

UEFA



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UEFA YOUTH LEAGUE

The finals return to Nyon

THE TECHNICIAN

Interview with Chelsea's
youth coach Adi Viveash

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

UEFA donates €100,000
to landmine victims

TWO EX-PLAYERS JOIN UEFA

Kessler and Stanković
take on advisory roles



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FORMER PLAYERS HAVE A KEY ROLE TO PLAY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOOTBALL

Few have greater authority to talk about football development than those who have played the game at the highest possible level. Former professional players have experienced at first hand policies that have influenced their careers and they are therefore in the best position to say what should and should not be done in regard to football development.

This is why I believe that it is crucial for UEFA to have former players involved in the decision-making process and I am delighted that Nadine Kessler and Dejan Stanković have both joined our organisation as football advisors.

Both players reached great heights during their playing careers. Nadine was a three-time UEFA Women's Champions League winner and was named FIFA Women's World Player of the Year and UEFA Best Women's Player in Europe in 2014. Her main roles will include helping to oversee the development of women's football and the growth of women's competitions.

Nadine's appointment shows UEFA's commitment to developing the women's game. This is one of my key objectives as UEFA president and as long as there is room for improvement, we will continue to raise the level and the profile of women's football.

Dejan, who won a UEFA Champions League title with FC Internazionale Milano and amassed over 100 caps for Serbia, will be responsible for working on dedicated UEFA projects as well as assisting UEFA national associations to develop talented youth players.

These two players have accumulated a colossal amount of knowledge and valuable experience not only in their professional careers, but also when they were learning the game as youngsters. I am pleased that they see it as a natural progression in their careers to join UEFA and to try to pass on their wisdom to future generations.

Investing in the next generation of footballers is an absolute necessity in order to develop players for the future. It is crucial that top-class football education is provided at a very early stage as this will enhance the technical level and abilities of those future professionals.

There is a possibility that in the future, more former players could join UEFA to lend their expertise. Their understanding of football as a whole is crucial for the development of the game across all levels and I look forward to developing a fruitful relationship with them over the coming years.



Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President



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THE LONG AND THE SHIRT OF IT

Once a simple heavyweight jersey, the modern football shirt can be seen as a winning fusion of design, technology and commerce, but just where might the high-tech factor take the shirt in years to come?



How times have changed: the plain shirts worn by René Vignal and Ian McPherson in a friendly between Racing Club Paris and Arsenal in 1950.



Picture the scene. It is the UEFA Champions League final in 2037. On the pitch a defender is caught out by the opposition winger, falling to the turf as his rival sprints away. A moment later the same defender loses another duel. It is the 65th minute. In the technical area, the coach glances at his team analyst as he scans the defender's readings for the last five minutes: heart rate, perspiration, temperature, adrenaline and cortisol levels.

This information, flashing up on the screen, arrives direct from a sensor embedded into the fabric of the player's shirt. Another sensor in the same shirt tells the media high up in the stand behind that he has covered less ground in the last five minutes than at any point in the preceding hour of the contest.

If this sounds far-fetched to you, think again. The football shirt has been many things over the long stretch of time since the first organised games in Victorian England in the 1870s – from simple, heavyweight jersey to sometimes garish fashion garment; from symbol of supporter devotion to source of commercial revenue.

A football shirt today, according to the manufacturers' promises, can help keep a player cool. It can support muscles and stimulate blood flow. It is lighter and drier than ever before. And, in the view of Christian Stammel, CEO of Munich-based Wearable Technologies, it may not be too long before it becomes even 'smarter'. He foresees a future when football shirts can feed the wearer information via connected fabrics incorporating digital technology.

"Shirts with integrated bio-vital sensors are already available on the market," he explains. "The real-time tracking of athletes during a game is actually more a permission issue – the technology is available and has to be implemented in a proper way. We could see in the future a big chance to enhance the visitor

"In the future, the shirt will be used for health-related information for the coach, for spectator enhancement during the match and for additional promotions or fan enhancement via display applications."

Christian Stammel
CEO of Wearable Technologies



Getty Images

Until the 1950s, goalkeepers like Watford's Jim McLaren, 'playing' here in 1938, wore woollen turtleneck sweaters.

or spectator experience during a game via real-time sensor data."

Stammel goes on to speculate: "The shirt will be used for health-related information for the coach, for spectator enhancement during the match and for additional promotions or fan enhancement via display applications."

Two shirts a season

Whatever the future brings, we have already travelled far from the days when a player had two shirts a season – one for cold winter afternoons and another for the warmer months of spring and summer. This is how Sandro Mazzola, the great Italy and FC Internazionale Milano forward, remembers it. Just two shirts to wear all season – and neither especially comfortable.

"When I played, our shirts were made of very thick wool during winter and when it rained they really became a dead weight to carry," he recounts. "In the summer we wore lighter shirts instead but they usually stuck to the body when you sweated."

Mazzola is talking about the 1960s, the decade before the evolution of the football shirt began to accelerate. Even at the 1970 FIFA World Cup in Mexico, he and his Azzurri team-mates ventured all the way to the final wearing shirts unmodified for the different demands of high altitude, heat and humidity. "The texture of our shirt was the same," Mazzola recalls. "Our shirts got very wet because of the sweat and just wouldn't dry, which obviously made them heavier." →

THE GAME

By comparison with today, the shirts at that time were not hugely different from those worn at the beginning of the 20th century. During the intervening years, fashions had altered slightly – from laced crew necks to polo necks and on to V-necks. Shorts became shorter. In the 1950s shiny materials were used for the first time in the manufacture of shirts – for instance, in 1954 Wolverhampton Wanderers FC, then champions of England, wore satin jerseys which glowed under the lights for their famous night-time friendly against the great Budapest Honvéd FC.

If change was happening, the old photographs of goalkeepers in the 1950s wearing woollen roll-neck sweaters to combat the cold of the northern European winter suggest it was happening slowly. After all, goalkeepers had worn much the same back in 1909 when the law was introduced stating that they “must wear colours that are distinguishable from the other players and the match officials”.

Transformation begins

The 1970s was the decade when the football shirt took its first big step into the future. The famous cockerel logo of French manufacturer Le Coq Sportif made history as the first to adorn the shirt of any team in a European Champion Clubs' Cup final



Getty Images

“Such overwhelming emotions come from wearing the Italy shirt. That second skin gives you a whole new image across the world. It makes you better, takes you to a higher level.”

Andrea Pirlo

– appearing on Feyenoord’s jerseys in 1970 and AFC Ajax’s in 1972.

Sponsor logos gradually followed. Viennese club FK Austria Wien blazed a trail when they wore the emblem of the Schwechater brewery on their shirts in 1966. Over the border in Germany, it was in 1973 that the German Football Association agreed to permit shirt advertising, a decision taken shortly after TSV Eintracht Braunschweig had become the first German side with a sponsored shirt – in their case, bearing the Jägermeister logo.

Liverpool FC achieved the same first in the English Football League in 1979 after agreeing a deal with Japanese company Hitachi. Three years later, UEFA allowed shirt sponsorship in its club competitions and the following season, Real Madrid CF’s white adidas shirts bore a sponsor’s name for the first time – Zanussi.

It is interesting to hear the recollections of a shirt designer from that era, when the concept of the football jersey as something of commercial value first gained currency. Working on behalf of the English sportswear manufacturer Admiral, Paul Oakley designed the England national team shirt in 1980, along with kits for Manchester United FC, Leeds United AFC, Southampton FC and Crystal Palace FC. Nobody then could have imagined that a club might one day be receiving more than €100m from manufacturers for the honour of supplying their kits. By contrast, the wish of Admiral at the time, Oakley remembers, was to create an identity for its own brand – rather than its clients’. “I am not sure how much we were aware at time but the real identity is with the club,” he says.

And he recalls a negative response from some quarters at the early commercialisation of the football shirt. “There was a lot of flak from various commentators at the time. I remember one saying, ‘Up till now any kid could pull on a white shirt and think he was playing for England. Now they’ve got to go out and pay.’ We were trying to make that acceptable.”

The shirts worn by Feyenoord in the 1970 European Cup – Le Coq Sportif was the first kit manufacturer to advertise on shirts in a UEFA competition.



Getty Images



“Our shirts and shorts at the 1998 World Cup were too big, whereas today they’re closer fitting, and made from a nicer, ‘stretch’ material.”

Bixente Lizarazu

The quality at the time was decidedly mixed, he adds. “The ones they made for the clubs were made from the same stuff as those made for general sale – polyester. When you slid along the turf for 20 metres you probably got a burn and you probably sweated buckets in them.” The shorts could be problematic too: at one leading English club in the 1980s there was actually a scramble among players before matches to get to the few larger-sized pairs available at a time when tight shorts were the fashion.

The 80s and 90s were a period of experimentation, with some particularly garish designs coming into vogue in the

90s – such as the shirt Norwich City FC wore when becoming the first English club to win at FC Bayern München in the 1993/94 UEFA Cup. Yet it was also the decade when supporters began to wear their colours en masse at matches.

‘Like a second skin’

Bixente Lizarazu played professional football from 1988 to 2006, and witnessed at first hand the changes in football shirt fashion. Lizarazu, whose career took him from FC Girondins de Bordeaux to Athletic Club, Bayern München and Olympique de Marseille, reflects: “Shirts have become more technical, a lot more comfortable. When you sweat, for example, it evaporates much more easily.

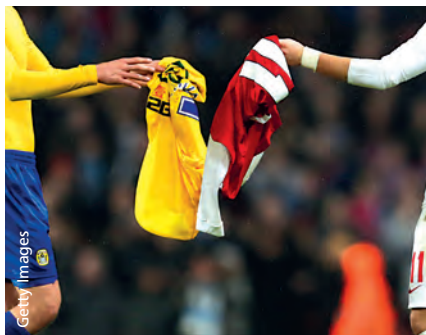
“Today’s shirts are more comfortable, they’ve got better,” Lizarazu adds. “There’s a nice feel to the material when you touch them and they fit better too. Our shirts and shorts at the 1998 World Cup were too big, whereas today they’re closer fitting, and made from a nicer, ‘stretch’ material. There’ve been different fashions. I knew the era of very tight shorts which showed off your thighs, and then we had the very long shorts which weren’t good for a player who’s not the biggest!”

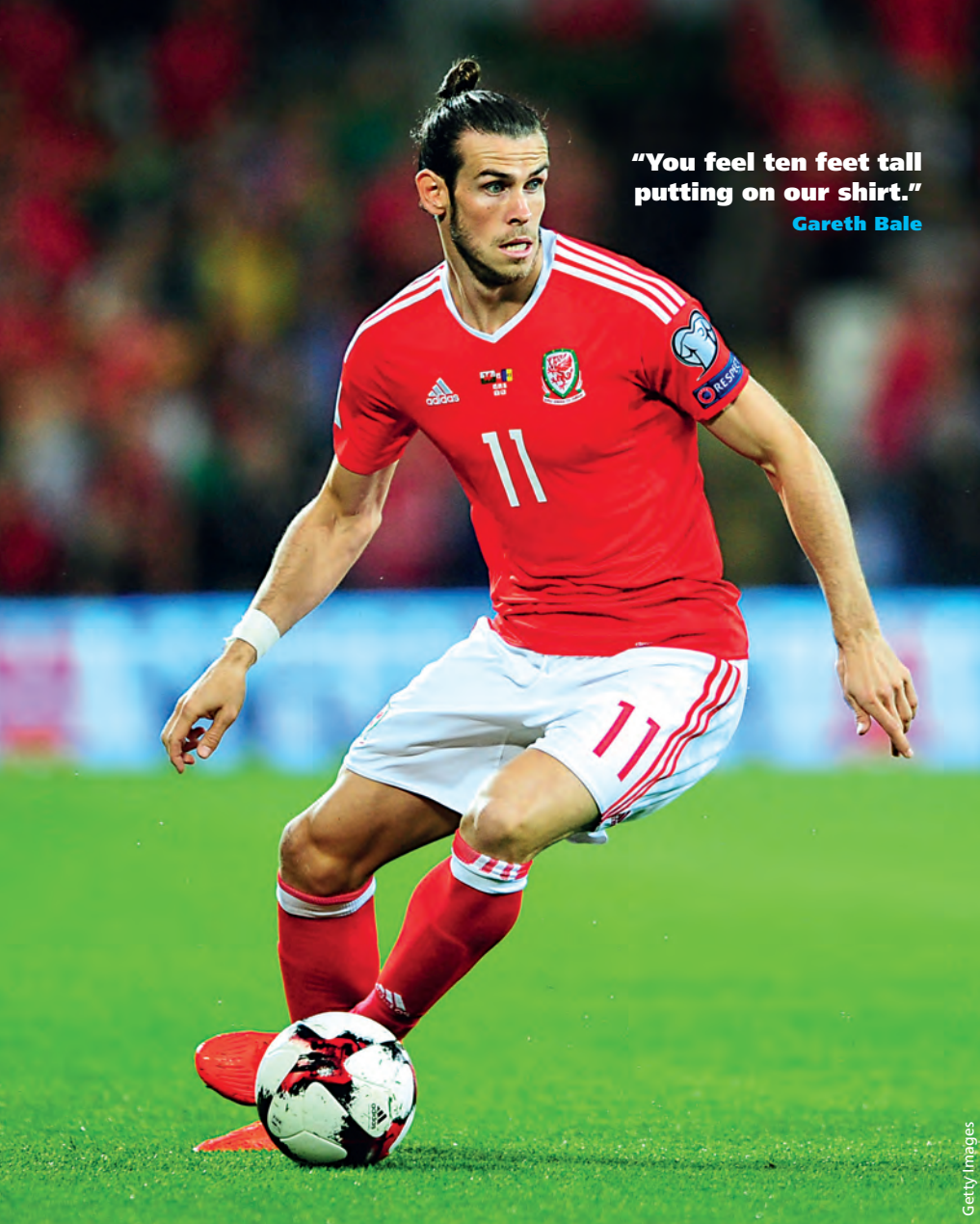
Gianluca Zambrotta, the former Italy full-back, concurs: “When I started out the shirts were looser, less tight, and made of different materials. Today’s shirts are like a second skin.”

In his career Zambrotta wore three of the most famous club shirts in the European game – those of Juventus, FC Barcelona and AC Milan. Yet when asked about his favourite shirts, he names three others: the Como Calcio shirt “of my debut”; the “first shirt in Serie A” that he wore with FC Bari 1908; and last but not least, the “first shirt with the national team”. For the supporter, club colours are non-transferrable. For the professional →

SWAPPING SHIRTS

It was in the national team arena that the tradition of swapping shirts began. This has now spread to the club game – especially in UEFA’s club competitions – though only a few elite teams give their players a new shirt as a matter of course for every match. Indeed, at certain UEFA Champions League clubs, players must pay for a new one whenever they decide to make a swap. For Bixente Lizarazu, the shirts he has collected provide a valued bank of souvenirs: “I have more than 500 shirts, and it symbolises my career. When I look at them, it helps me keep my memories alive. It’s a bit like having the scalp of your opponents.”





"You feel ten feet tall putting on our shirt."

Gareth Bale

Getty Images

footballer, though, each new jersey can serve as a milestone along the career road. And it is the national shirt which holds the greatest mystique for most.

After all, with Juventus Zambrotta might have played for the club with the biggest fan base in the Serie A, but wearing the blue of Italy was something else because – as he puts it – “there’s an entire nation watching you and following you”.

Zambrotta’s team-mate from Italy’s 2006 World Cup-winning team, Andrea Pirlo, captures that special feeling in his autobiography, I think therefore I play. “Such overwhelming emotions come from wearing the Italy shirt,” he writes, describing how “that second skin, with its Smurf-like blue, gives you a whole new image across the world. It makes you better, takes you to a higher level.”

Gareth Bale evoked the power of the shirt with similar words during Wales’s historic run to the semi-finals of EURO 2016 last summer. He may wear the fabled

white of Real Madrid, but the red of Wales has a special resonance for Bale, who said: “You feel ten feet tall putting on our shirt.”

Lizarazu, a world and European champion with France, has his own way of describing wearing his national shirt – a feeling of “being at home”, of belonging. “You want to achieve something big,” he continues. “You have to know it’s an international match, but equally you can’t be overwhelmed by the emotion, by the weight of responsibility.”

What next?

These footballers are talking about the emotional power of the shirt. But what about the technological advances which could give it new and different powers? According to Dr Martin Robertson, an analyst of the future of big events from Bournemouth University in the United Kingdom, there are two specific areas of innovation worth following: nanofabrics and connected fabrics.

Nanofabrics are smart fabrics, such as the fabric used for adidas Climachill T-shirts, which have embedded titanium and aluminium particles to reduce body temperature. These become activated by the wearer’s body heat. “You can get your players to be as cool as you want them to be or as hot as you want them to be,” Dr Robertson says.

Connected fabrics, meanwhile, have embedded sensors and a core that collects information from the sensors and transmits it to a separate device. In 2016, US sportswear company Under Armour foresaw an increased focus in the coming years on “smart clothing with embedded tracking functions”.*

Dr Robertson adds: “Connected material means you can get a lot of biometric material. It will be interesting to see not how easy it is to get that data but how easy it is to control that. Future audiences could be looking at players and seeing what is their heartbeat, how much they are sweating. And in professional sports, the challenge for managers and individual athletes will be containing the information.”

It is a vision of the future which Lizarazu, for one, views with a degree of unease. “We should be wary of any technological intervention,” he says. “It is interesting but it doesn’t tell you everything. I can imagine the football coach of 2050 with a computer which will know everything about his players up to the last second – how a certain player feels, if he’s tiring because he has too much lactic acid in his body. The coach can then replace him, which is just strange to me.”

“We know quite well that the mental side can help a player go beyond himself – he can have a brilliant last ten minutes because of his mental strength and that motivation to push himself on.”

“Scientific parameters tell us part of the story,” he adds. “We should use them but not act solely within these parameters. If you take the example of American football, it’s ultra-tactical like chess and you get the impression the players are simply pawns for the coach to play with. Rugby is becoming like that too. But football is still a sport where you get the feeling if Messi decides to change the course of a match, he can do it all on his own.”

And a sport where, still, the shirt can have its own inspiring effect ...

* Fung Global Retail & Technology’s Smart Fabrics report, 21 November 2016

THROUGH THE EYES OF A KIT DESIGNER



Jürgen Rank
adidas

I had the honour of designing the Germany shirt for the 2014 World Cup. We had many people involved from various departments and many discussions. Beforehand we went around Germany speaking to young players and young supporters. We asked them what Germany meant to them. With players like Mesut Özil and Lukas Podolski coming from different backgrounds, they said they were proud of their country and the achievements of integration. As a symbol of this confidence, we had the chevron on the front of the shirt and little lines to symbolise the different backgrounds of the players.

We decided not to have black, red and gold but tones of red to make it full of energy, the energy of this new German generation. We also had white shorts for the first time as the official colour in the home kit. I'm quite familiar with football history and we checked that Germany had never lost a World Cup game when having to wear white shorts, rather than the traditional black, with their white home shirts. It was a good omen.

Because of the weather conditions in Brazil – rain, heat and high humidity – we had the idea of producing the lightest jersey ever. This was the Adizero. There were times during the testing where we'd take it too far – it was too light and too fragile, so we had to strengthen certain elements of the jersey again as it should still be durable and should not rip.

In the history of football kits, you had cotton shirts, which were quite heavy. Then in the 70s and 80s they started with a mixture of fabrics. Now the shirts are ten

times lighter. When you give a new shirt to the old players, they're amazed by the fact the shirts are so light, breathable and dry so quickly.

Adidas has always been about innovation. Around a decade ago we had inserts on the front and then the back of shirts to make sure fresh air goes in and transports the hot air from the body out of the jersey – this was called Flow Mapping/Formotion. We then had the TechFit, really tight jerseys which we offered players for the 2010 World Cup and the next club season. We gave players the choice of the TechFit or a loose fitting one. Some players liked the TechFit – Arjen Robben loved it and Podolski too. In the France team almost everyone was wearing a TechFit jersey. Other players chose to wear it in a larger size so they felt more comfortable. Players like Robben liked it as it was harder for defenders to grab his jersey. And Spain won the World Cup in it.

When you look at the history of shirt design, the crazy stuff from the 90s with the loud prints is less possible to produce today due to many new kit rules and regulations. They don't allow the crazy stuff. We still innovate, though, and sustainability is an increasingly big thing for us. Recently, we did the adidas/Parley jerseys for Real Madrid and Bayern around Christmas. We have a great partnership with Parley, which is a company getting plastic waste out of the oceans. Many of our shirts are from recycled polyester anyway but this was something different – these were shirts made from bottles from the oceans, in this case from the Maldives.



Mesut Özil during Germany's 2014 World Cup quarter-final against France.

A WHITES CYCLE

Shutterstock



Real Madrid CF were inspired in the choice of their famous all-white colours by the famous English touring side of the late 19th and early 20th century, Corinthian FC – still playing today on a low rung of the non-league ladder as Corinthian-Casuals. Six decades later, Madrid's fame and allure was such that in 1961 Leeds United AFC manager Don Revie switched their colours from blue and yellow to all white in a bid to emulate the European club champions.

NUMBERS GAME

Getty Images



Both Arsenal FC and Chelsea FC experimented with numbered shirts in their league fixtures against non-numbered opponents one weekend in August 1928, though the first recorded instance of both sides both wearing them in the same match came in the 1933 FA Cup final between Everton FC and Manchester City FC, with Everton's players wearing 1 to 11 and City's 12 to 22. They were formally introduced in the English Football League in 1939. 🌐

REFORMS AND ELECTIONS ON THE HELSINKI AGENDA

The vibrant capital of Finland will welcome UEFA and its 55 member associations for the 41st Ordinary UEFA Congress on 5 April.

Key items on the agenda include a vote on a series of good governance reforms, as well as elections to the UEFA Executive Committee and FIFA Council.

Helsinki hosted an Extraordinary UEFA Congress in 1997. This time around, the Fair Centre Messukeskus will be the setting for the European national associations to decide whether to accept proposed reforms aimed at making UEFA a stronger and more transparent body in the future. The UEFA Executive Committee endorsed the proposals at its meeting in Nyon in February.

The proposals, which would be incorporated into the UEFA Statutes if approved, include the introduction of term limits for the UEFA president and members of the Executive Committee, with the possibility for them to serve for a maximum of three four-year terms. In addition, candidates for election or re-election to the UEFA Executive Committee would have to hold an active office (president, vice-president, general secretary or CEO) within their respective national associations.

Two full positions on the Executive Committee would be granted to representatives of the European Club Association (ECA), while UEFA's Governance and Compliance Committee would be strengthened with the appointment of two additional, independent members to the current three-member body.

Another reform proposal up for approval would see the inclusion of two new provisions in the UEFA Statutes – one to ensure that venues for all UEFA competitions, including competition finals, are selected in a fully objective manner through a transparent bidding process, and another to make ethics and good governance a statutory objective of UEFA. Finally, it is proposed that experts from national associations should be allowed to chair UEFA committees.

As far as the elections are concerned, 12 candidates are standing for 8 seats on the UEFA Executive Committee, each of them four-year terms (from 2017 to 2021). In addition, while five candidates were initially confirmed as standing for four seats with four-year terms on



the FIFA Council, three will now be standing for three seats. The FIFA Review Committee considered that the candidature of Vitaly Mutko (Russia) did not fulfil the eligibility requirements, due to a potential conflict of interest with his position of deputy prime minister in the Russian government. Meanwhile UEFA was notified that Geir Thorsteinsson (Iceland) successfully passed the FIFA eligibility checks to become a candidate for the FIFA Council elections. UEFA was, however, also informed of Mr Thorsteinsson's decision to withdraw his candidature for the FIFA Council, as he is no longer the active president of the Icelandic Football Association. As a consequence of Mr Thorsteinsson's withdrawal, UEFA will need to hold an additional election to designate a fourth European representative for a four-year term on the FIFA Council, and an Extraordinary UEFA Congress will therefore be organised later this year, on a date to be decided in due course. Meanwhile in Helsinki, one candidate will also be standing for a two-year term on the FIFA Council.

Finally, the Helsinki Congress will be asked to approve UEFA's consolidated and stand-alone financial statements for 2015/16 and the budget for the 2017/18 financial year, as well as the report of the UEFA president and Executive Committee for 2015/16, and the UEFA administration report for the same period. 🌐



UEFA Executive Committee candidates (8 four-year terms; candidates listed in alphabetical order)

- Zbigniew Boniek
Poland
- Kairat Boranbayev
Kazakhstan
- John Delaney
Republic of Ireland
- Armand Duka
Albania
- David Gill*
England
- Reinhard Grindel
Germany
- Elkhon Mammadov
Azerbaijan
- Karl-Erik Nilsson
Sweden
- Kieran O'Connor
Wales
- Michele Uva
Italy
- Michael van Praag*
Netherlands
- Servet Yardımcı
Turkey

* standing for re-election

FIFA Council candidates (3 four-year terms and 1 two-year term; candidates listed in alphabetical order)

- Sándor Csányi
Hungary
- Reinhard Grindel**
Germany
- Costakis Koutsokoumnis
Cyprus
- Dejan Savićević
Montenegro

** standing for the two-year term

FAMOUS NAMES JOIN UEFA'S STAFF

UEFA is welcoming some famous footballing names onto its staff at the House of European Football in Nyon – fully in line with its belief that they add special experience and bring new ideas to the promotion and development of the game.

Two former players who have enjoyed outstanding success and won a host of honours are now setting out on new careers with UEFA – former Germany international Nadine Kessler and ex-Serbian national team captain Dejan Stanković.

Kessler, FIFA Women's World Player of the Year and UEFA Best Women's Player in Europe in 2014, a UEFA Women's EURO champion in 2013, and three-time UEFA Women's Champions League winner, has joined UEFA as a women's football advisor. The role will see her make vast use of her knowledge in helping to oversee the development of women's football, as well as giving input on the growth of women's competitions.

"I think when you're looking for a new challenge after your football career, or your professional football career," said Kessler, who retired through injury in 2016, "it just has to be another challenge which fulfils you in a similar way, or makes you as happy every day as when you were a football player – because being a footballer is simply the best job in the world. Getting the opportunity to work for UEFA and looking at the times we have ahead of us in terms of how women's football is developing, I didn't think twice, and I'm more than happy about this decision."

Meanwhile, Stanković, who played 103 times for Serbia between 1998 and 2013, and won the UEFA Champions League with FC Internazionale Milano in 2010, has moved to Nyon to take up a role as a football development advisor.

He will work on projects assisting UEFA member associations to develop their best talents in the U14 and U15 age groups, as well as ensuring that top-class football education provided at that very early stage in their growth enhances the technical level of the professional footballers of tomorrow.

"I played football for 20 years and I received a lot from it. Now it is time to open a new chapter in my life," he said.

"It is an honour for me to work for UEFA, and to be given the chance to give something back to football. I'm very proud to be here."

"I have been part of a team all my life, and now I will be part of an even bigger team comprising UEFA's 55 national associations, to help them with the development of academy football and young players," Stanković added.

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, welcomed the arrival of Nadine Kessler and Dejan Stanković to the UEFA fold. "I feel it is important to bring the knowledge of former footballers into the administration of the game," he said. "They can offer a new perspective, and I value that." ⚽

Nadine Kessler and Dejan Stanković at the House of European Football in Nyon.



UEFA SUPPORTS LANDMINE VICTIMS

For the tenth consecutive year, UEFA has set aside €100,000 for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

UEFA supports the ICRC's physical rehabilitation programme for landmine victims and other people with disabilities in Afghanistan – providing artificial limbs, physiotherapy, vocational training and access to the centre's football team.

Each year, the donation is handed over by a player voted onto UEFA.com users' Team of the Year. Last year's cheque was presented by Paul Pogba.

This year, Sergio Ramos presented the €100,000 donation to the ICRC's regional director for Asia, Boris Michel, in the presence of UEFA Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee chairman Peter Gilliéron, ahead of Madrid's UEFA Champions League round of 16 encounter with Napoli at the Estadio Santiago Bernabéu on 15 February. The Spanish international was given the honour after receiving the most votes from fans in the UEFA.com users' 2016 Team of the Year poll. "I think it's a real privilege for us and it takes advantage of the global reach that football has to help [landmine victims] in every aspect of their daily lives," said the Real Madrid captain. "As key figures in this sport, we have to do that, we have to be united and help them, so that we can be a source of motivation in their day-to-day lives. Landmine victims are an inspiration for us of how to have a positive approach to life despite the problems they have. They don't stop dreaming and they fight to make their dreams come true."

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, paid tribute to the ICRC: "They have been working relentlessly to help landmine victims, many of whom are children. The ICRC programme in Afghanistan shows that football can offer real hope in challenging times. I am glad UEFA can help this cause, and that the sport we love can have a positive impact on the rehabilitation process of so many people in this troubled region."

"Landmine victims are an inspiration for us of how to have a positive approach to life despite the problems they have. They don't stop dreaming and they fight to make their dreams come true."

Sergio Ramos

SERGIO RAMOS TALKS TO DISABLED FOOTBALLERS IN KABUL

UEFA gave landmine victims playing for the ICRC rehabilitation centre football team in Afghanistan the opportunity to put their questions to Sergio Ramos. Here is an excerpt from their chat with the Real Madrid captain.

Shefa: Who was your inspiration?

Well, it's true that when I started out I was more a fan of attacking players and one in particular: the Brazilian Ronaldo, Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima. Another of my idols was Claudio Caniggia, an Argentinian forward with long hair, whom I liked a lot. It's because of him that I started to grow my hair long!

Omid: How can I become a great player?

To become a great player you've got to show a real dedication and commitment to football, you've got to be very humble and hard-working. And, above all, you've got to fight to make your dreams come true.

Ahmad Fawad: When you were my age, what dreams did you have?

When I was your age, I dreamed of being a footballer and, like I said before, thanks to a great deal of hard work and dedication, I've been able to fulfil my dreams.

Habibullah: If you hadn't become a football player, what would you have done?

If I hadn't been a footballer, I think I would've done something else in the sports world. I'm not sure which sport ... I think I'd have to say tennis. Yes, that's right, I think maybe I'd have gone into tennis if it hadn't been for football. 🏸



TROPHY HUNTERS

Ugra, Kairat, Sporting and Inter have their eyes on the prize as the semi-finalists prepare to contest the UEFA Futsal Cup finals in the Kazakh city of Almaty from 28 to 30 April.

The UEFA Futsal Cup finals kick off in Almaty at the end of April with holders Ugra Yugorsk, hosts Kairat Almaty, three-time winners Inter FS and 2011 finalists Sporting Clube de Portugal all vying for club futsal's ultimate prize. Ugra take on Sporting and Inter face Kairat in the semi-finals on 28 April, before the third-place match and final follow two days later, all at the 12,000-capacity Almaty Arena.

A record 52 teams took part in qualifying, including sides from San Marino (Tre Fiori) and Kosovo (Feniks) for the first time. Qualifying consisted of three rounds (preliminary, main and elite), with seeded clubs Ugra, Kairat, Inter and FC Dynamo given byes to the elite round. In total, 112 matches were played to determine the four semi-finalists. Of the 15 matches they have played so far, only one was not won

– Sporting's crucial 3-3 draw with former champions Dynamo that rubber-stamped their ticket to Almaty. Sporting will now have their sights set on their first trophy at this level as they aim to join an elite group of previous titleholders. The other three semi-finalists have won six UEFA Futsal Cups between them (Inter three, Kairat two and Ugra one). Here we take a closer look at the four contenders.

Ugra Yugorsk (RUS) **Winners 2016**

Ugra Yugorsk come into the semi-finals defending not only the European crown but also a terrific UEFA Futsal Cup record: dating back to their competition debut in last season's main round, Kaka's team have won all bar one of their 16 matches outright, the exception being their drawn 2016 semi-final against Benfica, which they won on

penalties. They have been equally prolific this term, Eder Lima's three elite round strikes helping take the central Russian club up to 65 goals across two campaigns at this level – and the star pivot on to 16 overall. Caio and Vladislav Shayakhmetov also made key contributions for the holders, who after defeating fellow Almaty finalists Kairat and Inter during their momentous 2015/16 debut, will fear no one.



"This tournament is unique as it provides an opportunity to compete against other European teams. We often compare it to the Champions League. These are the best teams in Europe."

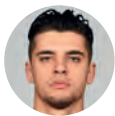
Eder Lima
Ugra pivot



Kairat Almaty's new home, the 12,000-capacity Almaty Arena, the venue for the final four.

Sporting CP (POR) Runners-up 2011

Under coach Nuno Dias, Sporting have won every possible domestic prize, leaving European glory as the last frontier for the Lisbon Lions. The fact that Sporting lost their one final appearance here in Almaty in 2011 will intensify their desire to return from Kazakhstan with the trophy. Earlier in the season Dias labelled this tournament the best club competition in the world, and his team have taken up the challenge in style. The only finalist side to start qualifying in the main round, they ended up top-scoring in the elite with 23 goals – fired by the sharp-shooting Diogo, and aided and abetted by Alex Merlim, Fortino and recent recruits Dieguinho and Kairat loanee Leo – eventually pipping Dynamo to a place in Almaty.



“I moved to Sporting because they are one of the best clubs in the world. Winning the European title with Sporting and making history is my dream, but this will be the most difficult final four in recent years.”

Leo
Sporting forward

Inter FS (ESP) Winners 2004, 2006 and 2009

Having won a record three UEFA Futsal Cup titles over six seasons, Inter won't need reminding it is now eight years since they ruled Europe. Nor will it help that they have been runners-up on their last two final tournament appearances, in 2010 and 2016. Yet even after that loss to Ugra last season in Guadalajara, the 'Green Machine' rolled on, parading another Spanish championship and, this term, acquiring Brazilian Bruno Taffy. The world-leading talents of coach Jesús Velasco and star Portuguese international Ricardinho help maintain the momentum. The latter was one of several players with two goals after Inter breezed through the main round, with Ortiz and Pola also impressing. Their immediate reward was a record ninth UEFA Futsal Cup semi-final.



“We're really excited and desperate to win. I'm focused on enjoying the tournament, because it's not easy to get there to compete with the very best. We'll have to keep cool heads and work hard.”

Ricardinho
Inter forward



The Futsal Cup final four has visited Almaty before, in 2011, when Kairat finished in third place, beaten by Sporting CP in the semi-finals.

Kairat Almaty (KAZ) Winners 2013 and 2015

Notably absent from last season's final tournament, Kairat are back and targeting a third UEFA Futsal Cup title. The 2013 and 2015 champions are contesting their eighth semi-final having mastered the elite round with three wins and 13 goals. The squad retains a familiar look from past successes as well as Kazakhstan's third place at Futsal EURO 2016, achieved under coach Cacau. Divanei carried the seven-goal scoring threat in qualifying while keeper Higuita's abilities outside his own box offer Kairat something different. Staging the final tournament in Almaty is appropriate given Kairat's record participation and rich contribution. They finished third when they first hosted the tournament in 2011; it just remains to be seen if they can now win it on home soil. 🇰🇿

“Lifting the trophy was the greatest feeling ever because this is the best tournament in the world – and if we win at home it will be twice as special. We have the chance to win this trophy for the third time, something only Inter have done.”



Higuita
Kairat goalkeeper

UEFA FUTSAL CUP FINALS FIXTURES



UEFA

Friday 28 April

Semi-finals

18.00 Ugra Yugorsk v Sporting CP
20.30 Inter FS v Kairat Almaty

Sunday 30 April

17.00 Third-place match
19.30 Final

All matches to be played at the Almaty Arena

All kick-offs are in local time

YOUNG AT HEART

For the first time in three years there will be a different name on the Lennart Johansson trophy as the semi-finalists gather in Nyon for the climax of the UEFA Youth League campaign.

The UEFA Youth League was formed to educate and develop youngsters in club academies across the continent and to help bridge the gap between youth and senior football. As the climax of its fourth season approaches – with the semi-finals and final to be played at Colovray stadium in Nyon between 21 and 24 April – it is clear that it is achieving its goal. Already over 200 players have taken the step up from the UEFA Youth League to either the UEFA Champions League or the UEFA Europa League and thanks in part to the Under-19 competition, they are taking the transition in their stride.

Arsenal FC forward Alex Iwobi is a case in point. A fortnight after scoring against FC Bayern München in the Youth League in November 2015 he was making his Champions League debut against the German heavyweights.

The then 19-year-old soon found his feet at the higher level, and has impressed many with how quickly he has settled into senior football and established himself in Arsène Wenger's side. For Iwobi, the chance to compete against some of the continent's best young players in the Youth League played its part in his progress.

'A very hard competition'

"It taught me quite a bit: you're not only playing English teams, you're playing foreign teams and you're learning their tactics and how they play," he said.

"When I stepped into the first team, it almost felt the same, so it did prepare me. It felt like you're in the Champions League as well, even though it's just the youth level. It's still a very high competition. For Under-19s, the games are very hard and you do learn."

Like the players, budding coaches and match officials also benefit from the competition's developmental ethos.

For the 12 officials chosen to work at these finals – three referees, six assistant referees and three fourth officials – the tournament will represent another significant step on their career paths.

As well as learning about different styles of play and benefiting from testing their skills against their peers from other nations, Youth League players absorb so much from their experiences off the pitch. For teams that have qualified through the Champions League path, travelling with the seniors to away games gives a valuable insight into life at the highest level, and also a chance to talk with the first-teamers away from the training ground. Education programmes organised by UEFA, meanwhile, teach the youngsters about some of the issues they may face during their careers, tackling important topics such as doping and match-fixing.

Respecting the opposition and match officials is another key Youth League mantra and provides an important grounding in the values that will guide the players throughout their careers. Both teams and officials are encouraged to mix after matches and eat meals together, deepening mutual respect and opening minds. In one notable example this season, Borussia Dortmund and Maccabi Haifa players and staff visited the Beit Theresienstadt holocaust memorial near Haifa and met two survivors of that concentration camp. Despite the horrors of Theresienstadt, the prisoners played football there, a potent symbol of their determination to keep the human spirit alive.

A fortnight after scoring against FC Bayern München in the Youth League in November 2015, Arsenal forward Alex Iwobi was making his Champions League debut against the German heavyweights.



Getty Images



Colovray stadium in Nyon, the venue for the Youth League final four.

UEFA

As part of the Youth League education programme, UEFA organises in-club sessions where guest speakers meet with young players to raise awareness of certain issues. In February, for instance, former UEFA referee Carlos Velasco Carballo, who oversaw the 2010/11 Europa League final, visited Valencia CF's Paterna training ground to explain and discuss rule changes for the 2016/17 season. "The objective is to bring the referee and players closer together because we share the pitch and in every game we should be trying to help each other, with utmost respect and mutual understanding," Carballo said.

The dangers of social media in sport, advice on how to handle interviews and press conferences and preventing match-fixing were also addressed during the session.

For supporters, meanwhile, the Youth League opens a window on the talent coming through at their clubs. With matches broadcast live around the world and streamed live on UEFA.com there is more opportunity than ever to catch a glimpse of the game's promising prospects. Jordi Mboula's sensational goal for FC Barcelona against Borussia Dortmund in the last 16 was a hit on social media, as was the annual Youth League skills challenge in which the competing teams post clips of their top tricks and flicks. The challenge

that matters most now, though, is to take home the Lennart Johansson trophy. Of the 64 sides from 40 member associations that kicked off in September, four remain. With Chelsea FC, winners for the past two seasons, not involved this time around, a new set of players will soon be enjoying that all-important first taste of success on the European stage.

Perfect hosts

For the fourth straight year the Youth League final tournament will be staged at Colovray stadium in the Swiss town of Nyon across the road from UEFA's headquarters, on the banks of lake Geneva. Nyon has embraced the finals since the competition was launched for the 2013/14 season and capacity crowds have provided a fitting stage for the season's climax. A big turnout is expected on both matchdays again this year, and activities are being organised to give the event a local flavour as UEFA joins forces with its home region to make the finals an occasion to savour. As part of the Youth League schools project, local schools are being encouraged to adopt and support a team for the finals. Sixteen teams from the regional football associations of Vaud and Geneva will take part in a mini-tournament, while Lausanne University students are again running the popular

UEFA YOUTH LEAGUE FINALS SCHEDULE

Semi-finals, 21 April

Real Madrid CF v SL Benfica
FC Barcelona v Salzburg

Final, 24 April, Nyon

Previous finals

2016 Paris Saint-Germain	1-2	Chelsea
2015 FC Shakhtar Donetsk	2-3	Chelsea
2014 SL Benfica	0-3	FC Barcelona

Youth Plaza at the stadium, creating a special ambience that is sure to appeal to young football enthusiasts.

The opening ceremony will feature a dancing school from the nearby French town of Divonne, who will be joined by the children of UEFA staff members, while teenagers will develop their film production skills by participating in the Youth League video project, run by the UEFA Foundation for Children together with Camp Cinema. All revenue from ticket sales will be donated to the foundation and is earmarked for projects to take seriously ill children to major matches or to meet their favourite players. ⚽

ADI VIVEASH

“I DON'T TELL THEM THINGS THEY WANT TO HEAR; I TELL THEM THINGS THEY NEED TO HEAR”

As Chelsea FC's development manager, Adi Viveash is the man responsible for the group of Under-23 players one step away from Antonio Conte's first team. Here he reflects on the challenges his young players face and explains his role in nurturing their talents. He begins, though, by remembering his Chelsea youngsters' triumphs in the 2015 and 2016 UEFA Youth League tournaments ...

How beneficial has the UEFA Youth League been for your players?

I think in terms of how much you can gain from a tournament like that. If you're looking at Chelsea as a model then the players have to be adept at playing international teams, coming up against different styles, different cultures and different systems, and the feel of the matches, I think, was a high level of learning experience for our boys. The biggest testament is what you do with the knowledge, and the fact that so many of those players have now kicked on into the senior game all around Europe, certainly from the first year we won it, shows that they've learned that skill set that they probably didn't have beforehand and added it to their armoury. You come up against players that you don't come up against week in, week out in your domestic league and it's a different kind of challenge. That's what you want – you want them to experience different challenges at a young age.

How does it feel to see a player like Andreas Christensen go on and play on a bigger stage as he has done in the UEFA Champions League with VfL Borussia Mönchengladbach?

When you work with players of that level and you put a lot of your own knowledge into them, to see them perform at the highest level makes you extremely proud. I think Andreas, within five months of playing in the Youth League final against Shakhtar and winning it, was marking Sergio Agüero against Manchester City in the competition proper, and that's the biggest gauge. There are boys around the first-team set-up now, in Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Dominic Solanke, who've played for Chelsea in the main competition as well. It gives you immense pride and makes you feel in some small part that you've helped them along their journey to success.

How important was it to see your players actually win the competition?

It's the equivalent of winning the Champions League for young players, so it's a major tournament to win. We know how much hard work went into both campaigns and we know how difficult it was to achieve success in both. The players knew that as well. They really targeted those tournaments, as we did as an academy, as [competitions] we wanted to do well in. We felt we had a really strong group of players in both tournaments – the first year was slightly different to

the second in that we had a lot of more individually talented players whereas the second group was probably more of a team. But both had tremendous abilities and characters within the sides. Apart from players progressing into the first team, there is nothing better than winning tournaments, especially on the international stage, and we beat some outstanding teams along the way. A lot of the players who played over the two years are made in Chelsea, especially last year's [squad] and probably six of the first year's group. So it means a lot – they've worked together for several years to get to this stage, and winning is a tremendous form of development. If you're going to play for a top club then you have to know what winning means and certainly the UEFA Youth League is a major tournament to win.

How long have you been in the Chelsea youth set-up now?

I've been here nine years and seen a lot of development in the players and obviously myself. I worked with the Under-12s when I first came here and since then I've had different roles, including coaching the Under-16s and three years as Under-18s lead coach. This is my third season coaching the oldest academy age group, renamed the development squad this →





Adi Viveash consoles Anderlecht's Nelson Azevedo-Janelas after Chelsea's semi-final win last season.

Getty Images

season, and I also coached the Under-19 team in both of the UEFA Youth League triumphs as part of the role.

Looking at your academy, are different coaches suited to different age groups? How do you decide who coaches a particular age group?

That's a decision made by the head of youth development. There are two coaches per age group and it depends on what skill sets you have got and how successful you are in all facets of the job – not just the tournaments, but your day-to-day work and planning. Obviously if you are deemed as being good enough and capable, then you move through the age groups. In my time it's obviously been relatively successful and I take that as being that you have the required skill sets that they want at the highest levels in the academy. That's the level I am at now, but you do it by doing a good job on a daily basis and showing the requirements needed to work at a club as big as this in bringing players through into the first-team squad.

How does training differ across the different age groups at Chelsea?

Up to Under-11 they are playing nine-a-side or seven-a-side, so it is different. In the Under-12s they step up to 11-a-side and generally the level of information you can give to the players and they can take on board is slightly different. You're working a lot on the core technique required to be moving through those

stages. Generally there's not a lot of movement with players up and down age groups at that age. It is a lot more about working on positional movements, etc. because they are still going through their growth stages.

Moving further on, with the programme at Chelsea, from Under-13 now they come in one day [a week] on a day release from school so they train here and do their schooling here. You are getting more of that into them at a younger age than when I started. The Under-16s have a full-time programme with full-time school, so they train every day. You're running them like a youth team. And with the Under-18s you're working the players like you would do in a first-team environment. They train every day, they do double training sessions,

in the morning and afternoon; they do gym, and they do individual programmes. They keep developing the areas of their game where they need to work. They do football education and programmes outside of here, and some of them do A-levels.

The main difference from the Under-18s to the Under-23s is that the Under-18s play regularly on a Saturday – so they work Monday to Friday and play Saturday. With our age group we can play Friday, Saturday, Sunday or Monday, so you have to have different programmes and be a bit more inventive with your day-to-day work. And because you're the nearest [group] to the first team you have to be as close as you can to the real game. Those are the challenges and you need to acquire those skill sets as a coach through the years to

"It's very important that they've got freedom of speech. Here we like a two-way, open relationship. They are able to communicate with us strongly and that's built up over the years."



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be able to work at that level. That is what's happened with me. I've been able to acquire those skill sets as well as being an ex-player with a 20-year career that helps you understand dressing rooms and situations that arise and dealing with certain players.

Can you talk about sports science and how it helps you in your planning?

We work with a GPS system so every training session we do is monitored. Players will wear the heart-rate belts and it plays quite a big part in our planning. We produce a daily report and go through that every day before we do our planning for the next day. We can look at certain areas with players – we target them, either through fatigue where we have to ease off and give them a rest, or see where we need to step on the gas with certain players. We also use it in all our matches so we can compare against our first-team players, as well as previous years' players at this age group and also our opposition.

It's a big part of our programme, it aids the players, and they're interested in it. They are all learning. We have two conditioners here with this age group who present to the players regularly and have discussions and look at them, and give them feedback on what they're looking at when they look at the data. It's important for them to understand their bodies and what it is when it feels like they are pushing their bodies to the max.

At what age specifically do your youngsters start using the GPS devices?

At Under-13 and Under-14, they'd have trialled it. They'd have used it sometimes when they train in the evenings and had a look at it. With Under-15s, this year they've used it in certain games. With Under-16s, Under-18s and Under-23s you are looking at the data every day.

Looking at non-football factors like schoolwork, diet and sleep, what steps do you take to ensure the boys' well-being?

They get checked in terms of that. There will be checks in the morning where the physios are speaking to

"Andreas, within five months of playing in the Youth League final against Shakhtar and winning it, was marking Sergio Agüero against Manchester City in the competition proper."



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players and if we're aware of anything or see anything then we make sure we stay on top of that. With how hard we work every day it's pretty easy to see if somebody is having a difficult time or they're a bit run down. But generally there's the data and just general communication with the players. We have a very good, open relationship with the players here. It's a two-way thing. Any time anybody spots anything, there are strategic plans in place to give the necessary individual the help they need if they are suffering from anything – be it illness, injury, or something personal off the pitch. There's a very good structure here and a couple of staff members who work in that department full-time. →



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You mentioned the players' schooling before. Can you elaborate on this?

Teachers come here from a school in a town nearby, Epsom, and teach players on a group or individual basis from Under-13 upwards. We also have a relationship with the school next door, Parkside School in Cobham, whereby the Under-16 boys go in there for part of their academic day on certain days of the week. So there is a big academic programme going on within the academy.

Is it hard to keep them focused on their school work when they have dreams of becoming professional footballers?

I see driven players, but the academic results for them are very important here. The top ranks at the academy are certainly looking at those exam results very stringently, and they make sure the boys get all the necessary support from the coaches and staff to make sure they get the best results they can. There is a lot more emphasis nowadays anyway in society in general on trying to achieve because football is a precarious industry

“Social media means they haven't just got one coach like we had, or one assistant manager analysing their performances – they've got whatever followers they've got on Twitter making comments on their games.”

and the fall-out is big as well, so you have to make sure that you are doing as well as you can to have a back-up plan.

We hear people say that young players have it easy compared to when you were coming through. But how do the challenges they face today compare with 20 or 30 years ago?

Social media means they haven't just got one coach like we had, or one assistant manager analysing their performances – they've got whatever followers they've got on Twitter making comments on their games. Here, every game is filmed and most games are shown live so they have a worldwide audience critiquing everything they do. There were obviously the pitfalls with finances in our day, though not to the extent there are now. The outside influences away from the game are still a big pitfall and falling into the trap of everything that is out there. But now they face a big mental challenge because of the exposure, and it means you are all around the world. There is nowhere they can hide. You can't hide, you don't get a minute's piece as a young player now. Some bring it on themselves but with others it's nothing to do with themselves.

The attention is massive and dealing with all that and knowing how to handle that stage of your youth development is a big problem for some young players and they need a lot of help in those areas. I think the biggest challenge for football in the next decade is the influences outside – the support teams that are built around these top talents now and how much they start to take over, and does it become something like in American sport where the American football quarter-back is a major, major person. Look at Tom Brady, the rigmarole around him is just enormous, but they are able to handle that. But as a young person they have a lot of people within their off-field camp, not just agents but support staff and you

“It's important for them to understand their bodies and what it is when it feels like they are pushing their bodies to the max.”



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“The attention is massive and dealing with all that and knowing how to handle that stage of your youth development is a big problem for some young players and they need a lot of help in those areas.”

have to be careful they're getting the right information all of the time. That is a big challenge to them as young players.

What particular qualities are you looking for in a young player at Chelsea? What does a 16-year-old need to ensure he is kept on?

By the time you are 16 here now you've been here eight years, so the people making the decisions are forming a picture. You're looking for personality and for different traits in different positions. There are the usual things – have they got a change of pace? Are they a powerful player? Are they a technical player? And that is nothing to do with size. They don't have to be six foot four; they can be five foot four. But is there explosiveness? Are they able to take a tackle? Can they make a tackle? Can they see a pass? Do they show bravery under intense pressure? What are they like defensively? How are they off the pitch? Do they take on tactical information? It is many things. Are they good around the group? What's their personality? What's their home life like? We do a lot on [this] so we know a lot from a young age but it's those characteristics that we are looking for.

Also, is there growth in them? Not in size, but as a player. Is there still more in them and what are the bits you're going to have to iron out? Obviously they're young, and to enable them to play at the highest level, have they got that desire to go the extra step? Most of the top players around the world are mavericks, I'd say. There's a little bit of a difference with them – a different kind of steely determination. It's different in each player but if you see that different quality it's worth working with every day to try to help them with the other bits that don't come so naturally as the God-given talent. →



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Chelsea's Under-19s in action during their two victorious UEFA Youth League finals: above against Shakhtar Donetsk (3-2) in 2015 and against Paris Saint-Germain (2-1) in 2016.

Getty Images

At what age do they start training with Chelsea?

Now they have a training group at Under-7s in our development centres around London, so kids will go in from the age of six. Coaches will work with the Under-7s and identify the players who they think have the skill sets required to move up. Then they come into Chelsea at Under-8s and then we whittle that down to a group that will start in the programme at Under-9s, and that's three evenings a week training and then a game on a Sunday.

When do they begin playing competitive football?

You don't play competitive leagues here until Under-18s but they play in a lot of

tournaments. They travel abroad to play in tournaments from Under-9 onwards and now from Under-12 they play Premier League cups too against teams from other academies in England. At Under-16 it is friendlies apart from when they play the Premier League tournament.

How important are loan spells elsewhere for your young players at Chelsea?

It's vital for players to go and experience the senior game. If they're good enough they should be out as early as they can if that is the pathway and it looks now that playing in the Premier League regularly is getting a bit older. You're looking at 21, 22 in some cases. You have to be playing in the senior game to understand what

it means – three points. It sounds silly, as easy as that, but it is [learning] what it takes to be in a winning dressing room or a losing one in competitive matches, and the difference in playing against physical men, 14 or 15 years older than you, and senior players. Also can you stamp your authority on a club that you go to? Can it appear that you are not a loan player, that you look like one of their players but better, if you like?

Do you work closely with Antonio Conte and his first-team coaching staff in providing updates on players in the academy?

Yeah, obviously the manager has been at quite a few of our games, and we train with them on occasions where we are playing 11 v 11 training matches with some of their players. He keeps an eye on the next group of players coming through and takes a keen interest in the players out on loan like Andreas Christensen and Tammy Abraham, Kasey Palmer, Charlie Colkett. There are many out on loan and a couple he has in his own squad. So he takes a keen interest in what's happening with them as well as the younger ones in my group. He wants to know about them and has seen a few of them in his pre-season programme this year. He'll be finding out all the key attributes they've got and he has a general interest in what we're trying to do and asks very interesting questions about the work and we ask the same back about his.

How difficult is it to manage young players' expectations and disappointments?

That is a key part of the job. For me you need experience to be able to do that properly. You have to have an understanding yourself. If you've been in the situations they've been in, then you can understand what they are going through. It is being able to know which players you can use, a different skill set that you have ... being able to cross-challenge, if you like. Sometimes players just come in and have a chat with you because they just need an arm around the shoulder and need to feel the support; other times they probably need to be told things that they don't want to hear. Managing expectations at

Chelsea's Tammy Abraham is on loan to Bristol City to gain some first-team experience and hone his skills.



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CHELSEA YOUTH GRADUATES

Since Adi Viveash became Chelsea development squad manager at the beginning of the 2014/15 season, the following academy players have made their debuts in the senior team:



DOMINIC SOLANKE
Striker
(Chelsea first-team squad)



ANDREAS CHRISTENSEN
Defender
(currently on loan at Borussia Mönchengladbach)



RUBEN LOFTUS-CHEEK
Midfielder
(Chelsea first-team squad)



ISAIAH BROWN
Winger
(currently on loan at Huddersfield Town)



JAKE CLARKE-SALTER
Defender
(currently on loan at Bristol Rovers)



FIKAYO TOMORI
Defender
(currently on loan at Brighton & Hove Albion)



TAMMY ABRAHAM
Striker
(currently on loan at Bristol City)



OLA AINA
Defender
(Chelsea first-team squad)

Getty Images

this level is one of the hardest things because they are some of the best young players in the world, and then at times they find their progress blocked by world-class senior players, and that can be difficult to understand. But again, I feel that is one of the areas I am particularly strong in because of the years in the game that I've had and the situations I've been through personally. The more life

experiences you have, the more you are able to be very honest and open with players and that's how I deal with it – I deal with it by being the same with each one: always put the players first and deal with each case individually and just be very honest with them. I don't tell them things they want to hear; I tell them things they need to hear. Sometimes that is something that helps, other times it makes them go

away and think, and other times they may directly say they have a different view on it – and there's nothing wrong with that. I tell them we've each got our opinion. It's very important that they've got freedom of speech and here we do allow them ... we like a two-way, open relationship. They are able to communicate with us strongly and that's built up over the years of trust that you have got with the players. 🌱

HOW DID FANS EXPERIENCE EURO 2016?

A robust sample of 63,277 people were asked about their UEFA EURO 2016 experience in an online survey carried out from 15 July to 15 August. A total of 11,524 completed the questionnaire (5,125 from France, 5,919 from the rest of Europe and 480 from the rest of the world), revealing some interesting and useful findings, as this selection of questions and answers shows.

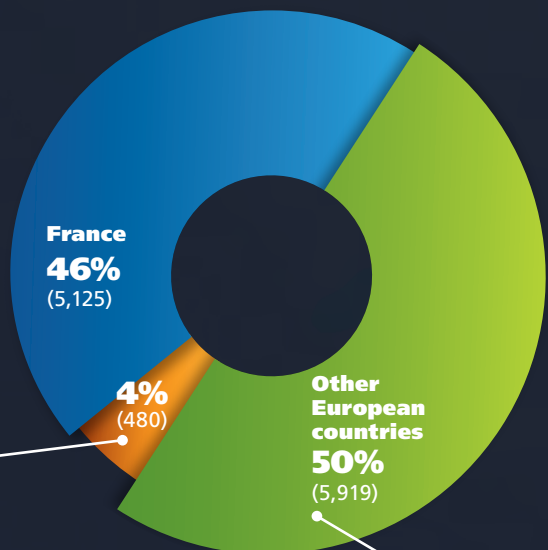
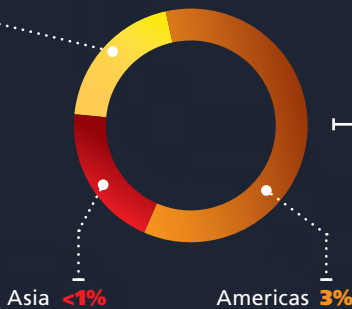


WHERE DID EURO 2016 VISITORS COME FROM?

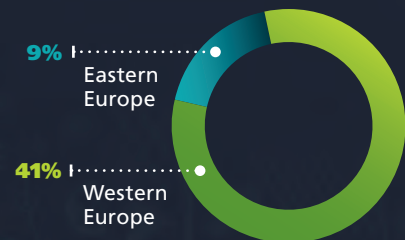


Rest of the world

Africa and Middle East <1%



PERCENTAGE OF FANS WHO HAD A MATCH TICKET



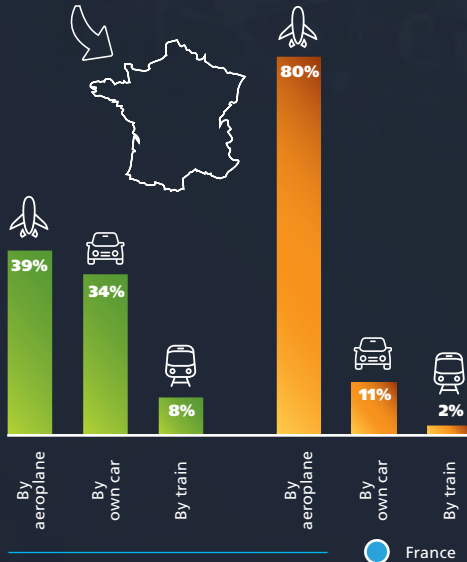


HOW DID FANS TRAVEL?

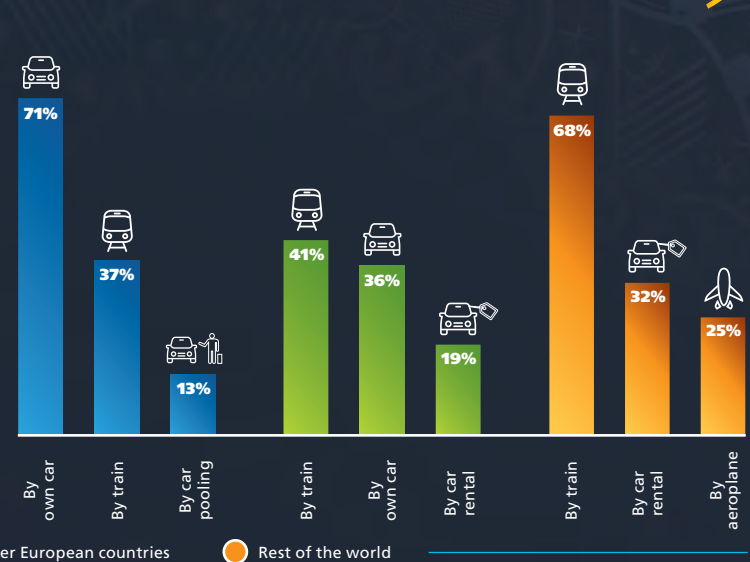
(Total percentage may exceed 100% as more than one answer was allowed)



To France (top 3 modes of transport)



Once in France (top 3 modes of transport)



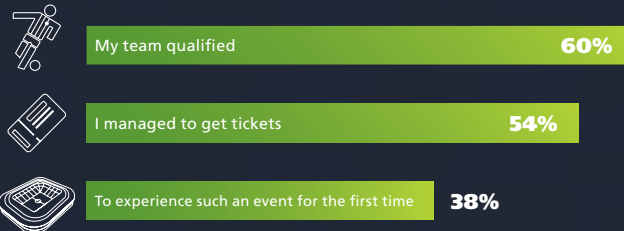
HOW MUCH DID FANS SPEND ON AVERAGE?



HOW LONG DID FANS STAY AND WHAT WAS THEIR REASON FOR VISITING?

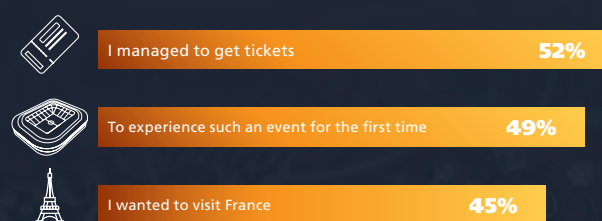
Fans from other European countries: **12** days

Top 3 reasons for visiting



Fans from rest of the world: **16** days

Top 3 reasons for visiting



STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

As the Coupe de France celebrates its 100th birthday, there is no better time to reflect on the success, both past and present, of a competition that continues to inspire every French football club, whether amateur or professional.



In 1957, Toulouse celebrated their only triumph to date in the Coupe de France, beating Angers 6-3 in the final at Stade Yves-du-Manoir de Colombes.



Olympique de Pantin, FC Sète, Excelsior Roubaix, UA Sedan Torcy ... the names of these previous winners may be consigned to the history books, but they serve as a sure sign of the Coupe de France's longevity. The fact that Paris Saint-Germain and Olympique de Marseille, with ten victories each, have lifted the trophy more times than any other club shows the level of importance that France's leading clubs have attached to the competition over the years. Its two most recent editions, both won by Paris Saint-Germain, the current powerhouse of French football, suggest that it has lost none of its sparkle over the past century. The Coupe de France is celebrating its centenary in 2016/17 and nothing – not even the Second World War – has stood in its way since it was created in January 1917. It has played an intrinsic part in the growth of French football ever since those early exploits of amateur clubs – the same clubs that, these days, light up the competition year in, year out by challenging, and sometimes even beating, professional opponents. The legendary achievements of Calais RUFC, the fourth division side that reached the 2000 final after eliminating four Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 clubs along the way, serve as a perfect example of why the French love their favourite cup competition so much: the repeated confrontations between amateurs – factory workers, office staff, firemen, ordinary Frenchmen – and professionals, between giants and minnows, between clubs whose pitches are nothing short of mud baths and those whose playing surfaces can only be described as pristine. →



In 2000, Nantes snatched a 2-1 win against amateur team Calais in the final at Stade de France. In a symbolic gesture, Mickaël Landreau invited the Calais captain, Réginald Becque, to lift the trophy with him.



7,290 clubs set off on the road to Paris

In France, maybe more than anywhere else, the domestic cup competition truly does involve all clubs: 7,290 of them in 2016/17, to be precise; ten times more than in England (736 participants in 2016/17), where the FA Cup has been contested on 136 occasions, and almost 100 times more than in Spain (83 participants). From Paris Saint-Germain, a club accustomed to European competition and domestic success, to the lowliest member of the bottom division of the most mediocre district league, all can dream of contesting the final at the Stade de France. A final that is an essential part of the French football calendar, an occasion full of pomp and ceremony at which the French president himself hands the trophy to the winners every season. Played in Île-de-France since the very first edition, the final traditionally provides an opportunity for the supporters of both finalists to descend on the French capital and proudly display their colours.



The French president has attended every French Cup final and sometimes even got a touch of the action, as General de Gaulle did in 1967 when the ball landed at his feet.

Presssports

The 2014 final between Guingamp and Rennes saw the Stade de France totally decked out in the colours of Brittany.



The 2009 and 2014 finals, for example, which were both won by EA Guingamp against Stade Rennais FC, saw tens of thousands of Bretons make the journey to the Stade de France and fill the stadium with Breton flags and songs performed in their regional language. These were special moments for Noël Le Graët, who attended the 2009 final as president of EA Guingamp and the 2014 edition as president of the French Football Federation (FFF). "I owe everything to the Coupe de France. In 1972/73, Guingamp caused a few upsets. They were in the Division d'Honneur [regional league] and knocked out four professional clubs. Guingamp would not have grown in the way it has without the Coupe de France. And I would never have enjoyed such a career in football," he told L'Equipe in January 2017.

The amateurs shine, but the professionals prevail

EA Guingamp's victory in 2009 was only the second time a club from outside the →

GLORIOUS UNDERDOGS

Every year, the Coupe de France produces its fair share of surprises as amateur clubs achieve seemingly impossible feats. Five of the most unlikely performances in the competition's history are recounted below.

1 – Calais RUFC (CFA, 4th tier) – Finalists, 2000

Epitomising the magic of the Coupe de France, the amateurs of Calais RUFC caught the imagination of all French football fans at the turn of the century by eliminating four professional clubs on their way to the final. After sweeping aside LOSC Lille (Ligue 2), AS Cannes (Ligue 2) and RC Strasbourg (Ligue 1), Calais knocked out FC Girondins de Bordeaux, the reigning French champions, in the semi-finals (3-1aet). The first fourth-tier club to reach the final, Calais lived up to their reputation as giant-killers by leading FC Nantes at half-time before eventually succumbing to a 2-1 defeat.

2 – US Quevilly (National, 3rd tier) – Finalists, 2012

Twelve years after Calais RUFC had sent shockwaves through French football, US Quevilly's exploits were almost as impressive. It took a 1-0 defeat to Olympique Lyonnais to finally end Quevilly's dream of becoming the first club from outside the top two divisions to lift the trophy. The side from Normandy had previously enjoyed victories over Olympique de Marseille (3-2aet) and Stade Rennais FC (2-1) in the quarter-finals and semi-finals respectively.

3 – SO Chambéry Foot (CFA 2, 5th tier) – Quarter-finalists, 2011

For a fifth-tier club to eliminate three Ligue 1 sides seems highly improbable, but that is precisely what SO Chambéry Foot achieved in the winter of 2011. One by one, AS Monaco FC, Stade Brestois 29 and FC Sochaux-Montbéliard were all defeated in Chambéry's tiny municipal stadium (capacity: 3,500). The giant-killers were then forced to play their quarter-final in Grenoble, where they were soundly beaten 3-0 by Ligue 2 side Angers SCO.

4 – USJA Carquefou (CFA 2, 5th tier) – Quarter-finalists, 2008

With a memorable 1-0 victory over Olympique de Marseille in the round of 16 followed by a narrow defeat to Paris Saint-Germain by the same scoreline less than a month later, USJA Carquefou's players became the true embodiment of amateur footballers unafraid to take on the big guns. The Bretons had previously seen off FC Gueugnon (Ligue 2, 1-0) and AS Nancy (Ligue 1, 2-1).

5 – US Quevilly (CFA, 4th tier) – Semi-finalists, 2010

Two years before reaching the 2012 final, US Quevilly, who were then in the fourth tier of French football, had already upset the odds by beating professional teams Angers SCO (Ligue 2, 1-0), Stade Rennais FC (Ligue 1, 1-0) and US Boulogne (Ligue 1, 3-1). As is often the case, it was Paris Saint-Germain who halted Quevilly's epic journey in the semi-finals (1-0).





Last year, PSG added a tenth Coupe de France title to their list of honours to draw level with Olympique de Marseille and share the honour of having lifted the trophy more times than any other club.

top tier had lifted the trophy, following Le Havre AC's triumph 50 years earlier. Indeed, even though small clubs upset the odds on a regular basis, the established order is almost always resumed by the time the cup is presented. This balance is probably what makes the Coupe de France so popular: amateur clubs light up the early rounds, knocking out a few big names along the way, before leaving the giants who remain to fight it out among themselves. In order to reward these amateur clubs and ensure they receive the media coverage they deserve, the FFF has been running a number of innovative marketing campaigns on their behalf for several years. In 2016/17, the 1,132 clubs who made it to the fourth round, most of them from regional leagues, were given a total of 27,456 complete kits (shirts,

shorts and socks). In a nod to the past in this anniversary season, the names of all the clubs that have lifted the trophy since 1918 were incorporated in the shirt numbers, with the likes of Olympique de Pantin mentioned alongside Olympique de Marseille and Paris Saint-Germain. While this particular campaign benefited a huge number of clubs, others are more targeted, shining the spotlight on a specific match. For the past five seasons, for example, the FFF has organised a 'dream match' in the sixth round, in which one club and its supporters are given the chance to enjoy the occasion in conditions worthy of the final itself. With the trophy on display and the stadium dressed in competition colours, the match is broadcast on TV. In 2016/17, US Saint-Philbert de Grandlieu and Sables-d'Olonne were the privileged pair. Another way in which the FFF gives amateur clubs unforgettable experiences is by allowing them to use its own prestigious facilities. The players of Picardy club ESC Longueau, for example, were able to follow in the footsteps of the French national team in November 2016,

OVERSEAS TERRITORIES JOIN THE PARTY

In an annual tradition that is set in stone, the seventh round of the Coupe de France is when the best clubs from France's overseas territories take on those from the mainland. In 2016/17, as the regulations require, 11 clubs emerged from their respective local competitions – two each from Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique and Réunion, and one from New Caledonia, Mayotte and Polynesia – to rub shoulders with clubs from the National, CFA and CFA 2 divisions. With five of the matches played abroad and the other six in metropolitan France, the FFF does its best to create a level playing field, since the long-haul flights and time differences involved often make it difficult for the away teams. Even so, none of the five overseas clubs that played at home in the 2016/17 competition managed to progress, although AS Excelsior Saint-Joseph (from the Indian Ocean island of

Réunion) salvaged some pride on their behalf by beating Avoine Chinon (CFA 2) in Indre-et-Loire. As the final representative of the 293 participating overseas clubs, Excelsior, with whom Dimitri Payet began his career, followed up their triumph with a home win over FC Mulhouse. They then prepared for a high-profile round of 64 encounter against LOSC Lille in some style, having been invited by the FFF to train at the national football centre in Clairefontaine, the traditional home of the French national team. The centre's magnificent facilities may have helped the visitors forget the 30-degree January temperature difference between the mainland and Réunion. However, they were not enough to inspire them to victory as LOSC Lille's 4-1 win brought an end to this season's exploits of Excelsior and their fellow overseas clubs, who have to wait until next season's seventh round before joining the party again.

AS Excelsior Saint-Joseph came all the way from the Indian Ocean island of Réunion to play Lille – a 10,000km journey each way, with a 30-degree difference in temperature to boot.



when they attended a pre-match training camp at the national football centre in Clairefontaine, including on-pitch training sessions, a night in the national team hotel and a coach ride to the match. All these activities help to bring the competition to life in the early part of the season, before the Ligue 1 clubs enter the fray, ensuring that it captures the public's attention throughout the year.

A treasure trove of inspiring stories

"The Coupe de France is in good health. We have the TV rights, which generate €17 million each year, and our sponsors, although it is sometimes difficult to say how much of that income relates to the Coupe de France. (...) The Coupe de France is one of the reasons why our sponsors choose to partner with us." Noël Le Graët is in no doubt: the Coupe de France remains an attractive proposition after 100 years because it has adapted to the modern game in order to become a competition in which TV companies and advertisers are keen to invest. With 13 rounds before the final, upsets at every stage and amateur players stealing the limelight year by year, it is a treasure trove of inspiring stories that merely need to be brought to the public's attention in order to keep interest levels high. It is therefore no coincidence that a large number of broadcasters are keen to bid for the rights to the competition for the 2018–20 period, for which the tendering process was recently launched by the FFF. In 2016/17, for the first time ever, all the matches in the round of 64 were broadcast by the current rights holders, Eurosport and France Télévisions, testifying to the growing interest in clashes between amateur and professional clubs. A second domestic cup competition, the Coupe de la Ligue, which is only open to professional clubs, was launched in 1995. Although it boasts an impressive list of winners – the only three teams to have won it more than twice are Paris Saint-Germain (6), FC Girondins de Bordeaux (3) and Olympique de Marseille (3) – it lacks the history and tradition of the Coupe de France and, in the early rounds in particular, is often used by clubs to give experience to players who usually sit on the bench. Like that of the Coupe de France, its final has been staged at the Stade de France since 1998. This year's final, however, will be held in Lyon,



Every year the French Football Federation organises a 'dream match' in the sixth round of the cup, with one club and its supporters – and their opponents – given the chance to enjoy their tie in conditions worthy of the final itself, with the trophy on display and live TV coverage.

Pressesports

marking the start of a tour that will see Bordeaux and Lille host the 2018 and 2019 finals respectively. Perhaps this is a signal that the national stadium is a little too big for this particular showpiece and ought to be reserved for

its older sister, the Coupe de France. A subtle blend of history, nostalgia, surprises and modernity, the Coupe de France continues, a century after it was created, to occupy a special place in the hearts of the French people. 🇫🇷

'FRANCE'S FAVOURITE COMPETITION'



Florent Soulez, the French Football Federation's marketing and strategy director, describes its efforts to increase public interest in the Coupe de France.


"Every season, one of the flagship projects of the Coupe de France is the distribution of shirts to the teams participating in the fourth round. This is a way of rewarding the amateurs who help make the competition so popular. This season, to mark the centenary, we gave them commemorative shirts and decided to organise some special, one-off events to generate maximum publicity. The 'dream match', visits to Clairefontaine, distribution of shirts bearing the players' names, etc. Our aim for the centenary edition was to make it unforgettable for the amateur clubs by enabling some of them to enjoy extraordinary experiences and step into the shoes of professional players. We do our best to promote the values of the Coupe de France, which is France's favourite competition, as much as possible. A few years ago, we realised that the general public only tended to start talking about the Coupe de France when the professional clubs joined in. By organising these activities especially for amateur clubs, we try to create a big-game atmosphere at specific matches in order to focus attention on some fantastic stories."

AUSTRIA

www.oefb.at

UEFA FUTSAL B LICENCE COURSE

CARMEN REDL

 The Lower Austrian town of Lindabrunn recently hosted the second week of a pilot UEFA Futsal B licence course, the first of its kind to be held in Austria. A total of 15 coaches attended the first session of the UEFA-backed course last autumn. The participants included former Austrian international Gilbert Prilasnig and the coaches of Futsal Bundesliga clubs Stella Rossa Wien and 1. FC All Stars Wiener Neustadt.

The six-day session was run by the Austrian FA's coach education director, Dominik Thalhammer, and Belgian futsal specialist Benny Meurs, who coached the Belgian national futsal team for more than a decade. The course was divided into more than 60 units and mainly covered technical and tactical aspects of the game. The final examinations for the UEFA Futsal B



licence will be held in March 2017.

The Austrian FA's sporting director, Willi Ruttensteiner, was delighted with the course: "It represents another step forward in the development of futsal in Austria. With UEFA's support,


we were also able, on this occasion, to welcome Benny Meurs, who has a wealth of experience at international level. Our aim is to use the course to improve the skills of every participant."

AZERBAIJAN

www.affa.az

PE TEACHERS RECEIVE FOOTBALL EDUCATION

MIKAYIL NARIMANOGLU

 From 13 to 15 February, the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) held a seminar at its headquarters to improve the football knowledge of secondary school PE teachers. The seminar, which was organised as part of a special

project supported by the AFFA and the Azerbaijani ministry of education, was attended by teachers from schools in Baku, Gusar, Shaki, Ismayilli, Lankaran and Ganja.

The main aims of the project are to promote healthy lifestyles among pupils,

to further physical education teachers' professional development by improving their football-specific knowledge and experience, to improve pupils' knowledge of the sport (e.g. as regards the Laws of the Game), to promote fair play and to identify talented children.



BELARUS

www.bff.by

LIVE DIALOGUE WITH FANS

ALEKSANDR ALEINIK

 The Belarus Football Federation has launched a new form of direct communication with football fans, replacing monthly briefings for media representatives. Starting in January, at the end of every month, two fans from different Belarusian clubs are invited to the federation's TV studio for a discussion with the general secretary, Sergei Safaryan. The idea came up because of the negative attitude of certain local media, who continuously misinformed football fans.

The new format allows guest fans to raise any questions they have about football in Belarus. Other fans also have the opportunity to take part by sending questions by email or via the

federations' official social media accounts. The discussion is streamed live on the federation's website.



The first two editions turned into a real debate, with fans of champion club FC BATE and top-division newcomers FC Krumbachy, and, for the second discussion, fans of lower-tier FC Luch and FC Molodechno raising numerous questions of current interest. The first discussion lasted for almost three hours, after which the time limit was altered to 90 minutes, to match the length of a football match. The clubs invited to select fans for the next discussion are chosen by the fans taking part in the previous session.


If the first discussions are anything to go by, it seems to be a great way of communicating without intermediaries and one that broadened the variety of topics on the table. At the same time, media coverage on leading sports websites and other media platforms has not decreased, whereas the number of links to our website has increased.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

www.nfsbih.ba

WINTER CAMP FOR YOUNG TALENTS

FUAD KRVAVAC

 The first months of 2017 were used by the premier league clubs to prepare for the second half of the season. For the first time, the league features only 12 clubs. The 22 rounds of the championship are followed by play-offs among the top six teams for the title and among the bottom six to avoid relegation.

Referee workshops have also been held, with international referees Milorad Mažić and Milovan Ristić from Serbia among the instructors. "Our referees and assistant referees had the opportunity to attend presentations by Milorad Mažić and Milovan Ristić on pre-match preparation and teamwork, and the impact of assistant referees on football today. It was a great idea to invite Mažić and Ristić to our workshop because we were able to appreciate what kind of professionals they are," said Ibrahim Hasanbegović, chairman of the referees committee.

In cooperation with UEFA, as part of its elite youth football development programme, we held football camps in

Mostar and Citluk for elite youth players from Herzegovina. For the first time, the camps included players up to the age of 14.

"Those taking part in this camp for elite youth players had the honour of being the first generation of participants in this UEFA project, which uses the latest training methodologies for this age group," said Darko Ljubojević, project leader for the elite youth football development project in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All of the youth national teams were also involved in winter training and preparation. The Under-17s


travelled to Podgorica in Montenegro to play two friendly matches against their peers there, coming away with a 3-0 win and a goalless draw. In Zenica, meanwhile, the women's Under-17s played two friendly matches against Serbia, who won both (2-0 and 1-0).

Last but not least, our national futsal national team were in Tychy in Poland for a tournament, where Boro Matan's team lost 6-3 against Slovenia, before drawing 2-2 with Finland and then losing their final match 3-1 against the hosts. Slovenia won the tournament with 7 points, ahead of Finland and Poland on 4 points each.



THIRD STADIUM SAFETY AND SECURITY CONFERENCE

TOMISLAV PACAK

 The Croatian Football Federation (HNS) recently held its third stadium safety and security conference, which gathered 50 respectable professionals from judicial and governmental bodies, the police, NGOs, media and the football family.

The importance of stadium infrastructure, better communication with fan groups and the media, and strict law enforcement were the main topics during the two-day event in Sveti Martin na Muri.

In other news, before he left his post as HNS technical director to become sports director at GNK Dinamo Zagreb, Romeo Jozak presented the HNS development programme. This 230-page book will be used as expert coaching material for developing footballers from the youngest age to senior level.

"The authors did a great job with this book, which will be used by experienced coaches and their newer colleagues as well. The book covers a very broad spectrum of player development and



Ivan Kepčija (left) and Romeo Jozak.

will certainly help protect and further strengthen Croatian technical football knowledge," said Zorislav Srebrić, senior advisor to the HNS president and holder of the UEFA Order of Merit, who wrote the foreword to the book.

Meanwhile, several committees have held education seminars ahead of the spring part of the football season.

Seminars for first and second division referees and referee observers were held in Medulin, with UEFA instructor Rune Pedersen a very welcome guest – the Croatian national team has fond memories of matches that Pedersen led in such expert fashion. Match commissioners had their own seminar, while national team and club doctors met in Zagreb for their annual medical symposium.


With different activities, HNK Hajduk and NK Osijek celebrated their 106th and 70th anniversaries respectively.

Looking ahead, the Croatian Football Federation has organised a friendly match against Mexico in Los Angeles in May, which will be Croatia's first match in North America but not outside Europe, the team having already played in Asia, Africa, South America and Australia.

Finally, it was with great sorrow that Croatian football said a final goodbye to Zvezdan Cvetković, the legendary Dinamo Zagreb player who also played for the Yugoslavian national team. Cvetković died in Zagreb in February at the age 56.

FOOTBALL COOPERATION FROM EAST TO WEST

MARTIN MOGENSEN

 Even though there are more than 8,000 kilometres between Japan and Denmark, the two nations moved a bit closer football-wise at the beginning of February.

With the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Japan Football Association and the Danish Football Association, a new chapter of exchange of knowledge and activities for children and adults has begun.

In particular, the Japan Football Association is interested in the Danes' experience in terms of grassroots football

and football in school time, including the great contribution of football to the health of people of all ages. "This focus on grassroots football and the health-improving elements of the sport is exciting", said the president of the Danish FA, Jesper Møller, when signing the MoU with his Japanese counterpart, Kohzo Tashima.

"Japan and Denmark have met each other several times for men's and women's national team matches. Cooperation in grassroots football will create lasting experiences and fruitful



knowledge sharing. We are proud to have Japan as one of our international partners," he added.

The MoU was signed on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Japanese-Danish diplomatic relations and the signing ceremony was attended by, among others, the Danish minister of culture, Mette Bock, the commissioner of the Japan sports agency, Daichi Suzuki, and the Danish ambassador to Japan, Freddy Svane.

ESTONIA

www.jalgpall.ee

FIGHTING MATCH-FIXING THROUGH LITERATURE

MAARJA SAULEP



Finnish youth author and football fan Mika Keränen, who has lived in Estonia for many years, has written a book which tells a story about match-fixing in football. The book's original title is *Maaliviivalla*, which translates as *On the Goal Line*.



The plot takes place during the 90 minutes of a football match – from kick-off to the final whistle – and it describes a young goalkeeper's experience of playing in a fixed match. The 18-year-old goalkeeper Kalle is excited when he finds out he is going to play his first top-division match, but his excitement is short-lived, as his coach informs him that in the 29th minute a penalty is going to be given against his team and he needs to let the opposition score.

Keränen said the idea for the book came out of frustration, because as a fan you would hear news about fixed matches and it felt as if honesty was lacking. As a writer he decided to address the topic.

"Another reason for writing the book was to try to make the world a little bit better. Young people who read the book will then be familiar with situations like that. If something similar comes up in real life, people might know how to act because they have already lived through it on the pages," Keränen explained.

His past experience as a coach and referee helped him with writing about football. As an active fan, he follows his favourite teams.

The plot of the book is completely fictional, according to the author, who has lived in Estonia for 20 years: "I want to draw young footballers' attention to the fact that one day they might find themselves in the same situation as the main character and be ready for it. That's why I would be happy if young people read the book."

Keränen's book, written in Finnish and translated into Estonian, is available to the Estonian Football Association as a tool in its fight against match-fixing.

FRANCE

www.fff.fr

FRENCH FOOTBALL IN CHINA

STÉPHANE LANOUÉ



On 14 February, the French Football Federation (FFF) and the Professional Football League (LFP) took their international development policy one step further by opening a joint development and cooperation office in Beijing.

The office has six priorities: to export the French football education system, to raise the profile of French competitions (Ligue 1, Ligue 2, League Cup and the French Cup) and the French national teams among the Chinese population, to strengthen strategic ties with Chinese stakeholders, to support French clubs and their business expansion strategies, to develop audiovisual coverage of French competitions through additional broadcast sponsorships, and to secure new sponsors.

"The opening of this office is an important step in our international development policy," says the FFF president, Noël Le Graët. "China has



embarked on an ambitious football development plan. The FFF has a duty to support this activity in the world's most populous country and one of the most dynamic. China is a growth engine and offers fantastic opportunities to promote French football."

Nathalie Boy de la Tour, president of the LPF, also welcomes the opening of the new office: "For a while now, we've been dealing more and more with our Chinese


counterparts, particularly following the involvement of [Chinese] investors in French professional clubs. Three years after holding the French Super Cup in Beijing, we are very happy to return to China to open an office which will be a hub for our dealings with Chinese football stakeholders. This move is unprecedented in the history of French football and clearly supports our international ambitions."

FAROE ISLANDS

www.football.fo

SPECIAL HONOUR FOR THE ASSOCIATION

TERJI NIELSEN

 The Faroese tourist board has given a special honour to the Faroese Football Association. At a closed ceremony, the tourist board gave the Faroese FA a special award for its efforts to put the Faroe Islands on the world map in a positive manner.

"The Faroese FA has for many years played an essential role in working to put the Faroe Islands on the world map in a positive manner. With hard work,

professionalism and effort, the Faroese FA has arranged many an event which has brought tens of thousands of people from all over the world to the Faroe Islands at all times of the year. This has been very important to Faroese tourism," states the tourist board in its citation.


Virgar Hvidbro, general secretary of the Faroese FA, accepted the award on behalf of the association.

GERMANY

www.dfb.de

EURO 2024 BID ANNOUNCED

STEPHAN BRAUSE

 On 1 March, the president of the German Football Association (DFB), Reinhard Grindel, presented the DFB's official declaration of interest in hosting EURO 2024 to the UEFA general secretary, Theodore

Theodoridis, at the House of European Football in Switzerland, after the DFB's presidential board had unanimously decided at its meeting on 20 January to go ahead with the bid.

Reinhard Grindel said: "It was important for me to tell UEFA personally that we are unanimously and resolutely behind this bid. We know that such a big event comes with organisational challenges, but we can also say with confidence that with our great experience, existing stadium infrastructure and the conditions already in place, we can organise a cost-efficient, first-class tournament. Together with the cities and stadiums, we will now prepare a world-class bid to present by April 2018."

The UEFA general secretary received a 40-page document containing, in addition to the official declaration of interest, a short presentation of 17 potential venues. The cities of Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Mönchengladbach, Dusseldorf, Gelsenkirchen, Dortmund, Cologne, Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern, Karlsruhe, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Freiburg and Munich have all applied to be host cities. The DFB will decide on 15 September which ten will go into the bid.



Reinhard Grindel (left) and Theodore Theodoridis

GEORGIA

www.gff.ge

FUTSAL HOSTS TWICE IN A ROW

OTAR GIORGADZE




 Tbilisi will be hosting a European Futsal Championship qualifying mini-tournament for the second time in a row in 2017. In January, the Georgian futsal team emerged victorious in their preliminary stage group, which was played out at the Olympic Palace in Tbilisi. Avtandil Asatiani's team defeated Israel 3-0 and Scotland 11-0 before beating Switzerland 6-3 in the decisive match to advance to the next stage. The matches themselves were quite exciting to watch, which was reflected in the stands. All the matches of the Georgian national side attracted a full house, with some 4,000 fans (a regional record) cramming into the stands on the final day. Georgia have now also been appointed to host their main qualifying round group in Tbilisi from 8 to 11 April, when they will be competing against the teams of the Netherlands, Belarus and Italy for a place in the final tournament. Futsal EURO 2018 will be hosted by Slovenia, with 12 teams taking part in the tournament from 30 January to 10 February.

GIBRALTAR

www.gibraltarfa.com

A NEW TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

STEVEN GONZALEZ

 The Gibraltar FA (GFA) is delighted to announce the appointment of Desi Curry as its new technical director.

More than 80 applications were received for this new position, the vast majority of them from professionals based abroad, and the final decision was made by the GFA general secretary, Dennis Beiso, and FIFA technical consultant Hansruedi Hasler, himself a former technical director at the Swiss FA.

Desi Curry brings a wealth of experience to the position. A graduate in education from Queens University in Belfast, he spent 18 years as a senior teacher and head of physical education at Laurelhill Community College in Northern Ireland before taking on the role of technical director at the Irish Football Association, where he was ultimately responsible for the management of all its footballing departments, from grassroots to

women's football, youth football, coach education, player analysis and disability football.

As a coach of Northern Ireland's youth teams since 2007, he has had prominent Northern Ireland internationals under his guidance, including the likes of Johnny Evans (currently at West Bromwich Albion), Kyle Lafferty (Birmingham City) and Stephen Davies (Southampton).

Since 2013 Desi has been working with UEFA as a coach instructor on Pro licence courses. He has also been involved in delivering courses and workshops around the world on behalf of FIFA, on the role of the technical director and its importance within national football associations and on the FIFA Handbook for Technical Directors. He was a member of FIFA's technical study group for the 2016 U-17 World Cup in Chile and currently serves as a technical observer at UEFA youth tournaments. Within the Gibraltar FA, Desi assumes



Desi Curry


immediate responsibility for all footballing and technical departments, working on short, medium and long-term strategies for the continued development of the beautiful game on The Rock.

HUNGARY

www.mlsz.hu / en.mlsz.hu

BERND STORCK IN RUNNING FOR PRESTIGIOUS GERMAN AWARD

MÁRTON DINNYÉS

 Hungary men's national-team coach, Bernd Storck, has been nominated for a prestigious award in recognition of his work in Hungary, which has strengthened German football's reputation.

The Ambassador of German Football prize, established in 2012, is awarded annually to Germans involved in football abroad who achieve exceptional results and, through their behaviour and status as role models, give a positive image of Germany and strengthen the country's footballing tradition. Former winners include Jürgen Klinsmann, and this year three names are in the frame for the award, Bernd Storck being joined by Michael Krüger, who has achieved

serious success in Africa, and FIFA instructor Horst Kriete.

"It is a huge honour for me to be nominated," Bernd Storck said. "Everyone knows the traditions of German football



Roland Bischof (left), founder of the award, with Bernd Storck

and during the course of my work I am always very conscious of the fact that I am not only representing myself but also my home country. I try to pass on what I learnt in Germany and work in a manner worthy of a representative of my country," he said before receiving his nomination certificate and prize money, adding that leading Hungary to last year's knockout stages of EURO 2016 in France was a great result and the pinnacle of his coaching career so far. Bernd Storck has offered his nomination prize money to the Csányi Foundation, which supports children from poor regions of Hungary.

The winner of this year's Ambassador of German Football award will be announced in Berlin on 16 May.

2019 EUROPEAN UNDER-21 CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS

DIEGO ANTENZIO

Key figures from the world of European football and Italy's national and regional authorities were present in the Italian parliament in Rome for the official presentation of the 2017-19 European Under-21 Championship final round, which will be hosted by Italy. Matches will be played in five Italian cities – Bologna, Cesena, Reggio Emilia, Trieste and Udine – as well as San Marino, thanks to a partnership between the two countries' football federations, the FIGC and the FSGC. Among the dignitaries attending the presentation were the Italian sports minister, Luca Lotti, the UEFA deputy general secretary, Giorgio Marchetti, the FIGC president, Carlo Tavecchio, the federation's CEO, Michele Uva, and the president of the Italian Olympic Committee, Giovanni Malagò. The various host regions were also represented, as was Italy's Under-21 national team, through head coach Luigi Di Biagio. The bid to host the tournament had been considered a strategic priority at the highest level, which was clear from the overwhelming support received from the Italian government and a host of other institutions, from key stakeholders in Italian football to other sporting institutions and the public authorities in San Marino and the host regions in Italy.

"We are proud to bring the European Under-21 Championship finals to Italy and San Marino for the first time," said Luca Lotti. "Not only is it a major event in its own right and a showcase for young talent; it also gives us the chance to prove that Italy is a capable host of such prestigious international events, while recognising that all the institutions and key figures involved will need to work together as a team."

Italy's winning bid has cemented the country's place as one of European football's key hubs, building on its recent success in hosting other major events, such as the 2014 UEFA Europa League final in Turin and the 2016 finals of the



men's and women's UEFA Champions League, in Milan and Reggio Emilia respectively. Altogether, these three matches were attended by around 200,000 spectators and generated about €90m. Meanwhile, EURO 2020 will see three group matches and a quarter-final played in Rome. "Italy finally gets to host the European Under-21 Championship," said the FIGC president, Carlo Tavecchio. "Despite our history of success in the competition, we have never hosted the finals. UEFA's decision to play the tournament here comes at a good time for Italian football, and we want the world to see all the positive work that is being done here, both on and off the field, to develop our young players and improve our facilities."

UEFA's deputy general secretary, Giorgio Marchetti, stressed that mobilising all the parties involved two years ahead of time was the best way for UEFA to ensure a successful competition. "This is a major event that will be watched all over the world, one that gives many young players the opportunity to establish themselves on

the international stage." The FIGC's CEO, Michele Uva, announced that negotiations were in progress with Credito Sportivo – an Italian bank dedicated to supporting sport and culture – for an interest-free loan of €10m towards the modernisation and redevelopment of the host facilities. "Overall," he explained, "we expect the tournament to generate around €70m in revenue. Our mission is to host a great European Championship and leave a meaningful cultural and sporting legacy in the regions involved."

The tournament will bring financial benefits, but it will also boost urban development and see significant improvements in infrastructure, including transport and hospitality resources – thanks to the efforts of the national tourist board, ENIT – as well as providing a unique platform to promote Italian products. As such, it represents an investment in the future of Italian football, and continues the country's recent trend of success in hosting major international events.

LATVIA

www.lff.lv

WOMEN'S FUTSAL HITS NEW HEIGHTS

TOMS ĀRMANIS



During the winter period from January to March, the highlight of Latvian women's and girls' football is the annual futsal league. This year it has set new records in both participation and intrigue.

During Latvian winters, which are usually very snowy and cold, amateur and professional men's and women's teams all generally play indoors. Due to the high demand for covered artificial pitches, women and girls spend this period in various futsal halls.

The women's futsal competition is split into four age groups – starting with players born in 2002 or before and ending with older girls taking their very first steps in football. From 39 teams last

year, 51 took part this year. In the eldest age group, the number of participating teams grew by five, the U14 and U12 groups expanded by four and three teams respectively, while the youngest age group stayed put on eight teams.

The league was played in mini-tournaments in every age group, with games taking place in nine different cities to promote women's and girls' football in different places and give the participants the chance to experience a fully fledged campaign. All of the mini-tournaments were characterised by many tense and high-speed games, providing ideal preparation for the upcoming outdoor season in the women's and girls' summer championships.



LUXEMBOURG

www.football.lu

NEW NATIONAL STADIUM

JOËL WOLFF



After many years of waiting, Luxembourg Football Federation officials and the whole football family in Luxembourg are finally set to see a dream come true: by the end of 2019, Luxembourg will have its own UEFA category 4 national football stadium.

The new arena will replace the venerable Josy Barthel stadium in Arloner Straße, which has fallen short of international standards for many years now.

Preliminary preparations for the construction of the new national football stadium in the south of Luxembourg city began in mid-February. The tender procedure for the construction of the new stadium is currently under way, with building work due to start on 21 August this year.

The city of Luxembourg will own and operate the new national stadium, sharing the construction costs with the Luxembourg state authorities.

The stadium, which is expected to cost €60m, will seat 9,385 spectators, all under cover. Its capacity could be increased to 11,500 at a later date without extensive reconstruction work. In addition to a 500-seat VIP enclosure, the south stand will include a large room that can be used as a venue for private events.

A car park with 2,000 spaces, a multi-purpose forecourt and a stop in the city's new tram network will be built next to the stadium.

All football fans in Luxembourg are looking forward with great anticipation and excitement to the new stadium taking shape and finally becoming a reality.




FYR MACEDONIA

www.ffm.mk

ANNUAL COACHING FORUM

ZLATKO ANDONOVSKI

 The Football Federation of Macedonia (FFM) and its centre for coach education held their annual coaching forum on 20/21 February for the purpose of continuous professional development. There were 300 coaches attending the event, all holders of UEFA diplomas issued by the FFM. The forum also marked a significant milestone as it coincided with the month of the 15th anniversary of the first-ever UEFA diploma course in FYR Macedonia.

The FFM's director of coach education, Nebojsa Markovski, opened the forum, emphasising the importance of the process of coach education and continuous professional development and giving a presentation on the implementation of the UEFA Coaching Convention within the FFM. Then the

president of the FFM, Ilcho Gjorgjoski, himself a UEFA Pro coach, highlighted that just as players need to go through a development process to reach their peak, so do coaches, and that an event such as this was part of that process.


Other distinguished speakers included Blagoja Milevski, head coach of the national Under-21 team, who gave a presentation on how the Under-21 team had made it to the forthcoming European Under-21 Championship final round in Poland; Romeo Jozak, technical director at the Croatian Football Federation, who presented his association's coach education strategy; and Mixu Paatelainen, UEFA technical observer at EURO 2016, who presented an analysis of the goalscoring at last summer's tournament in France.

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

ASSOCIATION WEBSITE UNDERGOES A FACELIFT

MARKETING DEPARTMENT

 FMF.md, the official website of the Football Association of Moldova (FMF), was relaunched in December and now boasts many additional features, including new branding and an 'FMF TV' section containing video footage.

Major stakeholders in the football family were consulted prior to the redevelopment of the website, as were existing users. Key objectives included making FMF.md easier to use – for both casual and regular visitors alike – and improving coverage of the latest news.

The new website features an innovative homepage providing thorough coverage of recent, ongoing and future events. Its revised structure gives users two ways of accessing the latest information, while specific FMF-oriented channels make for a more enjoyable experience for all visitors. There is also greater emphasis on



covering current FMF activities, with more background material being made available.

The relaunch has also given the FMF an opportunity to look to the future by adding an online shop and a ticket portal. They are scheduled to go live in the next few weeks, allowing fans to buy souvenirs and tickets for the national team's matches. The new website is very easy to navigate for mobile users, and it is now much easier to share news via social media.

The FMF is delighted with its revamped website, which has been acclaimed by members, teams, players and football fans in general.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

NEW TOP EXECUTIVES

ALEX VELLA

 The Malta Football Association (MFA) has recently appointed a new general secretary and elected a new vice-president. Angelo Chetcuti replaces former general secretary Bjorn Vassallo, who has been appointed director of European member associations at FIFA, while Matthew Paris replaces vice-president Chris Bonett, who has left the MFA to take up the post of UEFA integrity officer.

Angelo Chetcuti, a lawyer in his mid-thirties, has vast experience as a football administrator, having been a member of the MFA's executive committee and council for a number of years. He is also a senior official at a club in the Maltese league.

Matthew Paris, also a young lawyer, is another official with a thorough knowledge of football administration at club level. Until recently, he was vice-president of one of Malta's top clubs. He was elected ahead of six other candidates and joins the MFA's two other vice-presidents, Ludovico Micallef and Alex Manfre.

The two newly appointed officials are well-qualified and highly motivated and will give their all in their respective roles, which will include heading a number of MFA boards and ad hoc committees.

Under the presidency of Norman Darmanin Demajo, the MFA's energetic and enthusiastic team is striving to take the association to new heights and put Malta on the map with the aid of some innovative initiatives.



Matthew Paris (left) and Angelo Chetcuti

NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

VETERANS GET BACK IN THE GAME

NIGEL TILSON



Veterans' football in Northern Ireland is gaining in popularity, and the Irish Football Association (IFA) is promoting it even further by staging 23 Back in the Game veterans' football festivals across Northern Ireland this year. Since 2015, the number of veterans' clubs in Northern Ireland has already more than doubled, rising from 15 to 38.

Former Manchester United FC and Northern Ireland star Sammy McIlroy, who won 88 caps for his country, is a proud ambassador for the IFA's Back in the Game scheme. He says: "The programme is a great initiative to encourage those who have stopped playing to re-engage with the sport we love. The social side of things is equally

important, as this scheme promotes the physical and mental health aspects of well-being."

In addition to the festivals, a number of veterans' teams in Northern Ireland have received new kit with financial support from UEFA as part of a social responsibility project to encourage regular participation among men in the over-35, over-45 and over-55 age groups and women over 30.

The teams in question are: Mid Aged Ulster Ladies, Belfast Barca, Causeway Giants, Lurgan Town Wannabes, SionSonic, The Ards Rangers High Flyers, Hillsborough Knights, Downpatrick Devils, The Newington Swansongs, The Mighty Ducks, Carnmoney Diamonds and Wellie Wrecked.



Sammy McIlroy

ROMANIA

www.frf.ro

RAISING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

PAUL ZAHARIA



According to its strategic plan for 2015–20, one of the objectives of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) is to bring about a lasting improvement in the organisational performance of its members, in particular by enhancing the professional skills of their staff. To that end, the FRF has concluded a



partnership agreement with the Bucharest Academy for Economic Studies to organise different educational programmes.

Ad hoc and regular courses are to be organised for club executives, press officers, safety and security officers, team managers and other club officials.

In addition, a master's in sports management is due to be launched in 2018. This programme will be aimed at club executives, sports federation managers, government representatives, etc. and will be expanded across Europe in the near future. UEFA's support will play a key role in this project, as will the cooperation and know-how of prestigious schools of sports management in Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, all of which are already involved in the trans-European Play the Game project.

An internship and volunteering programme is also to be set up at the Bucharest Academy for Economic Studies, giving students the opportunity to obtain valuable practical experience in the world

of football and thereby learn the specifics of football management.

"I am delighted with this agreement with the FRF, which is our first-ever partnership with a sports organisation. From my point of view, the main asset will be the master's in sports management. We will aim to attract as many specialists as possible, and of course we all want this to be a long-lasting partnership, enabling us to train and educate as many young and successful sports managers as possible," said Nicolae Istudor, the rector of the academy, at the signing ceremony.


Răzvan Burleanu, the president of the FRF, said: "It's a proven reality that behind every sporting performance lies a team of officials – a team behind the team. Our aim is to give the best possible training to those officials, who are operating in the players' shadows. Officials working in football – and sport in general – need to be very competent and have high standards. This is an educational programme for the future."

SCOTLAND

www.scottishfa.co.uk

MALKY MACKAY LEADS PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

MICHAEL LAMONT

 At the end of 2016, the Scottish FA announced the appointment of Malky Mackay as its new performance director.

Malky has a breadth of experience as a player and coach, as well as being instrumental in the development of young players. He played for Celtic, then Norwich City, West Ham United and Watford, achieving consecutive promotions to the Premier League with all three English clubs. He also earned five caps for Scotland in the process, having started out on his journey at Hampden with Queen's Park. Malky became manager of Watford in June 2009 and subsequently won promotion



to the Premier League as manager of Cardiff City in 2013. As the Scottish FA's performance director, he is responsible for overseeing the strategy designed to improve elite talent development across the game, working in partnership with the clubs to deliver successful future international players.

In his first couple of months in the job, Malky has been touring the country, visiting club academies and performance schools as part of his preparations for implementing Project Brave, a series of recommendations aimed at improving the elite pathway and, in particular, the production of the most talented players through the development system known as Club Academy Scotland. He said: "I am immensely proud and privileged to become performance director and I am acutely aware of the importance of this role in achieving future success for our talented young players."

SERBIA

www.fss.rs

ENCOURAGING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

MIRKO VRBICA

 Women's football in Serbia is growing rapidly and the Football Association of Serbia and its sports director, Goran Bunjevčević, are doing everything to ensure the national teams have good working conditions to achieve results that reinforce the position of women's football in Serbia. This winter the Under-17 and Under-19 teams have been preparing for the final qualifying rounds for their respective European championships and Slavoljub Muslin, coach of the men's senior national team, was on hand at the girls' winter camp to give them some words of encouragement. The girls were, of course, delighted to see Muslin, with whom they had the chance to spend some time in conversation.

"Whenever I have time, I'm always available for all the Serbian national teams. There must be mutual appreciation and respect for what

we do in the Serbian FA, regardless of the level of competition and national team. I believe that among these girls there are promising and talented players, for whom every kind of support is important, especially at this age. You can see they love sport, they love football

and that is the basic prerequisite for being successful. I wish them and their coaches, Lidija Stojkanović and Suzana Stanojevic, all the best in the upcoming qualifiers for the European Championships," Muslin said.

Muslin visited the camp at the invitation of the coordinator of women's football at the Football Association of Serbia, Nikoslav Bjegovića, who pointed out that he had had the privilege to be coached by Muslin and was honoured to now be working with him at the FA of Serbia.



SLOVAKIA

www.futbalsfz.sk

FORMER REFEREE IGOR ŠRAMKA MOURNED

PETER SURIN



On 27 January, long-serving former referee Igor Šramka passed away at the age of 57.

"His decision during the EURO 2000 semi-final between France and Portugal forever changed the way people considered the role of assistant referee," said Jozef Marko, long-time member of the UEFA Referees Committee, shortly after Šramka had made that game-changing decision in Brussels.

Portugal defender Abel Xavier conceded a penalty for handball when the score was 1-1 in the 27th minute of extra time. The Slovakian assistant saw the incident and sent a signal to the main referee, Austria's Günter Benkő. After their consultation, Benkő awarded a penalty to France. The Portuguese protested, of course, but Šramka was confident about his decision. "I was convinced it was a penalty and there was no reason to step back." Zidane scored



from the penalty spot and France made it to the final and went on to lift the trophy as European champions.

Šramka's decision has gone down in the history of football. After seeing a replay of the crucial moment, the head of the Portuguese delegation visited him in the referees' dressing room and with a handshake accepted the accuracy of the decision.

The brave heart of a great man, whose respect for the truth and the rules affected that match and the future role of the assistant referee, stopped beating on 27 January following a heart attack on 23 January 2017. Doctors, including his

friend and fellow assistant referee Roman Slyško, fought for three days to save his life. But it was not to be.

Šramka, together with Luboš Michel and Martin Balko, formed a fantastic refereeing trio at the beginning of the new millennium, by when Šramka was already an experienced assistant referee. He officiated in five matches at EURO 2000, including the semi-final, four matches at the 2002 World Cup, including the Brazil v Turkey semi-final, and at the Confederations Cup in 2001. He and his countrymen were also among the EURO 2004 referee teams. In the UEFA Champions League, he officiated in 18 matches, and the Slovakian trio also oversaw the 2003 UEFA Cup final between FC Porto and Celtic FC.

In addition to football, he enjoyed bowling, and was a member of the executive committee of the Slovakian Bowling Federation. Igor Šramka was a true professional, fully dedicated and committed to his job.

His sudden death has shocked and saddened the Slovakian football family, who can take some comfort from the belief that he is overseeing the game from up above.

SLOVENIA

www.nzs.si

ALEŠ ZAVRL TAKES HIS EXPERIENCE TO UEFA

MATJAŽ KRAJNIK



Aleš Zavrl has stepped down from his position as general secretary of the Football Association of Slovenia after seven years and is moving to UEFA's headquarters in Nyon, where he will take over as head of club licensing.

During his time as general secretary of the Slovenian FA, the association successfully completed many different projects, including the reorganisation of its administration, which became a modern and internationally comparable organisation with up-to-date work processes, communication and a brand-new modern information system, among other features. He headed the organisational part of Slovenia's



qualification for the World Cup in South Africa, and under his leadership, the Slovenian FA hosted the final round of the European Under-17 Championship in 2016 – the first

European championship final tournament to take place on Slovenian soil – and was successful in its bid to host Futsal EURO 2018. Another of his notable achievements was the opening of the Slovenian headquarters and training centre at Brdo. He also played an instrumental role in the development the


association's strategy up until 2020.

"I am happy to have been able to contribute to the development and growth of Slovenian football, and I will be sure to follow the future progress in my home country. I am certain that changes are a necessary part of life and can be beneficial to an organisation. Every change brings a new challenge, which needs to be handled with the knowledge and experience we have gathered in all these years," said Zavrl after leaving his post.

Following Aleš Zavrl's departure, Matjaž Jaklič, head of the technical sector, has taken over as general secretary ad interim, until the president, Radenko Mijatović, finds a permanent replacement. "I want to thank Aleš Zavrl for his commitment and dedicated work at the association and his invaluable contribution to the development of football in Slovenia. I wish him all the best in his new career at UEFA," he said.

SWEDISH FANS HEADING FOR POLAND

ANDREAS NILSSON

 Sweden are gearing up to defend their European Under-21 Championship title in Poland this summer. Most of the players in the squad will be new to the championship experience, but Sweden's yellow wall of fans will be out in force again. The Swedish allocation of tickets to the games in Kielce and Lublin has sold out, and fans who have so far missed out are being directed to the general public sales of the Polish FA.

"We had tremendous fan support in the Czech Republic in 2015. The fans gave us a huge boost, and they definitely contributed to our success there. We're of course very happy to see that so many will be making the trip to Poland as well," says Sweden Under-21 coach Håkan Ericson.




In all, 7,500 tickets have been sold through the Swedish FA, with the largest allocation (2,700) sold for the team's first game, Sweden v England, in Kielce on 16 June.

Fans stuck at home will not be completely out of luck, as Kanal 5 has secured the Swedish broadcasting rights for the tournament.

REFEREES WORK UP A SWEAT IN MELONERAS

PIERRE BENOIT

 "From the heated brow, Sweat must freely flow." This line from Friedrich Schiller's Song of the Bell was somewhat apt for the 54 referees, assistant referees, prospective match officials and Swiss Super League and Challenge League coaches who attended the Swiss Football League's 29th annual training camp in Meloneras on Gran Canaria.

Those participants – all of whom have jobs in addition to working as referees and had to 'sacrifice' annual leave in order to attend the camp – endured an intense week of tough training. Patrick Graf, head of refereeing at the Swiss Football Association, was the lead organiser and put together an extremely demanding programme.

Participants had daily training sessions working on their fitness, strength and theoretical knowledge. Numerous instructors and coaches – almost one



per referee – were on hand to help ensure that match officials were fit and ready for the second half of the season. Oliver Riedwyl, a certified fitness coach working for Swiss Olympic and the Swiss Football Association, was one of three highly qualified coaches overseeing the fitness training. "Today's referees have to deliver top performances," says Patrick Graf. "A referee officiating in top-flight matches is an elite athlete. Unfortunately, though, Swiss referees are still amateurs in a professional world."

Oliver Riedwyl and his two colleagues worked on participants' fitness in the course of the week, building on specific base levels that referees had been asked to ensure prior to the camp. Mornings involved 90-minute sessions out on the pitch to improve participants' stamina, running form and speed.

That fitness training was supplemented with daily theory sessions, looking at issues such as handball, offside, unsporting behaviour, respect and body language. In addition, two games were organised between teams from Las Palmas, in order to allow participants to put things they had learnt into practice.

TURKEY

www.tff.org

TURKEY ANNOUNCES EURO 2024 BID

AYDIN GÜVENİR



A EURO 2024 bid information meeting was held at the administrative centre of the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) in Beykoz-Riva, Turkey, where the minister of youth and sports, Akif Çağatay Kılıç, and the president of the Turkish Football Federation, Yıldırım Demirören, confirmed that Turkey will bid to host EURO 2024.

The general director of sports, Mehmet Baykan, the undersecretary of youth and sports, Faruk Özçelik, TFF executive board members and Turkey's director of football, Fatih Terim, were also present.

Addressing the meeting, the TFF president said: "Today we come together for a good job on behalf of Turkish football. We are together for our EURO 2024 bid, which is our fourth bid to host a EURO. Turkey is the only country in Europe, and even in the world, to have invested in 32 stadiums. Unfortunately, we did not get the opportunity to host



the tournament before. Last time we lost by just one vote. This time we believe we deserve to be the hosts of EURO 2024. I would like to thank you for your support, Mr sports minister, Mr prime minister and, of course, Mr president of the Turkish Republic. I believe we will all work together on this path."

In his speech, the minister of youth and sports said: "As Mr Demirören says, we are making an important announcement and decision. We have got here with the political support of our country. The TFF will submit its application and the process will begin. I

can state clearly that Turkey has made a great leap in stadiums on the instructions of our president and prime minister. When we look at the stadiums that are currently being built in Turkey, there is only one country that rivals us, the USA, and its scale is obvious. We're the number one in Europe in this area. This is the most beautiful indicator of where we have come from in terms of infrastructure. I hope that the result will be very different this time and that our bid will be successful."

The TFF submitted its official declaration of interest to UEFA on 2 March.

UKRAINE

www.ffu.org.ua

ZHYTLOBUD-1 WIN FOURTH WOMEN'S WINTER CHAMPIONSHIP

YURI MAZNYCHENKO



The annual women's winter championship took place from 17 to 25 February in Vynnyky in the Lviv region of Ukraine. The nationwide competition was created by the Football Federation of Ukraine (FFU) in 2008.

In accordance with the competition regulations, the ten participating teams were divided into two groups for the group stage, which was followed by knockout matches.

The final was a head-to-head between two teams from Kharkiv – Zhytlobud-1 and Zhytlobud-2. From the outset, the reigning champions, Zhytlobud-2, dominated the play and took the lead through on-form Dyatel, who completed a good pass from Kalinina. However, Zhytlobud-1 were thrown back into the

game before the break through a Ryzhova own goal. In the 64th minute, Ovdychuk scored the winner for Zhytlobud-1, giving the Kharkiv team its fourth winter championship title (2008, 2014, 2015 and 2017).

In the play-off for third place, Zlahoda from Dnipro beat 2013 winter champions Legenda from Chernihiv on penalties (4-3) at the end of a goalless match.

After the competition, the FFU women's football committee named the best players in the tournament: Iryna Slavych (Lvivyanka) – best goalkeeper, Elyzaveta Kostyuchenko (Zhytlobud-1) – best defender, Ksenia Grytsenko (Zlahoda) – best midfielder, and Yana Kalinina (Zhytlobud-2) – best forward. Vira Dyatel was the top scorer with five goals.



THE RISE OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN MALTA

"UEFA's support has been crucial," says Malta Football Association (MFA) general secretary Angelo Chetcuti, after funds from the HatTrick programme helped to give a real boost to women's football on the island.



D. Aquilina



During the third cycle of the HatTrick programme (2012–16), each UEFA member association received up to €100,000 a year to invest in women's football development. The MFA put the money into some key sectors, such as coach education, Under-13 festivals, a new girls' academy and the branding of the women's game. Those efforts were recognised as best practice examples in a report compiled by UEFA on the activities of all its member associations under the UEFA Women's Football Development Programme.

"Women's football projects a very positive image of the game," says the MFA general secretary, Angelo Chetcuti. "Our game needs to be much more accessible, and gender balance is one of the areas that needs to be improved on. UEFA's support has been crucial. It helps us fund coach education and our academy, as well as our competitions."

One of 50 promising young players who now train weekly at the MFA's

Ta' Qali technical centre thanks to Malta's renewed focus on the women's game, 12-year-old Martina says: "Last summer, we had a summer camp organised by the MFA women's national academy. I had a trial and I got chosen, and that's where I started my career as a football player. Football helps me to feel confident. It shows we are able to speak up, because women are equal to men, and there isn't any difference."

The MFA has strengthened women's football at grassroots level, making it the biggest participation sport for girls on the island. And there is plenty of enthusiasm for further work in the sector.

Parents play a pivotal role when it comes to the participation of girls. Sarah, 12, who is also playing in the girls' academy, speaks highly of her father: "My dad is proud of me playing football," she says.

"He takes me to football several times a week. He waits for me for hours, sometimes in the rain, and he has been doing that for the past five years."

Mosta FC coach Josette Sant encourages the girls and their parents. She tells the girls

to leave their electronic devices at home and to come and play football and enjoy it. And she explains to the parents how football can improve their skills, their values and their sense of teamwork – on and off the pitch. "My objective in coaching football is to enable the girls to strengthen their ability, develop their football skills and develop their character," she says. "It gives me great satisfaction to coach in women's football because I'm seeing an increase in the number of girls playing football. I am also seeing an increase in their abilities, and for me they're just as good as boys."

"My hope is to continue to increase our numbers of young female football players, but also to strengthen the competition and see more and more people attending our women's games and our women's national team matches," Chetcuti adds. "We've had some very beautiful success stories and I hope we will continue and build on them."

Owing to its success, the Women's Football Development Programme has been extended for another four years as part of the fourth cycle (2016–20) of the UEFA HatTrick assistance programme. 🏆

BIRTHDAYS

Jan Peeters (Belgium, 2 April)
Elisabeth Derks (Netherlands, 2 April)
Michael Sjöö (Sweden, 2 April)
Marton Dinnyés (Hungary, 2 April)
Kaj Østergaard (Denmark, 3 April)
Martin Sturkenboom (Netherlands, 3 April)
Dennis Cruise (Republic of Ireland, 3 April) **60th**
Yoav Strauss (Israel, 3 April)
Emil Ubias (Czech Republic, 3 April)
Christian Kofoed (Denmark, 4 April)
Eamon Naughton (Republic of Ireland, 4 April)
Alex Miescher (Switzerland, 4 April)
Marco Casagrande (Finland, 4 April)
Jan Ekstrand (Sweden, 5 April)
Momir Djurdjevac (Montenegro, 5 April)
Alexey Sorokin (Russia, 5 April)
Aleksandra Pejkovska (FYR Macedonia, 5 April)
Vencel Tóth (Hungary, 6 April)
Snježana Fočić (Croatia, 6 April)
Laszlo Szalai (Hungary, 6 April)
Pavol Peráček (Slovakia, 7 April)
Jacques Devismes (France, 8 April)
Jim Fleeting (Scotland, 8 April)
Peter Hegyi (Hungary, 8 April)
Yevgeniy Stolitenko (Ukraine, 8 April)
Márton Esterházy (Hungary, 9 April)
Ladislav Svoboda (Czech Republic, 9 April)
Zoran Petrović (Serbia, 10 April)
Gordon Pate (Scotland, 10 April)
Panagiotis Tsarouchas (Greece, 10 April)
Vlastibor Minarovjech Jr (Slovakia, 10 April)
Eduard Kindle (Liechtenstein, 10 April)
Umberto Gandini (Italy, 11 April)
Kristiaan Van der Haegen (Belgium, 11 April)
Pierre Dumarché (France, 11 April)
Rodger Gifford (Wales, 12 April)
Valeriu Ionita (Romania, 12 April) **60th**
François De Keersmaecker (Belgium, 12 April)
António José Fernandes Cardoso
 (Portugal, 12 April)
Paolo Piani (Italy, 13 April)
Giovanni Spitaleri (Italy, 13 April)
Edvinas Eimontas (Lithuania, 13 April)
Octavian Goga (Romania, 14 April)
Georgios Bikas (Greece, 15 April)
Erol Ersoy (Turkey, 15 April)
Antonius van Eekelen (Netherlands, 15 April)
Dušan Fitzel (Czech Republic, 15 April)
Anders Hubinette (Sweden, 15 April)
Manuel Enrique Mejuto González
 (Spain, 16 April)
Charles Schaack (Luxembourg, 17 April)
Frances Smith (Republic of Ireland, 17 April)
Oguz Sarvan (Turkey, 18 April)
Alexandre Remin (Belarus, 18 April)
Norman Darmanin Demajo (Malta, 19 April)
Johan Timmermans (Belgium, 19 April) **60th**
Virgar Hvidbro (Faroe Islands, 19 April)
Elena Charina (Russia, 19 April)
Jean-Luc Veuthey (Switzerland, 20 April)
Michael Argyrou (Cyprus, 20 April)
Ilhan Helvaci (Turkey, 20 April)
Nenad Santrač (Serbia, 20 April)
Marc Lesenfants (Belgium, 21 April)
Vitor Pereira (Portugal, 21 April) **60th**
Martinus van den Bekerom
 (Netherlands, 21 April) **60th**
Alexandru Burlac (Moldova, 21 April)
Tomislav Vlahović (Croatia, 21 April)
Jan Damgaard (Denmark, 22 April)
Morgan Norman (Sweden, 22 April)
Rod Petrie (Scotland, 22 April)
Volodymyr Petrov (Ukraine, 22 April)
Claudine Brohet (Belgium, 22 April)
Roland Tis (Belgium, 23 April)
Mehmet S. Binnet (Turkey, 23 April)
Prune Rocipon (France, 23 April)
Nebojša Ivković (Serbia, 24 April)
Avraham Luzon (Israel, 24 April)
Sandor Piller (Hungary, 24 April)
Ilker Yucesir (Turkey, 24 April)
Roy Millar (Northern Ireland, 25 April)
Philippe Verbiest (Belgium, 25 April)
Dany Ryser (Switzerland, 25 April) **60th**
Salustia Chato Cipres (Andorra, 25 April)
Valentin Velikov (Bulgaria, 25 April)
Yariv Teper (Israel, 26 April)
Marina Sbardella (Italy, 27 April)
Jan Carlsen (Denmark, 27 April)
Edgar Steinborn (Germany, 27 April) **60th**
Frank Fontvielle (France, 27 April) **50th**
Yuriy Zapisotskiy (Ukraine, 28 April)
George Frank (Israel, 29 April)
Gudmundur Ingi Jónsson (Iceland, 29 April)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Meetings

3 April, Zagreb
 2016/17 European Under-17 Championship:
 final round draw
3 April, Helsinki
 Finance Committee
4 April, Helsinki
 Executive Committee
5 April, Helsinki
 41st Ordinary UEFA Congress
7 April, Pilsen
 2016/17 European Women's Under-17
 Championship: final round draw
13 April, Georgia
 2016/17 European Under-19 Championship:
 final round draw
21 April, Nyon
 2016/17 UEFA Champions League and
 UEFA Europa League: semi-final draws

NOTICES

- On 11 February, Gudni Bergsson was elected president of the Football Association of Iceland, taking over from Geir Thorsteinsson.
- On 18 February, Ilcho Gjorgjoski was re-elected president of the Football Association of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- On 6 March, Carlo Tavecchio was re-elected president of the Italian Football Federation.
- Luigi Zafferani has replaced Luciano Casadei as general secretary of San Marino Football Federation.

OBITUARY

- Johannes Malka** (Germany), a member of the circle of former UEFA committee members, passed away on 23 February aged 94. A former international referee, he was a member of the UEFA Referees Committee from 1978 to 1996, serving as its chairman for two years and as vice-chairman for four. In 2002, he was awarded the UEFA Order of Merit in ruby.

25 April, Nyon

Club Licensing Committee
 European Qualifying Competition for the
 2019 Women's World Cup: group stage draw

Competitions

3–12 April

Futsal EURO 2018 qualifying competition:
 main round

6–11 April

European Qualifying Competition for the
 2019 Women's World Cup: preliminary round

11/12 and 18/19 April

UEFA Champions League: quarter-finals

13 and 20 April

UEFA Europa League: quarter-finals

21–24 April, Nyon

UEFA Youth League: final four

22/23 and 29/30 April

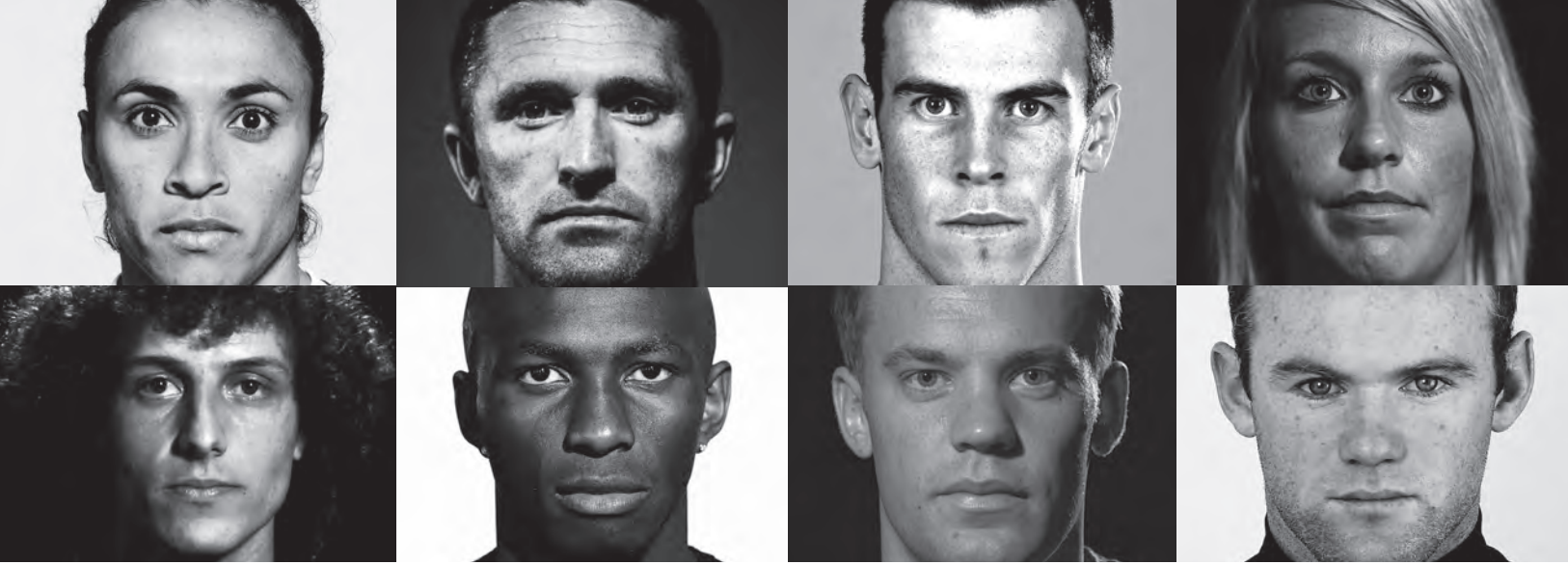
UEFA Women's Champions League: semi-finals

27 April–7 May, Bahamas

Beach Soccer World Cup

28–30 April, Almaty

UEFA Futsal Cup: final four



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