



MALTA RUSSIA

FIFA WORLD CUP 2022
EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS
GROUP H

WEDNESDAY
24 MARCH 2021

20.45HRS
NATIONAL STADIUM, TA' QALI
(BEHIND CLOSED DOORS)

OFFICIAL MATCH
PROGRAMME

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EUROPEAN
QUALIFIERS

INTERVIEW

MANGIA TO STICK WITH POSITIVE APPROACH AS MALTA FACE RUSSIA IN OPENING QUALIFIER

Malta will be vying to consolidate the progress shown during the last UEFA Nations League group campaign when they embark on a new competition – the 2022 World Cup qualifying round. **Kevin Azzopardi** spoke to **Devis Mangia**, the Head Coach of the National Teams, ahead of the opening qualifier, a home match against Russia

Malta earned the plaudits for their vibrant performances in Group D1 of the 2020-21 UEFA Nations League, finishing second with nine points and going on a seven-match unbeaten run which included friendly wins over Gibraltar and Liechtenstein.

The European Qualifiers represent a sterner challenge as Malta will be facing 2018 World Cup finalists Croatia, Russia, Slovakia,

Slovenia and Cyprus in Group H but coach Devis Mangia is looking forward to these tests, starting with today's home match against Russia, being played behind closed doors at the National Stadium.

"The European Qualifiers will be a different challenge (compared to the UEFA Nations League)," Mangia, who recently won the Coach Of the Year award at the annual SportMalta Awards L-Għażiex

Sportivi Nazzjonali, said. "I'm very curious to see how we, as a team, will approach these games."

"On paper, all qualifiers are difficult but it's all to play for."

On the back of the positive results achieved between September and November, Malta moved up 10 places to 176th in the FIFA rankings. Notwithstanding this improvement, Malta are still the lowest-ranked team in Group H



"We have our idea of how we want to play. We will adopt a positive approach but it's natural that games depend not only on what we would like to do but also on what the opponents allow us to do. On the other hand, we will also try to impede our opponents from imposing their game"

with Croatia (11th) boasting the best FIFA ranking among the six teams, followed by Slovakia (34th), Russia (39th), Slovenia (62nd) and Cyprus (100th).

Although conscious of the scale of the task awaiting the national team in these qualifiers, Mangia has no plans to ditch the bold and adventurous approach that underpinned Malta's performances in the UEFA Nations League.

"We have our idea of how we want to play," Mangia said. "We will adopt a positive approach but it's natural that games depend not only on what we would like to do but also on what the opponents allow us to do. On the other hand, we will also try to impede our opponents from imposing their game."

RESPECT FOR RUSSIA

Russia are regarded as one of the top guns in Group H along with Croatia, Malta's opponents in the third qualifier in Rijeka on March 30, three days after another away test, against Slovakia. The Russians will be going all out to launch their qualifying campaign on a top note with coach Stanislav Cherchesov selecting a 27-strong squad,

including experienced defender Yuri Zhirkov, of Zenit St Petersburg, Atalanta forward Aleksei Miranchuk and Monaco's Aleksandr Golovin.

Mangia has the utmost respect for Russia. "They are an important footballing nation," he said. "All the teams in the group are strong but, on paper, Croatia and Russia appear to have a slight edge. Russia did very well at the 2018 World Cup and also in the EURO 2020 qualifiers, finishing second in the group behind Belgium, but their performances in the UEFA Nations League fell somewhat below expectations.

"Nevertheless, Russia have a lot of quality and this is reflected in the calibre and experience of the players called up for these matches."

TRIPLE HEADER

Mangia has selected an initial squad of 30 players for this first international window of 2021 which has been expanded by UEFA to cover three qualifiers instead of the customary two to compensate for the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is probably the first time the



national team is playing three competitive games during a seven-day period as, in October and November, the two UEFA Nations League games were preceded by a friendly match.

The Malta coach has again opted for a mix of experienced and young players, confirming his faith in up-and-coming talents like Valletta's Shaun Dimech, Birkirkara's Paul Mbong, back in the frame after missing the November internationals, and Sliema Wanderers' Alexander Satariano, all aged 19.



PHOTOS: DOMENIC AQUILINA

"As we have been stressing all along, the selection is not based on the identity number of the players but we have chosen those who deserve to be here"

"This is slightly different from the previous international windows as we will be playing three competitive games," the Malta coach said. "It is for this reason that we have called up 30 players.

"As we have been stressing all along, the selection is not based on the identity number of the players but we have chosen those who deserve to be here. Our project is a medium- to long-term one, we need to think about today and also about tomorrow. The young

players are an integral part of this project and we need to give them the experience which is beneficial for them and also for the national team."

FEELGOOD FACTOR

Over four months have passed since Malta concluded their UEFA Nations League campaign with a creditable 1-1 home draw against the Faroe Islands, extending their unbeaten run to seven international matches. Mangia is optimistic that the feelgood factor generated by the encouraging performances in the September-November period will stand the squad in good stead as they head into a new competition.

"Those performances have strengthened the players' confidence as well as the belief in their own capabilities which is very important to achieve progress,"

Mangia said. "It's important that we maintain this improvement and for the players to show what they're capable of on the field of play.

"Our main objective for this qualifying competition is to continue growing as a team and further raise our standards."

Finally, Mangia expressed his relief and satisfaction that the opening qualifier against Russia is being played at the National Stadium, albeit behind closed doors, following the initial uncertainty caused by COVID-19 restrictions.

"It's fundamental for us to play our home games in Malta," Mangia said. "One of our priorities is to make the Maltese nation proud and we could feel the growing enthusiasm of the Maltese people during the UEFA Nations League, something that had an uplifting effect on the team." ↗



EUROPEAN
QUALIFIERS

FIFA WORLD CUP 2022 EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

GROUP H FIXTURES

MATCHDAY 1 - 24/03/2021

MALTA vs Russia	20.45
Cyprus vs Slovakia	20.45
Slovenia vs Croatia	20.45

MATCHDAY 2 - 27/03/2021

Russia vs Slovenia	15.00
Croatia vs Cyprus	18.00
Slovakia vs MALTA	20.45

MATCHDAY 3 - 30/03/2021

Cyprus vs Slovenia	18.00
Slovakia vs Slovenia	20.45
Croatia vs MALTA	20.45

MATCHDAY 4 - 01/09/2021

MALTA vs Cyprus	20.45
Slovenia vs Slovakia	20.45
Russia vs Croatia	20.45

MATCHDAY 5 - 04/09/2021

Cyprus vs Russia	15.00
Slovenia vs MALTA	18.00
Slovakia vs Croatia	20.45

MATCHDAY 6 - 07/09/2021

Russia vs MALTA	20.45
Slovakia vs Cyprus	20.45
Croatia vs Slovenia	20.45

MATCHDAY 7 - 08/10/2021

MALTA vs Slovenia	20.45
Cyprus vs Croatia	20.45
Russia vs Slovakia	20.45

MATCHDAY 8 - 11/10/2021

Cyprus vs MALTA	18.00
Slovenia vs Russia	20.45
Croatia vs Slovakia	20.45

MATCHDAY 9 - 11/11/2021

Russia vs Cyprus	18.00
MALTA vs Croatia	20.45
Slovakia vs Slovenia	20.45

MATCHDAY 10 - 14/11/2021

MALTA vs Slovakia	15.00
Slovenia vs Cyprus	15.00
Croatia vs Russia	15.00

INFORMATION CORRECT AS OF 23/03/2021.

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MALTA SQUAD

PLAYER PROFILES

GOALKEEPERS



Henry BONELLO

CLUB: Valletta FC
DOB: 13th October, 1988 **CAPS:** 23
National Team Debut: 29/02/2012
– Malta 2 Liechtenstein 1 (Friendly)



Matthew CALLEJA CREMONA

CLUB: Hibernians FC
DOB: 14th September, 1994 **CAPS:** 0



Jake GALEA

CLUB: Sliema Wanderers FC
DOB: 15th April, 1996 **CAPS:** 2
National Team Debut: 07/10/2020
– Malta 2 Gibraltar 0 (Friendly)

DEFENDERS



Andrei AGIUS

CLUB: Hibernians FC
DOB: 12th August, 1986 **CAPS:** 97 (6 goals)
National Team Debut: 25/02/2006
– Malta 0 Moldova 2 (Malta Int. Tournament)



Steve BORG

CLUB: Gżira United FC
DOB: 15th May, 1988 **CAPS:** 56 (3 goals)
National Team Debut: 07/10/2011 –
Latvia 2 Malta 0 (Euro Champ. Qualifier)



Karl MICALLEF

CLUB: Hamrun Spartans FC
DOB: 8th September, 1996 **CAPS:** 4
National Team Debut: 26/03/2019
– Malta 0 Spain 2 (Euro Champ. Qualifier)



Zach MUSCAT

CLUB: Casa Pia (Portugal)
DOB: 22nd August, 1993 **CAPS:** 43 (1 goal)
National Team Debut: 04/09/2014 –
Slovakia 1 Malta 0 (Friendly)



Enrico PEPE

CLUB: Birkirkara FC
DOB: 12th November, 1989 **CAPS:** 1
National Team Debut: 06/09/2020
– Malta 1 Latvia 1 (UEFA Nations League)



Kurt SHAW

CLUB: Sliema Wanderers FC
DOB: 1st April, 1999 **CAPS:** 6
National Team Debut: 12/10/2019
– Malta 0 Sweden 4 (Euro Champ. Qualifier)



MIDFIELDERS

**Myles BEERMAN**

CLUB: Sliema Wanderers FC
DOB: 13th March, 1999 **CAPS:** 6

National Team Debut: 06/06/2017
– Ukraine 0 Malta 1 (Friendly)

**Joseph MBONG**

CLUB: Hamrun Spartans FC
DOB: 15th July, 1997 **CAPS:** 24

National Team Debut: 29/05/2018
– Armenia 1 Malta 1 (Friendly)

**Ryan CAMENZULI**

CLUB: Floriana FC
DOB: 8th September, 1994 **CAPS:** 11

National Team Debut: 25/03/2015
– Georgia 2 Malta 0 (Friendly)

**Nikolai MUSCAT**

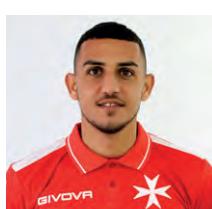
CLUB: Gżira United FC
DOB: 13th July, 1996 **CAPS:** 1

National Team Debut: 18/11/2019
– Malta 1 Norway 2 (Euro Champ. Qualifier)

**Triston CARUANA**

CLUB: Valletta FC
DOB: 15th September, 1991 **CAPS:** 4 (1 goal)

National Team Debut: 26/03/2018
– Finland 5 Malta 0 (Friendly)

**Steve PISANI**

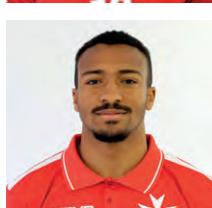
CLUB: Gżira United FC
DOB: 7th August, 1992 **CAPS:** 25

National Team Debut: 28/03/2015
– Azerbaijan 2 Malta 0 (Euro Champ. Qualifier)

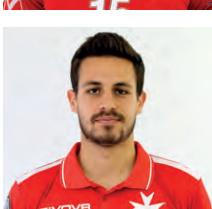
**Juan CORBALAN**

CLUB: Hamrun Spartans FC
DOB: 3rd January, 1997 **CAPS:** 12 (1 goal)

National Team Debut: 11/10/2018
– Kosovo 3 Malta 1 (UEFA Nations League)

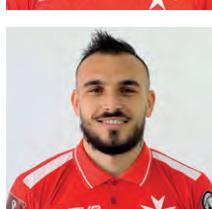
**Nevin PORTELLI**

CLUB: Gżira United FC
DOB: 16th September, 1999 **CAPS:** 0

**Matthew GUILLAUMIER**

CLUB: Hamrun Spartans FC
DOB: 9th April, 1998 **CAPS:** 8 (1 goal)

National Team Debut: 23/03/2019
– Malta 2 Faroe Islands 1 (UEFA Nations League)

**Teddy TEUMA**

CLUB: Royale Union St Gilloise (Belgium)
DOB: 30th September, 1993 **CAPS:** 6

National Team Debut: 03/09/2020
– Faroe Islands 3 Malta 2 (UEFA Nations League)

**Bjorn KRISTENSEN**

CLUB: Hibernians FC
DOB: 5th April, 1993 **CAPS:** 25

National Team Debut: 29/02/2012
– Malta 2 Liechtenstein 1 (Friendly)

**Dexter XUEREB**

CLUB: Gżira United FC
DOB: 21st September, 1997 **CAPS:** 0



FORWARDS



Jan BUSUTTIL

CLUB: Floriana FC
DOB: 6th March, 1999 **CAPS:** 1
 National Team Debut: 11/11/2020 – Malta 3 Liechtenstein 0 (Friendly)



Jake GRECH

CLUB: Hibernians FC
DOB: 18th November, 1997 **CAPS:** 15
 National Team Debut: 29/05/2018 – Armenia 1 Malta 1 (Friendly)



Paul MBONG

CLUB: Birkirkara FC
DOB: 2nd September, 2001 **CAPS:** 4
 National Team Debut: 03/09/2020 – Faroe Islands 3 Malta 2 (UEFA Nations League)



Luke MONTEBELLO

CLUB: Birkirkara FC
DOB: 13th August, 1995 **CAPS:** 8
 National Team Debut: 26/03/2017 – Malta 1 Slovakia 3 (World Cup Qualifier)



Kyrian NWOKO

CLUB: Valletta FC
DOB: 4th July, 1997 **CAPS:** 17 (3 goals)
 National Team Debut: 12/11/2017 – Malta 0 Estonia 3 (Friendly)



Alexander SATARIANO

CLUB: Sliema Wanderers FC
DOB: 25th October, 2001 **CAPS:** 3
 National Team Debut: 11/11/2020 – Malta 3 Liechtenstein 0 (Friendly)



Shaun DIMECH

CLUB: Valletta FC
DOB: 8th August, 2001 **CAPS:** 4 (1 goal)
 National Team Debut: 07/10/2020 – Malta 2 Gibraltar 0 (Friendly)



Luke GAMBIN

CLUB: Newport County AFC (UK)
DOB: 16th March, 1993 **CAPS:** 28
 National Team Debut: 27/05/2016 – Czech Republic 6 Malta 0 (Friendly)



COACHING STAFF



**Devis
MANGIA**

Head Coach



**Davide
MAZZOTTA**

Senior Assistant
Coach



**Guillermo
GIACOMAZZI**

Assistant
Coach



**Alessandro
ZINNARI**

Technical
Co-ordinator

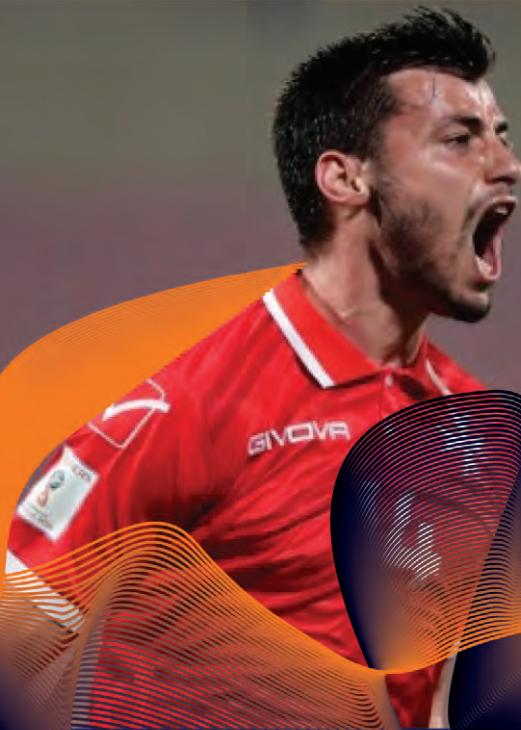


**Mario
CAPECE**

Goalkeepers
Coach

OTHER STAFF

Keith FENECH - Team Manager
 Luca PAGANI - Fitness Coach
 Francesco ZANASI - Fitness Coach
 Facundo STYK - Match Analyst
 Kevin AZZOPARDI - Communications
 Director/National Team Media Officer
 Daniel McKEAN - Team Doctor
 Luke BUSUTTIL LEAVER - Physiotherapist
 Julian RIZZO NAUDI - Physiotherapist
 Aaron ANCILLERI - Masseur
 Frankie CIANTAR - Kit Manager
 Mark PISCOPO - Kit Manager
 Fabrizio ATTANZIO - Administrator
 Rodney VASSALLO - Media Officer



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RESILIENT REDS

14 November, 2020 – UEFA Nations League
National Stadium – Ta' Qali

Malta vs Andorra 3-1

Andrei Agius, Ryan Camenzuli, Luke Gambin and Teddy Teuma keep their emotions in check as Malta equalise against Andorra in the penultimate UEFA Nations League Group D1 match at the National Stadium. Malta hit back from a goal down to win 3-1 with Jurgen Degabriele and Shaun Dimech sealing victory after an own goal had brought the teams level 10 minutes into the second half.

PHOTO: DOMENIC AQUILINA



MALTA'S NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM CHOSE



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SECOND ENCOUNTER BETWEEN MALTA AND RUSSIA

Rothmans International Tournament
Wednesday, 7th February, 1996 –
National Stadium, Ta' Qali

Malta 0-2 Russia

SCORERS: Valeriy Karpin 26; Sergey Kiryakov 61.

REFEREE: Milan Mitrovic (Slovenia).

ATTENDANCE: 1,800

Malta's 2022 World Cup European Qualifier against Russia will be the first competitive match between the two nations and the second ever with the previous encounter dating back to 1996 – during the eighth Malta Rothmans International Tournament.

In 1996, the Russians were preparing for the European Championship in England. They accepted the Malta FA's invitation to take part in the friendly tournament as they were able to play three test matches in the space of five days.

Malta-Russia was the opening game of the tournament. The visitors took the lead on 26 minutes when, from a Mostovoy cross, Karpin anticipated Reggie Cini with an accurate header. Just after the hour, the Russians doubled their advantage, Yuran crossing low to Kiryakov who tapped home.

Although Russia were the better side, Malta gave a good account of themselves and created several chances.

Russia went on to win the friendly tournament, beating Iceland 3-0 and Slovenia 3-1 on the final day. Their goalkeeper at the time was Stanislav Cherchesov, the current head coach of the Russia national team. Robert Gatt served as interim Malta coach during the tournament, temporarily taking over from Pietro Ghedin who had just ended his first spell as Malta coach.

MALTA Reggie Cini, Jeffrey Chetcuti (David Carabott 79), John Buttigieg (captain), Michael Woods, Darren Debono, Richard Buahagar, Silvio Vella, Nicky Saliba (Joe Sant Fournier 51), Joe Brincat, Gilbert Agius (Hubert Suda 88), Stefan Sultana. **COACH:** Robert Gatt.

RUSSIA Stanislav Cherchesov, Ramiz Mamedov, Yury Nikiforov, Igor Shalimov, Yury Kovtun, Viktor Onopko (captain), Valeriy Karpin, Andrey Tikhonov (Vladimir Beschastnykh 46), Aleksandr Mostovoy, Sergey Yuran, Sergey Kiryakov. **COACH:** Oleg Romantsev.

RUSSIA SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

Yuri Dyupin

CLUB: Rubin Kazan DOB: 17/03/1988

Andrey Lunev

CLUB: Zenit Saint Petersburg DOB: 13/11/1991

Anton Shunin

CLUB: Dynamo Moscow DOB: 27/01/1987

DEFENDERS

Georgi Dzhikiya

CLUB: Spartak Moscow DOB: 21/11/1993

Mario Fernandes

CLUB: CSKA Moscow DOB: 19/09/1990

Vyacheslav Karavaev

CLUB: Zenit Saint Petersburg DOB: 20/05/1995

Fedor Kudryashov

CLUB: Antalyaspor (Turkey) DOB: 05/04/1987

Ilya Kutepov

CLUB: Spartak Moscow DOB: 29/07/1993

Roman Neustädter

CLUB: Dynamo Moscow DOB: 18/02/1988

Ilya Samoshnikov

CLUB: Rubin Kazan DOB: 14/11/1997

Andrei Semenov

CLUB: Akhmat Grozny DOB: 24/03/1989

Igor Smolnikov

CLUB: Krasnodar DOB: 08/08/1988

Yuri Zhirkov

CLUB: Zenit Saint Petersburg DOB: 20/08/1983

Aleksandr Zhirov

CLUB: Sandhausen (Germany) DOB: 24/01/1991

MIDFIELDERS

Ilzat Akhmetov

CLUB: CSKA Moscow DOB: 31/12/1997

Daniil Fomin

CLUB: Dynamo Moscow DOB: 02/03/1997

Aleksandr Golovin

CLUB: Monaco (France) DOB: 30/05/1996

Aleksei Ionov

CLUB: Krasnodar DOB: 18/02/1989

Daler Kuzyaev

CLUB: Zenit Saint Petersburg DOB: 15/01/1993

Aleksei Miranchuk

CLUB: Atalanta (Italy) DOB: 17/10/1995

Rezuan Mirzov

CLUB: Khimki DOB: 22/06/1993

Andrei Mostovoy

CLUB: Zenit Saint Petersburg DOB: 05/11/1997

Maksim Mukhin

CLUB: Lokomotiv Moscow DOB: 04/11/2001

Rifat Zhemaletdinov

CLUB: Lokomotiv Moscow DOB: 20/09/1996

FORWARDS

Artem Dzyuba

CLUB: Zenit Saint Petersburg DOB: 22/08/1988

Aleksandr Sobolev

CLUB: Spartak Moscow DOB: 07/03/1997

Anton Zabolotny

CLUB: Sochi DOB: 13/06/1991

COACH

HEAD COACH: Stanislav Cherchesov

INFORMATION CORRECT AS OF 23/03/2021

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