

UEFA



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YEARS

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Theodore Theodoridis
UEFA General Secretary

UEFA CONTINUES TO EMPOWER AND INNOVATE IN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

Those of us who work in football can sometimes forget the magic of the game that inspired us to love it in the first place. Of course, players do not learn to love and play the game just by magic. It is UEFA's duty as European football's governing body to empower people to play the game, and, through the unique UEFA-Disney Playmakers programme for girls aged five to eight, we will open up football to an audience not yet engaged with our sport.

Inspired by storytelling in films such as *Incredibles 2*, the programme is the first-ever major pan-European grassroots football programme for girls and will be rolled out in seven countries this year. The aim is to create an environment where imaginations can run wild as an iconic Disney story is told through movement and play. This unique programme can be the spark for a more active generation of football-loving girls.

When we launched *Time for Action*, our new strategy for women's football last year, we laid out goals, strategies and outcomes that will ensure European football is as great as it can be. *Playmakers* is just one part of that commitment, and we look forward to working with Disney and our national association partners to realise the enormous potential of the programme.

Elsewhere, UEFA has listened to leading female players and learned of the sacrifices they had to make starting out playing the game; the lack of facilities and their long journeys to training and matches. Inspired by their experiences, UEFA has started a regional development programme for women's football. By funding regional footballing structures and education in Europe, the programme will ensure girls in their early teens do not have to travel far to fulfil their football dreams.

Those dreams can become reality in the UEFA Women's Champions League, which will have a new format from 2021/22, including a 16-team group stage. The competition will now have more matches, centralised marketing and exclusive matchdays that do not clash with other major football competitions.

UEFA is championing and innovating women's football at all levels of the game.

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The Yugoslavia captain Branko Zebec swaps pennants with France international Jean Vincent before their teams' semi-final. Curiously, France's captain was not Vincent, but Marian Wiesniewski.

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Presse Sports

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ESTONIA: WHEN THE ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY



Almost 30 years since regaining its independence from the Soviet Union, Estonia is constantly striving to keep football centre stage. In the country of Mart Poom and Konstantin Vassiljev, football is the most popular sport and has set itself the ambition of helping to improve society as a whole. Drawing inspiration from neighbouring Finland in terms of its structure, the Estonian FA hopes its national team will one day qualify for a major tournament.

Around 40km west of Tallinn, the small town of Laulasmaa provides an idyllic setting for residents of the Estonian capital to recharge their batteries after a hard week at work. Between the seemingly endless pine forests and the long beach on the Baltic Sea, visitors here have the chance to re-energise themselves while enjoying the peace and quiet of this part of Harju county.

Even in the meeting room at the local spa, the atmosphere is relaxed, despite the afternoon's packed agenda, as the board of the Estonian Football Association (EJL) gathers for a three-day meeting to discuss its road map to 2025.

"It's a tradition here: we move around each year and hold our board yearly vision meeting in a different county so we can visit all the regional leagues," explains EJL spokesperson Mihkel Uibolet as he

helps himself to a slice of salt-crusted pork, a local speciality.

Around him, children play between the tables under their parents' watchful eyes.

"The board members' families are always invited to join us. They don't take part in the meetings, but they can enjoy the spa. Since the members are all volunteers, it's a way of thanking them for their commitment," he continues between mouthfuls.

One big family

Since its rebirth in 1991, the Estonian FA has been operating like a big family, with Aivar Pohlak as its patriarch.

The 57-year-old EJL president is not exactly what you might expect the leader of a national football association to look like: with long grey hair and a bushy beard, he wears a thick Nordic-style →



Jana Pipar

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"Because football had disappeared from Estonian society, the association's first task was to re-establish a football culture."

Aivar Pohlak
EJL President

Danil Kuraskin attempts to outflank André Ferreira in a friendly between Portugal and Estonia (2-0) on 20 September 2019.



SPECIAL FEATURE

sweater and a pair of brand-new white trainers.

"I apologise in advance because I speak from the heart and my heart doesn't speak very good English," he says with great modesty, since his knowledge of Shakespeare's language is impeccable.

"If we had spoken in Estonian, I would have been able to read a book at the same time!" he jokes.

In fact, Aivar Pohlak is a true master of the national language, a multitasking individual who has worn numerous hats over the years: a former poet, children's author and teacher of maths and Estonian, he played as a striker for many years and, in 1990, with a group of friends, founded FC Flora Tallinn, a club whose 11 league titles make it one of the giants of the Premium League (the Estonian first division).

However, in this break between

meetings, it is in his role as EFL president that he sits down for a moment to share the story of Estonian football.

Football has always enjoyed unparalleled popularity in this former Soviet republic of 1.3 million people, albeit with a few bumps along the way. The national association was founded in 1921, a year after the Sinisärgid (blue jerseys) played their first match, a 6-0 friendly defeat at the hands of their Finnish neighbours.

It joined FIFA in 1923 and, the following year, took part in an international tournament for the first and only time to date: the Olympic Games in Paris.

"What followed was rather depressing," sighs Aivar Pohlak. "During the four decades of Soviet occupation, Estonian football culture completely disappeared. The hardest period was between 1969 and 1983, when Estonia was the only Soviet

republic not to have any clubs in the Soviet championship."

So, when Estonia regained its independence in 1991, it is easy to understand why football was considered 'a sport played by Russians, like ice hockey'. In the late twentieth century, Estonians tended to prefer basketball or Nordic skiing. But Aivar Pohlak refused to lose heart and, along with a number of close friends (many of them intellectuals and academics), rolled up his sleeves and set about the task of reviving football in his country.

"In 1992, when we played our first match since independence, against Slovenia on 3 June, there were only 26 players in the national championship who were eligible to wear the Estonian jersey. In other words, we hardly needed a selection process at all!" smiles the

Estonia's Under-17s have every reason to be optimistic as they prepare for the European finals on home soil in May. Trailing 2-0, they fought back to beat Under-17 heavyweights Spain 3-2 last September.



Konstantin Vassiljev in action during the EURO 2020 qualifier between Estonia and Belarus (1-2).



Jana Piipar

president, who was the national team's assistant coach at the time.

Rome was not built in a day

That inaugural match against Slovenia in Tallinn finished as an honourable 1-1 draw. But the result, like that of the matches that followed, was of little importance, since the main priority lay elsewhere.

"Because football had disappeared from Estonian society, the association's first task was to re-establish a football culture," says



Lisli Trosska

Aivar Pohlak. Just as Rome was not built in a day, it seemed unreal that Estonia could become a major football nation in just a few years.

Nobody could deny that the EJL's greatest achievement since independence has been the national team's qualification for the EURO 2012 play-offs, which they lost to the Republic of Ireland, on 11 October 2011.

"We realised that day that we were capable of achieving great things on our own," says Aivar Pohlak. "Before that, we had foreign coaches, but it was Tarmo Rütli, one of our own, who oversaw the greatest feat in Estonian football's recent history."

The Sinisärgid, who are currently 103rd in the FIFA rankings, have still to qualify for an international tournament. However, nobody considers this a failure and the EURO 2012 play-offs are still fresh in everyone's minds.

"Since then, we have seen a 30% increase in new members!" says Anne Rei, EJL general secretary. "With around 25,000 registered members in six men's and three women's divisions, football has returned to its position as Estonia's number one sport and our association is built around a solid structure, with 75 employees. If you look at basketball, for example, which is still very popular in Estonia, their association only has seven or eight members of staff."

Rei explained that an amateur championship was launched in 2011 in response to the huge public interest in

football. But after peaking in 2015 (3,500 registered teams), participation dropped off slightly (2,200 in 2019). She remains positive, though.

"As well as the 11-a-side and seven-a-side formats, we are going to launch five-a-side competitions," she says "And to make it easier, participants will be able to sign up online themselves with their identity card. Estonia is a country at the cutting edge of data digitisation and we are fully on board with it, with four people working in the association's IT department. We now have easy access to the personal data and statistics of all EJL-registered players. You could almost say we have the most comprehensive database in the world!"

There is every reason to be optimistic for an association in which the general atmosphere is both friendly and down to earth. Mihkel Uiboleht, for example, remembers how he was recruited as EJL spokesperson in the early 2000s, when he was only 17 years old.

"I used to cover matches for a sports news website and the association invited me to become its press officer. Because Aivar was running late, we ended up having to conduct the job interview in his car!" he smiles.

Firmly entrenched in his post ever since, Uiboleht has seen the association diversify its activities and launch a broad range of different competitions, including a football quiz championship.

"It's like a pub quiz," he explains, proud to have once been Estonian champion →



Jana Pipar

“We now have easy access to the personal data and statistics of all EFL-registered players. You could almost say we have the most comprehensive database in the world!”

Anne Rei
EFL General Secretary

himself. “It’s a way of building closer ties between the association and the fans because the competition is open to everyone.”

For the last 20 years, Aivar Pohlak has stopped flying and only travels by car.

“It helps me to keep my feet on the ground,” says the workaholic, who covered an impressive 90,000km last year.

His efforts are certainly paying off: in 2011, for example, the 14,336-seat Lilleküla Stadium (since renamed the A. Le Coq Arena) was built and became home not only to FC Flora Tallinn, but also the national team.

Entirely dedicated to football, the venue hosted the European Under-19 Championship final tournament in 2012 and the 2018 UEFA Super Cup between

Real Madrid CF and Club Atlético de Madrid (2-4 after extra time).

In May 2020, it will stage the European Under-17 Championship final round, a hotly anticipated event that will showcase some of Estonia’s up-and-coming stars.

Focus on youth

Rather than the lion, the national animal that appears on the country’s coat of arms, the Estonian FA chose the hedgehog as its emblem.

“It’s a small but wise animal that has to adapt to every situation in order to survive,” says Mihkel Uibolet. “And, of course, with the spines on their back, hedgehogs can be dangerous to predators.”

Norbert Hurt understood this philosophy well. After gracing Estonian football pitches for seven years, this former defensive midfielder is now sporting director at FC Flora Tallinn and, more importantly perhaps, coach of the national Under-17 team as part of a pilot project that he joined two years ago.

“I believe it’s important to work with the same group of players,” says Hurt. “And to always keep the senior team and its needs in mind, so we can adapt accordingly. All the national teams should work together.”

Holder of a master’s degree in sports science from the University of Tartu, Estonia’s second city, Hurt returned from his studies with a rather unusual but key

member of staff in tow: a psychologist.

“He used to play football a bit when he was young, so he knew the basics of the sport. We graduated from university together and he was looking for a job, so I invited him to come and work with me and my team. His job is to remove the obstacles that players can have in their heads.”

The softly spoken Norbert Hurt is clearly a teacher at heart. Over the years, he has developed a system of six values that he believes hold the key to sporting success and act like a moral contract between the different members of the team.

“Each player must adopt these values: team spirit, self-confidence, passion, never stop trying, never give up and, most importantly, play with freedom,” says Hurt.

It is probably this final principle that best sums up Hurt’s philosophy.

“On the pitch, I want my players to feel free, not weighed down with instructions. Obviously, you need a structured framework, which is why I see myself as a guide rather than as someone who gives out orders. I want them to be able to express their creativity.”

This approach appears to be paying dividends. In 2019, Norbert Hurt’s team saw off prestigious opponents such as France, Sweden, Spain and the Netherlands, giving them every reason for optimism as they look ahead to the forthcoming Under-17 finals on home soil.

“I want us to aspire to greater things



The Estonian FA organises football festivals to attract more children into the game, girls in particular.

than just losing by the smallest possible margin," says the coach. "In other words, I want my players' dream to become their objective. And many of them are desperate to play for the senior team one day."

Hurt adds that the values he is passing on should apply not only on the pitch, but in real life as well. He concludes by pointing out that the group of players currently under his charge, who were born in 2003, saw the national team reach the EURO 2012 play-offs while they were growing up. Since the competition was expanded to 24 teams in 2016, many people have started to dream of seeing the Sinisärgid qualify for their first international tournament, maybe in Germany in 2024. Norbert Hurt is the first among them.

In Estonia, football and society are therefore never very far apart. Since 2015, Aivar Pohlak's motto has been put into practice through the SPIN programme. Inspired by the English Kickz initiative, the Estonian version supports youngsters aged between 9 and 18 who find themselves in difficult situations.

"This programme is run jointly with the ministry of the interior, but it was our idea," says Anne Rei. "Many of the young people we work with are serial truants or have dropped out of school, but they also sometimes come from difficult family backgrounds and some are even involved in petty crime."

The SPIN programme operates throughout Estonia, with a local base in each county. The national association assigns football coaches and social workers to some 24 groups, where the youngsters take part in sports and group workshops with a social focus.

Analysed by the University of Tartu since it was launched five years ago, the SPIN programme has achieved some very encouraging results.

"We have noticed that the participants are not only behaving better at school, they are also scoring higher marks and taking part in lessons more, not to mention the increase in their self-confidence and self-control," says Anne Rei.

Plenty of encouragement, then, for an association that is making a greater contribution to Estonian society than ever before. Even though it has never reached an international tournament. Not yet, at least. 🍀

Three questions for:

Janno Kivisild,
technical director of
the Estonian Football
Association



How might you describe the identity of Estonian football today?

Our country is still very young, so it's impossible to give a clear answer to this question, since we are still growing. At the start of the 1990s, our tactics were very basic and, if we take defending as a specific example, we knew nothing about it at all. That's why we appointed Icelandic coach Teitur Thordarson to lead the national team in 1996, because he had a great reputation for his defensive work.

In 2011, Estonia achieved the greatest feat in its history under an Estonian coach. Do you think you can now do without the expertise of foreign coaches?

No. While we have made enormous progress and are now able to play high-level football under Estonian coaches, we still need the know-how of foreign coaches in some specific areas. Fitness is one example, along with the scientific aspects of football, talent-spotting and performance analysis. We still don't know enough about these things, but this is partly because Estonia is still a young country, and football here is also in its infancy.

What are the main elements of the road map for 2021 to 2025?

On the men's side, football follows a dual pyramid system, with playing on the one hand and performance on the other. We want to improve the structure of both these pyramids in order to raise performance levels. We will do this by making the first division fully professional and working intensively at youth team level. As far as the women are concerned, we are a little behind because women's football only has one pyramid, which is the playing pyramid. The first step will therefore be to create a dual pyramid system similar to that in the men's game. But that's only the start: as technical director, I always have to be looking ten years ahead, at least!



Nations League draw

The draw to determine the groups in each league of the second UEFA Nations League is to be held in Amsterdam on 3 March.

League A

- Pot 1:** Portugal
Netherlands
England
Switzerland
- Pot 2:** Belgium
France
Spain
Italy
- Pot 3:** Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ukraine
Denmark
Sweden
- Pot 4:** Croatia
Poland
Germany
Iceland

League B

- Pot 1:** Russia
Austria
Wales
Czech Republic
- Pot 2:** Scotland
Norway
Serbia
Finland
- Pot 3:** Slovakia
Turkey
Republic of Ireland
Northern Ireland
- Pot 4:** Bulgaria
Israel
Hungary
Romania

League C

- Pot 1:** Greece
Albania
Montenegro
Georgia
- Pot 2:** North Macedonia
Kosovo
Belarus
Cyprus
- Pot 3:** Estonia
Slovenia
Lithuania
Luxembourg
- Pot 4:** Armenia
Azerbaijan
Kazakhstan
Moldova

League D

- Pot 1:** Gibraltar
Faroe Islands
Latvia
Liechtenstein
- Pot 2:** Andorra
Malta
San Marino

THE 55 UEFA member associations have been split into four leagues according to their UEFA national team coefficient rankings (1–16 in League A; 17–32 in League B; 33–48 in League C; 49–55 in League D). Within each league, teams have been subdivided into two (League D) or four pots (Leagues A, B and C), again according to the rankings.

Format

The teams will play each other at home and away, with the four group winners in League A qualifying for the UEFA Nations League finals in June 2021, which will feature

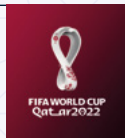
semi-finals, a third-place match and the final. The group winners in Leagues B, C and D will be promoted and those finishing bottom of the groups in Leagues A and B will be relegated.

As League C has four groups while League D only has two, the two League C teams to be relegated will be determined by two-leg play-offs in March 2022.

If a team due to participate in the play-offs qualifies for the 2022 World Cup play-offs, the League C teams ranked 47th and 48th in the overall Nations League rankings will be automatically relegated.

Calendar

- Matchday 1:** 3–5 September 2020
- Matchday 2:** 6–8 September 2020
- Matchday 3:** 8–10 October 2020
- Matchday 4:** 11–13 October 2020
- Matchday 5:** 12–14 November 2020
- Matchday 6:** 15–17 November 2020
- Finals:** June 2021
- Relegation play-offs:** 24, 25, 28 and 29 March 2022



2022 World Cup

The qualification system for the 2022 World Cup remains virtually unchanged, with the ten group winners qualifying directly for the final tournament in Qatar. However, the play-off format has been modified, with three teams qualifying from a two-round knockout competition. The play-offs will involve the ten group runners-up and the two best Nations League group winners (based on their overall Nations League ranking) that have neither qualified directly nor reached the play-offs already.

Futsal Champions League

LAST SEASON, the UEFA Futsal Cup



became the UEFA Futsal Champions League, and this time there is another first, with the four-team knockout finals being held in a neutral country. Minsk Arena in Belarus, which staged the 2014 Ice Hockey World Cup final and gymnastics at the 2019 European Games, will be the venue, with the semis on 24 April and the final and third-place play-off two days later.

While 57 clubs from 53 nations entered, it is Spain and Russia – who between them have provided 12 of the 18 past winners – that boast all four finalists. From Spain, there are 2012 and 2014 winners Barça – the only one of last year’s final four returning – and 2008 runners-up Murcia FS, who knocked out former champions Kairat Almaty and Benfica. Meanwhile, Russia’s pair have both made it on their European debut, Moscow’s KPRF, and Tyumen, the conquerors of holders Sporting CP.

Schedule

- 24 April**
Barça v KPRF
Murcia FS v Tyumen

- 26 April**
Third-place play-off
Final

Youth League



WITH STARS from this season’s UEFA Youth League like Troy Parrott, Rayan Cherki and Joshua Zirkzee already fast-tracked to their clubs’ senior teams, there will be no better place to see future talents than the seventh annual four-team knockout finals at Nyon’s Colovray stadium on 17 and 20 April. The surprise group-stage eliminations of finals’ regulars Barcelona and Chelsea shows the strength in depth, and while holders Porto are in February’s play-offs, Bayern, Juventus, Liverpool and Ajax are among those already in the round of 16 whose performances suggest they could lift the trophy for the first time.

Finland, Georgia and the Faroe Islands rewarded for fair play



FINLAND, Georgia and the Faroe Islands have won the 2018/19 UEFA fair play competition in each of the competition's three different categories.

Finland and the Faroe Islands won the overall fair play award and the award for spectator behaviour respectively for the second successive season, while Georgia took the award for the best improvement in their overall fair play score from one season to the next.

Each winning association will receive €50,000 to donate to amateur or professionals clubs of their

choice, to fund projects dedicated to fair play or respect. The rankings are based on the fair play results obtained from all UEFA competition matches played at both club and national team level between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2019.

Only associations that played a minimum of 42 matches were taken into account in the final rankings. This cut-off point is obtained by dividing the total number of UEFA matches by the number of participating UEFA member associations.



Obituary

JEAN FOURNET-FAYARD, former UEFA Executive Committee member and French Football Federation (FFF) president, has passed away at the age of 88.

Born on 31 December 1931 in Lyon, and a pharmacist by profession, Jean Fournet-Fayard was elected as FFF president in December 1984, succeeding Fernand Sastre. He was re-elected twice, in 1988 and 1992, before standing down in November 1993.

In addition to his eight-year membership of the UEFA Executive Committee (1992–2000), Jean Fournet-Fayard served the European governing body on a number of other committees. He was chairman of the Non-Amateur Football Committee (1992–98), the Professional Football Committee (1996–2000) and the Media Committee (1998–2000). He was, among other positions, also vice-chairman of the Club Competitions Committee (1992–2000) and a member of the Committee for the European Championship (1986–92), and he also sat on various task forces and working groups charged with the development and progress of the European game.

He was made an honorary member of UEFA at the Ordinary Congress in Düsseldorf in 2007.

UEFA Executive Committee and FIFA Council candidates

ELECTIONS will be held at the UEFA Congress in Amsterdam on 3 March.

Following the resignation of Reinhard Grindel from the UEFA Executive Committee and the FIFA Council in 2019, elections for these two seats will be held at the 44th Ordinary UEFA Congress.

By the deadline of 3 January 2020, the UEFA administration had received the candidature of Rainer Koch (Germany) for the position of UEFA Executive Committee member for a one-year term (until 2021).

In addition, the UEFA administration confirmed that Noël Le Graët (France), the only candidate for the seat of European member of the FIFA Council for a three-year term (until 2023), had passed FIFA's eligibility check.

Notices

- **Armen Melikbekyan** has been elected president of the Football Federation of Armenia.
- **Gerry McAnaney** is the new president of the Football Association of Ireland.
- **Rovnag Abdullayev** has been re-elected president of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan.
- **Peter Palenčík** is the new general secretary of the Slovak Football Association.
- UEFA has accepted the resignation of **John Delaney** (Republic of Ireland) as a member of the UEFA Executive Committee with immediate effect. His term of office was due to expire in 2021.

WHO CAN DETHRONE LYON?

As winners of the last four editions, Olympique Lyonnais are the team everyone wanted to avoid in the UEFA Women's Champions League quarter-finals, to be played on 25 March and 1 April. FC Bayern München drew the short straw and will attempt to bring an end to Lyon's stranglehold on the competition in a round that also features a number of other heavyweight clashes between regular participants in the competition's latter stages.

Lyon, Lyon, Lyon... and Lyon. Since 2016, Olympique Lyonnais have left all challengers in their wake en route to four consecutive Women's Champions League titles. Their dominance of the competition is such that, in their ten quarter-final appearances, they have qualified for the semi-finals every single time. In other words, the draw could have been somewhat kinder to the German team FC Bayern München, who reached the semi-finals themselves for the first time last season. Having edged their way past the Swedish side Göteborg FC on away goals (a 2-1 away win followed by a 1-0 home defeat) in the round of 32, and swept aside BIIK-Kazygurt of Kazakhstan (7-0 on aggregate) in the round of 16, the Germans will face a Lyon side as hungry as ever to add to their recent successes. Indeed, the French team's record since the start of the season is certainly impressive, with four wins out of four against the Russians of Ryazan-VDV and Danish side Fortuna Hjørring, and a 27-0 aggregate score that makes them the team with the best attack and the best defence of the competition so far. It has been a record-breaking start to the season for Lyon, who became the first club to have participated in 100 Women's Champions League matches and whose Norwegian striker Ada Hegerberg – with nine goals to her name already this season – became the competition's greatest ever goalscorer, with 53 goals, at the tender age of 24.

In the semi-finals, either Lyon or FC Bayern München will face the winners of one of the other big quarter-final ties, an Anglo-French battle between Arsenal WFC

and Paris Saint-Germain. The Londoners are regular participants at the quarter-final stage and will be competing in the last eight for a record 13th time. With Vivianne Miedema, the top goalscorer in this season's competition, in their ranks (10 goals from 11 shots on target), they brushed past Italian side Fiorentina and the Czech Republic's Slavia Praha, scoring 19 goals and conceding just two to mark a sensational return to the European stage after a five-year absence from the Women's Champions League. Over the same period, Paris Saint-Germain have emerged as a powerhouse of the European women's game, reaching the 2015 and 2017 finals. After convincing victories over Portuguese side SC Braga and Icelanders Breidablik, the Parisians will try to forget their elimination at the hands of another English opponent, Chelsea FC, in last year's quarter-finals, when they lost to an injury-time goal in the second leg.



Lyon's Eugénie Le Sommer in her team's round of 16 match against Fortuna Hjørring of Denmark.

Glasgow City will face two-time winners Wolfsburg in the quarter-finals.



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New format ahead

The 2019/20 Women's Champions League is the penultimate edition to be played under the current format, since the 2021/22 season will see the competition revamped in an effort to increase its visibility.

- The current knockout round of 16 will be replaced by a group stage, with four groups of four teams playing each other home and away. The top two in each group progress to the quarter-finals.
- The group stage will be preceded by two rounds, split into champions and league paths (as in the men's UEFA Champions League), to ensure at least ten associations take part in the group stage.
- Round 1 will be played as knockout mini-tournaments with a semi-final, a third-place match and a final; round 2 will feature home-and-away ties.
- In the first season, eight matchdays (two in round 2, four in the group stage and both quarter-final legs) will be scheduled so as not to clash with other major football competitions.
- The top six associations (as per the UEFA women's association club coefficients at the start of the previous season, i.e. summer 2020 for 2021/22) will each enter three teams; the associations ranked 7 to 16 will each enter two. All other associations have the chance to enter one team – their domestic champion – as before.

If they progress, they may come up against their nemesis, Olympique Lyonnais, winners of 13 consecutive French league titles, in the semi-finals.

A Spanish club, Glasgow or Wolfsburg in the final

As well as Olympique Lyonnais, FC Bayern München and Paris Saint-Germain, FC Barcelona and Club Atlético de Madrid find themselves in both the men's UEFA Champions League round of 16 and the quarter-finals of the Women's Champions League. This is a new record, which confirms the growing importance within the game of women's structures embedded in major European clubs. The tie between Barcelona and Atlético also symbolises the rise of women's club football in Spain, where match attendances and television audiences are booming. On the one hand, Barcelona, who became the first Spanish finalists in 2018/19 and currently top the

Spanish league, reached their fifth quarter-final in a row by disposing of Italians Juventus and ZFK Minsk of Belarus. On the other, Atlético, who beat Barcelona to the domestic title last season, will contest their first-ever UEFA competition quarter-final. Their road to the last eight was far from easy, however, with narrow victories over Serbian side ZFK Spartak Subotica (3-2, 1-1) in the round of 32 and England's Manchester City WFC (1-1, 2-1) in the round of 16. After suffering a 6-1 domestic league defeat to Barcelona in September, the Madrid team will be out for revenge as they target a semi-final berth.

The semi-finals will see the winner of the all-Spanish affair take on either a newcomer to this stage of the competition, Glasgow City FC, or the vastly experienced VfL Wolfsburg, who, on paper at least, make up what looks like the most imbalanced of the quarter-final pairings. Despite dominating the Scottish

championship (13 consecutive titles), Glasgow only just scraped through the round of 16, winning 3-1 on penalties after a 2-2 aggregate result against Danish side Brøndby IF to secure only their second-ever UEFA quarter-final spot. The Scots' last-eight opponents, Wolfsburg, already have two European titles under their belts (2013 and 2014) and have finished runners-up twice. Having made an outstanding start to their European campaign, scoring 22 goals and conceding none in their four victories to date, the Germans are hot favourites to progress. The fact that they are in the opposite half of the draw to Lyon means that Wolfsburg, who have been eliminated by the French side in the last four editions of the competition, cannot face their bogey team until the final. The Germans would surely love to take their revenge in the 2020 showpiece, which will be held in Vienna on 24 May. 🍷

HOW THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP CAME INTO BEING

Another EURO year is here – a special one into the bargain, as the tournament proudly celebrates its 60th birthday. The milestone gives us an ideal opportunity to look back and discover how one of the world's greatest sporting events was born, and to highlight the key events and people that made it happen...



The first final-round match in the European Championship – or the European Nations' Cup as it was known at the time – was played between France and Yugoslavia (4-5) on 6 July 1960 at the Parc des Princes in Paris.

The initial driving force behind the European Championship was Frenchman Henri Delaunay, long-serving general secretary of the French Football Federation (FFF), who would become UEFA's first general secretary. His dream of a European competition for national teams had begun in earnest in 1927, when he submitted a proposal to world football's governing body FIFA – in conjunction with the renowned Austrian football administrator Hugo Meisl – for the creation of a European national team cup. Delaunay's enthusiasm for the national team game was further reflected in his contribution to the creation of the FIFA World Cup, which was first staged in 1930. His European proposal did not meet with unanimous support. Undaunted, Delaunay would continue to pursue his idea once UEFA had been founded at a meeting of Europe's national football associations in Basel, Switzerland, on 15 June 1954. Soon after that momentous meeting, Delaunay wrote: "The idea is for a competition open to all the European associations which appears to retain everyone's attention. A three-member committee has been entrusted with examining this difficult problem. The competition should not lead to an infinite number of matches. Nor should it harm the World Cup, and participants should not always be forced to meet the same opponents in the same group."

Henri Delaunay's enthusiasm

Delaunay pressed home his opinion in France Football Officiel in September 1955. "So we now have a Union of European Football Associations," he reflected, "and this is all very well but, in my opinion, it has not yet entirely fulfilled its objective." Henri Delaunay welcomed that year's launch of the European Championship Clubs' Cup as "a wonderful new initiative" – but added: "There is an even greater need for a European Cup for national teams."

In the meantime, the first efforts to get the competition off the ground had floundered at the inaugural UEFA Congress in Vienna in March 1955. The three-member committee submitted a proposal that involved splitting the competition into two phases, with a knockout phase in the season before the World Cup, and a final tournament in a single country the following season. Fixture pile-ups would be avoided, because the proposed new competition would also act as the European qualifying competition for the World Cup.

Congress delegates promptly sent the proposal back to the subcommittee. "Maybe it was a lack of reflection which led to this rejection," wrote Henri Delaunay, "but in particular it stemmed from the indecisiveness →



Yugoslavia warming up before their semi-final.

of the national associations because of the many international matches and competitions with neighbouring countries in which they are already taking part.”

FIFA’s initial signals were equally lukewarm – an important stumbling block, given that the world body would have to give its assent for the competition to go ahead. The FIFA general secretary at the time, Kurt Gassmann, wrote to UEFA, expressing the view that he did not “entirely agree with the ideas that were presented concerning a UEFA competition and the qualifying competition for the 1958 World Cup.” His reasoning was that FIFA’s interests would be damaged – the holding of the final phase of a European competition in the same year as the World Cup finals, Gassman said, would create competition for the FIFA finals and potentially have an impact on FIFA revenue.

FIFA proposal

Gassmann suggested that a European competition’s knockout stages could be held two years before World Cup final tournaments, with the finals being staged a year ahead of the World Cup finals. The FIFA general secretary underlined that it would be in everyone’s best interests “to separate the knockout stage of the European competition from the preliminary stage of the FIFA competition.”

As the mid-1950s wore on, there was still considerable reticence to the proposal for a national team competition on the European continent. UEFA consulted Europe’s clubs, which showed themselves somewhat unwilling to release their players for an increased amount of national team fixtures. In addition, Henri Delaunay, who had fought fiercely to see his ideas become reality, passed away on the night of 9–10 November 1955. His role as UEFA’s general secretary was taken on by his 36-year-old son Pierre who, like his father, would combine the UEFA role with his duties

as general secretary of the French FA. Pierre Delaunay immediately took up the baton from his father in advocating the new competition. “Whether we like it or not,” he wrote in *France Football Officiel*, “the momentum is uncontrollable...the European competition will take off in the end, and sooner or later it will have the virtually unanimous backing of the associations.”

Stockholm summit

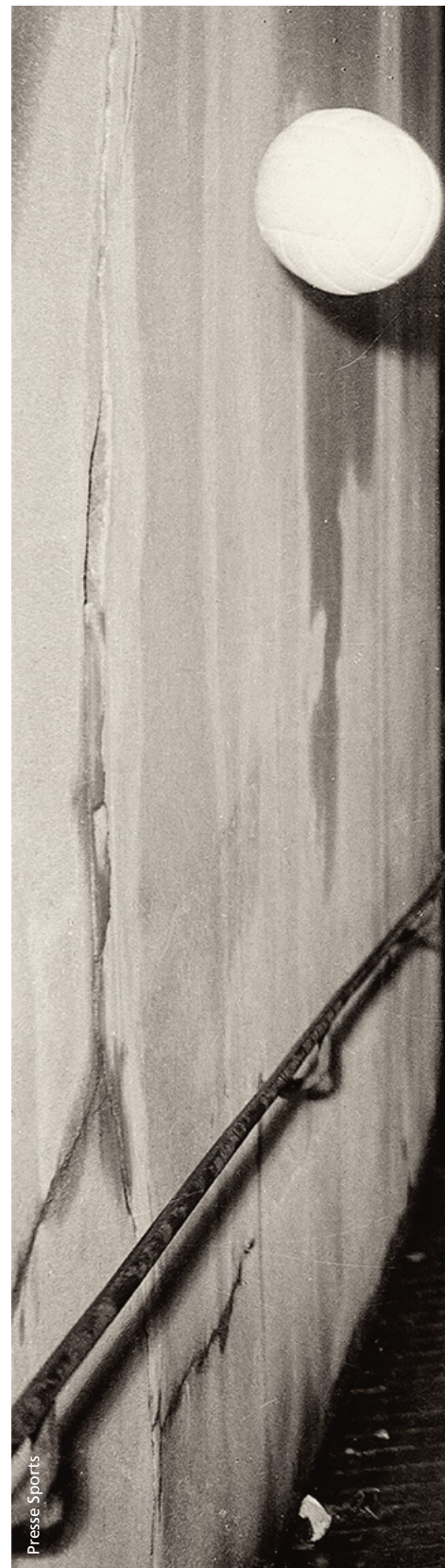
Responding to FIFA’s cool reaction, the UEFA subcommittee revised its proposal to avoid clashes with the World Cup finals, and now favoured a direct knockout format to prevent fixture congestion. The topic was not a key agenda item at the UEFA Congresses in Lisbon (1956) and Copenhagen (1957). Nevertheless, the 1957 gathering saw supporters of the project win a vote by 15 to 7, with four abstentions and one blank ballot paper, which led to the proposed competition becoming a focal point of deliberations at the next Congress in Stockholm on 4 June 1958.

Discussions in the Swedish capital wavered to and fro. According to the Congress minutes, the Italian FA president Ottorino Barassi “did not consider the creation of this competition as desirable, as it would restrict the international calendar and risked exciting national passions.” West Germany argued that it was not appropriate to establish a new competition without regulations having been put before the Congress. “Mr Pierre Delaunay,” the minutes stated, “thinks that after such a long study of this scheme ... it would really be hoped that the delegates present express a clear and definitive opinion on the subject.” In the end, the majority of the Congress delegates voted in favour of the introduction of the competition.

Deadlock broken

The turning point arrived when delegates adjourned for lunch. UEFA’s first president, Denmark’s Ebbe Schwartz, asked the subcommittee to re-examine the project, and also proposed that the competition’s start be put back to 1959 – a view not shared by the subcommittee. Ebbe Schwartz decided to break the deadlock. When the Congress resumed in the afternoon, he declared that “the draw will take place on Friday 6 June” – two days later – and turned to the remainder of the Congress business.

The Travellers’ Club at the Foresta Hotel in Stockholm was duly organised to stage the draw ceremony 48 hours after the Congress. →





The legendary Soviet goalkeeper Lev Yashin, the only goalkeeper to have ever won the Ballon d'Or, before the final.



Left: Lev Yashin in action in the final between the USSR and Yugoslavia.

Seventeen associations that had confirmed their intention to take part, and to pay the entry fee of 200 Swiss francs, were on the starting blocks – Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, East Germany, France, Greece, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland, Romania, Spain, Turkey, the USSR and Yugoslavia. Several prominent football powers – England, Italy and West Germany – were notable absentees for a variety of reasons.

The draw activities on 6 June took place with minimal fanfare. Not the greatest surprise, because attention was firmly focussed on the FIFA World Cup finals, also in Sweden, which would be kicking off just two days later. Representatives of the participating countries made the draw – firstly for the preliminary match required to bring the field down to 16, and then for the eight knockout fixtures. Closing the ceremony, Ebbe Schwartz proposed that the trophy be called the Henri Delaunay Cup, in recognition of the late Frenchman's crucial role in getting the competition off the ground, as well as to honour his services

The USSR's Igor Netto will always be the first winning captain to have lifted the Henri Delaunay Cup.

to international football. French Football Federation president Pierre Pochonet followed by announcing that the FFF would offer the trophy.

Off and running

If one considers modern-day football fixture calendars, it is interesting to note that the first round of 16 programme proceeded at an extremely sedate pace. The opening match took place on 28 September 1958 at Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium, with the USSR overcoming Hungary 3-1 in front of a crowd of 100,572. The honour of the first-ever EURO goal went to Anatoli Ilyin, who took just four minutes to give the USSR an early advantage. The closing round of 16 encounter – the return leg of the tie between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in Sofia – was held 13 months later, on 25 October 1959. The preliminary match to create a 16-team knockout phase was contested during the round of 16 programme, Czechoslovakia defeating the Republic of Ireland over two legs in the spring of 1959 before beating Denmark in the round of 16.

The first European Nation's Cup, as the competition was originally known – which would culminate in a four-team final round in France in July 1960 and title joy for the USSR – was off and running, and Pierre Delaunay took the opportunity to give a cautiously optimistic assessment of its future in the Official UEFA Bulletin in September 1958. "It can be expected," he wrote, "that, allowing for the experienced gained from this first edition ... the number of nations will be greater in 1962." The UEFA general secretary's prophecy would prove to be well founded, with 29 associations entering the second edition, held between 1962 and 1964. There would be no looking back now for a competition that would gradually occupy a leading position among the pantheon of major sporting events across the globe... 🏆



Henri Delaunay

The European Championship's eternal defender

"Few men have left such a distinct mark, by the sheer force of their personality, on such a universal activity as football, as Henri Delaunay." (Fifty Years of UEFA book, 2004)

UEFA's first general secretary, Frenchman Henri Delaunay, holds a prominent position in the organisation's history, not only as a pioneering spirit who made a crucial contribution to the birth of the European governing body, but also through his role as the catalyst for the creation of the European Championship.

Born in Paris in 1883, Henri Delaunay was a devoted football enthusiast who made the game his passion from an early age. At the tender age of 20, he was appointed secretary of Etoile des Deux Lacs, a leading French club of the time, and he took the helm as club president when he was 26. Delaunay's skills as an administrator had already been noticed at national level in the intervening years – in 1906, when he was just 23, he was named as general secretary of the new French Interfederal Committee, the forerunner of the French Football Federation (FFF) which was founded in 1919.

Football in the blood

A man of firm authority, who was also blessed with an innate sensitivity and well-sharpened humour, Henri Delaunay was an expert on football and its laws – a particular help in his role as a referee in France. In 1920, the world football body FIFA asked him to sit on its new consultative committee for the Laws of the Game, which would eventually be renamed the FIFA Referees Committee. He would subsequently compile the first series of decisions concerning the interpretation of the laws.

Delaunay cherished the dream of setting up a European competition for national teams to develop the identity and appeal of



Henri Delaunay
in the 1930s.

the national team game. He also gave impetus to the start of the FIFA World Cup. At the 1928 FIFA Congress in Amsterdam, he was instrumental in the adoption of a decisive resolution "to organise a competition which would be open to the representative teams of all of the affiliated national associations." The inaugural World Cup finals would duly follow in 1930.

UEFA pioneer

Delaunay would go on to be a seminal figure in UEFA's founding in June 1954, acting as a key spearhead in moves towards the formation of a group comprising Europe's national associations. FIFA's decision in 1953 to authorise

continental football confederations paved the way for the birth of the new European body at a meeting of 28 national associations in Basel, Switzerland, the following summer.

Henri Delaunay's tenure as UEFA general secretary would be regrettably short. His death in November 1955 meant that he would not be on hand to help UEFA take its first faltering steps; nor would he see the fulfilment of his long-standing dream of a European national team competition. Consequently, when the European Championship was finally launched in the summer of 1958, it was fitting that the trophy should carry the name of the man who had fought so tenaciously for the competition's creation.

ST PETERSBURG THE GREAT

Travelling football fans can expect a warm welcome in St Petersburg, not least because the sun will almost always be up over the Russian city during EURO 2020.

From its wonderful, state-of-the-art stadium to its extensive cultural offerings, St Petersburg provides visitors with a great all-round experience – and Russian Football Union (RFS) president Alexander Dyukov is excited about the city's role at EURO 2020.

Host to matches at the 2018 World Cup, St Petersburg is no stranger to the big occasion, and Dyukov feels it covers all the bases when it comes to global

sporting events, saying: "St Petersburg is a major, hospitable city, with well-developed infrastructure. It's home to one of Russia's biggest, and most comfortable, stadiums. The 2018 World Cup and Champions League matches held here testify to the high level of organisation on offer, as well as care for fans' comfort and convenience."

Personal welcome

On top of that, fans can also expect a warm and engaging welcome. "St Petersburg locals love football and treat other fans – from all over the world – with respect," says Dyukov, who is keen to point out there is plenty to see off the pitch too. "I've no doubt that fans coming here to support their teams won't just be interested in going to the football, but also in investigating the city's history, and having fun spending time here.

"Especially since EURO 2020 matches are going to be held during the 'white nights' – one of the things for which St Petersburg is famous," adds Dyukov, referring to summer in a city which is not that far from the Arctic Circle and where, for many weeks, the sun will be up most of the night and a beautiful twilight witnessed.

Having been Russia's capital for over two centuries means there is plenty to see. "St Petersburg was built by Peter the Great to be a 'window to the west' and is a city of quite unique architecture. And, of course, we've got world-famous museums such as the Hermitage and the Russian Museum."

And once visitors have ticked off the past, Dyukov says the present is well covered too. "The Russian Football Union is putting together a major entertainment programme here,





“We want EURO 2020 matchdays to be genuine celebrations. We want that positive football atmosphere to be felt all over the city, not just in the stadium. Our volunteers will always be delighted to help show fans to the stadium and around the city.”

Alexander Dyukov
Russian Football Union president



right throughout EURO 2020. Fan zones will be in full swing and we’re planning concerts by famous artists. The RFS is going to use its World Cup experience and heritage to absolutely maximum effect.

“We want EURO 2020 matchdays to be genuine celebrations,” adds Dyukov. “We want that positive football atmosphere to be felt all over the city, not just in the stadium. Our volunteers will always be delighted to help show fans to the stadium and around the city.”

‘Our guys’ backed again

The national team exceeded expectations with their performances at their home World Cup two years ago. They then backed that up with a strong qualifying campaign performance for EURO 2020, and after gaining a taste of home advantage in 2018, Dyukov is looking

forward to more of the same this summer.

“We’re delighted that the Russian team has two group stage matches in St Petersburg,” he says. “Fans from all over the country will be coming in to support the team. The Russian team (whom we also call ‘nashi parni’ – ‘our guys’) got through the qualifying stage safely, proving their success in the Russia-hosted World Cup was no accident, but the result of great work.”

If the same spirit can be summoned up, Dyukov has no doubts about the team. “I’ve every confidence that all the players in our national side will give it their all in this tournament as well. We can’t wait for EURO 2020 and look forward to the team stunning the whole country with an outstanding game and some excellent results!” 🍷

St Petersburg

The former capital of Russia is affectionately labelled the ‘Venice of the north’ thanks to its network of canals and 342 bridges, but St Petersburg also radiates regal grandeur. Founded by Peter the Great in 1703 to showcase the country’s growing stature, the city can take the breath away with its ornate palaces and cathedrals, while the State Hermitage Museum – one of over 200 museums in St Petersburg – is among the largest in the world. Staging seven matches at the 2018 World Cup also boosted the city’s standing as a prime football destination, and the newly built St Petersburg Stadium, designed to resemble a spaceship landing in the Gulf of Finland, will again draw the eye at EURO 2020.

MATCHES

- 13 June:** Belgium v Russia
- 17 June:** Finland v Russia
- 22 June:** Finland v Belgium
- 3 July:** Quarter-final



St Petersburg Stadium
Capacity: 61,000



Getty Images



REFEREES RELISHING THE CHALLENGE

Majorca hosted the latest UEFA winter referees' courses from 26 to 29 January – and UEFA's message to nearly 150 top male and female match officials was loud and clear at the start of a hectic spell for them: "Strive hard for excellence."

The referees prepare to be put through their paces in a fitness session at their winter course in Majorca under the instructions of Jean-Michel Prat.

sportsfile

UEFA's referee gathering achieved its objectives. The 106 advanced course referees fine-tuned their preparations for top-level assignments in the major UEFA competitions, while the introductory course gave 41 newcomers to the FIFA international list an essential grounding in the roles and duties of a UEFA match official.

The week on the Balearic island was especially geared towards ensuring that the officials were primed for duty in the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League and UEFA Women's Champions

League knockout stages. For the elite male referees, potential selection for the refereeing team at this summer's EURO 2020 final tournament provided additional motivation.

Start of an adventure

"You will never forget this day in your life – you're taking a big step on your career ladders," UEFA Referees Committee chairman Roberto Rosetti told the new international referees on their very first morning at a UEFA course. A presentation by two European elite referees, Dutchman

Björn Kuipers and Ukraine's Kateryna Monzul, gave the newcomers a fascinating insight into the many attributes that referees need to reach the summits of their profession.

In addition, the need for integrity was expressed in crystal-clear fashion during a presentation in which the young officials were asked to contribute fully to the fight against match-fixing by recognising, rejecting and reporting any related approach.

The advanced course referees analysed video clips of incidents and situations, held discussions together and gave

Assistant referees adapting to change

Modern-day football's demands mean UEFA gives equal priority to the progress of Europe's top assistant referees – more than 70 of whom came to Majorca from 21 to 24 January for their own spring preparation course.

The speed of current-day elite football, the VAR system and the need for crucial teamwork and effective communication between a match referee and those 'running the line' have enhanced the assistant referees' role in recent years.

Specific fitness training – concentrating especially on sprinting and sideways movement – was on the agenda, in addition to

match-related issues such as offside and its interpretation, and handball. The assistants worked in groups to analyse video clips of incidents from UEFA matches over the past few months, and also discussed the wider aspects of their job.

"It's true that their job is becoming increasingly important in modern-day elite football," explained

UEFA Referees Committee chairman Roberto Rosetti, "so it's vital that we work together on the various facets of the Laws of the Game, and look to achieve a common goal of maximum consistency in the referee team's on-field decision-making."

VAR training saw the assistants take part in simulator exercises for various situations, in which

they were required to react and give decisions. "We're very satisfied," said Rosetti. "Football is changing, refereeing is changing, and we've seen that the assistants have fully understood the need to adapt as well.

"We're extremely impressed with their work ethic and preparation – and their desire to achieve peak performance."

welcome feedback to UEFA – an invaluable component in the constant quest for improvement and consistency.

High-performance athletes

In fitness sessions, the referees admirably proved that modern-day elite match officials are in better physical condition than ever. "They are unbelievably professional in their preparation," said Rosetti. "They are now as much high-performance athletes as the players are."

Following its launch at UEFA level last year, the video assistant referee (VAR) system is now being introduced in the UEFA Europa League knockout phase this spring, and will also be deployed at, among others, EURO 2020. VAR work in Majorca included analysis of match situations and a specific on-field training session for the introductory referees.

"We believe that VAR is a crucial project for football," Rosetti said, "because it provides vital help for referees to take decisions. We're very happy with the figures that we've seen in the UEFA Champions League group phase – a decision has been overturned only once every four matches, which shows the quality of the referees' performances. But I must emphasise that we only want to use VAR for clear and obvious situations, and not for controversial moments. We love football, and we don't want to change the game."

Positive image

Protecting football's image remains a key facet of the referees' duties, and the officials were reminded to punish serious foul play and violent conduct, and not to tolerate cases of dissent or mobbing of officials: "Football must convey a positive image, especially to the younger generation," Rosetti reflected.

All of the referees were given an important motivational message to guide them through the coming months – be professional, be consistent and stay focussed. "We've urged them to seek excellence," said Rosetti, "to be prepared physically, mentally and tactically, and to demonstrate why many consider Europe's match officials to be the reference for refereeing across the world." 🌍



Georginio Rutter of France up against Adam Ritter of the Czech Republic during the European Under-17 Championship final round in the Republic of Ireland in 2019.



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"Our final objective is to prepare the players for France's senior team, so they have to have experiences in their youth teams which give them the broadest range of experience possible. In a player's development, defeats can be just as important as victories."

José Alcocer

BUILDING FOR TOMORROW... AND TODAY

Coaches from five nations explain the groundwork laid to ensure they have teams ready to compete for European Under-17 Championship qualification this spring – and reflect on their ultimate goals for their young charges.

For those boys' Under-17 national teams participating in March's elite round of qualification, the goal is clear: to win one of the 15 tickets to May's final tournament in Estonia. The European Under-17 Championship is the first of UEFA's continental prizes that a generation of players can aim for, and each national association will have already undertaken a long process to put their squad in place.

UEFA Direct spoke to the Under-17 head coaches of England, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland – Kevin Betsy, José Alcocer, Peter van der Veen, David Gordo and Stefan Marini – to gather their thoughts on talent identification, player development and their preparations (and targets) for their upcoming European Under-17 Championship assignments.

Finding the players

The French Football Federation (FFF) has approximately 60,000 licensed players in each generation. The task of Alcocer and his colleagues is to identify which ones might become footballers for France. How? "Through different processes carried out from the Under-15s, we identify a list of 250 players," Alcocer begins. "Of those 250 players, I see around 120, of whom 80 become 'internationals' and with whom we carry out activities – training camps, get-togethers, matches, etc." And what he is looking for is the following: "Game intelligence, technique, mindset and speed – change of rhythm and gestural speed."

Ahead of March's elite round in Hungary, Alcocer will have been able to observe his players in two friendlies against Denmark in February – before having three days to work with them prior

to the elite round kicking off. Monitoring their progress the rest of the time involves watching as many of their club matches as possible, while he also receives videos from clubs' youth departments and speaks to academy directors and coaches. "We also have technical staff in each region who submit reports on the players we're following."

It is equally illuminating hearing the approach taken by his Dutch counterpart, Van der Veen, who oversaw his nation's triumph in Ireland last May. It was the Netherlands' second successive continental crown at this level, which suggests they must be doing something right.

Van der Veen says the starting point is finding young footballers with 'soft feet' – i.e. an innate talent with the ball – and then focusing on five aspects, the most important one of which, he suggests, is mentality. He lists the others, starting with the "technical ability to get away under pressure", and then tactical and physical attributes and finally "learning ability, because we don't have lot of time to train together as a national team, so they have to learn quickly what we want".

In order to know his young players better, Van der Veen visits them at their clubs, while club coaches join the activities of the national teams. "For instance, I go to PSV for two days and join the Under-17s and Under-19s and will be on the pitch with the training session, so you see the development of every player there," he elaborates.

"We also do it with the players who play abroad. I went to Hoffenheim for three days, and Manchester City for two days. That's how you see the players in their own habitat. The coaches sometimes →

THE COACHES



Kevin Betsy, England



José Alcocer, France



Peter van der Veen, Netherlands

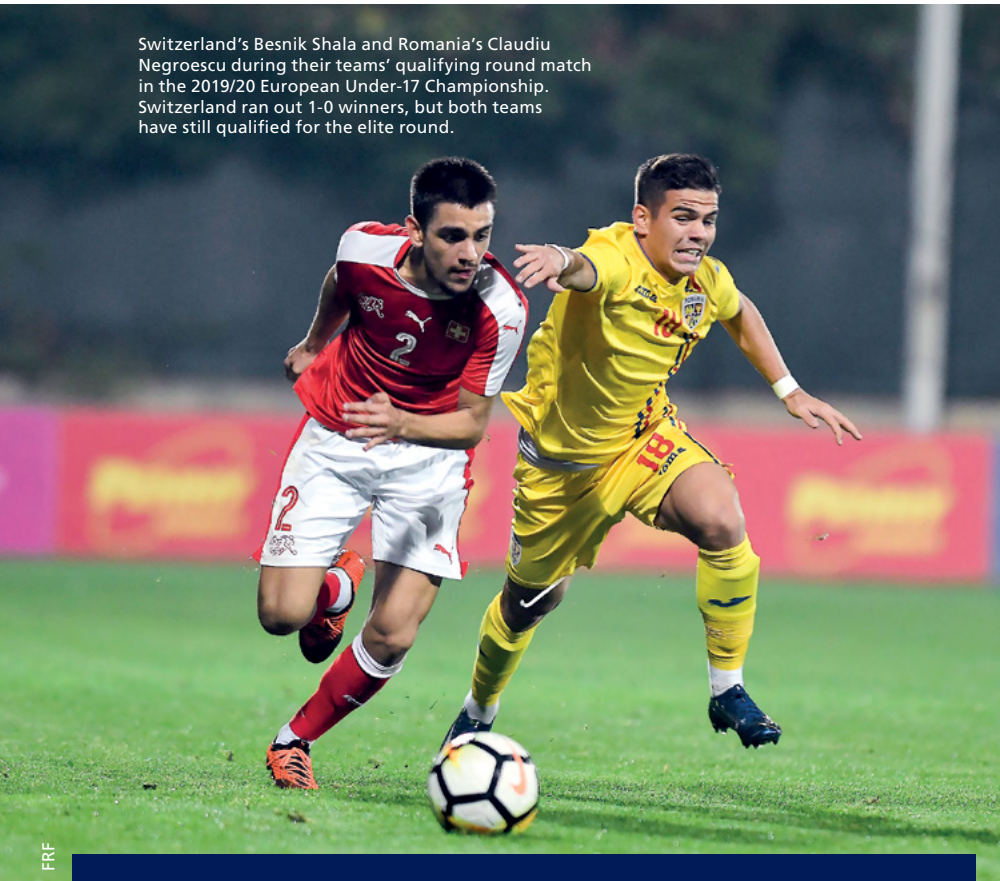


David Gordo, Spain



Stefan Marini, Switzerland

Switzerland's Besnik Shala and Romania's Claudiu Negroescu during their teams' qualifying round match in the 2019/20 European Under-17 Championship. Switzerland ran out 1-0 winners, but both teams have still qualified for the elite round.



FRF

“The players must have enough personality to be able to give a strong performance in an important tournament but, in general, we evaluate their technique, game intelligence and their physical characteristics.”

Stefan Marini

call me after a few months and say, ‘You have to look at this player now because he’s developing really well,’ and then I’ll go and watch him on a Saturday. The way we work in joining the sessions with the clubs is a big part of our success, I think.”

Getting used to wearing the England shirt

Across the North Sea in England, another reflection comes from the English Football Association’s men’s Under-17 coach, Betsy, who says planning for this qualification round effectively begins at Under-15 level. He explains: “We have training camps. We have year of birth difference in training

camps and then split them into three groups for each year. So it will be January–April, May–August, September–December.

“Normally in that Under-15 year we’ll see around 75 players across the year. Some of them are invited to training camps only and some of them play international fixtures, but it’s very much a step process, where it’s training camps, training camps and matches, and at the end of the year we have a tournament to get players used to wearing the England shirt and not making the shirt feel heavy at a younger age.”

This work continues right up to the point when qualification begins: “We’re

still covering some players that we haven’t seen in the 15 and 16 age groups, and then really trying to finalise the squad that will represent us in the qualification period. It’s basically a long-term plan where we’re making sure that the players come through the pathway, enjoy the experience, become familiar with how we play and how we work.”

For Spain’s Under-17 coach, Gordo, the system in place at the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) headquarters at Las Rozas ensures he has a good knowledge of the players stepping up to his age category. “Here we all work with every age group,” he explains. “There is a head coach, but at any moment of the season the rest of the coaches can take part in training camps or sessions with any of the groups.”

This meant last year he supported Julen Guerrero, the national Under-16 coach, in his work with the players he has since inherited. “I was lucky enough to share some moments with this group – I was Julen’s assistant and I got to know them.

“We manage between 50 and 60 players approximately,” he adds. “From this, we have to select 20 for the elite round. When we choose players, we think they are players who can adapt. For their development, they have to cope with going into a new group.”

Another case is that of Switzerland, a smaller country with a smaller pool to draw from according to their coach, Marini. “We have a pool of about 30 to 35 players from which we will recruit for the elite round,” he says. And the selection criteria he applies are as follows: “The players must have enough personality to be able to give a strong performance in an important tournament, but, in general, we evaluate their technique, game intelligence and their physical characteristics.”

Laying down a style

When it comes to establishing a style of play at Under-17 level, it is the senior national team who provide the reference point for France’s Alcocer. He elaborates: “We have a national team coordinator in France who sets out the framework for trying to play a certain way: a possession game, zonal defending, full-backs who can start attacks. We have a common base. After that, the style of play of the A team sets the example, such as the speed of transitional play and collective discipline.”

Spanish football provides one of the clearest examples of a nation with a particular philosophy – one which has brought success at senior and junior levels this century. “We have an idea of the style of play that best suits the profile of the Spanish footballer,” says Gordo. “We’ve gained good results from one way of playing. Clearly, everybody has their own personal interpretation, but we know the general lines to follow as this is what has brought success in the past.”

Over in England, it was in 2014 that The FA established its ‘England DNA’ philosophy for the national sides – a thread running from the youngest age groups through to the senior squad. “The only thing that changes is the size of the shirt from the Under-15s to the seniors,” says Betsy.

“It’s definitely something that the technical director [Dan Ashworth] and the England manager [Gareth Southgate] wanted to implement into the age groups. The style was very much to dominate possession and territory, and be really focused in our intensity once we lose possession of the ball. The best teams in the world dominate possession and we wanted to make sure our players had a similar pathway throughout each group.”

If Dutch football is famed for its 4-3-3 framework, Van der Veen stresses it is principles of play that matter most to the young Dutch squads. “Every team plays with the same principles,” he says. “For example, if we lose the ball, we want it back in five seconds.”

In the view of Switzerland coach Marini, meanwhile, a more flexible approach has its benefits. “At this level we still remain very variable,” he says. “We still want to train the players thoroughly, to let them play in different systems and not have them locked into a single system.”

Solutions to the relative age effect

In a conversation with national team youth coaches, it would be remiss to overlook the relative age effect. According to Alcocer, the FFF runs a parallel programme of activities for players born in “the second half of the year and for those players born in the first half but who fit the profile of late developers”.

He goes on: “We organise ‘Future’ camps where we bring along players in one or other of those categories. Each



“We have a group of approximately 40 Under-17 players and a Future group next to it. These are players who are behind in physical growth. We have the same system at Under-14, Under-15 and Under-16, and over the years we see a few of those smaller players develop and come into the team at Under-17 level.”

Peter van der Veen

KNVB



Enej Marsetec of Slovenia and Rio Hillen of the Netherlands.

Soccrates Images

season we put together a Future team which plays friendly matches in order to give them international experience and test them at a high level.”

The Swiss Football Association takes a similar approach with its Under-15s, organising a second team who play their own fixtures. Marini adds: “We do so partly at Under-16 level as well, so that we can keep track of them.”

At the Royal Netherlands Football Association’s base at Zeist, the Future

group of players have the advantage of sharing training facilities with their more advanced peers. Van der Veen explains: “We have a group of approximately 40 Under-17 players and a Future group next to it. These are players who are behind in physical growth. We have the same system at Under-14, Under-15 and Under-16, and over the years we see a few of those smaller players develop and come into the team at Under-17 level.” →



England Under-17 player Karamoko Dembélé and Germany's Bent Andresen during a friendly between their two teams.

As for the young players passing along the English FA's talent line, Betsy says: "We're very mindful of growth and maturation with this delicate age group. Some of those selected are Under-14 players and we have to give them a fair assessment of where they're at and when the right moment is to bring them into the pathway. The most important thing is the long-term potential we see in the player at the different stages."

While Betsy can cite an example like Phil Foden, a small but highly technical footballer who has progressed all the way from the Under-15s to the brink of the senior squad, Spain offers the prime example of a European nation that puts its faith in small players right through the age levels. "If we like a player, we'll keep faith with them," says Gordo. "[Andrés] Iniesta and Xavi are examples of the smaller players with technique, who might lack stature at this age but have ability."

Improvements, Spanish-style

Gordo goes on to provide an insight into his efforts to improve his players – as footballers and as individuals. He considers video an essential tool and records both matches and training sessions in order to capture images to illustrate points he wishes to make.

"Seeing images and getting to know opponents, and perhaps above all seeing themselves performing different actions – be it making a mistake or doing something positive – helps us to reinforce the good things and correct their mistakes or things they are doing less well," he says. "Pictures are very important. We have a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words – we believe this, as when the lads see images, they're much more receptive to assimilating ideas and understanding the dynamics of the game."

It is not just football lessons for Spain's youth internationals either, as the RFEF



“Here we all work with every age group. There is a head coach, but at any moment of the season the rest of the coaches can take part in training camps or sessions with any of the groups.”

David Gordo



European Under-17 Championship titleholders the Netherlands have their sights set on a third consecutive title in Estonia, which would be a competition first.

provides a tutor for when they are away with the national squad in order to support them with their school studies. "Every day we dedicate time to their academic work. Their clubs' tutors send us work for them to do while they are away with us. We're very keen to make sure they get this done and that, when they go back to their schools, they have their work done and are prepared for exams. It's vital in their education – we want them to have a broad education, as a player and as a person, so we place a lot of importance on this."

On the question of educating minds, Alcocer touches on his players' mental development from a sporting perspective, speaking of his responsibility to help his players "open up and share with others". He says: "[A coach] must try to make the player self-sufficient – able to evaluate his performances, to watch a match with the eyes of a player, to take a lead role in his own progression."

Winning or learning?

These efforts are all focused on taking teams to the European Under-17 final tournament in May – and, once there, trying to win it. No nation can match Spain's nine triumphs in this competition (including its pre-2001 guise as an Under-16 event), but Gordo, the man tasked with achieving a tenth victory this year, concedes short-term glory is not the only goal. "For us the ultimate objective is that our players carry on developing so one day they can play in the senior national team," he says. "This is the objective. And our first priority. But results are important too as we want players to improve by playing in all the best competitions, so if you're not in the EURO, we can't develop you fully."

For coaches working in youth categories, the key, as Gordo suggests, is to find the right balance for their players between winning and learning. Marini offers a Swiss perspective: "At the Under-15 and

Under-16 level, the result is still secondary. At these lower levels, it's more about selection, getting to know players, training them, etc. From Under-17 and Under-18 level, the result is much more important."

Alcocer, who is hoping to steer France to a first success since 2015, notes that "there's still a long path" for his players beyond this level, as he adds his own reflections. "We try to have the best balance possible," he says. "Winning matches is inevitably the aim when you get out on the pitch but, from our side, we insist above all on what must be done to win a match."

"When we're contesting a EURO, we try to win it, albeit while placing a lot of importance on the principles of our play. Our final objective is to prepare the players for France's senior team, so they have to have experiences in their youth teams which give them the broadest range of experience possible. In a player's development, defeats can be just as important as victories."

Let the final word go to Van der Veen, whose Dutch squad are seeking a hat-trick of Under-17 titles. Win or lose, he believes a high level of competition is vital for his youngsters' ongoing progression – and this, he argues, is where Dutch players have a head start on some of their peers.

The compact size of the Netherlands helps in this regard. "There's a good structure, where the best can play the best – we have to drive three hours maximum," he says. His players also benefit from early exposure to the men's game by virtue of the fact the biggest Eredivisie clubs' reserve sides play in the Dutch second and third tiers. "They get a lot of experience of physical resistance. They already experience professional play when they're still young."

The international arena, in turn, offers its own valuable lessons. "The great experience they have with us is they're playing against the best of other countries, so they get that experience for their development. If they don't do their best, they can be punished by conceding a goal. The development they get is the experience of the game." 🌱

"We're very mindful of growth and maturation with this delicate age group. Some of those selected are Under-14 players and we have to give them a fair assessment of where they're at and when the right moment is to bring them into the pathway."

Kevin Betsy

UEFA GROWS THROUGH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

UEFA Grow is a comprehensive business development programme designed to help all 55 UEFA member associations maximise their potential on and off the pitch.



The IT pillar of UEFA Grow aims to support UEFA member associations by helping them understand their IT capabilities and needs so that they can put in place the necessary services, systems and people to function effectively, and are also aware and flexible enough to adapt to future trends.

IT audit

The UEFA Grow and ICT teams first conducted an audit of the technology, systems and processes used by the national associations. This audit took the form of an IT maturity matrix that would enable UEFA to:

- provide a foundation to develop 'Football Federations of the Future' in a technology way;
- understand maturity levels of technology and processes across all participating national associations;
- provide guidance to minimise cybersecurity attacks;

- help make sure national associations invest money in the right areas at the right price;
- ensure that knowledge and best practices are shared;
- help make sure national associations have the right people in the right roles.

The IT maturity matrix was built on a model of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This was

developed with a working group of national association and UEFA representatives as well as industry experts. The group checked and challenged minimum standards required for IT across 60 KPIs and three tiers. The group also agreed to UEFA Grow providing support through a strategic and systematic approach, using scores from the matrix.

“The IT strategy that UEFA helped us work out was more than just a checklist; it taught us a structured approach to the implementation of IT projects; it taught us how to present projects in a compelling way, weighing up the benefits and risks of any proposed changes, as well as keeping everyone up to date with any IT-related works.”

Andreas Andersson
IT manager, Malta Football Association

Creating tailored IT strategies

Following completion of the matrix – which 48 UEFA member associations have done to date – UEFA provided each association with bespoke reports tailored to their results as well as with five dashboard views for them to manipulate and understand the results of their IT maturity matrix results.

UEFA also developed 18 specific dashboard views that enabled the UEFA Grow team and other business units at UEFA to better understand the way national associations operate, and their systems, tools and processes. This has helped inform strategic decisions regarding the way national associations register, categorise and collect data for players, how marketing tools are used, and how football stakeholders are engaged with.

The results of the IT maturity matrix help UEFA see which national associations are the most mature in their technology and processes and which could benefit from strategic or bespoke support in specific areas.

So far, the UEFA ICT team, in partnership with the UEFA Grow team, has supported ten national associations to create tailored IT strategies that are aligned with the association’s overall strategic goals. This ensures that the whole business understands and appreciates the role of IT, not only in streamlining and creating

60
key performance indicators in the maturity matrix

48
UEFA member associations have completed the matrix so far

18
specific dashboard views developed by UEFA

greater efficiencies within a national association’s workflow, but also in terms of how it can directly support the delivery of key strategic goals.

UEFA has helped national associations to understand return on investment (ROI) in IT and to help senior management recognise spending on IT for business benefits.

UEFA has also used the matrix results to plan cybersecurity e-learning that will be accessible to all national associations with multiple language options. This will be based on the internal e-learning undertaken by UEFA staff.

Following the launch of UEFA eEURO 2020, UEFA has assisted four national associations in developing bespoke efootball strategies, collaborating with industry experts and UEFA’s marketing division to support national associations with this new and exciting engagement and participation opportunity.

Sharing ideas and best practice

The results and dashboards for the IT maturity matrix are now centralised for national associations to access via the UEFA TIME portal. This portal offers access to both top-line and detailed information in a simple-to-view way.

As new technologies and IT practices emerge, UEFA ensures that ideas and successful practice are proactively shared across national associations in workshops and on the UEFA Play platform.

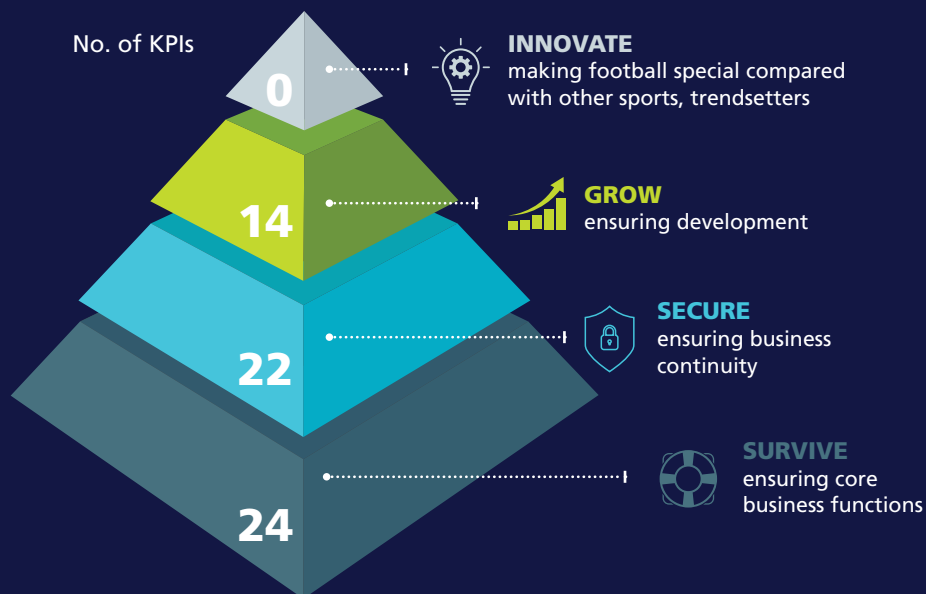
UEFA Grow brings together national associations and industry experts in dedicated workshops. For example, in January 2020, UEFA Grow brought together 16 national associations that use the COMET football management system to discuss ways to improve data collection for club and non-club players to add benefit across the business. The workshop also covered recommendations on improving player registration and shared successful practice in using the system.

The UEFA Grow IT pillar provides day-to-day support for national associations, using the experience and expertise of the UEFA ICT unit, helping answer questions, sharing knowledge and experience, and, importantly, helping ensure individual national associations do not repeat mistakes that others have made.

UEFA’s simple aim is to support and assist national football associations across Europe in modernising technology to improve football operations for fan and player engagement. 🌐

National association IT maturity model

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs



2020 SUPER CUP BALL DESIGNED BY CHILDREN

The winners of this season's UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League will play the 2020 UEFA Super Cup match in Porto on 12 August with a special adidas match ball featuring a series of drawings by children from organisations supported by the UEFA Foundation for Children.

UEFA president and UEFA Foundation for Children chairman Aleksander Čeferin selected the drawings that will feature on the UEFA Super Cup match ball.

The special match ball will be used to promote the values of UEFA and its foundation, highlighting the rights of every child and the unifying force of football. The drawings are the work of 18 children whose illustrations of what football means to them were selected by the UEFA president

and foundation chairman, Aleksander Čeferin, in a competition organised by the UEFA Foundation for Children in collaboration with ten European partner organisations. More than 200 drawings were received, many conveying the importance of diversity, equality and tolerance.

"I'm sure that the children will be thrilled to see their drawings on the Super Cup match ball and to know that stars of our game will be scoring goals with it," said Aleksander Čeferin.

Fundamental values

The UEFA Super Cup has been a key event for the UEFA Foundation for Children since the foundation's creation on 24 April 2015. It uses the match to raise awareness by sending a strong message of inclusion, integration, respect and solidarity to the thousands of spectators in the stadium and the millions watching on TV or on other communication platforms.

This year, the foundation wanted to go even further. Therefore, since 15 January, it has been running an Instagram campaign in collaboration with UEFA, telling the stories of the 18 budding artists, to show the positive impact of football on their young lives.

You can read their stories on the UEFA Foundation for Children website (uefafoundation.org) and its Instagram account @uefa_foundation, as well as on the UEFA Instagram account @UEFA_official. 🌐

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 "I'm sure that the children will be thrilled to see their drawings on the Super Cup match ball and to know that stars of our game will be scoring goals with it."

Aleksander Čeferin
 UEFA President



INTERVIEW

JUST SPEE TAKES OFFICE AS KNVB PRESIDENT

On 17 December 2019, Just Spee took office as the new president of the KNVB, the Dutch national football association. Spee, a former CEO of media companies Endemol and Stage Entertainment, succeeds Michael van Praag, who was in charge of the KNVB for the past 11 years and remains involved as a member of UEFA's Executive Committee. In an interview with UEFA Direct, Just Spee introduces himself.

BY AMIN BELHAJ CHANKOUR

Just Spee, congratulations on your election as the new KNVB president!

Thank you very much. I am happy and grateful that the members of the KNVB have chosen me as their president. I look forward to working together with the European football family for the future of our football.

What is your background in football?

Football has always been an important part of my life and that of my family. I joined the Royal Haarlemsche Football Club and, after progressing through the ranks of the youth academy, I managed to make it to the first team of this illustrious club, which is celebrating its 140th anniversary this year. As a football director, I have also gained experience in both professional and amateur football.

Prior to your candidacy for the KNVB presidency, you were the CEO of Endemol, a global media company. How will your work experience help you in your new job?

Media and new media are at the forefront of the future of football. I know the world of media is in flux at the moment, with changing consumer behaviour that demands a wider offer of our entertainment product. To translate this into football language, football fans are expecting more and more ways to watch their heroes and heroines in action. I am



aware of UEFA's developments in the field of OTT platforms and I truly look forward to contributing and cooperating on the many different innovations that are ahead of us. Besides, TV rights are still a large part of sports revenues and it is therefore crucial that the world of football is innovative in tackling the challenges of a changing world.

You mention working together with the European 'football family'. Why is this so important to you?

Our ambition is to contribute to the development of our game. The world is changing and that means we need to adapt. That is why we have created a strategy for the Future of our Football. Our international strategy is based on a dynamic, innovative and relevant

“I look forward to meeting my colleagues and friends from UEFA and the member associations, to hopefully further develop our deep bonds based on respect and our shared football values.”

international football community, for now and for the future.

This year, the KNVB will host the UEFA Congress in Amsterdam and the city will be a UEFA EURO 2020 venue. What can we expect?

I am honoured that UEFA will hold its yearly Congress in the Netherlands. We look forward to welcoming representatives of all 55 UEFA member associations in Amsterdam for the UEFA Congress and the draw for the league phase of the UEFA Nations League. Personally, I look forward to meeting my colleagues and friends from UEFA and the member associations, to hopefully further develop our deep bonds based on respect and our shared football values.

Regarding EURO 2020, Amsterdam will be host to four matches, and the city will be able to make a wonderful contribution to what is so dear to our Dutch hearts: building bridges. We are very proud to be part of the organisation and will continue working with UEFA to deliver a great tournament, honouring 60 years of European Championships. 🇳🇱

EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY FOOTBALL

Since June 2018, the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) has been part of a European consortium of universities, environmental companies, NGOs and national football associations in the LIFE Tackle project co-funded by the EU LIFE programme.

BY FLORIN SARI



Getty Images

Regarding its own priorities in the project, the Romanian federation decided to concentrate on the selective collection and management of waste, on energy efficiency of various stadium installations and on promoting environmentally friendly procurements. Two stadiums were chosen for demonstrative measures and pilot actions: the National Arena in Bucharest and the Anghel Iordănescu Stadium in Voluntari. The National Arena will host four EURO 2020 matches, while the Anghel Iordănescu Stadium will be used by the visiting teams for training sessions.

The challenges differ from one stadium to the other, but the success stories can inspire other stadium managers and football teams to action. For instance, the priorities of the National Arena aim to reduce the production of plastic waste by implementing a system of selective waste collection, to request green procurement certificates from caterers and to better manage energy consumption. In the case of the Anghel Iordănescu Stadium, its priorities include building an energy-efficient new office building, installing solar panels on the roofs of various facilities, and reducing plastic waste by introducing cups made of paper or of reusable materials.

One of the key success factors of the project is the support of the FRF management and of the two facilities. During the two working visits in November 2018 and July 2019, it became clear to the project team that there is not only support for but also a strong interest in positive environmental action, especially because previous similar actions benefitted the stadiums (rain water collection drastically reduces municipal costs) or had a positive impact for the local populations (the municipality of Voluntari already provides selective waste collection). 🌱

Environmentally friendly actions are being piloted at the National Arena in Bucharest, which will be hosting four EURO 2020 matches.

Tackle' stands for 'Teaming up for A Conscious Kick for the Legacy of Environment'. The scope of the project is to implement environmentally friendly actions in football and it has EURO 2020 as an aim for concrete results in reducing the environmental impact of football. Promoting cleaner football is one of the priorities of UEFA with regard to the biggest and most diverse EURO ever organised, and in terms of synergies, EURO 2020 and Tackle will leave a strong, positive legacy.



IGOR NETTO, CAPTAIN OF THE FIRST EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS

9 January 2020 marked the 90th anniversary of the birth of outstanding Soviet player Igor Netto, winner of the 1956 Olympic Games and of the inaugural European Championship in 1960 as a captain of the USSR national team.

BY EKATERINA GRISHENKOVA

Igor Netto was born on 9 January 1930 in Moscow. The future champion loved football from childhood, and at the age of 19 Netto's life changed completely when he was invited to FC Spartak Moscow, the club with which he was connected for his whole professional playing career. From 1949 to 1966, the midfielder remained faithful to Spartak, captaining the team for ten of those years. His 18 seasons at Spartak stand as a club record to this day. During that time, Spartak won five championships and three USSR cups.

From 1952 to 1965, Netto played for the USSR national team. He made his debut on 15 July 1952, and four years later, at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, the Soviet team, captained by Igor Netto, conquered Yugoslavia 1-0 in the final. On 10 July 1960, he wore the captain's armband in another decisive game against Yugoslavia, this time at the first-ever European Championship finals in France. Once again, his team proved stronger than their opponents, thanks to goals by Slava Metreveli and Viktor Ponedelnik, and ran out 2-1 winners. Five Soviet players were included in the UEFA team of the tournament, Netto among them.

A football legend and decent man

He went on to play in the 1958 and 1962 World Cups. The last one was especially memorable. Igor Netto not only possessed excellent technique, but also demonstrated a very responsible attitude to his work throughout his whole life, and was an example of decency and honesty. In the Soviet Union's group stage match against Uruguay, his team scored a goal through the wrong side of the net, and Netto,



of the legend. The ceremony was attended by the first vice-president of the Football Union of Russia, Netto's teammate at Spartak and in the USSR national team, and fellow 1956 Olympic champion Nikita Simonyan; the chairman of the football veterans committee, Aleksandr Mirzoyan; and current Russia international and Spartak player Georgy Dzhikiya.

Following the ceremony, a friendly match took place between veterans of Spartak and the USSR/Russia. Before the match, Nikita Simonyan delivered a symbolic kick of the ball. The game ended in a 4-4 draw. As the day came to a close at the Otkritie Arena in Moscow,

spotting a dishonest goal, called on the referee to disallow it.

After the end of his playing career, Netto worked as a coach in the USSR and abroad. He died on 30 March 1999 in Moscow, leaving the brightest mark in the history of Soviet football.

A match in his memory

In honour of the anniversary of Igor Netto's birth, the football veterans' committee of the Football Union of Russia and FC Spartak Moscow prepared a special programme of events.


On 9 January, veterans laid flowers on Netto's grave in Moscow in memory

an evening in memory of Igor Netto was held, attended by members of his family, players and the management of FC Spartak.

"On 9 January, commemorative and solemn events were dedicated to a great player. Igor Netto was distinguished by his great devotion to football and honesty, both in the game and in life. On the proposal of our committee, the executive committee of the Football Union of Russia decided to dedicate the 21st round of the Russian premier league to the memory of Igor Netto," said Aleksandr Mirzoyan, chairman of the football veterans' committee. 🌐

BOY INJURED IN EARTHQUAKE VISITED BY NATIONAL TEAM PLAYERS

ANDI VERÇANI

 Ten-year-old Santijano Vata is being treated at the trauma hospital in Tirana. The earthquake that struck our country on 26 November injured him and seriously damaged his house, killing his brother and grandmother. To help Santi through this difficult time, the Albanian Football Association arranged for national team players Bekim Balaj and Odise Roshi to pay him a surprise visit in hospital.

Balaj and Roshi gave the young fan a football and a signed national team jersey with his name on the back. The two players also promised him a trip to the Air Albania Stadium for one of the

national team's next matches there. "We've been actively involved since day one, with family, friends and colleagues of different nationalities in the clubs, to do what we can in the wake of this disaster. We, as a national team, will help rebuild the lives of people that were affected by this tragedy," Balaj said.


Roshi has also been moved by this catastrophe: "We want to help people that are going through a tough time, especially children. I am touched because today we met Santi, this special fan of the national team. I am very happy that we brought some pleasure and smiles to young Santi."



The visit to the young fan is part of the programme of holidays and visits that the Albanian FA has organised for the children of families affected by the earthquake. The association has initiated work to rebuild three houses and has also started an international campaign to support reconstruction in the areas struck by the earthquake.

KHOREN HOVHANNISYAN HONOURED WITH HIGHEST AWARD

NORAYR ZORYAN

 Armenia's player of the 20th century, the legendary Khoren Hovhannisyán, turned 65 on 10 January. On this occasion, and to recognise his great contribution to Armenian football, Khoren Hovhannisyán received the federation's supreme order from the president of the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA), Armen Melikbekyan. Khoren Hovhannisyán is the first person ever to receive this new award. Hovhannisyán expressed his gratitude to the Football Federation of Armenia and his confidence in the prosperous future of Armenian football.

The newly elected members of the FFA executive committee were also present at the ceremony, at which the FFA president highlighted the importance of honouring legendary players such as Khoren Hovhannisyán and promised to continue paying tribute to players who have made a significant contribution to Armenian football.

Elsewhere, the first continuing professional development course for Armenian coaches holding a UEFA licence has taken place, attended by more than 250 coaches and top-class European coaching specialists.

FFA technical director Ginés Meléndez presented his national coaching programme, while Artur Azaryan, head of the FFA football department, presented the FFA strategy for 2019–25.

Victor Orta, director of football at Leeds United FC, presented the activities of a

football or sports director at a high-level European club.

During the course, an interactive round-table discussion was held with the participation of Vardan Minasyán, head coach of FC Ararat-Armenia (current champions), and Abraham Khashmanyán, former head coach of FC Alashkert (current cup holders).

The second day of the course started with a presentation by Michał Listkiewicz, head of the FFA referees unit, on the video assistant referee (VAR). Pedro López, head coach of Spain's women's Under-20 team, spoke about the development trends in women's football. José Mourinho's former assistant, famous Spanish coach Aitor Karanka, spoke about the integrated training process. Closing remarks were given by Armen Melikbekyan, who emphasised the importance of holding such events in Armenia. At the end of the course, the coaches received their updated licences.



AZERBAIJAN

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ROVNAG ABDULLAYEV RE-ELECTED AS PRESIDENT

FIRUZ ABDULLA

The XXVIII Conference of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) was held on 28 January. After a short video, the AFFA president, Rovnag Abdullayev, greeted the delegates, guests and media representatives and gave the floor to the minister of youth and sports, Azad Rahimov, who highlighted the work of the AFFA in promoting football and a healthy lifestyle in our country.

In ordinary business, the AFFA president presented the association's annual report, while finance director Khalid Javadov presented the financial report for approval.

Later in the proceedings, the AFFA president presented a special gift from the association to UNICEF's



representative to Azerbaijan, Edward Carwardine, to mark more than ten years of cooperation between the AFFA and UNICEF.

There was also a presentation by EURO 2020 volunteers coordinator for Azerbaijan, Yusif Valiyev.

Then it was time for the elections. There was just one candidate for the presidency, the current incumbent, Rovnag Abdullayev, who was re-elected by acclamation. There were also the same number of candidates as seats for election on the AFFA executive committee, resulting in the following

12 new members being elected, also by acclamation: Isgandar Javadov, Kazbek Tuayev, Elkhan Mammadov, Zaur Akhundov, Rauf Aliyev, Vagif Sadigov, Elshad Nasirov, Farid Mansurov, Firudin Gurbanov, Mahir Mammadov, Elmar Mammadyarov and Konul Mehtiyeva.

BELARUS

www.abff.by

UEFA ASSIST SUPPORTS THE 2020 DEVELOPMENT CUP

ALEKSANDR ALEINIK

The traditional international Under-17 tournament, the Development Cup, was held in Minsk in January for the 16th consecutive year. The Minsk football hall once again became the main football venue in the city. This time the tournament, sponsored by the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus and supported by the Minsk city executive committee, featured eight teams, split into two groups of four.

Six of the eight participating teams were from Europe (Belarus, Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Iceland and Israel) while, with the help of the UEFA Assist programme, the other two were Under-16 teams from Asia (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Tajikistan won first place in their group with thrilling victories over Iceland and Georgia to set up a decider with the hosts. The final had its drama, with the Asian side taking a 2-0

lead that put them on course to win the trophy. However, the hosts came back in the closing seconds to eventually win on penalties and secure back-to-back titles for the second time in the history of the tournament (their previous victories came in 2006, 2007 and 2019). In the match for third place, Belgium left no chance for Israel with a commanding 5-0 victory. Belarusian forward Dmitri Latykhov, with two goals and two assists, was named player of the tournament.

All the coaches praised the high level of organisation of the event and stressed that it is a great experience for their teams and an important part of their preparation for official matches. The Development Cup has become an important fixture in the Under-17 calendar. Belarus, Belgium, Finland, Georgia and Israel are all preparing for the European Under-17 Championship elite round in March, while Tajikistan are getting set for the AFC U-16 Championship in Bahrain in September.



STADIUM IMPROVEMENTS ON THE AGENDA

FEDJA KRVAVAC



Robert Prosinecki is no longer head coach of the Bosnia and Herzegovina national team. This was decided by the executive board of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Federation (NFSBiH) after the national team's disappointing results in the EURO 2020 qualifiers. After constructive discussions and analysis, agreement and understanding were reached in the best interests of the national team as it heads into the play-offs for a place at EURO 2020. Robert Prosinečki showed correctness and a sincere desire for the national team to succeed in reaching the ultimate goal of a place in the European Championship final tournament. The common conclusion is that cooperation so far has been very professional and supportive.

Regardless of the difficulties of the national team in qualifying for EURO 2020, the NFSBiH has been forging ahead with its plans and preparations for hosting the European Women's Under-19 Championship final tournament in 2022.

The matches will be played at the Slavija and Grbavica stadiums in Sarajevo and the Pod Bijelim Brijegom and Rođeni stadiums in Mostar. Between now and the start of the finals in 2022, it is planned to improve the infrastructure at all these stadiums. Representatives of all the municipalities concerned have expressed their full support and desire to be fully involved in the organisation of the tournament.

Meanwhile, the NFSBiH continues to improve stadium infrastructure throughout the country. Some of the current projects under implementation involve improving reflector lighting at premier league stadiums, installing electronic ticketing gates at the entrances to the Pod Bijelim Brijegom (Mostar) Gradski (Banja Luka) and Asim Ferhatović Hase (Sarajevo) stadiums, developing youth football infrastructure at the FS RS Sports Center in Prnjavor and expanding the federation's training centre in Zenica.

The training centre in Zenica opened in spring 2014 and its capacity utilisation has increased year on year. It is used by



all the national teams, holds seminars and coach education courses, and hosts official and training matches, including official matches of the men's Under-21 national team and senior women's national team. Currently, the centre covers an area of 30,000m², with two full-size football fields (one with natural grass and the other with artificial turf), one artificial tent-covered pitch measuring 20 x 40 metres, as well as a facility with a seating capacity of 1,500 and hotel amenities. It is currently registered as a UEFA Category 2 stadium. Since December 2018, the NFSBiH has been leading a project to expand the training centre in cooperation with the city of Zenica and UEFA. As part of the plans, two new full-size natural grass football pitches will be added and the centre's accommodation capacities increased.

IFAB GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR VAR INTRODUCTION

NIKA BAHTIJAREVIĆ



After going through an extensive VAR education process, the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) has received IFAB's final approval to begin using VAR in Croatian football. In January, VAR workshops were held for players, coaches and media representatives, providing them with detailed information about the VAR technology and protocol.

"With this project, our aim is to grow football spectators' trust in the accuracy of refereeing in Croatian football. This is another important leap forward for Croatian football," said HNS executive

director Marijan Kustić at the VAR workshop for media representatives.

Sadly, the start of 2020 was also marked by a great loss for Croatian football, with the death of author and journalist Josip Prudeus. A prolific and celebrated writer, football fans will perhaps best remember Prudeus as the inventor of the Croatian national team's longstanding nickname the Vatreni.

In addition to the VAR workshops, the HNS used the winter break for youth-focused activities, including selection tournaments for girls and



boys in the Under-15 to Under-19 categories and national team camps for the same age groups. The staff of the men's senior national team were also hard at work finding a team base camp for EURO 2020. After internal discussions on all options, the HNS announced that the Vatreni will be preparing for their run at another medal at the training grounds of St Andrews University in Scotland.

DENMARK

www.dbu.dk

FOOTBALL AS MEDICINE

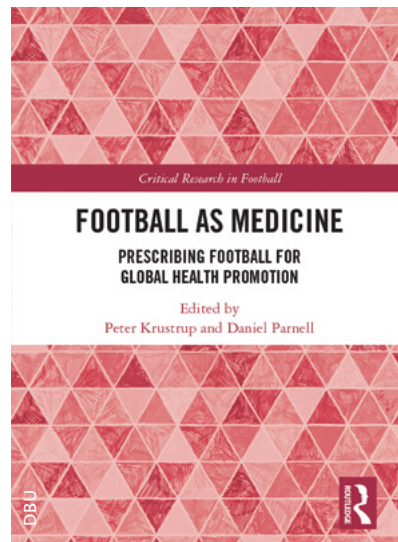
SØREN BENNIKE



For a decade, the Danish FA has worked closely with universities to explore, develop and implement football for health initiatives at grassroots level. Much of this work has been incorporated into a scientifically based book entitled Football as Medicine.

This is the first book to focus on football in the context of health from individual, public and population-level perspectives. It examines the effects of football training on health for specific target populations, for example, children, people with Type 2 diabetes, cancer patients, people with mental health conditions, socially deprived and older people.

It discusses the significance of football for public health and assesses



the efficacy of football interventions by clubs and community sport programmes. With its multidisciplinary approach, this is a valuable resource for football associations, as well as for students, researchers and practitioners working in physical activity and health, public health and health promotion.

Scientific work and evidence-based decisions, both in the field of football for health and in other areas, are a high priority for the Danish FA, which is organising a broad range of activities focusing on health. Examples include Football Fitness (for all), FC Prostate (for prostate cancer patients) and Football for the Heart (for patients with cardiovascular diseases) in local clubs, and 11 for Health in schools.

ENGLAND

www.thefa.com

TAKING A MINUTE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

DAVID GERTY



The English FA delayed the kick-off times to all FA Cup third round fixtures by one minute to encourage fans to 'Take A Minute' to think about looking after their mental health, as part of the Heads Up campaign. The move saw all 32 ties kick off one minute later than their traditionally scheduled timeslots, for example at 3.01pm, 12.16pm and 7.46pm.

A collaboration between The FA and Heads Together and spearheaded by HRH The Duke of Cambridge, the Heads Up campaign harnesses the influence and popularity of football to encourage more people – particularly men – to feel comfortable talking about, and taking action to improve, their mental health and to recognise that mental fitness is just as important as physical fitness.

The initiative was designed to raise awareness of the importance of looking after mental health, with 60 seconds representing just the first step in the




journey to improved well-being.

Heads Up partnered with Public Health England's Every Mind Matters across the FA Cup third round to draw attention to the simple steps available to everyone to look after mental health and well-being. The partnership signposted to the free, online Every Mind Matters resources and Your Mind Plan tool, which fans can use

to create a personal mental health action plan, providing them with a tailored set of simple self-care actions. Take A Minute messaging was visible across the weekend of fixtures, both in the stadiums and for the millions watching from home, and generated mass media attention and conversation on social media.

NEW INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT LAUNCHED

LAURA GOUTRY

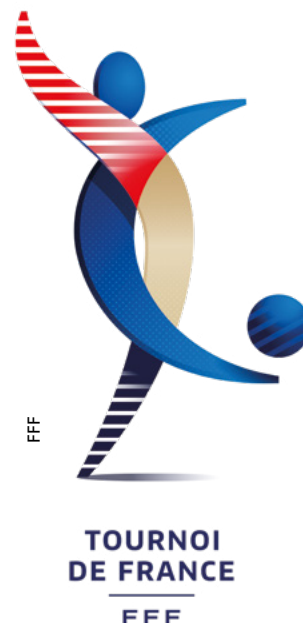
 The French Football Federation (FFF) is launching a new international women's tournament, with the inaugural edition set to take place from 4 to 10 March.

Christened the 'Tournoi de France', this year's tournament will bring together four of the world's top teams. The host nation will be joined by the Netherlands, who are the current European champions and World Cup runners-up (3rd in the FIFA rankings), Canada (8th) and Brazil (9th). It will be the first event on the 2020 calendar for the French team

(4th in the FIFA rankings) and their coach, Corinne Diacre.

The FFF executive committee chose the Ligue des Hauts de France to host this first tournament, which will comprise six matches played at two different venues: the Stade de l'Épopée in Calais and the Stade du Hainaut in Valenciennes.

This new FFF competition will be held each year in different parts of the country and at different venues. Following the success of the Women's World Cup in France last year, this marks the next step in the women's football development plan launched by the FFF in 2011/12.



NEW BATUMI STADIUM NEARS COMPLETION

OTAR GIORGADZE

 One of the largest sports infrastructure projects in Georgian history is nearing completion in the seaside city of Batumi. The new 20,000-seater arena is due to open in a few months' time. The UEFA Category 4 stadium will be home to the local club Dinamo Batumi, as well as hosting matches of the Georgian senior and youth national teams.

Participants in the 2020 edition of the traditional David Petriashvili Winter Cup visited the construction site of the new stadium in Batumi on 19 January. Teams from Spain, Ukraine and Turkey took part in this year's tournament, along with UEFA and FIFA select sides composed of former star players from various countries. Representatives of the Georgian Football Federation and the local government also took part in the visit, assessing the ongoing construction process. The opening of the new arena in Batumi is planned for the summer of this year. As for the



latest Legends Cup, it was hosted in Batumi for the first time, and was won by

the team from Ukraine, who defeated hosts Georgia 1-0 in the final.

GREECE

www.epo.gr

FOOTBALL CONTRIBUTES TO IMPROVING HEALTH

MICHALIS TSAPIDIS



'Football is medicine' is the new programme of the Hellenic Football Federation and the department of physical education and sport of Thessaly University, and it is already in full swing. This programme aims to highlight the contribution of football to improving the health of middle-aged people (aged over 40) with non-infectious disease risk factors.

This new initiative includes:

- carrying out a workout programme with football activities for middle-aged people;

- training PE teachers who will run the workout programme;
- writing a programme manual for the PE teachers;
- proposing training and delivery methodologies;
- holding information seminars in each city where the programme is being run and monitoring progress on a regular basis;
- understanding the relationship between the programme and the metabolic, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal adjustments in middle-aged people;

Implementation of the programme began in the regional football associations of Viotia, Epirus, Karditsa and Larisa, which embraced the initiative and allocated the necessary facilities and human resources.

The programme is approved and funded by UEFA and is being implemented in cooperation with the Danish Football Association. The most recent training sessions took place at Thessaly University in the presence of Danish professor in exercise physiology Magni Mohr and his colleague Jeppe Foged Vigh-Larsen.

ISRAEL

www.football.org.il

FIRST NATIONAL eFOOTBALL TEAM READY FOR ACTION

EITAN DOTAN



The first Israel Football Association efootball team has been selected to represent the country in the eEURO 2020 qualifiers and in the World Cup gaming equivalent, the FIFA eNations Cup. The team is comprised of three FIFA eNations Cup players and three Pro Evolution Soccer (PES) players for the eEURO 2020 qualifiers.

After two full days that saw more than 80 competitors taking part in qualifiers, semi-finals and finals, the Israel FA announced the country's first efootball gaming national team. The thrilling final stages of the selection competition, held in the VIP stand of Ramat Gan Stadium, were attended and followed closely by Israel senior national team players Manor Solomon, Eylon Almog and Yoav Gerafi. They were joined by senior women's national team player Marian Awad and women's Under-19 player Noa Seilmhodzic. Referee Orel Grinfeld received training from gaming referees, and became the first referee in Israel to be qualified to referee both video games and traditional football.



Coach Erez Gabai said: "I am very pleased that the Israel FA has risen to the challenge and joined the world of gaming. Of course, I am proud to be the first coach of the team. I believe in the players and in our ability to become part of the highest tiers in the world of competitive gaming."

Rotem Kamer, CEO of the Israel FA, added: "Establishing the team is part of a process of renewal, of joining the football associations under FIFA and UEFA in a parallel world to that of football on

the pitch. There is no competition between these two worlds but, rather, one pollinates the other. This coming June, while one EURO final tournament is taking place on the pitch, another will be taking place on digital platforms. Both will have

millions of viewers. Our gaming team will allow us to be present as a country, as a football association and as a national team in one more international, competitive arena. There is a young audience that the Israel FA wants to connect with, for whom it wants to create relevant content and speak with in a language it understands and loves, and the association needs to be present in worlds where that audience spends quite a lot of its leisure time. "

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR eSPORTS MASTERS

DIEGO ANTENZIO

 The Italian Football Association (FIGC) continues to break new ground in the world of esports. The country's first-ever efootball squad was announced on 19 January, after final-stage trials at the FIGC technical centre at Coverciano.

Sixteen hopefuls were split into four groups of four, with 'home' and 'away' fixtures against each opponent. The top three players from each group went on to battle it out in two groups of six, with the winners of each second-round group earning an automatic spot in the team.

The two remaining places were decided by a play-off, with the second-placed competitors each facing off against the third-placed player from the other group.

"The FIGC's investment in esports opens new paths for fan engagement and interaction," said CEO Marco Brunelli, "and the chance to offer new

opportunities, not least in the field of education, where we are helping to involve young people in a number of specific initiatives. The sector is growing exponentially, and the creation of the national efootball team is just the first step in a wider esports strategy."

In response to the demand for esports professionals, the FIGC has teamed up with the LUM School of Management in Milan to offer three scholarships for the second intake of the school's MasterEsports programme.

The first course in Italy to specialise in esports management, this executive master's programme will provide esports enthusiasts with a route into the industry, with a focus on projects operating at the intersection of esports, traditional sport and health promotion.

Applicants for the scholarships must be between 18 and 30, and will be ranked

on a points system, with the first, second and third-placed candidates receiving grants for 75%, 50% and 25% of the course fee respectively.

The recipients will also be offered a front-row seat alongside FIGC representatives at the eEURO 2020 qualifying rounds.

At the end of the course, they will be invited to give a presentation on a project targeting the development and integration of efootball activities in the 2020/21 season.

The course runs over six weekends, with additional visits to esports competitions where participants can go behind the scenes to learn more about how such events are organised.

See the video of the efootball trials here: <https://figc.it/it/tifosi/mediagallery/finale-timvision-enazionale-pes/>

DAINIS KAZAKEVIČS APPOINTED NEW HEAD COACH OF MEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

TOMS ĀRMANIS

 The board of the Latvian Football Federation has appointed local specialist Dainis Kazakevičs as the new head coach of the Latvian men's senior national team. He has been given a three-year contract.

The 38-year old has been managing the Under-21 team since 2013. Since 2012 he has also been the federation's sporting director.

"I see this as the greatest possible honour for any Latvian coach – to manage our national team. It is a massive challenge I see myself ready for. I understand that we have a mountain to climb in order to regain the support and trust of our supporters," Kazakevičs said. "I have

been a coach for 23 years, and my recent experience with our Under-21 team has



given me all the necessary insight into how the daily mechanics of a national team work. My previous experience has also given me vast knowledge of the player pool available to the national team – I have worked with the majority of these players myself and I have been in a daily direct contact with all our coaches and clubs as sporting director. I am sure we will succeed."

His first game in charge will be a friendly away to Montenegro on 26 March.

Kazakevičs replaces Slovenian Slaviša Stojanovič, who had been in charge of the team since March 2019. Under him, Latvia finished last in their EURO 2020 qualifying group with three points from ten matches.

MALTA

www.mfa.com.mt

KEY TECHNICAL PROJECTS AT THE HEART OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

KEVIN AZZOPARDI



The Malta Football Association has embarked on a series of technical projects that are at the heart of its strategic plan for the next eight years.

The overhaul of the technical sector revolves around three pillars – the technical centre (national team selections), the introduction of a professional football team into an overseas championship, and the creation of a new foundation focusing mainly on long-term football development. The foundation's principal tasks include the introduction of a school football programme, greater accessibility to the game and a talent optimisation strategy, an enhanced pathway from grassroots to elite football, player welfare and coach education.

The recent appointment of Devis Mangia as head coach of the men's



national team represents an important step in this long-term strategy aimed at raising the standards of Maltese football at all levels.

"We need to create a national identity and for this to happen, the introduction of a unified football philosophy for our national teams and the local game is essential," said Malta FA president Bjorn Vassallo. "This philosophy will be

defined by Devis Mangia, the head coach of the national team, who will be in charge of the entire technical sector.

"It's important that we have synergy between the projects and we believe Devis is the right person to lead this."

The Malta FA president explained that the association's main technical projects, which also include the proposed introduction of a professional club (seniors and Under-19s) into the Italian Lega Pro, are based on best practices successfully adopted in other countries.

"The technical overhaul centres around professionalism, a defined game philosophy, football development and player welfare. We are not changing a coach but the entire system," the Malta FA president said at the official presentation of Mangia as head coach in January.

MOLDOVA

www.fmf.md

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOP

COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT



A strategic communications workshop was held in Chişinău on 20 and 21 January under the auspices of the UEFA Grow development support programme.

Organised by the Football Association of Moldova (FMF) with UEFA, the key aims of the workshop were to create a communications strategy for the FMF, identify strategic priorities, share experience in the area of communications, analyse the situation of Moldovan football and create a communications action plan.

Support was provided by communications expert Amanda Docherty, former head of communications at Arsenal FC. The FMF was represented by its president, Leonid Oleinicenco, executive director Adrian Ixari, technical director Serghei Butelschi, competition



development manager Anatolii Ostap, head of marketing Serghei Barcari and communications team members Alexandru Greu, Victor Daghi and Ion Buga.

Using the UEFA Grow Football Federations of the Future framework launched at the end of 2019, the workshop developed a new strategy for the development of Moldovan football, entitled Focus on Children.

The four main priorities that the FMF will focus on from 2020 to 2024 are grassroots football, the national teams, the Moldovan national division (top division) and women's football.


The next communications workshop is scheduled to take place in March, when the final draft of the FMF communications strategy 2020–24 is expected to be up for discussion.

MONTENEGRO

www.fscg.me

FOOD FOR GOALS

BRANKO LATINVIĆ

 In December, the Football Association of Montenegro presented its first publication about healthy lifestyles. Food for Goals is the product of excellent cooperation with the public health institute of Montenegro. The valuable knowledge of doctors at the institute and the institute's experience in creating guidelines for healthy living were key elements in the process of creating the Food for Goals booklet.

Alarmed by the results of research about obesity among children across Europe, which put boys from Montenegro in fourth place, the football association's grassroots department started working on this project with the public health institute, which shared the same concerns regarding the current situation and the

results of the research. The aim was to draw the attention of parents and the general public to the prevalence of obesity among children in Montenegro and, at the same time, to provide material to help address the problem.

Food for Goals is written for children between the ages of seven and ten, but it will also be a valuable asset for their parents, who have a key role in educating their children in terms of their eating habits. The booklet gives basic information about healthy food – what is good for children to eat before, during and after training, the importance of hydration, and so on – as well as examples from some of Montenegro's top players,



including Stefan Savić, Stevan Jovetić, Vladimir Jovović and Marija Vukčević, so that the children (and their parents) can see what their role models eat.


The educational value of Food for Goals has been recognised by the ministry of education, which plans to use the booklet in primary schools.

NORTHERN IRELAND

www.irishfa.com

NORTHERN IRELAND'S TEAM OF FIFA REFEREES RECOGNISED AT SPECIAL CEREMONY

NIGEL TILSON

 Irish Football Association referees who will wear the FIFA international badge in 2020 have received recognition from the association. Irish FA president David Martin, who is

also chairman of the association's referees committee, acknowledged the referees' success at a special ceremony.

Malcolm Moffatt was guest of honour at the event. Malcolm, who served as a FIFA referee between 1975 and 1986 and officiated at the 1982 World Cup in Spain, presented each official with their 2020 badge.

Gareth Eakin was presented with a trophy to acknowledge that 2020 represents his 14th year as an international assistant referee. David Martin said he had given outstanding service to international football.

The president insisted all the officials on the FIFA list this year were ambassadors for not only

the association but also Northern Ireland, adding that each of them was a role model for referees at all levels of the game across the country.

New to the list of Irish FA FIFA male referees this year is Jamie Robinson. He joins Keith Kennedy, Ian McNabb and Tim Marshall on the list. Louise Thompson is the Irish FA's new female referee on the FIFA list, while Victoria Finlay has become a FIFA assistant referee. Ryan Kelsey and Andrew Nethery, meanwhile, are new to the FIFA list of male assistant referees for 2020. They join Stephen Donaldson, Gareth Eakin, David Anderson, Paul Robinson, Stephen Bell and Georgios Argyropoulos on the list.

FIFA officials are eligible to take charge of international, UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League fixtures.



FIVE-YEAR REFEREE STRATEGIC PLAN

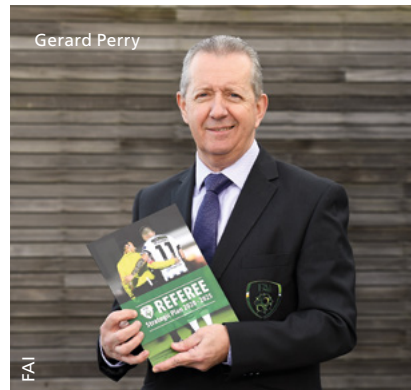
GARETH MAHER



The Football Association of Ireland hopes to see an increase in the number of referees officiating around the Republic of Ireland in the coming years. Participation and development are key areas of the new 2020–2025 Referee Strategic Plan, which was launched by the chair of the national referees committee, Gerard Perry. The strategic plan will also introduce a Respect the Ref campaign, while there are plans to appoint referee liaison officers to all affiliated grassroots leagues in Ireland.

“The referee strategy was created so that we can build on the foundations established by previous plans and to keep pace with the developments across all football programmes,” said Gerard Perry.

“We hope to facilitate the recruitment and retention of referees by integrating more with league structures. The aim is to recruit, retain, support and develop



Gerard Perry

referees to reach the highest standards and service the needs of the game.”

Ger McDermott, FAI club and league development manager, says the strategic plan is crucial to the future of refereeing in Ireland. “The five-year strategy is essential to provide us with a road map to ensure we recruit, support and retain the number of referees required to service the needs of the game as we grow participation,” he said. “We must also ensure that all referees are afforded the opportunity to develop to the best of their ability, in line with their ambitions. As we implement the strategy, respect for our referees will be integral to everything we do. Our objectives will be achieved through collaborative work between all stakeholders in the game.”

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

MIRKO VRBICA



The National Theatre in Belgrade was the venue for a ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Football Association of Serbia (FSS) and to present the annual FSS Golden Ball of Serbia awards to the best male and female football players and best coach of 2019.

In the presence of the prime minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, and government ministers, UEFA president Alexander Čeferin and other UEFA representatives, numerous legends of Serbian and Yugoslavian football, and personalities from many spheres of social and sporting life, the ceremony was divided into two parts: first, a play leading the audience through the history of the FSS, from the day it was founded on 13 April 1919 until the present day, and second, the Golden Ball awards ceremony.

The UEFA president, Aleksander Čeferin, greeted the FSS president Slaviša Kokeza, and congratulated the Football Association of Serbia on its centenary,



Slaviša Kokeza (left) and UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin

presenting the association with a centenary certificate from UEFA. In return, the FSS president presented the UEFA president with the association's gold pin. A special gift was awarded to Zoran Laković, UEFA's national associations director and a former general secretary of the FSS.

The Golden Ball awards went to Siniša Mihajlović, who was named best coach of 2019, Ajax captain Dušan Tadić, who received the best men's player of the year award, and FK Spartak captain and Serbian international Violeta Slović, who won the first-ever women's player of the year award.

TWO CHANGES IN KEY ROLES

PETER SURIN



On 1 January, two changes took place in key roles at the Slovak Football Association.

Jaroslav Kentoš took on the role of coach of the Under-21 national team and Peter Palenčík took over from Jozef Kliment as general secretary of the association.

There were different reasons for these changes. Jozef Kliment, who had served as the association's general secretary since 1 January 2011, has moved back to UEFA as head of national association development in the national associations division.

During his first tenure at UEFA, Jozef made many important contacts, which he then built on as general secretary of the Slovak Football Association.

The president of the Slovak FA, Ján Kováčik, advised the executive committee of the association to approve Peter Palenčík as Jozef's successor in the role of the general secretary. Previously head of international affairs Peter

Palenčík, has been with the Slovak FA for 15 years.

The first day of the new year was also the first day in a new role for Jaroslav



Kentoš, who became the new coach of the Under-21 national team. His predecessor, Adrián Guľa, who had been in charge for 18 months, had received an offer from a top Czech club and asked the Slovak FA president to terminate his contract early. "He had an offer from Viktória Plzeň. If he wants to go to a club, there is no point in making him unhappy. It was a matter of a couple of things coming together," explained Ján Kováčik.

Given the busy January schedule of the Under-21 team, the executive board had to react quickly and approved the appointment of the 45-year-old. Kentoš, a former player at seven top-flight clubs in three countries before becoming a youth coach and senior coach, leading the ambitious Slovakian team MŠK Žilina for a year and a half. "For every coach, it is an honour to become a national team coach," Kentoš said. His contract is valid until summer 2023.

TWO FOOTBALL LEGENDS MOURNED

PIERRE BENOIT



Swiss football lost two legends within a month as 2019 drew to a close.

Former national team coach Jakob 'Köbi' Kuhn, who won 63 caps as a player, died at the age of 76 after a long illness. Fritz Künzli, one of the country's greatest strikers of the last 50 years, four-time Swiss league top goalscorer and holder of 44 caps, passed away less than a month later.

'Köbi' Kuhn spent his whole playing career at FC Zürich, winning six Swiss league titles and five Swiss Cups between 1962 and 1977. In 2001, he became the national team coach, having previously coached the Under-19 and Under-21 teams. He led the national team to three major tournaments between 2001 and 2008.

After a long and difficult illness, Fritz Künzli died just before Christmas at the age of 73. He began his career with FC Glarus, where he was spotted and recruited as a 17-year-old by the FC Zürich chairman at the time, Edy Naegeli.

From the 1964/65 season onwards, the FC Zürich marksman was indispensable, winning four Swiss Cups and two league titles, finishing as the league's leading goalscorer a record four times and scoring 15 goals in his 44 appearances for the national team. In 1973, after nine years in Zurich, he spent three seasons at FC Winterthur, one of Switzerland's leading clubs at the time, before moving to FC Lausanne Sport, where he enjoyed great success both on and off the pitch, topped the scoring charts again and made such an



impression that the club re-signed him after spells with San Diego and Houston in the NASL.

UKRAINE

www.ffu.org.ua

UKRAINE WIN DAVID PETRIASHVILI TOURNAMENT

YURI MAZNYCHENKO

 Ukraine's national veterans' team won their first trophy at the fourth annual international Legends Cup, held in Batumi, Georgia, in mid-January. The tournament is dedicated to the memory of the late UEFA manager David Petriashvili, who lost his life in a car accident in Tbilisi in December 2015 at the age of 46.

In recent years, Georgia have lifted the trophy twice, losing it to Turkey in 2019.

This year, six teams of former famous players took part, split into two groups. They represented Georgia, Ukraine, Spain, Turkey, UEFA and FIFA.

Among the players in action in the tournament were former Ukraine internationals Vladyslav Vashchuk, Ruslan Rotan and Vyacheslav Shevchuk, together with European stars of the past decade Levan Kobiashvili from Georgia, Tuncay Şanlı from Turkey, José Amavisca from Spain, Milenko Ačimović from Slovenia, Nuno Gomes from Portugal and Angelos Charisteas from Greece. Ukraine started with a goalless draw against Turkey,



followed by a crucial 4-1 win in their next game, against the Spanish side. After beating the UEFA team in a high-scoring


game (5-1) in the semi-finals, Ukraine scored a late winner – and the only goal of the match – in the decider against Georgia.

WALES

www.faw.cymru

BUILT ON WELSH SPIRIT: END OF YEAR REVIEW

MELISSA PALMER

 In December, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) released its first-ever digital-only end of year review in a microsite format.

Entitled Built on Welsh Spirit, the FAW's interactive end of year review for 2019 showcases a journey through Welsh football, across all levels of the game, over the past 12 months.

The scroll-through microsite highlights the advancements that have been achieved at the elite level of the game, the FAW's engagement with Welsh life, heritage and culture, the development of facilities, the domestic game and governance restructure.

Through videos captured over the year via the FAW's Welsh football magazine show, FC Cymru, the overview of achievements for Welsh football this past year is brought to life, shown in a highly visual way that offers an engaging experience for all users.

The decision to publish the FAW's end of year review as a digital-only site was made to ensure the review would be more accessible and engaging for the FAW's supporters and stakeholders than ever before.

To further connect with primary stakeholders of the FAW, physical invites, with unique user access codes were sent

to contacts to personalise their experience of the online end of review and say 'diolch' (thank you) for their pivotal backing of Welsh football this year.

To read more about the work of the FAW, you can view the FAW End of Year Review 2019 at BUILT.ON.WELSH.SPIRIT.



FAW

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

1 SUNDAY Peter Frymuth (Germany) Benny Jacobsen (Denmark) Luis Medina Cantalejo (Spain) Christian Musenga (Italy)	2 MONDAY Aleksandr Gvardis (Russia) Jenni Kennedy (England) Damir Vrbanović (Croatia)	3 TUESDAY Zbigniew Boniek (Poland) Alexandru Deaconu (Romania) Andy Gould (Scotland) Carolin Greiner Mai (Germany) Hans Lorenz (Germany)	4 WEDNESDAY Sascha Amhof (Switzerland) 40 Patrick McGrath (Republic of Ireland)	5 THURSDAY Zoran Bahtijarević (Croatia) Rute Soares (Portugal) Yury Verheichyk (Belarus) Crawford Wilson (Northern Ireland)	6 FRIDAY Boris Durlen (Croatia) Marc Lenz (Germany) Ichko Lozev (Bulgaria) Hervé Piccirillo (France)	7 SATURDAY Davit Datunashvili (Georgia) Tomás Gea (Andorra) Ģirts Krastiņš (Latvia) Dušan Maravić (Serbia)
10 TUESDAY Diana Andersen (Denmark) Jasmin Baković (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Mateo Beusan (Croatia) Ilkka Koho (Finland)	11 WEDNESDAY Vito Di Gioia (Italy) 50 Lucien Kayser (Luxembourg) Olga Zhukovska (Ukraine)	12 THURSDAY Jean-François Crucke (Belgium) Miroslav Vitković (Croatia) 60	13 FRIDAY Thomas Partl (Austria) Robert Sullivan (England)	14 SATURDAY Jesús Arroyo Sánchez (Spain) Neil Jardine (Northern Ireland) Lucia Knappková (Slovakia) Despina Mavromati (Greece) Nikola Prentić (Montenegro)	15 SUNDAY Götz Dimanski (Germany) Ari Lahti (Finland) Robert Malek (Poland) Michael Ross (Northern Ireland)	16 MONDAY Tommy Andersson (Sweden) Carlos Velasco Carballo (Spain)
19 THURSDAY Mark Bos (Netherlands) Claude Kremer (Luxembourg) Ronald Zimmermann (Germany)	20 FRIDAY Sándor Csányi (Hungary) Eddie Foley (Republic of Ireland)	21 SATURDAY Jim Boyce (Northern Ireland)	22 SUNDAY Jacques Eyraud (France) Helmut Fleischer (Germany) Pascal Garibian (France) Chris Georgiades (Cyprus) Michael Kasabov (Bulgaria) Ginés Meléndez (Spain) 70 Nenad Ćrnko (Croatia) Hugo Quaderer (Liechtenstein) Gabriele Tomassi (Italy) Luca Zorzi (Switzerland)	23 MONDAY Gianni Infantino (Italy/Switzerland) 50 Franz Krösshuber (Austria) Andrea Lastrucci (Italy) 60 Mirosław Malinowski (Poland) Hilda McDermott (Republic of Ireland) Outi Saarinen (Finland)	24 TUESDAY	25 WEDNESDAY Michael Kirchner (Germany)
28 SATURDAY Pal Bjerketvedt (Norway) 60 Andriy Bondarenko (Ukraine) 40 Pavel Cebanu (Moldova) Lamprini Dimitriou (Greece)	29 SUNDAY Bernadette Constantin (France) Bernardino Gonzalez Vazquez (Spain) Sanna Pirhonen (Finland) Edgar Obertüfer (Switzerland) Christina Sass (Germany) Ignacio Sitges Serra (Spain) Alan Snoddy (Northern Ireland) Jovan Surbanović (Serbia)	30 MONDAY	31 TUESDAY Richard Havrilla (Slovakia) Marina Mamaeva (Russia) Matteo Trefoloni (Italy)			

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

1 WEDNESDAY Per Widen (Sweden) Christina Wolff (Germany)	2 THURSDAY Kevin Azzopardi (Malta) Elisabeth Derks (Netherlands) Marton Dinyés (Hungary) 40 Dejan Filipović (Serbia) Michael Jones (Wales) Michael Sjöö (Sweden)	3 FRIDAY Dennis Cruise (Republic of Ireland) Thomas Grimm (Switzerland) Kaj Ostergaard (Denmark) Yoav Strauss (Israel) Martin Sturkenboom (Netherlands) Emil Ubias (Czech Republic)	4 SATURDAY Marco Casagrande (Italy) Christian Kofoed (Denmark) Alex Miescher (Switzerland) Eamon Naughton (Republic of Ireland)	5 SUNDAY Adrian Azzopardi (Malta) Momir Djurdjevać (Montenegro) Jan Ekstrand (Sweden) Petteri Kari (Finland) Aleksandra Pejkovska (North Macedonia) Alexey Sorokin (Russia)	6 MONDAY Snježana Fočić (Croatia) Martin Hansson (Sweden) Vencel Toth (Hungary) Stephen Williams (Wales)	7 TUESDAY Vadims Lasenko (Latvia)
10 FRIDAY Eduard Kindle (Liechtenstein) Gordon Pate (Scotland) Mika Peltola (Finland) Zoran Petrović (Serbia) Panagiotis Tsarouchas (Greece)	11 SATURDAY Pierre Dumarché (France) Umberto Gandini (Italy) 60 Viktoriya Marozava (Belarus) Kristiaan Van der Haegen (Belgium)	12 SUNDAY Antonio Jose Fernandes Cardoso (Portugal) Rodger Gifford (Wales) Valeriu Ionita (Romania) Neil Morrow (Northern Ireland)	13 MONDAY Marcin Borski (Poland) Edvinas Eimontas (Lithuania) Michael O'Brien (England) Paolo Piani (Italy) Giovanni Spitaleri (Italy)	14 TUESDAY Octavian Goga (Romania) 60	15 WEDNESDAY Georgios Bikas (Greece) Erol Ersoy (Turkey) Anders Hubinette (Sweden) Antonius van Eekelen (Netherlands)	16 THURSDAY
19 SUNDAY Elena Charina (Russia) Norman Darmanin (Malta) Demajo (Malta) Virgar Hvidbro (Faroe Islands) Lise Klaveness (Norway) Ana Minić (Serbia)	20 MONDAY Michael Argyrou (Cyprus) 60 Nenad Santrač (Serbia) Kejdi Tomorri (Albania) 40 Jean-Luc Veuthy (Switzerland)	21 TUESDAY Alexandru Burlac (Moldova) Vitor Pereira (Portugal) Martinus van den Bekerom (Netherlands) Tomislav Vlahović (Croatia)	22 WEDNESDAY Robert Breiter (Switzerland) Claudine Brohet (Belgium) Jan Damgaard (Denmark) Morgan Norman (Sweden) Volodymyr Petrov (Ukraine) David Pugh (England) İlker Yücesir (Turkey)	23 THURSDAY Mehmet Binnet (Turkey) Prune Rocipon (France) Roland Tis (Belgium) 70	24 FRIDAY Nebojša Ivković (Serbia) Sandor Piller (Hungary)	25 SATURDAY Nikolaos Bartzis (Greece) Salustia Chato Cipres (Andorra) Thomas Einwallner (Austria) Dany Ryser (Switzerland) Valentin Velikov (Bulgaria) Philippe Verbiest (Belgium)
28 TUESDAY Yuriy Zapisotskiy (Ukraine)	29 WEDNESDAY Gudmundur Ingi Jónsson (Iceland) Andrius Skerla (Lithuania)	30 THURSDAY Alain Sars (France)				

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

8 SUNDAY

Attila Abraham (Hungary)
Kris Bellon (Belgium)
Josep Lluís Vilaseca
Guasch (Spain) **90**

17 TUESDAY

Simeon Tsolakidis
 (Greece)

26 THURSDAY

Gitte Holm (Denmark)
Giulio Palermo (Italy)

9 MONDAY

Vladimir Aleshin (Russia)
Herbert Fandel
 (Germany)
Otar Giorgadze (Georgia)
Henk Kesler
 (Netherlands)
Alexis Ponnet (Belgium)
Lennard van Ruiven
 (Netherlands)

18 WEDNESDAY

Paul Elliott (England)
Marcello Nicchi (Italy)
Marina Tashchyan
 (Armenia)

27 FRIDAY

José Antonio Casajus
 (Spain)
Hrachya Ghambaryan
 (Armenia)
Onur Kalkavan (Turkey)
Armen Minasyan
 (Armenia) **50**
John Peacock
 (England)

8 WEDNESDAY

Jim Fleeting (Scotland)
Peter Hegyi (Hungary)
Raphael Landthaler
 (Austria)

17 FRIDAY

Denis Rogachev
 (Russia)
Charles Schaack
 (Luxembourg) **60**
Frances Smith
 (Republic of Ireland)

26 SUNDAY

Lucilio Batista
 (Portugal)
Laurent Georges
 (France)
Jan Pauly
 (Czech Republic)
Markus Strömbergsson
 (Sweden)
Yariv Teper (Israel)

9 THURSDAY

Jean-Pierre Cassagnes
 (France)
Ksenija Damjanović
 (Serbia)
Márton Esterházy
 (Hungary)
Ladislav Svoboda
 (Czech Republic)

18 SATURDAY

Alexander Remin
 (Belarus)
Oğuz Sarvan (Turkey)

27 MONDAY

Jan Carlsen
 (Denmark)
Frank Fontvielle
 (France)
Marina Sbardella
 (Italy)
Edgar Steinborn
 (Germany)

MARCH

Meetings

2 March, Amsterdam
 Executive Committee
 Finance Committee

3 March, Amsterdam
 44th Ordinary UEFA Congress
 UEFA Nations League: league
 phase draw

4 March, Amsterdam
 Governance and Compliance Committee

20 March, Nyon
 UEFA Champions League and UEFA
 Europa League: quarter-final
 and semi-final draws

Competitions

2–11 March
 UEFA Women's EURO 2021: qualifiers

3/4 March
 UEFA Youth League: round of 16

10/11 and 17/18 March
 UEFA Champions League: round of 16
 (return legs)

12 March
 UEFA Europa League: round of 16
 (first legs)

17/18 March
 UEFA Youth League: quarter-finals

19 March
 UEFA Europa League: round of 16
 (return legs)

24/25 March
 UEFA Women's Champions League:
 quarter-finals (first legs)

25–31 March
 2019–21 European Under-21
 Championship: qualifiers

26 March
 UEFA EURO 2020 play-offs: semi-finals

31 March
 UEFA EURO 2020 play-offs: finals

APRIL

Meetings

2 April, Sweden
 European Women's Under-17
 Championship: final draw

8 April, Tallinn
 European Under-17 Championship:
 final draw

22 April, Georgia
 European Women's Under-19
 Championship: final draw

22 April, Belfast
 European Under-19 Championship:
 final draw

23 April, Nyon
 Marketing Advisory Committee

29 April, Nyon
 Fair Play and Social Responsibility
 Committee

Competitions

1/2 April
 UEFA Women's Champions League:
 quarter-finals (return legs)

5–14 April
 UEFA Women's EURO 2021: qualifiers

6–15 April
 UEFA Futsal EURO 2022 and 2020 FIFA
 Futsal World Cup: qualifying round
 play-offs

7/8 April
 UEFA Champions League: quarter-finals
 (first legs)

9 April
 UEFA Europa League: quarter-finals
 (first legs)

14/15 April
 UEFA Champions League: quarter-finals
 (return legs)

16 April
 UEFA Europa League: quarter-finals
 (return legs)

17–20 April, Nyon
 UEFA Youth League: finals

24–26 April, Minsk
 UEFA Futsal Champions League:
 final round

25/26 April
 UEFA Women's Champions League:
 semi-finals (first legs)

28/29 April
 UEFA Champions League: semi-finals
 (first legs)

30 April
 UEFA Europa League: semi-finals
 (first legs)

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EQUAL GAME

