



FOOTBALL DURING A PANDEMIC – THE LAST HOLDOUTS AGAINST CORONAVIRUS

As the global game and world at large has come to an effective standstill during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the current coronavirus football situation has led the football community to slowly come to terms with dealing with the effects of it. From closed door games, to cancellations, to dealing with the financial impact to clubs and players... day by day, measures are updated to best manage the situation for all involved.

However, in a limited number of countries, not all has come to a stop. It is a situation that is ever changing, but game of football has not come to a complete stop, with the flame of the game been kept lit in it's last remaining outposts. Some such as **Western Sahara football** are always under trying times, in the current coronavirus football landscape, some as Turkey and Australia held on until cancellations were unavoidable, while in other corners or the globe, the games continue.

Current Leagues

Belarus

The most consistent of these has been the Belorussian league, maintaining a full schedule behind closed doors from their March season start, including Champions League regulars BATA Borisov.

However as the **BBC reports** there is growing pressure from supporter groups to boycott games, in spite of president Lukashenko's resistance to disruption at this time, though no cancellations seem to be on the horizon in Belarus. Despite this, Fifpro and it's general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann have condemned the continuation of the league, saying,

"It is frankly not comprehensible how this could be going on"

On the field however, the surprise of the early stages has been two defeats from two for BATE. This leaves BATE to sit level bottom of the table. At the top 4 teams have made perfect starts with Minsk and Energetyk-BGU level on top on goal difference as the early pacemakers.

Slavia Mazyr v BATE

Minsk Derby

Neman v Vitebsk

☐☐ Belarus League Table

#	Team	MP	W	D	L	F	A	G	P
1	Shakhtyor	17	9	6	2	29	9	20	33
2	BATE	17	9	4	4	30	18	12	31

#	Team	MPWD	L	F	A	G	P
3	Neman Grodno	16934	22	13	+9	30	
4	Energetyk-BGU	17926	24	23	+1	29	
5	Dinamo Brest	16826	31	20	+11	26	
6	Dinamo Minsk	17827	21	13	+8	26	
7	Torpedo BelAZ	17755	21	20	+1	26	
8	Ruh Brest	17674	23	14	+9	25	
9	Isloch	17728	19	23	-4	23	
10	Vitebsk	17584	17	18	-1	23	
11	Slavia	17647	21	29	-8	22	
12	Slutsk	16538	19	26	-7	18	
13	Gorodeya	17449	15	28	-13	16	
14	Minsk	15438	17	28	-11	15	
15	Smolevichy-STI	16358	20	26	-6	14	
16	Belshina	17241	11	43	-21	10	

Nicaragua

The sole league continuing in the Americas is that of Nicaragua, currently in its Apertura phase of the 2019/20 season. However with case of Corona virus being confirmed in the county, [The Guardian](#) has reported 3rd placed Diriangén has expressed a wish to suspend the league, with fears among there players and staff of the current situation. However with government pressure to fulfill fixtures, and with their funding influence among a majority of teams in the league, no stoppage seems imminent.

In contrast there are opposers of the current situation. The league running as usual is seen as a platform for president Daniel Ortega's domestic display of stability and normality. In this environment, he is unlikely to accept dissenting voices from clubs. Clubs have raised occasional concerns by some such as Real Madriz, but such comments are quickly retracted. On the field Managua from the capital sit two points clear at the top of the table. They lead from Real Estelí, who defeated them after extra time in the 2nd of a two legged Apertura final in December.

Real Madriz FC v CD Ocotol

CD Ocotol v Real Estelí FC

JuventusFC v CD Walter Ferretti

☐☐Nicaragua Campeonato Nacional

#TeamMPWDLFAGP

Burundi


In contrast to other countries which continue, there is a great appreciation for the scale of the Coronavirus pandemic. With just now the first two officially confirmed cases in the country, no reason has been found to cancel regular events such as church mass, or football games, though it is now in question. Also, on what current coronavirus football measures can be taken. For instance, they refused to select European based players for national duty. This whilst international fixtures were still possible and were among the first calling on CAF to suspend such fixtures.

As such, the league, as the country as a whole runs in isolation to the outside footballing community. Therefore, Aigle Noir are now certain to cede their title won last season, the first in the clubs history. With only four game weeks remaining, Le Messenger have played one game extra, to sit 4 points clear from

Musongati. The league now looks set to go down to the wire.

 **Vitol'0 Fc v Musongati**

 **Athletico Academy v Aigle Noir**

 **Inter Star Vs Buja City**

🇧🇮 Burundi Premier League

#TeamMPWDLFAGP

 **Turkmenistan**

The Turkmenistan football league calendar kicked off as usual on March 6th. While Köpetdag Ashgabat were the dominant force post independence, recent seasons have seen success be in the hands of city rivals Altyn Asyr, winning all titles from 2014-2019. Most often runners up in this time is Ahal, based in Anau, outside the main and some 15km from the Ashgabat Stadium which they share. However yet again in 2020, it seems these two will be those fighting once again for the title.

***Update 1-6-20** – Thanks to the work of the people of the Russian “**Other Football**” news site, match footage was been captured, including full games, so be sure to check their site for the very latest updates on the 2020 Ýokary Liga.

🇹🇲 Turkmenistan League Fixtures

August 25, 2020

Köpetdag Aşgabat 10:00 Energetik

August 26, 2020

Ahal 10:00 Nebitçi

Şagadam 10:00 Aşgabat

August 27, 2020

Altyn Asyr 10:00 Merw

September 4, 2020

Aşgabat 10:00 Köpetdag Aşgabat

September 5, 2020

Altyn Asyr 10:00 Ahal

Nebitçi 10:00 Şagadam

Merw 10:00 Energetik

September 9, 2020

Köpetdag Aşgabat 10:00 Nebitçi

Energetik 10:00 Aşgabat

September 10, 2020

Şagadam 10:00 Altyn Asyr

Ahal 10:00 Merw

September 14, 2020

Ahal 10:00 Şagadam

Merw 10:00 Aşgabat

Nebitçi 10:00 Energetik

September 15, 2020

Altyn Asyr 10:00 Köpetdag Aşgabat

September 24, 2020

Şagadam 10:00 Merw

Energetik 10:00 Altyn Asyr

Aşgabat 10:00 Nebitçi

September 25, 2020

Köpetdag Aşgabat 10:00 Ahal

Leagues To Come

Tajikistan

A new contender to this list though will be that of Tajikistan which has confirmed it plans to play it's season curtain raising Super Cup as planned, albeit behind closed doors. With zero local confirmed cases of Coronavirus, it has been deemed there is no coronavirus football schedule changes. On March 31st Istaravshan heavily defeated league rivals Isfara 6-0 in a pre-season friendly, signalling their intent for the campaign. This gives good preparation for their season opener against Khatlon on Sunday April 5th. However Sunday's opening round of league fixtures will be pre-empted by the curtain raising Tajik Super Cup on Saturday with defending league/cup champions Istiqlol, playing the league runners up Hujand



Istaravshan 6-0

Isfara –[@rasulovjr23](#)

☐☐Tajikistan League Fixtures

Taiwan

The 2020 Taiwan football season will commence on April 12th. Current champions Tatung FC will look to regain their title from the 2019 season. In contrast to it's Asian neighbours, Taiwan has been largely unaffected by the spread of Coronavirus, with life continuing as usual for locals. For the league participants, it will be the same 8 teams from the 2019 campaign. This includes Red Lions and Ming Chuan survived relegation playoffs to retain their top flight status

2020 Participants

- 1 Hang Yuen
- 2 Taipei City Tatung
- 3 Taichung Futuro
- 4 Taiwan Power Company
- 5 Tainan Steel
- 6 Hasus Taiwan Sports University
- 7 Taipei Red Lions
- 8 Ming Chuan University

Ming Chuan win playoff

☐☐Taiwan League Table

#	Team	M	P	W	D	L	F	A	G	P
1	Taipower	14	11	21	3	46	+28	35		
2	Tatung	14	11	21	2	96	+23	35		
3	NTCPE	14	10	04	3	28	+24	30		
4	I Shou University	14	6	17	21	31	-10	19		
5	Hun Sing	14	4	46	13	20	-7	16		
6	NSTC	14	3	29	7	21	-14	11		
7	Ming Chuan Uni...	14	3	0	11	134	-23	9		
8	Fubon Financial	14	2	11	11	103	-21	7		

The time we now live in with coronavirus football 'chaos' now being the norm, is a tough adjustment. While many clubs and associations adjust for financial realities without the game, others persevere. Though it presents difficult times, the game has gone largely quiet. Some remain, but at what cost, time will tell.



WESTERN SAHARA FOOTBALL – A SAHRAWI SPORTING IDENTITY

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Southern Provinces, Sahara Occidental or simply Western Sahara. Even defining what name to give to this region presents just the first of the many hurdles to overcome before one can begin to understand the complicated state of Western Saharan football.

Expressing Sahrawi Football Identity ♦ Current Tensions ♦ Moving Forward

Football in Western Sahara

On the face of it, football in Western Sahara can seem to be quite a straight forward affair. Jeunesse Massira play in Laayoune (ES:El Aaiún; FR: Laâyoune), the largest city in Western Sahara. They play in the Moroccan football system, spending most of their time in the top flight even reaching four cup semi-finals, most recently in 2005. It's importance to Moroccan football is seen by the cities hosting of the 2016 Moroccan Cup final in the city's "Stade Sheikh Mohamed Laghdaf" stadium.

This narrative would be disputed by those supporting the POLISARIO, (*Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro*), who's aim is the self-determination of Western Sahara and to break from their perceived occupation by Morocco, previously through armed struggle but since a 1991 ceasefire has put focus on diplomacy and among other things sporting representation through the likes of football. Their narrative would suggest that Morocco's occupation is illegitimate and that football is being used as one of many tools to legitimize Moroccan control in the area.



Stade Cheikh Laghdaf

This can be seen in the origins of the Jeunesse Massira team itself. It was originally founded in 1977 in the central Moroccan city of Benslimane, centered between Rabat and Casablanca near Morocco's coastline. The team was originally named "Auxilliary Forces of Benslimane" reflecting the connection to the Royal Armed Moroccan Forces who established the team, much like the connections seen in Eastern European teams of the time and RAF Rabat, whom provided the inspiration for establishing a similar team in Benslimane. Football has been strong in Spanish Morocco with Atlético Tetuán appearing in the Spanish 1951/52 La Liga campaign, recording a 4-1 home win against namesakes Athletic Madrid and a 3-3 draw with Real Madrid.

In 1995, the decision was made for this team to move it's base from Benslimane to Laayoune in Western Sahara. Morocco had been in dispute over the territory with Mauritania following Spain's ceding of control in 1975, with the latter removing it's claims in 1979 following conflict with the POLISARIO. Morocco had strong control in the region surrounding Laayoune until 1982 before advances, in the form of a series of sand berm constructions, particularly in 1984 and 1985 gave Morocco significant control in the wider region. A referendum planned to take place in 1992 following a ceasefire never materialized and so the majority of the region continued under de facto Moroccan control allowing for the establishment of a football team in Laayoune.



Sahrawi fortification

This could be used to reflect the growing Moroccan control in the region as reflected in the change in the teams name to "Jeunesse Massira" with Massira being the name given to the "Green March" where up to 300,000 unarmed Moroccans marched across the border to occupy areas of Western Sahara vacated by the Spanish. The teams somewhat artificial existence is shown by an absence of local crowds at games, with support made up from mostly from the friends and family of security forces in the region. The moving of a Moroccan team into Western Sahara could be seen as a metaphor from the movement of Moroccan people across the border in 1975.



Expressing Sahrawi Football Identity

However, while Moroccan influence was expanding into Western Sahara, and into Western Saharan football, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) were seeking to take their own foothold into the footballing world. Many teams have represented the Sahrawi people throughout the years, with the first games being recognized by the Sahrawi Football Federation as having taken place in 1984 against Algerian league sides. The difficulties with political instability along with an almost total lack of resources made organizing fixtures a challenge for the Sahrawi Football Federation.



Western Sahara lineup vs. Esperanto

The prospects of development for Sahrawi football were given a boost when in 2003, Western Sahara was accepted as a member to the NF-Board, an organisation set up to help organised football for regions unaffiliated to FIFA. Though unable to attend any of the early tournaments organised by the NF Board due primarily a lack of funding, in 2012 they received financial help from the Kurdish organizers of the 2012 Viva World Cup allowing the team to travel to Erbil.

From this a transition occurred from the previous "Western Sahara XI" sides, a selection which had lost to a Galicia selection 2-1 in 2011, into a fully fledged Sahrawi National Football Team (nicknamed The "Dromederies") to compete as Western Sahara into the future. The then Sahrawi Minister of Youth and Sport,

Mohamed Moulud Mohaed Fadel officially announced the establishment on the 25th of March 2012. Following official backing and logistical support from Kurdistan, Western Sahara could finally compete on the international stage at a time when other sporting endeavours were being made in the region such as the introduction of the "Sahara Marathon".

The Viva World Cup would prove to be a relative success for the debuting Western Sahara team. A decision was made to send players from the Tindouf camps rather than those based in Europe, and following trials a team of 20 was given five days to train before making the journey to Kurdistan. Though losing their group games to hosts Kurdistan (6-0) and Occitania (6-2), a main cause being explained that players were slipping due to not being used to playing on grass. The placement round games would see improvement with wins against Darfur (5-1 : Their first in competitive football) and also against Raetia (3-0) before losing a more competitive rematch against Occitania to finish in 6th place overall in their maiden tournament. However, with disorganization within the NF Board halting any further tournaments being organised to date, Western Sahara made the switch to CONIFA to be it's home for the foreseeable future.

There is precedent for football outside of FIFA to be one approach used by nations who have gone on to successfully receive international recognition which has boosted their case for self determination. A similar approach was seen in North Africa by Algeria, who used a touring 'national' side to represent Algeria (Then part of France). This was to help to legitimize the Algerian statehood movement known as the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) team representing the Algerian resistance movement, also known informally as the "eleven for independence" in English.

On the eve of the 1958 World Cup, Algerian native players left Switzerland for Tunisia to join up with the FLN side including Mustapha Zitouni and Rashid Makhloufi, a league winner in 1957 with St.Etienne and with four French caps to his name. This team continued to tour until Algerian independence before it was succeeded by an official Algerian National team. In more recent times, teams such as Palestine and most notably Kosovo have expressed their national self determination through receiving international recognition through their football team, if not through total political recognition.

Current Tensions

Prior to this VIVA World Cup tournament, tragedy was to occur in the Moroccan controlled Western part of the region in the port city of Dakhla. SCC Mohammédia from Mohammédia, a port city just north of Casablanca, visited to face Mouloudia Dakhla recording a 3-0 victory. However reported tension and stone throwing as fans left the ground escalated as supporters left the stadium into riotous conditions. It was reported that "criminals" took advantage of the disorder to engage in attacks with knives, escalating to the point of five reported deaths, three civilians run over and two police officers with some 30 others wounded.

Similar tensions erupted south east of Laayoune earlier that year stemming from the originally peaceful Gdeim Izik protest camp which aimed to seek better treatment

for Sahrawi people, though some also took the opportunity to call for Sahrawi independence. The African Union condemned the violence, saying "Forcible measures taken by Moroccan authorities to dismantle the camp and disband the protesters have regrettably resulted in the loss of lives and the destruction of property", violence which spread throughout the region.

Morocco has also shown specific opposition to Western Sahara on a footballing front. Prior to the 2012 VIVA World Cup, Morocco attempted to contact Qatar Airways to have the team's scheduled flights from Doha to Erbil suspended, though the Western Saharan team still arrived on schedule in Kurdistan. Morocco have also hosted two celebration exhibition matches in Laayoune in commemoration of the Green March for the 40th anniversary in 2015 and once again for the 41st in 2016, featuring on both occasions Argentine legend Diego Maradona. Others to feature in these games include former players of the year Rivaldo and George Weah in front of crowds of 30,000 people. This, tied to the city's hosting of the Moroccan Cup final can be seen as how Morocco can also use football to boost recognition for their claims to this area.

Such actions are not limited to high profile football events. In 2016 at the u-20 L'Alcúdia hosted it's annual International Football Tournament (also known as COTIF) near Valencia, a tournament which has showcased the likes of Raúl, Isco and Abel Hernandez in past editions, though it was here where tensions again showed. At the opening ceremony the introduction of the Moroccan team was greeted by whistles from the 10/11 year olds from a Western Sahara team competing in a concurrent children's tournament. From this, the Moroccan team initially refused to attend the official reception from the mayor of L'Alcúdia, though this was later changed to a full withdrawal from the u-20 tournament, suggesting that they would not play if the Children's team from Western Sahara was allowed to compete. COTIF president Eliseu Gomez stated that "nothing was done with bad will, the claim that they can not be together in an official place, it is the first time in 33 years that a team withdraws during the competition". It shows the tensions of this conflict are far reaching.

Despite relinquishing 'de facto' control in the area in the 1970's, Spain continues to play an active role in supporting the people of Western Sahara. Many Sahrawi moved to Spain in search of a new life, now being dispersed through the country. This has created a separate Sahrawi community based in Europe which helps to support those away from Western Sahara. However due to difficulties in communicating with and travelling between those based in the refugee camps in Algeria, this has created two separate Sahrawi organisations, though unity is the ultimate goal. At present the footballing unity is found but the winner of the RASD cup in Spain playing against the champion from the camps, in a champion of champions final.

Moving Forward

Things are never easy when it comes to football for Western Sahara. In 2015 The Western Sahara team was invited to play a friendly game against an "Esperanto Selection" during the 100th annual Esperanto congress

in Lille, France, the first game to be played by an Esperanto side under fielded by the Esperanto FA. The first half went extremely well for Western Sahara, racing to a 4-0 lead. However at half time, the Esperanto players returned to their dressing rooms to find their possessions had been stolen. Dealing with this, they did not return for the second half and the match had to be abandoned. Following this in June 2017, Western Sahara played their first fixture for almost two years against a refugee select team in Tindouf, playing out a 3-3 draw with Mohamed Boglaida (2) and Hamid Mohammed on the scoresheet.

Western Sahara v Esperanto

With the official establishment of a Western Saharan team in 2012 after a long legacy of football in the region, the challenges into the future remain in the logistics of organising players and fixtures for this team to grow and thrive as representation for Western Sahara, its people and its footballing community. With occasional friendlies for the national team, and the RASD cup providing an outlet for those away from their homeland, football remains a passion for Western Saharan people. The political conflicts in the region may take time to solve, and though there can be sometimes crossover into sport, the hope is that in this case football can rise above all and bring people together in a peaceful way, simply for the love of the game.

Credit to those at [RASDSport](#) for help in the research of this article and to [@ditikisahara](#) for very helpful contributions also.

Note: All efforts have been made to ensure accuracy in this article, though with potential errors, particularly in translation errors. However if an error is noticed, please contact and any error will be happily corrected.



TOP 5 : ANDY SELVA'S TOP SAN MARINO GOALS

Andy Selva stands as possibly the most widely recognised player to wear the San Marino colours in international fixtures across the footballing world. His time playing for his country over a 20 year career leaves him as San Marino's record goal scorer, scoring not only important goals, but also many spectacular strikes to light up San Marino's fixtures during this time. **Here we highlight five of his very best strikes.**

Goal 1: 🇸🇲 Andy Selva vs 🇸🇰 Slovakia 2008 ('10 WCQ)

Starting at number one on the list and possibly ranking number one as the greatest individual goal in the relatively short history of San Marino football on the international stage. This goal in a losing 3-1 effort in a 2008 World Cup qualifier at home to Slovakia shows Selva's full range of skills. Great movement to find space, takes the defender one-on-one before beautifully curling the ball into the far corner, a simply wonderful goal.

Goal 2: 🇸🇲 Andy Selva vs 🇸🇦 Bosnia 2005 ('06 WCQ)

The first free kick to feature on this list, a list that could equally stand as a tribute to Andy Selva's ability from the dead ball, it highlights Selva's quality as a ball striker. Here from some 30 yards out, Selva produces a powerful strike with minimal back lift that flashes over the Bosnian wall, before flying past the keeper into the corner of the net. A free kick that many would be proud to produce and a stand out among Selva's many fine efforts.

Goal 3: 🇸🇲 Andy Selva vs 🇨🇾 Wales 2007 ('08 ECQ)

This wonderful dead ball strike came in a relatively competitive Euro 08 qualifying campaign for San Marino. They had a narrow 1-0 loss to Cyprus, and a heart breaking 2-1 loss to an Irish 90th minute winner, though again looked competitive at home to Wales. This well struck free kick pulled the score back to 2-1 and though the score remained at this leaving San Marino without a point, this strike remains the highlight of that game.

Goal 4: 🇸🇲 Andy Selva vs 🇧🇪 Belgium 2001 ('02 WCQ)

In February 2001, San Marino travelled to Bruxelles to face a Belgium side fresh from co-hosting the previous Summer's Euro 2000 championships. Though it features in the one true one-sided result on this list, Andy Selva's 25 yard strike from a free kick, right into the top corner of the Belgian net left Selva with one of his finest international strikes and left the home Belgian crowd to applaud this fantastic effort.

Goal 5: 🇸🇲 Andy Selva vs 🇱🇮 Liechtenstein 2004

No list can be complete without including this strike. Coming during a 2004 friendly, this goal from Andy Selva helped to record a 1-0 victory against Liechtenstein, a result which currently stands as their only victory in official international football to date. Again showing his proficiency from free kicks, this near 35 yard strike once again finds its way into the corner, past the keeper to create a piece of San Marino football history.

Complete list of Andy Selva International Goals

- 1: ECQ (Group 6) 10/14/98 (H) San Marino 1:4 Austria
- 2: WCQ (Group 6) 02/28/01 (A) Belgium 10:1 San Marino
- 3: WCQ (Group 6) 06/06/01 (H) San Marino 1:4 Belgium
- 4: Int. Friendly 04/28/04 (H) San Marino 1:0 Liechtenstein
- 5: WCQ (Group 7) 03/30/05 (H) San Marino 1:2 Belgium
- 6: WCQ (Group 7) 06/04/05 (H) San Marino 1:3 Bosnia&Herz.
- 7: ECQ (Group D) 10/17/07 (H) San Marino 1:2 Wales
- 8: WCQ (Group C) 10/11/08 (H) San Marino 1:3 Slovakia

Favourite Selva Goal

- 1: vs Slovakia
- 2: vs Bosnia
- 3: vs Wales
- 4: vs Belgium
- 5: vs Liechtenstein

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2026 WORLD CUP : CONCACAF SEEK THREE NATION BID

As FIFA continue their plans to further expand the number of teams competing at future world cups, CONCACAF General Secretary Philippe Moggio believes this presents a great opportunity for the region to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Speaking to [ESPN Deportes](#), Moggio spoke of his ambition to bring the World Cup back to the region, having last hosted the competition in the United States in 1994.

“Obviously, this is a high priority for our region. It is time to have the World Cup back at CONCACAF, considering the last time we had hosting duties was in 1994 in the U.S.”

The planned bid will consist of the hosting being split among the three largest associations in CONCACAF, in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Moggio believes that the expansion to 48 teams will require a developed

football market in terms of infrastructure and also commercial opportunities.

"It is a strong region in sporting and economic terms," adding "There will be a need for more stadiums to be played in. "There aren't many countries in the world which can say they will have no problems in hosting this kind of competition. This makes co-hosting bids, such as the one in our region and with three countries involved, more feasible."

Both Mexico (1970 & 1986) and the United States (1994) have previously hosted tournaments, with this being a potential first for Canada whose only previous World Cup experience came in qualifying for the 1986 edition. However, despite considering a three way joint bid, Moggio has ruled out a cross-confederation bid with CONMEBOL, despite the success of the Copa America – Centenario.



Azteca Stadium-Mexico

"The idea of cooperation in tournament organisation is always there and we are in our best disposition to explore different opportunities. However, when it comes to consider merging our Confederations and look for a joint World Cup qualifying pool, I don't think there's space for changes."

Despite the potential logistical and organisation problems that having such an expanded tournament may present, Moggio spoke highly of the initiative, speaking of the benefits it can bring to the regional and global game to give more countries the opportunity to appear on the grand stage of a World Cup, which can provide benefits for these countries into the future.

"We all know the World Cup is a great development tool for football. When a country has the chance of playing the tournament, it helps a great deal in the progress and development of football in that nation."

Though a decision on hosting for the 2026 World Cup is not due to take place until 2020, CONCACAF's previous hosting experience, infrastructure and an almost 30 year gap between hosting duties, this potential bid surely makes Moggio's CONCACAF offer favourite entering the bidding process.

1994 World Cup Highlights – BBC



TOP 5 : FOOTBALL VIDEO GAMES WITH SMALLER TEAMS

Football games have become incredibly mainstream in recent years, often adorned with a cover feature the top footballing stars of the day. However, what about lower ranked football teams representation in computer games. Here we look at a sample of just five to get your obscure football gaming fix.

1: Sensible World of Soccer – (*Amiga, PC, *XBOX Live : 1994*)

Sensible World of Soccer was an ambitious evolution from the 90's Amiga classic top down game Sensible Soccer. The massive expansion to the playable database means that if St Vincent & The Grenadines vs. Solomon Islands in 1996 takes your fancy, here is your chance to experience it!

A key feature of this game is the wonderful career mode which allows up to 20 seasons of engaging gameplay, including your chance to take for favourite club side from perhaps Estonia to continental glory! The gameplay itself is a benchmark for the genre and is a perfect place to start for a quick minnows football fix!



2: Actua Soccer 3 – (*PC, PS1 : 1998*)

Gremlin interactive were at the forefront on the move

to 3D football sims in the mid 1990's with their release of the Actua Soccer series. Though the gameplay was latterly usurped by EA Sports FIFA and Konami's ISS Pro Evolution Soccer titles, the graphics hold up well for a mid 90's title.

Much like Sensible Soccer's evolution, the Actua Soccer 3 featured a massive expansion to the playable teams covering all English league clubs along with some non-league and Ladies sides. Added to this was a massive global selection of sides from all confederations, so if you want to face you low ranked European team against a Thai or New Zealand opponent, here you can.



3: *Fifa 98* – (PSX, N64, SEGA etc. : 1997 (JP:1998))

Perhaps the most fondly remembered football game of this era, FIFA 98 set the template for what most football sims have become today. With great graphics for the time, fluid gameplay and even the fondly remembered indoor football feature, FIFA 98 is a game of almost total positives.

Of note to fans of football away from the giants of the game is that being a World Cup year game, it features a comprehensive "Road to World Cup" mode to include those teams involved in the qualifying stages, so you can take your low ranked teams from any confederation and begin the journey to World Cup qualification, and who knows, maybe with the main prize too.



4: FIFA World Cup 2014 – (PS3, XBOX 360 : 2014)

Following the trend set by FIFA 98 of comprehensive World Cup year games comes FIFA World Cup 2014. It features all 203 teams who participated in World Cup qualifying for the player to choose from. The only absentees are Bhutan, Brunei, Guam, Mauritania, Mauritius and South Sudan who did not enter qualification.

Being the most recent World Cup edition, this is the most recent football sim to feature on this list and as such comes with all the trappings players have come to expect from a modern football game. Excellent graphics, responsive gameplay, online gaming, so if you want a modern platform to try some of the lesser national sides in the world, this is the game for it

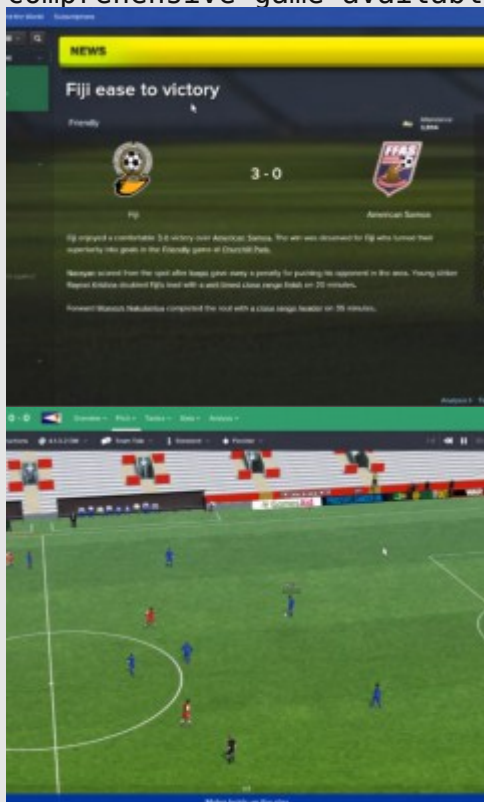




5: Football Manager 2017 – (PC, Mac, Linux : 2016)

A list of football video games without a reference to the world of football management sims would simply feel incomplete. As such, the latest incarnation of the global phenomenon Football Manager series is added to provide the most comprehensive and up to date team listings and player database for any lover of all levels of global football to delve into.

The game itself boasts 2,500 world teams with over 500,000 players to choose from. Version improvements include improved AI, magic spray from referees, sport scientists, data analysts and even topical Brexit scenarios for the 2017 edition. There is no more comprehensive game available today!





Honorable mentions –

This list does not necessarily reflect the best football simulations, but rather those with a wide selection of teams to choose from so that lesser sides are represented. As such games like Pro Evolution Soccer would certainly have featured with more comprehensive team listings.

Also this does not reflect traditional games like Subbuteo where one team could be Forfar Athletic, Malmo and San Marino all at once!

There are also unofficial mods that have been worked on such as this unreleased non-fifa mobile sim edited by those involved with Fernando De Noronha football, so there maybe more out there to discover



If you have any thoughts on this list, feel free to comment or suggest games that you think would make a great addition to this list.



GUINEA-BISSAU AFCON 2017 : UNDERDOGS ENTER THE LIONS DEN

The 2017 edition of the Africa Cup of Nations will feature Guinea-Bissau making their debut in, what looks set to be a thrilling edition with many of the perennial big hitters including Cameroon, Ghana, Egypt, Morocco and Ivory Coast challenging for the title. It is something of a fairy-tale for the small West African country, who will be making their debut in the tournament, having first attempted to qualify for the 1994 edition. They secured their path to the tournament in the penultimate game of qualification in a thrilling 3-2 over former champions Zambia.

Despite the government dropping out from funding a pre-

tournament training camp, along with last minute pay disputes and potential player strikes, a last minute player meeting with president Jose Mario Vaz has seen all outstanding bonuses up to €23,000 per player being paid. Despite the upheaval, the team is looking set to cause more shocks in the tournament proper.

This success has been built on team manager Paulo Torres looking to the former colonial base of Portugal to boost squad numbers with those based in Europe of Guinean extraction. There is a hope that the experience that these players have from playing at club level along with the likes of those in the victorious Portugal Euro 2016 squad will be of great benefit to the squad, as explained by team co-ordinator Caito Balde who is set to take charge of the side as Paulo Torres serves a four game ban for dissent against a referee during qualifying.

"Portugal are an inspiration to us...Many of the players in the Guinea Bissau team have played with many of those players who have now become champions of Europe. They have passed through the best training school that is Portugal and will look to show that at the Nations Cup"

Playing internationally since 1952, it has been a long footballing journey for small Guinea-Bissau. Their football association was officially founded in 1974, but had to wait until 1986 to be recognized by CAF and FIFA. Since making their competitive debut in Cup of Nations Qualifying in 1994, competitive matches have been a largely fruitless exercise for Guinea-Bissau with only four wins in qualification in their history. Upon the draw being made for qualifying for the 2017 edition, their form looked set to continue, being drawn the the same qualification group with former winners Zambia and Congo along with Victor Wanyama's Kenya. A total of one point with four goals conceded from the first two groups games seemed to fit this pattern. However in March, two meetings with Kenya within a week changed the completion of the group with Camara scoring in the home tie in a 1-0 win, quickly followed up four days later with Cicero scoring after 81 minutes in Kinshasa to put Guinea Bissau in uncharted territory. The game had to be halted for some 30 minutes as a home crowd frustrated by Kenyan coach and team selections had threatened to boycott the game, with tensions spilling over in to battles with stadium police. However the West African side were able to see the game out, with qualification turning from dreams to reality. As goalkeeper Jonas Mendes told CAFOnline after the match.

"We now believe that we actually can (go all the way to AFCON). It is not easy but beating Kenya, a very tough team home and away gives us some sense of belief. We will now focus on the two remaining matches and give it the best we can,"

This set up a dramatic fixture in June knowing a win at home to 2012 champions Zambia could see them through. In an enthralling encounter, Guinea-Bissau twice took the lead only to be twice pegged back by Zambia. Though as the game entered added time, the Guinea-Bissau

players were not looking to settle for the draw, as described by Bocundji Ca.

“Even against Zambia, we went in with the same determination as we had against Kenya,” Ca said. “We did not even consider drawing, we only wanted to win, by any means. It was the first opportunity in our history to qualify for AFCON, so we knew we could not miss it.”

In a seminal moment for football in Guinea-Bissau Toni Silva came up with a late, late winner to send the Guinea Bissau faithful into dream land. As Ca continued,

“The result meant more than football to the country”

Drawn to a group featuring the hosts Gabon, 2013 finalists Burkina Faso and African heavyweights and four time winners Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau will have their work cut out to produce further heroics. However, the side will be hopeful based on the progress in qualifying and will be sure to have the full support of the nation behind them as their footballing odyssey continues.

Guinea Bissau Squad AFCON Squad

Goalkeepers: Rui Dabo (Cova da Piedade), Papa Masse Mbaye Fall (Orellana Costa Dulce), Jonas Mendes (Salgueiros)

Defenders: Mamadu Cande (Tondela), Tomas dabo (Arouca), Eridson (Freamunde), Emmanuel Mendy, Rudinilson Silva (both unattached), Agostinho Soares (Sporting Covilha), Juary Soares (Mafra)

Midfielders: Bocundji Ca (unattached), Idrissa Camara (Avellino), Francisco Junior (Stromsgodset), Nani (Felgueiras), Piqueti (Sporting Braga), Sana (Academica Viseu), Toni Silva, Zezinho (both Levadiakos)

Strikers: Aldair (Olhanense), Abel Camara (Belenenses), João Mario (Chaves), Fredric Mendy (Ulsan Hyundai), Sami (Akhisar Belediyespor)