

## **Special Olympics Europe Eurasia (EE) Football Seminar Summary (March 2016)**

In March 2016 the 13<sup>th</sup> Special Olympics EE Football Conference was held in Belgium and saw a coming together of over 60 Special Olympics Football Coordinators, Coaches and European Football Association (FA) representatives for grassroots and disability from 32 countries.

The conference was primarily dedicated to the expansion of football for children and young athletes with an intellectual disability as a platform for their personal development with full acceptance and inclusion in their communities.

### **The future of disability sports at grassroots level - U12 football, the potential for development?**

A question and answer session was held to address the title of this section with a panel represented by:

- Kris Van Der Haegen - Director of Football, Belgian FA
- Iris Hugo-Bouvier - UEFA Football & Social Responsibility Unit
- William Gaillard - Former UEFA director of communication and Public affairs, currently Senior Advisor to ICSS & for Sports to Burson-Marsteller Europe
- Marcello Corrado – Policy Officer with the European Commission

The three key questions that were discussed were:

- 1. National Football Federations have started to introduce organised football training and competitions for younger players U6/U7. Could this be beneficial or a challenge for Special Olympics coaches/clubs/programmes to follow this lead set by National Football Federations and engage with this strategy?**

The general consensus from the floor was in agreement with the panels views in that competition should be avoided at this young age. The emphasis should be placed on fun and coaches/parents education on providing this environment was seen to be the biggest hurdle.

- 2. Integration/inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in society is a high expectation and aim nowadays. How could grassroots departments of FA's help football players and teams with an intellectual disability be integrated in mainstream, weekly organised football activities?**

The panel were all of the opinion reflecting the present Special Olympics stance in that Unified Football was the way forward. More and more in society today the education of pupils with disabilities was becoming entwined in that of main stream, if they learn together why can't they play sports together?

There should be much more emphasis on integration within grassroots groups/clubs. Parents should understand the need for this but again education of coaches and FA's was seen to be the main obstruction.

- 3. In near future a percentage of children with an intellectual disability will be integrated in regular schools in many EU countries. The result of inclusive school systems will be that players with disabilities will also prefer to play football together with their school friends after school in football clubs (instead of special football clubs). How do you feel football federations (grassroots/football clubs) anticipate dealing with this positive evolution and what steps could be taken to be well prepared?**

The conclusion from the group was funding! Everyone needs to realise the need for education, inclusion and synergy between agencies. Look at the possibility of mixed gender groups. “There are no disabilities, only abilities in football.”

### **Special Olympics EE Football Development Strategy (2016-2017)**

A power point statistical summary of where we are at presently was followed by the key development points for 2016/17. These were:

- Continue coach development - develop the quality of delivery and experience of individuals with an intellectual disability
- Investment in the next generation - young athletes and U12 football
- Increase number of Special Olympics EE/international Football tournaments
- Unified Football and Inclusion – look to develop these with clubs and homes along with schools and universities
- Expand partnerships to develop platforms to promote Special Olympics football (e.g. **.ECA-football clubs, JCF, NGO's**)

### **Young Athletes Programme (YAP)**

A power point presentation was given by Maureen Clarke showing the three implementation models of YAP:

- Community – sports club, community centre, day centre
- School – kindergarden/preschool, primary school, institution
- Family/Home

U12 football is very much a bridge between YAP which targets those aged 2-7 and the Special Olympics Unified programme for those aged 12 and above.

Further presentations were made on projects within Special Olympics EE:

- Unified Football & Research (S. Menke - Director Youth, Unified Sports & Research Special Olympics EE)
- King Baudouin Foundation/Special Olympics Turkey Unified Football U12's (S. Ovatman)
- Special Olympics Football Fitness (A. Cojocari)
- Project 'My first goal' – Czech Republic FA & Special Olympics (Belunek/Blazej)

### **Young Players Football**

Kris Van Der Haegen (Director of Belgian Coach Education) delivered a PowerPoint presentation on

- Vision of development of the Royal Belgian FA
- The philosophy of youth development of the Belgian FA
- The learning plan

Kris then gave an overview of how the Belgian FA has started to put in place systems and methodology to achieve their vision and philosophy:

“Although football is a team game the main focus is on the individual player: the basis for tailor made youth football”

The emphasis is on removing team competition away from the younger players with 3-5 year olds concentrating on general motor skills and from the age of 6 playing 2v2 formats. From here U7-U10 move on to 5v5, U10-U13 compete in 8v8, with 11-a-side not being played until at least individuals reach the age of 14.

To ensure all athletes have full participation, the power of team selection is to an extent removed from the coaches in that until the age of U17 all players play at least 50% of the playing time. This is achieved by dividing the game into 4 quarters rather than halves. There are no substitutions during each quarter but at the end of a particular quarter all the substitute players come on to the field.

This was followed with more detail on the Belgian FA development plan and the next steps in its progress.

Kris Van Der Haegen then delivered a training session according to the Belgian FA's new philosophy and vision with unified elements for children aged 6-10 followed by a question and answer session.