



Interview with Patrick Gasser

Senior Manager, Football and Social Responsibility, UEFA

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Patrick Gasser is head of UEFA's Football and Social Responsibility (FSR) Unit. He joined UEFA in 1999 as part of the National Associations Division, supporting football development in Eastern Europe. Prior to joining UEFA, Gasser spent 13 years working for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), where, as a field representative, he had a wide range of responsibilities, which included directing relief efforts and managing media contacts in war-torn areas of Africa, Asia and Europe. He also worked in the Human Resources Department at the ICRC Geneva headquarters.

DS: What is your role as head of the Football and Social Responsibility Unit of UEFA?

PG: My role is to make full use of football's power and popularity to help tackle social problems in Europe. Football plays an important positive role in European society. It is not just big business, but a communal activity based on helping to preserve social, educational and cultural values. Maintaining popular access to football throughout Europe contributes to Europeans' health and social cohesion.

DS: Does UEFA attempt to integrate social responsibility with its overall marketing objectives, and if so, how?

PG: The strategy is to develop and draw attention to football's social impact by investing in multi-sector activities that help address strategic social issues, particularly through partnerships with selected organisations. The approach is not marketing or communication oriented and has more to do with a sound stakeholder management.

DS: From your perspective, how important a component is corporate social responsibility (CSR) to corporate sponsors of European football?

PG: The notion of social responsibility has become more and more important. I dare say it is a booming industry. Our corporate sponsors have developed their own CSR programmes. This has helped us build our own strategy because it became obvious that social responsibility is vitally important to corporate sponsors.

DS: Do you feel that there is any difference in the role CSR plays in sports-related marketing and sponsorship in the EU as opposed to the United States, for example?

PG: I'm not an expert on sports-related marketing and sponsorship in the US compared to the EU. Again, from our point of view, we do not see CSR as a marketing tool but a way to balance the interest of stakeholders aimed at improving society and maintain a sustainable development for present and future generations.



DS: What kind of response has UEFA received from its corporate sponsors with regard to its social responsibility programmes?

PG: Corporate sponsors profit from the fact that UEFA's social responsibility programme seeks to address relevant current social issues and tries to deal fairly with its stakeholders. Therefore, UEFA competitions make an excellent marketing platform for corporate sponsors. Europeans are crazy about football. The strength of their passion for the sport magnifies the social, economic, cultural, educational and political impact of the game. At its best, football contributes to Europeans' social cohesion and health, bringing together people of different ethnic origins, religions, socio-economic layers and cultures, and contributing to the physical and mental health of the millions of European customers who play and watch the game.

But unfortunately, football doesn't always show its best side. Its force and machinery can just as easily be used for sordid ends as for constructive purposes. Football's power and popularity makes it especially vulnerable to being hijacked for use as a vehicle of corruption, drug use, racism, sectarianism, inter-group violence and other agendas that damage both sport and society. We aim to harness the power of the game to drive positive change. Our corporate sponsors use the football platform to drive their sales. We are in the business of behavioural change which is more complicated to achieve.

DS: How should organisations, whether sponsors or rights holders, understand the importance of not tying their CSR programmes to any marketing objectives?

PG: I think it is crucial that the social responsibility policy be defined with issues at hand in mind and not based upon marketing and communications objectives. The initial and most important step in CSR is to identify the issues. Once the CSR objectives are defined, then is the best time to determine how to communicate and integrate them into an organisation's marketing strategy

most effectively. UEFA wants to make sure that our CSR programme does not become mere window dressing. We want to be able to ask the tough questions and then see how they can be addressed. Obviously, this can sometimes create competing interests.

As an example, in the field of health, UEFA promotes living an active, healthy life style. We encourage regular exercise, (playing football), cooking and eating healthily (fruits, salads, vegetables, drinking water), and we promote a no-smoking policy. We are doing this because cardiovascular diseases were identified as the biggest public health issue in Europe and the obesity epidemic has started to impact the health of Europeans. Given our sponsor portfolio, this initiative has been a difficult undertaking. But there has been a positive evolution here. More and more venues across Europe have become tobacco free. In some UEFA competitions, there is pitch-side signage advertising bearing the slogan 'Enjoy responsibly' [relating to alcohol] and there are salad and fruit dishes, along with mineral water, on the menu cards in stadia. This allows the fans to make a choice. This is just one specific example of how UEFA has approached potential conflicts between our CSR programmes and the overall marketing objectives of our sponsors.

DS: What specific campaigns is UEFA currently undertaking to promote social responsibility?

PG: At an institutional level, we have anti-doping and corruption activities in place. UEFA has also introduced a club licensing scheme and financial fair play regulations, and we have engaged in social dialogue with stakeholders.

Furthermore, we work in the framework of long-term partnerships with a selected group of organisations promoting reconciliation in the former European conflict areas across former frontlines, with the help of an open grassroots, fun football project.

We address child obesity by promoting an active healthy lifestyle, in cooperation with the World Heart Federation (WHF). With that goal in mind, we



issued a cook book called 'Eat for Goals.

We have put all the social projects in connection with the upcoming EURO 2012 in Poland and Ukraine under to slogan of RESPECT.

The RESPECT projects fall into four categories. The RESPECT Diversity project will be implemented together with UEFA's long-time partner FARE (Football Against Racism in Europe) and its network association, Never Again. It will promote the positive message of diversity through various activities before and during the tournament, peaking at the semi-finals.

To date, over 80,000 police officers in Poland and Ukraine have received anti-discrimination training to help them identify discriminatory chants, symbols and behaviour. Also, hundreds of inclusivity zones will be created at the tournament. These are public buildings and spaces that are designated as being open and accessible to all, regardless of ethnic or national background, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

Meanwhile, the RESPECT Fan Culture project will support football fans during the UEFA European Football Championship finals. Together with Football Supporters Europe (FSE), fan embassies will be set up in the eight host cities to serve as places where fans can seek assistance with last-minute travel and accommodation arrangements as well as facilitation in unforeseen circumstances. Supporters of participating countries will also have their own mobile fan embassies that will move from stadium to stadium.

In addition, UEFA is working with CAFE (Centre for Access to Football in Europe) to manage three separate RESPECT Inclusion initiatives. Under the 'Football with No Limits' initiative, access to information will be provided to fans and visitors with disabilities by means of a tailor-made guide. Through the 'Showcase Games' project, people with disabilities will be given the opportunity to demonstrate their sports skills by competing in football matches before each quarter-final match. Funds for future inclusion initiatives will be raised through the UEFA EURO 2012 Tournament charity project, encouraging football supporters to donate money for upcoming projects, with UEFA paving

the way by committing to donate 3,000 euros for each goal scored during the tournament.

Finally, the RESPECT Your Health project will be leaving a long-lasting legacy in terms of improved public sports facilities which future generations will benefit from. Streetfootballworld, another UEFA partner, is organising over 3,000 five-a-side games on mini-pitches in Poland and Ukraine where parents and their children will be able to play football while being informed about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. As part of the Respect Your Health project, UEFA EURO 2012 has also been declared a tobacco-free event.

DS: What areas of social responsibility do you feel deserve even greater attention in the future, and what specific programmes does UEFA have planned to address that perceived need?

PG: A big concern is the environment. If we don't get control over climate change then I'm afraid the negative impact for society, including football, will be huge. UEFA has taken out a carbon compensation scheme for all our institutional flights with Climate Friendly and we have started to support the advocacy work of WWF. A further objective is to look at our competitions and organise them in a more sustainable way.

DS: At the Total Football, Total Access European conference, organised by CAFE, which was held at Wembley Stadium last year, you said, "The accessibility situation in Europe has started to improve, but it is a development process which will take time." In addition to the RESPECT Inclusion initiatives within the framework of EURO 2012, which you previously highlighted, could you please describe some of UEFA's additional efforts to improve the accessibility of football within the EU?

PG: UEFA presented the 2009 Monaco Award, worth one million Swiss Francs, to the National Association for Disabled Supporters (NADS). The objective was to start working with one of the more disadvantaged groups



among our stakeholders; namely disabled football fans. Out of this, the CAFÉ project was developed. The goal is to make football across Europe more accessible.

DS: Do you think UEFA's social responsibility initiatives have had any impact upon bigotry and racism among European football fans?

PG: Football is not racist, but rather, parts of society are. UEFA, as European football's governing body, goes beyond reinforcing football's positive aspects. It also takes assertive measures to counter harmful trends. UEFA's control and disciplinary body, anti-doping unit, and licensing scheme, along with many of its institutional policies, are just some of the tools used to fulfil this responsibility. We have sanctioned teams for racist abuse, banned clubs from playing in UEFA competitions, and worked to control violence in

matches. We have worked closely with national, international and European authorities to suppress the improper uses of our sport. This has helped tackle problems that extend far beyond the stadium, but also threaten the atmosphere, security and quality of the game. Campaigning with the help of the FARE network against any form of discrimination, not only in football, but society as a whole, has the impact of portraying that we are at least trying to do the right thing.

DS: In terms its legacy, what do you hope UEFA's social responsibility unit will be remembered for?

PG: For football to be perceived as a positive force in European society.

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