



All competitions ▾

About

Our history

Kicking off with the foundation of UEFA in 1954, we track the defining matches and moments that have shaped 70 years of European football history – on and off the field.



1954: the birth of UEFA

The story of UEFA began in the early 1950s as a quest by national governing bodies across the continent. Their goal: to unite the European game in a spirit of solidarity to develop the game on and off the field.



Many of these bodies wished to expand their activities, so their national and club teams could play either international friendly matches or in a competition setting. They also sought to enhance the development of key sectors of the game, such as training coaches and match officials, as well as to leverage the rapidly growing medium of television.

"The European national associations decide definitively on the constitution of a group of the said associations, under a form to be determined."

Motion agreed at UEFA's founding meeting in Basel, Switzerland – 15 June 1954

The road to European football union – based on mutual cooperation and solidarity – gathered speed between 1950 and 1954 thanks to three pioneering figures: Italian Football Federation president Ottorino Barassi, Belgian Football Association general secretary José Crahay, and French Football Federation president Henri Delaunay. The trio worked tirelessly behind the scenes to set the course for a new dawn of European football.

Pioneers of European football



Previous UEFA presidents

15 June 1954: A new European football adventure

In 1953, world football body FIFA opened the door for UEFA's foundation by giving the green light for the creation of continental football confederations. On 15 June 1954, Europe's national associations met in Basel, Switzerland, to rubber-stamp the formation of a pan-European football body – kicking off the construction of a footballing Europe.

[More on the birth of UEFA](#)

1950s



The fledgling UEFA took little time to find its feet after its foundation in June 1954. Important projects were quickly set in motion – none more so than the launch of two major competitions: the European Champion Clubs' Cup for club teams, and the European Championship for national teams.

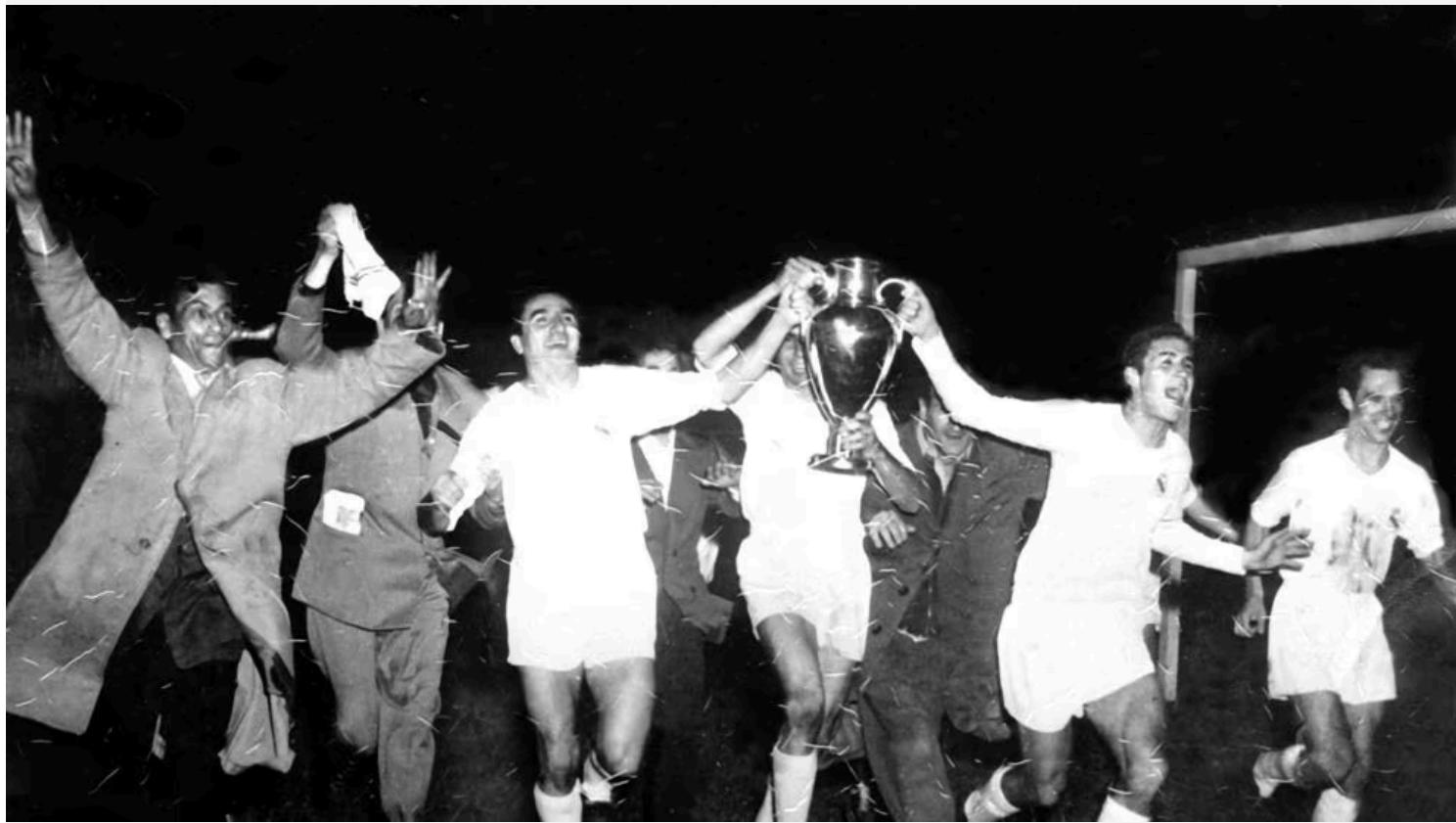
"The Champion Clubs' Cup is a wonderful new initiative..."

Henri Delaunay, UEFA's first general secretary

Iconic competitions

The Champion Clubs' Cup kicked off in September 1955. Spanish club Real Madrid would dominate the competition's early years, winning the trophy five times in succession.

At the same time, the idea of a European national team competition gained strength, leading to the European Championship making its bow in September 1958. Both competitions were to become iconic pillars on the European football landscape.



Real Madrid celebrate winning the first European Cup final in 1956
Popperfoto via Getty Images

Related reading



The birth of UEFA

1960s

The 1960s saw huge changes in society and sport, with UEFA striving to keep pace. Over the course of this decade, we matured from infancy into a sturdy 'youngster'.

UEFA headquarters moved from Paris to the Swiss capital, Berne. Our operations expanded to incorporate more expert committees addressing key football topics, while we started our first courses for coaches and referees. We also regulated the burgeoning transmission of football matches on TV.

First European Cup Winners' Cup

We added a new club competition to our calendar – the European Cup Winners' Cup for winners of Europe's domestic cup competitions. On the field, the European Champion Clubs' Cup flourished, while the European Nations' Cup was upgraded to a European national team championship.

"I will always defend 1960s football ..."

Benfica and Portugal legend Eusébio

World-renowned players such as Portugal's Eusébio, England's Bobby Charlton and Italy's Gianni Rivera enthralled fans as they bestrode the European stage.



Manchester United's Bobby Charlton lifts the European Cup after victory over Eusébio's Benfica, flanked by UEFA president Gustav Wiederkehr
Popperfoto/Getty Images

1970s

On the pitch, European football in the 70s was marked by Dutch artistry, German excellence and English spirit. Off it, the game developed immeasurably, as we modernised our organisation and consolidated our role as the cornerstone of the continent's most popular sport.

Ajax and Bayern Munich dominated our club competitions for the first half of the decade, both enjoying three successive European Champion Clubs' Cup triumphs – Ajax with their swashbuckling 'total football', and Bayern with a potent mixture of power and skill.

"It had an enormous impact on the whole world..."

Johan Cruyff on Ajax's innovative 'total football'



Ajax line up before the 1971 European Cup final - the first of three straight successes for the Dutch club
Popperfoto via Getty Images

It was then the turn of English clubs to take over at the top – Liverpool’s triumphs in 1977 and 1978 were followed by Nottingham Forest’s improbable rise from relative obscurity to clinch the title the following year. In addition, two new major European club competitions were launched – the UEFA Cup and UEFA Super Cup.

Panenka's penalty

Our national team competitions shared the spotlight. The decade’s two European Championship titles went to an impressive West German outfit in 1972 and Czechoslovakia in 1976 – the latter success notable for a unique penalty by Czech legend Antonín Panenka that sealed his side’s victory in the final against the German titleholders.

"It was the easiest and simplest way of scoring a goal."

Antonín Panenka on his audacious penalty that gave Czechoslovakia the 1976 EURO title

President Gustav Wiederkehr

There was sadness in 1972 when our president Gustav Wiederkehr died. His successor was Italian Artemio Franchi, destined to make a massive contribution to the modernisation of UEFA's competitions himself, reinforcing the game's popularity across society.

1980s

The 1980s saw football and UEFA adapt to significant shifts in the Europe's political, social and commercial landscape. From the expansion of political unity and advances in technology, to the emergence of marketing and sponsorship as a vital tool in sports promotion, the decade prepared the way for even more momentous changes to come.

These were not the only challenges we faced. The tragic death in a car crash of our president Artemio Franchi and the Heysel stadium disaster in Brussels both required strength to digest and overcome in the pursuit of progress and change.

Evolution of our competitions

On the field, there was much to savour as great players and teams continued to dominate the headlines and enthrall fans.

"You need a lot of luck with a shot like that ... I did not really understand it and what I did. You can also see that in my reaction. I am asking: 'What is happening?'"

Dutch striker Marco van Basten on his all-time great goal in the EURO 1988 final

The European Champions' Clubs' Cup and European Championship for national teams continued to evolve into competitions with massive appeal and exposure, while women's football began its steady rise to prominence.





Sweden were the first UEFA Women's EURO winners in 1984
PA Images via Getty Images

1990s

New horizons opened for UEFA and European football in the 1990s – a period marked by explosive growth in TV coverage and rights, sponsorship and communication that together transformed the game into a truly global phenomenon.

The decade started with the election of Sweden's Lennart Johansson as our fifth president. With general secretary Gerhard Aigner, he would guide UEFA through a period of rapid and far-reaching change. Both men understood the need to balance new commercial opportunities with respect for European football's traditional values while reinvesting revenue back into development.

"Over the years ... UEFA has become the focal point of the European game."

UEFA president Lennart Johansson

Launch of the new UEFA Champions League



In September 1991, an Extraordinary UEFA Congress in Montreux, Switzerland, decided to revamp the European Champion Clubs' Cup. Its replacement, the UEFA Champions League, was an immediate success. Football's global superstars captivated millions of fans in the stadium and in front of their TV sets across the world.



AC Milan's Dejan Savićević holds aloft the trophy after the 1994 UEFA Champions League final victory against Barcelona
Hulton Archive

New associations

After the break-up of the Soviet Union around the turn of the decade, we helped a host of new and independent national football associations in eastern Europe to find their feet, especially in terms of infrastructure.

New headquarters

On the eve of a new millennium, after almost 40 years based in the Swiss capital, UEFA moved to a new home in Nyon – a reflection of our rapid growth into a dynamic business organisation. The impressive House of European Football, located on the shores of Lake Geneva, officially opened for business in autumn 1999.

Go in-depth



In tune with a new football world

2000s

With the dawn of a new millennium, UEFA recognised the need to extend the scope of its partnership model to cover the entire European football community. In addition to longstanding ties with our member associations, which totalled 51 in 2000, we intensified our relationship with other stakeholders. Over the course of the decade, we established cooperation agreements with Europe's clubs, leagues and players' bodies.

The early 2000s brought a restructuring of our administration, with the then general secretary Gerhard Aigner taking the role of chief executive. Lennart Johansson was re-elected as president for a fourth term in April 2002. Two years later, another Swede, Lars-Christer Olsson, replaced Aigner as chief executive, Aigner having retired in UEFA's 50th year of existence – 33 of which he had spent honourably serving European football.

"Our structures may evolve – but our core beliefs are set in stone."

UEFA underlines its core values, 2006

Our mission

The 2004 European Championship (EURO 2004) in Portugal heralded the launch of our [HatTrick development programme](#), which distributes approximately two-thirds of our men's EURO revenue back into the game through projects run by our member associations. Renewed every four years, the programme has evolved into one of the largest solidarity and development initiatives in sport.

The decade also saw UEFA strengthen its role as guardian of the game by setting new standards for good football governance: first, with the approval of our pioneering [club licensing system](#) – a set of requirements that clubs must meet to be eligible to participate in our competitions, then with the introduction of financial fair play measures to stabilise club financial management.

Football as a force for social good

We also started to recognise football's potential as a force for good off the pitch, launching our Respect campaign to counter racism and violence in stadiums. To protect our sport's integrity, we set up a dedicated anti-doping team.

In January 2007, Michel Platini (France), one of the world's leading players in the 1980s, was elected as UEFA's sixth president, with Lennart Johansson named honorary president after 17 years of outstanding service to the game. Platini would be accompanied by two general secretaries through the 2000s: David Taylor (Scotland, 2007–09) and Gianni Infantino (Switzerland/Italy, from 2009).

Fine-tuning our top competitions

We continued to fine-tune our top competitions: on the field with the introduction of new formats, off it, through commercial and marketing changes. The UEFA Champions League went from strength to strength as Italy's AC Milan and Spanish clubs Real Madrid and Barcelona each lifted the iconic trophy twice during the decade. In 2009/10, the UEFA Europa League succeeded the UEFA Cup – a move designed to reinforce the competition's identity. Women's football, youth football and futsal also enjoyed rapid progress and increased profiles.

Three successful men's EURO final tournaments – in Belgium/Netherlands (2000), Portugal (2004) and Austria/Switzerland (2008) underlined the quality and popularity of the continent's national team football. France, Greece and Spain respectively were crowned European champions.



Greece stunned hosts Portugal at EURO 2004, which kicked off our HatTrick development programme
Action Images

2010s

As we approached our 60th anniversary in 2014, our role in uniting the wider European football community brought progress on a number of topics essential to the long-term health of the game:

- Club licensing
- Financial fair play
- Cooperation with European political organisations

Aleksander Čeferin

Michel Platini, re-elected twice in 2011 and 2015, resigned in September 2016 after nine years as president. His elected successor was Slovenian lawyer Aleksander Čeferin, president of the Slovenian Football Association (NZS) since 2011. In the same year, UEFA general secretary Gianni Infantino won election as the ninth president of the world football body, FIFA. He was succeeded at UEFA by deputy general secretary and national associations director Theodoros Theodoridis (Greece).

Aleksander Čeferin emphasised the importance of reinforcing close ties with member associations and other key football stakeholders. Stakeholders were given enhanced roles in our decision-making process, while collaboration with European political organisations intensified.

Social impact and development

Under the new president's leadership, we doubled down on our commitment to leveraging football's power for good. Our 'social fair play' initiative stood up to racism and discrimination in the game, while in 2015, we established the [UEFA Foundation for Children](#) – an independent charitable organisation dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children around the world through sport.

We also increased the amount of revenue reinvested in developing the game, both through our HatTrick development programme and the [Assist programme](#), created in 2017 to share European football's know-how and expertise with our five sister confederations.



Section content



UEFA's HatTrick programme helps to develop European football at all levels, while Assist aids the game's growth all around the world
SPORTSFILE

Women's football



In 2019, UEFA's first-ever women's football strategy – [Time for Action](#) – laid the foundations for the acceleration of the game's development across the continent. Our five-year vision was backed by a significant increase in investment to ensure:

- More opportunities and structures for women and girls to enjoy football;
- More support for our member associations to roll out their own women's football strategies;
- Increased visibility and value for our women's club and national competitions.

UEFA Women's EURO 2017 in the Netherlands (won by the hosts) and the burgeoning UEFA Women's Champions League – won six times by French side Lyon in the 2010s – set new benchmarks for the quality and competitiveness of women's football, inspiring more young girls and women to take up the game.

Elite men's competitions

Real Madrid dominated the UEFA Champions League, adding four more titles to their trophy cabinet, including a remarkable three successive victories from 2016 to 2018.

On the national team front, Spain triumphed at EURO 2012, jointly hosted by Poland and Ukraine. Four years later, hosts France finished runners-up to Portugal in EURO 2016 – the first European Championship with 24 teams at the final tournament. In 2013, we announced that the EURO 2020 finals would mark the competition's 60th anniversary by taking place in multiple countries – an unprecedented undertaking for any sports event.

UEFA Nations League

In the autumn of 2018, we launched our first new men's national team competition since the advent of the European Championships in 1958. The UEFA Nations League answered the associations' call for an increase in more competitive and meaningful matches. Reigning EURO champions Portugal secured the inaugural competition in finals held on home soil the following year.





Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo kisses the trophy after winning the inaugural UEFA Nations League
AFP/Getty Images

Player pathways

Throughout the decade, our youth tournaments offered young players in both the men's and women's game the chance to gain valuable experience of tournament football. Associations rely on our Under-17, Under-19 and Under-21 championships to prepare young talent for senior national team football, while numerous stars of the future have graced the UEFA Youth League en route to making a name for themselves at the highest level.

We also contributed to the rapid rise of futsal through the success of the UEFA Futsal EURO for national teams and the UEFA Futsal Cup for clubs, which was renamed as the UEFA Futsal Champions League from the 2018/19 season.

"European football must remain ... respectful, respectable and respected."

UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin at our 2019 Congress in Rome

At the decade drew to a close, Aleksander Čeferin marked his re-election at the 2019 UEFA Congress in Rome by unveiling a comprehensive five-year strategy for the European game - [Together for the Future of Football](#).

Selected for you



Champions League history



The birth of UEFA



French ideas and Spanish victories



Consolidation and modernisation



Triumphs and turbulence

Related topics

What we do



How we work



Our stakeholders



UEFA Foundation



Working at UEFA



UEFA.com

About

National associations

Running competitions

Development

Sustainability

News & media

EXPLORE

UEFA.tv

MORE

Match calendar

MyUEFA

Rankings

Tickets/Hospitality

UEFA Club Competitions store

UEFA National Team Football store

CHANGE LANGUAGE



English ▾

FOLLOW US ON



[Privacy](#)

[Terms and conditions](#)

[Cookie policy](#)

© 1998-2024 UEFA. All rights reserved

The UEFA word, the UEFA logo and all marks related to UEFA competitions, are protected by trademarks and/or copyright of UEFA. No use for commercial purposes may be made of such trademarks. Use of UEFA.com signifies your agreement to the Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy.

