Cuba
Football’s Wind of Change

Gunter Netzer
Real Madrid is a Good Choice for Odegaard

Northern Ireland
On the Right Track

Yaya Toure, Africa Cup of Nations

Stars on Show
Africa Cup of Nations
The Africa Cup of Nations final takes place in Equatorial Guinea on 8 February, ending a tournament shaped by strong performances from European stars. Elio Stamm visited the capital Malabo to report on the matches being played there and provide an insight into a city in transition where football is currently the only thing on people’s minds.

“Young players need to be nurtured”
In an interview with The FIFA Weekly, Norway technical director Jan Age Fjortoft discusses how football is developing in his country and the prospect of a youthful Norway side making it to the European Championship finals.

Sepp Blatter
After Qatar was represented at the Men’s Handball World Championship by a team primarily composed of recently naturalised players, the FIFA President makes his position clear: "This kind of scenario would not be possible in football. FIFA does not allow it."

Gunter Netzer
Our regular columnist considers the issue of players switching teams at a young age and explains why there is nothing wrong with Martin Odegaard’s recent move to Real Madrid.

Bayern in crisis
The champions have made a shaky start on their return to league football.

Stars on show
Our cover image, taken in 2012, depicts Côte d’Ivoire captain Yaya Toure.

John Wright

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- Match 27: Iran 🇮🇷 vs. Iraq 🇮🇶 3-3 (6-7) wop
- Match 28: Japan 🇯🇵 vs. UAE 🇦🇪 1-1 (4-5) wop

**Semi-finals · 26-27 January**
- Match 29: Korea Republic 🇰🇷 vs. Iraq 🇮🇶 2-0
- Match 30: Australia 🇦🇺 vs. UAE 🇦🇪 2-0

**3rd/4th Place Play-off · 30 January**
- Match 31: Iraq 🇮🇶 vs. UAE 🇦🇪 2-3

**Final · 31 January**
- Match 32: Korea Republic 🇰🇷 vs. Australia 🇦🇺 1-2 aet

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**Anja Mittag**
The German international has rediscovered the joy of football in Sweden.

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**Morocco**
The championship’s top eight sides are separated by just six points.

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16 ``` ```

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37 ``` ```
Football is a brotherhood. It’s peace.

Oscar Arias
Nobel Peace Laureate
On course

The 2015 Africa Cup of Nations comes to an end on Sunday. “The first fans start pushing through the turnstiles three hours before kick-off,” reports our staff writer Elio Stamm from Malabo, the capital city of host nation Equatorial Guinea. His feature begins on page 6.

With Cuba planning to allow footballers to move abroad legally, the knock-on effects for both the national team and the quality of youngsters playing in the domestic championship are likely to be positive. The centenary campaign of the Campeonato Nacional de Futbol de Cuba kicked off a few days ago, and we hear from those involved on page 24.

At this year’s Men’s Handball World Championship in Qatar, the hosts were represented by a team largely comprising recently naturalised players. In his weekly column on page 23, FIFA President Blatter explains: “The practice did not contravene International Handball Federation regulations, but it did contradict the spirit of a national team. This kind of scenario would not be possible in football.”

Perikles Monioudis
In the jungle
A view of Malabo,
Equatorial Guinea’s capital.
The long road to success

Equatorial Guinea’s capital Malabo is undergoing drastic transformation, with entire districts springing up almost overnight. Amid all the change the city’s love of football remains undiminished.

Elio Stamm (text) and Issouf Sanogo (images), Malabo
AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Small but atmospheric
The stadium in Malabo can seat 15,000 people.

Excited but peaceful
Fans queue for three hours before kick-off.
arely are cause and effect more closely connected than in Malabo. The first thing you notice on the approach to landing in Equatorial Guinea's capital city is a huge gas refinery. Its many chimneys reach towards the heavens, each emitting a small flame of exhaust gas that illuminates the night sky like a flare.

The three-lane toll motorway that connects the airport with the city centre winds its way between office blocks, hotels, banks and apartment complexes. Although these imposing edifices are strung out so as not to jostle for attention on the skyline, their facades still seem to compete to see which one boasts most glass, surprising angles and eye-catching colours. It is an architect's paradise where the end result matters more than the cost involved in achieving it. The official name of this impressive new district is Malabo II – an area that has grown from nothing in less than a decade.

**Oil find triggers expansion**

If the apartment blocks were higher and the hills in the distance not covered with jungle, you would be forgiven for thinking you had arrived in Dubai. Twenty years ago, Equatorial Guinea and its inhabitants – numbering fewer than one million – were not only one of the smallest nations in Africa but also one of its poorest. But that was before the discovery of gas and oil so pure it scarcely required processing. Between 1995 and 2003, the country's annual gross domestic product rose from $371 to $24,036. Although this is a fantastic figure for Africa, it is merely an average; wealth is by no means evenly distributed here. The country ranks fairly low on the UN's Human Development Index, which takes into account a nation's life expectancy, although reasonable progress means that 94 per cent of the population can read and write. Taxi driver Benjamin Abeso Mongo wears RayBan sunglasses and a smart beige sweatshirt, but his Toyota is at odds with the rapid pace of development evident across the city. Abeso has been forced to start his car with a screwdriver since the ignition key broke.

Led by President Teodore Obiang since 1979, the country has also invested heavily in its sporting infrastructure. Its two most modern stadiums are located in Malabo, located on Bioko Island near Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea's largest city Bata, situated on the nation's mainland. The construction of these arenas enabled the country to both host the Africa Cup of Nations in 2012 with neighbours Gabon and step up again three months ago when Morocco withdrew as tournament hosts for fear of the Ebola virus. Further stadiums in Ebebiyin and Mongomo that were not used three years ago were also whipped into shape in record time. All this means that taxi driver Abeso is currently able to chauffeur football fans from across Africa using Malabo's new transportation network.

**Merchandise – and fans – from across Africa**

Saturday means matchday in Malabo, with Côte d'Ivoire scheduled to take on Mali before Cameroon face West African hopefuls Guinea. Although the games do not kick off until the evening, by lunchtime dozens of fans are already strolling through streets separated from the Nuevo Estadio de Malabo by a roundabout with a three-dimensional football at its heart. At first glance, it is difficult to tell exactly who is supporting which team, as the national flags of Mali, Cameroon and Guinea all contain green, yellow and red. Only the orange-clad supporters of the Elephants from Côte d'Ivoire are visible from afar.

With the Africa Cup of Nations in full swing, the street traders are also offering fan merchandise. Although Leboux Tebadoueu usually sells metal tubing, his most popular items for sale are currently Mali and Cameroon shirts. “The Equatorial Guinea fans are all in Bata, where our team are playing their matches,” the trader explains almost apologetically. He neglects to mention the other reason for the roaring trade in foreign shirts: many migrant workers live in Malabo to assist with the huge amount of construction still underway, including plenty from the four countries competing for points in the capital.

The pan-African nature of Malabo is also apparent among Tebadoueu's fellow traders. Mini flags are available for purchase at the wooden shack plastered in home-burned DVDs run by Fabrice Armel Gondia, a computer scientist from the Central African Republic, while anyone wishing to top up the credit on their mobile phone is advised to visit the stall of a young man from Chad.

These migrant workers also help to ensure that the stadium is almost full for each match. While ticket prices are affordable for anyone living in Equatorial Guinea, flights across Africa are far more expensive. What's more, many visitors have to visit an embassy to obtain the visa necessary to make the trip. Nevertheless, there are plenty of visiting supporters in evidence. In the lobbies of the city's main hotel chains, the usual ranks of busy businessmen in black suits have been swelled by other middle-aged men in colourful football shirts, embroiled in lively discussions about offside decisions.

**Feverish anticipation before kick-off**

The first fans stream through the turnstiles a full three hours before kick-off. The stadium in Malabo forms part of a huge sports complex with a multi-purpose sports hall, swimming arena and association hotel where officials and international journalists are staying during the tournament. Although the arena only has 15,000 seats, the impressive roof construction makes it look much larger from the outside.

Anyone who has attended a football tournament in sub-Saharan Africa can attest to the creativity and enthusiasm of the region's fans,
AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

A small corner of Cameroon
Supporters dance before their group match against Guinea.

Ebola screening
A Malian fan has his temperature checked at the stadium.
with their brightly painted torsos, masks, hats, inflatable giant hands from the official sponsors and plastic vuvuzelas making them a sight to behold. One young man has glued his compact camera to a cardboard structure to make it look like a television camera, with a lens fashioned from a plastic bottle.

Singing and dancing, the hordes of fans march across the sprawling sports complex to various turnstiles manned by black-clad police officers in full protective gear. One after another, the spectators push their way through the gates, their eyes fixed on the steps leading up into the stands, their right foot already rising in anticipation of that first step. But before they can rush to find their seats, a hand is placed gently yet deliberately on their shoulders. “Ebola checks first, please.”

The hand in question belongs to Christine Bruel. Dressed in the white t-shirt of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the French doctor has been sent to Malabo by her government to oversee Ebola prevention at each match together with 30 colleagues from Cuba. Each traveller arriving in Equatorial Guinea’s capital city has already had their temperature taken upon arrival at the airport, and now all stadium visitors are undergoing the same process.

The fan Bruel stopped is wearing the yellow shirt of Mali. With a wave, she calls the tall, slim man over and, while wearing protective gloves, carefully touches the fan’s chin with her left hand while holding a thermometer against his temple. The young man closes his eyes tightly and furrows his eyebrows. “Although it looks like a gun, it doesn’t hurt,” Bruel laughs before letting the Malian go.

An amicable atmosphere
The checks seek to identify anyone with a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher, the French doctor explains. “That said, a raised temperature doesn’t automatically mean the fan shouldn’t watch the match.” Any such spectators are first examined more closely and questioned, but are not let into the arena if they have visited one of the countries most at risk from the disease in the past 21 days. After their temperature has been taken, each spectator must hold out their hands for a squeeze of hand sanitiser before making their way to their seats.

The next five hours pass in a blur of singing, dancing, trepidation and celebration. As the fans have bought tickets for both matches, the stadium resembles a colourful cauldron. The atmosphere is a friendly one, but although everyone goes home satisfied, nobody is euphoric. Both games end 1-1, by far the most common scoreline of this Africa Cup of Nations so far. Equatorial Guinea is the only former Spanish colony in Africa. As a result, Spanish remains the country’s official language even though the government has since endowed French and Portuguese with the same status. Nevertheless, there is one area in which Spain has had a lasting impact on Equatorial Guinea: the spirit shown by its football aficionados.

El Clasico beside the refinery
This passion becomes clear on Sunday morning when visiting the refinery near the airport,
Stars and staying power carry Elephants to final

Led by superstar Yaya Toure, Côte d’Ivoire’s golden generation now have one final opportunity to be crowned African champions.

It is said that quality will always prevail in the end, and that has certainly been the case for Côte d’Ivoire’s impressive array of stars at this year’s Africa Cup of Nations in Equatorial Guinea. In their quarter-final against tournament favourites Algeria – the strongest of the African sides at last summer’s World Cup – Manchester City striker Wilfried Bony scored two headers while new club team-mate and four-time African Footballer of the Year Yaya Toure added another from a free-kick. The reward for this display was a semi-final against DR Congo, where Bony provided two assists in a 3-1 win. Toure fired in a magnificent solo effort to open the scoring, with Gervinho later adding a noteworthy curling shot to make it 2-1.

Sunday’s final will be the third in six attempts at the African showpiece for the men in orange, and could be the last chance for Côte d’Ivoire’s golden generation to ascend the throne after two previous defeats. Goalscoring legend Didier Drogba retired from the national team after the World Cup, while midfield powerhouse Yaya Toure is now 31 years old.

Europe-based players add a touch of class

The Ivorians can head into the final with optimism (the second finalist has not been determined at the time of writing – see match schedule). They have stood firm in a tournament offering not only the highest standard of football but also an extremely evenly matched field of competitors. Hardly a group stage game was settled by more than one goal, while Côte d’Ivoire themselves had to muster all their experience to gain the upper hand after falling behind in both of their first two group matches. If the Elephants had not denied the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon and their German coach Volker Finke a late equaliser in their group stage encounter, all four teams in Group D would have been on level terms after ending all their matches 1-1, prompting the drawing of lots to determine which would progress to the knockout rounds. As it was, ‘only’ Guinea and Mali had to settle their stalemate this way, with Mali Football Federation president Boubacar Diarra pulling the dreaded third-place ball from the pot.

The high quality of this tournament was to be expected, with more than half the players involved plying their trade for European clubs. But what is particularly remarkable is that numerous individuals and teams delivered impressive performances despite having little or no previous experience on the international stage. For instance, not a single player in Congo’s squad had featured at an Africa Cup of Nations before.

Equatorial Guinea spring the biggest shock of all

Nevertheless, Equatorial Guinea have been the competition’s surprise package. Despite only qualifying by taking the tournament reins from Morocco, the host nation made a sensational run to the semi-final, thanks not only to the goals of former Real Madrid player Javier Balboa and a controversial late penalty in the quarter-final against Tunisia, but also to the exceptional reflexes of goalkeeper Felipe Ovono. The 21-year-old plays for Deportivo Mongomo in his homeland, which cannot even boast an organised professional league.

Ovono’s example shows that the Africa Cup of Nations is home not only to the stars of today but is also the place where the stars of tomorrow are born.

_Elio Stamm, Malabo_
where gas from deposits under the Atlantic Ocean is converted into liquefied natural gas and methanol. Entry is denied to anyone lacking the required authorisation, but an amateur match – anybody searching for a fully professional league in Equatorial Guinea would be left disappointed – between two domestic sides is taking place on the pitch next to this facility. The surface is uneven and dry as dust, the goalposts are bent out of shape. Goal-line technology was on hand to remove doubt at the World Cup in Brazil, but there is not even a net to be found here. Although many take to the field in sandals, the young men here all have one thing in common – they are all decked out in brand new football shirts. Half of the players wear the white of Real Madrid, the other half the red and blue of Barcelona. They may have no referee, but these footballers play out their own version of El Clasico with all the emotion and steely resolve of the original against the backdrop of the flaming refinery towers.

After a brief drive back along the wide avenues of Malabo II, with its expansive roundabouts adorned with elaborate fountains and monuments, the historical city centre soon comes into view. As all business and markets are closed on a Sunday, few pedestrians can be found ambling around Independence Square and its cathedral, currently under renovation. Nevertheless, the city centre abounds with life when compared with Malabo II and the developments on the other, eastern side of the city.

Grand plans and small pleasures
If Malabo II was primarily built for the future, with traffic as calm as a quiet neighbourhood road elsewhere, the route east of the capital to Sipipo is another matter entirely. It is possible to drive along the ten-kilometre-long motorway for minutes at a time without seeing another car. Although this is hardly a wonder considering that hardly anything has yet been completed around here, it is already evident that developers are aiming even higher this time around. The proof is lined up along the main road: a white sandy beach, the luxury Sofitel hotel currently playing host to the Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea teams, even a huge shopping centre. But the centrepiece of this new district is a gigantic conference venue where Africa’s powers regularly meet for summits. Fifty-two identical red villas along the street – one for each African country – even provide accommodation for the continent’s heads of state. It is quite an impressive development for a place that will soon lose its capital status to Oyala, a planned city about to be built in the depths of the jungle on the mainland. But that is still a distant prospect; what matters in Malabo right now is football. On Sunday evening, the host nation are playing their decisive group match against major neighbours and rivals Gabon. As the derby is taking place in Bata, fans in the capital’s old town gather around television sets instead. The ‘Baby’ sports bar has installed a screen specifically for the occasion on their front terrace, where a hundred-strong crowd drink Spanish beer, nervously watch the goalless first half and listen intently to the accompanying commentary – broadcast in French because the picture quality is better on that channel.

On the other side of the street, Nigerian Esther Toca runs a small kiosk where she has also set up a television to mark the Africa Cup of Nations. It might only be an old model placed on empty beer crates, but it has still attracted a lively crowd. Balanced on plastic stools outside her wooden shack, the assembled fans cry out each time a goalscoring opportunity is missed. Toca repeatedly hurries in and out selling chewing gum and cigarettes to the skittish supporters. Equatorial Guinea break the deadlock in the second half, ultimately winning 2-0 to cause a sensation and send Gabon out of the competition. The result sparks delirium and gridlock alike, both in the stands in Bata and on the streets in the centre of Malabo. It is a joyful noise in a city full of life.

None of this is apparent when standing on one of the new pedestrian crossings over the motorway in Malabo II. The impressive modern buildings reach proudly into the night skies, illuminated by spotlights in a range of different colours. Six lanes of highway are stretched out beneath them – but they are completely empty. All that can be heard in the distance is the faint, low hum of the last car disappearing beyond the asphalt horizon.
open happiness

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champions. Rarely had the side from Lower Saxony - a wholly owned subsidiary of the Volkswagen Group - earned as many plaudits throughout Germany as they did on 30 January, and not only because of their performance during the 90 minutes. Before the match, both sets of players and fans paid their last respects to former Wolfsburg midfielder Junior Malanda, who tragically died in a car crash earlier last month.

In 2013 and 2014, Bayern did not lose a single league match when they had not already won the Bundesliga title. The last time they tasted defeat without having been crowned champions beforehand was in October 2012, when they slumped to a 2-1 defeat at home to Bayer Leverkusen. Ever since Pep Guardiola’s appointment as head coach, there had been a collective belief throughout Germany that the Catalan tactician had an answer for everything Bayern’s domestic opponents were capable of throwing at them.

A little bit of the Bavarians’ all-encompassing self-confidence seems to have rubbed off on Wolfsburg, and about time too. Bayern had won all but three of their 17 league matches during the first half of the campaign, drawing the others, and looked streets ahead of their domestic competitors. The fact that the most intriguing battle at the top of the Bundesliga, one of the best three leagues in the world, has become the fight for second place is hardly the most compelling of sales pitches for the league of the world champions. Though the dominance of the Bavarians, who still hold a substantial lead over their rivals, is likely to continue, Wolfsburg at least managed to lay out a blueprint of how to beat the best team in the country, giving their Bundesliga brethren something to aspire to.

The discovery that the Munich juggernaut does not always run smoothly can only be good for the Bundesliga and should not prove too damaging to Bayern’s ambitions. Even they can’t be switched on at the touch of a button - a comforting thought, perhaps, for their domestic rivals.

Roland Zorn is a Frankfurt-based football expert.

They had been hailed as unbeatable and seemed far too strong for their Bundesliga rivals, but Bayern Munich’s shortcomings were laid bare for the whole world to see in their first league match after the winter break. Indeed, the Bavarians’ 4-1 defeat at second-place VfL Wolfsburg, which was followed by an underwhelming 1-1 draw at home to Schalke 04, was reminiscent of the 4-0 capitulation against Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals the previous season.

Like Real, Wolfsburg ruthlessly exploited Bayern’s vulnerability on the counter-attack, breaking with pace and verve to capitalise on a bad day at the office for the defending
Morocco: Botola Pro

Promise of a grandstand finish

Mark Gleeson is a Cape Town-based journalist and football commentator.

For the last two seasons, winning Morocco’s Botola Pro championship has come with a massive incentive – a place in the field for the end of year Club World Cup. As hosts of the last two editions, Morocco’s league winners have had a berth in the field for the annual gathering of the continental champions.

But while Raja Casablanca made full use of the opportunity to emerge surprise runners-up in 2013, last December’s early exit for Moghreb Tetouan, on penalties against Auckland City, proved a major disappointment. This year the Club World Cup will be played away from Morocco, which would presuppose that a little of the edge has been taken off the championship chase in the north African country.

Hardly! Instead, it remains as competitive as ever and, with just over half the season completed, only six points separate the top eight clubs in the standings, holding out the promise of a grandstand finish. The traditional rivalry between Raja and Wydad Casablanca has been rekindled, with Wydad’s lead at the top of the standings cut to two points as they were held to a draw at the weekend while Raja won away.

Wydad have 30 points to 28 for Raja, who are equal on points and goal difference but have scored more goals than third placed Tetouan. But clubs like Kawkab Marrakesh, who last won a title 23 years ago, FUS Rabat, who have never been champions, and Olympique Khouribga, champions in 2007, are also up among the frontrunners on 27 points.

Wydad have lost only once this season and proven the most steady although three draws in their last four outings is not the kind of consistency they seek. Their coach John Toshack says all teams can expect a slump at some point of the campaign, “given the competitiveness of most teams”.

“The level of championship is very interesting, exciting. I did not know anything about it before but I’ve been impressed,” said the former manager of Wales and Real Madrid. He is delighted key striker Fabrice Ondama is due back from the CAF Africa Cup of Nations after the weekend elimination of Congo from the quarter-finals of the tournament in Equatorial Guinea.

Raja, coached by the Portuguese Jose Romao, have vacillated starkly in form but proven strong enough to keep up with their rivals, even though they have already suffered five defeats this season. But defending champions Tetouan are the team to watch. They won away at Raja a fortnight ago and are on a six match unbeaten streak as they head into the business end of the season having put behind them the calamity of their FIFA Club World Cup experience.

Such was the disappointment of losing to the New Zealanders in December that Aziz El Amri, who had taken them to two titles in the last three seasons, departed as coach immediately. Now they have turned to Sergio Lobera, formerly with the youth structures at Barcelona, to guide them through the rest of the campaign.
Northern Ireland: Premiership

Ushering in a new era

David Winner is a London-based author and journalist. His books on football include 'Brilliant Orange' and 'Dennis Bergkamp: Stillness and Speed'.

It’s tempting to see the two teams currently dominating Northern Ireland football as standard-bearers for modernity. Crusaders FC, whose terrific attack has swept them to the top of the league, and reigning champions Cliftonville, who won the League Cup last week, are both fan-owned clubs who have ditched old kick and rush for an attractive possession-based game. They both have quirkily-named stadiums, too. Seaview, home of the Crues, has no view of the sea while Cliftonville’s Solitude is named for an isolated house that once stood on the site.

More importantly, the North Belfast neighbours have taken a stand against sectarianism. Cliftonville, whose fans include FIFA vice president Jim Boyce, is one of the League’s few Catholic teams, though it also has Protestant fans. Crusaders, located in a loyalist district, makes a point of having Catholic players and officials.

Two years ago, after loyalist demonstrators forced a game between the sides to be abandoned, both clubs proclaimed their abhorrence of what had happened. Since then ties have deepened, with players from the friendly rival clubs sometimes sharing training facilities and officials appearing together in public.

There has long been much to like about the second oldest league in the world. Its players are amateurs and UEFA may rank the Danske Bank Premiership 47th out of 53 leagues in Europe, but Northern Ireland also gave us George Best, Danny Blanchflower and William McCrum, inventor of the penalty kick.

Local clubs tend to have fascinating histories too. Glentoran, now loved by Belfast’s hipsters, was once the team of the shipyard workers who built the Titanic. And there have often been moments of genius like Matty Burrows’s famous goal against Portadown, shortlisted for the Puskas Award in 2010.

Now football is helping to heal a country still scarred by decades of communal violence and hatred.

No-one can forget the story of Belfast Celtic, the great Catholic club driven out of existence after loyalist rioters attacked their players during a match against Linfield in 1949. “People frequently revisit that tragedy and use it to remind themselves they never want to go back to that,” says French Belfast-based journalist Laure James. “There is still tension between the communities, but Crusaders and Cliftonville are in the vanguard of trying to move everyone towards a peaceful, non-sectarian future.”
“Young players need to be nurtured well”

As a player, Norway technical director Jan Age Fjortoft was a crowd favourite who sealed his place in Bundesliga history with a famous stepover. The 48-year-old explains how artificial pitches and one of the talents of the century could give his nation a shot at European Championship glory.

Yes, young Norwegian footballers are extremely strong on the ball, whereas my generation were better known for our combative style.

Has there been something of a rethink in the country’s youth development?

As our football clubs collaborate well with politicians, we’re now benefiting from modern, heated artificial pitches that can be used 24 hours a day. That means you can train with far greater focus and efficiency and work better on the players’ individual skills.

Iceland, whose national team surprised the Netherlands with a 2-0 win in Reykjavik in a European qualifier last year, are another team to have made successful use of artificial turf – plus 15 full-size indoor football pitches.

To be completely honest, Iceland have really impressed us. We’ve also learned a lot from Belgium, Switzerland and Austria, who have all recently reinvented themselves while developing fresh young talent.

Why has everything gone so quiet at Rosenborg when they were once Champions League regulars capable of giving the favourites a scare?

Under coach Nils Arne Eggen they were a little ahead of their time. They were influenced by the Ajax school, focusing on a counterattacking, high-tempo game, and it’s tough to maintain that kind of level year after year. Previously the team also still consisted of plenty of local guys, but that changed when Eggen left them. Since then the club has brought in players from other parts of Norway, which changed the culture. Today Molde are the team to beat – they’re the reigning league and cup champions.

League attendances were also higher during Rosenborg’s peak. Recently the average has been less than 7,000.

The fact that crowd pullers like Brann were relegated hasn’t helped either. Plus the league now has 16 teams, so there just aren’t as many exciting matches; we’ve had around 8,000 spectators per game. But don’t forget that we’re primarily a land of snow, a winter sport nation with fantastic cross-country skiers and heroes like Kjetil Jansrud [Super G Olympic champion in Sochi].

As a former international striker and captain who has played at the World Cup, you’ve played in some of the world’s best leagues in England and Germany. Where was the best place to be an overseas footballer?

Just like with the women in your life, you don’t want to forget about any of them. My first love was Vienna, where I was able to learn from ‘Goleador’ Hans Krankl as a 22-year-old at Rapid. To this day I’m grateful to my coach from back then – I give him a call every year at Christmas. I played for four clubs in England and as a Norwegian you automatically feel close to our neighbours across the North Sea because we get to watch their league on ‘Match of the Day’. As for Germany, journalists now get in touch with me whenever there’s a relegation battle. It seems my last minute goal after a stepover to ensure Eintracht Frankfurt stayed up in 1999 hasn’t been forgotten.

Jan Age Fjortoft was speaking to Andreas Jaros
Name
Jan Age Fjortoft

Date and place of birth
10 January 1967, Ålesund

Clubs played for (selection)
1988-1989 Lillestrøm
1989-1993 Rapid Vienna
1993-1995 Swindon Town
1995-1996 Middlesbrough
1997-1998 Sheffield United
1998 Barnsley
1998-2001 Eintracht Frankfurt

Norway national team
71 caps, 20 goals
First Love

Place: Soune, Senegal
Date: 15 April 2012
Time: 3.20 p.m.
Photographer: Christian Bobst
Official Mascot for the FIFA U-20 World Cup New Zealand 2015

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Two new development projects

FIFA is set to kick-off two new development projects in Somalia in the aftermath of the first-ever mission of a FIFA official to Mogadishu since 1986. The Somalia Football Federation (SFF) is now set to plan for the implementation of its second Goal project, a technical centre at Mogadishu’s College University Stadium, as well as for the construction of an artificial turf pitch as part of world’s football governing body Challenger scheme. In 2013 FIFA hosted its first development course in Mogadishu for 27 years.

Somalia’s civil war had a severe impact on football infrastructure as the artificial turf pitch in Mogadishu’s Banadir stadium, funded by FIFA in 2006 was severely damaged as were other facilities. The pitch has now been refurbished and serves as the venue for the matches of the ten-team Somali Football League.

During the visit, FIFA’s Development Manager for Africa, Zelkifli Ngoufonja discussed the implementation of more football development and grassroots activities in the country with the country’s FA President, Said Arab Abdiqani.

Towards a better future
FIFA is pleased to see that the SFF is aiming to promote the implementation of youth competitions and grassroots activities, and has made it a priority to extend its programmes to other regions outside Mogadishu.

After several years of violent conflict, the SFF is making concrete progress, football is moving towards a better future. The league is a success in Mogadishu, a trend that FIFA is confident will continue in the near future and is committed to support. ✨

SOMALIA

Only genuine national teams in football

The fact that sport builds social bridges and brings cultures together cannot be stressed often enough. However, what happened at this year’s Men’s Handball World Championship in Qatar stretched this notion to the point of absurdity. The hosts were represented by a team comprising an overwhelming majority of recently naturalised players. The practice did not contravene International Handball Federation regulations, but it did contradict the spirit of a national team.

This kind of scenario would not be possible in football. The FIFA Statutes (specifically the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes 5 – 8/III) set strict limits on changes of nationality. The regulations include a stipulation that a change of association is only possible if a player has not appeared for his current association in a full senior international in an official competition.

Even if this condition is fulfilled, appearing for a national team after acquiring a new nationality is only permitted under strict conditions:
- The player was born on the territory of the relevant association, or
- His biological mother or biological father (or grandmother or grandfather) was born there, or
- He has lived there continuously for at least five years after reaching the age of 18.

Qatar currently lie 92nd in the FIFA Ranking. The nation of 2.2 million faces the huge challenge of forming a competitive national football team by 2022. However, this cannot be achieved by quickly naturalising players because unlike the IHF, FIFA does not allow this. Indeed, scoring a goal with the hand is not permitted in football either.

Best wishes, Sepp Blatter
Wind of change

A few days ago the 100th edition of the “Campeonato Nacional de Futbol de Cuba” kicked off, a milestone campaign that coincided with the start of improving relations between Cuba and the USA. And now, Cuban footballers will reportedly be able to move abroad too.

Emanuele Giulianelli
No going back

However, Cuban players are forbidden from lacing their boots for overseas sides and are threatened with exile if they do so. Such is the fate of numerous footballers who fled their homeland to pursue their dream of playing the game at a higher level. It has left them with mixed feelings: they achieved their ambition but are now forbidden from returning to see their friends and relatives.

“I left Cuba when I was 21 in order to make my dream of playing football professionally come true,” said Andy Ramos, a goalkeeper in Miami who previously played for Edmonton and Fort Lauderdale. “That’s probably what every young Cuban football player wants. This way I can develop as a player and support my family financially. Unfortunately, after playing just once for Cuba in a World Cup qualifying game against Panama I’ve never been back in goal for the national team. The law says that any player who has a contract in a professional league outside of Cuba can never play in the national side again - and that goes for all sports. I don’t want to get into politics but in my opinion people who want to play their chosen sport as a career shouldn’t be discriminated against and should be eligible to play for Cuba.”

Any Cuban football fan will be able to tell you when the country’s golden age in the game was: 1938. Football was the most popular sport on the Caribbean island during the 1930s and Cuba were among the best in Central America. Their triumph at the 1930 Pan American Games preceded their finest hour in 1938 when the team qualified for the World Cup in France. There, Cuba managed to beat Romania 2-1 in a first round replay after the initial encounter had ended in a 3-3 draw. The victory booked their place in the quarter-finals, where they were beaten 8-0 by Sweden in Antibes.

Cuban football subsequently went into decline. Under the revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, ‘el futbol’ was pushed to the fringes both by the government and the media. It was not viewed as a weapon with which the USA, considered to be rivals in all aspects of life, could be defeated. It was deemed better to beat the arch-enemy at their own game, baseball, which grew to be the most popular sport on the island. Today the Cuban championship is an amateur league; professional football is not permitted and players earn an average of $20 USD per month. The season only runs for a few months each year, usually from January to June, in order to give the players more time to dedicate to their regular jobs.

“Zero support”

The few foreigners to try their luck in Cuba’s top flight were almost exclusively Africans, most of whom were medical students. There was one notable exception to that rule last season, however, when La Habana fielded Pietro Resta, an Italian who came up through Fiorentina’s youth academy. After arriving in Cuba to undergo surgery following an injury, Resta decided to stay and play in the country. “On a technical level the foundations are certainly there but the facilities, where they even exist, are pretty run down,” Resta said. “The players’ potential isn’t exploited. That much is clear when you look at the guys who perform really well in the U-20 national team but then drop off in the senior side. Our jerseys are donated to us by some Italian lads – and it’s the same at other clubs too. There is absolutely zero financial or logistical support.” Resta was nevertheless open to the idea of playing for Cuba after it was mooted as a possibility: “If I’d continued playing I would definitely have tried to make the step up into the national team. But I got injured again and decided to stay and play in the country. I’ve never been back in goal for the national team. The law says that any player who has a contract in a professional league outside of Cuba can never play in the national side again - and that goes for all sports. I don’t want to get into politics but in my opinion people who want to play their chosen sport as a career shouldn’t be discriminated against and should be eligible to play for Cuba.”

Cuban sports fans follow overseas club football on television with greater enthusiasm than baseball, with Real Madrid, Barcelona and AC Milan among the most popular sides. Supporters of the domestic championship exist only in certain regions of the country, a state of affairs largely due to the lack of available information about the league and the thinly-spread media coverage, meaning many people simply have no way of finding out the latest news.
In the USA
A snapshot from Cuba’s 4-1 defeat to the USA in Sandy, Utah on 13 July 2013.

Among the elite
Cuba drew 3-3 with Romania on 5 June 1938 in the first round of the World Cup in Toulouse, France, and won the replay 2-1.

Domestic league
Fans watch on at the Cienfuegos sports ground in Havana.
The Cuban Football Association (AFC) has benefited from FIFA development assistance a number of times over the years via projects including the modernisation of the association headquarters in 2001, the construction of a technical centre in 2004 and the installation of two artificial turf pitches in 2010, all in the capital Havana. The total invested comes to US$1.2 million. FIFA has also strongly supported instructional programs in Cuba, with frequent courses in coaching, refereeing and women’s football, and also in youth football and futsal.

Fleeing to the USA
The undisputed “Superclasico” in Cuban football is the fixture between La Habana and Villa Clara. The league’s star players are, naturally enough, the ones who play in the national team: Ariel Martinez (Sancti Spiritus), Yordan Santa Cruz (Cienfuegos), Alain Cervantes (Ciego de Avila), Daniel Luis Saez (La Habana), Brian Rosales (Isla de la Juventud), Alberto Gomez (Guantanamo), Armando Coroneaux (Camaguey) and Carlos Domingo Francisco (Santiago de Cuba) are among the most well-known.

“The dream of playing has remained alive despite the barriers that have been built.”

Maykel Galindo Castaneda, who was born in Villa Clara in 1981 and currently plays in midfield for Los Angeles Blues, earned 35 caps for Cuba before he absconded from a training camp during the Gold Cup and settled in the USA. “When I was with the national side in the USA in 2005 I took advantage of the opportunity to make my dream come true and start a football career there to be able to support my family better,” Galindo said. “It’s difficult living in a country with a culture so different from my own, but it’s even harder to be so far away from my family.”

Heviel Cordoves, who plays for Charleston Battery, tells a similar story: “I have to wait another seven years until I can return to Cuba to see my loved ones. It makes me very sad but at the same time I’m happy that I made such a tough decision because now I can build a future for myself and fulfil my dreams.”

‘Dream’ is the most commonly used term among those who have left Cuba to play football abroad, but it also holds great significance for the players contesting the Cuban championship between 31 January and 6 June: the dream of playing has remained alive despite the barriers that have been built to prevent them doing so.

In the last few days the government’s official press agency, Prensa Latina, reported that Cuba intends to allow footballers and other athletes to go abroad and play for foreign clubs.

“There are only a few sports that have been around for 100 years in Cuba,” said Torres Hernandez. “This is the reward for everyone who started out playing the game and who put in a great deal of effort over the years to keep the sport alive.” And they have done so against considerable odds. 😎

FIFA in Cuba
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THERE WILL BE HATERS
IN BRIEF

Ibrahima Toure's brace for Al Nasr in the Arabian Gulf Cup final against Al Sharjah helped him earn the Man of the Match award, yet it was not for his goals that the Senegalese forward will live long in the memory of the spectators. The 29-year-old, who moved to Dubai from Monaco in 2013, apparently felt so bored during the game that in the 77th minute, while waiting for his side to take a corner, he proceeded to do a handstand inside the penalty area. Clearly annoyed and wholly unappreciative of his stunt, the opposition players pushed Toure over, causing a scuffle. Toure was shown a yellow card for his trouble, but that was the only blot on any otherwise successful outing for his club: Al Nasr won the game 4-1 to secure their first domestic title in 25 years. The city of Dubai subsequently went head over heels - quite literally.

Sarah Steiner

How does a coach justify his decision to let all six substitutes warm up in the 25th minute of a match? He could say that he needs to have options in every position should a player sustain an injury. Alternatively, he could offer up the more old-fashioned argument that it does young footballers more good to keep moving than to sit lazily on the bench. Whatever the case, the six Cologne players who received this order from Peter Stoger last weekend at Hamburg's Volksparkstadion – as it will again be officially named from next summer – did not appear particularly happy about it. But what do you do when the decisions are in the coach's hands and the team is winning? For starters, it is vital to keep calm and forget about the sheltered bench, fleece-lined coat and hot cup of tea. For a brief moment, neutral onlookers may have wondered something else entirely: were Cologne about to pull the same trick as local lower-league counterparts Viktoria, whose unused substitute Andreas Moog once prevented a goal by waiting beside the post and intercepting the ball just before it crossed the line? Luckily, the visitors took the lead before anybody could give the idea any serious thought.

Alan Schweingruber

The World Dance Council was founded in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1950 and is one of two global governing bodies for dance and competitive dancing. Its duties include the annual vote for “International Dance of the Year”. After this honour was conferred upon the Viennese Waltz in 2014, one wonders whether Robert Kidiaba's signature 'bottom shuffle' might make the shortlist this time around. The DR Congo goalkeeper celebrated his team's progress to the semi-finals of the CAF Africa Cup of Nations with a unique goal celebration, sitting on the floor before quickly hopping around in a circle on his backside. Videos of his distinctive move have been viewed online thousands of times across the world. The shotstopper first showed off his special celebration on a global stage at the FIFA Club World Cup 2010, when he and his TP Mazembe team-mates made it to the final against the odds. Although DR Congo will not equal this achievement in Equatorial Guinea, Kidiaba deserves recognition for his spectacular contribution to the world of dance.

Tim Pfeifer
For the Game. For the World.

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FIFA.com
A final salute to a rugged, bygone era

Sven Goldmann

When Bayern Munich celebrated their 111th anniversary a couple of years ago the club produced a commemorative book to mark the occasion. Measuring 50 x 70 centimetres and filled with all manner of anecdotes spread across 556 pages, it was too big to fit in most commercially available bookshelves, and with a price of €2,999 was too expensive for most fans’ wallets. At the book’s unveiling, Udo Lattek summarised its contents in characteristic fashion: “We were pretty great in every regard!”

Lattek himself was indeed one of the coaching greats. He had spells at Borussia Monchengladbach, Barcelona, Dortmund and Schalke but it was with Bayern that he truly left his mark. That was back in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Beckenbauers, Mullers, Breitners and Rummenigges propelled Bayern onwards, leaving the coach with a role more akin to that of a master of ceremonies. Lattek took no offence when Beckenbauer once said of him: “All he did was carry our suitcases.” In keeping with the spirit of the age, Lattek glorified his alcohol consumption as a badge of honour: “All the great coaches liked to booze after all: just look at Weissweiler, Happel and Zebec. And I’m one of the greats too.”

On Sunday, three weeks after his 80th birthday, Lattek passed away in Cologne after suffering with Parkinson’s disease. Schalke defender and World Cup winner Benedikt Howedes took to Twitter to offer his condolences: “If they play football in heaven then they’ll do so with great success from now on. Rest in peace, Udo Lattek.”

Lattek won all three European Cup competitions and also lifted the German title eight times as a coach. With his passing, the game has lost a part of itself that no longer exists. A rugged kind of football, co-ordinated from the back room, a football that resonated with fans and pub regulars. Lattek was a champion of the people, and drew strength from the game as well as giving much to it. He worked in an era when coaches did not spend their time on video analysis but instead were busy enough trying to keep their players happy. He frequently managed to do so too, especially at Bayern. However, on occasion he was not as successful, for example at Barcelona, where his spat with Diego Maradona has become the stuff of legend. When the Argentinian failed to turn up at the team bus on time, Lattek waited a few minutes before ordering it to leave without Maradona on board. Lattek lost his job a couple of days later, with Maradona's compatriot Cesar Luis Menotti taking over the reins.

It is hard to imagine someone like Lattek in the well-structured, stylised world of modern football. He was more of a conductor than a tactician, a man who was not overly concerned with developing the game. Indeed, his training motto was: “the players must eat grass!” Lattek was a child of his times in a wild and rowdy age of professional football. Yet he did not want to be pigeon-holed as such, and in spring 2000 he achieved further success by saving Borussia Dortmund from relegation during a spectacular short-term spell as coach. In his honour the Dortmund players took to the pitch wearing black armbands in their home game against Augsburg on Wednesday. It was a final salute to a time that has now been consigned to history once and for all. ✝️
Birmingham, England

1982

Fans take to the trees to watch Aston Villa's UEFA Cup match against Besiktas.
A determined supporter peers through the branches to watch Dover Athletic versus Crystal Palace in the FA Cup third round.
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Was Martin Odegaard right to move to Real Madrid?

Question from Kristian Bylund, Oslo

When talented youngsters move from a small club to a bigger one there is often a huge outcry in many quarters, and understandably so, I might add. Some players end up at the wrong club, but that’s not the case with Martin Odegaard.

As a 16-year-old, neither Martin nor his family should be aiming for him to become a first team regular at Real Madrid any time soon. He needs time. He needs to be groomed carefully and I know from personal experience that he is at the right place for that to happen.

There is no doubt that competition for places in Madrid is fierce; if it wasn’t, the club wouldn’t have been at the pinnacle of the world game for the last 60 years. Yet Madrid also know how to take young, inexperienced players under their wing. Just because several world-class players have departed unhappily doesn’t mean there is something wrong with the club’s training system.

Almost all the big teams that were interested in Odegaard in the last few months have good academies. Therefore, I assume that his decision rested on small details in the end, but it is precisely those finer points that shouldn’t be underestimated. A young player under pressure who wants to develop has to feel at home, so his surroundings play an important role, as do the city, the weather and the food. And in that regard, everyone has their own preferences.

What have you always wanted to know about football? Ask Gunter Netzer: feedback-theweekly@fifa.org

“He is without a doubt the best coach I have ever had. I have never met a trainer who knows so much about the game. The level of detail he can go into ... We learned a lot in his first season here and things are going even better now we fully understand him.”

Franck Ribery on Pep Guardiola

“I started putting weight on a few years ago and I wear black clothes to cover it up. It’s as simple as that. I think I wear them pretty well, don’t I?”

Congo coach Claude Le Roy reveals why he always wears black on the touchline

“The three years ago, no. It just shows you how you can never tell in life, and even more so in football. We (Barcelona) had a very intense rivalry with Mourinho. It never reached the level of hatred, not even close, but there were disagreements with him and (John) Terry too. Chelsea were always the team that I most wanted to beat.”

Cesc Fabregas on whether he ever saw himself signing for Chelsea and playing under Jose Mourinho

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FIFA WOMEN’S WORLD CUP
CANADA 2015
6 June - 5 July
“My opinion counts in Sweden”

Anja Mittag has scored 31 goals in 114 appearances for Germany. She plays her club football for Rosengard in Malmo, Sweden, where she is in the form of her life.

The decision to leave Turbine Potsdam and join Malmo at the start of 2012 was the right one to help me grow as a player and a person. I’d slipped into a routine as the years rolled by but it wasn’t taking me anywhere – the opposite in fact. Things weren’t going well any more, I’d lost some of my appetite for the game and I felt burned out. I wasn’t really up for the fight because I felt I was no longer appreciated where I was. It was affecting my performances for both my club and country. The charge of scenery saved me and allowed me to escape a permanent feeling of sadness.

I’ve become very confident in my ability in Sweden and I’ve obviously matured with age. Here in Malmo they often come to me at half-time and ask for my views on the match and what I think we should change to make it better. I’m not used to that kind of recognition. I felt increasingly worn out with the atmosphere in Potsdam, although of course I had some great times with Turbine. I have a lot to thank the club for and I made long-lasting friendships there. The club also released me from my contract so I could make the move abroad.

I immediately felt at home in Malmo and I quickly recovered my instinct for goal. We won the Swedish Cup and when we played champions Koppbergs/Goteborg in the Super Cup I scored the winning goal in our 2-1 victory. I finished top scorer in the league, and I managed it again in 2014, when we also finished as champions.

I get a huge amount back from my teammates. I really, really enjoy playing with the likes of Brazil’s Marta and Switzerland’s Ramona Bachmann in a very exciting front line. We’ve come on brilliantly and we’ve set our sights high. We’re hugely ambitious.

The mark of a good player is never to be satisfied with what you’ve achieved and always be hungry for more. In this respect, every victory is a step in the right direction, which is why I’m so thrilled every time a game goes our way. That’s obviously the same with Germany. I have three European Championship winner’s medals, and in 2013 I scored the winning goal in the final against Norway. My biggest target for 2015 is to win a second World Cup to go with my first one from 2007. It would actually be the third time I could call myself a world champion, as I was in the Germany U-19 team in 2004 that won the World Cup for that age group in Bangkok.

I find life as an overseas player very pleasant, although getting to know people away from the game is tough because you tend to live your life in a bubble. I train with my teammates and they’re basically the only people I get to see on a daily basis. I feel very settled in the south of Sweden but I’m careful to maintain contact with home. One of the symbols of that is the lighthouse I’ve had tattooed on my lower left arm: the lighthouse symbolises home in the seafaring world. It connects me with my family in Chemnitz, where I started playing as a six-year-old all those years ago.

Anja Mittag was speaking to Rainer Hennies
## Germany (unchanged)
- **none**
- **16** (11 of which were in 2014)

### Iraq (4 matches)
- **Bahrain** (up 43 points)
- **Bahrain** (up 12 ranks)
- **Iraq** (down 51 points)
- **Jordan** (down 12 ranks)

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<td>Peru</td>
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<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Japan</td>
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</table>

**Full list available at**: [http://www.fifa.com/world-ranking/index.html](http://www.fifa.com/world-ranking/index.html)
The objective of Sudoku is to fill a 9x9 grid with digits so that each of the numbers from 1 to 9 appears exactly once in each column, row and 3x3 sub-grid.

### Easy

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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### Medium

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### Hard

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Puzzles courtesy: opensky.ca/sudoku

The FIFA Weekly, © FIFA 2015.
LAST WEEK’S POLL RESULTS

Which of these group leaders will make it furthest in the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations?

- 30% Côte d’Ivoire
- 47% Ghana
- 21% Tunisia
- 2% Congo

Source: Fifa.com

THIS WEEK’S POLL

Who was the subject of the best winter transfer in Europe?

- Andre Schuerrle (Chelsea - Wolfsburg)
- Fernando Torres (AC Milan - Atletico Madrid)
- Juan Cuadrado (Fiorentina - Chelsea)
- Lukas Podolski (Arsenal - Inter Milan)
- Wilfried Bony (Swansea - Manchester City)

Cast your votes at: Fifa.com/newscentre

"Sunday used to be the most beautiful day of the week, I went on the pitch and did what I liked best."

Argentine playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme on deciding to hang up his boots at the age of 36.

WEEK IN NUMBERS

2

different continental championships have been won by the same team for the first time in men’s football after Australia defeated Korea Republic in the final of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. The Socceroos were previously OFC Nations Cup champions on numerous occasions.

5
times in a row Ghana have now reached at least the semi-finals at the CAF Africa Cup of Nations, setting a competition record in the process. The Black Stars defeated Guinea 3-0 in the quarter-finals and can now boast of having reached the last four at every edition of the African championship since 2008.

8

Successive away defeats marks an unwelcome new record for Parma. ‘I Ducali’ have never before gone so long without scoring points on the road, having scored points as visitors for the only time so far this campaign more than four months ago. Their latest vanquishers were AC Milan, who themselves had previously been on a winless run since 14 December.