

= Croatia national football team =

The Croatia national football team (Croatian : Hrvatska nogometna reprezentacija) represents Croatia in international football . The team is controlled by the Croatian Football Federation , the nation 's governing body of football . A FIFA @-@ sanctioned national side previously represented the short @-@ lived Banovina of Croatia and Independent State of Croatia in nineteen friendly matches between 1940 and 1944 . This team was dissolved in 1945 as Croatia became a constituent federal republic of SFR Yugoslavia . In the period between 1945 and 1990 , Croatia was ineligible to field a separate team for competitive matches ; local players instead played for the Yugoslavia national football team .

The modern Croatian team was formed in 1990 , shortly before Croatia 's independence from Yugoslavia , and by 1993 had gained membership in FIFA and UEFA . The team played their first competitive matches in the successful qualifying campaign for UEFA Euro 1996 , leading to their first appearance at a major tournament . In Croatia 's FIFA World Cup debut in 1998 the team finished third and provided the tournament 's top scorer , Davor Šuker . Since becoming eligible to compete in international tournaments , Croatia have failed to qualify for only one World Cup (in 2010) and one European Championship (in 2000) .

Most home matches are played at the Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb , with some fixtures also taking place at the Poljud Stadium in Split or at other , smaller venues , such as Kantrida Stadium in Rijeka or Gradski Vrt in Osijek . The team was undefeated in its first 36 home competitive matches at Maksimir , the run ending with a heavy defeat to England in September 2008 . The team 's traditional nickname is Vatreni (" The Blazers ") .

The team was named FIFA 's " Best Mover of the Year " in 1994 and 1998 , the only team ? along with Colombia ? to win the award more than once . On admission to FIFA , Croatia was ranked 125th in the world ; following the 1998 World Cup campaign , the side rose to third place in the rankings , making it the most volatile team in FIFA Rankings history .

= = History = =

= = = Pre @-@ independence = = =

Association football was first introduced to Croatia by English expatriates working on industrial projects in Rijeka and Šupanja in 1873 . By 1907 , local clubs had been established in Croatia and a modern edition of the sport 's laws was translated and published . Before the nation 's independence , Croatian footballers played for the national teams of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1919 ? 39) and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945 ? 90) , though during periods of political upheaval , ethnically Croatian sides occasionally formed to play unofficial matches . A hastily arranged Croatian side , managed by Hugo Kinert , played a few matches in 1918 ? 19 .

In 1940 , Jozo Jakopi? led an unofficial national team representing the Banovina of Croatia (part of Kingdom of Yugoslavia) in four friendly matches , against Switzerland and Hungary . Following invasion by the Axis powers , the Croatian Football Federation became briefly active , joining FIFA on 17 July 1941 , representing the Independent State of Croatia . The side , led by Rudolf Hitrec , went on to play 15 friendly matches , 14 of those as a member of FIFA . Croatia 's first recorded result as a FIFA member was a 1 ? 1 draw with Slovakia on 8 September in Bratislava . The Independent State of Croatia continued playing matches until 1945 and the end of World War II , when SR Croatia was formed as constituent part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia .

From 1950 to 1956 , unofficial Croatian teams were briefly active ? they won games against Indonesia and a Yugoslav team playing as " Serbia " . The Yugoslavia squad at the 1956 Summer Olympics included Croatian footballers , as did Yugoslavia in World Cup and European Championship tournaments up to 1990 .

= = = Official formation = = =

The last Yugoslav team to field a considerable Croatian contingent played against Faroe Islands on 16 May 1991, days before Croatia's independence referendum. However, an unofficial Croatian team was formed shortly before, and played the team's first modern international game, against the United States on 17 October 1990 at Maksimir Stadium. The game, which Croatia won 2 ? 1, was one of three games played under caretaker manager Dra?an Jerkovi?. The match against the American side also marked the introduction of Croatia's national jersey, inspired by the chequered design of the country's coat of arms. Although Croatia was still officially part of Yugoslavia until its independence declaration on 8 October 1991, this team already served as a de facto national side. Croatia went on to win two more friendly games under Jerkovi?, against Romania in December 1990 and Slovenia in June 1991.

On 3 July 1992, Croatia was re @-@ admitted to FIFA, playing its first official matches in the modern era against Australia in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. This team was led by Stanko Poklepovi? as part of an international exhibition tour; in April 1993, Vlatko Markovi? was appointed as manager. Croatia finally gained admission into UEFA in June 1993, which was too late for the national team to enter the 1994 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, as these already commenced the year before. Markovi? only led the team in one match, a home win against Ukraine in June 1993, before being dismissed in February 1994 and replaced by Miroslav Bla?evi? the following month. The team's performances before Croatia's official independence were not recorded by FIFA, so they entered the World Rankings in 125th place. Bla?evi? led Croatia's qualifying campaign for Euro 1996, beginning with the nation's first post @-@ independence competitive victory, a 2 ? 0 win over Estonia on 4 September 1994. Their first competitive defeat came on 11 June 1995 in a 1 ? 0 away loss to Ukraine during the same qualifying campaign. They eventually finished first in their qualifying group and won FIFA's 1994 Best Mover of the Year award as they moved up to 62nd in the rankings by the end of the year.

= = = Golden Generation (1994 ? 99) = = =

Goran Vlaovi? scored the team's first goal at a major tournament, a late winner against Turkey at the City Ground in Nottingham in their first group match at Euro 96. After their opening victory, Croatia beat reigning champions Denmark 3 ? 0, but went on to lose against Portugal by the same scoreline in their final group fixture. Croatia still advanced to the knockout stage, but were beaten in the quarter @-@ finals 1 ? 2 by Germany, who went on to win the tournament.

In spite of the quarter @-@ final exit, Bla?evi? continued to lead Croatia in the 1998 World Cup qualifying campaign, which ended successfully after an aggregate victory against Ukraine in the two @-@ legged play @-@ off. In the group stage of the World Cup, Croatia beat Jamaica and Japan but lost to Argentina, before defeating Romania to reach a quarter @-@ final tie against Germany, then ranked second in the world. Though regarded as underdogs, Croatia won 3 ? 0 with goals from Robert Jarni, Goran Vlaovi? and Davor ?uker, all after Christian Wörns had been sent off. Croatia then faced the host nation, France, in the semi @-@ final. After a goalless first @-@ half, Croatia took the lead, only to concede two goals by opposing defender Lilian Thuram and lose 1 ? 2. In the third @-@ place match, Croatia beat the Netherlands 2 ? 1, with Davor ?uker winning the Golden Boot award for scoring the most goals of the tournament with six goals in seven games. Croatia's performance in 1998 was among the best debut performances in the World Cup (equaling Portugal's third place debut finish at the 1966 World Cup), and as a result, Croatia rose to number three in the January 1999 FIFA World Rankings, their highest ranking to date. For their achievements, the team of the 1990s was dubbed the "Golden Generation." A considerable portion of this squad (Jarni, ?timac, Boban, Prosine?ki and ?uker), previously won the 1987 FIFA World Youth Championship with the Yugoslavia under @-@ 20 team.

Despite good performances in their first two major competitions, Croatia's qualifying campaign for Euro 2000 was less successful, as they finished third in their qualifying group behind Yugoslavia and Republic of Ireland, and thus failed to qualify. Both fixtures against archenemies Yugoslavia (the rump state later renamed Serbia and Montenegro) ended in draws, which prevented Croatia

from qualifying for the tournament .

== = Joži? and Bari? period (2000 ? 04) == =

Although Blažević continued his tenure in spite of failure to qualify for Euro 2000 , he resigned in October 2000 following draws against Belgium and Scotland in the first two games of the 2002 World Cup qualifiers . His successor at the helm of the national team was Mirko Joži? , who previously led the Yugoslavia under @-@ 20 team to a World Cup triumph in 1987 . Despite the retirement of many Golden Generation players , Croatia went unbeaten during the rest of the qualifiers . They opened their 2002 World Cup campaign with a narrow loss to Mexico before producing a surprise 2 ? 1 victory over Euro 2000 finalists Italy in the next fixture , giving life to hopes of passing through to the knockout stage . However , they lost their final group fixture to Ecuador and were eliminated . Joži? then resigned , and was replaced in July 2002 by Croatian @-@ Austrian Otto Bari? , the team 's first manager born outside the Balkans .

During Bari? 's tenure , most of the remaining players from the Golden Generation squad were gradually replaced by younger players over the course of the Euro 2004 qualifiers . Croatia went on to qualify for the tournament with a playoff victory against Slovenia , winning 2 @-@ 1 on aggregate after Dado Pr?o 's decisive late goal in the second leg . At the finals tournament in Portugal , Croatia drew 0 ? 0 with Switzerland and 2 ? 2 with reigning champions France only to lose to England 2 ? 4 and suffer another elimination in the group stage . Bari? 's two @-@ year contract ended in June 2004 and was not renewed .

== = Kranj?ar period (2004 ? 06) == =

Former Croatia international Zlatko Kranj?ar , appointed to succeed Bari? in July 2004 , led the team through the 2006 World Cup qualifiers without losing a single match and topping the group ahead of Sweden and Bulgaria . However , local media outlets accused him of nepotism for selecting his son Niko Kranj?ar for the national squad . At the 2006 World Cup , Croatia lost their opening game to Brazil and drew 0 ? 0 with Japan after Darijo Srna missed a first @-@ half penalty . A 2 ? 2 draw with Australia , in which three players were sent off , confirmed Croatia 's exit in the group stage . The game was also notable for a mistake by referee Graham Poll , who gave three yellow cards to Croatian defender Josip ?imuni? , failing to send him off after his second offense . He later stated that he mistook ?imuni? for an Australian player due to his Australian accent . Poll was heavily criticised for losing control of the match , and retired from refereeing shortly afterwards .

== = Bili? period (2006 ? 12) == =

In July 2006 , the Croatian Football Federation replaced Kranj?ar with Slaven Bili? , who played for the national team during their Golden Generation era . Bili? , who previously managed the under @-@ 21 team between 2004 and 2006 , introduced a host of young players into the squad , which ultimately proved successful . His first game was a friendly away victory against 2006 World Cup champions Italy . After controversially suspending Darijo Srna , Ivica Oli? and Boško Balaban for missing a curfew after a turbofolk nightclub outing , Bili? led the team through qualifiers for Euro 2008 . Croatia topped their group , losing only one game to Macedonia and beating England twice , who as a result failed to qualify for the first time since 1984 .

Shortly before the European Championships , first @-@ choice striker Eduardo , who was the team 's top goalscorer during qualifying , suffered a compound fracture while playing for Arsenal in the Premier League . Bili? was forced to alter his final Euro 2008 squad significantly and recruited Nikola Kalini? and Nikola Pokrija? , neither of whom had yet played competitive games for the national team . The team received criticism after poor attacking performances in warm @-@ up games against Scotland and Moldova , but at the tournament they beat Austria , Germany and Poland in the group stages to reach the quarter @-@ finals with maximum group points for the first time in their tournament history . Niko Kova? remained team captain at what was expected to be his

final international tournament, except in the final group fixture when Dario Šimić temporarily held the captain's armband. Croatia's campaign ended dramatically when they lost a penalty shoot-out to Turkey, with Luka Modrić, Mladen Petrić and Ivan Rakitić all missing their penalties. Croatia left the tournament with records for fewest goals conceded (2), fewest games lost (0), and earliest goal (in the fourth minute of their opening game against Austria; this was also the all-time earliest successful penalty at the European Championship Finals).

Following the tournament, Bilić renewed his contract, becoming the first manager since Blažević to lead Croatia to successive tournaments. Croatia were again drawn to play England in the qualifying stages for the 2010 World Cup; the tie was voted the most anticipated of the campaign on FIFA.com. After a home win against Kazakhstan Croatia lost at home to England, ending a 14-year unbeaten home record. The team was eventually weakened due to a number of key players' injuries and went on to suffer their heaviest defeat in history, losing 5-1 to England at Wembley Stadium. Although Croatia defeated Kazakhstan in their final qualifying fixture, they were ultimately eliminated as Ukraine, who had previously defeated group leaders England, beat Andorra to win second place in the group. Bilić was once again heavily expected to resign as national coach, but instead vowed to renew his contract and remain in charge.

Despite heavy loss of form, which also saw the team fall outside the top ten in the FIFA rankings, Croatia were placed in the top tier of teams for the UEFA Euro 2012 qualifying draw; Croatia was previously a candidate to co-host the tournament with Hungary which would have allowed the team to qualify automatically, but UEFA eventually chose Poland and Ukraine as hosts instead. Despite being top seeds in their qualifying group, Croatia finished second behind Greece, settling for a play-off against Euro 2008 rivals Turkey. Croatia proceeded to beat Turkey 3-0 on aggregate, with all three goals coming in the away leg in Istanbul, thereby qualifying for the 2012 European championship. In the proceeding group stage draw for the tournament, Croatia were placed in the third tier of teams, and were eventually grouped with Ireland, Italy and defending champions Spain.

In the buildup towards the UEFA Euro 2012 tournament, the team's first major competition since their 2008 run at the same event, manager Slaven Bilić formally agreed a deal to manage Russian club Lokomotiv Moscow, thereby announcing he would resign from the national team when the tournament ended. Croatia opened their campaign with a comfortable 3-1 victory over the Republic of Ireland, with striker Mario Mandžukić scoring twice. Mandžukić continued his run at the tournament with an equaliser in the 1-1 draw against Italy, which was marred by controversial fan reactions and referee decisions from English official Howard Webb. In their last group match, Croatia suffered a 0-1 defeat to Spain. The late Spanish goal by Jesús Navas, along with Italy's victory over the Republic of Ireland in the final round, forced Croatia to exit the tournament in the group stage once again. Upon his formal departure, Bilić was also praised for his long-standing service to the national side. Jutarnji List daily labelled him as Croatia's only manager to depart on such positive terms and credited him for his strong revival of the national side during his six-year tenure.

== Štimac, Kovač and Pašić period (2012 - present) ==

Following Bilić's departure, former player and pundit Igor Štimac was appointed manager of the national team. Croatia's all-time top goalscorer Davor Šuker also took over as president of the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) after the death of Vlatko Marković ended a 14-year tenure. Štimac's managerial campaign was unsuccessful, as the team endured a succession of poor performances and narrowly finished second in their 2014 World Cup qualifying group. After only a year of his appointment, Štimac was replaced by former captain Niko Kovač, who previously managed the under-21 youth side. Kovač led the team to a 2-0 aggregate victory against Iceland in the qualifying playoffs for the 2014 World Cup, with both goals coming in the home leg in Zagreb.

At the World Cup, Croatia were drawn with host nation Brazil, Mexico and Cameroon. In the opening game of the tournament, Croatia lost 3-1 to Brazil. The match garnered heavy media

attention as Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura was scrutinized for a number of controversial decisions . In their second game , Croatia won 4 ? 0 against Cameroon , but did not progress from the group as they lost 3 ? 1 to Mexico in their final fixture .

In the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign , Croatia were drawn against Italy , Bulgaria , Norway , Azerbaijan and Malta . Following a goalless away draw against Azerbaijan and an away defeat to Norway , in early September 2015 , the Executive Committee of the Croatian Football Federation unanimously decided to terminate Kova? 's contract . On 21 September 2015 , Ante ?a?i? was named as the head coach of the Croatian national team . On 13 October 2015 , Croatia qualified for the finals by finishing as runners up in group H. Under ?a?i? , Croatia broke the record for most goals scored in one match , by beating San Marino in a friendly 10 ? 0 .

In Group D of UEFA Euro 2016 , Croatia were drawn against Turkey , Czech Republic , and Spain . They defeated Turkey 1 @-@ 0 , on a goal by Luka Modri? , and drew 2 @-@ 2 against the Czechs in a match marred by fans throwing flares on the pitch during the 86th minute . They ended group play by defeating Spain 2 @-@ 1 on an 87th @-@ minute goal by Ivan Peri?i? , handing the Spanish their first loss in Euro competition since Euro 2004 and winning the group for Croatia .

= = Colours = =

Croatia 's initial jersey was designed in 1990 by painter Miroslav ?utej , who also designed the nation 's coat of arms . Although slightly altered by manufacturer Lotto (the 1998 jersey was a white jersey with the chequers on the right side , like a flying flag) and Nike since its original release , the chequered motif was adopted as a symbol of national identity and similar designs are used by all Croatian national sports teams .

= = = Kit history = = =

= = Stadium = =

The majority of home matches take place at the Stadion Maksimir in Zagreb , which is also the home @-@ ground of local football club Dinamo Zagreb . The venue , built in 1912 and refurbished in 1997 , is named after the surrounding neighbourhood of Maksimir and has hosted national team games since Croatia 's competitive home debut against Lithuania . The Croatian Football Federation (HNS) previously agreed on extensive plans with the government to renovate the stadium and increase its current forty @-@ thousand seating capacity , however the proposal was eventually rejected by Zagreb Mayor Milan Bandi? in 2008 due to high construction costs .

Some home matches are occasionally played at other , smaller venues around the country . The Poljud Stadium in Split has hosted several qualifying fixtures since 1995 , the first being a 1 ? 1 draw with Italy . In the period between 1995 and 2011 , Croatia never won a competitive match at Poljud , which the local media dubbed " Poljudsko prokletstvo " (" the Poljud curse ") . The run was finally ended after the team came from behind to beat Georgia on 3 June 2011 . Qualifying fixtures have also been played at the Stadion Kantrida in Rijeka , along with the Gradski vrt stadium in Osijek and the Stadion An?elko Herjavec in Vara?din . However , these venues are rarely used due to their remote locations and smaller seating capacity , despite objections from local residents and some players .

= = = Home venues record = = =

The following table provides a summary Croatia results at various venues used for home games . Since Croatia 's first match in October 1990 , they played home games at eleven stadiums around the country . The following table provides a summary of Croatia 's results at home venues .

Key : Pld ? games played , W ? games won , D ? games drawn ; L ? games lost , % ? win percentage

Last updated : Croatia vs. San Marino , 4 June 2016 . Statistics include official FIFA @-@ recognised matches only .

= = Supporters = =

Football is Croatia 's most popular team sport , and the national team has developed an extensive fan @-@ base since its official formation in 1991 . Following Croatia 's successful 1998 World Cup campaign , three years after the Croatian war of independence , there was a rapid rise in domestic and global attention for the national side . British journalist Marcus Tanner of Balkan Insight commented that the national team became a symbol of Croatian independence from Yugoslavia . However , after the death of former @-@ president Franjo Tu?man , local political ties with the national team have loosened .

A large part of the team 's support base consists of fans of Hajduk Split and Dinamo Zagreb , the two best @-@ supported clubs in the Croatian domestic league , the Prva HNL . The clubs ' ultra @-@ style supporter groups , the Bad Blue Boys of Zagreb and The Torcida from Split , have both been associated with hooliganism , though violence between the two groups does not usually occur at international games . Heavy support for the Croatian national team also comes from Croats in Bosnia @-@ Hercegovina , particularly from fans of Zrinjski Mostar . The official Croatia supporters ' club endorsed by the Croatian Football Federation is called Uvijek Vjerni (Always Faithful) .

Fans ' behaviour at international games has led to various sanctions against the national team . Croatia was penalized and threatened with expulsion from UEFA for reports of racist behaviour by travelling fans at Euro 2004 . UEFA and FIFA have both penalized the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) for similar incidents in the past . During a friendly match against Italy in Livorno , a small group of Croatia fans formed the shape of a swastika . Croatian fans were also heavily scrutinized for racist behavior against Turkey in 2008 , as well as an incident of racial abuse towards English striker Emile Heskey in 2010 . During the 2006 World Cup a Croatian fan evaded security at a German venue and approached Croatian players on the field ; he was arrested and banned for trespassing . There were also reports of violent clashes between Croatian and Turkish supporters at Euro 2008 , as well as improper conduct by Croatia fans at Euro 2012 and the 2014 World Cup .

Croatia supporters often use flares during international matches , which has also caused sanctions as the use of pyrotechnics is strictly banned . In November 2014 , the Croatian fans again attracted criticism by chanting the Usta?e slogan " Za Dom ! Spremni " led by defender Josip ?imuni? after beating Iceland in the World Cup play @-@ offs . Croatia 's Euro 2016 qualifying fixture against Italy in Milan was temporarily suspended due to flares being thrown onto the field by a small section of Croatia supporters . The players and manager condemned this behavior as detrimental to the national team . The incident was suspected to be a protest against the Croatian Football Federation for allegations of corruption . In June 2015 , during the home game against Italy , played behind closed doors in Split , a swastika appeared embedded on the pitch . Croatian Football Federation called the incident an act of " sabotage " against the national team . The federation later apologized for the incident and called for a criminal investigation against the perpetrators .

Maksimir Stadium was the scene of a politically @-@ fueled riot between Croat and Serb fans at a Dinamo Zagreb ? Red Star Belgrade game following the 1990 parliamentary election . However , there have been no major issues between Croatian and Serbian supporters since then . The Croatian Football Federation and the Football Association of Serbia (FSS) both agreed to play the scheduled 2014 World Cup qualifying matches between the two sides without away supporters .

The team 's games are regularly broadcast live on HRT . Shortly after becoming manager , Slaven Bili? and his rock band released a single , " Vatreno Ludilo " (Fiery Madness) , which recalled the team 's progress during the 1998 World Cup and praised their present ambitions . The song reached the top position on the Croatian music charts and was widely played during Euro 2008 . Other Croatian artists such as Dino Dvornik , Connect , Prljavo Kazali?te and Baruni have recorded songs in support of the team , among which are " Malo nas je al nas ima " (We are few , but we exist) , " Samo je jedno " (There is but one thing [in my life]) , " Moj dom je Hrvatska " (My Home is Croatia) , " Srce vatreno " (Fiery Heart) , and " Hrvatska je prvak svijeta " (Croatia are World

Champions) .

= = Rivalries = =

Croatia has a fierce rivalry with Serbia . This rivalry stems from political roots , and is listed as one of the 10 greatest international rivalries by Goal.com and as the most politically @-@ charged football rivalry by Bleacher Report .

= = Competitive record = =

= = = FIFA World Cup = = =

Croatia qualified for and competed in three consecutive World Cup finals between 1998 and 2006 , but failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa after finishing 3rd in Group 6 of their Qualification Group behind England , and Ukraine . Although they had joined both FIFA and UEFA by 1992 , they were unable to enter the 1994 World Cup as qualification had started before the side was officially recognised . The nation 's best performance came in their first World Cup where they finished third . In their following two World Cup campaigns they were eliminated after finishing third in their groups .

Champions Runners @-@ up Third Place Fourth Place

* Draws include knockout matches decided on penalty kicks ; correct as of 23 June 2014 (Croatia v. Mexico)

= = = UEFA European Championship = = =

Croatia 's best results in UEFA Championships were quarter final finishes on their debut , in 1996 , and in 2008 . They did not qualify for the 2000 tournament . The HNS raised an unsuccessful joint bid with the Hungarian Football Federation to co @-@ host the 2012 tournament , which was awarded instead to Poland and Ukraine .

* Draws include knockout matches decided on penalty kicks ; correct as of 21 June 2016 (Croatia v. Spain)

= = Recent results and fixtures = =

= = = 2015 ? 2016 = = =

= = Players = =

= = = Current squad = = =

The following is the final list of players for the UEFA Euro 2016.Caps , goals and numbers correct as of 25 June 2016 after the match against Portugal .

Statistics include official FIFA @-@ recognised matches only .

= = = Recent call @-@ ups = = =

The following players have also been called up to the Croatia squad in the last 12 months and are still eligible for selection .

Status is applicable for the last game only .

