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ConIFA World Football Cup: Talking points from the Pre- Final Press Conference

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9th June 2018

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Karpatalja's run to the final

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Instantly questions were asked about Karpatalja's run to the final. The side were the last team to book their place having replaced Felvidek in May. Duerkopf insisted he was "impressed" by the side at last year's European Championships and pointed out the 2014 competition was won by the County of Nice, another replacement team.

Boratas added, "they are a good team", though insisted he respected the whole team, rather than highlighting a few players for close attention.

Level of local support

The Northern Cypriot fans have been noted for their vocal support throughout the tournament and this was something Necati Gench, a member of London's Turkish Cypriot was very proud of.

"I think it's fantastic", he began before noting the support, "has past our expectations, and they've played a major part in us getting to the final, yesterday you saw 2-1 down with the support behind us, they pushed us onto the win. The final 15 minutes, they helped us get over the line."

Kamali agreed, pointing out the political isolation of Northern Cyprus makes it very rare for the players and the team to travel abroad to play football: "It helped us feel like we are playing at home. If sometimes we need something, they make things easy for us, especially at the games supporting us, so it's very important for the players since we're abroad, that we're not used to playing abroad very much..."

Kamali then corrected himself by adding "Not much, none!"

Indeed as a side, they were not able to play preparation matches with the tournament being an example of the team being dropped into the deep end: "Before we came here, we didn't play any preparation matches," explains Kamali, "The first preparation match was the first game in the group against Karpatalja, the second preparation game was against Tibet and the fourth was against Padania. Every day we are getting better."

The Hungarians have too enjoyed lots of local support from the Hungarian community. Wenczel pointed out there was little history between the two Hungarian teams, Karpatalja and Szekely Land, as they've only played twice. It is expected that Szekely Land fans will stay after the third-place play-off to support the compatriots.

The political situation of Northern Cyprus

Northern Cyprus is politically embargoed as it was created after a Turkish invasion following a Greek-backed military coup. Greek Cypriots view Northern Cyprus as territory that is illegally occupied and there are grievances over expulsions and evictions. Currently, only Turkey recognises Northern Cyprus.

When asked if there was opposition to his team's involvement, Kamali responded: "Of course that's why we are here!"



A Greek Cypriot community organisation penned a letter in opposition to them being allowed to play.

Kamali insisted politics was a separate issue to his team: "In North Cyprus, the people love football. We have a lot of kids and young people joining the teams and playing the games. Especially in this century, you can't tell young people they cannot play due to politics, with the internet and everything they can easily access, are going to tell a 12, 15-year-old boy 'you can't play football'?"

"We don't care about the politics, we want to play football. That's why we are here."

The quality of teams

Naturally, the questions moved to the quality of opposition teams in the tournament.

The consensus was the quality on offer was quite high. Boratas explained this was vital for his team as isolation means they are a big fish in a small pond: "We are playing in our country on our island. We are swimming in our little pool, we want to be sharks, we want to be swimming in the oceans. We want to play, we want to join all other the world, it's very important for us."

Duerkopf and Watson agreed that the quality of teams has been quite high throughout ConIFA history, though it has improved year on year.

Duerkopf concurred with Boratas that being able to experience new football and different types of football has helped teams develop: "They haven't played footballers from other countries, footballers from other cultural backgrounds, and the style of football is very different."

Indeed, this tournament has bought up many surprises. As well as finalists Karpatalja not actually originally qualifying, favourites Ellan Vannin and defending champions Abkhazia did not make it out the group stages. United Koreans in Japan tipped by many as dark horses did not even pick up a single win in the group stage.

ConIFA Evaluation

A lot of discussion surrounding the tournament has regarded attendances, though Watson has no concrete figures: "The nature of non-league football in this country is they don't tend to keep the most precise records. We will get more precise statistics at the end."

The average he explained has been around 250, with a range of between 65 and 1,200.

"Which I think is more than we have anticipated in advance. That is the nature of the games which are on the middle of the day, on weekdays, which is usually something you'd try and avoid but was unavoidable in this context."

1,300 tickets have already been sold for the final, with the same figure expected on the day. From an organisational perspective, Watson believes the tournament has been a success: "We are about identity, we want to say people's identities matter. It could've gone better, we could improve but I think this is a big statement about who we are and what we represent."

Duerkopf points out Karpatalja play in the colours of both the Hungarian and Ukrainian national teams as an example.

ConIFA is still, of course, a small organisation, with just around 20 volunteers, given the circumstances and the logistical demands of organising over 40 matches in 10 days at several different grounds, Watson believes the organisation should be happy even though



still important to evaluate: "Many of us were doing this for this first time. On the whole, I'm pretty proud of the way that we've managed it, given we have such a tiny team."

He then adds, jokingly: "You know, teams have turned up, we've usually had three match balls!"

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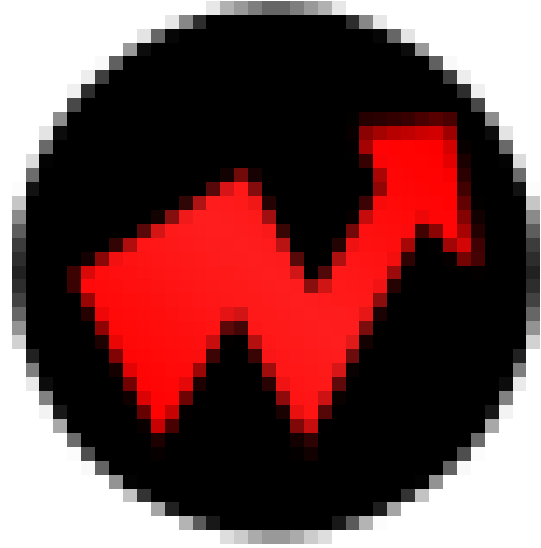
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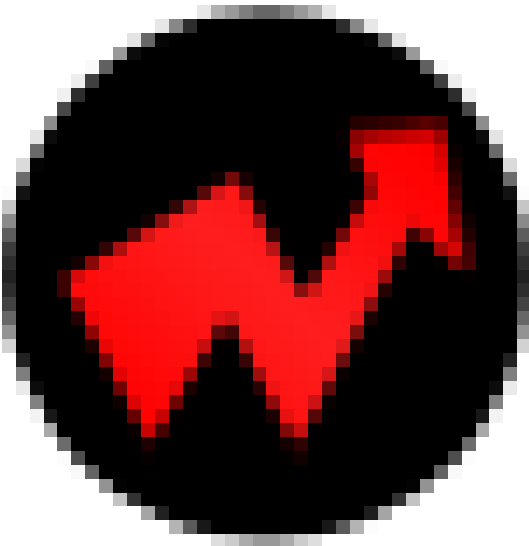


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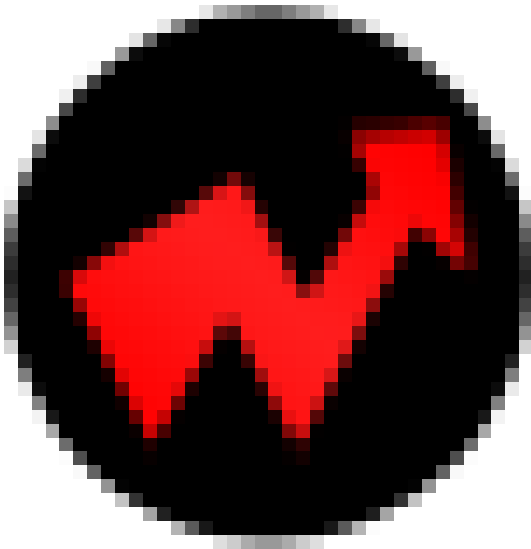




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