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Programme

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GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL NEWSLETTER



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UEFA's Technical Director, Andy Roxburgh, working with some young footballers during the grassroots conference in Oslo.

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Andy Roxburgh
Graham Turner

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Why Play Football?

EDITORIAL

**BY ANDY ROXBURGH,
UEFA TECHNICAL DIRECTOR**

Parents want to know why, grassroots coaches need to know why, while children, by playing, learn to know why. It's a powerful, fundamental question for those promoting the game: Why play football? Yes, it is the most popular sport in the world, both in terms of participants and spectators, but why? Why, as a child, did Ronaldinho of Brazil and Barcelona 'live for football'? The reasons for football's popularity are ingrained into the psyche of the game's ardent participants and followers, but they are often taken for granted and rarely articulated.

The simplicity of the game certainly plays a part in its mass appeal – it can be played with any kind of ball and on any type of surface. When street football was commonplace, before traffic noise replaced children's laughter, spontaneous small-sided games offered a wonderful learning environment for young players. Fully engrossed in the 'here and now', youngsters would experience games full of imagination and trickery, unbridled joy, friendly competition with no mismatching, self-regulating order, and a constant repetition of football skills and moves. As the late, great Rinus Michels stated at a UEFA conference: "Good coaches use the basic criteria of street football for their vision of grassroots development; they realise that these elements produce a natural process which gives the most efficient training for young kids." The street football environment may have all but disappeared, but the spirit which underpinned it lives on at progressive, club-based football schools.

But why should parents be encouraged to send their children to football rather than another sport? Dr Michel D'Hooghe (a member of FIFA's Executive Committee, Chairman of the FIFA Medical Committee, and member of UEFA's Working Group on Football Development) has strong views on the subject: "I would direct youngsters to a team sport because they will learn values which they will not encounter in individual sports. Football, the number 1 international sport, is primarily a social event. In my view, the best way for a child to integrate into a region or city is to join the local football club." Being part of a football club is therefore a way of life which encourages social integration and inclusion, and offers children the opportunity to develop their skills, to build friendships and to enjoy themselves. For children, participation is more important than winning. Miljan Miljanic, the former Real Madrid coach, endorses that view: "Goals are the most beautiful thing in football – not trophies or money – and children understand this."

Football is not a sport for the elite. It is available for everyone, irrespective of size, shape, colour or faith. It is a real sporting democracy, which offers educational values, health benefits, social opportunities, and sporting worth. The game is a wonderful vehicle for personal and sporting development.

Although it is a simple game, it is also fascinating because of the variety of skills and movements which are possible. During the 'golden age' of learning between 9 and 12 years of age, youngsters can become passionate about the ball and many spend hours perfecting the basic techniques (juggling, dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.). Acquiring the fundamental concepts of the game, through free play and guided discovery, is also a feature of this phase.

The ball in flight, the bulging net, the green grass, the colourful jerseys, the pitch-defining flagpoles, the enthusiastic opponents and the friendly team-mates are all motivating elements for young players. Expression and creativity are prized in football and children enjoy problem-solving and experimentation. However, to progress, they need to be fully engaged in the action, learn from others, and show a great deal of self-reliance. As Marco van Basten says: "Players must invest in themselves."

Why play football? Watch children playing the game and the reasons will be self-evident: you will see a fascination for the ball, fluid movement, playfulness, cooperation, competition, challenge, commitment, celebrations, commiserations, enjoyment and an abundance of energy. Children love to play; to experience, through football, a joyous way of life – Ronaldinho can testify to that.



Ronaldinho brings joy to the game.



UEFA/ERIKSEN

**UEFA VICE-PRESIDENT
PER RAVN OMDAL
IS A PASSIONATE PROMOTER
OF GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL.**

THE OSLO EXPERIENCE

WHAT IS GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL?

ANY READERS WHO FANCY THEIR CHANCES OF WRITING A DEFINITION ON THE BACK OF A POSTAGE STAMP OBVIOUSLY WEREN'T AT THE 5TH UEFA GRASSROOTS COURSE STAGED IN OSLO TOWARDS THE BACK END OF 2004.

It was about philosophy, strategy, UEFA's 'Summer of Grassroots Football' programme, technical training for children, practical sessions for the disabled, holiday football camps, government funding for grassroots projects, the challenges to be met in girls' football, a fun football training session, input from various national associations on the formulae they are adopting to boost grassroots schemes, discussion groups aimed at shaping future strategy and even the inauguration of one of the mini-pitches gifted by UEFA as part

of the HatTrick programme and the jubilee celebrations. The miracle was that it was all squeezed into something less than 72 hours. The participants – from all 52 of UEFA's member associations – went home with plenty to think about. For example...

Quantity or quality? Both!

Question: How do you reconcile two of UEFA's basic grassroots premises – on the one hand to recruit more football players at all grassroots levels and keep

them active for as long as possible; while, on the other hand, recognising, endorsing and promoting 'best-practice' standards? The answer is that it is by no means mission impossible to combine quantity with quality if we start from the premise that grassroots football is primarily a social activity and that many sectors of the community can become involved.

This was one of the points compellingly expressed by UEFA vice-president Per Ravn Omdal who, as a former president of the Norwegian FA and hailed as one of the prime movers in the grassroots world, was *mein host* during the conference in Oslo. He is a firm advocate of aiming for sustained growth by setting targets. "In Norway," he explained, "we set ourselves a target of a 10% annual increase in participation." There was relish in his voice as he added, "this creates dynamics!"

In point of fact, Norwegian dynamics are based on 5% growth in the boys' sector and 15% in the participation of girls. In other national associations where the girls' game is not as fully fledged as in Norway, the targets could legitimately vary even more widely.



UEFA/ERIKSEN

Grassroots football is extremely popular in Norway.

THE CONFERENCE IN OSLO.



UEFA/ERIKSEN



UEFA/ERIKSEN

As a point of reference, the number of registered players in Norway represents 8.4% of the country's population and the audit for 2004 will probably confirm a further increase.

But Per Ravn Omdal emphasised that clear and ambitious targets not only encourage hard work and dynamism on the part of the national association. Participation in football, he pointed out, makes individuals happy, helps to unite families within the school and community contexts, helps to establish lifelong friendships, and can play a significant role in promoting social values.

What is more, football can play an equally significant role in the battle to overcome racism and any other form of discrimination, it can offer healthy alternatives to those who might otherwise be lured into alcohol, tobacco

or drug abuse, and it can serve as a solid educational platform for basic social and human values, such as tolerance and respect. In terms of physical well-being, football can also make a contribution in societies where 30% of the 5-16 age group are considered to be overweight and 16% could be officially classed as 'obese'. It is estimated that, unless something is done, the percentages will double in the next decade. On a different tangent, the conference in Oslo included practical sessions in the impressive indoor arena belonging to Vålerenga IF, a club whose youth teams embrace players of 47 different nationalities. As Per Omdal commented, "only football can do that."

There are other positive knock-on effects in sporting, financial and even political spheres. Encouraging more youngsters to play football enhances

the possibilities of nurturing and developing the stars of tomorrow. Involving more families can help to discover more coaches, monitors, referees and volunteers. Participating in football then helps to lay down a strong power base of fans who will watch top-level professional matches at the stadium, on TV, or both. In turn, the greater the role of football within communities and societies, the easier it becomes to obtain political backing while, at the same time, attracting more and more youngsters and their parents into the grassroots fold provides compelling motives for sponsors to become commercially interested in offering support. In other words, there are many, many good reasons for setting ambitious targets and helping more and more members of society to discover that playing football is great fun.



**YOUNGSTERS ACQUIRING
THE BASICS.**



IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL WHAT IS SUCCESS?

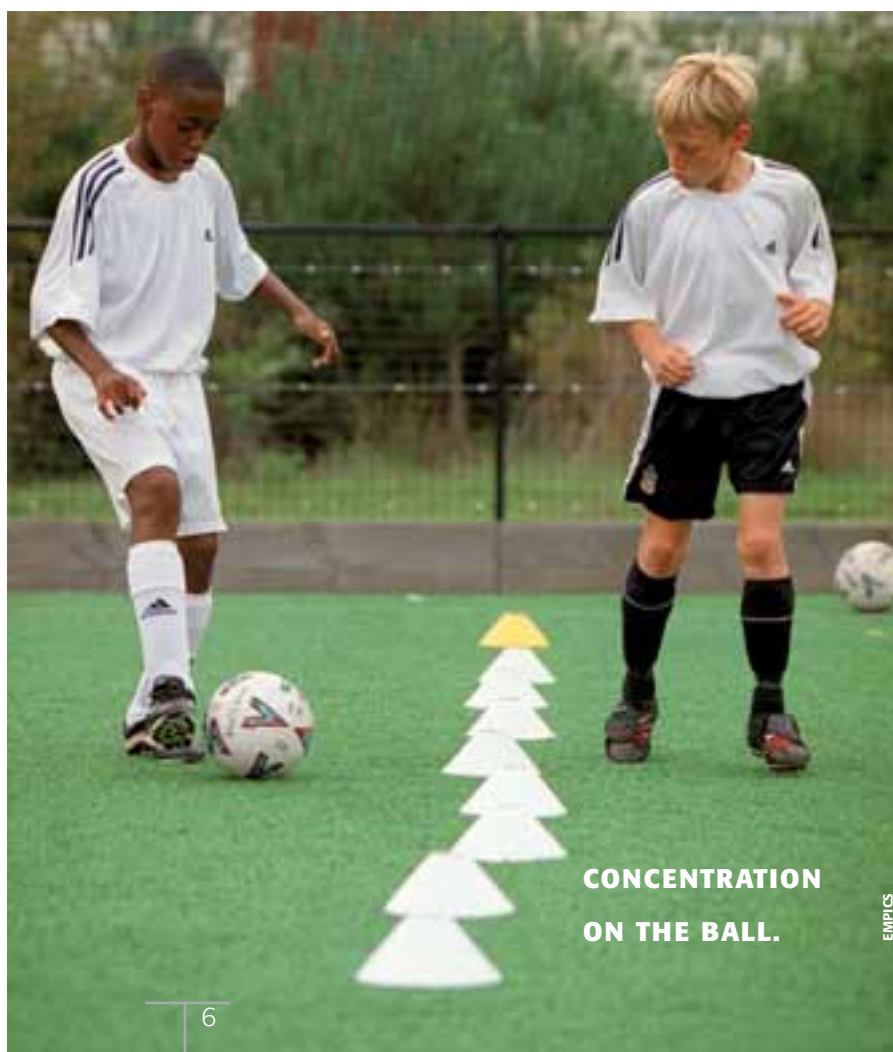
**IF THAT QUESTION IS POSED TO THE PRESIDENT
OF AN ELITE PROFESSIONAL CLUB, HE WILL PROBABLY LEAD YOU
TO THE TROPHY ROOM AND TELL YOU THAT SUCCESS CAN
BE ACCURATELY MEASURED BY THE WEIGHT OF THE SILVERWARE.**

**IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL, THERE IS NO ROOM
FOR A TROPHY ROOM OR EVEN A TROPHY CABINET.**

One of the primary objectives is to avoid subjecting youngsters to 'performance pressure' (with parents forming an important part of this particular equation) and to allow them to simply enjoy a game of football which entails, at most, the normal, ephemeral pleasures or displeasures associated with winning or losing.

So, at the tenderest ages – up until 11 or 12 – 'success' can be measured by the level of participation, the fun and friendships created in the footballing environment, the availability – or the construction – of training and playing facilities within walking distance of the children's homes, and the number of parents or volunteers who feel that they want to join in the fun.

From that point onwards, there are various yardsticks for measuring 'success'. They are all based on having developed diversified training and competition structures that will allow each and every individual optimal chances of satisfying his or her needs and ambi-



**CONCENTRATION
ON THE BALL.**



**EVEN ELITE YOUNG
PLAYERS STARTED
AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL.**

Bend me, shape me!

Catering for everybody's needs means that rigid structures are not the answer. Flexibility is the key word. At the Oslo conference, Per Ravn Omdal asked a pertinent question: "Are you prepared to deny eight girls in a small community the chance to play football just because they can't field a team of 11?"

Most people would instinctively answer 'no' – but the only valid answer is on the field of play. So how do you do it? As Per Omdal explained, the solution could be easy. Imagine an area where eight teams can field a full side but two others have only eight players. The local league could easily embrace all ten teams with all the fixtures involving the two 'short-handed' sides played as eight-a-side matches.

The same applies to training sessions. A club with 50 players in the same age bracket might, for example, establish a 16-player squad who can train five times a week; a second squad who – maybe because of studies – can train only twice a week; a third, smaller squad who train once a week; and another small squad of players who practise futsal or another form of indoor football.

Research has shown that many players have given up football because they were substitutes in their clubs and were given few opportunities to play. But, when they left, their friends – some of whom were talented players – left with them and were lost to the game.

It has to be recognised that, in this environment, friendship is often more important than football and that the only valid answer is equal opportunities for one and all.

In other words, rules and regulations should not be insurmountable barriers on the grassroots track. Solutions should be based on allowing as many people to play as possible – and if this means juggling with the size of teams, so be it.

tions and which provide the perfect platform for the development of individual skills within a team framework. Putting that long sentence into practice entails a great deal of expertise on sporting and administrative fronts. In other words, it is easier said than done – but it is very well worth doing.

If we ask the coaches at clubs and national associations to give us their perception of 'success', it will surely be the ability to detect, nurture and nourish the most promising talents from the grassroots. This means that there should be opportunities for the potential stars of the future to train their skills (a minimum of five times per week), to compete in eleven-a-side matches at regional or national level, and, of course, to be guided by coaches of the highest possible quality. A rung further down the ladder of dreams, 'success' means offering youth football opportunities in eleven-a-side or seven-a-side matches to players who may not possess such obvious claims to a future among the elite, but who will

enjoy local league football and training two, three or four times a week. For others, 'success' might be encouraging them to stay in the game, train once a week, play seven-a-side or five-a-side games on a local basis and organise their own schedules, possibly with help from their parents. And then, within the framework of amateur football for adults, 'success' means giving everybody opportunities to play club football and to take part in social activities built upon the foundations of team spirit.

In other words, a 'successful' grassroots structure is not just about setting up league and cup competitions. It's all about pinpointing needs and investing time and effort in catering for those needs in a way that will allow as many people as possible to continue enjoying a game of football for as much of their lives as possible. 'Success' is, quite simply, helping people to fall in love with the beautiful game and keeping the flames of affection burning for as long as possible.

GARY NEVILLE
(MANCHESTER UNITED)
LENDING HIS
SUPPORT TO A FOOTBALL
SCHOOL IN MALTA.

Happy holiday!

In some of UEFA's member associations, the 'Holiday Football Camp' has become an established part of the grassroots scene. Some are run by former players. Other footballers allow their names to be used in exchange for a sum of money. Other camps are run as purely commercial concerns. Others are sponsored by clubs or local authorities. So how can we ensure that certain standards are met and maintained? How can we assure parents that they are sending their children on safe, well-organised footballing holidays?

In Oslo, Robin Russell, Technical Coordinator at the English FA, provided some answers, using extensive research in the UK market as a starting point. The study analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the holiday courses and the

threats from other sports which are keen to muscle in on a major market.

The FA then introduced a Charter Standard Holiday Course Award aimed at assuring parents that standards were being met.

The criteria included checks on the qualifications of coaches (holiday camps are currently the largest employers of coaches in the UK), standards of child protection and first aid, plus monitoring of health and safety facilities. The coach-player ratio must not exceed 1:16, the children must be appropriately grouped, there must be equal opportunities for all, work must come up to the FA's Code of Conduct standards, and the programme must be based on at least 80% of practical football.



D. AQUILINA

By the summer of 2004, a total of 90 organisations had been granted the award and over 3,500 FA Charter Standard Holiday Courses were run. This gave over a quarter of a million children the chance to spend a fun summer holiday in a football environment and, at the same time, provided a financial injection of seven million euros into the game.

Coaching the coaches



While their children practise on the field, parents receive instructions in the stand.

If you are setting targets and aiming to encourage more people to become involved, year after year, in the grassroots game, it goes without saying that more and more coaches are required to take care of them. Or are they? It depends on the definition of the word 'coach', as very often monitors, tutors or coordinators could be alternative descriptions. At the base of the footballing pyramid, ability to work with children is usually more important than knowledge of football. It is not until we climb the pyramid that the importance of specialised coaching acumen really kicks in.

The Dutch FA (KNVB) is one of the national associations which encourages parents to become involved in grassroots football through 3,700 amateur clubs. They stage regular 'clinics' and

have a 'KNVB Road Show' which tours the country in a big truck, visiting 75 clubs per season. This involves – apart from a driver at the wheel, of course – two of the KNVB's grassroots coaches and 25 club volunteers. At the beginning of each season, they stage kick-off meetings and courses in 50 regions, with each course consisting of four three-hour meetings, with the content reinforced via a package that includes a book and a CD-ROM. The participants are the people – mostly parents – who will act as coaches in the 9-13 age bracket.

These volunteer coaches receive guidance from youth coordinators at club level and, another rung up the coaching ladder, from 50 part-time regional coaches who liaise with the KNVB's 20 full-time district coaches.

THE DRAW FOR THE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL ROUND IN MANCHESTER WAS PRESIDED
OVER BY KAREN ESPELUND, CHAIRWOMAN
OF THE UEFA WOMEN'S FOOTBALL COMMITTEE, AND
ENGLAND'S COACH SVEN-GÖRAN ERIKSSON.



What about the girls?

With the European Women's Championship finals in the offing, women's football is set to receive yet another boost during 2005 to add to the explosive growth of the game in recent times. In terms of the number of active players, there is still a major difference between masculine and feminine, yet over two thirds of UEFA's member associations have drawn up development blueprints for the women's game and, of course, they start at grassroots level.

Apart from sheer numbers, there are other significant disparities in terms of resources, administrative 'punching power', league structures, playing opportunities and, at the top of the pyramid, earning potential. But Karen Espelund, Chairwoman of UEFA's Women's Football Committee, reported in Oslo

that the number of Norwegian girls' teams had increased by 18.4% in just three years, with the number of participants rising by 16.9%.

The explosive growth raises important questions. For example, until what age is it positive for girls to play in mixed teams? If the experience is extended too far, it runs the risk of leading to 'survival of the toughest' situations, with the majority of girls opting to back out of a game which has become physically too demanding for them. Clubs therefore need to phase in separate girls' teams and give maximum opportunities to play, with small-sided games included on the curriculum alongside the eleven-a-side matches. Karen Espelund's experience suggests that girls would benefit from

playing in separate teams as early as six or seven years old.

However, the proliferation of girls' teams has highlighted a shortage of female coaches, referees and administrators and a lack of former players prepared to stay in the game as role models for the grassroots generations. The girls are moving fast, but there is still a lot of work to be done...

What next?

The sheer intensity and dimensions of the meeting in Oslo meant that participants travelled home with reams of information, opinions and practical demonstrations which could help to shape grassroots philosophies within their own national associations. But, before they headed for the airport, they posted some ideas on UEFA's notice board, such as:

- For UEFA to build on the summer promotional campaign that was a success in 2004.
- For UEFA to promote the flow of information on grassroots topics between member associations and to encourage 'partnerships'.
- For European football to make political leaders aware of the social importance of grassroots projects.
- For UEFA to help with educational tools, such as DVDs, CD-ROMS, etc.
- For UEFA to help national associations to enlist the aid of former top players to act as role models and ambassadors.

Some of these proposals have already become reality. But there is still a lot of work to do.





FAROE ISLANDS FA

**A MINI-PITCH
BESIDE THE SEA IN THE
FAROE ISLANDS.**

MINI-PITCHES A MAXI-PROJECT

**MINI-PITCHES HAVE BECOME A BIG THING. ALMOST EVERYBODY INVOLVED
IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL IS FAMILIAR WITH THE IDEA OF OFFERING PEOPLE
A CHANCE TO RE-CREATE THE OLD STREET-FOOTBALLING DAYS BY KICKING A BALL AROUND
ON A 'PITCH' WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE OF HOME.**



SFZ

An ideal surface for Slovakian youngsters to play on.

UEFA rates the mini-pitch as such a good idea that it gifted one to each national association during its jubilee year, and readers of *uefadirect* will have noticed story after story penned by associations which have been more than happy to take up the offer.

In fact the scheme was so well received that it seemed a crying shame to make it a one-off affair. UEFA has therefore decided to offer financial support for additional mini-pitch projects as part of the four-year HatTrick pro-

gramme and, although national associations have until 2008 to submit their proposals, many have already moved into top gear. By the end of January, UEFA had already endorsed projects to build some 1,200 mini-pitches and had pledged over 16 million Swiss francs in support.

UEFA's initial idea in the jubilee year was to offer a million francs to each member association to help with mini-pitch projects. The response has been refreshingly enthusiastic and, in many

cases, creative. The Slovakian association, for example, has aimed to maximise the number of mini-pitches by using UEFA's commitment as a persuasive argument in other sectors. In consequence, their mini-pitches are being funded by 20% injections from UEFA, the government, local authorities, the national association and sponsors.

In the Netherlands, the KNVB has opted to dovetail UEFA's offer with efforts being made by the Johan Cruyff Foundation, with 200 mini-pitches as the end result. The Dutch have gone for a model of mini-pitch that is slightly larger than average, allowing games to be played lengthwise or, alternatively, across each half of the pitch, thereby allowing four teams to enjoy some football simultaneously. In Scotland, the design has been modified so that basketball and volleyball can also get a look in.

The Finns are also doing some design experiments by conducting a pilot scheme involving several suppliers. After an evaluation process, the 'best' mini-pitches will start to spring up like mushrooms all over the country. The Nordic countries, of course, are what we might call market leaders in mini-



Johan Cruyff welcomes Ernest Walker, former chairman of UEFA's Stadium and Security Committee, to the inauguration of a mini-pitch, part of a joint operation between UEFA, the Dutch FA and the Johan Cruyff Welfare Foundation.

JAN DE KONING/KNVB

pitch projects, with government grants or contributions from state lotteries helping to fund the installation of thousands of pitches in areas where the climate prevents the game from being played on 'normal' pitches for most of the year.

In England, UEFA's contribution has been supplemented by government funding for mini-pitch schemes which target under-privileged areas in major cities, and the English have also been very proactive in sending trained leaders into these areas and per-

suading people to get on to the pitch and start playing.

Others might have been slightly slower off the mark but, having seen how popular mini-pitch football is becoming, are now getting their running shoes on. The Welsh association is now installing 44 mini-pitches, while the Ukrainians – after UEFA had helped them install 60 mini-pitches – have now persuaded the government to build another 400. The Polish national association constructed an experimental mini-pitch close to a school where 400 children were receiving their education and, when they saw for themselves that mini-pitch objectives were being perfectly fulfilled, began to draw up blueprints for a major national project. Other countries have taken the mini-pitch concept a step further. The Georgians, for example, have built one in each region and, alongside it, have constructed offices for each regional association whose administrators had previously worked from their homes. The mini-pitch project has a long way to go, but it has been fast out of the blocks and is moving very rapidly in the right direction.



Girls and boys playing together on the same mini-pitch in Lithuania.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES IN POLAND.

ABILITY DEFIES DISABILITY

**ANYBODY WHO HAS WATCHED DISABLED PEOPLE ENJOYING A GAME OF FOOTBALL
WILL KNOW THAT THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE EXPRESSIONS
OF SHEER JOY ON THE PLAYERS' FACES. THAT IS WHY UEFA HAS PUT DISABILITY FOOTBALL
WELL AND TRULY ON ITS AGENDA.**

It played a prominent part in the theoretical and practical sessions at the Grassroots Course in Oslo and this was followed up when the Disability Football Panel held its second meeting at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon at the end of January.

The participants in Oslo were moved by the first-hand account of disabled footballer/organiser Stig Martin Sandvik of Norway regarding his own experiences in developing grassroots football. Stig's presentation triggered the ques-

tion of how much effort Disability Football should put into the pursuit of success. One school of thought is sceptical about channelling resources towards a relatively small number of elite performers in national teams. The other emphasises the importance of creating role models capable of convincing disabled people that they can compete.

The English FA is one national association that has put a lot of thought into aiming for the right balance. At the

base of the pyramid, enormous progress has been made since an overall strategy for Disability Football was published in 2002 and substantial funding was allocated to a two-year programme. One of the first steps which the English and other national associations had to take was to pinpoint the appropriate contact groups, as Disability Sport can often be found under several different umbrellas. In England, the number of clubs involved in Disability Football grew from 25 to 45 within three years while, in parallel, work was being done with a view to improving the quality of training and administration, with specific training centres being established. The longer term aims were to implant local, regional and national competitions while, at the same time, national teams were being formed and treated in exactly the same way as youth teams in terms of resources and logistical support. Winning a world championship was the reward for their efforts, and the English feel that this has certainly boosted interest in the game at lower levels within the world of Disability Football.

However, the term 'Disability Football' covers a multitude of categories and sub-categories based on six different



A five-a-side disabled football tournament organised by UEFA in Manchester.

UEFA'S DISABILITY FOOTBALL PANEL.



Visually-impaired players in competitive action.

types of mental and physical disability. The presentations in Oslo made it clear that the enormous diversity creates challenges, and this was underlined when UEFA's Disability Football Panel met in Nyon. The agenda included reports on, for example, UEFA's long-standing relationship with the Special Olympics movement, the work being done by IBSA in the realm of football for the blind, the opportunities being offered in Russia for amputees to play football, an account of how the Czech

association is now including a Disability Football module within its coaching licence, and a follow-up to the Disability Football Conference last December in London, where the attendance figure exceeded 300.

There is too much work to be done that there is no excuse for blowing the UEFA trumpet. However, there was applause for the inclusion of Disability Football on the Oslo agenda, simply because the interest currently being



demonstrated by UEFA has added substance and impetus to the disability cause and helped to open doors on domestic fronts. UEFA is more than willing to step up its efforts in terms of endorsing projects and making its Grassroots Ambassadors available to support Disability Football events.

Disability Football has also been included in the Grassroots Programme for 2005 and each national association has been invited to nominate a 'Best Disabled Football Event', with the winners receiving 50 adidas footballs apiece by way of recognition. At the same time, uefa.com is setting up Internet links with disability football organisations with a view to enhancing communication and cooperation.

The second meeting of UEFA's Disability Football Panel was, understandably, based on an exchange of information and practical experiences. At the next meeting, the clear intention will be



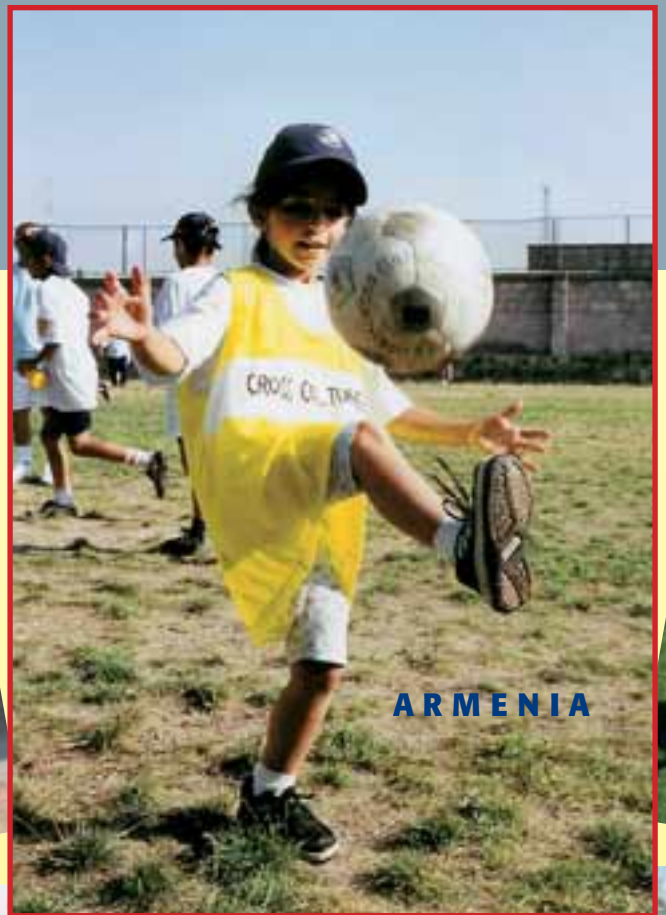
Disabled football teams together in Oslo.

to scratch the surface much more deeply and to focus on specific questions and talking points. Similarly, this article has aimed to provide a general overview, with the intention of going into much more detail on specific subjects during future editions of the Grassroots Newsletter.

PHOTO CONTEST



ITALY



ARMENIA



RUSSIA



NETHERLANDS



PORTUGAL

In conjunction with last year's UEFA Summer of Grassroots Football, the national associations were invited to send UEFA a photograph depicting the fun of playing and the values of grassroots football.

The photos submitted were presented to the participants attending the 5th UEFA Grassroots Course in Oslo, who picked out the entry of the Armenian Football Association as their favourite.

The contest is being repeated this year, and each national association is invited to submit a photo, drawing or painting related to grassroots football to UEFA before the closing date of 16 September. The winner will receive a special prize.





UEFA
Route de Genève 46
CH-1260 Nyon
Suisse
Téléphone +41 22 994 44 44
Télécopieur +41 22 994 37 34
uefa.com

Union des associations
européennes de football

