puts 'U21' alongside the days between Friday 16th and Friday 30th. It fails to mention that the event in Poland will be the first European Under-21 Championship final tournament to involve 12 teams. Nor does it tell fans of statistics that this is UEFA's 21st Under-21 competition, or that this tournament marks the 50th anniversary of UEFA's original creation of a competition designed to act as a bridge between the youth and senior levels of international football – all of which adds up to a half-decent pretext for reflection on the past and present of a tournament that has steadily grown in stature over the years.

The record books trace the origins of this competition back to 7 June 1967, when Bulgaria beat East Germany 3-2 in the first match of what was then the Under-23 Challenge Cup. It is interesting to think that,

in those days, players in the Under-23 age bracket were deemed to be only just emerging from their development phase. These days, talented players tend to be blooded at senior level at a far younger age, as illustrated at EURO 2016, where one in five of the players in the eight squads contesting the quarter-finals was 23 or younger.

A short jump to the senior team

Indeed, since the competition's age category was changed to Under-21 in 1976, the hitherto long jump to the senior game seems to have steadily shortened, to the extent that one of the perennial talking points among those who coach at this level is whether players who have already made their debut for the senior team should be asked to 'step back down' to the Under-21s. While some vote against, others regard it simply as a test of the Under-21 coach's motivational skills and maintain that the

FYR Macedonia have made history by qualifying for their first U21 final round.



finals of such a competition add a nice steep gradient to the learning curve. The Danish team at the 2015 final tournament in the Czech Republic were an extreme example in this regard, with eight of Jess Thorup's starting XI for their crucial group game against Serbia having already been capped at senior level.

That tournament – the fifth since the switch to odd-numbered years in 2007 – underlined the value of the Under-21 finals as a springboard to major senior events. Portugal midfielder William Carvalho, who was named player of the tournament by UEFA's technical observers, went on to lift the Henri Delaunay Cup in Paris a year later, along with Raphael Guerreiro, Rafa Silva and João Mário, other members of that Under-21 team who made an immediate transition to the senior side.

Similarly, Sweden, who had their name engraved on the Under-21 trophy for the first time in 2015 after pipping Portugal in a penalty shoot-out, sent goalkeeper Patrik Carlgren, defenders Victor Lindelöf and Ludwig Augustinsson, midfielders Oscar Lewicki and Oscar Hiljemark, and striker John Guidetti to France, less than a year after they had lifted the trophy in Prague.

While the Under-21 spotlights inevitably illuminate the players who are most likely to make an imminent impact at senior level, the coaches tend to remain in dimly lit backstage areas. But their learning curves are equally relevant. Among those who have successfully negotiated the transition from the Under-21s to senior level are England manager Gareth Southgate and Spain's Julen Lopetegui, who lifted the trophy in Israel in 2013 with a team featuring David de Gea, Thiago Alcántara, Isco, Koke and Álvaro Morata, all of whom have since made their mark in senior national team football and the UEFA Champions League. Although all eight of the 2015 finalists will be present in Poland, only three coaches will be making repeat appearances: the coaches of the winners and runners-up from 2015, Håkan Ericson of Sweden and Rui Jorge of Portugal, and Italy coach Luigi Di Biagio. Thus, nine coaches will be making their tournament debuts in Poland.

First final tournament for FYR Macedonia

Such opportunities have been restricted in the past. For almost two decades, ties were disputed on a home-and-away basis. The first final tournament – in Montpellier in 1994 – involved only four teams, and the last ten have been contested by eight teams. The expansion to 12 in 2017 affords greater opportunities to players and coaches alike. However, there will

MATCH SCHEDULE

16 June		
Sweden v England		Kielce
Poland v Slovakia		Lublin
17 June		
Portugal v Serbia	Bydgoszcz	
Spain v FYR Macedonia	Gdynia	
18 June		
Germany v Czech Republic	Tychy	
Denmark v Italy	Krakow	
19 June		
Slovakia v England	Kielce	
Poland v Sweden	Lublin	
20 June		
Serbia v FYR Macedonia	Bydgoszcz	
Portugal v Spain	Gdynia	
21 June		
Czech Republic v Italy	Tychy	
Germany v Denmark	Krakow	
22 June		
England v Poland	Kielce	
Slovakia v Sweden	Lublin	
23 June		
FYR Macedonia v Portugal	Gdynia	
Serbia v Spain	Bydgoszcz	
24 June		
Italy v Germany	Krakow	
Czech Republic v Denmark	Tychy	
27 June		
Semi-final 1	Tychy	
Semi-final 2	Krakow	
30 June		
Final	Krakow	

still be notable absentees this summer, such as two-time winners the Netherlands, and France, whose solitary title came on home soil way back in 1988. The latter's path to Poland was blocked by FYR Macedonia, who made history by qualifying for the final round of a UEFA competition for the first time. What is more, they did so after achieving a modest haul of just nine points from their first six qualifying matches. But four victories in their last four games, with seven goals scored and none conceded, resulted in FYR Macedonia, who are coached by former central defender Blagoja 'Bobi' Milevski, topping their group ahead of relative heavyweights France, Iceland, Ukraine, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Their reward is a place in a thorny Group B alongside Serbia, Portugal and Spain at a tournament where the teams are divided into three groups of four and the best second-placed team join the three group winners in the semi-finals. The Polish Football Association has endeavoured to make the 21 games accessible to as many people as possible: ticket prices range from €3.50 for group games to €9.30 for category 1 seats at the final, and the six venues are spread out across the country. Group B games are to be played in Gdynia, on the north coast, and Bydgoszcz, some 190km further south. The southeastern cities of Kielce and Lublin – the latter not all that far from the border with Belarus and Ukraine – will play host to Group A, which will feature defending champions Sweden, Slovakia, England and Poland. Group C (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany and Italy) will be based in Tychy and Krakow in the south, which will also host the semi-finals and the final.

This promises to be a fascinating tournament. Who will emerge victorious from the first ever 12-team final round and lift the trophy in Krakow? And how many of the players on show in Poland will also be on the plane to Russia for the World Cup in a year's time? 🌐



POLAND IN FULL STRIDE

As Poland prepares to host the European Under-21 Championship finals, its senior men's team are dominating their group in qualifying for the 2018 World Cup. Meanwhile, the Polish Football Association (PZPN) is a hive of activity, launching new initiatives in a whole range of areas – everything from grassroots football and licensed products to the association's online presence.



More than 700 children descended on Legia Warszawa's training ground for the first two days of the national finals.

The last few days of April are unusually chilly in Warsaw. The temperature struggles to make it past 14C, with a gusty wind making its presence felt, but that does not seem to bother the hundreds of children who have come to take part in the final stages of the 17th annual 'Z Podwórka na Stadion' ('From the backyard to the stadium') competition. From early in the morning, dozens of teams from all over the country converge on Legia Warszawa's training ground, which sits at the foot of Stadion Wojska Polskiego's massive walls, going head to head in front of their parents, coaches and other spectators. No matter that the weather has failed to oblige; this year, the calendar is firmly on the organisers' side. With May Day falling on a Monday and 3 May also a public holiday in Poland, the Tuesday in-between is a de facto holiday for many, offering the perfect opportunity to hold the finals of this national competition over three uninterrupted days. Magdalena Urbańska, head of the grassroots department at the PZPN, which organises the event, expresses her delight at its success as she watches the various matches taking place: "We have a total of 754 children taking part in this event, playing for 64 different teams. These are the national finals of a competition that began at regional level back in the autumn. We had more than 320,000 entries this year." In terms of participants, budget and organisation, this is the biggest children's football competition in Europe.

Rome was not built in a day, however, and this success is the result of a number of years of hard work. While Poland's co-hosting of UEFA EURO 2012 with →



PZPN

Ukraine had been a resounding success, when Urbańska arrived at the PZPN in late 2012 (with Zbigniew Boniek having just been elected president of the association), she found a machine that needed a little oiling in places: “At that point, there were two [grassroots] competitions – one for Under-10s and one for Under-12s. They were two separate projects, so we combined them to form a single competition. That simplified things in terms of organisation – establishing schedules, planning travel, etc. It’s also better from a communication perspective and as regards finding sponsors. Then, in 2013, we realised that there was also considerable demand and great potential at Under-8 level. They love playing football too, so we opened the competition up to Under-8s as well.” The teams that compete in the competition are not club sides taking a break from their league fixtures; they are teams of friends put together by parents or teachers – grassroots football in its purest form.

The PZPN’s headquarters are themselves a symbol of how far the association has come since 2012. To reach the offices, you have to take one of the immense arteries that criss-cross Warsaw and follow it out to the west of the city. In a quiet district, just off the main road, sits a group of modern buildings – the kind where you would imagine major corporations renting offices. This is where the PZPN now calls ‘home’. Maciej Sawicki, the association’s general secretary, plays estate agent and gives us a guided tour of the premises. Passing a spiral staircase that leads up to the second floor, he says: “Four and a half years ago, we had just a few offices in this wing of the building. Today, we occupy all of both floors, with a hundred or so people working here every day.”

Growing online presence

Maciej Sawicki manages many of the PZPN’s initiatives. With his tall, athletic frame and purposeful stride, the 38-year-old has the hallmarks of a former footballer. He played for Legia Warszawa and was capped at youth level in the late 1990s and early 2000s. When his playing career was cut short by injury, he set out on a highly successful excursion into





academia, studying at Harvard and completing the UEFA-supported MESGO programme. His CV, which combines inside football knowledge and academic qualifications, made him the ideal candidate for the PZPN, although he maintains that he never intended to work there: "I had always dreamed of becoming a footballer. After playing professionally, I never thought, when my career came to an end, that I would return to football as an employee of the PZPN! But I had business experience and I came from a football background, so I had what it took to take on this job. Football is my passion and my life. At the same time, I know how to manage projects. I have various administrative responsibilities. My team and I ensure that things keep moving and get done." The PZPN also has a real asset in Zbigniew Boniek, a popular figure who has just been voted onto the UEFA Executive Committee, and Sawicki is proud to be working alongside him: "It's great to have someone like him leading the organisation. We've already made lots of progress over the last five years, and his popularity has helped. He is one of the most famous Poles in the world."

Boniek – Polish football's star player of the 1980s – took charge of the organisation in late 2012, succeeding Grzegorz Lato – Poland's star of the 1970s – who had been president of the PZPN for four years. When they arrived, Boniek and his team found an association that had struggled to establish a real bond with its fans, as Sawicki recalls: "In 2012, we had major problems with public opinion. We were poorly thought of; the PZPN had a very negative image." Today, the association's approval ratings



are constantly improving, with the percentage of people having a good opinion of it increasing from 18% in 2012 to 45% in 2016. "That's the thing that I'm most proud of. We've established a relationship of trust between the fans and the association," he says, adding that the PZPN has also been helped by the national team's results. Poland were 70th in the FIFA rankings in 2012; now they are 11th, ahead of both Italy and England.

The PZPN has also made spectacular progress in its online presence, especially on social media. The number of fans following the association on Facebook rose from 61,000 in January 2014 to more than 500,000 in January 2016 – an increase of 725% – and it is now approaching a million 'likes'. Meanwhile, the number of people subscribing to the PZPN's YouTube channel increased by →



"More people are signing up every year, and we are also getting increasing numbers of girls. Each of the country's 16 regions has sent two teams – a boys' team and a girls' team. And when registrations opened last autumn, 38% of the people signing up were girls. That's incredible."

Magdalena Urbańska
Head of the grassroots department at the PZPN

710% over the same period. Here, too, the national team's results have had an incredible impact. Several videos showing the players unwinding at EURO 2016 have been viewed more than a million times.

YouTube stars

Łukasz Wiśniowski, who manages the association's YouTube channel, explains: "We make lots of behind-the-scenes videos of the team, and during the EURO we uploaded one a day. We really get inside the team: we stay in the same hotel; we go into their rooms; and the players joke around with us as if we were part of the team. They're very natural, and the results are excellent." Those videos are almost like a TV series, Wiśniowski explains. The Polish public has really taken to them, and to their favourite players: "Take Artur Jędrzejczyk, for example – a defender playing for Legia Warszawa. He's not the most well-known of players; he doesn't have any social media accounts; he's not on Instagram or Twitter. But he's very popular in Poland, because he's the star of these videos. He's very funny – constantly making jokes – and people love it." Between people watching the videos directly on YouTube, people watching them on other sites and people



seeing them on TV, where they are broadcast by national media, Wiśniowski estimates that some of his productions have been seen by more than 5 million people in Poland. As a former journalist, he also endeavours to provide more serious, in-depth content: "We've done some reports about Poles playing abroad for foreign clubs. We did one with Lewandowski in Munich, one with Milik in Naples ... It's a good way to inspire young players, who see just how far they can go if they work hard. We also make real programmes in our TV studio at the PZPN headquarters. It's good to have fun

videos, but we also want to create a debate – be it about training, the development of clubs, coaches, whatever. That kind of thing may be less entertaining, but it's every bit as important."

Like all of his colleagues at the PZPN, Wiśniowski is delighted to have Boniek leading the organisation: "He's heavily involved in the promotion of our content. He has one of the most-followed Twitter accounts in the country, with 800,000 followers – far more than the association's account. He posts links on his account, showcasing our work. He helps us enormously." The PZPN's own Twitter account is also something of a success story, having increased its followers by more than 500% between January 2014 and January 2016. That vertiginous growth is the result of a highly ambitious digital strategy, as exemplified by the PZPN's creation of a gigantic online platform, which went live in 2014. That site – Laczynaspilka.pl – takes its name from the PZPN's slogan 'Łączy nas piłka', which means 'United by football'. The concept is a simple one, and Maciej Sawicki sums it up in a couple of sentences: "The site fosters communication between everyone involved in the world of football – administrators, fans, players, referees, children, coaches, and so on. Everyone can go there and access information on the national teams, as well as seeing the results of hundreds of matches taking place across the country every week." The vast majority of those matches are at amateur level, but the site treats them in exactly the same way as it does the professional game. "Even for children's matches, the result is online 15 minutes after the final whistle. Within 24 hours, a match report is published, showing the line-ups, goalscorers, substitutes, and so on. That creates interest, with everyone wanting to see the results for their team or their competition."

A draw ceremony to rival the pros

In less than three years, that portal has become one of the country's most frequented websites, with hundreds of thousands of unique visitors and about 5 million page views every month.



The project's success owes much to UEFA and the funding provided by its HatTrick programme, as Sawicki is quick to acknowledge: "We are grateful to UEFA, who have supported us financially in this project through the HatTrick programme. That has allowed us to engage with large numbers of fans, which has greatly contributed to the promotion and development of football in Poland."

The PZPN's endeavours to engage with people online have been accompanied by other efforts to reach out to fans up and down the country. The 'Z Podwórka na Stadion' competition is one such initiative. For months, teams have been competing in each of Poland's 16 regions, seeking to qualify for the national finals in Warsaw. Magdalena Urbańska is pleased with her project's success on numerous levels: "More people are signing up every year, and we are also getting increasing numbers of girls. Each of the country's 16 regions has sent two teams – a boys' team and a girls' team. And when registrations opened last autumn, 38% of the people signing up were girls. That's incredible." Women's football in general is booming in Poland, with the PZPN using special funding from the UEFA women's football development programme launched in 2012 to run coach education programmes for women and establish a national championship for Under-13 girls. Women's football clubs have also been given new equipment, such as cameras to film their matches and training sessions.

Urbańska lists more of the competition's successes: "People have come from all over the country to take part in these finals – some from far away and from small towns out in the countryside. The association pays for their travel and hotels, with many players visiting the capital for the very first time. Emotions run high; it's about far more than just playing football. The most important thing is that they have fun and carry on playing football after the competition has ended."

This year, in order to give participants the full tournament experience, the PZPN decided to go big, organising a grand draw ceremony on 29 April, the eve of the event, to determine the groups for the finals. The location of the draw –



"In the qualifying competition for EURO 2016, we had the second best crowd figures in Europe, with an average of 50,000 spectators. And that has continued in our qualifying matches for the World Cup."

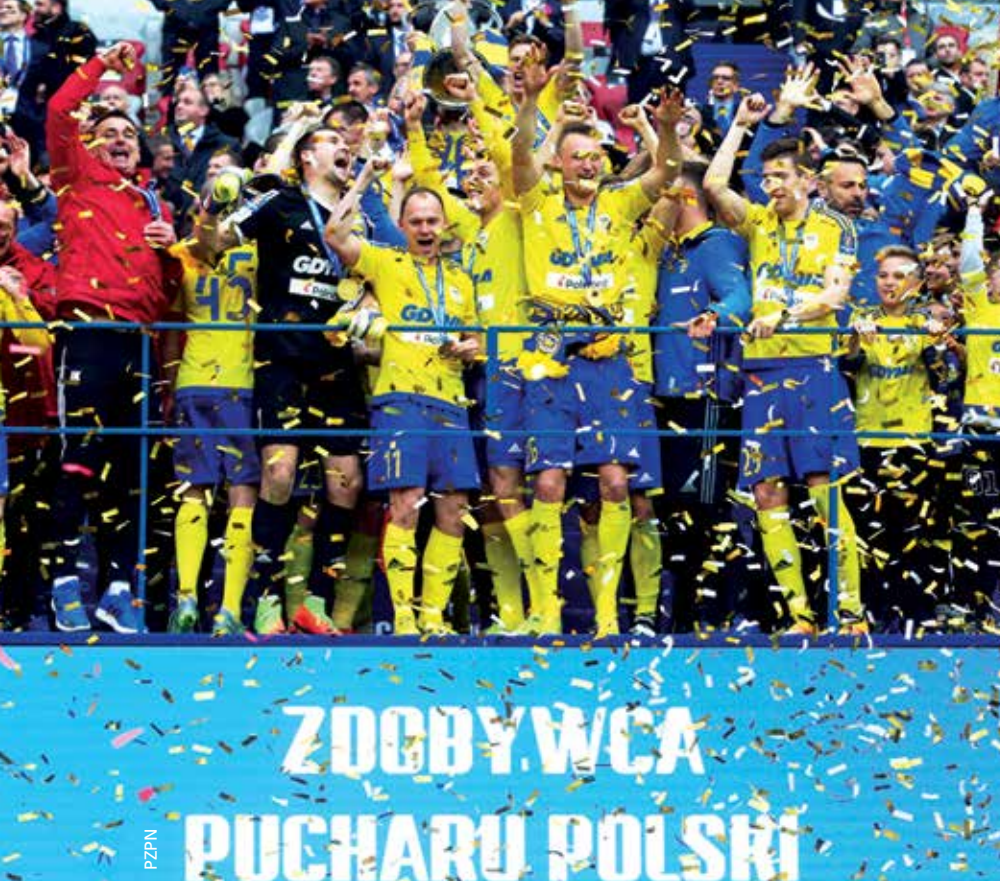
Maciej Sawicki
General secretary of the PZPN

right outside Warsaw's imposing National Stadium on the right bank of the river Vistula – was no coincidence, as although the first two days of football were set to take place at Legia Warszawa's training ground, the finals for each category would be played at the National Stadium on 2 May, just before the Polish Cup final.

As the children filed in to take their seats at the glamorous draw ceremony, they were accompanied by the roar of drums, with the hundreds of seats filling up in no time at all. As with all the biggest competitions, the people with the weighty responsibility of conducting the draw picked the balls out under the watchful eye of Zbigniew Boniek and other PZPN officials. Also looking on was Bielik, the association's white eagle mascot – another recent initiative that has proved very popular with young fans. Those formalities, which were conducted with the utmost precision, were punctuated by musical performances by young electro-violinist Tomasz Dolski, a local star who made his name in a TV talent show.

Bringing football into everyday lives

Maciej Sawicki stresses the competition's importance for the association: "That is one of the most important things – fostering and promoting grassroots football." Another initiative involves the establishment of football academies →



The tournament ended at the National Stadium ahead of the Polish Cup final, in which Arka Gdynia beat KKS Lech Poznań 2-1.

across Poland, allowing young players to hone their skills free of charge with the support of UEFA-qualified coaches. "We call these 'eagle academies'," Sawicki explains. "We have already opened 25 in the last two years, and we hope to make it to 45 in the near future. Children come and take part in talent-spotting days, with the best players being selected to train at the academies. This allows us to supply the clubs with good players, and everything is paid for by the association." Magdalena Urbańska stresses another advantage of all these projects – the fact that they allow the association to register all the football fans in the country: "When people sign up for a competition or a programme, they go into our database. Our objective is to identify as many people as possible who play or are fans of football and to communicate with them."

In order to go further and make football a bigger part of Polish people's everyday lives, the association has launched a major sales programme for licensed products. Agnieszka Prachniak, head of the general secretary's office, provides an overview of the various elements of this programme: "We wanted to ensure that the programme made commercial sense, and revenue is reinvested. Developing and promoting football are the most important things for us. We are reaching out to people and bringing supporters together – even in the smallest of villages." With this in



The PZPN's YouTube channel and its behind-the-scenes take on life in the national team is a hit with the Polish public.



A popular figure in Poland, PZPN president Zbigniew Boniek joined the children at the tournament.

mind, the PZPN has concluded contracts with numerous companies in recent years, sending more than 250 different licensed products to market.

Prachniak stands in front of a large glass cabinet displaying a selection of products, highlighting their commercial success: "The products for children are always popular; we sell a lot of diaries at the beginning of the school year; and all the children want a notebook with Lewandowski on it! Our products are available throughout the country." The PZPN sells all manner of things in the colours of the national team – everything from gadgets and accessories to pens and chocolate bars – and business is booming. Indeed, it was not for nothing that UEFA awarded the PZPN the prize for the best commercial partnership in its 2016 KISS Marketing Awards. The PZPN currently sells more than 11 million products a year, has signed contracts with a total of 22 partners and organises everything itself, without recourse to external agencies. It also has exclusive ownership of the image rights of its players, who are not allowed to appear anywhere in the national team's colours without the PZPN's consent. "If they want to have their photo taken with the shirt, they have to ask us," Prachniak says.

Budget doubled in four years

The PZPN's senior management are pleased with how things are going, but they have no intention of resting on their laurels and want to see that growth continue. The outlook remains bright, with the PZPN continuing to profit from the good results achieved by the men's national team, who lead their qualifying group for the 2018 World Cup by some distance. Moreover, thanks to the brand-new stadiums that were built for EURO 2012, fans are able to watch matches in optimal conditions, much to the pleasure of Maciej Sawicki: "In the qualifying competition for EURO 2016, we had the second best crowd figures in Europe, with an average of 50,000 spectators. And that has continued in our qualifying matches for the World Cup."

In June, Poland will play host to the European Under-21 Championship finals, and here, too, Sawicki has cause to smile: "We have already sold 60% of all tickets.



Poland's matches are all sold out, as are the semi-finals and the final." Looking beyond the country's grand new stadiums hosting tens of thousands of spectators, the PZPN wants to give everyone the chance to play, and to do so all year round: "We have more than 2,600 artificial mini-pitches. We also intend to build covered pitches, so that we can continue to play when conditions are bad."



"We wanted to ensure that the programme made commercial sense, and revenue is reinvested. Developing and promoting football are the most important things for us. We are reaching out to people and bringing supporters together – even in the smallest of villages."

Agnieszka Prachniak
Head of the PZPN general secretary's office

The PZPN intends to continue on its current path, redistributing money in an intelligent manner and benefiting from various opportunities and UEFA programmes: "We have achieved all of this with the aid of UEFA. We are particularly grateful for the GROW marketing support project, which is an excellent initiative and has helped us greatly. Without funding, it's impossible to implement good projects, but we've also benefited from UEFA's expertise. The people at UEFA provide support by giving us the benefit of their know-how and experience, helping us to improve our projects and make them truly effective." The PZPN's budget has doubled in the last four years, and Poland now has 350,000 active players. "That's not a huge number," Sawicki says, explaining that the target for the next few years is to get 3% of the Polish population – more than a million people – playing the game. It is clear that the Polish eagle has not yet finished spreading its wings. 🦅





Sportsfile

INTER REIGN SUPREME AGAIN

Inter FS have claimed their fourth UEFA Futsal Cup title after an eight-year wait, seeing off Sporting CP 7-0 in an otherwise closely fought final four in Almaty.

When Inter FS won three UEFA Futsal Cups between 2004 and 2009, they seemed set to dominate the European club game. But after losing the 2010 final in extra time to SL Benfica, the Madrid side began to find themselves eclipsed. At first Barcelona took over as the pre-eminent Spanish force, and then when Inter returned to Europe, their next final was in 2016, when as hosts they lost to competition debutants TTG Ugra Yugorsk of Russia.

Twelve months on, Inter are European champions again. And while they fell short on home territory last year, Jesús Velasco's side travelled more than 8,000km to Almaty and defeated Sporting Clube de Portugal by a record 7-0 margin in this year's final.

As well as Sporting, holders Ugra qualified for the final four along with Kairat Almaty, the 2013 and 2015 champions who were picked to host the event. Kairat qualified in 2011, and coincidentally Sporting finished

second on that occasion too, and Kairat also emulated their bronze medal from six seasons ago this time around.

Record number of teams

A record 52 teams entered the competition but in the end, of the four seeds given byes to the elite round only FC Dynamo missed the finals, pipped by Sporting on goal difference.

The draw held at half-time of Kazakhstan's football Super Cup – won by Kairat Almaty's namesake 11-a-side club – paired the hosts with Inter, and Ugra against Sporting. At the end of April, the clubs arrived for the finals themselves, held at Almaty Arena, newly built for the 2017 Winter Universiade.

Sporting, the only club in the finals to have never won the title and the sole main round survivors, started as outsiders against Ugra but never looked it once play got under way. The Portuguese team tore into their opponents but it took until the second half

For the 2018/19 season, the competition will be renamed the UEFA Futsal Champions League.

for Alex Merlim and Dieguinho to put them in control before Vladislav Shayakhmetov set up a nervous finish. This 2-1 loss was Ugra's first experience of European defeat.

That was swiftly followed by the showdown between Inter and Kairat, backed by a crowd of 10,238, the second highest in UEFA Futsal Cup history. If the first semi-final had sometimes been cagey, this was a pulsating affair, with Cabreúva putting Kairat ahead early on. Ricardinho then equalised after another of his magical skill tricks, only for Igor to make it 2-1 to the hosts at the break. Inter levelled again when Ricardinho converted a penalty and it was his corner, turned in by Ortiz's deflected shot, that won the game with 78 seconds left.

That put Inter into their seventh final, one ahead of Dynamo's record, and in fact their record of coming through semi-finals now stands at played six, won six (there were no semi-finals in 2003/04).

See-saw struggle

Despite the disappointment, around 8,000 fans were back at the arena two days later to see Kairat tackle Ugra for bronze. And they were well rewarded. Three times Ugra led, only for Kairat to equalise swiftly each time. Then the hosts edged ahead and although Divanei put in an own goal he then scored what seemed to be the winner for Kairat. However, Marcênio struck with just 20 seconds left to force penalties for the sixth time in 11 third-place play-offs (which unlike the other fixtures cannot go to extra time).

Higuaita, the Kairat and Kazakhstan goalkeeper whose ability to roam outfield with a powerful shot has been so key to those teams' rise up the futsal ranks, had been relatively quiet by his standards but the shoot-out allowed him to come to life, and after he saved Ugra's second kick from Dmitri Lyskov, Kairat held their nerve and Douglas Junior converted what proved to be the winning penalty to make it 3-2.

Those first three games had gone to the wire. The final did not. Once Fabricio Bastezini put Inter into a seventh-minute lead, Sporting were playing catch-up. Sporting did not wilt, even after Lolo made it 2-0 before half-time, but the start of the second period proved fatal for the Lions' chances. First Ricardinho feigned a crossed kick-in, only to tap it to Rafael to lash in. Then, soon after, Ortiz showed similar trickiness, again making to smash a free-kick but instead subtly back-heeling to

RESULTS

28 April 2017

Semi-finals

TTG-Ugra Yugorsk 1-2 **Sporting**

Clube de Portugal

Referees: Saša Tomić (Croatia) /

Gábor Kovács (Hungary)

Inter FS 3-2 Kairat Almaty

Referees: Bogdan Sorescu (Romania) /

Alessandro Malfer (Italy)

30 April 2017

Match for third place

TTG-Ugra Yugorsk 5-5 **Kairat Almaty**

Kairat win 2-3 on penalties

Referees: Alessandro Malfer (Italy) /

Gábor Kovács (Hungary)

Final

Sporting Clube de Portugal 0-7 **Inter FS**

Referees: Saša Tomić (Croatia) /

Bogdan Sorescu (Romania)

Inter defender Lolo scored the second of the Spaniards' seven goals against Sporting in the final, despite the best efforts of Brazilian opponent Dieguinho.

allow Mario Rivillos to advance and score.

Not giving up, Sporting went for broke with Merlim as flying goalkeeper, but that allowed Inter to score three times from their own half into an empty net, the first by Rivillos and the next two brilliant displays of technique by Ricardinho. Never before had a team scored seven goals in a UEFA Futsal Cup final.

Welcome to the Futsal Champions League

In a season where he became only the seventh player to pass 40 UEFA Futsal Cup goals, the final four's top scorer, Ricardinho, celebrated his second title after 2010. As a teenager he lost the 2004 final with Benfica against Inter. "This club needs to be at the top in Europe again," Ricardinho said. "Last year, we could not win this trophy at home but this evening, with the 7-0, we showed we are the best."

It was also a second title for veterans of Inter's 2009 triumph Ortiz and Jesús Herrero. Inter now stand two UEFA Futsal Cups clear of any other club, while Spain can boast eight victories in the 16 editions to date.

As for the competition itself, it will undergo its second revamp in 2017/18 ahead of being renamed the UEFA Futsal Champions League in 2018/19. The first relaunch saw the introduction of the final four in 2006/07; next season the three highest-ranked nations (Spain, Russia and Portugal) will receive two automatic entries for the first time, with Italy also benefitting from two berths thanks to a Spanish victory this season. Whoever the contenders are, though, it will be a tough task to deny Inter a fifth crown. 🏆



Sportsfile

BOOM TIME FOR FUTSAL

Invented in Uruguay in 1930, futsal is now played all around the world. For many years, Europe lagged behind, but it will soon boast a number of new competitions, boosting futsal's media profile and supporting growth in the sport.

THE STORY SO FAR



South American spread



European spread

Futsal invented by Juan Carlos Ceriani

1930



Creation of FIFUSA in Rio de Janeiro

1971

João Havelange becomes FIFUSA President

1974

João Havelange becomes FIFA President



Futsal appears in Europe

1975



Impressive crowds turned out for this season's UEFA Futsal Cup finals in Almaty, Kazakhstan, as the indoor game's popularity starts to soar.

The UEFA Champions League will soon have a new little sister.

As of the 2018/19 season, the UEFA Futsal Cup, which is contested by all the top clubs in Europe, will be renamed the UEFA Futsal Champions League. This new identity, which forms part of the futsal development strategy that was unveiled by the UEFA Executive Committee on 4 April, will help the competition to cement its position within the sport.

A couple of brand new competitions are also being launched with a view to supporting the development of futsal – a European Women's Futsal Championship and a European Under-19 Futsal Championship. Moreover, from now on, the Futsal EURO will take place every four years, with 16 teams taking part, rather than being contested by 12 teams every two years. These new and improved competitions aim to respond to the strong growth in demand in Europe, which had previously been slow in taking to futsal in comparison with South America. Indeed, while the precise origins of football are a matter of debate, with nobody able to pin it down to a single creator, the birthplace of futsal is indisputable.

A visionary inventor

Juan Carlos Ceriani invented futsal – which was originally called 'fútbol de salón' in Spanish or 'futebol de salão' in Portuguese – in Uruguay in 1930 in response to the continual flooding of outdoor pitches during the country's rainy season, which sometimes prevented his pupils from playing football for long periods of time. Far from being a simple derivative of football played indoors, futsal was

devised as a whole new sport, taking inspiration from basketball (as regards the number of players), handball (as regards the pitch), water polo (as regards the role of the referee) and, of course, football.

Futsal's original philosophy stemmed from its inventor's personality. Ceriani was a sports teacher working for the ecumenical YMCA movement, which played a key role in the spread of futsal in South America. In setting out the rules of futsal for the first time in 1933, and disseminating them via the YMCA network, Ceriani laid the foundations for the sport's future development. Those original rules still represent the heart and soul of the sport.

In the mid-1950s, the first regional futsal associations were established in Brazil – in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Then, in 1971, the sport's growth was given a boost by the creation of an international governing body, FIFUSA, which essentially comprised the national associations of South American countries at that point and sought to promote 'futebol de salão' around the world. FIFUSA's first president was the Brazilian João Havelange, who held that position until he was elected president of FIFA in 1974.

Shortly after taking up his new role at the head of world football's governing body, Havelange announced that he wanted FIFA to take control of 'futebol de salão', and he spent the rest of his 24 years in office seeking to make that a reality. In an effort to differentiate its sport from football – and itself from FIFA – and to get the whole world speaking the same language, FIFUSA came up with the →



Global spread

1989

First FIFA Futsal World Cup



1998/99

First European Futsal Championship (25 associations)

First UEFA club competition
UEFA Futsal Cup
(27 clubs)

2001/02



2017

2017-18 European Futsal Championship (48 associations)

2016/17 Futsal Cup (52 clubs)

The Nedelya Cup was popular in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, when various forms of futsal also appeared in western Europe.

Keystone

name 'futsal' (a contraction of 'fútbol' and 'salón') in 1985. That was three years after the first ever FIFUSA World Championship, which was won by Brazil on home soil.

The rivalry between the two governing bodies continues to this day, with the World Futsal Association (the successor to FIFUSA) organising international competitions outside of FIFA's control with slightly different rules. For its part, world football's governing body organised its first ever FIFA Futsal World Championship (later renamed the FIFA Futsal World Cup) in the Netherlands in 1989, where Brazil once again took the trophy.

After several decades of being played primarily in South America, futsal is now a truly international phenomenon, with 120 countries taking part in the qualifying

competition for the 2016 Futsal World Cup in Colombia. Although Argentina won that tournament, continuing South America's dominance of the event (six of the eight tournaments have been won by either Brazil or Argentina), the presence of Azerbaijan and Egypt in the quarter-finals and Iran in the semi-finals is a perfect example of the universal nature of modern-day futsal. Indeed, 'smaller' countries find it easier to be competitive in futsal than they do in football.

Europe's gradual uptake

Europe was the setting for the birth of modern football back in the mid-19th century, but it does not have the same filial bond with futsal. Although a form of futsal became popular in the Soviet

Union in the 1950s, with 'mini-football' being declared an official sport, it was not until the 1970s that futsal made it to western Europe, South American immigrants bringing it with them to Portugal and Spain and the YMCA again playing an important role in the sport's spread. At that point, the rules of futsal were still far from uniform. Indeed, it was not until FIFA took control of the sport's organisation that rules were harmonised across Europe.

In 1974, the UEFA Executive Committee established a Committee for Indoor and Women's Football in a bid to standardise the sport, which was being played in two different formats – both five-a-side and eight-a-side – on pitches of differing sizes, with various different types of ball,

FUTSAL AND UEFA

The European Futsal Championship was born

The UEFA Executive Committee approves the proposal to launch a continental competition

1996

2001

UEFA special workshop

The 18 UEFA non-participating countries are invited to the European Futsal Championship 2005 in Ostrava, Czech Republic

2007

The first attempt

Organisation of a European competition, final tournament in Cordoba

1998

Birth of the UEFA Futsal Cup

2005

The consolidation

The European Futsal Championship becomes part of the Eurotop programme. The 'final four' club competition is launched



Sportsfile

FUTSAL FOR DUMMIES

Starting **5** + **9** substitutes

2 x 20min periods (actual playing time)

20m x 40m (handball pitch) and **3m x 2m** (handball goal)

5 cumulative fouls (10m penalty kick, 60% goal ratio)

2min penalty for red cards (one man down until a goal is scored)

1 time-out per team per half

Flying goalkeeper rule

Played mostly on a wooden floor (or Taraflex, PVC tiles)



Playas de Castellón, winners of the first-ever UEFA Futsal Cup in 2002

UEFA Archives

and with differing rules as to whether the ball could be played against the side panels or not. UEFA's efforts had no immediate impact and the committee was disbanded in 1978 – a sport for which national competitions were organised in only five European countries was simply not a priority.

It was not until December 1991 that the draw was held for UEFA's first ever five-a-side qualifying tournaments – a ten-team qualifying competition for the 1992 Futsal World Championship, which took place in Hong Kong in November of that year. Those mini-tournaments were contested in Spain and Italy.

In 1993, at the instigation of Ángel María Villar Llona, president of the Royal Spanish Football Federation and a member

of the UEFA Executive Committee, a questionnaire was sent to all of UEFA's member associations – only 13 of which organised national futsal championships at that point – in order to establish a picture of the state of futsal in Europe. It was also around that time that the sport's rules were harmonised and FIFA drew up its first list of specialist futsal referees.

In autumn 1995, UEFA organised three qualifying groups for the 1996 Futsal World Championship, as well as an invitational tournament in Cordoba in January 1996 for Europe's top teams, which was won by Spain. Following the success of that tournament, the UEFA Executive Committee decided in December 1997 to launch the European Futsal Championship. A total of 25 countries

took part in the qualifying competition for the inaugural Futsal EURO, which took place in 1999.

With seven wins in ten tournaments, Spain have dominated that competition. They are also the second most successful futsal nation at world level, behind Brazil, having won the Futsal World Cup twice – in 2000 and 2004. That success can be attributed, in particular, to the role that futsal plays in the development of their young players, with numerous football internationals – such as Xavi and Iniesta – coming to the game via futsal.

In parallel, futsal's growing popularity within UEFA's member associations resulted, in March 2001, in the UEFA Executive Committee agreeing to the Futsal Committee's request for a →

The product

First ever Futsal EURO with 12 teams. Attendance records in both competitions

2012

More milestones

50 clubs in the club competition. New overall attendance record in Belgrade Arena (113,820)

2018/19

2010

Taking root

14,300 spectators watched the Futsal EURO semi-final, and nearly 100,000 the whole 20-match tournament

2016



Getty Images

The next steps

Women's futsal, youth futsal, Futsal Champions League, etc.



Getty Images

International futsal's leading light, Ricardinho, in action for Portugal against Ukraine at Futsal EURO 2014

European club competition. And so, the UEFA Futsal Cup was born, with clubs from 27 different national associations contesting the inaugural competition. After qualifying via mini-tournaments, eight clubs battled it out for continental supremacy at a final tournament in Lisbon in March 2002, with Spanish side Playas de Castellón FS coming out on top. Fifteen years on, a record 52 member associations now take part in the competition.

The perfect complement

Futsal had long been the subject of misconceptions, often being considered in opposition to football and regarded as competing with its 'big brother'. That explains why it was neglected for so long in Europe – a continent where football's power is absolute. That perception has changed significantly in recent years, with the European approach to futsal now mirroring that seen on the other side of the Atlantic, where it has always been regarded as an excellent player development tool. Pelé, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Neymar – the list of great Brazilian players who started off playing indoors is endless, with futsal preferred to football for children under the age of 12. The Brazilians were quick to understand that football and futsal complemented each other, especially in terms of youth development.

With players seeing about 30% more of the ball than they do in football, futsal helps to improve ball control and precision. The repetition of basic actions

aids the development of cognitive skills. It is also perfect for certain fundamental aspects of players' development: peripheral vision, decision-making, the use of both feet, etc. The size of the pitch – eight times smaller than a football pitch – forces players not only to think creatively in order to create goalscoring opportunities, but also to coordinate their positioning on the pitch, which helps them to grasp tactical principles and learn how to play as a team. Should I push up and press my opponents? Is it better to try to run with the ball or give it to a team-mate? Should I play this pass to someone's feet or into space? With limited space on the pitch, a futsal player is forced to make lots of decisions very quickly, with the result that futsal is fun to play, but also challenging from a technical, tactical and physical perspective, requiring intense bursts of energy. A good futsal player will be comfortable on the ball, have a thorough understanding of tactics and be capable of rapid decision-making – skills that can easily be transposed to football and are valued by all coaches. Eighty-seven years after its creation, futsal has achieved the ideal position in its relationship with football: it's a sport in its own right, it's growing all around the world (with an estimated 30 million people playing it worldwide), and its competitions are constantly gaining in stature. And all the while it's complementing football and contributing to footballers' development. ⚽

A DIFFERENT BALL

Law 2 of the Futsal Laws of the Game, which are decided by FIFA, is very clear: "The ball may not bounce less than 50cm or more than 65cm on the first rebound when dropped from a height of 2m." The ball bounces less than in football in order to encourage teams to play the ball on the ground and foster ball control and technical skills. While some of the rules of futsal clearly set it apart from football (time-outs, unlimited 'flying' substitutions, fouls accumulated per team not just per player, etc.), futsal's defining feature is the ball. So much so that, at one point, it even gave the sport its name, with the Uruguayans preferring the name 'bola pesada' – meaning 'heavy ball' – to 'fútbol de salón' in the sport's early days. Although it is smaller than a football – with a circumference of 62–64cm, compared with 68–70cm in football – a futsal ball weighs roughly the same as its football equivalent (between 400g and 440g), which makes it seem heavier and allows it to achieve that reduced bounce.



Sportsfile

FUTSAL V FOOTBALL

If you want to understand the differences between football and futsal, the numbers speak for themselves!

FUTSAL

PITCH SIZE
800m²



160m²
per player

TEAMWORK



20%

Each player on the pitch makes up
20% of the team in futsal

**TOUCHES PER
PLAYER PER MATCH**



130

SUBSTITUTES'
average playing time



30%

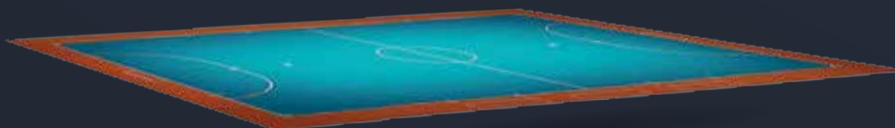


**AVERAGE NUMBER
OF GOALS PER
MATCH**



7.07

(2016/17 UEFA
Futsal Cup)



11-A-SIDE FOOTBALL

PITCH SIZE
7,140m²



650m²
per player

TEAMWORK



9.09%

Each player on the pitch makes up
9% of the team in football

**TOUCHES PER
PLAYER PER MATCH**



100

SUBSTITUTES'
average playing time



5%

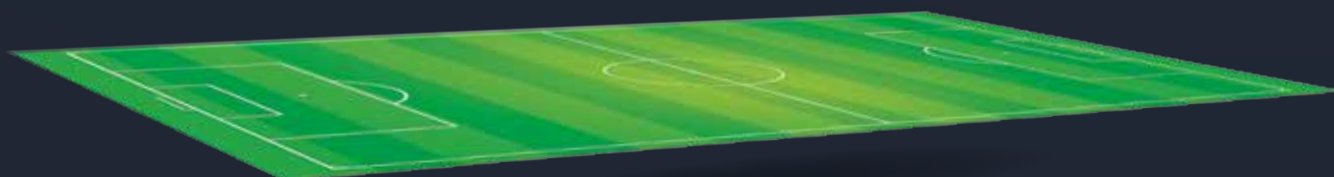


**AVERAGE NUMBER
OF GOALS PER
MATCH**



3.03

(2016/17 UEFA
Champions League)





JESÚS VELASCO

"AS A COACH, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BE TRYING TO IMPROVE AND REINVENT YOURSELF"

Having been pipped at the post in the final last year, Jesús Velasco led Inter FS to victory in the UEFA Futsal Cup this season, earning the Spanish club their fourth European title. Velasco looks back on his team's road to success and offers his take on the evolution of the indoor game, drawing on a wealth of experience both in Italy and his native Spain.

Inter FS last lifted the UEFA Futsal Cup in 2009. After falling at the final hurdle in 2016, how do you explain your success this season?

One of the main reasons is that, this season, virtually all our players arrived at the final tournament in good physical shape, in contrast to last season. The final that we lost in 2016 also helped us enormously to prepare for this year's comeback, when we were determined to take our revenge.

Was the team better equipped to win this season?

We were able to prepare better in numerous ways. We approached the competition differently, with a clearer idea of what we had to do to win it. The fact that the players were injury-free was also a major factor.

"All coaches know they have to win matches, but it's even more the case at Inter than elsewhere. Here, if you lose three matches in a row, it's a disaster."

Since you joined Inter in 2012, the club has won countless trophies in Spain without ever managing to lift the UEFA Futsal Cup. Did your recent victory fill you with more relief than joy?

From a personal point of view, it made me very happy. It was a great moment. But from a professional perspective it also felt like a huge weight had been lifted. The club has UEFA Futsal Cup ambitions virtually every season and to have finally won it is a huge relief, both for me and for the club as a whole. Inter FS is a club made to win titles, and the Futsal Cup is the most prestigious there is, so it was about time we won it after several years of missing out.

The UEFA Futsal Cup finals are a unique tournament, with two matches – semi-finals and final – in the space of three days, against the best clubs in Europe. How do you prepare for such intense, high-level competition?

Our training method is fairly intense, which means that our players can recover very quickly. Playing two high-level matches in three days is not a problem for our team because we are used to

playing three matches in three days in the Spanish Cup. It's a very useful way of helping us prepare for the challenge of the finals.

The 2017 finals were played in Almaty, Kazakhstan, more than 8,000km from Madrid, with a four-hour time difference between the two cities. Did this make the journey and preparing for the competition more difficult?

Given the distance, we tried to find the quickest way of flying between the two cities and looked into chartering a direct flight to Almaty. But we gave up on that idea in the end because it was too expensive. We took a regular flight in the end, with a stopover in Frankfurt. We arrived in Kazakhstan three days before the semi-finals, to give us time to recover from the journey and get used to the time difference. Everything went as planned and the players were in perfect physical condition for both matches.

Do you think the standard at the UEFA Futsal Cup finals is the highest in the world? →

I don't think you'll find a better standard anywhere else today. It's the moment when the top clubs reach their peak, all aiming to become European champions. As winners, we will never forget the 2017 edition, of course. On both technical and tactical levels the standard was very high and all four teams stood a genuine chance of winning. For all these reasons, I believe this year's edition was the best so far.

Portugal's Ricardinho was man of the match in both your games in this year's finals. What role did he play in your victory?

Ricardinho played a vital role in our success. When he's at his best, he can make a huge difference, especially in attack. He's also able to defend with high intensity. He was determined to shine and to finally lift the UEFA Futsal Cup with Inter. He showed that he could be relied on when it mattered and was one of our keys to victory.

He has already been voted the world's best player four times (in 2010, 2014, 2015 and 2016).

"I would like to see the game get faster in the future. However, I'm afraid it'll become slower unless the rules change."

Do you think he's on a different level to the rest of your squad?

He's a player like any other, in the sense that he's part of the team, but at the same time you can say he's on a different level because he does extraordinary things on the pitch. He's extremely creative, which – combined with his intelligence, technical skill and physical strength – makes him a very special player. He plays for the team, fits in perfectly with our style of play and often finds ways of breaking the deadlock when matches are tight.

When he scores an outstanding goal like the 2-2 equaliser against Kairat Almaty in the semi-final, are you still taken aback or does nothing he does surprise you any more, having

coached him for a number of seasons now?

It's the type of goals he scores that makes Ricardinho so special. He has it all: the physical qualities needed to make quick changes of pace, technical skills that enable him to beat three opponents in one move, and tactical intelligence that helps him to find space on the pitch. I'm used to seeing him score goals like that now and pull off other incredible moves.

He's a very creative player. As a coach, do you try to give him as much freedom as possible?

I give him very general instructions. He assimilates our game plan perfectly, both defensively and in attack, but he also has plenty of freedom to do what he wants. Sometimes, this can cost us goals, because he makes a mistake and loses the ball in a dangerous area, but we have to let him take risks so that he can produce those game-changing moments.

In last season's final, Jesús Velasco and his team lost out to Russian debutants Ugra Yugorsk, who beat the hosts 4-3 in Guadalajara.



Sportsfile



Ricardinho and his team-mates took it to the wire against Kairat in the semi-finals in Almaty but snatched a 3-2 win.

on this system a lot in training. Because we win most of our matches, our opponents often play without a goalkeeper towards the end, in an attempt to get back into the match, and we've developed strong tactical discipline that helps us to take advantage of our opponents' mistakes and score from a long way out, as we did in the final against Sporting.

With four titles, Inter have won the UEFA Futsal Cup more times than anyone else. What is it like to work at such a prestigious club?

Firstly, I have an advantage over other coaches because our club has greater resources than the others, which means we can build a large squad of high-calibre players. I have the privilege of being able to choose from a squad of 15 players, all of whom are capable of being first-team regulars. But it's also a huge responsibility, because the team is expected to win titles every season. All coaches know they have to win matches, but it's even more the case at Inter than elsewhere. Here, if you lose three matches in a row, it's a disaster.

The Spanish championship is very competitive, with a large number of teams competing for the title. Is it an advantage at European level to be playing high-level matches on a regular basis?

Playing in a tough league is an advantage as long as it doesn't mean your players suffer injuries as a result, as has been the case for us over the last two seasons. In a very competitive league, you have tighter games, they're more physical and injuries can mount up. It's tricky if four or five of your players are injured for important occasions such as the UEFA Futsal Cup finals. →



In this season's final, after a tight opening period, Inter dominated against Sporting CP, coming out 7-0 winners. In the last few minutes, you got three goals with long-distance shots from your own half, while your opponents were without a goalkeeper. Is this a tactic you work on a lot in training?

It's something we're working on more and more. In futsal, you can put an outfield player in goal, which is something that a lot of teams often do to give them a numerical advantage on the pitch when they have possession of the ball. Personally, I'm not a big fan of it, but we have to be adaptable and we work

"I think opportunities to bring the goalkeeper out should be limited and it should only be done by teams that want to score goals rather than those that just want to keep hold of the ball, which is sometimes the case at the moment."

"At the top level, futsal and football are very different. But there are some areas in which we can learn from each other: training methods, technical work, individual tactics, attacking play, and so on."

You coached in Italy for a number of seasons. Is there a real cultural difference between Italian and Spanish futsal?

Italian futsal is more physical and the playing systems there are less flexible than in Spain. The players are very disciplined and have less room for manoeuvre, whereas Spanish players have more freedom and can be creative. Also, the standard of goalkeeping in Spain is the best in the world, which makes it more difficult to score goals.

What have been the biggest changes in futsal since you began coaching in the 1990s?

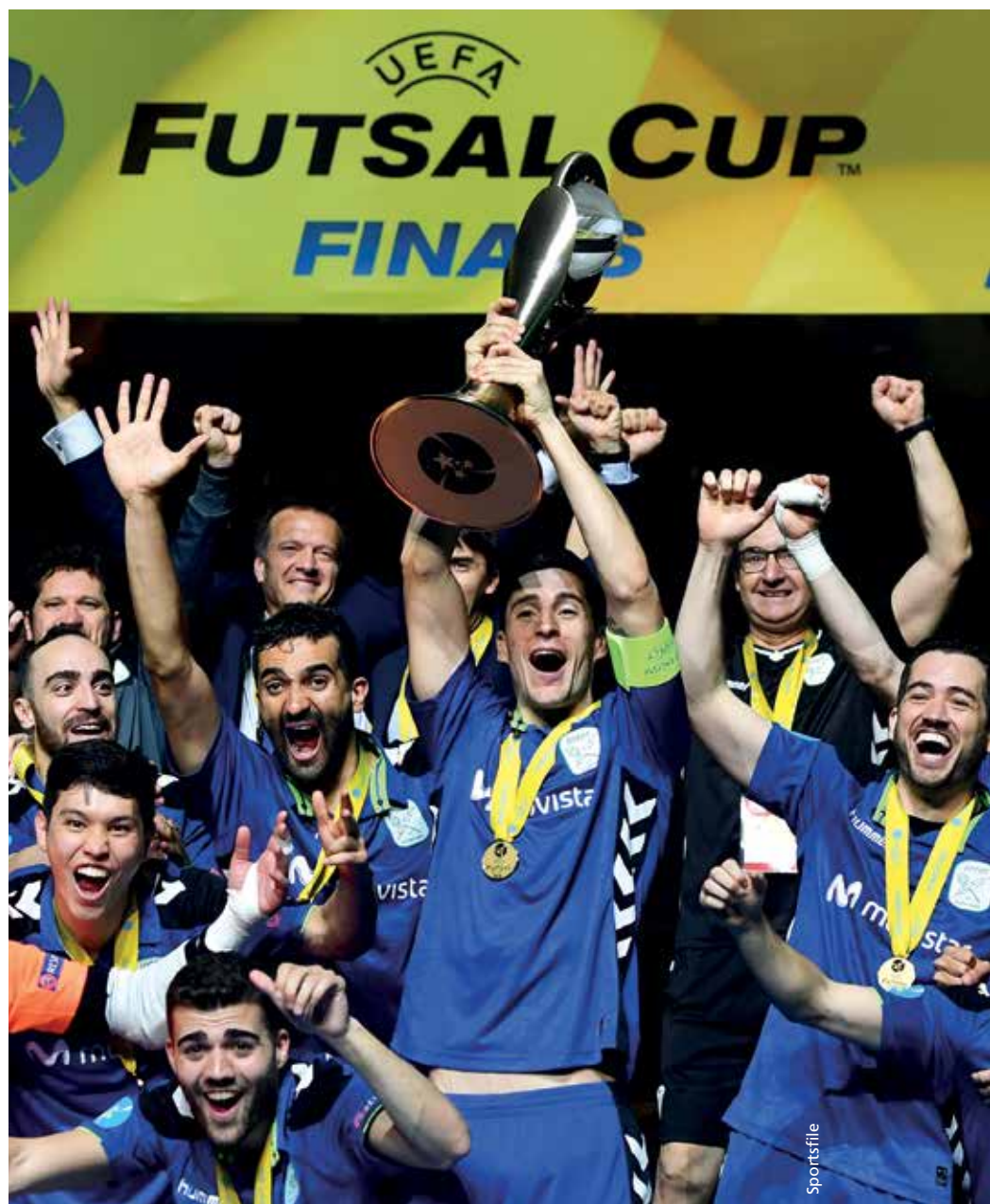
The rule changes have had a big impact. Before, the goalkeeper wasn't allowed to leave the area and there was a lot more room in the attacking third. Now, goalkeepers can come out, there's less space, and that's made it easier to defend. The opportunity to attack with five outfield players against four also makes the closing stages of matches more exciting.

In what areas have futsal players improved the most in recent years?

They have improved both strategically and physically. These days, players are tactically very disciplined and much stronger physically; they're quicker, more resilient and more powerful.

How do you see the game of futsal developing over the next few years?

I would like to see the game get faster in the future. However, I'm afraid it'll become slower unless the rules change. At the moment, coaches can do little more than make sure their teams defend well,



take advantage of dead-ball situations and have strong '5 v 4' [flying goalkeeper] tactics. Futsal is a great sport to watch when it's fast-moving, when there are plenty of one-on-ones, when the ball moves quickly from one end to the other ...

What rules would you change to ensure that futsal develops in the way you would like it to?

That's a difficult question. For example,

I think opportunities to bring the goalkeeper out should be limited and it should only be done by teams that want to score goals rather than those that just want to keep hold of the ball, which is sometimes the case at the moment.

In 2018/19, the UEFA Futsal Cup will be renamed the UEFA Futsal Champions League. European Women's and Under-19 Futsal

Championships are also being introduced in 2018. Are you pleased to see UEFA doing more with futsal?

These are very important decisions, and ones that have been well received in the futsal world. UEFA wants to develop our sport and, in the years to come, there should be more and more teams not only in the men's competitions but also in the women's and youth events. It's our job to make futsal a spectacular sport that attracts spectators. Futsal is already a fascinating sport to watch when it's played at a fast pace. When it's slower, it's much less interesting for everyone. Futsal needs to be spectacular to keep everyone happy.

Inter have links with Club Atlético de Madrid. Do you have any contact with Atlético coach Diego Simeone and his staff?

The two clubs are linked at administrative level and they're working on a cooperation agreement, but I don't know yet what exactly it's going to involve. I've never spoken to Diego Simeone, but he's clearly someone I would like to talk to. He's a coach who can instil a lot in his players, so it would be great to establish professional links with him.

Generally speaking, can futsal coaches draw inspiration from



With nine domestic titles under his belt – six from Italy and three from Spain – Velasco had his sights firmly set on European glory.

"In my 20-year career, I've never run the same training session twice. You always have to keep the players on their toes and guide them towards achieving the club's objectives."

the work of football coaches, and vice versa?

At the top level, the two sports are very different. But there are some areas in which we can learn from each other: training methods, technical work, individual tactics, attacking play, and so on.

Do you watch other indoor team sports, such as handball or basketball, for inspiration?

The main reason I watch these sports is because I enjoy sport in general. I think you can learn things anywhere and it's important to always be thinking about what you can learn from watching a coaching session at youth level, or one in handball, volleyball or some other sport. If you think creatively, you can get ideas from almost any sport. As a coach, you should always be trying to improve and reinvent yourself. In my 20-year career, I've never run the same training session twice. You always have to keep the players on their toes and guide them towards achieving the club's objectives. Coaching is a great way to spend your days. I love what I'm doing right now! 🌱



SALZBURG TRIUMPH IN NYON

A new name has been added to the UEFA Youth League's short roll of honour, with FC Salzburg prevailing over FC Barcelona, SL Benfica and Real Madrid CF at Colovray stadium at the end of April.

For the fourth successive year, the semi-finals and the final of the UEFA Youth League took place in the Swiss town of Nyon. The Austrians joined two-time champions Chelsea FC and 2013/14 victors Barcelona as winners of the Lennart Johansson Trophy after three sold-out matches played in glorious conditions.

They did it the hard way, too, eliminating several high-profile teams en route to Nyon – namely, Manchester City FC, Paris Saint-Germain FC and Club Atlético de Madrid – after easing past FK Vardar and FC Kairat Almaty in earlier rounds.

The calibre of the opposition that Salzburg overcame in Switzerland was just as impressive. They were behind for some time in their semi-final, trailing 1-0 to Barcelona until just after the hour mark, but then Marco Rose's energetic side responded with two unanswered goals, substitute Patson Daka scoring the second of them on his

debut in the competition. Cue a flurry of backflips by a player who had already fired Zambia to victory at the U-20 Africa Cup of Nations the previous month.

"I'm beyond happy," said Rose. "When you look at how confidently the team played – how we attacked – you have to be proud. Thanks to the boys we can continue this journey. Now it's on to the final, and we're looking forward to it. It was a fantastic team performance. The boys did outstandingly – particularly to come back from a goal down. It was excellent."

Hannes Wolf, who equalised and then set up the winner for Patson, added: "We wanted to push them back with our pressing. We weren't too bad in the first half, but we went behind. In the second half it worked very well."

Similar narrative

The final was strikingly similar. This time, Salzburg were a goal down against Benfica

until the 72nd minute, when Patson headed in the equaliser from Wolf's corner. Fellow substitute Alexander Schmidt, making his first appearance since November because of injury, swiftly completed the turnaround, watched by Rui Costa, Nuno Gomes and UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin.

That victory represented a belated birthday present for Salzburg captain Sandro Ingolitsch, who turned 20 just six days before the final. It also meant that Rose's charges finished the Youth League season unbeaten, having managed a competition-best 29 goals in their 9 matches.

"I can't describe how proud I am of them," explained Rose. "I have said the same after every match – Manchester City, Paris, Atlético and Barcelona – and I'm delighted that they've taken the final step today and not come away empty-handed. This victory will stay with us forever."

Wolf – who provided three assists in Nyon – and Mergim Berisha both scored seven goals in the competition. Those forwards were two of the three players with first-team experience in Rose's final tournament squad. The other, Amadou Haidara, struck on his senior debut in an Austrian Cup tie less than three weeks before travelling to the tournament.

When asked how good his team could become, Rose replied: "They can go far if they work hard. All of them have a lot of potential, but they need to work because this is not the end. They need to improve, to develop, in order to progress, but a lot of them are ready for that, so I hope we will see some of them in their respective national teams."

Benfica runners-up again

That loss to Salzburg was the second defeat in a Youth League final for Benfica and their coach, João Tralhão, who was also in charge when the Eagles were beaten 3-0 by Barcelona three years ago.

"We knew Salzburg were a tough side, but we played very well," Tralhão said. "We could have won; we should have won. My players did very well and showed



Salzburg's Patson Daka in action in the final against Benfica.



what they can do. They fought hard, but today they just didn't have luck on their side.

"Salzburg are a very strong team," he said, "and they pushed us hard at certain points in the game, but we should've controlled those periods better. Those five minutes [when Salzburg scored twice] did for us."

The Portuguese expatriate community turned out in force to support Tralhão's team, and they had plenty to smile about in the first half of the final. Cheered on vociferously by a group of flag-waving fans, Benfica took the lead in the 29th minute via the head of José Gomes. At that point, he, João Filipe, Mesaque Dju and Gedson Fernandes were all set to add the Youth League to the European Under-17 Championship title that they had won with Portugal in Azerbaijan 11 months earlier.

The Portuguese side also gave their fans plenty to cheer about in their semi-final, with Filipe and João Felix both scoring twice as Benfica beat Real Madrid 4-2. This was the third time in four seasons that Real Madrid had been knocked out at the semi-final stage, following similar defeats in 2013/14 and 2015/16.

RESULTS

Semi-finals – 21 April 2017

FC Barcelona 1-2 **FC Salzburg**

Referee: Andris Treimanis (Latvia)

Real Madrid CF 2-4 **SL Benfica**

Referee: Bartosz Frankowski (Poland)

Final – 24 April 2017

SL Benfica 1-2 **FC Salzburg**

Referee: Ali Papabiyik (Turkey)

Guti's side conceded three goals in the first 19 minutes, before fighting back to 3-2, but Filipe's late second rubber-stamped the result and ended any lingering hopes of a Real Madrid comeback. "We started very badly, making a lot of errors, and they took advantage," said the three-time UEFA Champions League winner.

Although Barcelona and Real Madrid headed home disappointed after the semi-finals, the Catalan side's Jordi Mboula at least had the minor consolation of ending up as the competition's joint leading goalscorer alongside AFC Ajax's Kaj Sierhuis. Mboula's eight goals included a wonderful solo effort against Salzburg in the semi-final – a weaving run away from three opposing players, followed by a fantastic curling shot into the far corner.

Away from the main pitch at Colovray sports centre, a mini-tournament for children was contested by 16 local teams from the regions of Vaud and Geneva. Here, as in the Youth League, UEFA's key messages of fair play and respect were championed, with children showcasing their talents before taking their places in the stadium to catch a glimpse of some of Europe's brightest young prospects. 🌐

RUSH PRIDE IN WALES RECOGNITION

The focus of the footballing world will turn to Cardiff in June when the Welsh capital hosts both the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Women's Champions League finals. Former Wales striker Ian Rush has been championing this honour as the official UEFA ambassador of the UEFA Champions League final.

“It’s special to have the Champions League final in Cardiff,” Rush explained. “It’s a chance for people to see what Cardiff city is like and to experience the Welsh traditions. Whichever teams are there, they will get a fantastic reception because they are friendly people there and they just want to give a tremendous occasion. Even though the game is special and the stadium’s incredible, there are other parts of Cardiff too, and all within walking distance. It’s not just the game.”

Rush lifted the European Champion Clubs’ Cup in 1981 and 1984 during his playing career with Liverpool FC, and it is that success that made him the perfect

candidate to be the face of the Cardiff 2017 final. “It’s special to be asked by UEFA to become an ambassador,” he explained. “But to be asked to do that in Wales, it’s amazing; it’s like a reward, a thank you. It’s a privilege for me. Basically, I just want to show that football is thriving in Wales, and I think it’s the perfect time. I think this is another big step for us and to have the final in Cardiff is putting Wales on the map even more, and that’s great for the country.”

The Champions League final will take place at the National Stadium, right at the heart of this historic and cosmopolitan city and an iconic part of the Cardiff skyline. Opened in 1999 following a

redevelopment of the old Cardiff Arms Park that became synonymous with rugby success, the 74,500-capacity cauldron, which also boasts a retractable roof, is more than a worthy host for such a prestigious event. “It’s an amazing stadium with the stands and the pitch and everything,” enthused Rush. “I don’t know many other stadiums that are in the centre of town. I think it’s going to be an amazing atmosphere. That’s what the supporters have got to make it to be, that’s what it’s all about.”

Although better known for its rugby traditions, Rush was one of the first players to make football headlines at the old Cardiff Arms Park, scoring the only goal





Sportsfile

Ian Rush returned to Wales in good company after the semi-finals draw in Nyon on 21 April.

in a 1-0 victory over Germany in a EURO qualifier in 1991. Germany were world champions at the time. "We had a great team," Rush recalled. "It was one of our most famous nights and that put us on the map as well." In keeping with the blend of modern and historic architecture that presents itself on every corner of the capital city, a section of the old Arms Park remained as part of the redevelopment. "I look at the stadium now and still see part of the Arms Park there," added Rush. "It's bigger, it's more modern, and that's what you've got to do."

Exciting times

These are exciting times for football in Wales, and this latest recognition follows on from successfully hosting the UEFA Super Cup in 2014, while unparalleled success was enjoyed on the field at EURO 2016 as the national team reached the semi-finals. "I was proud to be at the EURO," Rush added. "I think there's no better time for Wales as we've got to keep that going, and I think this is

another big step for us. We're known for rugby, but I think after the EURO and with the Champions League final we're competing with the rugby now. We'd love to get to the position where we play football [at the National Stadium] and we fill it every time. It's filled every time Wales play rugby, and that's what we've got to look to do."

There is no doubt that Rush speaks with unwavering pride for his country, and is excited about the prospect of the world having its eyes opened to the beauty and tradition that Wales has to offer. A huge opportunity for Wales and Welsh football, Rush is hoping that the overall experience will see the supporters that make it to the final come back to the city in the future. "We want to give a good time on and off the pitch," he explained. "Football is only a game at the end of the day. We have a great family tradition in Wales. We're a proud nation. Go there and enjoy the tradition of Wales. Experience the Welsh and enjoy not just the game, but enjoy Cardiff and Wales too." ⚽



FESTIVAL OF FOOTBALL HEADS TO THE BAY

There's much more to the Champions League than the showpiece final, as Cardiff Bay hosts the UEFA Champions Festival between 1 and 4 June. Four days of free entertainment are headlined by the Ultimate Champions match on 2 June, as legends of the game compete on a floating pitch that will also host a number of other fixtures and free-play sessions during the event.

The main stage at the Roald Dahl Plass will host local artists, DJs and bands each day, while the Champions Gallery at the Wales Millennium Centre offers the perfect opportunity to explore the history of the competition. Creative workshops and the opportunity to have a photo with the iconic trophies also form part of the event, while the Football Association of Wales' recent 20-stop trophy tour has enabled the whole country to be a part of the occasion. The UEFA Champions Festival offers everyone the opportunity to embrace the Champions League final experience.



Getty Images

Last season's Champions Festival in Milan

FRENCH FOCUS ON FINAL

Paris Saint-Germain and holders Olympique Lyonnais will compete for the UEFA Women's Champions League trophy at Cardiff City Stadium on Thursday 1 June, with a joint-record fourth title the aim for high-scoring Lyon and manager Gérard Prêcheur as they head to the Welsh capital.

Victory over English champions Manchester City Women's FC in the semi-finals confirmed Lyon's place in the final, and with a star-studded squad of players recently boosted by the arrival of United States international Alex Morgan, they will be confident of repeating last season's success against their domestic rivals. By comparison, Paris Saint-Germain were comfortable victors over FC Barcelona in the last four, but will be under no illusion about the tough challenge that presents itself next as they prepare to take on the side that has become the dominant force in the women's game.

Lyon striker Ada Hegerberg was voted UEFA Best Women's Player in Europe last season, primarily for her goalscoring exploits in the Women's Champions League, and while she has contributed four goals to the cause in the current campaign, the side boasts no less than a dozen different goalscorers, such is their overall attacking strength. The key to stopping them lifting the trophy once again will be to deny attacking midfielders Eugénie Le Sommer and Camille Abily as the duo currently top the team's goalscoring charts. Having disposed of Wolfsburg in a repeat of last season's final at the quarter-final stage, Lyon appear to have already overcome their toughest hurdle.

Having successfully navigated the semi-final stage for the second time in

three seasons, Paris Saint-Germain will embrace their opportunity to take centre stage in the showpiece final, and will be familiar with the strengths of their domestic rivals. Having masterminded their campaign to this stage, coach Patrice Lair will again look to the goalscoring prowess of Brazilian striker Cristiane to give his side the attacking edge. However, Lair will be well aware of the importance of a well-drilled defence if his side are to have any chance of keeping Lyon quiet at the other end of the field.

True test of nerve for Paris

The tactical battle could be an intriguing one, and while Lyon will inevitably play to their attacking strengths, Paris Saint-Germain will understand that sitting back with a cautious approach could play into their hands. However, the side from the French capital would be ill-advised to throw caution to the wind against the most prolific attacking line-up in the women's game, and it could well be a true test of nerve for Lair and his players. In addition, Manchester City's 1-0 victory over Lyon in the semi-final second leg may not have been enough to take them through, but highlighted the vulnerabilities that do exist.

The final takes place at the impressive 33,000-seater Cardiff City Stadium. Opened in 2009, the stadium also hosted the UEFA Super Cup between Real Madrid



This year's final will be the third head to head between Lyon and Paris in the Women's Champions League in as many seasons: last season Lyon beat Paris in the semi-finals (pictured), while in 2014/15 Paris knocked Lyon out in the round of 16.

CF and Sevilla in 2014. Home to Cardiff City FC, the stadium was initially built to accommodate just under 27,000 fans, and a further development to increase the capacity was completed in the summer of 2014 prior to the UEFA showpiece match. Also the home of the Wales national team, the stadium has gained a reputation for its ability to create a special atmosphere, while its proximity to the city centre makes it a popular venue with supporters. 📍

CARDIFF CITY – A FOOTBALL HISTORY

The focus may be firmly fixed on hosting two enormous events as the Champions League finals come to Cardiff, but the Welsh capital has a proud history of football that first came to national prominence back in 1927. Fred Keenor was the Cardiff City captain when the Bluebirds headed to Wembley Stadium to take on Arsenal in the FA Cup final, and victory

for the Welsh side ensured the trophy would leave England for the one and only time in its history.

Real Madrid CF were the victims of one of Cardiff City's greatest triumphs in 1971 when a header from Brian Clark defeated the Spanish giants in the quarter-finals of the European Cup Winners' Cup, as manager Jimmy Scoular

masterminded a triumph that would never be forgotten.

Real Madrid returned to Cardiff in 2014 to face Sevilla in the UEFA Super Cup at Cardiff City Stadium, and two goals from Cristiano Ronaldo ensured better memories this time around. However, attentions now switch to the National Stadium, with the 74,500-seater venue promising to be the

perfect host. While it may be associated primarily with rugby, the stadium is no stranger to the round ball either, and has hosted English domestic showpiece finals as well as fixtures at the 2012 Summer Olympics. Steep stands and a retractable roof ensure an incredible, fan-friendly atmosphere, while the architecture has become an iconic part of the Cardiff landscape.

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

A true celebration of the amateur spirit, this season's UEFA Regions' Cup finals will be staged from 1 to 9 July in Istanbul, Turkey.

Speaking after his side had won the 2011 UEFA Regions' Cup, Braga's José Fortunato explained how Europe's top amateur competition makes footballing dreams come true. "I'm sure in the future we will look back at this experience as something unique and remarkable," he said. "I feel like I'm floating on air."

This competition has been giving Europe's top amateur players that feeling for ten editions, and while past competitors have gone on to play in the UEFA Europa League, UEFA Champions League and even at senior international level, it is very much a celebration of the amateur spirit.

The Regions' Cup showcases the talents of players who have never featured at any professional level, with eligibility criteria ensuring that the teams that qualify through their own national amateur tournaments compete at a similar level. That means fierce competition, plus a real sense of community and respect.

The effort teams and coaches put into the finals is huge. Gerry Smith, who led Eastern Region IRL to glory in the 2015 tournament, alluded to his coaching team's workload after their final success. "It wasn't until 3.15 this morning that my assistant Gerry Davis finished doing the DVDs for this game, and we were back at it for 8.30," he said. "All week long it's been football, football, and more football."

Of course, the teams would not have it any other way, and the set-up of the Regions' Cup finals ensures that they have every chance to shine. Host associations provide brilliant training facilities, an army of supportive volunteers,



The draw for the Regions' Cup final round took place in Istanbul on 2 March.

Group A

Istanbul (Turkey)
Ingulec (Ukraine)
Zagreb Region (Croatia)
Lisboa (Portugal)

Group B

Castilla y León (Spain)
Olomouc Region (Czech Republic)
Region 2 (Republic of Ireland)
South Region (Russia)

Group matches 1, 3 and 6 July

Final 9 July

and venues and playing surfaces worthy of Champions League games. UEFA also uses the competition as a proving ground for up-and-coming match officials, with finals' referee teams boasting top-level experience at home and aspiring to reach the very top of their profession.

Playing for passion

The football is not professional, then, but the emotions are even more intense as a result. As Veneto forward Francesco Gasparato put it after his side won the 2013 edition: "Tomorrow, we return to our normal lives – back to work on Monday, but certainly with a bigger smile. I do what I do really happily – I have a child, my partner and my job and I play football when I've got time. It's a passion – it's the thing I like doing the most in the world and today we reached the pinnacle. The biggest joy of my life was when my child was born, and then there is this."

Teams from eight UEFA member associations will be flying the flag for their countries at the tenth Regions' Cup final tournament. Croatia's Zagreb Region will be looking to go one better than in 2015 when they were beaten in the final by Irish hosts Eastern Region, while this year's hosts, Istanbul, will be hoping familiar surroundings suit them well.

"Being hosts is an advantage for us and not an additional pressure," said coach Kamil Doygun, whose players are drawn from local leagues in Turkey's main city. "These players could comfortably play in our second division. They have the potential to go even further."

Time will tell, but in the short term, they will enjoy some of the best facilities in Turkish football, with the tournament centring on the Hasan Doğan complex, named in honour of a former Turkish Football Federation (TFF) president and base for the senior national team. Located in Riva, around 30km north of Istanbul, close to the shores of the Black Sea, the complex was formally opened in July 2014. It includes five training grounds and rehabilitation facilities as well as running tracks, swimming and therapy pools and the offices of the TFF. Two other venues will also stage games: the Yusuf Ziya Öniş Stadium, which is home to Sariyemspor, and the Ümraniye Stadium, home of another suburban side, Ümraniyespor. ⚽



Istanbul's Iskender Can in qualifying action

DIALOGUE WITH FANS CRUCIAL

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, met with supporters' groups in Nyon on 24 April and emphasised that listening to fans' interests was vital for the good of the game.

The UEFA president stressed the importance of having “an open line of communication” with football fans as he held his first meeting with supporters' groups since being elected to the helm of European football's governing body.

Mr Čeferin held a briefing in Nyon with the Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE), Supporters Direct Europe (SD-Europe) and Football Supporters Europe (FSE). He emphasised the need for “close cooperation” with football fans and the importance of taking their interests into account.

“Supporters' groups are vital members of the football community, and it is imperative that we have an open line of communication with them. Football would not be the game it is today without the passion and dedication of its fans. I hope that by cooperating closely, we can make important decisions for the good of European football.” Among the topics of discussion at the meeting were improving access for disabled fans wanting to attend football matches, as well as efforts to tackle violence, racism and homophobia at games. ⚽



The UEFA president with supporter representatives

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER WELCOMES UEFA REFORMS

The European commissioner for education, culture, youth and sport, Tibor Navracsics, has expressed satisfaction that UEFA is committed to embedding good governance in its activities.



Speaking to the UEFA Congress in Helsinki last month, Tibor Navracsics, the European commissioner for education, culture, youth and sport, said he was glad that UEFA was fully committed to

fostering good governance. He expressed the view that governance “needs to become part of the DNA of sport organisations, big and small. We have all seen how failures in governance have tarnished the image of sport. Football has been particularly vulnerable, although it is by no means the only sport affected. It is due to its huge popularity that football is under even closer scrutiny.”

“I was also pleased that UEFA signed up to the declaration I launched last

September urging all sport federations and organisations, in the EU and beyond, to embed the culture of good governance in their activities. Transparency, accountability and stakeholder involvement are the backbone of good governance principles. Sport must regain people's trust to keep its place at the heart of our societies.”

Common objectives and values

Commissioner Navracsics emphasised that UEFA and the European Commission shared common objectives in a broad range of areas, with a formal arrangement for cooperation signed in 2014 and covering various topics, including financial fair play, match-fixing and third-party ownership. He reflected that football can be much more than entertainment or a passion and underlined the power of sport and football in bringing people together,

promoting social inclusion and the values of fair play, solidarity and mutual respect. The two organisations also shared many values and aspirations, he said, such as “integrity, respect for human rights and dignity, non-discrimination and solidarity.”

He welcomed the work UEFA was undertaking to nurture football's grassroots – including UEFA Grassroots Week, held each September and aligned with the European Commission's European Week of Sport, which promotes sport and physical activity across the continent.

“I know how active UEFA is in these fields,” the commissioner said, “and its campaigns against racism and violence have been particularly important. Football has the power to reach out to large sectors of society in a way that politicians and governments simply cannot.” ⚽

2015/16 FOOTBALL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT OUT NOW

UEFA EURO 2016 set new benchmarks for socially responsible tournament operations, UEFA member associations have organised projects across Europe and beyond thanks to new HatTrick social responsibility incentive payments, and UEFA's social responsibility partnerships continue to leverage the power of football to great effect.

The objective of UEFA's football and social responsibility (FSR) programme is to manage the environmental, social and economic impacts of European football, which has a vital role to play in driving social development and creating long-term benefits for society.

To demonstrate its commitment to leveraging the power of football, building on past successes and assimilating lessons learned, each year UEFA reports on its achievements to date and those of its members and partners, as well as the challenges faced in the fields of diversity, inclusion, the environment, health, peace and reconciliation, solidarity and fan dialogue.

This latest report, the fourth in a five-year FSR cycle, summarises the efforts made during the 2015/16 season to integrate social responsibility and sustainability into UEFA's business process.

"UEFA is on an ever-advancing football and social responsibility journey," said Peter Gilliéron, UEFA Executive Committee member and chairman of the Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee. "And the 2015/16 season was a very special one, not least because of EURO 2016, which saw the seamless integration of social responsibility and sustainability into UEFA's tournament operations."

Indeed, EURO 2016's approach to social responsibility and sustainability earned it ISO 20121 certification for operations from the International Organization for Standardization.

Another important milestone was the establishment of dedicated HatTrick incentive payments to support UEFA's member associations in their efforts to develop and foster football and social responsibility at all levels within their territories.

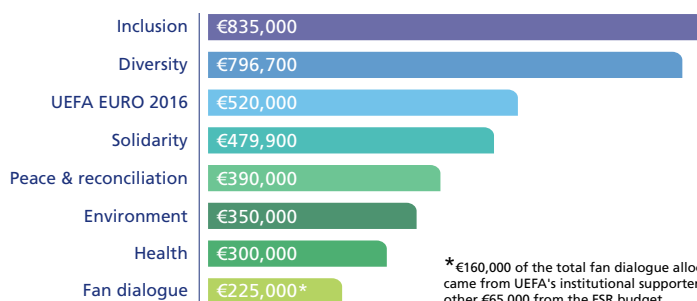
A total of €2.75m drawn from EURO 2016 revenues was made available to UEFA's 55 member associations in



The 2015/16 Football and Social Responsibility Report is available to download from UEFA.org.



2015/16 FSR budget by theme



*€160,000 of the total fan dialogue allocation of €225,000 came from UEFA's institutional supporters budget and the other €65,000 from the FSR budget.

Total €3,896,600

2015/16 to make European football more socially responsible and sustainable across the board.

"The efforts of UEFA, EURO 2016 SAS, UEFA's FSR partners, staff, volunteers, national associations, clubs, players, and last but not least, fans to play their part in this virtuous FSR circle are commendable. We need to keep the momentum going," Mr Gilliéron added.

UEFA's appetite to move forward and progress along its social responsibility and sustainability path remains as strong as ever. Among the key success factors on this journey are the long-term partnerships UEFA enjoys with a limited number of specialised NGOs, whose invaluable work is also outlined in the latest report. Available in English, French and German, it covers the period between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016. 🌐

SLOVAKIAN HALL OF FAME

It is better to see something once than to hear about it a thousand times. This Asian proverb certainly applies to Slovakian football's hall of fame, which was officially inaugurated on 22 March.

The honour of cutting the ribbon was given to Slovakia's coach of the 20th century, Jozef Vengloš; one of the most famous Slovakian footballers of all time, Jozef Adamec; and the president of the Slovak Football Association (SFZ), Ján Kováčik.

"We have a saying that a person who does not know his history does not deserve his future. Every institution, including sports organisations, should have a place where their history can be relived," Kováčik said on opening the SFZ hall of fame. "We want to remember and honour the great moments of our past and in doing so look ahead with confidence. We do not have to be afraid of the future! This is a place where we can come together and reminisce, but also plan our future."

Artefacts, memorabilia and historical documents are laid out across two floors: the ground floor belongs to the modern era of Slovakian football, as of 1994, while the first floor showcases the greatest achievements of Czechoslovakian football from its beginnings until 1993. It is impossible to single out the most precious exhibit, but the shortlist would probably include Ján Popluhár's official invitation to Stanley Matthews' farewell match, Anton Urban's silver medal from the 1964 Olympics, the boots worn by Jozef Čapkovič in the 1976 European Championship final, complete with the original turf, the award presented to Jozef Adamec when he won the golden boot for best league scorer, the ball used by Štefan Čambal in his second international match, donated by the grandchildren of the first Slovak to play in a World Cup final, and one of the balls from Slovakia's EURO debut against Wales in Bordeaux last year.

Visitors can spend five minutes to five hours perusing the history of Slovakian football, looking back over the achievements of the individuals and teams that have left their mark on the game, learning new things or just soaking up the atmosphere and reliving some historic moments, not to mention



'meeting' the famous players, coaches and officials whose portraits hang in the hall of fame. A total of 16 big names of Slovakian football have been inducted into the hall of fame so far: Jozef Adamec, Jozef Čapkovič, Karol Dobiaš, Karol Galba, Karol Jokl, Anton Ondruš, Ján Popluhár, Adolf Scherer, Viliam Schroj, Leopold Štastný and Jozef Vengloš formed the first 11, and they were joined in 2017 by Titus Buberník, Štefan Čambal, Jozef Kšiňan, Ján Pivarník and Michal Vičan. New names will be added each year. Visitors will also find photos of all 234 players who have

worn the Slovakian national team shirt since 2 February 1994, and of course the coaches who led them from the bench.

"I'm delighted that the hall of fame is now a reality. It will really help Slovakian football," said Jozef Vengloš, the biggest living legend in Slovakian football. "It proves that we have achieved many successes and can be proud of our history. I believe that many young players will take the time to visit this unique place and that it will serve as a great inspiration for them."

Peter Zeman, who first came up with the idea and now coordinates the hall of fame, donated a number of items from his own memorabilia collection. "We acquired the space for the hall of fame last year and since December we have been working on decorating and setting the place up," he said. "Of course, this will be an ongoing process and we will keep looking for new memorabilia to add."

The hall of fame will also acquire a new home, together with the SFZ and the Slovakian national team, when Slovakia's new national stadium has been built. Located at Tehelné pole in Bratislava, the stadium is scheduled for completion by the end of 2018. 🏟️




From left to right: Jozef Adamec, Jozef Vengloš and Ján Kováčik

AZERBAIJAN

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FOOTBALL JOURNALISM WORKSHOP

TORA AKHMEDOVA

 Azerbaijan's state academy of physical education and sport (ASAPES) recently organised a two-day workshop on football journalism in cooperation with the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA).

The manager of ASAPES' continuing professional development programmes, Tukazban Jafarova, opened the workshop with a general overview of the topics to be covered. She then gave the floor to AFFA's information and public relations specialist, Firuz Abdulla, who gave a brief presentation and wished the participants all the best in their training.

A final welcome was given by the head of ASAPES' strategic development committee and the rector's international relations advisor, Shamsiyya Mustafayeva, before the workshop proper got under way under the guidance of experienced instructor Dan Mason.

The workshop was attended by 12 journalists, selected on the recommendation of AFFA's media committee, and by members of AFFA's



media and PR and marketing and sponsorship departments. Together, the participants exchanged ideas about modern trends in sports journalism, the


impact and potential of social media, how to provide information quickly and efficiently, and how to manage multimedia projects.

BELARUS

www.bff.by

A NEW LOGO FOR THE TOP DIVISION

ALEKSANDR ALEINIK

 The Football Federation of Belarus (BFF) has developed a new logo for its top division, giving the Belarusian Premier League a fresh new look with the aid of local creative agency DAB.

The design for the new logo is based on the centre circle of a football pitch, symbolising the unity of the country's top clubs. The green lines denote the quest for victory and give the logo a dynamic quality, while the 11 red pentagons positioned within those lines represent players, divided into defenders, midfielders and forwards. The focal point within the new logo is, of course, a ball.

Yury Sadovski, deputy head of the BFF's marketing and communication department, is delighted with the result: "We are very pleased with our new logo and all the related branding, which was developed just in time for the new season. We created several versions: a full colour logo (green and red), a monochrome black version and a monochrome white version. This will allow us to use the logo on different backgrounds." The new logo is also available in two language versions: Belarusian and Russian.

All top-flight clubs were given a full set of branded materials before the new



season kicked off on 1 April, including press conference backdrops, boards, ball stands for pre-match ceremonies and T-shirt patches. Already, the league has a completely different look and feel about it. With a large number of teams separated by just a handful of points at the top of the table, and attendance figures at several clubs, such as FC Dinamo Brest, FC Gomel and FC Dnepr Mogilev, substantially higher than in the past, the 27th season of the Belarusian Premier League represents an exciting new page in the history of Belarusian football.

BELGIUM

www.belgianfootball.be

EIGHT SEMI-PROFESSIONAL REFEREES FOR 2017/18

GLEN SCHAILLIE



The Royal Belgian Football Association is set to launch a new initiative aimed at professionalising refereeing, with eight referees becoming semi-professional next season.

The aim is to gradually increase that figure over time, in order to have 10 semi-professional referees by 2018/19 and 12 by 2019/20. "We intend to work intensively on their pre-match preparation, match analysis and coaching. They will spend one and a half days a week practising at our national football centre," explains Johan Verbist, head of refereeing at the Royal Belgian Football Association. "We hope to improve the skills of every single one of those match officials. But we won't just



Johan Verbist

be helping our semi-professional referees. All of our referees are equally important to us, and we will obviously continue to support the others as well."

The association hopes that, in addition to improving the quality of refereeing in domestic football, this initiative will also result in Belgian referees featuring more prominently at international level.

All 19 of Belgium's elite referees were able to apply for semi-professional status, and a total of 15 did so. "We are really pleased with that figure and the amount of enthusiasm on display," says Koen De Brabander, the association's general secretary.

The eight referees who have been selected are: Sébastien Delferière, Bart Vertenten, Alexandre Boucaut, Jonathan Lardot, Erik Lambrechts, Lawrence Visser, Bram Van Driessche and Nathan Verboomen.

Belgium's match officials now have their own Twitter account (@BelgianReferees), so you can follow the referees' progress as they embark on this new initiative.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

www.nfsbih.ba

NEW STAND AT STADION GRBAVICA

FEDJA KRVAVAC



On 1 April, the new East Stand at Stadion Grbavica was inaugurated. The stand, which seats 4,266 spectators and was built with the aid of donations from fans, friends of FK Željezničar and sponsors, forms part of a long-term renovation project at the stadium. The honour of formally opening the new stand fell to revered former player and coach Ivica Osim – the great 'Švabo'. "In all my years of playing at Stadion Grbavica, I never saw a better pitch. This should have happened long ago. I would like to thank everyone who has come here today. This is a nostalgic



club that lives within its means and has produced a miracle," he said. Thus, after 13 long years, Željezničar will once again be hosting European matches at their home ground.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Under-16 team recently won the Josip Katalinski Škija Memorial Tournament, beating Montenegro 4-2 on penalties in the final. The tournament was also contested by a team representing Belgrade and a team representing Sarajevo and East Sarajevo. The trophy was presented to the winners by Ivica Osim. Montenegro's Amir Muzurović was given the award for the player who most reminded people of Josip Katalinski Škija.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's futsal team headed to Baku in April for the main round of the European Futsal Championship. They lost 5-4 to hosts Azerbaijan, before drawing 2-2 with Hungary and 6-6 with Albania, so failed to qualify for the final round.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Under-16 women's team recently won a UEFA development tournament in Podgorica. They overcame Azerbaijan 3-1 and Kazakhstan 2-1, before beating hosts Montenegro 5-4 on penalties in the final.

SFK 2000 Sarajevo's youth team have won Bosnia and Herzegovina's national girls' championship, topping the table with 35 points. ŽFK Radnik Bumerang were runners-up with 31 points, followed by ŽFK Iskra Bugojno (30 points), ŽFK Mladost Poljavnice (23 points), ŽFK Banja Luka (18 points), ŽFK Lokomotiva Brčko (14 points), ŽOFK Gradina (6 points) and ŽFK Modriča (3 points).

Futsal club Mostar SG Staklorad have won the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Futsal Cup, beating MNK Centar over two legs in the final. Although they lost the second leg 5-4 on 22 April, their 5-3 victory in the first leg a week earlier was enough to give them victory on aggregate.

BULGARIA

www.bfunion.bg

UNDER-19 TRAINING CAMPS IN PREPARATION FOR FINALS

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MEDIA DEPARTMENT



Angel Stoykov's Under-19s have three training camps lined up, in Albena, Stara Zagora and Sofia in preparation for the European Under-19 Championship finals in Georgia this summer.

The first training camp will be held at the Albena resort complex from 5 to 10 June, from 13 to 17 June the team will train in Stara Zagora and from 20 to 30 June the squad will be based at the national football centre in Sofia's Boyana district. These training camps will also involve friendly matches, the dates and opponents for which will be announced in due course.

The team will head straight from the national football centre in Sofia to Georgia, where they will join England, Germany and the Netherlands in Group B.

The president of the Bulgarian Football Union, Borislav Mihaylov, praised Angel Stoykov and his players on their excellent performance in qualifying for this summer's European Under-19 Championship finals and treated them to a celebratory dinner at the national football centre. "I congratulate you on qualifying for this Under-19 EURO," he said. "With your passion and skills, you have made the Bulgarian fans proud of you. I wish you all the very best for the tournament in



Georgia. I'm confident that, although you will be up against very strong opponents, you will succeed in defending the honour of Bulgarian football."

The players and staff all received special bonuses for qualifying for the final tournament and claiming their place among the eight best teams in Europe.

CROATIA

www.hns-cff.hr

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY THROUGH FUTSAL

TOMISLAV PACAK



International Roma Day was celebrated in Zagreb with a futsal tournament organised by the World Roma Organization in Croatia and the Croatian Football Federation. Four teams contested the tournament: a side representing Croatia's ethnic minorities, Croatia's deaf-mute national team, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Roma national team, and the 'Humanitarian Stars' from Kotor Varos in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"We are happy and proud to be celebrating our day – a day that has been celebrated worldwide since 1971 – in this manner. We are most grateful to the Croatian Football Federation and its president, Davor Šuker, our partners and associates in this endeavour, for helping us to organise such a fantastic event," said Toti Dedić, president of the World Roma Organization.

Meanwhile, Croatia's football family recently said a sad goodbye to Tomislav



Židak, who died in April aged 65. Židak, who was one of the country's most loved and respected sportswriters, dedicated most of his career to football, receiving numerous awards for his contribution to sports journalism. Hundreds of big names in the game paid their respects to one of the most influential voices in Croatian sport.

Even without any Croatian clubs making it through to the knockout stage, six Croatian internationals have reached the semi-finals of the UEFA Champions League. Indeed, with at least one Croat playing for

each of the four clubs – Šime Vrsaljko at Club Atlético de Madrid, Mario Mandžukić and Marko Pjaca at Juventus, Luka Modrić and Mateo Kovačić at Real Madrid CF and Danijel Subašić at AS Monaco FC – Croatia are assured of having a Champions League winner for the fifth year in a row.

Finally, GNK Dinamo Zagreb's Under-14 team recently won the 15th Vukovar Veterans' Memorial Tournament, beating Osijek 4-0 in the final. Dinamo Zagreb's Viktor Kanižaj was named player of the tournament, with team-mate Ivan Šaranić finishing as the top scorer.

FAROE ISLANDS

www.football.fo

WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM QUALIFY

TERJI NIELSEN



The Faroese women's national team have once again made it through to the group stage of World Cup qualifying.

In April the Faroe Islands FA hosted the Group 5 preliminary round mini-tournament, in which the home team competed against Luxembourg, Montenegro and Turkey.

The Faroe Islands and Turkey both remained unbeaten after two matchdays and it all came down to their head to head. The winners of this match would top the group and qualify directly for the next round. The match was close, and Turkey got ahead before the break,

putting pressure on the hosts. But with the support of more than 1,000 fans in the stands, the Faroese fought back to win the game 2-1.

This is seen as a massive result for women's football in the Faroe Islands, and everyone is now looking forward to the qualifying group stage, where the team will face the Czech Republic, the mighty Germany, Iceland and Slovenia.

"We want to play against stronger nations, and we really will be tested in this group. It will be a challenge, but without a doubt it will also be an exciting and valuable experience for our players," says head coach Pætur Clementsen.

GERMANY

www.dfb.de

VOLUNTEER INITIATIVE CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY

THOMAS HACKBARTH



Hard-working volunteers are a cornerstone of our sport. Mindful of that, the German Football Association (DFB) launched a special initiative – Aktion Ehrenamt – 20 years ago in order to honour and support all those people who dedicate their time and energy to the game on a voluntary basis. Aktion Ehrenamt shines a spotlight on all the different people on whom our clubs depend, from coaches and youth leaders to club presidents, administrators, treasurers and so on.

Changes in society have resulted in changes in people's relationships with their clubs and it has become increasingly difficult to establish lasting ties. In response to that, the DFB's Aktion Ehrenamt encourages people to volunteer, provides training and pays tribute to the vital contribution that volunteers make. DFB Volunteer Awards are presented to one volunteer in each of Germany's 280 football districts every year. In addition,

100 award winners are invited to join the prestigious '100 Club' in recognition of their exceptional commitment to the game. Since 2016, the DFB has also been honouring 'football heroes' – young volunteers between the ages of 16 and 30 who have made an outstanding contribution to the game. Every spring, the association organises a trip to Barcelona for the winners of these youth volunteer awards.

About 1.7 million people are involved in football in Germany on a voluntary basis. In order to reach those people, the DFB has also used Aktion Ehrenamt to establish dedicated structures such as a volunteer committee, which directs all assistance measures and projects developed by the association's qualifications department. These are then rolled out to clubs via 21 dedicated officials with responsibility for volunteers at regional level and a further 274 officials at district level.

GEORGIA

www.gff.ge

SECOND AMATEUR CUP SEASON GETS UNDER WAY

KETI GOLIADZE



The 2017 edition of the Georgian Football Federation (GFF) Amateur Cup kicked off on 19 April at Ozurgeti central stadium. The opening match was attended by the GFF's general secretary, David Mujiri, and vice-president, Nika Jgarkava. "The Georgian Football Federation, together with the Amateur Football Association, first organised the Amateur Cup in 2016, when some 250 teams and 5,000 players took part," Mr Mujiri explains. "The number of participants has increased significantly this year, and I am sure that this trend will continue in the future, which is excellent news in terms of mass participation in football."

This year, the Amateur Cup features 314 teams and 8,000 amateur footballers from 45 towns and districts around the country. The competition will be played out in three stages, with teams competing at municipal, regional and finally national level. The municipal stage takes the form of a cup competition, with the winners and, in some cases, the best runners-up advancing to the regional stage, which will comprise 11 leagues of 6 to 8 teams. These will be played out in a round-robin format and coincide with the Tbilisi premier league and first division competitions, as well as the Tbilisi Cup, whose finalists will enter the final stage of the 2017 Amateur Cup. They will be joined at the decisive national stage by the 14 winners of the regional leagues, for what is sure to be an exciting end to a unique competition.



HUNGARY

www.mlsz.hu / en.mlsz.hu

TACKLING BUDAPEST'S PITCH SHORTAGE

MÁRTON DINNYÉS



For decades, news relating to pitches in the Hungarian capital has been all about their gradual disappearance. That is about to change thanks to the Budapest Pitch Development Programme, under which the Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ) is joining forces with local authorities to improve the city's grassroots infrastructure.

The first agreement is due to be signed with Pestszentlőrinc-Pestszentimre local council for the creation and renovation of pitches in the capital's 18th district. That will be followed by similar agreements with the city's 22 other districts, in order to make sure that Budapest's large numbers of amateur and youth players

all have somewhere to play their weekend matches.

Gábor Gundel Takács, head of the MLSZ's Budapest directorate, says: "I know Budapest football well from several different perspectives. Fifty or sixty years ago, there were more than 270 pitches in Budapest. Today, there are barely 100, which means that the pitch situation is worse in the capital than anywhere else in the country. Consequently, the MLSZ's Budapest directorate has launched a programme aimed at ensuring that no more pitches are built on for other purposes, existing pitches are upgraded appropriately where needed, and more pitches are created."

Those new pitches, which will be funded by the government, will be in addition to the 1,000 or so pitches of different sizes that the MLSZ has established across the country in the last six years under the leadership of Sándor Csányi.



ITALY

www.figc.it

BOYS' AND GIRLS' UNDER-12 FINALS AT COVERCIANO

DIEGO ANTENZIO



The national Under-12 club competitions organised by the youth and schools division of the Italian



Football Federation (FIGC) will soon reach their conclusion, with the final rounds to be played at the federation's Coverciano training complex on 17 and 18 June. The Fair Play Elite tournament for boys and the Danone Nations Cup for girls are contested by teams from Italy's professional league clubs (Serie A, Serie B and Lega Pro) and elite football schools. The finalists have had to work hard to reach this stage, seeing off rivals in qualifying rounds at local, regional and inter-regional level.

Both competitions are part of a coordinated, multi-phase project developed by the FIGC's youth and schools division to promote a broad spectrum of grassroots activities across Italy. The youngsters play in teams of eight (girls' competition) and nine (boys') – a format that will become the model for this age group as of next season. In addition, individual skills are put to the test before each match in a short one-on-one shootout competition, providing an opportunity to assess the players' attitude and ability as they approach the end of the

first stage in their footballing education, with particular emphasis on fair play as an essential part of every player's development. The one-on-one shootout is about awareness and individual skills, focusing on dribbling and shooting in the case of outfield players, and coming off the line and narrowing the angle for goalkeepers. It also contributes to the youngsters' ongoing physical, technical and mental development.

This is the second year that the FIGC's youth and schools division has organised a girls' Under-12 competition in cooperation with Danone. By focusing on the development of young female players, the competition further contributes to a sector of youth football that has seen substantial growth in recent years. This is at least in part thanks to a new provision in the FIGC's club licensing regulations whereby every club wishing to participate in the national leagues has to have a girls' Under-12 team. This year's Danone Nations Cup featured 58 teams (23 from professional clubs), which represents an increase of over a third in the space of a season. The winners will travel to New York to represent Italy at world finals in September. Around 400 teams, meanwhile, entered the Fair Play Elite Under-12 boys' tournament.

KAZAKHSTAN

www.kff.kz

ROUND-TABLE MEETINGS IN ASTANA

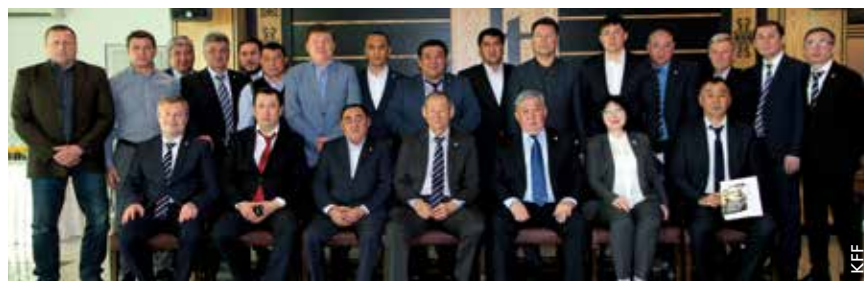
MURATBEK BIMANOV



On 19 and 20 April, the Football Federation of Kazakhstan (KFF) hosted its latest round-table meetings on the development of amateur football at regional level, with a view to discussing key issues and identifying solutions to problems.

In addition to the presidents and general secretaries of regional football federations, the meetings in Astana were, for the first time, also attended by the heads of regional sports departments.

The KFF's general secretary, Kanysh Aubakirov, welcomed the participants: "In addition to the heads of regional football federations, we have also invited the leaders of regional sports departments. This is very important for us, because you are involved directly at regional level and contribute to the development of mass sport. We want sports management bodies to understand the importance of the regional football federations. Your remarks and suggestions, which will really contribute to the development of grassroots football, will be taken into account at the KFF's general assembly. If we work together, we will be able to devise a



joint strategy for the development of football at regional level."

The meetings were an opportunity not only to discuss the development of football in the different regions, but also to exchange views on topics such as club licensing (including issues relating to legal documentation, financial fair play and infrastructure) and the organisation and running of competitions in youth and grassroots football. Participants heard, for example, about the KFF's new Regional Cup competition for amateur teams, which will be contested for the first time this season. The top four teams in that competition will be given places in the preliminary round of next season's Kazakh Cup.

There was also a proposal to license amateur players at regional level, and a

presentation on a football project for primary schools nationwide, which the KFF is planning to pilot in Astana and Almaty in 2018 in conjunction with the Kazakh ministry of education and science.

The head of the KFF's grassroots department, Yerlan Dzhamentayev, also explained that, as part of the association's plans to raise the profile of amateur football, the final rounds of certain amateur competitions would be organised by the KFF from now on.

The round-table participants all agreed that such meetings are an important cornerstone of effective interaction between the different parties involved in amateur football in Kazakhstan.

LATVIA

www.lff.lv

STARKOV'S RETURNS TO MANAGE THE NATIONAL TEAM

TOMS ĀRMANIS



Aleksandrs Starkovs, who led Latvia to their biggest success so far in qualifying for EURO 2004 in Portugal, has returned for a third spell as head coach of the national team. He signed a two-and-a-half-year contract in April to take up the position vacated by fellow countryman Marians Pahars, who stepped down at the end of March. Pahars himself took over from Starkovs in July 2013, having previously managed Skonto FC and the Latvian Under-21s. His last game in charge was a friendly



Aleksandrs Starkovs (middle)

match in Georgia, which the visitors lost 5-0. Pahars, who spent most of his playing career as a striker for Southampton FC in the English Premier League, is now looking to return to club football.

Between his previous stints with the Latvian national team (2001-04 and 2007-13), Starkovs has managed such clubs as FC Spartak Moskva in Russia, Bakı FK in Azerbaijan and Skonto FC in his native Latvia. He was also a member of the board of the Latvian Football Federation.

LITHUANIA

www.lff.lt

FOCUS ON THE WOMEN'S GAME

VAIDOTAS JANUŠKA



 Women and girls have taken centre stage in Lithuania this spring as the Lithuanian Football Federation (LFF) organised the second editions of both its girls' futsal championship and its women's futsal league, while also hosting a couple of international tournaments.

Ladygolas, the girls' futsal championship, continues to defy expectations, with 445 teams taking part this season. "Many people shook their heads when we told them we were thinking of launching a women's futsal project," the LFF's grassroots manager, Vaidotas Rastenis, explains.

"In 2016 we expected to have 200 teams at most and in the end we had 347. This season we had even more teams, in three different age categories." Last season Ladygolas was shortlisted for UEFA's KISS Marketing Award for best women's football marketing campaign.

Meanwhile, at elite level, nine teams took part in the second season of the LFF women's futsal league, while a record 15 teams signed up for the second division of the women's football league.

With the women's game clearly going from strength to strength, players and staff have gained valuable experience by hosting Women's World Cup qualifiers and a UEFA women's Under-18 development tournament, as well as taking part in a women's Under-16 development tournament in Slovenia in preparation for the European Women's Under-17 Championship final tournament Lithuania will host in 2018.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

COACHES OBTAIN UEFA PRO LICENCES

ALEX VELLA

 A total of 19 coaches have successfully completed the first UEFA Pro licence course organised by the Malta FA's technical centre. The centre's coach education department received positive feedback from UEFA Jira Panel member Dany Ryser, who oversaw the assessments – the final stage of a rigorous 450-hour course.

Excellent results were achieved across the board, confirming the hard work put in by the candidates and the high quality of education offered by the Malta FA in all its coaching courses. Ryser confirmed that the Maltese coaches had demonstrated great competence and willingness to work hard in order to achieve the required standard.

The Malta FA congratulated the newly qualified Pro licence holders on their achievements and presented certificates to each of them, as well as to those who completed the UEFA Elite Youth A licence

course at the end of May.

The Malta FA's coach education department is headed by Stephen Grima, with Robert Gatt as director of the technical centre.



D. Aquilina

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL SUCCESS STORY

PRESS OFFICE



The Moldovan women's national team have qualified in impressive fashion for the group stage of the European qualifying competition for the 2019 Women's World Cup. Drawn into Group 3 for the preliminary round, the Moldovans, led by coach Alina Steţenco, beat Andorra 4-0 and Lithuania 2-0 before drawing 0-0 with Israel to finish second. Although beaten to top spot on goal difference, Moldova qualified for the group stage as the best runners-up of all four preliminary round groups. The qualifying group stage draw at the end of April put them in Group 6 alongside Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Romania.

"This was not an easy achievement," Steţenco said after her team's qualification. "I want to say a huge thank you to my players, who believed they could do it and did exactly what I asked of them. The match against Lithuania was particularly special for me. It was like a dream come true. We played really good football, we had control of



the ball, and we passed very well, which is not something we managed in previous years against strong opponents such as Sweden and Denmark."

This success story is not down to chance but the result of serious hard work, which begins with the youngest age groups. In order to give all its players the best possible training, the Football Association of Moldova invites its women's teams to use the facilities at the national technical centre in Vadul lui Vodă and organises lots of friendly tournaments during the year. UEFA's development tournaments have been a great help in giving the younger players international

experience and two years ago the senior team made it into the qualifying group stage for Women's EURO 2017, triumphing over Latvia, Lithuania and Luxembourg in the preliminary round mini-tournament they hosted and competing against Denmark, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden in the next round.

As a sign of the changing times, two years ago only the captain played for a foreign club; now 11 of Moldova's senior national team have been signed by clubs in Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Romania and Russia. By all accounts, women's football in Moldova has an exciting future ahead of it!

NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

FUTSAL 'PIONEERS' PRESENTED WITH INTERNATIONAL CAPS

NIGEL TILSON



The Irish Football Association has presented international caps to Northern Ireland's first-ever futsal squad. The players made history in December when they made their bow at the Futsal Home Nations Championships in Wales. At a presentation ceremony held at the National Football Stadium at

Windsor Park in Belfast the achievements of both the team and the backroom staff were celebrated. The event also highlighted the rapid development of the sport in Northern Ireland over the last 18 months.

Irish FA president David Martin presented the caps. "The Irish FA encouraged the creation of a culture of futsal back in 2013,

as documented in the association's corporate strategy," he explained. "Subsequent youth and futsal strategies have served to embed the game of futsal into all future Irish FA development plans. Events like this highlight the progress that has been made and I look forward to the future development of the sport."

Jonathan Michael, head coach of the Northern Ireland futsal team, said: "It has been wonderful to recognise the achievements of the players. This group of players are pioneers for the sport in Northern Ireland and I hope that their experiences and influence will inspire many more to get involved in the game."



ROMANIA

www.frf.ro

DEFIBRILLATORS FOR CLUBS

PAUL ZAHARIA



Following the death of FC Dinamo's Patrick Ekeng on 6 May 2016 and a thorough inventory of the medical facilities of all its affiliated members, the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) decided to provide each of its clubs with an external automatic defibrillator. The FRF's medical department identified this as a 'must', especially as so few already had such devices of their own.

The FRF wanted not just to hand out the devices but to combine their distribution with education sessions in the form of special seven-hour courses on first aid and how to manage emergency situations that could occur on the pitch during matches or training.

The head of the FRF's medical department, Dr Mihai Meiu, conducted this educational tour with Dr Ovidiu Cismaru, an emergency doctor who works with the FRF. They started at the FRF football centre in Mogosoaia in December and worked their way around the country, completing their tour at the end of April.

Given the size of Romania, which is not a small country by any stretch, the courses were organised on a regional basis in the cities of Timisoara, Cluj-Napoca, Targu Mures and Brasov – one of which is within a two-hour drive of every FRF member. Each club was asked to nominate a medical specialist to attend and take receipt of their

defibrillator on successful completion of the course.

This project, supported and financed by UEFA, was a real first for Romania and according to Dr Cismaru, the instructors were "pleasantly surprised" by the level of take-up and existing knowledge among the club doctors. "All the course participants were well aware of how an external defibrillator should be used in conjunction with traditional resuscitation manoeuvres," he said.

The initiative was very well received, with almost 200 clubs having taken up the invitation. As a result, around 90% of FRF members now have defibrillators that will help them gain precious time in the event of an emergency.

SCOTLAND

www.scottishfa.co.uk

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ADVISORY BOARD

MICHAEL LAMONT



The Scottish FA has established an Equality and Diversity Advisory Board (EDAB), designed to enhance inclusivity and ensure Scottish football moves towards a better representation of Scotland.

As a core component of its strategy 'Scotland United: 2020 Vision', the Scottish FA has made a commitment to progressing and embedding equality in all levels of Scottish football and the EDAB is a fundamental initiative in that regard.

The newly formed EDAB convened for its first meeting at Hampden, the home of Scottish football, in March and it will subsequently meet quarterly. It aims to serve as a senior supporting group to provide guidance to the Scottish FA and ensure that the organisation's commitment to inclusion, equality and diversity is embedded throughout its structures, plans and activities.

Chaired by Ralph Topping, a member of the Scottish FA Board, the EDAB also involves the Scottish FA's chief executive, head of human resources, and diversity



and inclusion manager, working alongside six independent members with expertise in different aspects of equality and diversity.

At the initial meeting, the EDAB members were presented with an introduction to the Scottish FA's structure, an overview of the equality initiatives already undertaken and a review of the

new grassroots disability strategy due to be launched later this year.

"We are proud of the Scottish FA's work towards equality and the strides we have made," Ralph Topping said. "Appointing this advisory board will support our aim of being fully representative and inclusive in all areas and at all levels of our work."

SERBIA

www.fss.rs

TOP PRIZES AWARDED TO SERBIA'S BEST

UGLJESA VRBICA



The Football Association of Serbia (FSS) recently held its third general meeting of the 2016–20 period, which brought together 79 delegates at the FSS sports centre in Stara Pazova. Special guests included Bjorn Vassallo, FIFA's member association regional director for Europe, who, on behalf of FIFA president Gianni Infantino, wished everyone continued success in their efforts to promote and develop Serbian football. The event was also attended by former coaches of the national teams of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Serbia, as well as a large number of staff and football officials.

The delegates approved the executive committee report for 2016, which outlines the excellent work undertaken by the FSS across a number of different areas. The national Under-17 and



Under-21 youth teams were congratulated on their performances in their respective European competitions, and hope and support was expressed for the senior team, coached by Slavoljub Muslin, in their efforts to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

It was also announced that, in line with FSS president Slaviša Kokeza's pre-election promise, work is expected to start on a number of important projects for Serbian football, including the construction of a new national stadium and administrative 'house of football'.

Finally, awards were presented to the best and most promising individuals in Serbian football in 2016. Uroš Djurdjević was named the most promising player, and Nenad Lalatović received the award for best coach. Nenad Minaković was singled out as the most promising referee in Serbia, and the award for the most promising referee trio went to Milorad Mažić, Milovan Ristić and Dalibor Djurdjević. Allegra Poljak was named the best female player, Tanja Djapić the most promising female player, and Nemanja Savić the best coach in women's football.

SLOVAKIA

www.futbalsfz.sk

PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR AMATEUR FOOTBALL

PETER SURIN



Less than 1% of the people who play football do so professionally. The amateur game represents 99% of those involved in and passionate about the world's most popular game, making it the real global phenomenon. In Slovakia, this recognition has given rise to BE-PRO, a unique service that brings together players, clubs and others involved in amateur football. The service works much like an online dating service for football, creating a virtual space where players, clubs and officials can connect.

"The project has been up and running for five years now," one of the co-founders, Andrej Kalina, explains. "It works on the principle of supply and demand. Players look for clubs, and clubs look for players – that's the basic premise. On the one hand, players

can choose from a variety of clubs, and on the other hand clubs can see what players are available. We're talking about amateur football, so it's free to post ads. There's nothing to lose, for players or clubs. Both sides can only benefit from using BE-PRO."

The services available on BE-PRO are not only for players and clubs, but also for coaches, masseurs, doctors, physios, fitness coaches and club officials, all of whom can post their biographies and CVs to raise their profiles within the game and connect with clubs. Beyond the primary function of informing and connecting people and clubs, the aim of BE-PRO is to create a community of football lovers, so the website also gives users an opportunity to chat about tickets, matches and tours, and exchange other information of mutual interest.



The BE-PRO database now has 5,444 users and has facilitated hundreds of transfers within Slovakia and even abroad, especially after the website's relaunch this winter. BE-PRO's supporters include big names in Slovakian football past and present, such as Filip Šebo, Juraj Halenár and the national team's all-time leading goalscorer, Róbert Vittek. The new platform has a fresh, new look and new functionalities, and there are currently more than 200 open ads, from players, coaching staff and others looking for clubs, and vice versa.

SWEDEN

www.svenskfotboll.se

NEW UNDER-21 COACH APPOINTED

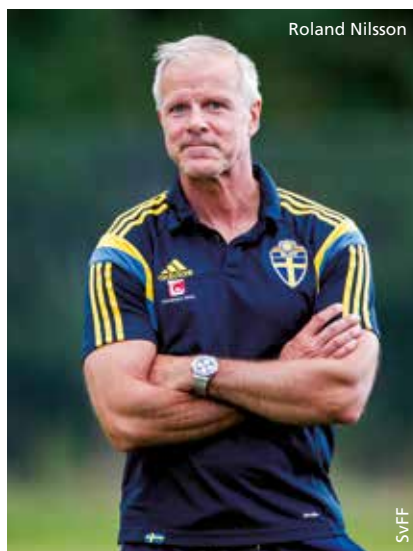
ANDREAS NILSSON



Roland Nilsson is set to take charge of Sweden's national Under-21 team when they return from Poland this summer.

"We couldn't be happier with this appointment. In his career, Roland has been contributing to the Swedish national teams for almost 25 years already. You only need to take a brief look at his résumé to see what he's achieved," said Håkan Sjöstrand, general secretary of the Swedish FA.

Nilsson's résumé includes 117 caps for Sweden (1986 to 2000), winning the UEFA Cup (1987), a World Cup bronze (1994), four Swedish championship titles (three as a player, one as a coach), and iconic status at at least two of his former clubs: Helsingborgs IF and Sheffield Wednesday FC. He began his coaching career in 2001



at Coventry City, and continued with stints at GAIS Göteborg, Malmö FF and FC København. Since 2014, Nilsson has coached Sweden's Under-17 side.

"It will be an honour and a privilege to keep working with the national teams, and to bring through a new generation of players that I already know well. It's also an inspiring challenge to build on the amazing success Håkan Ericson has had with the Swedish Under-21 side in recent years," said Roland Nilsson.

Current coach Håkan Ericson will step down after the European Under-21 Championship finals in Poland this summer, where Sweden will be looking to defend their title from 2015. Roland Nilsson will then lead the team into qualifying for the 2019 finals in Italy, starting in September this year.

SWITZERLAND

www.football.ch

NEW UEFA PRO LICENCES

PIERRE BENOIT



Eleven coaches were recently awarded UEFA Pro licences at the house of Swiss football in Muri, near Berne, having successfully completed all the various theoretical and practical units of the Swiss FA's 2015/16 UEFA Pro licence course.

The coaches in question are Matteo Vanetta, Gerardo Seoane, Roberto Cattilaz, Johann Vogel, Thomas Stamm, Marco Walker, Erminio Piserchia, Joël Magnin, Marc Duvillard, Raphaël Wicky and Massimo Lombard – all of whom successfully completed and passed the numerous modules and exams.

Obtaining this elite coaching qualification requires a tremendous amount of hard work and commitment over a long period of time, but it opens the door to coaching at clubs in the top two Swiss leagues. The licence is also recognised abroad, in all countries that are signatories of the UEFA Coaching Convention.

Among the 2015/16 graduates are five former Swiss internationals, namely Vogel (94 caps), Wicky (75 caps), Lombardo

(15 caps), Walker (10 caps) and Magnin (1 cap), and two previous Under-21 national team players, Vanetta and Seoane.



TURKEY

www.tff.org

SERVET YARDIMCI JOINS UEFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

AYDIN GÜVENİR

 The Ordinary UEFA Congress, which brings together the presidents and general secretaries of all 55 UEFA member associations, is always a special occasion and this year's event, the 41st of its kind, was no exception. Among the many important items on the agenda were elections for eight seats on the UEFA Executive Committee and one of those seats went to the first vice-president of the Turkish Football

Federation (TFF), Servet Yardımcı. Mr Yardımcı received 34 votes from the delegates assembled in the Finnish capital and will serve on the committee for the next four years.

Besides Mr Yardımcı, the TFF was represented in Helsinki by its president, Yıldırım Demirören, vice-president Ali Dürüst, executive committee members Cengiz Zulfikaroğlu, Alaattin Aykaç and Mustafa Çağlar, and general secretary Kadir Kardeş.



UKRAINE

www.ffu.org.ua

EUROPEAN FUTSAL AT ITS FINEST IN KYIV

YURI MAZNYCHENKO

 From 8 to 11 April the Palace of Sports in Kyiv played host to some of Europe's top futsal teams in a qualifying mini-tournament for Futsal EURO 2018. The capital of Ukraine welcomed the national teams of Croatia and Belgium, who together with Ukraine entered the competition directly in the main round, and Montenegro, one of the group winners of the preliminary stage.

After two days of matches, Ukraine and Croatia both remained unbeaten and had to go head to head on the final matchday to decide who would get a direct ticket to Slovenia and who would have to contest the play-offs.

Oleksandr Kosenko's team conceded in the first half, but after the break the Ukrainians raised the roof in the Palace of Sports with goals by Mykola Bilotserkivets and Volodymyr Razuvanov. With this resolute victory, Ukraine secured their place in the finals of the European Futsal Championship alongside Azerbaijan, Italy, Kazakhstan, Portugal, Russia, Spain and the hosts, Slovenia. The tournament will take place in Ljubljana from 30 January to 10 February 2018.

"We wanted to please the fans who came to support the team at the Palace



of Sports," Kosenko said after the mini-tournament in Kyiv. "The final match was a true final, with two strong contenders. On some level our will to win was greater than Croatia's and we showed more desire and skill.

Croatia also played well, but we were the better side. We can't stop now, though. The EURO is waiting for us this winter. We must prepare for the tournament and do our best to perform well in Slovenia."

BIRTHDAYS

Dušan Savić (Serbia, 1 June)
Ekaterina Fedyshina (Russia, 1 June)
Ferenc Székely (Hungary, 2 June)
Ivaylo Ivkov (Bulgaria, 3 June)
Radek Lobo (Czech Republic, 3 June)
Klara Bjartmarz (Iceland, 3 June)
John Ward (Republic of Ireland, 4 June)
Yauheni Tratsiuk (Belarus, 4 June) **60th**
Mete Düren (Turkey, 4 June)
Jean-Samuel Leuba
 (Switzerland, 4 June) **50th**
Ludovico Micallef (Malta, 5 June)
Jaap Uilenberg (Netherlands, 5 June)
John MacLean (Scotland, 5 June)
Maksimas Bechterevas (Lithuania, 5 June)
Michael Joseph Hyland
 (Republic of Ireland, 6 June)
Lars-Åke Björck (Sweden, 7 June) **80th**
Michel Sablon (Belgium, 7 June) **70th**
Sandor Berzi (Hungary, 7 June)
Onofre Costa (Portugal, 7 June)
Johannes Scholtz (Netherlands, 8 June)
Piero Volpi (Italy, 9 June)
Jesper Møller Christensen
 (Denmark, 9 June)
Antoine Portelli (Malta, 9 June)
Petri Antero Jakonen
 (Finland, 9 June) **50th**
Jonathan Ford (Wales, 9 June)
Monica Jorge (Portugal, 9 June)
Hans Bangerter (Switzerland, 10 June)
Andrew Shaw (England, 10 June)
Eleni Kiriou (Greece, 10 June)
Kyros Georgiou (Cyprus, 11 June)
Thórir Hakonarson (Iceland, 11 June)
Kristinn Jakobsson (Iceland, 11 June)
Zoran Đimić (Serbia, 11 June)
José Luis López Serrano (Spain, 12 June)
Alain Courtois (Belgium, 12 June)
Jørn West Larsen (Denmark, 12 June)
Iwona Małek-Wybraniec (Poland, 12 June)
Haris Gvozden
 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 12 June)
Roland Coquard (France, 13 June) **70th**
Targo Kaldoja (Estonia, 13 June)
Matej Damjanović
 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 13 June)
Galina Doneva (Bulgaria, 14 June)
Nuno Castro (Portugal, 14 June)

Viacheslav Koloskov (Russia, 15 June)
Miguel Galan Torres (Spain, 15 June) **70th**
Vilma Zurze (Lithuania, 15 June)
Alkan Ergün (Turkey, 16 June)
Ramish Maliyev (Azerbaijan, 16 June)
Kepa Larumbe Beain (Spain, 16 June)
Michael Joseph Maessen
 (Netherlands, 17 June)
Rainer Werthmann (Germany, 17 June)
Paolo Rondelli (San Marino, 17 June)
Anne Rei (Estonia, 17 June)
Philippe Piat (France, 18 June)
Hannelore Ratzeburg (Germany, 18 June)
Ivan Novak (Croatia, 18 June)
Eduard Prodani (Albania, 18 June)
Elkhan Mammadov (Azerbaijan, 18 June)
Tobias Wolf (Germany, 19 June)
Maria Mifsud (Malta, 20 June)
Peter Peters (Germany, 21 June)
Zoran Cvrk (Croatia, 21 June)
Tomasz Mikulski (Poland, 21 June)
Paulius Malzinskas (Lithuania, 21 June)
Ilja Kaenzig (Switzerland, 21 June)
Keith Stuart Hackett (England, 22 June)
David Martin (Northern Ireland, 22 June)
Ante Kulušić (Croatia, 22 June)
Zvi Rosen (Israel, 23 June) **70th**
Vladimir Antonov (Moldova, 23 June)
Georg Pangl (Austria, 23 June)
Jean-Jacques Schonckert
 (Luxembourg, 24 June)
Renatus Temmink (Netherlands, 24 June)
Jouni Hyytiä (Finland, 24 June)
Arturs Gaidels (Latvia, 24 June)
Mario Gjurchinovski
 (FYR Macedonia, 25 June)
Foppe de Haan (Netherlands, 26 June)
Anja Palusevic (Germany, 26 June) **40th**
Nerijus Dunauskas (Lithuania, 26 June)
Barry W. Bright (England, 27 June) **70th**
Sigurdur Hannesson (Iceland, 27 June)
Eyjólfur Ólafsson (Iceland, 27 June)
Ruud Dokter (Republic of Ireland, 27 June)
José Venancio Lopez Hierro
 (Spain 27 June)
Wim Koevermans (Belgium, 28 June)
Ivan Borissov Lekov (Bulgaria, 29 June)
Paul Daniel Zaharia (Romania, 29 June)
Ginta Pece (Latvia, 29 June)
Peter J. van Zunderd
 (Netherlands, 30 June) **70th**

OBITUARY

Josef 'Beppo' Mauhart, former president of the Austrian Football Association, died on 7 May at the age of 83. At UEFA he served as a member of the Committee for the European Championship from 1996 to 2000 and vice-chairman of the National Teams Committee from 2000 to 2002.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Meetings

1 June, Cardiff

Executive Committee

19 June, Nyon

UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League: first and second qualifying round draws

22 June, Belfast

European Women's Under-19 Championship: final round draw

23 June, Nyon

UEFA Women's Champions League: qualifying round draw

Competitions

1 June, Cardiff

UEFA Women's Champions League: final

3 June, Cardiff

UEFA Champions League: final

7–13 June

European Under-21 Championship: 2017–19 qualifying matches

9–11 June

European Qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup

16–30 June, Poland

European Under-21 Championship: 2015–17 final round

17 June–2 July, Russia

FIFA Confederations Cup

27/28 June

UEFA Champions League: first qualifying round (first legs)

29 June

UEFA Europa League: first qualifying round (first legs)



NO TO RACISM

