

THE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE MARKETING

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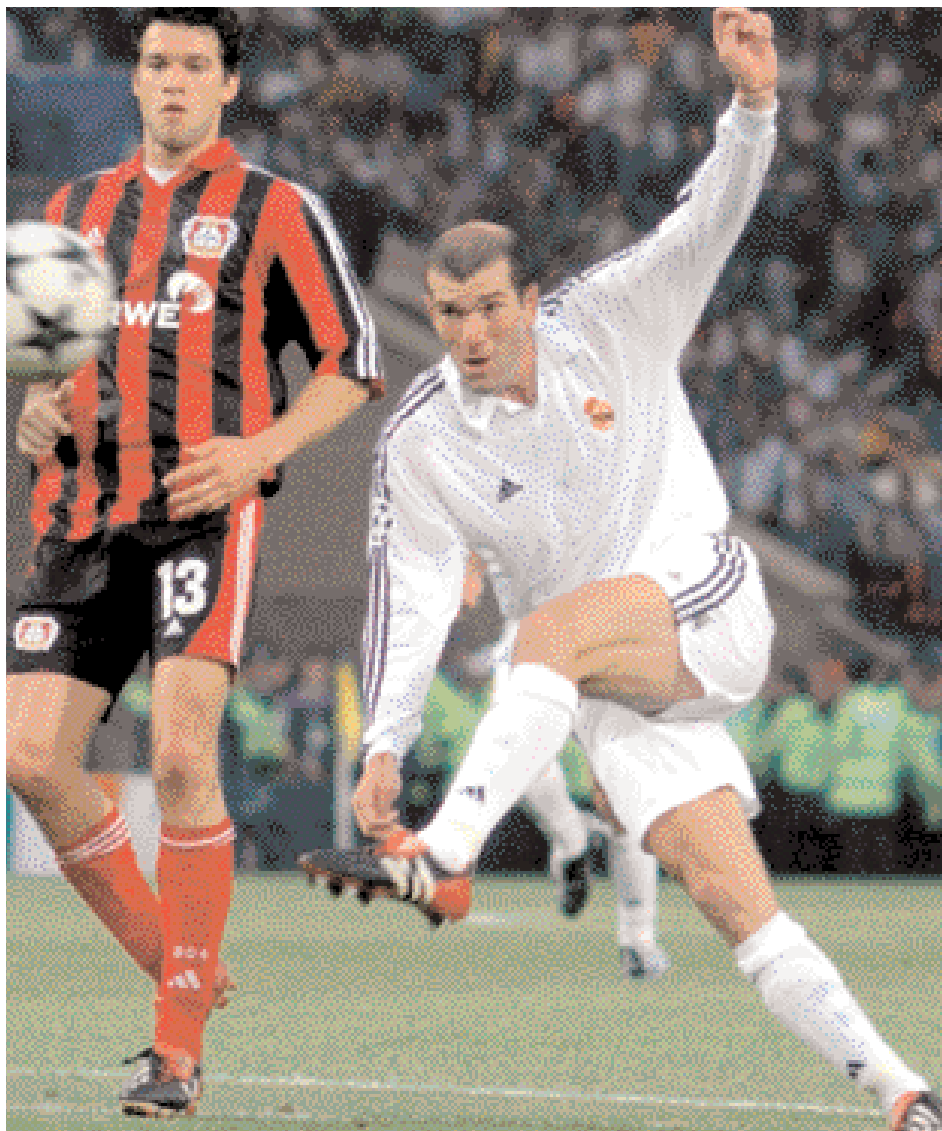
Our readers could be a little surprised to see an article on soccer in this magazine. However, we also want to widen our horizons and exchange views and ideas with the top experts from other sports and with anyone who could advise the basketball team's officials. On a final note, the articles are written by the top people in this field, but in a very clear and easy to read way and anyone, independently of the basketball Division in which his club plays, can "steal" one or more of these ideas to adapt and use at his own level.

Every football fan today is aware of the UEFA Champions League. This is the story of the creation of one of the most successful and most watched sports programmes in history.

At the UEFA Extraordinary Congress 1991, it was decided that UEFA should re-organise the way the European Champions Clubs' Cup was to be played. This new system began in the 1991-1992 season, and prepared the ground for the creation of the UEFA Champions League the following year.

During the 1991-92 season UEFA concluded that the new "league system" was working. Now it was possible to know how many matches each club would play, and TV schedules and sponsorships could be arranged accordingly. A partner was needed to organise a centralised marketing concept that would provide adequate income to the top clubs, maintain its funds for grass roots football and the national federations, and give support to weaker clubs. UEFA issued a new set of commercial regulations requiring each participating club to cede its marketing rights to UEFA starting with the 1992-93 season.

TEAM AG, of Lucerne, Switzerland, was selected in February 1992 to help establish the new centralized marketing. The basic premise was to optimize the revenue and ensure that the funds raised would go directly to the benefit of football. TEAM was engaged on a commission basis, with all contracts to be signed by UEFA. This centralized



marketing approach represented a major change for the clubs. Each club in the European Champions Clubs' Cup had been responsible for its own TV and commercial rights. Now UEFA was asking each club to "turn over" these rights to UEFA in return for fixed payments for qualification to the final eight, a fee per match won in the league, and fees for reaching the Final.

UEFA OUTLINED ITS OBJECTIVES WITH THE NEW SYSTEM:

- 1 Healthy and controlled growth of football

- 1 Financial solidarity whereby an appropriate share of the revenue obtained from the central marketing was shared with football as a whole
- 1 National Associations
- 1 National Leagues
- 1 Clubs eliminated in the first rounds of the competition
- 1 Increased revenue for the teams taking part

The unique vision of the UEFA Champions League was the centralised marketing concept with its key partners: the clubs, televi-

sion, and sponsors/ suppliers cooperating closely with UEFA, and its marketing agent TEAM. The operational agenda was that each of the three partners should contribute to the concept while at the same time receiving direct benefits.

THE BRAND IDENTITY

The first priority for the new marketing concept was to have a strongly branded product that would clearly stand out and be unique in the busy sports world. First a name for the competition had to be found. It was decided to use "UEFA Champions League" as it was a league composed of champion clubs. A logo was created that was composed of 8 stars formed in a sphere like a football. The stars represented the "star" football clubs of Europe. A choral-classical musical anthem was also developed from a theme of Handel's. This simple yet striking new logo, combined with the classical musical theme, gave the new competition an elevated image and prestigious feel. The Champions League was born!

THE MARKETING CONCEPT AND SPONSORSHIP

The new marketing concept was both innovative and commercially adapted to the changing market conditions. Each sponsor would receive exclusivity in its product area, not only in the stadium as was previously done, but also on TV, with commercial airtime spots and program sponsorship. By tying stadium advertising together with on-air sponsorship, it became almost impossible for non-sponsors to associate with the competition. The 3 pillars of stadium advertising, commercial airtime, and program sponsorship generated a "multiplying media effect" that offered new levels of recognition to the sponsors. A "less is more" approach was taken and a maximum of 8 international sponsors was decided upon. The sponsor package included 4 stadium advertising boards, ticket allocations, and identification on TV interview backdrops and in the VIP and press areas. Each of the sponsor ticket holders was also invited to specially arranged hospitality suites before and after the matches.

TELEVISION

A UEFA Champions League Television Network was envisioned with nationally exclusive television stations. The invitations to participate were open to every television station in Europe that provided national terrestrial coverage. TV partners were offered a fixed schedule of 6 matches with simultaneous kick-offs, and the almost certain knowledge that a team from their territory would be participating. This was a major advantage for television with the new "league" format. Each broadcaster committed to a strong package of programmes designed to give guaranteed coverage of all live mat-



ches, a highlight programme later in the evening of all the other matches, and a 30 minute studio program before each match day to promote the matches.

In addition to their rights fee, each television partner provided the program sponsorship for the official sponsors, and gave best prices and placement for commercial airtime spots around the matches. Broadcasters were rewarded with high prime-time audiences and the loyalty of their viewers.

THE CLUBS

The original 8 clubs in the first true UEFA Champions League season in 1992-93 experienced an approach to match organisation and commercialisation that was very new. Their stadium had to be made clean of all existing branding, new positions had to be created for an increased number and quality of TV coverage, hospitality suites and best-seated tickets had to be turned over for UEFA sponsors. As the UEFA Champions League developed it became clear that the financial rewards for the clubs were more substantial than had previously been possible. Secondly, the clubs were part of something that was much bigger than the previous competition.

IMPLEMENTATION

With few exceptions this programme was implemented as planned. The new transparency and the will and wish of UEFA to listen to its partners proved very beneficial to all. For example, television wanted cameras in-goal and wanted to make interviews immediately after the match. Many changes like these were gradually made. To make sure that the original plans were implemented, a strong group of professionals was developed to oversee the execution of all aspects of the competition. UEFA sent a venue director and media officer to each match to look after the sporting and media sides, while TEAM sent along a venue manager and venue co-ordinator to guide the TV and sponsor partners. It was paramount from the beginning that the

conditions for all clubs had to be the same, even though they may be implemented slightly differently from venue to venue.

Critical to the success of the implementation of this new league was the post-match de-brief process to ensure quality and flexible uniformity for all teams. After each match conclusions were drawn about the performance of all parties, and feedback given. This ensured that mistakes were not repeated, that all teams and commercial partners were given quality service, and that the "best-practices" were passed on. In order to harmonise the overall interests of European club football and reduce the pressures of too many matches, UEFA will streamline the competition starting with the 2003-2004 season. The number of participating clubs will remain at 32, however the number of matches will be reduced by eliminating the second group phase, and going straight to "eighth finals" knockout rounds.

RECOGNITION AND INCOME

Today the UEFA Champions League has become one of the world's premier sports competitions. Television stations in all Continents have vied for the television rights. After ten years in existence, it is the world's biggest annual football competition and is broadcast to over 200 countries with a worldwide audience of over 4 billion viewers per season. Cumulative television coverage over the past 10 years grew from 610 hours for the 1992/3 season to 17,200 hours during the 2000/01 season. Over 5.5 million fans attend UEFA Champions League matches per season at the 32 clubs across Europe.

UEFA publishes annually the income and expenditures, including the allocation to clubs. In its first year 56 million Swiss Francs were distributed to the clubs, national associations and national leagues. Now, eleven years later, nearly 900 million was distributed.