THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

VfL Wolfsburg Women

LAOS
EDGING TOWARDS A PRO LEAGUE

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NEW ZEALAND’S TROPHY AMBITIONS

LATVIA
VERSATILE ALL-ROUNDER
MARIS VERPAKOVSKIS
The She-Wolves
VfL Wolfsburg’s women’s team are currently the standard against which all other sides are measured, so what is it that gives the club an edge over the competition? Sarah Steiner visited the Champions League winners in northern Germany to find out.

The Netherlands
Dutch league leaders PSV Eindhoven were favourites for victory over Ajax, only for the visitors to score twice in the closing minutes to win 3-1.

Sepp Blatter
Ahead of International Women’s Day on 8 March, the FIFA President says: “The potential for growth is greater than in any other area of our sport, and the opportunity to overcome social and community barriers is even more pronounced.”

Laos
Although the 25th season of the Premier League kicked off last weekend, the competition’s aim of professionalisation is still a long way off.

Paraguay
In the last round of matches, teams battled for supremacy during two hotly-contested encounters in Asuncion.

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35 Secret of success
Gunter Netzer on the difficulty of great players becoming a good coach.
Pictured: Jose Mourinho

37 Louis Saha
A car accident changed the course of the former French international’s career.

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A wonderful notion

In the late 1980s a young radio reporter was keen to ask a German football coach a question. She appeared nervous, possibly because she was new to the business, but no sooner had the enquiry left her lips than the coach replied: “I’m not talking to you about football.” In a flash the journalist understood: he did not want to discuss it with her because she was a woman.

As the coach in that instance has long since realised, you can have some extremely lively discussions about football with women. Although this statement seems completely unnecessary in the year of the seventh Women’s World Cup, it is important to place the competition in this context when you consider that 30 million female footballers and many more millions of women with a passion for the game around the globe still have to overcome persistent stereotypes every day. If these misgivings had already been set aside, sceptics would have stopped constantly comparing women’s football with the men’s game, a habit that also persists in tennis and skiing.

Sarah Steiner travelled to northern Germany last week to profile the women’s team of the moment: two-time Champions League winners VfL Wolfsburg. As you can read from page six onwards, the locals’ enthusiasm for the She-Wolves was apparent as soon as our reporter arrived at the station – a delightful notion in itself.

Alan Schweingruber
Dances with She-Wolves

VfL Wolfsburg represent the current gold standard in women’s club football. We paid a visit to the She-Wolves and their coach Ralf Kellermann.

Sarah Steiner (text) and Thomas Schweigert (photos), Wolfsburg
The landscape is dominated by waterways and greenery, but although the Mittelland Canal glistens in the sun, an icy wind is gusting through the streets. The people of Wolfsburg in Lower Saxony, situated roughly halfway between Hanover and Berlin, are used to this pattern of weather. Towering brown chimneys dominate the skyline of the town founded in the first half of the 20th century to house the workers at the sprawling VW automobile plant. The wind is an essential part of Wolfsburg, just like football club VfL. “Of course we go to the Wolves,” says a stallholder at the main station. When we ask for his views on the women's team, he answers promptly and with pride: “They won the Champions League. Pretty good huh?”

**Glittering haul**

In 2013 the VfL Women sealed a historic treble of the German championship, the domestic cup and the Champions League. “We rose a bit like the phoenix from the ashes and went all the way in all three competitions. It was a fantastic year!” recalls coach Ralf Kellermann. “But the following year was really tough. The pressure was enormous, because we were determined to show everyone that our success was no fluke.” The coach’s message clearly got through to his players, who defended their Bundesliga and Champions League titles in 2014. In recognition of the team’s success, Kellermann was named coach of the year for women’s football, and his captain Nadine Kessler is the reigning Women’s World Player of the Year. It could hardly be much better, but the path to the top has been a long and taxing one, as influential midfielder and current Germany regular Lena Goessling confirms. “I remember the [3-1] defeat in Munich on 26 February 2014. We didn’t know how to cope with a situation like that, because we’d forgotten how you pick yourself up again. But
it taught us a lesson and it was the starting point for us retaining the title.” The She-Wolves’ first defeat of the season had left them five points off the top of the table, but a goal in the 89th minute of their final match ultimately saw them finish the Bundesliga campaign top of the pile.

Contrasting disciplines
Wolfsburg set up a women’s football section in 2003. The decision was carefully considered and the project viewed as long term. Just as in the women’s game as a whole, enormous progress has been made since then but there remains plenty of unexploited potential, says Thomas Roettgermann, the club’s CEO with responsibilities including women’s football: “Every sporting discipline needs its heroes.” But for heroes to emerge, there needs to be a stage. One vital platform was the 2011 World Cup in Germany which brought increased media attention, bigger stadiums and huge crowds. In terms of the latter criteria, the women’s game would like to get much closer to men’s football, although comparisons between the disciplines are almost impossible. “We shouldn’t measure ourselves against the men’s game. Women’s football is a great deal less significant, and that’ll be the case for a long time,” Roettgermann says. “They’re different sports.”
Is that really the case? Both variants involve 22 players, one ball and two goals with the objective of putting the former into the latter. The Laws are identical, so why should these be different sports? It is a pointless debate, agrees Kellermann. “It would never cross anyone’s mind to compare the times posted by male and female 100-metre sprinters. And the number 100 in the men’s tennis ranking would beat the women’s number one 6-0, 6-0.” Naturally, this is because of the sexes’ entirely different physical attributes, making the women’s game slower, with shorter passes and weaker shots. The length of the learning curve is also a factor. The German FA (DFB) formally prohibited its clubs from offering women’s football in 1955, not lifting the ban until 1970. Germany’s women first contested an international in 1982, and the inaugural Women’s World Cup was in 1991. The Women’s Bundesliga in its current form has not yet reached its 20th birthday. Even now it is not always plain sailing, reveals Roettgermann. “There’s no way Champions League dates should be clashing with the Bundesliga schedule, but that’s exactly what we still have today.”

Desires, dreams, hopes
Wolfsburg’s vision is to confront the imperfections head on by striving for perfect organisation in the women’s game. The concept is to establish structures and procedures that nurture success and breed more of it. The system seems to be working. “Even we didn’t think we’d win as many trophies as we have in recent years.”

whelming passion since she was small. As a child she kicked a ball around with her twin brother. He gave up the game at some point, but she now makes a living from it, at the “most professional club in the women’s Bundesliga,” she herself says. “Everything here just works.” Every word she utters is infused with the winning mentality that pervades the club from top to bottom, although she too harbours desires, dreams and hopes for the future. “Bigger crowds and more media attention – that would obviously be great,” says Goessling. However, she knows there is no point being unrealistic. “Women’s football still has huge growth and development to come, but we’ll never earn the kinds of salary that mean we’ll never have to work again.”

Balancing work and play
Slowly but surely, the women arrive at the VfL training facility. The club’s training pitches and dressing rooms are located behind the old Stadion am Elsterweg. Martina Mueller, a member of the team for the last decade, arrives in the parking lot. “Wolfsburg has become my home. I work here, I live here, I play here, and my friends are here. I’m going to stay here after I finish playing,” says Mueller, who – like almost all her team-mates – has come to training straight from work. However, professional playing careers are becoming more and more of a reality at the elite end of the women’s game in the leading leagues such as Germany, Sweden, France and USA. The opportunity now exists for the players to focus completely on the game and earn a living from doing so, although in the majority of cases the players still work part-time or study, playing and training as semi-pros.

Juggling the demands of playing and working is a big challenge. The VfL management is acutely aware of this and attempts to ease the process for its players, many of whom are employed by the club or companies associated with...
Number two keeper Merle Frohms came to Wolfsburg at the age of 16 and is currently serving an apprenticeship in business administration. "I knew this is where I'd find the best opportunities to gain the experience I need," she says. Football is her life, making her no different whatsoever from her team-mates. She gives everything for the game, even when that requires a degree of self-denial and iron discipline. "Obviously it's not always easy. But in return, I get to experience things that others of my age never will," explains Frohms. Indeed: an U-20 World Cup success with Germany and a treble triumph with VfL is not a bad haul for a 20-year-old.
New arrivals to the fore in post-winter break Bundesliga

The title race in Germany’s Women’s Bundesliga is gathering pace. With six rounds of matches to go, only five points separate the top four teams, and over the winter break, clubs across the division have been busy strengthening their squads ahead of the final push.

The standout ‘new’ arrival is undoubtedly Yuki Ogimi. The Japanese international is a familiar face in the Bundesliga – she won the top goalscorer award for 1. FFC Turbine Potsdam in 2012/13 – and is now back in Germany having left Chelsea for VfL Wolfsburg. Ogimi is joined by Julia Simic, another former Turbine player, who left the Brandenburg outfit to join the Wolves in January.

Three in the chasing pack
Bayern, Wolfsburg’s closest challenges, also made additions to their playing staff, signing Iceland international Dagny Brynjarsdottir from Florida State University. The 23-year-old recently came second in the Hermann Trophy for the best college player in the United States, and Bayern coach Thomas Wörle has been highly complimentary of her abilities: “She’s a very talented player with an eye for goal, and someone that can be used flexibly in either attacking midfield or up front.” Expectations on the team are high, but Wörle has been keen to remain realistic in the face of the league leaders’ dominance. “For us to be second in the table makes for a great snapshot of our season, and we won’t give that position up to our rivals without a fight. But at the moment, nobody can trouble Wolfsburg.”

Just one point behind the Bavarians and five off the top are the aforementioned Potsdam and 1. FFC Frankfurt, both of whom can still dare to dream of lifting the title. Frankfurt opted against bringing fresh faces in over the winter, but they did manage to secure an important signature, that of head coach Colin Bell. “Looking back over the experience I’ve had in Frankfurt, I sense a great motivation to carry on down the path we’ve set ourselves,” said the Englishman. “But for now, my focus is purely on the challenges we face this season. There’s still a lot that we can achieve.”

Potsdam, meanwhile, have a host of new faces to energise the club for the remainder of the campaign. At the turn of the year they added Danish defender Nina Frausching Pedersen from English champions Liverpool, the Bosnian Amela Krso from Hungarian outfit Ferencvaros and Chinese national team goalkeeper Wang Fei from Dalian. Although catching the She-Wolves will take some doing, a European finish is certainly within Potsdam’s grasp, and coach Bernd Schröder is hopeful that each of his new recruits can play their part in the coming months. “We still have every chance of finishing second and qualifying for the Champions League,” said the veteran tactician.

Trio face relegation battle
SC Sand, MSV Duisburg and Herforder SV are the three clubs most in danger of relegation, with the latter a long way short of safety indeed having taken just two points from 16 matches. The newly-promoted side will have been boosted by the arrivals of the American Carlie Davis from Apollon Limassol and Canadian Rachel Melhado from Seattle Sounders, but survival is looking unlikely following their last result, a 2:0 loss to SGS Essen.

Sand welcomed as many as five new players to their squad over the winter. Americans Alexa Gaul and Alexa St. Martin, Canadian duo Bryanna McCarthy and Melissa Busque and Albanian international Furtuna Velaj will all be charged with helping to keep the struggling side above water over the final few matches, but there is pervasive optimism around the club that relegation can be avoided after coach Sven Kahleit signed a two-year contract extension. The terms of the new deal are only valid for the top flight, but general manager Gerald Jungmann has faith that the season will end on a successful note. “We’re thinking positively and not worrying about what might happen in the future.”

Duisburg, second from bottom in the standings, are also in dire need of points, and had the unenviable task of taking on league leaders Wolfsburg in their last outing. Predictably, the Zebras were easy meat for the Wolves, who sent them packing after a 7:0 hiding. The Ruhrpott club will no doubt welcome the arrival of the American Carlie Davis from Apollon Limassol and Canadian Rachel Melhado from Seattle Sounders, but survival is looking unlikely following their last result, a 2:0 loss to SGS Essen.

New stadium for the She-Wolves
The training session in Wolfsburg gets underway with passing and heading drills. The banter is friendly and the atmosphere relaxed. Coach Kellermann is at the centre of it all, exuding calm authority and an undeniable air of satisfaction. He is the hub at the centre of the Wolfsburg wheel, combining the functions of coach and sporting director. He has personally and meticulously pieced together the team he wants. “Before every signing I hold lengthy talks with the player in question. I’ll only make a contract offer once I’m 100% convinced that an individual fits into the team,” he explains.

Bringing in gifted players may well buy short-
term success, he argues, but the club as a whole is what matters over the longer term. Two new players fitting into the overall concept arrived during the winter break, Yuki Ogimi from Chelsea and Julia Simic from league rivals Turbine Potsdam.

Despite the loss of captain Nadine Kessler to injury, this season’s results underline the fundamental success of the Kellermann model. The team played at their new stadium for the first time on 15 February, when they trounced Bayer Leverkusen 5-0. A week later, they travelled to face second-placed Bayern Munich and defended top spot in the table with a goalless draw. The next appointment in their defence of the Champions League comes on 22 March when VfL face Rosengard in the quarter-final first leg. A week later, Kellermann’s team take on SC Freiburg in the domestic cup semi-finals.

It is a packed and demanding schedule for the She-Wolves, imposing a major physical and mental burden. “It’ll be a punishing year,” acknowledges Goessling, but she is relishing the challenge: “We’re totally motivated and hungry for silverware.” There will be little time for the players to relax and recharge their batteries. For many of the VfL stars, the season will be far from over even if they do make it to the Champions League final on 14 May in Berlin, because the Women’s World Cup Canada 2015 starts in June. The players will swap their club shirts for their national colours as they go in search of the biggest prize in the game.

“I’ll only make a contract offer once I’m 100% convinced that an individual fits into the team.”

Ralf Kellermann
- 24 September 1968, Bielefeld (Germany)
- Coach
- Joined VfL in: 2005 (scouting section), head coach since 2008
- Awards: FIFA World Coach of the Year for Women’s Football 2014

The new stadium incorporates a natural turf pitch, the VfL Center (offices, dressing rooms, fitness area) and the VfL FussballWelt football museum.
The weekend’s top game had only just kicked off when Luis Aguilar put Guarani ahead from their first attack. Seemingly unfazed, Libertad, who have won the two most recent championships, restored parity almost immediately through Antonio Bareiros’ header.

More was still to come and five minutes before the interval the biggest talking point of the day took place. The ball fell to Libertad midfielder Angel Rodrigo Cardozo Lucena just outside the penalty area, and his powerful shot ricocheted off the crossbar down on to the ground and back on to the bar again. Lucena’s team-mates insisted that the ball had crossed the line but their protests fell on deaf ears as the referee, Edgar Barreto, allowed play to continue after exchanging a quick glance with his assistant Milciades Saldivar. Television replays appear to confirm that he was right to do so.

Guarani took advantage of the momentary disarray in the Libertad camp and re-took the lead from their next attack. After launching a break down the right flank, Adilson Lezcano’s cross found Julian Benitez in the centre, where he beat the hesitant opposition defence to the ball to find the target. It was the turning point in a hard-fought derby. Libertad subsequently piled on the pressure in search of an equaliser, but it was Guarani who again scored next, with second-half substitute Fernando Fabian Fernandez striking 20 minutes from time to make it 3-1.

By now Libertad must be sick of the sight of Fernandez, who is known as “La Fiera” (The Beast) at Guarani: in the previous Clausura championship, Paraguay’s 2014 Player of the Year defeated El Guamarelo almost single-handedly, netting a hat-trick in a 5-1 triumph. This time Fernandez helped his club to a fourth victory in five games to overtake Libertad in the standings and go top of the table. After subsequently beating Cerro Porteno 4-0, Guarani now have a five point lead at the summit. ✈

City rivals
Guarani, in yellow, defeated Libertad 3-1 in a fiercely-contested derby.
Netherlands: Eredivisie

Ajax earn morale-boosting victory

Andreas Jaroš is a Vienna-based freelance writer.

As has been the case in recent years, the Eredivisie’s leading clubs have struggled to make inroads in European competition this season. PSV Eindhoven were dumped out of the UEFA Europa League in the first knockout round by Zenit St. Petersburg, while record Dutch champions Ajax Amsterdam failed to progress beyond the UEFA Champions League group stages for the fifth time in a row.

Domestically, the two clubs remain the frontrunners in the race for the league title, although the balance of power appears to have shifted towards Eindhoven this term. After four successive championships and the seemingly annual exodus of key players last summer, Ajax had slipped 14 points behind their rivals ahead of last weekend’s meeting between the two heavyweights at the Philips Stadion. Defeat for Ajax on Sunday would have all but secured the title and a place in the group stages of next season’s Champions League for PSV, but what happened on Matchday 25 took everyone by surprise.

The hosts, who had not lost at home in the league this season, dictated the play early on, but it was Ajax who opened the scoring after half an hour when Ricardo Kishna prodded home Anwar El Ghazi’s cross, despite the efforts of keeper Jeroen Zoet to claw the ball off the goal-line.

The majority of the crowd inside the 35,000-capacity arena was cheering again on 77 minutes. A delightful header from Luuk de Jong - the former Borussia Monchengladbach striker’s 15th league goal of the season - gave Ajax’s Dutch international custodian Jasper Cillessen no chance and the PSV supporters hope of a late win. However, a deflected free-kick from the visitor’s Danish substitute Lasse Schöne after 83 minutes and El Ghazi’s stoppage-time strike condemned Phillip Cocu’s charges to a first home league defeat of the campaign. It was only the second time PSV had conceded more than once at the Philips Stadion all season.

Although Ajax’s 3-1 victory cut PSV’s lead over Frank de Boer’s troops to 11 points with nine games to go, it remains to be seen whether this result will breathe new life into the title race. PSV remain on course to seal their first league crown in seven years, with only Ajax harbouring any realistic hope of catching the runaway leaders.

Alkmaar remain 17 adrift in third place despite their 2-0 win over Willem II, while Feyenoord slipped 19 points behind PSV after being held to a 0-0 draw in Utrecht. The Rotterdam club has been making the headlines for all the wrong reasons of late, which may have contributed to head coach Fred Rutten’s decision to leave his post at the end of the season after just one year at the helm. ☺️
Patience required

Roland Zorn is a Frankfurt-based football correspondent.

Teerasil Dangda has returned to the place where he is happiest, namely Muangthong United in Thailand. After becoming the first Thai footballer to play in Spain’s La Liga, Dangda has come home following an unsuccessful loan spell.

In truth, the 26-year-old, slender centre-forward looked a little lost in Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi’s big league. The striker made six goalless appearances in the Spanish top flight wearing Almeria’s colours, and one goal in the Copa del Rey was not enough to secure him a permanent deal. Six months on from his summer of 2014 move, Dangda left the Andalusian harbour city short on luck. “It was a good experience for me,” reflected Dangda shortly before his comeback in the Thai Premier League (TPL). “I found out just how huge the differences are between Spanish and Thai football.”

The attacker who has scored 28 goals in 57 caps for his country and won the 2013 TPL Golden Boot is currently having to show some patience. Dangda was not at his best in the first three matches of the new Thai Premier League season, failing to find the net in any of them, and that is little wonder according to the man himself: “The less I played at Almeria, the more confidence I lost,” he explained.

Nonetheless, Thai fans expect to see Dangda firing goals for fun again, and the three-time TPL winner will certainly need to find his scoring boots soon if the Twin Qilin are to keep pace with reigning champions Buriram United, who last year successfully defended their title. Before the new season kicked off on February 13th, four-time champions Buriram and Muangthong United were understandably tipped as the favourites for the TPL title. After all, no other side has lifted the coveted trophy in the last seven years.

The champions have made a solid start to the season too, with a win and a draw against arch rivals Muangthong, who have not looked quite as impressive so far. Buriram United have strengthened their squad with the signing of a Brazilian who boasts UEFA Champions League experience. Diogo Santo, who Olympiacos bought for nearly nine million euros in 2008, has had more luck than Teerasil Dangda. The striker, freshly arrived from Palmeiras, has already found the net, something that Dangda would love to do in order to kick-start his second career in the red and black of his beloved Muangthong United.
Name
Maris Verpakovskis

Date and place of birth
15 October 1979, Liepaja, Latvian SSR, Soviet Union (now Latvia)

Position
Striker

Selected clubs
1997–2000 Liepajas Metalurgs
2001–2003 Skonto Riga
2003–2009 Dynamo Kiev
2009–2014 Ergotelis

Latvia national team
104 caps, 29 goals
How did the idea of simultaneously being club president and a player come about?
Maris Verpakovskis: Last year I played for Ergotelis in the Greek Super League. In my hometown of Liepaja in Latvia, the sponsor of the local team, which plays in the country’s first division, declared bankruptcy and the question arose as to whether the club could continue to function. With a huge amount of effort, the Latvian FA and the local mayor decided to keep the side in the top flight. In January 2014 I was asked to return and help the team keep its place in the league. I accepted the offer and became president of the club I’d played for from 1996 to 2001. I’d actually planned on hanging up my boots but I trained with the team in order to stay in shape. The coach offered me the chance to play some games when they were short of numbers due to injuries or suspensions, and that’s how it all started.

Will you play in the coming season too?
I don’t know yet. I haven’t been able to train with the squad yet because my role as president is very time consuming. Over the course of the season we’ll see whether I’m needed and if I’ll have found the time to train with them. Whether or not I’m able to help the team will depend on how I feel physically.

Have you invested money in the side?
Yes, I did so last year but our objective is to finance the club through sponsorship deals and prize money from UEFA through participating in the Europa League. In addition, the city administration has made funds available to support us. Our aim for the coming season is to finish in the top three in order to secure automatic European qualification. That would be extremely important for our balance sheet. Last year we finished fourth, but this time around we might be able to do a bit better.

Which teams will be your biggest competitors?
I think they’ll be the sides that finished in the top three last year: Ventspils, Skonto and Jelgava. We can definitely compete with them and I’m certain the quality of the league will be higher this season than last, even if Latvian football isn’t going through a particularly rosy period right now, especially due to the economic situation. There are no longer any tycoons willing to invest in football, as used to be the case. There are hard times ahead for us.

You were part of the golden era in Latvian football when the national team qualified for the 2004 European Championship in Portugal. What is the difference between then and now?
Back then the national team played at a higher level than they do today, and a lot of money was invested in football. When we managed to draw with Germany at that tournament we were aware that football was the most popular sport in the country at that time - ahead of basketball and ice hockey. One of the country’s richest men back then was the current association president Guntis Indriksins, who invested a great deal of money in Skonto Riga and created a very strong team there. The club had fantastic training facilities, a great stadium and a really strong side. He could afford to fund professional training camps and sign top-quality foreign players. Back then a lot of the national team’s players, myself included, were contracted to Skonto Riga, so that made it easy for us to reproduce our club form on the international scene. We had a blind understanding. Unfortunately, that’s no longer the case today. The national team is going through a very difficult time and was drawn in a tough World Cup qualifying group. The coach, Marian Pahars, is aware of the situation and is doing his best but it’s not easy, especially as players in the biggest leagues, such as Artjoms Rudnevs at Hamburg, aren’t always first choice at their clubs.

Are there any top-quality players left in the Latvian championship?
Last year two or three players showed that they’re able to cope at a high level. Even as youngsters they managed to make the step up into the senior Latvia team. One of them is Janis Ikaunieks, who made his senior international debut aged 19 and moved to French side Metz. The league’s top scorer last season, Vladislavs Gutkovskis from Skonto Riga, scored 28 goals at the age of 20 and could still improve this term. The third player is Ventspils centre-back Kaspars Dubra. Those three could play in the big foreign leagues and I’m sure that another two or three players will make the breakthrough this year.

Maris Verpakovskis was speaking to Emanuele Giulianelli
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Place: Thimphu, Bhutan
Date: 12 December 2013
Time: 11.35 a.m.
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THE DEBATE

FIFA.com users share their thoughts on women’s football:

I’m 14 years old, I come from the United Arab Emirates and I live for football! Marta has been my biggest inspiration since I began playing in a school team at the age of 12. I’ve been hoping for the chance of a career in football ever since. Insha’Allah.

Barca4life11, United Arab Emirates

Although I’m not female, I really enjoy watching women’s football matches. The level of women’s teams has improved to such an extent that some sides could pose a threat to the men. I hope FIFA’s programmes will inspire even more girls and women to live their footballing dreams and support them as they do this.

Bingiman, Zimbabwe

I’m from Costa Rica and it’s really not easy for women’s teams here. We receive virtually no support. I’m 15 years old and play as a goalkeeper, and when I’m on the pitch I can forget about all my problems for a moment. My greatest idol is Hope Solo and I train as often as I can to improve my game and perhaps reach her level one day. But above all I want to prove that girls have huge potential and need to be encouraged.

Hildegard95, Costa Rica

I’m a 14-year-old Brazilian. Every day I play football with real pleasure and passion, even though I have to play alone because there’s no team for girls and women in my town. Despite this, football is my life and I’m working towards realising my dream of playing for Brazil one day. I would like to see women’s football receive the same appreciation as the men’s game.

CarolLoma10, Brazil

Football is my absolute favourite sport, and I think it’s very exciting and inspiring to follow developments in the women’s game. We should be aware of how much has changed for the better over the past few decades, and that’s exactly why we have to believe that women’s football will soon be just as widely accepted worldwide.

Benjamin72, Ghana

“It’s inspiring to follow developments in women’s football.”

March 8 is International Women’s Day. To mark the occasion, FIFA is staging a Women’s Football and Leadership Conference at Home of FIFA in Zurich on Friday 6 March. High-profile guest speakers from the worlds of politics, business and sport will address and discuss the future of the women’s game and the role of women in sports administration.

Twenty years ago, I said that the future of football is feminine. Nowadays, more than 30 million girls and women play football in all 209 FIFA member associations. Women’s football is booming, especially at junior levels: 14 percent of all young players are female.

The potential for growth is greater than in any other area of our sport, and the opportunity to overcome social and community barriers is even more pronounced. Even in territories where women are all but invisible for cultural reasons, football can instil a sense of purpose and self-worth that is too often denied them in their everyday lives.

The International Football Association Board acknowledged the signs of the times in 2014 when it confirmed that the wearing of head coverings in official football matches is permissible. This opened the door to football for millions of girls and women.

Especially in the Arab world, where the next U-17 Women’s World Cup will take place in Jordan in 2016, our sport plays a crucial role in efforts to promote integration and equality for women. However, a willingness to reappraise the situation is even more pronounced. Even in territories where women are all but invisible for cultural reasons, football can instil a sense of purpose and self-worth that is too often denied them in their everyday lives.

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Although I’m not female, I really enjoy watching women’s football matches. The level of women’s teams has improved to such an extent that some sides could pose a threat to the men. I hope FIFA’s programmes will inspire even more girls and women to live their footballing dreams and support them as they do this.

Bingiman, Zimbabwe

I’m from Costa Rica and it’s really not easy for women’s teams here. We receive virtually no support. I’m 15 years old and play as a goalkeeper, and when I’m on the pitch I can forget about all my problems for a moment. My greatest idol is Hope Solo and I train as often as I can to improve my game and perhaps reach her level one day. But above all I want to prove that girls have huge potential and need to be encouraged.

Hildegard95, Costa Rica

I’m a 14-year-old Brazilian. Every day I play football with real pleasure and passion, even though I have to play alone because there’s no team for girls and women in my town. Despite this, football is my life and I’m working towards realising my dream of playing for Brazil one day. I would like to see women’s football receive the same appreciation as the men’s game.

CarolLoma10, Brazil

Football is my absolute favourite sport, and I think it’s very exciting and inspiring to follow developments in the women’s game. We should be aware of how much has changed for the better over the past few decades, and that’s exactly why we have to believe that women’s football will soon be just as widely accepted worldwide.

Benjamin72, Ghana

“It’s inspiring to follow developments in women’s football.”

An appeal to Iran

Best wishes, Sepp Blatter
Cause for celebration

The 25th season of the Laotian league has just begun, with 11 teams competing in a championship still a long way from its desired aim of professionalisation.

Emanuele Giulianelli
In the People’s Democratic Republic of Laos some of the first division teams are government-owned, leading to clubs with names such as Lao Army – the military side – and Lao Police Club. Lane Xang Intra is owned by Intra Corporation Sole, a company from Vientiane, partly financed by Thai investors, that specialises in constructing hydroelectric power stations across the country.

In 2012/13 Dan Corneliusson, a Swedish former professional footballer whose career was suddenly cut short through injury as a youngster, worked with the Laotian Football Federation for a year on football development projects. Corneliusson, not to be confused with the eponymous centre-forward who played for Como in the 1980s, has an excellent knowledge of the local conditions. “A great deal of money is invested in Laotian football, from Thailand in particular,” he said. “The reason being, in Thailand they have a huge interest in taking the best players to the Thai League one day. A club like Lane Xang is paradise for players from Africa and eastern Europe, who weren’t deemed good enough in their homelands.”

One of the league’s biggest stars is 22-year-old Soukaphone Vongchiengkham, who was signed by Lane Xang Intra this year. Vongchiengkham comes from a poor family in the south of the country and started out as a youngster in the EZRA academy, and played in Thailand prior to his transfer back to Laos. “The level is much higher in the Thai league than it is in the Laotian league,” he said. “But I’m confident we’re on the right track. We’re making progress step by step to change from an amateur league into a professional one, and we will manage it. I’m happy to be able to contribute something to the development of the game.”

Room for improvement
Laotian Football is making progress, and those involved in the process are aware that the path towards becoming a professional league is a long and difficult one. Last year marked the maiden season for the new Laotian Premier League, which stemmed from a FIFA development project. The league still has an amateur feel to it, but spectators are nevertheless delighted to go and watch live games. “The players aren’t especially accomplished in terms of technique,” said Portuguese coach Mario Parreira, who was at the helm of Lane Xang last year. “But they play – and that’s enough. During a match they usually try to exploit their pace. A lot of the time the impression given off is one of an afternoon kick-about among friends.”

Parreira believes that in order for local players to improve, they must learn how to read the game and to play as a team.

Changes required
Laos is an impoverished country, shaped by huge contradictions and social conflicts. The annual GDP is $1,348 USD per capita in a nation of 6.7 million inhabitants, spread out across a vast expanse of territory. Population density is 28 people per square kilometre. The majority of citizens live on a subsistence economy, cultivating stony and sandy land which is unsuitable for purpose and only just provides them with enough to feed their families, leaving nothing left over to sell or trade at markets.

“When you look at the children playing football in the streets you can see how much potential there is.”

Guido Cozzi / SIME / Schapowalow
Naturally enough, such hardships also leave their mark on the country’s football. According to Coneliusson, one crucial aspect Laotian players need to improve upon is their willingness to learn: “When I played with the lads they were well aware that I’d played in Europe. They saw that I’ve got a good technique but they nevertheless tried to tell me how to play. Sometimes they’re just not able to recognise how low their own level is.”

The current national team coach is Englishman David Booth, who was installed as the successor to Japanese duo Kokichi Kimura and Kiyoshi Sekiguchi in 2012 thanks to the financial support of Vietnamese tycoon Doan Nguyen Duc. The Laotian FA had opted for Japanese coaches because Japan is one of the strongest footballing nations in Asia.

After two years at the helm, Sekiguchi drew similar conclusions to Coneliusson about the state of the game in Laos: “Laotian players are quick and have a basic grasp of technique. But learning tactics takes time. When you look at the children playing football in the streets you can see how much potential there is. They just need to learn that you cannot achieve success without sacrifice and dedication.”

Foreign investors
Last weekend the 25th season of the national league got under way. Defending champions FC Hoang Anh Attapeu are owned by an agricultural and real estate firm called Hoang Anh Gia Lai Joint Stock Company, which belongs to the HAGL Group owned by Vietnamese business magnate Doan Nguyen Duc.

Yet over the course of the campaign the eyes of the nation will be firmly trained on the youngsters at Lane Xang, whose captain Phoutpasong Sengdalavong is optimistic: “We’re getting better all the time. We want to win the title. The Laotian league will be more exciting this year.”

Laos are currently 161st in the FIFA World Ranking, down from their highest-ever placing of 143rd in 1997. There is no doubt that football could help the country break with a mindset that has held them back. “If you’re strong and have a dream, anyone can become a good footballer,” said Vongchiengkham. “Even I managed it in a country as poor as Laos.” 

To find out more, visit http://tinyurl.com/q35xffm
LAOS

Capital: Vientiane
Population: 6.7 million (as of 2013)
Official language: Lao
Area: 236,800 km²
Highest point: Phou Bia, 2,818m

FIFA ranking (Feb 2015): 161st (men), 86th (women)
Registered players: 2,600
Unregistered players: approx. 106,000
Clubs: 50

FIFA in Laos: FIFA donated $965,000 to the Lao Football Federation between 2010 and 2012 as part of the Goal development programme. These funds were used to build the Federation’s headquarters in the capital, Vientiane, complete with offices and space for academic lectures, and also enabled the construction of an artificial pitch at the city’s national technical centre.

Nong Khiaw Lao children enjoying a kick-about.
Big ambitions in New Zealand

New Zealand have been quietly building momentum in recent years and, having flown under the radar for so long, now aim to demonstrate a new level at the upcoming Women’s World Cup. Indeed, Football Ferns midfielder Betsy Hassett says “our goal is to win the cup.”

Betsy Hassett is well placed to comment having been part of New Zealand’s elite football ranks from a young age. She spent her school days at Auckland’s Avondale College, a suburban school which has somehow produced a vast quantity of past and present national team stars, including Amber Hearn, Kirsty Yallop and long-time former skipper Maia Jackman. Hassett would then spend after-hours training at the Wynns academy, operated by no less a figure than New Zealand football icon Wynton Rufer. Little wonder then that the industrious central midfielder – invariably one of the first on the Football Ferns teamsheet – has such pedigree.

Going for gold

It feels like Hassett has been on the scene forever, though she is still only 24. Hassett debuted at 17, while still at school. And the young veteran says the mentality in the playing group between her 2008 debut and the present day couldn’t be starker. “Heading into Germany 2011 we were still establishing ourselves when we competed against the top teams, and getting a feel for what it is like to compete against the best,” Hassett said. “Going into Canada we are going for gold. We have played a lot of games against the top teams in the past few years, and our results show we can really compete. We are going to (Canada to) win the World Cup. That is our team goal.”

The notion might seem fanciful to some, but the Women’s World Cup is perhaps a stage in which the outsider can shine. Japan were crowned world champions at Germany 2011, yet heading into the tournament they had never won a knockout stage match. New Zealand, for their part, have advanced to the quarter-finals of the 2012 Women’s Olympic Football Tournament: a first in a senior global tournament. In the past two years alone New Zealand have secured results against the likes of Norway, Denmark, Brazil, China PR and Korea DPR.

International experience

Like Hassett, almost the entire squad have played overseas, and most have also benefitted from a massive amount of international match experience. The average age of the squad is still young, yet there is a vast amount of experience with eight squad members boasting 75 caps or more, and another three with more than 50.

Aside from players based overseas, the remainder of the squad are currently domiciled in New Zealand, effectively in a camp-based environment in the lead-up to Canada 2015. All the players are based in Auckland under the direction of coach Tony Readings, competing in training games every week against youth boys’ teams.

Learn from each other

Hassett says the experienced gained at club and international level has been invaluable and helps overcome any perceived mental barrier when the Football Ferns take the field. “Playing against other professional players makes you realise you are at the same level,” she said. “It is a much better level playing overseas, especially the top leagues where we have players in the likes of Sweden, Germany and now even in Japan. It is great to have that high level training or playing every day. "When we come back together we share a little of what we learned and I think that is really healthy for the team. It is unbelievable how much better we have become. And what is crazy is that we are still so young, but have been together for so long.”

Peter Smith

For more information visit
http://tinyurl.com/kj3qczk
THERE WILL BE HATERS
The last of a dying breed

Dominik Petermann

Fast-paced wingers shape the landscape of modern attacking football, and the sight of Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale and Arjen Robben skipping past defenders at top speed is a familiar one. There is little trace left of the gracious, unhurried manner of bygone eras.

That said, there is one player who persists in calmly sauntering across the pitch: Andrea Pirlo, the last of a dying breed. Hamburg-based newspaper “Zeit” recently described his playing style as “an Adriano Celentano-esque mixture of audacity and grandeur”, going on to say: “If he could, Pirlo would surely play in sunglasses and an unbuttoned shirt, with a glass of Chianti in his hand.” And so he would. Unfazed, he would continue to spread the play all over the pitch, and occasionally, when the mood took him, he would score – with an effort of astounding precision rather than power.

His graceful style is reminiscent of the football of the 1970s, of Gunter Netzer, Franz Beckenbauer and Johann Cruyff, who, by modern standards, all jogged around the pitch at a downright ridiculously slow pace. Football may be quicker and more powerful nowadays, but it was far more graceful back then.

Pirlo’s autobiography is titled “I think therefore I play” as a variation on Descartes’ well-known phrase, even though the playmaker’s talent is surely more of a God-given gift than a result of the rational thinking the philosopher was famed for. In his book, Pirlo writes: “I don’t feel pressure. I couldn’t care less. I spent the afternoon of 9 July 2006 in Berlin sleeping and playing on the PlayStation. In the evening, I went out and won the World Cup.” And why should he feel pressure, this World Cup winner, Champions League winner, fan favourite and style icon? His reaction to any event during a game, be it a goal or a loss of possession, is always a dignified, nonchalant shrug of the shoulders.

Even one of last year’s World Cup winners could not help but be impressed. In a recent interview with German football magazine “11 Freunde”, Shkodran Mustafi said: “Pirlo was the one who really blew me away. Watching him on TV I thought: ‘He’s a granddad, he slows everything down.’ But out on the pitch you realise the opposite is true.”

Pirlo still has plenty to teach the younger crop of players but, alas, his playing style is likely to disappear forever when he finally hangs up his boots. &
Domsod-Apaipusza, Hungary

1976

A back-heel with a difference.
Bradworthy, England

2012

A full-blooded volley in Devon, England.
Develop the game
FIFA’s primary objective is to develop the game of football in our 209 member associations. The FIFA World Cup™ gives us the resources we need to invest USD 550,000 per day in football development across the globe.

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Developing football everywhere and for all
Organising inspiring tournaments
Caring about society and the environment
Why don’t great players become good coaches?

*Question from Antonio C., Porto (Portugal)*

H
er when I worked as team manager at Hamburg, the coach Ernst Happel once said he couldn’t understand why it was so rare for good footballers to try their hand at coaching. After all, he argued, it’s not that difficult.

Well, it’s true that former professional footballers have certain fundamental qualities that help them get off to a decent start as a coach, but you need more than that to be successful in that line of work. You need tactical understanding, ideas, people skills. It’s not enough to have had a couple of good years on the pitch as a player.

A coach can benefit from his success and glory as a player in the first couple of weeks on the touchline, but after that he’s judged by his ability as a coach – and rightly so. In my opinion anyone who was a difficult player before hanging up their boots is destined for failure in the dugout. A player who perhaps used to be reckless or lazy in training often tries to be a disciplinarian and demand order as a coach. That’s a recipe for disaster.

Happel had rough edges too, but he was a good player and at least as good a coach. I think his career was the exception to the rule, though. The two things – being a good player and being a good coach – are not connected. Now more than ever.

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

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“I have realised that we are on the Titanic. Above deck it’s all first-class, beautiful, shiny, with people dancing. But then there’s the second level, the third. I thought we’d sink with the first obstacle we hit. Do you remember what happened to the Titanic? Those in first class were saved; those below were left to die.”

Sandro Melli, Parma’s team manager

“He has a dream job that we’d all love to have. I think every manager in the world would like the stability by being here year after year after year, to buy to sell and rebuild, and wait and wait for success.”

Jose Mourinho has his say on Arsene Wenger

“I don’t know where it comes from or understand if it is funny. Am I being ridiculed? Is it serious? My mother always told me that I am a person who polarises opinion. There is this saying in Denmark: ‘You are someone who divides the sea’. I meet some people who think that I am the greatest person in the world. I meet others who want to throw bottles at me.”

Nicklas Bendtner on being nicknamed ‘Lord’ by the Wolfsburg supporters

“I was in the dressing room with an hour to go before kick off when Sir Alex Ferguson saw it and made me shave it off. I said no at first, and then I saw his face change very quickly, so I went and shaved it off in the toilet. Some of my hairstyles have been really bad – I hadn’t thought them through.”

David Beckham
Unleash your confidence

ALL NEW Sorento

[Microm & Wide Driver Space]  [Advanced High Strength Steel]  [Blind Spot Detection]  [Smart Power Tailgate]
“I became more aggressive and determined”

After escaping unharmed from a car crash as a teenager, Louis Saha went on to make 20 appearances for the French national team.

I was 19 years old and on my way to training at Metz. Back then I was a winger and my whole game was about dribbling. I wanted to have fun in life and have fun playing football. I had just got my first car and you could say I was young and foolish. I lost control of the car, which is what happens when you believe you're the world's best driver! I collided with the side barrier on the edge of the road and was thrown about 30 metres out of the car. Two heavy lorries zoomed past, yet somehow, neither of them hit me. To this day, I have no idea how they missed me.

Everything happened so incredibly quickly. One minute you're driving along the road and think you have everything under control. The next moment, one short lapse in concentration changes everything. I didn't think much of the accident in the immediate aftermath and went straight to training. My dad picked me up and when he saw the scene of the accident and the state of my car, he couldn't believe I had escaped unharmed.

You could say that was the moment that changed my career. Before the accident I was a nice guy, but I changed my attitude and felt a spark that inspired me to be more aggressive and determined. Looking back, I can see this change came about after the accident - I became more determined. Beforehand, I wasn't really a key player and didn't want to be one either. I wasn't a player who had to score all the goals for my team. I was just enjoying my football and wasn't really thinking about what I wanted to achieve, but that soon changed. I was converted from a winger to a centre-forward. I became more selfish and scored more goals. I wanted to make the most of every opportunity that came my way and six months later I was playing on loan for Newcastle United in England. It was a fantastic opportunity for me and I wanted to make the most of it.

I have launched a social network called Axis Stars, which is designed exclusively for athletes. The platform is meant to help players get to grips with the business side of professional sport. As a young player you tend not to ask that many questions and you're always convinced you can survive, even if you make a mistake. That's exactly what happened to me. I was very lucky. I made a mistake on the road and survived. The accident changed my attitude and I'm very happy about that.

Louis Saha was speaking to Ben Lyttleton

In Turning Point, personalities reflect on a decisive moment in their lives.
### Men's World Ranking

#### Germany (unchanged)
- **Points**: 0
- **Rank**: 1
- **Moves into top ten**: none

#### Côte d'Ivoire, Congo DR (7 matches each)
- **Equatorial Guinea (up 370 points)**
- **Equatorial Guinea (up 69 ranks)**

#### Libya (down 156 points)
- **Libya (down 35 ranks)**

#### Last updated: 12 February 2015

**Rank** | **Team** | ** +/- Points** | **Points** | **Rank** | **Team** | ** +/- Points** | **Points** | **Rank** | **Team** | ** +/- Points** | **Points**
---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---
1 | Germany | 0 | 1729 | 190 | Qatar | -17 | 305 | 108 | Puerto Rico | -1 | 119 |
2 | Argentina | 0 | 1534 | 189 | St Vincent and the Grenadines | +17 | 306 | 107 | Suriname | -1 | 115 |
3 | Colombia | 0 | 1456 | 188 | Namibia | 0 | 293 | 106 | Swaziland | -1 | 103 |
4 | Belgium | 0 | 1430 | 187 | Sudan | -4 | 288 | 105 | Guyana | 1 | 101 |
5 | Netherlands | 0 | 1385 | 186 | Libya | -35 | 281 | 104 | Belize | 17 | 90 |
6 | Brazil | 0 | 1333 | 185 | Cuba | -1 | 271 | 103 | Tahiti | -1 | 86 |
7 | Portugal | 0 | 1189 | 184 | Liberia | 0 | 268 | 102 | Gambia | -1 | 95 |
8 | France | -1 | 1168 | 183 | Kenya | 1 | 266 | 101 | Montserrat | -1 | 86 |
9 | Uruguay | 1 | 1146 | 182 | Senegal | 2 | 263 | 100 | India | 0 | 85 |
10 | Spain | -1 | 1144 | 181 | Russia | -2 | 258 | 99 | Pakistan | 17 | 85 |
11 | Switzerland | -1 | 1117 | 180 | South Africa | -4 | 257 | 98 | Sri Lanka | -1 | 78 |
12 | Italy | -1 | 1112 | 179 | United Arab Emirates | -14 | 250 | 97 | Cameroon | 0 | 75 |
13 | Costa Rica | 3 | 1076 | 178 | Turkey | 0 | 248 | 96 | Colombia | -1 | 75 |
14 | Chile | 0 | 1037 | 177 | Uzbekistan | -4 | 246 | 95 | Zambia | -5 | 245 |
15 | England | -2 | 1028 | 176 | Venezuela | 0 | 244 | 94 | Vietnam | -3 | 242 |
16 | Romania | -1 | 1022 | 175 | Croatia | -3 | 242 | 93 | Cameroon | 0 | 240 |
17 | Czech Republic | 0 | 990 | 174 | Japan | -3 | 241 | 92 | Cuba | 1 | 240 |
18 | Albania | 0 | 961 | 173 | Algeria | 0 | 240 | 91 | Kuwait | -3 | 239 |
19 | Croatia | 0 | 945 | 172 | Algeria | 0 | 239 | 90 | Luxembourg | -2 | 238 |
20 | Côte d'Ivoire | -2 | 932 | 171 | China PR | -14 | 237 | 89 | Solomon Islands | -1 | 236 |
21 | Mexico | -1 | 912 | 170 | Guatemala | -9 | 236 | 88 | Cameroon | 0 | 235 |
22 | Slovakia | -1 | 903 | 169 | Angola | -3 | 235 | 87 | Azerbaijan | -5 | 234 |
23 | Austria | 0 | 881 | 168 | Hungary | 1 | 235 | 86 | Aruba | -3 | 232 |
24 | Greece | 0 | 871 | 167 | Haiti | -5 | 234 | 85 | Vietnam | -3 | 231 |
25 | Ghana | 12 | 694 | 166 | Venezuela | 8 | 234 | 84 | Philippin | -3 | 230 |
26 | Tunisia | 4 | 680 | 165 | Paraguay | 3 | 230 | 83 | Moldova | -4 | 229 |
27 | Ukraine | 2 | 659 | 164 | Honduras | -5 | 229 | 82 | New Zealand | -1 | 228 |
28 | Denmark | 2 | 646 | 163 | Ecuador | 1 | 228 | 81 | Tajikistan | -1 | 227 |
29 | Ecuador | -3 | 640 | 162 | Brazil | 2 | 227 | 80 | Guinea-Bissau | -5 | 226 |
30 | Bosnia and Herzegovina | -1 | 632 | 161 | Estonia | -2 | 226 | 79 | Kazakhstan | 0 | 225 |
31 | USA | -4 | 624 | 160 | Sierra Leone | -1 | 225 | 78 | St Lucia | 0 | 224 |
32 | Israel | 0 | 605 | 159 | El Salvador | 3 | 224 | 77 | Myanmar | 0 | 223 |
33 | Russia | -2 | 759 | 158 | Morocco | -9 | 223 | 76 | Barbados | 1 | 223 |
34 | Wales | 0 | 764 | 157 | Cyprus | -3 | 222 | 75 | Thailand | 1 | 222 |
35 | Cape Verde Islands | -2 | 716 | 156 | Mozambique | 8 | 222 | 74 | Afghanistan | -2 | 221 |
36 | Senegal | -1 | 744 | 155 | Oman | 2 | 221 | 73 | Central African Republic | 0 | 220 |
37 | Iceland | -4 | 743 | 154 | Bolivia | -8 | 220 | 72 | Chad | 0 | 219 |
38 | Scotland | -2 | 730 | 153 | Malawi | -5 | 219 | 71 | Turkmenistan | 0 | 218 |
39 | Serbia | -1 | 723 | 152 | Iraq | 20 | 218 | 70 | Madagascar | -1 | 217 |
40 | Poland | 1 | 709 | 151 | Benin | -9 | 217 | 69 | Malta | -2 | 216 |
41 | Iran | 10 | 701 | 150 | Lithuania | -5 | 216 | 68 | Syria | 0 | 215 |
42 | Nigeria | 1 | 664 | 149 | Jordan | -4 | 215 | 67 | Kyrgyzstan | 1 | 214 |
43 | Guinea | -4 | 602 | 148 | Saudi Arabia | 4 | 214 | 66 | Korea DPR | -2 | 213 |
44 | Sweden | 0 | 654 | 147 | Antigua and Barbuda | -4 | 213 | 65 | New Caledonia | 0 | 212 |
45 | Cameroon | -3 | 646 | 146 | Tanzania | -3 | 212 | 64 | Malaysia | 0 | 211 |
46 | Congo DR | 11 | 641 | 145 | Thailand | 1 | 211 | 63 | Grenada | 0 | 210 |
47 | Slovenia | -1 | 640 | 144 | Laos | -1 | 210 | 62 | Singapore | 1 | 209 |
48 | Hungary | -3 | 634 | 143 | Bangladesh | 8 | 209 | 61 | Maldives | -4 | 208 |
49 | Congo | 12 | 630 | 142 | Indonesia | 1 | 208 | 60 | Hong Kong | -3 | 207 |
50 | Equatorial Guinea | 63 | 630 | 141 | Congo | -2 | 207 | 59 | Curaçao | -2 | 206 |
51 | Northern Ireland | -4 | 626 | 140 | Tunisia | -1 | 206 | 58 | Laos | -1 | 205 |
52 | Turkey | -4 | 619 | 139 | Belarus | -2 | 205 | 57 | Brunei Darussalam | 0 | 204 |
53 | Mali | -4 | 610 | 138 | Portugal | -1 | 204 | 56 | Papua New Guinea | 0 | 203 |
54 | Korea Republic | 15 | 608 | 137 | Israel | 0 | 203 | 55 | American Samoa | 0 | 202 |
55 | Japan | -1 | 605 | 136 | Egypt | 3 | 203 | 54 | Andorra | 0 | 201 |
56 | South Africa | -4 | 592 | 135 | Gabon | 4 | 202 | 53 | British Virgin Islands | 0 | 199 |
57 | Egypt | 3 | 590 | 134 | Peru | -5 | 201 | 52 | Eritrea | 0 | 198 |
58 | Gabon | 4 | 585 | 133 | Zamb | -5 | 200 | 51 | Somalia | 0 | 197 |
59 | Peru | -5 | 566 | 132 | Cuba | -1 | 199 | 50 | Cook Islands | 0 | 196 |
60 | Zambia | -10 | 556 | 131 | Liberia | 0 | 198 | 49 | Anguilla | 0 | 195 |
61 | Panama | -5 | 555 | 130 | Kenya | 1 | 197 | 48 | Bhutan | 0 | 194 |
THE Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)

EASY

1

3 2 8 6 7
3 2 8 6 7
3 2 8 6 7
3 2 8 6 7
3 2 8 6 7

2

4 8 2 1
4 8 2 1
4 8 2 1
4 8 2 1
4 8 2 1

MEDIUM

9 1 5 4 3
9 1 5 4 3
9 1 5 4 3
9 1 5 4 3
9 1 5 4 3

HARD

5 4 7 2 1
5 4 7 2 1
5 4 7 2 1
5 4 7 2 1
5 4 7 2 1

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.
Who will be the top scorer of the 2014/2015 UEFA Champions League?

- Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
- Edinson Cavani (Paris Saint-Germain)
- Luiz Adriano (Shakhtar Donetsk)
- Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona)
- Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)
- Jackson Martinez (FC Porto)
- Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
- Mario Mandzukic (Atlético Madrid)

Cast your votes at: FIFA.com/newscentre

Last Week’s Poll Results

Which of these former champions is your favourite to win the 2015 CAF Champions League?

- Al-Ahly (EGY)
- Raja Casablanca (MAR)
- TP Mazembe (COD)
- Espérance de Tunis (TUN)
- Enyimba (NGA)
- Asante Kotoko (GHA)
- ES Sétif (ALG)

WEEK IN NUMBERS

6
successive home draws for Roma means the club from the Italian capital are now well off the pace in the Serie A title race. Although the Giallorossi dropped points once again on their most recent outing, their opponents were top-of-the-table Juventus. The frontrunners are now unbeaten in 16 games, longer than any other club in Europe’s top five leagues.

518
goals were scored by Alberto Bueno in Rayo Vallecano’s 4-2 win against Levante – the first time one of the club’s players has reached this tally in a single match. The 26-year-old’s feat helped his team record back-to-back victories for the first time in the current campaign. He scored all four of his goals within 15 frantic first-half minutes.

4
Flamengo matches have featured Leo Moura, placing him seventh on the club’s all-time appearances list as he bids farewell to the team he has represented for the past decade. All the other players in the top ten made their debuts for the Mengão in 1976 or earlier.