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AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORIES

ConIFA World Football Cup: In Conversation with Western Armenia's Yagan Hiraç

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Western Armenia are one of the 16 teams competing in this summer's ConIFA World Football Cup. The National Student spoke to co-founder of their governing body, Football Federation of Western Armenia and player Yagan Hiraç ahead of the tournament.





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represent them at international tournaments: "This land is part of my fatherland and the land of my grandfathers and a lot of people I know want to create a team.

"It was an idea really, we saw ConIFA on the internet and we thought 'why not?' so we met the President in Geneva, and we started to try and make a Western Armenia team.

"We can play for our land, if we try and do something like this with FIFA, we cannot do it. The people of Armenia can follow us and participate and we can share during the tournament, with each other."

At the 2016 ConIFA WFC, Western Armenia began with an impressive 12-0 victory over the Chagos Islands with David Ghandilyan scoring a double hat-trick, Hiraç was also on target in that game. This was followed by a narrow defeat to hosts and eventual winners Abkhazia before the team met Panjab in the quarter-finals. An Arun Purewal hat-trick put Panjab 3-0 up at half-time and despite second-half strikes from Tamaz Avolian and Raffi Kayah, the side was eliminated. The team will once again meet Panjab in the group stage.

A penalty shootout victory over Iraqi Kurdistan and defeat to Sapmi in the placement rounds meant the side finished 7th in their first international tournament.

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Hiraç is hoping for further progress in London this summer both on the pitch and off the pitch: "We are competitive. We want to win all of our games, so let's see."

He believes it is important the team "don't forget where we come from" and "share with the Armenian community within London.

"We have a big community there too so let's see if they come to watch our games and after the game, we can speak to them and share with them."

It has been reported by the Office of National Statistics that they are around 2,000 Armenians living in the United Kingdom. These notably include Bargain Hunt host David Dickinson, musician Levon Chilingrian, and actor Kevork Malikyan.

The team has been successful in engaging with the Armenian community, receiving plenty of requests from the wider Western Armenia diaspora from players wishing to join the team, with contact being made from as far away as Argentina, the United States and Australia. Hiraç admits financially it is very difficult to organise the travel for these players to get them involved, however.

He does though wish to use his position to help his compatriots in their football career. "We have good links with some soccer teams," he explains. The relationships with Armenia club Ararat Yerevan and Stade Nyonnais could help players in their quests to secure contracts.

A further long-term goal for Hiraç, who has spent time at Standard Liege and Servette amongst others, and the Federation is to "go to some countries and cities, where Armenians are living and to make a camp for them", another way in which Armenians can gain support in their football.

The team's opening match is against United Koreans of Japan in Carshalton on Thursday with the match kicking off at 1200.



Western Armenia's final group against Kabylie on the 3rd June in Enfield at 1800 will be featured on The National Student with live Twitter coverage and a full match report after the game.

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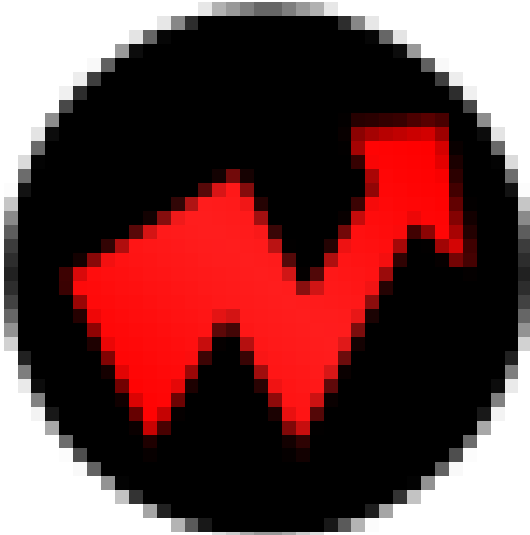
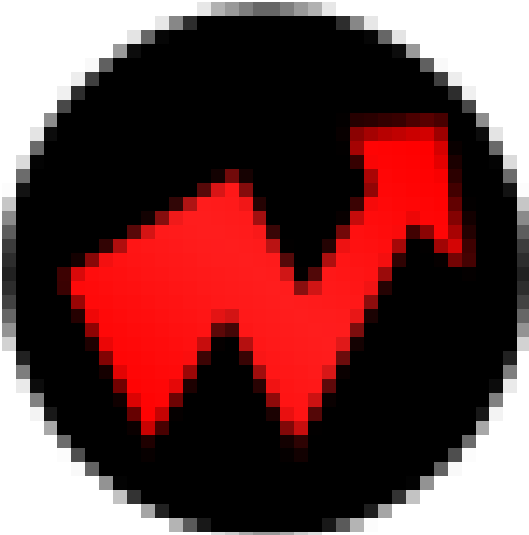




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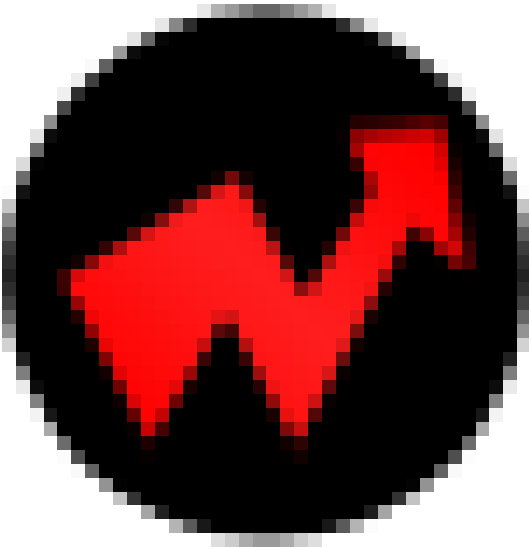
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