



GERMANY
The referees at their mid-season meeting in Frankfurt.

BONGARTS



ENGLAND
Chairman Geoffrey Thompson.

THE FA



AUSTRIA
The centenary logo.

OFB

News from member associations



AUSTRIA ÖFB celebrates its centenary

The Austrian Football Association will be 100 years old on 18 March. To mark this milestone, the association is issuing a commemorative coin and stamp, a video and a 450-page "birthday book" of history and statistics.

The highlight of the celebrations will be a gala evening at the Vienna state opera house on 17 August, followed the next day by a friendly match between Austria and Germany at the Ernst Happel stadium.

On the field, the national team have a training camp in Florence from 29 February to 4 March, ahead of the first international of the year, an away match against Slovakia on 31 March, in Bratislava. The team's first home game is scheduled for 28 April, when Luxembourg travel to Innsbruck.

The Challenge 2008 youth development project is into its second year. This year, 11 courses are planned for tomorrow's potential national team players. Clear progress has already been made. Of the 70 players involved, who are split into two squads (16-19-year-olds and 19-24-year-olds), no fewer than 39 have already made it into the Bundesliga, and 23 of them are already regular first-team players. A further ten now play in the second division, while another seven are trying their luck abroad. The ÖFB's partners, the Federal Chancellory and the Bundesliga, have already promised their continued support.

Wolfgang Eichler



BELGIUM Referee exchange between Belgium and the Netherlands

For some years already, the Belgian and Luxembourg FAs have been cooperating in the form of regular referee exchanges, an experiment which has proved to be very successful. Then in December 2002, the Belgian Referees Committee and its Dutch counterpart met to set up a similar referee exchange programme. Agreement was reached very quickly.

In early 2003, four Dutch first division matches were refereed by Belgian referees, and four Belgian second and third division matches were taken charge of by Dutch referees.

In July 2003, a first evaluation was conducted, and the results exceeded all expectations! The clubs, the media and the observers were all enthusiastic and complimentary about the experience. As a result, in December 2003, steps were taken to move up a level and to organise exchanges at the level of the Dutch "Eredivisie" and Belgian first division in 2004. Three such exchanges are planned, in February, March and April. For the time being, they will be for middle-of-the-table matches, based on the need to proceed gradually. Belgian referee Johan Verbist has been appointed for the match on 8 February between Willem II and ADO, while Dutch referee Eric Braamhaar was in charge of the match between Beveren and Westerlo on 14 February.

The main objective of this initiative is, of course, to help our young referees make faster progress, since the international experience aids their character development, gives them an insight into football in another country and con-

fronts them with different mentalities. And there is no doubt that such experience is an asset when it comes to European appointments.

A UEFA working group is currently developing plans to apply this type of international exchanges on a wider scale.

François Vantomme



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Captain Mirsad Hibić leaves football

After Bosnia and Herzegovina's last match, against Denmark in the EURO 2004 qualifiers in Sarajevo (1-1), captain Mirsad Hibić announced his retirement from the national team. He has also left Spanish premier league Club Atlético de Madrid, where he was also captain.

In Madrid and Sarajevo, everybody is surprised by this decision. At his age (born on 11 October 1973), he could have played for several more years. But...

"I have been professional for 12 years. I feel that my body cannot handle hard pressure any more. In addition, I have been separated from my family and friends for almost all these years", he said.

Mirsad Hibić started his career with FK Celik in Zenica, and then played for NK Hajduk in Split, with whom he played in the UEFA Champions League. After that, he played in Spain for Sevilla FC and then Club Atlético de Madrid.



AUSTRIA Supporting the Challenge 2008 project: (left to right) Friedrich Stickler, Karl Schweitzer, Secretary of State for Sport, and Peter Westenhaler, member of the board of the Bundesliga.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
Captain Hibic is hanging up his boots.



FINLAND
Keith Armstrong has obtained the Pro licence.

He made his first official appearance for the Bosnia and Herzegovina national team at the Bilino Polje stadium in Zenica in April 1996 and went on to play in 36 international matches, matching Elvir Bolic's record. He also played for Bosnia and Herzegovina's Mediterranean representation in Montpellier in France and scored the first-ever goal of any Bosnia and Herzegovina national team.

Mirsad Hibic will officially say goodbye to the fans and take his leave of the national team in a friendly against Finland at the Bilino Polje stadium in Zenica on 28 April, on the same ground as where he began his career.

Fuad Kravac

TheFA ENGLAND



Visit to Africa

FA Chairman Geoff Thompson was a guest of the Confederation of African Football at its General Assembly in Tunis ahead of the 24th edition of the African Cup of Nations. The invitation came as a result of the increasingly close relationship that England enjoys with CAF through its assistance programmes. As The FA's relations with its partners

under the UEFA-CAF Meridian Project – Botswana, Malawi and Lesotho – enters its seventh year, 2004 will also see the delivery of two pan-continental workshops in Africa – Refereeing (to be held in Kenya) and Marketing (Cameroon).

"As far as I am concerned," said Thompson, *"it is a great honour to be invited to such a significant event in the African football calendar. I firmly believe that in order to enjoy a fruitful partnership, it is important to understand or at least have a first-hand and informed appreciation of Africa's issues so that the relatively modest contribution we are able to make to football in this huge continent is targeted, appropriate and of value to its development."*

The FA's International Development Programme is now active in every continent, assisting confederations and national associations with the development of their technical and administrative structures. Whilst its active participation in the UEFA-CAF Meridian Project is longstanding – a commitment also reflected in Geoff Thompson's appointment to the Meridian Board in 2002 – The FA recently added a historic agreement with the South American confederation (CONMEBOL) to its portfolio of continental cooperation agreements. The 2004 programme will kick off with FA Stadium Safety and Security Seminars held in conjunction with CONMEBOL in Ecuador and Chile in March.

Jane Bateman



FINLAND

Pro licence graduates

Many of the older guard of Finnish professional coaches, who qualified at the highest level of coach education prior to the institution of UEFA's Pro licence in Finland, graduated on 7 February after completing a refresher course to obtain the Pro licence.

The course was planned under the guidance of UEFA's Jira Project Panel. Lars Arnesson and Henk van de Wetering assisted and gave their professional input to finalise the details and standards of the course so that it met those required for the Pro licence. The group of professional coaches covered different themes, such as the Finnish national teams, coaching and youth coaching, and international football. Participants also visited clubs in England, Italy and Spain. The FA of Finland's Head of Coaching, Jyrki Heliskoski, hails the experience gained.



GERMANY

Referees positive about the season so far

The 44 referees who officiate in the Bundesliga and Second Bundesliga met in Frankfurt at the end of January for their regular mid-season assembly. The meeting is an opportunity to review the current season so far. At the midway point this season, the number of expulsions had risen to 27, compared with 16 at the same time last year. Volker Roth, Chairman of the DFB's Referees Committee, defended the referees' tough stance: *"In some cases, such decisions are, of course, questionable, but I think that our referees have taken the right decisions for the most part."*

The aim of the mid-season meeting was to further improve the performance of the German referees. To this effect, video analyses are used, as a way to optimise uniformity of decisions. A focal point in this respect was passive offside.

The introduction of a fourth official was judged to have been very positive. *"The fourth official, by his presence alone, has a calming effect,"* said FIFA referee Markus Merk, thereby giving a clear vote in favour of referee quartets. National team head coach Rudi Völler, attending the two-day meeting as a guest, declared the referees to be of a *"very high standard"*. He welcomed UEFA's proposal to organise referee exchanges. Regarding the frequency of such exchanges, Volker Roth, father of this idea, said: *"We would like to be able to make use of this possibility two or three times a season."*

Niels Barnhofer



PHOTO NEWS

BELGIUM
A foreign assignment for Johan Verbist.