



News from member associations

ARMENIA



Visit by the UEFA CEO

On 3 April, UEFA chief executive Lars-Christer Olsson travelled to Yerevan to meet the president of the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA), Ruben Hayrapetyan, and the head of the FFA sports committee,



The UEFA Chief Executive was able to see for himself how much Armenians of all ages love football.

Ishkhan Zakaryan, before going on to meet other federation staff. Presenting the key areas of UEFA policy, Lars-Christer Olsson underlined the cooperation with national football associations of the former USSR, referring in particular to UEFA's assistance programmes and solidarity between national associations. He also answered questions about the club licensing system, and about the involvement of the national associations in UEFA committees and working groups.

In reply to questions concerning the situation of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the UEFA CEO indicated UEFA's readiness to send a group of officials to Armenia and Azerbaijan to analyse the situation and seek

a solution. UEFA hoped that these games could be played in the host countries, but was aware of the many problems relating to security.

After the meeting, Olsson visited the Matenadaran, one of the world's oldest libraries, where over 17,000 ancient manuscripts are stored. After the visit, our guest met the head of the Armenian Church, Garegin II, before moving on to the Parajanov museum.

The following day, the UEFA CEO opened a second mini-pitch in Yerevan, accompanied by the FFA president and the deputy mayor of Yerevan.

Under the HatTrick mini-pitch project, UEFA had already given the Armenian FA one pitch, which was inaugurated by UEFA vice-president Per Ravn Omdal in November 2004. A total of 20 pitches will be built in the capital and another 20 in the regions.

After the ceremony, Lars-Christer Olsson visited the headquarters of Banants to see an example of work being done at club level. Grass pitches have been relaid and an artificial pitch is almost finished. Reconstruction work has been carried out on an indoor hall, which will house another artificial surface. Our guest was also shown the hotel, training halls and dressing-rooms.

He then went on to visit the Nairi stadium, scheduled to be a venue for the European Under-17 Championship qualifying group matches in Armenia, and the Pyunik club, where extensive renovation work is under way.

The UEFA CEO also had a meeting with the Armenian prime minister, Andranik Margaryan, who expressed his appreciation of UEFA programmes implemented in Armenia and underlined the importance attached to football by the government. The prime minister gave an assurance that the Azerbaijan delegation would be well received and that security would be tight for the Armenia v. Azerbaijan EURO 2008 qualifier.

In a press conference the same day, Lars-Christer Olsson again referred to the matches to be played between Armenia and Azerbaijan. "We have decided to create a working group consisting of representatives from UEFA, Armenia and Azerbaijan

to discuss this matter and find the best way forward. The meeting will be in May and we will discuss all possible solutions. The top priority is, of course, security. UEFA would like the games to be played in the host countries and hopes that they will be," he said.

In reply to a question about whether he was satisfied with his visit to Armenia, he added, "It's my first visit to Armenia and it's very important for me. Apart from dealing with football matters, I have met the head of the Armenian Church and visited many cultural places. I welcome the prime minister's position on football development in the country. And who could forget the happy faces of the children at the inauguration of the mini-pitch? I feel positive about the development of Armenian football. It's important for me to be sure that UEFA funding is being put to good use."

Arayik Manukyan

BELGIUM



The "Open Stadium Fund"

The image of football has been increasingly tarnished in recent years by acts of violence, anti-social behaviour and expressions of racism which poison the atmosphere in the stadiums. Unfortunately this situation is not confined to our most popular national sport but extends to daily life in general. People everywhere are often plagued by feelings of unease and insecurity, which will continue to grow if nothing is done. So it is time to take action to restore the image of football and of society as a whole.

This is the context in which Els Van Weert, Secretary of State for Sustainable Development and Social Economy, presented the "Open Stadium Fund" in the auditorium of the Belgian FA on 25 April. All first and second division clubs across the country are being invited to tender projects





aimed at using the impact of football to achieve social objectives. The scheme is managed by the King Baudouin Foundation and chaired by Michel Preud'homme, member of the Belgian FA's executive and technical committees. Bids must be submitted to the Foundation by 15 August and must demonstrate the added value of the respective programmes in social, environmental, democratic and/or participatory terms. An independent panel will then evaluate the projects and select those they consider the best. The candidates will be informed of the outcome in early September and successful applicants will qualify for financial assistance.

As this initiative gets under way, there are high hopes for change, with the prospect of our clubs becoming socially committed enterprises which stand to gain from their new status. Indeed, their image will be enhanced and this will enable them to attract sponsors and supporters more easily, their security costs will be lower, etc. Now, the ball is in their court.

Pierre Cornez

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



NK Orasje win the cup

It has been a busy time in football recently, especially on the domestic front. The premier league stepped up a gear, with matches on both Saturday and Wednesday, a change of pace that the players accepted better than expected.

The domestic cup competition was also still in full swing. In the two-leg final, NK Orasje beat NK Siroki Brijeg after a goal-less first leg at the Pecara stadium and a 3-0 win in the second leg at the Goal stadium in Orasje. It was a double celebration for NK Orasje, as the club is also marking its tenth year of existence.

"This is a great success for our team. It wasn't easy. But we beat the new premier league champions and have won a place in the UEFA Cup," said Davor Mladina, head coach.

In the women's cup, ZNK SFK 2000 met ZFK Borac from Banja Luka in the final, played at the Grbavica stadium in Sarajevo. ZNK SFK 2000 won 2-0.

Indoors, the futsal cup was won by MFK Partizan from Sarajevo, who beat MFK Leotar from Trebinje 5-2 at the Skenderija hall.

The futsal league competition has also finished. Three teams took part in the final tournament, which took place in Bihac: MNK Seljak from Livno, MNK Partizan from Sarajevo and MNK Banja Luka.



Cup winners NK Orasje.

MNK Partizan emerged as champions, ahead of MNK Seljak and MFK Banja Luka.

In the youth sector, the Under-21s played a friendly in Modrica against Slovenia, which they won 1-0. The Under-18s, led by Nikola Nikic, did not do so well, losing three of their four recent matches, one against FYR Macedonia (2-0) and two against Croatia (3-0 and 4-1). In their second match against FYR Macedonia, they managed a goal-less draw.

The Under-16s met their counterparts from the same two countries, but with slightly better results, one win and one draw. They lost their first match against FYR Macedonia 2-0 but won the return match 2-1. Against Croatia, they managed a 1-1 draw to begin with, but then lost the second match 2-1.

These results are cause for concern for those responsible for youth football in Bosnia and Herzegovina; however, it was decided that only players from domestic clubs would be fielded for these matches.

Not to be left out, the senior national team play South Korea in Seoul and Iran in Teheran at the end of May in preparation for the EURO 2008 qualifiers.

Fuad Krvavac

CROATIA



Croatian football celebrates its deep roots

Spring has been a busy time in Croatian football in all respects. The greatest focus of attention has been preparations for the third consecutive participation of the Croatian national team in the World Cup. Amid this atmosphere of optimism for a successful performance by our national team, an ordinary general meeting has been held. The gathering was also an opportunity to put on an impressive presentation celebrating the history of Croatian football, 125 years since the first football arrived in the town of Zupanja from England, and 100 years since Zagreb-based club PNISK played their first match, which was against Hungarian club FTC in

Budapest. It is also 66 years since the first match of the Croatian national team, which played Switzerland in Zagreb on 2 April 1940, a match they won 4-0. The general meeting was attended by the only surviving participant from that match, Milan Antolkovic, an excellent international player in his day, not to mention a successful coach, long-standing president of the association of Croatian coaches and always a promoter of fair play in sport. Even today, at 91, his vitality still shows through. Milan Antolkovic received a very warm welcome from the participants, and Vlatko Markovic, president of the Croatian FA, presented him with a special national team shirt.

Just one month after that first senior national team match, Croatia's Under-18 team played their first match against their Hungarian counterparts. This shows that great attention has always been paid to youth in Croatian football. Returning to the present, we are grateful to UEFA for entrusting us with the organisation of an elite round mini-tournament in the 2005/06 European Under-19 Championship, when our team will be pitting their skills against Israel, Portugal and FYR Macedonia. The tournament is being played in the Zagreb region. To date, we have received nothing but praise for all the tournaments we have hosted.



Vlatko Markovic, president of the Croatian FA, presents a souvenir shirt to Milan Antolkovic.

At grassroots level, a new Veterans' Football Committee has been appointed. Veterans' football has a long tradition and huge following. The aim is to bring veterans football under the umbrella of the association and its regional organisations and make it an integral part of our grassroots activities and of UEFA's goals in this respect. Further good cooperation has been achieved with the Open Fun Football school, especially in terms of getting girls involved in football. This area is a priority concern for the association, with a view to accelerating the development of women's football.

Ante Pavlovic