

**WORLD CUP WOE** JAMES ELLIS INVESTIGATES THE PLIGHT OF TEAMS WHO ARE EXCLUDED FROM THE GAME'S SHOWPIECE EVENT

# Football's forgotten men

In mid-September, the Faroe Islands kick off their qualifying campaign for the 2010 World Cup with an away tie in Serbia and a home match four days later with Romania. The windswept province of Denmark will take to the field at the Tórsvøllur stadium, built in 2000 with the financial rewards gained being eligible to play international football.

Meanwhile, the players of Greenland, another Danish province, will be kicking their heels rather than footballs, unable to take part in the competition because of a change in membership rules by Uefa, European football's governing body.

Football provides Greenlanders with a strong sense of national identity – distinct to that of Denmark – to the point where it can literally be a matter of life and death: in 2004, three of its players perished at sea travelling home from a game.

## Moving the goalposts

In 2005, Uefa decreed all future members also had to belong to the United Nations and Greenland's application to join perished. 'It's just one of the many anomalies that teams on the boundaries of international football must deal with,' says Steve Menary, author of new book *Outcasts! The Lands That Fifa Forgot*.

An unlikely contender for the National Sporting Club's football book of the year later this month, *Outcasts!* looks at teams such as Greenland, Zanzibar and Tibet, excluded from international competition thanks to organisers infuriatingly complex regulations.

The reason for Uefa's rule change was to head off a political time bomb when Gibraltar applied to join in 1999. 'The Spanish FA threatened to pull its teams from international competition,' says Menary. 'So Uefa adopted the UN membership rule.

And to join Fifa (football's international governing body), you have to be a member of your regional federation, so that door also closed.'

The situation becomes even more confusing as each regional federation has its own membership criteria while Fifa only asks that members 'belong to the international community'. The non-unified criteria and loose definitions mean Hong Kong and the French colony of New Caledonia are among 23 'non countries' that are members of Fifa. In the UK, the anomalies see England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as Uefa and Fifa members, while the nascent international aspirations of the Isle Of Man and the Channel Islands are well and truly curtailed.

Inevitably, in an era when the Premier League can float plans to play matches around the world, money is at the root of some of the problems. 'When the Eastern Bloc split in the 1990s, Uefa and Fifa's membership expanded massively and more money became available,' says Menary.

'Some of that filters down; each Fifa member gets \$1million [£497,000] every four years towards development. It's peanuts to the English FA but, if you're Montserrat, it's a fortune. The Greenlanders know they're not good enough to play international matches but were simply looking for aid to build a grass pitch.'

## In love with the game

Menary believes that, while there are different reasons 'outcast' teams seek recognition, one thing unites them: 'Some need money to keep playing; others, such as Occitania [an area covering parts of southern France, Spain and Italy which has its own language], want to preserve a culture. But they all want to play for the love of the game.'



Shunned by Fifa: Northern Cyprus take on Greenland during the 2006 Fifi Wild Cup held in Germany

Such is that love that 'outcasts' have scraped and saved to hold impromptu tournaments including the Federation of International Football Independents (Fifi) Wild Cup, held in June 2006, and the ELF (Equality, Liberty, Fraternity) Cup in November 2007. Many teams have also banded together as members of the NF (non-Fifa) Board, an organisation set up in 2003 as a self-styled 'waiting room for Fifa'.

'We respect all the international and national institutions and have spoken to Unesco about a possible future partnership,' says NF vice-president Jean-Luc Kit. 'Fifa wants to affiliate the football associations of states. Our job is to look after the FAs of nations, peoples, minorities and isolated territories.'

The NF Board, which oversees 'outcast' teams playing for the Nelson Mandela trophy at its own Viva World Cup, seems to be the

only way for most of its teams to fulfil international aspirations; whether they can afford to or not is another matter.

'We have the contacts to play; we only have to find partners to help pay,' says Kit. 'We don't want the money for us, we only want it to play football.'

Fifa did not reply to Metro's request for a comment.

*Outcasts! The Lands That Fifa Forgot (Know The Score! £16.99) is out now*