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Swiss football on road to success

Knowing they can do it

For the first time since 1966, the Swiss football team will take part in a major tournament. Its qualification for the 1994 World Cup in the United States is without doubt the biggest event in Switzerland's 1993 sporting year.

The year before last the only player to be named a world class attacker in the German Bundesliga, one of the most important competitions in the world, was Switzerland's Stéphane Chapuisat. This season four top Swiss footballers are playing in Germany.

René Lenzin

This is important evidence that Swiss football now has to be taken seriously on the international stage and that the Swiss championships are no longer a lucrative league for foreign football pensioners – as they were often considered until recently.

Strong performance

This upward revision is closely linked with the performance of the national

The Swiss national football team and its trainer, Roy Hodgson.



team. In the World Cup qualification matches Switzerland lost only one game and won three out of four possible points against such redoubtable opponents as Italy and Scotland. Between May 1992 and October 1993 the Swiss team played a series of twelve matches without loss. This has led to an enthusiasm for football quite unusual for this small country; international matches at home are sold out, and two to three

thousand fans travel abroad to wherever Switzerland is playing.

The present wave of success is linked to the names of two trainers. Ulli Stielike and Roy Hodgson. Stielike, a former player in international top teams, took the national team in hand in 1989, just after it had once again failed to qualify for the World Cup finals. He immediately told the players an unpleasant home-truth: that they were now travelling third class on the international scene and they could only move up by dint of a lot of hard work. The German trainer then succeeded in forming a core of good players who were ready to do more than was required to win the local championship. The new team did fail to make the European finals under Stielike, but it could not be denied that a wind of change was sweeping through Swiss football.

Discipline and tactics

Stielike's successor, Britain's Roy Hodgson, was able to build on the new psychological climate and also provided the team with an innovative tactical concept which gave them an assured style. His idea of football was based on discipline, team solidarity and self-confidence – all part of the British football tradition. By now the Swiss team has got to the point when it can recover and make up lost ground even in matches



Stéphane Chapuisat (right) pushes through, taking Swiss football with him.

which started very badly. Hodgson has come to realise that the changes he has had to make so far have been fairly minor – and this greatly facilitates the automatism which is part of all modern sport. The present team certainly has a future, and almost without exception today's players have a good few years of top performance before them.

Objective: playing abroad

In January the national team will attend a training camp in the United States in order to get the right feel for the upcoming World Cup. If the players do well amongst the 24 participants in the finals they will be rewarded not only in the form of premiums but also by coming to the attention of club managers and transfer intermediaries abroad. And then perhaps there will be even more Swiss players generating enthusiasm outside our borders. Playing and earning good money abroad is the magic formula which nearly all Swiss footballers are aiming at, for in contrast to the national team club football at home is not (yet) really up to international standards. And when players find themselves performing to virtually empty stadiums, their thoughts stray easily not only to the forthcoming matches in the USA but also to the achievements of Milan's San Siro or Madrid's Bernabeu or the Olympic stadium in Munich.

Sport in 1993

Highlights for Switzerland

Switzerland's sporting year 1993 actually saw its first real highlight in December 1992 when the Swiss team only just failed to win the Davis Cup finals in the United States. About ten months later, however, Switzerland's tennis players were to come well below expectations: after poor performances against India and Israel, Switzerland was once again out of the Davis Cup World League. This, taken together with the ice hockey team's demotion from the A World Championships, was certainly the year's main sporting disappointment. Between them, however, lay a whole string of successes, some of which we are happy to mention here.

● The national handball team took an

excellent fourth place in the A World Championships and thereby emphatically confirmed its place amongst the world's leaders.

● The women's national volleyball team – which has recently been treading the stony path from an international nobody to medium-class performance – came third in the Universiade.

● Light athlete Julie Baumann-Rocheteau took a gold in the 60-metre hurdles at the indoor world championships.

● Gustav Weder brought home a gold in the four-seater and a silver in the two-seater bob-sleigh world championships.

● Shot-putter Werner Günthör was world champion for the third time in a row and thereby came back from his humiliation at the Barcelona Olympic Games.

● In the rowing world championships Switzerland achieved a silver medal each for the light double two-seaters and the light four-seaters without a cox.

● In the alpine world skiing championships the only Swiss medal winner was Urs Lehmann with a victory in the downhill.

● At the European horse-jumping championships Switzerland brought home golds in the team event and the individual marking – with Willi Mellinger on Quinta.

● Judoka Eric Bron came second in the under-65-kilo world championships and took the first ever Swiss medal in this sport.

● Rolf Biland and Kurt Waltisperg were the fastest side-car team for the sixth time in the motor cycle world championships.

● Swiss cyclists also came up with an excellent year: the amateurs obtained a world championship bronze in the 100-kilometre timed event; Tony Rominger again shone with his victory in the Round Spain race and his second place in the Tour de France; Alex Zülle won the Paris-Nizza and took second place in the Round Spain; and Pascal Richard won the Tour de Romandie and the Round Lombardy.

● The Swiss orienteering team repeated its 1991 victory and was again world champion in the relay event.

RL

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Werner Günthör – three times world champion.

