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UEFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DECIDES ON UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Format to be changed from season 2003/2004

The UEFA Executive Committee, chaired by UEFA President, Lennart Johansson, has unanimously decided to change the format of the UEFA Champions League from season 2003/2004 "in the longer term interests of the competition and European football."

The new format will still involve 32 clubs playing in a league format of 8 groups of 4 for group stage one, but will then revert immediately to a two-leg knock-out system with 16 teams, thus abolishing the second group phase.

Setting out the thinking behind the decision, UEFA President, Lennart Johansson, said:

"We believe this reduction in the size of the competition is in the longer term interests of everyone involved – clubs, players, fans, broadcasters, sponsors and European football in general.

"It is not easy to change a competition which is recognised as the best club event in the world, but sometimes you need to act for the future.

"We have been listening carefully to our stakeholders and it is clear that there are a variety of views, however we believe this is a moment for leadership in the wider interests of the game.

"As the European governing body, UEFA has to consider many different factors, both sporting and commercial, and at the same time think ahead.

"We want to see a better balance in European football, a less congested fixture list for players and clubs and a flagship competition, which has the right sporting mix and brand strength.

"Changing circumstances in the commercial environment are important but so is planning for the future and basing your competitions on public interest and long-term development.

"We believe that this move will send the right signal to the whole of European football about how we can work together to tackle some of the challenges ahead."

The UEFA Executive Committee also agreed to conduct a further evaluation on the future of the UEFA Cup, with a decision to be taken at its meeting on 12/13th December.

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