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Host countries

China, Canada, Scotland, Italy, Japan, Ecuador, Egypt, New Zealand, Trinidad & Tobago, Finland, Peru and Korea—the FIFA U-17 World Cup has been staged by every confederation.

Format

The format of the teenage tournament has always aimed to give all confederations an equal chance, especially in this developing age group. In order to give associations from each confederation the opportunity to flex their muscles against their contemporaries from all corners of the globe, three teams from each confederation and one from Oceania have been allowed to qualify. For 2007, the number of contenders was increased from 16 to 24: AFC 4 (plus 1 additional slot for hosts Korea), CAF 4, CONCACAF 4 (plus 1 extra slot as the winning confederation of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Peru 2005), CONMEBOL 4, UEFA 5, OFC 1.

From 1985 to 1993, matches were played over two 40-minute halves (extra time was ten minutes each way). In Ecuador in 1995, the standard duration of matches was increased to the traditional format of 45 minutes per half (with 15 minutes per half in extra time).

History

A glance over recent years serves to illustrate how the organisers of the past eleven championships endowed each one with an individual flavour.

KOREA 2007: The tournament has now been held three times on Asian soil and, having scaled the heights at China 1985 and Japan 1993, Nigeria leave the continent with their third FIFA U-17 World Cup title. Their opponents Spain have now reached three finals and tasted defeat in every single one. The play-off for third place was also between a European team and an African team, with Germany winning against Ghana. This is the first time that 24 teams have come together, and a first for 7 of them: Belgium, England, Haiti, Honduras, Syria, Tajikistan and Togo.

PERU 2005: Triumphant Mexico sealed their first FIFA world championship title at youth level in their long footballing history, defeating highly-fancied Brazil by a clear-cut 3-0 scoreline in the final. For the South Americans, the result represented a first final defeat since a 3-2 reverse against Ghana at the 1995 tournament in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

FINLAND 2003: Brazil triumphed 1-0 over courageous Spain in Helsinki's Töölö stadium to become world champions for the third time. Though the eventful final produced the strike that equalled the all-time record for most goals at a single FIFA U-17 World Championship (117, Egypt ,97), the match did not live up to the raucous goalscoring standards set at the 2003 edition of the tournament. As always, the championship showcased a wealth of young talent, with USA's remarkable 14-year-old Freddy Adu leaving a lasting impression.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO 2001: France won their first FIFA U-17 World Championship in comprehensive fashion, leading throughout the entire tournament with the lethal strike partnership of Sinama Pongolle and Le Tallec. Sinama Pongolle became the all-time top scorer in a U-17 championship with nine goals.

NEW ZEALAND 1999: On a day when football in New Zealand set a record for crowd attendance, Brazil edged out Australia 8-7 in a penalty shoot-out to retain the FIFA U-17 World Championship crown. A crowd of 22,859 spectators crammed the stadium to watch. The Aussies, who had made it to their first ever final of a FIFA tournament, came close to taking the shine off Brazil with a couple of excellent goalscoring chances.

EGYPT 1997: Brazil became the first South American team to win the U-17 World Championship and to add the FIFA/JVC Cup to its unparalleled list of international honours. In a replay of the 1995 U-17 final in Ecuador, Brazil encountered Ghana but this time the roles were reversed. While two years earlier the Africans had had the upper hand, winning 3-2 in the final, this time it was Brazil who came out on top, coming from a goal behind to snatch a dramatic victory from the holders. Africa became the only continent to ensure all three teams made it to the last eight.

ECUADOR 1995: Ghana's youngsters made it three in a row for Africa as they swept to a thrilling 3-2 victory against Brazil in the final of the 1995 World Championship in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

JAPAN 1993: In autumn 1993 (shortly after the triumphant start of the J.League), Japan proved itself to be a perfect and, above all, technologically superb organiser. Nigeria beat Ghana 2-1 in the final, setting new standards in technique and tactics for this age category.

ITALY 1991: The Italian association pulled off a feat of organisational prowess at very short notice when it managed to arrange yet another "Italian summer". A series of unforgettable matches at six venues scattered all over Tuscany, culminating in a technically superior, irresistible winner from Ghana was the mark of this first U-17 World Championship.

SCOTLAND 1989: This was the turn of the first European country, namely Scotland, with its long and sophisticated tradition in professional football, to host this FIFA championship. At the memorable final in Glasgow's Hampden Park, a crowd of more than 50,000 watched transfixed as the home team, two goals up at half-time, allowed Saudi Arabia to creep up on them and beat them by a hair's breadth on penalties after a goalless extra time.

CANADA 1987: The sprawling cities of Toronto and Montreal and the picturesque provincial venues of St John (New Brunswick) and St John's (Newfoundland) provided the backdrop to the 2nd FIFA Under-16 World Championship in Canada in 1987. Nigeria were on the verge of repeating their 1985 triumph in a thrilling final only to be downed by the USSR in the penalty shoot-out.

CHINA PR 1985: The inaugural FIFA under-16 competition in 1985, the first international tournament ever to be held in China PR, witnessed stadiums filled to capacity, while the Workers' Stadium in Beijing, with a capacity of 80,000, was packed to the rafters no fewer than four times. African supremacy, which was to leave its mark on championships in the ensuing years, began to assert itself in China PR, with Nigeria the winners and Guinea semi-finalists.

General

A total of 67 associations have taken part in the U-17 World Cup to date and 1993 even saw the participation of a united RCS (Czechs and Slovaks) team. Of the 30 associations that have qualified just once for the tournament, RCS, Germany DR, Côte d'Ivoire, Korea DPR, Netherlands, Scotland, Soviet Union, Turkey, Hungary, England, Syria and Tajikistan made it to the second round, with England making it to the quarter finals in 2007. In 2005, the Netherlands and Turkey met in the match for third place, with the Dutch running out 2-1 winners.

With three titles each in the under-17 age group, Brazil and Nigeria lead the all-time ranking, followed by Ghana with two wins. Brazil have made it to the final on five occasions (1995 -1999, 2003 and 2005), winning in 1997, 1999 and 2003. Nigeria have also taken part in five finals (1985, 1987, 1993, 2001 and 2007), winning in 1985, 1993 and 2007. Ghana reached the final four times in a row (1991 - 1997), winning twice in 1991 and 1995. The Oceanian confederation has been represented once in a U-17 World Cup final: in 1999, Australia lost 7-8 to Brazil in a penalty shoot-out.

As for the number of times that teams have taken part, the USA (12x) are evergreens. They lead Brazil (11x), Australia (10x) and Argentina (9x), all of whom are a step ahead of the other participants.

Matches

After the FIFA World Cup™ and the FIFA U-20 World Cup, the FIFA U-17 World Cup is the third oldest FIFA competition. Up until 2005, the tournament was played with 16 teams and as of the 2007 tournament with 24 teams.

Since the inaugural tournament in China PR, 404 matches have been hosted under the auspices of the U-17 World Cup. Brazil have contested the most matches (55), followed by the USA (44), Ghana and Argentina (43). The tournament's most successful teams are Brazil (35 wins, 9 draws, 11 defeats) and Nigeria (29 wins, 9 draws, 4 losses).

All in all, 11 different teams have qualified for the 12 finals. A team from every confederation, has reached the semi-finals, indicating a considerably level playing field in this age group.

In 1987, 1989, 1999 and 2007 the final was decided on penalties. All other finals were decided in regular time.

Teams from the same confederation have met in the final only once, with Ghana playing Nigeria in the 1993 final.

Brazil reached the final three times in a row (1995 - 1999) and are still the only team to successfully defend their title (1999).

Goals

The most goals scored in a tournament was in Korea 2007 (165 goals with an average of 3.17 per match) which is obvious due to the increase in the number of matches. Egypt 1997 and Finland 2003 both have a record of 117 goals with the highest average of 3.66 goals per match, ahead of Peru 2005 (111 goals, 3.47 per match), Japan 1993 (107 goals, 3.34 per match) and Trinidad and Tobago 2001 (102 goals, 3.19 per match).

The tournament's top goalscorer to date is France's Florent Pongolle with nine goals in four matches (U-17 World Championship 2001), ahead of Marcel Witeczek from Germany FR, who scored eight goals in three games (U-16 World Championship 1985). In third place are David (Spain), who scored seven goals in three matches during the 1997 tournament, Ishmael Addo (Ghana), who scored seven in four matches in 1999 and Macauley Chrisantus (Nigeria) who scored 7 goals in 7 matches. Only Chrisantus and Pongolle went on to win the title with their respective team-mates. Witeczek's German team lost in the final.

Pongolle and Witeczek both notched up two hat-tricks in a FIFA U-16/U-17 tournament (Pongolle in 2001 against Japan and the USA; Witeczek in 1985 against China PR and Brazil). David (Spain) tallied four goals in one match when his team defeated New Zealand 13-0.

In a historical overview, Brazil have scored a total of 124 goals in the FIFA U-17 World Cup (at an average of 2.25 per match). In second and third place are Ghana with 86 (2.00) and Nigeria with 83 (1.98 per match). The highest goal average nonetheless belongs to Russia (3.50) who scored 21 goals in 6 matches at their only appearance at the U-17 World Cup. They took the trophy home from Canada in 1987, with Nikiforov and Arutyunian leading them to victory.

The fastest goal in the history of the FIFA U-17 World Cup was scored after just 9 seconds by Brazil's Fabinho in their opening match against New Zealand in 2007. Two of the most famous players in the list of fastest goalscorers are certainly Nwankwo Kanu, who opened Nigeria's 8-0 victory over Canada in the first minute of the match, and Wilson Oruma, who repeated the trick by scoring first in Nigeria's 2-1 victory over Japan. Sergei Arutyunian (URS, 1987), Bel (BRA, 1995) and Celso (BRA, 2005) complete the list of first-minute goalscorers.

The world champions have managed to crown one of their own as top goalscorer on four occasions: Nigeria's Wilson Oruma in 1993, Florent Pongolle for France in 2001, Mexico's Carlos Vela in 2005 and Macauley Chrisantus of Nigeria in 2007.

The most goal-laden match in the U-17 World Cup was held in Ismailia (Egypt) in 1997, with Spain inflicting maximum damage by crushing New Zealand 13-0. However, other than sealing the Golden Shoe for David, the shower of goals reaped a meagre harvest: Spain were beaten in the semi-finals by eventual runners-up Ghana.

Players, coaches, referees, crowds

From all the U-17 events, 67 players went on to participate in the FIFA World Cup™. Two also played in a FIFA World Cup™ final and came out on top: Frenchman Emmanuel Petit in 1998 (France v. Brazil) and Brazil's Ronaldinho in 2002 (Germany v. Brazil). Petit took part in the U-16 World Championship in 1987 and Ronaldinho triumphed in the 1997 final. Just one former U-17 player, Petit, has scored in a FIFA World Cup™ final (France v. Brazil 1998).

The youngest ever player is Nigerian Peter Ogaba, who played in the FIFA U-16 World Championship in 1987 at the tender age of 12 years and 10 months.

Juan Santisteban coached Spain on seven different occasions, but did not finish higher than second (1991, 2003 and 2007). Nigeria's Sebastian Brodrick-Imasuen coached teams at four different tournaments and won in 1985. Roy Rees (USA) and Les Scheinflug (AUS) also coached teams at four different tournaments but failed to win a title.

Alongside the numerous outfield players who went on to further fame and fortune are the goalkeepers who have since claimed their place in the football hall of fame: Al Deayea (KSA), Bosnich (AUS), Buffon (ITA) and Iker Casillas (ESP). They all bear witness to the importance of the tournament for young goalkeepers.

Several U-17 World Cup coaches went on to bring their experience to bear in FIFA World Cup™ matches. Craig Brown, Scotland (U-17 1989 and World Cup 1998), Victor Pua, Uruguay (U-17 1999 and World Cup 2002) and Rene Simoes, Brazil (U-17 2001 with Trinidad & Tobago and World Cup 1998 with Jamaica) are the only ones to have also coached at the FIFA World Cup™.

The U-17 World Cup has also served as a springboard for referees, some of whom officiated at important matches during subsequent FIFA World Cup™ competitions – Said Belqola from Morocco was the first African referee appointed for a World Cup final (1998, France v. Brazil; he sadly passed away after a long illness in June 2002); South African Achmat Salie also officiated in this final as an assistant referee. England's Philip Sharp was also an assistant for the Germany v. Brazil final in 2002. The honour of participating in a final was also bestowed upon Costa Rican assistant referee Berny Ulloa Morera when he officiated Argentina v. FR Germany in 1986.

The highest accumulative audience total was registered in China PR in 1985 (1,231,000), at an average of 38,469 spectators per match. On six occasions, 80,000 people have formed the biggest crowd at a U-17 World Cup match; five times in China PR in 1985 and 1997 in Egypt for the Egypt v. Germany match.