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Long live football

A tournament full of twists and turns and a carnival atmosphere with Switzerland under the spotlight for three weeks: football's Euro 2008 proved a tremendous success with more than four million fans visiting the host cities. We look back at the event now that the final whistle has gone. By Alain Wey



The fan zone in the Federal Square in Berne firmly in the grip of the Dutch.

"Lo, lo, lo, lo, lo, lo... lo!" – the European Football Championship climaxed in Vienna with Spain being crowned as champions of Europe. As is the tradition with Latin teams, Swiss cities were treated to a cacophony of horns as masses of cars took to the streets. A touch of melancholy was felt by some Swiss supporters after three weeks of scintillating football. It's over, but what a fantastic tournament! Beyond the fan zones and the majestic stadiums of the major Swiss cities, the entire country, both in rural and urban areas, joined in the celebration of football. In Fribourg, the Fri-Son concert venue was transformed into a temple of football with three giant screens on which fans enjoyed the matches in good spirits even in defeat. Will Switzerland ever become a great footballing nation? The foundations are in place. The support is there, as is a pool of talented players. Many Swiss fans were disappointed after their team's exit, but it made little difference. In the host nations of mountains and lakes, Euro 2008 witnessed lots of great achievements as well as moments of grace and euphoria. The hospitality and organisation were also first-class. A look back at the tournament.

"The atmosphere in the cities and streets, the newspaper articles and television coverage all confirm that Euro 2008, a great unifying festival of the people, was a remark-

able success", commented Samuel Schmid, Minister of Defence and Sport, and Benedikt Weibel, Federal Council delegate for Euro 2008. According to initial estimates, more than four million people visited Basel, Geneva, Zurich and Berne for the 15 matches held in Switzerland. Throughout the tournament, 930,000

fans watched the matches in Berne, peaking on 13 June with a 150,000-strong orange army invading the streets of the capital for the Holland v. France match (see video and photos at www.oranjebern.ch). In addition, 1,050,000 visitors were recorded in Basel, 700,000 in Geneva and around two million in Zurich (700,000 in the fan zone alone). The sixteen UBS arenas around the country welcomed around a million fans. Despite poor weather conditions the atmosphere was extremely cordial and the event was a hit. A German fan said ironically: "The only thing the Swiss couldn't organise for us was the weather." Switzerland's public transport was used by 85 percent of the supporters, with almost two million football fans taking advantage of more than 4,000 special trains to get to the Euro 2008 matches.

While the Swiss only had a brief period in which to cheer on their team, they continued to fervently follow their favourite teams and enjoy the tremendous drama of the competition. The way initial animosity towards Turkey turned, in the course of the tournament,

into respect for the fighting spirit of a team that scored three times in the final minutes of its matches, is still fresh in the memory. At such times football seems to heighten all human emotions, from the most base to the most noble. Nor will we forget the Dutch orange invasion, with their improvised campsites, or the dark red shirts of Portugal. Switzerland's Portuguese community gave their team an incredible welcome, with 2,000 motorbikes following the Portuguese team bus from Geneva airport to Neuchâtel.

Euro 2008 is without doubt the most important international event held in Switzerland over the past fifty years. The impression it has made on major international sporting bodies may well convince them to stage other large-scale events in Switzerland. This prestigious tournament has left us with many fond memories: rarely have so many goals been scored at the quarter-final and semi-final stages. The impact of Euro 2008 remains to be seen. Cooperation with Austria worked well and hundreds of thousands of football fans fell in love with our beautiful country. Even though the Swiss team missed their opportunity, the Swiss showed a great sense of fair play, kept their spirits up and got behind the qualifying teams in a way that warmed the heart. The favourites Holland, the virtuosity of the Spanish and the feline grace of Fernando Torres will remain in the hearts of the Swiss and Austrians. While Mexico cried "olé" in 1986, France chanted "I will survive" in 1998, Euro 2008 rocked to "Seven Nation Army" by The White Stripes, and at each match fans euphorically sang "Lo, lo, lo, lo, lo, lo... Lo": in other words, long live football!



Spain coach Aragones as a bullfighter.