

FOR THOSE IN TWILIGHT



VIVA WORLD CUP

The planet's forgotten teams are gearing up for their biennial festival of football. In Lapland. Stewart Fisher reports

NOW the European Championships are out of the way, it must be time for the World Cup to begin. The Viva World Cup, that is. For the benefit of the uninitiated, the Viva World Cup is a biennial tournament which pits together those nations and peoples not recognised, for whatever reason, by Fifa. It starts tomorrow night in the town of Gulli-vare, Lapland, under the midnight sun.

The hosts - officially known as the Sami - are also the holders, and will compete against Kurdistan, Provence, Padania and Suryoye in their bid to retain the Nelson Mandela trophy which they won by beating Monaco (not to be confused with the club side who play in the French Ligue 1) 21-1 in 2006.

So should Sepp Blatter be worried by all of this, and what does a 17-year-old student from Inverness have to do with it? The tournament is organised by the New Federation Board (N-F Board), an umbrella association for these misfit nations, which includes members such as Occitania, Tibet, Zanzibar and Somaliland. The organisation are careful to carry a disclaimer refuting any suggestion that they are political, but attaining representation within international football can be a serious business. Some N-F Board members, such as Greenland and Gibraltar, have ambitions of playing under the Fifa banner, while others, like Chechnya, have only provisional membership of the misfits club.

The Invernesian who has been caught up in this murky world is Nathan Mackenzie, vice-president of the Confederation of European New Federations (CENF), essentially the Uefa to the N-F Board's Fifa. If it all seems a bit like the old Monty Python joke about the People's Front of Judea, Mackenzie doesn't seem to mind the distraction it provides from his studies and his other life as a season ticket holder at the Caledonian Stadium. The young Scot became one of CENF's 10 founding members after coming across the topic on a web forum, and works mainly on the website and newsletters.

"I was just on one of the forums and I got to know one of the guys who was involved," Mackenzie said. "I spoke to him a lot and he was wanting to start up a European Confederation, so we got a couple of people involved and we started one up. From there we just started to co-ordinate games and organise things, and now we are building up towards a European Cup next summer in Holland and are hoping to take teams such as Greenland and Wallonia [from the south-east part of Belgium]. At the moment we are helping the N-F Board with the Viva World Cup. It is just something I do in my spare time, the N-F Board is a bit more professional. We have just started off, so it is a bit more

€200,000 to put the teams up in Holland for the week next summer, and there have been other issues in the past with visas.

"It is not going to be a commercial success," he said. "As for our tournament, we will probably not make much money out of it, but it does give these teams a chance to represent themselves on the international stage. It is a small tournament and it is a lot of money for a lot of teams. If the tournament was to have say 10 teams it would need to be over two or three weeks and that would be very expensive. For a team to play in Holland for about a week costs about €200,000 so that is a lot of money."

In 2006, the Viva World Cup's late switch of venue from Northern Cyprus to Occitania, near Toulon, cost them the services of several teams who attended a rival competition called the ELF Cup. The numbers dwindled from 16 to eight, then down to six. When West Papua and Southern Cameroon failed to attend the general assembly, then the Roma (the Romanians) suffered logistical

Sapmi: The current holders of the Viva World Cup and this year's hosts represent the Sami people, who are primarily located in northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

Kurdistan: Kurdistan will play in the Viva World Cup for the first time and hope to upset the tournament favourites, Sapmi, in their opening game.

Padania: Representing various regions of Northern Italy, Padania have been playing football since 1998 and make a debut appearance at the Viva World Cup.

Arameans Suryoye: Encompassing a broad area, this ethnic group is found in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Israel, Iran and Turkey. Brought together for the Viva World Cup, this will be the first time that the team has participated in competitive football.

Provence: For the first time since 1921, a team from Provence will play competitive football hoping to improve on the region's football record - played two, lost two.

difficulties, the tournament was left to proceed with just three entrants. After 42 goals in three games, the Sami were worthy winners. Indeed, one of their players is said to have turned down a full international cap with Norway in order to represent them.

As for Mackenzie's plans for world domination, it seems Blatter's seat at football administration's top table is safe for now. "For me, it is sort of a hobby at the moment," he says. "Our president, Paul David Carli from Holland, does most of the travelling around and that sort of thing. I don't really have enough money to go travelling around Europe anyway, but it is something I would love to do later on."