

'Forgotten' Nations Offered Chance To Shine

This summer the elite of European football will arrive in Austria and Switzerland for UEFA Euro 2008, **writes James Goldman**. Over 23 days in June the likes of Portugal, France, Spain and Germany will battle it out and after 31 matches in locations such as Vienna, Geneva, Zurich and Basle the 2008 winner of the European Championship will be crowned in front of the world's media. But while the thoughts of many football fans will automatically turn to World Cup qualification in the weeks immediately following the event, over in Sweden football's 'forgotten' teams will get their chance to shine. Just over a week after the European Championships come to a close, a little-known tournament will be contested in Gallivare, Sweden.

Organised by the New Federation Board (NF-Board) for non-FIFA nations, the Viva World Cup 2008 is the brainchild of four men with a love for sport and a passion for involving the minnows. Sitting in a Brussels pub called La Mort Subite or 'The Sudden Death' some years ago, Luc Mission, Christian Michelis, Thierry Marcade and Jean Luc-Kit decided to create a new organisation that would work towards providing the world's unrecognised footballing nations with a prestigious tournament - in their own words "so that everyone can play".

"The tournament was created by a group of people who understood that outcasts existed within sport and this was something that should have never happened," George Wuethrich, the vice-president of the NF-Board, explained to PA Sport's Premier Football. "I spoke with Jean-Luc Kit in 2003 and he wanted to bring all these so called 'outcasts' together at a world tournament called Viva World Cup and I immediately agreed." Kit, one of the driving forces behind the creation of the tournament, explained how he conjured up the idea. "As a football

historian since 1977, I was in contact with a lot of FAs that weren't affiliated to FIFA but who wanted to play. It was time to create an event for them," he said.

The inaugural event in 2006 was not without its teething problems, many of which still hamper the efforts of the organisers today. Initially planned for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the tournament was marred by disagreements with local authorities and when the NF-Board decided to shift the event to Occitania, the fact they could not pay the expenses of competitors meant many of those interested did not have the funds to take part. "Every team has to look for its own funds and the NF-Board officials use their own cash to travel and to stay in hotels," explained Wuethrich. "The NF-Board has more willpower than money so far and cannot pay for a lot of expenses."

Financial and logistical problems meant that in the end only four teams made it, and when South Cameroon's team were prevented from playing by work permit issues, their games had to result in walkovers. By the end of the week's competition, Sapmi (an area in Northern Europe encompassing parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) had been crowned champion, scoring 42 goals in its three games, and beating Monaco 21-1 in the final. The challenge now is to build on those foundations.

Kit said: "If we had £2 million we could organise a big competition with 32 FAs, all travel paid, and it would include the likes of Tibet, Chagos, Chechnya, Australian Aborigines, Maori, Indians of America, Easter Island, Falkland, St. Helena, Darfur, Western Sahara and Mapuche, who would like to participate but currently struggle to raise the funds." "We want to find sponsors," added Wuethrich. "The NF Board has recognised that sponsors are vital to most teams, many of which are in economical dire straits. In order to travel and pay for accommodation sponsors are needed. The pitfall of course is that the tournament could lose its spirit and also become financially driven."

Hosted by the FA of Sapmi, it is hoped the Viva World Cup 2008 will include the likes of Suryoye, Gozo, Padania, Kurdistan, Maasai, West Papua, Greenland, Syriacs and Zanzibar, Tibet and Somaliland. Under the shadow of the European Championships, it will probably not even register on the radar of most fans. For football's 'forgotten few', however, just playing at all represents a massive success.

[Back to Headlines](#)