Behind a social movement there is the passion, energy and compromise of individuals who are driven by the idea of contributing to a project that transcends their own success and existence. This is the real driving force behind collective social impact.

For more than three decades, we have seen the football for good movement develop and grow, motorized by the hearts and minds of first, a handful, and now, thousands of individuals who truly believe in football as a catalyst for social change. Those of us who work in the field of football for good, are used to crossing paths with outstanding individuals who are questioning the status quo, fighting to improve their communities, co-creating and sharing ideas... Yet, I never cease to get inspired by the level of commitment and creativity of each and every member of the football for good community.

So, we talk about a movement, about collective power, but this is really about people, about exceptional human beings, from all walks of life who, one way or another, take the conscious decision of walking together and putting aside their individual agendas. Here we talk about thousands, if not millions of individuals who are crazy enough to embark upon a joint mission and share its glory.

Not everyone will be in the headlines; not everyone will be remembered; but what will remain is more than enough for these crazy human beings: being part of the movement, changing the world through football.

Elvira Gonzalez-Valles,
Editor-in-Chief
COLOMBIA

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COMMON GOAL MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TEAM UP, FOR GOOD
COMMON GOAL MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TEAM UP, FOR GOOD
This April began with a triumphant kick-off: the very first collaboration cycle between Common Goal members (including football players and managers) and organisations that are using football as a tool to advance social change in their communities. The allocation of the pledges from Common Goal members to 27 organisations was made public in March and represents a milestone for the field of football for good, positioning Common Goal as a new player in the field and one of the largest initiatives for social change within the football industry.

The resources generated through Common Goal, over 400,000€, will be used in two different streams: the first enables football players to team up with specific organisations successfully implementing football for good programmes to drive change related to specific social topics (e.g. advancing gender equality, promoting peacebuilding) or in geographic areas (communities, regions or countries) that they feel a connection to or to address their social concerns. The second stream allows football players to support “Common Goal signature projects” – projects that build upon collaboration between several organisations and Common Goal members and strive to advance the field of football for good. These initiatives don’t benefit just the organisations directly involved, but have the potential to improve the sustainability and quality of all football for good organisations interested in the topic they address. Pooling the resources, expertise and commitment of many Common Goal members and implementing organisations, these initiatives intensify the efforts of everyone involved to create a greater impact beyond their mere implementation.

As part of Common Goal’s on-boarding process, members were invited to express their interest in supporting any of the streams mentioned above. They could, if they wished, support both streams, allocating different percentages of their pledges to either one of them. The football players’ pledges are accumulated in the Common Goal Fund and later transferred to all of the selected organisations. This procedure is carried out by streetfootballworld partner, King Baudouin Foundation.

The overall process is supervised, discussed and approved by Common Goal’s governing body, the Common Goal Management Committee, which consists of Common Goal Co-Founders Jürgen Griesbeck (streetfootballworld Founder and CEO) and Juan Mata (Manchester United midfielder), Moya Dodd (former player for the Australia National Soccer Team, board member of the Football Federation Australia (FFA) and Vice President of the AFC) and Luc Tayart de Borms (Managing Director of the King Baudouin Foundation). Their mandate is to take all necessary measures to guide the use of the Common Goal Fund, which includes the pledges of the Common Goal members. Following the recommendations of an expert group from streetfootballworld, the Common Goal Management Committee is the decision-making body on how Common Goal resources are allocated to different organisations or projects.

Within the first Collaboration Cycle of Common Goal, 27 players have chosen to team up with one or more organisations. As a result, a total of 27 organisations will be part of a one-year collaboration cycle taking place from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. It is worth mentioning that within the first cycle, the most addressed social topics chosen by Common Goal members are gender equality, social inclusion and quality education.

But what do we mean by “players teaming up with organisations”? In order to fully comprehend this idea, it is necessary to understand the team play nature of Common Goal. Over the last nine months, the movement has grown significantly and a great deal of progress has already been made. Nevertheless, what has been of key importance for Common Goal Founder Jürgen Griesbeck, and the team that works with him daily, is the idea that Common Goal is a team effort. As such, Common Goal strongly emphasises that Common Goal is a team effort. As such, Common Goal strongly emphasises that Common Goal is a team effort.
The other collaboration stream – the Common Goal signature projects – aligns several players and organisations behind high-impact initiatives that involve several organisations and players. The Common Goal signature projects emphasise the importance of collective power to achieve social change and draw their effectiveness from the collaboration of experts within the field. These organisations were invited to present ideas in 2017. All of these proposals were reviewed by a steering group of experts within streetfootballworld with the final decision taken by the Common Goal Management Committee.

The first Common Goal signature projects involve 20 Common Goal members and 11 implementing organisations, and will be supported between April 2018 and April 2020. The selected initiatives are: Social Enterprise Initiative and Good Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM).

Each project has a budget of €71,300.50. Social Enterprise Initiative will be led by Kick4Life and involves the participation of Football United, Street Soccer USA, Sport4Life, Dream A Dream, and Tiempo de Juego over a two-year period. The project aims at developing resources and support around social enterprise, using Kick4Life’s experience to help other football for good organisations to set up and grow their own sustainable businesses, enabling them to ultimately extend the impact and reach of their work. Kick4Life Co-Founder Steve Fleming said: “Common Goal is the most significant initiative in the history of football for good, so to be selected to lead this project is an honour and an important responsibility. We hope to achieve a lasting impact through the creation of resources and support that will enable organisations in our sector to become more sustainable.”

Good Menstrual Hygiene Management is a project led by WASH United and will involve the development and implementation of a Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Manual in cooperation with streetfootballworld network member, Slum Soccer. Following this pilot phase, WASH United will train three football for good organisations in India in the implementation of the MHM Guide – Yuwa, OSCAR and Dream a Dream, that will be implementing and testing the guide in their very diverse contexts: Yuwa works directly with girls in a very remote part of rural India, while Dream a Dream works through teachers and OSCAR Foundation employs a multiplier approach through young leaders working as trainers. Through this project a total of 2,500 girls in India will be provided with MHM education in 2018. Furthermore, the tool will be available for other organisations that would like to incorporate this relevant topic in their work.

“Common Goal is the most significant initiative in the history of football for good, so to be selected to lead this project is an honour and an important responsibility.”

Steve Flemming, Kick4Life co-Founder
DRIVING SOCIAL CHANGE
WITH NISSAN

At 10am on 15th February 2018 the official whistle was blown to publicly announce that Nissan had joined the football for good team. In collaboration with longstanding streetfootballworld partner UEFA Foundation for Children, this marked the beginning of a two-year venture to support Sport dans la Ville in France and Street League in the United Kingdom to promote employability among marginalised youth.

Speaking at the time of the announcement, Stuart Jackson, VP Brand & Communications, Nissan Europe explained that: “At Nissan we believe in creating a cleaner, safer, fairer society through the power of our people and our products. As an official UEFA Champions League partner, we are now looking to harness the power of football to create a fairer society and brighten the futures of young people across Europe.”

streetfootballworld designed the programme to build on its network members’ coherent and successful curriculum combining employability with football activities while simultaneously providing Nissan employees with the opportunity to become involved in the field of football for good. Engaging employees in an effective and meaningful way is a key component of streetfootballworld’s corporate partnerships. Employees can become part of the power of our people and our products. As an official UEFA Champions League partner, we are now looking to harness the power of football to create a fairer society and brighten the futures of young people across Europe.”

With a little help from Kyiv 2018 Ambassador and 2002 UEFA Champions League winner, Andriy Schevchenko, Ben also completed challenge number two with ease: “Take a selfie with a football legend.” Finally, Laura asked Ben for his prediction of the biggest game of the quarter final draw. “Un petit classico” – “A classic,” Ben responded, “Barcelona against Real Madrid!” Later, at the draw, his eyes lit up when Barcelona was revealed. With A.S. Roma drawn next, he wasn’t able to secure a third win. Even so, it was an “awesome day!” that, aside from offering some memorable encounters with football stars, as Ben noted, served to develop his confidence on camera. We will keep an eye out for this young star in the making!

LUCK OF THE DRAW: A DAY TO REMEMBER
Beyond the employability pitch, Nissan offered 18-year-old Sport dans la Ville participant Ben Gomis an action-packed day out at UEFA HQ on the occasion of the UEFA Champions League quarter-final draw on 16th March.

From meeting football legends, training with the F2 Freestylers to attending the official match draw, it was a full agenda for the young Barcelona fan from Paris. But first he had to solve a list of challenges set by Paris Saint-Germain defender and two times UEFA Women’s Champions League finalist Laure Boulleau. The first - to find the women’s champion league trophy - was quickly crossed off the list.

CATALYSING YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY
Using the power of football as a driving force, the programme will assist the participating youth in their personal development and with the acquisition of employability skills. With increased motivation and confidence, as well as proficiency in key competencies, such as CV writing and job interview performance, these young people will significantly enhance their chances of finding a job. Through the programme, they will also have the opportunity to visit Nissan offices and factories, as well as receive in-work support.

With their investment into the academies of streetfootballworld’s network member Street League in Tee Valley and North London, Nissan will enable the engagement of 320 young people during the course of two years. In France, streetfootballworld network member Sport dans la Ville will channel the resources towards the participation of at least 250 youth.

Nissan recognises the potential for football-based social development programmes to empower young people in disadvantaged communities, while also providing Nissan employees with the opportunity to get engaged in meaningful activities in France and the UK.”

Chairman of the UEFA Foundation for Children and president of UEFA, Aleksander Čeferin, said: “Improving the employment prospects of underprivileged young people in Europe is a huge challenge for us as a society. We welcome this new partnership with official UEFA Champions League sponsor Nissan Europe, who recognises its responsibility in society and lives up to this by investing in the communities they operate in to increase youth employability.”

“Football has a proven ability to bring people together and change lives,” commented streetfootballworld Partnerships Director, Johannes Axster, “We’re grateful that Nissan recognises the potential for football-based social development programmes to empower young people in disadvantaged communities, while also providing Nissan employees with the opportunity to get engaged in meaningful activities in France and the UK.”

The UEFA Champions League partnership is another example of Nissan’s dedication to and growth in global sports, which includes: major international cricket events, such as the ICC Men’s and Women’s World Cups, the Canadian Football League, the Heisman Trust and Heisman Trophy, and the City Football Group, which includes the Manchester City, Melbourne City and New York City clubs.

Nissan’s NCAA partnership in the US also marks the widest-reaching sponsorship in the history of collegiate sports – backing 100 colleges and universities, as well as select NCAA Championships – covering 22 sports. In addition, Nissan has a number of sporting ambassadors, including footballers Gareth Bale and Sergio Agüero.
Generation Amazing, a programme coordinated by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, is aimed at contributing to the lasting legacy of the 2022 FIFA World Cup™ and fulfilling Qatar’s promise to use the hosting of the event as a catalyst to empower people across the region and beyond.

During the countdown to the 2022 tournament, throughout its duration and long after the stadium lights have dimmed, Generation Amazing seeks to transform local communities, empower young people to overcome disadvantages and contribute to a new era of social responsibility in world football.

Generation Amazing has embarked upon a journey to touch the lives of people living in some of the world’s most disadvantaged regions and tackle prevalent social issues. Teaming up with NGOs and football for good organisations, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, has kicked off Generation Amazing to support ongoing social development programmes, strengthen football infrastructure, stage football festivals and engage youth ambassadors.

“The vision behind Generation Amazing,” H.E. Hassan Al-Thawadi from the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy states, “is to use football to transfer skills to individuals that they may use within their community.”

Since the programme was set in motion in 2010, it has reached 33,000 beneficiaries in six countries. Beyond Qatar, Generation Amazing’s international programme has already been operating in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Nepal and Pakistan. As the initiative gains momentum and enters its next phase, those programmes are set to continue while Generation Amazing increases its geographical spread and initiates projects in Kuwait, Oman, India and the Philippines.

At a gala event in Doha on 22nd March 2018, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy announced that streetfootballworld had been designated as the international implementing partner responsible for coordinating the project globally. One of the main outcomes of the partnership will be the construction of football pitches in communities identified as the most vulnerable to provide access to sport and a platform for the delivery of football for development initiatives promoting skills such as teamwork, leadership and communication.

“We jointly believe in the vision that the FIFA World Cup in Qatar 2022 can change realities in the Middle East and in Asia and that is why we at streetfootballworld are proud to partner with the Supreme Committee,” streetfootballworld Network Director Vladimir Borković commented.

For the upcoming year, streetfootballworld has inked agreements to kick off programmes with organisations operating in India and the Philippines. The goal for 2018 is to engage 26 communities in targeted countries which would impact the lives of over 150,000 children and young people.

Further regions and programmes will be announced in due course, as streetfootballworld joins the other Generation Amazing partners to dedicate efforts over the next four years to fulfil their mutual target – to reach one million young people by 2022.
I SEE LIFE IN A DIFFERENT WAY. EVERYTHING THAT I DO NOW IS BECAUSE OF FOOTBALL.

JEAN SSENINDE,
Football Player
Uganda Women’s National Team & Crystal Palace L.F.C.

Upon joining Common Goal in October 2017, the player for the Uganda Women’s National Team and Crystal Palace L.F.C. sent off her number 6 Uganda football shirt. It arrived at the streetfootballworld office together with a hand-written note: “It’s Jean Sseninde here. Am so happy to be a part of Common Goal and am ready to help change the world for the better. With love and care, Jean Sseninde.”

She sits down to talk with streetfootballworld about her own personal football journey, the sacrifices she has made along the way, and how the beautiful game has motivated her to inspire and aid others.
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW
Jean Sseninde

When the Defender for Crystal Palace Ladies and the Ugandan Women’s National Team publicly announced that she was pledging 1% of her salary to the Common Goal movement, it wasn’t her first foray into the world of football for good. Already in 2006 she established the ‘Sseninde Foundation’ and, two years ago, she began staging the annual tournament ‘Sseninde Women’s Development Cup’, both with a particular focus on empowering young girls and women. How does Common Goal complete the picture? What motivates the softly spoken 25-year-old to aim high on and off the pitch? Why does she feel compelled to continuously and increasingly give back? Jean speaks about the sacrifices she has made to pursue her dream of a professional football career, how the beautiful game has inspired her to make a difference to the lives of others and explains that team play transcends everything she does.

You recently said that: “Football is more than just a game. It is a way for us to express ourselves.” What does football enable you to express that isn’t possible off the pitch?
I see life in a different way. Everything that I do now is because of football. I feel like everything I do now is kind of connected to football. It’s because of the decisions I took. I feel like, for me, staging the tournament, having the foundation, it’s a way of expressing myself and it’s all happened because of football... Everyone who can’t talk, everyone who is black or white or disabled gets the chance to play. It’s a way they can show how happy football can make them.

What – or who – first instilled your passion for the beautiful game?
When I was eight years old my brother – he was really good at football – would play and I would have a go and play with him. I started football because of him. I took it on professionally, he didn’t. I’ve always had the desire to play ever since then.

How did you make the step from playing for fun to becoming a professional?
Back home in Uganda, women’s football hadn’t reached the top level yet, so I didn’t really have the opportunity when I was younger to have top quality coaches, like I maybe would have had if I grew up in the UK. In high school during my A-Levels there wasn’t even a girls’ team so, together with a group of the others, I set one up. When then opportunity later came to go to the UK, I knew I had to take it.

At only 17 years of age, it must have been hard.
Taking the big step to come to England wasn’t easy because I was just 17 and I missed my family. I had to make sacrifices for the game. I think that made me realise that football is more than just a game. It makes people do so much more than just playing on the pitch. I started this journey a long way back in high school where I had to fight to start a girls’ football team and it’s just so many personal sacrifices that I’ve had to make. So, sometimes it tires me out, but everything has been so worth it.

What makes it worth the sacrifice?
Football has made me learn lessons along the way. It’s given me that passion and desire to keep going, yearning for the opportunities for ways I can make a difference.

From the moment I left home I knew that it was up to me to make everything work. Because I had left so much at home. I wasn’t going to let that slip away. I had to work hard and see how far I can go in football.

Your parents weren’t always so enthusiastic about you becoming a footballer. Did they have other plans for your future career?
Sure (smiles). I wanted to do Sport Sciences at University, but my mum was like: ‘You’re supposed to do Human Resource Management’. I’m sure it’s because she wanted the best for me just like every parent. Seeing what has happened to me football-wise, she’s seen that I’ve had to fight for it and it’s paid off in the end, so she’s supportive now.

Aside from being a player, you became engaged in humanitarian work. What made you decide to establish the ‘Sseninde Foundation’ and to initiate the ‘Sseninde Women’s Development Cup’?
I came over to the UK when I was 17 and I left my friends, I left my family, I kind of left everything I knew and I took the risk to come here on my own but I had the dream that maybe if I do it then other people will look up to me and see that things are possible. It was more about giving hope to other young girls and boys to believe in their dreams and actually go for them. Getting here to the UK I got opportunities to play for Phoenix, for Queen’s Park Rangers and now Crystal Palace and also the exposure I think there wasn’t any other female Ugandan player playing outside of Uganda then and I was kind of the first one back home, so it’s more to give the girls hope. That all triggered me off wanting to do this more and more and seeing the smiles on the girls’ faces gives me joy.

Last year, you decided to join the Common Goal movement... What sparked your decision?
When I saw Common Goal for the first time on Instagram it triggered off something, because the description in the bio already showed me that this is a movement that I want to be a part of. This time, I didn’t have to do things alone, I could be part of a group of people and then – together – we could make a difference to so many others. And this time I wasn’t changing people’s lives in just Uganda, but the whole world.

How did your family and others around you react to you joining Common Goal?
My family is really happy for me and I am the only footballer back home. They are overwhelmed by all these things happening, because last year when I was going to do the tournament, Juan Mata was kind enough to support, so they were overwhelmed, they couldn’t believe it. It wasn’t just my family but, I would say, the whole country. It’s incredible.

Leaving your home country to pursue a career in professional football, establishing your own foundation and football tournament, joining the Common Goal movement. The list of your achievements doesn’t end there and is already impressive. What are your hopes and dreams for what is still to come?
Football-wise I would say that I haven’t really achieved my dreams yet. I haven’t yet got that many trophies, but it’s given me so much more. It makes me appreciate the game a lot more being in the game. Besides currently doing my UEFA B licence in coaching on bursary with the FA, I would say joining Common Goal is like a personal Holy Grail way. Being on a team with players that you’ve dreamt of seeing as a young kid, you literally just saw them on TV one time, and then you’re on the same team. I think that, for me, is a very big thing. I think it shows how the sport can change lives. Because, at one time I was in Uganda without hope and now we could give hope to others, you could see my idols of mine and we are on the same team. So, I think that, for now, is enough because football has given me that. It has given me the opportunity to be able
Jean Sseninde

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Jean Sseninde

to change other people’s lives while being part of a team. Let’s say with the foundation or the tournament – for the last two years we’ve had eight teams – but I always say that, regardless of how many girls come to participate in the tournament, it’s about that one person whose life changes because sometimes you can’t change everyone’s life in a day, but one person can always be blessed with that one action on that day. I do everything because it’s about that one person whose life changes on that day. It’s about that one person who gets a smile on that day. For me, it makes everything worth it.

What was the last thing that changed your own life a little bit, that made you smile? Having Jurgen (Griesbeck) message me about the FIFA opportunity (editor’s note: Jean Sseninde was recently invited to speak on the panel at the FIFA Conference for Equality and Inclusion) was a dream come true in its own way, because I was going through some issues personally at the moment. So, I think with football you always have your teammates. I had my teammates. I was saying: “If you’re not given a seat at the table when you are a woman, then you should create your own table.” So that’s what we should do. We should fight to have a say in the decisions that are made that affect all of us – men and women. If we never get the chance, we should start making our own opportunities.

In the face of this pay disparity, but also considering the fact that when you joined Common Goal you were already active in the field of football for good through your foundation and football tournament: What’s driving you to give back so much?

Again, because it’s always about changing other people’s lives and also showing an example. Sometimes, if you do it then other people will end up doing it. So it’s about setting the example, setting the pace for others to follow. It’s also about the passion of being part of a team like Common Goal. I mean, who wouldn’t want to be a part of the team? (smiles) For me, with Common Goal there was no second guessing, it was like the puzzle had clicked into place when I heard about Common Goal. Regardless of how much I am earning I would always want to be part of it.

If I am remembered or not one day, I just want to change so many other people’s lives and make sure that at least someone’s life changes because of whatever I did.

What is your message to the young girls and boys whose lives you seek to improve? As casual as it may sound, I would say: ‘Never give up’, because I think every day is a day to test you so many times! You just have to make the choice not to look back because, for me, that is one thing that has kept me going: having a strong mentality. Make friends, talk to a lot of people, but more importantly, just never give up because every day is very tough and there is nothing you can do about it and you just have to keep going.

Who has had the most impact on your own life? How did she or he shape you? Right now I keep saying it was my mum and dad. My mum was a politician back home and seeing her and the challenges she was going through really inspired me. They say charity begins at home, so maybe if she was a bad mother, I wouldn’t be who I am now, so it’s one thing I always thank God for. She brought me up to be a good person, a responsible person. The way she is, I look up to her, I want to be that kind of person, to grow up and be an example for others. My father, too, has been very, very supportive throughout my whole journey. He’s always been the one to make sure that everything is fine. He’s been with me through the good and the bad times, sacrificed a lot for me and always been on my side. They have been my biggest role models.

Is that what’s so special about football? Yes, I think it is the word “a team”, because we all have different ideas, but when we come together and we share all our ideas, we do things together. On the football field, even the greatest players wouldn’t be the greatest players if they didn’t have great defenders, great midfielders or the best goalkeeper. We are all what we are because of somehow, somewhere the people who were part of us in our lives: I would say it is about being a team.
NEW YORK CITY POLICE OFFICERS SUPPORT YOUTH AS MEDIATORS OF FOOTBALL3 EVENT

JOINING FORCES ON THE PITCH
On Wednesday, 21st February 2018, New York was the scene of a football event hosted by streetfootballworld together with local network members City in the Community Foundation and South Bronx United. The players from both organisations were joined by Officers from the New York City Police Department who took some time off the beat to support as match mediators.

Safe spaces to play are a rarity in New York City. In East Harlem and the South Bronx, they are particularly hard to find. The two neighbourhoods are only one train stop, a polluted river and a few short city-blocks apart and find themselves on unfortunate common ground when it comes to negative statistics. The South Bronx is the poorest congressional district in the United States, with a child poverty rate of 47% and a high school graduation rate of only 51%. East Harlem is the address of the second highest concentration of public housing projects in the nation and breeds some of New York City’s most violent youth gangs. To help tackle these social challenges, local streetfootballworld network members, City in the Community Foundation and South Bronx United, are using football to work with young people and help them to build leadership skills, teamwork, and succeed in their formative years and beyond.

These young people often hail from backgrounds where there is a deep rift between the local community and law-enforcing institutions, such as the police force. In order to offer a different experience and shift perspectives, streetfootballworld, City in the Community Foundation (USA)
Foundation and South Bronx United teamed up with the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office and the New York City Police’s (NYPD) 23rd Precinct to bring them all onto the same pitch – as a team. On Wednesday, 21st February 2018, they jointly hosted a football event.

Tasked with policing communities riddled by crime, gang violence, and drug abuse, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) has a precarious relationship with locals whose perception of the force is often marred by negative past experiences with its officers. Officer Raymond Ortiz, a community police officer from the 23rd Precinct explains: “As a police officer we have to deal with all different types of issues on a daily basis. It’s not every day that you are able to work with people to help them come to their own solutions.”

streetfootballworld trained 12 NYPD officers to act as mediators for an interactive day of football matches for girls aged 5–20. Ortiz continues, “the football3 methodology is vital for young people to experience because in life, there isn’t always a referee, mediator, or police officer. Being able to learn the skills to solve problems, whether big or small, is an amazing tool to have in life.”

The participants in the football3 matches were divided into three age categories: 5–10, 11–15, and 15–18. Each game was mediated by 3 NYPD officers who led the group in their first ‘3-half-experience’, beginning with a pre-match discussion, physical play, followed by a post-match discussion. Michelle Mota, a 15-year-old City in the Community participant reflects, “I never knew until this day that soccer can bring two communities together and turn them into a family.” Mota has played in numerous competitive soccer programmes and is a longstanding participant of City in the Community Foundation’s Saturday Night Lights initiative aimed at violence prevention and youth-development, funded by the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office. Mota said that football fits in well with the programme goals of Saturday Night Lights: “When we sat around in a circle, I saw everyone’s face and noticed how diverse we were, yet how similarly we all thought. And not only did we think the same way on the field, but also in life.”

Bridget Mahon, the Youth Development Counselor at South Bronx United shared similar thoughts: “The football3 methodology was a great way to expand the sport of soccer to include the essential life skills of communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution. I was proud to see our students build community by working together with their peers and NYPD mediators.” South Bronx United shares similar goals, as it uses soccer to unite a diverse community and promote educational achievement, wellness, and character development.

With over 20 NYPD officers in attendance, 75 young girls, and over 100 spectators throughout the football event, the two communities came together to decide upon their own rules for the day.

Football proved a neutral space for NYPD and youth to work together to problem solve both on and off the field. Officer Ortiz explains, “Sports are an ideal conflict resolution tool between youths. When it comes down to it, whether it’s basketball, soccer, or any other sport it is a perfect teaching opportunity for the NYPD and coaches to work with youth, rather than against or in opposition to them.” In a time when communities of colour and their law enforcement agencies all too often view each other as adversaries, the relationships built over the course of this event have the potential to change these neighbourhoods, and the men and women who police them, for the better.
INCREASING YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY THRU...
In February this year, representatives of nine organisations from eight European countries met at streetfootballworld’s Berlin office for the kick-off meeting of ‘Scoring for the Future’: Albion in the Community (UK), RheinFlanke and Champions ohne Grenzen (Germany), Kicken ohne Grenzen (Austria), INEX – Association of voluntary activities (Czech Republic), A.S.D. Balon Mundial Onlus (Italy), Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (Romania) and Fundación Red Deporte y Cooperación (Spain). Funded by the European Commission’s Erasmus+ Sport programme, the project aims to tackle the issue of employability of NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people. By harnessing the power of sport, young people will be equipped with transferable skills to support their employability. With its emphasis on “communication, teamwork, reliability, time-keeping and resilience, the project will help young people to make positive lifestyle changes that will help them move nearer to work, or find work,” Mark Slide, Assistant Inclusion Manager at Albion in the Community summarised.

A PROBLEM FOR US ALL

According to Kicken ohne Grenzen’s Karina Lackner, the 3.4 million NEET young people in the EU often struggle with other areas of their lives and due to their predicament tend to lack “self-confidence, motivation, self-discipline and support in the family.” This leaves them without “the necessary skills to re-enter the education system and a related career perspective,” Karina adds. She points out that this problem has wider implications for us all, since “these young people often have problems with their peers to shape society, which can lead to isolation and resignation and endanger social cohesion.”

These views are echoed by Mark Slide: “Despite economic growth in some areas, levels of youth unemployment in the housing estates where Albion in the Community works remain high, and almost half of young people in these areas fear that there will be fewer job opportunities in the next three years,” Mark states. The conception of ‘Scoring for the Future’ derives from the notion that football is an excellent tool to achieve the aim of helping young people get back on the right track. Mark explains how his organisation attempts to address the issue: “Albion Goals football mentoring provides that support, and is a bridge to other agencies to be supportive, too. Young people need to do something positive with their lives, and use their skills and abilities to earn money. This in turn gives young people self-worth and value.”

TEAMING UP AGAIN

The ‘Albion Goals’ programme run by the UK-based streetfootballworld network member is just one example of the kind of know-how and experience attendees brought to the kick-off meeting in Berlin, as they embarked upon the new two-year venture by building on the achievements of the 2015–2017
**IN FOCUS: EUROPE**

**Scoring for the Future**

Team Up! project.
“The Team Up project was an excellent opportunity to see other football-based employability programmes in action,” comments Mark Slide, “This has enabled us to evaluate best practice and impact, and look at new ways of delivering the programmes to Albion Goals participants.”

According to him and the other project members, Team Up! was a well-received success, bringing together a number of organisations in the spirit of collaboration. Relationships were strengthened and experiences were shared, allowing each organisation to learn from and inspire others. The exchange of knowledge and best practices established alignment across different social contexts and led to the production of the Team Up! Toolkit. “I believe that ‘Scoring for the Future’ will take that process one step further,” Mark added.

**THE BIG KICK-OFF**

At the ‘Scoring for the Future’ kick-off meeting in Berlin, attendees were able to elaborate on the relevance of the project to their organisations and their expectations for the future. “The project is a way for us to learn from already very experienced and established organisations and initiatives,” Karina Lackner from Kicken ohne Grenzen pointed out. As a new addition to the team she shared her excitement about joining the group. “The project provides a suitable platform for synergy effects where great knowledge transfer can produce the best possible impact. The kick-off meeting in Berlin was an inspiring encounter for us. Even though many of the partner institutions are already well established, we learned in mutual exchange that we also face the same challenges or pursue very similar ideas.”

Over the course of the 24-month project period, the group will reconvene for three annual meetings and site visits in Bucharest, Brighton and Cologne hosted by the local participating organisations. Together, they will review football-based methodologies and programmes to increase young people’s employability prospects and jointly author a Training-of-the-Trainer toolkit so that these learnings can be implemented in and beyond their own programmes, in Europe as well as in other regions of the world.

**WHY FOOTBALL?**

As highlighted by the European Union Work Plan on Sport (2014–2017), the sport sector has great potential to promote and achieve sustainable social inclusion, education and training. This path has been followed further by the European Commission’s Expert Group on Human Resources Development in Sport, which focused on employability of NEET young people in and through sport. streetfootballworld has been a partner in these high-level discussions in an observer role of the Expert Group, which published its findings to the Council on 20th February 2017.

We identified sport and, in particular, football as a highly efficient and attractive tool to engage young people (boys and girls) in non-formal educational activities and to keep them engaged. Youth, and especially NEET young people, are better able to cope with challenges if they feel empowered and educated to take control of their lives and proactively drive change in their communities. One of the best ways to promote these positive life skills is through youth leadership in sports. Combined with the needs identified in streetfootballworld’s internal analyses conducted in the European network and the issues highlighted throughout the work plan on sport, such as positions on social inclusion and integration and the output from the Expert Group on Human Resources Development in Sport, ‘Scoring for the Future’ will apply a series of innovative methodologies and approaches throughout the planning phase, implementation, dissemination and the project’s legacy.

**YOU CAN’T SCORE IF YOU DON’T SHOOT**

‘Scoring for the Future’ is necessarily ambitious for it to tackle such pressing concerns: Over the next two years, the involved organisations from across Europe will reach approximately 13,000 young sportspeople (from disadvantaged backgrounds, refugees, host communities, migrants). Through their participation in inclusive sport training programmes, they will develop key life skills in communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, leadership and tolerance.

These young people will, in turn, use the experiences they have gained through these programmes to become multipliers of sport-based youth employability methodologies in their communities and sports clubs. 20 coaches and managers will be involved in the design and development of Training-of-the-Trainer toolkit, and with many more trainers, managers, decision-makers and other multipliers exposed to best-practice examples in the field of skill-development through sport, the learnings from the project will outlive its official duration. Towards the end of the ‘Scoring for the Future’ lifespan, key figures from European grassroots sports, government and private sector organisations will gather at a multiplier event to present the results of the programme on a European stage to international stakeholders.

Even though many of the partner institutions are already well established, we learned in mutual exchange that we also face the same challenges or pursue very similar ideas.

Karina Lackner, Kicken ohne Grenzen, Austria
PITCH PERFECT
GIZ-FUNDED PROJECT PROVIDES KENYAN COMMUNITIES WITH SAFE SPACES TO PLAY
To give children and young people in Kenya access to sport, the GIZ-funded pilot project ‘More Space for Sport – 1000 Chances for Africa’, carried out by streetfootballworld together with local network members HODI, MTG and TYSA, has created a series of safe places to play through the construction of football pitches and programme support across the region. This infrastructure also serves as a platform for expanding existing programmes or developing new initiatives to promote equal opportunities and education in marginalised communities.

From the over two million young people the streetfootballworld network reaches each year, more than one million live in Africa. Our members in this region are experts in the use of football to address peacebuilding, gender equality, HIV/AIDS, WASH (Water and Sanitary Hygiene) and many other critical social issues, but their impact is often limited by insufficient access to sports infrastructure. streetfootballworld previously addressed this issue through a World Cup 2010 legacy project with the construction of holistic centres for health and education based around football pitches. These centres, such as that hosted by Kick4Life in Lesotho, have been able to create self-sustainable institutions with libraries, accommodation and schools around their initial facilities. In a number of locations worldwide, we have also built mobile pitches designed to fit any local need.

With this track record as a stable foundation, the pilot project ‘1000 Chances for Africa’ was launched in Kenya in 2015 with the aim of later scaling across the continent. For this, Kenya offered an excellent opportunity to create a best practice model of this infrastructural approach to development through football. streetfootballworld’s network member organisations have been active in the country since 1987 and cover its core regions, from the eastern coast to Nairobi, to the northern and western regions. The eight Kenyan high-impact grassroots organisations have established close cooperation with one another, learning from each other’s experiences and jointly strengthening their programmes. All organisations have strong affiliations with schools, businesses, local administrations and regional governments in the regions where they work. Providing this group with individually adapted infrastructure was aimed at bolstering the positive impact of sport on Kenyan society.
MORE THAN A PLACE TO PLAY

With funding from the German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ), we teamed up with three of our Kenyan network members, Horn of Africa Development Initiative (HODI), Moving the Goalposts Kilifi (MTG) and Transforming Young Stars of Africa (TYSA) to set the ball rolling towards the attainment of the overriding project goal: providing existing local organisations (NGOs, community centres, schools, youth clubs etc.) with the necessary infrastructure to promote social development through sport.

First and foremost, many communities lack adequate spaces for their children and youth to play. As Dorcas Amakobe, Executive Director of Moving the Goalposts (MTG) remembers from a visit to a football match on an improvised pitch in his organisation’s local community: “I never understood why there were so many players stopping and bending towards their feet.” Upon closer inspection, he realised that it was because the young footballers, many of who were playing barefoot or in flip flops, had been pricked by thorns characteristic of the region’s predominant vegetation.

Referring to his organisation’s community, Francis Ojilo, Sports for Development Coordinator at TYSA, remarks: “Among the major challenges facing young people in the community around TYSA are child labor, neglect and drug abuse.” Other topics addressed by TYSA, HODI and MTG include gender inequality, lack of access to schools and quality education.

The first football pitches were built on readily available parcels of land in highly underserved areas. A key part of the process was the involvement of the local communities in all stages of the production, including architectural design, construction and, whenever possible, skill building programmes. This served to both boost the economy of the region and to spark a sense of ownership amongst locals, the latter being crucial to the success and sustainable outcome of the project.

Taking ownership of ‘their pitches’ was not something the local children and youth had any difficulty with. Newton Kipng’eno, a Form Two student and TYSA participant, commented: “I’m very much motivated and inspired to play on this field which looks like an international field! I have learned how to behave well on and off the field, treating my peers fairly, with respect, and hard work among other values. These values were not in me sometimes back when this field was not available for play.”

With the construction complete, these communities not only have safe spaces to play for their children and youth, but also a hub for carrying out long-term activities and programmes to address the region’s most prevalent social issues.

Francis Ojilo, Sports for Development Coordinator at TYSA, notes that: “With the presence of TYSA’s Youth and Community Sports Resource Centre that was funded by GIZ, TYSA has been able to address some of the challenges facing its target group. The football field is the school of life at TYSA and that’s why we are grateful to GIZ’s aid in the construction of the centre,” adding that the pitch is a place where TYSA’s “trained coaches and volunteers help these children and youth to overcome the problems through football and life skills sessions. With our slogan ‘Play, Learn and Act’, the target group takes the messages and lessons learned on the football field and puts them into practice in their daily life.”

With the bulldozers pulling away from the final pitch to be completed at the end of February this year, the project ‘More Space for Sport – 1000 Chance for Africa’ has come to a successful close with four pitches constructed or refurbished throughout the country. For the children and youth, this is only the beginning, as they line up to take their places on the pitch!
ASSMAAH HELAL, AUSTRALIA:

“FOOTBALL TAKES ME TO ANOTHER WORLD”

Though Assmaah Helal grew up in a family of football enthusiasts, she almost hung up her football boots. Twice. But with her father cheering her on, she realised that if she really wanted to play, nothing and no one could stand in her way. Today, the 31-year-old uses her love of the sport to affect social change as Programme Operations Manager at Sydney-based NGO Football United during working hours and, after clocking off, to fulfil her goal of turning women’s leadership in football into the norm.

“You know how parents live vicariously through their children?” Assmaah asks laughing. When it came to football, she and her three brothers’ most ardent supporter was their father. Feeling pressured by his eldest brother’s perception of football as blocking his educational advancement to give up the sport, Assmaah’s father vowed it would be different for his children. After emigrating from Egypt to Australia, he ensured that in his family’s new home, all of his children would be signed up to a sports team. “Football was in our blood,” says Assmaah. “We would watch all the World Cup games and stay up all hours of the night watching the English Premier League,” she recalls. The beautiful game brought the family together.

When Assmaah first played on a team herself at the age of six, she admits that she hated it: “Being the only girl, I was a bit bullied.” Perhaps football wasn’t for her, after all. For a few years, she left the pitch behind and worked her way down a list of other sports: tennis, karate, athletics. But nothing could quite compare, as it soon became clear that there was something that these sports couldn’t offer her: “They were all solo sports and I realised that I was missing the passion for working as a team and achieving a goal together. My calling was back to football.”

THERE’S NO MATCH FOR FOOTBALL

With more girls’ football teams now on the scene, Assmaah had a very different experience when she returned to the sport: her new team in the western suburbs of Sydney felt like a safe space where she could hone her talent. In this environment, football was also able to help her develop valuable skills to employ beyond the pitch. “I was a very shy child and still am a bit of an introvert,” Assmaah reflects today, “but on the pitch, it takes me to another world. It really brings out this other level of confidence and communication. As a centre back I have to...
lead from the back and have a very controlling and assertive voice. I feel that that quality enables me to really be a good leader in the work that I do just to communicate effectively with my team members.

"They play hard, you play harder back. Everyone respects each other on the field because this is the game."

Another thing the budding footballer learned was the art of decision-making: "On the field you make so many decisions. In football, you don’t have much time to think and you just do and if you make a mistake you’ve got to just come back from that mistake asap. You can’t put your head down and walk away. And that’s something I’ve applied to my life, just make a decision quick and if it’s a bad decision just suck it up, move on and make the next mistake!"

Despite all of these gains, Assmaah almost hung up her football boots for a second time a few years later. When, at the age of 12, she decided to start wearing the hijab, she wondered whether this meant that she would have to give up football all over again. When she sought counsel from her father, he was incredulous: “Why are you even thinking of it this way? There should be no question about you continuing or not. We’ll find a way for you to play. We’ll find a way for you to wear the hijab in a way that is acceptable by the league.” Together, they spoke to the football association and received their backing.

Assmaah’s doubts were further allayed by the reaction of her teammates. Though none of them wore Islamic dress, she received their unanimous support: “When you are a member of a team and you work hard, show up to training, lead and communicate effectively, no one cares how you look or you dress.” This sentiment extended beyond her own team to the opposition: “they play hard, you play harder back. Everyone respects each other on the field because this is the game.” Assmaah notes, admitting with a laugh that: “If there’s a problem with someone, maybe I didn’t tackle her that well.” That’s not to say it doesn’t happen, but thankfully I have never received negativity during my football experience.

Another obstacle blocking many girls’ path to the pitch was that they simply didn’t perceive it as a safe space. As a 12-year-old, Assmaah also didn’t feel comfortable running around in public, “I was really body conscious,” she confesses. “If you think about women-only gyms – it’s just about women wanting to be in a safe environment.”

In her final year at university, she resolved to tackle the issue and set about organising a women’s only futsal tournament mainly aimed at Muslims, but including all other women who wished to take part.

“The response was incredible,” Assmaah remembers, “In the first year we registered eight teams. I know that doesn’t sound a lot. It was eight teams of about ten, so that was eighty people. It grew to about 160 people and 24 teams. It still runs to this day.”

The numbers have recently declined, which Assmaah feels is due to the fact that many women feel increasingly comfortable “engaging in the mainstream system.” The important thing, she states, is for women to have options. “Not everyone has to be part of a club, not everyone has to play}

be a reason beyond her own novelty that there weren’t other girls and women on the pitch who wore the hijab. She felt frustrated and asked herself “Why don’t others feel motivated to play the game that I love?”

“I went through a phase in my life when I was surrounded by some really toxic people who were saying: ‘You shouldn’t be running around in public and playing a sport with hijab,’” Assmaah explains. They expressed their opinions with such vigour that Assmaah began to wonder if they might be right and she should just do as they said. “But even then I was like: ‘But there must be a way for me to still play!’”

She decided to research into the matter and began asking her friends and acquaintances within the community why they stopped playing when they reached secondary school. Many said that it was because they were “focused on education or that their parents didn’t prioritise sport for them.” Just like her father’s eldest brother, many of Assmaah’s peers also believed that sport and education were diametrically opposed. A belief, Assmaah felt, that was based on a lack of education: with more knowledge, they would see “how the two can marry one another; that, actually, sport is good for education.”

"It’s important to embrace the non-traditional ways of playing football. You know, by starting your own leagues, your own competitions where you feel safe and you can embrace your identity in a non-threatening way."

FOOTBALL4GOOD WORK IS NEVER DONE

A knee injury may have forced Assmaah to take a break from the football pitch, but it has only intensified her football for good activities. “I need to be doing things constantly,” Assmaah admits. Though, for the past 10 years, she has been working full-time for Football United, an NGO focused on using sport for social change in Australia and Asia, she constantly asks herself: how society says. It’s important to embrace the non-traditional ways of playing football. You know, by starting your own leagues, your own competitions where you feel safe and you can embrace your identity in a non-threatening way.”

When FIFA issued a ban on the hijab for professional footballers in 2007, Assmaah was concerned that it would prevent women from playing the sport on a global scale. She knew she had to get involved. “I was one part of a global campaign that was driven by incredible people like Prince Ali in Jordan or Moya Dodd here in Australia”, she says modestly. She admits that she had an important role to play as a woman who wore the hijab in a western context “to show that it wasn’t just a culturally Middle Eastern thing, but that it was a global concern (...). I know it was a campaign beyond me and it was for future generations that come after me. So, I made a big effort to make sure that my voice was heard.” In early March 2014 the ban was permanently lifted.

A CAREER-PATH SAVE

Looking at her life now, it is hard to imagine that Assmaah’s career initially took a very different turn. After studying Exercise Science, she spent three years working as a personal trainer. “I was still helping people,” Assmaah says, but to her it felt monotonous and she was overcome with frustration at developing programmes and fitness plans for people who “were just keeping the same habit” week after week.

She resigned and never looked back: “I find it really rewarding working with young people. They’re just ready to learn, ready to take challenges, be responsible, to have people believe in them. They inspire me every single day just to be a good role model.” When asked how she would define a good role model, she responds without needing to reflect: “I think it’s important for any young person to have people in their life to be inspired by, to show them what is possible but not necessarily that they would emulate, so it’s not about copying someone, it’s about seeing what is possible, being able to pursue a path that you’re passionate about.” Just like she was able to.
Glued to his phone, addicted to video games, physically inactive and with poor exam results, Andre lacked direction in his life. After hearing about Albion in the Community through a close friend, Andre decided to give it a go and has not looked back since. The ‘Albion Goals’ programme reignited his passion for football and unleashed a new sense of ambition. As Andre swaps Snapchat for sports gear, he lets us in on his new-found skills and aspirations to reach his ambitious goals for the future.

BACK IN THE GAME

17-year-old Andre Lopes was born and raised in the English coastal town of Worthing in Sussex. The next largest city is Brighton, the home base of non-profit organisation and streetfootballworld network member Albion in the Community, the official charity of English Premier League side, Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club. It was there that Andre met “Slider”, as he affectionately calls Mark Slide, one of his mentors at the organisation that uses the power of football to improve the health, wellbeing, and education of young people in the local community. With Mark Slide and other AITC team members cheering him on, he gained new confidence on the pitch and a fresh sense of purpose.

Since joining Albion in the Community, Andre has enrolled at Chichester College, where he hopes to improve his job prospects by retaking his exams and obtaining coaching qualifications. Ultimately, he would like to play, coach and manage professionally within the football world. As well as hoping to soon line up for local side Worthing Town, Andre attends AITC training sessions every week and it is through these that he got his first exposure to football3. He took part in a football3 tournament and is as positive about its unique approach to football-based skill learning as he is about the game as a whole.

IT’S ALL ABOUT RESPECT

“I loved it! All the players and I learnt so much respect and especially about fair play. We learnt a lot about equality, that both genders have certain skills but it was really good to see that women can do the same things as men, and men the same as women. It brought everyone together like a family and made it more fun.”
An integral component of football3 is that participants decide upon their own in-game rules and ensure they are adhered to, rather than having a referee. Fair play is therefore given more prominence while the hope is that players are more mindful of their approach given the extra responsibility, which Andre happily feels he learnt from. “Both teams celebrated when a goal was scored, which I didn’t expect, but it was all about respect for the other players.”

When asked if he would recommend football3, Andre replied without hesitation, “Definitely. It’s a really good game and I hope to play more in the future. I hope it becomes a more popular game in the times to come.” On personal learnings he continues, “It’s all about fair play, respect and social skills. Being honest and respecting people, whoever they are.”

INSPIRATION TO ASPIRATION
Like many a young football lover, Andre is torn between the incessant debate over who is better – Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo? After straining to give a definitive answer, Andre eventually gave Messi the nod for ability, but it is Ronaldo who really strikes a chord for his work beyond professional football, as well as Andre’s own proud Portuguese heritage. Andre also hopes to play for Portugal one day and was keen to point out he is a “striker at heart”, despite currently being deployed in midfield. With the same often being said about Ronaldo, the pair are somewhat kindred spirits.

“I’ve always looked up to family members, but Ronaldo is one of my inspirations because he worked so hard to be noticed and improve his skills. I’ve always looked to him, his charity work and that he wants to help others. He always has time for fans and is just a good person in general.”

Speaking of his Portuguese background, Andre remembers how he “went to Portugal once and it was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I went to a cousin’s wedding when I was a young boy and it was a beautiful, amazing place” and adds laughing: “Better weather than England!”

“I would love to play for Portugal because of Ronaldo and my Portuguese family. I speak Portuguese to them when at home.”

In his desire to follow Ronaldo’s example, Andre believes the skills he took from football3 and Albion in the Community will go a long way to help that dream. “It would be fun to take a football3 session as a mediator,” Andre says, “it could help me with my coaching ambitions. Using the social skills I have learnt, I would like to help others also improve. If I become a scout or manager, I would like to give chances to people who might not normally have them.”

GOING AFTER DREAMS
Andre is but one example of the personal growth and impact that can be felt by participants in streetfootballworld’s network member programmes. He feels his outlook on life has changed thanks to Albion in the Community and football3, with reignited ambitions and new-found motivation to do his best to keep improving. Before leaving to resume the pursuit of his lofty goals, Andre had a parting message for anyone else in a similar situation: “Don’t give up on your dreams, try to achieve them as much as you possibly can.”
In November 1997, the Iranian men’s national football team faced Australia in a play-off for a place at the 1998 World Cup in France. After a 1–1 draw in the first encounter at home, the team traveled to Melbourne for a tense second leg, but the occasion is noted for its drama off the pitch as much as on it.

In its short, tumultuous history, the Islamic Republic of Iran has provided numerous pivotal talking points. Amidst recent political unrest on home soil, with a place in the World Cup in Russia on the horizon, football for good in history looks back to a moment remembered fondly across the nation. The night Iran qualified for the 1998 World Cup in France and subsequent performance at the tournament.

As an Iranian journalist notes, “in terms of freedom of expression, soccer stadiums are nearly as important as the internet in Iran now. The protest is more secure there because the police can’t arrest thousands of people at once. State television broadcasts many matches live and the people use it as a stage for resistance. They’re showing banners to the cameras and chanting protest songs, which is why some games are broadcast without sound now.”

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

On 29th November 1997, barely a month after Mohammed Khatami was elected as president promising a less restricted society, the men’s national football team faced Australia in a winner-takes-all second-leg qualifier for a place at France ’98. The political context building up to the game in Melbourne and the tense 90 minutes that followed sparked memorable scenes in Tehran.

With just 20 minutes remaining, Australia held a seemingly unassailable 2–0 (3–1 aggregate) lead until Karim Bagheri’s goal turned the tide to give Iran a glimmer of hope. Just four minutes later, Khodadad Azizi’s name was written into Iranian football folklore as he netted the equaliser which sent his team to France on the away goals rule.

The drama was not limited to the pitch, however, as the victory celebrations escalated into spontaneous displays of political expression in the Iranian capital, Tehran. Defying societal norms, many women removed their veils and took to the streets alongside men to honk their car horns, wave flags and dance together to blacklisted music. Shortly after, 5,000 women stormed the national stadium where the team was being welcomed to protest a ban from attending matches and defy calls in the media for them to watch the ceremony on television at home.

ONWARDS TO FRANCE

More such scenes followed six months later as the national side faced the United States in the tournament proper. The strained political relations of the two nations saw the US Soccer President bill the occasion “the mother of all games.” In a full-blooded affair, Iran held on to record their first ever victory in the World Cup and the Iranian people again exploded into fits of celebration. “People danced in the streets, openly drinking alcohol and women removed head-scarves,” remembers FIFA media officer Mehrdad Masoudi. “The Revolutionary Guard didn’t do anything about it because they were so happy. They were football fans first and Revolutionary Guards second.”

These events are as relevant today as they were 20 years ago, but they illustrate the uniting force that football can be to bring divergent groups together against societal constraints. What does Russia ’18 have in store?
The playing field is not equal. All over the world, girls and women have to tackle harder than their male counterparts. And that is before they even reach the pitch.

Our friends at the non-profit initiative Equal Playing Field (EPF) have made it their goal to challenge gender inequality in sport, promote sports development for girls and women all over the world and raise awareness to – ultimately – change the game for women, for good.

To that effect, Equal Playing Field gathered like-minded female footballers to launch a global campaign. In June 2017, the action kicked off on the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro for the highest-altitude football match ever recorded, resulting in media buzz and an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

This year in March, 20 female footballers set off from all over the world to meet in the Middle East for the Jordan Quest. We join the trip through the lens of photographer, Dana Rösiger. Her images combined with the commentary by Co-Founder of EPF, Erin Blakenship, illustrate that, though the journey did culminate in a record-breaking match at the lowest point on Earth, it was about more than clocking yet another World Record.
“The Jordan Quest offered us a unique opportunity to work on two of our key reasons for existence at the same time: One, to again highlight – and overcome – the mountains that girls and women face in sport, this time a bit more metaphorical than our Kilimanjaro challenge (although we still trekked almost 100km). It is hard to think of another region where women are so consistently underestimated, under-represented and under-valued in sport (and everything else) than the Middle East. So the Quest became a chance to create access to football for girls maybe for the first time; to play like the boys and see themselves as equal to them for the first time; for communities to see the power and impact of sport for girls and for change maybe for the first time.”
“Jordan was the right choice for this project for all of the same reasons – fundamentally the potential of our impact. It is a country that is surrounded on all sides by conflict and turbulence, made up of communities in need of change and a national culture of hope, inclusivity and resilience. It is a leader in the Middle East and Asia in its commitment to supporting women’s football, but it is also still a country with a long way to go for change.”
"Our goal was to showcase the game we love throughout the country with exceptional female athletes from across the region. Check. To deliver camps in a range of communities to help open the door for girls and women to enjoy and benefit from sport in an unprecedented way. Check. To support the development of already brilliant female players into leaders for change in their own communities around the world. Check. To challenge cultural and physical barriers to women in sport in Jordan, the Middle East and the wider Asia region. Check. To strengthen local resilience and our global network of extraordinary women and organisations who join us in our demand for opportunity, equality and respect – nothing more, nothing less. Check. To continue to tell our collective stories and amplify our message around the world. Check."
“EPF is now represented by women from more than 30 countries on six continents – all athletes, leaders, and drivers of change for the sport they live for and the communities they come from, be that the grassroots leagues in rural villages and urban neighbourhoods, or the world’s elite competing in World Cups and the Champions League, and for every level in between. Our motivation to challenge the structures and norms that limit women’s access, acceptance and value as athletes comes not only from our commitment to gender equality in sport, but also from what we know football can do for girls and women. Football grows you as a human being – confidence, teamwork, leadership, communication, discipline, work ethic, integrity, accountability, the value of merit-based advancement, what it takes to win, and how to pick yourself up when you fail. These skills you get from football are the same ones that help you excel in everyday society, the same skills to overcome the obstacles you face. And more than just improving you as an individual, it helps strengthen and unite communities.”
“Seeing the pitch for the first time – a rich green with netted goals surrounded by desert browns and reds. Walking out on it and knowing it will be a legacy for the community. Seeing it surrounded by boys and men who had no idea why we were there and why we got to play on it and they didn’t. Bringing in girls off the street when they came to the fence and asked to join in. Watching them ignore the rocks being thrown and focus on the game, laugh, learn, grow, challenge themselves – proudly asking if they can show their mom on the sideline their new goalie diving skills. And then to step out on that pitch not 24 hours later to thousands of community residents cheering for a women’s game... I am not sure there are words. I remain in awe of what we had achieved.”
How do I feel now? Tired :) humbled, hopeful, proud and determined to keep going. What EPF is doing matters and has the potential to really change things. And that is exactly what we intend to do, one female athlete at a time.
29-year-old Anja Huchthausen was born in Heidelberg, Germany. She studied International Business and Foreign Trade at the University of Applied Sciences in Worms, Germany, later working as a Marketing and Communications Manager for a start-up in Cologne. After spending time abroad in Argentina and Mexico, Anja became fascinated by Latin America. Though she is a self-proclaimed “marathon and triathlon addict”, it was football that took her back to the continent. In January 2017, she left her previous life behind to work for streetfootballworld network member Tiempo de Juego in Santa Marta, Colombia. Starting out as a volunteer, Anja extended her stay indefinitely, when she took up the position of project coordinator for the organisation in May 2017. Here, she tells us her story.

Champeta, Arepas, fútbol and sunshine 365 days a year. Welcome to the Caribbean Sea, welcome to Santa Marta – “La perla de América”, welcome to Colombia!
Here I am, having quit my job in Germany, ditched my computer and donned sports shoes, packed up my apartment and reduced my belongings to the contents of a backpack. My goal: to get to know the world a bit better. On your marks, get set, go!

Over the past years, I already travelled a lot throughout Latin America so, this time, I looked for a new experience aside from the typical “backpacker” tourist route on this – to me – beloved continent. I thought I would get a different picture of a country by working as a volunteer. I would be closer to the local people and gain a local experience. As luck would have it, a friend of mine who introduced me to the organisation, explained what they are doing and where help is needed. Two months later, I ended up in the second-oldest city in Latin America to do a three-month volunteer placement. To be perfectly honest, I didn’t have a clear idea what I would be doing at the organisation and had actually never worked with kids before. But, as a passionate sportsperson, I loved their mission to change kids’ lives in a positive way through sport, music, dance and art, achieving peace and social harmony in the community.

The first time I stepped into the world of this transforming community “La Lucha”, I was definitely surprised. Surprised by the very bad conditions of the neighbourhood where some 6000 displaced people live. It is a place marked by the conflicts of the past 50 years in Colombia. I was surprised by the little dark room where classes were held; surprised by the dirt, heat, the loud noises everywhere around you; and surprised by the amount of kids running towards you, hugging you like they have known you all of their lives and smiling like they have no worries at all. And me? Speechless and totally in love with them!

I already realised at the beginning that you need some special personal skills if you want to do voluntary work with kids in this area: you have to show initiative, be 10000% able to improvise and be flexible, spontaneous, very patient, be able to solve conflicts peacefully, be resistant to heat, noise and dirt and to have good Spanish skills to understand the kids talking to you in “Costeño”, the slang spoken along the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

“Do what you can do best,” I was told. So I did. The organisation gave me a lot of space to develop activities with the 5- to 18-year-old kids and youth. Twice a week, I gave sports lessons at the small multi-court in the heart of the neighbourhood “La Lucha”. I taught English once a week, gave handicraft workshops, painted a classroom with other volunteers and helped the organisation with all upcoming events: International Women’s Day, Neighbourhood Day, football games – the list goes on.

After three months I decided to stay. I have never experienced a job that makes as much sense as this one. I feel very lucky and thankful to gain all these experiences, and I have come to value my life and the conditions in which I grew up even more. I really couldn’t separate myself from these wonderful kids with so many talents and I couldn’t believe my luck when I got a job offer as “Project Coordinator” at Tiempo de Juego. Ever since, I’ve been living in Santa Marta and working every day to help make the lives of the kids a bit better and give them new opportunities. It is a life full of football, sport, dance, music and other activities which transforms the kids’ lives in a positive way and creates a peaceful environment.

So, here I am in Santa Marta, where Tiempo de Juego has been working for the past four years in a neighbourhood with the lovely nickname “La Lucha” (“The fight”). Here, the organisation engages 150 kids through its programmes and aims to transform their daily lives by developing life skills through sport, music, dance and art, achieving peace and social harmony in the community.

The non-profit organisation “Fundación Tiempo de Juego” was established twelve years ago in the capital of Colombia, Bogotá. The initial idea was to set up a football school in the neighbourhood Altos de Cazuca, where you can find the highest rate of internally displaced people in the country. Violence, drugs, murder: all are part of the daily agenda. With their programme “Fútbol por la paz”, the Tiempo de Juego team wanted to improve the situation for the kids living in this neighbourhood and create a more peaceful environment through sport.

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Inspired by this story? Tiempo de Juego is always looking for motivated volunteers!